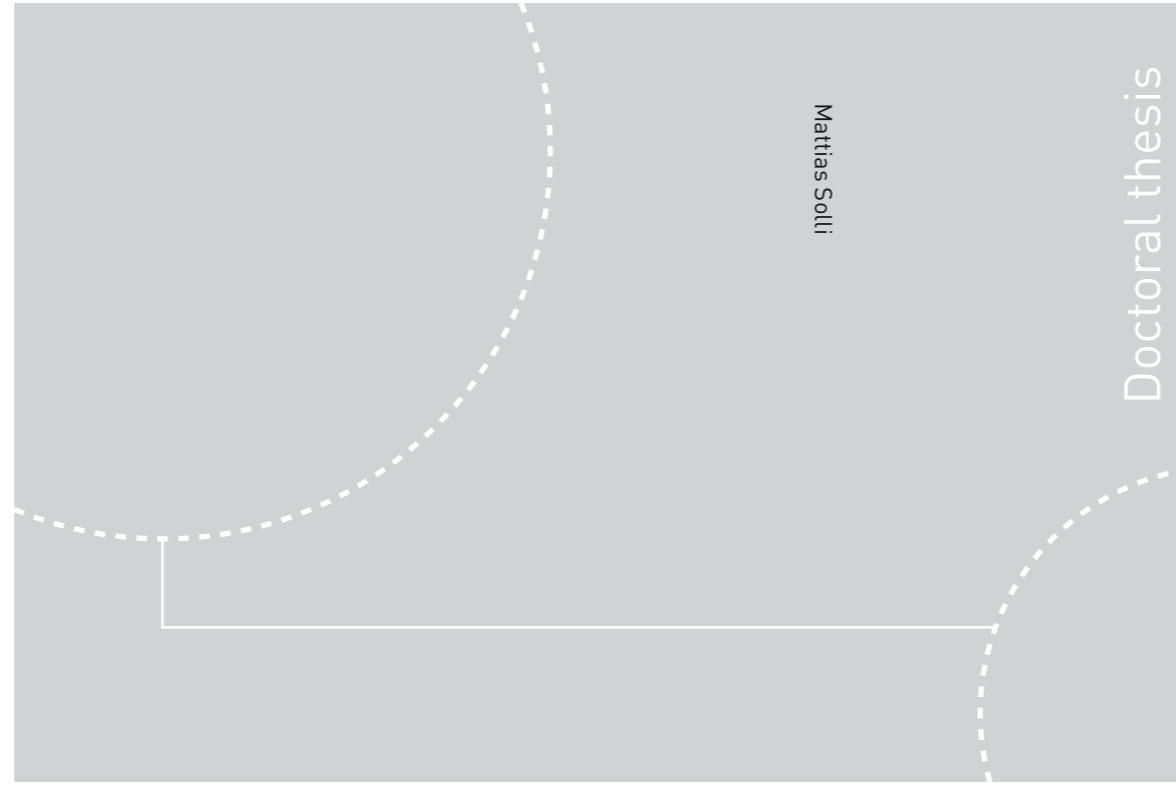


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Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, and Nondirective Meditation

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If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn.

Charlie Parker



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# **TOWARDS AN EMBODIED HERMENEUTICS**

**GADAMER, MERLEAU-PONTY, AND NONDIRECTIVE MEDITATION**



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# **TOWARDS AN EMBODIED HERMENEUTICS**

**GADAMER, MERLEAU-PONTY, AND NONDIRECTIVE MEDITATION**





## Introduction. Practices of Self-Knowledge

I am not yet able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know myself; so it seems to me ridiculous, when I do not yet know that, to investigate on irrelevant things. And so I dismiss these matters and accepting the customary belief about them [...] I investigate not on these things, but myself, to know whether I am a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 229e-230

### 1. Philosophical Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Nondirective Meditation

What does it imply to know oneself? How can we gain increased understanding of the genuine traits of *who we are* as individuals and moral beings? Within the Western philosophical tradition, the question of self-knowledge is as old as philosophy itself – *philosophy* began by taking it into account. The following considerations will take recourse to two philosophical traditions that hold the question vivid in our contemporaries; the *philosophical hermeneutics* expressed in two phases of the long career of Hans-Georg

Gadamer,<sup>1</sup> and the *phenomenology* expressed in the earliest works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.<sup>2</sup> According to both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, self-knowledge is basically an indirect enterprise. Self-knowledge is gained not through abstract formula aiming to express once and for all the compound nature of man, and not through the unmediated gaze targeted directly towards one's situation or inner life, but rather through concrete detours into something other than oneself. To avoid the private and self-concealing orders of solipsist life, one needs to be mirrored in orders outside oneself. Only by having a distance to oneself can one see oneself.

As representatives of the modernist philosophical tradition after Kant, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty frequently rely on art experience as a paradigmatic example to reveal the nature of indirect self-knowledge. Together with the inter-human dialogue, which serves as another example, art experience is for Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty a concretized event of expanded self-knowledge in the medium of something else. As readers of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty – or perhaps even more if one consults the vast corpus of secondary literature on these philosophers – one sometimes gets the impression of a fixed necessity in the philosophical recourses to art experience. It is *as if* the art experience and dialogue were not *paradeigmata*; which is to say, examples meant to reveal essential dimensions in human life that can also evolve elsewhere, i.e. in other paradigmatic structures. The recourse to art experience has become somewhat static.

The current study will not follow directly in the well-rehearsed path of art experience and dialogue. Running the risk of trying out a new domain of description, the ambition to be pursued, rather, is to bring Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies into substantial dialogue with another practice of self-knowledge that has gained increased relevance to our contemporaries, namely *meditation*. Just as art experience has already been here for a while, meditation is about to become an integrated part of modern life. Literally speaking, there are today hundreds of practices called meditation, practiced by millions of people around the globe. Meditation is no longer associated first and foremost with mystics, alternative movements or religious life, but is taken onboard in everything from institutional health care, public schools, to professional business life. Meditation has today become one of the leading routes to fight stress. Given that stress and stress-related diseases over the last decades have been observed to be one of the major plagues in the Western situation, meditation is seen to be an effective nonpharmaceutical way of handling them.<sup>3</sup> In its modern form,

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<sup>1</sup> Exposed in the forthcoming will be the relationship between Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Gesammelte Werke 1 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2010). and essays and lectures published by Gadamer in the subsequent years. Emphasis will be put on Gadamer's essays on aesthetic experience, for the most part gathered in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage*, Gesammelte Werke 8 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2011); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Svend Davanger, Halvor Eifring, and Anne Grete Hersoug, *Fighting Stress* (Oslo: Acem Publishing, 2008); Paul Grossman et al., "Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits: A meta-analysis," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 57, no. 1 (2004); Christopher R. K. MacLean et al., "Effects of the transcendental meditation program on adaptive mechanisms: Changes in hormone levels and responses to stress after 4 months of practice," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 22, no. 4 (1997); John Kabat-Zinn et al., "Effectiveness of a Meditation-Based Stress Reduction Program in the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 149 (1992); Patricia Carrington et al., "The Use of Meditation-Relaxation Techniques for the Management of Stress in a Working Population," *Journal of Occupational Medicine* 22, 4 (1980); Herbert Benson, J.F. Beary, and M.P. Carol, "The relaxation response," *Psychiatry* 37 (1974).

meditation is a self-administrated practice of self-care; a way of finding rest, awareness and well-being in a contemporary situation that is for many filled with high and shifting demands of their personal and professional life.

To our knowledge, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies have not been applied and discussed in the new-emerging interest in meditation – least of all in the form of an expanded, juxtaposed co-reading of the two philosophers. By contrast, the contemporary popularity of meditation is mirrored in a wide and heterogeneous specter of other scientific and philosophical approaches. During the last few decades, a rapidly increasing interest in meditation can be observed, for instance within neurology,<sup>4</sup> psychology,<sup>5</sup> cognitive science,<sup>6</sup> cultural studies,<sup>7</sup> and Anglo-American analytical phenomenology.<sup>8</sup> In some of these discourses, we find the meditative technique that will serve as our prime example of analysis; the technique described and classified as *nondirective meditation*.<sup>9</sup> Together with the majority of meditation styles practiced today<sup>10</sup> this meditative practice has originated in an Asian religious tradition (Hinduism). It was introduced to the Western countries in the latter part of the 1950s and has since then been radically reinterpreted within the contexts of Western psychology and neurology. In the contemporary form that we will take an interest in, nondirective meditation is conceived strictly as a psychological and secular – or religious-neutral – phenomenon. The current context will study nondirective meditation as a mundane and transparent practice, *not* as a mystical, religious, or quasi-religious practice evolving outside rational discussion.

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<sup>4</sup> Kieran C. R. Fox et al., "Functional neuroanatomy of meditation: A review and meta-analysis of 78 functional neuroimaging investigations," *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 65 (2016); Jian Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014); Antoine Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation," *Trends Cognitive Science* 12 (2008); Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An introduction", in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, ed. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Cristiano Crescentini et al., "Psychological and physiological responses to stressful situations in immersive virtual reality: Differences between users who practice mindfulness meditation and controls," *Computers in Human Behavior* 59 (2016); Fangfang Chen et al., "The effect of body–mind relaxation meditation induction on major depressive disorder: A resting-state fMRI study," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 183 (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being - Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2015). Natalie Natalie Depraz, Francisco Varela, and Pierre Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003); Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear, eds., *The View From Within: First Person-Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (Imprint Academic, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Halvor Eifring, ed. *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation; Cultural Histories* (Oslo: Hermes, 2014); Halvor Eifring, *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam - Cultural Histories* (London, New Dehli, New York, Sidney: Bloomsbury, 2013). and Halvor Eifring, ed. *Asian Traditions of Meditation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, forthcoming 2016). For a review of the cultural history of the scientific interest in meditation as such, Are Holen, "The Science of Meditation; Elements of a Cultural History", in *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, ed. Halvor Eifring (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, forthcoming 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, eds., *Self, No Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". Anders Nesvold et al., "Increased heart rate variability during nondirective meditation," *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology* 2012/19 (Published online June 2011) (2011); Svend Davanger et al., "Meditation-specific prefrontal cortical activation during acem meditation: an fMRI study," *Perceptual Motor Skills* 111,1 (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Eifring, *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation; Cultural Histories* Introduction. i.

Nondirective meditation is described as a peculiar combination of *mental* and *sonorous activity*. In a typical situation of practice, the meditator sits comfortably with his or her eyes closed, while repeating a meditation sound or mantra silently and unrestrained *in thought*.<sup>11</sup> The sonorous activity is thus based on a "mentalized" sound. A sound is repeated – volitionally<sup>12</sup> – not by being spoken out aloud, and not by being subvocalized with tongue or other speech organs, but merely by being imagined, unrestrainedly, with as little cognitive effort as possible in the moment. While performing this repetitive act, the meditator seeks to pay no direct attention to other thoughts, emotions, or bodily sensations but steers instead an open, nonconcentrated, and nonjudgmental mode of attention towards the self-induced mental sound. In the volitional contribution of the moment *likes* or *dislikes* are set aside. The meditator takes no interest in what spontaneously evolves around the inner sound, but accepts everything as it is, so to speak, while just repeating the sound in an unrestrained way.

Executing this unrestrained sonorous-mental activity is described as having a dual impact on mind and body. It both relaxes<sup>13</sup> and provokes.<sup>14</sup> In the first instance, the activity soothes the mind and body by generating what is described as a *relaxation response* in the neurological system. Mind and body are brought to rest in a modus related to sleep, yet not equivalent to sleep.<sup>15</sup> That is, while falling asleep is neither unusual nor "forbidden" in the practice, it also furnishes for a situation wherein the meditator can rest deeply while nevertheless being awake. In phenomenological terms, furnishing for is what we can call an *epoché*.<sup>16</sup> With the gentle repetition of the sound comes an open attitude towards spontaneous modes of generating order, potentially allowing new configurations to evolve more freely.

The provocative aspect, in the second instance, comes within the framework of the *epoché* of the relaxation response. Though relaxing, the activity of repeating the sound harbors (potentially, not necessarily) a moment of friction. Acting unrestrainedly with a mental sound in various psychological climates is a mental task that easily provokes to the fore various psychological tensions in the meditator; for instance, self-images associated with the feeling of not performing a task *correctly*. Evolving with the double aspect of soothing and provocation is a form of self-care not only in the organic and psychological sense but also in the more existential sense. The physical relaxation response comes together with a situation wherein memories and tensions that build up in shorter or longer periods of life are potentially allowed to be processed.<sup>17</sup> Involved in

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 2, Box 3; Maria Ospina et al., "Meditation practices for health: state of the research," *Evidence Reports/Technology Assessments* 155 (2007); Davanger et al., "Meditation-specific prefrontal cortical activation during acem meditation: an fMRI study".

<sup>12</sup> Davanger, Eifring, Hersoug (ed.): *Fighting Stress – Reviews of Meditation Research*, (Acem Publishing 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Benson, Beary, and Carol, "The relaxation response"; Carrington et al., "The Use of Meditation-Relaxation Techniques for the Management of Stress in a Working Population".

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Are Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation* (Oslo: Acem Publishing, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Benson, *The Relaxation Response* (New York: Harper Torch/HarperCollins Publishers, 2000). 112–13.

<sup>16</sup> Describing meditation as an *epoché* is done in Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation*.

the sonorous activity is a therapeutic effect analogous to a caring and accepting dialogue with another human being, only in meditation the meditator is alone, encountering him- or herself only with the self-induced mental sound. In this self-encounter evolves the potential self-knowledge associated with the practice. Meditation is described as a practical training in learning to *let go* of psychological investments.

Before we start digging heavily into the philosophical issues evoked by nondirective meditation, a few words of definition and limitation of scope are needed. From what we have now begun to see, the word nondirective refers to the negative principle of not steering (i.e. directing) the meditation sound and the effects it might have on mind and body in any particular direction. That is, the meditator seeks not to decrease or increase what happens spontaneously during meditation, and seeks not to control the sound by force and restraints. The manual of the meditative practice is basically *just* this: repeat the sound as unrestrained as possible in thought, whenever this is an option, regardless of what happens spontaneously.<sup>18</sup>

The nondirective principle can (and will, eventually) be contrasted with meditation as *focused* attention,<sup>19</sup> or as we will call it, *concentration*. Typically, a concentration technique seeks to cultivate a sustained focus of attention. The goal is to maintain vigilant and stable attention, undisturbed by spontaneous activities.<sup>20</sup> These goals of focus, vigilance and nondisturbed attention, are not part of the manual of nondirective meditation – they represent in many ways the opposite of what is sought for in the practice. In speaking of nondirective meditation, we refer here to a class of individual meditation styles today outlined as *Transcendental Meditation*,<sup>21</sup> *Clinically Standardized Meditation*,<sup>22</sup> *Relaxation Response*,<sup>23</sup> and *Acem Meditation*.<sup>24</sup> Though elaborated differently, these styles share the basic of being sound-based meditation practices, and they share the essential nondirective instruction just indicated.

Now, among the multitude of meditative practices existing today, there are other styles of meditation techniques that can be called nondirective, without thereby involving meditation sounds or mantras. In such practices, the breath or other bodily sensations are typically used as vehicles of meditative attention. In our context, however, we leave these nonsonorous forms of nondirective meditation out of consideration. We will speak of nondirective meditation almost exclusively as the sonorous-based activity. By the same token, we claim no comprehensiveness to everything called meditation today. Literarily speaking, there are hundreds of practices called meditation around the world, secular, half-religious, or religious, while an overall consensus about definition and classification is lacking. Limiting the scope of the investigation to the one specific

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Patricia Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation* (London: Harper Collings Publishers, 1998). 84.

<sup>19</sup> Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation". 2.

<sup>20</sup> B. Allan Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness", in *The View from Within*, ed. Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear (Thorverton: Imprint Academic: 1999). 175 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Mahesh Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living; Transcendental Meditation* (New York: Plume/Penguin Group, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*.

<sup>23</sup> Benson, *The Relaxation Response*.

<sup>24</sup> Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation*; Davanger, Eifring, and Hersoug, *Fighting Stress*.

meditation technique is done to avoid unnecessary complications that would take us away from the philosophical questions.

On the other hand, privileging the sonorous form of meditation is done out of philosophical interest. The fact that the practice is based on an inner hearing of sounds that resembles language without thereby *being* language is intriguing. The sound makes the practice intriguingly difficult to classify with philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology. Are we here speaking of a hermeneutical phenomenon (Gadamer) or a perceptual phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty)? Or, are we speaking of a combination of the two phenomena – or perhaps something that we do not yet know what it is?

In the classical phenomenological sense of Husserl,<sup>25</sup> the *epoché* is coupled with a systematic form of introspection. The philosophical gaze turns towards itself to describe the eidetic orders of its own being and foundation. In the case of nondirective meditation, however, the word *introspection* appears a little inapt from the outset. On the one hand, the meditative practice certainly implies an attentional gaze going inwards, in the very concrete sense of closing the eyes and being open to the spontaneous expressions of consciousness. On the other hand, the practice is not so much an *intro-spectare* as an *intro-audire*. The meditative consciousness uses not primarily a mental gaze turned directly towards the expressions of consciousness, but a sonorous awareness directed a little on the side of the meditating self, namely towards the self-induced sound. Through the device of mental sound, the practice becomes an indirect form of self-encounter. While the spontaneous mind is allowed to evolve freely *around* or *together* with the sound, the meditating consciousness turns volitionally back on itself through the sonorous system of the phenomenal body.

What are the philosophical implications of performing this mode of sonorous activity? Given the relatively short history of Asian meditation techniques in the Western context, it could only be expected that Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty – as well as any other philosopher in their preceding tradition – offer no explicit answers. Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty demonstrate not only a complete lack of concepts applying directly to the practice of nondirective meditation but also, more generally, to meditation in the technical and defined senses of today.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, both philosophers do occasionally mention the word meditation,<sup>27</sup> yet there is no doubt that the connotations here go in the direction of the Western philosophical and contemplative tradition, not towards techniques recently imported from the Asian traditions.<sup>28</sup>

The reference to tradition is informative. In the Western tradition effective in Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, meditation has been intimately tied to the interpretation of texts, parables or religious

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<sup>25</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie (1913)* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950). § 31.

<sup>26</sup> In the contemporary discourse on meditation, *meditation* is defined according to specific criteria. Cf. Halvor Erifring and Are Holen, "The Uses of Attention", in *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation - Cultural Histories*, ed. Halvor Eifring (Oslo: Hermes, 2014); Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation". It seems safe to say that Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty demonstrate no knowledge of the thematic discussed here.

<sup>27</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 464. Reference to Descartes.

<sup>28</sup> Erifring and Holen, "The Uses of Attention." 6.

enigmas;<sup>29</sup> or as heightened awareness towards *meaning* or *meaning conditioning* orders in some form or another. Famous meditators with the Western philosophical tradition confirm the picture. In *The Trinity*, for instance, Augustine is meditating *day and night* on the Word of God (i.e., the Bible), seeking for the omnipotent truth of God *in the written*.<sup>30</sup> Reading the Word, which expresses the ultimate subject-transgressing order, is a way of expanding self-knowledge. Descartes' *Meditations*,<sup>31</sup> another famous example, seeks for the minimal self-reflection of consciousness. Less text oriented, obviously, Descartes nevertheless presents a quest for the minimal condition of *meaning*. The only meaning properly worth elaborating is the language of mathematics, secured and overviewed by the presumptive clarified standards of a method. Lastly, and all the nearer to Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's meditative revision of Descartes' new *beginning* of philosophy is a quest for the ultimate foundation of phenomenology. Meditation is the path to the transcendental Ego, i.e. the method headed towards the ultimate phenomenological order constitutive for the *Sinn* of philosophy.<sup>32</sup>

In sharp contrast to what we can indicate with these typical references to the Western philosophical tradition, prominent meditation techniques today imported from Asia are not *meaning*-oriented practices. That is, instead of being practices of interpretation or heightened awareness towards conditions of meaning, Asian meditation techniques are, typically, perceptual practices paying attention to the breath, the fluctuation of spontaneous thoughts, body sensation in general, or, as in nondirective meditation, mantras that are presumptively void of meaning. To speak only for the latter mentioned practice, the sounds used in the more accomplished forms of nondirective practice are linguistic or linguistic-like, yet it would be wrong to call them *words*, or even more wrong, a *chain* of words, as in a sentence being read. While the sound consists of short sonorous sequences of vowels and consonants<sup>33</sup> (i.e. linguistic sounds<sup>34</sup>), the sound is presumptive without semantic, symbolic or ritual meaning – or any other meaning expressed using the word *meaning* in the conventional sense.<sup>35</sup> It furnishes not for intellectual activity associated with interpretation in the everyday sense of the word. The sound is *just a sound*, so to speak; *neutral* in terms of meanings and associations.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Halvor Eifring, "Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam; Technical Aspects of Devotional Practices", in *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam; Cultural Histories*, ed. Halvor Eifring (London, New Dehli, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity* (New York: New York City Press, 2012). 1.3.5./ 69. Here and forthcoming, the reference to Augustine will be dual. The first number refers to the classical pagination, the second to the page numbers in the current edition.

<sup>31</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen: eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1977). Cf. Chapter 1, "Der Weg zum transzendentalen Ego."

<sup>33</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing"; Ospina et al., "Meditation practices for health: state of the research".

<sup>34</sup> Our evolving description of the sounds divert from Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound* (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993). which describes mantras as *nonlinguistic*. 7. Our context will take particular interest in the fact that the sounds resemble language, without being any particular empirical language.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 214.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Eifring, "Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam; Technical Aspects of Devotional Practices."



Within the Western cultural context, meaningless meditation sounds are doubtlessly one of the more distinguished new phenomena.<sup>37</sup> In the traditional context of Hinduism, by contrast, such sounds have long roots in religious or half-religious life. Nondirective meditation was developed in a nonscriptural tradition wherein *sounds* – and not the *Word*<sup>38</sup> – was considered the more sacred and ontological prime.<sup>39</sup> The neutral sounds of mantra were believed to manifest in the divine order of the universe. In the Western reinterpretations of the meditation technique, however, these religious and ontological undertones of the neutral sound are left behind. From being associated with theological orders of creation and a holistic worldview of man and universe, the meditation sound is now conceived in methodological and psychological terms, i.e. in light of how the unrestrained and neutral sound works in body and psychology.

In this hermeneutical situation of reinterpretation of nondirective meditation there evolves for us a question of overall philosophical interest. What form of subject emerges for philosophy – indirectly – in and through the contemporary new-understanding of nondirective meditation? Cut loose of religious interpretation, what form of subjectivity evolves in the mental-sonorous activity of repeating the sound unrestrained in thought? Revealed with nondirective meditation seems to be a mode of inner, transformative and enactive subjectivity, which turns towards itself guided by the manual of a delineated cultural practice. Literarily speaking, the subject acts *in* him or herself with a sound apt for the purpose – and apparently he or she gains some self-knowledge by doing so.

We can address the question regarding the subject to the Western philosophical tradition. How does the subject of meditative hearing stand in relationship to the Western philosophical tradition? We have already pointed out one important difference regarding *meaning*, but can the new emerging subject – along other axes – also be called a prolonging of initiates always already evolving in our tradition? These questions lack answers in the present discourses on nondirective meditation. To our knowledge, no comprehensive study situates the meditative practice firmly, scholarly and positively in the Western philosophical tradition. Instead, presentations of meditation techniques imported from the Asian or Eastern traditions often include negative references to Western philosophical tradition, highlighting its rationalistic tendencies. Livia Kohn exemplifies the take. In a broad swipe of characteristics, including everything from the Delphic *Know Thyself*, to Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, she writes: "In overall theory, the Eastern understanding of mind and body sees them as a single subtle process, while the Western biomechanical models think of them as gross substances, machine-like systems that may happen to be in somewhat the same place but do not totally

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. the Bible, *John* 1.1.: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*.

mesh."<sup>40</sup> Modern Western thinking is first and foremost causal and linear, Kohn holds. It is dominated by reductionist tendencies aiming to find *one* cause for one result, and analyzing experience from there.<sup>41</sup>

Now, there is little doubt that Kohn expresses some truth in regards to tendencies of dualism and rationalism within Western philosophy. That said, she also expresses a simplistic understanding of Western philosophical tradition and contemporary thought. She does not recognize, for instance, how the longer Western philosophical tradition has accumulated initiatives going in drastically nondualist and nonrationalist directions. Not recognized either is the response to dualism and rationalism developed in the nearer phenomenological tradition after Husserl, wherein thinkers like Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty have contributed extensively.

Narrowed down to a detailed description of experience, the philosophical question of the subject pertains to a phenomenology of inner subjectivity. Of interest here is the discrepancy between the traditional account of nondirective meditation and the empirically informed new reinterpretations of the same technique. Within its traditional context of Hinduism,<sup>42</sup> the phenomenal instance that heard the mantras stood in direct contact with its ontological surroundings. In Kohn's phrasing of the traditional account: the individual self was seen as a manifestation of cosmic forces, and the inner events were seen as "connected to all".<sup>43</sup> In general, these religious and ontological bonds between individual and cosmos are left behind in the Western empirically oriented reinterpretations of nondirective meditation. The practice is secularized, but simultaneously also individualized and interiorized. In the Western version of the meditative practice, we can say, the *epoché* of the relaxation response shows tendencies of being a solipsist enterprise. The inner, enactive subject shows tendencies of emerging without a lifeworld – not only in regard to tradition but also in embodied analysis. To the degree that these tendencies can be demonstrated in reading, thus, something does, in fact, happen when the meditative practice becomes described in the schemas of the empirically oriented discourses.

Although we cannot take Kohn's non-nuanced analysis of "Western thought" as adequate, the intentional bonds from "inner" to "outer" are cut or at least made less apparent. How the phenomenal instance that hears the meditation sound stands in relationship to its moral and physical surroundings calls for a comprehensive, phenomenological analysis of embodiment.

Importing nondirective meditation into philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology means evoking the current practice in theories that are largely reflected in terms of tradition, and which also offer radically nondualist and nonrationalist accounts of human experience. The philosophical subjects of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's are not substances standing over the substance of an object; neither in the form of a

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<sup>40</sup> Livia Kohn, *Meditation Works; in the Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Traditions* (Magdalena: Three Pines Press, 2008)., 116–117. Another example of the negative reference to tradition is found in Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. cf. Introduction . 1 (Locke and Descartes) and 214 (Heidegger).

