

Gesture and Art in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty

Author: Gustavo Gomez Perez

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:104044>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),
Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2014

Copyright is held by the author. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Boston College
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Department of Philosophy

GESTURE AND ART IN HEIDEGGER AND MERLEAU-PONTY

a dissertation

by

GUSTAVO GOMEZ PEREZ

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2014

© copyright by GUSTAVO GOMEZ PEREZ

2014

Gesture and Art in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty

Gustavo Gómez Pérez

Dissertation director: Professor John Sallis

Abstract: The present dissertation explores the motif of gesture and demonstrates that it encompasses the resonances between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. My thesis specifically is that the notion of gesture articulates the problems of art and language, revealing fundamental convergences in the ways in which Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty investigate a non-metaphysical approach to the sensible and question the limits of philosophy. I develop this argument by closely following Merleau-Ponty's reading of Heidegger's works in the lecture-notes from his courses at the Collège de France. I also rely heavily on Heidegger's reflections on gesture and the body as they are depicted in the Zollikon seminars, considering that some of these reflections retrieve crucial arguments from *Being and Time* and that they bear a significant resemblance to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body. In this way, I elucidate what may be called the gestural character of the work of art and language, establishing structural connections between the texts of these two thinkers.

This dissertation is divided into three parts. I devote the first part to the themes of the body and gesture and show that the concept of form and the problem of perception lead to questions concerning the possibilities of a phenomenology of the body. I conclude this part by arguing that, for both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the notion of gesture corresponds to a phenomenological approach to the body as openness to the world and as an affective milieu. Departing from the arguments and comparisons delineated in the first part, in the second and third parts I examine separately the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in order to determine the settings of the notion of gesture within their respective

approaches to art and language. The second part treats problems concerning the sensible character of the work of art, arguing that gestures perform a poetical disclosure of nature. In the third part I focus on questions of language and demonstrate that gestures unfold what could be called the *logos* of the sensible, which constitutes the primary source of language and meaning. I conclude by interpreting Heidegger's work as a *gestural* philosophy that emphasizes the performative dimension of language, an emphasis that is missing from Merleau-Ponty's work.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Gesture, Art, and the Limits of Philosophy.....	1
Debate Concerning the Resonances between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.....	6
The Problem of the Body and the Problem of the Truth of Being.....	11
Methodological Considerations.....	14
Outline of the Project.....	18
Part One: The Problem of the Body and Gesture.....	24
Chapter One: The Problem of the Body from Merleau-Ponty to Heidegger.....	25
Phenomenology and the Roots of the Body.....	25
Gestalt and Comportment: Beyond Materialism and Idealism.....	27
The Concept of Form and the Notion of Body Schema.....	30
<i>Being and Time</i> : Perception and Gestalt Theory.....	34
The Body and the Limits of <i>Being and Time</i>	39
Chapter Two: The Problem of the Body in Heidegger.....	42
The Formulation of the Problem.....	42
The Body: The “Most Difficult” Problem?.....	44
The Lived Body.....	47
The Body as the Threshold between Being and Beings.....	50
The Body at the Limits of Phenomenology.....	52
From the Lived Body to Gesture.....	58
Chapter Three: The Gestural Body.....	60
How to Talk about the Body: Preliminary Remarks on the Rappports between Gesture and	
Language.....	60
Gesture and Expression: Differences with Husserl.....	68
The Semantic Correlations between the terms “ <i>Gebärde</i> ” and “Gesture”.....	71
Gesture, Region, Intentionality.....	73

Gesture, Comportment, and the Artistic Work	76
Part Two: Gesture and Art.....	83
Chapter Four: Body, Gesture and Art in Heidegger's Work	84
Preliminary Remarks on the Body in Heidegger's Reading of Nietzsche	84
The Being of Things and the Work of Art	90
Createdness: A Contrast with Nietzsche	94
The Shining of the Earth and Its Limits.....	98
Gestalt and Contemplation in the Work of Art	103
Between Being and Human Being: The Ambiguous Character of the Poetic Work	108
The Foundational Gesture of the Work of Art.....	110
The Poetic Gestures of the They.....	116
Chapter Five: Nature, Art and Gesture in Merleau-Ponty.....	121
The Earth and the Impossible Concept of Nature.....	121
Body and Nature in Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl.....	125
Nature and Perceptual Faith: Preliminaries to the Ontology of the Flesh.....	134
Sensible Being and the Lived Body	138
Flesh and Gesture	147
Being and the Flesh: Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Heidegger	157
Art and the Gestures of Being	160
Part III: Gesture and Language	172
Chapter Six: Gesture and Language in Heidegger.....	173
Language, Gesture and Expression.....	173
Gesture, Voice and Stimmung in the Orbit of <i>Being and Time</i>	182
<i>Stimmung</i> and Body: The Lectures on Logic from 1934.....	187
From <i>Stimmungen</i> to Poetry: "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry"	192
Essential Hints and Gestures	195
Hints, Signs and Gestures in <i>Zum Wesen der Sprache und zur Frage nach der Kunst</i>	199
Thanking, Thinking and Gesture.....	203

Writing and Gesture	212
Gesture, Silence	219
Chapter Seven: Primordial Language and Gesture in Merleau-Ponty	227
Being, Saying and the Body: Preliminary Remarks on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and	
Language.....	227
The Problem of Expression and Consciousness in the <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i>	231
Language, Sedimentation and Gesture	242
The Diacritical Structure of Language	245
Meaning and Institution: Gesture and the Carnal Generality of the World	250
Gesture and Ontology of Language: On the Way to <i>The Visible and the Invisible</i>	261
Conclusion	274
From Philosophy of Gesture to Gestural Philosophy	274
The Performative Character of Heidegger's philosophy	276
Thinking and the Language of the Event.....	281
Bibliography	285

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my wife, Annalisa, for her persistent encouragement throughout my doctoral studies and for her patience and support during my involvement in this project. I would like to thank my friend and colleague Frances Maughan-Brown for her unconditional assistance. I am thankful to my friends and colleagues Lori Mele, Timo Helenius, Teresa Fenichel, Peter Hanly, and David Ellis for helping me to clarify the ideas that led to this dissertation.

I want to express my gratitude to my advisor, Professor John Sallis, for his generous advice and support, and to Professors Richard Kearney, Jeffrey Bloechl, Gary Gurtler, S.J., and Dennis Schmidt for their willingness to help me develop this project.

This dissertation was completed with the support of a Dissertation Fellowship granted by the School of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Philosophy at Boston College. During my doctoral studies I also received the financial support of the Fulbright Program, Colfuturo, and the Department of Philosophy at Boston College.

Introduction

Gesture, Art, and the Limits of Philosophy

In what sense is the phenomenon of gesture a philosophical problem? How do the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty introduce the problem of gesture into the domain of philosophy? The present work springs from these questions, and considers them to be questions involving the destiny and nature of philosophy, the limits and possibilities of thought. This perspective seems necessary if one is to trace the problematic of gesture back to the grounding concerns that give impulse to the work of these two philosophers, and which may determine their fundamental convergences.

A concise assessment of the necessity to think the limits of philosophy is found in the notes Merleau-Ponty wrote for his lectures at the Collège de France from 1958-1959 and 1969-1961.¹ In these notes Merleau-Ponty also carries out a general interpretation of Heidegger's work.² At the start of these notes, Merleau-Ponty argues that our times are of crisis for philosophy because these times challenge the classical ideal of rationality, as well as the metaphysical understanding of being as objectivity. For this reason, he suggests, it is imperative to think ontology anew.

In these times of crisis, one major philosophical difficulty consists in not losing sight of the grounds: the lived body, perception, life and being. These grounds are always already there as constitutive dimensions of existence. But these grounds withdraw from philosophical language. Surely, in our lives, and even in our sciences, urges Merleau-Ponty, we are somehow in touch with a being that involves us, and cannot be conceptualized as

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours au Collège de France 1958-1959 et 1960-1961* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

² See *ibid.*, 91-148.

“matter” or “spirit,” as if it were just a separate region of reality. Yet, he says, “our ‘philosophical’ thinking remains spiritualist, materialist, rationalist or irrationalist, idealist or realist, if it is not silent.”³ Therefore, if we are to contemplate a renewal of ontology beyond metaphysics, if such a renewal is possible, it is necessary that philosophy learn to be silent. This silence, however, cannot be absolute, for that would be a renunciation of philosophy and thought.⁴

Merleau-Ponty suggests, on the one hand, that the grounds *of* philosophy are concealed in silence, inaccessible to metaphysical, representational thinking. On the other hand, he indicates that if philosophy is to regain access to the grounds of existence, if it is to become a thinking and logos *of* being, it must follow an indirect path. It needs to yield its word to non-philosophy, to modes of thinking that are non-philosophical, and which may grant access to the being of things: art, poetry and literature, for instance. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, if philosophy is to speak, it must do it in order to preserve the silence of life and to remain open to it. It must become a language that speaks without becoming a metaphysical system, that is, without abandoning its performative, existential roots.

Merleau-Ponty’s thought bears significant similarities to Heidegger’s thinking, whose work is, from the start, haunted by the questions of life and being: of a factual life and a being that are elusive to thinking, and which are imbricated in existence.⁵ Indeed, in the course of the aforementioned lecture-notes, Merleau-Ponty reads Heidegger’s work,

³ Ibid., 37, my translation. “Notre pensée «philosophique» reste spiritualiste, matérialiste, rationaliste ou irrationaliste, idéaliste ou réaliste quand elle n’est pas silencieuse.”

⁴ Françoise Dastur explains this point clearly in her article “La lecture merleau-pontienne de Heidegger dans les notes du “Visible et l’invisible” et les cours du Collège de France (1957-58),” *Chiasmi International* 2 (2000): 373-88. She says: “la thèse de Merleau-Ponty est claire: la décadence de la philosophie classique est ‘inessentielle’, car elle est seulement celle d’une certaine manière de philosopher” (376).

⁵ As Françoise Dastur remarks, “la méthode ‘indirecte’ de Merleau-Ponty et sa ‘philosophie négative’ trouvent en effet leur anticipation chez Heidegger lui-même...” Ibid., 378.

considering particularly his turn towards a thinking of the truth of being, as an effort to think the verbal essence of being, “*le Wessen verbal, indivise de l’existence.*”⁶

According to Merleau-Ponty’s lecture-notes, Heidegger’s efforts to think the essential unity of existence, and the silence or withdrawal of being, is not a form of mysticism. That is to say, it is not a dogmatic denial of philosophy. On the contrary, the thinking of being is a primordial philosophical task: it is the task of pursuing the truth, the original truth that *has* us, which we experience from within our entanglement in the world. This idea is formulated, for instance, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935),⁷ which is a work Merleau-Ponty knew well. In this work Heidegger recalls the affinity between the notions of *doxa*, brilliance and glory, and the determination of *doxa* as that which is accepted in its appearing, in the way it comes to light, as *Ansehen*.⁸ According to Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger alludes here to the original openness to beings, the most primal access to a dimensionality of being, a region, which prearticulates our relation to beings.⁹ This dimensionality of being has *physis* as one of its structural moments.¹⁰ In this case, *physis* is understood as a being which comes out of itself, and which we do not posit or determine. This openness to the being of beings, this *Offenheit*, is prior to any distinction between subject and object, passivity and activity. Openness is presupposed as an initial displacement or movement of being, a clearing that lets things be. In what seems an echo of these formulations, as well as a

⁶ *Notes de cours*, 95.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.40 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976). English: *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000). See also Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours*, 111. The titles of Heidegger’s works that have been translated into English will be given in English. Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

⁸ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 110/108-109.

⁹ See *Notes de cours*, 112-113.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

reformulation of Husserl's idea of *Urdoxa*,¹¹ Merleau-Ponty speaks in his later works of *Urdoxa*, the perceptual faith that first gives us access to the nascent world of perception.

Since we are not separate from the totality of being, we participate in the movement of disclosure of being, of *physis*. Such movement occurs *in* us, and *with* us, before any particular action from our part. Just being there, existing, we are already a site or place, a determinate emplacement of the event of disclosure –just as Silesius' rose *is* without why.¹² It is in this context that we must read Heidegger's fascination for Socrates. Indeed, Heidegger refers to Socrates as the greatest thinker of the West, the thinker who wrote nothing. Socrates' silence, his refusal to write, is for Heidegger a significant gesture that bears testimony to the depth of his thinking. The example of Socrates shows that the flight of thinking is inseparable from the being of the thinker: Socrates' thought was inseparable from his presence, his body, his voice, his actions.

Thus, the question is: How are we to understand this logos of silence, this voice of the ground? Throughout his work, Merleau-Ponty insistently argues that our bodies are the point of contact with the world and the earth. Yet, reading Husserl's concept of earth, he also remarks that the earth does not move, for it is the fundamental ground of experience. This means that there is a relation to the lived body, and to the earth-ground, which precedes any reference to motion and rest and, therefore, cannot be understood in terms of objective

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. Karl Schumann, Vol. Husserliana III/1 (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 241. English: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten, Vol. Second Book (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 252. With regard to the notions of *Urglaube* or *Urdoxa*, Husserl says the following, "We introduce the term *primal belief* [*Urglaube*] or *protodoxa* [*Urdoxa*], by which the intentional retrorelatedness [*Rückbezogenheit*], elaborated by us, of all 'belief modalities' is suitably expressed" (252). Thus, according to Husserl, the notion of primal belief alludes to our implicit belief in the existence of the objects of perception. In *The Husserl Dictionary* (New York: Continuum, 2012), Dermot Moran and Joseph Cohen explain this point as follows: "Husserl stresses that our 'fundamental belief' or 'basic belief' (*Urglaube*) concerning the existence and actuality of the world is given by perception" (49).

¹² *Notes de cours*, 107.

relations. There is a contact with ourselves, and with the earth-ground, that is more fundamental than any objective relation and which, according to Merleau-Ponty, implies a horizon of humanity, an existential entanglement in the world. In this regard, he suggests that the lived body, in spontaneous gestures and comportments, *in the world*, is a threshold: the site of passage to the silent, mute ground of being, the absolute ground of the earth.

In *Being and Time* (1927)¹³ Heidegger does not examine the problems concerning the beings of the earth and the body as such, but he sets the basis for approaching the question concerning the meaning of being in general. In this case, Heidegger determines our fundamental relatedness to being as a whole, our existential engagement with the world, in terms of the concept of comportment, *Verhalten*. Later, in the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger further specifies that our comportments are gestures, *Gebärden*. He shows that the bodying forth of the body, the existential unfolding of the body, is in each case the opening of a region, of a dimensionality within which we come to encounter things as they are. In this way, Heidegger hints at potential articulations between the phenomenon of the body and the work of art, for the work of art, too, in its earthly character, opens a site for the disclosure of beings. This intercrossing between the questions of art and bodiliness echoes the most fundamental philosophical insights present in Merleau-Ponty's work, to which the problematic of gesture is also crucial.

On the basis of this outline, let me summarily determine the scope and purpose of the present work: I shall investigate how do Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty articulate the problematic of gesture in relation to a non-metaphysical approach to the question of being. The themes of art and language are the two structural axes of my research. In this way, I

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.2 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977). English: *Being and Time*, revised by Dennis J. Schmidt, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

expect to show that the problematic of gesture is a pivotal question at the center of the problems of art and language and, therefore, of decisive importance for understanding the way in which Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty explore the limits of philosophy.

I also expect to contribute to current scholarly debates concerning the correlations and differences between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. For the most part, recent works on this topic take into consideration references to Heidegger that appear in major works such as the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945)¹⁴ and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964),¹⁵ but little is said about the notes and summaries from Merleau-Ponty's later courses at the Collège de France. Current studies also tend to overlook the resonances between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty arising from the problematic of the work of art, and the strategic importance of the question of art in a non-metaphysical thinking of being. In order to demarcate better the scope of the present work, let me move on to draw out an outline of some interpretations of the relation between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, those that touch on crucial points of our theme.

Debate Concerning the Resonances between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty

The publication of the *Zollikon Seminars* (1959-1969),¹⁶ edited by Medard Boss and published in 1987, marks the beginning of a debate concerning the correlations between Heidegger's approach to the phenomenon of the body and Merleau-Ponty's work. In his

¹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). English: *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012). The titles of Merleau-Ponty's works that have been translated into English will be given in English. Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

¹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). English: *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Zollikoner Seminare*, ed. Medard Boss (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987). English: *Zollikon Seminars. Protocols-Conversations-Letters*, ed. Medard Boss, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

article "Heidegger among the Doctors," Fr. William Richardson indicates that there are important convergences between the works of both philosophers, and remarks that this point "cries out for a careful comparison."¹⁷ Richard Askay, who worked on the translation of these seminars into English, points out that there are significant similarities between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and underscores that these similarities include: "their analysis of bodily being viz. (a) gesture and expression, (b) bodily being and spatiality, (c) refusing to see the body as merely a corporeal, self-contained object, and (d) phantom limb analysis."¹⁸ Askay considers these questions particularly in relation to *Being and Time*, the *Zollikon Seminars*, and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Regarding the differences between both philosophers, Askay points out that "Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the lived body essentially remains on the level of subjectivity,"¹⁹ and thus suggests that Merleau-Ponty's approach to the body does not take into consideration the ontological structure of existence, and remains within a philosophy of consciousness. In one of the working notes for *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty himself hints at this problem.

This evaluation of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is, however, partial. Askay does not take into account either Merleau-Ponty's ontological turn or the internal tensions traversing the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty the lived body is determined by anonymous structures, so that it cannot be simply reduced to the level of subjectivity and consciousness. I should also note that in the *Phenomenology of Perception* there is a sustained

¹⁷ See William Richardson, "Heidegger among the Doctors," in *Reading Heidegger. Commemorations*, ed. John Sallis, 49-63 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 52.

¹⁸ Richard Askay, "Heidegger, the body, and the French philosophers," *Continental Philosophy Review* (Kluwer Academic Publishers), no. 32 (1999): 29-35, 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

criticism of metaphysical dualisms, and the traditional approach to being as objectivity, and this position sets Merleau-Ponty's work on the way to ontology.²⁰

Kevin Aho undertakes the task of exploring some of the similarities between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty mentioned above. He demonstrates, for instance, that for “Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the spatial world is not a ‘receptacle’; rather, the body constitutes spatiality in its everyday movements.”²¹ Aho further indicates that there is coincidence “in the way the two interpret bodily movements, gestures, and expressions as already understood in terms of a meaningful social nexus.”²² In this sense, according to Aho, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty develop an understanding of the self that is not reducible to self-enclosed consciousness. He further remarks that in both cases there is an approach to the body as something other than a material thing, and an understanding of our relation to things that is not based on a physicalistic paradigm. He concludes that both philosophers offer a “phenomenological description of embodied agency that applies to human acts and practices *generally*.”²³ Yet, he qualifies their description of embodied agency as an example of regional ontology.

Aho identifies four essential differences between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. First, Merleau-Ponty conceives the world as intentional “object” of an incarnated consciousness, whereas for Heidegger “Dasein *is* the world.”²⁴ Second, Merleau-Ponty explains the articulation between world and meaning as if they were constituted by

²⁰ In *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), John Sallis remarks, for instance, that already in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty carries out “...a radical critique of that conception of being which, on Merleau-Ponty’s view, has dominated modern thought –namely, that conception according to which being is understood as objectivity. To this degree Merleau-Ponty’s earlier work is already directed at the ontological question”(54).

²¹ Kevin Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 38.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 45.

consciousness; Heidegger instead shows that meaning is somehow articulated in a “public context of intelligibility.”²⁵ Third, Merleau-Ponty sets perception as a sort of natural contact with the world that grounds cultural meaning, whereas for Heidegger there is a preeminence of Dasein, such that “perception is always saturated with cultural meaning.”²⁶ Fourth, Merleau-Ponty privileges the present of perception, and “Heidegger argues that our comportment in the present is derived from and made possible by a more primordial temporal structure that cannot be understood in terms of perception.”²⁷ Based on these premises, Aho suggests that “Merleau-Ponty is unable to account for the conditions of possibility of meaning,”²⁸ and that Heidegger’s philosophy remains for the most part abstract and formal –although, he remarks, this problem may be solved in part through Heidegger’s *metontology*.²⁹

In his article “Merleau-Ponty’s Criticism of Heidegger,”³⁰ Douglas Low examines in detail the arguments given by both Askay and Aho. He refutes their interpretations of the differences between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, as well as their criticisms of Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the body. According to Low’s argument, it is false that Merleau-Ponty disregards an ontological analysis of the body and that Heidegger’s account of being-in-the-world supersedes Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of perception. Furthermore, he shows that Merleau-Ponty adopts Heidegger’s characterization of human existence as *ekstasis*, to the

²⁵ Ibid., 46.

²⁶ Ibid., 47.

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

²⁸ Ibid., 48.

²⁹ Aho explains this as follows: “Metontology is associated with the ontic sciences only insofar as it has ‘being as its subject-matter.’ In short, Dasein is now thematized as *a* being, but not in terms of its static, present-at-hand attributes. Rather, it is thematized in terms of existence” (49). See also Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.26 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), 199-200. English: *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 157. Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

³⁰ See Douglas Low, “Merleau-Ponty’s Criticism of Heidegger,” *Philosophy Today* 53, no. 3 (2009): 273-293.

extent that the body is not related to the world as intentional object, but as openness. He says: “in a Heideggerian spirit, Merleau-Ponty claims that the individual’s experience rest upon the body that opens to a world that includes it and other human bodies.”³¹

Low carefully refutes Aho’s criticism of Merleau-Ponty –to which I referred above –, and points out that although both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger give primacy to the ontological, in Merleau-Ponty there is a more balanced attention to the ontic and, thereby, his philosophical approach to the body is more encompassing. Low summarizes this position as follows: “It is the ontological understanding of human existence that guides Merleau-Ponty’s studies, but it is the structure of the body (its emergent properties) that allows human ontological meaning to appear.”³²

Although Low’s reading, in my opinion, seems to be accurate, his interpretation of the correlation between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty does not consider the influence Heidegger’s later works may have had on Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. This influence is especially recognizable in Merleau-Ponty’s later lecture-notes. As Merleau-Ponty remarks in these notes, in *Being and Time* Heidegger overemphasizes the centrality of Dasein, and this leads to what could be called the “the anthropological misunderstanding” [*l’équivoque anthropologis*].³³ For in *Being and Time* the worldhood of the world is determined in light of Dasein’s ontological structure, and a proper understanding of the horizon of the world in terms of the truth of being, in terms of the fundamental openness of being, is left in abeyance. Consequently, Merleau-Ponty devotes more attention to examining Heidegger’s works from the 1930s and thereafter. Thus, one could say that Heidegger’s later works, in which the problem of the truth of being is central, are more influential on Merleau-Ponty’s

³¹ Ibid., 273.

³² Ibid., 279.

³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours*, 95.

phenomenological ontology than *Being and Time*. And this point deserves careful consideration.

Thus, considering potential similarities between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I shall follow closely Merleau-Ponty's interpretations of Heidegger's work. Concerning the debate mentioned above, I shall argue that Aho's assessment of the problematic of the body as something restricted to a regional ontology conflicts with Heidegger's qualification of the problem of the body as a pressing problem, which involves the problems concerning the meaning of being and the ontological difference. It seems to me that Aho's interpretation overlooks the idea that for Heidegger the body may be interpreted as site of openness, as a setting of the truth, and as poetic gesture.

The Problem of the Body and the Problem of the Truth of Being

In the present research I follow, to some extent, the path opened up by Daniela Vallega-Neu's interpretation of the problem of the body in Heidegger. It is worth noting that Vallega-Neu finds important resonances between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, specifically in relation to ontological questions. Let me review briefly one of her central arguments.

Discussing the problem of bodily being, with a focus on Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy*,³⁴ and considering Merleau-Ponty's ontological investigations in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Vallega-Neu says:

In both cases the originary opening of the bodily dimension of being occurs through the finitude of being (in Heidegger articulated as withdrawal, in Merleau-Ponty as zero of being or nothingness). In both cases bodily being is thought as an opening, articulating event, although in different ways. A significant difference is found in the fact that Merleau-Ponty arrives at the bodily dimension of being through an analysis of perception, whereas in Heidegger we arrive at it through the disclosive power of an attunement to the withdrawing aspect of being. Further Merleau-Ponty's focus always remains the plenitude of being/s, and

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.65 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989). English: *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

the negativity of being is thought only as passage, as an invisible that belongs to the visible, whereas in Heidegger the withdrawal or abysmal opening of be-ing functions like an origin out of which a world and earth disclose.³⁵

The claim that for Merleau-Ponty the negativity of being is thought only as passage is controversial, for Merleau-Ponty thinks the negativity of being following to an important extent Heidegger's own indications, as may be inferred from his later lecture-notes. Still, Daniela Vallega-Neu's reading is remarkable because it fills out a gap in Heidegger's account of the problem of the body, as it is developed in the Zollikon seminars. She articulates Heidegger's understanding of bodily being and art, and remarks that Heidegger tends to consider being and beings as simultaneous, that is, as different dimensions of an original and unique event of disclosure, whereby being finds a shelter in beings, in works of art and the gestures of the body. For the purposes of the present introduction, I should note that Vallega-Neu's interpretation demonstrates that Heidegger's reflection on art would complement the analysis of bodily being from the Zollikon seminars, and links the problem of bodiliness and gesture to the cardinal question of the truth of being. This is something that remains implicit in Heidegger's approach to the problem of the body in the Zollikon seminars, and it is a point of controversy.

In the Zollikon seminars Heidegger approaches the problem of the body mainly on the basis of the existential analytic, with a renewed emphasis on the value of everydayness, and does not properly articulate this problem with the question of the truth of being and the event, which is in part what I shall attempt to do in the present work. David Farrell Krell accurately defines this problem, again in a contrast with Merleau-Ponty:

That the *body* as being in the world is the cardinal *ontological* problem is no news to students of Merleau-Ponty, whose work Heidegger knew about, but who plays no role at all in the

³⁵ Daniela Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2005), 100.

Zollikon seminars, even though the question of the body is the recurrent theme there. It is also worth noting that when the question of the body is raised, as it is throughout the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger reverts to the vocabulary of existential ontology, of *In-der-Welt-sein*, whereas the aletheiological and topological language of the later Heidegger is left in abeyance: references to *φύσις* and to the open region are vague and indeterminate, references to appropriation and the granting are all but absent.³⁶

Krell's reference to Merleau-Ponty calls attention to the fact that the body is the "cardinal *ontological* problem," and criticizes Heidegger for bypassing a proper ontological analysis of such an important question. Developing this argument, Krell provides a very extensive and detailed account of the problem of the body in Heidegger, and its articulations with the question of life. His analysis shows that life is a haunting *daimon* Heidegger never manages to grasp, and that this *daimon* puts into question the distinctions between Dasein and animal, existence and pure life. In a sense, Krell's study indirectly corroborates Merleau-Ponty's view on the problem of the body and sensible being, particularly considering what he says about the concept of earth in Husserl, and the main determinations of the notion of flesh: the earth is a non-object; rather, it is in some way a phantom that resists philosophical representations.

Based on this outline of some of the main positions and problems concerning the correlations between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I may determine in a preliminary way the scope of the present work, and the points of view on the basis of which I may develop this research.

Let me, then, recapitulate and conclude this section. As I have already indicated, it is widely assumed that there are essential philosophical convergences between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, particularly concerning the problematic of the body. However, despite these

³⁶ David Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 53.

similarities, it is also generally acknowledged that Heidegger neglected the question of the body, whereas Merleau-Ponty did not. The question, then, is whether this difference in “emphasis” compromises the possibility of a fundamental affinity between their philosophical projects. This question involves another one, that is, whether a radical ontological thinking, should relegate the problem of the sensible, and of the body, to a subordinate problem.

My analysis of the problem of gesture should involve a response to these questions. This is clear if one takes into account the way Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty approach the problems of art and poetic language. Indeed, for both thinkers the work of art, and the poetic work in general, relates to the primordial experience of the truth, as it is implicated, too, in gestures and comportments. In line with this, one could say that art and poetry give us access to a living, dynamic truth that is imbricated in our embodied existence. In this way, art makes possible a thinking of the truth of being, and of ontology, that is foreclosed in metaphysical approaches. Still, since the trajectories of both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are traversed by turns, and by inner tensions, one cannot help but recognize that the similarities between the two thinkers necessarily involve essential divergencies. The path of each thinker has a unique voice and tone, which cannot be assimilated to any other. For this reason, after drawing out some parallels, I shall focus on interpreting each path separately. Thus, a substantial part of this work will be devoted to tracing the motif of gesture within the more general problematics of art and language, as it is articulated in each individual path.

Methodological Considerations

As I have already indicated, in the present dissertation I shall investigate how the motif of gesture may be articulated with the more general problematics of art and language

in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. This means that this work has an exegetic character, and that it covers a wide range of texts and problems. In covering this material, I focus on the constellation of concepts, themes and problems germane to the problem of gesture; for example: the concept of form, the concepts of hint and sign, the theme of comportment, the problem of the body, the problem of bodily expression –including the problematic of the voice and the tone in speech –, and the question of silence. In order to contain my research within reasonable limits, particularly regarding the Heideggerian corpus, I concentrate my research on texts in which there are explicit and substantial references to the problem of gesture or the body. In this sense, Heidegger's essay on the work of art is an exception.

Having said this, I should note that the most salient difficulties I encountered in the present work have to do with the issue of language. From a methodological point of view, this issue has multiple ramifications.

Although it is quite obvious, I should note that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty speak different languages and they have very different styles of writing and philosophizing. Furthermore, I should recall that in the internal development of their works, the terminology and the style undergo significant transformations. For this reason, in my arguments I often digress in order to explain the evolution and genesis of terms and concepts. Sometimes, it is necessary, too, to trace links between problems and concepts that initially may seem disparate, but which illuminate the problem of gesture and the body.

I should also note that the problem of gesture overlaps with other substantive questions in ways that are often implicit. In these cases, it seemed necessary to venture interpretations and to make explicit what the texts merely evoke, and to leap over different periods and texts to reveal trains of thought the authors themselves did not develop.

For example, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the verb *verhalten*, which, in the context of the existential analytic is translated as “relate itself,” alluding to Dasein’s understanding relatedness to being, whereas the noun *Verhalten* translates as comportment or behavior. In *Being and Time* Heidegger uses the verb *gebärden* once in order to define the comportment or behavior of the they, *das Man*.

Later, in the *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* (1949/1957),³⁷ Heidegger occasionally introduces a hyphen in the noun *Ver-halten*, and in this way he transforms the meaning of this term: Andrew Mitchell translates it as “restraint,”³⁸ but one could also say that it refers to the way being has a hold on us, and the way we stand in relation to being. Or, one might also say that this hyphen calls attention to the way we carry our being, the way we bear our existence: our stance, our posture, *Haltung*.

In the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger equates comportment in general, *Verhalten*, and gesture, *Gebärde*, for in both cases there is reference to the bearing or carrying of one’s entire being, that is, including one’s body. Gestures, in turn, are determinations of the bodying forth [*Leiben*] of the body [*Leib*], the existential dimensionality of the body. Heidegger alludes to this movement using the expression: “*der Leib leibt*.”

These brief indications suffice to show that in Heidegger’s work the problems of the body, gesture, and comportment are intrinsically related. Moreover, one can see that Heidegger’s analysis of bodily being hinges on peculiarities of the German language, and that this characteristic makes his work somewhat untranslatable. This means that one cannot undertake an analysis of the problematic of gesture and the body without calling attention to

³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, ed. Petra Jaeger, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 79 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005). English: Martin Heidegger, Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, Kindle Edition, trans. Andrew Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.”

³⁸ See *ibid.*, 170/159.

the terminological peculiarities of Heidegger's work, and without calling attention to the limits imposed by language itself, which sometimes requires that one leave terms or expressions untranslated.

Although Merleau-Ponty's work rarely includes etymological analyses, and he does not play with language in the same way that Heidegger does, his philosophical insights are fundamentally determined by an attentive consideration of the ambiguity of concepts. For example, one can see that in *The Structure of Behavior* (1942),³⁹ Merleau-Ponty starts his research calling attention to the characteristic ambiguity of the concept of comportment or behavior, which can be applied equally to describe physical and psychic phenomena, and which may also be characterized in terms of the concept of form. The ambiguities inherent to the concepts of form and comportment are decisive for understanding Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the problem of the body in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. In this book he introduces the concept of "body schema" to name the implicit understanding of our bodies that is manifest in our posture, movements and gestures, and which may not be subordinated to objective determinations of the body. In this sense, the concept of "body schema" articulates meaning and bodily movement, and is a re-appropriation of the concepts of comportment and form. Along these lines, one may say that when Merleau-Ponty talks about the body he does not always refer to the body we touch and see as a material thing, and one needs to be attentive to these nuances when considering potential parallels with Heidegger's analysis of the "lived body," of *Leib*.

Based on these premises, one could say that the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty cannot be compared *in general* without somehow effacing the peculiarities of their own

³⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement*, 4e édition, Quadrige (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013). English: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963). Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

philosophical modes of inquiry. Yet, Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, and appropriation of Heidegger's work provides a standpoint for bridging these differences. For this reason, as I have already indicated, in my arguments I often follow Merleau-Ponty's own interpretations of Heidegger's works.

Let me conclude this section by noting that Merleau-Ponty provides extensive analyses of bodily being and gesture in relation to art, whereas in Heidegger's work there are few explicit references to this relation. This fact makes it difficult to determine in what sense, and to what extent, the problematic of gesture is central in Heidegger's approach to art. For this reason I devote extensive sections of the present work to elucidating this relation, in order to make explicit how Heidegger understands the *work* of art, what type of action it is, and in what sense it involves the bodily character of gestures.

Outline of the Project

This dissertation consists of three parts, but the first part differs substantially from the other two. In the first part I sketch out a general introduction to the problematics of the body and gesture, and I weave connections between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in which their approaches to the notion of gesture converge. In the second and third parts I examine the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty separately, and I explore the problem of gesture with a focus on the themes of art and language. In this sense, one could say that the second and third parts of the dissertation explore in depth the background of problems and arguments that is presupposed in the first part.

The first part of the dissertation comprises three chapters. In the first chapter I take up the concept of form as the basis to draw out a parallel between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. I show that in the *Phenomenology of Perception* the concept of form –which Merleau-

Ponty borrows from Gestalt theorists –evolves into Merleau-Ponty’s concept of body schema, and that the concept of body schema determines the body as openness to the world in a way that bears similarities with Heidegger’s existential analytic. Then I examine some basic correlations between Gestalt theory and Heidegger’s existential analytic. On the basis of this examination, I recall arguments from *Being and Time* that relate to the problem of sense perception and compare them with central theses from the *Phenomenology of Perception*. To conclude this chapter, I call attention to some differences between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and then I introduce questions concerning specifically the problem of the body in Heidegger.

In the second chapter I examine Heidegger’s approach to the problem of the body as it is developed in the Zollikon seminars. I underscore that in these seminars Heidegger qualifies the problem of the body as the most difficult and, therefore, there may be strong reasons to think that Heidegger considers the problem of the body as a cardinal ontological problem. I argue that the essential difficulty pertaining to the problem of the body has to do with the fact that the phenomenon of the body is ambiguous, and I remark that Heidegger is deeply aware of this ambiguity. The phenomenon of the body is ambiguous because I am my body –the lived body, *der Leib* –and, at the same time, the body is a thing in the world, *a* body. I conclude by saying that Heidegger leaves the problem of the body in suspense, but this suspense is significant: it shows that the problem of the body is a genuine phenomenological challenge.

The third chapter is devoted to examining the problem of gesture and the articulations between gesture, language, and art. It continues the train of arguments sketched out in the second chapter –particularly in what concerns the phenomenon of the lived body –and sets up parallels with Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of gesture. I argue that the notion of

gesture sheds light on the problem of the body because gestures conjoin bodily movement and meaning, specifically the meaning that is entwined into affective dispositions. After a contrast with Husserl's approach to gesture in the *Logical Investigations*,⁴⁰ and considering some arguments from Merleau-Ponty's reading of Heidegger, I conclude by showing that gestures stem from a pre-intentional openness to the world, in the same way as the work of art.

The second part of the dissertation is centered upon the themes of art and gesture, and it contains two chapters: chapters four and five. In this part of the dissertation I extensively discuss ontological questions –specifically in relation to the problems of nature, life and the earth –and show how they relate to the phenomenology of the body and art.

In chapter four I investigate Heidegger's approach to the bodily dimension in art. Initially, I argue that the motifs of the body and life, as they appear in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche (1936-40),⁴¹ resonate in the lecture *The Origin of the Work of Art* from 1936,⁴² particularly in what concerns the concept of form and the earthly dimension of the work. Elaborating on this point, I draw some comparisons with Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh. I further argue that the *work* of art has a gestural character, for it is a sort of doing that stems from a primordial involvement in being, which is prior to the distinction between subject and object. In line with this, I suggest that one could characterize the work of art as the

⁴⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vols. Zweiter Band, I-II Teile (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1913/1925). English: *Logical Investigations*, Vols. I and II, trans. J. N. Findlay (New York: Routledge, 2001). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Band 6.1 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996). English: *Nietzsche I and II*, trans. David Farrell Krell, Vol. I and II (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); *Nietzsche III and IV*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi, Vol. III and IV (New York: HarperCollins, 1991). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

⁴² Martin Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes (1935-36)*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.5, in *Holzwege*, 1-74 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977). English: "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 139-212 (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

primordial work of a historical people, not of a subject, as the communal gesture that sets a rift in the earth. I conclude this chapter by establishing some connections between the problem of gesture and the motif of the “They,” as it is introduced in *Being and Time*.

Chapter five is dedicated to examining the intercrossings between the problems of the body, art and gesture in Merleau-Ponty’s work. The introduction to this chapter is an extensive reflection on the motifs of nature and the earth, particularly in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Husserl. I show that in Merleau-Ponty’s work the body appears as the pivotal element that connects us to the fundamental earth-ground or primordial nature, and that the problem of the earth-ground leads to questions concerning the negativity of being. With regard to this, I trace some connections between Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh and Heidegger’s thinking of being as no-thing. Continuing on from this point, I argue that the ontology of the flesh articulates the relation between lived body and being in such a way that the body appears eminently as a gestural body: a body that presupposes an affective milieu of significance, an attuned engagement with being. The last section of this chapter explores the resonances of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh in his meditations on the work of art, as he develops them in *Eye and Mind* (1961).⁴³

The third part of the dissertation deals with the problem of language, and includes chapter six and seven. In this part of the dissertation I continue exploring the themes of gesture and affectivity, and elucidate questions concerning both the bodily character of language and the linguistic and gestural nature of the body.

⁴³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “L’œil et l’esprit,” in *Oeuvres*, ed. Claude Lefort, 1591-1628 (Paris: Gallimard, 2010). English: “Eye and mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, ed. Ted Toadvine and Leonar Lawlor, 351-378 (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007). Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

In chapter six I investigate the problem of gesture in relation to Heidegger's meditations on language and attunement. To introduce this chapter, I elaborate on Heidegger's approach to the problems of gesture and language in relation to the primordial notion of saying. Then I proceed to examine Heidegger's critique of the metaphysical interpretation of gesture as expression and his approach to gestural signification as something that involves grounding attunements. In *Being and Time* Heidegger illustrates this point with a reference to poetic speech, and I meditate extensively on this indication and the way it shows the body as attunement. The central sections of this chapter trace the correlation between gesture and poetry in Heidegger's lectures on Hölderlin from the 1930s, specifically in relation to the motifs of the hint and the sign. I further examine the motifs of the hint and the sign in Heidegger's notes on language published as *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*.⁴⁴ I argue that essential signs and gestures are pervaded by the silence of attunements, and this leads to questions concerning the attunement of gratitude and its relation to thinking. Thus, I conclude this chapter by exploring Heidegger's approach to thinking as handicraft in *What is Called Thinking?* (1951/52)⁴⁵ and his reflections on gesture in "A Dialogue on Language" [*Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache*] (1953/54), text included in *On the Way to Language*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See Martin Heidegger, *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, ed. Thomas Regehly, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.74 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2010), 92. This book has not been translated into English, thus, in the course of the present work I will provide my own translation of the passages I quote and the transcription of the original.

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.8 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002). English: *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: HarperCollins, 2004). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.12 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985). English: *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

Chapter seven is devoted to the themes of language and gesture in Merleau-Ponty's work. This chapter is introduced with a discussion about the influence Heidegger's ontology of language may have had on Merleau-Ponty's view. Then, I move on to investigate Merleau-Ponty's approach to the problem of language and expression in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, and the distinction he establishes there between the *spoken speech*, which is sedimented language, and *speaking speech*, which is gestural. Reading Merleau-Ponty's course summaries and lecture-notes, and expanding on the problematic of gesture, I examine Merleau-Ponty's qualification of language as diacritical, and the way in which it leads to ontological questions. Along these lines, I argue that the notion of gesture serves to articulate different levels of meaning, the level that corresponds to ideality and sedimented significations and the level that corresponds to lived, affective significations. In this way, I show that the problem of gesture is intrinsically related to Merleau-Ponty's idea of carnal generality, which in turn corresponds to the understanding of meaning as institution. At this point in the argument, I make reference to *The Prose of the World* and related texts.⁴⁷ Based on Merleau-Ponty's reading of the problem of ideality in Husserl, I conclude this chapter by exploring the idea of carnal generality in relation to the theme of nature and the earth, and showing how these themes are integrated in the ontology of the flesh.

⁴⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). English: *The Prose of the World*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1981). Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

Part One: The Problem of the Body and Gesture

Chapter One: The Problem of the Body from Merleau-Ponty to

Heidegger

Phenomenology and the Roots of the Body

Husserl's philosophy is certainly the most salient influence on the works of both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Husserl's phenomenological maxim "*zu den Sachen selbst!*" is perhaps the most significant imprint of this influence. But what, exactly, does this phenomenological return to the things themselves mean? The phenomenological imperative "to the things themselves" is a call to return to the beginnings of philosophy, to the grounds that determine thinking,⁴⁸ what is given before articulated thought.⁴⁹ But this is perhaps an impossible task, for how could thinking reflect on its own ground without misrepresenting it as an object? So, it seems, this task requires a transgression of the limits of objectifying, reflective thinking, and the passage towards a non-metaphysical thinking. As Merleau-Ponty points out in his lectures on Nature (1956-60)⁵⁰ and also throughout his later lectures on Husserl (1959-60),⁵¹ Husserl's pursuit of the *bloße Sache* leads him to the limits of phenomenology, the earthly roots of the body, the point of contact between body and earth. Merleau-Ponty explains that the earth is a very peculiar object, a non-object, for it silently

⁴⁸ With regard to this, John Sallis explains in *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*, "radical philosophy is a peculiar *return to beginnings*, a turning towards what already determines it" (17).

⁴⁹ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Merleau-Ponty: Notes de cours sur L'Origine de la géométrie de Husserl suivi de Recherches sur la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Franck Robert and Renaud Barbaras (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 11-18. English: *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002). 11-17. Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

⁵⁰ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La nature. Notes, Cours du Collège de France, suivi des Résumés de Cours Correspondants* (Paris: Gallimard/ Editions du Seuil, 1995). English: *Nature. Course Notes from the Collège de France*, Compiled and with notes by Dominique Séglaard, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 109-10/ 76-77. Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

⁵¹ See *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 81-84/67-71.

moves with us and, at the same time, it remains at essential rest. The earth is the ground presupposed by our lived body, a ground that withdraws from any attempt at representation. Thus, one may say that the earth escapes the domain of intentional relations and encroaches on the domain of being. For the earth is the soil and source of all reflection, the ground that is present wherever we go; even if we were to go to other planets, the earth would remain present as that which constitutes the world we were thrown into, and which pre-figures all thought. As Merleau-Ponty suggests in his lecture-notes on *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, this is the constellation of problems underlying the convergences between the later Husserl and Heidegger. And as I shall demonstrate in the present work, this constellation of problems also determines the essential affinities between Merleau-Ponty, especially after his “ontological turn,” and Heidegger.⁵²

In Merleau-Ponty’s view, the problem of the body is fundamental to the questions concerning the pre-predicative grounds of thought, a problem that touches on the limits of philosophy and phenomenology. Indeed, from the very beginning of his career Merleau-Ponty was haunted by the problematic of the body and its relations to the grounds of phenomenology, a problem that relentlessly demands him to explore new terms, new points of departure, new attempts at articulating the horizon of humanity and nature as a whole.

Already in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty carries out an extensive reflection on the problem of the body, and demonstrates that the body contains a pre-predicative understanding of the world that is manifest in comportment. He introduces the

⁵² Regarding the method Merleau-Ponty uses to draw out the convergences between Husserl and Heidegger, and which is highly indebted to Heidegger, Leonard Lawlor remarks that Merleau-Ponty interprets these convergences on the basis of a dialogue, set in a *milieu* between the extremes of subjective and objective thought, which assumes that the other’s presence remains open in my own interrogation, in such a way that we may think with him what remains unthought or unsaid in his thought. See Leonard Lawlor, “*Verflechtung*: The Triple Significance of Merleau-Ponty’s Course Notes on Husserl’s ‘The Origin of Geometry,’” in: *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, xi-xvi.

concept of “body schema” [*schéma corporelle*], which is borrowed from studies in psychiatry and neurology,⁵³ in order to qualify this embodied understanding. This concept is set up as a re-interpretation of the concept of gestalt, which is the central concept in *The Structure of Behavior*. The body schema has, indeed, a strategic function analogous to that of gestalt, for it qualifies human comportment as intrinsically meaningful. In the pages that follow I will examine this conceptual development in detail. On the basis of this analysis I will sketch out some basic points of coincidence with Heidegger’s work.

Gestalt and Comportment: Beyond Materialism and Idealism

In *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty develops an analysis of comportment that aims to overcome the division between idealism and materialism, and which would explain the relation between consciousness and nature independently of causal or mechanistic frameworks. As Merleau-Ponty explains, the initial problem consists in the impossibility of maintaining the opposition between reflex or automatic actions and intentional, intelligent activity. Such opposition is unsustainable not only because it leads to confusions and obscurities,⁵⁴ but also because a proper explanation of comportment presupposes a configuration of the world as a unified whole, a gestalt or structure.⁵⁵ With regard to this, as

⁵³ According to Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, Merleau-Ponty adopts this notion presumably on the basis of his reading of a book by Jean L’hermite, *L’image de notre corps* (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1939), wherein there is a synthesis of researches on the body developed at the time in disciplines such as neurology and psychiatry. Particularly, De Saint Aubert argues, the work of the neurologist and psychiatrist Paul Schilder’s had a decisive influence, for his concept of *Körperschema* will determine the evolution from the concept of body schema to the concept of the flesh. See Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Être et chair. Du corps au désir: L’habilitation ontologique de la chair* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), ch. 1.

⁵⁴ See *The Structure of Behavior*, 60/43.

⁵⁵ See Barry Smith essay, “Gestalt Theory: An Essay in Philosophy,” in *Foundations of Gestalt Theory*, ed. Barry Smith, 11-81 (Munich and Vienna: Philosophia, 1988). Following the presentation of Barry Smith we can provide a general determination of the concept of Gestalt on the basis of Ehrenfel’s definition, which, according to Smith, is the seed of the various developments of this theory. He says the following: “Ehrenfel’s proposal, now, is that wherever we have a relation of this sort, between a complex of experienced elements on the one hand and some associated unitary experience of a single invariant structure on the other, we are to conceive this latter structure as a Gestalt, and to understand the given unitary experience as structurally analogous to the

Merleau-Ponty argues, the concept of form works as a hinge articulating the spheres of nature and consciousness, for it can be applied to both spheres of experience:

It is not a question of risking one hypothesis among others, but of introducing a new category, the category of 'form', which having its application in the inorganic as well as the organic domain, would permit bringing to light the 'transverse functions' in the nervous system of which Wartheimer speaks and whose existence is confirmed by experience without a vitalist hypothesis. For the 'forms' and in particular the physical systems, are defined as total processes whose properties are not the sum of those which the isolated parts would possess.⁵⁶

Merleau-Ponty underscores that the main contribution from Gestalt theorists is that they determine comportments as structured wholes, which cannot be explained in terms of discrete elements. He further suggests that Gestalt theory sets the grounds for understanding comportment beyond the dichotomies between freedom and determinism, for it shows that even our "least conscious reactions" appear always "guided by the internal and external situation itself and capable up to a certain point of adapting themselves to that which is particular to it..."⁵⁷ In this way, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the concept of form pinpoints two essential aspects of human comportment. On the one hand, comportments involve a meaningful apprehension of the world as a whole, that is, an embedded, pre-reflexive understanding of figures against a ground. On the other hand, comportments are spontaneous adaptations to particular situations, whose meaning is not reducible to physical

experience of a spatial shape" (14). As Smith points out, what is remarkable in Ehrenfel's approach is that it can be applied to the most diverse types of experience, even non-perceptual ones: "The Gestalt concept is then generalized further to embrace also complex objects of experience founded on *inner* perceptions, that to say, on one's presentations of one's own elementary feelings, acts or mental states" (15). This general determination of the concept of Gestalt is also implied in Merleau-Ponty's own approach, even though mostly the Berlin school influenced him.

⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, 66/47. "Il ne s'agit pas de risquer une hypothèse parmi d'autres, mais d'introduire une nouvelle catégorie, la catégorie de «forme», qui ayant son application dans le domaine inorganique comme dans le domaine organique, permettrait de faire apparaître dans le système nerveux, sans hypothèse vitaliste, les «fonctions transversales» dont avait parlé Wertheimer et dont l'observation confirme l'existence. Car les «formes» se définissent comme des processus totaux dont les propriétés ne sont pas la somme de celles que posséderaient les parties isolées."

⁵⁷ Ibid., 60/43. "Puisque nos réactions les moins conscientes ne sont jamais isolables dans l'ensemble de l'activité nerveuse, qu'elles semblent guidées dans chaque cas par la situation interne et externe elle-même et capables, jusqu'à un certain point, de s'adapter à ce qu'elle a de particulier:"

or physiological processes –a point that marks Merleau-Ponty’s distance from some main authors from Gestalt psychology.⁵⁸

On the basis of the insight that forms are indivisible unities, that they cannot be explained referring to “external,” separate elements,⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty shows that comportment “no longer has one signification, it *is* itself signification.”⁶⁰ In this way, the concept of form implies a *gestural* understanding of comportment. He says: “...the reactions of an organism are not edifices constructed from elementary movements, but gestures gifted with an internal unity.”⁶¹ Along these lines, one may say that the notion of gesture defines human action and comportment out of the framework imposed by metaphysical dualisms, for gestures adumbrate a field of meaning that is prior to the voluntary, constitutive work of consciousness. It is worth noting, however, that in *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty does not explore in depth the structure of the phenomenal body, nor the ontological grounds presupposed by his study of the concepts of form and comportment. This book is devoted to the characterization and analysis of the concept of form in the organic world, and it demonstrates that the concept of form is of decisive importance for understanding the functioning of bodies in general.⁶² Merleau-Ponty undertakes the task of exploring further the structure or form of the body, the phenomenal body and its existential relation to the world, later in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

⁵⁸ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2014), 53. English: “The Primacy of Perception,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 89-118 (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 99. Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

⁵⁹ See *The Structure of Behavior*, 206/134.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 187/122. “Ici le comportement n’a plus seulement une signification, il est lui-même signification.”

⁶¹ Ibid., 196/130. “...les réactions d’un organisme ne sont pas des édifices de mouvements élémentaires, mais de gestes doués d’une unité intérieure.”

⁶² According to De Saint Aubert, the passage from *The Structure of Behavior* to the *Phenomenology of Perception* can be characterized in terms of a passage from the exterior view of the body to the interior view of the phenomenal body. See Emmanuel Saint Aubert, *Être et chair. Du corps au désir: L’habilitation ontologique de la chair* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 78.

The Concept of Form and the Notion of Body Schema

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* the concept of form is re-interpreted in terms of the notion of body schema, *schéma corporelle*. Merleau-Ponty carries out this re-interpretation in three moments. The first moment defines this schema as a sort of summary (*résumé*) of our bodily experience. In this case, the body schema is presented as “capable of providing any momentary interoceptivity and proprioceptivity with a commentary and a signification.”⁶³ This initial approach characterizes the body schema as a work of unification that somehow sets the body apart, as if it were not intrinsically related to a context or environment. But this is just an initial approach to the form of the body. Hence, the second moment goes further and specifies that the body schema is more than a synthesis or summary of bodily associations because it displays significations contained in my entire situation. And this means that the body schema is a gestalt and a posture: “Thus we are making our way toward a second definition of the body schema: it will no longer be the mere result of associations established in the course of experience, but rather the global awareness of my posture in the intersensory world, a ‘form’ in Gestalt psychology’s sense of the word.”⁶⁴ Here, Merleau-Ponty remarks that the experience of my body presupposes a global awareness of my stance in the world. This second definition, however, does not explain what is the type of relation to the world that gives unity to my posture or the conditions on the basis of which my global awareness of the world is constituted. Hence, Merleau-Ponty proceeds to characterize a third, deeper determination of the body schema, which may be understood in terms of the body’s dynamic entanglement in the world. At this level, the body schema is form or

⁶³ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 115/101. “...capable de donner un commentaire et une signification à la interoceptivité et à la proprioceptivité du moment”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 116/102. “On s’achemine donc vers une seconde définition du schéma corporelle: il ne sera plus le simple résultat des associations établies au cours de la expérience, mais une prise de conscience globale de ma posture dans le monde intersensoriel, une «forme» au sens de la Gestaltpsychologie”

structure insofar as it reveals a practical and affective engagement with the world. Merleau-Ponty introduces the final definition of body schema as follows: “If my body can ultimately be a ‘form,’ and if there can be, in front of it, privileged figures against indifferent backgrounds, this is insofar as my body is polarized by its tasks, insofar as it *exists toward* them, insofar as it coils up upon itself in order to reach its goal, and the ‘body schema’ is, in the end, a manner of expressing that my body is in and toward the world.”⁶⁵

Hence, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, the notion of body schema reveals the ecstatic character of the body, such that its form or gestalt is not simply the expression of an epistemic function or an static image of my being, but rather of an intimate connection to the world as a whole: polarization, directionality, a sense of existential meaning.⁶⁶

With regard to this, Emmanuel de Saint Aubert argues that the notion of body schema foreshadows Merleau-Ponty’s notion of carnal generality and the notion of flesh, for it reveals the body as a gestural body, whose spontaneous movements are reconfigurations of the world as a whole.⁶⁷ De Saint Aubert further explains that the body schema is a system of equivalences, a symbolic and libidinal body whose gestures are, in a sense, shaped by desire.⁶⁸

We therefore see how Merleau-Ponty’s appropriation of the concept of gestalt as perceptual unity, a unity structured in terms of the relation between figure and ground, leads to an interpretation of the lived body as gestural body. In line with this, one might say that

⁶⁵ Ibid., 117/103. “*En dernière analyse, si mon corps peut être une «forme» et s’il peut y avoir devant lui des figures privilégiées sur des fonds indifférents, c’est en tant qu’il est polarisé par ses tâches, qu’il existe vers elles; qu’il se ramasse sur lui-même pour atteindre son but, et le «schéma corporel» est finalement une manière d’exprimer que mon corps est au monde.*”

⁶⁶ In relation to this point, in “The Primacy of Perception” Merleau-Ponty claims the following: “As Gestalt psychology has shown, structure, gestalt, meaning are no less visible in objectively observable behavior than in the experience of ourselves –provided of course, that objectively is not confused with what is measurable” (100).

⁶⁷ See De Saint Aubert, *Être et chair*, 108. He says: “*Le schéma corporel déploie un space expressif et dessine le monde par ses gestes.*”

⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, 111-12.

the body is not primarily a physical body, and that the world is not primarily an objective world. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, the carnal generality of the world, which is “schematized” by our bodies, is an affective milieu. In this regard, as will become clearer in subsequent sections of this dissertation, there are some important affinities with Heidegger’s existential analytic, particularly regarding the notion of attunement.

And yet, at this stage Merleau-Ponty still struggles to find an appropriate way to define the complexities of the body schema. Even when Merleau-Ponty qualifies the body schema in terms of an affective engagement with the world, the world still appears, to some extent, to be an intentional object of incarnated consciousness. He remarks that my body “is in and toward the world,” “*mon corps est au monde*,” without specifying what grants unity to this articulation between body and world in ontological terms. Therefore, although the concept of body schema already prefigures the basic traits of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh, as De Saint Aubert demonstrates,⁶⁹ one can see that acknowledging the centrality of the problem of the body does not mean that its ontological status has been clarified. Indeed, although the body schema is not reducible to the body-thing or the body-image, neither can it be determined as a subjective body, a body that is incarnated *consciousness*.⁷⁰ In short, the being of the body, and the nature of its connection to the world, remains as a pressing difficulty.

In one of the working notes for *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that his earlier work remains caught in a “philosophy of consciousness” whose fundamental

⁶⁹ This is one of the central theses De Saint Aubert defends in *Être et chair*.

⁷⁰ See Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20. Gallagher suggests that Merleau-Ponty’s concept of body schema denotes “a dynamic functioning of the body in its environment,” and is opposed to what he determines as “body-image,” which is a conscious representation of our own bodies. According to De Saint Aubert, Gallagher’s interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of body schema is misleading, for part of Merleau-Ponty’s point is to show the difficulty to determine such distinction from a genuine phenomenological perspective. See *Être et chair*, 39-58.

premises still require “ontological explication.”⁷¹ This would explain in part why, after the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty turns his attention to the problem of truth, and to the problem concerning the nascent logos of nature. As I shall argue later on, this turn sets the problematic of the body in relation to questions concerning the meaning of being in general. Elaborating on this problem, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty will refer to the body as the redoubling of being, as the intertwining of the visible and the invisible. On this view, bodily movements and gestures reveal themselves as the primordial latencies of the nascent logos of the world.

Let me conclude this section by noting that, in Merleau-Ponty’s earlier work, the problem of the body, and the distinction between lived body and body-object –or body schema and body-image –, already involves questions concerning the difference between being and beings. In fact, one can see that from the very beginning Merleau-Ponty’s work sets up an approach to the body that goes beyond any determination of the body as object. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* the body is dealt with in terms of the notions of form and comportment, as embodied understanding of the world. Merleau-Ponty develops a phenomenology of the body that challenges metaphysical dualisms, and which prepares the way for an ontological turn that coincides with Heidegger’s work in significant ways. Let me, then, explore some of the fundamental affinities between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. In this task, I shall focus on central arguments from *Being and Time*, for this work had a direct impact on the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

⁷¹ *The Visible and the Invisible*, 234/183.

Being and Time: Perception and Gestalt Theory

As I have already indicated, in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of form, gestalt, as a concept that unifies the spheres of consciousness and nature, and he often returns to this concept to determine the ways in which perception immediately grants us access to the world as a structured whole, which is not divisible into discrete elements. Thereby, the concept of form provides a key for understanding perception away from traditional dichotomies between empiricism and intellectualism, materialism and idealism, granted that we read the notion of form from a phenomenological perspective, as Merleau-Ponty does, avoiding the assumption that forms are reducible in principle to physiological or physical processes.

Heidegger's analyses of perception and language, as well as his determinations of the constituents of existence, also introduce notions such as form or structure. Moreover, after *Being and Time*, the concept of form or figure becomes central to understanding the problematic of the work of art. Thus, analyzing the influence of Gestalt theory in Heidegger's work may be fruitful for understanding significant coincidences with Merleau-Ponty's work.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger does not use the concept of gestalt, perhaps because it is a concept that stems from particular disciplines like psychology and physiology and, therefore, may be essentially inadequate to characterize human comportment and perception from the perspective of the Fundamental Ontology. It is clear, however, that Heidegger knew gestalt theorists, and that they may have had a decisive impact on his work,⁷² especially

⁷² Bernhard Radloff argues that Heidegger must have known about Gestalt theorists via his reading of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, but he also demonstrates that Heidegger was closely acquainted with some of them. See Bernhard Radloff, *Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism: Disclosure and Gestalt* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2007), 22-23.

through his reading of Husserl.⁷³ Bernhard Radloff explains this point clearly: “Through the early writing of Husserl in particular, Heidegger will have been led to an acquaintance with the works of gestalt theorists. The “Third Investigation” of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* explicitly deals with the relation of part and whole, and the particular character of ontic and ontological wholes.”⁷⁴ With regard to the resonances of gestalt theory in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, one should note that Husserl’s account is of remarkable clarity when it comes to distinguishing different types of unity accomplished between parts and wholes. Barry Smith summarizes Husserl’s contribution to the problem of Gestalt as follows:

The Gestalt problem is, in effect, a problem of unity, and Husserl here argues that unity can come about in two distinct ways. Either given objects are such that –like nuts and bolts, or adjacent pieces in a jigsaw–they do not need any additional objects in order to fit together to make a unified whole. Or they are such that –like two pieces of wood which need to be nailed together –they are not in themselves sufficient to make a unity but can be unified only given the presence of some additional object (LU III, §§1f). Such unifying objects may be of two sorts: on the one hand they may be independent objects like a nail or a mass of glue, capable of existing in separation from a whole of the given sort. On the other hand however, and more interestingly, they may be *dependent* objects, capable of existing only in consort with the objects they serve to unify.⁷⁵

This brief reference to Husserl’s theory of wholes and parts may be relevant to understanding some central arguments in *Being and Time*, and the way in which Heidegger approaches the problem of bodily perception, for he understands perception on the basis of structures that unify the whole of existence and whose basic moments do not exist separately. That is to say, borrowing the language of Husserl’s “Third Investigation,”⁷⁶ the different components of existence are not “pieces,” but rather moments founded on a unified whole. Heidegger shows, indeed, that things appear primordially in the context of a

⁷³ With regard to the correlations between Husserl’s thought and Gestalt theory see Barry Smith, “Gestalt Theory: An Essay in Philosophy,” 18-22. Smith remarks: “Thus as for Ehrenfels, so also for Husserl, we grasp the configuration and its quality *in one glance* –not by collecting together in intuition a sum or sequence of objects or relations...”(18).

⁷⁴ Radloff, *Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism*, 22.

⁷⁵ Smith, “Gestalt Theory: An Essay in Philosophy,” 21.

⁷⁶ See Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Investigation III, Ch.1.

totality of signification, which is embedded in Dasein's existence. He says: "We shall call this relational totality of signification *significance* [*Bedeutsamkeit*]. It is what constitutes the structure of the world, of that which Dasein as such always already is."⁷⁷ The totality of significance is determined by the interplay of the structural components of existence and the temporality of being-in-the-world.⁷⁸ The structural components of existence are ontological disposition or attunement [*Befindlichkeit*], understanding [*Verstehen*], and discourse [*Rede*], and they are "equiprimordial" dimensions of being-in-the-world, of our thrownness in the world, which means that they determine beforehand our relations to things, and that they are in a relation of mutual correspondence.

In this context, discourse is a primordial articulation of understanding that precedes linguistic expression or speech. Considering the problem of the primacy of the question in Heidegger, John Sallis explains this point as follows: "Before there is speech, earlier than any question Dasein may address to himself, there is the articulation of the *Verstandlichkeit* that belongs to Dasein's disclosedness, a prearticulation that speech will always assume and express."⁷⁹ Let me be clear that the decisive argument is that a prearticulation of significance precedes particular acts of expression, and that this prearticulation is determined as openness

⁷⁷ *Being and Time*, 116-17/85. "Das Bezugsganze dieses Bedeutens nennen wir die Bedeutsamkeit. Sie ist das, was die Struktur der Welt, dessen, worin Dasein als solches je schon ist, ausmacht."

⁷⁸ Bernhard Radloff articulates explicitly Heidegger's analytic of Dasein with basic premises of Gestalt theory as follows: "Heidegger's transformation of the question of intentionality, which grounds it in being-in-the-world, in effect integrates the problem of wholes into his analytic of Dasein's temporality and historicity. The call of a bird, the approaching motorcycle, the glimpse of someone passing, is already given as such by the hermeneutic As of understanding, by *Befindlichkeit*, and by discourse (*Rede*), which together constitute Dasein in the temporality of its being-in-the-world. What is 'perceived' in this way already has gestalt in the sense that a determinate whole is grasped as such in its local and temporal specificity, as having particular qualities, and as standing-forth out of a context of significance (horizon or 'background') in which it is embedded. In its being, Da-sein is always already directed towards –he intends –the being of the thing (GA20, 40/31). Moreover, since Heidegger explicitly defines historicity as a more concrete working-out of Dasein's temporality, the wholeness of entities within the world is ultimately constituted by the interpretive horizon of Dasein's historicity. The 'gestalt' of innerworldly beings is given by this horizon, and this is one way the gestalt as whole is distinct from the formal concept of the whole explained in the *Logical Investigations*." *Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism*, 29.

⁷⁹ John Sallis, *Double Truth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 33.

to the world: disclosedness. That is to say, speech arises from a ground of lived significations. Heidegger emphasizes this point when he analyzes in particular the phenomena of language and meaning.

Heidegger explains that the totality of significance involves an existential horizon that cannot be reduced to or subordinated to particular determinations of language, for instance, judgments or statements, nor to any particular function, for instance, the “expressive” function. Put differently, the particular “factors” [*Momente*] of language can only be articulated in light of ontological structures:

Attempts to grasp the “essence of language” have always taken their orientation toward a single one of these factors and have understood language guided by the idea of “expression,” “symbolic forms,” communication as “statement,” “making known” experiences or the “form” of life. But nothing would be gained for a completely sufficient definition of language if we were to put these different fragmentary definitions together in a syncretistic way. What is decisive is to develop the ontological-existential totality of the structure of discourse beforehand on the basis of the analytic of Dasein.⁸⁰

In this passage, Heidegger claims precisely that particular moments of language are determined in relation to a prior apprehension of the structure of discourse, which is integrated in the totality of Dasein’s existing. In this sense, one can see that Heidegger’s argument refers to the totality of existence in a way that foreshadows Merleau-Ponty’s determination of the concept of body schema, which is determined as openness to the world. The convergence with Merleau-Ponty’s work becomes more evident if we take into consideration the overall argument of the passage just quoted. That passage precedes Heidegger’s explanation of understanding in relation to the phenomena of hearing and

⁸⁰ *Being and Time*, 216/157. “Die Versuche, das »Wesen der Sprache« zu fassen, haben denn immer auch die Orientierung an einem einzelnen dieser Momente genommen und die Sprache begriffen am Leitfaden der Idee des »Ausdrucks«, der »Symbolischen Form«, der Mitteilung als »Aussage«, der »Kundgabe« von Erlebnissen oder der »Gestaltung« des Lebens. Für eine voll zureichende Definition der Sprache wäre aber auch nichts gewonnen, wollte man diese verschiedenen Bestimmungstücke syncretistisch zusammenschieben. Das Entscheidende bleibt, zuvor das ontologisch-existentialle Ganze der Struktur der Rede auf dem Grunde der Analytik des Daseins herauszuarbeiten.”

hearkening. Heidegger suggests that Dasein's understanding is embodied, for he claims that there is an intrinsic correspondence between bodily perception and understanding: "Dasein hears because it understands."⁸¹ Although Heidegger does not allude expressly to the body, his analysis shows that sense perception relates to things as structured wholes, as forms, as expressions of the potentiality-to-be [*Seinskönnen*] of Dasein. That is to say, perception is integrated in a horizon of social practices and meanings. For this reason, Heidegger remarks, we never perceive complexes of qualities or elemental sensations: "'Initially' we never hear noises or complexes of sound, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column of the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the crackling fire."⁸² What Heidegger says here coincides in part with Merleau-Ponty's analysis of perception in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, for Merleau-Ponty starts by arguing that perception gives us access to structured wholes that cannot be divided into elementary sensations, and which are not founded on conceptual determinations or judgments.