<sup>41</sup> Kohn, *Meditation Works; in the Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Traditions*. 117.

<sup>42</sup> Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*.

<sup>43</sup> Kohn, *Meditation Works; in the Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Traditions*. 177.

rational mind standing over body nor in the form of an "inner" cogito faced with "external" objects of the environment. Key concepts in philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology secure the bond across any dualist division, in ways not associable with Kohn's "Western rationalism". *Sprache*, or the *hermeneutical phenomenon*, is for Gadamer the fundamental order expressing a holistic view on man and world; *not* at the cost of individuality and subjectivity, but, on the contrary, as the dialectical order rendering individuality and subjectivity possible in the first place. *Perception*, or the *perceptual phenomenon*, expresses an analogous order for Merleau-Ponty. The hermeneutical and the perceptual phenomena *are* the dialectical and ontologically prime orders always already evolving *between* individuality and communal life. The hermeneutical and the phenomenological selves are relational through and through. They are in the dynamic and lived relations of *I–me, I–other, I–you, I–community, I–world*, etc.

In other words, whatever the subjectivity of nondirective meditation is or is not, the "inner" subjective dimension stands in an intrinsic relationship to the "outer," when conceived with philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology. The meditating consciousness is a practical modification of the relational self; a way the relational consciousness turns towards itself *in doing*. In an important sense, therefore, importing the reinterpreted variant of nondirective meditation into the philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology is to reestablish the phenomenal bonds from "inner" to "outer" – without thereby re-establishing any religious or half-religious takes on the meditative practice.

As indicated, however, what makes nondirective meditation interesting for philosophy is not that Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies can be applied to culturally new practice as mere tools of description, but that questions seem to bounce back to philosophy the moment one does so. Curiously, the meditative practice does not fit in the initial frameworks offered by Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. Or perhaps better put, this new cultural practice both fits and does not fit into their universal theories of experience. On the positive side, essential aspects of nondirective meditation communicate well with essential aspects of both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies. On the negative side, essential aspects of the meditative practice also *lack* conceptual correspondence within the contemporary philosophies. Compelling questions are here heralded with the conjunction *and*: the fact that essential aspects of nondirective meditation communicate negatively and positively with essential philosophemes within *both* philosophical hermeneutics *and* phenomenology implies a combination of terms more intriguing than it might look like at first glance. Philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology *are not the same philosophical position*. The fact that Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty stand on the same "side" in questions of dualism does not imply that they bridge dualism along the same philosophical path. Important systematic and methodological discrepancies between these post-Husserlian philosophers arise precisely in the ways they bridge modern dualism. In other words, by bringing philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology together in one and the same analysis, nondirective meditation initiates a combination found in neither of the two philosophers in isolation.

a. Path of *Lesen* – Path of *Perception*. Unity and Methods of Phenomenology

Let us – for introductory purposes – sketch out the themes and perspectives conjured up when we say that nondirective meditation communicates with both philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology.<sup>44</sup> In light of the longer Western philosophical tradition, both Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies can be said to reconcile the division between the inner and outer life of the subject dominating modern Western thought. Famously enough, perhaps, Augustine and Descartes play key roles here. Augustine, we could say, is the thinker wherein modern dualism is articulated in latent ways, later strengthened and radicalized by Descartes. However, Augustine is also the thinker introducing latent solutions to the same dualism. When Augustine meditates *day and night* on the Word of God, he indirectly opens two nondualist approaches to experience. One approach goes through interpretation and language. The Word of God, according to Augustine, expresses an ontological unity preceding the division between subject and object, man and the world, man and God. This unity is the true language of the heart, according to Augustine; the *verbum cordis* or *verbum Interius* is the inner language of man which unites the "inner" with the "outer" and the "outer" with the "inner". Meditating on the enigmatic Word of God, then, is the path to this ultimate bond of being. The Word is the medium to discover the unity in oneself. It is the vehicle to an ahistorical unity evolving within the historically conditioned being of man.<sup>45</sup>

From Augustine's meditation to Gadamer's philosophy there runs a direct line of hermeneutical impact, which is crucial to philosophical hermeneutics.<sup>46</sup> Devoting a section of *Wahrheit und Methode* to the *verbum*-teaching of Augustine (and Thomas Aquinas),<sup>47</sup> Gadamer firmly situates his own hermeneutics in Augustine's thinking. The move is typical of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Seeking a critical revision of the contemporary situation dominated by dualist approaches to man, Gadamer goes back to the initial formation of the problem. Philosophical hermeneutics can be read as an accomplishment of the hermeneutical initiative launched by Augustine. Gadamer's *Sprache* is a secularized and hermeneutically revised version of Augustine's *verbum Interius*. In other words, Gadamer fulfills Augustine's initiative of making reading and language the bridge on dualism. *Lesen* or *Auslegung* becomes the path accomplishing the phenomenal bond evolving between man and the world; the inner language of man is the dialectic unity of understanding always already latent in the hermeneutical self.

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<sup>44</sup> What we say in Section 1a will be demonstrated in closer detail in Part One–Three.

<sup>45</sup> Loosely referred to here is Augustine, *The Trinity*, Chapter 3, Book XV, 407 ff.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Jean Grondin, "Unterwegs zur Rhetorik. Gadamer's Schritt von Platon zu Augustin in 'Wahrheit und Methode'", in *Hermeneutische Wege; Hans-Georg Gadamer zum Hundertsten*, ed. Günter Figal, Jean Grondin, and Dennis J. Schmidt (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Jean Grondin, *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001); Mirela Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamer's Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Section 3,2,b, *Sprache und Verbum*.

In contrast to Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty evolves his account of experience not in explicit recourse to Augustine. In light of tradition, however, it is not problematic to say that the phenomenologist accomplishes a second solution to dualism latent in Augustine's meditation, namely the approach of perception and embodiment. Meditating on the Word, Augustine indirectly launches a historically new conception of embodied consciousness.<sup>48</sup> For Augustine, there is no essential distinction between the meaning found in books, and the ontological order of the world, *and* the internal organization of embodied life. The ontological unity of the phenomenal body, the understanding heart, the words expressing the creation and norms of God, and the order of the perceptual world, is one and the same unity. Seen from the perspective of the phenomenal body, the unity of the body expands its surroundings. Potentially, the phenomenal and historically conditioned body possesses in itself an ahistorical order evolving in the perceptual world. Merleau-Ponty can be said to accomplish this approach to man – the nondualist path of *perception*.<sup>49</sup>

There is no doubt that Merleau-Ponty pursues the idea of embodied consciousness with details that is virtually absent in both Augustine and Gadamer. Where Augustine and Gadamer can only be called indicative in approaching the phenomenal body, Merleau-Ponty elaborates in *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* a largely detailed account of embodied consciousness. Merleau-Ponty targets embodiment not on the grounds of postulates, but by building up an immensely complex concept of human behavior. Starting "from below",<sup>50</sup> i.e. from rudimentary behavioral structures far more *lived* than *known*, up to what he calls "symbol behavior" unique to man, the phenomenologist demonstrates how human consciousness expands into its surroundings. Consciousness is the unitary and dialectical transition between the orders of its own organization and the organizations of the lifeworld.

Along their paths of *Lesen* and *perception*, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty work out concepts typical to each path. Gadamer's path of *Lesen* models a contemporary, nondualist philosophy around key concepts like *Text*, *Interpretation*, *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* etc., as well a general attention to *tradition* and *moral life*, and an accumulation of cultural practices in general – in short, concepts expressing the nondualist and transformative nature of understanding (*Verstehen*). Merleau-Ponty's path of *perception*, on the other hand, models experience in terms of *body proper*, *body schema*, *structure of behavior*, etc. – in short, concepts expressing the nondualist nature of embodiment.

Perplexingly enough, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's concepts of experience are in many senses neatly overlapping. Conceptually speaking, the unity of Gadamer's hermeneutical phenomenon *includes* the phenomenal body pursued and elaborated by Merleau-Ponty, whereas the unity of Merleau-Ponty's perceptual phenomenon includes the moral life of man pursued and elaborated by Gadamer. At the same time, the unities at stake put pressure on various aspects of experience. Very often, or even *typically*, as we

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 422.

<sup>49</sup> In the forthcoming, *Lesen* and *perception* (italics to indicate the French spelling) will be used to designate the hermeneutical and perceptual phenomena targeted by Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, respectively.

<sup>50</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 4.

will see in the next section, the one philosopher emphasizes and places pivotal conceptual attention on aspects downplayed or even left out by the other philosopher. Thus, Gadamer's exemplarily lack of detail about embodiment, for instance, is equaled by Merleau-Ponty's likewise lack of the elaborated concepts of hermeneutical transformation [*Verwandlung ins Gebilde*], moral concepts [e.g. *phronesis*] or tradition and formation of knowledge [*Bildung*].

Already now we see the contours of the intriguing philosophical landscape conjured up by the importing of nondirective meditation into philosophy. To the degree that the meditative practice calls for a positive combination of both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's approaches, a subject located somewhere in between the paths of *Lesen* and *perception* is evoked. Evoked is a subject that potentially harbors both the transformed and emancipative nature of understanding elaborated by Gadamer, *and* the phenomenal body elaborated by Merleau-Ponty. This is a subject that both learns from tradition (Gadamer) *and* that spontaneously throws itself out in largely detailed behavioral structures (Merleau-Ponty). Or in light of tradition: evolving is an Augustinian subject located somewhere in between the two possible nondualist subjects instantiating the modern subject.

As noted from the outset, when we take recourse to nondirective meditation we will do so on the basis of how the practice is described in empirical discourses of today. This banal fact signals a certain discrepancy regarding the readiness of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. There is no doubt that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is initially more apt than Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics for a direct dialogue between philosophy and nonphilosophy. *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* are distinguished by communication with empirical discourses literally absent in *Wahrheit und Methode* and other writings of Gadamer.

How are we going to deal with this fact? Taking philosophical hermeneutics seriously, we cannot merely cross out the apparent gap between his mode of doing philosophy and the empirical discourses. "Wir denken von der Mitte der Sprache aus,"<sup>51</sup> reads a statement of Gadamer. The task of philosophy is to think *with* language<sup>52</sup> – with what is established, not against, in direct and negative encounters with it. Philosophical hermeneutics is a critical philosophy,<sup>53</sup> but it always works from within the theories to be discussed by taking seriously the claims and values being advocated. Now if we are to follow Gadamer's lead back in a reading on himself, we need to take some methodical considerations. If Gadamer is to be brought into substantial contact with findings of the empirical sciences without too much conceptual violence, our move towards these discourses needs to be by the logic of his own philosophy.

One way to work our way into a proper situation of communication between Gadamer and the current discourses is to also ponder the difference between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology in respect of the *nearer* philosophical tradition initiated by Husserl. Eventually, Husserl will be the pivotal thinker

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<sup>51</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 465.

<sup>52</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Mit der Sprache denken (1990)," *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. Einleitung. 5.

for the contact we seek. As is well known, both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies are late revisions of Husserl's phenomenology. In our context, Husserl will be linked to philosophical *methods*. That is to say, Husserl's phenomenology will be less a positive philosophy – or what in German can better be called a *Realphilosophie*<sup>54</sup> – than the supplier of possible ways of *doing* philosophy. Husserl is the initiator of philosophy as a phenomenological-eidetic description; i.e. of the ways that Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty turn the latent possibilities of tradition into a philosophical hermeneutics and a phenomenology of perception.

Schematically conceived, the important figure regarding philosophical impact is as follows. Husserl's phenomenology (directly or indirectly) is what makes Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's paths of *Lesen* and *perception* (which they more or less explicitly inherit from the longer philosophical tradition) into questions of *how* to describe the eidetic orders of experience. Qua phenomenological methods, *Lesen* and *perception* are more than mere preferences of themes and concepts. The themes and concepts typical to philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology (such as *Text* and *embodiment*) also manifest standards effective in how to do philosophy. The *what* of philosophy comes with a *how* of philosophical practice, so to speak. Gadamer systematically *reads on reading*; he practices *Lesen* and *Auslegung* when he outlines the general structures [*Struktur*] of *Lesen* and *Auslegung*. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, *perceives* where the hermeneutist *reads*. The phenomenologist displays general structures of perception from within the framework ultimately opened with perception.

Herein evolves the difference between the different ways of doing philosophy. Where Merleau-Ponty takes privileged recourse to the empirical discourses of his contemporaries, Gadamer takes privileged recourse to *tradition*. *Wahrheit und Methode* evolves what Gadamer calls a hermeneutical universe<sup>55</sup> mainly by the *Geisteswissenschaften*, with the historical span from the pre-Socratics up to the phenomenologist of Gadamer's nearest predecessors (cf. Husserl and Heidegger). In this sense, philosophical hermeneutics is practical (reading) philosophy reflecting back on itself as practical (reading) philosophy.<sup>56</sup> The hermeneutical dimension is exposed by reading texts themselves exposing the hermeneutical dimension (cf. Augustine). *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, then, are not oriented towards tradition to the same degree as Gadamer's *magnum opus* but all the more towards the contemporary empirical discourses. Merleau-Ponty trumps Gadamer in respect of variability. Targeted in Merleau-Ponty's first books are traditional and contemporary philosophies, phenomenology (Husserl), critical philosophy (Kantian), empiricism (Humean) but also texts of the kind strikingly absent in *Wahrheit und Methode*, namely psychology, sociology, behaviorism, physiology, and even physics (most of which were of newer dates by the time of writing). Going through these discourses is how Merleau-Ponty demonstrates his key thesis: to perceive is where everything begins and ends. Radically conceived, the perceptual phenomenon harbors a philosophy of science just as much as concrete, first-person experiences of the world.

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<sup>54</sup> Günter Figal, "Hermeneutik und Phänomenologie", in *Verstehensfragen* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2008). 177.

<sup>55</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Einleitung*. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Figal, "Das Tun der Sache selbst." 236–237.

In isolation, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's notions of *Lesen* and *perception* can be called revised modifications of Husserl's coining of the word *Phänomenon* (1907). Establishing phenomenology as a practice of systematic description, Husserl re-evokes the intrinsic duality of meaning originally evolving in the Greek word *Phainomenon*, namely the essential correlation between *Erscheinen* [emergence] und *Erscheinendem* [appearances: something emerges for an instance].<sup>57</sup> As Gunter Figal has pointed out, *Lesen* is in Gadamer's works the *Erscheinung* of the text being read within the concrete situation of the reader *for whom the text emerges for*.<sup>58</sup> Analogously, we can add, perception in Merleau-Ponty's writings is the emergence of the perceptual phenomenon for the perceiving body. Unlike Husserl, then, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty seek not for a purified methodological gaze on the phenomenon,<sup>59</sup> but situates the correlation rather *in* the factual dimension of human life. The phenomenal correlation is the unity of the transpersonal and historical world. *In* the factual world wherein the human lives and dies – and nowhere else – is where the phenomena of philosophy evolve.

Methodologically speaking, what we say here implies that the experiences of lived life are not external phenomena to Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies. That is, the philosophers seek not to describe facticity in ways analogous to how, for instance, philosophy of science can relate to science.<sup>60</sup> Rather, recourse to the situatedness of everyday understanding is simultaneously a mode in which Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty situate their own philosophies in the life of the human. The phenomenal correlation of *Erscheinung* and *Erscheinendem* evolving in the factual world is where philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology of perception begin and end. In other words, the concrete world orientation in which we live our lives evolves – in germ – the sources for philosophical reflection. The task of both philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology is to make explicit from the inside a certain generality evolving in everyday understanding. The phenomenal bond of everyday life harbors the resources which ultimately are *raised to understanding* (Gadamer) and *seesawed into philosophy* (Merleau-Ponty<sup>61</sup>). Thus, we can understand better the relevance of the paradigmatic experiences discussed above. Going through paradigmatic examples such as art and dialogue serves a double purpose for the philosophers. On the one hand, by going through such examples, they seek to clarify – conceptually – what goes on in lived experience. On the other hand, going through these examples is also a way the philosophers bring their conceptual clarification back to concrete experience.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986). 14.

<sup>58</sup> Figal, "Hermeneutik und Phänomenologie." 183.

<sup>59</sup> In Husserl's take, the *method* of phenomenology evolves in the "Wesensanalyse in der Sphäre der unmittelbaren Evidenz." (Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*. 14.) Philosophical method in this sense is largely foreign to Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, both due to reasons indicated here, and for reasons that will be elaborated in Part Three below.

<sup>60</sup> Point borrowed from Günter Figal, "The Phronesis of Understanding", in *The Specter of Relativism*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995). 236.

<sup>61</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow", in *Signs* (Northwestern University Press, 1960). 164.

<sup>62</sup> Borrowed and slightly rewritten here is an explanation from Günter Figal, "Wahrheit und Methode zur Einführung", in *Klassiker Auslegen; Wahrheit und Methode*, ed. Günter Figal (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011). 3.



Potentially, philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology thus contribute to how life is lived. Analogous to art, dialogues – or, as we intend to display, practices such as nondirective meditation – the philosophies are practices that potentially work within, and have an effect on, factual life. Philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology are practices of self-understanding. They are not philosophical abstractions done for their own sake and in accordance only with closed-circled internal logic, but abstractions done in accordance with life and relevant to how factual life unfolds. The *how* of philosophy mirrors and revises the *how* of life.

If what we say here indicates an important family resemblance between Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, their emphases on *Lesen* and *perception* yet again separate them. According to what we just said in the outset of Augustine, what are being *expressed* with their respective *Erscheinung* and *Erscheinendem* are not *the same*. For Gadamer, the phenomenal correlation is an evolving of *Sinn*. The generality of everyday experience evolves *in language (Sprache)*: "Die Sprache ist die Spur der Endlichkeit,"<sup>63</sup> we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*. The *Sinn* of *Endlichkeit* is all-encompassing. The reflected generality coming in this *Spur*, we can say, is what philosophical hermeneutics seek to raise to understanding. "Die Begrifflichkeit, in der sich das Philosophieren entfaltet, hat uns [...] immer schon in derselben Weise eingenommen, in der uns die Sprache, in der wir leben, bestimmt."<sup>64</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, the phenomenal correlation is the phenomenal body. The body is a "system open onto the world and *correlative with it*,"<sup>65</sup> he writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The generality of factual life is a generality evolving with the perceiving body; this is why it is our "*general means*" of understanding. The descriptive effort of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, we can say, is to reveal the generality more or less tacitly evolving in the perceiving body. Phenomenology must "restore the world of perception",<sup>66</sup> Merleau-Ponty writes. We must rediscover our "naïve contact with the world in order to [...] raise it to a philosophical status."<sup>67</sup> In other words, phenomenology for Merleau-Ponty is to make explicit a knowledge we always already possess just by perceiving the world. "We will find the unity of phenomenology and its true sense [*sens*] in ourselves."<sup>68</sup>

In what we say here, in the outset of Husserl, we recognize what we have just indicated to be the Augustinian nondualist approaches to man. Loosely considered, the phenomenal correlation of *Erscheinung* and *Erscheinendem* is the nondualist unity – or *unities*, if we accentuate the difference between *Lesen* and *perception*.

To understand *how* the post-Husserlian philosophers raise the nondualist unity of everyday life into eidetic expressions either by going to tradition (Gadamer) or to the empirical sciences (Merleau-Ponty) we

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<sup>63</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 461.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>65</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 526, endnote 115.

<sup>66</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *An Unpublished Text*, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Northwestern University Press, 1964). 3.

<sup>67</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Preface. lxx.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* Preface, lxxi and lxx.

need to evoke Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung*<sup>69</sup> from 1900–1901. *Kategoriale Anschauung* is Husserl's discovery of how to systematically describe a categorial modification of phenomenal experience. Perceptual intentionality potentially harbors a certain surplus; a categorial level [*Stufe*] evolves (potentially) in perception. The task of a systematic phenomenological description is not only to clarify these categorial levels, but, ultimately, to categorically clarify itself as a systematic description of experience. Now when Gadamer turns to tradition in *Wahrheit und Methode*, and Merleau-Ponty turns to the embodied experience in the empirical discourses *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, they utilize variously the potentials in Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung*. That is, both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty can be said to raise the *Kategoriale Anschauung* of everyday understanding into a philosophically reflected conception of *Kategoriale Anschauung*, yet in the line of the paths of *Lesen* and *perception* this takes the hermeneutist to tradition and the phenomenologist to empirical discourses.

Through the impact of Heidegger,<sup>70</sup> Gadamer's recourse to tradition practices a largely revised understanding of the *Kategoriale Anschauung*. Reading tradition [*Auslegung*] is a way to reveal and intuit the categorial structures [*Struktur*] of factual life. Tradition harbors categorial expressions of the *Sinn* of facticity. The task of philosophical hermeneutics is to reveal, revise and accomplish these categorial expressions (for instance in Augustine). Interestingly enough, however, the same categorial approach that takes Gadamer to tradition, also harbors moments that simultaneously take philosophical hermeneutics *away* from embodied life and the empirical sciences. As for embodiment, this dimension of factual life is not rejected, naturally, but taken up – *Aufgehoben*, in German – into the fuller categorial structure [*Grundstruktur des Verstehens*], which harbors the *eidos* of embodied life. Polemically rejected along the same methodological path, however, are the empirical sciences as a privileged approach to man.

It is well-known how *Wahrheit und Methode* launches of in a critical move towards methodological ideals of the *Naturwissenschaften*. The hermeneutical phenomenon, by Gadamer, cannot be reduced to a question of right *method*. *Verstehen* is in the human condition, and the human condition is *always* present in the task of understanding. "Das Phänomen des Verstehens durchzieht nicht nur alle menschlichen Weltbezüge," he writes. "Es hat auch innerhalb der Wissenschaft selbständige Geltung und widersetzt sich dem Versuch, sich eine Methode umdeuten zu lassen."<sup>71</sup> The hermeneutical dimension cannot be proved by the natural sciences. It is the independency of human understanding. Taking seriously what resists method instead of naively seeking to overcome otherness involved is for Gadamer a way of revealing the eidetic structure [*Grundzüge*] of understanding.

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<sup>69</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus," vol. GA 1, *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978); Martin Heidegger, *Ontologie der Faktizität* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995); Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena Zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs (Vorlesungen 1923-1949)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1979).

<sup>71</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. Einleitung. 1.

Less known, apparently, is the fact that Gadamer's critical move also evolves his version of Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung*. Going through tradition is a way to reveal the categorial moment of questionableness in self-understanding. It is the way contemporary thought becomes properly situated in tradition (instead of being fooled by the naïve self-esteem of the present<sup>72</sup>) but also the way contemporary thought becomes aware of its own borders (*Text*<sup>73</sup>) within its own understanding. The hermeneutical phenomenon is not a positive phenomenon, but the categorial ambiguity of "Fremdheit und Vertrautheit" always already evolving in understanding<sup>74</sup>— raised to understanding in its ultimate (ontological) categorial mode of being: *Sprache*.

Where the hermeneutical *Auslegung* is elaborated in a polemic distance to the empirical sciences, Merleau-Ponty sees no reason to follow a similar impulse. "[I]t has never entered my mind to do away with science," he states. "It is rather a question of understanding the scope and the meaning of science."<sup>75</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological description and the empirical sciences are not and cannot be opposed to each other.<sup>76</sup> Rightly conceived, rather, they complement each other. The third-person perspective of the empirical sciences and the reflected first-person perspective of phenomenology share an essential and irreducible belongingness to the same world: the world of perception.

Merleau-Ponty's recourse to the empirical sciences harbors an interpretative moment that is not always recognized in the commentary literature.<sup>77</sup> Merleau-Ponty encounters phenomenal life not head-on, as it were, but discovers it indirectly, in and through readings of the empirical discourses. Or to be more precise to Merleau-Ponty's words: the body is *rediscovered*.<sup>78</sup> Not banally, of course, as if the phenomenologist first pretends to have forgotten his bodily being, and then, more or less fictively, "finds it" again. The point is rather that the *discourses* of his contemporaries apparently have forgotten the embodied dimension of life. With various conceptual results, the empirical discourses have lost contact with what it is to be an embodied self. Hence, Merleau-Ponty writes: "We must rediscover structure of the perceived world through a process similar to that of an archeologist. For the structure of the perceived world is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge."<sup>79</sup> Reading the texts of the empirical discourse, thus conceived, is a "digging down to the perceived world,"<sup>80</sup> through the conceiving of how a knowledge of the body is sedimented in the discourses. Actively encountering the empirical discourses is a way of restoring<sup>81</sup> the world of perception.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 375.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 300.

<sup>75</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*. 34.

<sup>76</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man", in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Eide (Northwestern University Press, 1964). 73.

<sup>77</sup> One example discussed below is Günter Figal, *Gegenständlichkeit* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2006). 157–158.

<sup>78</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. cf. 54 and 74.

<sup>79</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962)* 5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 3.

In this interpretative approach to the empirical sciences Merleau-Ponty's revised version of Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung* evolves.<sup>82</sup> Understanding the scope and the meaning of science is a way Merleau-Ponty practices his revised version of *Kategoriale Anschauung*. Merleau-Ponty conceives the empirical results as eidetic variations of phenomena undertaken along axes other than those elaborated in the philosophical tradition. Rightly conceived, he claims, the empirical sciences can and must inform philosophy, just as philosophy can and must contribute to interpreting the empirical results properly. They are practices of knowledge that complement each other. The third-person perspectives of empirical sciences and the systematically reflected first-person perspectives of phenomenology are not external to each other, although they are not fully overlapping either. The human, according to Merleau-Ponty, is double-sensed structure; both "inner" in the sense of an *I*-perspective and "outer" in the sense of radical third-person-perspectives. The human being is phenomenological *and* biological-physical; both a lived structure with deeply personal experiences and the context or milieu for physical and cognitive mechanisms.<sup>83</sup> Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that precisely the ambiguity *between* the various perspectives is what needs to be understood. The ambiguous *in between* is the perceptual phenomenon, so to speak. In other words, revealing the eidetic and ambiguous structures between the first- and the third-person perspectives is for the phenomenologist to reveal aspects of the dialectical and indeterminate relationship between man and the world.

If we now return to the meditative practice, we see the fuller contours of the philosophical landscape about to be invoked by importing the practice into philosophy. Saying that the practice is both *Lesen* and *perception* is to say that the philosophical subject emerges somewhere in between Gadamer's way of exposing human facticity in grand categorial expositions from "above", i.e. from the perspective of human *Sprache*, and Merleau-Ponty's from "from below",<sup>84</sup> from detailed elaborations of structures of behavior. It emerges between a practice mainly calling upon tradition (Gadamer), and a practice calling upon the empirical sciences together with tradition (Merleau-Ponty).

Herein rests the reason for trying out nondirective meditation as a new example of philosophical description. While recourse to the classical *paradeigmata* of philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology such as art experience and dialogue today hardly cause much friction within the philosophical frameworks, nondirective meditation will force to the fore questions pertaining to basic premises of Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophical orientations. Why do the philosophers take the paths they do, and what happens if we emphasize aspects a little differently than they do themselves to accommodate the new cultural practice? What does the culturally new practice make us see in the universal theories of philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology – thematically and methodologically? In answering these questions, a positive philosophical account is called for that does not exist, either in the initial writings of Gadamer and

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<sup>82</sup> Loosely referred here is Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man." The lecture will be studied closer in Section 7 below.

<sup>83</sup> Explanation borrowed from Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind; cognitive science and human experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991). xv.

<sup>84</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 4.

Merleau-Ponty or elsewhere, namely an *embodied hermeneutics*.<sup>85</sup> It is into this domain that we need to pursue.

#### b. Nondirective Meditation: Text and Action

What – in concrete description – does it imply to say that nondirective meditation belongs somewhere in between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology? Let us draw out – again, tentatively – how the meditative practice typically is to be seen from the two philosophical viewpoints. We already know that meditating according to the basic procedures of the practice involves a phenomenal design that is new in the Western cultural and philosophical context. Although we cannot expect to find full conceptual covers in Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, we can display various aspects of the practice using philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology.

The course of the current subsection will be as follows. First, with Gadamer, we will see the positive relevance of key hermeneutical concepts such as *Text* and *Sachlichkeit* of understanding. Second, with Merleau-Ponty, we will see the positive relevance of Merleau-Ponty's enactive approach to experience. Then we turn to the communication between the meditative practice and the philosophies. Tentatively displaying the conceptual loci wherein the meditative practice apparently does not fit in is significant in understanding the philosophical questions provoked to the fore by the practice. Thus, third, we will indicate how the enactive profile of the meditative practice (which sits well with Merleau-Ponty) lacks conceptual resonance in Gadamer's philosophy. Fourth, we will see how aspects intrinsic to the nondirective meditation as a cultural practice (which sits well with Gadamer) lacks resonance in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

Conceived in light of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*, it seems natural to target the meditative practice from the perspective of a meditation sound. Through Gadamer's path of *Lesen*, the meditation sound can be conceived as a minimized version of *Text*. This does not suggest a direct comparison between reading in the conventional sense and the meditative practice, nor a claim that the meditation sound "really" is a word from the philosophical perspective. Legitimizing the hermeneutical description, rather, is the simply provocative and harmonizing moments of the sound. Though neutral regarding semantic and symbolic meaning, the sound is not neutral in the sense of being *indifferent*. According to the demonstrations of the neurological and psychological discourses that are discussed below, the sounds apparently work on the meditator both in the sense of initiating a physiological relaxation response and a process of revised self-understanding. These moments sit well with Gadamer's hermeneutical text concept. Although Gadamer differentiates in great detail between various forms of texts (scientific prose is not the same as a poem, etc.),

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<sup>85</sup> To our knowledge, the term *embodied hermeneutics* is first introduced by Linda O'Neill, "Embodied Hermeneutics: Gadamer meets Wolf in a Room of One's Own," *Educational Theory* 57 (2007). O'Neill draws Gadamer not in the direction of phenomenology the way we intend to do, however, but seeks to make Gadamer relevant in the context of gender analysis.

the core of the hermeneutical *Text* concept is what the hermeneutist conceives as *Anstoß*.<sup>86</sup> *Text* designates anything that causes rupture or friction in understanding (in other words, it is neither tied to letters written on paper nor meaning in the everyday sense of the word). *Text* and the articulate provocation of understanding are two sides of the same event of understanding. *Text* is what initiates a process of revised, transformed understanding of human growth.

We note the terminological specification: not in the conventional sense, but only in this philosophically revised sense can (and will) the meditation sounds be considered as *Text*. To keep the conventional and the philosophical senses of text apart, we will use the German *Text* when referring to the philosophical sense of the word. From Gadamer's perspective, the meditation sounds deserve the classification *Text* to the degree that they furnish for an ongoing and open-ended process of understanding. That is, the sound as *Text* must strike the meditator and deal him or her with a blow [*Anstoß*], not only once or twice but continue to be a provocative moment throughout a longer process.

Together with the general *Text* orientation of *Wahrheit und Methode* comes another relevant conception of Gadamer's, namely the *Sachlichkeit*<sup>87</sup> of understanding [*Verstehen*]. In contrast to how Merleau-Ponty approaches phenomenal experience, Gadamer's indirect path to self-knowledge leads him to conceive of experience not from the perspective of the subject that "understands" but from the viewpoint of *what is understood* (i.e. *Sache*). That is, understanding is moved from a privileged viewpoint of the individual consciousness to the more universal *Sache*, which then includes the individual consciousness. Gadamer does so as counter-reaction to the hyperbolic emphasis on subjectivism and individualism evolving in the Western philosophical tradition after Descartes. "Der Fokus des Individuums ist ein Zerrspiegel," Gadamer writes. "Die Selbstbesinnung des Individuums ist nur ein Flackern im geschlossenen Stromkreis des geschichtlichen Lebens."<sup>88</sup> Properly conceived, self-understanding is a process that always already has begun. "Lange bevor wir uns in der Rückbesinnung selber verstehen, verstehen wir uns auf selbstverständliche Weise in Familie, Gesellschaft und Staat, in denen wir leben."<sup>89</sup> Being situated in historical life is to be thrown into a world whose ultimate conditions are given. The *Sachen* evolving in one's innermost private understanding neither begins nor ends with oneself. They expand into the orders of the shared, moral world.

Genuine self-understanding – the "Selbstbesinnung des Individuums" – is for Gadamer to take this ontological premise to the heart of understanding. That is, *Selbstbesinnung* is to acknowledge the givenness of individual understanding as the border and possibility of understanding. Such acknowledgment comes not

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<sup>86</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)", in *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode; Ergänzungen; Register, Gesammelte Werke 2* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1993). 340. We keep this word in German because of the lack of a good English equivalent. *Anstoß* means that something causes an effect, with the connotation of being pushed [*stoß*] in a direction.

<sup>87</sup> The English version of *Wahrheit und Methode* (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004).) translates *Sachlichkeit* with *factualness*. We will use the German *Sachlichkeit* and *Sache* in order to avoid confusion with the word *fact*.

<sup>88</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 281.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 281.

in the form of intellectual postulates, verbalizations, or promises, ultimately seeking to transgress the conditions of one's own life. Only by going into the factual premise of self-understanding, does the hermeneutical self expand on what it is to be a human. Only by taking the borders of self-understanding to the heart of one's own self-identity, does the subject transgress the borders of the given. "Erkennen, was ist, ist [...] das eigentliche Ergebnis aller Erfahrung, wie alles Wissenwollen überhaupt,"<sup>90</sup> writes Gadamer. In the true *Erkenntnis* evolves the emancipative power of human consciousness. Something is transformed in the way the individual conceives of himself in relationship to self and others. Understanding is expanded from within historical life. A *Sache* is understood anew.<sup>91</sup>

Gadamer can be called a spokesman for a certain way of being a human; the moral standard of a human that *seeks for* and *gains* maturity. The hermeneutical consciousness, aware of its own limitations and realistic possibilities, is a mature consciousness, both in the direct biological sense of becoming an adult and in the extended sense of having attained insight into the reality of life. Gadamer's account of *Bildung* pinpoints important aspects herein. The self-awareness of the *gebildete* consciousness implies a distance from the immediacy of desires, personal needs and private interests, in favor of the demands of universal perspective, writes Gadamer (in the outset of Hegel).<sup>92</sup> "Die allgemeinen Gesichtspunkte, für die sich der Gebildete offenhält, sind ihm nicht ein fester Maßstab, der gilt, sondern sind ihm nur als die Gesichtspunkte möglicher Anderer gegenwärtig."<sup>93</sup> The human knowledge implied in tactfulness and discretion harbor a related moment of mature behavior. By showing tact, Gadamer writes, one respects the other person by passing over what provokes him or her unnecessarily; not by ignoring it, but by keeping it in view in ways that avoid pushing the intimate sphere of the other.<sup>94</sup> *Sensus communis* is another example of maturity. *Sensus communis*, in Gadamer's interpretation, expresses the (mature) ability to take up the shared perspectives in the encounters with others, by allowing the shared meaning [*Sinn*] to emerge.<sup>95</sup> The hermeneutical concept of *Erfahrung* [experience]<sup>96</sup> coins the maturing accumulation of shared perspectives as an acquired openness. *Erfahrung*, in the proper sense of the word, implies an openness towards new experiences, writes Gadamer. An experienced person has not only become experienced through experience, but he or she has also become more open to experience.<sup>97</sup> The maturity of a hermeneutical consciousness is not in the possession of an a priori method of how to handle challenges, but simply in the readiness for new experience. Openness towards new expressions of life is what distinguishes the experienced, hermeneutical consciousness from the consciousness captured by dogmas.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 363.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 26.

<sup>96</sup> The German term is here needed to discern the *Erfahrung* from *Erlebnis*, both of which are translated as *experience* in English. The difference between these words is crucial in *Wahrheit und Methode*.

<sup>97</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 361.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 366–367.

Rephrasing what we see here, Gadamer can be called a proponent of a moral flexibility associable with an including and generous co-being between people. As is metaphorically indicated with the German word *Takt* [*Takt* means not only tactfulness in German but also *rhythm*], Gadamer speaks for a certain musicality in moral life; a sensibility and flexibility towards the various human expressions potentially arising in the situation. Moreover, with the *Text* concept, Gadamer emphatically speaks for practices forcing to the fore an increased understanding of this moral flexibility. In an important sense, the worth of the provocative aspect of *Text* is to force human maturation to happen. Gadamer's hermeneutical consciousness takes up the task of human growth (*Bildung*) by taking up the provocation of the *Text*. Being forced to scrutinize its own foundation, the hermeneutical consciousness attains a more flexible way of being towards moral life. Taking up the task of *Lesen* is a way the hermeneutical consciousness reflects back on itself and contains – indeed harbors in an including, moral sense – the perspective of the other.

Let us try to apply these hermeneutical points on the sound-based nondirective meditation now in question. Of pivotal value, if we follow Gadamer's perspectives, is how the meditator handles the task of repeating the sound unrestrainedly in thought. In the heightened ("textualized") self-relation provoked to the fore with the sound evolves the possibility of a transformed attitude towards oneself. By the logic of Gadamer's concepts, meditative *Erkenntnis* does not amount to intellectual or outspoken recourse to ideals such as "acceptance" or "tolerance". Required is *only* an ability to listen to how the sound (*Text*) is at the moment. "Wer einen Text verstehen will, ist [...] bereit, sich von ihm etwas sagen zu lassen,"<sup>99</sup> we say with *Wahrheit und Methode*. The meditator must be willing to apply the sound to the singular event. "Er muß den Text auf *diese* Situation beziehen, wenn er überhaupt verstehen will."<sup>100</sup> Listening to the sound in thought is a practical exercise in the receptivity [*Empfänglichkeit*] for the otherness of the *Text* [*Andersheit des Textes*].<sup>101</sup>

In Gadamer's perspective, learning to *let go* of the various investments in meditation is learning to *hear* what seeks to be expressed in the nonunderstood dimensions of consciousness. Self-*understanding* is to acknowledge – in genuine transformation of attitude – the continuum between oneself and otherness. This transformation occurs when the meditator – not by force, but gradually, and as the result of the organic process of understanding – recognizes him- or herself in the evolving sounds. "Alles Sichverstehen vollzieht sich [...] an etwas anderem, das da verstanden wird, und schließt die Einheit und Selbigkeit dieses anderen ein."<sup>102</sup> In the continuum between self and other evolves the expanded self-understanding. New domains of the relational self are discovered.

Moreover, by the logic of Gadamer's concepts, nondirective meditation evolves an intrinsic relationship between the inner dimension of hearing the sound *Text* and moral life in general. *How* one deals with the otherness of the meditation sound is mimetic of *how* one deals with otherness in life. Not as a point-

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 273.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 329.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 273.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 102.



by-point correlation, but rather as a general and unspecific relevance, the way of being *towards* the sound likens the way of being towards the moral world. Understood or not understood, the same *Sachen* that express themselves *in* meditation express themselves outside meditation. Consequently, any transformation of self-relation evolving in meditation has relevance beyond the solipsist modi of self-hood. The self-awareness *in* meditation is not a flickering in the closed circuits of an individual life but has a potential impact on how life is lived in a moral community.

We turn now to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. How will nondirective meditation positively look from the phenomenological perspective? Above all, the practice becomes situated in a phenomenal body. Whereas *Wahrheit und Methode* hardly mentions the presence and constitutive role of the phenomenal body, Merleau-Ponty's *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* persistently evolves the inescapable relation between self-knowledge and embodiment – in perception. The enactive presence of perceiving body is for Merleau-Ponty an irreducible, transcendental moment in *any* experience whatsoever. "The body is our general means of having a world,"<sup>103</sup> he writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*; it is "our anchorage in a world."<sup>104</sup> When we understand something, we understand it with the body.<sup>105</sup> Seeing a picture for the first time, hearing a piece of music, or learning how to think through abstract formulas, are accomplishable only insofar as the body is capable of integrating these expressions in our own reservoir of bodily expression. In an extended sense, Merleau-Ponty uses the word *gesture*.<sup>106</sup> Analogous to how a communicating body expresses itself in movements, hearing, verbalization or even thinking are for Merleau-Ponty expressive gestures *phrasing out* the expressed. The embodied gesture becomes a certain style, formed by what it perceives.

In effect, Merleau-Ponty forwards a radical thesis of *action*. Knowing something is to know the variability of actions this particular thing or notion implies. The content of perceptual experience is a modulation of bodily enactive skills. The *what* of perception is determined by the enactive *how* and the implicit readiness executes the necessary movements.<sup>107</sup> "We experience a perception and its horizon 'in action' [*pratiqument*] rather than 'posing' them or explicitly 'knowing' them,"<sup>108</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. Thus is claimed no one-to-one correlation between perceptual consciousness and the motor functions of the body.<sup>109</sup> The point is more general, and less strict with regard to correlating between consciousness and its physical being. Embodied consciousness, according to Merleau-Ponty, is a thoroughly enactive structure – from inner to outer. No locus of consciousness is behind action. Nowhere is consciousness a static structure and nowhere

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<sup>103</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 147.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 146.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 143 ff.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 190 ff.

<sup>107</sup> Phrase borrowed from Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2006). 1, which gives a similar account. On Merleau-Ponty and Noë, see Ståle Finke, *The Body of Gesture and Imitation – Merleau-Ponty and the Enactive Approach* (Forthcoming).

<sup>108</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences (1946)", in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Eide (1964). 12.

<sup>109</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Structure and Conflicts in Child Consciousness (1949-50)", in *Child Psychology and Pedagogy – The Sorbonne Lectures 1949-1952* (Northwestern University Press, 2010). 138–9.

is there a pure contemplative consciousness detached from action. Consciousness is *in* action. It is an energetic and (in various ways) enactive structure through and through.<sup>110</sup>

According to Merleau-Ponty, intrinsic to the enactive structure of the phenomenal body is an inescapable self-relation. To be a body, we read in Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is not to be situated in *a* body; it is to be a *body proper* [*le corps propre*] – a phenomenal body that is *my own body*. "We never move our objective body, we move our phenomenal body since it is our body as a power of various regions of the world that already rises up towards the objects to grasp and perceive them."<sup>111</sup> The world of perception is *always* perceived from the viewpoint of the body proper. "Its permanence is not a permanence in the world, but a permanence on *my side*."<sup>112</sup> So conceived, there is a certain invariability in our mode of being in the world: a resistance to every perspectival variation expressed by the being of the body.<sup>113</sup> However, according to Merleau-Ponty, the inescapably embodied situation is *no* static situation. Although perception comes about from *somewhere*, it is not thereby locked up in its perspective.<sup>114</sup> Because the body proper is a self-relating structure, it perceives situations also from the viewpoint of other people. By being a body proper the possibility is also given of displacing the privileged position of the individual self and perceive the world from the perspective of others. In the limited gaze on the world is a potential richness of other perspectives.

The enactive framework of Merleau-Ponty resonates well with a decisive feature of nondirective meditation, namely its basic *enactive* profile. In contrast to many meditation techniques that seek states of consciousness of various kinds and with various degrees of static nature,<sup>115</sup> the secularized variants of nondirective meditation that we will take an interest in is not about achieving *states* of consciousness. The meditation technique is a mode of *doing* something, not a mode of achieving something.<sup>116</sup> It is *how* the meditation sound is induced by volitional effort from moment to moment that counts, not *what* is experienced as a result of the same act.

Herein evolves an almost counterintuitive conception of action – at least for a classical Western philosophical approach to action. Kant,<sup>117</sup> for instance, both conceive of action as directed towards an aim. One acts to accomplish something – either determinate or indeterminate, activity has a *Wozu*, as Kant puts it. Now, if one looks at meditation from the outside, one can say that the meditator meditates to pursue certain

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<sup>110</sup> Supporting the current description of consciousness are the elaborations of Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. Cf. Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007); Noë, *Action in Perception*.

<sup>111</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 108.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 93.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 94–95.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An introduction."

<sup>116</sup> Some schools of nondirective meditation privilege forms of consciousness, describing meditation as a "pure consciousness." Jonathan Shear and Ron Jevning, "Pure Consciousness: Scientific Exploration of Meditation Techniques", in *The View from Within; First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, ed. Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 1999). In the contemporary understanding of the practice that we will show an interest in, however, this *experience-based* mode of conceiving meditation is more or less completely left out. Here, the way that the sound is being repeated is the whole crux of practice, *not* what is the psychological or bodily result of this action.

<sup>117</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

desired outcomes, such as relaxation or increased self-knowledge. In meditation, however, the meditator practices a mode of doing without aiming at anything at all but to repeat the neutral sound. The meditator executes, volitionally, a mode of action without aiming towards any particular goal. Aiming to achieve this or that in meditation is nothing but contraproductive in the meditative context. To achieve relaxation and the potential self-knowledge associable with the practice, the meditator cannot strive to reach these results. Only by giving up volitional striving does the meditation sound work on mind and body in the sense indicated above – at least in the longer term perspective.

What happens if we import the enactive meditative practice into the enactive phenomenological framework of Merleau-Ponty? Though Merleau-Ponty also lacks concepts applying directly to the peculiar modification of action now brought forth with nondirective meditation, his first book, *Structure of Behavior*, offers a largely detailed conception of action ready to be used in a description thereof. With Merleau-Ponty, the sonorous-mental activity of nondirective meditation seems to be a way for the enactive consciousness to turn towards its own structures of behavior. The body proper perceives itself indirectly, we can say, having the volitional activity in the center of the open and resting mode of attention, while everything else that happens in the body is allowed to evolve freely in the attentional periphery. Executing the mental gesture of repeating the meditation sound is a way consciousness moves into its energetic and enactive structures, as these structures express themselves spontaneously in the mind. The resting, nonconcentrated and sonorous attention turned towards the spontaneous expressions of consciousness is apparently an indirect, enactive awareness of basic behavioral traits. Or to phrase the same point with Merleau-Ponty's words: turning the sonorous awareness into the spontaneous activities of consciousness implies an indirect attention to how the world is *lived on my side*.<sup>118</sup> In an unrestrained activity, consciousness turns back on its "general means of having a world" i.e. into the phenomenal body as a "power of various regions of the world that already rises up towards the objects to grasp and perceive them."<sup>119</sup>

With Gadamer's *Text* and *Sachlichkeit*, and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of action and body proper, we have indicated how significant philosophemes of these philosophers resonates well with key moments in nondirective meditation. The subsequent parts and sections will expand both on the concepts and their relevance. Now, however, we turn to the negative communication between the philosophers and the meditative practice, again starting with Gadamer.

Gadamer is a so-called *Vollzug*-thinker.<sup>120</sup> *Vollzug* can, among other things, be translated into *execution*, *performance*, or *carrying out*. In short, saying that Gadamer is a *Vollzug*-thinker pinpoints a thorough orientation in his writings, towards *praxis* and *execution* in the concrete sense of *doing*. Most notably, the concepts of *Lesen* and *Interpretation* established with *Wahrheit und Methode* are here tied to the

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<sup>118</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 93.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 108.

<sup>120</sup> Günter Figal, "Vollzugsinn und Faktizität", in *Der Sinn des Verstehens; Beiträge zur hermeneutischen Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1996).

concrete activity of *reading*. That is, analogous to how one cannot truly experience an artwork based on paraphrase, any person that seeks to *understand* a text has to read the text *in concreto*.<sup>121</sup> Thus, a typical phrase of Gadamer's underlining the irreducible moment of execution reads: "[A]lles verstehende Lesen scheint immer schon eine Art von Reproduktion und Interpretation. Betonung, rhythmische Gliederung und dergl. gehören auch dem stillsten Lesen an. Das Bedeutungshafte und sein Verständnis sind offenbar mit dem Sprachlich-Leibhaften so eng verbunden, daß Verstehen immer ein inneres Sprechen enthält."<sup>122</sup> We note Gadamer's phrasing: understanding is intimately tied to the concrete linguistic reality [*Sprachlich-Leibhaften*]. Understanding is in the dynamic execution of linguistic emphasis and the rhythmic outline given with the text as a concrete linguistic unit.

To say that understanding implies execution is, for Gadamer, to call upon a self-relation analogous to what we just saw in Merleau-Ponty. Understanding is *self-understanding*. "Verstehen [heißt primär], sich in der Sache verstehen, und erst sekundär, die Meinung des anderen als solche abheben und verstehen," writes Gadamer. "Die erste aller hermeneutischen Bedingungen bleibt somit das Vorverständnis, das im Zu-tun-haben mit der gleichen Sache entspringt."<sup>123</sup> By recognizing him- or herself reflected in the otherness of the text the reader moves within a shared belongingness to the same *Sache*. Gadamer raises the principle of self-relation into a hermeneutical principle known as the *application moment*.<sup>124</sup> "Einen Text verstehen, heißt immer schon, ihn auf uns selbst anwenden,"<sup>125</sup> he writes. In extension of what we saw in the Gadamerian description of nondirective meditation, understanding a text is for Gadamer to make the text relevant to the present situation.<sup>126</sup> Making the text relevant to one's own situation is not a subsequent and accidental part of the understanding process, but a principle determining the process from the outset.<sup>127</sup> Against this background, Gadamer underlines that: "[V]ollzug ist nichts als *die Konkretion des Sinnes selbst*. [...] Einen Text verstehen, heißt immer schon, ihn auf uns selbst anwenden."<sup>128</sup>

Curiously, Gadamer's *Vollzug* apparently sits well with the enactive profile of nondirective meditation. Just as Gadamer indicates with *Lesen*, meditation is indissoluble from a moment of self-execution. To

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Gadamer's *phronesis*-reading, Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. II, 2b, Die hermeneutische Aktualität des Aristoteles. For a discussion of this section in *Wahrheit und Methode*, see Figal, "The Phronesis of Understanding." Friederike Rese, "Phronesis als Modell der Hermeneutik. Die hermeneutische Aktualität des Aristoteles (GW 1, 312-329)", in *Klassiker Auslegen; Wahrheit und Methode*, ed. Günter Figal (Tübingen: Akademie Verlag, 2011). It could have been interesting to pursue *phronesis* from the current perspective of action. However, Gadamer's evoking of *phronesis* conveys no close description of action. The same aspects of action and *Vollzug* holds in Gadamer's *phronesis* as elsewhere in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Gadamer's puts emphasis on the moral being of *phronesis* in ways that generally reflecting what we call the hermeneutical path of *Lesen*. For a close reading of Aristotle's concept from the viewpoint of action, see Friederike Rese, *Praxis und Logos bei Aristoteles: Handlung, Vernunft und Rede in Nikomachischer Ethik, Rhetorik und Politik* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2003).

<sup>122</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 166–165.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 299.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* II, 2a. Das Problem der Anwendung.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* 401.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 313.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* 328.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 401. Italics original.

meditate, the meditator has to meditate. No one can repeat the sound in thought for another person; the practice essentially is tied to the self-induced initiative of carrying out the meditation sound. Interestingly enough, however, precisely in the *Vollzug* moment, nondirective meditation also will reveal a conceptual silence in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Whereas the enactive profile of the meditative practice easily finds adequate resonance in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the same profile will reveal that Gadamer offers no fine-grained concept of action.

To see the question evolving here, we pursue the logic of Gadamer's *Vollzug* concept one step further. The German *Vollzug* means not only *execution*, *performance*, and *carrying out* but also *accomplishment*. These linguistic nuances play an important role in philosophical hermeneutics. *Verstehen* as such is not the doing that leads to understanding; it is rather an event wherein something (*a Sache*) is understood. It is the sudden turning over of the whole situation; the "Now I understand it!", so to speak. Gadamer's *Vollzug* of understanding draws attention away from the activities involved in the process of understanding. *Verstehen* includes the process leading to the turning over, yet it is accomplished only when it is accomplished. The hermeneutist refuses to draw out *Vollzug* as a one-to-one correlation between action and understanding. *Vollzug* implies action, yet it does not equal action in the strict sense. "Verständigung ist kein bloßes Tun",<sup>129</sup> he writes. The tone is significant: *Bloßes Tun*, we can say, indicates a reductionist and instrumentalist approach to human understanding. If understanding was a "bloßes Tun," then procedure-based recipes to understanding ("ein Verfahren des Verstehens"<sup>130</sup>), in the form of "do this and then you will understand" would be indirectly accepted.