Taking into account that sense perception is founded on being-in-the-world, Bernhard Radloff points out that our openness to the world prefigures what is seen or heard, and "consequently the thesis of gestalt theory, that we do not perceive sense data, but particular, meaningful forms, also follows for Heidegger, although on different premises."⁸³ According to Radloff's reading, Heidegger distances himself from gestalt theory insofar as he examines the ontological grounds of our relations to things, thus going beyond a merely "epistemological" view. As I have already argued, vestiges of this epistemological view persist in Merleau-Ponty's concept of gestalt, and the notion of body schema, insofar as his

⁸¹Ibid., 217/158. "Das Dasein hört, weil es versteht."

⁸²Ibid. In German: "Zunächst hören wir nie und nimmer Geräusche und Lautcomplexe, sondern den Knarren den Wagen, das Motorrad. Man hört die Kolonne auf dem Marsch, den Nordwind, den klopfenden Specht, das knisternde Feuer."

⁸³ Radloff, *Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism*, 29.

work remains caught in a “philosophy of consciousness.” As Heidegger’s existential analysis makes clear, the Fundamental Ontology must leave behind the opposition between subject and object and, thereby, any reference to consciousness or the cogito as constitutive grounds.

One should note, however, that although Heidegger’s explanation of perception in *Being and Time* coincides with that of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* in significant respects, the overall picture and the basic premises of these two works differ. Let me recapitulate and explain the main coincidences and differences in question.

The Body and the Limits of *Being and Time*

In line with the views of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, one can say that bodily perception presupposes a holistic involvement in the world, and that the structures of significance or meaning are pervasive. Specifically, one can see that Heidegger’s understanding of bodily perception is intrinsically related to our potentiality-to-be, *Seinkönnen*, as a horizon of practical possibilities. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis shows that perception involves a horizon of practical intentions, the horizon of an “I can.”

Moreover, for Heidegger the totality of significance is linked to affective dispositions. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty remarks that the horizon of perception is pervaded by affectivity and desire. Indeed, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty takes up the “affective milieu” [*milieu affectif*]⁸⁴—the milieu of love and desire, for example—as the point of departure for understanding how beings can exist in general.⁸⁴ And yet, Merleau-Ponty understands this affective milieu of the world of perception in terms of intentionality, without exploring its ontological structure. Heidegger, instead, explores grounding ontological attunements, for

⁸⁴ See *Phenomenology of Perception*, 180/156.

instance, in relation to the nothingness of existence and to death. He also identifies care as basic comportment that gives structure to existence, and which escapes the domain of practical or cognitive relations.

Considering the totality of Dasein in relation to death, Heidegger recalls the difference between totality and sum briefly referencing Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. He argues specifically that the unity of Dasein's essence can never be understood in terms of a sum of parts,⁸⁵ not even when it comes to grasping the fragmentariness or incompleteness of existence. "What constitutes the 'unwholeness' in Dasein, the constant being-ahead-of-itself, is neither a summative together which is outstanding, nor even a not-yet-having-become-accessible, but rather a not-yet that every Dasein, as the being that it is, has to be."⁸⁶ What Dasein is "not-yet" is already comprised in its being as a structural factor, as a modality of the nothingness of existence. Dasein is a totality such that, in its very existence as being-in-the-world, it already contains a reference to what is not-yet as something that matters, as something that is intimated in terms of care. This concept of care goes beyond any practical or theoretical apprehension of my being and it may not be reduced to intentional structures.

Having said this, however, one should note that when Heidegger introduces the concept of care in *Being and Time*, he does so through a fable, which shows that *Cura*, care, gives unity to the body [*Leib*], the earth [*Erde*], and spirit [*Geist*]. But Heidegger never determines explicitly in what sense care gives form to the lived body, and in what sense care is anchored to the earthly dimension of the body, nor how this anchorage put us in touch with earthly beings as such earthly beings. Some of these problems will be analyzed only later

⁸⁵ In a footnote, Heidegger explains that the distinction between totality and sum is familiar to us since the times of Plato and Aristotle, and mentions Husserl's doctrine on whole and parts in the *Logische Untersuchungen* (see footnote, *Being and Time*, 324/234).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 325/235. "Was am Dasein die «Unganzheit» ausmacht, das ständige Sichvorweg, ist weder ein Ausstand eines summativen Zusammen, noch gar ein Noch-nicht-zugänglich-geworden-sein, sondern ein Noch-nicht, das je ein Dasein als das Seiende, das es ist, zu sein hat."

on, particularly in relation to questions concerning the work of art. And yet, even then the problem of the body is not thematized as such. Thus, the necessary question is: Where is the body in Heidegger's ontology?

With regard to this, and considering Heidegger's analysis of sense perception, let me recall that with similar premises about the nature of perception Merleau-Ponty is led to explore the being of the body and the carnal generality of the world. And this happens not only in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, but also in *The Visible and the Invisible* and the later lecture-notes, in which he deals with ontological questions and takes up important elements from Heidegger's later works.

Chapter Two: The Problem of the Body in Heidegger

The Formulation of the Problem

The Zollikon seminars contain Heidegger's most explicit and extensive references to the problem of the body. In a conversation following these seminars, dated March 3, 1972, Medard Boss prompts Heidegger to respond to Jean Paul Sartre's reproach that Heidegger "only wrote six lines about the body in the whole of *Being and Time*."⁸⁷ In this case, Sartre's complaint sets up a contrast with the position of French existential philosophers and phenomenologists, for whom the body is a cardinal problem that deserves extensive analyses.⁸⁸ To illustrate this point, I shall refer briefly to the position of Alphonse de Waelhens, for it has become a paradigmatic point of reference in comparisons with Merleau-Ponty.

In his preface to Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior*, De Waelhens affirms that Heidegger takes as evident our capacity of movement, perception and action, dismissing a concrete account of our bodily being, thus neglecting "...the world that for us is always already there."⁸⁹ Here, Merleau-Ponty's work is presented as a counter-example, which demonstrates the possibility and advantages of an explicit phenomenological analysis of the body, on the basis of similar premises to those present in Heidegger's existential analytic.

Heidegger's response is at the same time simple and thought provoking. He says: "I can only counter Sartre's reproach by stating that the bodily is the most difficult [to

⁸⁷ *Zollikon Seminars*, 292/231.

⁸⁸ See Richard Askay, "Heidegger, the body, and the French philosophers," 29. See also *Zollikon Seminars*, 156/120.

⁸⁹ Alphonse de Waelhens, "A Philosophy of Ambiguity," in *The Structure of Behavior*, xix.

understand] and that I was unable to say more at the time.”⁹⁰ Let me, then, examine in detail Heidegger’s response, considering primarily those indications given in the Zollikon seminars.

Heidegger accepts implicitly that it may be necessary to say more about the body than he did in *Being and Time*,⁹¹ for to qualify the bodily as the “most difficult” [*das Schwierigste*] is to assert, in the superlative, that this phenomenon has the character of a fundamental philosophical problem, that is, a problem that deserves extensive and persistent examinations. Yet, apart from some sessions in the Zollikon seminars, some parts of his lectures on Nietzsche from the 1930s, and a session in the seminar on Heraclitus with Eugen Fink (1966-67),⁹² Heidegger never meditates expressly on the phenomenon of the body.⁹³ Hence, he acknowledges that he could not say “more” about the body in *Being and Time*, and that this is a central problem; however, in the years that followed he never undertook the task of meditating on the body *as such*, even though the themes of poetry and art, importantly influenced by his reading of Nietzsche, contain a reference to the bodily dimension of existence.⁹⁴ Thus, two interrelated questions arise: Why is the problem of the body qualified here as the most difficult?⁹⁵ And, why was Heidegger unable to say “more” about the body in *Being and Time*, and thereafter? For now, I will focus on the first question, for it produces

⁹⁰ Zollikon Seminars, 292/231. “Sartres Vorwurf kann ich nur mit der Feststellung begegnen, daß das Leibliche das Schwierigste ist und daß ich damals eben noch nicht mehr zu sagen wußte.”

⁹¹ It is worth noting that despite this “implicit” acceptance, in general, in the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger rejects Sartre’s criticism, for it is based on a misunderstanding of his philosophy. With regard to this, see Richard Askay, “Heidegger, the body, and the French philosophers,” 29-35.

⁹² Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraklit Seminar Wintersemester 1966/67* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1970). English: *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67*, trans. Charles H. Seibert (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

⁹³ Heidegger’s silence in regard to the problem of the body has been widely discussed. For a general outline of the literature on the topic see Patrick Baur, *Phänomenologie der Gebärden* (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2013), 11-19.

⁹⁴ Daniela Vallega-Neu elaborates on this point in *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2005), Chapter Five.

⁹⁵ Regarding the first question, Vallega-Neu responds the following: “One reason why the question of the body is so difficult for Heidegger certainly resides in our tendency to see the body as an object, a thing, a living thing, certainly, that distinguishes itself from plants and animals insofar as it has a mind. We present (*Vorstellen*) the body to our mind as an entity, and presentational thought is exactly what, according to Heidegger, has prevented Western thought from asking the more fundamental question of being itself.” Ibid., 83.

the key to respond to the second one. Although these questions have been repeatedly examined in scholarly works on Heidegger and the problem of the body,⁹⁶ I still need to reformulate them in order to set the basis for understanding the relation between gesture and art, as well as potential correspondences with the work of Merleau-Ponty. Heidegger's position in relation to the problem of the body is ambiguous, and in some cases his explorations of the topic come close to those of Merleau-Ponty, yet in a way that remains unthought, more implicit than explicit.

The Body: The “Most Difficult” Problem?

In order to gain clarity regarding this first question I shall consider the intercrossings between the problem of the body and other eminent philosophical problems. In the context of the Zollikon seminars Heidegger refers to two of these philosophical problems. First, in one of the introductory sessions of the Seminar, he affirms the following: “Since being is not the same as beings, *the difference between beings and being* is the most *fundamental and difficult* [problem].”⁹⁷ Second, in the context of a reference to Socrates as the “West’s greatest thinker,” Heidegger recalls Socrates words approvingly, according to which “To say the same thing about the same thing *is the most difficult*.”⁹⁸

The first statement is part of a discussion on the irreducibility of our understanding of being to the ontic level of our relations to things, and an examination of the way one must

⁹⁶ See, for instance, Kevin Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*, 22; Baur, *Phänomenologie der Gerbärden*, 106-17; Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Vers une ontologie indirecte* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 197-202; Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, 83-87.

⁹⁷ *Zollikon Seminars*, 20-21/17. “*Sofern Sein nicht seiendes ist, ist die Unterscheidung des Seienden vom Sein die fundamentalste und schwerste.*”

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30/24, my italics. “*...das allerschwerste: vom Selben das Selbe zu sagen.*”

approach ontological questions.⁹⁹ On this occasion, Heidegger remarks that catching a glimpse of being requires “proper readiness to receive-perceive” [*eigene Bereitschaft des Vernehmens*], a “distinctive act” [*ausgezeichnete Handlung*] that carries out a “transformation of existence [*eine Wandlung der Existenz*].”¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, he suggests, the distinction between being and beings hinges on a fundamental receptivity or openness to being, that is, a certain disposition. It is worth noting that here such “glimpse” of being is qualified as a sort of perception or apprehension, *vernehmen*, and that *vernehmen* is not sheer receptivity but a mode of action, *Handlung*.¹⁰¹ One can see, then, that the problematic of the ontological difference contains from the outset a reference to the problems of perception and action and, in this way, a reference to the question of embodied agency.

With regard to the second statement, Heidegger explains that the difficulty in saying the same about the same has to do with a proper way, a proper method, to access phenomena, considering the presuppositions that in each case determine this access.¹⁰² Furthermore, Heidegger points out that Socrates’ greatness resides in his having written nothing, indicating that his silence implies an effort to remain within the orbit of things themselves, preserving a saying that is tautological, which says always the same about the same in order to say nothing, revealing what is unsaid or presupposed in each case. In this way, Socrates’ greatness is assessed by his capacity to relate what is said to what is unsaid, to

⁹⁹ For an analysis of the difficulty inherent to the problem of the body in Heidegger, and its relation to the problem of the ontological difference see Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, 83-86. Our examination of these questions is to some extent supported by her analysis.

¹⁰⁰ *Zollikon Seminars*, 21/18, modified.

¹⁰¹ For a detailed discussion of the meaning of *vernehmen*, see Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.40 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976). English: *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000), 146-47/ 146-147.

¹⁰² See Patrick Baur, *Phänomenologie der Gebärden*, 86. Here, Patrick Baur alludes to this Socratic “Tautismus” as an essential trait of Heidegger’s phenomenology, according to which the reference to a tautological saying of the same, of being itself, and things themselves, is fundamentally determined as difficult, as something that can only be understood with a sense, or attunement, of difficulty. He says: “Zum Tautismus der heideggerischen Phänomenologie gehört damit eine Strategie der Aufladung des Selben: Die Sache selbst –und damit immer auch: das Sein –zeigt sich in ihrer Selbigkeit im Pathos der Schwere, in der Übernahme seines Lastens auf dem Dasein.”

that which remains in silence and antecedes any particular act of showing or saying. And this is precisely what is “most difficult.”¹⁰³

Thus, in both statements the difficulty of the problem in question is related to a *critical* task, that is, to the possibility of disentangling or discriminating what is presupposed or *accepted* and what is posited or supposed,¹⁰⁴ considering that what is *accepted* is that which remains essentially unsaid, and invisible, *in* that which is said or shown. With these premises, I suggest that the unique superlative difficulty that characterizes the problematic of the body is *the same*, and corresponds to the difficulty of distinguishing between that which is taken as essential to our bodily being, which corresponds to what is presupposed and remains invisible, and the visible, perceptible dimension of the phenomenon. Moreover, taking into account that the body conjoins visibility and invisibility, for it is at the same time a power of vision and thought and a visible thing with visible mechanisms, one might say that when it comes to the problem of the body the “most difficult” relates to the possibility of determining to what extent, or in what sense, the body shelters or preserves that which remains unsaid, that which is presupposed in our implicit understanding of beings.

Thus, among the eminent, “superlative” problems, the problem of the body seems to have a particular status, for the difficulty concerning the body is in principle twofold, it combines two seemingly different problems. On the one hand, the problem consists in determining the existential dimension of the phenomenon of the body without treating *the* body as *a* body, without confusing the existential, lived body with the perceptible physical

¹⁰³ Heidegger discusses the silence of Socrates in different works, and different periods. I will analyze in greater detail the question concerning Socrates’ silence in the last part of the present work.

¹⁰⁴ *Zollikon Seminars*, 7/6. Considering the distinction between ontic and ontological phenomena, Heidegger claims here: “each supposition is always already grounded in a certain kind of *acceptio*” [...*jede Supposition gründet immer schon in einer bestimmten Weise der acceptio*].

body, the body as “ontic phenomenon.”¹⁰⁵ This perspective involves a paradox, for one must presume that to some extent the body is a non-body, a no-thing. On the other hand, the problem consists in assessing to what extent or in what sense our bodily being becomes part of the ground of our ontological understanding of things. There is another paradox here, for one must consider that what one may know about the being of the body presupposes the body; it is the body itself that somehow speaks and thinks when *we* are thinking and speaking “about” the body. These two interrelated problems reveal the phenomenon of the body as unique and paradoxical. One may say, then, that for Heidegger the body is an ambiguous phenomenon, which in each one of its manifestations as “lived body” involves the totality of our own being, in such a way that it can never be determined as a mere thing, a simply objective body.

The Lived Body

Heidegger elaborates further on this twofold, essential difficulty, in the Seminar on Heraclitus with Eugen Fink. In that seminar, the problem of the body is also qualified as the “most difficult” in the context of a discussion on the topics of sleep and dream, which involve some references to the problem of perception, touch and the darkness that presumably characterizes our relation to sensible being. On this occasion Heidegger claims: “a human is embodied [*leibt*] only when he lives [*lebt*],”¹⁰⁶ thus suggesting that the “bodying forth” [*leiben*] of the body coincides with the unfolding of life, granted that life is understood existentially, ontologically, not as the domain of biology, nor as a life that is present to itself

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. In this regard, Heidegger explains that ontic phenomena are visible or perceptible, whereas ontological phenomena, such as “the existence of something,” are not.

¹⁰⁶ *Heraclitus Seminar*, 234/146. “*Der Mensch lebt nur, wenn er lebt.*” This sentence is difficult to translate because Heidegger uses the verb “*Leiben*,” which has not a direct correlate in English. Considering Askay’s translation of *Leiben* as “bodying forth” in the *Zollikon Seminars*, we propose to translate this sentence as follows: “The human being bodies forth insofar as it lives.”

as self-consciousness. He affirms again that “the body phenomenon is the most difficult problem,”¹⁰⁷ and suggests that this problem is intrinsically related to the problem of language. He says precisely: “The adequate constitution of the sound of speech also belongs here. Phonetics thinks too physicalistically, when it does not see *φωνή* [speech] as voice in the correct manner.”¹⁰⁸ To conclude this point, Heidegger corroborates that “the bodily in the human is not something animalistic,”¹⁰⁹ and that a proper understanding of the bodily has not been reached by metaphysics.

These series of interventions in the seminar on Heraclitus must be read carefully, for there is much that is said between the lines. Heidegger shows here that what determines our essential relation to the body is the fact that we live it, something already indicated in the correlations between life and body that resonate in the verb “*leiben*.”¹¹⁰ In a sense, one cannot see the body at a distance, for the body is in each case mine, it is myself, and cannot be objectified.¹¹¹ But as the reference to the verb *leiben* indicates, the lived body remains open, in movement, in the world: it is not confined to the sphere of subjectivity. Thus, on one hand, the lived body should not be understood in terms of the metaphysical distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, which means that it cannot be identified with the “sensible” skin, with the physical limits of my body.¹¹² With regard to this, in the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger cautiously remarks: “perhaps one comes closer to the phenomenon of the body by distinguishing between the different limits of a corporeal thing [*Körper*] and those of the

¹⁰⁷Ibid. “Das Leibphänomen ist das schwierigste Problem.”

¹⁰⁸Ibid. “Hierher gehört auch die adaequate Fassung des Sprachlautes. Die Phonetik denkt zu sehr physikalisch wenn sie *φωνή* als Stimme nicht in der rechten Weise sieht.”

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 235/146.

¹¹⁰ See the entry corresponding to the term “*Leib*” in Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*.

¹¹¹ This point is emphasized in the Zollikon Seminars: “The bodying forth [*Leiben*] of the body is determined by the way of my being. The bodying forth of the body, therefore, is a way of Dasein’s being” (113/86).

¹¹² See William Richardson, “Heidegger among the Doctors,” 52.

body [*Leib*].”¹¹³ On the other hand, the limits of the body change and unfold with my sojourn in the world, and have a poetic –in the sense of disclosive –character. As I shall argue in subsequent sections of the present work, this means that the lived body is intertwined with the world, entangled in things. For, as Heidegger expresses it, the body is primordial spatiality, visibility, and openness, in any case, not self-presence, contrary to what Derrida’s reading of the concept of *Leib* in Husserl suggests.¹¹⁴ And although the body is, in a sense, expression, what it “expresses” is its very sojourn in the world, which is to say that, considered in this way, the body is primordial language: saying, showing.

In the aforementioned passage from the seminar on Heraclitus, Heidegger alludes in passing to the complex relation between body and speech, both in the sense of the bodily dimension of speech, and the “linguistic” dimension of the body. In both cases what is at stake is our ecstatic involvement in the world. He intimates that just as the voice is not something physical, as phonetics presumes, the lived body in general is not something animalistic, that is, something that could be understood on the basis of “biological” premises. But this does not mean that the voice is something spiritual, animated by a subjective consciousness. In subsequent sections of this work I will examine these indications in greater detail. For now I can anticipate that Heidegger’s brief reference to the relation between body and language may bear special significance, for it suggests that the lived body, the ontological body, is the body that we experience as *Stimmung*: attunement, tune and voice.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Ibid., 112/86.

¹¹⁴ Since Heidegger’s analysis of the body touches on classical problems of Husserlian phenomenology, such as the preeminence of speech, of the voice, as spiritualized expression in contraposition to involuntary gestures, this distinction seems pertinent here. See Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 33-37.

¹¹⁵ In *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), Michael Haar claims that “*Stimmung* maintains a privileged relation with the

The Body as the Threshold between Being and Beings

Let me recapitulate and emphasize that what is problematic about the body has to do with a proper distinction between the ontological and the ontic levels of the phenomenon, and the fact that the ontological phenomenon of the body is somehow a non-body, an invisible or unperceivable body, an atmosphere, an attuned body. Indeed, in an effort to preserve this distinction, Heidegger never fully “touches” upon the physical body, he always keeps it at some distance, as if this were a necessary tactic to touch the core of the phenomenon.¹¹⁶ Therefore, borrowing Daniela Vallega-Neu’s words, one could probably say that the body remains as a “threshold between be-ing and beings,”¹¹⁷ and between being and not-being, which is to say that it is an intrinsically problematic phenomenon hovering between two different levels of existence. From this perspective, following Vallega-Neu’s reading, a proper understanding of the body implies, on the one hand, an effort not to think being as “an open horizon that transcends beings, an open horizon that analogously to beings would be understood as a higher being beyond beings,”¹¹⁸ and, on the other hand, it requires that we think the body “more originally from within the opening of the truth of being.”¹¹⁹

Thus we see how the problem of the body involves the questions concerning the meaning of being, that is, metaphysical presuppositions concerning what “being” is, and its

body” (38), suggesting that “*Stimmung* is like the spirit that envelops the body” (ibid.). Here we shall suggest something different, that is, that the body itself is *Stimmung*, once we consider the gestural dimension of the body, rather than its merely physical or physiological status.

¹¹⁶ Some authors have read Heidegger’s “prudence” as a veiled refusal or neglect of the problematic of the body and the flesh, rather than as a proper phenomenological approach to it. See Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Vers une ontologie indirecte*, 197-202.

¹¹⁷ Daniela Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, 95. Following Parvis and Maly’s translation of “*Seyn*,” Vallega-Neu translates “*Seyn*” as “be-ing,” with the hyphen, to underscore the temporal character of the verb. I will follow the more recent practice of translating “*Seyn*” as “beyng,” and “*Sein*” as “being.”

¹¹⁸Ibid., 84.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 85.

relation to beings. One cannot come close to the problematic of the body without questioning the metaphysical concepts and categories traditionally ascribed to the body, for the lived body exists, it “is,” in a way that escapes the determination of the body as sheer presence, as a thing. Accordingly, we can probably say that for Heidegger the body, “*der Leib*,” marks a limit to the possibilities of phenomenology, for in trying to determine it we risk dissolving it as a metaphysical nothingness, or we risk reifying it, which is the most imminent threat. In a sense, it is necessary to preserve silence in relation to the body because the expression itself, the “body,” probably distorts in a too physicalistic way what we experience as *our* bodies, the “body” does not preserve the traces of “life,” of the essentially elusive factual life that grounds our existence.

Having said this, it seems that a proper approach to the body would require the exploration of a non-metaphysical thinking of the sensible and of life, and a non-metaphysical language that would preserve the “lived” dimension of our bodily being without understanding it in “animalistic” or biological terms,¹²⁰ that is, as the encircled captivity in an environment wherein there is no relation with beings *as such*.¹²¹ Indeed, what is decisive for Heidegger in relation to an ontological approach to the body is a determination of the body in light of what being-in-the-world means. Consequently, the primordial dimension of the body is determined as openness to the world, which means that

¹²⁰ See Martin Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik (1929/30)*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 29/30 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983). English: *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Walker Nicholas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

¹²¹ The question of the difference between the human being and the animal in Heidegger is a difficult one, which requires an extensive exploration of its own. Heidegger himself claims that the problematic of the essence of the animal remains a problem, which can only be properly discussed after examining the concept of world (see *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 396/273). For now, suffice it to say that for Heidegger the ring of an environment and a species captivates the animal, and although the animal may be related to beings, it does not relate to beings *as such*. Explaining the thesis “the Animal Is Poor in World” Heidegger says precisely: “The animal certainly has access to...and indeed to something that actually is. But this is something that *only we* are capable of experiencing and having manifest *as beings*” (269/390).

it is primordially given in an indirect manner: the body bodies forth as I deal with things in the world, and as I relate to others. In this sense, it seems, the life of the body is a life in need, traversed by negativity, by a fundamental sense of limit and, thereby, an essential loss or withdrawal.

The Body at the Limits of Phenomenology

In the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger indicates that the phenomenon of the body can only be properly determined on the basis of a fundamental analysis of existence, in light of our involvement with the world as a whole. He says: “All existing, our comportment, is necessarily a bodily comportment, but not only [bodily comportment]. It is bodily [*leiblich*] in itself. However, existing must be determined beforehand as relationship to the world.”¹²² In this sense, as Richard Askay expresses it, “*bodily being presupposes being-in-the-world.*”¹²³ Indeed, if one takes into account that the notion of Dasein alludes to the way in which human beings relate to being in the “there” of existence, and beyond the metaphysical distinction between subject and object,¹²⁴ it is clear that from the point of view of the Fundamental Ontology our bodily being appears as a modulation of existence, a modality of being-in-the-world that is not object-like, for in that case the lived body would no longer be my body, the body that dwells in the clearing. In this regard, Heidegger says “If the body as body is always my body, then this is my own way of being. Thus, bodying forth is co-determined by my being human in the sense of the ecstatic sojourn amidst the beings in the clearing [*gelichtet*]. The limit of my bodying forth (the body is only as it is bodying forth: “body”) is the horizon of being within

¹²² See *Zollikon Seminars*, 258/206. “*Alles Existieren, unser Verhalten ist notwendig leiblich, aber nicht nur. Es ist in sich leiblich. Nur muß man vorher das Existieren als Weltbezug bestimmen.*”

¹²³ Richard Askay, “Heidegger, the body, and the French philosophers,” 32.

¹²⁴ See *Being and Time*, §§9 and 10.

which I sojourn [*aufhalten*].”¹²⁵ Heidegger, thus, suggests that the body is a structural dimension of existence, whose limits are opened through my entanglement in the world.

Hence, it seems, in *Being and Time* Heidegger cannot say “more” about the body because a proper determination of the lived body hinges on a preliminary determination of human existence and its relation to being, and this relation is ultimately structured in terms of care, beyond any reference to bodily phenomena as such. In a sense, however, this implies that the phenomenon of the body is not a crucial point of departure for developing an analysis of existence, which means that in order to understand the fundamental structures of existence the problematic of the body comes as a derivative or secondary one. This explains why Kevin Aho concludes that “Heidegger was not, at bottom, interested in giving an account of embodied agency,”¹²⁶ but rather of the structures of meaning on the basis of which we make sense of things. Presumably, it is in this context that one should understand the essential distinction between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

Partly in line with Aho’s position, Richard Askay points out that bodily being is subordinated to being-in-the-world because particular modes of embodiment always presuppose a prior understanding of being. In this sense, bodily being is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for existence, that is, “bodily being is ‘founded upon’ Dasein’s responsiveness to the clearing.”¹²⁷ Askay further explains Heidegger’s stance as follows: “Bodily being is necessary for us to be related to the world in any situation. Being-in-the-world is necessary for there to be *any relations at all* since it is primarily an understanding of being in which anything else is possible, i.e., existence is ontologically more primordial than

¹²⁵ *Zollikon Seminars*, 113/86-87. “Wenn der Leib als Leib je mein Leib ist, dann ist diese Seinsweise die meinige, so ist das Leiben mitbestimmt durch mein Menschsein im Sinne des ekstatischen Aufenthaltes inmitten des gelichteten Seienden. Grenze des Leibens (der Leib ist nur insofern er leibt: Leib) ist der Seinshorizont, in dem ich mich aufhalte.”

¹²⁶ Kevin Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*, 6.

¹²⁷ Richard Askay, “Heidegger, the body, and the French philosophers,” 32.

bodily being.”¹²⁸ On these premises, according to Askay, Merleau-Ponty’s work, which takes the body as a cardinal phenomenological problem, is misleading.

In sum, both Askay and Aho would agree that for Heidegger the problematic of the body is secondary, subordinated to the problematic of being-in-the-world and the question concerning the meaning of being. And there are good reasons for endorsing this position, for Heidegger occasionally makes this claim. For instance, in the Zollikon seminars, while explaining that we can only have eyes because we are able to see, and not the other way around, Heidegger emphatically remarks that “we would not be bodily [*Leiblich*] the way we are unless our *being-in-the-world* always already fundamentally consisted of a receptive/perceptive relatedness to something which addresses us out of the openness of our world, from out of that openness as which we exist.”¹²⁹ This passage complements the one quoted above, according to which bodiliness presupposes being-in-the-world, and reinforces Askay’s point.

Yet, Heidegger also says “more.” Sometimes he suggests that the phenomenon of the body is a primordial dimension of being-in-the-world. One should not underestimate this ambiguity in Heidegger’s position, particularly because he often suggests that the lived body has an affective dimensionality, and the problem of attunements is crucial for ontology. In addition, if it were clear that the problem of the body is just a derivative one, it is unlikely that Heidegger would have qualified the problem of the body as a pressing problem.

Indeed, if Heidegger considers the problem of the body as the “most difficult,” it is because this phenomenon has an ontological dimension, it is a constitutive structure of our

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ *Zollikon Seminars*, 293-94/232. “*So könnten wir auch nicht leiblich sein, wie wir es sind, wenn unser In-der-Welt-sein nicht grundlegend aus einem immer schon vernehmenden Bezogen-sein auf solches bestünde, das sich uns aus dem offenen unserer Welt, als welches Offene wir existieren, zuspricht.*”

understanding of being. Otherwise, Heidegger would not have said that “bodying forth is co-determined [*mitbestimmt*] by my being human,” as was mentioned above, but rather that my being human simply “determines” my bodying forth. And this is not an occasional remark, for Heidegger expressly shows that the phenomenon of the body entwines into fundamental ontological phenomena such as space and time.

In the Zollikon seminars, while discussing the relationship between body and space, and after claiming that bodiliness is only possible because we are already spatial, Heidegger immediately remarks that he is simply trying to come close to the phenomenon of the body and, in so doing, “...*we are not speaking of a solution to the problem of the body*. Much has already been gained merely by starting to see this problem.”¹³⁰ Heidegger shows that one cannot approach the problem of the body without presupposing the phenomenon of space. In this sense, the question of space seems more fundamental than the question of bodiliness. Yet, this approach is problematic because the lived body, the body that is the ground-basis of my own existing, is also a fundamental structure on the basis of which I may have a sense of nearness and distance and, in this way, the lived body precedes space.

Thus, although there is a certain preeminence of the problem of spatiality in relation to the question of bodiliness, this preeminence alludes to a way of seeing the body, a direction or way to approach the problem of the body. Heidegger suggests that in approaching the body we always presuppose space, and we experience the body initially in terms of space -although not only in this way.¹³¹ For one could only claim in a definite way

¹³⁰ Ibid., 105/81.

¹³¹ I interpret what Heidegger says about the relationship between bodiliness and space as follows: the phenomenon of space, understood existentially, as a sense of nearness and distance, determines in a fundamental way our approach to the body, that is, we cannot see or conceive the body without presupposing space. Yet, this is only a point of departure, a tentative one, which intends to introduce us to the complexities of the “existential” dimension of the body, and which intends to show that bodiliness cannot be reduced to what is sensed physically, just as we cannot first understand space in terms of “bodily” properties.

that the phenomenon of the body is subordinated to the phenomenon of space if one presupposes that the body is only “spatial.” But this is not the case if the limits of the lived body are not the limits of a corporeal thing, if the nature of space is not determined by objective coordinates, and if the nature of the body is “co-determined” with the limits of our existence. Let me explain this argument in more detail.

Indeed, if the limits of the lived body [*Leib*] are not the limits of a corporeal thing, but rather coincide with the horizons of my sojourn in the world, then, it seems incorrect to say that bodily being is a necessary but not sufficient condition of existing, or that being-in-the-world is more primordial than bodily being, for we cannot determine the lived body from the outside. With these considerations, we cannot subordinate the body to spatiality, for there is also an essential temporality of the body, as well as a temporal and a linguistic dimensionality of the body. One could extend this argument to prove the originality or equiprimordiality of the phenomenon of the “lived body” in relation to other ontological phenomena, but this point will become clearer only later, in the next chapter, in the context of an analysis of the body as gesture.

I want to suggest, then, that Heidegger is aware of the inherent difficulties and paradoxes pertaining to the problem of the body, and that these paradoxes constitute the core of this phenomenological problematic. Precisely after saying that “existing must be determined beforehand as relationship to the world,” Heidegger says the following: “To speak of bodiliness as ‘condition’ is not a phenomenological interpretation, but rather is said

from the outside. If I speak of condition, I objectify both bodiliness and existing. If I speak of condition, I am already outside, actually separated from existing.”¹³²

Heidegger’s stance in relation to the problem of the body is, in this sense, related to the limits of the phenomenon; it has to do with the fact that the body is both a phenomenon and a non-phenomenon. The body is, on the one hand, inscribed in a phenomenological region as an entity and, on the other hand, it is a “dark thing” that withdraws from thinking. Without expressly articulating this ambiguity, Heidegger oscillates between these two limits of the phenomenology of the body. Let me clarify this point by contrasting two passages from the Zollikon seminars.

First, discussing the distinction between corporeal things and the body, which is presumably difficult for French philosophers because the expression “*le corps*” conflates the two dimensions, Heidegger says the following: “This is to say that for them [the French] it is very difficult to see the real problem of the phenomenology of the body.”¹³³ Later, in a conversation with Medard Boss, Heidegger further explains this point, expanding on his response to Sartre’s criticism, when he says that “a sufficiently useful description of the phenomenon of the body has not emerged,” and that “such a ‘phenomenology of the body’ can *only* proceed as a description. Any attempt at ‘explanation,’ that is, of derivation from something else, is meaningless.”¹³⁴ Heidegger suggests here that a phenomenology of the body is still missing, yet to come, and that it can only be determined as a description of the phenomenon of the body itself, from within its existential dimensionality. In this way, Heidegger implies that a phenomenology of the body is possible in principle.

¹³²Zollikon Seminars, 258/207. “Das Reden vom Leiblichen als Bedingung ist keine phänomenologische Interpretation, sondern ist eher von außen her gesprochen. Wenn ich von Bedingung spreche, vergegenständliche ich beides, das Leibliche und das Existieren. Wenn ich von Bedingung spreche, bin ich schon draußen, aus dem Existieren eigentlich herausgefallen”

¹³³ Zollikon Seminars, 116/89.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 202/157.

Second, in another conversation with Medard Boss, Heidegger claims: “There is actually no phenomenology of the body because the body is not a corporeal thing [*Körper*]. With such a thematic approach, one has already missed the point of the matter.”¹³⁵ Heidegger further remarks that the “potentiality-to-be” [*Seinkönnen*] depends on our relationship with things, and the body is not among them. Therefore, one might say that there is not actual phenomenology of the lived body, of *der Leib*, and that there may never be, because we never have an intentional relation to the lived body, it never gives itself as a thing. This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the earth in Husserl makes clear: the body is part of the constitutive background that is presupposed in our relations to things, and which may not be reduced to the phenomenal level.

From the Lived Body to Gesture

Thus, in the Zollikon seminars, when relating the body to space, or to being-in-the-world, Heidegger is introducing us to the problem of the body, bringing us closer to it, without pretending to have solved the problem. Heidegger further suggests that a proper existential determination of the phenomenon of the body requires a view from within the “phenomenon” itself. This would only be possible if one were to see the body from out of the truth of being, if one were to let the lived body speak from its own relation to being, its dimensionality as an original mode of disclosure. But in that case, the lived body would already have withdrawn, disappeared as body. In this way, it seems, one can only say “more” about the body by letting the body speak from itself. As Patrick Baur explains, “saying more would not mean saying much, it is not a saying of what is new,”¹³⁶ but rather to keep open

¹³⁵ Ibid., 231/184.

¹³⁶ Patrick Baur, *Phänomenologie der Gebärden*, 114, my translation. “*Das Mehr-Sagen wäre kein Viel-Sagen, kein Sagen des Neuen.*”

the possibility of thinking and saying, and of preserving the intensive force of the saying.¹³⁷

Then, the necessary questions are: How can we let the body, *der Leib*, speak from itself? In what way can we determine the language *of* the body? And, what exactly does “*der Leib*” say about the body and its relation to life, and being in general, that would corroborate its ontological importance? Responding to these questions, I will show that both the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty address the ontological problematic of the body through the notion of gesture, which articulates the withdrawal of the body as something essential to the body. In this way, I want to suggest that one must look for the body in its intersections with language and art, for in these intersections the body displays its performative possibilities, and in this way the body is experienced as the “site” of disclosure: primordial saying or showing, poetry.

¹³⁷With regard to this, Patrick Baur says precisely: “Das »Mehr« eines Mehr-zu-sagen-Wissens wäre also nicht das viele der πολυμαθία. Im Merh des Sagens würde sich für Heidegger gerade das Sagen nicht vermehren. Es wäre demnach nicht extensive, sondern intensive: Dem Mehr-zu-Sagen-Wissen wäre ein eindringlicheres Sprechen zuzuordnen” (Ibid.).

Chapter Three: The Gestural Body

How to Talk about the Body: Preliminary Remarks on the Rapports between Gesture and Language

As I have already argued, Heidegger's existential analytic accounts for the fundamental structures of being-in-the-world without subordinating this analysis to a physicalistic point of view. Accordingly, he interprets bodily perception and practical comportments in terms of fundamental structures of existence, which are unified in care. He says precisely: "The whole of the constitution of Dasein is not simple in its unity, but shows a structural articulation which is expressed in the concept of care."¹³⁸ As Heidegger expresses it, the fable of *Cura* reveals care as a structural unity that somehow supersedes the traditional definition of the human as a compound of body and spirit. He says: "This pre-ontological document becomes especially significant not only in that 'care' is here seen as that to which human Dasein belongs 'for its lifetime,' but also because this priority of 'care' emerges in connection with the familiar interpretation of the human being as a compound of body (earth) and spirit."¹³⁹ The fable of *Cura* shows that care gives form to the human life, between birth and death, bearing testimony to a somewhat mythical union, a unity that precedes particular determinations of life in terms of body and spirit. Still, despite the significance of this problem, in *Being and Time* Heidegger does not explore the correlations

¹³⁸ *Being and Time*, 265/192. "Das Ganze der Daseinsverfassung selbst ist daher in seiner Einheit nicht einfach, sondern zeigt eine strukturelle Gliederung, die im existenzialen Begriff der Sorge zum Ausdruck kommt"

¹³⁹ Ibid. 263/191. "Dieses vorontologische Zeugnis gewinnt dadurch eine besondere Bedeutung, daß es nicht überhaupt die »Sorge« als das sieht, dem das menschliche Dasein »zeitlebens« gehört, sondern daß dieser Vorrang der »Sorge« im Zusammenhang mit der bekannten Auffassung des Menschen als des Kompositums aus Leib (Erde) und Geist heraustritt."

between care, body [*Leib*], and earth [*Erde*], but rather shows that the structural unity of existence is determined by an affective engagement with the world as a whole, by care. With regard to this, Heidegger gives additional indications in the Zollikon seminars.

In these seminars, Heidegger remarks that the existential analytic sets the basis for a proper understanding of the problematic of the body.¹⁴⁰ He further explains that one cannot provide a proper determination of the existential dimension of the body without a constant vigilance to the difference between being and beings. In this context, the issue of terminology, and of language generally, is a decisive one. The term “body,” for instance, relates primarily to *a* being, and in this way it may hinder a proper view of the ontological phenomenon. In fact, responding indirectly to Sartre’s criticism, Heidegger indicates that French philosophers may be unable to access properly the phenomenon of the body, for examining questions concerning the body they count solely on the expression “*le corps*,” and lack another term to characterize the existential, living dimension of the body, which corresponds to the German *Leib*. The passage in question is the following:

One often hears the objection that there is something wrong with the distinction between a corporeal thing and a body. This is raised, for instance, because the French have no word whatsoever for the body, but only a name for a corporeal thing, namely, *le corps*. But what does this mean? It means that in this area the French are influenced only by the Latin *corpus*. This is to say that for them it is very difficult to see the real problem of the phenomenology of the body. The meaning of the Greek word *σῶμα* is quite manifold. Homer uses the word merely for the dead body. For the living body, he uses the term *δέμας*, meaning “figure”[*Gestalt*]. Later on, *σῶμα* refers to both the body and the lifeless, corporeal thing, then also to the serfs, to the slaves. Finally, it refers to the mass of all men.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, if we take into account that Medard Boss actually “applies” fundamental premises of Heidegger’s existential analytic to the fields of psychiatry and medicine, we can assume with more certainty that *Being and Time* indeed contained important references to bodiliness, without making explicit reference to the body. See Medard Boss, *Existential Foundations of Medicine and Psychology*, trans. Stephen Conway and Anne Cleaves (New York: J. Aronson, 1979).

¹⁴¹ *Zollikon Seminars*, 116/89. “Man hört gegen die Unterscheidung von Körper und Leib des öftern den Einwand, da könne doch etwas nicht stimmen, weil zum Beispiel die Franzosen überhaupt kein Wort für Leib hätten, sondern nur einen Namen für den Körper, nämlich: *le corps*. Was aber heißt das? Es heißt, daß die Franzosen nur von lateinischen *corpus* her bestimmt sind in diesen Bereich; die heißt daß ihnen sehr erschwert wird, die eigentliche Problematik der Leibesphänomenologie zu sehen. Die Bedeutung des griechischen Wortes *σῶμα* ist sehr mannigfaltig. Homer gebraucht *σῶμα* nur den toten Leib, für den lebenden

Considering the distinction between the Greek words *σῶμα* and *δέμας* Heidegger emphasizes the importance of the distinction between the German terms *Körper* and *Leib*. The term *Körper* refers to the merely physical dimension of the body, to the body as an object, “*le corps*.” On the contrary, *Leib* is the lived body, the body as *Gestalt*, the “bodying forth of the body.”¹⁴² One can see, therefore, that these terminological specifications are not secondary, but rather determine from the outset the phenomenal region in question. If one sees the body as *Leib*, then the body emerges as a structural modality of being-in-the-world, not as a separate thing. That is to say, the lived body is figure, *Gestalt*, insofar as it is openness to the world. Put differently, *der Leib* is the body that cannot be sectioned or torn apart from our own being, the body that is intensive or qualitative, not extensive or quantitative. Heidegger explains this point as follows:

The difference between the limits of the corporeal thing and the body, then, consists in the fact that the *bodily limit* is extended beyond the *corporeal limit*. Thus, the difference between the limits is a quantitative one. But if we look at the matter in this way, we will misunderstand the very phenomenon of the body and of bodily limit. The bodily limit and the corporeal limit are not quantitatively but rather qualitatively different from each other. The corporeal thing, as corporeal, cannot have a limit which is similar to the body at all. Of course, one could assume in an imaginative way that my body qua corporeal thing extends to the perceived window, so that the bodily limit and the corporeal limit coincide. But just then the qualitative difference between the two limits becomes clear. The corporeal limit, by apparently coinciding with the bodily limit, cannot ever become a bodily limit itself. When pointing with my finger toward the crossbar of the window over there, I [as body] do not end at my fingertips. Where then is the limit of the body? “Each body is my body.” As such, the proposition is nonsensical. More properly, it should say: “the body is in each case my body.” This belongs to the phenomenon of the body. The “my” refers to myself. By “my,” I refer to me. Is the body in the “I,” or is the “I” in the body? In any case, the body is not a thing, nor is it a corporeal thing, but each body, that is, the body as body, is in each case my body. The *bodying forth* [*Leiben*] of the body is determined by the way of my being.¹⁴³

das Wort *δέμας*, was soviel besagt wie ›Gestalt‹. Später meint *σῶμα* sowohl den Leib wie den leblosen stofflichen Körper, dann wieder die Leibeigenen, die Sklaven; dann überhaupt die Menschenmasse.”

¹⁴² Ibid., 113/86.

¹⁴³ Zollikon Seminars, 112-13/86. “Der Unterschied der Grenzen von Körper und Leib bestünde hiernach darin, daß die Leibgrenze weiter hinausgeschoben wäre als die Körpergrenze, so daß der Unterschied der Grenzen quantitativer wäre. Aber wenn wir die Sache so nehmen, so verkennen wir gerade das Leibphänomen und die Leibgrenze. Die Leibgrenze ist gegenüber der Körpergrenze nicht quantitative, sondern qualitative verschieden. Der Körper kann als Körper eine solche Grenze wie der Leib gar

Heidegger argues that the body bodies forth, *der Leib leiben*, but in so doing it has a peculiar relation with the “I,” and with language.¹⁴⁴ The body that bodies forth is in each case my body, and this means that the body has itself an ecstatic character, it brings me out of myself. That is to say, the lived body unfolds Dasein’s existence, for as Merleau-Ponty remarks “the *Jemeinigkeit* of Dasein is but the fleeing away from itself.”¹⁴⁵ Saying “I,” showing myself, I efface myself, I am already away, adrift in the world. Therefore, one could say that the lived body is figure, *Gestalt*, because it is traversed by the presence of the others, pervaded by attunements, *Stimmungen* and, in a fundamental sense, by care. Heidegger clarifies this point further through an analysis of the movement of someone’s hand in contrast to the movement of a watch on the table. The watch is moved, transported, in a way that can be measured, quantified, it can be isolated or posited as a visible thing: it is a piece of equipment. On the contrary, the movement of the hand is inseparable from the person, this movement is never just an abstract movement, but rather the shining of someone’s presence. A thing can be moved or transported without its relation to myself coming to the fore, whereas I cannot move my hand without at the same time manifesting a certain involvement of my entire being, a certain attitude or mode of being: a posture, a stance.

nicht haben. Man könnte sich nämlich denken, rein als theoretische Möglichkeit, daß mein Leib qua Körper sich ausdehnt bis zum whargenommenen Fenster, so daß die Leibgrenze und die Körpergrenze sich decken. Aber gerade dadurch wird die artmäßige Verschiedenheit der beiden Grenzen deutlich. Die Körpergrenze wird dadurch, daß sie sich dem Anschein nach mit der Leibgrenze deckt, niemals selber zu einer Leibgrenze. Beim Zeigen mit dem Finger auf das Fensterkreuz dort drüben höre ich nicht bei den Fingerspitzen auf. Wo ist denn die Grenze des Leibes? »Jeder Leib ist mein Leib.« An sich ist der Satz unsinnig. Genauer müßte es heißen: der Leib ist je mein Leib. Das gehört zum Leibphänomen. Das »mein« ist bezogen auf mich selbst. Mit dem »mein« meine ich mich. Ist der Leib im »Ich« oder ist das »Ich« im Leib? Der Leib ist jedenfalls kein Ding, kein Körper, sondern jeder Leib, das heißt der Leib als Leib ist je mein Leib. Das Leiben des Leibes bestimmt sich aus der Weise meines Sein.”

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 114/87.

¹⁴⁵ *Notes de cours*, 117, my translation. “La Jemeinigkeit du Dasein n’est autre chose que sa fuite hors de lui-même.”

Based on these premises, Heidegger specifies the movement of my body, the bodying forth of the body, as comportment or “gesture” (*Gebärde*).¹⁴⁶ The term “gesture” reveals the existential dimension of the body in a way that may not be as clear in the determination of the body as *Leib*. The notion of gesture captures as a unity the structural duplicity of my living body: the bodying forth of the body unifies physical movements or actions and a field of significance that initially emerges as *Stimmung*: an attunement, understood as a tune or voice, which pervades as an atmosphere the entirety of my being and my relatedness to the world.¹⁴⁷ In a sense, gesture plays a role analogous to the concepts of form and comportment in Merleau-Ponty’s early works, for these concepts articulate meaning and movement beyond causal or mechanistic paradigms. Indeed, for both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, genuine gestures are spontaneous adumbrations of meaning, not “reflex,” automatic movements.¹⁴⁸

Concluding the Freiburg lectures from 1957, Heidegger distinguishes between gestures [*Gebärden*] and gesticulations [*Geste*], between attuned or saying gestures and mere gestures. He says: “Gestures are not at first mere gestures that subsequently express something and then become a language, rather gestures are in themselves what they are through saying, wherein their bearing, enduring, and conveying each time remain already gathered. Gestural bearing is determined by saying and is thereby constantly the resonance of restraint [*Ver-halten*]. The gestural first attunes all movements.”¹⁴⁹ As Heidegger expresses it,

¹⁴⁶ *Zollikon Seminars*, 115/89.

¹⁴⁷ As Baur remarks, one of the particularities of the notion of gesture is that it illuminates the phenomenon of the body as an inseparable unity of psychic and bodily elements (*Phänomenologie der Gebärden*, 20).

¹⁴⁸ With regard to this, see *The Prose of the World*, 78/56. Here, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes sharply between the improvisation of a child prodigy and a true artist, in order to show that genuine gestures imply a concentrated or thoughtful involvement in the world.

¹⁴⁹ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 170/159. “Die Gebärden sind nicht zuvor bloße Gebärden, drücken dann etwas aus und werden demzufolge eine Sprache, sondern die Gebärden sind in sich, was sie sind, aus dem Sagen, darin ihr Tragen, Ertragen und

the bodying forth of the body is a gestural movement insofar as it is attuned, inasmuch as the gesture reveals the body as a tune, a voice, a modulation of saying and showing which is pervaded by affective, ontological dispositions. One may also say that gestures bear and retain the echoes of what has been said as something that resonates in the self-abandonment of comportments and postures, a complex relation that is synthesized in the expression “*Ver-halten*.” Along these lines, one might say that genuine gestures are embodied articulations and “interpretations” of our implicit understanding of the world. In short, gestures gather as a *unique and simultaneous event* the structural components of existence, as they are defined in *Being and Time*: attunement or ontological disposition, understanding, and discourse.

Indeed, explaining the articulation of the structural components of existence, and discussing what relating to human beings mean, Heidegger says in the Zollikon seminars: “Ontologically disposed understanding in itself is a ‘saying’ [discourse], a showing of something.”¹⁵⁰ Heidegger does not mention the concept of interpretation here, yet it is implied. In *Being and Time*, the aforementioned structural components are described as fundamental conditions of interpretation. Interpretation, in turn, is defined as the revealing of understanding. As Carman Taylor explains: “Interpretation, as Heidegger intends it, then, is literally a kind of *exhibiting* or *showing*.”¹⁵¹ Taylor further demonstrates that interpretive *showing* is, basically, a practical comportment that unfolds in bodily gestures our implicit, ontological understanding of things: “Bodily postures and facial expressions are primitive

Zutragen je schon versammelt bleiben. Das Tragen nach der Weise der Gebärden wird be-stimmt aus dem Sagen und ist darum stets ein Schwingen des Ver-haltens. Das Gerbärdenhafte stimmt erst alle Bewegungen.”

¹⁵⁰ Zollikon Seminars, 211/263. “Das befindliche verstehen ist in sich ein Sagen, ein Zeigen.”

¹⁵¹ Taylor Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic. Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 211.

instances of the elaboration and appropriation of understanding in overt demonstrative form, for they point up something understood *as* understood.”¹⁵²

We therefore see how the problematic of gesture may be traced back to fundamental arguments from *Being and Time*, and how it relates to the more general question of language. I shall examine the relation between gesture and language in subsequent chapters of the present work. For now, let me remark that in the aforementioned passage from the Freiburg lectures Heidegger claims that “the gestural first attunes all movements,” thus suggesting that gestures have a grounding character, and articulate as a unity, in *Stimmung*, our primordial relation to language. Hence, Heidegger’s approach to gesture intimates that gestures are primordial phenomena, original articulations of language. They yoke together action and meaning.

Already in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty introduces the problematic of gesture, and its relation to language, in a similar way. He suggests that gestures determine in some way the essence of humanity, and declares that the origins of language may be found in “gestural signification.” With regard to this, he says: “Speech is a gesture, and its signification is a word.”¹⁵³ The gestural signification –which Merleau-Ponty defines, eventually, as a breach in silence –is the atmospheric signification that is felt intimately in our affective engagement with others, and pervades comportment as a whole. As Merleau-Ponty expresses it, gestures accomplish the decisive step of expression or communication, for they reveal a domain of significance that is prior to cognition, which is not mediated by representations. He says precisely:

¹⁵² Ibid., 212.

¹⁵³ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 214/190. “Notre vue sur l’homme restera superficielle tant que nous ne remonterons pas à cette origine, tant que nous ne retrouverons pas, sous le bruit des paroles, le silence primordial, tant que nous ne décrirons pas le geste qui rompt ce silence. La parole est un geste et sa signification un monde.”

Consider an angry or threatening gesture. In order to understand these gestures, I have no need of recalling the feelings I experienced while I myself performed these same gestures. I have from the inside, quite a limited knowledge of the gesture of anger, and so an association through resemblance or a reasoning by analogy would be missing a decisive element. And moreover, I do not perceive the anger or the threat as a psychological fact hidden behind the gesture, I read the anger in the gesture. The gesture does not *make me think* of anger, it is the anger itself.¹⁵⁴

Hence, one can see that both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty find in the phenomenon of gesture a grounding dimension of language, which is structurally related to human existence as a whole: a conjunction of body and spirit. As Dennis Schmidt expresses it, analyzing the notion of gesture in Gadamer: “What a gesture expresses is the ‘there’ in the gesture itself. A gesture is something wholly corporeal and wholly spiritual at one and the same time. The gesture reveals no inner meaning behind itself.”¹⁵⁵ The question is, then: How do we distinguish primordial gestures from bodily movements in general?

One could probably say that all bodily movement presupposes a gestural understanding of being, a fundamental comportment or stance, but comportments or gestures cannot be determined as sheer bodily movements. As I have already indicated, a bodily movement that is set apart from the totality to be exhibited as a sheer bodily form, or as a conventional sign with an extrinsic meaning, would lose the melodic unity of a proper gesture, of a proper saying or showing. In this sense, just as there is a relevant distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*, there is an essential difference between gestures and mere gesticulations, in such a way that, as Heidegger puts it, “the nonessence of the gesture is the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 215/190. “*Soit un geste de colère ou de menace, je n’ai pas besoin pour le comprendre de me rappeler les sentiments que j’ai éprouvés lorsque j’exécutais pour mon compte les mêmes gestes. Je connais très mal, de l’intérieur, la mimique de la colère, é manquerait donc à l’association par ressemblance ou au raisonnement par analogie, un élément décisif—et d’ailleurs, je ne perçois pas la colère ou la menace comme un fait psychique caché derrière le geste, je lis la colère, dans le geste, le geste ne me fait penser à la colère, il est la colère elle-même.*”

¹⁵⁵ Dennis Schmidt, *Between World and Image: Heidegger, Klee and Gadamer on Gesture and Genesis*, Kindle Edition, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 131.

gesticulation.”¹⁵⁶ In order to delimit with more accuracy the domain of the problematic of gesture, and to identify what is essential to gestures, in the section that follows I draw a contrast with a classical metaphysical view, namely, Husserl’s interpretation of gesture in the *Logical Investigations*.

Gesture and Expression: Differences with Husserl

Let me define Heidegger’s understanding of “*Gebärde*” against the background of Husserl’s approach to “gesture” [*Geste*] in the *Logical Investigations*. Husserl’s approach to gesture, and more precisely to the relation between language and gesture, presupposes an understanding of language as expression, specifically as the expression of voluntary intentions. As Derrida points out, interpreting the concept of expression in Husserl, “the explicit teleology that commands the whole of transcendental phenomenology would be at bottom nothing but a transcendental voluntarism. Sense wants to be signified; it is expressed only in a meaning [*vouloir-dire*] which is none other than a wanting-to-tell-itself proper to the presence of sense.”¹⁵⁷

In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl distinguishes between “*meaningful signs*” or “expressions,” and gestures [*Geste*], which are meaningless insofar as they do not express a voluntary intention, and have a merely indicative character. In this context, Husserl defines speech as expression, and remarks that “such a definition excludes facial expression and the various gestures which *involuntarily* accompany speech without communicative intent, or those in which a man’s mental state achieve understandable ‘expression’ for his environment,

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. “*Das unweisen der Gebärde ist die Geste.*”

¹⁵⁷ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 34-35.

without the added help of speech.”¹⁵⁸ Although Husserl aims at separating indication and expression, he admits that there is, in general, a certain interweaving of gesture and expression. As Derrida demonstrates, what separates genuine expressions from the mixed expressions that include gestures is an explicit, voluntary act of consciousness, which stems from the solitary life of the mind. This solitary life of the mind is to be expressed in speech. Indeed, as Husserl explains, without the added help of speech gestures are meaningless.

Hence, according to Husserl, communicative actions are not intrinsically related to our bodily stance and our relation to the world as a whole. He specifies this point as follows: “Such ‘utterances’ [referring to gestures] are not expressions in the sense in which a case of speech is an expression, they are not phenomenally one with the experiences made manifest in them in the consciousness of the man who manifests them, as is the case with speech.”¹⁵⁹ In this respect, gestures are spontaneous comportments that lack meaning as they are devoid of the *ideal* unity of an expression. In other words, Husserl suggests that gestures do not involve an interpretive appropriation of things or others, but rather a vague sense of familiarity:

In such manifestations one man communicates nothing to another: their utterance involves no intent to put certain ‘thoughts’ on record expressively, whether for the man himself, in his solitary state, or for others. Such ‘expressions’ in short, have properly speaking, *no meaning*. It is not to the point that another person may interpret our involuntary manifestations, e.g., our ‘expressive movements’, and that he may thereby become deeply acquainted with our inner thoughts and emotions. They ‘mean’ something to him in so far as he interprets them, but even for him they are without meaning in the special sense in which verbal signs have meaning: they only mean in the sense of indicating.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Investigation I, 31/187-88; my italics. “Dagegen schließen wir das Mienenspiel und die Geste aus, mit denen wir unser Reden unwillkürlich und jedenfalls nicht in mitteilender Absicht begleiten, oder in denen, auch ohne mitwirkende Rede, der Seelenzustand einer Person zu einem für ihre Umgebung verständlichen “Ausdrücke” kommt.”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 31/188. “Solche Äußerungen sind keine Ausdrücke im Sinne der Reden, sie sind nicht gleich diesen im Bewußtsein des sich Äußernden mit den geäußerten Erlebnissen *phenomenal Eins*.”

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. “In ihnen theilt der Eine dem Anderen nichts mit, es fehlt ihm bei ihrer Äußerung die Intention, irgendwelche “Gedanken” in ausdrücklicher Weise hinzustellen, sei es für Andere, sei es auch für sich selbst, we er mit sich allein ist. Kurz, derartige “Ausdrücke” haben eigentlich keine Bedeutung. Daran wird nichts geändert dadurch, daß ein Zweiter unsere unwillkürlichen Äußerungen (z.B. die “Ausdrucksbewegungen”) zu deuten, und daß er durch sie über unsere inneren Gedanken

In contrast to the views of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's account is significant in multiple respects. Let me, then, review Husserl's argument concisely. First, he claims that the essential function of speech is to express voluntary intentions. Second, he says that gestures lack a proper representational content and, therefore, they should be sharply distinguished from expressive actions and speech. Departing from these premises, he remarks that gestures communicate nothing. Yet, he admits, through gestures the others can become "deeply acquainted with our inner thoughts and emotions." This means that gestures *say* something about our stance in a situation, but something that is not meaningful, as Husserl intends it. In this respect, the proper, voluntary, communicative action is disconnected from the existential, bodily grounds in which it is given "involuntarily." And this is, in my opinion, the most controversial point in Husserl's account.

As I have already indicated, according to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, gestures contain an existential meaning –they are pre-predicative interpretations of the world –, and they are intertwined with language. This means, in a sense, that gestures are "involuntary" movements that may reveal deep thoughts and emotions. Regarding this specific point, one could say that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty would not be at odds with Husserl. Yet, the problem is that Husserl separates the spheres of language, meaning, and gesture, and he restricts meaning to the sphere of the solitary life of consciousness.

Thus, one may say that the main problem in Husserl's view is that it reduces meaning to voluntary intentions and separates speech, understood as expression of consciousness, from the phenomenal field of gestures. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary,

un Gemüthsbewegungen mancherlei zu erfahren vermag. Sie "bedeuten" ihm etwas, sofern er sie eben deutet; aber auch für ihn haben sie keine Bedeutungen im prägnanten Sinne sprachlicher Zeichen, sondern bloß im Sinne von Anzeichen."

understand gestures as ecstatic. In this sense, gestures are comportments that articulate a horizon of signification prior to singular acts of expression –or even gesticulation. In order to clarify this point, let me examine the semantic field of the notion of gesture.

The Semantic Correlations between the terms “*Gebärde*” and “Gesture”

Although gestures are usually understood as rhetorical ornaments accompanying speech or physical movements “expressing” meanings,¹⁶¹ Heidegger understands the notion of gesture, *Gebärde*, in relation to the etymology of the word. He remarks that the notion of gesture contains the sense of a bearing, the enduring of something, and a sense of collecting or gathering. This constellation of meanings also corresponds to the Latin origins of the term “gesture,” in French “*geste*.”

In the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger examines in detail the etymology of *Gebärde*. He points out that the prefix “*Ge-*” alludes to the act of gathering and, thereby, to primordial determinations of logos and being. He says that the verb “comes from *bären* [cf. Latin *ferre*: to carry, to bring],”¹⁶² which means the carrying or bringing forth of something: “*gebären*.” The entry to *Gebärde* in the *Grimm Wörterbuch*, which is a point of reference in Heidegger’s etymological analysis, includes links to verbs such as *gebaren*, which refers to doings, comportments, and gesticulations –also in the sense of dissimulation or pretense –, and *gebären*, which contains references to the generation of fruits or the bearing of a child –that is, modes of generation of life in general–, or the bringing forth of something with a certain sense of pain and endurance.

¹⁶¹ It is important to bear in mind that Heidegger insistently underscores that gestures do not “express” anything; they have no expressive or communicative function as it is ordinarily understood. I will analyze this problem later, in the last part of the present work.

¹⁶² *Zollikon Seminars*, 117/90. “»bären« = *tragen, bringen*.”

Hence, one can see that the German word for gesture, *Gebärde*, preserves a reference to poetic capacities of the body, and a sense of receptivity and fertility. One may find similar indications in the English term “gesture,” which originates from the Latin *gestus*, and relates to the bearing of the body. This term is linked to the verb “gestate,” from the Latin *gesta*, which denotes deeds or achievements, and may also refer to the bearing of a child in pregnancy –in the same way as the German *gebären* –, and *gerere*, to perform or to carry on.

Analyzing the notion of gesture, and considering some of the aforementioned semantic indications, Giorgio Agamben remarks: “What characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of *ethos* as the more proper sphere of that which is human.”¹⁶³ Agamben further explains that what is endured or supported in gesture is the means-character of the body, “*it is the process of making a means visible as such*. It allows the emergence of the being-a-medium of human beings and thus it opens the ethical dimension for them.”¹⁶⁴ According to Agamben, one cannot conceptualize gesture in terms of the false alternative between *praxis*, understood as an action that has an end in itself, and *techne*, interpreted as an action that has an extrinsic end.¹⁶⁵ As Agamben expresses it, gesture is a type of action that is ethical insofar as it embraces human finitude, and reveals our dependance upon a sensible milieu: the body.

On the views of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, gesture, too, is intrinsically related to the proper sphere of human acting, of finitude. For example, Heidegger says in the Zollikon

¹⁶³ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End. Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 57.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁶⁵ Agamben considers here the Aristotelian distinction between *praxis* and *techne*, as it is carried out in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

seminars that gesture is “one’s gathered [*gesammelt*] bearing and comportment,”¹⁶⁶ that is, it is the comportment that bears or endures our being-in-the-world. Let me recall a passage I referred to previously, in which Merleau-Ponty declares: “Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we do not return to this origin, so long as we do not rediscover the primordial silence beneath the noise of words, and so long as we do not describe the gesture that breaks this silence. Speech is a gesture, and its signification is a word.”¹⁶⁷

Along these lines, one may say that gesture brings us back to the ground of the sensible world, to the moment of disclosure: the rupture of silence. Or, as Heidegger would put it, in gesture one is gathered in being, one is colligated to the world as a whole.

Gesture, Region, Intentionality

As I have already indicated, gesture is a kind of acting, of *Handeln*, which is not an end in itself. It bears or carries the world that is already there as a field of possibilities. In this sense, Heidegger suggests that gestures reveal the “ecstatic” meaning of bodiliness,¹⁶⁸ to the extent that they set up a region wherein we may encounter something or someone. He says precisely: “Each movement of my body as a ‘gesture’ and, therefore, as such and such a comportment does not simply enter into an indifferent space. Rather, comportment is always already in a certain region [*Gegend*] which is open through the thing to which I am in a relationship, for instance, when I take something into my hand.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *Zollikon Seminars*, 118/90. “Vom Menschen her heißt Gebärde ein gesammeltes Sich-Betragen.”

¹⁶⁷ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 214/190. “Notre vue sur l’homme restera superficielle tant que nous ne remonterons pas à cette origine, tant que nous ne retrouverons pas, sous le bruit des paroles, le silence primordial, tant que nous ne décrirons pas le geste qui rompt ce silence. La parole est un geste et sa signification un monde.”

¹⁶⁸ *Zollikon Seminars*, 118/90. Explaining this point, Heidegger alludes to the phenomenon of blushing, and remarks that bodiliness has an ecstatic meaning insofar as it is the immediate testimony of an exposure to others.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 118/91. “Jede Bewegung meines Leibes geht als eine Gebärde und damit als ein sich so und so Betragen nicht Einfach in einen indifferenten Raum hinein. Vielmehr hält sich das Betragen schon immer in einer Bestimmten Gegend auf, die offen ist durch das Ding, auf das ich bezogen bin, wenn ich zum Beispiel etwas in die Hand nehme.”

As Merleau-Ponty explains in his *Notes de cours*, Heidegger's notion of region, *Gegend*, involves something more than an intentional relation to things. He says precisely: "before intentionality has taken place, it is necessary an openness, a leeway [*Spielraum*], a region [*Gegend*] wherein it can be displayed. This region is time. It is that margin that is not nothing whereby the ek-stasis can occur."¹⁷⁰ I take this to mean that intentional comportments presuppose our involvement in a historical world, a world whose depth impregnates the being of things.¹⁷¹

Thus, one might say, on the one hand, that gesture is receptivity to the being of things and others. Heidegger says that blushing, for example, "is a gesture insofar as the one who blushes is related to his fellow human beings."¹⁷² On the other hand, that gesture is a way of being out of one's body, involved in the world. In order to explain this point, let me recall a passage from "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," one that complements what was said above about the qualitative limits of the body: "When I go toward the door of the lecture Hall, I am already there, and I could not go to it at all if I were not such that I am there. I am never here only, as this encapsulated body; rather, I am there, that is, I already pervade the space of the room, and only thus can I go through it."¹⁷³ As Heidegger explains, the relation between the door and me is not a relation between physical things. The door is pervaded by my presence and spatiality, which is also the spatiality I share with others in a common world of meanings, practices and affects. In this way, my gestures reveal an all-encompassing

¹⁷⁰ *Notes de cours*, 136, my translation. "Avant qu'une intentionnalité ait lieu, il faut une ouverture, un Spielraum, un Gegend où elle puisse se déployer. C'est ce Gegend qui est le temps. Il est cette marge qui n'est pas rien où l'ek-stase pourra avoir lieu."