Indirectly, Gadamer can here be said to follow Kant's conception of action. Action has an intentional *Wozu*, we can say from the Gadamerian perspective; action aims toward something and therefore it cannot be too strictly tied to understanding. If understanding equaled a *Wozu* of action, understanding potentially would be subjugated to will; it would be as if a human could order and claim to understand. At the same time, Gadamer's nonfocus on action can be seen in light of how he follows Augustine's path of *Lesen*. Leaving out the details of embodied doing is perhaps a way respecting the enigmatic nature of human facticity – respecting the "rätselhaften Phänomen des denkenden Bewußtseins [...], [das] sich von aller Leibgebundenheit und Zeitgebundenheit unabhängig immer weiter ins Unbestimmte hinausdenkend und weiterdenkend verliert?"<sup>131</sup> For Gadamer, we can say, cutting understanding loose from action is a way to preserve understanding as an enigmatic and free being. Ultimately speaking, *Verstehen* is not a human activity but "das Tun der Sache selbst".<sup>132</sup>

In the context of nondirective meditation, Gadamer's stance towards action will gain a dual character. On the one hand, Gadamer awe for *Verstehen* puts a profound light on a process like the one furnished in

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 450.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 300.

<sup>131</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Leiberfahrung und Objektivierbarkeit (1986)", in *Über die Verborgenheit der Gesundheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010). 97.

<sup>132</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 467.

meditation. To be in the meditative process is to be in an open-ended process that cannot be controlled or dominated. Whatever comes out of it, it simply comes *if* or *when* the situation is ready for it. On the other hand, Gadamer's approach to experience will eventually also turn out a little abstract – or *too categorial* – when applied to nondirective meditation. With Gadamer, we can principally state that nondirective meditation is a *doing*, but we cannot demonstrate meticulously *how* it is so. We cannot scrutinize details in what the meditator actually does in the sonorous self-encounter of meditation. Gadamer's *Vollzug* will leave open a region of silence, so to speak, right were the enactive profile of the sonorous activity could have been pursued.

The subsequent parts will scrutinize reasons, implications, and consequences of Gadamer's lack of enactive details. Apart from the reasons indicated here, why is there no detailed concept of embodiment in philosophical hermeneutics? In seeking an answer to this question, nondirective meditation will function as a something of a methodological device. It will bring into view both *how* and *why* there are no detailed conceptions of action in Gadamer's philosophy and the upshots of a more determinate emphasis on action. Against the background of the longer and nearer philosophical traditions evoked above, we see already how the question of action potentially can take us to the core of what philosophical hermeneutics. The post-Husserlian usage of the *Kategoriale Anschauung* is here an important aspect. Localizing the conceptual locus to understanding nondirective meditation as action will be to localize pivotal loci in the hermeneutical usage of Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung*. We will study how and why Heidegger simultaneously leaves out detailed discussions of embodiment and the constructive dialogue with the sciences. Thus we can eventually also import nondirective meditation into philosophical hermeneutics on a reflected ground.

As we now again turn to Merleau-Ponty, we note the following negative figure emerge. Although Merleau-Ponty has the resources to target the enactive profile of nondirective meditation, we cannot merely call upon his philosophy either to understand the practice. Nondirective meditation is a delineated form of cultural practice; it is a *technique*.<sup>133</sup> Implied in saying this, is that the meditative practice is a type of knowledge accumulated and handed over by traditions. Accumulated, for instance, is the knowledge of how to put together mantras or meditation sounds that affect the potential outcome of relaxation and self-knowledge, or principles and vocabularies guiding the meditator into the processes opened with the sounds. Now, these moments of tradition represent Gadamer's home ground, but how do they resonate in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy?

In principle, the moment of tradition and the accumulation of cultural practices are fully compatible with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. *Human work* designates the general "ensemble of activities by which man transforms physical and living nature,"<sup>134</sup> we read in *Structure of Behavior*. (The context is a brief reference to Hegel). Work, according to Merleau-Ponty, is the full scale of human action; which is to say, every kind of concrete content, abstract, original or inherited meaning that men find or create in the environment.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Erifring and Hølen, "The Uses of Attention." 6.

<sup>134</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 162.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 162.

In other words, it belongs to the essential traits of the body proper to be part of a moral community, including the accumulation of cultural practices and knowledge in the form of use-objects [*Gebrauchsobjekte*].<sup>136</sup> Consciousness, writes Merleau-Ponty, concretizes its being in clothes, books, musical instruments, tables and gardens, as well as other 'cultural objects' and language.<sup>137</sup> The body proper permeates the usage of its use-objects of various kinds; through the use-objects the body proper is extended into its surroundings.<sup>138</sup> Thus, the use-objects not only constitute a proper milieu of a human life, they *are* the "interior" manifest in the "exterior,"<sup>139</sup> so to speak. The cultural practices continuously bring about new cycles of behavior.<sup>140</sup>

Now we see the inverting figure emerging when juxtaposing Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. Analogous to how Gadamer reflects action into analysis without further elaboration, Merleau-Ponty reflects the moment of cultural practices into perceptual life with a similar lack of elaboration. *How* the moment of tradition works in the body proper is underplayed in the phenomenological analysis. Symptomatically enough, the phenomenologist elaborates no concepts equivalent to Gadamer's *Bildung* or *Phronesis*; concepts that are handed over by tradition, revised in philosophical hermeneutics, and inflicting back on how tradition is read.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, apart from brief references to use-objects à la what we just saw, Merleau-Ponty lacks analysis analogous to Heidegger's *Zuhandenheit* describing *how* human life involves accumulated practices aimed at achieving something in particular. In an important sense, the emphatic scope of *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* is just not *here*; that is, not in the closer demonstrations of how human practices and customs sediment into articulated forms of doings and knowledge that work *in* the body proper. Instead, the focus is put more on what goes on in the spontaneous life of the body proper rather than on the accumulation of cultural practices, traditions, and ethical life.<sup>142</sup>

What we say here shows typical differences between Gadamer's path of *Lesen* and Merleau-Ponty's path of *perception*. Whereas philosophical hermeneutics emphasizes cultural practices and moral being, phenomenology emphasizes the spontaneity of perceptual life. While the hermeneutical phenomenon of Gadamer expresses a fuller explication of accumulated knowledge of moral life, the perceptual phenomenon of Merleau-Ponty expresses the fuller accumulation of the extemporaneous expressivity of embodied life.

Merleau-Ponty's lack of elaboration on cultural practice becomes apparent when we try to understand nondirective meditation. Here, the body proper folds back on its own spontaneous being guided by a cultural practice. An embodied hermeneutical process is initiated: the body proper not only repeats patterns of

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 162. Merleau-Ponty cites here to Husserl: *Ideen*.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 162.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 162.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Figal, "The Phronesis of Understanding."

<sup>142</sup> What we say here involves a slight exaggeration. In order to avoid misunderstanding: we are *not* hereby saying that Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer implicitly operate with division between "nature" and "culture." That is, the fact that Merleau-Ponty lacks concepts of *Bildung* and *Phronesis* etc. is *not* a symptom of a favoring of the "lower," biological aspect of human behavior, at the cost of the "higher," culturally reflected man, while Gadamer makes the opposite favoring.

behavior but also has a chance to revise the structures of behavior. New cycles of behavior, as Merleau-Ponty put it, are allowed to emerge in the behavioral repertoire of the body proper. Seen in the light of Gadamer, there is an intrinsic moral dimension in the process of revised behavior. Already the most rudimentary consideration of a new perspective on oneself harbors a moment of relating differently to the moral community. Though Merleau-Ponty does not disagree, he does not elaborate on the phenomenological design of such an embodied process of understanding either. The phenomenologist offers the conceptual resources to do so, but he himself refrains from elaborating the fuller structure of understanding.

Following the lead of Gadamer's persistent recourse to tradition and moral knowledge, a phenomenological analysis of nondirective meditation engages Merleau-Ponty in a hermeneutical turn of phenomenology. Curiously, by doing so, we do in fact go back to a motivation formulated by Merleau-Ponty in a very early presentation of his research program (1933). Presenting his original combination of philosophical and neurological interest the young Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the paradigmatic example of self-perception. "One would especially have to study the recent literature on the 'perception of one's own body'",<sup>143</sup> he writes. Though not directly in the sense that Merleau-Ponty had in mind in 1933, when we turn to the recent empirical discourse on meditation we do turn towards the recent literature on the "perception of one's own body" – as things are conceived *today*, in 2016. Reading *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* from the viewpoint of the sonorous-meditative practice is a chance to situate a hermeneutical moment in Merleau-Ponty's early philosophy. By exposing the subject that seems to emerge with the meditative practice we can explore an underdeveloped hermeneutical moment in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception.

### c. Relevance of *Inneres Hören*

We have now established a certain preliminary familiarity with a culturally new practice called nondirective meditation and the philosophical approaches of *Text* and action. Thus, we have sketched out the main contact points between this practice and philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology. Also, we have begun to see how questions bounce back to philosophy as soon as we apply the concepts to the practice. Nondirective meditation is "lack-revealing" within the philosophical theories. The practice reveals general aspects that *could* very well have been more fully exposed by Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, but which aren't – for traditional and methodological reasons. Nondirective meditation calls for a juxtaposed reading of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, a way of reading the one philosopher in light of the other. In so doing, we investigate the theoretical landscape in between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology, which – apparently – is where we find the adequate conceptual locus for a philosophical understanding of the meditative practice.

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<sup>143</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Study Project on the Nature of Perception; Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1933)", in *Merleau-Ponty; Perception, Structure, Language*, ed. John Sallis (Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press, 1981).



In the case of Gadamer, importing nondirective meditation into philosophy and describing it with both his and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy will serve a double purpose. Curiously, in a series of essays published *after Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer introduces a concept that shares at least one striking similarity with nondirective meditation: both are modes of inner hearing. This apparently simple similarity will prove to have some consequences for how we read Gadamer.

Here we need an introductory look at Gadamer's *Inneres Hören*. In his post-*Wahrheit und Methode* essays on aesthetic experience, Gadamer takes an increased interest in the phenomenon of concrete, silent reading – thematized as a mode of dwelling on the poetic expressions of poems, in quiet, and for one's *Innere Ohr* alone. "[A]les liegt in der 'inneren Stimme' und ist da für das 'innere Ohr',"<sup>144</sup> writes the hermeneutist here. Reading silently – and slowly<sup>145</sup> – has a value for its own. It is a way to *hear* an inner expressivity of human life otherwise easily overheard. "Es ist ein stilles Vorsichhineinsprechen," the hermeneutist writes; "ein In-mich-hinein-Sprechen."<sup>146</sup> *Inneres Hören* is *inner* in a strong sense of the word. This hermeneutical event of hearing *cannot* be a public or intra-social experience. It is by necessity a highly individualized experience. The *Innere Ohr* perceives something that nobody else can hear, writes Gadamer.<sup>147</sup> The nuances of the poetic texts reaching expression in this inner context cannot be actualized otherwise. "Meinem inneren Ohr kann keine mögliche Sprachverwirklichung, auch nicht durch meine eigene Stimme, voll genügen."<sup>148</sup> What is heard by the inner ear cannot be brought forth in the materialized voice: "[E]s ist nur wie eine zu hörende Stimme und muß, ja kann keine wirkliche Stimme sein."<sup>149</sup> The material voice is too coarse, so to speak, or too loud, or even too accidental, to carry out the fragmentary nuances heard in the silence of inner hearing.

From a Gadamer-exegetical perspective, *Inneres Hören* both extends what is established with *Wahrheit und Methode* and manifests a new turn in Gadamer. In general, the philosophy of *Wahrheit und Methode* is the philosophical framework effective in the *Inneres Hören*. So, for instance, the key moments from *Wahrheit und Methode* applied to nondirective meditation above (Section 1 b) are also valid for the *Inneres Hören*. Thus conceived, *Inneres Hören* designates an intensified hermeneutical experience and represents in the logic of Gadamer's writings a radicalized version of the hermeneutical text concept. *Inneres Hören* is an application of the language of the poetic text, we can say; the only linguistic attitude proper to the poetic texts being targeted.<sup>150</sup> At the same time, however, *Inneres Hören* also manifests a qualitative new moment compared to *Wahrheit und Methode*. Most notably, *Inneres Hören* makes vivid a certain *perceptual turn* within philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer goes from describing the categorial

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<sup>144</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Lesen ist wie Übersetzen (1989)", in *Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage, Gesammelte Werke 8* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1993). 284.

<sup>145</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hören - Sehen - Lesen (1984)", in *Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage, Gesammelte Werke 8* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994). 271.

<sup>146</sup> The citations are from Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)", in *Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage, Gesammelte Werke 8* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1993).267. and Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 248.

<sup>147</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 247.

<sup>148</sup> Gadamer, "Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung (1964/1978)." 148.

<sup>149</sup> Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)." 267.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.267.

preconditions of understanding (*Wahrheit und Methode*) to describing concrete or actual events of understanding.

The current turn is indicated already in the citations just being read: what Gadamer indicates by saying that "[A]les liegt in der 'inneren Stimme' und ist da für das 'innere Ohr'"<sup>151</sup> is a concrete, phenomenal experience of an actual hearing of an *inner voice* (although Gadamer puts it in quotation marks). The "innere Stimme" comes together with another, new feature of Gadamer's post-*Wahrheit und Methode* essays, namely that *Sinn* is apparently and generally paired with a sonorous moment of *Klang*. The poetic text is not "just" *Sinn*; it is *Sinn und Klang*.<sup>152</sup> In effect, *Lesen* has turned into a phenomenal monitoring of meaning [*Sinnerfassung*] wherein the emergence [*Erscheinung*] of the poetic text is a *sonorous* feature – a "sinnlicher Klangerscheinung."<sup>153</sup> As indicated, this orientation towards the actual inner voice and the sonorous aspect of the poetic text is new in Gadamer's writings. Just as there is no *Inneres Ohr* either, the "innere Stimme" and the *Klang* of language are virtually absent in Gadamer's *magnum opus* from 1960.

That said, Gadamer's introduction of *Inneres Hören* is discrete and easy to overhear. Gadamer does not speak of a perceptual turn in his own writings, and no fuss and pointers accompanies the turn towards the inner mode of hearing. At some point in Gadamer's text production,<sup>154</sup> the *Inneres Hören* is just there, as it were; without emphasis or introduction. What is more, in none of the essays discussing the phenomenon can *Inneres Hören* be said to be a topic of investigation in the direct sense. Whereas *Wahrheit und Methode* elaborates concepts at length and in ways reciprocally determining each other, Gadamer's subsequent reflections on *Inneres Hören* are far briefer and more indicative. Not only are the reflections on the phenomenon scattered in a series of essays published with years in between and only subsequently gathered together,<sup>155</sup> but in the essays, Gadamer touches upon this modification of hearing almost in the form of a *by the way*... The concept appears in contexts wherein Gadamer discusses something a little on the side of the current phenomenon, first and foremost when he discusses the *Vollzug* of art. Although a vast amount of references to tradition can be recognized when he does so, the hermeneutist does not explicate how this conceptual invention<sup>156</sup> stands in relationship to tradition. Thus, all in all, much goes without saying when Gadamer introduces the *Inneres Hören*. It is as if the tacit and nonspoken dimension of inner hearing mimetically has inflicted on *how* Gadamer thematizes the phenomenon. Given the respect and awe Gadamer has for the enigmatic nature of understanding, the hypothesis of a mimetic infliction is not altogether wild.

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<sup>151</sup> Gadamer, "Lesen ist wie Übersetzen (1989)." 284.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 248 ff.

<sup>153</sup> Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)." 267.

<sup>154</sup> Gadamer mentions – in one sentence only – the *Inneres Hören* already in a lecture from 1964, published as an essay in 1978: Gadamer, "Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung (1964/1978)." 148. Two minor corrections can thus be given to Grondin who states (in Jean Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr in Gadamer's Ästhetik. Distanz und Selbstreflexion der Hermeneutik", in *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001). 132) that *Inneres Hören* first appears in *Die Aktualität des Schönen* in the year 1977. In other words, Grondin cites the wrong title of its first appearance, and gives the wrong year for *Die Aktualität des Schönen*.

<sup>155</sup> I.e. in Gadamer, *Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage*.

<sup>156</sup> Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamer's Hermeneutik*. 223.

Approaching the inner hearing indirectly might be a way to respect the worth and profundity of silence and the outcome of a slow reading submerged in the tacit dimension of human expressivity.

In any regard, Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* has not gained much attention in the secondary literature on Gadamer. Jean Grondin is a pioneer in noting the concept in the first place, and he has actualized some of its consequences for a comprehensive Gadamer-reading.<sup>157</sup> Oliva Mirala has taken Grondin's approach one step further, by elaborating on how *Inneres Hören* stands in light of tradition, and by emphasizing the line between this concept and the *verbum interius* of *Wahrheit und Methode*.<sup>158</sup> However, none of these commentators speak of a perceptual turn in Gadamer's philosophy either. The perceptual turn is a claim made necessary and apparent in our context. The importing of nondirective meditation into a juxtaposed approach to Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies is what eventually makes us see the perceptual turn.

The relationship between nondirective meditation and *Inneres Hören* is intriguing. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the dimension of inner hearing, shared by the meditative practice and Gadamer's concept, is inflicted by numerous differences that are as essential as they are striking. The meditation sounds or mantras used in nondirective meditation are not poems, for example, and the manuals elaborated for the meditative technique harbor technical details neither equivalent to Gadamer's concept nor directly relevant to what the hermeneutist has in mind. On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that both nondirective meditation and *Inneres Hören* are concrete modifications of inner hearing. Both are modifications of being silent; a hearing not with the physical ears, and not by speaking aloud, but only by perceiving a sound evolving in imagination – or in thought.

In the form of an almost naïve question comes an important crux of consideration: if nondirective meditation can be described as a positive combination of *Text* and action, what does this fact indirectly say of Gadamer's modification of inner hearing? Does it not say that there might be an enactive dimension also in Gadamer's concept? If a human subject can act – volitionally – by hearing a sound unrestrainedly in thought in the current meditative practice, why should not the philosophical subject of Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* be said to *act* as well?

Now these questions would not mean much, perhaps, were it not for the distinguished *non*-enactive implications of Gadamer's *Vollzug*. As discussed above, we find no elaborate conception of action in Gadamer's philosophy due to traditional and methodological reasons. Yet, there it is – the *Inneres Hören* as a perceptual phenomenon sharing a striking similarity to a distinguished mode of doing something *im Ohr*. From the perspective of the meditative practice, it seems almost obvious that the *Klang* of the poem is being *acted out* by the hearer. The *Inneres Hören* is conduct – a way of doing something. The sound of language is induced by

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<sup>157</sup> Jean Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik", in *Denken der Individualität - Festschrift für Josef Simon zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Sören Hoffmann and Stefan Majetschak (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995). Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr in Gadamer's Ästhetik. Distanz und Selbstreflexion der Hermeneutik."; Jean Grondin, "Gadamer's Aesthetics - The Overcoming of Aesthetic Consciousness and the Hermeneutical Truth of Art", in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. M. Kelly (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>158</sup> Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamer's Hermeneutik*. Chapter 6,2, *Das Innere Ohr*.

own free will, not by force but by a mental effort that is appropriate for the sonorous organization of the encountered text. The hearer acts by taking an initiative – and by simultaneously adapting to the situation.

The comparison with nondirective meditation would be weak if it only rested on the apparent similarity between the two modifications of hearing. This is not the case, however. If one looks at Gadamer's essays in light of other works of Gadamer made after *Wahrheit und Methode* one sees a discrete yet significant orientation towards embodiment – or *Leibliche Erfahrung*. One example comes in the context of language: "Sprache ist übrigens nicht nur Wortsprache," Gadamer notes in 1992. "Es gibt die Sprache der Augen, die Sprache der Hände, Zeigen und Nennen, all das ist Sprache und bestätigt, daß Sprache stets im Miteinander ist."<sup>159</sup> Another example, in a series of lectures held on the nature of health,<sup>160</sup> Gadamer pursues the perspectives on embodiment some steps further by discussing how the living and healthy body is entangled with its physical and moral surroundings, and how the balanced situation of the individual implies a continuous, embodied adjustment to communal life. Curiously, even within subsequent editions of *Wahrheit und Methode* we can find indications pointing towards the same tendency in Gadamer. As has been revealed by Jean Grondin,<sup>161</sup> Gadamer later made some small but significant revisions within his *magnum opus* that point in the same direction as those he brings forth with *Inneres Hören*. To the degree that there is a perceptual turn in Gadamer's writings, the examples tangent here must be taken into consideration.

In comparison with the largely detailed elaborations of Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer's reflections on embodiment can only be called indicative. Gadamer admits that he has crossed into the phenomenological domain associated with Merleau-Ponty – i.e. in what we call the path of *perception*. "Mit Aristoteles zu sprechen, ist die Seele gar nichts anderes als die wirkende Wirklichkeit, das 'am Werke sein' des Leibes, seine 'Energieia' und 'Entelecheia,' und so ist der Leib nichts anderes als die 'Möglichkeit' der Seele, die Lebendigkeit des Wachseins und Denkens," Gadamer writes in an essay from 1993. "Merleau-Ponty hat das richtig gesehen – und vollends Aristoteles: Der Leib ist nichts für sich, kein corpus."<sup>162</sup> However, he also admits (in an interview) that philosophical hermeneutics needs to explore further into the nature of the *Leib*. "Ich bin selber längst so weit zu wissen, daß Zeigen [...] auch schon Sprechen ist und die gesamte Leiblichkeit mitspricht, die Gesten-Sprache, Tonsprache usw. Man muß viel, viel weiter gehen."<sup>163</sup> In yet another context, the hermeneutist even locates *Lesen* – in a way implying *Inneres Hören* – as the prime locus wherein philosophical hermeneutics needs further phenomenological exposition. "[W]as Lesen ist und wie Lesen geschieht, scheint mir eines der noch dunkelsten und einer phänomenologischen Analyse am meisten bedürftigen Dinge."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Gadamer, "Zur Phänomenologie von Ritual und Sprache (1992)." 407.

<sup>160</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Über die Verborgenheit der Gesundheit: Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010).

<sup>161</sup> Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik."

<sup>162</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Phänomenologie, Hermeneutik, Metaphysik (1983)", in *Hermeneutik im Rückblick, Gesammelte Werke 10* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1995). 103. Sml. Gadamer, "Leiberfahrung und Objektivierbarkeit (1986)." 96.

<sup>163</sup> Gadamer, *Die Logik des verbum interius. Hans-Georg Gadamer im Gespräch mit Gudrun Kühne-Betram*, in *Dilthey Jahrbuch*, bd. 11, Göttingen 1998, 30, here cited from Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamers Hermeneutik*. 88.

<sup>164</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 245.

In our context, nondirective meditation becomes the vehicle or motivating example to pursue some of the *Bedürfnis* of phenomenological analysis called for by Gadamer – although we do it with approaches other than those offered only by Gadamer himself. Reading Gadamer from the viewpoint of the meditative practice and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is a chance to accentuate what we (provisionally) have called a discrete perceptual turn in Gadamer. We can follow the possibilities and limitations of philosophical hermeneutics with regard to embodied experience, scrutinizing how far Gadamer can take us – and *where* and *why* we need the help of Merleau-Ponty to carry out the initiatives taken by the hermeneutist. In other words, we can strengthen and carry out the move towards an embodied hermeneutics already going on in the writings of Gadamer, and see where the step to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is called for according to Gadamer's ambition.

What we have said in the current and prior section harbors the reasons why sound-based nondirective meditation is of interest to philosophy. To the degree that it exemplifies an *in between* of the hermeneutical and perceptual phenomenon, the practice is *as such* also relevant for other domains of experiences. The philosophical subject of nondirective meditation is not exclusive to nondirective meditation but has general relevance. The cross-relevance to *Inneres Hören* harbors an important indication. Being in many ways an extreme example – based as it is on nonsemantic or neutral sounds, and procedures of an unrestrained and neutral way of encountering the situation – the practice is generally relevant for an understanding of human practices of understanding, such as Gadamer's slow and dwelling reading.

We said above that nondirective meditation harbors a moment of provocation within the self-understanding of the meditator (*Text*). By what we have now introduced from philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology, we are about to see an analogous figure emerge also within the self-understanding of the philosophies. Nondirective meditation is a *Text* – not only for the meditator but also for the philosophies set out to describe the practice. If a fuller eidetic account is to be expected, certain revisions of theories will be called for both on the side of philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology. Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty each need to take a step closer to the other. Instead of having two paths, one of *Lesen*, one of *perception*, the two nondualist approaches to human experience need to be brought into contact with each other. This does not mean that philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology must be subject to accidental revisions. To do things *correctly*, we must pursue as we have, in fact, already begun. We must think *with* language, as Gadamer called it; i.e. we must work from the inside of the theories.

The principal point to our context is this: eventual adjustments to potent human experience belong to the self-understanding of the philosophies. That is, if philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology are encountered with a concrete modification of human experience not fitting into the philosophical frameworks, it is *philosophy* that stands in the need of revision, not the human experience. In other words, it is not up to philosophy to declare that a concrete human experience "really" is something other than it is, by rerouting description into well-established formula. Or to phrase the point with Gadamer: whoever wants to understand the *Text* of human life must be prepared to listen to what the *Text* has to say. "Wer verstehen will, wird sich

von vornherein nicht der Zufälligkeit der eigenen Vormeinungen überlassen dürfen, um an der Meinung des Textes so konsequent und hartnäckig wie möglich vorbeizuhören – bis diese überhörbar wird und das vermeintliche Verständnis umstößt."<sup>165</sup> Philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology are not static theories that stand or fall by confirmation or dis-confirmation of empirical reality. They are rather dynamic modes of expositions of human life thoroughly reflected back on themselves as preliminary – not in the relativist sense, naturally, but in the reflected eidetic sense of a thought aware of its own limitations. To work with language, thus, we need to demonstrate how the revisions are motivated from within these philosophies. Keeping track of the meditative phenomenon is a chance to actualize borders within philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology.

#### d. Hermeneutical Philosophy vs. Empirical Phenomenology

We have indicated how nondirective meditation communicates with the philosophies of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, and seen how the practice conjures up a theoretical field evolving between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology. Taking seriously the fact that the culturally new meditation practice communicates with both Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies provides a chance to investigate the transitional and ambiguous relations between the two contemporary philosophies.

If we take a look at the discursive field of phenomenology today – of 2016 – we see how the making of these clarifications serves a double purpose. Within the plurality of the contemporary practices sorted under the unspecific umbrella term *Phenomenology*,<sup>166</sup> we can distinguish between two prominent milieus which prolong the programs of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty respectively.

On the first hand, we have the German-based Gadamerian milieu represented by thinkers and commentators like, for example, Gunter Figal,<sup>167</sup> Hans-Helmuth Gander, Jean Grondin, Oliva Mirela and David Espinet. Generally conceived, pursued here is a phenomenology and hermeneutics that are mainly orientated towards the longer Western tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Kant etc., and the nearer phenomenological tradition of Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer. What is not found in this milieu, however, is

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<sup>165</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 273.

<sup>166</sup> To speak only in the outset of a small assortment of the many handbooks and overviews on phenomenology published in English in the last two decades, we find *Phenomenology* today used in the discussion of questions pertaining to, for instance, subjectivity and nature, intentionality and embodiment, self and consciousness, language and knowledge, ethics and politics, time and history, art and religion (Dan Zahavi, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). *Phenomenology* is just as relevant within the framework of classical phenomenology in the tradition after Husserl as it is in experimental cognitive science (Shaun Gallagher and Daniel Schmicking, eds., *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* (Dordrecht, New York, Heidelberg, London: Springer, 2010).), in medicine (Kay S Toombs, ed. *Handbook of Phenomenology and Medicine* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 2001).) and in moral philosophy (John Drummond and Lester Embree, eds., *Phenomenological Approaches to moral Philosophy; a handbook* (Dordrecht: Springer Science and Business, 2002).) To seek for a unitary meaning of the word *Phenomenology* across these disciplines would (most likely) be a futile project.

<sup>167</sup> Figal, *Gegenständlichkeit*.

an empirical and experimental orientation. The German phenomenology after Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer has its own systematic foundation neither threatened nor complemented as such by the natural sciences. On the other hand, we have a Merleau-Ponty-inspired Anglo-American milieu, represented by philosophers and cognitive scientists such as Evan Thompson,<sup>168</sup> Francisco Varela,<sup>169</sup> and Shaun Gallagher.<sup>170</sup> This milieu is not tradition-oriented the same way as the German one, but, instead, positively informed by experimental results of the empirical sciences of various sorts. In a broad sense of the term, phenomenology evolves here as a collaboration between cognitive science, psychology, neurology, and biology, and research on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.<sup>171</sup>

Between these post-Gadamer and -Merleau-Ponty milieus of today, there seems to be little discourse contact. Down to a level of citation, the German and the Anglo-American milieus evolve as separate theoretical performances. (Seeking citations of Thompson, Varela and Gallagher in the writings of Figal, Gander, or Grondin, or the other way around, is a futile effort.) The two milieus seem to investigate the human life form in ways not directly in opposition to each other, but not coordinated either. In other words, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's paths of *Lesen* and *perception* still run parallel to each other.

Let us study the motivation to pursue this task by taking a short recourse into representatives of each of the two milieus of today. Figal exemplifies how the Gadamerian legacy is preserved and further developed today. Figal follows in Gadamer's path by describing experience in largely categorial terms. In *Gegenständlichkeit*, he seeks to elaborate what he calls a *hermeneutical philosophy* in the outset of Gadamer, by revising and expanding on the pivotal meaning of the hermeneutical *Text* concept. "In der hermeneutischen Erfahrung hat man es mit etwas zu tun, das man selbst nicht ist, mit etwas, das entgegensteht und darin herausfordert,"<sup>172</sup> Figal writes. The hermeneutical experience is experience of *something*; a *Text* which one can both come to accord with and never fully come to accord with.<sup>173</sup> Unlike Gadamer, then, Figal concretizes the hermeneutical *Text* into a principle notion of *Gegenstand*. Here, the openness [*Offenheit*] initiated by the hermeneutical *Text*, or *Gegenstand*, is drawn out in categorial determinations of *Raum* [room and/or space]. Figal attempts to expose the hermeneutical dimension of freedom, language, and time, qua *raumliche* phenomena. Here, philosophy evolves as an eidetic description of *Leben*. "[D]ie Phänomenologie, um die es hier geht, [ist] ein räumliches Denken," Figal explains; "ihre Begriffe sind von der Erfahrung des Räumlichen her gebildet, sie erfaßt ihre Phänomene von deren Räumlichkeit her."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Thompson, *Mind in Life*.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Francisco Varela, "Neurophenomenology: a new approach to cognitive functions and neural synchrony" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3 (1996).

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005)., and Shaun Gallagher, *Phenomenology* (Palgrave Macmillian, 2012).

<sup>171</sup> Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>172</sup> Figal, *Gegenständlichkeit*. 3.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 4.

Figal exemplifies the post-Gadamerian attitude towards the empirical discourses. The hermeneutical-philosophical conception of *Leben* is from the outset a nonempirical enterprise. Philosophy *today* can remain as it has been since the beginning, Figal programmatically states in the Introduction: "Daß [Philosophie] aus innerer Logik oder wegen der Überzeugungsstärke der empirischen Wissenschaften zu Ende gehe oder sich von ihrer Tradition absetzen müßte, ist Legende. Die klassischen Begriffe tragen noch, besser als viele der modernen, wenn man sie nur unbefangen und in Bezug auf die Sache zu gebrauchen versteht."<sup>175</sup> Just as the hermeneutically oriented philosophy is not threatened by deconstructive forces from within (in senses pursued, for instance, by Jacques Derrida), philosophy is not threatened from the outside, from the empirical sciences. By the same token, hermeneutical philosophy of *Leben im Raum* has little (if anything at all) to learn from the empirical sciences of today. No interest is shown in taking up the challenge posed by recent cognitive science, for instance, by linking the hermeneutical consciousness with the study of human cognition in cognitive psychology and neuroscience.<sup>176</sup> *Philosophie* is *reading* philosophy; it rests with tradition for an expanded knowledge on what it is to be a human.

Curiously, Figal's attitude towards the empirical sciences is reflected in the way he reads Merleau-Ponty. Figal evokes Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*<sup>177</sup> in ways that downplay – or do not really take seriously into consideration – Merleau-Ponty's intrinsic and affirmative relationship with the empirical sciences. In a typical passage, Figal briefly notes that *Raum* (in the form of *orientation, up, down* etc.) comes into view only indirectly in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, insofar as embodied life in general comes into view when it "gestört wird". "Das," Figal then quickly concludes, "ist der Grund, weshalb Merleau-Ponty bei seinen Untersuchungen des Raumes ausführlich psychologische und psychiatrische Studien diskutiert."<sup>178</sup> In other words, Figal's Merleau-Ponty takes recourse to morbid behavior *only* because behavior here has become textualized in the hermeneutical sense. Morbid behavior is behavior taken out of its proper context of health and illuminates thus indirectly the unitary whole of lived life wherein behavior normally evolves.

Figal's brief remark on Merleau-Ponty is significant due to its apparent shortcomings. By what we have begun to see, Figal's remark speaks only half the truth. It is *true* that *Phenomenology of Perception* to large degrees exposes embodied life mainly on the basis of morbid behavior in the textual sense indicated by Figal. Certainly, studying morbid behavior is an indirect approach to nonmorbid life. Not recognized by Figal, however, is the other indirect feature of Merleau-Ponty's writings; i.e. the phenomenological-interpretative strategy pursued in and through Merleau-Ponty's encounter with the empirical discourses of psychology and psychiatry. Figal does not evoke the methodological aspects of Merleau-Ponty's approach introduced in the section above, and he does not see that going through the cases of morbid behavior – as these cases are

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>176</sup> Paraphrasing of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind; cognitive science and human experience*. 150.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Figal, *Gegenständlichkeit*. 157–158.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Ibid. 158. Italics added.



described by experimental approaches to man – is the way Merleau-Ponty allows phenomenology to become positively informed by these experimental and hence nonphenomenological discourses.

We see the point of Merleau-Ponty's approach all the more clearly in the outset of *Structure of Behavior* – a book not consulted by Figal. Unlike *Phenomenology of Perception*, this first book by Merleau-Ponty does not take outset recourse to morbid behavior as such. Revisited here, through critical readings, are the mechanical and psychological models of describing behavior used, for instance behaviorism and *Gestalt* psychology, and how these models tentatively are supported by models of physics. Though localizing inadequacy in these models, Merleau-Ponty does not reject these nonphenomenological approaches to behavior. By reinterpreting their findings and revising their models, Merleau-Ponty elaborates a positive and comprehensive phenomenological account of behavior on the grounds of the empirical sciences. This methodological and systematic aspect of Merleau-Ponty's thinking is left fully unvisited by Figal. Exegetically considered, Figal does not see that the positive account of behavior established in Merleau-Ponty's first book is implied in the phenomenologist's second book. Philosophically considered, Figal does not see the worth and possibility of an empirically informed, philosophical conception of human life in the form introduced by Merleau-Ponty.

Consequently, Figal also misses the fine-grained and multiphase complex conception of behavior offered by Merleau-Ponty. Missed, hence, is also the chance to describe the behavioral structure (in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the word) of *raumliche* hermeneutical consciousness. Figal could have expanded his notion of experience along axes other than those produced from within his own philosophical tradition, but crosses out the possibility by reading Merleau-Ponty only halfway.

Turning towards the post-Merleau-Pontian milieu, we let Thompson, Varela, and Gallagher be the main representatives. Together with Varela, Thompson launched in 1991<sup>179</sup> a research program later coined as the *enactive approach of neurophenomenology*. *Mind in Life* represents a lengthy elaboration of the approach. Here, Thompson seeks to combine (or indeed harmonize<sup>180</sup>) discoveries within biology, psychology and neurology with a systematic, phenomenological description of intentionality into a comprehensive approach to man and self-hood. Mental life is embodied life, writes Thompson. "Where there is life, there is mind, and mind in its most articulated forms belongs to life."<sup>181</sup> The life of man evolves as a self-organizing and self-producing (*autopoietic*) embodied consciousness.<sup>182</sup> Mind, according to Thompson, is implied down to the most rudimentary forms of biological organizations of man. Mind is an incipient mind that finds its sentient expressions in the self-organizing dynamics of action, perception and emotions, together with the self-moving flow of time consciousness.<sup>183</sup> From the minimal level of the simplest systems found on Earth, the

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<sup>179</sup> Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind; cognitive science and human experience*.

<sup>180</sup> Thompson, *Mind in Life*. i.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* Preface. i.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* Preface. i.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* Preface. i.

prokaryotic or bacterial cells,<sup>184</sup> up to the phenomenon of human empathy and enculturation,<sup>185</sup> Thompson builds up a largely complex conception of human consciousness intrinsically entangled with its environment. "The roots of mental life lie not simply in the brain, but ramify through the body and environment,"<sup>186</sup> Thompson writes. Mental lives involve both body and world and the world beyond the surface membrane of organisms.

Thompson not only explicitly follows the lead of Merleau-Ponty.<sup>187</sup> More or less openly, he presents the newer neuro-phenomenological analyses of embodiment as an expanded and "updated" variant of Merleau-Ponty's research program.<sup>188</sup> Gallagher agrees with this characterization. According to him, Thompson and Varela's fruitful and creative reactualizing of Merleau-Ponty's program into collaborations between empirical science and phenomenology represents a rebirth of phenomenology.<sup>189</sup> Between 1960 and 1991, writes Gallagher, phenomenology was about to "die a slow death."<sup>190</sup> No major works in phenomenology were written after 1960, he argues. For sure, there were many books written *on* phenomenology; but first and foremost these books were commentaries providing a detailed exegesis of the works of Husserl and Heidegger.<sup>191</sup> In 1991, on the other hand, i.e. with Varela and Thompson's new research program, a *different* phenomenology came to articulation: a reincarnation of phenomenology with renewed emphasis on embodied cognition.<sup>192</sup> According to Gallagher, the recent collaborations between empirical science and phenomenology represent the primary way phenomenology is put to use today.<sup>193</sup> Worked out in these collaborations are issues defining phenomenology from the outset, yet implying both fruitful rethinking of classical phenomenology as well as a fruitful rethinking of cognitive science.<sup>194</sup>

Significantly absent in this proclaimed reincarnation of phenomenology are not only Figal and his German-based colleagues but also Gadamer's elaborated thinking. Whereas Heidegger has some appeal in the Merleau-Ponty-inspired discourse,<sup>195</sup> substantial insights of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics are almost completely absent in Thompson, Varela, and Gallagher. Certainly, they do occasionally *mention* Gadamer,<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Ibid. Chapter 13.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. Preface i.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. Part Four.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 87.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Gallagher, *Phenomenology*. 16.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>195</sup> Gallagher and Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*.

<sup>196</sup> Thompson and Varela mention Gadamer in Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind; cognitive science and human experience*. 149, and Gallagher, *Phenomenology*. 190 and 210. Gallagher discusses Gadamer a little more extensively in Shaun Gallagher, "Language and Imperfect Consensus: Merleau-Ponty's Contribution to the Habermas-Gadamer Debate", in *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism*, ed. Thomas W. Busch and Shaun Gallagher (State University of New York, Albany, 1992). However, seeking to establish a positive communication between Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, Gallagher does not elaborate on the differences between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology.

yet the evoking is done in largely general terms wherein important differences between him, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty are lost. Gadamer is not consulted as such, but occasionally name-dropped in ways that reduce his thought to more or less the same philosophical position as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. In other words, Gadamer is taken into consideration in ways that blur what we have begun to see are essential differences between the path of *Lesen* and the path of *perception*. Everything becomes perception.

Varela and Thompson exemplify this take by writing on Continental philosophy in broad terms, with reference to Heidegger and "his student Hans Gadamer." "In general," Varela and Thompson write, "Continental philosophers, even when they explicitly contest many of the assumptions of underlying hermeneutics, have continued to produce detailed discussions that show how knowledge depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history – in short, from our *embodiment*."<sup>197</sup> Drawing out this point not based on primary sources but on secondary commentary on Heidegger and Gadamer, Varela and Thompson do not recognize the fact that neither Heidegger nor Gadamer has elaborate conceptions of phenomenal embodiment; least of all in the sense directly comparable to the empirically informed enactive approach of Varela and Thompson. By the same token, not recognized is that the absence of detailed concepts of embodiment rests on profound philosophical and methodological grounds. In effect, the school of philosophical hermeneutics (as Varela and Thompson call it) is not taken seriously into account. It is directly presented as a variant of embodied phenomenology and not as an independent account offering challenging questions to the newborn phenomenological approach.

Above, we saw how Gadamer advocates a maturity in understanding. What could have been interesting to know, is how Thompson and Varela understand the enactive and neuro-phenomenological design of the hermeneutical maturation. What is the embodied structure of the moral flexibility pursued by Gadamer via the many concepts inherited from the *Geisteswissenschaften*? To our knowledge, there are no reasons to expect anything else other than that Gadamer's perspectives are fully compatible with the biological-moral embodied subject described in Thompson's *Mind in Life*. Yet the specific answers are not given a priori by equaling hermeneutics with phenomenology. Perhaps the right answers are even inaccessible if *Lesen* is simply re-defined from the outset as perception?

In any regard, crossing out a substantial Gadamer-reading, Varela and Thompson have crossed out a profound, challenging, hermeneutically reflected source of insights into the transformative nature of human understanding. Left out is also the methodological insights accumulated in philosophical hermeneutics. From what we have seen, *Lesen* (or *Auslegung*) designates not only an activity potentially taken up by a body proper but also the way philosophical hermeneutics raises to understanding the resources of everyday consciousness. Taking *reading* seriously as a philosophical discipline is a way philosophical hermeneutics approaches and conceptualizes a dimension of truth in everyday understanding. The methodological and conceptual resources evolving in Gadamer's extended preoccupation with reading are not noted by Thompson, Varela, and

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<sup>197</sup> Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind; cognitive science and human experience*. 149. Italics original.

Gallagher. Analogous to Merleau-Ponty's *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, therefore, these writers downplay the hermeneutical dimension both of embodiment and within the descriptions of human life.

Hence, viewed from the outside, the traditions after Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty seem to have developed into an unfortunate situation of nondialogue. On the one side, we find Figal, who has Gadamer's insights reflected in his hermeneutical philosophy, but who has then left out the perspectives offered by the empirical sciences as well as the "different phenomenology" of today. From the perspective of the Anglo-American milieu, Figal is not part of the proclaimed rebirth of phenomenology. Regrettably, Figal is not present in a dialogue with Thompson et al., defending the values inherited from the *Geisteswissenschaften* either. In effect, Gadamer risks being classified as outdated in the contemporary collaborations between philosophy and the empirical sciences – *as if* the ideals and methodology advocated by Gadamer had no place in a dialogue with the empirical sciences. On the other side, we find an enthusiastic new-beginning of phenomenology, which does not properly recognize the worth of tradition and tradition-founded philosophy in the form of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Crossed out are the accumulation of reflected conceptions of human being and knowledge handed over by texts. Not noted is the maturation of a thinking (Gadamer's) that takes up, reflects, and revises the philosophical tradition from within, precisely in the years that phenomenology apparently was about to "die a slow death" (as Gallagher put it).

In sum, an intriguing philosophical gap emerges in the contemporary discourses. Though obviously related – given the singular human life form, ontologically considered – the hermeneutically informed *Leben* evolving in Figal's writings, and the empirically informed conception of life evolving in the Anglo-American phenomenological milieu (cf. *Mind in Life*), are not on the same philosophical map.

Thus is the background motivation for our investigations on embodied hermeneutics. The hermeneutical and phenomenological interest in nondirective meditation can serve the indirect aim of bridging the distance between the German and Anglo-American philosophical milieus of today. Exploring the ambiguous and transitional terrain between Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty from the viewpoint of nondirective meditation is to prepare for a tighter communication between their successors. However, taking seriously the methodological and philosophical questions conjured up with the meditative practice is a chance to preserve ideals and methods accumulated on each discursive side. We can defend Gadamer's tradition orientation and the standard of human maturity evolving here, as well as Merleau-Ponty's empirical-phenomenological program.

To do so, we cannot just write about Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. We need to practice a form of hermeneutics, locating the textual loci wherein the direction of *Lesen* and *perception* are defined. Only thus can we make the Merleau-Pontian research program relevant to the hermeneutical philosophy and the Gadamerian knowledge of reading relevant to the empirically oriented phenomenology. Keeping track

of the meditative practice between Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, we will be moving toward a reflected form of embodied hermeneutics.

## Part One. Meditation and Self-Knowledge in the Western Philosophical Tradition

In our contemporary situation, the word meditation is maybe first and foremost associated with the many meditation techniques recently imported from the Asian traditions. However, meditation, and words and notions associated with meditation, are an intrinsic part of the Western philosophical tradition as well. To develop a historically reflected philosophical understanding of meditation, this legacy of tradition is where we need to start. Before we can approach the import of new meditation techniques head-on, we need to understand what evolves within the foundation of the philosophy aiming to approach these techniques.

We said in the Introduction that the Western conception of meditation has traditionally evolved in close association with reading. How and why is this so? Can we locate some of the same impulses that determine meditation within philosophy?

The aim of Part One is not to present an exhaustive study of meditation within the philosophical tradition, but to follow the philosophical history of the word meditation. We will do so in two stages of pivotal importance in the Western philosophy. Beginning in the Attic context of Plato and Homer, Section 2 will pursue the history of the word meditation in two other words that influence the cultural and philosophical understanding of meditation, and on philosophy: *meletē* and *medesthai*. With these words emerge two distinct forms of scriptural practice. Plato associates *meletē* with philosophical writing in an extended and affirmed sense of the word – most notably, as *writing in the soul*. *Medesthai*, by contrast, is a poetic word used by Homer in contexts of semi-writing or oral transmitting of knowledge. Plato emphatically rejects *medesthai*, in a critique that makes the word associable with perception in a negative and nonphilosophical sense of the word. According to Plato, genuine self-knowledge comes with *meletē*

(reading) but not with *medesthai* (perception). How and why does Plato make such a distinction between these words, and what does the distinction say about his philosophy?

In Section 3, we will follow the word meditation in the context wherein the modern subject emerges for philosophy, with Augustine and Descartes. In the extension of the scriptural connotations of *meletē* and *medesthai*, we will see how meditation for Augustine and Descartes is intrinsically tied to modes of writing and reading. Around the word meditation, we will see, these authors make distinguished contributions as to how the modern subject can be considered. Indirectly and directly there emerge both the nondualist and nonintellectual subject of Augustine and the dualist and rational subject of Descartes.

## 2. Gathering and Nongathering of the Soul. Meletē and Medesthai. (Plato and Homer)

Let's pursue words and notions that have influenced on the Western, philosophical understanding of meditation. One relevant word is the Greek word *meletē*. *Meletē* is translated into "caring for", "attending to", "practicing" or "using something",<sup>198</sup> "exercise" and complete and advanced speech.<sup>199</sup> The verb *meletan* is translated as "to deliver [a speech]".<sup>200</sup> Another relevant word is the Greek *medesthai*. *Medesthai* is translated as "to think",<sup>201</sup> "attend to", or "estimate to",<sup>202</sup> but also to be "mindful of",<sup>203</sup> as well as "to consider" "to evaluate", and "to decide"<sup>204</sup> and to be "careful".<sup>205</sup> *Medesthai* is a medium form of the verb *medō*, which is translated as "to rule" or "to lead", as in a having the control over a city or military troops, guarding or protecting the properties.<sup>206</sup> Also, *medomai*, which means to "care for something", or "auf etwas bedacht sein".<sup>207</sup> and the word *medea*, which means to "have a courageous plan",<sup>208</sup> is part of the meaning of *medesthai*.

Regarding etymology, the two words relate differently to the Latin word *meditatio*. *Meletē* is not the etymon of the word meditation but influences greatly how meditation later becomes conceived,

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<sup>198</sup> Per Rönnegård, "Melete in Early Christian Ascetic Texts", in *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam - Cultural Studies*, ed. Halvor Eifring (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014). 80.

<sup>199</sup> Donald Andrew Russell, *Greek Declamation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). 10.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>201</sup> Homer, *Iliad* (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1924/1999). 443.

<sup>202</sup> Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958). 393.

<sup>203</sup> Plato, *Lesser Hippias*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 1996). 371c; *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Encyclopædie Britannica Company, Merriam-Webster, 2004.

<sup>204</sup> Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1972).

<sup>205</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1995). 11.110.

<sup>206</sup> <http://logeion.uchicago.edu/index.htm>. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

through the process when the classical Greek texts become translated into Latin. Here, *meletē* and *meletán* often are translated into *meditatio* and *meditare*.<sup>209</sup> Various sources hold today that *medesthai* is the etymological origin of the word meditation.<sup>210</sup> As we soon will come to see, however, the impact of *medesthai* is not comparable to *meletē*. The history of the word is another.

Greek mythology is informative in understanding the words *meletē* and *medesthai*. Meletē was said to be the muse daughter of Apollo and the sister of Arché.<sup>211</sup> The mythological family of Meletē makes the word connote order and rationality. However, *meletē* is also used in contexts determining a human mode of attentive caring towards an object of thought, or oneself. In general Greek culture, *meletē* connoted *exercise* and *practice* of speech and thought; the first within rhetoric, the second within philosophy.<sup>212</sup> These usages and connotations of order, rationality, and human attentive care and practice lead the connotations of *meletē* in the direction of what we today loosely can understand as *reflecting* or *pondering upon* something for its own sake, as in *thinking through* a topic or *meditating on something*.

Curiously, when the etymological meaning of *medesthai* is evoked in the contemporary discourses, this is usually done with the tacit implication that the word connoted the same in the age of the Attics as its translations do today. The meanings of *medesthai* are imported into contemporary contexts as if this word, as a matter of course, designated a mind gathered on itself, or gathered on a topic. Apparently, it is taken for granted that the word describes a mind pondering on a topic with some cerebral presentness steering its activity, being thus an attentive and receptive mind in some form or another.<sup>213</sup> It is *as if medesthai* meant the same in the Attic context, and that this meaning is the same as we today can associate with meditation.

This is not the case, however. If we look at the *usage* of the word *medesthai* in the Attic context, one sees that the connotations attached to the word go much more in the direction of a mythological, dissociative or ambiguous mind than what we usually associate with the cerebral practice of *thinking* on something. Whereas *meletē* is associated with human practice, *medesthai* is almost exclusively used in mythopoetic contexts describing the life of gods and heroes. In mythology, the name of the goddess *Medea*

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<sup>209</sup> Rönnegård, "Melete in Early Christian Ascetic Texts." 79. According to Rönnegård, the development of *meletán* into *meditation* is probably most evident in the translation of Epicurus. 87. The relation between *meletē* and *meditation* is also discussed in Mark Vessey, *A Companion to Augustine* (Blackwell Publishing, 2012). 156.

<sup>210</sup> Ludwig Döderlein, *Handbuch der lateinischen Synonymik* (1839); Brent Willock, "Psychotherapy and the Realistic Scope of Health Insurance," *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* 18 (1988). 298; Angus Fletcher, *A new Theory for American Poetry – Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004). 193; Marshall Welch, *Spiritual Building Blocks; Using Your Head, Heart, and Hands to Love God, Our Self, and Neighbors* (San Francisco: Xlibris Corporation, 2015).(unpaginated); <http://www.etymonline.com>.

<sup>211</sup> In another line of tradition, Meletē was said to be the daughter of Zeus. This does not alter our general point.

<sup>212</sup> For a broader discussion of the word *meletē* and its various usages in the Attic culture, see: Russell, *Greek Declamation*. Chapter 1.

<sup>213</sup> Examples on this are: Patrick Bigelow, "The Indeterminability of Time in Sein und Zeit," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* XLVI (1986). 365; Matthias Buntins, *Psychologische Tests und mehrwertige Logik* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2014). 17; Willock, "Psychotherapy and the Realistic Scope of Health Insurance". 298; Fletcher, *A new Theory for American Poetry – Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination*. 193.



is portrayed as a clever, courageous and cunning woman. Medea is the granddaughter of Helios, the Sun, which represents order and rationality within the Phoenician and Egyptian myth. However, in contrast to the muse Meletē, Medea is portrayed as an untamable personality destroying families, refusing subordination to her husband, and refusing to bow to any king.<sup>214</sup> In other words, where Meletē connoted order and rationality, Medea connotes chaos and dissolution of order.