¹⁷¹ With regard to this, Françoise Dastur explains that Heidegger uses the term region as a redefinition of the notion of horizon, in order to emphasize that the horizon is a milieu common to being and nothingness, a field, not a limit that is far in front of us. See Dastur, "Le lecture merleau-pontienne de Heidegger...", 381.

¹⁷² *Zollikon Seminars*, 118/91. "Es ist auch eine Gebärde, insofern der Errötende auf die Mitmenschen bezogen ist."

¹⁷³ "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 159/359. "Wenn ich zum Ausgang des Saales gebe, bin ich schon dort und könnte niemals hingehen, wenn ich nicht so wäre, daß ich dort bin. Ich bin niemals nur hier als dieser abgekapselte Leib, sondern ich bin dort, d.h. den Raum schon durchstehend, und nur so kann ich ihn durchgehen."

awareness of my situation: the door is not just an objective door, but the door of a lecture hall that may or may not be familiar to me, pervaded by an emotional atmosphere and a personal history.

According to Merleau-Ponty, after *Being and Time* Heidegger thinks our ecstatic rapport with being in terms of a transversal relation, which is not centered in Dasein's projection onto the world. This means that Dasein is a site of passage, a clearing in which things may appear: "There is not Dasein but in its openness to being, which comes to the fore in an ontological arrangement wherein Dasein is but the 'site.'"¹⁷⁴ Accordingly, one may say that gestures reveal the disclosive character of the body, namely, the body as poiesis.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty develops very similar ideas. For example, he says: "Places in space are not defined as objective positions in relation to the objective position of our body, but rather they inscribe around us the variable reach of our intentions and gestures."¹⁷⁵ In this regard, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly underscores that we move through a phenomenal body, driven by goals and tools, through "intentional threads."¹⁷⁶

At this point, I should recall that essential gestures are not merely intentional. To the extent that they are silent, with no particular meaning, they disclose a pre-intentional ground. As I have already argued, fundamental comportments or gestures are entwined into an affective milieu, which may not be reduced to intentional structures. This is why Heidegger says that gestures move in a determinate region. Moreover, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, gestures break the "...silence beneath the noise of words." For gestures emerge against the

¹⁷⁴ *Notes de cours*, 98; my translation. "Il n'est Dasein que de son ouverture à l'Être, dans un fonctionnement ontologique dont il n'est que le «lieu», et qui passé au premier plan."

¹⁷⁵ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 168/144. "Les lieux de l'espace ne se définissent pas comme des positions objectives par rapport à la position objective de notre corps, mais ils inscrivent autour de nous la portée variable de nos visées et de nos gestes"

¹⁷⁶ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 123/132.

silent ground of significance that we inhabit, and relate us to the nascent and inexhaustible logos of the world of perception. In this sense, one might say that gestures are not meaningful but rather pregnant with meaning. For a gesture, insofar as it is just a gesture, remains open, enigmatic, in the same way that a work of art does.

Gesture, Comportment, and the Artistic Work

Referring to Cézanne's paintings of Mount St. Victoire, Heidegger suggests that the mountain motivates the painting and guides the artist's comportment: "...what he saw determined the way and manner of his action [*Handeln*] and of his procedure in painting. The mountain he saw in this or that way is the determining ground [motive] –that by which the painter's comportment is determined in this way or that."¹⁷⁷ Heidegger says precisely that the mountain determines [*Bestimmt*] Cézanne's comportment, meaning that the mountain is disclosed through an attunement, *Stimmung*.¹⁷⁸ One may say, then, that the mountain impregnates and affects the artist in a qualitative, intensive way. For the artist must be concerned about the being of the mountain if he is to paint it, willing to dedicate his time to this task. Thus, the necessary question is: How can a mountain *affect* an artist, a person?

In order to respond to this question, let me start by referring to Jacques Taminiaux's reading of Heidegger's essay on the work of art.¹⁷⁹ In his article "The Origin of 'The Origin of the Work of Art,'" Taminiaux examines the passage from the Fundamental Ontology to

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 262/209. "...das Gesehene als solches bestimmt die Art und Weise des Handelns, seines Vorgehens beim Malen. Der Berg ist qua so und so von ihm Gesehenes der Bestimmungsgrund, das, wovon her der Maler zu einem so oder so sich Verhalten bestimmt wird."

¹⁷⁸ In another passage from the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger mentions Cezanne's painting of Mont St. Victoire in order to show that we "intuit" the painting as an emotional-sensible unity that is felt more than seen objectively. See *ibid.*, 103-04/79.

¹⁷⁹ Jacques Taminiaux, "The Origin of 'The Origin of the Work of Art'," in *Reading Heidegger*, ed. John Sallis, 392-404 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). Jacques Taminiaux demonstrates that *Being and Time* was decisively influenced by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and that "Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology is both a reappropriation and a critique of Aristotle's views," 394.

the lectures on art from 1936. Specifically, he calls attention to the transformation in Heidegger's approach to the being of things. With regard to this, Taminiaux says: "In the frame of Fundamental Ontology, paying attention to the being of things was clearly not a central issue for the task of thinking. Things did not deserve interrogation since their Being had nothing enigmatic. It was defined either by presence-at-hand or by readiness-to-hand."¹⁸⁰ Continuing on from Taminiaux's reading, one may say that in the essay on the work of art Heidegger is deeply concerned about the enigmatic being of things, in such a way that they are not simply pieces of equipment or objects.

As Taminiaux expresses it, Heidegger's turn in thinking involves a new approach to everydayness, a renewed vision on the being of things, in contrast to the predominant perspective in *Being and Time*. Along these lines, one might say that after the turn he values differently what "being absorbed by the world" means. At this point, the world is an enigma to be explored from within, just as it happens in artistic comportment. For the work of art sets itself amidst sensible things. In this regard, what is remarkable about the work of art is that it sheds light on the essence of comportment in general, understood as rapturous engagement with the world.

In relation to this problem, Merleau-Ponty explains in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that comportments or behaviors may only be properly understood from within. He says: "Behaviour can only be grasped by another type of thought [different to causal thought] that takes its object in its nascent state, such as it appears to him who lives it, with the atmosphere of sense by which it is enveloped..."¹⁸¹ As Merleau-Ponty expresses it,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 403.

¹⁸¹ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 140/122. "il [le comportement] n'est saisible que pour un autre sorte de pensée —celle qui prend son objet à l'état naissant, tel qu'il apparaît à celui qui le vit, avec la atmosphère de sens don't il est alors enveloppé, et qui cherche à se glisser dans cette atmosphère..."

comportments are concrete modes of being entangled in the world, in such a way that one cannot see things at distance, nor with clarity: the atmosphere of meaning enshrouds comportments and things.

To supplement this point, let me examine the following passage from the Zollikon seminars:

Comportment”[*Verhalten*], the “comportments,” refer to the interconnected ways of relating to beings as a whole, wherein most of them [beings] are not noticed expressly in each case. *Sojourning with* is the same...and at the same time as the letting come to presence of beings. This constitutes my Da-sein in the present situation, at any given time. Nothing more can be said about it. One cannot ask about this comportment’s “porter,” rather the comportment carries itself. This is precisely what is wonderful about it. “Who” I am now can be said only throughout this sojourn, and always at the same time in the sojourn lies that with which and with whom I sojourn, and how I comport myself toward [them]. “To be absorbed” by something...does not mean “to be dissolved” like sugar in the water, but rather “to be totally preoccupied by something,” as for instance, when one says: He is entirely engrossed in his subject matter. Then he exists authentically as who he is, that is, in his task.¹⁸²

Heidegger asserts that comportments are ways of relating to things in which they become, to some extent, inconspicuous. As he expresses it, this inconspicuousness is not blindness to the being of things, but rather a way in which one lets them be. Along these lines, one may say that in letting things be one is, at the same time, letting oneself go with them, just as it happens when one is fully involved in a task. Thus, in comportment there is no subject, no “porter”: one loses oneself. Following this argument, one might say that insofar as one is absorbed by the world one is essentially lost. In comportment one is not present, not even as body.

¹⁸² Zollikon Seminars, 205/160. “Das Verhalten, die ›Verhältnisse‹ meinen die zusammengehörigen Weisen des Bezuges zum Seienden im Ganzen, wobei das meiste jeweils nicht eigens beachtet wird. Dasselbe ist der Aufenthalt bei...und zugleich das Anwesenlassen von Seiendem. Mein Dasein ist jeweils in der gegenwärtigen Situation dadurch konstituiert. Mehr lässt sich gar nicht darüber sagen. Man kann nicht nach einem ›Träger‹ des Verhaltens fragen, sondern das Verhalten trägt sich selbst. Das ist gerade das Wunderbare daran. Das ›Wer‹ ich jetzt bin, lässt sich nur sagen durch diesen Aufenthalt, und in dem Aufenthalt liegt immer zugleich auch das, wobei ich mich aufhalte und mit wem und wie ich mich dazu verhalte. ›Aufgeben‹ bei...heißt nicht ›Sich-auflösen‹, wie sich der Zucker im Wasser auflöst, sondern ›benommen werden von etwas, wie z.B. wenn man sagt: er geht ganz in seiner Sache auf. Dann existiert er eigentlich als der, der er ist, d.h. in seiner Aufgabe.”

Heidegger explains this point by analyzing what “being lost in space” means, and recalling a famous anecdote about Thales: “Thales, lost in thought, walked along a road, fell into a ditch, and was ridiculed by some servant girl, his body was in no way ‘lost in space.’ Rather, it was not present. As in the case above, precisely when I am absorbed in something ‘body and soul,’ the body is not present. Yet this ‘absence’ of the body is not nothing, but one of the most mysterious phenomena of privation.”¹⁸³ At this point, one cannot help but think that this mysterious phenomenon of privation determines the *being* of the body, and the relation between body and being. In this regard, one might say that the body withdraws in order to let beings be.

To strengthen this argument, let me recall here Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Heidegger’s reflections on the historical dimension of being. In the *Notes de cours*, he says:

The *Seinsgeschichte* would then be the way in which being conceals or dissimulates itself; the presentation of the entity is in principle *Verborgenheit* of being. These “withdrawals” are not constructive explanations based on an In-itself: they are founded in our experience of the being and the entity that we ourselves are. Heidegger: we do not know what we are but after having lost it, each one is for himself the most distant; that is, the presence to oneself is non-perception, perception is of that which we no longer are, we were. The being that *is* in us does so remaining beyond our perception: all perception is non-perception. Such is the true nothingness, which is not *nichtiges Nichts*, but *Sein*.¹⁸⁴

Elaborating on a similar idea, Merleau-Ponty explains in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that the essential paradox of perception consists in the fact that we know something insofar as we ignore it. When I am properly involved in something, in a task, my body and my

¹⁸³ Ibid., 111/85. “Als der Philosoph Thales nachdenklich einhergehend in eine Grube fiel und dabei von den Mägden ausgelacht wurde, da war gerade sein Leib nicht in den Sternen, dieser war vielmehr weg. Gerade wenn ich –wie im genannten Falle –mit der Leib und Seele in einer Sache aufgebe, ist der Leib weg. Dieses Weg-sein des Leibes ist aber nicht nichts, sondern eines der geheimnisvollsten Phänomene der Privation.”

¹⁸⁴ *Notes de cours*, 137, my translation. “La Seinsgeschichte sera donc (les) manières don’t l’Être se déroboe ou se détourne: la présentation de l’étant est par principe Verborgenheit de l’Être. Ces «retraits» ne sont pas explication constructive par un En Soi: Ils sont constatés dan notre experience de l’Être et de l’Etant même que nous sommes; Heidegger: nous ne savons ce que nous sommes qu’après l’avoir perdu; chacun est pour lui-même le plus éloigné; i.e.: la presence à soi est imperception, la perception est de ce que nous ne sommes plus, nous étions; l’être qui este en nous ne le fait qu’en restant en deçà de notre perception, toute perception est imperception. Tel est le vrai néant, celui qui n’est pas nichtiges Nichts, mais Sein.”

consciousness become anonymous.¹⁸⁵ Along these lines, Merleau-Ponty remarks that insofar as I become anonymous the experience of perception fades away.

In this way we see how the problem of the lived body, of gesture, challenges the limits of phenomenology. For bodily comportments and gestures withdraw from perception in order to let perception occur. In this sense, one may say that gestures are elusive, phantasmagoric. And yet, gestures are “determined,” they are precisely the initial point of contact with the world that is “there,” and the earth that supports us,¹⁸⁶ with the being of things and others.

As I have already mentioned, concerning Cézanne’s painting of the mountain, Heidegger says that the mountain is the determining ground (*Bestimmungsgrund*) that guides the gestures of the painter. This means that Cézanne relates to the mountain through an attunement, a *Stimmung*. Thus, one may say that the painter, as he paints the mountain, must let the mountain *touch* him as something that concerns him.

Based on this analysis, let me try to elucidate the enigmatic reference to Cézanne that closes Heidegger’s last Freiburg lecture from 1959. The passage in question reads as follows: “There is a conversation about painting that discusses to what extent what is painted in color only contains a sketch and outline of the image that it forms, but is supposed to contain these in such a manner that the sketch in the image does not properly show itself. In this conversation Cézanne says:/ ‘One must not take people by the sleeve.’”¹⁸⁷ According to Heidegger, the sketch, the outline, the *Riß*, are not shown in the painting. They are as absent

¹⁸⁵ See *Phenomenology of Perception*, 99-101 / 87-91.

¹⁸⁶ *Zollikon Seminars*, 224/178. In relation to the earth, Heidegger says: “‘Before’ the human being, the earth too comes into the presence of the clearedness as such, of which the human being is the guardian” [“*Auch die Erde vor dem Menschen west an in die Gelichtetheit, die der Mensch hütet, als solche*”].

¹⁸⁷ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 176/165. “*Es gibt ein Gespräch über Malerei, das erörtert, inwiefern das Gemalte der Farben eerst die Zeichnung und den Riß eines Bildes bildet und enthält, jedoch so enthalten soll, daß sich die Zeichnung im Bild nicht eigens zeigt. Bei diesem Gespräch sagt Cézanne: »Man muß die Leute nicht am Ärmel ziehen«.*”

or “untouchable” as the artist himself.¹⁸⁸ He further suggests that the sketch withdraws and opens a space for something to appear.¹⁸⁹ Along these lines, one might say that the trace, the gesture in the work of art, reveals an essential commonality between things and us. It shows that things withdraw in what is visible or sensible, as we ourselves do through our bodies. And this means that we may lose things in the same way in which we lose ourselves. For this reason, they can *touch* us or *move* us, intensively, as a *Stimmung*: they are in memory.

Merleau-Ponty examines a similar problematic in relation to what he calls “secret visibility.” In the context of a central argument from *Eye and Mind*, he says: “Since things and my body are made of the same stuff, it is necessary that my body’s vision be made somehow in the things, or yet that their manifest visibility doubles itself in my body with a secret visibility. ‘Nature is on the inside,’ says Cézanne. Quality, light, color, depth, which are over there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them.”¹⁹⁰ In short, Merleau-Ponty suggests, the body and things keep a secret or invisible communication, and the depth of things echoes the depth of our own being.

Let me recapitulate and conclude. My analysis of gesture has shown, on the one hand, that the lived body is essentially gestural, absorbed comportment, and, on the other hand, that the work of art reveals essential characteristics of comportment, specifically regarding ontological questions. I have also demonstrated that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have very similar points of view with regard to the problem of gesture and comportment. In

¹⁸⁸As Andrew Mitchell remarks in a note to the aforementioned passage, Heidegger provides a “free” translation of Cézanne’s words: “Personne ne me touchera ne me mettra le grappin dessus. Jamais! Jamais!” Ibid., 166.

¹⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, 176/165.

¹⁹⁰ *Eye and Mind*, 1596/355. “Puisque les choses et mon corps sont faits de la même étoffe, il faut que sa vision se fasse de quelque manière en elles, on encore que leur visibilité manifeste se double en lui d’une visibilité secrète: «la nature est à l’intérieur», dit Cézanne. Qualité, lumière, couleur, profondeur, qui sont là-bas devant nous, n’y sont que parce qu’elles éveillent un écho dans notre corps, parce qu’il leur fait accueil.”

what follows, I will continue to explore the problematic of gesture and art. Specifically, I will investigate in what sense the problem of gesture and the lived body is integrated in the philosophical trajectories of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and the most significant ramifications of this problem.

Part Two: Gesture and Art

Chapter Four: Body, Gesture and Art in Heidegger's Work

Preliminary Remarks on the Body in Heidegger's Reading of Nietzsche

Between *Being and Time* and the Zollikon seminars, around the time of the so-called turn in the 1930s, Heidegger has a decisive encounter with Nietzsche –I am referring to Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche from 1936-37. He finds in Nietzsche a significant voice that puts into question the limits of metaphysics, overturning the traditional opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. As David Farrell Krell expresses it, Nietzsche's thought culminates the metaphysical tradition, for in Nietzsche there is a new interpretation of sensuousness that strives to overcome nihilism "...in a creative thinking of being as *φύσις*."¹⁹¹ In this sense, for Nietzsche, sensible being expresses a relentless power of creation.

Krell examines in detail this point in Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche, and remarks that life is in itself perspective, knowing, interpreting or schematizing in response to practical need,¹⁹² not mere biologism, as Heidegger sometimes indicates in the course of these lectures.¹⁹³ Thus, Krell continues, the stream of life is the stream of chaos, but chaos in turn is related to the bodying forth of the body, to a primordial poetizing capacity.¹⁹⁴ Here, as Krell expresses it, Heidegger's reading overlaps with Nietzsche's voice, and the identity of

¹⁹¹ David Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 221.

¹⁹² Krell, *Daimon Life*, 232.

¹⁹³ This is a point explicitly emphasized by Krell in opposition to Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche: "Human being is the being of some body who is alive. Yet the bodying forth of life cannot be reduced to sheer humanization, anthropomorphism, organicism, or biologicism." Ibid., 230.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 231; 233.

the speaker remains undetermined.¹⁹⁵ For Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche appears, to an important extent, a voicing of his own thought, yet with a focus on the problem of bodiliness that seems more befitting of Nietzsche's work. The point is that, on this occasion, Heidegger takes up the problem of bodily being, and he does so in a way that foreshadows the analysis of the body from the Zollikon seminars, as well as his approach to the work of art.

Following the impetus of Nietzsche's thought, Heidegger delves into the problem of life and its relation to the phenomenon of the body. He says precisely: "life lives in that it bodies forth."¹⁹⁶ Taking into account this essential correlation between life and body, Heidegger acknowledges that the problem of the lived body has not been studied with the seriousness it requires: "We know by now perhaps a great deal –almost more than what we can encompass –about what we call the body, without having seriously thought what bodying is."¹⁹⁷ Heidegger further explains that the bodying forth of the body is a constitutive phenomenon underlying our knowing [*Erkenntnis*] of living things: "It may be that *bodying* is initially an obscure term, but it names something that is immediately and constantly experienced in the knowledge of living things, and it must be kept in mind."¹⁹⁸ He remarks that the meaning of "bodying forth" remains obscure. Yet, this obscurity is indicative of the depth and pervasiveness of the phenomenon, for this phenomenon announces itself "first" and "constantly" in our experience of things, as part of the background in which they appear

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 232.

¹⁹⁶ Nietzsche III and IV, 509/79. "Das Leben lebt, indem es leibt."

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. "Wir kennen bisher vielleicht sehr Vieles und fast schon Unübersehbares von dem, was wir den Leibskörper nennen, ohne uns ernstlich darauf besonnen zu haben, was das ist, das Leiben."

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. "Vielleicht ist das Leiben zunächst noch ein dunkles Wort, aber es nennt etwas, was bei der Erkenntnis des Lebendigen zuerst und ständig erfahren und in der Besinnung gehalten werden muß."

as such. In sum, bodying forth is a basis of an affective knowing, a basis that withdraws as something opaque, and is given transversally through the things we encounter.¹⁹⁹

Heidegger develops this point further by showing that the “bodying forth” of life cannot be determined by the physical properties of the body-object, the *“Körper.”* He suggests that the obscurity of the phenomenon of the lived body is essential, more fundamental than any bodily opaqueness. Yet, he also admits that the obscurities of physical nature are fundamentally inscrutable. “As simple and as obscure as what we know as gravitation is, gravity and the falling of bodies, the bodying of a living being is just as simple and just as obscure, though quite different and correspondingly more essential.”²⁰⁰ The “simple” phenomena of gravity and the falling of bodies are already obscure and mysterious, but the obscurity of the bodying forth of life is even more fundamental, a type of gravity that one cannot measure or calculate: it has to do with a qualitative falling and a qualitative weight, and an existential sense of grounding.

How is this understanding possible? How do we know that the falling of physical bodies is essentially different from the bodying forth of the lived body? In line with Heidegger’s analysis, one can say that the bodying forth of life is more fundamental than “physical” gravity because it is a more encompassing phenomenon. It is an ontological phenomenon that involves our own being, not only the being of things. It cannot be encapsulated as a thing: it passes through us and moves us. Heidegger says precisely: “The bodying of life is nothing separate by itself, encapsulated in the ‘physical mass’ [*Körper*] in which the body can appear to us; the body [*der Leib*] is transmission and passage at the same

¹⁹⁹ For a detailed account of Heidegger’s interpretation of the bodying forth of the body as affectivity, see Diego D’Angelo, “Die Schwelle des ‘Lebe-Wesens’: Überlegungen zur Leibinterpretation Heideggers in der Nietzsche-Abhandlung,” *Studia Phaenomenologica. Romanian Journal for Phenomenology* 12 (2012): 61-83, 70-71.

²⁰⁰ *Nietzsche III and IV*, 509/79. “So einfach und so dunkel jenes ist, was wir Gravitation, Schwerkraft und Fallen der Körper kennen, so einfach und so dunkel, aber ganz anders und entsprechend wesentlicher ist das Leiben eines Lebewesens.”

time.”²⁰¹ One can see, then, that the body as *Körper* is a fleeting and minimal modulation of the stream of life, of the bodying forth of life, of *Leib*. And one may glimpse at it in an instant, in inconspicuous gestures. As Heidegger puts it: “Through this body flows a stream of life of which we feel but a small and fleeting portion, in accordance with the receptivity of the momentary state of the body.”²⁰² The lived body is, then, supported by the more general dimensionality of life and, thereby, it is essentially vulnerable, it may be carried away [*fortgetragen*] and enraptured [*hingerissen*]: “Our body itself is admitted into this stream of life, floating in it, and is carried off and snatched away by this stream or else pushed to the banks.”²⁰³ Heidegger finishes this rapturous passage by unexpectedly establishing a correlation between life and world. He says, “that chaos of our region of sensibility which we know as the region of the body is only one *section* of the great chaos that the ‘world’ itself is.”²⁰⁴ The region of our lived body corresponds to the region of sensibility, a sectioning or fissure that opens up chaos within chaos, a world within the “world.”

This conclusion calls attention to the intrinsic complexities of the concept of “world,” which are indicated through the quotations marks. To explain this, let me recall Krell’s analysis of the concept of world in Heidegger. Krell points out that Heidegger understands the concept of world following at least three paths, the first one takes up the world as the referential totality of existence, the second interprets it as cosmos, and the third path, introduced in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, alludes to an essential duplicity, according to

²⁰¹ Ibid. “Das Leiben des Lebens ist nichts Abgesondertes für sich, verkapselt in den »Körper«, als welcher uns der Leib erscheinen kann, sondern der Leib ist Durchlaß und Durchgang zugleich”.

²⁰² Ibid. “Durch diesen Leib strömt ein Strom von Leben, davon wir je nur rein Geringes und Flüchtliges und dieses wieder je nur gemäß der Empfängnisart des jeweiligen Leibzustandes spüren.”

²⁰³ Ibid. “Unser Leib selbst ist in diesen Strom des Lebens zu einer Schwebe in ihm eingelassen und durch diesen Strom fortgetragen und hingerissen oder auch an den Rand gedrängt”.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., my italics. “Jenes Chaos unseres Empfindungsbezirkes, den wir als Leibbezirk kennen, ist nur ein Ausschnitt aus dem großen Chaos, das die »Welt« selbst ist.”

which human beings both have a world and are part of the world.²⁰⁵ Indeed, one might say that this essential duplicity underlies Heidegger's determination of the world as chaos within chaos, as reduplication of the primordial openness of life in the bodying forth of the body.

With regard to this, Krell further remarks that "Heidegger's third way reminds us of Merleau-Ponty's attempt to define the reversible flesh of the world –the element with respect to which existence is never wholly free yet never entirely subservient."²⁰⁶ I will address this parallel with Merleau-Ponty later. For now, suffice it to show that for Heidegger the world itself is chaos and life, insofar as it has a chiasmatic structure, as is the case with the structure of the flesh of the world in Merleau-Ponty's ontology. After all, Heidegger suggests already in *Being and Time* that Dasein's falling in the world could also be read as a falling into the stream of life and things, and that this falling manifests our deeper involvement in being, an ontological connection that is essentially inconspicuous, invisible. And all these motifs are present also in his reading of Nietzsche, though implicitly.

Thereby, one might say that there is an intercrossing between the problems of sensible being and the body and the fundamental question of being. Krell explains this point as follows: "...the bodying forth of life conducts Heidegger back to the fundamental challenge of 'Will to Power as Art,' to wit, the still-outstanding 'new interpretation of sensuousness.' For in his very first lecture course on Nietzsche, which concludes with a reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Heidegger agrees with Socrates that human beings "cannot body forth" as "living being" (ζῶον) unless they have already caught sight of being, as though being itself were somehow bound up with life."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ *Daimon Life*, 113, n.11.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 230.

As Heidegger expresses it, life bodies in our body, and this bodying is a knowing that stamps [*aufprägen*] a form in chaos. That is to say, the bodying forth of the body is a sectioning of chaos, a reduplication of the chaos that is the stream of life, which is the world we live in. In line with Plato's *Phaedrus*, Heidegger suggests that we catch sight of being in losing ourselves in the world. In this way, Heidegger adumbrates a new interpretation of sensuousness according to which the sensible is conceived in itself as latency of meaning, of being, which is already there, in the "world."

Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche shows that we come to know things from within the openness of chaos and life before they appear as pieces of equipment or "theoretical" objects, and this primordial dimensionality relates to the idea of beauty, understood as radiation or shining of the being of things. For if things did not shine in being, how could we come to grasp their singularity? As Heidegger puts it, beauty somehow recalls the existential depth of things: their belonging to being. Moreover, one could say that beauty reveals the poetic character of existence, the fact that existence is openness to the world, to chaos and its "forms." In this sense, Heidegger's approach does not contain a sort of nihilism, according to which being is sheer metaphysical nothingness, an indeterminate vapor. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty says, it means that "there is a thought that is not reflection (=thematization, objectivation, light coming from the one who thinks, and not from thought), but precisely the very fact of thought (that is, of that 'leap,' of that call of being (*heißen, Gebeiß*), of that setting in correlation with the *Bedenklich*, with what 'gives itself to thought,' of that light that clears itself)."²⁰⁸ As I shall argue in the section that follows,

²⁰⁸ *Notes de cours*, 146; my translation. "Il y a une pensée qui est; non réflexion (=thématisation, objectivation, lumière venant de celui qui pense, et non du penser) mais précisément du fait même du Denken ([c'est-à-dire] de ce «saut», de cet appel de l'Être (*heißen, gebeiß*), de cette mise en correspondance avec le Bedenklich, avec ce qui «donne à penser», de cette lumière qui s'éclaire elle-même)."

reading the essay on the work of art, Heidegger determines this non-reflective thought as a poetic thought, and as a gestural comportment.

The Being of Things and the Work of Art

In *The Principle of Reason* (1957),²⁰⁹ Heidegger counterposes Silesius' verse, "the rose is without why," to Leibniz' principle of reason, according to which "nothing is without a why."²¹⁰ Heidegger remarks that "obviously the rose is an example for all blooming things, for all plants and all growth,"²¹¹ which, reposing in their own grounds, do not ask whether one looks at them. Heidegger points out that the rose is without why, but not without a ground: the rose blooms *because* it blooms.²¹²

With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty remarks that, for Heidegger, "being is its own possible, i.e., there is a continuous self-creation of the rose, and there we find the *Rose-sein*."²¹³ What is remarkable in this approach to the being of the rose is that it reveals an essential difference with the being of human beings. Closely following Heidegger's arguments, Merleau-Ponty says that human beings set up a relation to their own presence, to their own visibility, to the possibility of being seen,²¹⁴ which is to say, human beings care about their being. In existing they cannot help but consider the *way* in which they are in the world.²¹⁵

²⁰⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.10 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997). English: *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). Hereafter with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 55/36.

²¹¹ Ibid. "Dir Rose steht hier offenbar als Beispiel für alles Blühende, für alle Gewächse, für jegliche Wachstum."

²¹² See *Notes de cours*, 108.

²¹³ Ibid., 107-08, my translation. "Chez Heidegger, l'être est son propre possible, i.e., il y a une auto-créeation continuée de la rose et c'est là le Rose-sein."

²¹⁴ Ibid., 108.

²¹⁵ See *The Principle of Reason*, 56-57/37-38.

Thus, Heidegger argues, there is a decisive element “unsaid” in Silesius’ poem: “What is unsaid in the fragment –and everything depends on this –instead says that humans, in the concealed grounds of their essential being, first truly are when in their own way they are like the rose –without why.”²¹⁶ Heidegger does not explain this claim here. Yet, he suggests that humanity is *essentially* related to all that grows and blooms insofar as it shines forth. This shining, however, is different to the silent shining of the rose. For humans shine through language, their presence is in a way a saying or showing. In a sense, humans are like the rose insofar as they are who they are, precisely insofar as they are not identical to the rose, and live in the aletheic truth, disclosing their grounds: poetizing. One might say, then, that it is through the work of art that humans shine as what they are.

This idea is sketched out already in *Being and Time*, yet in an enigmatic and fragmentary way. In section 34 from *Being and Time* Heidegger claims: “the communication of the existential possibilities of attunement, that is, the disclosing of existence, can become the true aim of ‘poetic’ speech.”²¹⁷ Hence, Heidegger suggests that this “communication” stems from the bodily dimension of speech, the modulation of the voice, the “way” of speaking. The facticity of the there, the fact that we are thrown in the world, in *Befindlichkeit*, reveals its own possibilities through the “sensible” dimension of language. Allegedly, poetic speech communicates these possibilities precisely because it discloses the sensible in its musical tonality. It is a movement that leads us and involves us as a whole,²¹⁸ in unison,

²¹⁶ Ibid., 57-58/38. “Das ungesagte des Spruches –und darauf kommt alles an –sagt vielmehr, daß der Mensch im verborgensten Grunde seines Wesens erst dann wahrhaft ist, wenn er auf seine Weise so ist wie die Rose –ohne Warum.”

²¹⁷ *Being and Time*, 216/157. “Die Mitteilung der existenziellen Möglichkeiten der Befindlichkeit, das heißt das Erschließen von Existenz, kann eigenes Ziel der »dichtenden« Rede werden.” I will analyze in detail this passage later on, in chapter six, which is devoted to language.

²¹⁸ Heidegger gives further indications on the importance of tone, and the existential unity of hearing and seeing in *The Principle of Reason*, particularly from lectures six to eleven.

demanding a concentrated or gathered response, just like the movement that, according to Goethe –specifically, Heidegger’s interpretation of Goethe –, leads the musician.²¹⁹

In *Being and Time* Heidegger does not explain in detail the implications of this approach to “poetic speech,” but one can see that this brief reference to poetry foreshadows the analysis of poetry and art carried out later in the lecture on *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In this lecture, Heidegger indicates that the setting of the work, its form or *Gestalt*, reveals our musical attunement with the earth. One may say, then, that the form reveals the way in which we establish our own existence amidst things, in attuned correlation with their sensible being.²²⁰ Let me explore this argument in detail.

In this lecture Heidegger approaches the concept of form or figure in light of his interpretation of truth as disclosure, and he shows that the structural moments of the setting of the truth may be determined as the strife between world and earth. Specifically, he says: “The strife that is brought into the rift and thus set back into the earth and thus fixed in place is the figure [*Gestalt*]. Createdness of the work means truth’s being fixed in place in the figure.”²²¹ Heidegger defines the figure as a “fixing” [*festgestellt*] of the strife, which is a retrieval of the interplay between truth and untruth, set back [*zurückgestellt*] in the earth. Put differently, the figure reveals the earth as ground and limit of disclosedness. I take this to mean that, being in the clearing, we can only relate to the ground as limit. For without the

²¹⁹ See *The Principle of Reason*, 132/89.

²²⁰ With regard to the problems concerning the concept of form, and its relation to the work of art, Heidegger may have had in mind not only Nietzsche’s work, but also Schiller’s, which also occupied him around that time. See Martin Heidegger, *Übungen für Anfänger. Schillers Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen. Wintersemester 1936/37*, ed. Ulrich von Bülow (Marbach am Neckar: Marbacher Bibliothek. Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2005). I make reference to this lecture course here because, as Maria del Rosario Acosta points out, these lectures are the result of Heidegger’s work on the problem of art during the 1930s (see Maria del Rosario Acosta, ““The secret that is the work of art”: Heidegger’s Lectures on Schiller,” *Research in Phenomenology* 39 (2009): 135-163, 135).

²²¹ *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 51/189. “Der in den Riß gebrachte und so in die Erde zurückgestellte und damit festgestellte Streit ist die Gestalt. Geschaffensein des Werkes heißt: Festgestelltsein der Wahrheit in die Gestalt.”

resistance of the earth there would be no clearing, things would have no contour, no outline. Concerning this, Heidegger says: “In the earth, however, as essentially self-secluding, the openness of the open region finds that which most intensely resists it; it thereby finds the site of its constant stand, the site in which the figure must be fixed in place.”²²² The earth is resistance and, in this sense, it offers the constant *locus* or support to the openness of the world, to history. One may say, then, that we are not like the rose because we do not rest in the ground. Rather, we are in departure, violently separated from the ground. We have a voice that somehow drives us out of being and, thereby, we dwell in the strife, in the rift: as a breach.²²³

As Heidegger explains, the moment of disclosure is manifest in the “createdness of the work” [*Geschaffensein des Werkes*], and this distinguishes the work of art from the productions of “handicraft.” Presumably, the work of art makes salient the self-secluding character of the earth, whereas in handicraft the earth as such is neglected in its subordination to functionality.²²⁴ Distinguishing between art and handicraft, Heidegger underscores that the earth shall not be understood as matter in opposition to form. Along these lines, one can say that the form of the work is the outline, the limit that is set in the earth. It, the form, brings the secluding dimension of the earth to the foreground, and

²²² Ibid. 57/194. “*An der Erde als der wesentlich sich verschließenden findet aber die Offenheit des Offenen seinen höchsten Widerstand und dadurch die Stätte seines ständigen Standes, darin die Gestalt festgestellt werden muß.*”

²²³ With regard to the essential strife that sets humans into limits, into an existence determined by forms and limits, and technical violence, see *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 153/153 and 169/171. See also Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours*, 121.

²²⁴ It is worth noting that at the very beginning of the essay on the work of art Heidegger defines thinking as a craft, thus suggesting that in crafts there may be already a certain relatedness to being that is analogous to the relatedness to being that characterizes the work of art, but which is missing in mechanical, industrial work. See also the first three sessions from *What is Called Thinking?*

reveals a fundamental comportment, namely, poetry: a primordial way in which human beings are colligated to beings as a whole.²²⁵

Createdness: A Contrast with Nietzsche

What is proper of the work of art, in contrast to the work of handicraft, for instance, is that one sees it as a work and as strife. That is to say, in the work of art the movement of creation becomes explicit. With regard to this, it seems that Heidegger takes up, at least in part, a central thesis from Nietzsche's "aesthetics," namely, that the work of art shows itself as metaphor and translation. Moreover, I should note that Nietzsche qualifies the work of art as the expression of poetic drives that are primordial, ontological, in a way that foreshadows, to some extent, Heidegger's view.

And yet, when affirming the primordial significance of art, Nietzsche often does so by opposing art and truth, leaving unquestioned the metaphysical understanding of truth and knowledge. And Heidegger is particularly concerned about this point. As John Sallis explains, "Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche put into question the tautological bond between truth and knowledge, marking that bond as one that even Nietzsche has in common with Plato."²²⁶ Thus, the necessary question is: To what extent, and in what sense, does Heidegger go beyond both Nietzsche's idea, and that of the metaphysics of art in general? Before responding this question, let me succinctly review Nietzsche's perspective.

In several of his works Nietzsche remarks that the work of art is the metaphysical activity par excellence insofar as it manifests its creation-character, and makes salient the

²²⁵ See Martin Heidegger, *Übungen für Anfänger. Schillers Briefe...*, 91-92.

²²⁶ John Sallis, *Double Truth*, 68-69.

creative drives at the basis of human existence. For instance, in *The Birth of Tragedy*,²²⁷ Nietzsche claims: “only as an aesthetic phenomenon do existence and the world appear justified,”²²⁸ which means that art is a metaphysical activity insofar as it reveals the creative essence of existence.²²⁹ And in “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”²³⁰ he remarks that art shows itself as a lie or metaphor, so that it makes manifest a fundamental impulse to create metaphors [*Metapherbildung*],²³¹ an “art of dissimulation” [*Verstellungskunst*] that finds its culmination in humanity.²³² Hence, the work of art reveals the will to appearance and illusion as something even more primordial than truth. Following this, in *The Will to Power*, in his notes on *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche asserts: “The will to appearance, to illusion, to deception, to becoming and change (to objectified deception) here counts as more profound, primeval, ‘metaphysical,’ than the will to truth, to reality, to mere appearance: –the last is itself a mere will to illusion.”²³³

Yet, according to Heidegger, Nietzsche’s perspective on art hinges on a reversal of Platonism that privileges the sensible in contraposition to the intelligible. He remarks that Nietzsche’s view harbors a metaphysical biologism. He further indicates that Nietzsche’s

²²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Schriften zur Literatur und Philosophie der Griechen* (Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1994). English: “The Birth of Tragedy,” in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs, 1-116 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Hereafter with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

²²⁸ Ibid., 133/113. “...nur als ästhetisches Phänomen ist das Dasein und die Welt ewig gerechtfertigt.”

²²⁹ Nietzsche suggests that we are essentially just forms or images emerging out of a more original creative source, nature and life itself, and art is a way of turning our eyes to see ourselves.

²³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Über Wahrheit und Lüge in Außermoralischen Sinn,” in *Erkenntnis-Theoretische Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968). English: “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs, 139-153 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

²³¹ Ibid., 108-09/150.

²³² Ibid., 98/141.

²³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht. Versuch einer Umwerthung aller Werthe (1884/88)*, Kindle Edition (project.gutenberg.de), Vol. II (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1922), Section 853, III. English: *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), 453. “Der Wille zum Schein, zur Illusion, zur Täuschung, zum Werden und Wechseln (zur objektivierten Täuschung) gilt hier als tiefer, ursprünglicher, »metaphysischer« als der Wille zur Wahrheit, zur Wirklichkeit, zum Schein: -letzterer ist selbst bloß eine Form des Willens zur Illusion.”

aesthetics is a “masculine aesthetics” that sees the work of art as expression of an active creative will. It is contrary to Kant’s aesthetics, in which the experience of beauty is passive, based on the experience of the spectator.²³⁴ Thus, Heidegger concludes, insofar it is still dominated by metaphysical dualisms, and perpetuates the domain of “aesthetics,” Nietzsche’s approach to the work of art is questionable. As Heidegger explains in the “Epilogue” to the essay on the work of art, a proper approach to the essence of the work of art must challenge aesthetics –which is an extension of metaphysics –, and inscribe the problematic of art within the more general question of being.

In his lectures on Nietzsche, however, Heidegger argues that Nietzsche’s aesthetics reveals an important aspect of the work of art: “rapture” [*Rausch*].²³⁵ For Nietzsche, art carries out a rapturous movement, whereby there is a feeling of excess and intensification of the powers of life.²³⁶ And yet, as John Sallis remarks, the problem is that Nietzsche considers only one side of the rapture, which has to do with the forming or ordering of the “chaos within oneself.”²³⁷ Nietzsche’s onesidedness is problematic because he ignores the proper ontological dimension of the work of art, which is related to the other side of rapture, the movement beyond oneself into the domain of the sensible.²³⁸ As I have already indicated, Heidegger notes that the rapture of the work is a rapture of the beautiful. It is the shining of being, just as Plato claims in the *Phaedrus*. Heidegger expresses Plato’s view as follows: “The beautiful is what advances most directly upon us and captivates us. While encountering us as

²³⁴ See *Nietzsche I and II*, 67-68/70-71.

²³⁵ See *ibid.*, 91-100/92-101.

²³⁶ With regard to this point, Diego D’Angelo explains that one may be related to beings as a whole, exposed in the “there” of existence, thanks to the rapture of bodily attunements. See “Die Schwelle des ‘Lebe-Wesens’: Überlegungen zur Leibinterpretation Heideggers in der Nietzsche-Abhandlung,” 76.

²³⁷ John Sallis, *Transfigurements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 168.

²³⁸ For a detailed interpretation of Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche and Plato’s *Phaedrus* in relation the notion of rapture see John Sallis (*Transfigurements*, Chapter Eight).

a being, however, it at the same time liberates us to the view upon Being.”²³⁹ Thus, Heidegger insists that our comportment towards the beautiful is an ecstatic rapture that draws us beyond ourselves, as a view upon being.

In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger gives some important indications in relation to this point. He says that “the Being of all beings is what is most seemly [*das Scheinedste*] –that is, what is most beautiful, what is most constant in itself, what the Greeks meant by ‘beauty’ is discipline.”²⁴⁰ Thus, one can see that the rapture of beauty, as a view upon being, is a “disciplined” rapture that remains within what is constant: the utmost shining that exceeds all visibility. It is the clearing that underlies the appearing of things, and which encompasses our own grounds. Along these lines, some pages after this reflection on the Greek concept of beauty as discipline, in the context of a meditation on Parmenides’ poem, Heidegger notes that an apprehension of being comes along with the appearance of beings, and remarks the following: “Furthermore, if appearing belongs to Being as *physis*, then the human as a being, must belong to this appearing. And since Being-human amid beings as a whole obviously constitutes a distinctive way of Being, the distinctiveness of Being-human grows from the distinctive way of belonging to Being as the apprehending that holds sway.”²⁴¹ I take this to mean that things and my own being shine or appear through a certain understanding of being, which is imposed upon us as we both belong to *physis*, but that in humans implies a sense of withdrawal, not mere continuity with nature.

In relation to this point, one can see that there are significant intersections with Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the notion of flesh. For Heidegger shows that we come to

²³⁹ Nietzsche I and II, 199196. “Das Schöne ist jenes, was am unmittelbarsten auf uns zukommt und uns berührt. Indem es uns als Seiendes trifft, entrückt es uns zugleich in den Blick aus das Sein.”

²⁴⁰ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 140/140.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 148/148. “Wenn jedoch zum Sein als φύσις das Erscheinen gehört, muß der Mensch als Seiender diesem Erscheinen zugehören. Da wiederum das Menschsein inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen offenbar ein eigenes Sein ausmacht, wird die eigenheit des Menschseins aus der Eigenart seiner Zugehörigkeit zum Sein als dem waltenden Erscheinen erwachsen.”

encounter beings in the primordial openness of nature, of being, which is, in fact, a withdrawal of being: no-thingness. Accordingly, as I shall argue in the next section, what is essentially sensible, what belongs to *physis*, to primordial nature, is not a “physical” plane of pure visibility –a metaphysical substrate –, as opposed to the intelligible, but rather a sensible being with dimensionality and depth.

The Shining of the Earth and Its Limits

Beauty is the utmost shining of being: an intensive shining, whose intensity traverses us. It reveals our belonging to the world, as well as our departure from being, from the ground. This shining of being is somehow preserved in the work of art. For the work of art lets what is visible occur as dis-closure, as primordial truth. Along these lines, one might say that the work of art is a display of visibility in general. It is itself not-visible, not-manifest: no-thing. One may also say that the work is beautiful insofar as it is an outline of visibility, which may not be reduced to something visible in particular. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger articulates this relation between beauty and truth –as disclosure –as follows:

Thus in the work of art it is truth, not merely something true, that is at work. The picture that shows the peasant shoes, the poem that says the Roman fountain, do not simply make manifest what these isolated beings as such are –if indeed they manifest anything at all; rather they make unconcealment as such happen in regard to beings as a whole. The more simply and essentially the shoes are engrossed in their essence, the more directly and engagingly do all beings attain a greater degree of being along with them. That is how self-concealing Being is cleared. Light of this kind joins its shining to and into the work, is the beautiful. *Beauty is one way in which truth essentially occurs as unconcealment.*²⁴²

²⁴²*The Origin of the Work of Art*, 43/181. “Im Werk ist die Wahrheit am Werk, also nicht nur ein Wahres. Das Bild, das die Bauernschuhe zeigt, das Gedicht, das den römischen Brunnen sagt, bekunden nicht nur, was dieses vereinzelte Seiende als dieses sei, falls sie je bekunden, sondern sie lassen Unverborgenheit als solche im Bezug auf das Seiende im Ganzen geschehen. Je einfacher und wesentlicher nur das Schubzeug, je ungeschmückter und reiner nur der Brunnen in ihrem Wesen aufgehen, um so unmittelbarer und einnehmender wird mit ihnen alles Seiende seiender. Dergestalt ist das sichverbergende Sein gelichtet. Das so geartete Licht fügt sein Scheinen ins Werk. Das ins Werk gefügte Scheinen ist das Schöne. Schönheit ist eine Wiese, wie Wahrheit als Unverborgenheit west.”

This passage indicates that it is truth itself that is at work in the work of art. The work of art is the event of unconcealment and is not sheer manifestation. Fundamentally, this means that no particular being, no particular truth, is manifest in the work. Rather, what is manifest is an inextricable relation to the totality of the world, i.e., to being in general. As Heidegger puts it, what shines as beautiful is dis-closure, un-concealment, *Unverborgenheit*, the “opening” of the “closure” of things. Does this mean that the uniqueness of the being that is “manifest” in the work evaporates? It does not. As I have already indicated, things have their own limits precisely insofar as they set themselves against the grounds of life, of the earth. Whatever appears in the work is preserved in its ground, in the earth, in a unique, “non-representable,” relation.

Heidegger suggests that “the self-concealing Being” [*das sichverbergende Sein*] shines in the work in the simplest presencing of the thing: the peasant shoes shine through the colors, the Roman fountain appears through the sounding of the poetic word. The earthly dimension of things comes into the open as that which closes itself off, as something set within limits. Yet, this does not mean that the thing is contained as a thing in itself. Rather, this means that the limits of things emerge as foldings of the earth that remain within a common element. Indeed, Heidegger defines the earth as closed off, but also as an element that allows things to flow together in reciprocal accord, in “unison” [*Einklang*], just as if the earth were the invisible milieu of primordial nature, of being.²⁴³ He says:

All things of earth, and the earth itself as a whole, flow together into a reciprocal accord. But this confluence is not a blurring of their outlines. Here there flows the bordering stream, restful within itself, which delimits everything present in its presencing. Thus in each of the self-secluding things there is the same not-knowing-of-one-another. The earth is essentially

²⁴³ On the multiple meanings of the concept of earth in Heidegger, see Michael Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). Michael Haar shows that Heidegger’s concept of earth has multiple meanings, and entails references both to the concrete support of the work of art, and the ontological dimension of nature, physis, and the withdrawal of being. See also Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension...*, 150, n.27.

self-secluding. To set forth the earth means to bring it into the open region as the self-secluding.²⁴⁴

As Heidegger explains, the earth is the “bordering stream” that preserves the flowing or circulation of things, and sets up the limits of things. One might say that this flowing of things and earth occurs as a simultaneous movement of imbrication and difference, in what may be characterized as a polyphonic milieu. For things are like mirrors of the earth, second level grounds. They set up new modes of self-seclusion against the fundamental, absolute ground that is *the* earth. In this sense, the earth appears as an ambiguous element, one that is both primordial ground and the principle of individuation of things, at once absolutely general and absolutely singular. Indeed, earthly things may be brought to accord because they are rooted in the same earth. And yet, having roots in the earth, things are never fully present: they have depth, and shadows.

Thus, as was suggested above, Heidegger’s characterization of the earth bears important similarities to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh. Indeed, the structure of the flesh involves the reciprocal intertwining of the visible and the invisible. It makes possible the exchange or circulation of things, without effacing their differences. The flesh is, in this sense, the primordial element or milieu of the world, which Merleau-Ponty occasionally describes as a magma that constitutes men and nature, space and time.²⁴⁵ This element is vicariously revealed, for example, in Proust’s “sensible ideas:” musical ideas opaque to intelligence, tenebrous, with shadows.²⁴⁶ This element names the reversibility of things, their

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 33/172-173. “*Alle Dinge der Erde, sie selbst im Ganzen, verströmen sich in einem wechselweisen Einklang. Aber dieses Verströmen ist kein Verwischen. Hier strömt der in sich beruhete Strom des Ausgrenzens, das jedes Anwesende in sein Anwesen begrenzt. So ist in jedem der sichverschließenden Dinge das gleiche Sich-nicht-kennen. Die Erde her-stellen heißt: sie ins Offene bringen als das Sichverschließende.*”

²⁴⁵ *Notes de cours*, 211.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 193. The importance of Proust’s “sensible ideas” in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh, also in relation with Heidegger’s work, is analyzed by Mauro Carbone in *The Thinking of the Sensible*.

hollowness, which is at the same time pregnancy of meaning. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty says: “This mixture is chaos, but it is also the proliferation of meaning.”²⁴⁷

I will examine Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh later, for now suffice it to show that, for Heidegger, the earth works as a grounding element that resonates in things, in such a way that they are preserved within what we should call “radiant” limits, the limits that shelter things amidst the open.²⁴⁸ Along these lines, one could say that things shine as things insofar as they carry the earth, their own shadow, granted that we understand that shadows are not opposed to light like terms in a dialectical relation.²⁴⁹ The earth emerges, in this sense, as that which remains constant in the appearing of things. Heidegger occasionally refers to this earthly dimension of things as a will to remain the same, to persevere in being. He says, for example, that “color shines and *wants* only to shine.”²⁵⁰

One should note, however, that the strife between earth and world, which to some extent may also be understood as the intertwining of the visible and the invisible, light and shadow, is not to be thought in dialectical terms precisely because light and shadow are structural dimensions of the truth,²⁵¹ of the historical movement of the truth of being; that is to say, they are both *in* being.²⁵²

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 213, my translation. “*Le mélange, c’est le chaos, mais c’est aussi la prolifération du sens.*”

²⁴⁸ As John Sallis suggests, the earth is the secluding dimension of the truth, which provides a shelter for beings and, thereby, is the support of the there in which things come to be in the open (See *Transfigurements*, 186).

²⁴⁹ See *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 138/129.

²⁵⁰ *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 33/172; my italics. “*Die Farbe leuchtet auf und will nur leuchten.*”

²⁵¹ Considering his own determination of dialectic as an essentially unstable thinking, Merleau-Ponty suggests, however, that Heidegger’s thought is dialectical insofar as it remains “on the way,” for Heidegger rejects dialectique only insofar as it privileges the light. See *Notes de cours*, 146-147.

²⁵² As Vallega-Neu points out, “Heidegger maintains that in order to be sheltered in a true entity, the original strife of truth must be transformed into the strife between world and earth” (*The Bodily Dimension...*, 92). She further explains that although initially Heidegger insists on distinguishing “between the strife between world and earth on the one hand and concealment and unconcealment on the other hand,” through the thinking of the fourfold he “moves toward a thinking that incorporates more and more the simultaneity of being and beings” (150, n.23).

In fact, two decades after writing his essay on the work of art, in the *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, Heidegger returns to these themes. He underscores that disclosure and concealment are yoked together in the being of things. He refers to Leonardo's saying, "light reveals, shadow conceals,"²⁵³ and remarks that when one experiences things in a thoughtful, "commemorative" [*andenkend*] way, "they hint at a world out of which they are what they are."²⁵⁴ This point is further illustrated in relation to Cézanne's work: "when, for example, Cézanne lets the *montagne St. Victoire* appear in his paintings again and again and the mountain presences as the mountain ever more simply and powerfully, then this does not lie solely, nor even primarily, in that Cézanne discovers himself ever more decisively through his painterly technique, but rather in that the 'topic' moves, i.e., speaks, ever more simply."²⁵⁵

Heidegger shows, thus, that things have a dynamic and qualitative depth: their shining is already a primordial logos. That is to say, the meaning of things cannot be exhausted in just one frame, one vision, because their being constantly renews itself. And, one may add, being, as primordial nature, is every day just as it was on the first day.²⁵⁶ Along these lines, one might say that the artist's work speaks the truth insofar as it follows the inexhaustible "claim" of the enigma of the visible, the enigma of the being of things. This enigma of the visible is each time inaugural: a recurrent beginning.²⁵⁷ In relation to this point,

²⁵³ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 138/129-30. "Das Licht zeigt, der Schatten verbirgt."

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 139-130. "...sie winken in eine Welt, aus der sie sind was, sie sind."

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 139/130-31. "Wenn z.B. Cézanne immer wieder die *montagne St. Victoire* auf seinen Bildern erscheinen läßt und der Berg als der Berg immer einfacher und mächtiger anwest, dann liegt dies nicht nur und nicht in erster Linie daran, daß Cézanne immer entschiedener in seiner Maltechnik findet, sondern daran, daß das »Motiv« immer einfacher bewegt, d.h. spricht..."

²⁵⁶ This is an idea that will have important resonances in Merleau-Ponty's thought, and which in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* is expressed as follows: "Everything has always already been said. And yet this 'same' possesses, as its inner truth, the inexhaustible wealth of that which on every day is as if that day were the first." "*Alles ist immer schon gesagt. Aber dieses »dasselbe« hat allerdings den unausschöpfbaren Reichtum dessen zur inneren Wahrheit, was jeden Tag so ist, als sei es sein erster Tag*" (104/102-03).

²⁵⁷ In *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Julian Young points out that Heidegger's view on art correctly assesses that material things possess an "unlimited plenitude," but he tends to identify the earthy dimension of the work, which gives self-subsistence to things and makes them inexhaustible,

Heidegger says in the Zollikon seminars: “The artist is capable of hearing this claim more purely each and every time such that this claim guides the brush for him and even proffers the colors to him. The painter paints what he hears as the appeal of the essence of things.”²⁵⁸ Hence, one may say that the gestures of the artist follow the movement of things, the latencies dormant in their outline, in their figure: the *Gestalt*.

Gestalt and Contemplation in the Work of Art

Beauty is the shining of the form of things, which is also the shining of the *Gestalt* that is set back in the earth, the figure or outline that guides the gestures of the artist. The *Gestalt* is the fixing in place that remains in the state of “not-yet” disclosed. One may say that the form or *Gestalt* of the work of art retrieves the primordial, more primitive shining of things: a primordial openness that cannot be inscribed in physical, objective limits.²⁵⁹ It is in this context that one should understand the work of art as poetry: *Dichtung*. Heidegger suggests that, in poetizing, humans bring things out of un-concealment in an originary way. In this regard, he says that poetry is a mode of comportment that consists in letting the open occur and set itself in things: “What poetry as clearing projection, unfolds of unconcealment and projects ahead into the rift-design of the figure, is the open region which poetry lets happen, and indeed in such a way that only now, in the midst of beings, the open region

with merely “tactile,” material qualities (48-49). As we have argued, insofar as the earth remains self-secluded, it cannot be characterized as matter, as it is usually understood, for instance, in relation to the work of handicraft.

²⁵⁸ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 139-131. “...der Künstler es vermag, diesen Anspruch je und je reiner zu hören, so daß dieser Anspruch ihm den Pinsel führt und die Farben zureicht. Der Maler malt, was er hört, als den Zuspruch des Wesens der Dinge.”

²⁵⁹ Considering the roots of the problematic relation between visibility and truth in *Being and Time*, we could probably say that the “artistic” form reveals what Diego D’Angelo calls the essential “touch” [*Berühren*], which implies an attuned, concerned relatedness to things, that shines in the truth, in the fundamental truth *Dasein* lives in, and which precedes and makes possible any express manipulation of things or any explicit reference to them. See Diego D’Angelo, “Zeigen und Berühren: Der Pragmatische Sinn der Rede bei Heidegger im Hinblick auf Aristoteles Auffassung der Wahrheit,” *Bulletin d’analyse phénoménologique* VIII, 6 2012, <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/bap.htm> (accessed 02 01, 2013), 12-13.

brings beings to shine and ring out.”²⁶⁰ Heidegger defines the poetic comportment as a movement toward the origins of the world. In this movement, what is decisive is an abandonment of the will, a “letting-be” that precludes any explanation in terms of passivity and activity. The necessary questions, then, concern the determination of this poetic work: What type of human action is it? And, in what sense is poetizing a bodily comportment, a gesture?

In the “Addendum” to the essay on the work of art, written in 1956, Heidegger clarifies how the term “*Ge-Stell*” is to be understood in the context of the lecture. He points out that it must be distinguished from the meaning this term has in his essay on technology. In this case, the term “*Ge-Stell*” is intrinsically related to the concept of *Gestalt*, which in turn is read in line with the Greek *μορφή*. He says precisely: “In accordance with what has so far been explained, the meaning of the noun *Ge-Stell* [enframing] used on page 189, is thus defined: the gathering of the bringing-forth, of the letting-come-forth-here into the rift-design as bounding outline (*peras*). The Greek sense of *morphê* as *Gestalt* is made clear by *Ge-Stell* so understood.”²⁶¹

Heidegger makes reference to the Greek *μορφή* in order to show that the notion of form or *Gestalt* should not be understood as a sort of objective, material limit that “closes off” the thing, but rather as the limit that is present in the thing as an *Umriß* (*πέρας*), an outline. That is to say, the *Gestalt* sets a qualitative or affective limit, just as it happens with the lived body, understood as *δέμας*, another Greek word that Heidegger translates as *Gestalt*

²⁶⁰ *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 60/197. “Was die Dichtung als lichtender Entwurf an Unverborgenheit auseinander faltet und in den Riß der Gestalt vorauswirft, ist das Offene, das sie geschehen läßt und zwar dergestalt, daß jetzt das Offene erst inmitten des Seienden dieses zum Leuchten und Klingen bringt.”

²⁶¹ Ibid., 72/209. “Gemaß dem bisher Erläuterten bestimmt sich die Bedeutung des auf S.51 gebrauchten Wortes »Ge-stell«: die Versammlung des Her-vor-bringens, des Her-vor-ankommen-lassens in den Riß als Umriß (*πέρας*). Durch das so gedachte »Ge-stell« klärt sich der griechische Sinn von *μορφή* als *Gestalt*.”

in the Zollikon seminars.²⁶² Thereby, one may say that Heidegger's reference to the Greek notion of form also contains a reference to gestures, that is, to the forms of our actions and comportments.²⁶³ In line with this, I suggest that the proper forms of things can only be given as such to a lived body, a body that bodies forth and gestures. Let me develop this argument in more detail.

Heidegger suggests that the work of art is a privileged instance of the most proper mode of human acting, what he calls the "highest doing" "[*höchstes Tun*]."²⁶⁴ This "highest doing" is qualified as such because it is essential, a purely human doing, which does not pretend to be more than that. Thereby, what is "highest" is, in a sense, a minimum: the doing that is set within the limits of humanity, within the horizon of human temporality. As Heidegger expresses it, this essential doing unfolds as pure form: hint, gesture, outline. This is what Heidegger suggests when he defines the work of art as "the setting-into-work of truth" [*Ins Werk-Setzen-der Wahrheit*]. To understand this, it is crucial to define "setting."

In the lecture on the work of art Heidegger defines the truth as a "setting" into work, that is, a fixing in place. Still, the nuances of this definition are explained in detail only in the "Addendum." Indeed, at the beginning of the "Addendum" Heidegger remarks that any attentive reader of the lecture must face an "essential difficulty" [*wesentliche Schwierigkeit*] interpreting what the "establishing of the truth" [*Feststellen der Wahrheit*] means. The difficulty has to do with the meaning of "fixing" or "setting." He says that one should understand this setting as an action that lets something happen. As Heidegger explains, the difficulty is resolved if we remember that the verb *setzen* translates the Latin *ponere* and the Greek *θέσις*.

²⁶² See supra., 65-66; and *Zollikon Seminars*, 116/89.

²⁶³ The Greek *μορφή* refers to the shape and form of things, the outward appearance, but also to the shapes of the body in gestures or gesticulations (see Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Perseus Project, Kindle Version by Handleclassics.com).

²⁶⁴ *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 71/208.

By means of these terminological specifications Heidegger makes clear that the “setting” refers to what is “admitted into the boundary (*peras*), brought into the outline.”²⁶⁵ Indeed, in drawing an outline one lets something appear in its proper limits. As was mentioned above, Heidegger qualifies this action as the “highest doing.” He further refers to a passage of his lecture “Science and Reflection” [*Wissenschaft und Besinnung*] (1953),²⁶⁶ in which this “highest doing” is determined as a type of life, an ethical possibility: the Greek *βίος θεωρητικός*.

Hence, one may say that the setting that takes place in the work of art involves a “theoretical” mode of life, in the original Greek sense of the word. As Heidegger explains, the concept of *theory* originally implies a reverential attention to the unconcealment of something that presences:²⁶⁷ “If now we think the word *theōria* in the context of the meanings of the words just cited [referring to the terms *thea* and *oraō*], then *theōria* is the reverent paying heed to the unconcealment of what presences.”²⁶⁸ Thus, for Heidegger the setting of the work of art is dependent on what presences in its presencing, what is not-yet present, but is hinted at. Heidegger strengthens this argument by referring to the original Greek meaning of the “temple.” It is the place elevated from the earth, from which one could read the signs of the birds and interpret the future. This meaning is partly preserved in the Latin “*Contemplatio*.”

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 71/208. “*umrissen, in die Grenze eingelassen (πέρας), in dem Umriss gebracht.*”

²⁶⁶ Martin Heidegger, “Wissenschaft und Besinnung (1953),” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, 37-66 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000). English: “Science and Reflection,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lowitt (New York: Harper & Row (Garland Publishing), 1977). Let me note that the translation of the title should read “Science and Meditation,” because the term “reflection” distorts what Heidegger actually means by “besinnung,” and “meditation” corresponds to current translations of this term.

²⁶⁷ With regard to this, Julian Young examines the sense of holiness that transpires through the work of art, underscoring the fact that in the work of art the mysterious, self-secluding dimension of the earth, is that which makes something appear as holy, or ‘awesome.’ See *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*, 42.

²⁶⁸ “Science and Reflection,” 51/164. “*Denken wir das Wort θεωρία jetzt aus den zuletzt genannten Wort bedeutungen, dann ist die θεωρία das verebrende Be-achten der Unverborgenheit des Anwesenden.*”

But, what exactly is *present* in the work of art? Heidegger responds to this question in the course of the essay: the “*factum*” that the work *is*, just the “impulse” [*Anstoß*] of the work to remain in the open.²⁶⁹ The *τέχνη* of the creator is in this sense just a mode of seeing the truth, an occasion for the truth to occur, and the *will* of the preservers [*die Bewahrenden*] is to keep this truth in the open. In both cases, what is at stake is something different to the “performance” [*leisten*] carried out by an individual subject who intends to accomplish something in particular. For the work of art is not an object, what one sees is not there in the physical surface of the work. Rather, the work of art is a unique event that needs to be continuously re-interpreted, for its presence is singular, and it withdraws at any attempt at representation or conceptualization.

Precisely, Heidegger defines *τέχνη* as a mode of knowing [*Wissen*] in the original Greek sense of “having seen” or apprehending [*vernehmen*]. He says: “The word *technê* denotes rather a mode of knowing. To know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present as such.”²⁷⁰ Thus, the work of art is a particular mode of knowing whereby one lets “oneself be involved” [*sich einlassen*] in what comes to presence, a peculiar will that is also needed by the preservers of the work. Hence, Heidegger remarks, the work of art is a “will to know”, or a will that is itself knowing, and brings us down to the grounds of the original contact with the truth, with the world that emerges in front of us: “Knowing that remains a willing, and willing that remains a knowing, is the existing human being’s ecstatic entry into the unconcealment of being.”²⁷¹ The work of art is, furthermore, a *work* that is rapturous. It implies the sober “resolution [*Ent-Schlossenheit*] to go

²⁶⁹ See *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 52-53/192.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 46/184. “Das Wort *τέχνη* nennt vielmehr eine Weise des Wissens. Wissen heißt: gesehen haben, in dem Sinne von sehen, der besagt: vernehmen des Anwesenden als eines solchen.”

²⁷¹ Ibid., 55/192. “Das Wissen, das ein Wollen, und das Wollen, das ein Wissen bleibt, ist das ekstatische Sich-einlassen des existierenden Menschen in die Unverborgenheit des Seins.”

beyond one's self' [*Übersichhinausgehen*].²⁷² I take this to mean that in the work of art one lets oneself go. In this regard, one may also say that in the work of art one reaffirms one's sensible being, one's gestural body. In order to further clarify this point, the question that we now must ask is: who is the "one" whose "self" is left behind with resoluteness in this case? Heidegger gives hints at responding to this question in the course of the "Addendum," referring to some central difficulties from *Being and Time*.

Between Being and Human Being: The Ambiguous Character of the Poetic Work

At the end of the "Addendum" Heidegger indicates that the whole essay on the work of art moves "on the path of the question of the essence of being,"²⁷³ and it takes up the essential question from *Being and Time*. Accordingly, he continues, the definition of the work of art as "the setting-into-work of truth" must be understood in relation to the fundamental "ontological" question of the meaning of being. Heidegger thereby remarks that art belongs to the event determining the meaning of being: "It belongs to the *appropriate event* [*Ereignis*] by way of which the 'meaning of being' (see *Being and Time*) can alone be defined."²⁷⁴

If art belongs to the primordial event that sets up the meaning of being, then the work of art is the foundation of the world. This means that the work of art is both the origin of the world and a part of the world. In short, it is essentially ambiguous. Elaborating on this problem, Heidegger gives some indications [*Fingerzeigen*] –still inadequate, fragmentary formulations of this problematic –, underscoring two ambiguities involved in the expression "the setting-into-work of truth."

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid., 73/210. "...auf dem Weg der Frage nach dem Wesen des Seins."

²⁷⁴ Ibid., "sie gehört in das Ereignis, aus dem sich erst der »Sinn vom Sein« (vgl. »Sein und Zeit«) bestimmt."

The first ambiguity alludes to the “subject” and “object” of the setting.²⁷⁵ On the one hand, the work of art is a “setting-into-work of truth” because the truth itself is the “subject” producing the work. Heidegger remarks that this is a consideration of the work in terms of the *Ereignis*. Yet, considering that art is a summoning or claim [*Zuspruch*] to human beings, which cannot be without them, the truth is in a sense the “object” of the setting. The truth emerges through the work of human beings.²⁷⁶

The second ambiguity stems from the first one, and is characterized as an ambiguity arising from the human relation to art. This ambiguity is that in the “setting-into-work of truth” it remains “undecided” [*unbestimmt*] but “decidable” [*bestimmbar*] “who does the setting or in what way it occurs.”²⁷⁷ Hence, although in a certain sense human beings produce works of art, in another sense it is rather a historical event that is appropriated by human beings. This fundamental ambiguity constitutes the work of art as the call for a decision, as an interrogation. As Heidegger explains, the ambiguity characteristic of the work of art echoes the way in which the relation between humans and being conceals itself. And this constitutes a pressing difficulty since *Being and Time*, which, according to Heidegger, is still in need of an adequate formulation.