Homer uses the word *medesthai* in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These passages are worth citing in some length, as we soon will take them into closer inspection in the light of Plato. It is Achilles that speaks of *medesthai* in the *Iliad*:

[Y]ou all go and declare my message, for I will not sooner think [*μεδήσομαι*] of bloody war until battle-minded Priam's son, noble Hector has come to the huts and ships of the Myrmidons, as he slays the Argives, and has burned the ships with fire. But around my hut and my black ship I think [*οἴεσθαι*] that Hector will be stayed, eager though he be for battle.<sup>215</sup>

Although *medesthai* here is translated into *thinking*, we must note that spoken from within this poetic representation the word is associated much more with a mythological form of prediction than what the translated word indicates in isolation. The mythological moment of prediction is clearer in the *Odyssey*, wherein *medesthai* is spoken from a "flawless seer,"<sup>216</sup> a fortune-teller, who advises Odysseus to curb his own spirit and that of his men, and leave in peace the island where they have camped. Interestingly, the island is described as inhabited by "the cattle and fat sheep of Helios, who sees and hears all things"; i.e. the cattle and sheep of the god associated with order and rationality. Leave these animals alone, is the advice. Otherwise you will perhaps never reach home:

If you leave these and are careful [*μέδῃαι*] on your homeward journey, you still reach home. But if you harm them, then I foresee ruin for your ship and your comrades, and even if you shall yourself escape, late shall you come home and in distress[.]<sup>217</sup>

As we see, the *medesthai* emerges not only within the connotation of mythological prediction but is also given a connotation of carefulness in a sense opposite to what is typified with the mythological character Medea. Odysseus must keep away from the offspring of Helios; he must not harm the rational order of the island. We see a similarity to the passage from the *Iliad*, where the use of *medesthai* expresses a carefulness against destruction (bloody war). The two passages together, then, *medesthai* emerges as an

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<sup>214</sup> Luke Norman and Monica Norman, *Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman Mythology* (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2010). 312.

<sup>215</sup> Homer, *Iliad*. 9.649–9.655.

<sup>216</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.99.

<sup>217</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*. 11.104–11.113. Note that there is a small discrepancy between the Loeb translation and the *Chicago Homer* offered online (<http://digital.library.northwestern.edu>), which reads: "If you keep your mind [*μέδῃαι*] on your return and leave them unharmed ..."

ambiguous mode of thinking or attending. Partly it belongs to an untamed behavior; partly it belongs to a controlling of desires.

What we say here in regard of *meletē* and *medesthai* is reflected in Plato's philosophy. Plato uses the word *meletan* in several places and (as far as we can see) always in an affirmative sense. *Meletan* is used in contexts designating the mental exercise in preparing for an activity, either philosophical or technical.<sup>218</sup> Two examples are in the *Phaedo*, wherein the word is used to describe the exercise practiced by true philosophers; the exercise of getting used to death as an inescapable border of the human life. Socrates leads the conversation:

-Well, then, this is what we call death, is it not, a release and separation from the body?  
-Exactly so.  
-But [...] the true philosophers and they alone are always most eager to release the soul, and just this – the release and the separation of the soul from the body – is their study [*μελέτημα*], is it not?<sup>219</sup>

If the soul departs pure, we read in some further passages below, it is because the soul has practiced [*meletan*] philosophy. The soul drags with itself...

nothing of the body, because it never willingly associated with the body in life, but avoided it and gathered itself into itself alone, since this has been its constant study [*μελετώσα*]. [...] [T]his means nothing else than that it pursued philosophy rightly and really practiced being in a state of death: or is this not the practice of death?<sup>220</sup>

In other words, in cultivating *meletan* the soul attains for Plato not only clarity of its own final condition; it becomes also *gathered*; it becomes "gathered itself into itself alone." Similar connotations are given in Plato's *Critias*, wherein *meletan* is used in a context describing "learning by heart" and "engraving on one's mind."<sup>221</sup> A soul learning something by heart is a soul independent of something external to its order. Instead of being scattered in various accidental investments of life, the soul practicing *meletē* is gathered in into itself. It finds proper worth of life not external to its existential condition, but *in* the existential condition.

In contrast to *meletē*, *medesthai* is not taken up by Plato. Or to be precise, Plato uses it *once*<sup>222</sup> – and this is in a critical context, citing precisely the passage of the *Iliad* that we have just read. (*Hippias Minor* 371c<sup>223</sup>). Plato's critique of the word is informative to how we can understand the meaning of

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<sup>218</sup> Rönnegård, "Melete in Early Christian Ascetic Texts." 87.

<sup>219</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London England: Harvard University Press (Loeb Edition), 1995). 67d.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. 80e.

<sup>221</sup> *Critias*, 113b. Cf. Rönnegård, "Melete in Early Christian Ascetic Texts." 87.

<sup>222</sup> Today we can document the statistics of words by means of online search engines.

<sup>223</sup> The citation in *Hippias Minor* reads (in the *Loeb Edition*): "For I shall not be mindful [*μεδῆσομαι*] of bloody war until warlike Priam's son, the glorious Hector, shall reach the tents and ships of the Myrmidons slaughter of Arigeves and shall burn the ships with fire. But at my tent and my black ship I think Hector, though eager for battle, will come to a halt." Plato, *Lesser Hippias*. 371b-c.

*medesthai* and will be studied below. First, however, we need to contextualize the cultural and philosophical context wherein the two words *meletē* and *medesthai* emerge.

**a. The Impact of Literacy. Writing in Soul**

To understand the fuller philosophical relevance of *medesthai* and *meletē*, the various connotations evoked with the words must be seen in the light of literacy and philosophy as cultural phenomena. The age that we are approaching with these words is the age wherein what is considered to be the beginning of philosophy coincides with the cultural situation in which writing establishes itself. Initiated within the ancient Phoenician and Egyptian cultures, literacy is consolidated as a commonly available practice by the Attics approximately around the end of the fifth century B.C.<sup>224</sup> In the pre-literal situation, verbal communication was the sole means of passing on knowledge. There existed no other way of restoring knowledge than human memory and social repetition of what was handed over. Remembrance and communication of large epic poems, myths and rhapsodies were made possible using the musicality and rhymes of language, as well as a psychological and corporal identification with the communicated. The public task of the rhapsodist was to make the stories vivid for the audience. He was the embodied medium of the story. The audience saw, heard and lived through what the rhapsodist went through.

The introduction of writing represented a new technology for restoring and presenting knowledge. According to Havelock, writing made possible for the Greeks a new awareness of situation-independent meaning. The new technology made possible a handing over of knowledge, which was independent of personal verbal communication. "Refreshment of memory through written signs enabled a reader to dispense with most of that emotional identification by which alone the acoustic record was sure to recall," Havelock explains. "This could release psychic energy, for a review and arrangement of what had now been written down, and of what could be seen as an object and not just heard or felt. You could, as it were, take a second look at it."<sup>225</sup> So considered, writing meant the possibility of fixation or gathering. Something could be articulated in one context, by one person or by one group of people, and be taken up in another context. Meaning could circulate among men.

Havelock upholds that a new technology of writing rendered possible a new philosophical and critical self-awareness evolving in the Greek culture. That is, when a new form of self-understanding ultimately emerges as *philosophy*, this self-understanding is a fuller articulation of a cultural movement starting together with literacy. The releasing of psychic energy coming with writing allowed for a new

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, London The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1963); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Der Anfang der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy; The Technologizing of the Word* (London/New York: Routledge, 1982/2012); Ingebjørg Seip, *Form og fornuft - En filosofisk jakt på estetikkens formbegrep* (Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 2004).

<sup>225</sup> Havelock, *Preface to Plato*. 208.

freedom of thought. More profoundly, according to Havelock, the new technology of writing provided a new distance between the *knower* and the *known*. Writing furnishes a separation of the instance that *has* a second look at something, and the *something* that is being looked upon. Together with the history of the alphabet there emerges in the Greek language a new family of meanings designating the *psyche* regarding *me* and *self*. The movement towards literacy represents an intellectual revolution reflected down to the evolving of new syntactical contexts of new nouns, verbs and pronouns designating corporal and cognitive loci for experience.<sup>226</sup> In other words, writing made it possible to conceive of oneself qua selves or personalities. Instead of conceiving oneself as mere fragments of a general ontological atmosphere, or intrinsic parts of a cosmic life force, gradually linguistic resources were formed to conceive of oneself as a relatively autonomous being.<sup>227</sup> The possibility was given of a soul that *thinks* by questioning not only tradition and the cultural situation, but ultimately also its being.

With Gadamer, we can "philosophize" Havelock's points further. The alphabet, writes the hermeneutist, represented for the Attics a "gewaltige Abstraktionsleistung".<sup>228</sup> This new technology furnished language with the possibility of reflecting back on itself in presumptive fixations of utterances and positions – although the Greeks, according to Gadamer, suffered from a certain "Sprachvergessenheit," undermining a clear conception of the actual and potential role played by language in this abstraction.<sup>229</sup> Regardless, the alphabet made possible that language could fold back on itself as *text*: *logos* becomes a medium in which something is revealed, upheld, defined and communicated. Only in the abstract fixating of statements, we could say, can philosophical concepts emerge. Something – ultimately an *eidos* – can stand out in the reflecting, dialectical recurrence to the evolving topic.

Against this background, we can better understand Plato's metaphor *meletē* as an *engraving* in the soul (*Critias*). The "engraving on one's mind" as a metaphor for *verbal* philosophical practice – i.e. as a metaphor for *dialectics* – reflects that philosophy is rendered possible by literacy. Also *Phaedo* associates the philosophical soul with reading. The purification of a *gathering* of the soul, i.e. the study of *meletē*, is described through metaphors indicating a process of *reading*. The purification consists in "teaching [ἐθίζειν]<sup>230</sup> the soul the habit of collecting and bringing itself together from all parts of the body, and living, as far as it can, both now and hereafter, alone by itself, freed from the body as from fetters."<sup>231</sup> The soul *reads* its own final situation by getting used to – or genuinely accepting – the indispensable fact of death.

The fact that Plato uses a metaphor in describing *meletē* and the nature of the philosophical soul is in itself significant. It bears witness to how a slight but important "second look abstraction" reflected in

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 198.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. 197.

<sup>228</sup> Gadamer, *Der Anfang der Philosophie*. 17.

<sup>229</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 422. Cf. Gadamer's critique of Plato's *Cratylus* in Part III, 2a in the same book.

<sup>230</sup> *Ethizein* is derived of *ethos* (ἔθος) and means *habituation* in the ethical sense. Aristotle makes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.1, a point of the relationship between these two nouns. (Pål Rykkja Gilbert: personal correspondence.)

<sup>231</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*. 67c.

philosophical semantics. As the Greek word *metaphora* suggests, a metaphor means a displacement or relocation of something – something is moved *over* or *across* the *fora*. We can see an apparent analogy to the concrete movability of a written text. The written text is not context-dependent; it can store, transfer or relocate the meaning from one context to another. Quite concretely, the written word is flexible in a sense that the orally transmitted word is not. Plato uses the possibility of the metaphor philosophically. That is, when describing *meletē* in the transferred and transformed sense as the *engraving of the soul*, the initial and concrete meaning of the word *writing* is displaced and given an abstract and philosophically affirmed meaning. The meaning of the word is given a new and philosophically clarified meaning, despite the fact that the perceptual emergence of the word is unaltered.

Thus, if we add the new form of self-distance emerging with the new technology of writing – i.e. what Havelock calls the distance between *knower* and *known* – we see a fuller picture of the scriptural metaphor of *meletē*.

Self-distance is a crucial theme in Plato's writings. Properly speaking, to attain self-knowledge is to attain self-distance – they are aspects of the same possibility to understand the *eidos* of being. Plato's *Theitos* exemplifies this, by underlining the intrinsic relation between self-distance and *thinking*. *Thinking* is described as a dialectical process wherein the soul gains distance and ownership to a meaning (*doxa*). Thinking, we read, is "talk which the soul has with itself about any subject which it considers."<sup>232</sup> The soul's inner dialogue with itself is intrinsically intertwined with the language (*logos*) in which the questioning is unfolding:

[T]he soul, as the image presents itself to me, when it thinks, is merely conversing with itself, asking itself questions and answering, affirming and denying. When it has arrived at a decision, whether slowly or sudden bound, and it is at last agreed, and is not in doubt, we call that its opinion; and so I define the forming opinion as talk which has been held, not with someone else, nor yet aloud, but in silence with oneself.<sup>233</sup>

In the *Sophist* Plato articulates another mode of self-distance evolving in thinking, namely in the form of a distinction between a "material" and "immaterial" *logos*.<sup>234</sup> "[T]hought (*dianoia*) and speech (*lógos*) are the same; only the former, which is a silent inner conversation of the soul with itself, has been given the special name of thought."<sup>235</sup> Thinking is thus the mode in which the soul gains distance even from the vocal sound of the *logoi*. "[T]he stream that flows from the soul in vocal utterances thought the mouth has the name of speech[.]"<sup>236</sup>

<sup>232</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* (Harvard College: Harvard University Press, Loeb Edition, 1921/1967). 189e.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. 190a.

<sup>234</sup> Noteworthy, in bringing the soul's "inner dialogue with itself" into a context of inner hearing in Gadamer's sense we follow Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik." and Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamers Hermeneutik*. cf. 10. We return Grondin's reading in Section 13a below.

<sup>235</sup> Plato, *Sophist* (Harvard College: Harvard University Press, Loeb Edition, 1921/1967). 263d.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 263e. The current Plato reading is borrowed from *Teätet* and *Sophisthes* from Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamers Hermeneutik*. 9–10. As Oliva also notes, there is a close connection between Plato's inner dialogue of the soul,

Importantly, *meletē* – and its philosophical-metaphorical status – fits right into Plato's affirmed schema of self-distance. Advocated with the philosophical usage of the word is a soul that seeks its proper being, gathering around itself, by exercising and learning proper self-distance. Instead of crying like a child, paralyzed by the fear of death, the philosophical soul gains distance to, and gets peace from, these emotions.<sup>237</sup> In radically questioning its presuppositions, we can say, the soul of *meletan* gains an internalized and responsible ownership of the aporetic finality of one's own human condition. Instead of being a human that just dies, as it were, the philosopher practices to be a human that bears its human condition.<sup>238</sup> In the process of learning how to handle the inescapable reality of life, the soul transforms itself into its proper partaking (another meaning of *meletē*, we noted) in *logos*. Hence, the self-distancing soul is demonstrated in the very usage of the metaphor of *writing in the soul*. Demonstrated with the philosophical displacement of meaning is the presence of a soul that moves in *logos*. The transformation of meaning from literal to philosophical-metaphorical meaning is the trace of a self-distancing, philosophical soul.

#### b. Fatherly Presence of Logoi. Gathering vs. Spontaneity

We have now contextualized and expanded on the meaning and role of Plato's usage of the word *meletē*. *Meletē* emerges in the core of the new cultural and philosophical self-understanding initiated by the alphabet. The fact that *medesthai* is used almost exclusively in myths and poetry within the same historical context has important implications for how we can understand the word. Qua poetic word, *medesthai* is associated not with the new technology, but with the oral tradition of handing over knowledge. Homer's texts are *semi-writing*: they are organized and presented in ways reflecting that they are meant to be presented orally. That is, they are meant for the perceptual context; written or gathered together as whole with the intention of being accomplished in the shared time and space of an orator and an audience.

In the cultural context wherein literacy establishes itself, Plato is an important spokesman for a revised and critical awareness of the traditional mode of handing over knowledge in oral presentations represented by Homer. Plato, we can say, articulates the cultural insight that the poetic-mythological practices are distinct from knowledge proper. As we will see in a moment, Plato formulates the insight that the truth claims of poems, storytelling and paintings are distinct from what evolves in philosophy, science and handcraft. In other words, art is "only" *art* (if not in senses directly comparable to our contemporary

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and Gadamer's notion of dialectics: "[D]ie Unendlichkeit der dialektischen Bemühung, die er [Platon] von den Philosophen fordert, ist der Ausdruck der Diskursivität unseres endlichen Verstandes." Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 426–427.

<sup>237</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*. 84b.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Unsterblichkeitsbeweise in Platons 'Phaidon' (1973)", in *Griechische Philosophie II, Gesammelte Werke 6* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1985). For the relationship between *meletē* and *aporia* in Plato's writing: Sean D Kirkland, *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato's Early Dialogues* (New York: State University Press, 2012). 99 ff.

conceptions of art) – it speaks not truth proper. This critique, then, is the philosophical framework of *medesthai*. The mind of *medesthai* belongs to a cultural practice that not only loses general influence (the oral mythopoetical storytelling) but which is also criticized for presenting threatening pseudo-knowledge.<sup>239</sup>

Apparently, the almost thorough nonpresence of *medesthai* within the philosophical contexts indicates that *medesthai* is nonassociable with what we with Havelock and Gadamer have described as the *second look abstraction* of the thinking soul. By comparing *medō* with another philosophical keyword, *archē*, we get one indication of what this can imply: as does *medō*, *archē* also means *command*. Aristotle, for example, uses this meaning when describing the formation of a general concept (articulating an *archē*). Analogous to an army, which at first flees in panic but then, one soldier after the other, stops before the whole troop suddenly starts obeying orders as a unified whole, a general concept is formed gradually before it suddenly stands out [*metabole*] in accordance with its internal principle.<sup>240</sup> Judged from its absence within philosophical discursive practice, *medō* and *medesthai* seem not to have this quality of *gathering* something into a rational principle. Whereas *meletē* (whose mythological origin character is the sister of *Archē*, as we noted) gathers the soul into itself, the command of *medō* apparently lacks the philosophical connotation of evolving a principle within its execution.

Let us see how Plato excludes the *medesthai* from the philosophical self-understanding by examining the (one and only) passage wherein Plato uses the word *medesthai*. In the passage, Socrates cites Homer to discuss the moral character of Odysseus and his men. The tone is critical. The citation is used to demonstrate how Achilles says something different to what he has just been saying. Achilles contradicts himself, Socrates points out: whereas (in the cited passage) Achilles says to Odysseus that he will stay at the camp, he has just been saying (some lines above)<sup>241</sup> that he would sail by daybreak. In other words, Achilles says both that he would move *and* stay, which in effect means that he utters a classical contradiction of thought. Moreover, Socrates adds, Homer presents Achilles as so clever that he can perform this self-contradiction even without Odysseus or anybody else seeming to notice it.<sup>242</sup>

Plato's critique of Achilles is, shall we say, relatively harsh. After all, between the two admittedly contradictory statements of the hero, there is given a series of speeches both begging and arguing against his initial decision are being raised. First, Achilles' old horseman bursts into tears at the decision and greatly fears what will happen. Having listened to his words, Achilles says, at first, that he will discuss his initial decision after a night's sleep, before he then promptly changes his decision. The change comes after he has been criticized from another comrade for neglecting his friendship with the people staying at the camp. Why, then, does Socrates present such a strong critique of Achilles' change of decision, instead of praising

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<sup>239</sup> Cf. Plato, *Republic (VI-X)* (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 2013). Book X.

<sup>240</sup> Aristotle: *An. Post.* B119, 100a. Gadamer frequently recalls this point in Aristotle, as in Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 358; Gadamer, "Die Universalität des hermeneutischen Problems (1966)." 229.

<sup>241</sup> Homer, *Iliad*. 9.355.

<sup>242</sup> Plato, *Lesser Hippias*. 371.

him for his ability to listen to reasons coming from his trusted men? And, eventually, what does this tell us about the character of the *medesthai*?

To understand Socrates' critical tone, we need to turn to Plato's *Phaedrus*. This is a treatise wherein Plato discusses the new technology of writing and the alternative it presents to the traditional mythopoetic storytelling. The discussion is initiated by a move wherein the myths are being dismissed. No genuine knowledge of the soul comes with these stories, Socrates states. Certainly, they can be amusing to tell and hear, yet the myths are external to the genuine (philosophical) nature of the soul.<sup>243</sup>

Plato's perspective on writing and knowledge rests on the principle that words in general – more notably, words qua *logoi* – lead the human soul. "[T]he function [*dynamis*] of speech [*logos*] is to lead souls by persuasion,"<sup>244</sup> we read. According to Socrates, the necessary precondition of this function is the ability to perceive unity in what emerges as manifold. The principle [*archai*] of learning is "that of perceiving and bringing together in one idea the scattered particulars"; which is to say, to make clear by definition the particular thing that one wishes to explain.<sup>245</sup> Unless one wants to take up the procedure of a blind or deaf man, we read, anyone who seeks the nature of anything ought to first consider the modes in which the considered thing is simple or multiform, and then "[I]f it is simple, enquire what power of acting it possesses, or of being acted upon, and by what, and if it has many forms, number them, and then see in the case of each form, as we did in the case of the simple nature, what its action is and how it is acted upon and by what[.]"<sup>246</sup> The person who knows how to deal with a topic divides things not accidentally, but in classes appropriate to the topic itself. He cuts through the thing with words, we read. Just like a trained butcher knows how to part an animal correctly, the trained soul knows where the natural joints are. He cuts *with* the joints instead of "trying to break any part, after the manner of a bad carver."<sup>247</sup> Only by following this lead – which is the lead of the thing or topic being investigated – can the discourse [*logos*] acquire "clearness and consistency".<sup>248</sup>

From what we have seen, knowledge of the thing cannot, according to Plato, come without self-knowledge of the soul. The knowledge of things corresponds to self-knowledge. Anyone who seeks knowledge about the leading of souls with words must thus know whether the human soul, in general, is "one and all alike, or, like the body, of multiform aspect; for this is what we call explaining its nature."<sup>249</sup> To know this is important because whoever wants to lead a soul must also know what kind of discursive means one ought to use in communication. The words must be addressed to the soul as accurately as possible. One must know what discursive means are needed, i.e. know what action is required by the soul

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<sup>243</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 1995). 290e–230.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.* 271c–d.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.* 265d.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.* 370d.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.* 365e. Same point is made in Plato, *Cratylus* (Cambridge/Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (Loeb Edition) 1992). 386e–387

<sup>248</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 265d.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.* 271.



– "how it is acted upon and by what".<sup>250</sup> However, possessing this knowledge, the knower must also know what he knows. That is, the knower must be able to reflect systematically on the knowledge of how distinct words correspond to the souls to be addressed. The knowing person, according to Socrates, thus knows how to "classify the speeches [*logoi*] to the nature of the souls that is to be addressed, knowing how they adapt to each other, namely, the causes of the effects produced and why one kind of soul is necessarily persuaded by certain classes of speeches, and another is not."<sup>251</sup> Or, as Socrates puts it elsewhere: "[U]nless a man takes account of the characters of his hearers and is able to divide things by classes and to comprehend things under a general idea, he will never attain the highest human perfection in the art of speech."<sup>252</sup>

Intrinsic to Socrates' reflections on the *logoi* and the soul is an ambiguous attitude towards writing. Writing cannot uncritically be taken up as an alternative to the oral mythopoetic storytelling. In fact, Plato's paradigm of *good writing* is not writing in the conventional sense, but rather the metaphorical writing in the soul, which in this context means the practice of the philosophical dialogue. The true *logoi* of the philosophical practice are the ones that are "written in the mind of the learner,"<sup>253</sup> we read. The noble usage of words is to employ the "dialectic method" by planting and sowing intelligent words in a fitting soul.<sup>254</sup> Planted directly in the soul of the other, the oral *logoi* can grow to become the "living and breathing word of a person that knows."<sup>255</sup> The words are thus "not fruitless, but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words capable of continuing the process for ever, and which makes their possessor happy, to the farthest possible limit of happiness."<sup>256</sup>

Writing in the conventional sense is for Plato more problematic. Written *logoi* have the "strange quality" of likening paintings, we read. "[F]or the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with the written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say one and the same thing."<sup>257</sup> In other words, written *logoi* have the problematic character of presenting themselves as inflexible perceptual units. As soon as they are written on paper, they become too fixed in their utterances. Just as paintings, they cannot adjust their meaning independently of its static perceptual emergence.

In other words, where the *logoi* of the dialectics are flexible and induce a *growth* of new *logoi* of verbal articulations, the written *logoi* stand in danger of merely repeating only what *has been*. The point is crucial: the leading of the soul into *logos*, we could say, is a prospective, not retrospective activity. The

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<sup>250</sup> *ibid.* 271.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.* 271b.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.* 273e.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.* 276.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.* 276e.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.* 276.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* 277.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.* 275d.

dialectical unfolding of a philosophical inquiry represents not an already fulfilled or accomplished conceptualization of the thing but an ongoing and progressive transformation into *logos*.<sup>258</sup>

Plato's metaphor for describing the difference between the good oral *logoi* and the potentially dangerous written *logoi* calls upon the fatherly and responsible being of the soul. The *good* and flexible oral *logoi* always come together with a father. They are accompanied by a responsible soul, gathered around itself. The written words, by contrast, lack this fatherly presence. They lack the company of a self-critical instance evaluating the context of which they speak. The written words cannot rearticulate themselves; they cannot paraphrase their meaning in accordance to the souls of new receivers. "[E]very word, once it is written, is bandied about alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it; and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak."<sup>259</sup> Written words just repeat themselves and state the same; but since the context always shifts, they nevertheless never say the same. A written text has "no power to protect or help itself," Socrates says: "when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it."<sup>260</sup> Verbal discourse, by contrast, "is able to defend itself and knows to whom it should speak and before whom to be silent."<sup>261</sup>

In other words, whereas the written words are circulating without any defense of misunderstandings or misuse, the verbal *logoi* are accompanied by the self-critical and dynamic soul of the speaker. This fatherly soul is the self-critical and stable factor amidst ever-changing contexts. It is the instance which can rearticulate the meaning of the *logoi* appropriate to the situation.

Despite the critical attitude, however, Plato does not categorically reject the written *logoi* altogether. By itself it is no disgrace to write speeches, Socrates makes clear; what certainly *is* a disgrace, however, is "speaking and writing not well, but disgracefully and badly."<sup>262</sup> Bad and disgraceful writing is for Plato unorganized and associative writing. The words of a bad discourse come as "thrown out helter-skelter" – without legitimizing why "the second topic had to be put second for any cogent reason."<sup>263</sup> Disgraceful *logoi* bears witness to an author that has "uttered boldly whatever occurred to him."<sup>264</sup> In other words, disgraceful writing becomes a mere manifestation of an associative mind without any direction.

In Plato's metaphoric, the unorganized *logoi* emerge not as good sons of a fatherly soul of *logos*. The seed of an associative mind cannot breed well-born offspring of *logos*, only more associations. This is the problem of writing: if a helter-skelter discourse is allowed to circulate, always repeating itself, it will breed even more helter-skelter *logoi*. In the *Phaedrus*, this is precisely the problem of the mythopoetic discourses. According to Socrates, writers such as Sophocles and Euripides lack coherency and harmony in

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<sup>258</sup> Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen 1: Die Sprache* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2010). Chapter 1.

<sup>259</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 275e.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. 275e. Note that the two last sentences are given in reverse order in the original text.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. 276.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. 258d.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid. 264b.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. 264b.

composition. They give long speeches about small affairs and very short speeches about great affairs, in ways demonstrating anything other than "proper combinations of [...] details in such a way that they harmonize with each other and with the whole composition."<sup>265</sup> Hence, these stories generate no proper self-knowledge of the soul but only flights into incoherent modes of conceiving self and reality.

Composed *right*, on the other hand, the *logoi* (spoken or written) emerges as organized as a well-born living being [*zoon*]. It is organized "with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and to the whole."<sup>266</sup> In other words, the words reflect back on its evolving medium: parts and whole are adjusted to each other. The organization of *logoi* is thus of pivotal value. Only by being *organized* – in the *biological* sense of the word – do the words imitate the presence of a fatherly companion. A well-organized sequence of *logoi* reveals the corresponding presence of the rational soul awakening *over* or *in* the words. Only thus is the *dynamis* of the soul, and the *dynamis* of the words, one and the same.

These points bring us back to the *medesthai* of *Hippias Minor*. What the words of Achilles demonstrate, in Plato's perspective, is the noncompany of a fatherly and self-critical soul attending the utterances of the hero. There emerges no responsible soul attending the displayed change of decision together with the words. The hero changes his words but not his standpoint. The organization of his words correlates to no soul that knows what he is doing when changing his words. Plato demonstrates what is at stake in a further passage of the *Hippias Minor*, turning to the question of what is worse; to be a soul that voluntarily speaks falsehood, or a soul that does it involuntarily, which is to say, a soul that speaks and acts without knowing. "I think that those who injure people and do wrong and speak falsehood and cheat and err voluntarily, not involuntarily, are better than those who do so involuntarily," Socrates says. "Sometimes, however, the opposite of this seems to me to be the case, and I am all astray about these matters, evidently because I am ignorant; but now at the present moment a sort of paroxysm<sup>267</sup> of my disease has come upon me, and those who err in respect to anything voluntarily appear to me better than those who err involuntarily."<sup>268</sup> Even Socrates – which is to say, the philosophical father par excellence in Plato's philosophical dialogues – is led astray by discussing the self-contradictory nature of Achilles' words. Similar things also happen elsewhere in the dialogue: first, Hippias is being accused by Socrates of starting to imitate Odysseus,<sup>269</sup> and finally, the whole dialogue ends in a conclusion that Socrates himself cannot agree with.<sup>270</sup> In other words, the noncoherent notions and poetic words of Homer not only demonstrate a lack of self-distance of the soul of the hero. They even erase the necessary self-distance of the philosophical thinking on the topic.

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid. 268c.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. 264b.

<sup>267</sup> [*Paroxysm*: *outbreak* in the medical sense of a disease.]

<sup>268</sup> Plato, *Lesser Hippias*. 272d–e.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. 370e.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. 376e.

The notion of mimetic *infliction* evolving here is interesting. The demonstrations of the *Hippias Minor* express a general critique of mythopoetical storytelling launched by Plato in many dialogues. The illusionist of music, poetry and art exploits a natural shortcoming in the human soul;<sup>271</sup> its weakness for mimetic influence.<sup>272</sup> Rhythm and harmonies have for Plato the powerful ability to penetrate the soul at its deepest,<sup>273</sup> making the soul reverberate, so to speak, by their modi of organizations. Also, the charming and seducing<sup>274</sup> presentations of characters, destinies and human actions are potentially dangerous, as they can inflict on behavior ways of speaking and ways of thinking.<sup>275</sup> If misused, we read, this power of music and storytelling is dangerous. It can lead the soul fully astray. The noble artist knows this and uses the mimetic correlation with care: "Fine language then, melodiousness, elegance and good rhythm match goodness of character, not in the sense of simplicity that we say by the way of endearment, but the quality of mind equipped with a truly good and fine character."<sup>276</sup> Informed as he is by philosophical clarifications, the noble artist will preserve a harmonious self-distance *to* his work and *in* his work. The work will mirror a soul that is not carried away by its perceptual manifestation of mimetic correlation, but which knows what he is doing. Thus, the presentation will inflict onto the listener or perceiver in a good way.

The really disgraceful artist, on the other hand, will lose any self-distance, succumbing fully to the mimetic features of his presentation. "[T]he whole style of this man consists of words and gestures carried out through impersonation,"<sup>277</sup> Socrates says. Finding nothing below his standard the disgraceful artist will imitate "everything seriously and in front of large audiences";<sup>278</sup> everything from thunder, blowing winds, sounds of hail, cartwheels and rollers, trumpets, flutes and pipes, as well as the barking of dogs and bleating of sheep. In this madness of mimesis, we could say, there will be no room for an articulated inner dialogue of the soul with itself. No self-distance would be furnished; it would be impossible to *think*. The gathered nature of soul would be completely dissolved into the scattered impulses of the mimetic inflictions of the moment. Although Socrates does not dissolve into imitating barking of dogs, trumpets and flutes, precisely this negative moment of self-erasing and confusing mimesis, we could thus say, is what is demonstrated in the *Hippias Minor*.

Let us conclude the reading of Plato. With the risk of deducing too many consequences by our current information, we could now say that the manner in which the word *medesthai* emerges in a context of incoherence and confusion in Plato's text is thus informative for an understanding of the word. Conceived from Plato's perspective, the mythological mind *medesthai* involves no rational self-dialogue but rather a spontaneous and associative reaction to what happens in the situation. The mind of *medesthai*

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<sup>271</sup> Plato, *Republic* (VI-X). 602d.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. 395d.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.* 401d and 411a–b.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.* 398b.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.* 395d.

<sup>276</sup> Plato, *Republic* (I-V) (Harvard College: Loeb Classical Library, 2013). 400d–e.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.* 397a–b.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.* 397.

does not *read* the complex moral and existential situation of the human. Fully submerged in the needs and inclinations, it just *acts out* the impulses of the moment. The mind of *medesthai* is not gathered as a soul with proper self-distance. The spontaneous utterances of *medesthai* correspond to no soul led by *logos*. The mind of *medesthai* pays no attention to the self-contradictions of its bold and helter-skelter utterances, and can thus freely and irresponsibly twist the words in whatever direction. In short, the mind of *medesthai* answers to no rational principle (*archē*).

Nowhere in Plato's writings are *medesthai* and *meletē* de facto put together. Nevertheless, by comparing *medesthai* and *meletē* we can say that, for Plato, *meletē* is everything that *medesthai* is not. *Meletē* fits well into a schema of the responsible father. Teaching oneself to take responsibility for one's destiny is to be the father of one's situation. *Medesthai*, on the contrary, evolves no father. Where *meletē* is a gathering of the soul, conceiving itself in the light of absolute finality, leading to a radical self-distance of transformed self-understanding, *medesthai* is the dispersion of the soul in the concrete moment, evolving neither self-distance nor self-understanding. In other words, where *meletē* is an articulation of *thinking*, *medesthai* is *nonthinking*.

There is one interesting ambiguity lurking in this comparison of *meletē* and *medesthai*, however. When we conceive the relationship between *medesthai* and *meletē* thus – i.e. as antinomies – we do in effect evaluate the relationship between the words from the perspectives established with Plato. Hermeneutically conceived, only from the perspective of *philosophy* does Homer's *medesthai* emerge as an incoherent and paradoxical mode of thinking. Only from a perspective that has articulated what *thinking* is, does something like *nonthinking* evolve.

However, as indicated above, the *medesthai* passage in the *Iliad* can be read differently from that suggested by Plato's relatively harsh critique. Evolving in Homer's poetic scene wherein the hero changes his mind about leaving the camp, we could say, is not a contradiction of thought, but rather a mode of self-distance. The scene can be read as a description of a flexible and adjustable response to the moral situation, coming in the form of a prospective draft of an action ("I will no sooner think..."). Demonstrated are how human perspectives can evolve from the present *now*, to future situations, in ways implying a moral dimension transgressing the concrete situation. So conceived, what culminates in Achilles' change of decision described as *medesthai* is the evolving of perspective, which first goes back and forth among the comrades, then reaches a paradigmatic articulation in Achilles. In other words, something coherent and lasting evolves in the flexibility of perspective; something that we, from the perspective of Plato, could call a fatherly soul; an attentive and coherent awareness of the moral complexity involved, emerging in the distinct verbalizations and expressions of Achilles and his comrades.

Through this alternative reading, hence, Homer's poetic description harbors aspects that point in the direction of Plato's soul gathering around itself and gaining self-distance. In effect, from a hermeneutical viewpoint, Plato's subsequent articulation of a proper self-distance of the philosophical soul (*meletē*) is an accomplishment of notions initiated by Homer's *medesthai*. The *medesthai* is not external to

the formation of philosophy, but taken in and transformed into a new and systematic articulation clarifying what spontaneous self-distance is or can be. For also the philosophical soul of Plato is spontaneous and sensitive to the context of the expression. Described in the art of dialectics is a vital and nonfixed mode of behavior open to the expressions of the other. Analogous to the discussion of Homer's poetic scene, the philosophical soul is open to being led by the necessities of the concrete situation.

Plato not only avoids an affirmation of these aspects in Homer's text, which he could have emphasized in positive terms, he even undermines the tendency of the formation of coherency evolving in Homer's poetic scene. In fact, *Hippias Minor* deletes the direct speech of the *medesthai* situation – which is to say, the meta-discourse of Achilles' words – articulating a moral promise ("[Y]ou all go and declare my message...").<sup>279</sup> In other words, if Plato's self-distance can be said to accomplish a tendency initiated by Homer, Plato makes this articulation by increasing the distance to Homer. Plato articulates what the responsible philosophical soul is, not only by transforming and rearticulating the self-distance potentially evolving in *medesthai* into (for instance) *meletē*, but also by strengthening the aspects rendered negative. In the philosophical transformation, the nongathered mind becomes "only" a nongathered mind. Taken for what it is, the helter-skelter mind of *medesthai* harbors no potential insights into what it is to be a human being.

### c. Etymology and Contemporary Connotations

We have now conceived the aspects of the history of meditation within the Western philosophical context. In the Attic situation, linguistic prefigurations of the word meditation are coupled with questions of how to gain adequate self-distance. *Meletē* couples self-distance with practices of writing and reading. *Meletē* includes an accumulation of practices and techniques and the specification of distinguished forms of human knowledge. According to Plato's discussions, *meletē* is both a path to and precondition for moral being. Practicing *meletē* is a way of accomplishing the morally sound self-distance always already evolving in the soul. *Medesthai*, by contrast, is which by associated with perception, nonknowledge, and nondistance of the self. The mind of *medesthai* is an associative and nongathered mind, easily distracted and seduced by music, rhythms, and linguistic and dramatic means of expression.

In the subsequent sections<sup>280</sup> we will see how Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty echo various aspects now conceived with Plato and Homer. Though none of the contemporary philosophers writes about *medesthai* and *meletē* directly, we will see how they typically emphasize aspects belonging either to the one or the other word. On his path of *Lesen*, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics echoes aspects seen belonging to Plato's *meletē*. Gadamer's general emphasis on *Bildung* and the accumulation of cultural

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<sup>279</sup> Cf. Seip, *Form og fornuft - En filosofisk jakt på estetikkens formbegrep*. Chapter 2.

<sup>280</sup> Most notably Section 4b and 5b below.

practice fits in here but so too do other typical hermeneutical conceptions, such as the reconciliation with facticity. On his path of *perception*, Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, emphasizes aspects seen in *medesthai*. Most notably, what we elsewhere conceived as the spontaneity of perceptual consciousness can be conceived as a contemporary version of *medesthai*.

Curiously, to the degree that the nondirective meditation evolves in between the paths of *Lesen* and *perception*, we have with Plato and Homer located a historical background to the ambiguity between the two paths. Echoed in the ambiguity between *Lesen* and *perception* are key moments within the Western philosophical tradition originating in the situation wherein philosophy takes the Delphic imperative of *Know Thyself* into account.

The words *meletē* and *medesthai* do, of course, have a history independent of Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty and nondirective meditation. How do we see the echoes of these words elsewhere? Surely, Plato's *gathered soul* cannot be directly compared with a modern subject that sharpens its mind in a Cartesian sense of cogito. From a modern viewpoint, the gathered soul is far more ambiguous or equivocal than gathered in senses connoting stringency and control in the modern epistemic sense. Plato's gathered soul is a moral being accomplishing itself in and through the participation in the shared order of *logos*. Permeated by *logos*, the human soul is permeated by a timeless, omnipotent, and inexhaustible ontological order. Reading the scripture engraved in the soul is to accomplish a dynamic and responsible way of being a human being both in relationship to oneself and one's destiny and in relationship to the moral community.

However, the further development of *meletē* and *medesthai* harbors tendencies that go in the direction of stringency and control in the modern sense. Hermeneutically considered, the translations of the words into the Latin *meditatio* reinforces the aspect of a gathering of mind initiated by Plato. Interesting enough, of the two words, it is thus the notions of *meletē* that in a sense trump in the further development into meditation – despite the fact that it is *medesthai* and not *meletē* that is the etymon of the word. That is, although the Latin word will come to describe a mind far more univocally gathered than Plato's *meletē*, the Latin *meditari* and *meditatio* have more in common with *meletē* than *medesthai*. Omitted, in any regard, is the nongathered mind of *medesthai* and its connotations of fortune-tellers, gods and heroes.

We see the development in a brief look into the etymology of *meditari* and *meditatio*. The Latin *meditari* belongs to a large family of words that have in common an exactness of practice. *Meditari* relates to *medicalis* and *medicus*, stemming from the adjective *mederi* (*to attend to a person or thing* in the medical and attentive sense). Also associated with *meditari* is the Greek *mesos* (*middle*) which relates *meditari* to the *medial* (from *medialis*: "situated in the middle"), *mediare* ("to cut in half") and *medius/meditas* ("middle", "center", "half")<sup>281</sup>. That is, *meditari* evolves in a family of words that translates the middle of

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<sup>281</sup> Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*.

*mesos* by equating it with order and exactness. We see the same tendency in the Greek word *metron* ("means for measurement", "a measure", or "a rule"<sup>282</sup>), which is also related to *meditari* through the Latin *metiri*.<sup>283</sup> All in all, *meditari* comes to mean a practice of study, learning and caring, as attentive caring towards oneself, or to *reflect upon* something for its own sake,<sup>284</sup> with the implications of measurement and exactness. When *meditari* comes to mean "have in mind", or "to intend"<sup>285</sup> it implies a notion of a thought-measuring of an idea, a fact, or a thing.<sup>286</sup>

Though brief, these linguistic considerations are informative for an understanding of what is connoted by the contemporary word meditation. Consulting the dictionaries of today, we see that meditation is defined as a gathering of mind in the strongly unambiguous sense. To meditate, we read, is to "Focus one's mind for a period of time."<sup>287</sup> Meditation is a way of concentrating the mind; a way of centering – or gathering – one's attention (here in the full definition):

Most meditative practices concentrate attention in order to induce mystical experiences. Others are mindful of the mental character of all contents of consciousness and utilize this insight to detach the practitioner either from all thoughts or a selected group of thoughts – e.g. the ego (Buddhism) or the attractiveness of sin (Christianity). Meditation may also serve as a special, potent preparation for a physically demanding or otherwise strenuous activity, as in the case of the warrior before battle or the musician before performance.<sup>288</sup>

To meditate, we also read, is "to engage in mental exercise (such as concentration on one's breathing or repetition of a mantra) for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness."<sup>289</sup> Likewise, in German, *Meditation* is defined as a "[sinnende] Betrachtung", synonymous to "Betrachtung, Einkehr, Sammlung, Überlegung".<sup>290</sup> Crucially, as we later will learn,<sup>291</sup> the close connotations between meditation and a gathered mind in the senses indicated here are not only linguistic but are also held vivid in contemporary scientific investigations of consciousness. Here, various Buddhist concentration techniques are frequently used as the rigorous and well-developed ways to explore the first-person perspective on

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Friedrich Kluge: *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2002.

<sup>284</sup> Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*.

<sup>285</sup> [www.latin-dictionary.net](http://www.latin-dictionary.net).

<sup>286</sup> Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*.

<sup>287</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>.

<sup>288</sup> <http://www.britannica.com>.

<sup>289</sup> <http://www.britannica.com>.

<sup>290</sup> <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung>. Simile also in the classic *Handbuch der lateinischen Synonymik* (1839) of Ludwig Döderlein: [*Meditari* [von Griechisch *Medesthai*] [ist] die gesteigerte und angestrenzte Geistestätigkeit, welche ein bestimmte Resultat bezweckt." Meditation is "intensiv, mit Ernst, Anstrengung und Lebendigkeit nachdenken" (<https://archive.org/details/handbuchderlate02doedgoog>). For another discussion of the linguistic definitions of meditation see: Svend Davanger, "The Natural Science of Meditation", in *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* ed. Halvor Eifring (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). (231).

<sup>291</sup> Cf. Subsection 10b and Section 11 below.



consciousness. The approved basis of these techniques is that they furnish a stable and controlled and *less* excited, undisciplined and scattered modification of self-attention.<sup>292</sup>

In general, few traces are seen of the nongathered mind of *medesthai* in these contemporary definitions and interests in meditation. Historically considered, the way meditation is conceived today expresses the drastic accomplishment of a gathering of mind that started with Plato's critique of *medesthai*. As we will see in the next section, there is one name that in particular can be associated with the gathering of mind observable in the Western history of the word meditation: *Descartes*.

### 3. The Honesty of Written Meditation. Modern Subject (Augustine and Descartes)

Between the Attic situation of Homer and Plato and the situation of Christianity expressed by Augustine and Descartes, a new ontology and a new view of the human have emerged. Human life is no longer embedded in the shared *logos* of the world as a matter of course but is rather cut off from the truer order of reality by an inborn, original sin. The human world is no longer inhabited by multiple gods, half-gods, mythological heroes, cicadas and cattle and sheep belonging to a god of order and rationality such as Helios, but has gained the shape of a monotheistic universe. Culturally speaking, we might say that the gathering of a new and more unified self-awareness emerging with literacy in the Greek culture, has now evolved into a more unitary ontological conception of the world. In any regard, the life of man between the Attic world and the world of Christianity become more unified – or more gathered. Instead of living in constant communication with the surroundings in the broad sense of the word, man has become a subject ultimately being looked at from *one* omnipotent creator – the God Almighty.

We will now see how Augustine and Descartes use the word meditation to designate paths to restore contact with God or the truthful orders created by Him. These paths cannot be directly compared with contemporary practices of meditation. Neither of the authors outlines technical procedures of meditation as a delineated activity as such,<sup>293</sup> and they offer no definition targeting the word directly. Instead, the word is

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<sup>292</sup> Cf. Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness." 176.

<sup>293</sup> What we have in mind here are practices described elsewhere in Christian contexts, for example, as practices revealed by Rönnegård when he demonstrates how Plato's and Epicurus's usages of *meletē* are echoed in the earliest Christian practices of ascetic life. What the Greek and the Christian usages of the words have in common, which is Rönnegård's chief point, is that *meletē* pertains to a "discursive and concentrative way of digesting and interiorizing a message, to *overcome distractions* and eventually reach the final goal, whether that be liberty, happiness, virtue or, in Christianity, salvation" (Rönnegård, "Melete in Early Christian Ascetic Texts." 79. italics added.) One early saying from Christian life brought to light by Rönnegård, then, is a story stemming from the earliest sources (400–600 A.D.) pertaining to how *meletē* describes how a younger brother is set to repeat the words "Son of God, have mercy on me" whenever being approached by a demon. Although the brother does not understand the words, so goes the saying, the prayer is held to have the intended effect, inasmuch as the *beast* would understand the word, and thus keep away from the life of the brother. Other sayings describe how specific psalms and Bible verses are used as objects of the practice of *meletē*. (ibid. 81.) What goes unnoticed in Rönnegård's cultural study, however, is the

brought into use more or less discretely, first and foremost in passages wherein the authors describe their procedures of writing and investigation. Augustine and Descartes' meditations are *written* meditations; they are ways of proceeding into topics of existential difficulty by writing.

Curiously, the word meditation is used in ways linking it not only to the activity of writing but also to the ways the authors expect their texts to be *read*. That is, when meditation describes the course of actions taken by the writers, it does so in ways appealing to the reader. The written meditations are ways of leading the readers into the topics as they progress. In hermeneutical terms, the word meditation emerges as a kind of application moment. The meditations are where texts and human reality meet, as it were, both for the authors and the reader – it designates the application of the shared text to the singular human situation. In one and the same textural gesture, the word reflects back on the concrete situation of the author striving with the difficulties of the topics, and prospectively towards the situation of the reader. The *I* of the writer is exemplary: the author represents the human gaze on the world.

The fact that what counts as meditation is fully entangled with literacy for Augustine and Descartes can be seen against the background of the history of the word displayed in the previous section. Augustine and Descartes do not thematize the words *medesthai* and *meletē*,<sup>294</sup> yet the way they relate meditation and writing, as a matter of course, reflects a hermeneutical continuum in the history of the word with the philosophical tradition. In ways that apparently need no explanation for Augustine and Descartes, meditation and reading are just aspects of the same procedures of truthful investigations. No less profound, however, is the moments of vital challenge and self-care entangled with the same history of meditation. In Homer's poetic scenes, *medesthai* is used in contexts wherein Achilles and Odysseus's men are threatened. They must take care of themselves. Otherwise, they will release forces of unknown power and danger. A related imperative evolved in Plato's *meletē*: the philosophical soul must take care of itself to avoid the moral decay of being an irresponsible soul void of the proper self-distance of *logos*. Though the ontological foundation has altered drastically between the Attic and the Christian situation, the moment of existential challenge and self-care is also prolonged in the meditations of Augustine and Descartes. Meditation is not associable with any other undertaking of everyday life. It concerns issues of vital importance; it is a way the human self cares for itself in a world filled with the potential pains of being on the wrong track – morally, eidetically, and existentially considered.

Strikingly new with Augustine and Descartes (compared to Homer and Plato) is the personal tone of the authors in their written communications with the readers. In ways that are absent in Plato's spokesman Socrates, for instance, Augustine and Descartes often write in a direct speech addressed to the reader. In an open and direct communication with the reader, the meditative quest evolves the tone of an honest and

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*philosophical-metaphorical* aspects of Plato's *meletē*. Thus also unvisited is the shift in meaning occurring between Plato's usage of the word, and the ascetic Christian practices which he describes as *meletē*.

<sup>294</sup> In a brief note, Guy Stroumsa relates Augustine's *meditation* with *meletē*. *Meletē*, in the Augustinian context, describes the personal study of the Scripture as a constant prayer between silence and speech. Guy Stroumsa, "Augustine and Books", in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012). 156.

fallible human / seeking knowledge, guidance and even comfort in studying the Word of God (Augustine) or the principles of objective knowledge (Descartes). "[D]ear reader," we read in Augustine's *The Trinity*, "whenever you are as certain about something as I am go forward with me; whenever you stick equally fast seek with me; whenever you have gone wrong come back with me[.]"<sup>295</sup> As readers, we are invited to "keep up with me, while I am perforce picking my way through dark and difficult places."<sup>296</sup> Though less inviting, perhaps, Descartes underlines a similar necessity of accompanying him in the task of clarification. "I seek to be read by none, except those who will be able and willing to meditate seriously alongside of me,"<sup>297</sup> we read in the *Meditations*. "I think myself entitled to reject out of hand and to regard as of no account whatever the judgments passed on my work by those who have refused to meditate along with me and who stick with their own prior objections."<sup>298</sup> Inviting or not, participation<sup>299</sup> in the written word are crucial to both authors. To be led by the word<sup>300</sup> the reader has to come along by his or her own free, human will.

Let us follow the word meditation within Augustine's and Descartes' writings. What forms of subjects emerge around this word? What contours of a human self emerge indirectly through the various challenges being encountered?

#### a. *Verbum Cordis*

As is suggested by the title of Augustine's book, *The Trinity*, the course of Augustine evolves as a contemplation on the Christian trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Trinity consists of three factors of equal ontological purport. It expresses not a subordination of the Son to his Father, or a subordination of the Holy Word to God, but rather an intrinsic theological belongingness of all three. Meditation, in this context, will come to mean to dwell upon, to seek, find and reveal for the reader how the truth of God *speaks* in the Holy Word.

Augustine uses the word meditation only once in *The Trinity*. It appears in the very first chapter of the book, wherein the author (as he puts it) "comes to terms with his readers and outlines his method."<sup>301</sup> This context is informative, not only due to the personal contact thus sought to be established between writer and reader but also because Augustine here launches off with a warning of three distinguished errors frequently undertaken by people who seek an understanding of the Biblical God. The first error, we read, is to deduce *by analogy* the nature of God by means of self-experienced standards. Perceptual experience

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<sup>295</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*. 1.3.5. / 68.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. 1.3.6. / 69.

<sup>297</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Preface. 8.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. *Second Objection*. 102.

<sup>299</sup> Alluded to here is Gadamer's discussion of *participatio*, for instance in Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 115.

<sup>300</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 271c–d.

<sup>301</sup> Subtext to Chapter 1 in the English version currently being read.

*as such* are not the means to understand the nonperceivable yet omnipresent God. In Augustine's words: the readers cannot "transfer what they have observed about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things, which they would measure by the standard of what they experience through the senses of the body or learn by natural human intelligence, lively application, and technical skill."<sup>302</sup>

The second error is related, also stressing the inadequacy of direct analogy. Here, the reader is warning of the error of humanizing the nature of God, conceiving Him as a form of human being, which is to say, ascribing to Him "the nature and moods of the human spirit."<sup>303</sup> The third error pertains to understanding the human facticity correctly when faced with the altogether superior being of God. The error evolves in the lack of humbleness and acknowledgment of what it is to be a final being. The error is to try to reach the timeless and unchangeable nature of God, we read, as people do when they try to "climb above the created universe, so ineluctably subject to change, and raise their regard to the unchanging substance that is God."<sup>304</sup> What all these errors have in common, writes Augustine, is that the people here conceive of God via paths blocking genuine understanding. Too categorically they assert their presumptuous opinions. And, Augustine adds, "rather than change a misconceived opinion they have defended, they prefer to leave it uncorrected."<sup>305</sup> In other words, the people inclined to commit the three erroneous approaches to God are not only *wrong*; they even seem to lack the ability to understand that they do wrong and hence correct their ways of thinking and proceeding into the topics.