Still, Heidegger’s analysis suggests that historical decisions take place within a primordial openness to the world, and a primordial relation to the earth. Along these lines, one may say that the origins of historical decisions remain essentially hidden because they cannot be inscribed in particular modes of saying or showing. Strictly speaking, no human

²⁷⁵ Heidegger qualifies his own formulations are mere “indications” [*Fingerzeigen*], and at the end of the “Addendum” he acknowledges that the problem concerning the question of meaning of being, and the relation between being and human beings, have not been yet formulated in adequate terms. It is clear, therefore, that formulating the problem using terms such as “subject” and “object” is still inadequate, and they must be read as formal indications with a tentative character.

²⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 74/211.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 74/211. “...wer oder was in welcher Weise »setzt«.”

being has witnessed the origin of a historical world, for this origin cannot be ascribed to particular historical facts –any “fact” already presupposes a history. Therefore, the primordial saying and showing that gives impulse to history may only be preserved as an *implicit* understanding of being, in such a way that we can never set it forth objectively.

Based on these premises, one might say that the origin of the world should be understood as a mythical, poetic origin, as a leap out of ordinary time. It is, in a sense, a somewhat divine, non-mortal, origin. It is in this context that one shall understand the work of art as *poiesis*, and as foundation. And, it seems, these are the reasons why Heidegger characterizes the setting of the work of art as a *Riß*, a “rift-design” that delimits a historical world, and which resonates in human actions as an outline, a form, *Um-riß*. Let me proceed to examine this argument.

The Foundational Gesture of the Work of Art

The semantic field of the term “*Riß*” refers to meanings such as “delineatio, scissura, fissura, rima,”²⁷⁸ the verb *reißen* alludes to the action of tearing apart, including actions such as the opening of furrows in the land, the drawing of lines or of scriptural characters, the projection of signs, or even the accomplishing of rapid and violent movements.

As Heidegger puts it, the rift-design [*Riß*] sets itself in the strife between world and earth. It is a movement in which a historical people mirrors its own being and, at the same time, brings forth the “face” of things. The work of art is a project, an outline that somehow shapes the world in establishing separations and divisions of the earth: furrows. The work of art is, so to speak, an action that sketches traits in the sensible world, and calls for a public, communal response. This is, for example, what Heidegger suggests in the following passage:

²⁷⁸ See the entry to the term *Riß* (*Ris*?) in the *Grimm Wörterbuch*.

The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves. This view remains open as long as the work is a work, as long as the god has not fled from it. It is the same with the sculpture of the god, a votive offering of the victor in the athletic games. It is not a portrait whose purpose is to make it easier to realize how the god looks; rather, it is a work that lets the god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself. The same holds for the linguistic work. In the tragedy nothing is staged or displayed theatrically, but the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought. The linguistic work, originating in the speech of the people, does not refer to this battle, it transforms the people's saying so that now every living word fights the battle and put up for decision what is holy and what unholy, what great and small, what lofty and what flighty, what master and what slave (see Heraclitus fragment 53).²⁷⁹

This passage describes two main scenarios of the strife: the temple and the tragedy, for the sculpture belongs to the sacred space of the temple. What these two “works” have in common is the call for a collective ritual, set in a space torn apart from the ordinary space of everydayness. And yet, these rituals transfigure the ordinary, becoming part of the “living word” and, also, we might say, of our living movements and actions, our gestures. Along these lines, one may distinguish two basic levels of the *setting* of the strife, two different moments of the rift-design. On the one hand, there is the primordial setting of the strife between world and earth that occurs in a somewhat mythical time, the time of the work of art. This time is essentially past, for it recalls a primordial appropriation of the truth: the first and renewed *presencing* of the world of the work. The second level is a redoubling and

²⁷⁹ *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 29/168-69. “Der Temple gibt in seinem Dastehen den Dingen erst ihr Gesicht und den Menschen erst die Aussicht auf sich selbst. Diese sicht bleibt so lange offen, als das Werk ein Werk ist, so lange als der Gott nicht aus ihm geflohen. So steht es auch mit dem Bildwerk des Gottes, das ihm der Sieger im Kampfspiel weihet. Es ist kein Abbild, damit man an ihm leichter zur Kenntniss nehme, wie der Gott aussieht, aber es ist ein Werk, das den Gott selbst anwesen läßt und so der Gott selbst ist. Dasselbe gilt vom sprachwerk. In der Tragödie wird nichts auf – und forgeföhrt, sondern der Kampf der neuen Götter gegen die alten wird gekämpft. Indem das Sprachwerk im Sagen des Volkes aufsteht, redet es nicht über diesen Kampf, sondern verwandelt das Sagen des Volkes dahin, daß jetzt jedes wesentliche Wort diesen Kampf föhrt und zur Entscheidung stellt, was heilig ist und was unheilig, was groß und was klein, was wacker und was feig, was edel und was flüchtig, was Herr und was Knecht (vgl. Heraklit, Fragm. 53).”

appropriation of the first, a continuation and response whereby the strife is set in living words and gestures, in everyday saying and showing.²⁸⁰

One might say that this appropriation of the work of art in everyday speech and gestures is a redoubling that preserves the impulse, the transformative potentialities of the first. It is not a dead imitation or copy. This means that the two moments are not two separate spheres of reality, for the second moment preserves in a dormant way the poetic transformative dimension of the first, it is dormant poetry. And the work of art preserves vividly this poetic potentiality insofar as it is kept alive in a tradition. Along these lines, one might say that the work of art bears testimony to the original institution of meaning in history. This is why Heidegger understands the work of art as poetic foundation of the world.

Indeed, at the end of the essay on the work of art, Heidegger declares that the work of art is fundamentally poetic: “Art as the setting-into-work of truth, is poetry.”²⁸¹ In this case the notion of *poiesis* is understood in a wider sense as a fundamental comportment that determines our relation to the truth: “Not only the creation of the work is poetic, but equally poetic, though in its own way, is the preserving of the work; for a work is in actual effect as a work only when we remove ourselves from our common place routine and move into what is disclosed by the work, so as to bring our own essence itself to take a stand in the truth of beings.”²⁸²

²⁸⁰ In the passage in question, Heidegger does not talk about gestures, but the reference to theatre indicates that the gestures of theatre may be preserved in everyday life, just as the words of poetry are preserved in living speech.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 199/62. “Die Kunst ist als das Ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit Dichtung.”

²⁸² Ibid. “Nicht nur das Schaffen des Werkes ist dichterisch, sondern ebenso dichterisch, nur in seiner eigenen Weise, ist auch das Bewahren des Werkes; denn ein Werk ist nur als ein Werk Wirklich, wenn wir uns selbst unserer Gewöhnlichkeit entrücken und in das vom Werk Eröffnete einrücken, um so unser Wesen selbst in der Wahrheit des Seienden zum Stehen zu bringen.”

As Heidegger explains, the work of art is poetic inasmuch as it removes the ground of what is customary for us, bringing us back to the primordial, unsettling truth underlying our familiar bonds with the world. Borrowing Merleau-Ponty's vocabulary, one can explain this by saying that the work of art stirs the grounds of our "perceptual faith" in the world, to such an extent that the world as a whole is somehow re-instituted or re-appropriated. In this sense, according to Heidegger, the work of art is foundation, *Stiftung*. He says: "The essence of art is poetry. The essence of poetry in turn, is the founding of truth."²⁸³ Through the concept of foundation Heidegger dovetails the notions of *poiesis* and history, understood as *Geschick*, as destiny, showing that the work of art is artistic or *poietic* insofar as it institutes a world within the world. In this regard, as Heidegger remarks, the poetic dimension of the work of art hinges on language: the inaugural language constituting a tradition. Heidegger underpins the historical potential of poetry, in its primordial relation to language, in light of three basic meanings of the concept of foundation, *Stiftung*: "founding as bestowing, founding as grounding, and founding as beginning."²⁸⁴

Elaborating on the concept of *Stiftung*, Heidegger first remarks that the work of art is donation or bestowing, which undermines what is taken for granted as real, unquestionable and evident. He says precisely:

The setting-into-work of truth thrusts up the awesome and at the same time thrust down the ordinary and what we believe to be such. The truth that discloses itself in the work can never be proved or derived from what went before. What went before is refuted in its exclusive actuality by the work. What art founds can therefore never be compensated and made up for by what is already at hand and available. Founding is an overflow, a bestowal.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Ibid., 63/199. "Das Wesen der Kunst ist die Dichtung. Das Wesen der Dichtung aber ist die Stiftung der Wahrheit."

²⁸⁴ Ibid., "Stiften als Schenken, Stiften als Gründen, Stiften als Anfahren."

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 63/200. "Das Ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit stößt das Un-Gebeure auf und stößt zugleich das Gebeure und das, was man dafür halt, um. Die im Werk sich eröffnende Wahrheit ist aus dem Bisherigen nie zu belegen und abzuleiten. Das bisherige wird in seiner Ausschließlichen Wirklichkeit durch das Werk widerlegt. Was die Kunst stiftet, kann deshalb durch das Vorhandene und Verfügbare nie aufgewogen und wettgemacht werden. Die Stiftung ist ein Überfluß, eine Schenkung."

The setting of the work is described as a hermeneutic movement that comes upon what is un-familiar and turns around what is familiar. In this sense, it may appear as a shock, a rapturous or excessive movement, *Überfluß*. Although the work of art has the character of a gift and is excess with respect to anything given before, this gift is not to be understood as a new thing or a new particular meaning. What the work bestows is not a “present” that now becomes available, rather a region of fundamental significations that was already there, though veiled. Heidegger indicates this as follows: “Truly poetic projection is the opening up of that into which human being as historical is already cast.”²⁸⁶ In a sense, this means that the work of art reveals the limits of what is sensible as sensible support, as ground and territory that sustains a mode of living. It is a way of working and drawing outlines on the earth, whereby a historical people determines the outlook of the world, strives to make a living through that which is already set or given:

This is the earth and, for a historical people, its earth, the self-secluding ground on which it rests together with everything that it already is, through still hidden from itself. But this is also its world, which prevails in virtue of the relation of human beginning to the unconcealment of Being. For this reason, everything with which man is endowed must, in the projection, be drawn up from the closed ground and expressly set upon this ground. In this way the ground is first grounded as the bearing ground.”²⁸⁷

Here, Heidegger remarks that the work makes salient the ground as ground by actually carrying it, bearing it, that is, by exposing its own limits as work. On the basis of this recognition of the limit as limit, the work foreshadows the possibility of death, the relentless opaqueness of existence. In a word: finitude. As I have already indicated, the work of art sets a rift in the earth and, in so doing, the work reaffirms its belonging to the ground.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. “*Der Wahrhaft dichtende Entwurf ist die Eröffnung von Jenem, worin das Dasein als geschichtliches schon geworfen ist.*”

²⁸⁷ Ibid. “*Dies ist die Erde und für ein geschichtliches Volk seine Erde, der sich verschließende Grund, dem es aufruht mit all dem, was es, sich selbst noch verborgen, schon ist. Es ist aber seine Welt, die aus dem Bezug des Daseins zur Unverborgenheit des Seins waltet. Deshalb muß alles dem Menschen Mitgegebene im Entwurf aus dem verschlossenen Grund heraufgeholt und eigens auf diesen gesetzt werden. So wird er als tragende Grund erst gegründet.*”

This latter point is further emphasized in the determination of *Stiftung* as beginning [*Anfangen*]. Heidegger points out that the work of art is a beginning, understood as a “head start” [*Vorsprung*] that gives a preliminary vision of its own end: “A genuine beginning, as a leap, is always a head start, in which everything to come is already leaped over, even if as something still veiled. The beginning already contains the end latent within itself.”²⁸⁸ The world pre-figured in the work of art, in the poetic event, is historical, and as such it has an anticipatory vision of the end to come, it emerges within spatio-temporal limits. In short, the work of art projects the end insofar as it draws the outline of a people, it shapes them and “individualizes” them.

I want to suggest, then, that the concept of foundation defines the comportment of a historical people, as it relates understandingly to its own being. A people shapes its own being through communal rites and behaviors that have the ambiguous character of gestures or outlines stamped in the earth: actions that belong to a self that is always to come, yet to be decided. Along these lines, one could say that the different moments of the concept of foundation determine the way a people relates to being, to temporality and historicity, in analogy to the way *Dasein* assumes its own situation in *resoluteness* [*Entschlossenheit*].

Specifically, in *Being and Time* Heidegger describes summarily this point as follows: “Coming back to itself, from the future [*Zukünftig*], resoluteness brings itself to the situation in making it present. Having-been arises from the future in such a way that the future that has-been (or better, is in the process of having-been) releases the present from itself.”²⁸⁹ Hence, in resoluteness *Dasein* comes back to its situation as the ecstatic “making present”

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 64/201. “Der echte Anfang ist als Sprung immer ein Vorsprung, in dem alles kommende schon übersprungen ist, wenngleich als ein Verhülltes. Der Anfang enthält schon verborgen das Ende.”

²⁸⁹ *Being and Time*, 431-32/311. “Zukünftig auf sich zurückkommend, bringt sich die Entschlossenheit gegenwärtigend in die Situation. Die Gewesenheit entspringt der Zukunft, so zwar, daß die gewesene (besser gewessende) Zukunft die Gegenwart aus sich entläßt.”

already determined by the “having been” of its thrownness in the world, and the anticipatory projection towards the end.

As I argued above, the work of art appears as the resolute movement of going beyond oneself, whereby a people expressly assume their own ground as ground, the site wherein they have been thrown historically, and wherein they gain an anticipatory vision of their own end. In this way, it seems, through the work of art Heidegger elucidates what the resolute comportment of a people means, and how it anticipates or makes possible the resolute comportment of the individual Dasein. If this assumption is correct, one can also say that Heidegger develops implicitly, in the lecture on the work of art, a revaluation of the ontological possibilities of the they. In the section that follows, concluding the present chapter, I will elaborate upon this point by venturing a reading of the poetic dimension of the they, which remains “unthought” in *Being and Time*.

The Poetic Gestures of the They

The public world of the they is the basis of the self of Dasein. This world constitutes the ground of significance, of directives according to which Dasein first determines its own self: “The world of Dasein frees the beings encountered for a totality of relevance which is familiar to the they in the limits which are established with the averageness of the they. *Initially*, ‘I’ ‘am’ not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the they.”²⁹⁰ Heidegger points out that “initially” [*Zunächst*] we are in the world discovered with others. Thus, one may say that the question addressed in the essay on the work of art, which

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 172/125. “*Die Welt des Daseins gibt das begegnende Seiende auf eine Bewandnisganzheit frei, die dem Man vertraut ist, und in den Grenzen, die mit der Durchschnittlichkeit des Man festgelegt sind. Zunächst ist das faktische Dasein in der durchschnittlich entdeckten Mitwelt. Zunächst »bin« nicht »ich« im Sinne des eigenen Selbst, sondern die Anderen in der Weise des Man.*”

is about the *origin* of the work of art, alludes precisely to the structure of this beginning: How is it that the public world of the they, the world of a historical people, shapes itself?

To what extent the initial character of the world of the they relates to the poetic disclosure of the world in the poetic work of a people remains unsaid in the essay on the work of art, despite the express references to *Being and Time*. Yet, as was shown above, in *Being and Time* there is a brief mention of poetic speech as the communication of the existential possibilities of attunement, which indicates that already in *Being and Time* Heidegger acknowledges the importance of poetry for establishing affective bonds with others.²⁹¹

One should note, however, that it is questionable whether “a people” could be simply identified with the they, particularly because the “They-self” is essentially dispersive, and the notion of people implies unity. However, the two notions are closely related, to the extent that the notion of a people gives a sense of unity and form to the public world we share with others, and which in *Being and Time* was characterized in terms of the they. For if the work of art is the sober resolution to go beyond “oneself,” and the work of art involves the totality of a people, then it seems that in the work of art there is the possibility of an “authentic,” resolute existence pertaining to a people. And yet, Heidegger says in *Being and Time* that authenticity presupposes the domain of the they, the public world of visibility and opinion. Thus, let me explore particularly how the domain of the they prefigures the possibility of a poetic comportment.

Despite being inconspicuous, somehow invisible, the they functions as a “self” whose comportment undergoes historical transformations, without being a “collectivity”

²⁹¹ Regarding the intrinsic relation between attunement and art, Heidegger also gives important indications in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, wherein he defines creativity as the freedom that supports a burden “that weighs upon man’s overall mood, so that he comes to be in a mood of melancholy” (270/182).

understood as an aggregation of individual Daseins. In *Being and Time* Heidegger says: “Of course, the they is as little objectively present as Dasein itself. The more openly the they behaves, the more slippery and hidden it is, but then too the less it is nothing at all.”²⁹² What is remarkable in this passage, which argues that the they is eminently real, is that the “comportment” of the they is determined as *gebärden*. Heidegger states “...*das Man gebärdet*,” using the verb *gebärden* as counterpart of the verb *verhalten*, which in *Being and Time* generally refers to the comportment whereby Dasein relates understandingly to its own being.

Although my emphasis on this point may seem arbitrary, for Heidegger does not emphasize expressly the “gestural” dimension of the comportment of the they, there are significant reasons that explain why the verb *gebärden* may have been used in this particular case. Indeed, Heidegger remarks that the they behaves in a way that makes ungraspable and hidden its own being the more manifest or public [*offensichtlich*] it is. That is to say, the they, just as Poe’s purloined letter, becomes invisible precisely because of its direct, frontal visibility.

As I have explained previously, in the Zollikon seminars Heidegger points out that the etymology of the verb *gebärden* comes from *bären*, related to the verbs *gebären* and *gebaren*, which according to the *Grimm Wörterbuch*, allude to comportments, modes of production, but also gesticulations understood as mimic, disguise or dissimulation, *Verstellung*.²⁹³

Analyzing the mode of being of the they, Heidegger remarks that it covers up or disguises Dasein’s authentic possibilities of disclosure, and does so precisely by constituting the common public world of things, the openness of sheer visibility. In explaining the

²⁹² Ibid., 171/124. “*Allerdings ist das Man so wenig vorhanden wie das Dasein überhaupt. Je offensichtlicher sich das Man gebärdet, um so unfäßlicher und versteckter ist es, um so weniger ist es aber auch nichts.*”

²⁹³ These are some of the meanings of the verbs *gebaren* and *gebären*, given in the *Grimm Wörterbuch*, which also refers *gebaren* and *verhalten* as synonymous.

aforementioned reference to the comportment of the they, Heidegger notices that the simple unprejudiced everyday “vision” reveals the they as “the most real subject,”²⁹⁴ even if the they never has the solidity of a stone. He thus suggests that our most transparent and immediate perceptions and gestures, the perceptual field of what is taken for granted in everyday life, hinges on a comportment of this impersonal self. And this comportment, I may add, is somehow poetical.

Indeed, if the they discloses the world in such a way that it conceals its own being,²⁹⁵ then it has a complex productive or generative capacity. The possibility of disguising and deluding presupposes the power to multiply forms, the possibility of transformation, and pregnancy. These are all different meanings that, as I have often remarked, belong to the semantic field of the verb *gebärden*.²⁹⁶ In this sense, the world of the they vibrates and seems alive; it is a world of light and shadows.

One might say, then, that Dasein comes to the world, falls into the world of the they that was already there, just as falling into life. And this life is pregnant of hidden possibilities and forms, in such a way that Dasein’s own self may be constituted through the work that unveils them and, at the same time, perpetuates their shadows. For the public world of the

²⁹⁴ See *Being and Time*, ibidem. The passage in question, which is the continuation of the previous quotation, is the following one: “*Dem unvoreingenommenen ontisch-ontologischen »sehen« enthüllt es [das Man] sich als das »realste Subjekt« der Alltäglichkeit. Und wenn es nicht zugänglich ist wie ein vorhandener Stein, dann entscheidet das nicht im mindesten über seine Seinsart*” “To the unprejudiced ontic-ontological ‘eye,’ it reveals itself as the ‘most real subject’ of everydayness. And if it is not accessible like an objectively present stone, that is not the least decisive with regard to its kind of being.”

²⁹⁵ Precisely, the possibility of an authentic disclosure is opened to Dasein against the ground of *Verstellungen* constituted by “das Man”, as is clearly stated in the following passage: “*Zunächst ist das Dasein Man und zumeist bleibt es so. Wenn das Dasein die Welt eigens entdeckt und sich nahebringt, wenn es ihm selbst sein eigentliches Sein erschließt, dann vollzieht sich dieses Entdecken von »Welt« und Erschließen von Dasein immer als Wegräumen der Verdeckungen und Verdunkelungen, als Zerbrechen der Verstellungen, mit denen sich das Dasein gegen es selbst abriegelt*” “Initially, Dasein is the they and for the most part it remains so. If Dasein explicitly discovers the world and brings it near, if it discloses its authentic being to itself, this discovering of ‘world’ and disclosing of Dasein always comes about by clearing away, covering and obscurities, by breaking up the *disguises* with which Dasein cuts itself off from itself” (172-173/125).

²⁹⁶ In *Daimon Life*, David Farrell Krell also calls attention to this relation between gesturing and giving birth entailed in the term *gebärden* (see *Daimon Life*, 258).

they outlines a world of perception that appears as what is most real. Specifically, Heidegger says that the world of the they is real even if it is not as solid as a stone, and the comparison with the stone indicates that the they imposes a limit to one's vision or perception, just as natural beings do. In a sense, then, the domain of the they constitutes a ground of perception that somehow presupposes the impenetrability of nature, the impossibility of full transparency.

This explains, in my opinion, why Heidegger would define the notion of a people in correlation to the notion of earth, for the earth names that which is essentially secluded, and may not be fully disclosed, as we stand in the world. What the lecture on the work of art would show is that this poetic dimension of the they may not be so ethereal as it may initially appear. It is rooted in the earth, it is set within the limits of sensible being: the earth that supports the world of visibility and perception.

Chapter Five: Nature, Art and Gesture in Merleau-Ponty

The Earth and the Impossible Concept of Nature

As I argued in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy relentlessly endeavors to return to its living ground, the living world (*Lebenswelt*), the world of perception that founds our acts of reflection and which may be characterized also as the "earth" (*terre*) of thinking.²⁹⁷ In his presentation at the "Société française de Philosophie" in 1946, "The Primacy of Perception," Merleau-Ponty declares that perception cannot be determined in light of the classical distinction between matter and form, for in perception matter is itself "pregnant (*prégnante*) with its form."²⁹⁸ Furthermore, he shows that perception constitutes the ground of thinking, for perception functions as the "nascent logos"²⁹⁹ on the basis of which we determine the meaning of things in general.³⁰⁰ He says, therefore, that "the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values, are constituted for us."³⁰¹ This nascent logos of perception is not to be relinquished in more elevated experiences of science and rationality. As Merleau-Ponty expresses it, perception remains as the ground supporting the virtual, ideal world that appears to be purely human. In the discussion following the aforementioned presentation, Merleau-Ponty clarifies that although the ultimate roots of science and thinking lie on the

²⁹⁷ In the presentation at the "Société française de Philosophie," published as "The Primacy of Perception," Merleau-Ponty expressly claims that he intends to bring rationality "down to earth." See "The Primacy of Perception," 34/90. See also Ammar Zeifa, "Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty; The Sense of the Earth and the Earth of the Sense," *Phenomenology and the human positioning in the cosmos; the life-world, nature, earth*, 2013: 255-289, 257).

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 39/92.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 56/101.

³⁰⁰ Developing further this idea, and referencing Husserl, in his lectures on nature, Merleau-Ponty makes reference to the ground of the *Lebenswelt* as a "logos of the aesthetic world" (*Nature*, 104/72). We will examine this point in more detail in subsequent sections of the present work.

³⁰¹ *The Primacy of Perception*, 56/101. "...la expérience de la perception nous remet en présence du moment où se constituent pour nous les choses, les vérités, les biens..."

perceived world, this does not imply that our experience is restricted to it. He explains this point by saying: “I did not mean to say that the perceived world, in the sense of the world of colors and forms, is the totality of our universe. There is the ideal or cultural world. I have not diminished its original character; I have only tried to say that it is somehow created on the face of the earth.”³⁰² Thus, Merleau-Ponty suggests, although one may inhabit the ideal worlds of culture as if it were independent of “material” conditions, the world emerges in fact against the ground of the earth, the background of a “nonhuman nature.”³⁰³ In other words, one may say that thinking can fly into ideal worlds because it carries within it an earthly ground that supports it, which is its fundamental basis. The questions that arise here are: how does Merleau-Ponty articulate the relationship between thinking and the nonhuman ground of nature? How does he overcome a philosophy of consciousness? What are the links he finds between human gestures and actions and *the* earth?

Already in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty intends to bring knowledge back to its beginning, its moment of birth in “the sensible as sensible,”³⁰⁴ and he also acknowledges that nature constitutes a fundamental ground of thinking, one that is inherently opaque. Indeed, at the time, Merleau-Ponty was already familiar with Husserl’s 1934 text “Foundational Investigations on the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth does not Move,”³⁰⁵ which is also a decisive reference

³⁰² Ibid., 76/111. “Je n’ai pas voulu dire pour autant que le monde perçu, au sens de monde des couleurs et des formes, fût la totalité de notre univers. Il y a le monde idéal ou culturel: je n’ai pas diminué l’originalité, j’ai seulement voulu dire qu’il se fait en quelque sorte à ras de terre.”

³⁰³ Ibid., 56/101.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Edmund Husserl, „Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre in der gewöhnlichen weltanschaulichen Interpretation. Die Ur-Arche Erde bewegt sich nicht. Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum phänomenologischen Ursprung der Körperlichkeit der Raumlichkeit der Natur im ersten naturwissenschaftlichen Sinne. Alles notwendiges Anfangsuntersuchungen (1934),“ in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, 307-325 (New York: Greenwood, 1968). English: “Foundational Investigations on the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth does not Move,” in *Husserl at the Limits of Philosophy. Including Texts by Edmund Husserl*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo, trans.

in his lectures on Nature ten years later. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, making a brief reference to this Husserlian fragment,³⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty counterpoises the Husserlian earth, which is obscurely imbricated in our being, to Brunschwig's transparent ideal of universe.³⁰⁷ Yet, on this occasion, the problematic of the earth and nature receives little attention, and it is not thematized as part of an ontological research. Is it, perhaps, because such a research on nature would shatter the grounds of the *Phenomenology of Perception*? Or is it because at the time Merleau-Ponty may have endorsed without criticism one of the problematic outcomes of Husserl's fragment, the one that, as John Sallis remarks, leaves the earth "...suspended from transcendental life, from constituting subjectivity"?³⁰⁸ I will not attempt to respond these questions specifically, but rather use them as guidelines for understanding Merleau-Ponty's turn towards the ontology of the flesh.

As I have often indicated, the sensible as "*moment du naissence*" draws phenomenology toward the limits of an obscure region, the sphere of the earth, nature and what Merleau-Ponty sometimes calls wild being. This means that the world of perception has a dark side that is irreducible to the world of consciousness: the side that is rooted in nature. Thus, the problem of perception leads to the question concerning the being of nature as such. For this reason, it seems, if thinking were to explore this dark side of perception, the roots of perception in nature, it must necessarily tread upon the question concerning the meaning of being in general. In this sense, one could probably say that once Merleau-Ponty embarks on the exploration of the world of perception, he is already on the path to ontology. Let me,

Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002). Hereafter I will refer to this text as "Foundational Investigations."

³⁰⁶ In his Introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, Derrida explains that this text is, indeed, a fragment. See Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavy Jr. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 85, n.88. See also John Sallis, *Double Truth*, 43-44.

³⁰⁷ See *Phenomenology of Perception*, 85/73. See also Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Le scénario cartésien* (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 64.

³⁰⁸ John Sallis, *Double Truth*, 52.

then, start by exploring this movement towards ontology in the trajectory of Merleau-Ponty's work.

In his earlier work Merleau-Ponty admits that the phenomenology of perception is a paradoxical task, for perception involves both immanence and transcendence. Despite the fact that he acknowledges the complexities of this paradoxical task, at the time Merleau-Ponty investigates only one side of the paradox, the one that corresponds to incarnated consciousness. Specifically, he considers the way in which the world is integrated in perception, and he does not delve into the "outside" of consciousness. Nevertheless, as Merleau-Ponty indicates years later in one of his lecture-notes on Nature, the analysis of perception and its cardinal paradoxes requires an exploration of the counterpart of subjectivity and consciousness. For philosophy is "...a will to confront human artifice with its outside, with nature."³⁰⁹

Merleau-Ponty undertakes the study of the concepts of earth and nature in his lectures at the Collège de France (1956-1959) some ten years after the *Phenomenology of Perception*. His historical analyses show that the idea of nature has been predominantly developed within the frameworks of causality and finalism. Against this tendency, and in line with thinkers such as Schelling and Husserl, Merleau-Ponty argues that nature resists any attempt at conceptualization. For nature cannot be posited as an object: it is behind us, working in us through the body.³¹⁰ This means that the thinking of nature as such must begin with the body, for it is our body that remains closer to the fundamental level of nature as ground. Merleau-Ponty finds a decisive articulation of this point in Husserl, particularly in

³⁰⁹ *Nature*, 119/85. "...une volonté de confronter l'artifice humaine à son dehors, à la Nature."

³¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 117/83. Rejecting a teleological enframement of nature, Merleau-Ponty will also underscore the fact that nature resists representation to such an extent, that it is not even comparable to the vision we gain of it in the work of art, just as Kant intended to do (117/87).

Ideas II (1928)³¹¹ and the “Foundational Investigations.” Let me now move on to examine Merleau-Ponty’s reading of these texts.

Body and Nature in Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl

As Merleau-Ponty expresses it, Husserlian phenomenology looks for an original contact with the world, prior to the constitution of the I-subject.³¹² In this way, Merleau-Ponty continues, Husserl is led to investigate the intentional structures of an original passivity preceding the secondary passivity of habit. This original passivity is encrypted in the primordial world of perception that is essentially embodied, *Leibhaft*.³¹³ Thus, the phenomenological analysis of the body is of most importance in determining the foundations of intentionality. In Merleau-Ponty’s words: “So that there be something, it must be presented to an incarnated subject, *Subjekt-leib*.”³¹⁴

What does being an incarnated *subject* mean? Merleau-Ponty explains this problem recalling a central argument from the *Phenomenology of Perception*. He says that once I perceive an object there is consciousness of the possibilities of action or movement that belong to it.³¹⁵ He remarks that my own body is never given solely as an object and, thereby, that my awareness of my own body cannot be fixed. That is to say, my body is essentially felt as a fleeting power or capacity: “The awareness that I have of my body is a sliding awareness, the feeling of a power, of a being-able-to.”³¹⁶ This “sliding awareness” reveals the body as a site

³¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, ed. Marly Biemel, Vol. Husserliana IV (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952). English, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer, Vol. Second Book (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

³¹² See *Nature*, 103/72.

³¹³ Ibid., 105/73. See also Husserl’s *Ideas II*, 61.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 106/74. “Pour qu’il y ait une chose, il faut qu’elle soit présentée à un sujet incarné, Subjekt-leib.”

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid. 107/74. “La conscience que j’ai de mon corps est une conscience glissante, le sentiment d’un pouvoir.”

of passage, the basic structure enabling the transit or circulation of appearances: “My body is that organizer of a ‘transitional synthesis.’ I organize with my body an understanding of the world, and my relationship with my body is not that of a pure I, which would successively have two objects, my body and the thing, but rather I live in my body, and by means of it I live in the things.”³¹⁷

As Merleau-Ponty explains, the body is not a central organizer of things that may be reified, as the body carries out a “transitional synthesis” it makes me live in things. Thus, following on from his reading of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty suggests that things are just a moment of the carnal unity between my body and the world. And, therefore, the “incarnated subject,” the *Subjekt-leib*, is a paradoxical subject whose being should not be restricted to the sphere of subjectivity, for it is, essentially, openness to the world.

One could probably say, then, that the body is the reduplication or redoubling of the fabric of things, a fold in the sensible. This redoubling of the sensible, however, can by no means be schematized in terms of the division between mind and body. Rather, the redoubling of the sensible implies that my body is itself sensitive (*excitable*), before potential interventions of the mind, of consciousness. Explaining this point, and foreshadowing a cardinal argument further developed in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty calls attention to Husserl’s analysis of touch from *Ideas II*.³¹⁸ He summarizes Husserl’s analysis as

³¹⁷ Ibid. “*Mon corps, c’est celui qui est capable de passer de telle apparence à telle apparence, comme l’organisateur d’une »synthese de transition«*. J’organise avec mon corps une compréhension du monde, et le rapport avec mon corps n’est pas celui d’un je pur, qui aurait successivement deux objets, mon corps et la chose, mais j’habite mon corps et par lui j’habite les choses.”

³¹⁸ The passage in question from Husserl’s *Ideas II* reads as follows: “‘Touch’-sensations” belong to every appearing Objective spatial position on the touched hand, when it is touched precisely at those places. The hand that is touching, which for its part again appears as a thing, likewise has its touch-sensations at the place on its corporeal surface where it touches (or is touched by the other). Similarly, if the hand is pinched, pressed, pushed, stung, etc., touched by external bodies or touching them, then it has its sensations of contact, of being stung, of pain, etc. And if it happens by means of some other part of one’s Body then the sensation is *doubled* in the two parts of the Body, since each is then precisely for the other an external thing that is touching and acting upon it, and each is at the same time Body”(152-53).

follows: “When I touch my left hand with my right, my touching hand grasps my touched hand as a thing. But suddenly, I perceive that my left hand becomes the sensing. The relation is reversed.”³¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty concludes that the body is itself an anonymous subject, whose spontaneous activity is constituted from within the sphere of sensible being. Husserl’s example shows, indeed, that there is in the body an initial movement of reflection. With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty adds that the body has the capacity to grasp the form of things, and to detect the moment of completion or perfection of an object, “optimal forms,” which Husserl qualifies as the best aspect of things that is given in normal perception.³²⁰

Merleau-Ponty points out, however, that this sentient reflexivity of the body is still lacunary, for it does not account for the primordial constitution of the unity of my body, which is presupposed in the perception of unitary objects. This lacuna may be filled up with a reference to the others, to the body of others. As Merleau-Ponty explains, the body of others works as a mirror that gives form to my own body, individualizing it and, thereby, making possible the experience of separate objects.³²¹ Merleau-Ponty does not provide a detailed explanation of this point here, so I will expand on his account.

³¹⁹ *Nature*, 107/74-75. “*Quand je touche ma main gauche avec ma main droite, ma main touchante saisit ma main touchée comme un chose. Mais soudain, je m’avise que ma main gauche se met à sentir. Les rapports se renversent.*”

³²⁰ See *ibid.*, 108/75. See also Husserl, *Ideas II*, 61-65. The passage in which Husserl introduces the idea of this “optimum” of perception is the following: “Now the process of perception, in virtue of which one and the same external world is present to me, do not always exhibit the same style; instead, there are distinction which make themselves noticeable. At first, the same unchanged Objects appear, according to the changing circumstances, now this way, now in another way. The same unchanged form has a *changing appearance*, according to its position in relation to my Body; the form appears in *changing aspects*, which *present ‘it itself’ more or less ‘advantageously.’* If we disregard this and instead consider real properties, then we find that one and the same Object, maintaining an identical form, does have different color appearances (the form as filled), according to its position relative to an illuminating body; furthermore, the color appearances are different when it stands under different illuminating bodies, but all this happens in an ordered fashion, one which may be determined more precisely in regard to appearances. At the same time, certain conditions prove to be the ‘normal’ ones: seeing in sunlight, on a clear day, without the influence of other bodies which might affect the color-appearance. The ‘optimum’ which is thereby attained then counts as the *color itself*, in opposition, for example, to the red light of the sunset, which ‘outshines’ all proper colors” (64).

³²¹ It seems to me that Merleau-Ponty’s argument echoes some basic formulations from the Fifth Cartesian Meditation, and a discussion of this text would be fruitful, yet he does not make reference to this text in the context of the present discussion.

One can say, indeed, that the experience of the body of others is the first experience of the redoubling of my body, whereby a distance, a gap is introduced. The body of others appears, then, as a primordial outside, an unreachable object of desire whose unity is indirectly captured through affective threads, and whose presence reveals a structural hollowness within my own being: when encountering others I experience my body as the object of the gaze of the other, and the distance that separates the other from me. Presumably, it is in this way that the unity of my body as object may be constituted. Thus, Merleau-Ponty indicates, the bodily experience of the other is a constitutive dimension of the unity of my body and, thereby, turns to be the condition of possibility for thinking things as such, the pure thing, “the *bloße Sache*.”³²² Paradoxically, this conclusion implies that the pure thing is not so pure. It is not given directly. It presupposes a passage through the others and, moreover, a libidinal ground, a carnal generality, in which our bodies are imbricated through pores and hollows, just as Emmanuel de Saint Aubert has indicated in his analysis of the body schema and the phenomenon of the mirror.³²³ Thus, the question arises: What is the nature of this fundamental ground that unites me to the others, and to things in the world?

With regard to this, one can find fruitful indications in Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of Husserl’s concept of earth. As Merleau-Ponty explains, Husserl’s “Foundational Investigations” carry out a shift towards the primordial ground that is the earth, away from the focus on questions concerning the essence of the pure thing. In this Husserlian fragment the earth is described as a quasi-object, an object *sui generis* that is not an object among others, but rather the soil wherefrom objects emerge, including our own bodies: the earth is

³²² *Nature*, 109/76.

³²³ See De Saint Aubert, *Être et chair*, 183-93.

beyond categories of movement and rest, the cradle that, as primordial origin, contains the possibilities of all things.³²⁴

Following on from Husserl's analysis, Merleau-Ponty points out that modern science has mistaken the nature of the earth-ground, for it considers the earth plainly as a planet among others. Yet, this scientific view on the earth as relative ground has become predominant, even though it contradicts our more intuitive experience of the earth. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes this point saying: "We have forgotten the notion of *Boden* ('ground'), because we have generalized it, situating the Earth among the planets. But, Husserl says, imagine a bird capable of flying to another planet: it would not have a double ground. Wherever I go, I make a ground there and attach the new ground to the old where I lived. To think two Earths is to think one same Earth."³²⁵

On Husserl's view, *the* earth, the one and same Earth, which is absolute ground, *Boden*, appears as the site of originary synthesis, which cannot be exhibited or disclosed at the level of a relative basis-body, that is, as a relative ground or as a Copernican earth that could be displaced by another earth. Sallis explains this originary synthesis as follows: "Such –one could add –is the power of originary synthesis that, beneath the level at which the two [earths] would alternate reciprocally between basis and body, they would –despite a certain spatial separation –be unified into a single basis, a single earth, older, in a sense, than the others."³²⁶

³²⁴ See *Nature*, 77/110. With regard to Husserl's concept of earth, and its relation to Heidegger, in "*Verflechtung*," the preface to *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, Leonard Lawlor points out that "The Husserlian earth is equivalent to what Heidegger calls Being, and the earth understood as Being beings about, for Merleau-Ponty, a clarification of the notion of the 'possible'" (xvii).

³²⁵ Ibid. "*Nous avons oublié la notion de Boden, parce que nous l'avons généralisée, situant la Terre parmi les planets. Mais, dit Husserl, imaginons un oiseau capable de voler sur un autre planète, il n'aurait pas un double sol. Du seul fait qu'il est le même oiseau, il unit les deux planètes en un seul sol. Où que j'aïlle; j'en fais un Boden. Je rattache le nouveau sol à l'ancien que j'ai habité. Penser deux Terres, c'est penser une même Terre.*"

³²⁶ John Sallis, *Double Truth*, 49.

As Merleau-Ponty explains, the originary earth is a unifying ground that, being in *essential* rest, is the point of departure that makes it possible for us to be in the world.³²⁷ That is to say, the earth-ground is the origin, the place of birth, and the unique and absolute basis that is presupposed in all movement and all rest, and which constitutes the historicity of our being.³²⁸ For the site of origin, the territory of one's birth –even if such territory were a vessel, or a spaceship travelling to other earths –remains as the decisive point of reference in the movement and temporality of one's life, and the fundamental reference to the unique, single earth. No matter how far away one imagines such surrogate earths to be, they can be earths only insofar as they rest in the ground, in *the* Earth that does not move.

What is remarkable in Husserl's analysis of the earth is that it reveals an ontological foundation that challenges the limits of phenomenology. Even if at the end of the "Foundational Investigations" Husserl attempts to bring the earth back to the transcendental ego, such an attempt is undermined by the singular character of the earth as the root of thought, as the principle that is older than all thought. With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty points out that the earth is the "root" (*racine*) of all history, foundation of the world,³²⁹ thus showing that the exploration of the being of the earth lead us to the foundations of

³²⁷ See Husserl's "Foundational Investigations," 316/125. The passage in questions reads as follows: "My carnal flight-vessel is based upon a mobile body (the car). 'I can fly so high that the earth seems like a sphere.' The earth can also be so small that I could traverse it from all sides and indirectly arrive at the idea of asphere. I therefore discover that it is a large spherical body. But the question is whether and how I would arrive at corporeality in the sense that the earth is 'astronomically' just one body among others, among the celestial bodies. One could hardly say how, even if I imagine the bird at any altitude and intend that it can experience the earth as one body among others. Why not? For us human on the earth, the bird or the flying machine moves, and that is valid for the bird and the people on the flying machine insofar as they experience the earth as the source (*Stamm* 'body,' as the ground 'body.' But can the flying-machine not function as 'ground'? Can I exchange or conceive the exchange of, as the primordial land of my movements, the ground and body with the ground in motion? What would that be in terms of a change in apperception and what would its demonstration be? Must I not conceptually transfer to the flying-machine in constitutive validity (according to the form) what in general endows the earth with the sense as my ground, as the ground of my flesh?" Husserl's point is that we carry the earth with ourselves, as that which always remains in rest, producing a single kinesthetic system on the basis of which we can perceive movement and repos (see also Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 316/124).

³²⁸ See John Sallis, *Double Truth*, 49.

³²⁹ *Nature*, 111/77.

humanity in general. Indeed, if one is to explore the earth-ground, whose being constitutes us, one cannot remain within the limits of transcendental phenomenology. Departing from Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl, one could say that, after deciding to explore the ground-earth, it becomes imperative to make a leap towards ontology, and examine the question concerning the meaning of being in general.³³⁰

Based on this reading of Husserl, and examining the transition from questions concerning the body to the problem of the earth, Merleau-Ponty lays out the background of his own approach to primordial nature, describing his own concept of nature in the summary of the course on "The Concept of Nature I."³³¹ He explains that nature is the enigmatic ground, a mythical and somehow phantasmagoric object that pervades the horizons of subjectivity, spirituality and history.³³² Nature, he continues, is phantasmagoric because it cannot be objectified as it predetermines our being: it provides the support and "materials" (*matériaux*) of existence.³³³ Indeed, Merleau-Ponty suggests, the silent and anticipatory work of nature pervades every single level of existence, interlacing being and human being in such a way that makes it impossible to draw sharp distinctions between subject and object, consciousness and nature, the sphere of the being in itself (*en soi*) and the sphere of the being for itself (*pour soi*). He says precisely: "Whether in the case of the individual fact of birth, or the birth of institutions and societies, the originary relation between man and being is not that between something for itself and something in itself."³³⁴

³³⁰ On the influence of Husserl's "Foundational Investigations" on Merleau-Ponty's thinking of the flesh see Mauro Carbone, "Flesh: Towards the History of a Misunderstanding," *Chiasmi International* 4 (2002): 49-64.

³³¹ Translated in to English in *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*. This text is attached to the French edition of the course notes *La Nature*, but is not included in the English translation of these notes. Hereafter with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

³³² See *Nature*, 355-57/133-34.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 356/133.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 356/132-33. "*Qu'il s'agisse du fait individuel de la naissance, ou de la naissance des institutions et des sociétés, le rapport originaire de l'homme et de l'être n'est pas celui du pour soi à l'en soi.*"

In this way, Merleau-Ponty recalls the Husserlian motif of the earth, the earth that is fundamental ground and originary synthesis, prior to all distinction between the ideal and the real.

The problem of nature involves, therefore, the enigmatic rapport between being in general and humanity. Nature not only supports the basic operations of perception, but also determines the constitution of “historical significations.”³³⁵ Merleau-Ponty declares that this overlapping of nature and history, this correlation between the “immemorial” and the “newest present,” “disorients reflexive thinking.”³³⁶ And, he remarks, this is a difficulty that Husserl’s work does not fully explore.

According to Merleau-Ponty, nature is at work before the body: it is the basis of a synthesis that is prior to the “passive synthesis” and the “synthesis of transition.” Nature, he suggests, is the “presence” that connects the diverse fragments of space and the different moments of the world.³³⁷ For this reason, the being of nature brings reflection to the limits of an ontological foundation, a wild being prior to any appearing object and any work of consciousness: “If we are not to be resigned to saying that a world from which consciousness is cut off is nothing at all, that a nature without witnesses would not be, then in some way we must recognize primordial being, which is not yet being-subject nor being-object and which in every respect baffles reflection.”³³⁸ Merleau-Ponty remarks that reflection is disoriented by primordial nature because the grounds of nature lead us to

³³⁵ Ibid., 356/133.

³³⁶ Ibid., modified. The passage in question reads: “...cet appel en lui au présent le plus neuf désoriente la pensée réflexive.”

³³⁷ Ibid., 357. It is worth noticing, as Lawlor does, that in the case of Merleau-Ponty “his attempt to make universal dimensionality converge with the present does not imply that he is relapsing into some sort of ‘metaphysics of presence’” (“*Verflechtung*,” xv), for this present is not a visible objectifiable present, but a present with depth, a present grounded in a self-secluded earth.

³³⁸ Ibid., 357/133-34; translation modified. “*Si nous ne nous résignons pas à dire qu’un monde d’où seraient retranchées les consciences n’est rien du tout, qu’une Nature sans témoins n’aurait pas, il nous faut reconnaître de quelque façon le être primordial qui n’est pas encore le être-sujet ni l’être-objet; et qui déconcerte la réflexion à tous égards...*”

consider the more fundamental question of being. For the essence of nature as ground cannot be determined on the basis of a regional ontology. Yet, this means that the philosophical exploration of the being of nature is necessarily ambiguous: it follows a phantom that is fundamentally absent and elusive, one which is never objectively present. For when thought is confronted to the vastness of being, it can no longer rely on conceptual determinations that would exhibit objects with fixed outlines. At the level of this ontological foundation, reflective thinking finds itself entangled in its bodily roots. As Merleau-Ponty expresses it, from a radical, ontological point of view, there is no way to posit a relation either of continuity or of total separation, which means that nature is an impossible “object,” just like being:

From this primordial being to us there is not derivation, nor any break; it has neither the tight structure of the mechanism, nor the transparency of a whole which precedes its parts. We can neither conceive of primordial being engendering itself, which would make it infinite, nor think of it being engendered by an other, which would reduce it to the condition of a product and dead result. As Schelling has remarked, there is in nature something which makes it such that it would impose itself upon God himself as an independent condition of its operation.³³⁹

This problematic sets the basis for understanding the questions guiding Merleau-Ponty’s ontological investigations in his later and unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible*, wherein he takes up some ideas present in Heidegger’s work, putting into question the possibilities of Husserlian phenomenology. Leonard Lawlor clarifies this point by comparing Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: “...the limit of Husserlian phenomenology lies in Heideggerian ontology. For both [Merleau-Ponty and Derrida] this limit is the Heideggerian conception of

³³⁹ Ibid., 357/134. “...de lui [primordial being] à nous il n’y a pas derivation et pas de casure; il n’a ni la texture serrée d’un mécanisme, ni la transparence d’un tout antérieur à ses parties; on ne peut concevoir ni qu’il s’engendre lui-même, c’est qui le ferait infini, ni qu’il soit engendré par un autre, ce qui le ramènerait à la condition de produit et de résultat mort. Comme disait Schelling, il y a dans la Nature quelque chose qui fait qu’elle s’imposerait à Dieu même comme condition indépendante de son opération.”

negativity.”³⁴⁰ Indeed, the originary earth and primordial nature are themes that challenge the limits of phenomenological thought, and necessitate the search for an indirect, alternative path, whereby the negativity of being, the essential withdrawal of being, may be elucidated. Thus, in what follows, I shall explore Merleau-Ponty’s turn toward ontology taking into account some references to Heidegger’s work in order to determine the fundamental relations between the problematics of gesture and art.

Nature and Perceptual Faith: Preliminaries to the Ontology of the Flesh

In his later lecture-notes on nature, Merleau-Ponty argues that primordial nature shatters the frameworks of classical ontology and reflective thinking. The phenomenon of nature baffles reflective thinking because nature is at the same time the ground, the earth that supports us, and the “substance” of the world that appears in front of us. Otherwise put, nature is *at the same time* immanent and transcendent, and therefore irreducible to the planes of immanence and transcendence. As I have often indicated, this paradoxical tension between immanence and transcendence is already present in the problematic of perception. For perception is the operation that links thinking to the world, the phenomenon that brings thinking “down to earth,” to its origins.

In his later work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty interrogates the grounds of perception expanding on its internal paradoxes. He starts by examining the sphere of “perceptual faith,” which is the point of departure for the criticism of science and objectivism that prepares the way to the ontology of the flesh. The notion of “perceptual faith” is quite complex, for this faith is an adherence to the truth I live in, a structural openness to the being of things, which takes place before any conscious intervention on my

³⁴⁰ Leonard Lawlor, “*Verflechtung*,” xxxi.

part. This perceptual faith is not mere belief because it imposes itself upon me as self-evident. As John Sallis argues: “The perceptual faith expresses our way of comportment, always already established and taken for granted, within the pre-objective dimension of perceptual experience which Merleau-Ponty sought to uncover in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.”³⁴¹

The perceptual faith constitutes a comportment that takes place at a pre-objective level. For this reason, perceptual faith must be understood from “within,” as it resonates in our bodily experience, and as it unfolds in lived thought.³⁴² This means that perceptual faith cannot be expressed by reflective thinking. This faith exists prior to the movement of reflection. Let me elaborate on this point and examine how Merleau-Ponty defines the relation between reflection and perceptual faith.

In what seems a tacit reference to Heidegger’s criticism of metaphysics in *Being and Time*, Merleau-Ponty criticizes classical ontology for determining being in terms of beings, of entities, thus neglecting the question concerning “the meaning of being.”³⁴³ He further remarks that classical ontology is based upon a philosophy of reflection. This type of philosophy tends to divide up the world into the realms of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, and to determine the relation between them in terms of a continuous system of causal relations. As Merleau-Ponty expresses it, reflection necessarily posits an external and static

³⁴¹ John Sallis, *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*, 60.

³⁴² With regard to this problem, it is worth noting that Heidegger’s lecture on “Hegel’s Concept of Experience” seems to have had a decisive influence on Merleau-Ponty’s later thought, for he follows it closely in his own reading of Hegel, in his lectures from 1960-61, “*Philosophie et non-philosophie depuis Hegel*.” See *Notes de cours*, 275-320, published in English as: “Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Hegel,” trans. Hugh J. Silvermann, in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Hugh Silvermann (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 9-83. See Martin Heidegger, “Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung (1942/43),” in *Holzwege*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, 115-208 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977). English: “Hegel’s Concept of Experience (1942-43),” in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, 86-156 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁴³ *The Visible and the Invisible*, 33/16. “...la question du sens d’être.”

view of nature and being, because to reflect is to be already outside the flux: reflection is from the outset separation and division.³⁴⁴

The problem, then, is to turn to reflection to see from the outside, in terms of causal relations, the grounds of our perceptive world. This applies, too, to the “natural attitude,” which sees things within a unified world of objective relations precisely because it has already been involved in the primordial world of perception. That is to say, when it is a matter of thinking the grounds of perceptual faith one cannot turn to the natural attitude in order to overcome the problems arising from reflective thinking. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty’s argument is that neither the natural attitude nor reflective philosophy can determine the structure of perceptual faith, for that would be to assume that they can take up a panoramic view, from above, of the grounds that constitute them. Even the transparency and naturality that is usually ascribed to reflective thinking, which determines the objectivity of science, is but an indirect proof of our *faith* in perception. Merleau-Ponty explains this problem as follows: “Because perception gives us faith in a world, in a system of natural facts rigorously bound together and continuous, we have believed that this system could incorporate all things into itself, even the perception that has initiated us into it.”³⁴⁵

Merleau-Ponty’s analysis has shown that nature is a somewhat impossible object, essentially elusive and opaque. Now, he suggests, we may explore the obscure grounds of nature through perceptual faith: *Ur-doxa*. This primordial faith would leap over the gaps of nature without effacing them, without picturing nature as homogeneous ground. For even science has demonstrated that the ground of perception is not necessarily a continuous, homogeneous field. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty claims that “[t]oday we no longer believe

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 69/45.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 46/26-27. “Parce que la perception nous donne foi en un monde, en un système de faits naturels rigoureusement lié et continu, nous avons cru que ce système pourrait s’incorporer toutes choses et jusqu’à la perception qui nous y a initiés.”

nature to be a continuous system of this kind; a fortiori we are far removed from thinking that the islets of “psychism” that here and there float over it are secretly connected to one another through the continuous ground of nature.”³⁴⁶ Thus, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates, on the one hand, that even contemporary science undermines the ideal of a transparent and objective nature and, on the other hand, that perceptual faith shall not be used to restore a metaphysical conception of nature, that is, perceptual faith should not be taken as coincidence with nature, it is not dogmatic faith.

Let me, then, recapitulate these considerations and pinpoint Merleau-Ponty’s initial problematic. The problem is the following: If nature is not a continuous ground fully visible, and yet it is the ground of the world of perception –the world disclosed in perceptual faith – then one ought to determine how the essential invisibility of the ground is inscribed in perception. This amounts to questioning our own relation to what is visible and invisible in general, as well as the ontological presuppositions that make possible our understanding of the world as a unified whole. Merleau-Ponty formulates these questions as follows: “We have then imposed upon us the task of understanding whether, and in what sense, what is not nature forms a “world,” and first what a “world” is, and finally, if world there is, what can be the relations between the visible world and the invisible world.”³⁴⁷

In order to resolve this problem, Merleau-Ponty must interrogate the world encrypted in perceptual faith, the world that precedes the distinction between essences and their conditions of possibility, between the *that* and the *what* of perception.³⁴⁸ He indicates that this interrogation must depart from “what is not nature.” This seemingly innocuous

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 46/27. “*Aujourd’hui, nous ne croyons plus que la nature soit un système continu de ce genre; à plus forte raison sommes nous bien éloignés de penser que les îlots de «psychisme» qui flottent ici et là sur elle soient secrètement reliés par le sol continu de la nature.*”

³⁴⁷ Ibid. “*La tâche s’impose donc à nous de comprendre si, et en quel sens, ce qui n’est pas nature forme un «monde», et d’abord ce que c’est qu’un «monde», et enfin, si monde il y a, quels peuvent être les rapports du monde visible et du monde invisible.*”

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

remark suggests that in exploring the grounds of nature we must direct our sight first toward what is derived from it, what is seemingly opposed to it: the already formed world of things and essences, which appears at this side, the positive side of being. One must be careful not to read this indication as a slippage into dualism, for Merleau-Ponty is not suggesting that we take “ideas” or objective things as point of departure for interrogation, nor that we adopt a detached, neutral, merely theoretical point of view. Instead, the task is to investigate the point of contact with the world without leaping dogmatically into the world itself.

Consequently, Merleau-Ponty calls attention to the most immediate and ambiguous “object” of our experience, the quasi-object that is the body, and which constitutes our own being: “...it is necessary to re-examine the definition of the body as pure object in order to understand how it can be our living bond with nature.”³⁴⁹ This examination should not be “scientific” because it is related to my “own” body, not to an objective body. For this reason, echoing a Heideggerian motif, Merleau-Ponty points out that a radical philosophical interrogation of perceptual faith would follow a path different to that of traditional science, for “...philosophy is the set of questions wherein he who questions is himself implicated by the question.”³⁵⁰

Sensible Being and the Lived Body

As Merleau-Ponty argues, it is the perceptual life of my body that “...accomplishes the primary openness to the world.”³⁵¹ Thereby, he suggests, one should investigate the lived body in order to understand the emergence of the world as a structured whole. Following this train of thought, one could say that the lived body carries out a synthesis between the

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 59/37. “...c’est elle qui accomplit l’ouverture première au monde.”

earth-ground and the human world, not only the “synthesis of transition” from one “appearance” to another within the world. One might say that Merleau-Ponty takes the body as an instance of primordial nature, a sort of ground, a fragment of the earth. For the lived body is, in a sense, the structural fragment of the earth we carry ourselves, the ground of the perceptive world that is intrinsically tied to our personal history, one that is openness to the world.

But the lived body is traversed by a peculiar negativity, for the body is a being that has already detached itself from the originary earth, from the roots. The lived body is not the earth itself, *the* ground, but neither is it a temporary basis, that is, a relative ground. In a sense, one could say that the lived body is a basis in between the deepest level of the originary earth and the superficial level of a relative ground-basis, a ground-vessel. And yet, one should note that the lived body is closer to the earth than to a ground-vessel. As Husserl indicates, the lived body is in essential unity with the earth,³⁵² for it does not move, it is essentially at rest. He says precisely: “Consider my flesh. In primordial experience, the flesh has no moving away and no rest, only inner motion and inner rest, unlike the outer bodies.”³⁵³

Most probably, Merleau-Ponty has this Husserlian analysis of the lived body in mind when he remarks that embodied perception challenges Sartre’s dichotomy between the “in-itself” and the “for-itself.”³⁵⁴ He explains that the life of my perceptive body reveals a space

³⁵² See Edmund Husserl, “Foundational Investigations,” 121.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁵⁴ See Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York : Washington Square Press, 1956). Regarding the relation between the For-itself and the In-itself, concluding *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre summarizes his own position as follows: “the For-itself and the In-itself are reunited by a synthetic connection which is nothing other than the For-itself itself. The For-itself, in fact, is nothing but the pure nihilation of the In-itself; it is like a hole of being at the heart of Being” (617). Here, we see that for Sartre the only positive being is that of the In-itself, and the For-itself is defined as a negation of the first, which synthesizes precisely because it *is* not, because it *is* only as negation of the In-itself, which is to say that the synthesis of the For-itself is not a real

of circulation, a unifying ground that involves the self and the world in general. He also notes that the body opens a gap both in the essence of things and of the self.³⁵⁵ In this sense, the lived body appears as a site of passage, a pivot and threshold, a being in between being and nothingness.

Merleau-Ponty deconstructs the Sartrean dichotomy between being and nothingness by showing that my visible being transfigures itself to become the other, "... I feel at the surface of my visible being that my volubility dies away, that I become flesh, and that at the extremity of this inertia that was me there is something else, or rather an other who is not a thing."³⁵⁶ Moreover, he explains, if I am essentially embodied, and if my embodied self is constantly drawn toward the other, then the lived body is in each case an "other," which implies that I myself am nothing. And yet, as Merleau-Ponty explains, I am not sheer nothingness; rather, I am a nothingness that is opened to being, that is inscribed in being: "I knew very well that I was *nothing* and that this nothing swept itself away in favor of being."³⁵⁷ In this way, as Merleau-Ponty indicates, the nothingness that I am is not opposed to being, nor to the positive pole of a being "In-itself."

Thus, Merleau-Ponty suggests that our bodily being carries out the impossible passage from the invisible to the visible, from nothingness to being, from myself to the other and from my body to the world. In this sense, the lived body appears as a dual being, a paradoxical synthesis. This dual character is clearly illustrated by the phenomenon of vision, for the body is, at the same time, power of vision and a visible thing. And this duality is at the same time synthesis, for the redoubling of vision and visibility implies that there is

synthesis, is nothing. Merleau-Ponty shows, therefore, that the problem in Sartre's position is that it sees the In-itself as pure positivity, and the For-itself as pure negativity, thus remaining within a dualistic thinking.

³⁵⁵ See *The Visible and the Invisible*, 106-07/77.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 88/61. "...je sens à la surface de mon être visible que ma volubilité s'amortit, que je deviens chair, et qu'au bout de cette inertie qui était moi, il y a autre chose, ou plutôt un autre qui n'est pas une chose:"

³⁵⁷ Ibid. "Je savais bien que je n'étais rien et que ce rien s'emportait lui-même au profit de l'être."

entanglement in the world. The relation between body and world is, thus, quite complicated. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty qualifies this entanglement in the world as a madness: “There is a sort of madness in vision such that with it I go unto the world itself, and yet at the same time the parts of that world evidently do not coexist without me (the table in itself has nothing to do with the bed a yard away); the world is the vision of the world and could not be anything else. Being is bordered along its whole extension with a vision of being that is not a being, that is a non-being.”³⁵⁸ As a result of this madness of vision, one is led to recognize the positive side of nothingness. As Merleau-Ponty expresses it, before being a power of vision, or a visible thing, the body is “no-thing”: nothingness as openness onto the world, nothingness as potentiality to be. It is at this level of the analysis of the body that Merleau-Ponty takes up most decisively the Heideggerian problematic of negativity and ontology.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger shows that, strictly speaking, the chair can never touch the wall, for there is no possible relatedness between the chair and the wall that would make possible an encounter.³⁵⁹ As Diego D’Angelo explains, for Heidegger, bodily contact and touch presuppose disclosure of the world, involvement in the world, Being-in.³⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty develops a similar idea, for he suggests that vision, bodily vision, is from the start involvement in being. And my own being, which is both vision and visibility, is out of itself, embodied in things. One may say, therefore, that the lived body is pervaded by a transversal significance that impregnates things, one type of significance that comes from being itself, from the general stream of life and, indeed, passes through us. For this reason, as Merleau-

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 104/75. “Il y a une sorte de folie de la vision qui fait que, à la fois, je vais par elle au monde même, et que, cependant, de toute évidence, les parties de ce monde ne coexistent pas sans moi: la table en soi n’a rien à voir avec le lit à un mètre d’elle, -le monde est vision du monde et ne saurait être autre chose.”

³⁵⁹ See *Being and Time*, 74/55.

³⁶⁰ See D’Angelo, “*Zeigen und Berühren*,” 12.

Ponty indicates, the lived body is a condensation of life, and that life involves things and us in an “atmosphere,” in the astronomical sense of the word.³⁶¹

Merleau-Ponty describes life and its process of individuation and “embodiment” in a way that foreshadows the entire problematic of the ontology of the flesh. He remarks, for instance, that life involves us and exposes us to multiple horizons, in what may be called essential promiscuity:

Life is constantly enshrouded by those mists we call the sensible world or history, the *one* of the corporeal life and the *one* of the human life, the present and the past, as a pell-mell ensemble of bodies and minds, promiscuity of visages, words, actions, with, between them all, that cohesion which cannot be denied them since they are all differences, extreme divergences of one same something.³⁶²

Life is understood here as an atmospheric milieu, “one same something,” which is the prepersonal ground that keeps things –ideas, words, and actions –together, without effacing their differences. In this sense, it seems to me, life is another name for the primordial earth, for primordial nature. Indeed, in his reading of Husserl’s concept of earth, in the context of his lectures on nature, Merleau-Ponty remarks that primordial nature is the unifying ground that supports all levels of experience, and which unifies humanity. He says: “Nature envelops everything, my perception and that of others, insofar as these can be for me only a divergence of my world.”³⁶³

With regard to this, one can see that there is an intersection with Heidegger’s approach to the concept of earth in the essay on the work of art. In this essay, Heidegger describes the earth as part of the stream of life, part of the ground that makes possible the circulation between things. As I have indicated already, considering one of Heidegger’s

³⁶¹ See *The Visible and the Invisible*, 115/84.

³⁶² Ibid., “Elle est constamment enveloppée de ses brumes que l’on appelle monde sensible ou histoire, l’on de la vie corporelle et l’on de la vie humaine, le présent et le passé, comme ensemble pêle-mêle des corps et des esprits, promiscuité des visages, des paroles, des actions, avec, entre eux tous, cette cohésion qu’on ne peut pas leur refuser puisqu’ils sont tous des différences, des écarts extrêmes d’un même quelque chose.”

³⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 112/78.

interpretations of the concept of earth, the earth is a stream that keeps things together, in unison, without becoming indeterminate matter. On the contrary, for Heidegger the earth works as a principle of individuation, which gathers different “forms” of life, remaining always the same, self-secluded ground.

However, in what concerns the problem of the earth one can only find vague moments of convergence between the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. A more precise assessment of their similarities may only be possible in light of the fundamental question concerning the meaning of being. Let me, then, examine Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the question of being, and to the negativity of being. In examining these questions, I shall sketch out some potential correspondences with Heidegger’s work on the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s *Notes de cours*.³⁶⁴

In the passage from *The Visible and the Invisible* quoted above, Merleau-Ponty does not refer directly to Heidegger’s works. And yet, he describes the impersonal “one” in a way that recalls crucial arguments from *Being and Time*. Furthermore, he conceives primordial being as an atmosphere, an ethereal presence, in a way that echoes some passages from the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, a work Merleau-Ponty knew well at the time of his later work. Specifically, one can find resonances of those passages in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* that discuss Nietzsche’s critique of the concept of being. In them Heidegger considers, not without a certain irony, whether being may be nothing, just a vapor. I will examine this reference in more detail later. For now, I suggest that Merleau-Ponty undertakes the task of exploring the negativity of being by taking up one of Heidegger’s fundamental questions.

³⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty’s later lectures at the Collège de France make it clear that Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* decisively influenced him. See, for instance, *Notes de cours*.

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty investigates in what sense being is nothing, and in what sense its vaporous and elusive “presence” is not sheer indeterminacy, metaphysical obscurity. Concerning this point, he suggests that the *one* of life is the milieu of a carnal generality that cannot be grasped “in itself,” and which pervades our bodily being as a phantasmagoric presence.

As I have indicated already, in his lectures-notes on nature Merleau-Ponty qualifies nature as phantasmagoric because it cannot be brought up in consciousness as a thing. In a sense, however, he also shows that nature is a phantom that is eminently real, more real and concrete than any “real thing,” for it belongs to the general and fundamental structure of life and being. Elaborating on this idea, Merleau-Ponty indicates that life is a general “something” that is at the basis of the *one* of embodied life and the *one* of history, i.e., spirit.

Merleau-Ponty qualifies the life of history and the life of the body as an atmospheric pre-individual *one*, but this pre-individual *one* is not determined by transcendental, ideal structures. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty expresses it, he takes up the point of view of “...our involving in Being.”³⁶⁵ On this view, our embodied being is first of all constituted as a general body, that is, an expression of the carnal generality of the world. Now, if the lived body is initially experienced as part of an atmospheric milieu, the question becomes: How does one end up perceiving solid things, and thinking objective essences and ideas?

Merleau-Ponty responds to this question by undermining the assumption that things are primordially solid. He suggests that things appear as solid and fixed objects only to a “pure spectator” who produces ideas, and who is in turn convinced of “touching being” precisely because it is surrounded by “actual Being.”³⁶⁶ The expression “actual Being” alludes

³⁶⁵ *The Visible and the Invisible*, 115/85. “c’est notre implication dans l’Être.”

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 146/110. “l’Être actuel.”

here to the “actuality” of my engagement with the world. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty’s argument is that the experience of objectivity and solidity presupposes an involvement in being as a whole. For being prearticulates the possibilities of my existence and is the source of the “*facticity*” of the facts.³⁶⁷

At this point one must recall the distinction between *Fakticität* and *Tatsächlichkeit*, as it is defined in *Being and Time*, for Merleau-Ponty explains that the fixation of the idea or of the essence of things hinges on the factual ground of existence, which is irreducible to the objective actuality of mere facts. In this way, he suggests that things are inscribed within the limits and possibilities into which we are thrown, the limits of existence that are constituted by an ecstatic temporality. Merleau-Ponty says precisely: “Under the solidity of the essence and of the idea there is the fabric of experience, this flesh of time, and this is why I am not sure of having penetrated unto the hard core of Being...”³⁶⁸

Merleau-Ponty underscores that we can never be sure of having disclosed the “hard core of Being.” In this case, he is not suggesting that there is such thing as a hard core of being, an impenetrable and solid being behind the appearances.³⁶⁹ He suggests exactly the opposite: that radical being, the grounding being that involves us, relentlessly withdraws from direct contact. In fact, Merleau-Ponty claims that the fabric of experience is the flesh of time because my finite existence is projected into horizons exceeding the limits of my perception and my possibilities of action. That is to say, I live in a world whose possibilities can never be restricted to the possibilities of individual agency: “my incontestable power to

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 148/111-112. “*Sous la solidité de l’essence et de l’idée, il y a le tissu de l’expérience, cette chair du temps, et c’est pourquoi je ne suis pas sûr d’avoir percé jusqu’au noyau dur de l’être...*”

³⁶⁹ With regard to this question, in her article “World, Flesh, Vision,” in *Chiasms, Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh*, ed. F., Lawlor, L. Evans, 23-49 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), Françoise Dastur remarks: “Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty pose the same question to Husserl concerning the *right* of the phenomenological reduction to be completed and the *status* of the subjectivity which with it leaves us” (27).

give myself leeway (*prendre du champ*), to disengage the possible from the real, does not go as far as to dominate all the implications of the spectacle and to make of the real a simple variant of the possible; on the contrary it is the possible worlds and the possible beings that are variants and are like doubles of the actual world and the actual Being.”³⁷⁰ Let me emphasize that here Merleau-Ponty uses the expressions “actual Being” and “actual world” in order to qualify them as grounds of my factual life, not as actual beings. It seems that Merleau-Ponty employs the adjective “actual” to point out that the generality of being, and the world, is necessarily imbricated in my living present, and that it constitutes the depth of my present.³⁷¹ As I have often remarked, the solidity of things presupposes the depth of being. Or, one might say, the visibility of things is the counter-side of depth. And this means that the actuality of visible being is traversed by the horizons of space and time, which pervade the present of my embodied existence: “For the visible present is not *in* time and space, nor, of course, *outside* of them: there is nothing before it, after it, about it, that could compete with its visibility. And yet it is not alone, it is not everything. To put it precisely, it stops up my view, that is, time and space extend beyond the visible present, and at the same time they are *behind* it, in depth, in hiding.”³⁷²

In sum, Merleau-Ponty shows that possible worlds and possible beings, ideas, and essences are in each case “variations” of the actual or present visible world, which are rooted in the facticity of my embodied being. Yet, my embodied being is not inscribed in a punctual here and now; it is rather traversed by a carnal generality with depth and horizons. In this

³⁷⁰ *The Visible and the Invisible*. “...mon incontestable pouvoir de prendre du champ, de dégager du réel le possible, ne va pas jusqu’à dominer toutes les implications du spectacle et à faire du réel une simple variante du possible; ce sont au contraire les mondes et les êtres possibles qui sont des variantes, et comme des doubles, du monde et de l’Être actuels.”

³⁷¹ With regard to this, see also, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 20/19.

³⁷² *The Visible and the Invisible*, 150/113. “Car le présent visible n’est pas dans le temps et l’espace, ni, bien entendu, hors d’eux: il n’y a rien avant lui, après lui, autour de lui, qui puisse rivaliser avec sa visibilité. Et pourtant, il n’est pas seul, il n’est pas tout. Exactement: il bouche ma vue, c’est-à-dire, à la fois, que le temps et l’espace s’étendent au-delà, et qu’ils sont derrière lui, en profondeur, en cachette.”

sense, the visible present is not simply visible, simply present, for it is constituted by ecstatic-horizonal temporality.³⁷³ On this view, the thickness or depth of the spectacle we inhabit does not presuppose a hidden reality behind the “appearances,” but rather the encompassing generality of being, the atmospheric involvement in being. Therefore, one could say that the analysis of my lived body reveals my own visibility as extension of the general visibility of things, and the depth of things as a prolongation of my own depth. Merleau-Ponty formulates this conclusion as follows: “The visible can thus fill and occupy me only because I who see it do not see it from the depths of nothingness, but from the midst of itself; I the seer am also visible.”³⁷⁴ Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty will articulate this insight through the notion of flesh. Let me, then, move on to examine specifically the problematic of the flesh.

Flesh and Gesture

Merleau-Ponty initially characterizes the flesh as the milieu, the fundamental element, of the carnal generality of the world. Yet, Merleau-Ponty declares, this is a tentative name, a name for something that has no name in philosophy.³⁷⁵ The flesh refers to the sensible milieu that is “thickness” and not just a physical or material surface, the element things and I have in common. Within this element, Merleau-Ponty remarks, the one who perceives things

³⁷³ Later on, Merleau-Ponty comes back to this point and explains what the ecstatic-horizonal temporality of the thing means taking into consideration the notion of “flesh.” Consider, for instance, the following passage, which is extracted from the already classical chapter “The Chiasm”: “A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds. If we took all of these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world –less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility. Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a flesh.” Ibid., 173/132-33.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 150/113. “*Le visible ne peut ainsi me remplir et m’occuper que parce que, moi qui le vois, je ne le vois pas du fond du néant, mais du milieu du lui-même, moi le voyant, je suis aussi visible...*”

³⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, 191/147.

“...feels that he is the sensible itself coming to itself and that in return the sensible is in his eyes as it were his double or an extension of his own flesh.”³⁷⁶

The term “flesh” is, therefore, a hint, an indication, not a concept with a determinate content. Since the flesh is the element of our own temporal existence, it cannot be identified with a continuous, extended material ground beneath the perceived world. One might say that this element is secrecy: the flesh keeps things together establishing invisible bonds, which dislocate or shatter the “natural” emplacements of thing. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty says: “The things –here, there, now, then –are no longer in themselves, in their own place, in their own time; they exist only at the end of those rays of spatiality and of temporality emitted in the secrecy of my flesh.”³⁷⁷

One can say, then, that the flesh names a turn in vision whereby things reveal their essence as forms, as imbrications of my own being, as correlates of my gestures and actions.³⁷⁸ In this regard, the flesh is an impossible notion at the limits of phenomenology. For the flesh is a “notion” that is experience, whose “content” is an event, essentially dynamic, not something manifest or visible.

Indeed, what makes the thinking of the flesh fundamentally difficult and obscure is that it somehow dislocates the familiar and stable junctures of space and time. The thinking of the flesh is, as Merleau-Ponty often suggests, something like a mad vision in which the distinction between subject and object, myself and the others, world and I are challenged. To put it more precisely, one could say that the thinking of the flesh is a *radical* return to the

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 114/150-51. “*se sent...qu’il est le sensible même venant à soi, et qu’en retour le sensible est à ses yeux comme son double ou une extension de sa chair.*”

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 114/151. “*Les choses, ici, là, maintenant, alors, ne sont plus en soi, en leur lieu, en leur temps, elles n’existent qu’au bout de ces rayons de spatialité et de temporalité, émis dans le secret de ma chair...*”

³⁷⁸ In this regard, Françoise Dastur underscores that “Being is not a plenitude into which one would have to sink and dissolve oneself,” but rather it is a background that is fragmentarily and indirectly experienced through our creations. See Dastur, “World, Flesh, Vision,” 31.

world. Indeed, the madness of this thinking of the flesh is not supposed to drive us out of the world. It aims, on the contrary, at turning one's sight towards sensible being and the "there" of existence, the ground in which "...the objective body and the phenomenal body turn about one another or encroach upon one another."³⁷⁹

Although the flesh names the encroachment between objective and phenomenal body, this encroachment should not be interpreted as a sort of fusion. The madness of this return to the sensible is neither the attempt at fusion with being nor the madness of indifferentiation and pure homogeneity. Rather, this return is a repetition that happens in time, and which contains a melodic variation of the same, a displacement or retardation. Merleau-Ponty elaborates on this point, saying that:

There is an experience of the visible thing as pre-existing my vision, but this experience is not a fusion, a coincidence: because my eyes which see, my hands which touch, can also be seen and touched, because therefore, in this sense they see and touch the visible, the tangible from within, because our flesh lines and even envelopes all the visible and tangible things with which nevertheless it is surrounded, the world and I are within one another, and there is no anteriority of the *percipere* to the *percipi*, there is simultaneity or even retardation.³⁸⁰

The reversibility of *percipere* and *percipi* does not imply the conflation of these two moments because this event is inscribed in spatiality and temporality. This means that perception opens up a delay or retardation, it is not an immediate apprehension of something. My right hand can touch my left hand, but the hand touching and the hand touched are never the same, the eye perceived is never the eye perceiving, there is always an insurmountable gap separating these two moments. This essential absence or lack is what gives dimensionality to the visible.

³⁷⁹ *The Visible and the Invisible*, 155/117. "...corps objectif et corps phenomenal tournent l'un autour de l'autre ou empiètent l'un sur l'autre."

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 162/123. "Il y a une expérience de la chose visible comme préexistant à ma vision, mais elle n'est pas fusion, coïncidence: parce que mes yeux qui voient, mes mains qui touchent, peuvent être aussi vus et touchés, parce que, donc, en ce sens, ils voient et touchent le visible, le tangible, du dedans, que notre chair tapisse et même enveloppe toutes les choses visibles et tangibles don't elle est pourtant entourée, le monde et moi sommes l'une dans l'autre, et du *percipere* au *percipi* il n'y a pas d'antériorité, il y a simultanéité ou même retard."

Merleau-Ponty suggests, in this way, that all visible inscription, any gesture or any act of vision is in itself the trace of an absence, just as the furrows in the land that are pregnant or generative. And this tracing of furrows in the visible is what renders the “carnal texture” of ideas. He says precisely: “Their carnal texture [of ideas] presents to us what is absent from all flesh, it is a furrow that traces itself out magically under our eyes without a tracer, a certain hollow, a certain interior, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing...”³⁸¹ Even though ideas are essentially invisible, they pervade the visible as that which is necessarily missing, lacking in the visible, they are the emptiness that surrounds visibility.³⁸²

One could say, therefore, that ideas are transfigurations of the flesh insofar as they are not the invisible of an indeterminate and static visibility. That is to say, ideas are not the expression of a metaphysical nothingness; instead they are in each case the invisible *inscribed*, stamped, in the vision of things.³⁸³ Ideas appear, then, as traces of the temporal unfolding of visible things, traces weaving a subtler, transparent flesh, the flesh of meaning and language.³⁸⁴

The furrows of ideas are inscribed in the visible and, thereby, preserved in time. Specifically, examining the temporal dimensionality of being, Merleau-Ponty indicates that the weight and thickness of the world is the weight of the past, the past that is not left behind in a linear sequence, but rather the past that incises vertically on my present: “When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body,

³⁸¹ Ibid., 195/151. “*Leur texture charnellenous présente l’absence de toute chair; c’est un sillage qui se trace magiquement sous nos yeux, sans aucun traceur, un certain creux, un certain dedans, une certaine absence, une négativité qui n’est pas rien...*”

³⁸² It seems that Merleau-Ponty outlines this idea on the basis of his reading of Husserl’s text, “The Origin of Geometry,” particularly considering the concept of foundation and its relation to writing. See Lawlor, “*Verflechtung*.”

³⁸³ For some considerations about the Flesh as communicability, and its relation to language, see Mauro Carbone, “Flesh: Towards the History of a Misunderstanding,” *Chiasmi International* 4 (2002): 49-64, 50.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 198/153.

I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is a part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts.”³⁸⁵

As Merleau-Ponty remarks, my vision expresses an immemorial past, a visibility that belongs to being, whereby the visible world emerges in front of me as something more than what it “actually” is. One can say, therefore, that there is in actual perception a gestural, inconspicuous recognition of a horizon of virtualities, of ideas. Perception is primordial memory, for it contracts the past and transforms it into concrete comportments. Merleau-Ponty describes this primordial memory as a certain visibility, a power of vision. He indicates that the invisible layer of my perceptual field is a modulation or qualitative tonality of the visible itself. It is not opposed to the plane of the visible like a layer juxtaposed to the ground of the sensible world, and separated from it. That is to say, the virtualities of perception, its qualitative doublings, unfold *with* the body’s movements and actions: the body that is vision and the body that is visible are in each case imbricated. If metaphors were necessary to clarify this point, says Merleau-Ponty, “it would be better to say that the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is but one sole movement in its two phases.”³⁸⁶

In this regard, Merleau-Ponty insists that the experience of touch, whereby my own body is redoubled, is the trace of a redoubling of being. As I have indicated already, Merleau-Ponty’s characterization of the flesh as ontological element hinges on this insight: “everything said about the sensed body pertains to the whole of the sensible of which it is a

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 162/123. “*Quand je retrouve le monde actuel, tel qu’il est, sous mes mains, sous mes yeux, contre mon corps, je retrouve beaucoup plus au’un objet: un Être dont ma vision fait partie, une visibilité plus vieille que mes opérations ou mes actes.*”

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 179-80/138. “*Si l’on veut des métaphores, il vaudrait mieux dire que le corps senti et le corps sentant sont comme l’envers et l’endroit, ou encore, comme deux segments d’un seul parcours circulaire, qui, par en haut, va de gauche à droite, et, par en bas, de droit à gauche, mais qui n’est qu’un seul mouvement dans ses deux phases.*”

part, and to the world.”³⁸⁷ Accordingly, another fundamental premise underlying the analysis of the flesh is that what I experience through my body compresses the history of the world. This means that my gestures are never only my gestures, and my perception is never simply my perception. The limits “separating” my body from the world are not the limits of two separate planes of reality and, to be precise, one should say that my own body moves with the world. Merleau-Ponty remarks, then, that my body and the world are intertwined: “There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. Or rather, if, as once again we must, we eschew the thinking by planes and perspectives, there are two circles, or two vortexes, or two spheres, concentric when I live naively, and as soon as I question myself, the one slightly decentered with respect to the other...”³⁸⁸

Moving on from these “metaphors,” one may understand reflection, the possibility to question ourselves, to distance ourselves from ourselves and the world, and our capacity to “produce” ideas of ourselves and the world, as a slight movement, an inconspicuous displacement, whereby we lose sight of our general involvement in being and, thereby, turn to see ourselves as subjects. But, in any case, the element of the flesh remains there as the general milieu we live in.

Specifically, in what is perhaps the most straightforward definition of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty says: “The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 180/138. “Or, tout ce qu’on dit du corps senti rentit sur le sensible entier dont il fait partie, et sur le monde.”

³⁸⁸ Ibid. “il y a insertion réciproque et entrelacs de l’un dans l’autre. Ou plutôt, si, comme il le faut encore une fois, on renonce à la pensée par plans et perspectives, il y a deux cercles, ou deux tourbillons, ou deux sphères, concentriques quand je vis naïvement, et, des que je m’interroge, faiblement décentrés l’un par rapport à l’autre.”

and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being.”³⁸⁹

This definition of the flesh as a *general thing*, i.e., as an “*etwas*,” resonates with Merleau-Ponty’s reading of texts such as *The Principle of Reason* or *Introduction to Metaphysics*.³⁹⁰ As Merleau-Ponty points out in his *Notes de cours*, for Heidegger being withdraws in the ground of things as openness, as the primordial pivot in between the objective thing and the metaphysical nothingness, as something that gathers things without becoming one of them.³⁹¹

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty indicates that the flesh is the constituent of a “style” of being, a principle that supports the visibility of things, their form. But, he insists, this element of being cannot be compared to things, for the flesh is an ontological constituent of existence. This is why no metaphor would be appropriate to describe what the flesh is, and this is the reason that Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the flesh goes vis-a-vis the phenomenology of the lived body. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty says that the flesh is an element, one should have in mind a primordial, ontological element like the elements thought by Presocratic thinkers, or like the primordial earth, not a physical one. The flesh is, therefore, the qualitative element in which our movements take place, the milieu of the lived body, not of the objective one. Having said this, it may be possible to determine more precisely some articulations between the problematic of the flesh and the problem of gesture.

The flesh is the element midway between the idea and the concrete individual. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty says that the flesh is a *general thing* this does not mean that it is an idea

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 181-82/139. “*La chair n’est pas matière, n’est pas spirit, n’est pas substance. Il faudrait, pour la désigner, le vieux terme d’«élément» au sens où on l’employait pour parler de l’eau, de l’air, de la terre et du feu, s’est-à-dire au sens de un chose générale, à mi-chemin de l’individu spatio-temporel et de l’idée, sorte de principe incarné qui importe un style d’être partout où il s’en trouve une parcelle. La chair est en ce sens un «élément» de l’Être.*”

³⁹⁰ See *Notes de cours*, 103.

³⁹¹ See *ibid.*, 102-104.

attached to things, but rather, it is the generality that constitutes the thing as a determinate thing. To put it more precisely, one should say that this generality of the flesh is the element that relates me to the thing existentially, that is, as extension of my vision, affections and actions. Since the flesh is the milieu of our existential engagement with things, one could say that the flesh is the sensible milieu of gestures. Indeed, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty defines gestures as conjunctions of meaning and movement, in which a particular style of being becomes manifest. As I indicated in an earlier chapter, for Merleau-Ponty gestures carry out the decisive step of communication, as they display a meaning that is itself sensible and that unfolds with our movements. In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty retrieves this problematic of gesture in terms of what he calls, inspired by Proust, “sensible ideas.”

In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty indicates that his ontological project intends to think the world of perception from within. He claims, for instance: “Before the essence as before the fact, all we must do is situate ourselves within the being we are dealing with, instead of looking at it from the outside...”³⁹² Consequently, for Merleau-Ponty a proper ontological view requires a mode of thinking that becomes itself experience, which comes down to the level of “sensible ideas.” One can therefore say that the ontology of the flesh hinges on a mode of thinking that is itself gesture, performance. For the conjunction of the visible and the invisible, of the idea and the body, corresponds to the unfolding of our actions qua gestures, circumscribed in a horizon of meaning that has not been solidified in consciousness. This is, precisely, what Merleau-Ponty suggests when he talks of “sensible ideas” in the context of *The Visible and the Invisible*.

³⁹² Ibid., 155/117. “À l’égard de l’essence comme du fait, il n’est que de se placer dans l’être dont on traite, au lieu de le regarder du dehors...”

Merleau-Ponty explains that sensible ideas are not invisible abstractions separate from tangible realities, but rather invisible forces producing sensible configurations: “We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas, precisely because they are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must “dash on his bow” to follow it.”³⁹³

The example of the sonata not only shows that the idea is a power guiding our bodies in the instant of the performance, but also indicates that our individual being somehow dissolves its proper limits and becomes spectral in the embodiment of the idea: in performing or listening to the sonata we are possessed by the idea. In this way, Merleau-Ponty indicates, on the one hand, that in artistic performances we may have a primordial grasp on the invisible depth of the flesh; on the other hand, that in the course of a performance our sensible flesh is inherently porous and prompt to become an idea. And this happens also when our bodily flesh migrates to the flesh of language as something is *said*.³⁹⁴

Indeed, if the idea can take possession of us this means that our own being is pervaded by invisibility, it is intrinsically porous. This porosity reveals the reversibility and essential promiscuity of the flesh as a fundamental trait of our experience in general, a fundamental dimension of our relation to being, according to which there is no singular determination of the sensible that would not be inscribed in a more general horizon of meaning. Merleau-Ponty underscores this point in the context of a reference to Heidegger’s understanding of *Wesen* as a verbal expression. Merleau-Ponty says:

³⁹³ Ibid., 196/151. “*Les idées musicales ou sensibles, précisément parce qu’elles négativité ou absence circonscrite, nous ne les possédons pas, elles nous possèdent. Ce n’est plus l’exécutant qui produit ou reproduit la sonate: il se sent, et les autres le sentent, au service de la sonate, c’est elle qui chante à travers lui, ou qui crie si brusquement qu’il doit «se précipiter sur son archet» pour la suivre.*”

³⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, 198/153.

There is no emplacement of space and time that would not be a variant of the others, as they are of it; there is no individual that would not be representative of a species or of a family of beings, would not have, would not be a certain style, a certain manner of managing the domain of space and time over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that domain, of radiating about a wholly virtual center –in short, a certain manner of Being, in the active sense, a certain *Wesen*, in the sense that, says Heidegger, this word has when it is used as a verb.³⁹⁵

Merleau-Ponty underscores that we should not reify particular emplacements or modalities of existence because we always move in a dynamic understanding of being. Our dealings with things are set in a historical world that is projected towards the future, and that condensates the past as a horizon of virtualities that were never present. For this reason, as I have often indicated, things are never restricted to a punctual here and now: things have depth when they are encountered within the element of the flesh.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty points out that in each case our own being is constituted by experiences and thoughts that “have about themselves a time and a space that exist by piling up, by proliferation, by encroachment, by promiscuity –a perpetual pregnancy, perpetual parturition, generativity and generality, brute essence and brute existence, which are the nodes and antinodes of the same ontological vibration.”³⁹⁶ Put differently, beings move within the element of the flesh, a sensible element that redoubles them by touch, that makes them sensitive to touch, even the subtle touch of “thinking.” Grasping things, thinking them, presupposes the ontological openness to the flesh, which integrates things into larger wholes. Based on these premises, let me move on to examine in more detail how

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 152/114-15. “Il n’est pas un emplacement de l’espace et du temps qui ne tienne aux autres, ne soit une variante des autres, comme eux de lui; pas un individu qui ne soit représentatif d’une espèce ou d’une famille d’êtres, n’ait, ne soit un certain style, une certaine manière de gérer le domaine d’espace et de temps sur lequel il a compétence, de le prononcer, de l’articuler, de rayonner autour d’un centre tout virtuel, bref, une certaine manière d’être, au sens actif, un certain *Zesen*, au sens, dit Heidegger, que le mot a quand il est employé comme verbe.”

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 152-53/115. “...ont autour d’elles un temps et un espace d’empilement, de prolifération, d’empiètement, de promiscuité, -perpétuelle prénance, perpétuelle parturition, générativité et généralité, essence brute et existence brute, qui sont les ventres et les noeuds de la même vibration ontologique.”

this determination of the “gestural” dimension of the flesh incorporates elements of Heidegger’s work.

Being and the Flesh: Reflections on Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Heidegger

Evoking Proust and Heidegger, combining them in what seems to be an impossible composition, Merleau-Ponty offers an interpretation of this *Wesen*, this verbal being that makes things vibrate with historical depth, in a footnote referring to Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics*. This footnote is remarkable because it elucidates potential convergences between Heidegger’s approach to the question of being and the thinking of the flesh. The passage in question is as follows:

The highschool building, for us who return to it, thirty years later, as for those who occupy it today, is not so much an object which it would be useful or possible to describe by its characteristics, as it is a certain odor, a certain affective texture which holds sway over a certain vicinity of space. This velvet, this silk, are under my fingers a certain manner of resisting them and of yielding to them, a rough, sleek, rasping power, which respond for an X-spot of my flesh, lend themselves to its movement of muscled flesh, or tempt it in its inertia.³⁹⁷

Here, Merleau-Ponty alludes to the sections from *Introduction to Metaphysics* in which Heidegger recalls the analysis of perception developed in *Being and Time*, according to which we never hear pure noises, see pure abstract forms, nor touch pure rough materials, but rather totalities with meaning. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger also touches on arguments that resonate in the essay on the work of art. He refers to van Gogh’s painting of the peasant shoes, claiming that without representing anything the painting puts us in front of the shoes and their respective existential possibilities, disclosing the shoes in an immediate correspondence with a world that embraces us. He also alludes to the question of being and

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 152/115. “Le lycée, pour nous qui y revenons, trente ans après, comme pour ceux qui aujourd’hui l’habitent, n’est pas tant un objet qu’il soit utile ou qu’il soit possible de décrire par ses caractères, au’une certaine odeur, une certaine texture affective qui a puissance sur un certain voisinage d’espace. Ce velours, cette soie, sont sous mes doigts une certaine manière de leur résister et de leur céder, une puissance rugueuse, lisse, crissante, qui répondent d’un lieu X à ma chair, se prêtent à son mouvement de chair musclée ou la tentent dans son inertie.”

wonders whether being *is* in all the things that “are.” Clearly, he remarks, all sensible “solid” things “are,” they have a certain relation to being. But being itself withdraws from these singular things and seems to be sheer nothingness.

After considering these questions, and in a puzzling reference to Nietzsche, Heidegger admits that in a certain sense being is a vapor, a phantasmagoric and evanescent atmosphere. He says: “But Being remains undiscoverable, almost like Nothing, or in the end *entirely* so. The word “Being” is then finally just an empty word. It means nothing actual, tangible, real. Its meaning is an unreal vapor.”³⁹⁸ The meaning of being, just as the meaning of the term “art,” is no longer actual, nothing real corresponds to it. Yet, the “vapor” of being pervades every single instance of my actual perception of things, it surrounds things perceived as a sensible configuration of meaning, even if it is ungraspable and resists any objective definition.

Heidegger intimates that being is the nothingness that impregnates things and keeps them alive, the affective atmosphere that determines their historical essence, and which is forgotten in metaphysics. The reference to van Gogh’s painting, as well as the reference to the highschool building, calls attention to the historical texture of things, the horizon of significance within which things appear as what they are. Perhaps this historical texture is the ground of the affinity between “art” and “being,” as words that no longer name anything actual or real, but rather something forgotten and left behind in the past, the original past that repeats itself in every single perception and gives relief or salience to things.

Thus, it seems, what is forgotten in reflective, objectifying thinking is the essential depth of things, their roots in a general dimensionality of life and being. Within the orbit of similar questions Merleau-Ponty says that “one forgets that this frontal being before us –

³⁹⁸ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 26/38.

whether we posit it, whether it posits itself within us qua being-posited –is second by principle, is cut out upon a horizon which is not nothing, and which for its part is not by virtue of composition.”³⁹⁹

As I have already indicated, in the “Addendum” to the essay on the work of art Heidegger indicates that the work of art is the setting into work of the truth of being, that the question of art is intrinsically related to the question of the meaning of being and the questions concerning the relation between human being and being. Throughout the essay, Heidegger remarks that the essence of the thing is given in the work of art, not in philosophical theories. Heidegger suggests that there is in art a primordial experience of things, just as the one we could have in our everyday encounter with things in the world if we were attentive to their affective depth.

In line with Merleau-Ponty’s reading of the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, one can say that art brings thinking back to the flesh of the world, reactivating indirectly our primordial relation to sensible being, just as it happens with the velvet that reacts to my touch and that is awakened by my movements. In short, art offers an indirect path for thinking to return to sensible being, it retrieves the gestural dimension of thinking.

Particularly, in his lecture-notes on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty remarks that philosophy would escape the false alternative between objectivity and mystic silence if it followed the indirect path of art, the gestures of art, poetry, and life: “There would really be indirect language. The one which would not try to objectify the *Gesagte* <‘the said’>, but which gives

³⁹⁹ *The Visible and the Invisible*, 167/127. “On oublie que cet être frontal, devant nous, soit que nous le posions, soit qu’il se pose en nous en tant qu’être-posé, est, par principe, second, découpé sur un horizon qui n’est pas rien, et qui lui n’est pas par composition.”

it through gestures = poetry –And we could generalize: history, life, Passions.”⁴⁰⁰ Philosophy can retrieve its sensible grounds, recall the living and spontaneous body, if it thinks through art and poetry, through life and passions, not primarily through concepts or categories that annul the distance and dimensionality of things. Merleau-Ponty remarks that the question concerning our relation to being depends on a delicate balance of proximity and distance: “Infinite distance or absolute proximity, negation or identification: our relationship with Being is ignored in the same way in both cases. In both cases, one misses it because one thinks one will ensure it more effectively by approaching the essence or the thing as closely as possible.”⁴⁰¹ Thus, it seems, art would keep thinking at a proper distance, different to the distance of objective thinking. Accordingly, in what follows, I will explore Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the relation between being and art. Specifically, I will examine in what sense art provides an experience of touch and vision that keeps things at a proper distance, and whether this experience of touch may be characterized as a gestural imbrication in the flesh of the world.

Art and the Gestures of Being

Being is not *a* being, but rather the nothingness that permeates things, which withdraws its own presence. As Merleau-Ponty explains, being is like an “atmosphere” pervading our relations with things. For things are intertwined with the flesh of our bodies – of our being –and they are inscribed in the horizons of practical possibilities.⁴⁰² And

⁴⁰⁰ Husserl *at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 60/49. “Il y aurait bien langage indirect. Celui qui n’essaie pas de objectiver le Gesagte, mais le donne comme par geste = poésie –Et l’on pourrait généraliser: histoire, vie, Passions.”

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. “Or, distance infinie ou proximité absolue, négation ou identification, notre rapport à l’Être est ignoré de la même façon dans les deux cas. Dans les deux cas, on le manque parce qu’on croit mieux l’assurer en s’approchant au plus près de l’essence de la chose.”

⁴⁰² In his notes on Husserl, in a passage that explains the openness in between ideality and thing as a general thing, an *etwas*, Merleau-Ponty remarks that this invisible being, is a vertical being that corresponds to the being of praxis. See Husserl *at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 27/24.

continuing on from this point, Merleau-Ponty suggests that there is in things an implicit reference to my own flesh, even to the movement of my muscles. Let me recall, again, the passage in question: “This velvet, this silk, are under my fingers a certain manner of resisting them and of yielding to them, a rough, sleek, rasping power, which respond for an X-spot of my flesh, lend themselves to its movement of muscled flesh, or tempt it in its inertia.”⁴⁰³

Things outline potential actions and, thus, a world that we inhabit. In this way, as Merleau-Ponty points out in his lecture-notes on Husserl, “what is at issue is to remain in our sojourn,”⁴⁰⁴ to remain immersed in the spectral presencing of being, *Wesen*, and enraptured in the madness of perception. Merleau-Ponty finds, indeed, that perception itself, even in the phenomenon of touch, opens up an insurmountable gap, a communication at distance and a “vision,” whereby things radiate beyond their limits. Thus, rather than fusion, the limits of touch reveal a crossing, a chiasm in the sensible. When I touch things there is, at the same time, a touching that comes from the things, which displaces me. Exploring an example excerpted from Husserl’s work, Merleau-Ponty describes this experience of touch as follows:

Already in the “touch” we have just found three distinct experiences which subtend one another, three dimensions which overlap but are distinct: a touching of the sleek and of the rough, a touching of the things –a passive sentiment of the body and of its space –and finally a veritable touching of the touch, when my right touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the “touching subject” passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the thing, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 152/115. “Le lycée, pour nous qui y revenons, trente ans après, comme pour ceux qui aujourd’hui l’habitent, n’est pas tant un objet qu’il soit utile ou qu’il soit possible de décrire par ses caractères, au’une certaine odeur, une certaine texture affective qui a puissance sur un certain voisinage d’espace. Ce velours, cette soie, sont sous mes doigts une certaine manière de leur résister et de leur céder, une puissance rugueuse, lisse, crissante, qui répondent d’un lieu X à ma chair, se prêtent à son mouvement de chair musclée ou la tentent dans son inertie.”

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁰⁵ *The Visible and the Invisible*, 174/133-34. “Déjà dans le «toucher», nous venons de trouver trois expériences distinctes qui se sous-tendent, trois dimensions qui se reçoivent, mais sont distinctes: un toucher du lisse et du rugueux, un toucher des choses –un sentiment passif du corps et de son espace –, et en fin un véritable toucher du toucher, quand ma main droite touche ma main gauche en train de palper les choses, par lequel le «sujet touchant» passe au rang de touché, descend dans les choses, de sorte que le toucher se fait du milieu de monde et comme en elles.”

There exists an encroachment between my phenomenal body and the body object because the experience of perception is not unidirectional. Perception also comes from things, just as if things had in each case imposed a range of visibility upon us: they see us while we see them. Touch is somehow formed in the midst of the world because the world itself is constituted as the *logos* we inhabit rather than as *bloße Sache*: touch is already pervaded by meaning, but a meaning that is sensible, that is a peculiar mode of shining, which involves the openness that allows things to *move* us while we reach them. This apparently simple experience cannot be easily captured through reflective philosophy or science because they renounce the possibility of inhabiting things and they turn things into artifacts to be manipulated. This experience is also inconspicuous to “profane vision,” which has become too metaphysical, overcharged with common sense.

In *Eye and Mind* Merleau-Ponty explores alternatives to reflective thinking and its predominant metaphysics of the body. He takes up arguments developed in *The Visible and the Invisible* and shows that our primordial experience of sensible being may be incorporated in philosophy and thinking once thinking returns to the origins of sensible life. This return requires that philosophy relinquish the pretense of universality, the perspective of the *kosmotheoros*: “it is necessary that the thought of science –surveying thought, thought of the object in general, be placed back in the “there is” which precedes it, back in the site, back upon the soil of the sensible world and the soil of the worked upon world such as they are for our lives and for our bodies...”⁴⁰⁶ This re-placing of philosophy and thinking in the soil of the world is, in a sense, a re-immersion in the opacity of the body. But the opacity of the

⁴⁰⁶ *Eye and Mind*, 1592/352. “Il faut que la pensée de science –pensée de survol, pensée de l’objet en general –se replace dans un «il y a» préalable, dans le site, sur le sol du monde sensible et du monde ouvré tels qu’ils sont dans notre vie, pour notre corps.”

body is not simply a limit to thinking, as it was for Descartes, but rather an enigmatic territory to be explored in a new mode of philosophizing.

Specifically, in *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty envisages this philosophy to come, this new metaphysics of the body beyond metaphysics, in the experience of art. Particularly, he calls attention to painting. He says: “This philosophy, which is still to be made, is what animates the painter –not when he expresses opinions about the world but in that instant when his vision becomes gesture, when, in Cézanne’s words, he ‘thinks in painting’”⁴⁰⁷

The instant in which vision becomes gesture is the fleeting instant of transfiguration, when vision touches, moves, and is responsive to things, moved by them. As Merleau-Ponty explains, the painter explores the enigma of vision as an invisible movement that, coming from things, passes through the lived body. Thus, the painter guides his movements and his vision through the way things give themselves in primordial perception. What becomes manifest in art, in painting, and what is missing in reflective thinking, is a deep awareness of the lived body. For the painter displays the enigmatic “knowledge” that belongs to the body, the one that unfolds in its immediate relation to things, in gestures.

Although Merleau-Ponty does not focus on gesture here, as he does in the *Phenomenology of Perception* or *The Prose of the World*, and there are only few mentions of this notion, there are good reasons to think that the notion of gesture plays an important role articulating this new metaphysics of painting. In fact, painting is essentially gestural: it follows the directives of the lived body, which is intertwined with the world. And, as I have argued already, gestures express the bodying forth of the body, they “express” our existential engagement with the world. Specifically, in a passage that echoes Heidegger’s own analysis of

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. 1612/367-58. “Or, cette philosophie qui est à faire, c’est elle qui anime le peintre, non quand pas il exprime des opinions sur le monde, mais à l’instant où sa vision se fait geste, quand, dira Cézanne, «il pense en peinture».”

the bodying forth of the body and of gesture in the Zollikon seminars, Merleau-Ponty remarks: “I say of a thing that it is moved, but my body moves itself; my movement unfolds itself. It is not in ignorance of itself, blind to itself, it radiates from a self...”⁴⁰⁸ The body radiates from a self means: it knows itself and what it can do in relation to things, before explicitly formulating this knowledge. In short, the body itself knows how to interpret the world.

Thus, what is remarkable in the bodily experience of the artist is that the vision of things unfolds itself as a meaningful movement, as an articulated comportment guided by a holistic vision of the world. It is well known that someone experienced in the art of drawing, for instance, does not look at the canvas but rather at the thing he draws, as if the hands already knew what the eyes see, and what distance the hands themselves traverse through their traces.⁴⁰⁹ This simple example illustrates the enigmatic overlapping of vision and movement that constitutes the body. It illustrates, too, the reversal in which a thing seen at a distance is incorporated as a trace guiding our actions and, in turn, becomes a vision. In this way, the lived body manifests itself as a power of reduplication of things. Recalling in passing the notion of flesh, Merleau-Ponty explains this as follows:

Things are an annex or prolongation of my body; they are incrustated in its flesh; they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the very stuff of the body. These reversals, these antinomies, are different ways of saying that vision is caught or is made in the middle of things, where something visible undertakes to see, becomes visible for itself and through the vision of all things, where the indivision of the sensing and the sensed persists, like the original fluid within the crystal.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 1594/352. “Je dis d’une chose qu’elle est mue, mais mon corps, lui, se meut, mon mouvement se déploie. Il n’est pas dans l’ignorance de soi, il n’est pas aveugle pour soi, il rayonne d’un soi...”

⁴⁰⁹ This is, for instance, what Betty Edwards’ exercise of “pure contour drawing” demonstrates. See Betty Edwards, *The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 85-96.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 1595/354. “...elles sont une annexe ou un prolongement de lui-même, elles sont incrustées dans ma chair, elles font partie de sa définition pleine et le monde est fait de l’étoffe même du corps. Ces renversements, ces antinomies sont diverses manières de dire que la vision est prise ou se fait du milieu des choses, là où un visible se met à voir, devient visible pour soi et par sa vision de toutes choses, là où persiste, comme l’eau mère dans le cristal, l’indivision du sentant et du senti.”

The moment of indivision of the sensing and the sensed, of course, implies a transformative leap rather than a mystical fusion, for it corresponds to the reversal of the flesh. This moment reveals that things are a prolongation of my body and that we are made of the same stuff, thrown together into the open realm of visibility. Yet, this visibility is never fully crystallized in the images of things, and it never constitutes a static and solid ground, neither in the images of art nor in the images of perception. Visibility is understood here as dynamic, a modulation of the flesh of things. The moment of vision is never a static moment, for it preserves within “the indivision of the sensing and the sensed,” that is, it contains an encrypted enigmatic power of reduplication, a movement or tendency to repetition and difference. Put differently, every moment of vision, every image, is pregnant with multiple fields of action. The painting, for example, resonates in my body, at the same time as “light, color, depth.”⁴¹¹ This pregnancy of the visible constitutes the world. That is to say, to exist, to come into existence, means to bear the world of perception: its weight, its thickness, and its possibilities.

Painting, as well as art in general, propagates a visibility that was at work in things, and in the body. In other words, painting shows that perception is never just a passive engagement with something given once and for all, but rather a relentless movement of disclosure. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty discovers with Cézanne that vision carries within itself an invitation to movement, to action, to painting, because bodily perception is already burdened with the uncountable traces of things, and our body alone cannot contain them.

Merleau-Ponty suggests, then, that visible things, things given in perception in the apparent inertia of “pure things,” contain a tendency to reduplication that, while passing through our bodies, germinates in new spirals of visibility, new outlines or sketches of things,

⁴¹¹ *Eye and Mind*, 1596/355.

adumbrating new worlds. Merleau-Ponty elucidates this point as he asks: “Why would this internal equivalence, this carnal formula of their presence that the things arouse in me not arouse an outline that is again visible, in which every other gaze would find again the motifs that support their inspection of the world? Thus, there appears a visible to the second power, a carnal essence or icon of the first.”⁴¹²

Merleau-Ponty determines the emergence of things as an outline (*tracé*), and art as a redoubling of visibility, a carnal essence or icon that reduplicates the “first” outline or trace inscribed in the flesh of things. The redoubling of the sensible that takes place in art is, in a sense, mimesis and mimicry. Yet, art’s reduplication of the visible is not sheer copy, precisely because the work of art preserves the “tracing” of the visible, its movement, not a dead “image.” Merleau-Ponty explains this point by analyzing the case of the mural paintings in Lascaux, for these paintings may initially appear as a very simple example of imitative painting. Merleau-Ponty indicates that if one considers attentively these paintings one can see that they are not dead images, like fissures in the rocks. Rather, they have an enigmatic presence that cannot be fixed, they appear like ghosts animating the walls: “Pushed forward here, held back there, supported by the wall’s mass they use so adroitly, they radiate about the wall without ever breaking their elusive moorings.”⁴¹³ With the painting of the animals, the protuberances and fissures of the walls acquire a new life and, at the same time, the animals themselves are invested with new layers of significance: they may evoke strength, fear, or convey new meanings to sexual desire. Thus, these murals re-awaken the enigma of the visible, they carry out a redoubling of the visible. And this power is essential to painting.

⁴¹² Ibid. “*Cet équivalent interne, cette formule charnelle de leur présence que les choses suscitent en moi, pourquoi à leur tour ne susciteraient-ils pas un tracé, visible encore, où tout autre regard retrouvera les motifs qui soutiennent son inspection du monde? Alors paraît un visible à la deuxième puissance, essence charnelle ou icône du premier.*”

⁴¹³ Ibid. “*Un peu en avant, un peu en arrière, soutenus par sa masse dont ils se servent adroitement, ils rayonnent autour d’elle sans jamais rompre leur insaisissable amarre.*”

Presumably, painting arouses my sight and enraptures it in such a way that it cannot be put to rest or fixed. “For I do not gaze at it [the painting] as one gazes at a thing. I do not fix it in its place. My gaze wanders within it as in the halos of Being. Rather than seeing it, I see according to, or within it.”⁴¹⁴

Although the painting is set in place, limited by a physical surface, it makes my gaze vibrate with the visible, wander within the visible. In this sense, the painting preserves the spontaneous life of a gesture, of the living gesture that brought it to life. For the painting does not remain fixed in place as a thing, nor is it the production of purely mechanical effects. What Heidegger says about the “fixing” in place of the truth in the work of art may also count here: rather than being emplaced as a thing, the work of art is a setting that draws something to one’s vision, and in this sense the painting works as an outline, a trace to be reactivated in future works and visions. For how could something be given in painting, to the future, if the painting did not preserve the tentative, fragmentary, sketchy or projective dimension of a gesture, rather than the determinate, finished, complete character of an act of imposition, restricted to a punctual time and space? Precisely, the work of art clears a sensible, visible space, allowing things to appear, to become present, without imposing the presence of the thing as an object. That is to say, the work of art emerges as the rhythmical response to a movement initiated as an outline or project in the things themselves, just as if they were from the very beginning gestures indicating the paths one must follow.

As I have indicated in an earlier chapter, Merleau-Ponty notes that, in Cezanne’s work, “[i]t is the mountain itself which from over there makes itself seen by the painter; it is

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. “*Car je ne le regarde pas comme on regarde une chose, je ne le fixe pas en son lieu, mon regard irre en lui comme dans les nimbes de l’Être, je vois selon ou avec lui plutôt qui je ne le vois.*”

the mountain that he interrogates with his gaze.”⁴¹⁵ Indeed, the painter asks the mountain to show itself, he invokes the specter or ghost of the mountain, the veil that lets us capture the mountain as that visible mountain. “What exactly does he asks of it? To unveil the means, which are nothing but visible, by which the mountain makes itself into a mountain before my eyes.”⁴¹⁶ I should note that, employing similar arguments, Heidegger refutes the interpretation of art as imitation in the essay on the work of art.

As I have already argued, for Heidegger the work of art is a work yielding to an impulse coming from the truth itself, from the primordial disclosure of the world, in such a way that things themselves come to presence. Yet, the truth sets itself as a rift, as an outline, to such an extent that what appears in the work is somehow the specter of the thing: the pure shining of its being, the testimony of its seclusion, its belonging to the closing of the earth. In this way, Heidegger suggests that the essence of the thing reveals itself only in a rapturous movement, a movement that takes us out of ourselves and brings us back to the rift, i.e., the limit of pure visibility as visibility, form as form. This abyssal edge of visibility is what emerges in the quasi-automatic, delirious movements of the artist.

Merleau-Ponty describes painting as a delirious and somewhat mad gesture that responds to the impacts coming from the world with a countermovement, be it a trace of the hand or the eye.⁴¹⁷ Although in a quite unperceivable manner, the eyes move with the world, and this movement restores the thickness or dimensionality that remains invisible in the visible dimension of things. It is this dimensionality imprinted on the surface of the visible that painting makes visible. The work of art makes visible what is invisible in customary

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 1599/357. “*C’est la montagne elle-même qui, de là-bas, se fait voir du peintre, c’est elle qu’il interroge du regard.*”

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. “*Que lui demande-t-il au juste? De dévoiler les moyens, rien que visibles, par lesquels elle se fait montagne sous nos yeux.*”

⁴¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 1596-97/356-7.

vision, or as Heidegger would say, the radiance of being in beings: “Painting gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible; thanks to painting we do not need a ‘muscular sense’ in order to possess the voluminosity of the world. This voracious vision, reading beyond the ‘visual givens,’ opens upon a texture of Being of which the discrete sensorial messages are only the punctuations or the caesura. The eye dwells in this texture as man dwells in his house.”⁴¹⁸ At this point, the following questions arise: How is it that this “voracious vision” opens upon a “texture” of being? And how can the gestures of painting help us to characterize what is gesture as such?

One may attempt a response to these questions by elaborating on the passage just quoted. As I suggested above, what is invisible in profane vision is the very visibility of things as pure visibility, which constitutes the spectral structure of the way things give themselves. Merleau-Ponty explicitly clarifies this point when alluding to Cezanne’s interrogation of the mountain, in the context of the passage mentioned above. He says: “Light, lighting, shadows, reflections, color, all these objects of his investigation [the investigation of the visible carried out by the painter] are not altogether real beings; like ghosts, they have only visual existence. In fact they exist only at the threshold of profane vision; they are not commonly seen.”⁴¹⁹ Thus, painting gives existence to ghosts, to objects that are not objective beings. What painting does, what determines the gesture of the painter as an action of painting, is the fact that it restores what is given in vision, the ghosts or specters of things, their visibility. In this sense, painting is delirious because it inhabits, at the same time, the dimension of specters and the dimension of tangible things. Painting is, in

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., “...elle donne existence visible à ce que la vision profane croit invisible, elle fait que nous n’avons pas besoin de «sens musculaire» pour avoir la voluminosité du monde. Cette vision dévorante, par-delà les «données visuelles», ouvre sur une texture de l’Être dont les messages sensoriels discrets ne sont que les ponctuations ou césures, et que l’œil habite, comme l’homme sa maison.”

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 1599/357. “Lumière, éclairage, ombres, couleur, tous ces objets de la recherche ne sont pas tout à fait des êtres réels: ils ont, comme les fantômes, d’existence que visuelle, ils ne sont même que sur le seuil de la vision profane, ils ne sont communément pas vus.”

this sense, a pure gesture that does not accomplish anything “real” but, on the contrary, makes of the real a caesura, a rift, openness, void, a “no-thing.” Following this argument, one can say that the voracious vision of painting gives voice to one’s affective engagement with things. Painting replicates in a sensible, tangible landscape what, according to Heidegger, characterizes the elusive structure of being: *Es gibt Sein*, Being gives, “it” gives being, rather than “being something.” Indeed, Merleau-Ponty says, “the painter’s vision is an ongoing birth”⁴²⁰ and, in this sense, the rapture of the artist, the delirium of painting, is an “inspired” vision that reestablishes our exposure to the world. The notion of “inspiration” is fundamental in this case: “What we call ‘inspiration’ should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that we no longer know who sees and who is seen, who paints and what is painted.”⁴²¹

The allusion to breathing recalls the element of the flesh and reveals the visible as a milieu we inhabit, a milieu charged with an atmospheric significance, which is “felt” or intimated rather than known. Merleau-Ponty is familiar with Heidegger’s reflections on dwelling and language, as well as with the famous formula, according to which “language is the house of Being,” which is mentioned in *The Visible and the Invisible*, and examined in some of his later lecture-notes. Giving the visible as visible implies, in this context, reinstating what was already there in the grounds of our existence, what remains in the background as an implicit understanding of things: the intimate, somehow instinctive, understanding of being that is disclosure of the world, the air of meaning we breath while sojourning in the world.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 1600/358. “*La vision du peintre est une naissance continuée.*”

⁴²¹ Ibid. “*Ce qu’on appelle inspiration devrait être près à la lettre: il y a vraiment inspiration et expiration de l’Être, action et passion su peu discernables qu’on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu, qui peint et qui est peint.*”

Let me, then, recapitulate and conclude. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of painting shows that things act upon us following the logic of spectrality, of imbrication and intertwining, rather than the logic of causality and mechanics. That is to say, sensible things, as sensible, evoke and suggest, rather than cause and determine. Things give themselves by giving up their solidity, their manipulability, so that they may radiate as pure presencing, as unfolding essences, as affectivity and meaning. In this way, what is given in things is a weight of a different sort than that of a solid object. It is the weight of history, and of the past of nature. In short: things act upon us as suggestive outlines that resonate in our "gestures." In order to receive things as they give themselves, one must give up one's solidity as subject and let the very exteriority or visibility of perception, of the lived body take the lead. That is to say, one must migrate to the realm of pure form: "The painter lives in fascination. The actions most proper to him –those gestures, those outlines of which he alone is capable and which will be revelations to others because they do not have the same lacks as he does –they seem to emanate from the thing themselves, like figures emanating from constellations."⁴²² This passage indicates, precisely, that the actions most proper to the artist are gestures, outlines, i.e., actions that embrace the visible dimension of things as the trace of an invisibility, of a history and an understanding whose density and weight is out of all measure. Painting is a gesture, a phantasmagoric event, like a gesture of friendship: when I give my hand in a gesture of friendship, what is given is not the hand, and what is received is not the hand, and who receives is not the hand. The giver, the gift, and the receiver are behind the scenes, behind or before the hand, and yet, they are also in the hands in the form of the gesture, which is itself the friendship.

⁴²² Ibid. "*Le peintre vit dans la fascination. Ses actions les plus propres –ces gestes, ces tracés dont il est seul capable, et qui seront pour les autres révélation, parce qu'ils n'ont pas les mêmes manques que lui –il lui semble qu'ils émanent des choses mêmes, comme le dessin des constellations.*"

Part III: Gesture and Language

Chapter Six: Gesture and Language in Heidegger

Language, Gesture and Expression

Previously, in the third chapter of the present work, I argued that gestures pertain to the open or public dimension of our bodily comportments, and that gestures are for Heidegger modalities of primordial saying or showing. Along these lines, I mentioned briefly that gestures are not to be understood as expressions, nor as indications in Husserl's sense, for gestures open up a region or domain of significance that is prior to consciousness. In this regard, I suggested that gestures disclose in each case one's implicit understanding of being, which is grounded on attunements. This means that gestures are poetic, they are a work of disclosure, similar to what happens in the work of art. That is to say, gestures *give a body* to our attuned understanding of the world.

Accordingly, in the present chapter I will investigate to what extent Heidegger's approach to the problem of gesture articulates both the bodily or sensible dimension of language, and the "linguistic" dimension of the body. To develop this idea I will focus on texts in which Heidegger refers to the problem of gesture, or themes in the orbit of the problem of gesture, such as the motif of the hint and the sign. But first I will clarify Heidegger's position in relation to the problem of expression.

In the Zollikon seminars Heidegger introduces the notion of gesture as a way to characterize the bodying forth of the body. Accordingly, Heidegger determines the lived body as form [*Gestalt*], namely, as an existential structuration of meaning. Specifically, the notion of gesture accounts for the experience of meaning as attuned relatedness to the

world. In this sense, as was indicated already, Heidegger's position challenges the Husserlian account of gesture and meaning that is developed in Husserl's earlier works.⁴²³

In a conversation with Medard Boss, dated March 5-9, 1966, Heidegger suggests that attunements disclose the world as a whole, they disclose an atmospheric totality of significance that is not grounded in the solitary mental life of consciousness, as the Husserlian view on the concept of expression implies.⁴²⁴ With regard to this, Heidegger remarks: "According to Husserl, the constitution of an object of consciousness occurs in such a way that the hyletic data, pure sensations, are given as primary and then receive a meaning as *noemata* [intentional objects of consciousness]. In other words, a meaning [*noema*] is ascribed to the [sensory] stimulus by a psychical [*notetic*] act. Nevertheless, the whole is a pure construct."⁴²⁵

Although in the *Logical Investigations* Husserl understands expression as "a unitary total act,"⁴²⁶ a whole in which the apperceived thing and the "sense-giving" act come together, for him this whole is constituted in consciousness, it is an intentional experience with "objective" content to be communicated. And, as Derrida points out, these premises continue to be present in later developments of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.⁴²⁷

⁴²³ At this point, I should note that, despite Husserl's Cartesianism, Heidegger was decisively influenced by Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, as it is widely known, particularly by Investigation VI, and found there important indications to formulate properly the question concerning the meaning of being. The intricacies of Heidegger's appropriation of the *Logical Investigations* are accurately explained by Françoise Dastur in her article „Heidegger und die 'Logischen Untersuchungen',“ *Heidegger Studies* 7 (1991): 37-51.

⁴²⁴ Following on from Derrida's reading of Husserl, one can specify the Husserlian view in question as follows: "Expressions as meaningful signs are a twofold going-forth beyond itself of the sense (*Sinn*) in itself, existing in consciousness, in the with-oneself or before-oneself which Husserl first determined as 'solitary mental life.' Later, after the discovery of the transcendental reduction, he will describe this solitary life of the soul as the noetic-noematic sphere of consciousness." *Speech and Phenomena*, 32-33.

⁴²⁵ *Zollikon Seminars*, 261/208. "Die Konstitution eines Gegenstandes des Bewußtseins vollzieht sich nach ihm so, daß primär die hyletischen Daten, reine Sinnesempfindungen, gegeben sind und daß diese Daten dann noematisch, das heißt, durch das Denken, eine Bedeutung bekommen. Dem reiß wird mit anderen Worten eine Bedeutung zugesprochen durch einen psychischen Akt. Das Ganze ist indessen eine reine Konstruktion."

⁴²⁶ *Logical Investigations*, Vol. 2, 117.

⁴²⁷ See *Speech and Phenomena*, 3.

Thus, contrary to Husserl's view, which is taken here as an instance of the metaphysical subjectivism inaugurated by Descartes,⁴²⁸ Heidegger suggests that our comportments display an existential significance, an embodied meaning, which is pervaded by ontological dispositions and, thereby, is not founded on hyletic data or given sensations. That is to say, gestures and bodily comportments are not "expressions," nor are they mere indications in Husserl's sense.

In the dialogical context of the Zollikon seminars, during the session that took place in May 14, 1965, and which is part of an ongoing discussion concerning the problematic of the body, Heidegger suggests that the experience of significance is essentially gestural, and criticizes explicitly the understanding of gesture as "expression." He elucidates this point examining a simple movement of the hand:

I just saw how Dr. K, was 'passing' his hand over his forehead. And yet I did not observe a change of location and position of one of his hands, but I immediately noticed that he was thinking of something difficult. How should we characterize this movement of the hand? As a movement of expression? Admittedly, if it is a movement that expresses something which is internal, then this characterization only states the effect of the movement. But nothing whatsoever is said yet about the kind of movement itself as a hand movement. We specify this hand movement as a 'gesture' [*Gebärde*]. Even when I place the watch on the table, I move within a gesture. And the hand? How does it belong to me? The hand belongs to my arm. Putting the watch away is not only a movement of the hand, but also of the arm, the shoulder. It is *my* movement. I moved myself.⁴²⁹

Specifically, Heidegger qualifies the movement of the hand as gesture, but then he suggests that they involve my entire body and, ultimately, my entire being. For the movements of my body carry my being in the world. As Heidegger expresses it, gestures are

⁴²⁸ See *Zollikon Seminars*, 185/142.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 115/89. "Eben sah ich, wie Herr Dr. K. mit der Hand über seine Stirne >fährt<. Allein: ich habe nicht eine Orts- und Lageveränderung einer seiner Hände beobachtet, sondern ich habe ihm unmittelbar angesehen, daß er sich etwas Schwieriges überlegt. Wie sollen wir diese Handbewegung kennzeichnen? Als Ausdrucksbewegung? Zugegeben, es sei eine Bewegung, die etwas Inneres ausdrückt, dann ist mit dieser Kennzeichnung allenfalls festgestellt, was die Bewegung leistet; aber damit ist noch gar nichts über die Art der Bewegung selbst als Handbewegung gesagt. Wir bestimmen die Handbewegung als *Gebärde*. Auch wenn ich die Uhr auf den Tisch lege, bewege ich mich in einer *Gebärde*. Und die Hand? Wie gehört sie zu mir? Die Hand gehört zu meinem Arm. Das Uhrablegen ist nicht nur eine Bewegung der Hand, sondern auch des Armes, der Schulter. Es ist meine Bewegung. Ich bewege mich."

themselves an exposure of the way we stand in relation to the world and others. I take this to mean that in gesturing one somehow retrieves the moment of birth, one's being-thrown in the world, namely, the intensive passage from nothingness to being, from invisibility to visibility. For, as I have often indicated, the "self" of *my* body is in each case openness, exposure to the world.

Heidegger remarks, indeed, that in Dr. K's movement it is manifest that he is thinking something difficult. And this remark suggests that even a simple, quite ordinary movement, is a gesture that cannot be restricted to an objective time and place. That is to say, the gesture is fundamentally a hint, a trace. In this case, the gesture is itself the trace of an invisibility, a thought, and an attunement: a sense of difficulty. Most probably, this reference to the relation between hand and thinking is not incidental, for already in 1951, in *What is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger claims that "...thinking guides and sustains every gesture of the hand,"⁴³⁰ implying that the body, in each movement, circumscribes an invisibility, a withdrawal that calls for thinking.⁴³¹

In the Zollikon seminars Heidegger discusses the theme of gesture in relation to psychic problems such as stress, and their "manifestation" in behavior. He argues, then, that the so-called mental or psychic states are dependent upon our primordial encounter with others in the world.⁴³² In this context, he suggests that gestures reveal an affective engagement with others: when the other cries we *see* tears, and sadness, not a composite of water plus something else, and when someone blushes we immediately see it as

⁴³⁰ *What is Called Thinking*, 26/23. "Das Denken leitet und trägt jede Gebärde der Hand."

⁴³¹ As Stephen Mulhall argues, in this case the hand is a metonymic figure for the whole human body. See Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 298.

⁴³² Heidegger's analysis, thus, implies premises essentially different to those of Husserl's analysis of "intentional feelings" in the *Logical Investigations* (Vol. 2), Investigation V, 106-12.

embarrassment, fever, or heat, never just a sheer, red surface.⁴³³ Heidegger emphasizes this point in the analysis of blushing, which I mentioned in an earlier chapter. Indeed, Heidegger claims that blushing is not expression but gesture, “... insofar as the one who blushes *is related to his fellow human beings*. With this you see how bodiliness has a peculiar ‘ecstatic’ meaning. I emphasize this to such a degree in order to get you away from the misinterpretation of ‘expression’!”⁴³⁴

One may think, mistakenly, that Heidegger opposes the *activity* of expression to the *passivity* of gesture, for Heidegger presents gestures as traces of the way the others and the world affect us. But the point Heidegger wants to emphasize is that gestures are not actions that we initiate and dominate, but rather events that we carry or endure. For this reason, as I have often indicated, gestures cannot be properly qualified in terms of the binary opposition between passivity and activity. For the receptivity of gestures is also a certain doing, an active openness, a response to the claim of being. In this context, it is important to remember the distinction between essential gestures, or the essential dimension of gestures, and voluntary actions or passions. For gestures take place before we apprehend ourselves as subjects, they contain a depth that cannot be reduced to the level of ontic phenomena.

With regard to this, in the Zollikon seminars Heidegger recalls the difference between ordinary feelings, and “psycho-somatic” phenomena in general, and what in *Being and Time* is defined as “ontological disposition” [*Befindlichkeit*]. He remarks that “ontological dispositions” are Dasein’s attuned “relationship to the world, to the Da-sein-with [*Mitdasein*]

⁴³³ See *Zollikon Seminars*, 78-82.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 118/91; my emphasis. “...*insofern der Errötende auf die Mitmenschen bezogen ist. Damit sehen Sie, wie die Leiblichkeit diesen eigentümlichen ekstatischen Sinn hat. Dies betone ich so sehr, um sie von der Ausdruck-Mißdeutung wegzubringen.*” It is worth noticing that Heidegger concludes this passage accusing “French psychologists” of understanding psychic phenomena on the basis of the idea of “expression,” that is, relating them to internal states and, thereby, overlooking the ecstatic dimension of the body as relationality and affectivity.

other humans, and to itself.”⁴³⁵ Furthermore, he continues, ontological dispositions hinge on the claim of being, that is, on “...the human being’s being exposed [*Ausgesetztheit*] toward beings as a whole [*des seiende im Ganzen*].”⁴³⁶ Based on these distinctions, one might say that gestures are simultaneous to the primordial disclosure of beings.

Gestures respond to the original event of disclosure in such a way that the co-dependence between being and human beings become manifest. For in gesturing I show myself, I say myself, I become word, as I am thrown into a tradition, a destiny, and a horizon of intelligibility. At this point, I should recall that Dasein’s particular way of finding itself in the world, its thrownness, is structurally articulated with understanding and language. In this regard, Heidegger says: “Thrownness [*Geworfenheit*] and understanding [*Verstehen*] mutually belong together in a correlation whose unity is determined through language. Here language is to be understood as a [primordial] ‘saying’ [*Sage*], in which beings as beings, that is, in view of their being, show themselves.”⁴³⁷ In this particular case, Heidegger refers to language [*Sprache*] as saying, and determines it as the original event of disclosure that yokes together thrownness and understanding. In this way, Heidegger reinterprets and reformulates the relation between the different constituents of existence, as they are described in *Being and Time*, in light of a more fundamental unity.

In a conversation with Medard Boss, dated March 9, 1966, Heidegger makes express reference to the structural components of existence pointing out that attunement or ontological disposition [*Befindlichkeit*], understanding, and discourse [*Rede*] are equiprimordial. He also indicates that “ontologically disposed understanding in itself is a saying, a showing

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 182/139. “*Sie ist die das Dasein be-stimmende Gestimmtheit seines jeweiligen Bezugs zur Welt, zum Mitdasein der Mitmenschen und zu sich selbst.*”

⁴³⁶ Ibid. “*...ist jedoch ihrerseits wiederum fundiert in der Ausgesetztheit des Menschen an das Seinede im Ganzen.*”

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 182-83/139; modified. “*Geworfenheit und Verstehen gehören wechselseitig zusammen in einer Zusammengehörigkeit, deren Einheit durch die Sprache bestimmt ist. Sprache ist here zu denken als Sagen, in dem Seiendes als Seiendes, das heißt aus dem Hinblick auf Sein sich zeigt.*”

of something.”⁴³⁸ Contrasting this remark with the passage quoted above, one can infer that saying unifies different moments of language in such a way that “attuned understanding” is taken as a modality of saying.

Let me, then, reformulate this transition from language as articulation of discourse, of *Rede*, to language as *Sage*, which is developed in the Zollikon seminars. In *Being and Time* language [*Sprache*] is grounded on discourse [*Rede*], which is equiprimordial with understanding and attunement. These structural components of existence are co-originary moments of Being-in, wherein language appears as a moment of articulation. In the Zollikon seminars, following the trajectory of his works after the so-called turn, Heidegger revises his initial position and refers to “saying” [*Sage*] as the most primordial moment of openness to the claim of being. This primordial moment is itself the initial articulation of a trace, a primordial word that is a gesture, an attuned responsiveness to others and the world. Hence, Heidegger understands the structural components of existence in terms of a more primordial unity, to the extent that language appears as ground and, thereby, as ungrounded, as *Abgrund*. As Heidegger explains, this means that the word is not a term in the relationship with something external to it, nor the expression of a pre-established meaning, but rather the very movement of disclosure. In the Zollikon seminars, in the context of a discussion on bodiliness, Heidegger formulates this idea as follows:

A word is *not* a relationship. A word discloses [*erschliesst*]. It opens up. The decisive moment of language is significance [*Bedeutung*]. Sounds also belong to language, but they are not the fundamental [characteristics]. I can understand the same meaning in different languages. The essential character of language is the ‘saying,’ that a word says something, not that it sounds. A word shows something. Saying means showing. Language is the showing [of something].”⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 263/211; modified. “Das befindliche Verstehen ist in sich ein Sagen, ein Zeigen.”

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 233/185. “Das Wort ist keine Beziehung; das Wort erschließt, öffnet. Das Entscheidende der Sprache ist die Bedeutung. Das Lautliche gehört auch zur Sprache, ist aber nicht das Fundamentale. Ich kann in verschiedenen Sprachen sprachlich dasselbe meinen. Das wesentliche der Sprache ist das Sagen, daß ein Wort etwas sagt, nicht daß es lautet. Daß ein Wort etwas zeigt. Sagen = zeigen. Die Sprache ist das Zeigende.”

Heidegger claims that the word is not a relationship, indicating that the word is significance at work; it is not a static term, but rather an essential gesture, a fundamental comportment: showing. It is the notion of signification or meaning that is important in this context, for it alludes to the movement of the word as saying, as primordial openness. Precisely, immediately after this passage on the word as showing, Heidegger remarks that we stand in the clearing of being, to the extent that in dealing with something we are always simultaneously opened to the world as a whole.

In this way, Heidegger suggests that the word appears as word only insofar as it is itself a region, an existential space: openness. It is not sound but, as Merleau-Ponty would say, “an absolute emptiness.”⁴⁴⁰ Indeed, one cannot grasp the word as word, as significant word. One can only catch a glimpse of it indirectly, while following its spacings and deferrals. Adding to Merleau-Ponty’s reading, one could say here that language is kept alive as “said” insofar as it gives itself through gestures, insofar as it preserves a performative dimension.⁴⁴¹

Let me recapitulate and conclude this section by saying that the emptiness or essential silence of the word, and of gesture, is set as a claim one must respond to: a significant and pressing silence. Taking into account Heidegger’s qualification of all human comportment as gestural,⁴⁴² one could say that if gesture is the *immediate* saying or showing of something, and if showing presupposes the openness to what has primordially been given and said, then it follows that all gestural showing, all essential comportment is responsive, the resonance of the originary truth of being, the truth we dwell in. Heidegger sketches out

⁴⁴⁰ *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 60/49.

⁴⁴¹ See *ibid.*

⁴⁴² As was indicated in one of our initial reflections on Heidegger’s definition of gesture, in the course of the Zollikon seminars Heidegger claims that all human comportment is gestural.

this argument as follows: “The existential relationship cannot be objectified. It’s basic essence is one’s being concerned and letting oneself be concerned. [It is] a responding, a claim, an answering for, a being responsive on grounds of the clearedness of the relationship. ‘Comportment’ is the way I stand in my relationship to what concerns me in each case, the manner one responds to beings.”⁴⁴³

The “existential relationship” cannot be objectified because it is grounded in openness, thrownness, a pre-objective receptivity. The example of blushing is of particular significance, for it indicates that our entire being allows itself to be affected by things before any direct intervention on our part. This comportment cannot be reduced to the level of merely ontic phenomena because it stems from *Grund-Stimmungen*. As I have often remarked, fundamental moods and attunements have the atmospheric character of a voice [*Stimmung*] pervading the totality of our living space, and preceding our particular understanding of beings. In this way, the gestural articulation of language and the body, which implies our openness to an inextricable ground of significations, involves a comprehension of our bodily being as *Stimmung*. Indeed, the way the body announces its own presence to us has the character of a feeling, a resonance or a tremor, whose being may be characterized as a voice.

One may say that “having” a body means, fundamentally, to have a voice, to have the gift of the word. But what it means to have a voice is not simply to be able to utter words; rather, to be attuned, to be able to hear, to be exposed to or opened to a world that transcends us and traverses us. I shall consolidate this argument by exploring the genesis of

⁴⁴³ Zollikon Seminars, 232/185. “Die existentielle Beziehung läßt sich nicht vergegenständlichen. Ihr Grundwesen ist das Angegangensein und Sichangehenlassen, ein Entsprechen, ein Anspruch, ein Antworten, ein Verantworten auf Grund des in sich Gelichtetseins des Bezuges. >Verhalten< = die Weise, wie ich jeweils in meinem Bezug zum mich Angehenden stehe, die Weise, wie man dem seiendem entspricht.”

the relation between language and *Stimmung*, and its articulations within Heidegger's reflections on gesture.

Gesture, Voice and Stimmung in the Orbit of *Being and Time*

The sensible dimension of the voice, and its intrinsic relation to our ontological dispositions and attunements, is a problem Heidegger briefly hints at in *Being and Time* while examining the themes of language and discourse in §34. He shows that discourse is essentially double, that it does not communicate something univocally, in one direction; rather, it always “voices itself” [*Sichausprechen*], in saying something “else,” in pointing to something. Thus, it seems, the indicative and the sensible character of language are gathered in the melodic unity of the voice. Thereby, Heidegger indicates that discourse articulates itself in the sensible modulations of language as the harmonic structuring of the voice. Although Heidegger talks of speaking, or voicing “out,” as if he were talking of expressions in the Husserlian sense, he underscores the fact that the voice does not express something internal, something different to its own sensible being, as happens paradigmatically in poetic language. He suggests that the exteriority of the voice is not an objective exteriority, but rather the unfolding of existential possibilities. He says precisely:

All discourse about...which communicates in what it says has at the same time the character of *voicing itself*. In talking, Da-sein expresses itself not because it has been initially cut off as “something internal” from something outside but because as being-in-the-world it is already “outside” when it understands. What is expressed is precisely this being outside, that is, the actual mode of attunement (of mood) which we showed to pertain to the full disclosedness of being-in. Being-in and its attunement are made known in discourse and indicated in language by intonation, modulation, in the tempo of talk “in the way of speaking.” The communication of the existential possibilities of attunement, that is, the disclosing of existence, can become the true aim of “poetic” speech.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 215-16/157, modified: the English version translates *Sichausprechen* as “expression,” which is correct, but in the context of our argument this translation may be misleading, for this reason we decided to translate it with the verb “to voice.” “Alle Rede über..., die in ihrem Geredeten mitteilt, hat zugleich den Character des Sichausprechens. Redend spricht sich Dasein aus, nicht weil es zunächst als »Inneres« gegen ein Draußen abgekapselt ist, sondern weil es als In-der-Welt-sein westehend schon »draußen« ist. Das Ausgesprochene ist gerade das Draußensein, das heißt die jeweilige Weise der Befindlichkeit (Der Stimmung), von der gezeigt wurde, daß sie die volle Erschlossenheit des In-Seins betrifft.

This is the only passage in *Being and Time* that refers to “poetic speech.” And, as I indicated in earlier chapters, it foreshadows some of the cardinal questions developed in Heidegger’s essay on the work of art. Now I suggest that this passage reveals the way in which Heidegger approaches the gestural dimension of language and its relation to the problem of attunement. One can see, indeed, that Heidegger qualifies the sensible dimension of speech other than as mere noise, without underestimating the importance of bodiliness. Specifically, Heidegger qualifies the sensible character of discourse in terms of the intonation of the voice, the *way* of speaking. For in poetic speech the “indicative” character of speech is not referred to as an extrinsic element, but rather to what could be called its own *presencing*. That is to say, the voice presents itself as pure voice, as the event of saying or showing in its ongoing state: dis-closure. Thus, the attuned understanding pervading the tonality of the voice is just a possibility or latency of meaning: a meaning still to come. Or rather, one may say, the attuned signification of speech is the unfolding of meaning as possibility. This means that, in calling attention to itself, speech undergoes a transfiguration and becomes something other than sheer “material” vibration, it appears precisely as voice, as *my* voice.

Presumably, poetic speech interlaces language and factual existence, for in poetic speech language resonates with existential, not merely conceptual, significance. In poetic speech we are thrown in language as something we live from within, not as an external means of communication. Heidegger does not explain this point here, yet the context of the passage indicates that poetic speech does not simply use language, making it disappear as *means* of communication; rather, poetic speech experiences language. Poetic speech plays

Der sprachliche Index der zur Rede gehörenden Bekundung des befindlichen In-Seins liegt im Tonfall, der Modulation, im Tempo der Rede, »in der Art des Sprechens«. Die Mitteilung der existenziellen Möglichkeiten der Befindlichkeit, das heißt das Erschließen von Existenz, kann eigenes Ziel der »dichtenden« Rede werden.”

with the sounding of the words, their peculiar espaciality such as it is adumbrated in a verse, and their rhythm, that is, their capacity to harmonize with each other. In short, one might say that poetic speech reveals the word as the latency of an attunement, an accord.

In his lecture course from 1929-30, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger takes up the problem of attunement again and, eventually, applies it to poetry and art. Already in the introductory reflections on the nature of philosophy, Heidegger calls art, including poetry, the “sister” of philosophy, because they both involve our relatedness to being as a whole, that is, they involve fundamental attunements.⁴⁴⁵ Thus, although Heidegger does not explore specifically the problem of art and poetry in the course of these lectures, what he says on boredom reveals indirectly the bonds between philosophy and art or poetry. Let me examine this point in more detail.

As Heidegger explains, the crucial step in philosophy has to do with the possibility of being “within the whole.”⁴⁴⁶ Heidegger explains this point by showing that we cannot understand what philosophy is without philosophizing ourselves, and philosophizing depends on our capacity to awaken fundamental attunements. This means that philosophizing requires that we listen to the words or hints that come out of a fundamental attunement, a *Grund-Stimmung*. In this case, Heidegger focuses on boredom, the attunement that sets us in the long “while” of the pure passing of time, wherein the totality of the world seems oppressing but, in so doing, reveals its invisible and inextricable bonds to us.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ See *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 7/5. This is a provocative claim, for in opposition to the traditional philosophical stance against poetry, Heidegger indicates his interest in coming to proximity with poetry, which in turn implies a revaluation of the sensible beyond metaphysical frameworks.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 8/5. “*Im Ganzen*.”

⁴⁴⁷ Jan Slaby pinpoints in few lines how is it that boredom works as a fundamental attunement that is condition for philosophizing. He says: “Boredom, as the experience of *Lange-Weile* —of a time that is becoming long — points towards *time* as that which the fundamental questions of metaphysics are intimately tied up with.” Jan Slaby, “The other side of existence: Heidegger on boredom,” in *Habitus in Habitat II -Other Sides of Cognition*, ed.

What is remarkable in Heidegger's analysis of boredom is that it reveals the ontological character of moods or attunements. For, strictly speaking, one cannot talk philosophically about boredom without presuming one's involvement in boredom itself, without *awakening* it. If one's philosophical thinking on boredom is to be philosophical at all, it cannot simply posit boredom as an object of reflection but rather must immerse in the grounds of boredom itself as an attunement that was already there, as a structural constituent of our being.⁴⁴⁸

Heidegger remarks, then, that fundamental attunements can only be awakened, rather than produced, precisely because they are *radical* phenomena, which cannot be derived from other phenomena, nor detached from existence. In a sense, existence itself, as the ecstatic openness to the world, is attunement. Heidegger explains this point by saying: "Man only finds himself involved and affected at all if he is already capable of being affected in his Dasein and can find himself gripped in this ability to be affected, indeed if this possibility of *being gripped* lies in his very essence. This essential possibility of being gripped belongs to the essence of man insofar as his Da-sein always –but not exclusively –implies being attuned."⁴⁴⁹ Dasein is always attuned insofar as existing necessarily implies the capacity to be affected and being "gripped" [*Ergriffenheit*]; in one word: vulnerability.

Along these lines, one could say that the "tone" [*Stimmung*] of existence, the tune of Dasein, attunement, presupposes a milieu of affectivity, which may be qualified as a general

Sabine Flach, Daniel Margulies and Söffner Jan, 101-120 (Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2010), 108.

⁴⁴⁸ Slaby accurately remarks that for Heidegger boredom is not a state we produce: "So in order to perform the phenomenological act of waking us up to boredom, there is no need to create a state of boredom in the first place. Instead, one has to inhibit the activities and distractions that routinely fill most of one's regular life. Once these shallow surface activities are halted, boredom is revealed to be already there, lurking beneath the surface of dispersing activities." Ibid., 109.

⁴⁴⁹ *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 268/181. "Getroffen und betroffen wird er nur dann, wenn der Mensch in seinem Dasein treffbar und in der Betreffbarkeit ergreifbar ist, wenn in seinem Wesen die Möglichkeit des Ergriffenseins gehört zum Wesen des Menschen, sofern sein Da-sein immer –aber nicht nur –heißt: Gestimmtsein."

capacity to be affected, moved, gripped and transformed. For this reason, I presume, Heidegger explains the possibility of awakening an attunement as a transformative move, as a modulation of existence. He says: “Where there is attunement, there is the possibility of change of attunement, and thus also of *awakening attunement*.”⁴⁵⁰

Having said this, let me briefly refer to the problematic of gesture. As I have indicated, to be attuned means that one has been initiated into the qualitative idiom of the sensible, for attunements are a silent, yet *sensible*, communication with others and the world. In other words, that one sees something, or that one understand another person, requires that one participate in the affective dialogue that remains dormant *in* the manifest, public world. Attunements constitute, in this sense, the invisible thread that keeps us tied to the same world, the same horizon of intelligibility and visibility.

One may say, therefore, that attunements require a subtle diacritical capacity of interpretation that pertains to the bodying forth of the body. For, as Heidegger often suggests, a subtle change in the tone of voice, or in the tonality of the color of the face, or in the movements of the hand, would make the entire difference between one attunement or another. This would explain in part why Heidegger says that poetic speech communicates the existential possibilities of attunement, as he does in *Being and Time*. For poetic speech plays with the enigmatic possibilities of the sensible dimension of speech, letting the words emerge as spontaneous gestures, which adumbrate zones or regions of significance, and which contain primitive and subtle, quasi-instinctual meanings. Presumably, the poetic word is the retrieval of a primitive effort of expression, a struggle to find the words that name what is pressing or important in a given situation. In this sense, it is the word itself, in its capacity to resonate “there,” that grants the possibility of communication.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid. “Wo Stimmung da ist, Wandel der Stimmung und so auch Weckung von Stimmung möglich.”

Let me conclude this analysis with a brief reference to Merleau-Ponty's work, which bears important similarities to what has just been said. In *The Prose of the World* Merleau-Ponty meditates on the sensible dimension of language and says: "With my throat, my voice, my intonation, and, of course, with the words, with my preferred constructions and the time I allow each part of the phrase, I compose an enigma that has only one solution such that the other person, silently accompanying this melody bristling with changes, with switches and falls, can manage to take it into his own repertoire..."⁴⁵¹ In line with this, one may say that the voice composes an enigma with only one solution because meaning is something that emerges from the unique event of speech as saying, from the singular gesture that makes it alive as a trace to be retrieved and carried further by others.

In this sense, poetic speech has a decisive importance inasmuch as it makes salient the gestural dimension of language, and its intrinsic correlation with attunement, a relation that generally remains dormant or inconspicuous in our ordinary dealings with language. Yet, Heidegger unfolds the ontological presuppositions of this position only after the so-called turn in his thinking, when poetry comes to the forefront as the essential companion of thinking.

***Stimmung* and Body: The Lectures on Logic from 1934**

I have indicated that language and *Stimmungen* are imbricated in what could be called the gestural dimension of speech: the tonality of the voice, the way of speaking. Following on from Heidegger's approach to poetic speech in *Being and Time*, I have remarked that the communication of the existential possibilities of attunement may become the proper task of

⁴⁵¹ *The Prose of the World*, 42-43/ 30. "Ce n'est pas en déposant toute ma pensée dans des mots où les autres viendraient l'y puiser que je communique avec eux; c'est en composant, avec ma gorge, ma voix, mon intonation, et aussi bien sûr les mots, les constructions que je préfère, le temps que je choisis de donner à chaque partie de la phrase, une énigme telle qu'elle ne comporte qu'une solution..."

poetic speech because poetic speech preserves the affective dimensionality of our relation to language. But the problem of the relationship between poetic speech and attunement becomes particularly important later, the 1930s, at the time of Heidegger's decisive encounter with Hölderlin. Let me, therefore, consider Heidegger's approach to the bodily dimension of attunements, as he develops it in his lectures on Logic from 1934, the same year of Heidegger's first lectures on Hölderlin.

In the 1934 Freiburg summer lecture, *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*,⁴⁵² Heidegger addresses the problem of attunement and expands on the question concerning the bodily dimension of attunements. At this point, Heidegger takes into consideration the resonances between the terms “determination” [*Bestimmung*] and mood or attunement [*Stimmung*].⁴⁵³ With regard to this, he remarks that the “determination” of our essence as human beings is dependent on attunements. This means that attunements such as joy, annoyance, or even indifference, define the way in which one stands in the world and, moreover, the way in which one comes to understand and interpret things in general.⁴⁵⁴ Hence, attunements are fundamental phenomena determining the way we are “transposed” in the world; they are not subjective psychological experiences. Indeed, for Heidegger, psychologism misunderstands the true nature of affective dispositions. He says that “we misinterpret mood, because we do not want to see that precisely mood transposes us into

⁴⁵² Martin Heidegger, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, ed. Günter Seubold (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998). English: *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, trans. Wanda Torres Gregory and Yvonne Unna (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009). Hereafter with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

⁴⁵³ In the English version of this lecture the term *Stimmung* is translated as “mood.” Yet, in the context of our present research it seems more appropriate to translate it as “attunement” because this term preserves the reference to the musical idea of tone or tuning, which is present also in the German.

⁴⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, 151-52/125-26.

the whole of beings, that each time it first circumscribes the sphere of beings beforehand, as it discloses [eröffnet] and keeps open [offenhält] the sphere of beings.”⁴⁵⁵

In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger declares that what characterizes humanity is the possibility of transposedness [*Versetztheit*] into the world, including the animal world, i.e., the capacity to “set” itself in relation to what is manifest *as* such, and *as a whole*.⁴⁵⁶ In the text from 1934, Heidegger further elaborates on this idea and shows that transposedness is made possible by attunements. Along these lines, he suggests that one’s intimate pre-understanding of the meaning of being is first disclosed through moods. Heidegger says: “By virtue of mood, we are *exposed* [ausgesetzt] into the being [*das Sein*] that oppresses or elevates us. We are not first isolated in an I that is curled up in itself, that subsequently comes into a relationship with things, but we are each time already in a mood, which exposes us beforehand into beings themselves. We ourselves dwindle in such exposedness into the thereby manifest being [*Sein*].”⁴⁵⁷

Heidegger shows, thus, that moods or attunements contain an implicit understanding of the world. It is through attunements that the world appears, for instance, as threatening. Furthermore, Heidegger declares, in moods we do not recoil in a subjective self, instead we empty ourselves to leave room for things –which is another way of saying that we are transposed into the world. He says: “Precisely that which we like to characterize as that which is inner, and [which we] transfer into the mind, is not in there anywhere, like a stomach, but it is outside, and we are outside by virtue of it in each case. Mood determines

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 151/125. “Wir mißdeuten die Stimmung, weil wir nicht sehen wollen, daß gerade die Stimmung uns in das Ganze des Seienden versetzt, daß sie in vorbinnen den Umkreis des Seienden jeweils erst umgrenzt, indem sie den Umkreis des Seienden eröffnet und offenhält.”

⁴⁵⁶ See *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Chapter Five.

⁴⁵⁷ *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, 152/126. “Kraft der Stimmung sind wir ausgesetzt in das Sein, das uns bedrängt oder erhebt. Wir sind nicht zuerst abgesondert in ein in sich eingerolltes Ich, das nachträglich in ein Verhältnis zu den Dingen kommt, sondern wir sind jeweils schon in einer Stimmung, die uns im vorbinnen in das Seiende selbst aussetzt. Wir selbst schwinden in solcher Ausgesetztheit in das dabei offenbare Sein.”

us in such a manner that we stand essentially in the exposedness.”⁴⁵⁸ This passage is remarkable: in it Heidegger challenges the traditional oppositions between inside and outside and reverses their order. The apparently innocuous analogy between the mind and the stomach carries out this reversal. Heidegger suggests that, on the one hand, what we usually take to be the “exterior” dimension of our being, the body and its organs, constitute that which remains enclosed, encrypted and invisible in our exposure to the world. Indeed, one could note, even the skin becomes invisible as pure “physical” skin in everyday life, the skin is never just a tissue that makes possible a neutral touch; instead, it is intrinsically charged with meaning in such a way that we are forced to neutralize its power with clothing. On the other hand, what appears to be internal and invisible, our moods and attunements, is precisely that which first comes to presence in our encounter with others, that which determines the way we stand out in the world, set out [*ausgesetzt*] with things and others. In line with this, one could say that the way we “stand” in the world, our own posture, can only be determined in light of the prefigurations of our attunements. And attunements, in turn, presuppose rootedness in nature, a sense of grounding, of belonging to the earth. This is, for example, what Heidegger suggests in the following passage, which continues the passage just quoted above:

That which is visible and graspable of ourselves from the outside, the body, which we sense from inside, seems to be the properly main thing in the present-at-hand human being. With its help, we stand with both legs firmly on the ground. The body, not the dangling in exposedness through mood, counts thus as supporting ground. However, what do legs, body and other extremities mean here? If we were to have a dozen or more legs, we would not then stand firmer on the ground. We would not stand at all, if this standing were not attuned-through by moods, by virtue of which earth, ground; in short: nature first bears, preserves and threatens us.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid. “Gerade das, was wir gern als Innerliches bezeichnen und ins Gemüt welegen, ist nicht irgendwo darinnen, wie in einem Magen, sondern es ist draußen, und wir sind kraft seiner jeweils draußen. Die Stimmung bestimmt uns dergestalt, daß wir wesensmäßig in der Ausgesetztheit stehen.”

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. “Das von außen her an uns Sichtbare, der Leib, den wir von innen her spüren, scheint am vorhandenen Menschen das eigentlich Trägende zu sein. Mit seiner Hilfe stehen wir mit beiden Beinen fest auf der Erde. Der Leib, nicht das Schweben in der

As Heidegger explains, the very sense of ground is something that can only be properly determined on the basis of moods or attunements [*Stimmungen*]. Standing firmly on the ground is a mode of being, a way of relating to being, a sense of appropriation or belonging to the world and to the earth. Hypothetically, even if one loses one's ground, if one does not stand firmly on the ground, there must be a grounding attunement on the basis of which one may notice such loss. That is to say, steadiness or instability are primarily ways of responding to the world, which cannot be derived from a merely physical state of affairs: I might feel hesitant and unstable walking on twelve legs, whereas a physical impairment might compel me to embrace my situation with absolute resoluteness, forcing me to stand firmly on the ground. Put differently, attunements pervade the ground against which beings are delineated as such particular beings: the sun, the moon, the other's body, the ripe fruit we see or the computer we write with, all of these things are given as such only with the colors and substance of affectivity. As Heidegger puts it, attunements are somehow the voice of nature, they show what is dangerous, threatening or essential. Along these lines, one could say that attunements are the closest we can get to the primordial logos of nature. For how could we come to *know* what is beautiful, desirable, repulsive, or hateful, if the secret codes to interpret these "meanings" were not at work in the atmosphere that we inhabit and breathe, and which has nurtured our beings before we came to have any sense of our own self?

Ausgesetztheit durch die Stimmung, gilt so als der tragende Grund. Aber was besagen hier Beine, Leib und sonstige Gliedmaßen? Wenn wir ein Dutzend und mehr Beine hätten, wir stünden dann nicht fester auf der Erde. Wir stünden überhaupt nicht, wenn dieses Stehen nicht von Stimmungen durchstimmt wäre, kraft deren uns Boden, Erde, kurz: Natur erst trägt, behütet und bedroht."

It is in this context that one must understand why Heidegger claims that the body is “suspended from the power of moods,”⁴⁶⁰ for strictly speaking we appropriate our own body, we come to “know” that this body is intimately ours and needs care, through moods. As I indicated above, the necessity or urgency to breathe, the need of support, the fear for what may come, all these phenomena presuppose that we already exist within an affective milieu, that we are in communication with the world as whole, and that we are exposed to a primordial sense of relevance or significance. In Heidegger’s words: “In the affirmation of the body’s being-born-by mood, the body does not become fancifully spiritualized, but precisely by virtue of the interwovenness in mood, corporeality has for us that which is oppressive and relaxing, that which is confusing or preserving.”⁴⁶¹

In sum, Heidegger suggests that the lived body is itself rooted in the communicability of attunement, it hinges on “the interwovenness in mood” [*der Verwobenheit in die Stimmung*], to such an extent that even what we take to be the most concrete or intense *bodily* experiences are carried through the milieu of affectivity, which is essentially invisible, non-objectifiable.

From *Stimmungen* to Poetry: “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry”

It is widely known that the so-called turn in Heidegger’s philosophy, whose cardinal motifs can be traced back to the beginning of the 1930s, has to do with a decisive transformation in relation to language. This turn is itself a transformation in thinking, and occurs as the turn towards the thinking of the truth of being, in such a way “...that the truth of being come to language and that thinking attain to this language.”⁴⁶² As John Sallis

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 153/126. “...aufgehängt in der Macht der Stimmungen.”

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 153-126/27. “In der Behauptung des Getragenseins des Leibes durch die Stimmung wird der Leib nicht phantastisch vergeistigt, sondern gerade kraft der Verwobenheit in die Stimmung hat die Leiblichkeit für uns das Bedrängende und Lösende, das Verwirrende oder Bewahrende.”

⁴⁶² *Letter on Humanism*, 344-246. “...daß die Wahrheit des Seins zur Sprache komme und daß das Denken in diese Sprache gelange.” On the theme of Heidegger’s turn, see also Martin Heidegger, “Preface Letter,” in *Heidegger. Through*

expresses it, “the problem of language directs us into that of the reversal, and conversely. The two problems are intertwined, they *belong together*.”⁴⁶³ Thus, the necessary question is: how does Heidegger think the sensible dimension of language and attunement after the turn, and in the context of his decisive encounter with Hölderlin?

In the lectures on Hölderlin from 1936,⁴⁶⁴ particularly in the lecture “*Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry*,” one can find important indications to elucidate the problem of language and attunement. Specifically, Heidegger shows that language determines our exposure to the world as something that is never indifferent to us. He suggests that language inaugurates the possibility of a threat, a danger, namely, the possibility of being deeply affected by beings: “Danger is the the threat that being poses to being itself. But it is only by virtue of language at all that man is exposed to something manifest: *beings* which press upon him and inflame him in his existence, or *nonbeings* which deceive and disappoint him.”⁴⁶⁵

As Heidegger explains, language grants the possibility of disclosure because it first gives significance to things: a site, a locus, a place in the world. Heidegger claims, precisely, that “language first creates the manifest place [*Stätte*] of this threat to being.”⁴⁶⁶ I take this to mean that language is a place that brings about the possibility of exposure and, thereby, the possibility of misunderstanding, dissimulation, deception and danger. The word is, in this sense, the ground wherein hearing and speaking come together, the site that allows for

Phenomenology to Thought, trans. William Richardson, viii-xxiv (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), xvii-xxiii.

⁴⁶³ John Sallis, *Language and Reversal*, Vol. III: Language, in *Martin Heidegger. Critical Assessments*, ed. Christopher Macann, 190-211 (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 202.

⁴⁶⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.4 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981). English: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, an imprint of Prometheus Books, 2000).

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 36-37/55. “*Gefahr ist Bedrohung des Seins durch Seiendes. Nun ist aber der Mensch erst kraft der Sprache überhaupt ausgesetzt einem Offenbaren, das als Seiendes den Menschen in seinem Dasein bedrängt und befeuert und als Nichtseiendes täuscht und enttäuscht.*”

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid. “*Die Sprache schafft erst die offenbare Stätte der Seinsbedrohung...*”

exchange and encounter.⁴⁶⁷ Along these lines, one may say that the word is a dynamic place, a space of freedom; what in the Zollikon seminars is characterized as a pure saying or showing. That is to say, the word clears a site insofar as it is essentially *poetic*: the setting of the truth, of disclosure, just as it happens in the work of art.

Inspired by Hölderlin, Heidegger understands the essence of the word in terms of the poetic word, and the poetic word as a gift, a free bestowal that is the foundation of a world: disclosure. The poetic word is a gift insofar as the poet lets the word say or show something on its own accord, he lets the being of the word appear in freedom. In this way, the poet speaks to let himself be enraptured by the excess of meaning, of being, that radiates from language, from the saying or showing of things. In a sense, it is the free radiance of things –the saying or showing of things themselves –that makes *necessary* the poetic, creative, institution of the word. Heidegger argues, indeed, that being and beings *must* be freely bestowed and created, and that “such free bestowal is a founding.”⁴⁶⁸

Here, Heidegger’s approach to the notion of institution or foundation [*Stiftung*] recalls the formulations from the end of the lecture on *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In that text, Heidegger remarks that the work of art is grounded in the poetic word and, in turn, the poetic word is the foundation that sets history in motion. For the poetic word is an inaugural effort to define the outline and significance of things, in such a way that they may be re-appropriated in the future. As Heidegger expresses it, the poetic word is a setting of the truth of being; it is a movement of disclosure that institutes a tradition, the world of a historical people whose future and limits remain open. Hence, as was suggested in the fourth chapter of the present work, the poetic word emerges as a gesture, an elusive event that is manifest

⁴⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 39/57.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 41/59. “*Solche freie Schenkung ist Stiftung.*”

as a trace or an outline, which is somewhat *unnecessary* or excessive in relation to anything given or available. In short, the poetic word is an event, *Ereignis*: the word that takes possession of us.

To conclude this section, let me recall Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of the relation between *Ereignis* and language in Heidegger. Merleau-Ponty argues, indeed, that language is *Ereignis* insofar as it is the institution of a mode of expression that is primordial and, therefore, cannot be restricted to a particular idiom.⁴⁶⁹ For any particular idiom or tradition presupposes an openness to the world, and language is originally entwined into the world, before it becomes a system. In this sense, the event of language is a re-setting in our origins, in openness, in such a way that we are given that which we must possess: "...we are transported to the place where we take possession of language (and especially to the place where it takes possession of us)."⁴⁷⁰ Paradoxically, this means that the primordial poetic word *imposes* itself as a donation –a gift that comes along with the world –; it *demand*s a work of re-interpretation and of free appropriation. In this regard, it seems to me, Heidegger touches on a cardinal point of the problematic of language as gesture. For, as Heidegger states and Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, the primordial word is a hint, an indication or outline that requires a continuation, it is the minimum trace necessary to make something visible without fixing its limits.

Essential Hints and Gestures

In *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry* Heidegger qualifies the poetic word as the transferring of hints from the gods to the people. Reading some of Hölderlin's verses from

⁴⁶⁹ See *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 52.

⁴⁷⁰ In the context of his later lectures on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty reads Heidegger's notion of *Stiftung* in relation to the *Ereignis*, as follows: "*Denken* is to be gathered in this *Ereignis*: we are dispersed outside of it. We set ourselves back up in it. cf. we rediscover the *Urstiftung* of which we are the *Endstiftung*. cf. *Was heisst Denken?*: we rediscover a path that the thing has already traversed." *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 61/50.

the poem “Rousseau,” Heidegger remarks that the saying of the poet is the “intercepting” [*Auffangen*] of the hints that constitute the immemorial language of the gods.⁴⁷¹ Heidegger’s interpretation suggests that the essential word can only be captured in a fleeting instant, in the blink of an eye, in a fragmentary vision. One might say, then, that the essential hint surpasses “mortal” limits because its provenance is not a particular historical fact, which may be represented objectively; rather, it is experienced as a gift, a *present* that leaps over the sequence of an ordinary course of events. Thus, Heidegger indicates, the essential word, the language of the gods, and the language that is the legacy of a people, is the language that is hint, essential signaling or gesturing. But what is an essential hint? And what is it supposed to indicate?

Heidegger responds to these questions in his lecture course on Hölderlin from 1934–35, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein."*⁴⁷² In this lecture, Heidegger explains that poetizing is “a saying of the type of the indicative making manifest.”⁴⁷³ Poetry, *Dichtung*, is *dictated* by the gods and this dictate or saying is “reiterated” or repeated [*Weiterwinken*] to the people.⁴⁷⁴ Thus, the poetic saying makes the gods manifest in their hinting or indicating, rather than as something meant or “observable” [*Betrachtbar*].⁴⁷⁵ Consequently, what is essentially transmitted through poetry is the hinting as pure hinting, namely, as the trace of an absence, a trace that is repeatable and transferrable only insofar as it remains empty.

⁴⁷¹ *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*, 46/63.

⁴⁷² Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, ed. Susanne Ziegler, Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.39 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999). English translation in preparation by William McNeill as *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germanien" and "Der Rhein,"* to be released on September 18, 2014.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30; my translation. “*Dichten: ein Sagen in der Art des weisenden Offenbarmachens.*”

⁴⁷⁴ See *ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

For Heidegger the hint [*Wink*] is different from the ordinary sign [*Zeichen*], the sign understood as a tool to point to something else and make it noticeable.⁴⁷⁶ Heidegger points out that the difference between the sign and the hint may be evident already in everyday gestures for salutation, for example, in the waving of our hands when meeting someone at the moment of arrival or departure.⁴⁷⁷ As Heidegger expresses it, the gesture of waving our hands while departing or arriving does not function as a sign, it does not intend to point to someone or something; rather, it is a hint. He further remarks that the gesture of salutation preserves the sense of proximity while departing, while the distance increases, or the sense of distance while arriving, while the proximity increases. In this way, the gesture yokes together distance and proximity, that is, the modulations of our invisible bonds to the others, the inner movements of our existential relations to others. This example is significant not only because it shows that hints are determined by a ground of existential significance, but also because it calls attention to the irreducible tension between visibility and invisibility that pervades our most simple bodily expressions. It is in this context that one must understand why Heidegger claims that “the gods hint, but simply insofar as they *are*.”⁴⁷⁸ Presumably, Heidegger underlines the reference to the verb “to be” because he intends to show that being is itself a hint, an elusive trace, an absence.

In this way, Heidegger suggests that hinting constitutes the essential language of existence, the language of our involvement in *being*. Heidegger claims, in fact, that existence is poetic because it needs to be founded, given: it cannot be earned.⁴⁷⁹ Thus, he understands

⁴⁷⁶ See *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ See *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 32; my translation. “*Die Götter winken aber einfach, indem sie sind.*”

⁴⁷⁹ See *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, 42/60.

existence as poetic foundation, donation, or gift [*Schenkung*].⁴⁸⁰ With regard to this, and following Derrida's reading of the gift, one might say that existence is a gift in the paradoxical sense of the gift: a present that is never present, a present or gift that withdraws its origins and grounds.⁴⁸¹ Along these lines, the primordial, paradoxical gift of existence is a hint, it gives itself in hints and gestures. That is to say, language and existence are intertwined, they are primordial gifts, or givens, that presuppose each other.

Indeed, one exists without knowing why, ignoring the ultimate source, the origin, the ground of existence. And the origin of existence is, however, hinted at in our own being, in the fact that we are. Concerning this, one could say that existing is the reiteration of the instituting gesture of being, the saying of being: the primordial exposure to the world. For existing is the gift *of* being. This gift is openness, clearing, withdrawal, and, therefore, essential freedom. But along with the gift of existence, of language, it comes the possibility of death, and the dissemination of the specters of death.

As Heidegger indicates, in the foundation of language and of the world, in the transmission of the poetic hints, lies the possibility of danger, of non-being. This primordial danger conceals the essential difference between being and beings, and between essential hints and signs. Put differently, the transmission of the poetic hints brings about the possibility of concealment, and the closing off of possibilities: the forgetfulness of being. In this way, the hints of the poet foreshadow the possibility of no possibility, death: *the* danger. To be a poet is to embrace the danger by communicating the hints. And to belong to a

⁴⁸⁰ With regard to this, Françoise Dastur explains that the poetic work is institutive, and essentially historical, insofar as it institutes the singular word that constitutes the identity of a people, and determines its destiny. See Françoise Dastur, "Le poésie comme origine (Hölderlin et Heidegger)," *Studia Phaenomenologica. Romanian Journal for Phenomenology* 3, no. Special Issue (2003): 83-98, 97-98.

⁴⁸¹ See Jacques Derrida, *Donner le temps* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1991), 21-38.

people is to embrace the danger by appropriating the hints. In both cases one is involved in the circle of history –in *a* history and *a* destiny [*Geschick*] –and finitude.

Having said this, one can say that the danger *is* in the hint, which is sent in time, opened to the future. For essential hints are empty hints, they are not *present*, they say nothing; therefore, they carry within them the imminent possibility of misunderstanding and loss. Hints are essentially invisible, absent, even though they resonate in visible marks.⁴⁸² Accordingly, one may say that the poetic hint, as essential word, is *Ereignis*, the involvement in a silent dialogue [*Gespräch*] with the saying of being, with the word that is itself flesh, and flows with us, carries us, appropriates us. Let me elucidate this relationship between language and the event, as it is developed in some of Heidegger's notes and lectures on language.

Hints, Signs and Gestures in *Zum Wesen der Sprache und zur Frage nach der Kunst*

In the years that followed these meditations on Hölderlin's poetry, Heidegger continues with his attempt to think about the distinction between essential word and sign-words, which remains a pressing difficulty. A decisive moment is when he distinguishes between language as pure means of communication and "expression," and *event-like* signs. With regard to this, in the notes entitled *Das Zeichen* included in the volume *Zum Wesen der Sprache und zur Frage nach der Kunst*, particularly in §45, Heidegger establishes a threefold distinction between the "thing-like sign" [*dinghafte Zeichen*], expressive signs [*ausdruckhaften Zeichen*], and the essential "event-like signs" [*ereignishafte Zeichen*].

⁴⁸² In this sense, one may say that hints are essential words, for as John Sallis explains examining Heidegger's lecture course on Parmenides, from 1942-43, "the fundamental meanings of words do not get effaced in the course of time, through use or perhaps misuse, but rather are always already effaced, concealed, apparent only in what is already derivative." John Sallis, *Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 166.

Heidegger argues that “‘thing-like’ signs show something in a different way and for other reasons than announcements, gestures, and comportments.”⁴⁸³ Gestures, he continues, may be taken as living signs and, in a sense, as external expression of an interior. Heidegger explains that “here ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ count already as a grounding schema for living beings.”⁴⁸⁴ Heidegger does not delve into this problem here. It is clear, however, that he intends to distinguish between an objective sign that is simply visible, and a living sign or gesture that has intrinsic depth and that may be tentatively –and mistakenly –characterized as the visible expression of an invisible interior. But a more fundamental characterization of the sign, what Heidegger calls *event-like* sign, is irreducible to the level of visible signs. For thing-like signs, expressions and language –understood in a narrow sense as a linguistic system – are derivative phenomena. Essential signs, Heidegger suggests, are event-like insofar as they cannot be determined on the basis of what is objectively given. To be precise, the event-like signs do not designate or represent anything. Rather, as Heidegger puts it, they show in “the abyss” [*Ab-grund*].⁴⁸⁵ Presumably, this means that essential signs are gestures of openness to being, in which beings are gathered in the movement of the gesture, not set apart as mere things; for “in the [act of] showing each being is in the event, inasmuch as it is cleared [*Gelichtet*] in being as appropriated [*als Geeignet*].”⁴⁸⁶ In this way, one might say that the event-like character of the sign must be defined as a certain engagement with things, in which things themselves are silently incorporated as part of our existence.

Specifically, in the context of this meditation on the essential sign, Heidegger indicates that the sign is what is most inconspicuous [*Das Unscheinbarste*] and without

⁴⁸³ *Zum Wesen der Sprache und zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 92; my translation. “Dinghafte Zeichen zeigen in anderer Weise und auf anderen Grunde als Verlautbarungen und Gesten und Gebärden.”

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., my translation. “»Innen« und »Außen« gilt hier schon [*als*] Grundschema des Lebendigen.”

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 89; my translation.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., my translation. “Jedes Seiende ist, sobald es im Sein als Geeignet gelichtet ist, im Zeigen in das Ereignis.”

obstrusiveness [*ohne Aufdrängnis*].⁴⁸⁷ Thus he suggests that before one comes to notice the showing of something, ordinary signs and things, one has already *received* a hint or indication about what this something is –or, more precisely, about the fact that that being *is* –, and this indication is silent. This essential sign is itself part of our ground and, therefore, it is without ground.

Heidegger intimates, then, that visible signs, words, gestures, and expressions are dependent on a silent showing or signaling that stems from the ground we dwell in. This ground is a non-ground because it is a clearing, an openness, and, thereby, the essential saying or showing is not comparable to any visible thing.⁴⁸⁸ In line with this, Heidegger develops an exploration of the essence of the sign, and of the act of indicating, which differs significantly from the analysis carried out in *Being and Time*, particularly in §17 and §18.

In *Being and Time* the sign is a peculiar thing or tool that refers to something else and, in so doing, “...raises the total meaning-context, the referential totality, into our circumspection,” as John Sallis indicates.⁴⁸⁹ In his notes on language, Heidegger meditates on the fundamental essence of the sign, as it is illuminated out of the truth of being, instead of thinking the sign from the point of view of the tool.⁴⁹⁰ From this perspective, the essential sign denotes “no-thing.”

Although in *Being and Time* signs are not taken as mere tools, for they make explicit a totality of significance,⁴⁹¹ Heidegger remarks that such analysis is predominantly determined by ontic characterizations of the sign.⁴⁹² For the essential sign does not raise the referential

⁴⁸⁷ See *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁸⁹ John Sallis, “Language and Reversal,” 194.

⁴⁹⁰ See *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 94-95.

⁴⁹¹ See *Being and Time*, 80/78.

⁴⁹² Heidegger points out that this is a limit pertaining to *Being and Time*’s analysis of the sign and the phenomenon of reference. See *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 94.

totality to our circumspection, nor does it reveal a meaning-context, but rather openness or disclosedness as such. To be precise, one could say that the essential sign is the event itself: “The showing of the sign is not an indication set in movement through representing, it is the appropriating event itself.”⁴⁹³ It is in this context that one must understand the depth of Hölderlin’s poetic indication, so decisive for Heidegger, which declares that we are a sign to be read or interpreted.⁴⁹⁴ One could say that we are a sign to be interpreted because we are the clearing. And this means that we are in a relentless state of indigence, of dispossession: our being is the openness to what is yet to be given, yet to come, and which shall never become present, even though it *has* us from the very beginning. Existing is, indeed, a waiting, a long while, and the prefiguration of silence and death. In existing we send ourselves as a hint to the future, as a promise of meaning, as word: a history, a destiny.

Precisely, in the course of these notes on language, Heidegger refers to the word as hint, and underscores that in this way “*the word appropriates humanity*.”⁴⁹⁵ He remarks that the event unfolds as wording,⁴⁹⁶ as hint or indication. This indication, he continues, is to be appropriated in gratitude, for gratitude is the receptivity that may release or bring something to presence.⁴⁹⁷ Here, one cannot help but think of a primordial dialogue, in which gratitude appears as an essential gesture or comportment that responds to other essential gestures: the initial gesture that says the word –a name, for example –and, thereby, *gives* existence.

This analysis foreshadows the correlation between thinking [*Denken*] and thanking [*Danken*], which Heidegger adumbrates in the course of the notes and lectures on language I

⁴⁹³ *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 88; my translation. “Das Zeigen des Zeichens ist nicht eine durch das Vorstellen in bewegung gesetzt Weisung, es ist das Ereignen selbst.”

⁴⁹⁴ See *What is Called Thinking?*, 11/9-10.

⁴⁹⁵ *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 79, my translation. “Das Wort ereignet den Menschen.”

⁴⁹⁶ In fact, in this same context, Heidegger notes that “The event words” [*Das Ereignis wortet*]. Ibid., 99; my translation.

⁴⁹⁷ See *ibid.*

have been exploring up to now,⁴⁹⁸ which is further developed in relation to “memory” [*Gedachtnis*], “the gathering of thought,”⁴⁹⁹ in the lectures on *What is Called Thinking?* from 1951 and 1952. Let me, then, examine the relationship between language, gesture and thinking in these lectures.

Thanking, Thinking and Gesture

In the beginning of the lectures on *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger suggests that thanking and thinking are intrinsically related. They are both the response to a call, one which is itself a gift that should be returned: “Thought has the gift of thinking back, a gift given because we incline toward it.”⁵⁰⁰ Thinking is, in this sense, the gift of receptivity, and the gift of a promise. It is the promise of thinking, the exposure to what is most thought-provoking, most striking, namely, “...that we are still not thinking.”⁵⁰¹ Thinking, just as gratitude, is an essential event that is relentlessly postponed. In a sense, thinking does not happen: it is the inkling of an absence, a minimal touch.

Heidegger explores the problem of thinking through one stanza from Hölderlin’s poem *Mnemosyne*. Heidegger calls attention to a specific verse in which Hölderlin says that we are a sign to be read. Presumably, Heidegger suggests, we are a sign because we *point to* what withdraws. Accordingly, what is most essential to us is the capacity to remain on the path of thinking what withdraws, our capacity to relate to what is unknown and to learn from it, not the alleged possession of a rational capacity of representation. This means that what belongs to us most essentially is something we do not possess. Rather, it is something that dispossesses us, namely, a certain capacity to comply with what calls for us, what requires us.

⁴⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, 99-100.

⁴⁹⁹ *What is Called Thinking?*, 5/3. “...die Versammlung des Denkens.”

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 5/4. “Das Bedachte ist das mit einem Andenken Beschenkte, beschenkt, weil wir es mögen.”

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6/4. “...daß wir noch nicht Denken.”

Heidegger says: “Man learns when his doing and letting [*Lassen*] answers to whatever essentials are addressed to him at any given moment.”⁵⁰²

In this context, Heidegger sketches out a comparison between the thinker and the joiner’s apprentice. He conceives thinking as “handicraft” [*Hand-Werk*],⁵⁰³ the “handicraft par excellence.” Presumably, in this case, Heidegger does not characterize thinking as a “craft” in general, but as *handicraft*, for thinking is intrinsically related to the hand. This means that the work of thinking hinges on our relatedness to sensible beings, just as the joiner’s work is founded on “relatedness to wood.”⁵⁰⁴

Heidegger remarks that “the hand is a proper thing.”⁵⁰⁵ He suggests that the hand belongs to us essentially because it is pervaded by language. He says precisely: “Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft.”⁵⁰⁶ Thereby, Heidegger claims that there is an abyssal difference between hands and sheer grasping organs. For language determines thinking, and “...thinking guides and carries every gesture of the hand. To carry means literally: to gesture.”⁵⁰⁷ Along these lines, Heidegger asserts that apes have grasping organs, but not hands. Apes do not have hands,

⁵⁰² Ibid., 5-6/4; modified. “*Der Mensch lernt, insofern er sein Tun und Lassen zu dem in die Entsprechung bringt, was ihm jeweils an Wesensthem zugesprochen wird.*”

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 18/16.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 17/14. This determination of handicraft as a work that brings forth the latent forms from the wood, and which is analogous to thought, seems to imply a revision of the determination of handicraft carried out in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in which handicraft is described as a goal-oriented type of work that effaces the earthy dimension of the material, and which in this way it makes inconspicuous its work of disclosure.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 18-16; modified. “*Mit der hand hat es eine eigene Bewandtnis.*” J. Glenn Gray translates this sentence as follows: “The hand is a peculiar thing.” This translation preserves the idiomatic sense of Heidegger’s claim, but it loses sight of Heidegger’s reference to a unique relation between hand and thought, and the fact that for Heidegger the adjective “proper” [*eigen*] has a very particular significance. What is proper is what is authentic or essential, and “event-like.” For this reason, in the context of the present work, it may be necessary to use a more “literal” translation. I translated this phrase taking into account Derrida’s translation, which reads: “with the hand one is dealing with what is particular or proper” Jacques Derrida, “Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand,” in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis, trans. John P. Leavy Jr., 161-196 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 172.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 18/16. “*Nur ein Wesen, das spricht, d.h. denkt, kann die Hand haben und in der Handhabung Werke der Hand vollbringen.*”

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 26/23; modified. “*Das Denken leitet und trägt jede Gebärde der Hand. Tragen heißt wörtlich: gebärden.*” J. Glenn Gray omits the second sentence in his translation of this passage, so I have translated it myself.

presumably, because they are fundamentally unable to think and speak. As Derrida contends, this is a dogmatic assertion that leaves in silence the “essential axiomatic” of Heidegger’s evaluation of the hand. It preserves the problematic opposition between man and animal – problematic because unjustified–, and it presupposes controversial premises concerning the value of human work.⁵⁰⁸ In this sense, Derrida suggests, Heidegger’s position remains metaphysical. Let me, then, refer succinctly to Derrida’s critique of Heidegger.

Derrida says that for Heidegger thinking is incarnated, thinking is “a certain manner of *Dasein* as *Leib*.”⁵⁰⁹ Moreover, he continues, thinking is “handling,” a term that may not be understood as ordinary dealing or acting, but rather as an action that “belongs to the essence of the *gift*, of a giving that would give, if this is possible, without taking hold of anything.”⁵¹⁰ And yet, Derrida insists, this determination of thinking as gift is pervaded by a rhetoric of the proper, a secret desire for what is pure, essential and uncontaminated. Thus, he remarks with a critical tone, the hand is not determined by use and profit, “guided by capital.”⁵¹¹ Rather, it follows the pure inclination of the gift as gift, which in this case determines what is proper of “our” essence as human beings.⁵¹² Thus, if it is to remain uncontaminated, within

⁵⁰⁸ Derrida points out that Heidegger’s distinction between hands and grasping organs is “dogmatic in its form,” for “this traditional statement presupposes an empiric or positive knowledge whose titles, proofs, and signs are never shown [*montrés*]” (“Geschlecht II,” 173). Thus, Heidegger’s approach is controversially authoritative and questionable insofar as he is not showing, and not willing to show, the “essential axiomatic” of his discourse (see *ibid.*), that is, due to the fact that he leaves in silence the traces of the distinction between man and animal, between hand and grasping organs. As Derrida expresses it, this implicit axiomatic lays out a hierarchical distinction between the essential craft or work of the hand, and the ordinary trade-oriented craft wherein the hand, just as poetry, is in danger (see *ibid.*, 170-71), and which entails a political evaluation of human work on the basis of a privileged language.

⁵⁰⁹ Derrida, *Geschlecht II*, 171.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵¹² As Heidegger explains in his Bremen lecture “Positionality”[“*Das Ge-Stell*”], from 1949, in a passage that seems to corroborate what Derrida denounces as a problematic ideal of the “authentic” or “proper,” the hand can only be properly determined in light of the totality, as a structural part of my being that cannot be isolated as a “piece”[*Stück*], which cannot be understood in terms of the elements of machinery. See *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 37/35.

the sphere of the proper, the hand can only give itself, be itself. This is what Derrida calls the “double vocation” of the hand.

The hand has a double vocation because it is itself voice, it voices itself. In other words, the hand is monstrosity. Or, as Derrida expresses it, “the monstrosity [*monstrosité*] of the gift or of what gives itself.”⁵¹³ This monstrosity of the hand involves a determination of the essence of the human that aims at a questionable and dangerous ideal of simplicity, unity and purity. This ideal of simplicity is based on the *gift* of language and, thereby, perpetuates a form of logocentrism.⁵¹⁴

Now, let me venture a response to Derrida.

Despite the traces of logocentrism, and the rhetoric of the proper and the essential, it seems to me that Heidegger’s meditation on the hand undermines metaphysical logocentrism and anthropomorphism, and in a decisive way. As I have indicated in relation to Heidegger’s notes on the essence of language, the essential language is a silent one, a language that is itself dispossession, withdrawal. It is language –and, by extension, thinking and the hand –that *has* us, and not the other way around.⁵¹⁵ Thus, one could say that the essential giving, the *gift* of language and thinking, is not opposed to taking, because it is not a gift the human itself does, but rather an event that involves us. As Derrida notices in recalling the double “vocation” of the gift, the *proper* goes out of the circle of exchange, it is a gift that gives itself without taking anything. But, paradoxically, this means that the gift is pure, essential, or proper, insofar as it is impossible. It is separated by an abyss from any “human” grasping or

⁵¹³ Derrida, *Geschlecht II*, 174.

⁵¹⁴ Derrida remarks that after the “Letter on Humanism” we cannot expect to find in Heidegger a sheer metaphysical anthropomorphism. This does not mean, as Derrida’s analysis makes clear, that there are not “traces” of a metaphysical anthropomorphism lurking behind the opposition between man and animal, giving and taking.

⁵¹⁵ Derrida mentions this reversal of our relation to language, but he does not explore its implications in the course of the article we are discussing here.

taking. In order to clarify this point, I will argue that Heidegger's analysis of the gestures of the hand reveals an openness, which is itself a silence, a rift, a clearing [*Lichtung*]. And this means that the gestures of the hand are not opposed to *Lichtung*, contrary to what Derrida suggests when reading *Lichtung* in reference to light and the act of vision.⁵¹⁶

Derrida seems to underestimate silence as a structural element of the *gift* of language, for he makes no mention to the silence of the hand, the hollow the hand itself "is" in grasping, even though he quotes and comments in detail the passage in which a decisive allusion to silence appears.⁵¹⁷ In contrast to Derrida's view, I should note that Heidegger's distinction between hand and grasping organ is marked by a reference to silence, and that this distinction functions at two levels.

First, Heidegger remarks, the hand does more than grasping or catching, pressing or pushing, it can also reach or receive things. This is what I consider to be the first level of the difference, a difference that seems a difference of degree, a non-essential difference. For here the hand is determined in terms of a relation between things. In this case, the hand is not simply a grasping organ, but is quite similar to it.

⁵¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 171.

⁵¹⁷ The passage in question, translated and commented by Derrida, reads as follows in the English version: "The hand designs and signs (*zeichnet*), presumably because man is a (monstrous) sign (*ein Zeichen ist*). Two hands fold into one [*fallen sich*: also join together], a gesture meant to carry man into the great simplicity [*Einfalt*; I am not sure of comprehending this sentence that plays on *sich falten* and *Einfalt*; whether it be a matter of prayer or of more common gestures, what matters above all is that the hands can touch each other as such, in auto-affection, even at the touch of the other's hand in the gift of the hand; this implies that the hands can also show themselves]. The hand is all this, and this is the true hand work (*das eigentliche Hand-Werk*). Everything is rooted here that is commonly known as handicraft (*Handwerk*), and commonly we go no further. But the hand's gestures [*Gebärden*: a word worked over very much by Heidegger in other texts too] run everywhere through language [or through the tongue], in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent. And only when man speaks, does he think –nor the other way around, as metaphysics still believes. Every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself (*sich trägt*) through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself [*gebärden sich*] in that element. All the work of the hand is rooted in thinking. Therefore, thinking (*das Denken*) itself is man's simplest, and for that reason hardest, *Hand-Werk* if it would be properly accomplished (*eigens*)." *Ibid.*, 175.

Second, and more importantly, the hand can reach and receive *itself* in its relation to others: “the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others.”⁵¹⁸ Heidegger’s formulation seems to have a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it indicates that what is proper of the hand is its capacity to welcome and reach the others, yet not as things, that is, not as something to be taken, to be grasped; rather, as others to come, others separated by an insurmountable distance. On the other hand, Heidegger suggests, the possibility of welcoming the other hinges on the mere exposure of the hand as hand, the hand’s capacity to reach and “welcome” itself. I take this to mean that the hand can welcome the other, can let the other come, precisely in its capacity to show itself as hand, as bare hand that does nothing more than give itself, “receive,” or *undertake* its own capacity to receive or welcome. This is what the gesture of salutation, which Heidegger mentions in his analysis of the hint in Hölderlin, illustrates.

One can see, therefore, that what is proper of the hand is an emptiness, a hollow, a concavity, or even a pregnancy, understood as the capacity to carry and endure the other. In other words, what is “proper” of the hand is its gestural capacity to bear, conceive, or gestate. Indeed, Heidegger says: “The hand carries. The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a sign. Two hands fold into one, a gesture meant to carry man into the great oneness.”⁵¹⁹

Derrida notes that the term “*Gebärde*” is worked over very much by Heidegger, but he does not make a pause to examine this notion. He calls attention to the aforementioned passage and he talks about the folding [*fallen sich*] of the hand, and about the great simplicity [*Einfalt*], the folding in one, of the two hands joint together, but he never examines why

⁵¹⁸ *What is Called Thinking?*, 18-19/16. “...sie reich sich und empfängt sich in der anderen.”

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 18/16. “Die Hand trägt. Die Hand zeichnet, vermutlich weil der Mensch ein Zeichen ist. Die Hände fallen sich, wenn diese Gebärde den Menschen in die große Einfalt tragen soll.”

Heidegger qualifies this movement as *gestural*. In his commentary on the text, Derrida simply remarks: “whether it be a matter of prayer or of more common gestures, what matters above all is that the hands can touch each other as such, in auto-affection, even at the touch of the other’s hand in the gift of the hand.”⁵²⁰

Contrary to Derrida’s reading, one might say that if gesture is a carrying or bearing, and if it starts as a folding of the hand, then the fold is not so much a return to itself but rather the openness to an other, which is to be carried or suffered. As a supplementary note, let me recall here a passage from Heidegger’s seminar on Heraclitus with Eugen Fink, from 1966/67, in which Heidegger discusses what giving the hand means. Specifically, in the context of the problematic of perception and questions concerning sensible proximity and distance, Eugen Fink says: “Touching ourselves is also a special phenomenon. A minimum of distance holds sway between what touches itself.”⁵²¹

Hence, one could say that the folding of one hand already announces the irreducible alterity inscribed in one’s encounter with the hands of the others, for the alterity of the hand that is *welcomed* and brought to proximity is itself inscribed in a clearing. The hand is hand because it folds, and as it folds, it opens itself up, it unfolds an empty space. And this is why the hand may receive something. Along these lines, one might say that thinking is gestural, and not simply determined by the hands-things, because it bears an absence. Being there as hand, folding itself, the hand points to what withdraws, it thinks: the hand echoes something that withdraws, and *suffers* this loss.

⁵²⁰ Derrida, *Geschlecht II*, 175.

⁵²¹ *Heraclitus Seminar*, 228-29/141. “Ein besonderes Phänomen ist auch die Selbstberührung. Zwischen dem Sichberührenden waltet ein Minimum von Ferne.”

At this point, let me refer to one of the final paragraphs from Heidegger's Bremen lecture "The Danger," in which he says: "To be an echo is the suffering of thinking."⁵²² Clearly, the figure of the echo that is suffered recalls that of the hand that bears and endures what is to come, what is to be received. Along these lines, one could say that thought, which is itself saying or showing, is an echo insofar as it carries out a torsion, a separation, a departure from what is proper or essential. In this sense, thought exposes a wound, a pain, a suffering. Therefore, the folding, or echoing of the hand may be "affectivity," "suffering," ontologically understood, but not "auto-affection," as Derrida remarks.

In touching itself, in folding itself, the hand points to an other that withdraws, while opening up a separation or rift that undermines any pretence of coincidence or self-identity. This is also what Merleau-Ponty underscores in his phenomenological description of the folding of the hand. Recalling Merleau-Ponty's analysis, one might say that, for Heidegger, too, the fold of the hand is a chiasm that brings about dispersion or multiplicity, the latencies of an outline, the gestation or conception of something to come. For, clearly, in this case, redoubling or folding implies at least three.⁵²³ Or, as Eugen Fink expresses it: "There is not brightness in which there is only one thing. In the brightness many things set themselves off."⁵²⁴

When the hand gives itself, when the hand generates a hollowness or concavity, it becomes somewhat non-human. For what is to come, what gestures adumbrate, as gestures, cannot be inscribed in human measures and calculations. Indeed, when someone gives the hand in friendship, one cannot measure the friendship, and when someone folds the hands in a prayer, one cannot measure the piety. These gestures are essentially invisible; they have a

⁵²² *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 66/61. "Ein Echo zu sein, ist das Leiden des Denkens."

⁵²³ See John Sallis, *Double Truth*, xii.

⁵²⁴ *Heraclitus Seminar*, 232/144. "Es gibt keine Helle, in der nur ein Ding ist. In der Helle begrenzen sich viele Dinge"

strange provenance. Or, one might also say, they belong to being, to the most ancient echo of being, beyng, what Merleau-Ponty would call wild being.

As Heidegger expresses it, the hand gives itself to beyng. In exposing itself as bare hand the hand reveals an ancient covenant, it hints at an otherness, the otherness of being: the *one* that has the hand. For when it returns to itself the hand is no longer human, it simply “is,” in its *own* “site,” somehow like Silesius’ rose: without why. Heidegger adumbrates this correlation between hand and being, in his Bremen lecture “The Turn,” from 1949, when he discusses questions concerning what we are supposed to do and how we must think. He says precisely that “...thinking is the authentic action [*Handeln*], where action means to give a hand [*an die Hand geben*] to the essence of beyng in order to prepare for it that site in which it brings itself and its essence to speech.”⁵²⁵

I want to suggest, then, that Heidegger introduces the figure of the hand *as* gesture because in gesturing the hand unfolds a hollow and, thereby, it exposes itself to the otherness of what may come, to the saying of the most ancient beyng. Indeed, hand’s gestures are themselves modalities of an ancient saying whose origins we ignore, a voice whose origins are prior to the history of metaphysics: one may say that they are mythical, poetic origins. In order to elucidate this point, I will examine Heidegger’s meditations concerning poetry and writing, as well as the relationship between history and literature, which are taken up in his lecture course on Schiller from the winter semester from 1936-37,⁵²⁶ but also in the sections I have examined from *What is Called Thinking?*

⁵²⁵ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 71/66. “...das Denken ist das eigentliche Handeln, wenn Handeln heisst: dem Wesen des Seyns and die Hand geben, um ihm jene Stätte zu bereiten, in die es sich und sein Wesen zur Sprache bringt.”

⁵²⁶ *Übungen für Anfänger. Schillers Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*. In translating the passages from this text, I used as support the Italian translation: Martin Heidegger, *Introduzione all'estetica. Le Lettere sull'educazione estetica dell'uomo di Schiller*, ed. Adriano Ardovino, trans. Adriano Ardovino (Roma: Carocci, 2008).

Writing and Gesture

Examining Schiller's idea of the beautiful form, in the lecture on Schiller from 1936-37, Heidegger wonders, where is the form of the work of art, or where is writing as such?⁵²⁷ With regard to these questions, he suggests, one must acknowledge that the words guide us beyond themselves, they precede us in such a way that "we always already co-intend what is said."⁵²⁸ He further indicates that "in the dialogue we *live* in language,"⁵²⁹ to the extent that language is already there speaking to us, without any "artificial abscission" [*künstlich abschneiden*],⁵³⁰ and without the need of a *grammatic*.⁵³¹ In short, language is alive in the dialogue, it is not an instrument.

These indications help us elucidate Heidegger's claim according to which Socrates "is the purest thinker of the west."⁵³² In *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger explains that Socrates' greatness has to do with the fact that he "placed himself" [*sich...stellen*] and remained throughout his life "in the draft of the current."⁵³³ "This is why," adds Heidegger, "he wrote *nothing*."⁵³⁴ Heidegger alludes here to the current of that which withdraws and calls for thinking. Probably, this is also the current of life and love, for in another reference to Socrates, a reference mediated by Hölderlin's poem "Socrates and Alcibiades," Heidegger calls attention to the verse that reads: "who the deepest has thought, loves what is most alive."⁵³⁵ One could say, then, that Socrates is the purest and greatest thinker of the west because his thought was deeply engaged with life. But, what life? Presumably, the life that is

⁵²⁷ Heidegger also formulates these questions in the course of his meditations on language in *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, particularly in the notes devoted to *Das Zeichen*, 91.

⁵²⁸ Heidegger, *Übungen für Anfänger...*, 86; my translation. "*Wir meinen das Gesagte immer schon mit.*"

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 83; my translation. "*im Gespräch leben wir in Sprache.*"

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁵³¹ See *ibid.*, 83.

⁵³² *What is Called Thinking?*, 20/17.

⁵³³ Ibid., modified. "*...in den Zugwind dieses Zuges.*"

⁵³⁴ Ibid., emphasis added.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 20. "*Wer das Tiefste gedacht, liebt das Lebendigste.*"

openness and withdrawal, the life of thought. For the figure of Alcibiades is presented here as the most lovable, the most alive, probably, because of his youth. And youth shines because of its possibilities. Youth is openness and, in a sense, nothingness: it is not fixed, not yet. And this openness, one may add, reveals the essence of life, of being. This is what remains, always, the *same*.

Years later, in the Zollikon seminars, Heidegger states that Socrates is the greatest thinker of the West. In this case, Heidegger suggests that the strength of Socrates' thought is measured by his capacity to say always the same about the same, that is, to say nothing.⁵³⁶ This is precisely what sets Socrates apart from the rest of the "great" thinkers of the west, all of whom Heidegger qualifies as fugitives looking for a "lee" [*Windschatten*] in writing.

As Heidegger expresses it, the current that draws thought is a current of air, a *Zugwind*, just like the voice. Writing appears, thus, as a fallacious attempt to find stability amidst the current of living speech, of the fleeting voice that disappears with the passing of life, which draws us away. The history of literature, the history of the fugitive thought that looks for shelter in writing, is the history of the West, the history of metaphysics. One might think, therefore, that Heidegger opposes the original presence of the living speech to the derivative and merely specular presence of the written word.⁵³⁷ And yet, Socrates' example shows that living speech is not more effective, more *present*, than writing. Ultimately, Heidegger's point is that neither the voice, nor writing offer a safe refuge against the currents of life. The virtue of Socrates is, in this sense, that he embraces the fact that life withdraws and passes away. The necessary questions are, then: what is there in the word, in speech, that

⁵³⁶ As was already indicated in the first chapter of the present work, in the Zollikon seminars Heidegger refers to Socrates as the greatest thinker of the West, remarking in this case that to think always the same, to say the same about the same, is the "most difficult" thing, and is what Socrates did (See *Zollikon Seminars*, 30/24).

⁵³⁷ Derrida suggests this at some point in the interpretation of Heidegger's hand, which we discussed above.

calls for writing? What compelled Plato to fix and stabilize the words of his master? What did Socrates “say” that *needs* to be written? This set of questions may be synthesized in one fundamental question, which I already mentioned: Where is writing?

This fundamental question has to do with the grounds of writing, which are also the hidden grounds of metaphysics. As Heidegger expresses it, writing is at the basis of metaphysics, and it emerges as a violation, an illegitimate irruption into the life of thought. Heidegger remarks in *What is Called Thinking?* that the figure of Socrates announces a still secret history of metaphysics, the history of the turn to writing, the turn to alphabetic writing, to logic and logistics. And Heidegger qualifies this turn as a getting away, an escape. Heidegger says precisely: “An as yet hidden history still keeps the secret why all great Western thinkers after Socrates, with all their greatness, had to be such fugitives.”⁵³⁸

Heidegger gives some indications concerning this secret history of the “fugitive thought,” of the thought that became literature, in one of the seminar sessions on Schiller, dated January 20, 1937. Over the course of this seminar, in a formulation that prefigures the one I just mentioned about the currents of thought and language, Heidegger points out that “language has a peculiar instability,”⁵³⁹ for language fades away as soon as it comes to life in the dialogue: “Language *is* in the dialogue. But it soon fades away, and then, properly, *is* no more. In this way, language has a peculiar unstability. Nevertheless, the artistic gender that creates *in* language, which creates *out of* it and in it, became essentially historical.”⁵⁴⁰

As Heidegger explains, and as was clear already in his meditations on Hölderlin, it is the poetic or artistic appropriation of language that gives language an initial impulse as

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 20/18. “*Es bleibt das Geheimnis einer noch verborgenen Geschichte, daß alle Denker des Abendlandes nach Socrates, unbeschadet ihrer Größe, solche Flüchtlinge sein mußten.*”

⁵³⁹ *Übungen für Anfänger...*, 81; my translation. “...*die Sprache hat eigentümliche Unbeständigkeit.*”

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 81; my translation. “*Die Sprache ist im Gespräch. Aber dieses ist ja verhallt, ist dann eigentlich nicht mehr. So hat die Sprache eine eigentümliche Unbeständigkeit. Trotzdem ist doch grade die Kunstgattung, die in der Sprache schafft, aus ihr schafft und in ihr ist, wesentlich geschichtlich geworden.*”

foundation of the world of a people, of history. The question remains, “how did word and saying gain *stability*?”⁵⁴¹ Heidegger gives a provisional response to this question by alluding to the traits of language that are salient in oral, pre-alphabetic traditions: “It [word and saying] was anticipatedly sung, spoken and preserved in memory.”⁵⁴² Heidegger further remarks that “saying is in a certain sense a singing,”⁵⁴³ which “originates from determinate conditions and a determinate entourage, and then is sung again.”⁵⁴⁴ One could say, then, that singing is the most primordial characterization of the word, a saying that contains a horizon of melodic repetitions, which are embodied by a people. Specifically, Heidegger explains that the possibility of stability and the preservation of language hinges on the structuring of existence and language, the structuring that may be traced back to the song of rhapsodists: “Presupposition of stability was an articulation and a totally determined mode of existing of the people itself, which has its existence in language. Song of rhapsodists.”⁵⁴⁵ Heidegger suggests, then, that a people articulates its own existence by living language, in a sense, by singing it. On this view, what makes singing an originary mode of saying is the fact that it gathers up the voice of a community. One can also say that singing is itself an attuned mode of existing with others. It is, so to say, a shared comportment, a communal performance.

The main conclusions Heidegger derives from this reference to singing are that “literature,” writing, is not a necessary condition of historicity, nor the only “reality” [*Wirklichkeit*] of language, and that language cannot be thought primarily or originally

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., my translation. “*Wodurch bekam zu Anfang das Wort und das Gesagte einen Bestand?*”

⁵⁴² Ibid., my translation. “*Es wurde vorgesungen, vorgeredet und im Gedächtnis aufbewahrt.*” Heidegger sketches here an argument about the distinction between oral and alphabetic traditions that for the most part coincides with the theory that decades later was formulated by Eric Havelock in his book *The Muse Learns to Write*, and Marshall McLuhan in *Gutenberg’s Galaxy*.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 82; my translation. “*Das Sagen ist gewissermaßen ein Sang.*”

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., my translation. “*bei bestimmten Gelegenheiten und in bestimmter Umgebung entstanden und dann weiter gesungen.*”

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., my translation. “*Die Voraussetzung der Beständigkeit war eine ganz bestimmte Gliederung und Daseinsform des Volkes selbst, das in der Sprache seine Existenz hat. Sang der Rhapsoden.*”

in terms of writing, at least not in terms of alphabetic writing.⁵⁴⁶ Introducing a brief reference to Plato's *Phaedrus*, Heidegger notes that if one considers the primordial determination of language as singing, one would see as "a monstrous change" [*einen ungeheuren Wandel*] that "language and what is said and spoken became written, circumscribed in writing."⁵⁴⁷

One can see, then, that the secret history of Western thought is the history that springs from a particular type of distortion, the monstrous mutation according to which language is "unnecessarily" circumscribed, encircled in writing, in such a way that its melodic unity is somehow effaced. As Heidegger puts it, what is monstrous in writing, or more precisely in alphabetic writing, is that it implies an expatriation, and in a certain sense a dismemberment, of primordial modes of saying and showing. In short, writing is a departure from the singing voice, from the language that is itself tune, *Stimmung*, not from the voice understood as self-presence.

In alphabetic writing words are transcribed as if they were discrete elements, compounds of "sounds" [*Lauten*] that are somehow static and isolable. That is to say, in writing language starts being treated as an object, as a sort of thing. Yet, Heidegger takes precautions and notices that writing in general is not simply opposed to the voice, for the essence of the voice changes with the transformations of writing. Heidegger underscores that the introduction of alphabetic writing transfigures the essence of the voice in such a way that the voice "appears" as the articulation of sounds, not as sung words; and yet, he adds, what is said is determined by the way it is "tuned." In short, the idea of the voice as self-presence is a correlate of alphabetic writing, which presupposes a certain indifferent, "objective" tone

⁵⁴⁶ See *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.* My translation. "*daß die Sprache und das Gesagte und Gesprochene geschrieben wird, umgeschrieben in die Schrift.*"

–still, a tone. Let me consider, for instance, the following remarks from the transcription of Heidegger’s notes:

What comes to be written in writing?

What is properly *writing*?

Writing are the sounds, vocals and consonants, in which what is spoken is *transcribed*

A is a *letter* (the Greeks got writing from the Egyptian)

This is not obvious; the Chinese, for instance, write *what is meant*, and not what sounds.⁵⁴⁸

Reading the initial questions formulated here, for example the one that reads “*What* comes to be written in writing?,” one notices that the inscription of the question involves a reference to the tone, that the writing itself, the writing of the “*What*” in italics, pre-figures “how” this questions must be answered: by attending to the tone, the stress of what is written. Precisely, the way in which Heidegger responds to these questions, the way in which these questions have been transcribed,⁵⁴⁹ suggests that writing necessarily flows beyond itself, that it hints at the grounds on the basis of which something is said. This approach reveals a circle, our involvement in a certain understanding of language and writing, the fact that we already presuppose something about what writing is and how writing works. In this sense, although alphabetic writing determines the voice as sound, to the extent that “A is a *letter*” that would correspond to the phonemon “A,” Heidegger’s analysis demonstrates that when the “A” says something it is no longer a phonemon but a singing voice: disclosure.

The contrast with Chinese writing shows that the monstrosity of alphabetic writing has to do with a certain inversion of the relation between what is “said” and what is written, for alphabetic writing determines what is said in terms of elementary sounds, in terms of an

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 82-83; my translation. “Was *wird in der Schrift geschrieben?*/Was ist *eigentlich Schrift?*/Schrift sind Laute, Selbstlauter, Mitlauter, in die das Gesprochene umgeschrieben wurde/A ist ein Buchstabe (Die Griechen hatten die Schrift von den Ägyptern)/Das ist nicht selbstverständlich; die Chinesen z.B. schreiben das gemeinte und nicht das Lautende.

⁵⁴⁹ It is worth noting that here we are dealing with the transcription of notes from Heidegger’s students, as they were taken in the course of the lectures, and not with a manuscript from Heidegger. In any case, this fact reinforces our argument, for the transcription reveals an element, the tone, which we have proved to be essential in Heidegger’s approach to language.

objective determination of the presence of the voice, thus concealing the musicality of speech. Presumably, Chinese writing is of a different nature, for it conveys what is intended as such, not a fragmentary determination of a sound. In this sense, Heidegger characterizes alphabetic writing as monstrous precisely because it conceals its monstrosity, its poetic grounds. For the stability of language, no matter how it is achieved, implies in each case a transformation of the relation to meaning, to our entire being, to being in general. Heidegger says precisely: “It is not indifferent, what one writes and in what mode one transposes [oneself] in writing and stability.”⁵⁵⁰

In sum, one can say that the purpose of Heidegger’s reference to the silence of Socrates is not to oppose writing to the “living presence” of the voice, nor to identify metaphysics with literature and writing without further qualification, but rather to show that writing implies a change in our relation to being, in such a way that the very same inscriptions and songs that give us a ground, which set the limits of an existential space and a territory, open up the possibility of loss and transformation: uprootedness.

On this view, the point that needs emphasis is that writing gives no assurance of stability, despite its presumed “objectivity.” Indeed, Heidegger’s reference to Chinese writing, and specifically the brief reference to the Greek inheritance of writing from the Egyptians, alludes to the essential errancy that belongs to language. And, as I have already indicated, the essence of language cannot be determined by a particular grammatic, even though language as saying is always inscribed in “determinate surroundings” [*bestimmter Umgebung*]. This means, however, that the possibility of history, and of stability and *presence*,

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 83; my translation. “*Es ist nicht gleichgültig, was man schreibt, und wie man in die Schrift und in die Beständigkeit umsetzt.*”

depends on a logos that is more ancient than alphabetic writing, a logos *inscribed* in our singing voices and attuned gestures.

To conclude this section, let me refer to Heidegger's meditation on language in "The Essence of Language." Throughout this lecture Heidegger recalls Hölderlin's verses about words as flowers of the mouth, and he relates this to the "modes of the mouth," the dialects of different regions or *Mundarten*.⁵⁵¹ The comparison between words and flowers elicits both the belonging to the earth and the departure or separation from it. Following on from Heidegger's reading of this point, one could say that language involves a liberation from the earth, a de-parture from the roots, as well as a relatedness to what withdraws during this departure, communication at distance and in silence. For the flower never fully abandons the earth, although being suspended in the air. One could say, then, that the blossoming of words, which is already a departure from the earth, preserves this tension: the word is uprooted because it speaks from outside of the roots, and because it is already out of the ground.

Gesture, Silence

Based on these reflections on writing, let me assess the significance of Heidegger's reflection on the silence of gesture, specifically of *silence as gesture*. Indeed, what is remarkable in hand's gestures is that they speak without speaking, without sounds, and without grammar. Along these lines, one might say that gestures reveal the essentiality of language. For gestures illustrate as no other phenomenon does the pervasive dimensionality of language: they give us speech even in the absence of movement. Being-there, still, is also a form of gesturing—even a corpse may preserve a gesture and say something.

⁵⁵¹ *On the Way to Language*, 193-97/97-101.

In *What is Called Thinking?*, before he states that we think insofar as we speak, and not the other way around, Heidegger says: “But the hand’s gestures run everywhere through language, in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent.”⁵⁵² Along these lines, one can say that Socrates’ refusal to write, the “purity” of his thought, the *gesture* of not-writing, is as meaningful as what he said in his dialogues. Moreover, if one is to understand what Socrates said, it is because one already understands the meaning of his silence. In a sense, Socrates’ silence reaches us beneath and beyond writing.

One could say, indeed, that the gesture of silence is an originary mode of saying, for its resists grammatical frames, it is irreducible to writing. Perhaps, even the primordial saying of songs presupposes gestures, for gestures embody an immemorial poetic that may resonate in dance or theater, but whose origins coincide with the mysterious origin of the lived body. Let me explore this argument in line with some of Heidegger’s reference to the No-play.

In “A Dialogue on Language,”⁵⁵³ from 1953-54, Heidegger takes up the problem of gesture, in a way that corroborates the originality of gesture in contrast to technical means of expression, and reveals the essential correspondence between gesture and language. In this dialogue, Heidegger deals with the question of aesthetics and hermeneutics, and problems related to the nature of art and poetry. He also discusses the differences between the Western, metaphysical sensibility, and the Japanese approach to art and the beautiful. In this context, gesture appears as a mode of saying or showing that challenges metaphysical modes of expression and conceptualization.

In the dialogue, Heidegger recalls count Kuki’s words, and notes that in Japanese there is a word, “*Iki*,” that denotes something similar to the “aesthetic” experience.

⁵⁵² *What is Called Thinking*, 19/16. “Aber die Gebärden der Hand geben überall durch die Sprache hindurch und zwar gerade dann am reinsten, wenn der Mensch spricht, indem er schweigt.”

⁵⁵³ This dialogue is included in the volume *On the Way to Language*. Title: “Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache.”

Specifically, this word names the “sensible appearance, whose vivid rapture makes the suprasensible shine through.”⁵⁵⁴ Although this explanation of sensible beauty seems to perpetuate the metaphysical distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, the Japanese interlocutor dispels this association. He makes clear that, what in *Iki* is “sensible,” the *Iro*, color, is something more than what can be perceived through the senses. And the emptiness or nothingness that “shines through” the sensible, the *Ku*, is something different than what is “only-suprasensible” [*Nur-Übersinnliche*].⁵⁵⁵ These indications demonstrate the fundamental differences between Japanese and the Western language of metaphysics, and imply that there exists an imminent “danger” in translation: the danger of homogenization, the danger of losing sight of what is unique in each mode of being and language, and the danger of suppressing that which shall remain unsaid.

Looking for common references, which may facilitate a proper translation or communication from language to language, from house to house, Heidegger refers, through the voice of the Inquirer, to Kurosawa’s film *Rashomon*. He indicates that this film captures “subdued gestures” [*verhaltene Gebärden*] that cannot be inscribed within the domain of Western aesthetics.

The Japanese considers that Kurosawa’s film may be “too realistic,” too imbedded in the objectifying view of photography –precisely because it is, indeed, a film. But he also acknowledges that the movie preserves a type of gesture of the hand, a mode of touching, that can hardly be called a gesture, for it is infinitely remote from any touch: “For this hand

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 96/14; modified. “...sinnlichen Scheinen, durch dessen lebhaftes Entzücken Übersinnliches hindurchscheint.”

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 97/15.

is suffused and borne by a call calling from afar and calling still farther onward, because stillness has brought it.”⁵⁵⁶

What is remarkable in this peculiar touch of the hand, which may be inconspicuous for any Western spectator, is that it somehow passes through the cribs of cinema and photography, it is not totally neutralized by them. This fact demonstrates the pervasiveness of the *language* of gestures as something that underlies the objective view of cinema. For the film speaks of this subtle Japanese gesture, despite its own objective codes and frames.⁵⁵⁷ This means that cinema preserves a poetic dimension that concerns hints and indications, rather than direct objective representation of things.

Indeed, despite the untranslatability of the Japanese gestures, something of their uniqueness speaks through the alien sphere of cinema, and reaches the eyes of the foreign inquirer. Therefore, one could say that the gestures endure in the movie as subtle traces or indications of an absense. In this sense, the reference to the film *Rashomon* may not be incidental. For this movie unfolds the multiple, irreconcilable perspectives surrounding a crime, an event that is essentially absent, which does not take place *in* the film. It is likely that Heidegger had this in mind, as he refers to this movie approvingly.

Thus we see, despite its objective and rigid frames, that the film manages to let something unsaid shine through, which is precisely the condition of possibility for a true dialogue, and a genuine interpretation or translation. In line with this, one can say that the

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 99/16. “Denn diese Hand ist von einem weither und noch weiterhin rufenden Anruf durchtragen, weil aus der Stille zugetragen.”

⁵⁵⁷ In this sense, without making it explicit, and probably beyond the scope of what Heidegger foresees in his dialogical meditation, the dialogue with the Japanese comes close to Walter Benjamin’s observation, according to which photography and cinema reveal an “optical unconscious,” which has to do with the camera’s capacity to record nuances of gestures and affective dimensions of things that escape any explicit focus. This is to say that despite its mechanical character, photography and cinema preserve still a poetic dimension, a position clearly in tune with Heidegger’s analysis of technique.

possibility of hermeneutics, the possibility of genuine translation and communication, hinges on that which is left in suspense, but is still indicated *in silence*, through gestures. And this is precisely what the Dialogue itself, the dialogue between the Inquirer and the Japanese, indicates. One can see this in a close analysis of the dialogue.

The Japanese interlocutor establishes a contrast between the language of cinema and the nature of the No-play. He underscores that the No-play takes place on an empty stage. Heidegger points out that “this emptiness demands uncommon concentration,”⁵⁵⁸ and the Japanese interlocutor responds that “thanks to that concentration, only a slight additional gesture on the actor’s part is required to cause mighty things to appear out of a strange stillness.”⁵⁵⁹ Following on from this, and to demonstrate how a minimal movement of the hand may make appear something great, the Japanese character himself performs a gesture.

We, as readers, do not see this gesture, but Heidegger describes it to us. We do not “see” the gesture that Heidegger describes. And, strictly speaking, neither does Heidegger see what the Japanese interlocutor shows. Still, Heidegger’s description says something about this gesture, it outlines some traces of what it is. We come to know, for instance, that the Japanese’s gesture brings to presence a mountain landscape that, in fact, is also absent or invisible on the original stage of the No-play. This sense of incompleteness or emptiness, which is intensified by reducing what is visible to its minimum, is the most fundamental trait of this gestural showing. The Japanese interlocutor says, indeed: “With it all, the gesture subsists less in the visible movement of the hand, nor primarily in the stance of the body.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 101/18. “*Diese Leere verlangt eine ungewöhnliche Sammlung.*”

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. “*Dank ihrer bedarf es dann nur noch einer geringen Gebärde des Schauspielers, um Gewaltiges aus einer seltsamen Ruhe erscheinen zu lassen.*”

'The essence of what your language calls 'gesture' is hard to say.'⁵⁶⁰ Thus, the question becomes, how do we characterize this event, the type of saying the hands perform in silence. In short: Where is the gesture?

The core of the problematic of gesture is laid down here. It is hard to say what a gesture is because, despite its being "corporeal," it is also essentially invisible, inconspicuous, pervaded by invisibility, by nothingness. However, the term "gesture" itself hints at the fundamental traits of this experience. "And yet" says the Inquirer, "the word 'gesture' helps us experience truly what is here to be said"⁵⁶¹

Heidegger suggests, then, that in order to understand what is at stake in the gestures of the *No-play*, as well as in the peculiar touch of the hand that transpires in *Rashomon*, it is necessary to follow what the word itself indicates about this experience, what language says about itself. This means, in a sense, that word and gesture are imbricated, that they carry each other. Indeed, the Inquirer remarks, that "gesture is the gathering of a bearing."⁵⁶² And this is a reference to the etymology of the word. As I have often indicated, the German word for gesture, *Gebärde*, includes the prefix "Ge-," which contains a sense of collecting or gathering –and, let me note in passing, the reference to this prefix is a leitmotif in Heidegger's later works. This verb also contains a reference to the *Mittelhochdeutsche* verb "bern",⁵⁶³ which alludes to the action of carrying, enduring or bringing forth something, namely, "Tragen." These etymological references elucidate the idea that word and gesture come together. For understanding the word is to understand what the word does and,

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid. "Dabei beruht die Gebärde weniger in der sichtbaren Bewegung der Hand, nicht zuerst in der Körperhaltung. Das Eigentliche dessen, was in Ihrer Sprache »Gebärde« heißt, läßt sich schwer sagen."

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 101/18. "Und doch ist dieses Wort vielleicht eine Hilfe, das zu-Sagende wahrhaft zu erfahren."

⁵⁶² Ibid., "Gebärde ist Versammlung eines Tragens."

⁵⁶³ See Patrick Baur for further references to the semantic field of this term (*Phänomenologie der Gebärden*, 268).

conversely, that the words do what they say: the word “gesture” carries its own sense. And this movement happens in silence, inconspicuously.

Continuing on from the reading of the Dialogue, one could say that the gesture is the gathering of a bearing, a bearing that we do not perform but which “first bears itself *toward* us,”⁵⁶⁴ just as it happens in language. This is to say that the gesture is the gift of a bearing, the gift we receive by bearing or carrying it in turn, “the gathering which originally unites within itself what we bear to it and what it bears to us.”⁵⁶⁵ Thus, the gathering is not collection or composition after the fact, and the bearing itself is not a visible action. Rather, the gathering and the bearing come as openness to something, just as happens when the Japanese character makes the mountain landscape appear: “In a beholding that is itself invisible, and that, so gathered, bears itself to encounter emptiness in such a way that in and through it a mountain appear.”⁵⁶⁶

In this regard, Heidegger’s approach to gesture implies a reference to the nothingness of being, the fundamental openness within which things appear and make themselves visible: “That emptiness then is the same as nothingness, that essential being which we attempt to add in our thinking, as the other, to all that is present and absent.”⁵⁶⁷

As Heidegger expresses it, gesture is originary, primitive, wild language. It is a language that has not been said and cannot be said explicitly, which remains always in the

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., “...uns sich erst zu-trägt.”

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 102/19. “die in sich ursprünglich einige Versammlung von Entgegentragen und Zutrag.”

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. “In einem selbst unsichtbaren Schauen, das sich so gesammelt der Leere entgegenträgt, daß in ihr und durch sie das Gebirge erscheint.”

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid. “Die Leere ist dann dasselbe wie das Nichts, jenes Wesende nämlich, das wir als das Andere zu allem An- und Abwesenden zu denken versuchen.”

background of affectivity, yet as a background that is essentially withdrawn, which relentlessly recedes from objectivity. In this sense, gestures remain essentially open. One might say that the gathering of gesture runs counter to the gathering of *Ge-Stell*, to the gathering of “positionality.” Resisting the positionality of *Ge-Stell*, gestures preserve the possibility of a vicarious encounter with what is essentially other and can only be announced indirectly.

Chapter Seven: Primordial Language and Gesture in Merleau-Ponty

Being, Saying and the Body: Preliminary Remarks on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Language

The word “body” is a word whose meaning remains elusive, obscure, for there can be no distance from this “object:” we dwell in our bodies as we dwell in being, and the flesh of the body is the same flesh of the world. Yet, meaning pervades my body: my body speaks, names things, and sketches out in perception the beings of nature and the world. In a sense, the body gives a horizon of meaning. Or, to be more precise: in the body *there is* meaning.

Merleau-Ponty’s exploration of the flesh reveals a fundamental paradox, for what appears to be the most concrete, sensible being, is pervaded by invisibility, by the inextricable no-thingness of meaning –not absolute nothingness but rather an evanescent nothingness, an atmospheric presence of the past. In this way, following Husserl’s path toward the *bloße Sache*, Merleau-Ponty ends up on the path of the Heideggerian “logos,” exploring an essential saying that is itself withdrawal, silence. Along this path, language is discovered as primordial logos of being. As Heidegger puts it, language, the essential word, just like being is not a “being,” but gives.⁵⁶⁸

Interpreting this Heideggerian motif of the “gift” of language, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes in one of his later lecture-notes the importance of using the French “*il y a*” to translate the German “*es gibt*.” As Merleau-Ponty sees it, the crucial point in Heidegger’s expression is that “there is” being: we dwell in a plane, a region of being. Thus, “*es gibt Sein*”

⁵⁶⁸ See *Letter on Humanism*, 334/238; *On the Way to Language*, 182-83/88.

does not mean that being gives something in particular, but rather that being is already presupposed, pre-given, in our dealings with things and our dwelling in the world.⁵⁶⁹

With regard to the primordially of language, in the “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger points out that language is “the house of being.”⁵⁷⁰ This expression indicates that we dwell in language; that language that precedes us and “has” us.⁵⁷¹ This Heideggerian insight had decisive influence on Merleau-Ponty’s later works. One can see traces of this influence in the later lecture-notes, course summaries, unedited texts, and, less explicitly, in texts published during his life.⁵⁷² For this reason, in the present chapter I will articulate Merleau-Ponty’s appropriation of Heideggerian motifs on language and gesture by reading his main works in light of the hints found in these fragmentary lecture-notes and summaries.

It seems to me that the most solid standpoint for undertaking this task is Merleau-Ponty’s own interpretation of Heidegger’s turn. In the course summary of one of his lectures at the Collège de France from 1958, entitled “*Possibilité de la philosophie*,”⁵⁷³ Merleau-Ponty examines Heidegger’s approach to the relation between language and being, and he shows that, after *Being and Time*, Heidegger resets the question concerning the meaning of being, without dismissing it. As Merleau-Ponty explains, after *Being and Time* the cardinal question concerning the meaning of being is no longer determined as a centrifugal movement that goes from Dasein to being, “*transcendence*,”⁵⁷⁴ but rather as a step back to the original

⁵⁶⁹ See *Notes de cours*, 113-14.

⁵⁷⁰ *Letter on Humanism*, 313/115.

⁵⁷¹ See, for instance, *Zollikon Seminars*, 226/181, or *On the Way to Language*, 85/5.

⁵⁷² See, *Notes de cours*, 124-127, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 59-63/48-52. For a similar formulation anteceding these direct references, see also *The Prose of the World*, 156/110.

⁵⁷³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours. Collège de France; 1952-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 141-56. Translated into English as “Philosophy as Interrogation,” in: *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. John Wild, James Edie and John O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 167-180.

⁵⁷⁴ *Notes de cours*, 97.

disclosure of being, to Dasein as openness to being.⁵⁷⁵ Consequently, Merleau-Ponty remarks that Heidegger determines the point of departure for thinking the question of being as a “there exists” (“*il y a*”) that is disclosure at work.⁵⁷⁶ In this way, one may say that Heidegger’s turn towards the thinking of being does not involve the abandonment of the fundamental question from *Being and Time*, for Heidegger’s thinking preserves the same orientation towards being,⁵⁷⁷ but rather develops a more adequate formulation of the problematic of time,⁵⁷⁸ and a decisive refutation of “the anthropological misunderstanding” [*l’équivoque anthropologiste*].⁵⁷⁹

Thus, Merleau-Ponty remarks, after *Being and Time* Heidegger’s work is focused on the question of the truth of being, and explores the pre-objective “there” that grounds our understanding of the being of things. Explaining this point, Merleau-Ponty recalls Heidegger’s analysis of Silesius’ verse “the rose is without why” in *The Principle of Reason*. In line with Heidegger’s reading of this verse, Merleau-Ponty underscores that the rose does not have a cause out of itself and, in this sense, it is without foundation, a pure presencing: active being-there. As Merleau-Ponty explains, there exists in the simple presence of the rose an “act” of being (“*ester*”), and this being reveals an enigmatic intertwining of being and language.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁷⁶ See *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, 90/177-78. See also *Notes de cours*, 95.

⁵⁷⁷ In his *Notes de cours*, Merleau-Ponty says more emphatically that the “idea” is the same, just that now it is explained better (98).

⁵⁷⁸ See *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, 90/178.

⁵⁷⁹ *Notes de cours*, 95. What Merleau-Ponty calls the “anthropological misunderstanding” is the idea that the question of being may be subordinated to the question of Dasein, an idea Heidegger did not posit, but, as Merleau-Ponty explains, it is somehow implied in *Being and Time*.

⁵⁸⁰ On the active sense of being, and its intertwining with language, see *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 59/48. Regarding Merleau-Ponty’s use of the term “ester,” Lawlor explains: “The term ‘ester,’ it seems, is a neologism manufactured on the basis of the Latin *stare*, which is the infinitive ‘to be,’ in the active sense of realization. It would be used to denote the being of a contingent, spatiotemporal property such as tiredness” (English: 86, n.127).

Along these lines, one could say that Silesius' verse depicts the rose as animated by the nascent logos of being: the simple presence of the rose "is," the rose enacts the "is." With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the radiance of the presence of the rose cannot be separated from the word "being," "is." Put differently, the recognition of the rose as rose presupposes an understanding of what "being" means. One might say that the word "being" carries the being of the thing; the thing grows out of the space opened up by that word. Merleau-Ponty expresses this idea as follows: "The word to be is not a sign to which we could find a corresponding 'representation' or object: its meaning is not distinct from its operation, which is to make Being speak in us rather than us speak of Being."⁵⁸¹

The aforementioned analysis reveals central aspects of Heidegger's approach to language that are integrated in Merleau-Ponty's work. First, the idea that language is without ground, unfounded, *Abgrund*: we dwell in language, language speaks itself, and there is "nothing" behind language.⁵⁸² Second, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in his concluding remarks about Silesius' verse, the intertwining of thing and word, and silence. For the thing is language in silence, a showing and saying in silence: what the rose "says" remains a secret. Thus, what characterizes this turn towards an ontological approach to language is the repositioning of language as original *logos*, as *logos* of the world, as the "house," i.e., the abyssal ground of being.

Language is original or primordial event of disclosure, the event that opens up a clearing, a horizon of possibilities. The rose shows and says itself in the openness of language. In this sense, there is a fundamental affinity between the rose and the body, for the

⁵⁸¹ *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, 90/179. "...le mot d'être n'est pas comme les autres un signe auquel on puisse faire correspondre une "representation" ou un objet: son sens n'est pas distinct de son operation; par lui c'est l'Être qui parle en nous plutôt que nous ne parlons de l'Être."

⁵⁸² See *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 60/49.

body is –it is the presence of a *being* –, just as the rose. And yet, the body that is my body is not exactly like the rose because the rose remains in the ground, whereas my body is openness to the world. One could say that the rose *rests* in language, the being of the rose simply presupposes language, whereas we, as embodied beings depart from language: we are related to language *as* language –and, thereby, to the thing *as* thing. And this is precisely what the phenomenon of gesture manifests: the dynamic intertwining of the lived body and language.

Accordingly, I shall demonstrate that gesture is a pivotal element in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language. For, in Merleau-Ponty's work, the phenomenon of gesture reveals the sensible dimension of language and, at the same time, reveals the body as the original source of signification. This means that, similarly to what happens in Heidegger's work, gestures are themselves unique articulations of meanings: they are not expressions in a traditional sense, for they do not express pre-established meanings, they are not conventional means of communication. Having said this let me begin this investigation by analyzing Merleau-Ponty's idea of expression.

The Problem of Expression and Consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Perception*

To some extent, Merleau-Ponty's reading of Heidegger's philosophical turn towards a thinking of being mirrors his own philosophical itinerary. Heidegger departs from a thinking centered in the being of Dasein, and moves towards a thinking of the truth of being. Similarly, in his philosophical trajectory Merleau-Ponty moves from the body as incarnated consciousness to the being of the world, the ontology of the flesh. As was indicated above, the intersection of these ontological paths passes through the recognition of the ontological primordially of language. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's ontological "turn"

involves a reformulation of the relationship between consciousness and language, as it is determined in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty argues that perception is grounded in pre-predicative consciousness, which constitutes the body schema, the system of equivalences that makes possible my communication with the world. In this context, language seems to depend upon the originary consciousness of the body. This position implies that language is a derivative phenomenon, just as Leonard Lawlor indicates.⁵⁸³ Perhaps, the most explicit formulation of this approach to language is found in the following passage from the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*: “Separated essences are the essences of language. It is the very function of language to make essences exist in a separation that is merely apparent, since through language they still rely upon pre-predicative life of consciousness.”⁵⁸⁴

Merleau-Ponty suggests that the work of language hinges on the operations of originary consciousness, which somehow articulates our experience of the world before it comes to be expressed through words. He shows, accordingly, that the “function” of language is to make essences appear as independent from the operations of consciousness, that is, to create ideal meanings. Hence, language is taken as the medium that produces secondary, derivative, essences or meanings. Yet, it is important to notice that Merleau-

⁵⁸³ Leonard Lawlor explains that there is a rupture in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, which goes from a derivative view of language to an ontology of language, in which language is originary, in his article “Essence and Language: The Rupture in Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* III, no. 3-4 (2003): 155-62. As Lawlor explains, in the *Phenomenology of Perception* language is derived from originary consciousness.

⁵⁸⁴ *Phenomenology of Perception*, x/xxix. “Les essences séparées sont celles du langage. C’est la fonction du langage de faire exister les essences dans une séparation qui, à vrai dire, n’est qu’apparente, puisque par lui elles reposent encore sur la vie antepredicative de la conscience.” In his article “Essence and Language,” Leonard Lawlor uses this passage to support his thesis that in the *Phenomenology of Perception* language is derived from originary consciousness, for he remarks that language makes essence exist separately. Still, it is important to emphasize, as I do in this section that Merleau-Ponty underscores that the separation of linguistic essences is only apparent, not real, and for this reason one could say that language is ultimately imbricated in originary consciousness.

Ponty's formulation is ambiguous, for he underscores that the function of language is "merely apparent," that is, the operations of language, what language produces, cannot be truly separated from the life of consciousness. I take this to mean that the work of language is necessarily imbricated in the operations of consciousness, but I will explain this point later. For now, let me examine in detail Merleau-Ponty's approach to the problem of expression.

Merleau-Ponty explicitly describes the movement of expression that goes from pre-predicative consciousness to signification as follows: "But our body is not merely one expressive space among all others, for that would be merely the constituted body. Our body, rather, is the origin of all the others, it is the very movement of expression, it projects significations on the outside by giving them a place and sees to it that they begin to exist as things, beneath our hands and before our eyes."⁵⁸⁵

The lived body, and not language, is the original source of expression, the one that "projects" itself in what would be the "second level" of significations, which in turn can appear as separate essences, as "things." What is controversial is that the body seems to work as a positing consciousness whose "movement of expression" is centrifugal: it goes from consciousness to things. As Merleau-Ponty explains, this movement of expression is said to project significations on the "outside" in such a way that the body is implicitly taken as an "inside," that is, a sort of subjective center that gives existence to words and things. Moreover, in this centrifugal movement, the outside appears opposed to the body, as object of perception. Hence, Merleau-Ponty's position approaches the idealism he insistently refutes, for the body works as an original consciousness that "structures" the world. If one continues in this direction it is difficult not to see the lived body as an instance of a

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 171/147. *"Mais notre corps n'est pas seulement un espace expressive parmi tous les autres. Ce n'est là que le corps constitué. Il est l'origine de tous les autres, le mouvement même de expression, ce qui projette au dehors les significations en leur donnant un lieu, ce qui fait qu'elles se mettent à exister comme des choses, sous nos mains, sous nos yeux."*

transcendental constituting consciousness, an implication that undermines the spirit of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, and which explains in part Merleau-Ponty's self-critical remark in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

Having said this, I shall formulate the main challenge in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of language by means of a question: how can we understand the motor intentionality of the body, and Merleau-Ponty's reference to the originary consciousness of the body, without endorsing a sort of idealism? Indeed, Merleau-Ponty is aware of how difficult it is to dispel idealism once he defines the body as originary consciousness. With regard to this, he remarks that there is a paradox intrinsic to the phenomenon of "being in the world." He says: "I throw my perceptual intentions and my practical intentions against objects that appear to me, in the end, as anterior and exterior to these intentions, and which nevertheless exist for me only insofar as they arouse thoughts or desires in me."⁵⁸⁶ Thus, intentionality implies the reference to transcendent objects, and yet they are recognized as such only from the point of view of consciousness, in the sphere of intentional acts. Yet, if consciousness is embodied, and if my body is openness to the world, Merleau-Ponty must recognize that there is a movement that comes from objects to consciousness, in such a way that they awaken thoughts in me, as if they already contained the potentiality of meaning. Exploring this point, some paragraphs after distinguishing between the primary movement of expression of the body and the secondary significations of language, Merleau-Ponty concludes: "The experience of the body leads us to recognize an imposition of sense that

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 97/84. "...en me portant vers un monde, j'écrase mes intentions perceptives et mes intentions pratiques en des objets qui m'apparaissent comme antérieurs et extérieurs à elles, et qui cependant n'existent pour moi qu'en tant qu'ils suscitent en moi des pensées et des volontés."

does not come from a universal constituting consciousness, a sense that adheres to certain contents.”⁵⁸⁷

Thus, although the body is supposed to initiate the movement of expression, projecting significations on the outside, Merleau-Ponty remarks that there is a fundamental, grounding “sense” imposed on my body: there is a meaning or sense that constitutes the body as the “knotting together of essence and existence,”⁵⁸⁸ and which cannot be separated from our existential relations to things.

At this point, one should distinguish between two levels of signification. On the one hand, there is the level that corresponds to linguistic meanings, which are derivative. On the other hand, there is the most fundamental level of existential signification, which is pre-predicative or, in a sense, “pre-linguistic.” And it is this existential background of signification that constitutes the body as originary consciousness. Accordingly, one could say that the originary consciousness of the body is a “pre-conscious” articulation of sense, a sense that is lived, adherent to the things perceived. Linguistic expressions, on the contrary, have a meaning borrowed from things or experiences. This meaning is sedimented: it appears fixed, as a thing.

Still, if the body is a ground of existential significations, the question remains as to what qualifies the lived body as body, and how it is that an existential background of meaning is constituted *in* the body.

One may sketch out a response to these questions on the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the body as a sexed being. In this context, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the body

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 172/48. “*La expérience du corps nous fait reconnaître une imposition de sens qui n’est pas celle d’une conscience constituante universelle, un sens qui est adhérent à certains contenus.*”

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

is first given as a libidinal body and thereby, a matrix of symbolic equivalences of the world.⁵⁸⁹ He introduces this point as follows:

Indeed, the natural world is given as existing in itself beyond its existence for me, the act of transcendence by which the subject opens to the natural world carries itself along and we find ourselves in the presence of a nature that has no need of being perceived in order to exist. Thus, if we wish to reveal the genesis of being for us, then we must ultimately consider the sector of our experience that clearly has sense and reality only for us, namely, our affective milieu. Let us attempt to see how an object or a being begins to exist for us through desire or love, and we will thereby understand more clearly how objects and being can exist in general.⁵⁹⁰

What is remarkable in this passage is the portrayal of affectivity as an ontological ground, as the ground on the basis of which things come to exist for us. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty remarks that in order to understand how beings or objects are constituted in general, first we must look at the way things are constituted as objects of desire or love. In this regard, he suggests that we are initially related to the world through affective bonds. Thus, one may say that the lived body is itself an “affective milieu,” the power of expression and desire that ties us to the world.

As I have already argued, in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty relates the concept of form or *Gestalt* to the concept of “body schema,” and suggests that the lived body must be understood as directionality, intentionality, and expression, that is, as openness to the world. Therefore, although Merleau-Ponty often depicts the body using the “language

⁵⁸⁹ As Emmanuel de Saint Aubert points out, Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “body schema” implies from the beginning an understanding of the body in terms of libidinal intercorporeality, but this position will be expressly articulated only after the *Phenomenology of Perception*. See Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Être et chair*, Chapter 2.

⁵⁹⁰ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 180/156. “En effet, le monde naturel se donne comme existant en soi au delà de son existence pour moi, l’acte de transcendence par lequel le sujet s’ouvre à lui s’emporte lui-même et nous nous trouvons en présence d’une nature qui n’a pas besoin d’être perçue pour exister. Si donc nous voulons mettre en évidence la genèse de l’être pour nous, il faut considérer pour finir le secteur de notre expérience qui visiblement n’a de sens et de réalité que pour nous, c’est-à-dire notre milieu affectif. Cherchons à voir comment un objet ou un être se met à exister pour nous par le désir ou par l’amour et nous comprendrons mieux par là comment des objets et des êtres peuvent exister en général.”

of consciousness,” what the body expresses or signifies is founded on our bodily experience, not on the sphere of consciousness or on the spirit. With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty says:

Thus, when we say that bodily or carnal life and the psyche are in a reciprocal relation of expression, or that the bodily event always has a psychical *signification*, these formulas need to be explained. Valid as they are for the exclusion of causal thought, nevertheless they do not mean that the body is the transparent envelope of Spirit [*l'Esprit*]. To return to existence as if to the milieu in which the communication between the body and the mind [*l'esprit*] are comprehended is not to return to Consciousness or Spirit, and existential psychoanalysis must not serve as a pretext for a restoration of spiritualism. We will understand this better by clarifying the notions of “expression” and “signification” –which belong to the world of language and constituted thought –that we have just applied uncritically to the relations between the body and the psyche and whose correction must be learned through our bodily experience.⁵⁹¹

It is clear, then, that the use of “spiritualist” terms is strategic. It functions as an alternative to mechanistic interpretations of the body. Along these lines, one might say that the spiritualist language, the language of consciousness, serves to gain access to the affective dimensionality of the body as something that may not be reduced either to causal connections or to merely psychical states,⁵⁹² but this problem is still in need of more precise formulations.

Up to this point, one could say that the body is a cluster of affective and dynamic significations. Or, in Merleau-Ponty's words, “a totality of lived significations that moves towards its equilibrium.”⁵⁹³ One should note, however, that although Merleau-Ponty describes the body as a tendency to equilibrium, the body remains open as an unstable unity, traversed by multiple conflictive tensions. That is to say, the body is essentially decentered, it

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 186-87/162. “Quand nous disons que la vie corporelle ou charnelle et le psychisme sont dans un rapport d'expression réciproque ou que l'événement corporel a toujours une signification psychique, ces formules ont donc besoin d'explication. Valables pour exclure la pensée causale, elles ne veulent pas dire que le corps soit l'enveloppe transparente de l'Esprit. Revenir à l'existence comme au milieu dans lequel se comprend la communication du corps et de l'esprit, ce n'est pas revenir à la Conscience ou à l'Esprit, la psychanalyse existentielle ne doit pas servir de prétexte à une restauration du spiritualisme. Nous le comprendrons mieux en précisant les notions d'«expression» et de «signification» qu'appartiennent au monde du langage et de la pensée constitué, que nous venons d'appliquer sans critique et que l'expérience du corps doit au contraire nous apprendre à rectifier.”

⁵⁹² For arguments complementing this point, see Saint Aubert, *Être et chair*, 124.

⁵⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 211/187. “c'est un ensemble de significations vécues qui va vers son équilibre.”

is not the core of a substantive self. Rather, it is somewhat anonymous, a modulation of the generality of sensible being.⁵⁹⁴

As Merleau-Ponty discusses the phenomenon of repression in relation to the “phantom limb,” he recalls that the body is fundamentally ambiguous: the body belongs to me and to the world. In a sense, one could say that the body is an anonymous existence traversed by forces that pertain to the world itself. Merleau-Ponty says precisely: “What allows us to center our existence is also what prevents us from centering it completely, and the anonymity of our body is inseparably both freedom and servitude.”⁵⁹⁵

The body is, at the same time, freedom and servitude because its freedom, its spontaneity, condenses a history that exceeds one’s personal history, a history that is entwined into nature. The habits that constitute the identity of the body, its particular unity and style, take shape in the milieu of a general corporality. And, for this reason, these habits contain references to more general patterns or types of behavior. In this sense, the openness of the body is both the possibility of spontaneity and transformation and the possibility of homogeneity and mechanical repetition –these mechanical tendencies of the body are paradigmatically illustrated by the phenomenon of the phantom limb. Merleau-Ponty elaborates on this point by examining the way our thoughts, the significations we project, have the tendency to sedimentation. He suggests that thoughts and meanings are integrated in the world of perception in such a way that they constitute a second “world of thoughts.” I will now move on and examine this point.

⁵⁹⁴ On the concept of generality, and its relation to Merleau-Ponty’s appropriation of the concept of “body schema,” see Saint Aubert, *Être et chair*, Ch. 1.

⁵⁹⁵ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 101/87. “Ce qui nous permet de centrer notre existence est aussi ce qui nous empêche de la centrer absolument et l’anonymat de notre corps est inséparablement liberté et servitude.”

Merleau-Ponty does not conflate the “world of thoughts” with the “first world” of perception. Rather, he tries to keep them separate. But, the question is: in what sense is the world of thoughts separated from the world of perception? Presumably, this separation occurs when the “world of thoughts” is sedimented, in such a way that its contents and operations may appear as fixed objects. And this happens because the operations of consciousness are shaped through memory, imitation, and habit, just as bodily functions. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty says:

To the extent that consciousness is only consciousness of something by allowing its wake to trail behind itself, and to the extent that, to think an object, consciousness must rely upon a previously constructed “world of thought,” there is always a depersonalization at the heart of consciousness. From this appears the principle of a foreign intervention: consciousness can be ill, the world of its thought can fall to pieces; or rather, since the “contents” dissociated by the illness did not figure in normal consciousness as parts and only served as the supports for significations that transcended them, consciousness can be seen attempting to maintain its superstructures even though their foundation has collapsed. It mimics its customary operations, but without the power of obtaining their intuitive realization and without the power of hiding the strange deficiency that steal, from them, their full sense.⁵⁹⁶

Analyzing Schneider’s pathology, Merleau-Ponty learns that consciousness may be alienated, it may fall out of its original living flux to remain fixed in its own world and operations. Alienated consciousness would not be consciousness in movement, openness to the world, but rather mechanism. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty describes the illness of consciousness as a redoubling of consciousness in which consciousness becomes foreign to itself: the “contents” of thought are dissociated from their original source and become pure mimicry. The superstructure of thought may collapse because, in its ideal or abstract flights,

⁵⁹⁶ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 159-60/138-39. “Dans la mesure où la conscience n’est conscience de quelque chose qu’en laissant traîner derrière elle son sillage, et où, pour penser un objet, il faut s’appuyer sur un «monde de pensée» précédemment construit, il y a toujours une dépersonnalisation au cœur de la conscience; par là est donné le principe d’une intervention étrangère: la conscience peut être malade, le monde de ses pensées peut s’effondrer par fragments, -ou plutôt, comme les «contenus» dissociés par la maladie ne figuraient pas dans la conscience normale à titre de parties et ne servaient que d’appuis à des significations qui les dépassent, on voit la conscience essayer de maintenir ses superstructures alors que leur fondement s’est effondré, elle mime ses opérations coutumières, mais sans pouvoir en obtenir la réalisation intuitive et sans pouvoir masquer le déficit que les prive de leur sens plein.”

it becomes an inert system, uprooted from its existential foundations, i.e., its bodily anchorage in perception.

In this way, Merleau-Ponty “repeats” at a different level an analysis that was initially related to the body, and which revealed the body as a power of expression that is anonymous and contains the possibility of alienation. This analysis shows that lived body and consciousness mirror each other, they operate in similar ways, they are two sides of the same intentional schemas. For the lived body is primordial consciousness: intentionality and expression. Consciousness is essentially embodied and takes up the habits and tendencies of the body, which is why consciousness can be ill and collapse into fragments, just as the body can. This means that consciousness is entanglement in the world, is exposure to the world. As Merleau-Ponty explains, consciousness *has* a body and, thereby, it extends upon the sensible generality of the world: “Consciousness projects itself into a physical world and has a body, just as it projects itself into a cultural world and has a habitus. This is because it can only be consciousness by playing upon significations given in the absolute past of nature or in its personal past, and because every lived form tends toward a certain generality, whether it be the generality of our habitus or rather that of our bodily functions.”⁵⁹⁷

Having said this, the point I want to emphasize is that in order to conjure up the false alternative between spiritualism and materialism, Merleau-Ponty follows two routes. On the one hand, he describes the lived body as a body that is itself consciousness, a body that projects significations and is opened to the world as a meaningful totality. On the other hand, he shows that consciousness somehow imitates the body: it can be ill, and fragmented,

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 160/139. “*Que la maladie psychique, à son tour, soit liée à un accident corporel, cela se comprend, en principe, de la même façon; la conscience se projette dans un monde physique, et a un corps, comme elle se projette dans un monde culturel et a des habitus. Parce qu’elle ne peut être conscience qu’en jouant sur des significations données dans le passé absolu de la nature ou dans son passé personnel, et parce que toute forme vécue tend vers une certaine généralité, que ce soit celle de nos habitus ou bien celle de nos «fonctions corporelles».*”

and its operations may be sedimented in habits. Thus, one could say that there is a mirror-play between consciousness and body, for Merleau-Ponty understands consciousness on the basis of the dynamics of the body, and the body as the phenomenal, existent body, which is itself consciousness. In a sense, these two routes converge in Merleau-Ponty's notion of generality, as it is introduced in the citation above. For the lived body is a sectioning of the generality of the sensible. But this generality is also the condition of possibility for the *movement* or fluidity of thinking. Indeed, anchored in the lived present of bodily perception, the world of thought is not a static landscape of sedimented thoughts, it never reaches the full encompassing view of the *kosmotheoros*, for it is thought only insofar as it is alive, and it is alive only insofar as it remains in movement, open to a world whose horizons it cannot delimit from the outside. That is to say, in the optimal functioning of consciousness, the sedimentation of thoughts does not appear as a solid store of conceptual contents; instead, it is integrated into the atmosphere of existential significations animating our living present. With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty says: "...my acquired thoughts are not an absolute acquisition; they feed off my present thought at each moment; they offer me a sense, but this is a sense that I reflect back to them."⁵⁹⁸

In sum, one could say that the lived body is a constitutive dimension of consciousness because it is intentionality and expression, and because the work of consciousness is not confined to the "world of thoughts," but rather is incarnated in the history of my body as an atmosphere pervading the present of perception. Merleau-Ponty further articulates this point through an analysis of language and its roots in living speech. As Merleau-Ponty explains, the phenomenological analysis of speech is the decisive step to

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 151/132. "...mes pensées acquises ne sont pas un acquis absolu, elles se nourrissent à chaque moment de ma pensée présente, elles m'offrent un sens, mais je le leur rends."

overcome once and for all the subject-object dichotomy, and to grasp the unity of body and consciousness. This means, as was suggested above, that speech is consciousness in action and, conversely, that the operations of consciousness do not exist prior to the bodily articulations of speech.

Language, Sedimentation and Gesture

Merleau-Ponty argues that the tendency toward sedimentation is intrinsic to language, for language can refer to language, speak about itself, as no other modes of expression can. And, in this process, language itself becomes the milieu of reflection and ideality. Along these lines, one could say that the background of language constitutes the very fabric of our conscious life and, ultimately, that these cannot be separated: consciousness is consciousness *in* language. As I indicated early on, the separation between idea or meaning and linguistic expression is apparent, not real. Following this logic, Merleau-Ponty remarks: “The sense of a phrase appears as intelligible to us throughout, even detachable from this phrase and defined in an intelligible world because we presuppose as given all the participations that it owes to the history of the language and that contribute to determining its sense.”⁵⁹⁹

As Merleau-Ponty explains, the experience of sense or meaning presupposes familiarity with language, appropriation of the history of language. He suggests that it is this familiarity or habituation that makes language appear as a transparent means of communication, as the vehicle of ideas that are simply intelligible. This is one structural aspect of our experience of language. Specifically, this is what Merleau-Ponty calls “spoken

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 219/194. “Le sens d’une phrase nous paraît intelligible de part en part, détachable de cette phrase même et défini dans un monde intelligible, parce que nous supposons données toutes les participations qu’elle doit à l’histoire de la langue et qui contribuent à en déterminer le sens.”

speech” (*parole parlée*): the totality of words and significations that are sedimented in the background of our understanding of things.

Language appears to be an objective structure, an artifice, because it has already been integrated as a part of our intentional schemes. The operations of language seem to be subordinated to the control of consciousness because consciousness is already pervaded by the history of language. And this history is reactivated in each act of speech or expression. Following this argument, one could say that already in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty understands language to be an originary constituent of existence, a structural dimension of perception. In fact, in the argumentative context of the passage quoted above, and after comparing language and music, Merleau-Ponty concludes: “But as we have said the clarity of language is in fact established against an obscure background, and, if we push the research far enough, we find that language itself, in the end, says nothing other than itself, or that its sense is not separable from it.”⁶⁰⁰

Thus, as Merleau-Ponty remarks, there is nothing behind language, the sense of words cannot be detached from our living engagement with speech. Sedimented language is part of our background understanding of things, and this means that language transpires throughout our bodily movements and comportments. Merleau-Ponty determines this existential dimension of language through the motif of gesture. He often uses the notion of gesture to qualify artistic modes of expression –like music and painting –whose meaning is intrinsic to the sensible dimension of the work, and whose meaning is experienced as part of an affective milieu. But he suggests that not only “artistic” gestures but gestures in general reveal an existential, affective, or emotional dimension of meaning, and that they somehow

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. “Mais en réalité, comme nous l’avons dit, la clarté du langage s’établit sur un fond obscur, et si nous poussons la recherche assez loin, nous trouverons finalement que le langage, lui aussi, ne dit rien que lui-même, ou que son sens n’est pas séparable de lui.”

constitute the origin of language. He says precisely: “We must, then, seek the first hints of language in the emotional gesticulation by which man superimposes upon the given world the world according to man.”⁶⁰¹

In sum, one can say that emotional gesticulations are the initial flares of language, whereby the world is transfigured, impregnated with affective depth, turned into a human world. As Merleau-Ponty explains, gestures are essentially emotional and, for this reason, they reveal the pre-cognitive roots of language, the layer of existential significations that animate speech and that precede the use of language as a neutral vehicle of information. In line with this conclusion, Merleau-Ponty would suggest that emotional gestures are primordial determinations of language, instantiations of “speaking speech” (*parole parlante*), of the living dimension of speech. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty argues, along with the spoken word, sedimented language, there is speaking speech: the speech that is itself movement, action.

Particularly, examining speech disorders such as aphasia, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that speech is articulated in bodily movements and actions, not in the ideal sphere of thought. And this means that one accomplishes thought in the moment of performance, in the concrete speech. For this reason, as I have already indicated, the essence of speech may be characterized as gestural: “Speech is a genuine gesture and, just like all gestures, speech too contain its own sense.”⁶⁰² Elaborating on this point, Merleau-Ponty compares the unity of significant gestures and the unity of the work of art, “...whose sense is

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 219/194. “Il faudrait donc chercher les premières ébauches du langage dans la gesticulation émotionnelle par laquelle l’homme superpose au monde donné le monde selon l’homme.”

⁶⁰² Ibid., 214/189. “La parole est un véritable geste et elle contient son sens comme le geste contient le sien.”

only accessible through direct contact, and who send forth their signification without ever leaving their temporal and spatial place.”⁶⁰³

We therefore see that already in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty perceives in gestures a primordial dimension of language, which is not subordinated to the operations of a “pre-linguistic” consciousness. He shows that gestures institute a primordial layer of significance against the background of sedimented language, and the mute ground of nature. I should note, however, that in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty also suggests that gestures are inscribed in a cultural world, as if gestures were essentially codified as social conventions, as if they were primarily a human production, and as if the body were somehow detached from nature and not an integral part of the carnal generality of the world.⁶⁰⁴ This point is problematic because behind gestural “conventions” there lies a basic ground of gestural communication that has no positive, fixed meanings, and this explains why communication across entirely different cultures is in principle possible.

The Diacritical Structure of Language

The articulation of the two basic dimensions of language, the living language engrained in bodily perception and “adherent” to the sensible appearance of things, and the historical sphere of sedimented meanings, is a pressing problem that haunted Merleau-Ponty in the years that followed the *Phenomenology of Perception*. And this problem motivates a continuous reflection on the theme of gesture, of living gestures and speech, and its articulations with language as a system.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 177/153. “...le sens n’est accessible que par un contact direct et qui rayonnent leur signification sans quitter leur place temporelle et spatiale.”

⁶⁰⁴ See *ibid.*, 220/194-95. Merleau-Ponty remarks, for instance, that gestures of anger in Japanese culture are determined on a different background than in the Western world, in such way that the meaning of the emotions is entirely different. This example is problematic because, although partially true, it seems to contradict the fact that gestures have a basic plasticity, which makes it impossible to circumscribe their meanings as cultural codes.

In his presentation at the first *Colloque international de Phénoménologie* in 1951,⁶⁰⁵ Merleau-Ponty examines the relationship between gestural expressions, which are taken as part of the living ground of speech, and the “objective” stratifications of language. Merleau-Ponty argues that although the distinction between these two spheres of language –language as objective system and language as living speech –is for the most part clear and unquestionable for disciplines such as linguistics and psychology; the articulation between them still prevails as an enigma for the phenomenological view. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, from a phenomenological perspective, the difficulty is to determine the ontological articulation of the different levels of speech,⁶⁰⁶ not only to lay out the juxtaposition of these two levels, a task already accomplished by Saussure.⁶⁰⁷

In sum, Merleau-Ponty searches for the conditions that determine the emergence of novel meanings from the sedimentation of language. Here, he undertakes this task on the basis of Saussure’s distinction between language (*langage*) and speech (*parole*), and Saussure’s account of the interplay between the diachronic and synchronic orders of language.⁶⁰⁸

In this context, Merleau-Ponty shows that the development of language never reaches the ideal state of a universal system, but rather functions as “a cohesive whole of convergent linguistic gestures.”⁶⁰⁹ In line with arguments from *The Prose of the World*, which will be examined in the following section of the present work, Merleau-Ponty qualifies

⁶⁰⁵ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), ch. 2. English: *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964). Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 108/86.

⁶⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, 86-87/108-09. See also Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), Introduction, ch. I-III.

⁶⁰⁸ Saussure uses the terms “synchronic” and “diachronic” to distinguish between two types of linguistics, which correspond to two states of language: “Everything that relates to the static side of our science [linguistics] is synchronic; everything that has to do with evolution is diachronic. Similarly, *synchrony* and *diachrony* designate respectively a language-state and an evolutionary phase.” Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 81.

⁶⁰⁹ *Signes*, 109/87. “...un ensemble de gestes linguistics convergentes.”

language as an “ensemble of gestures,” and underscores that language works in each case as a dynamic totality that is reconfigured through singular events of expression. As Emmanuel Alloa points out, “just as language can be considered as a form of gesture, gesture itself manifests the diacritic structure of language.”⁶¹⁰

Following Saussure’s explanations of the function of diacritical markers in language, Merleau-Ponty argues that signs have a diacritic value because they do not constitute a system of fixed, positive meanings, but rather of lateral, indirect significations.⁶¹¹ He says specifically that signs are structured through differences, and oppositions: “Each one of them expresses only by reference to a certain mental equipment, to a certain arrangement of our cultural implements, and as a whole they are like a blank form we have not yet filled out, or like the gestures of others, which intend and circumscribe an object of the world that I do not see.”⁶¹² As Alloa indicates, Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Saussure, in what concerns the determination of language as diacritic,⁶¹³ may be based on a play on “the double sense of *écarter* as both excluding and spacing, producing a gap (*écart*),”⁶¹⁴ and he further remarks that “the only reference to the diacritical we find in the *Cours de linguistique générale* which Merleau-

⁶¹⁰ Se Emmanuel Alloa, “The Diacritical Nature of Meaning. Merleau-Ponty with Saussure,” *Chiasmi International. Trilingual studies concerning Merleau-Ponty’s Thought* 15 (2013): 167-180, 171. See also Maurice Lagueux, “Merleau-Ponty et la linguistique de Saussure,” *Dialogue* IV, no. 3 (1965): 351-364, 353.

⁶¹¹ With regard to this, Alloa makes the following analysis of diacritical signs: “Diacritical signs are peculiar signs since, while being regulating utterances, they cannot be uttered themselves; while being operators of articulation, they cannot in turn become the subject of articulation. Determining the value of vowels in Ancient languages like Classical Greek or Latin, they are not vowels themselves, but rather come from the side and alter the vocalic value. Written in the margins of the letters, above, beneath or beside them, they provoke their alteration in terms of accentuation or tone. Sometimes, such as in Classical Greek, they were even used to turn a letter into a numeral. The basic function is however to determine the value of a sign and hence to exclude those possibilities that are not pertinent. As it were, the term *diacritical* would thus to be understood etymologically as that ‘through which’ (*dia*) a ‘distinction’ (*diakrisis*) is to be made. The diacritical markers hence operate partially, from the divide between signs, not so much attributing a signification to a sign than ‘dividing’ possibilities, excluding significations.” “The Diacritical Nature of Meaning,” 168.

⁶¹² *Signs*, 110/88. “Chaque d’eux n’exprime que par référence à un certain outillage mental, à un certain aménagement de nos utensils culturels, et ils sont tous ensemble comme un formulaire en blanc que l’on n’a pas encore rempli, comme les gestes d’autrui qui visent et circonscrivent un objet du monde que je ne vois pas.”

⁶¹³ Alloa alludes here, in particular, to a passage from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, trans. Hugh J. Silvermann (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 93.

⁶¹⁴ Alloa, “The Diacritical Nature of Meaning,” 172.

Ponty studied extensively is, if not pertinent for a conceptualization of the term, at least revealing on the impossibility of having something like a general, decontextualized writing of all languages.”⁶¹⁵

Thus, it seems, the determination of language as diacritic stems from Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Saussure. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that language presupposes an embodied, diacritical capacity of interpretation,⁶¹⁶ and that meaning is constituted as a “differential process.”⁶¹⁷ This means that signs function essentially like empty gestures, blank forms to be filled out in future appropriations.

As Merleau-Ponty explains, the emptiness and silence surrounding the world of signs function as an invitation to praxis, even though no action would ever fill out the essential emptiness of the sign. Elaborating on this point, Merleau-Ponty explains that linguistic signs, just like gestures, rise up from the field of my actions, they stem from the “I can” rather than the “I think.” Hence, words as gestures are extensions of the corporal schemas uniting my body to the world, which operate without the directives of representations: “I have a rigorous awareness of the bearing of my gestures or the spatiality of my body which allows me to maintain relationships with the world without thematically representing to myself the objects I am going to grasp or the relationships of size between my body and the avenues offered to me by the world.”⁶¹⁸ As Merleau-Ponty indicates, the structural silences of language, the diacritical differences and spaces that constitute speech, are pervaded by the

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 172-73. The passage in question in the *Course in General Linguistics* states that, “...an alphabet applicable to all languages would probably be weighed down by diacritical marks” (34), and suggests that it is not possible to establish a uniform phonological system that would be applicable to all languages.

⁶¹⁶ Alloa expresses this point as follows: “The diacritical operation and the determination of significance do not start with standardized propositional language, but already at the level of perception.” “The Diacritical Nature of Meaning,” 174.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ *Signes*, 111/89. “J’ai une conscience rigoureuse de la portée des mes gestes ou de la spatialité de mon corps qui me permet d’entretenir des rapports avec le monde sans me représenter thématiquement les objets que je vais saisir ou les rapports de grandeur entre mon corps et les cheminements que m’offre le monde.”

silent “awareness” (*conscience*) of my body, they are integrated in my embodied existence.⁶¹⁹ That is to say, the diacritical values of language hinge on the diacritical capacity of interpretation that is perception itself, and which allows me to capture differences of meaning in minimal, “unperceivable” movements, textures, and tones. For example, this is what happens when I listen to someone speaking and every alteration of the voice renders different significations of which I am not consciously aware.⁶²⁰

Continuing this argument, Richard Kearney remarks: “Our body schemas, Merleau-Ponty claims, operate like phonetic systems which function according to principles of which they are not conscious.”⁶²¹ Kearney further explains that what is at stake here is not a reference to the unconscious, but rather to “imperception,” for in the salience of figures the grounds are not perceived as such, and “this diacritical interplay between figure and ground represents an endless reversibility –for what is one perceiver’s figure is another’s ground and vice versa.”⁶²²

One may say, therefore, that diacritical perception hinges on the silent consciousness of background structures, in such a way that any thematic positing of concepts or representations, any attempt at founding perception in consciousness, may end up paralyzing our movements and causing the event of signification to fail.⁶²³ We therefore see how the qualification of perception as diacritical is a decisive move towards the overcoming of the philosophy of consciousness. For if one is able to capture the meaning of the most minimal,

⁶¹⁹ In “*Le monde sensible et le monde de l’expression*,” one of the lectures given at the *College de France* in 1952-53, Merleau-Ponty explains that consciousness and movement must be understood as two extreme poles, two abstract moments of the unified movement of existence (see *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, 17/76).

⁶²⁰ See *Signs*, 111/89.

⁶²¹ Richard Kearney, “Diacritical Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutic Rationality*, ed. Maria Luísa Portocarreño, Luis António Umbelino and Andrzej Wiercinski, (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012), 177-96, 186.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 187.

⁶²³ This is a central thesis from the *Phenomenology of Perception*, which structures Merleau-Ponty’s explanation of the case of Schneider.

inconspicuous variations in perception, before the explicit constitution of a “content,” then one must assume that the world itself, the world whose fabric is shared by my body, is that which lays down the basis for interpretation. It is in this argumentative context that one must understand Merleau-Ponty’s remark according to which significations animate speech (*parole*), just as the “world arouses my body.”⁶²⁴ In this regard, Alloa says that “one cannot but acknowledge that Merleau-Ponty went the way of an ontological questioning of the grounds of the diacritical and its discovery.”⁶²⁵

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty suggests that language originates from bodily gestures or expressive acts, and that these gestures involve a schema of the world. And this means that the world is not the other of language, but rather the imminence of language. Continuing this argument, in *The Prose of the World* and the lectures related to this project, Merleau-Ponty further explores the articulation between body, world and language. Specifically, he investigates the grounds of the truth, and the primordial institution of meaning against the silent ground of nature. Thus, let me move on to examine Merleau-Ponty’s concept of truth and the idea of meaning as institution, in order to define how the passage to the problem of nature is developed.

Meaning and Institution: Gesture and the Carnal Generality of the World

After the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty embarks on a philosophical project concerned with the correlation between mind and body, and a theory of truth. Part of this project is published as *The Prose of the World*, a book Merleau-Ponty left unfinished in 1951. In this book Merleau-Ponty outlines a theory of expression, according to which meaning is instituted in the sensible world as openness, a blank space to be retrieved in historical

⁶²⁴ *Signes*, 112/89. “*le monde anime mon corps.*”

⁶²⁵ Alloa, “The Diacritical Nature of Meaning,” 170.

appropriations. In this case, as in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty takes up the analysis of expressive possibilities of the body and gestures in order to understand the primordial intertwining of body and mind. With regard to this, explaining Merleau-Ponty's new project in his preface to *The Prose of the World*, Claude Lefort points out that "...the concrete theory of the mind was to be constructed around a new idea of expression which was yet to be completed, of an analysis of gestures and the mimetic uses of the body and all forms of language, to the most sublimated language of mathematics."⁶²⁶

Lefort's indication, which is supported by Merleau-Ponty's report to Martial Gueroult about his new project,⁶²⁷ confirms that the analysis of gestures is a crucial element in Merleau-Ponty's exploration of the ontological grounds of language. As I have already indicated, gestures make manifest a sort of primitive and general communicability, they unfold a language that seems to be rooted in nature. Along these lines, one could say that the phenomenon of gesture presupposes the idea that we move within the milieu of a carnal generality, that our body functions as a mirror of the world. This idea of a carnal generality is present already in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, it is implicit in the concept of body schema, as has been suggested in previous sections of this dissertation. Yet, one finds an explicit formulation of this idea only in subsequent works.

In the second chapter of *The Prose of the World*, in a footnote explaining how language is based on a sort of natural communicability –a nascent logos that stems from nature or the world itself –Merleau-Ponty argues that language is founded on the phenomenon of a "carnal generality: what warms me, warms him; it is founded on the magical action of like

⁶²⁶ *The Prose of the World*, xii/xiii.

⁶²⁷ See *ibid.*

upon like (the *warm* sun makes me *warm*), on the fusion of me embodied –and the world.”⁶²⁸

As Merleau-Ponty explains, the carnal generality of the world is a primordial milieu of significance, which is constituted through the interpenetration and porosity of beings, the fluidity of the sensible.

One might say that this carnal generality determines one essential moment of the origins of language, then, in the chapter entitled “The Indirect Language,” complemented by a second fundamental moment that corresponds to the structural dimension of silence, and whose main traits I examined in the previous section. Let me recall here that, for Merleau-Ponty, sensible being is not a homogeneous milieu of communicability. My body is never simply “fused” with the world, for bodily movements and gestures are chiasmic and spontaneous. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty indicates that gestures make leaps, ruptures, “...outlining, in the inconceivable platitude of being, hollows and reliefs, distances and gaps –in short, a meaning.”⁶²⁹

Based on these premises, I suggest that Merleau-Ponty identifies two structural constituents of meaning. On the one hand, and let me emphasize this point, he considers the example of the transmission of warmth to the body and remarks that there exists a general communicability within the world that prefigures the work of language, and that is initially determined in terms of a “fusion” between body and world: the experience of the carnal generality of the world. On the other hand, in the passage cited above, Merleau-Ponty considers specifically the expressive dimension of painting and its diacritical character. In this case, Merleau-Ponty shows that gestures create hollows and gaps in being. And this means that gestures do not communicate *directly*, they are not in a relationship of continuity

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 29/20. “...la généralité charnelle: ce qui me donne chaud lui donne chaud, sur l'action magique du semblable sur le semblable (le soleil chaud me donne chaud) sur la fusion moi incarné-monde...”

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 110/79. “...dessiner dans la platitude inconcevable de l'être des creux et des reliefs, des distances et des écarts; un sens.”

with the rest of the world, even though they are rooted in the carnal generality of the world. One must assume, therefore, that meaning emerges as a tension between these two moments. Put succinctly: meaning is the openness of a gap within the generality of the sensible.

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty indicates that gestures and bodily expressions carry out a productive deformation of the world, a deviation from the world –including both the natural and the historical world –that institutes horizons of meaning. And this work of institution occurs as a reconfiguration of the whole. In this sense, the work of expression is not merely subjective, for human gestures and expressions are integrated with the common world of human practices, they are reconfigurations of the world as a whole. Merleau-Ponty explains this point as follows:

The body not only flows over into a world whose schema it bears in itself but possesses this world at a distance rather than being possessed by it. The gesture of expression which undertakes on its own account to delineate what it intends and make it appear outside, retrieves the world and remakes it in order to know it so much the more. But already, with our first oriented gesture, *someone's* infinite relationships to his *situation* had invaded our mediocre planet and opened an inexhaustible field to our behavior. All perception, and all action which presupposes it, in short, every human use of the body is already primordial expression.⁶³⁰

Here, human gestures are qualified as rifts within sensible being, whereby a horizon of infinite possibilities is released, an emptiness that is also virtuality. Merleau-Ponty suggests that our interventions in the world, every human use of the body, are meaningful insofar as they open up a distance in relation to the world. For the world does not possess us, it is not predelineated before our actions. Rather, the world remains dormant, distanced, an enigma to be reactivated, “possessed” by us through attempts at interrogation. That is to say, the

⁶³⁰ Ibid. “Non seulement le corps se voue à un monde dont il porte en lui le schéma: il le possède à distance plutôt qu’il n’en est possédé. A plus forte raison, le geste d’expression qui se charge lui-même de dessiner et de faire paraître au dehors ce qu’il vise accomplit-il une vraie récupération du monde et le refait-il pour le connaître. Mais déjà, avec notre premier geste orienté, les rapports infinis de quelqu’un avec sa situation avaient envahi notre médiocre planète et ouvert à notre conduite un champ indéfini. Toute perception, et toute action que la suppose, bref tout usage de notre corps est déjà expression primordiale.”

world is always yet to be possessed, never *actually* given; it is fragmentarily intimated, indirectly, in our expressive acts.

In the context of the passage cited above, Merleau-Ponty further suggests that our actions, as gestures, are outlines inscribed in the world, reintegrated with the generality of the world in such a way as to call for new appropriations. Expanding on this point Merleau-Ponty refers to painting, and his reference to painting is significant because painting elicits the depth of perception. Presumably, painting reveals the latency of meaning that vibrates within visible beings; it shows visible things as if they were about to *say* something, and this imminence of meaning is what Merleau-Ponty calls “primordial expression.” Furthermore, as painting returns to the visual world of perception, as it reconfigures the visual world, it instigates a re-enactment of the primordial interrogation of the world that is perception itself.

As Merleau-Ponty explains, perception is itself interrogation because it is the response to an enigma: the enigma of the sensible world. Responding to this enigma, the body transforms things into emblems of its own corporality, into signs. With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty says that “[p]erception makes what is expressed dwell in signs, not through some previous convention but through the eloquence of their very arrangement and configuration. It implants a meaning in what did not have one, and thus, instead of exhausting itself in the moment it occurs, perception inaugurates an order and founds an institution or tradition.”⁶³¹

Merleau-Ponty remarks that perception is primordial expression in order to show that perception is neither the expression of conventions nor the direct apprehension of the world itself, but rather openness to the world. And, as openness to the world perception

⁶³¹ Ibid., 110-11/78-79. “...il fait habiter en eux l’exprimé, non pas sous la condition de quelque convention préalable, mais par l’éloquence de leur arrangement même et de leur configuration, plante un sens dans ce qui n’en avait pas, et qui donc, loin de s’épuiser dans l’instant où elle a lieu, ouvre un champ, inaugure un ordre, fonde une institution ou une tradition.”

does not contain the world as a system of fixed representations. Perception may only grasp the world indirectly by sketching forms, traces, outlines. One could say, then, that perception is foundation of meaning only insofar as it is “implanting” of meaning, effort of expression, adumbration of language. What perception discloses is the “seed” of signification, the institution of a field of meaning, not raw materials or sensations. And this means that perception is historical: it is involved in history, it is the institution of a tradition. That is to say, perception does not impose a meaning but rather opens up a field of meaning. In short, perception establishes, not things themselves, but ways of seeing things.

Thus, perception perpetuates the enigma of the sensible world, it does not solve it. Along these lines, one could say that meaning is the very latency of meaning, interrogation. Based on these premises, Merleau-Ponty sketches out a response to the problem of translation and originality—in the sense of novelty. The problem is that different cultures, with different backgrounds of signification and value, with different modes of expression and gestures, can communicate, even though there is not an objective ground of perception. The difficulty consists, precisely, of explaining this possibility of communication without introducing the idea of a “Spirit” of history, and without presupposing that cultural differences depend upon objective material conditions. With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty indicates that cultures have a gestural origin, whose settings remain essentially open. He says:

We propose, on the contrary [contrary to the idea of emplacing culture within a physical geophysical territory], to consider the order of culture or meaning as an original order of advent which should not be derived from the order of mere events, if such exist, or treated simply as the effect of unlikely conjunctures. If it is characteristic of the human gesture to signify beyond its simple factual existence and to inaugurate a meaning, it follows that every gesture is *comparable* to all others. They all arise from a single syntax. Each gesture is both a beginning and a continuation which, insofar as it is not opaque and enclosed like an event that is complete once and for all, has a value beyond its simple presence and is in this respect allied in advance with or an accomplice in all other expressive efforts. Moreover, the human

gesture is not only a possibility simultaneous with all other expressive efforts. It also assumes a structure with them in the world of painting.⁶³²

Merleau-Ponty insists that the original source of meaning is not an order of mere events, a conjunction of facts rooted in a geographical territory. Rather, what is originary is the order of culture or signification, understood in terms of a somewhat gestural syntax: “each gesture is both a beginning and a continuation.” As Merleau-Ponty puts it, cultural expressions are preserved as gestural expressions, in such a way that every “factual” event is immediately inscribed as something more than a “presence,” as a hint that is sent to the future. This is particularly evident, for instance, in the tradition of painting. Merleau-Ponty explains that any painting can find resonances in any other, no matter the relative distances in terms of space and time. For what makes all gestures *comparable*, including the gestures of painting, is their tentative character, their openness to the possibility of future interpretations.

Merleau-Ponty develops these arguments further in his 1952 article “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” which stems from the previously discussed, central chapter in *The Prose of the World*. On this occasion he declares that language can only be preceded by language. He says precisely: “speech always comes into play against the background of speech.”⁶³³ Thereby, he concludes, if there is not original presence behind language, then all language is indirect and, therefore, silence.⁶³⁴ One could say that language

⁶³² Ibid., 121/79-80. “Nous proposons au contraire de reconnaître l’ordre de la culture ou du sens comme un ordre original de l’avènement qui ne doit pas être dérivé de celui, s’il existe, des pures événements, ni traité comme le simple effet de certaines rencontres peu probables. Si l’on admet que le propre du geste humaine est de signifier au-delà de sa simple existence de fait, d’inaugurer un sens, il en résulte que tout geste est comparable à tout autre, au’ils relèvent tous d’une seule syntaxe, que chacun d’eux est une commencement, comporte une suite ou des recommencements en tant qu’il n’est pas, comme l’événement, opaque et fermé sur lui-même, et une fois par toutes rendu, qu’il vaut au-delà de sa simple présence de fait, et qu’en cela il est par avance allié ou complice de toutes les autres tentatives d’expression. Davantage: non seulement il est composable avec elles, et s’organise avec elles dans un monde de la peinture (mais encore si la trace en demeure).”

⁶³³ *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*, 53/244. “la parole joue toujours sur fond de parole.”

⁶³⁴ See *ibid.*, 54/245.

is essentially indirect because, as was explained above, what language signifies or communicates is based on an act of institution, an effort of expression that is, in a sense, groundless, silent. And yet, the silence that grounds language is always a silence pregnant with voice, communication at distance, the hint that communicates something precisely insofar as it is not coincidence but disclosure, un-veiling. Continuing this argument, Merleau-Ponty says that “if we press the meaning of the little word ‘say’ and bring into light what constitutes the price of language, we would find that it is the intention to unveil the thing itself and to go beyond what is said to what what is said signifies.”⁶³⁵ One could say, then, that the effort of expression, primordial language, is a continuous movement of disclosure, a relentless effort to establish the truth, and to test the limits of our historical world. In this sense, one can say that language and expressive acts in general unfold as the struggle to establish the truth against the inextricable silence of the world, the silence of nature. Let me now move on to examine the way in which Merleau-Ponty carries out the passage from the problem of the truth to nature.

In the lecture course entitled “Materials for a Theory of History”(1953-54), Merleau-Ponty remarks that all action is situated in a historical horizon, in such a way that history appears as the inner logic connecting “all the levels of activity.”⁶³⁶ This means that we dwell in history, in a horizon of openness and freedom, so that our actions resonate in humanity in general, not only in the space and time we dwell in: “our contact with our age is an initiation into every age, man is a historian because he belongs to history and history is only the

⁶³⁵ *The Prose of the World*, 145/102. “*Si nous pressons le sens de cet petit mot «dire», si nous tirons au chair ce qui fait le prix du langage, nous y trouvons l'intention de dévoiler la chose même, de dépasser l'énoncé vers ce qu'il signifie...*”

⁶³⁶ *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, 44/96. “*...tous les ordres d'activité.*”

amplification of practice.”⁶³⁷ This approach to history supplements the arguments I sketched out above, but it also establishes the basis for understanding Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the concept of truth.

As Merleau-Ponty explains, on the basis of this theory of history we can say that truth is not a factual state, a static delimitation of facts, nor a certain representation of things, but rather the very struggle of expression, the practical efforts to bring to light the obscure laws guiding our practical activities. He says precisely: “Truth is not found in certain historical agents, nor in the achievement of theoretical consciousness, but in the confrontation of the two, in their practice, and in their common life.”⁶³⁸ As will become clear in subsequent arguments from these lectures, this means that truth gains its ideality from its historical preservation and reactivation as institution, its integration in practices and efforts of expression that participate in a common world, a sensible world which functions as “hinge” [*charnière*].⁶³⁹

Elaborating on this idea, in the summary of the 1954-55 course, “Institution in Personal and Public History,” Merleau-Ponty defines the concept of institution as follows: “Thus, what we understand by the concept of institution are those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions, in relation to which whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning, will form an intelligible series or a history –or again those events which sediment in me a meaning, not just as survival or residues, but as the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future.”⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 50/101. “Notre contact avec notre temps est une initiation à tous les temps; l’homme est historien parce qu’il est historique; l’histoire n’est que l’amplification de la pratique.”

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 55/105. “La vérité ne se trouve pas dans certains sujets historiques existants, ni dans la prise de conscience théorique, mais dans leur confrontation, dans leur pratique et dans leur vie commune.”

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 60/180.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 61/108-09. “On entendait donc ici par institution ces événements d’une expérience qui la dotent de dimensions durables, par rapport auxquelles toute une série d’autres expériences auront sens, formeront une suite pensable ou une histoire, - ou encore les

One can see, then, that the concept of institution serves to articulate what could perhaps be called an agonistic concept of truth: truth as the historical strife for the preservation of meaning, as something that must be reactivated in singular acts and practices. Along these lines, one might say that the truth is set as an interrogation, instituted as an event that *demand*s a response, and that may not be preserved as a representation. Moreover, one could add that truth is the expression of a peculiar desire: the inexhaustible desire for the future, for the preservation of the world.⁶⁴¹

Following this logic it is clear that the world we live in, the world in which the truth is set, is pervaded by desire. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty explains, the notion of institution presupposes a certain “animal” magnetism, a certain urge for imitation and propagation that impregnates from the outset our bodily interactions with others. Merleau-Ponty says precisely: “There is something comparable to institution even at the animal level (the animal is impregnated by the living creatures which surround him at birth).”⁶⁴²

In this way Merleau-Ponty suggests that gestures follow a somewhat “subterranean logic” [*logique souterraine*],⁶⁴³ a logic that is not manifest. This means that the instituted truth or meaning imposes itself through carnal contact: impregnation. And this includes the experience of truth and meaning in science. Presumably, science looks for the truth *per se*,

événements qui déposent en moi un sens, non pas à titre de survivance et de résidu, mais comme appel à une suite, exigence d'un avenir.”

⁶⁴¹ Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, in his book *Être et chair*, articulates the problematic of desire in Merleau-Ponty as follows: “La phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty –dans sa grande attention à l'intrication de la perception et du mouvement, aux subtilités d'une foi perceptive et interrogative qui soutient notre être-au-monde, ou encore à l'engagement anthropologique integral impliqué par la vision en profondeur –, éclaire ce point et fraye une essentielle approche indirecte du désir. Celui qui voit endure et dépasse l'inachèvement de la chose perçue, celui qui perçoit la profondeur traverse le conflit des images monoculaires et consent à l'inépuisable” (339).

⁶⁴² *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, 61/109. “Il y a quelque chose comme une institution dans l'animalité (il y a une imprégnation de l'animal par les vivants qui l'entourent au début de sa vie).”

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 63/110.

objective truth, and uses a logic that is universal and atemporal. But even in this case, says Merleau-Ponty, the experience of the truth depends upon a common field of experience.⁶⁴⁴

Based on these premises, I want to suggest that although Merleau-Ponty considers the order of culture as original, the problem concerning the limits between history and wild nature becomes more pressing after he delves into the problem of truth, and this motivates in part the transition to the theme of nature. For the very effort to unveil the things themselves presupposes that we have received a subtle indication of their being. Moreover, it presupposes that the silence of the thing has impregnated the silence of language. In short, we see things because they somehow *call* our attention. Along these lines, one may say that our “cultural” gestures are propagations of the immemorial history of nature: our bodily expressions somehow contract the history of nature, and conversely, the history of nature is reconfigured by our expressive efforts.

Indeed, as was previously argued, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the phenomenon of gesture indicates that the sphere of sedimented significations is incorporated in the passing of time, in such a way that what initially appeared to be a mere artifact ends up integrated with the flow of perception through habit. This may explain why, at the beginning of *The Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty says that “language is the double of being,”⁶⁴⁵ a formulation that prefigures the path to be followed in *The Visible and the Invisible*, and that envisions language as replication of the gathering force of being, for in this same context language is also determined as “...the gesture of renewal and recovery which unites me with myself and others.”⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 64/111.

⁶⁴⁵ *The Prose of the World*, 10/5. “il est la doublure de l’être.”

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 26/17. “...est le geste de reprise et de récupération qui me réunit à moi-même comme à autrui.”

Having said this, let me recapitulate and conclude this section. In *The Prose of the World* and texts related to this project, Merleau-Ponty outlines a definition of the bodily dimension of language, according to which our body is institution of meaning, expression, history. Regarding this, Merleau-Ponty says that “...it is through our body that we have the first experience of the impalpable body of history prior to all initiation into art.”⁶⁴⁷ In this sense, one could say that the body functions as a sort of writing that preserves the history of the world, and which is not simply the mute *voice* of nature. Up to this point, however, the problem of the articulation between human language and the *mute* logos of nature, of wild being, has not been resolved. For if the body is already a departure from nature and is historical, this presupposes an idea of being as double, as reduplication, for the body is in the world and the world is made of the same stuff as the body. And this is the crux that leads Merleau-Ponty toward the problem of nature and being, the one that occupies him in the years following the writing of *The Prose of the World*.

Gesture and Ontology of Language: On the Way to *The Visible and the Invisible*

Merleau-Ponty's concept of institution serves to determine the historical dimension of gestures and language. As Merleau-Ponty explains, gestures somehow synthesize our history and, at the same time, outline a meaning that is sent over, as an interrogation, to the future. Continuing this argument, while concluding the summary course on “Institution in Personal and Public History,” Merleau-Ponty says that the purpose of reflecting on the concept of institution is to set phenomenology on the path of a metaphysics of history, which comes along with a meditation on the meaning of being, and which does not simply

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 117/83. “Nous avons dans notre corps avant toute initiation à l’art la première expérience du corps impalpable de l’histoire.”

assume that “being exists” [*l’être est*].⁶⁴⁸ In this sense, it seems, the problem of institution is a preliminary to ontology.

With regard to this problem of ontology, in his course summary on “The Problem of Passivity: Sleep, the Unconscious, Memory” (1954-55), Merleau-Ponty points out that he intended to “...develop an ontology of the perceived world going beyond sensible nature.”⁶⁴⁹ As Merleau-Ponty states, the challenge is to develop an ontology that does not presuppose a mechanistic view of nature and that does not perpetuate the opposition between nature and consciousness. Thus, in this context, “going beyond sensible nature” means: going beyond a metaphysical understanding of nature. In line with this, Merleau-Ponty underscores that our perceptual experience presupposes the contact with an “outside” (*dehors*), and this outside is not the outside counterposed to subjective consciousness, but rather it is an atmosphere charged with the presence of the past. That is to say, sensible nature cannot be opposed to consciousness because nature has always already been part of our past, of our history. And this means that what we understand as a conscious action, or as a voluntary attribution of meaning, is not a transparent or immediate relation to things: it involves a “distance” (*écart*), the variation or modulation of a previously instituted field of meaning and existence, a reconfiguration of the common, sensible world that was already there.⁶⁵⁰ In short, our present actions are never entirely present: they are rooted in perception and, thereby, in the past of nature. In this context, Merleau-Ponty remarks that perception is neither passive nor active; it is anterior to both passivity and activity, it is a pre-personal engagement with the world as a whole, primordial memory, which operates even in dormancy. This explains, to some extent, why we can re-awake after a deep sleep, for even then there is a certain contact,

⁶⁴⁸ *In Praise of Philosophy*, 65/113.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 66/114. “*Le cours cherchait à prolonger au-delà de la nature l’ontologie du monde perçu*”

⁶⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, 67/115.

a pre-personal consciousness: perception. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty suggests that there is a minimum in perception in which perception touches on the generality of nature and brings it out of darkness, though not to full light. The experiences of dream and art, in which the activity of waking consciousness is suspended, may bring us back to the grey zone of perception that constitutes the threshold to nature.

As Merleau-Ponty remarks, the access to the roots of perception, the minimum of perception, requires dialectical efforts: the capacity to distinguish what is positive in negativity and what is negative in positivity, independently of the traditional opposition between consciousness and nature, subject and object.⁶⁵¹ Following this logic, nature cannot be taken as absolute negativity, as absolute silence. This means that a thinking of nature as such should be possible: nature as phenomenon, the “macro-phenomenon” that involves us and things.⁶⁵²

The problematic of nature, as it is articulated in the later lectures at the Collège de France was partly prefigured in Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of perception. The reference to the living ground of meaning, to the carnal generality of the world adumbrated in *The Prose of the World*, also hints at important elements of Merleau-Ponty’s later approach to nature and the ontology of the flesh. Yet, the investigation of the phenomenon of nature as such, as enigmatic source of meaning that nurtures existence and supports our being, becomes the object of an explicit thematization only at the time of the preparatory stages of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Indeed, in his lectures on Nature, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly remarks that this investigation is the preparation for a phenomenological ontology of visible being. In his first

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 79/123-24.

⁶⁵² As Renaud Barbaras explains it, “to say in effect that natural being is macrophenomenon is to affirm that *the very reality of nature implies its perceptibility*: there is all-encompassing being only as perceived being.” Renaud Barbaras, “Merleau-Ponty and Nature,” *Research in Phenomenology* 31, no. 1 (2001): 22-38, 36.

lecture from 1956-57, Merleau-Ponty explains this point as follows: “Naturalism apart, an ontology which leaves nature in silence shuts itself in the incorporeal and for this very reason gives a fantastic image of man, spirit and history.”⁶⁵³

As I already have indicated, nature is the elemental phenomenon that supports Merleau-Ponty’s theory of meaning as institution. Nature is, in principle, irreducible to the spheres of spirit and history. And, for this reason, it is the ground that makes possible the continuous transformation of historical significations. As Merleau-Ponty explains, in reference to Lucien Herr’s commentary on Hegel, nature “is there from the first day.”⁶⁵⁴ This means that nature continuously renovates the present of perception and animates the historical significations sedimented in our history. To be precise, Merleau-Ponty’s argument is that gestures may be spontaneous only insofar as they have a source that is irreducible to the level of instituted significations and historical events. Following this logic, nature as such, as the macro-phenomenon that envelops our being and our actions, cannot be posited as an absolute principle that is *causa sui*, nor may it be reduced to a mechanism, for that would be to return to determinism.

It is in this context that we must understand why the phenomenon of nature is intrinsically related to the general question of the meaning of being, and to the question concerning the original rapport between being and man. Specifically, as was argued in earlier chapters, Merleau-Ponty articulates these questions on the basis of a reading of Husserl’s later works and Heidegger’s meditations on language. In the context of the present reflection on language and gesture, what must be emphasized is that Merleau-Ponty finds in nature an

⁶⁵³ *Nature*, 91/130. “Tout naturalism mis à part, une ontologie qui passe sous silence la Nature s’enferme dans l’incorporel et donne, pour cette raison même, une image fantastique de l’homme, de l’esprit, et de l’histoire.”

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 94/133 “La nature “est au premier jour.” In the context of his reading of Hegel and Schelling, this idea is also referenced in the Course Notes (see *ibid.*, 49).

original logos, a non-instituted pre-word, a milieu of communication and mute significations that animate language. As Renaud Barbaras puts it, “nature is not only soil, but also cradle of expression.”⁶⁵⁵ In order to clarify this point, let me examine Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the problem of ideality in Husserl.

Reading Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry*, in the summary of the lecture course “Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology,” Merleau-Ponty recalls that ideality depends upon the appropriation of previous productions or acts of institution. Along these lines, he explains that signification arises from the re-enactment of speech, from the participation in a dialogue with others. For, Merleau-Ponty remarks, “every production of the spirit is a response and an appeal, a coproduction.”⁶⁵⁶ Based on these premises, Merleau-Ponty argues that ideality does not pre-exist speech; rather, it emerges out of the propagation and sedimentation of the word, particularly in the form of writing.

As Merleau-Ponty explains, writing is the mutation of the word that preserves the mere form of communicability, it is the matrix for the potential dialogue between x and x, a dialogue whose sense remains dormant until someone comes to awaken it.⁶⁵⁷ What is remarkable in this analysis of writing is that it emphasizes both the essentially embodied character of language and ideality and its fundamental iterability, the fact that language is basically a phenomenon of propagation. Husserl shows, indeed, that ideality is inscribed in the horizon of a tradition as the concrete –embodied –reactivation of writing and sedimented speech. And this means that every singular act of speech is never just “singular,” for in speaking we carry on with a dialogue that started long before our own existence. One

⁶⁵⁵ Renaud Barbaras, “Merleau-Ponty and Nature,” 29.

⁶⁵⁶ *In Praise of Philosophy*, 167/187. “toute production de l’esprit est réponse et appel, co-production.” See also *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 8 (English translation).

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

can say, therefore, that language involves a tendency toward repetition, which in turn reveals a desire or need of fulfillment, of meaning. Language is, in this sense, a call for language. In line with this, and referring to Heidegger's *On the Way to Language*, Merleau-Ponty concludes that "to come back to the problem of ideality, Husserl's analysis foreshadows Heidegger's thought on the 'speaking of speech.'"⁶⁵⁸

Merleau-Ponty points out that what Husserl says about ideality and horizon in *The Origin of Geometry* is taken up from a different perspective in the "Foundational Investigations." As I have said in earlier chapters, in this text Husserl explains the problem of ideality from the bottom up: his point of departure is the problem of the earth, rather than the sphere of ideality. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, Husserl suggests that before having bodies as mere objects there exists a unified horizon of the sensible, a community or "society" within the sensible world, a general communicability with the world. This is, for example, what the following passage indicates: "There is a kinship between the being of the earth and that of my body (*Leib*) which it would not be exact for me to speak of as moving because it is always at the same distance from me. This kinship extends to others, who appear to me as other bodies, to animals whom I understand as variants of my embodiment, and finally even to terrestrial bodies since I introduce them into the society of living beings when saying, for example, that a stone 'flies.'"⁶⁵⁹

The contrast Merleau-Ponty establishes between these two directions in Husserl's work, one departing from the problem of ideality and the other from the problem of the

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 168/189. "Pour revenir au problème de l'idéalité, les analyses de Husserl devancent les pensées de Heidegger sur le 'parler de la parole.'" See also *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 9 (English translation).

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 169/190. "Il y a parenté entre l'être de la terre et celui de mon corps (*Leib*), dont je ne peux dire exactement qu'il se meut puisqu'il est toujours à la même distance de moi, et la parenté s'étend aux autres, qui m'apparaissent comme «autres corps», aux animaux, que je comprends comme variantes de ma corporéité, et finalement aux corps terrestres eux-mêmes puisque je les fais entrer dans la société des vivants en disant par exemple qu'une pierre «vole»." See also *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 9 (English translation).

earth, reveals the body as the pivotal element that yokes together the society of living beings and the tradition or history of ideas. Elaborating on this point, in his last lecture from 1960, “Nature and Logos: The human Body,” Merleau-Ponty concludes that “now we must think of the human body (and not ‘consciousness’) as that which perceives nature which it also inhabits.”⁶⁶⁰

In this context, one can say that just as we carry the earth within ourselves, in the lived body, so we carry meaning in every act of speech and gesture. The community between body and sensible world in general establishes the bonds of perception as a horizon of communicability and affectivity. Thus, there is no need to presuppose a world of consciousness separate from the living world, one subordinated to the other, in order to explain the emergence of meaning and ideality. Rather, Merleau-Ponty suggests, one could say that there is a “double being” (*un être double*): “The themes of the *Umwelt*, of the body schema, of perception as true mobility (*Sichbewegen*), popularized by psychology and neurophysiology, all express the idea of corporality as an entity of two faces or two ‘sides’...”⁶⁶¹

We therefore see how Merleau-Ponty articulates the problem of expression and meaning through the idea of the generality of the sensible, of the body schema as prefiguration of the sensible flesh of the world.⁶⁶² As Merleau-Ponty points out, the characteristic duplicity of the body, according to which it is both sensed and sensing, reveals the body schema as what could be called a “..lexicon of corporality in general, a system of

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 176/196. “C’est maintenant le corps humaine (et non la ‘conscience’) qui doit apparaître comme celui que perçoit la nature don’t il est aussi l’habitant.”

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 177/197. “Les thèmes de l’*Umwelt*, du schéma corporel, de la perception comme mobilité vraie (*Sichbewegen*), popularisés par la psychologie ou la physiologie nerveuse, expriment tous l’idée de la corporéité comme être à deux faces ou à deux «côtes»...”

⁶⁶² As I indicated already, in different sections of the present work, Emmanuel de Saint Aubert extensively develops this argument in his book *Être et chair I*.

equivalences between the inside and the outside, which prescribes one to the other its fulfillment in the other.”⁶⁶³ In this way, the human body structures a “natural symbolism” [*symbolism nature*],⁶⁶⁴ it is primarily a libidinal body, whose ontological articulations would be explored in *The Visible and the Invisible*, particularly in the chapter entitled “The Intertwining – The Chiasm.”

One could say, then, that this “lexicon” of corporality is a prefiguration of the ontological structure of the flesh, as it is described in *The Visible and the Invisible*. As it was argued in an earlier chapter, the flesh names the intercrossing of the visible and the invisible, of inside and outside, that constitutes the world of perception. In this context, ideality is understood as the invisible side of the sensible that is manifest in language, which is still flesh, a flesh that, compared to the flesh of the visible body, is “less heavy, more transparent.”⁶⁶⁵

Let me recall that, according to Merleau-Ponty, the world of language is somehow prefigured in the structure of bodily perception –for example, in the redoubling of hand touched and hand touching. Therefore, one can say that language is animated by the silent logos of the sensible world, a logos that is itself desire and affectivity. And this means that, strictly speaking, language cannot *refer to* things as if they were constituted beforehand, for things are always already pervaded by silence and invisibility.⁶⁶⁶ Rather, Merleau-Ponty insists, one could say that the relation between sensible things and language is governed by the ambiguity and promiscuity of the sensible.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., 178/197. “*c’est une lexique de la corporéité en général, un système d’équivalences entre le dedans et le dehors, qui prescrit à l’un de s’accomplir dans l’autre*”

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 180/199.

⁶⁶⁵ *The Visible and the Invisible*, 198/153. “*...moins lourd, plus transparent.*”

⁶⁶⁶ This, precisely, is the limit of Bergson’s theory of pure perception and intuition, which Merleau-Ponty bears in mind in the formulation of his approach to language and truth.

For this reason, Merleau-Ponty remarks, the language that speaks of sensible being – which should be the language of philosophy – must be indirect and metaphorical, “...where what counts is no longer the manifest meaning of each word and of each image, but the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges. It is indeed a language of this sort that Bergson himself required for the philosopher. But we have to recognize the consequence: if language is not necessarily deceptive, truth is not coincidence, nor mute.”⁶⁶⁷

Merleau-Ponty underscores that, in order to gain access to the language of the truth, it is necessary to bring language back to its living roots, its gestural origins, its “nascent state” in perception.⁶⁶⁸ With regard to this, let me be clear that the point is not to demonstrate that everything is subordinated to language, nor that language only speaks about itself, but rather to understand that silence is a constitutive and operative dimension of language, and that this silence is imbricated in life, in the logos of living things. This is why Merleau-Ponty says that “...language lives only from silence; everything we cast to the others has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave.”⁶⁶⁹

One can thus say that the life of language comes from silence, from the silence that is life, but this silence is also truth, revelation, an inaugural expression of “something,” an “X,” an interrogation that provokes philosophical questioning.⁶⁷⁰ In this context, Merleau-

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 164/125. “*Ce qui compte n’étant plus le sens manifeste de chaque mot et de chaque image, mais les rapports latéraux; les parentés, qui sont impliqués dans leurs échanges. C’est bien un langage de ce genre que Bergson même a revendiqué pour le philosophe. Mais il faut bien voir la conséquence: si le langage n’est pas nécessairement trompeur, la vérité n’est pas coincidence, muette.*”

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 165/125. “*...à l’état vivant ou naissant.*”

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 165/126. “*...il ne vit que du silence; tout ce que nous jetons aux autres a germé dans ce grand pays muet qui ne nous quitte pas.*”

⁶⁷⁰ See *ibid.* Emphasizing that the language of the philosopher is based on this nascent logos of things, Merleau-Ponty develops this argument as follows: “But, because he has experienced within himself the need to speak, the birth of speech as bubbling up at the bottom of his mute experience, the philosopher knows better than anyone that what is lived is lived-spoken, that, born at this depth, language is not a mask over Being, but – if one knows how to grasp it with all its roots and all its foliation – the most valuable witness to Being, that it

Ponty indicates, one can see that the sedimentation of language as a linguistic system is grounded on the language of perception, and thus it is a “regional problem” in philosophy: “Hence the problem of language is, if one likes, only a regional problem –that is, if we consider the ready-made language, the secondary and empirical operation of translation, of coding and decoding, the artificial languages, the technical relation between a sound and a meaning which are joined only by express convention and are therefore ideally isolable.”⁶⁷¹

Thus, Merleau-Ponty suggests, the fundamental ontological problem in relation to language has nothing to do with language understood as a linguistic system, but rather with the language that is itself gesture, and which may also be called the language *of* being: the language that pervades all dimensions of existence, the universal theme of philosophy. In order to clarify this point, let me call attention to the following passage, which continues the one cited above:

But if, on the contrary, we consider the speaking word, the assuming of the conventions of his native language as something natural by him who lives within that language, the folding over within him of the visible and the lived experience upon language, and of language upon the visible and the lived experience, the exchanges between the articulations of his mute language and those of his speech, finally that operative language which has no need to be translated into significations and thoughts, that language-thing which counts as an arm, as action, as offence and as seduction because it brings to the surface all the deep-rooted relations of the lived experience wherein it takes form, and which is the language of life and of action but also that of literature and of poetry –then this logos is an absolutely universal theme, it is the theme of philosophy.⁶⁷²

does not interrupt an immediation that would be perfect without it, that the vision itself, the thought itself are, as has been said, “structured as language,” are *articulation* before the letter, apparition of something where there was nothing or something else.”

⁶⁷¹ Ibid. “De sorte que le problème du langage n’est qu’un problème régional, si l’on veut –c’est-à-dire: si l’on considère le langage tout fait, l’opération secondaire et empirique de traduction, de codage et de décodage, les langages artificiels, le rapport technique d’un son et d’un sens qui ne sont joints que par convention expresse, et sont donc idéalement isolables.”

⁶⁷² Ibid. 165-66/126. “...mais qu’au contraire, à considérer la parole parlante, l’assomption comme naturelle des conventions de la langue par celui qui vit en elle, l’enroulement en lui du visible et du vécu sur le langage, du langage sur le visible et le vécu, les échanges entre les articulations de son paysage muet et celles de sa parole, enfin ce langage opérant qui n’a pas besoin d’être traduit en significations et en pensées, ce langage-chose qui vaut comme séduction, parce qu’il fait affleurer tous les rapports profonds du vécu où il s’est formé, et qui est celui de la vie et de la action, mais aussi celui de la littérature et de la poésie, alors ce logos est un thème absolument universel, il est le thème de la philosophie.”

This passage is remarkable because it depicts the nascent logos of life in terms of a language that is itself movement and action. Merleau-Ponty suggests, however, that this nascent logos is not sheer “natural” language devoid of conventions, for it is the “speaking word” that integrates conventions as part of its living significance. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, the speaking word is the word that is intertwined with lived experience in such a way that it cannot be detached from the body. It functions like an extension of the body. Merleau-Ponty qualifies this essential word as “language-thing,” and this means that it is concrete, it resonates in the world, it does something: this word is like an arm. Along these lines, Merleau-Ponty says that the speaking word can seduce and offend, for example. But one must be careful not to think that the essential power of the word is restricted to visible or practical “effects.” For literature and poetry, which speak with the logos of perception, behold the sensible dimension of language, the unfolding of the being of language as openness. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty suggests that language can affect the others precisely insofar as it permeates their flesh, it is flesh. Language can seduce or offend because the others and I have the same flesh. And the flesh is from the outset the redoubling of affection, the exposure to alterity, even within the close circle that defines my own self, and which determines the privileged connection with my own body. With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty says:

Yet this flesh that one sees and touches is not all there is to flesh, nor this massive corporeity all there is to the body. The reversibility that defines the flesh exists in other fields; it is even incomparably more agile there and capable of weaving relations between bodies that this time will not only enlarge, but will pass definitely beyond the circle of the visible. Among my movements, there are some that go nowhere –that do not even go find in the other body their resemblance or their archetype: these are the facial movements, many gestures, and especially those strange movements of the throat and mouth that form the cry and the voice. Those movements end in sounds and I hear them. Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibration from within; as Malraux

said, I hear myself with my throat. In this, as he also has said, I am incomparable; my voice is bound to the mass of my own life as the voice of no one else.⁶⁷³

Merleau-Ponty insists that the flesh is not bodiliness understood as objectivity, because the flesh names the reversibility and duplicity of our perceptual experience, and the relentless intertwining of the visible and the invisible that perception presupposes. Or, one might also say, the flesh is the sensible milieu that makes possible our contact with things, as well as the intangible halo that surrounds this contact. In the passage cited above, Merleau-Ponty indicates that the reversibility of the flesh is more “agile,” that its inner motility is intensified and more fluid in the fields not circumscribed to the spheres of direct contact or touch. For before one comes to touch something, before one enters the domain of intentional relationships, there is in this massive corporality that defines one’s own body a clearing, a space of play, a gap or void in which one’s being resonates and acquires a voice. Merleau-Ponty says, “I am a sonorous being,” and that the reversibility of the flesh is at work in the movements of my throat, in the “ungraspable” phenomenon of the voice. I should note, however, that the voice Merleau-Ponty describes here as the resonating of my own being is a voice that is somewhat mute; it goes nowhere, it says nothing. To some extent, it is like the empty clinking of crystal. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the element of the flesh operates in the vibrations of our bodily movements, the facial movements and gestures that emerge spontaneously from my body without intending anything in particular.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 188/144. “Or, cette chair que l’on voit et que l’on touche n’est pas toute la chair, ni cette corporéité massive, tout le corps. La réversibilité qui définit la chair existe dans d’autres champs, ell y est même incomparablement plus agile, et capable de nouer entre les corps des relations qui, cette fois, n’élargiront pas seulement, passeront définitivement le cercle du visible. Parmi mes mouvements, il en est qui ne vont nulle part –qui ne vont pas même retrouver dans l’autre corps leur ressemblance ou leur archétype: ce sont les mouvements du visage, beaucoup des gestes, et surtout ces étranges mouvements de la gorge et de la bouche qui font le cri et la voix. Ces mouvements-là finissent en sons et je les entends. Comme le cristal, le métal et beaucoup d’autres substances, je suis un être sonore, mais ma vibration à moi je l’entends du dedans; comme a dit Malraux, je m’entends avec ma gorge. En quoi, comme il l’a dit aussi, je suis incomparable, ma voix est liée à la masse de ma vie comme ne l’est la voix de personne.”

In sum, one could say that before being a thing one's body is flesh, and this means that it is gesture, it moves, vibrates, and resonates just for the sake of hearing and seeing, as a mass thoroughly pervaded by invisibility and silence: as a clearing, as openness.

My body is, in this sense, the *locus* of the exchange between the visible and the invisible, silence and sound, wherein the flesh of the world reveals its own potentialities. Specifically, in a working note from December 1960, Merleau-Ponty cryptically says: "The flesh = this fact that my body is passive-active (visible-seeing), mass in itself *and* gesture."⁶⁷⁴ In concluding the present chapter, this note is of special significance because it equates flesh and gesture. One can say, then, that the flesh is essentially gesture, and that gestures involve both passivity and activity, and carry out a fold, a movement that reflects our silent engagement with the world. More precisely, one could say that gestures are specular images of the world, for they reflect how we stand in the world, and how the world stands for us.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 319/271. "*La chair = ce fait que mon corps est passif-actif (visible-voyant), masse en soi et geste –.*"

⁶⁷⁵ In the context of this working note, Merleau-Ponty sketches out this idea as follows: "The specular image, memory, resemblance: fundamental structures (resemblance between the thing and the thing-seen). For they are structures that are immediately derived from the body-world relation – the reflections resemble the reflected = the vision commences in things, certain things or couples of things call for vision – Show that our whole expression and conceptualization of the mind is derived from these structures: for example *reflection*." Ibid.

Conclusion

From Philosophy of Gesture to Gestural Philosophy

The present dissertation explored the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, with a focus on their approaches to the problem of gesture. I have shown that the problem of gesture is at the center of cardinal questions involving the themes of art and language. Specifically, I have argued that the *proper* sphere of human acting may be characterized as ecstatic involvement in the world, in such a way that the world itself is founded and reconfigured through what could be called, borrowing an expression from Merleau-Ponty, a gestural syntax: a sequence of hints, outlines, spacings. Along these lines, I have further remarked that gestures presuppose a milieu of affectivity and attunements, and that art and poetic or literary language are paradigmatic expressions of this grounding milieu. This affective milieu is our primordial point of contact with the world. For this reason, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty see poetic works in general as necessary points of reference for philosophizing. Thus, one may say that the theme of gesture draws philosophy towards the limits of a primal, poetic contact with the world, in which thinking becomes, in a sense, performance. It is at this point that the point of view of a philosophy of gesture is in some way transformed in a gestural philosophy, a philosophy that is itself poetic comportment.

Although I have hinted at the problem of performativity and philosophy, this point has not been examined in this dissertation. Such task would have required an extensive analysis of the style of each philosopher, comparing different periods and works in a way that would exceed the scope of the present research. Still, to conclude this dissertation, I will sketch out a basic approach to this problem. In this regard, I should note that the works of

Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have different ways of approaching the gestural or performative dimension in philosophy, and that Heidegger's thinking is, in this particular sense, more radical. Hence, for the purposes of the present conclusion, I shall focus on the work of Heidegger, and specifically on texts I have already worked out.

Unfortunately, the only remains of Merleau-Ponty's last ontological project are just preliminaries and fragments. They suffice to show, however, that his thinking radically challenges the limits of phenomenology and philosophy. Merleau-Ponty says indeed that the flesh is something that has no name in philosophy, thus suggesting that his thinking of the flesh adumbrates a new philosophy, a new way of thinking. What kind of thinking is this? He gives some concrete indications to respond to this question in *Eye and Mind*. He suggests that the experience of painting reveals key elements of a new metaphysics of the body, for painting inhabits the visible world. Furthermore, he remarks, painting reveals the contours of things, their outlines, without sacrificing their depth. He also refers to Proust and to the experience of literature. With regard to this, he insists that philosophy must return to the grounds of sensible ideas, tenebrous ideas that involve us in an affective and sensible atmosphere. Thus, it seems, the ontology of the flesh is fundamentally indirect. It explores the sensible world following the indications of artistic or literary works –and even science. But, what about the sensible milieu of philosophy, language? Is it not necessary to poetize *with* language –the affective and sensible milieu of language –as one does philosophy *about* the sensible world?

Although Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is full of examples excerpted from literature and art, it is clear that his own way of philosophizing is not *so* literary or artistic. Thus, one can say that, despite being deeply concerned about the problem of gesture, Merleau-Ponty's work is not gestural itself. It is not concerned about letting language speak from itself. Still,

we cannot know how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy would have developed after the encounter with the enigmatic element of the flesh.

In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's work is, in my opinion, essentially different from Heidegger's. Concerning this argument, it seems impossible to reconcile their differences. For Heidegger's language and style is experimental, in that he brings philosophy closer to poetry. He does not simply talk about poetry, or language, but rather he allows language to guide thinking; in other words, he lets language and thinking occur, be *event-like*. Along these lines, one can say that Heidegger's philosophy, specifically after the so-called turn, is essentially gestural. It delves into the sensible dimension of language and moves with it.

This is particularly clear in his works from the late 1930s and thereafter, as in the notes on language that I examined in the present work. Thus, let me elucidate this problem considering specifically the notes from *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*.

The Performative Character of Heidegger's philosophy

As it was already argued in relation to his notes on language, for Heidegger the essential word is a hint, an event-like sign. It does not determine anything in particular, and it cannot be grasped in visible things.⁶⁷⁶ Along these lines, one may say that the word appropriates us following the directives of the paradoxical logic of attunements: the word gives itself as a phantasmagoric presence that touches us and moves us from a distance. Insofar as the word is hint, it may be characterized as the trace of an absence, of a painful departure, of a tearing apart.⁶⁷⁷ In this sense, he suggests, the hint carries out the decisive split between word and words, between essential sign and conventional ordinary sign –one might also say, between being and beings.

⁶⁷⁶ See *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 31.

⁶⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, 45-50.

And yet, this is not something Heidegger plainly asserts, but rather something he communicates indirectly through his involvement in language, for an appropriate approach to the essence of language cannot simply talk “about” language.⁶⁷⁸ Indeed, the performative and rhetorical implications of philosophical language, elements present from the beginning of Heidegger’s trajectory, gain increasing importance throughout his explorations of the language *of* the event.⁶⁷⁹

Heidegger approaches the *event-like* word and sign through constellations of terms or phrases that remain open, letting words and signs resonate in the uniqueness of their appearance, just as fragmentary hints or traces, without setting them into one-directional logical relationships, with fixed meanings.⁶⁸⁰ Words and signs are wrested out of silence, but in such a way that they never abandon the realm of silence, that is, to the extent that they become manifest as hints. Thus, words are to be grasped as minimal indications that break silence: the latencies of a voice that is caught in action, in the movement of departure from its silent origin. Let me explain this point considering the following brief passage, which bears the title “Language wrests” [*Die Sprache entreißt*]:

The word – the stillness.

From out of the rift and bearing away in the sounding and the tune.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ As Krzysztof Ziarek points out, the essential word, the “other word,” is not something we can talk about, but rather something we can follow attentively as a hint: “This other word is not something one can talk ‘about,’ just as little as one could talk ‘about’ this transformed language, as neither is reducible to or graspable as an object that could be grasped or comprehended conceptually.” Krzysztof Ziarek, *Language after Heidegger*, Kindle Edition (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 147.

⁶⁷⁹ This is something we can easily infer if we consider, for instance, the performative element present in Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy*, whose style pervades in parts the notes on language we are dealing with here. With regard to this, Daniela Vallega-Neu says the following: “What the language of the *Contributions* says is found in the performative motion, that is, in the occurrence of thinking and language, and not in something that this occurrence would present objectively.” Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 3.

⁶⁸⁰ Concerning Heidegger’s concept of language, Ziarek indicates: “The philosophical significance of this approach to ‘redefining’ language can be summarized as follows: ‘what’ language is, how it happens, is described by Heidegger first not as an idea or a concept but as the relatedness opened up in its design (*Aufriß*) by the constellation enacted by a set of prefixes” (*Language after Heidegger*, 26)

⁶⁸¹ *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 58; my translation. “Das Wort – die Stille. / Dem Riß entnehmen und forttragend in das Lauten und die Stimme.”

Here, one does not find a definition of the word or language from without. Instead, Heidegger lets words and signs to carry out the work of language, to say something in such a way that the essence of language, the manner in which it initially moves us or affects us, unfolds from an experience with language itself. Let me consider, for example, the correlation between the pair of terms “word” and “stillness,” which are separated by a hyphen. The hyphen *means* nothing, and yet it *does* something: it keeps together the words, while simultaneously reveals the silent space that sets them apart. One might say that the hyphen itself is a rift whose movement is defined in the second line of the passage, and which marks the initial moment of departure from silence towards the sound and the voice.⁶⁸²

Hence, Heidegger suggests that there is silence in the word and a resonance of the word in silence. One could say that the simple trace of the hyphen hints at the origin of language, the breaking of silence in a minimal trace; for Heidegger occasionally characterizes the primordial showing as the strife that breaks silence and brings language to sound.⁶⁸³ Thus, on the one hand, the hyphen is an outline that recalls the earthly dimension of the word, just as in the setting of the truth in the work of art.⁶⁸⁴ In this case, the earthly element could be determined both as writing and voice, and silence. On the other hand, one can say that the hyphen marks a departure and an abyss – a movement away from the earth-ground – , a deterritorialization that causes violence against the word. For the “hyphen” is already hyphen, the “word” is already word, the “trace” is already trace... too close to us to be

⁶⁸² Elsewhere, in the course of these notes and lectures on language, Heidegger expressly determines the “movement” [*Bewegung*] of language in terms of the rift [*Riß*]. Ibid., 46. With regard to this “movement” of language that is carried out through diacritical marks and signs see also Ziarek, *Language after Heidegger*, 47.

⁶⁸³ See *ibid.*, 153.

⁶⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, 111, 134.

essential silence, too *meaningful* to be the showing that is pure showing, the word that is simply a word.

In this way, one can experience the failure of language, the rupture or fracturing of the word that leaves the essential word behind, in an elusive silence. This failure of language is at the same time the failure of silence, a certain experience of the impossibility of silence: the *need* of a trace. Pain transpires through this need, the pain anchored in the abyssal separation from the origin, the pain that necessitates an assuaging word. Alluding precisely to this experience of failure and pain, in his lecture “The Essence of Language” (1957-58), Heidegger remarks that one can only bring language as such to the word in those rare occasions when the words are missing, when “...we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us.”⁶⁸⁵

Following Heidegger’s reading, one could say that the word is at the same time wound and healing, pain of departure, separation, and mourning, as well as promise of favour or grace. In a passage from these notes on language that recalls the problematic of the hint in Hölderlin, Heidegger says precisely that “The word ‘is’ – the indicative [*winkende*] stillness of favour out of the pain in the event.”⁶⁸⁶ That is to say, the word itself, the “is” – again accompanied by the breach of the hyphen –intimates the possibility of grace...out of pain.

One can see, then, that words, indications, spacings, blanks, and pauses, signs marking turns or leaps –the hyphen, the comma, or the colon, for instance –map out the

⁶⁸⁵ *On the Way to Language*, 151/59 “...wo wir für etwas, was uns angeht, uns an sich reißt, bedrängt oder befeuert, das rechte wort nicht finden.”

⁶⁸⁶ *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 62; my translation. “Die Wort »ist« – die im Ereignis aus dem Schmerz winkende Stille der Huld.”

geography and topological traits of a unique and inextricable territory:⁶⁸⁷ the silence of the event, the silence of the truth of being, the “pre-word” [*Vor-wort*].⁶⁸⁸ According to Heidegger, the silence of being is not a homogeneous silence, it is not a metaphysical nothingness, but the latency of multiple modes of manifestation, a silence with voice or tune (*Stimmung*): “word and tune of being.”⁶⁸⁹

Essential words and signs respond to a pressing silence, just as gestures issuing from an urgent painful call. In a sense, one may say that essential words are like silent tears: “to still thirst - *tears still*.”⁶⁹⁰ In these notes Heidegger elicits the affinity between thirst and tears, and the essential silence of the event-like word. He gives subtle indications concerning the sensuous and affective plane of the event, in line with the bodily dimension of attunement and affectivity previously discussed. The water remains a secret element, absent, because the water we drink and the “water” (tears) we release in pain are essentially different, incomparable, while at the same time it maintains a certain affinity.

Heidegger suggests, therefore, that within the sphere of the *event-like* indications there is no such thing as plain, physical water, but rather tears, or the water we need to quench thirst, for example. In each case there is a silent tune at work that discloses the water as a essential sign, operating a transfiguration whose inner rules one cannot see.

⁶⁸⁷ This idea is posited by Ziarek as follows: “The overall implication of these ways of rethinking language by listening to it and by amplifying the resonance of what words, prefixes, hyphens, and compounds disclose is that the ‘twisting free’ of metaphysics (*Verwindung*), or at least thought’s preparation for the possibility of such release from metaphysical conceptuality, depends on thinking’s capacity to open up its conceptual structure to the poetic movement of language. Without transforming our relation to language, and with it of the way we deploy language in thinking, there is no possibility of twisting free of the metaphysical framing of the question of being or of changing the manner in which humans experience their existence with regard to it.” *Language after Heidegger*, 28.

⁶⁸⁸ *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*, 59.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 69; my translation. “*Wort und Stimmen des Seyns*.”

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 62; my translation. “*den Durst stillen – Tränen stillen*.”

But, based on this analysis, one might still ask in what sense is this *direct* experience with language philosophical, namely, an experience of thinking. This question is related to Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Heidegger, according to which, although his thinking shows that one cannot express being directly, he still looks for a *direct expression* of being.⁶⁹¹ Alternatively, as I have already suggested, Merleau-Ponty suggests that one follow the hints given by other experiences of being, such as the one given in life, or in science.⁶⁹² Let me finish by exploring a response to this criticism, trying to explain in what sense Heidegger's questioning aims at producing an experience of thinking, which is direct insofar as it is not necessarily guided by other modes of expression, without presupposing a metaphysical understanding of being, as something that may become directly accessible or present.

Thinking and the Language of the Event

As I have already said in chapter six, distinguishing “thing-like” signs, expressive or living signs, and essential signs, Heidegger decisively rejects any comparison between the essential word and the phenomenal word, the essential sign or gesture and the phenomenal gesture. Such a drastic distinction between phenomenal signs and event-like signs seems to harbor a hidden metaphysical dualism, in which the bodily or phenomenal side of experience is neglected. Yet, Heidegger's purpose is different: to challenge metaphysics, and to think the sensible dimension of the sign in a non-objective manner. This is, indeed, what the following passage explains: “The difference between sensible and non-sensible (supersensible) is metaphysical. Silence, event-like in essence, is more ‘sensible’ than the sensuousness of sheer senses, more perceptible than black and white –because more event-like–, more ‘impressive’

⁶⁹¹ See *Notes de cours*, 148. He says precisely: “...il cherche une expression directe de l'être dont il montre par ailleurs qu'il n'est pas susceptible d'expression directe.”

⁶⁹² See *ibid.*

than sense-impressions. Everything that is impression-like remains at the front-[face] and surface objectively thought.”⁶⁹³

It is worth noting that although Heidegger claims that the event-like sign is never “comparable” [*vergleichbar*] to any phenomenal sign or gesture,⁶⁹⁴ in the passage cited above there is a comparison between event-like perception and sense-perception. However, Heidegger determines this comparison in such a way that a difference in degree indicates a difference in nature. In a sense, the comparison indicates that event-like phenomena are unique: they are more sensible than any sensible thing because they are felt as something that concerns us deeply. One could say, then, that Heidegger finds in bodily silence, in a certain privation of the sensible, an intensification of perception and affectivity. For manifest in silence is the depth of the sensible, its intensive affectivity, which is incommensurable with “superficial” quantitative properties.

Heidegger insistently determines the “exchange” of hints, the essential dialogue constituting the appropriation of the event, using terms such as “gratitude” [*Danke*] and “grace” [*Huld, Gunst*].⁶⁹⁵ In line with previous reflections on the correlations between thinking and thanking, one might say that these terms qualify the *way* in which we receive-perceive something that is of essential significance, they provide the tone through which essential hints may be caught. Indeed, gratitude qualifies that which is received in freedom, as a grace or favour. Moreover, gratitude calls attention to an excess that breaks out of the

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 62; my translation. “Der Unterschied von Sinnlich und Unsinnlich (Übersinnlich) ist metaphysisch. Die Stille ist ereignishaft im Wesen »sinnlicher« als die Sinnlichkeit der bloßen Sinne, vernehmlicher –weil ereignender –als Schwarz und Weiß, »affizierender« als Sinnes-Eindrücke. Alles Eindruck-hafte bleibt an der gegenständlich gedachten Vorder- und Oberfläche.”

⁶⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, 89. This formulation was first discussed at the beginning of the previous section in relation to Heidegger’s distinction between the thing-like signs, expressive signs and event-like signs.

⁶⁹⁵ At some point, Heidegger alludes to the “event-like” word in relation to the “turn” [*Kehre*], and in the constellation of terms such as “gratitude” [*Danke*], “grace” [*Gunst*], and “salutation” [*Gruß*] (91), thus suggesting that the event-like word is the hint that induces a turn or transformation in thinking, just as the one he experienced in his encounter with Hölderlin, or with Nietzsche, for instance.

circle of causal economy; gratitude is a modality of openness: receptivity. With regard to this, in a passage on gratitude, Heidegger says: "...event-like indication in the hints of the truth of being –*delivering and bringing*.”⁶⁹⁶

I therefore suggest that gratitude names a primordial receptivity, a relatedness to being, to the truth. And this receptivity must properly be characterized as a hint, a gesture. Following this reading, one can determine more precisely the sensible dimension of event-like hints. Indeed, Heidegger qualifies gratitude as an intensive “touch,” suggesting that it is the minimal touch necessary to awaken wonder and, thereby, thinking. He says: “Often it [gratitude, *Danke*] is only a hardly noticeable touch, out of which amazement grows concerning a yet unexpected silence, which lets everything rest calmly.”⁶⁹⁷

Thus, gratitude is an intensive, qualitative touch, which is invisible, inconspicuous, insofar as it is subtle, minimum. Heidegger further remarks that in gratitude a minimum touch may bring forth a maximum intensity: wonder. In a sense, then, the event of gratitude is a non-event, something like a traumatic shock that effaces its traces. As Heidegger explains, in a way, gratitude leaves us in silence, which makes everything rest in peace. It is a moment of suspension, for nothing happens, there is only the pure imminence of the event, expectation. Along these lines, one can say that gratitude is only a word, a pure word or indication that does not designate anything real or actual, as it is ordinarily understood. Gratitude cannot be grasped in anything present, it simply occurs as an inconspicuous gesture that responds to a gift, when the gift has not become possession, when it is something we do not have, not yet.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 99; my translation. “...ereignetes Weisen in die Winke der Wahrheit des Seyns –Befreien und Bringen.”

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., my translation. “Oft ist es ein kaum merkliches Anrühren, daraus ein Verwundern erwacht über bisher Ungeahntes Stilles, das ruhig alles in sich beruhen läßt.”

Based on these premises, I contend that Heidegger's philosophy may be an attempt to provoke thinking by awakening gratitude, or wonder, specifically in relation to the gifts of language. It seems that such a movement may be possible by generating a peculiar sort of shock; it is the shock of minimal touch, a minimal indication. Perhaps something like the indication of a hyphen, or the indications of words that say nothing objective. The "*Event*" is one such word.

In this way, one can corroborate that Heidegger's philosophy is not veiled mysticism that aims at a direct contact with being; it is not an invitation to fuse with absolute silence, but rather a gestural philosophy that involves the reader in order to investigate *event-like* phenomena. For ontological phenomena, *event-like* phenomena, are those to be seen as one is involved in them. These are essentially invisible, but may be recognized as gestures, in the sense one has in mind when one talks of a gesture of friendship or gratitude. In sum, one could say that Heidegger's philosophy is gestural insofar as it explores hints and gestures that must be interpreted from within an experience of language.

Bibliography

- Acosta, Maria del Rosario. "'The secret that is the work of art': Heidegger's Lectures on Schiller." *Research in Phenomenology* 39 (2009): 135-163.
- Aho, Kevin. *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009.
- Alloa, Emmanuel. "The Diacritical Nature of Meaning. Merleau-Ponty with Saussure." *Chiasmi International. Trilingual studies concerning Merleau-Ponty's Thought* 15 (2013): 167-180.
- Askay, Richard. "Heidegger, the body, and the French philosophers." *Continental Philosophy Review* (Kluwer Academic Publishers), no. 32 (1999): 29-35.
- Barbaras, Renaud. *La perception. Essai sur le sensible*. Paris: Hatier, 1994.
- Barbaras, Renaud. "Merleau-Ponty and Nature." *Research in Phenomenology* 31, no. 1 (2001): 22-38.
- Baur, Patrick. *Phänomenologie der Gebärden*. Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2013.
- Boss, Medard. *Existential Foundations of Medicine and Psychology*. Translated by Stephen Conway and Anne Cleaves. New York: J. Aronson, 1979.
- Carbone, Mauro. "Flesh: Towards the History of a Misunderstanding." *Chiasmi International* 4 (2002): 49-64.
- . *The Thinking of the Sensible. Merleau-Ponty's A-Philosophy*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004.
- Carman, Taylor. *Heidegger's Analytic. Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

- D'Angelo, Diego. "Die Schwelle des 'Lebe-Wesens': Überlegungen zur Leibinterpretation Heideggers in der Nietzsche-Abhandlung." *Studia Phaenomenologica. Romanian Journal for Phenomenology* 12 (2012): 61-83.
- . "Zeigen und Berühren: Der Pragmatische Sinn der Rede bei Heidegger im Hinblick auf Aristoteles Auffassung der Wahrheit." *Bulletin d'analyse phénoménologique VIII*. 2012 йил 6. <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/bap.htm> (accessed 2013 йил 01-02).
- Dastur, Françoise. "Heidegger und die 'Logischen Untersuchungen'." *Heidegger Studies* 7 (1991): 37-51.
- Dastur, Françoise. "La lecture merleau-pontienne de Heidegger dans les notes du "Visible et l'invisible" et les cours du Collège de France (1957-58)." *Chiasmi International* 2 (2000): 373-88.
- Dastur, Françoise. "Le poésie comme origine (Hölderlin et Heidegger)." *Studia Phaenomenologica. Romanian Journal for Phenomenology* 3, no. Special Issue (2003): 83-98.
- Dastur, Françoise. "World, Flesh, Vision." In *Chiasms, Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, by F Evans and L. Lawlor, edited by F., Lawlor, L. Evans, 23-49. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- De Wachlens, Alphonse. "A Philosophy of Ambiguity." In *The Structure of Behavior*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, translated by Alden L. Fischer. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963.
- De Wachlens, Alphonse. "Une philosophie de l'ambigüité." In *La structure du comportement*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942.
- Derida, Jacques. *Donner le temps*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1991.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*. Translated by John P. Leavy Jr. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

- Derrida, Jacques. "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand." In *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, by John Sallis, edited by John Sallis, translated by John P. Leavey Jr., 161-196. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- . *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Translated by David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.
- Dillon, M.C. *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Edwards, Betty. *The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999.
- Gallagher, Shaun. *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Grimm, Jacob und Wilhelm. *Deutsches Wörterbuch. 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden*. Leipzig: Quellenverzeichnis Leipzig 1971, 2014 йил 29-January.
- Haar, Michael. *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*. Translated by Reginald Lilly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Übungen für Anfänger. Schillers Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen. Wintersemester 1936/37*. Edited by Ulrich von Bülow. Marbach am Neckar: Marbacher Bibliothek. Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2005.
- . *Being and Time*. revised by Dennis J. Schmidt. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- . *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.65. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989.
- . *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*. Kindle Edition. Translated by Andrew Mitchell. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

- . *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*. Edited by Petra Jaeger. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 79. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Brief über den Humanismus (1946)*. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.9, in *Wegmarken*, by Martin Heidegger, edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, 313-364. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976.
- . *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- . *Der Satz vom Grund*. Edited by Petra Jaeger. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.10. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes (1935-36)*. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.5, in *Holzwege*, by Martin Heidegger, edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, 1-74. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977.
- . *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. Edited by Petra Jaeger. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.40. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976.
- . *Elucidations of Hölderlin's poetry*. Translated by Keith Hoeller. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, an imprint of Prometheus Books, 2000.
- . *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.4. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981.
- . *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Translated by William McNeill and Walker Nicholas. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- . *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik (1929/30)*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 29/30. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983.
- . *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*. Edited by Susanne Ziegler. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.39. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999.

- Heidegger, Martin. *Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung (1942/43)*. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.5, in *Holzwege*, by Martin Heidegger, edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, 115-208. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Hegel's Concept of Experience (1942-43)." In *Off the Beaten Track*, by Martin Heidegger, edited by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, 86-156. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- . *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000.
- . *Introduzione all'estetica. Le Lettere sull'educazione estetica dell'uomo di Schiller*. Edited by Adriano Ardivino. Translated by Adriano Ardivino. Roma: Carocci, 2008.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Letter on Humanism." In *Basic Writings*, by David Farrell Krell, edited by David Farrell Krell, 213-266. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993.
- . *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*. Translated by Wanda Torres Gregory and Yvonne Unna. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009.
- . *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*. Edited by Günter Seubold. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.38. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998.
- . *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*. Edited by K. Held. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.26. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978.
- . *Nietzsche*. Edited by David Farrell Krell. Translated by Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. Vol. III and IV. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- . *Nietzsche*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. Vol. I and II. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- . *Nietzsche*. Edited by B. Schillbach. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 6.1. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996.

- . *On the Way to Language*. Translated by Peter D. Hertz. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Preface Letter." In *Heidegger. Through Phenomenology to Thought*, by William Richardson, translated by William Richardson, viii-xxiv. New York: Fordham University Press, 2003.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Science and Reflection." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, by Martin Heidegger, translated by William Lowitt. New York: Harper & Row (Garland Publishing), 1977.
- . *Sein und Zeit*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.2. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977.
- . *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*. Translated by Michael Heim. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Basic Writings*, by Martin Heidegger, edited by David Farrell Krell, 139-212. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993.
- . *The Principle of Reason*. Translated by Reginald Lilly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- . *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.12. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985.
- . *Was heisst Denken?* Edited by P.-L. Coriando. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.8. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002.
- . *Wegmarken*. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.9. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976.
- . *What is Called Thinking?*. Translated by J. Glenn Gray. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Wissenschaft und Besinnung (1953)." In *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, by Martin Heidegger, edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, 37-66. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000.

- . *Zollikon Seminars. Protocols-Conversations-Letters*. Edited by Medard Boss. Translated by Franz Mayr and Richard Askay. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- . *Zollikoner Seminare*. Edited by Medard Boss. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987.
- . *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*. Edited by Thomas Regehly. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd.74. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2010.
- Heidegger, Martin, and Eugen Fink. *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67*. Translated by Charles H. Seibert. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979.
- Heidegger, Martin, and Eugen Fink. *Heraklit*. Vol. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 15, in *Seminare (1951-73)*, by Martin Heidegger, edited by C. Ochtwad. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005.
- . *Heraklit Seminar Wintersemester 1966/67*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1970.
- Husserl, Edmund. "Foundational Investigations on the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth does not Move." In *Husserl at the Limits of Philosophy. Including Texts by Edmund Husserl*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, edited by Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo, translated by Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002.
- . *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Vol. Second Book. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000.
- . *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by F. Kersten. Vol. Second Book. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998.

- . *Ideen zu einer reinern Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine einföhrung in die reine Phänomenologie*. Edited by Karl Schumann. Vol. Husserliana III/1. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976.
- . *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*. Edited by Marly Biemel. Vol. Husserliana IV. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952.
- Husserl, Edmund. “Kopernikanische Umwendung der Kopernikanischen Umwendung (1934).” In *Raumtheorie: Grundlagentexte aus Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaften*, by Jörg Dünne and Stephan Günzel, edited by Jörg Dünne and Stephan Günzel, 153-166. Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp, 2006.
- . *Logical Investigations*. Translated by J. N. Findlay. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- . *Logische Untersuchungen*. Vols. Zweiter Band, I. Teil. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1913.
- . *Logische Untersuchungen*. Vol. Zweiter Band II Teil. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1921.
- Husserl, Edmund. “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre in der gewöhnlichen weltanschaulichen Interpretation. Die Ur-Arche Erde bewegt sich nicht. Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum phänomenologischen Ursprung der Körperlichkeit der Raumlichkeit der Natur im ersten naturwissenschaftlichen Sinne. Alles notwendiges Anfangsuntersuchungen (1934).” In *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, by Marvin Farber, 307-325. New York: Greenwood, 1968.
- Kearney, Richard. “Diacritical Hermeneutics.” In *Hermeneutic Rationality*, by Maria Luisa Portocarreño, Luis Antonio Umbelino and Andrzej Wiercinski, edited by Maria Luisa Portocarreño, Luis Antonio Umbelino and Andrzej Wiercinski, 177-96. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012.

- Krell, David Farrell. *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Lagueux, Maurice. "Merleau-Ponty et la linguistique de Saussure." *Dialogue* IV, no. 3 (1965): 351-364.
- Lawlor, Leonard. "Essence and Language: The Rupture in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy." *Studia Phaenomenologica* III, no. 3-4 (2003): 155-62.
- Low, Douglas. "Merleau-Ponty's Criticism of Heidegger." *Philosophy Today* 53, no. 3 (2009): 273-293.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*. Translated by Hugh J. Silvermann. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and mind." In *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, by Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, edited by Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, 351-378. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.
- . *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. Edited by Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo. Translated by Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002.
- . *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by John Wild, James Edie and John O'Neill. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "La nature ou le monde du silence (pages d'introduction)." In *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, by Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, edited by Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, 41-54. Paris: Hermann, 2008.
- . *La nature. Notes, Cours du Collège de France, suivi des Résumés de Cours Correspondants*. Paris: Gallimard/Éditions du Seuil, 1995.
- . *La prose du monde*. Edited by Claude Lefort. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.
- . *La structure du comportement*. 4e édition, Quadrige. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013.
- . *Le primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques*. Lagrasse: Verdier, 2014.
- . *Le Visible et l'invisible*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "L'oeil et l'esprit." In *Oeuvres*, by Claude Lefort, edited by Claude Lefort.

Paris: Gallimard, 2010.

—. *Merleau-Ponty: Notes de cours sur L'Origine de la géométrie de Husserl suivi de Recherches sur la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty*. Edited by Franck Robert and Renaud Barbaras. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.

—. *Nature. Course Notes from the Collège de France*. Compiled and with notes by Dominique Séglaard.

Translated by Robert Vallier. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003.

—. *Notes de cours au Collège de France 1958-1959 et 1960-1961*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Notes de cours sur 'L'Origine de la géométrie' de Husserl." In *Notes de cours sur "L'Origine de la géométrie" de Husserl, suivi de recherches sur la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, edited by Robert Franck and under the direction of Renaud Barbaras, 11-92. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.

—. *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.

—. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Hegel." In *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty*, by Hugh Silvermann, edited by Hugh Silvermann, translated by Hugh Silvermann, 9-83. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

—. *Résumés de cours. Collège de France; 1952-1960*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

—. *Signes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

—. *Signs*. Translated by Richard C. McCleary. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Primacy of Perception." In *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, by Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, 89-118. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. *The Prose of the World*. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by John O'Neill. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1981.

- . *The Structure of Behavior*. Boston, MA: Beacon Pres, 1963.
- . *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- Moran, Dermot, and Joseph Cohen. *The Husserl Dictionary*. New York: Continuum, 2012.
- Mulhall, Stephen. *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Über Wahrheit und Lüge in Außermoralischen Sinn.” In *Erkenntnis-Theoretische Schriften*, by Friedrich Nietasche. Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp Verlag, 1968.
- . *Der Wille zur Macht. Versuch einer Umwerthung aller Werthe (1884/88)*. Kindle Edition (project.gutenberg.de). Vol. II. Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1922.
- . *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Schriften zur Literatur und Philosophie der Griechen*. Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1994.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense.” In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, translated by Ronald Speirs, 139-153. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. “The Birth of Tragedy.” In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, by Nietzsche Friedrich, edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, translated by Ronald Speirs, 1-116. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- . *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 1968.
- Radloff, Bernhard. *Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism: Disclosure and Gestalt*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2007.

- Richardson, William. "Heidegger among the Doctors." In *Reading Heidegger. Commemorations*, by John Sallis, edited by John Sallis, 49-63. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Saint Aubert, Emmanuel de. *Être et chair I. Du corps au désir: la habilitation ontologique de la chair*. Paris: Vrin, 2013.
- . *Du lien des êtres aux éléments de l'être. Merleau-Ponty au tournant des années 1945-1951*. Paris: Vrin, 2004.
- . *Le scénario cartésien*. Paris: Vrin, 2005.
- . *Le scénario cartésien. Recherches sur la formation et la cohérence de l'intention philosophique de Merleau-Ponty*. Paris: Vrin, 2005.
- . *Vers une ontologie indirecte*. Paris: Vrin, 2006.
- Sallis, John. *Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- . *Double Truth*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Sallis, John. *Language and Reversal*. Vol. III: Language, in *Martin Heidegger. Critical Assessments*, by Christopher Macann, edited by Christopher Macann, 190-211. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- . *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003.
- . *Transfigurements*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Sartre. *l'être et le néant*. Paris: Gallimard, 1950.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. New York : Washington Square Press, 1956.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.
- Schmidt, Dennis. *Between World and Image: Heidegger, Klee and Gadamer on Gesture and Genesis*. Kindle Edition. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013.

- Slaby, Jan. "The other side of existence: Heidegger on boredom." In *Habitus in Habitat II -Other Sides of Cognition*, edited by Sabine Flach, Daniel Margulies and Söffner Jan, 101-120. Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2010.
- Smith, Barry. "Gestalt Theory: An Essay in Philosophy." In *Foundations of Gestalt Theory*, by Barry Smith, edited by Barry Smith, 11-81. Munich and Vienna: Philosophia, 1988.
- Taminiaux, Jacques. "The Origin of "The Origin of the Work of Art"." In *Reading Heidegger*, by John Sallis, edited by John Sallis, 392-404. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Vallega-Neu, Daniela. *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- . *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*. Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2005.
- Young, Julian. *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Zahavi, Dan. *Husserl's Phenomenology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Zeifa, Ammar. "Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty; The Sense of the Earth and the Earth of the Sense." *Phenomenology and the human positioning in the cosmos; the life-world, nature, earth*, 2013: 255-289.
- Ziarek, Krzysztof. *Language after Heidegger*. Kindle Edition. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013.