In the framework of these normative remarks, meditation – qua intense reading – soon enters as the better alternative to the erroneous paths leading anywhere but to God. Rather than being blocked in understanding by categorical opinions, the person seeking knowledge of God should take up a broad and honest study not only of the Bible but also of the commentary literature.<sup>306</sup> That is, to furnish a mind genuinely open to God and the mystery of the Trinity the reader must situate his or her personal study of the Bible within a larger discursive field of other readings. Though not seeking outside the field of faith, the reader should actively challenge his or her opinions, reading literature that not univocally supports the pre-established opinions but that questions them. To perform genuinely "penetrating investigations" of the Bible, so Augustine puts it, "it is useful to have several books by several authors, even on the same subjects, differing in style though not in faith, so that the matter itself reaches as many as possible, some in this way others in that."<sup>307</sup> At the same time, Augustine underlines, the discursive orientation cannot be a mere intellectual exercise. Seeking knowledge of God cannot come unaccompanied by a personal devotion, and an actual self-scrutinizing pondering on the Word.

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<sup>302</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1.1.1. / 65.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.* 1.1.1. / 65.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.* 1.1.1. / 65.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.* 1.1.1. / 65.

<sup>306</sup> On Augustine and his intense and committed relationship with *books*, see Stroumsa, "Augustine and Books."

<sup>307</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*. 1.3.5. / 68.

Exemplified by the personal attitude laid bare by the author, then, Augustine expresses how the Word demands an intense and all-embracing attention towards the law of God, in sustained and devoted meditating on the Bible. Let us read in full the passage from which we have already introduced the first sentence (Section 1):

All I am concerned with is to *meditate* [*meditabor*] on the law of the Lord, if not *day and night*, at least at whatever odd moments I can snatch (Ps 1:2), and to prevent forgetfulness from running away with my meditations [*meditationes*] by tying them down on paper. [...] trusting in God's mercy that he will make me preserving in all truths I am sure of, and that *if in anything I am otherwise minded he will reveal this also to me himself* (Phil 3:15), either by hidden inspirations and remainders, or by his own manifest utterances, or by discussions with the brethren. That is what I pray for, that is my deposit and my heart's desire, placed in the keeping of one who is a sufficiently reliable custodian of goods he himself has given and redeemer of promises he himself has made.<sup>308</sup>

We see how citations to specific passages of the Bible make Augustine's text a hermeneutical exposition in a sense of *Auslegung*. The written meditation situates Augustine's text *in* the Bible, so to speak; it ponders the Word of God from within the written word. At the same time, we see how meditation signals a practice of holding the author *in persona* on the path of God. Meditating "day and night" is *the* adequate path moving with the truth of the Word. Meditation is not a delineated practice to be taken and put away at will, but a way of living. The time of meditation is *day and night*; the meditator *always* ponders the Word of God. Meditation, we can say, is the practice of a mind encountering the troubles of human life, seeking a way to stay on the right path. Meditation is not an intellectual activity; it is to follow the heart's desire.

Against the background of the three errors, the meditator moves towards God not by committing false analogies on the nature of God (first and second error), and not by thinking too highly of himself as a final being (third error). Rather, the meditator moves forward *only* on the grounds of a humble and heartfelt desire to understand the Word. If God reveals himself in the utterance of the Bible or the more hidden inspirations and reminders, the heartfelt occupation of the meditator is to try to hold on to these truths. Writing complements the reading meditation. Tying the emerging insight down on paper prevents forgetfulness from doing away with the insights.<sup>309</sup>

The "heart's desire" used in the current passage leads us to a fuller understanding of Augustine's meditation. In our context, the "heart's desire" is interesting because of an apparent relationship to Plato's *meletē* as a "learning by heart" or "*engraving* on one's mind."<sup>310</sup> Both *meletē* and *meditation* put the increasing of self-knowledge on a par with the reading and writing something within oneself. In the more local context of Augustine, the "heart's desire" is interesting because it links the first chapter of *The Trinity*

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid. 1.3.5. / 69. Italics original.

<sup>309</sup> The form of Christian meditation, here described in the outset of Augustine, is today reflected in the meditative practice known as *lectio divina*, or sacred reading. Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading; The Ancient Art of Lectio Divinia* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Trumph, 1996).

<sup>310</sup> *Critias* 113b. Cf. Rönnegård, "Melete in Early Christian Ascetic Texts." 87.

to the last chapter; more specifically, to Chapter 15.3 discussing the *verbum cordis* [Word of the Heart]. Though not speaking about meditation in the latter context, Augustine extrapolates here on the nonintellectual form of understanding just indicated by meditation. What the "heart's desire" must gain contact with, we can say, is ultimately the language of the heart. This is an *inner* language in more than one sense. It is in the human, but ultimately also a language evolving in language. It is in every historically conditioned language of man, yet it is independent of the empirical status of these languages.

In the center of this historically new conception of language<sup>311</sup> stand the allegories and parables of the Bible. These allegories, writes Augustine, are the ways God communicates that there is a likeness between Him and man – a likeness that is "an obscure one and difficult to penetrate."<sup>312</sup> Crucially, one chief aspect of this difficulty of likeness already evolves in what is the title of Augustine's book. In a crucial sense, the Trinity – and the fact that the Son of God once became human – is impossible to understand for the human being. It is an enigma in the strongest sense of the word. It is an enigma in the form of obscure allegory<sup>313</sup> – obscure not by chance, but obscure through and through.

Now, the point of vital importance for Augustine is this: the enigmatic character of God's expressions must neither be rejected nor tried to be "solved" as such (in analogies) but rather *affirmed* as genuinely unsolvable. The similarities between the human and God evolve in the enigmas themselves. Thus, instead of seeking for a likeness using schematic or direct comparison between humans and God, the human has to see itself mirrored in the enigma brought to man by the Word.<sup>314</sup> Put differently, instead of seeking for a likeness by transferring what one has observed about bodily things to the incorporeal and spiritual being of God, the human has to see the relationship between God and itself mirrored in the impenetrable allegories of the Bible.

The allegories of the Bible *are* literarily speaking the Word of God, writes Augustine. "The reason why it is called the Word of God is that it conveys divine not human teaching."<sup>315</sup> Consequently, the human must not approach the teaching *as if* it was an obscurely written *human* teaching. This would be to simplify the teaching of God. Instead, according to Augustine, the human must recognize itself as created in the image of God by personally recognizing his or her human being in the enigmas of the Bible. That is, the human must see that the enigma of God is the enigma of mankind. The human is transformed into the same image of God when it sees itself in the *speculum* of God's enigmatic words, writes Augustine. In the enigma of the Trinity man sees "him by whom we are made by means of this image, which we ourselves are, as through a mirror,"<sup>316</sup> Being mirrored in the enigma of God is "not looking out from a *specula*,"<sup>317</sup> we

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<sup>311</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode.*, Section 3,2,b, *Sprache und Verbum*.

<sup>312</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*. 15.0.16. / 409.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.* 15.3.15. / 408.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.* 15.3.15. / 408.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.* 15.11.20. / 412.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.* 15.3.14. / 407.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.* 15.3.14. / 407.

read. That is, it is not looking into a mirror from an external lookout point,<sup>318</sup> as if the human possessed a standpoint external to the law of God. Rather, being mirrored in the Word is done from within the Word. The human always already *lives* the enigmatic likeness with God, yet he or she has to discover it by seeing him- or herself mirrored in the enigma. Meditation, we can say, is to study the *speculum* of the Word. It is to follow the heart's desire with sustained and thorough attention to the enigmatic likeness between God and the human, as the likeness is conveyed in the Word.

Let us see how the *verbum cordis* belongs to the picture. The Word emerging for the honest reader that genuinely ponders and affirms the enigmas of the Bible – by seeing itself reflected in the enigmas – is the language of the heart. This language is a silent language. "Even if no words are spoken, the man who is thinking is [...] uttering in his heart."<sup>319</sup> Man has two sorts of mouths, writes Augustine; one is the mouth of the body, the other is the mouth of the heart. In a crucial sense, the utterances of the heart are *prior* to the actual thoughts or the utterances of the other mouth. The *verbum cordis* is the preformed understanding – an understanding *lived* before it is *known*. *Verbum cordis* concerns things that "we are aware of even when we are not thinking of them."<sup>320</sup> By the same token, *verbum cordis* evolves a fundamental unity of thinking, speaking, and seeing.

[J]ust because we say that thoughts are utterances of the heart, it does not mean that they are not also seeings, arising when they are true from the seeing of awareness. When things happen outwardly through the body, speech is one thing, sight is another; but when we think inwardly they are both one and the same; just as hearing and seeing are two things that differ from each other among the senses of the body, while in the consciousness it is not one thing to see and another to hear.<sup>321</sup>

*Verbum cordis* is what creates unity in consciousness. Outwardly, things might emerge differently to sight and hearing. Inwardly, by contrast, there is unity. Independent of actual thoughts and verbalizations, there is an ahistorical order evolving in the organization of human consciousness.

In the Introduction, we said that Augustine initiates what Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies later will pursue and accomplish as the paths of *Lesen* and *perception*. In this respect, the current passage of *The Trinity* is of pivotal importance. The *verbum cordis* is a unity given both in reading and perception. The reading has been implied all the way, as we know. The unity of the *verbum cordis* is what the heartfelt desire of meditation finds in the Bible and the commentary literature. The meditator simultaneously finds it in the books and him or herself. The silent language of the heart is the *shared* language, not only between humans but ultimately also between man and God.

The recourse to perception is evolved in what we just said: the silent utterances of the heart make the body proper into a locus of a synthesizing order. *Verbum cordis* is the evolving unity between thinking,

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid.15.3.14. / 407.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.15.3.17. / 410.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.15.3.17. / 410.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.15.3.18. / 410–411.

sensing, and consciousness in general. As just indicated from the reading perspective, the perceptual unity expands far beyond the perceiving human body. The unity evolves in books, and with its ontological bond to God, the silent language of the body proper even contains moments of the ontological order of the perceived world.

As we read a little further in *The Trinity*, we gain a more detailed conception of what we are saying. According to Augustine, the Word is not – and cannot be – tied to *one* empirical language. The silent language of the heart is effective in *all* languages:

If anyone [...] can understand how a word can be, not only before it is spoken aloud but even before the images of its sound are turned over in thought – this is the word that belongs to no language, that is to none of what are called the languages of the nations [...] If anyone, I say, can understand this, he can already see through his mirror and in this enigma some likeness of that Word of which it is said.<sup>322</sup>

God is everywhere, in an ahistorical way, whereas the language of man is determined by time and place, customs and human varieties. Yet, to utter something verbally in a given language is always already to be *in* the evolving likeness of God mirrored in the Word:

For when we utter something true, that is, when we utter what we know, a word is necessarily born from the knowledge that we hold in the memory, a word that is absolutely the same kind of thing that we hold in the memory, a word that is absolutely the same kind of thing as the knowledge it is born from. It is the thought formed from the thing we know that is the word which we utter in the heart, a word that is neither Greek nor Latin nor any other language; but when it is necessary to convey the knowledge in the language of those we are speaking to, some sign is adopted to signify this word. And usually a sound, sometimes a gesture is presented, the one to their ears, the other to their eyes, in order that bodily signs may make the word we carry in our minds known to their bodily senses. What after all is gesticulating but a way of speaking visibly?<sup>323</sup>

We see how the body proper is intertwined with language, both in the silent sense and in the spoken sense. The gestures of the body *speak*. They are visible expressions carrying out what we are aware of even when we are not thinking of them.<sup>324</sup>

Augustine extrapolates what he means here by saying that signs are adopted to signify words with recourse to letters. Letters are "signs of vocal sounds, while in the vocal sounds of our speech are signs of the things which we are thinking of."<sup>325</sup> The crux of a sign, either verbal, written, or gestural, is to *ignite* something shared in the hearer, reader, or perceiver. "[T]he word which makes a sound outside is the sign of the word which lights up inside, and it is this latter that primarily deserves the name of 'word'."<sup>326</sup> We note this: it is the *inner* being lightened up by the words, which *primarily* deserves the name *word*. The

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid. 15,3.19. / 411.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. 15,3.19. /411.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid. 15.3.17. / 410. Italics added.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid. 15.3.19. / 411.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid. 15.3.19. / 411.



inner, shared, and silent dimension is the prime dimension of man and the dimension where language in the proper sense of the word evolves.

[...] neither uttered in sound nor thought or in the likeness of sound, which necessarily belongs to some language, but which precedes all the signs that signify it and is begotten of the knowledge abiding in the consciousness, when this knowledge is uttered exactly as it is. When it is uttered vocally or by some bodily sign, it is not uttered just exactly as it is, but as it can be seen or heard through the body.<sup>327</sup>

No expression of the body can utter the inner language *exactly as it is*. It can only be seen or heard *through* the body – which in some sense implies a diminishing of the knowledge that we hold in the memory, as Augustine put it in the citation above. The evolving likeness of man and God as it expresses itself in the heart of man is *potentiality* more than *actuality*. It is a knowledge that begets [creates or causes] a "knowledge abiding in the consciousness." The knowledge as such is unattainable as such, yet it is what constantly forms and shapes the human expressivity from within.

In the nonrealizable potentiality, always already is effective in human thought and language, is the real enigma of the Word. When uttered, the Word comes to expression only as it accidentally can be actualized through the body. "[I]f you wish to arrive at some kind of likeness of the Word of God, however unlike it may be in many ways, do not look at that word of ours which sounds in the ears, neither when it is uttered vocally nor when it is thought of silently,"<sup>328</sup> Augustine writes. The true Word of God, and hence the likeness between God and man, *cannot* be expressed by means of the body:

The words of all spoken languages are thought of silently, and people run over songs in their minds while their mouths remain silent; and it is not only the number of syllables either, but the notes of the melodies as well, all of them bodily realities pertaining to the bodily sense called hearing, that the thoughts of those who are thinking them over, and silently pondering them all, find ready to hand in their own kind of nonbodily images. *But we must go beyond all these and come to see that the word of man through whose likeness of a sort the Word of God may somehow or another be seen in an enigma.*<sup>329</sup>

*Going beyond* the accidental expressions of human expressions is to ponder the enigma of man and God. The *verbum cordis* is the unsolvable enigma; or is the honest and heartfelt acknowledgment of the enigma. In the logic of what we have seen, nonintellectual and heartfelt occupation of meditation is the *only* way to gain contact with this profound dimension in the life of man. Meditation is *the* path to the inner dimension of man; beyond what can be conceived just by being silent (and, for instance, running over songs in the mind). Pondering the enigmas of the Bible is a path to a silent language more profound than

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid. 15.3.19. / 412.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. 15.3.19. / 412

<sup>329</sup> Ibid. 15.3.19. / 412.

accidental silence. This silent language is universal, yet personal. Only the heartfelt, personal and humble approach to the enigmas can hope to gain contact with its resources.

Now the initiatives launched by Augustine will be pursued in various contexts in the subsequent parts and sections.<sup>330</sup> With Gadamer, we will (Subsection 4a) extrapolate on the indications specific to language given by Augustine, whereas with Merleau-Ponty (Subsection 5a) we will expand on Augustine's idea that the body proper can be the locus of a synthesizing order transgressing its individuality. Currently concluding what we so far discussed, however, we paraphrase what we have seen in the outset of Augustine's meditation and *verbum cordis* as follows.

For the meditating subject of Augustine's, any form of human understanding, everyday perception and communication with others are constantly determined and overthrown by a unitary, ontological trans-subjective order, articulated (in the passages we have read) as the *verbum cordis*. This inner language simultaneously preforms thinking, perception and silent or verbal expressions from the inside. The inner language conveys the ontological likeness to God and overthrows the subject from the inside of their being – if not directly, for instance in the heartfelt engagement with Bible studies, then indirectly, in the inspirations and reminders evolving in the everyday perceptual life. The *verbum cordis* expresses the ontological likeness between man and the divine, in an all-encompassing order.

Qua inconceivable, we can say, this likeness represents a closeness to God, and an insurmountable distance to him simultaneously. God cannot be grasped; he cannot be reached. The best to be hoped for, for the Augustinian subject, is to be *on the way* to God through meditation. By the same token, the inconceivable nature of God is the inconceivable nature of the human self. The enigma of God is not outside the subject, but inside. In an important sense, the subject is as inconceivable to itself as God is. The human is just as much cut off from a full grasp of itself as he or she is from God. The enigma of God is in the subject; it permeates everything he or she does, thinks, or says. In this perspective, meditating on the Word of God is simultaneously to meditate on oneself. Being on the way to God is to be on the way towards the enigmatic dimension silently evolving in all self-understanding. Meditating on the *verbum cordis* is to be on the way to the limited yet open potentiality in human understanding given with the human condition. Meditation is not an intellectual process, but rather a process involving the giving up of false and grandiose conceptions of one's likeness with God. Only by affirming the genuine enigma does something "light up inside," as Augustine puts it. According to him, this lightening is what primarily deserves the name of *word*.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> With Gadamer, we will in Section 4a extrapolate the indications specific to *language* given in what we now have seen in Augustine, whereas Section 5a, with Merleau-Ponty, will pursue the idea of the body proper as the locus of a synthesizing order.

<sup>331</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*. 15.3.19. / 411.

## b. Point of *Cogito*

We turn towards the meditating subject of Descartes by accentuating a line from Augustine. We just saw how the meditating *I* of Augustine seeks *inwards*, scrutinizing the orders of his singular being in quest for a truth surpassing his singularity of human being. Now, although it would be wrong to call Augustine a dualist in the direct Cartesian sense, his initiative can be said to point in the direction later evolving into the Cartesian *cogito*. Read a little differently to the way we just did (by emphasizing the unity of reading and everyday perception), Augustine's quest towards an inner dimension of man beyond the accidental orders of human everyday life can be read as a recourse to an inner subjectivity of a mind cut off from its fuller embodied reality.<sup>332</sup> Read thus, the meditating *I* withdraws from the factual situation of books and perception privileging an *inner man*, located beneath or beyond human facticity. The meditating *I* privileges not mundane reality as it is, so to speak, but rather dwells upon a truth, which resides in the core of its own being.<sup>333</sup> The ignition of the inner, of which Augustine spoke, is an ignition of a consciousness turned not toward the perceived world, but principally speaking away from it.

Whether or not this is an adequate way of reading Augustine, the philosopher Descartes is, in any regard, the one that radicalizes the idea of withdrawal into an inner, independent dimension of subjectivity. As is well known, Descartes' *Meditations* set out not as an interpretation of the Word of God, as Augustine, but as a response to the historically new ideals of objective and mathematical truth. The chief aim of the Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* is to establish an absolute secure foundation of mind; an Archimedic *point* for thought – "firm and amovable"<sup>334</sup> – principally free of doubt. Part of the aim culminates in the now no less famous words of the *Second Objection*: "I can finally decide that this proposition *ego sum, ego existo* whenever it is uttered by me, or conceived in my mind, is necessarily true."<sup>335</sup> In other words, the moment wherein thought reflects back on itself is an irreducible moment of existence and hence, a ground onto which knowledge can be built. The firm ground of objective truth is in the intrinsic order of consciousness – principally independent of both body and the perceptual situation in general.

In our context, Descartes is interesting as an important contributor to the cultural connotation between meditation and a gathered mind in the sense of control and epistemic stringency.<sup>336</sup> For Descartes, the existential honesty of the meditations of the first philosophy, and the respect for God and scientific objectivity are aspects within the same attitude. "[T]his is all I was intending to prove in these *Meditations*," he writes, namely that the "solid and clear [...] knowledge of our mind and of God" are "the

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<sup>332</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Preface ixix. Cf. Section 5a below.

<sup>333</sup> Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen: eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie*. 161. Cf. Endnote 21 in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 493. Cf. Section 5a below.

<sup>334</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. 17.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Section 2. We return to the point in Section 11 below.

most certain and evident of all reasons that can be grasped by human intelligence.<sup>337</sup> For Descartes, it is self-evident, in the strong sense of the word, that meditations seeking the firm ground of knowledge must be executed with a controlled and stringent attention that overviews the whole procedure. That is, when thought reflects back on itself in the Cartesian meditation, described is a consciousness that perceives itself clearly and distinctly, and exclusively with the mind's eye [*oculi mentis*]. "[I]n this act of knowledge [*cognitione*] there is nothing other than a clear and distinct perception [*clara et distincta perceptio*] of what I affirm to be the case."<sup>338</sup> In strong terms, objective *truth* is thus put on a strong par with the clarity of perception. *Clarity* and *falsity* are for Descartes mutually exclusive terms. Just as much as the idea that unclear and indistinct perceptions can be *true*, the idea that *cogito* perceives something clearly and distinctly *and* false involves a contradiction in terms. *Only* knowledge executed as clear and distinct perception *is* and *can be* true.<sup>339</sup> "[T]herefor," Descartes concludes in the opening of the *Third Meditation*, "I seem already to be able to lay down, as a general rule, that everything that I very clearly and distinctively perceive is true."<sup>340</sup>

The paradigmatic example, which illustrates the apparent and (for Descartes) altogether obvious role of clarity in the self-reflecting consciousness, is the truth of simple geometry – "for instance, two plus three equals five," as Descartes writes.

[W]henever I turn my attention to the things themselves that I perceive very clearly, I am so thoroughly convinced by them, that I cannot help exclaiming: Let whoever can, deceive me as much as he likes: still he can never bring it about that I am nothing; or that one day it will be true that I have never existed, when it is true now that I exist, or that perhaps two plus three added together are more or less than five; or that such things can be true in which I recognize an obvious contradiction.<sup>341</sup>

What the subject *knows* as clear and distinct *cannot* be taken away from the subject. The obvious nature of the truth perceived is self-sufficient. No explanation and further interpretation are needed. By the same token, the clear and distinct perceptions of the mind's eye are constitutive for the subject. Descartes' subject is formed – or gathered – when executing the rational principles of knowledge. The *doing* of the mind's eye is unitary, and so is the subject executing the unity of the mind's eye.

We expand on what we say here in contrast to Augustine's meditating subject. In the previous section, we saw how Augustine's meditating subject is a discursive; it is a hermeneutical self expanding the knowledge of itself through books and discussions with others. The subject is principally overthrown by the Bible and encouraged to question its self-experienced truths in reading and discussions. Augustine's meditating subject is a nonintellectual subject. In an important sense, the Augustinian subject *knows* the

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<sup>337</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies. Synopsis*. 12.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.* 26.

unitary language of the heart only by giving up the idea of grasping it in a strict and unambiguous sense. By contrast, Descartes' meditating subject is radically nondiscursive. The eidetic statement that *two plus three equals five* needs no discussion. Qua clarified expression for a mind's eye, we can say, the language of mathematics is self-explaining and self-sufficient. By the same token, the subject accomplishing this truth is rational through and through, at least to the degree that clarity and distinction are accomplished. Strictly speaking, Descartes' subject needs only what itself *sees* clearly and distinctively. The human possesses a natural intelligence,<sup>342</sup> Descartes writes in the *Discourse on the Method*; and an inborn ability to "listen to reason."<sup>343</sup> Pursuing the path of self-apparent clarity is to accomplish itself as a human being regarding importance and excellency.<sup>344</sup>

In an important sense, Augustine's subject apparently accepts and embraces the nature of facticity in meditation, in ways explicitly rejected by Descartes. Where Augustine's meditation subject gives itself over to God, with all its imperfect and ambiguous human history, Descartes's subject seeks for a point in consciousness, which, ultimately speaking, has no embodied history. The biological fact that the human has to pass through childhood and adolescence to become an adult rational being is a factor that potentially threatens the ability to listen to reason. Ontogenetic history makes the proper standard of reason *almost* unattainable, we read in the *Discourse on the Method*:

[B]ecause we all have to pass through a state of infancy to manhood, and have been of necessity, for a length of time, governed by our desires and preceptors (whose dictates were frequently conflicting, while neither perhaps always counseled us for the best) [...] it is almost impossible that our judgments can be so correct and solid as they would have been, had our reason been mature from the moment of our birth, and had we always been guided by this alone.<sup>345</sup>

In other words, the course of life precludes the natural intelligence given by birth by creating habits of dissociations of a nongathered mind. The banal fact that man is dependent on others in the years of nascent consciousness is a serious hindrance for the human to accomplish full clarity of mind. The accumulation of experience undermines judgment: it makes judgment subjective in the negative, relativist sense of the word. Consciousness associated with the ontogenetic history is a consciousness attached to investments of lived life experience. To be rational in the proper sense of the word, thus, consciousness has to overcome its own history. To be *objective*, the subject has to rise above its own facticity.

Against the background of the *Discourse on the Method*,<sup>346</sup> the task of Descartes' meditating subject is to transgress its own history and find in him/herself a natural light of clarity given as a potentiality

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<sup>342</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse On The Method Of Rightly Conducting The Reason, And Seeking Truth In The Sciences* (Infomotions, 2001). 5.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>346</sup> *Meditation* is in this book used only once, in a passage wherein the word loosely describes the discipline needed in the repeated and prolonged effort to see things *right*. *Ibid.* 11.

of mind. The only hope for reason is to relocate its natural intelligence, using clarified standards of *how* consciousness uses itself in self-reflection. "[T]o be possessed of a vigorous mind is not enough," Descartes underlines; "the prime requisite is rightly to apply it."<sup>347</sup> The higher the potential of insight and truth, the higher is the potential of error and faults. "The greatest minds, as they are capable of the highest excellence, are open likewise to the greatest aberrations: and those who travel very slowly may yet make the greatest progress, provided they keep always to the straight road, than those who, while running, forsake it."<sup>348</sup> Only the consciousness that follows rational *hodos*<sup>349</sup> can hope to be on the way to truth proper.

In ways that are fully compatible with the clarity of the *Meditations*, the *Discourse on the Method* evolves the path of rationality as a path of radical self-criticism. The respect of objective truth falls together with an existential honesty willing to put in question every mode of pre-established truth. To use one's mind *right*, whether vigorous or not, the mind has to be a self-critical consciousness committed *only* to truth and the clarity of the self-experienced. The author himself witnesses the readiness to self-critique: "I have never contemplated anything higher than the reformation of my opinions, and basing them on a foundation wholly my own,"<sup>350</sup> he writes. In fact, the *I* of Descartes' analysis is himself the best example of a self-critical consciousness executing the honesty being praised for being the prime characteristic of man *in general*. "I have never met with a single critic of my opinion who did not appear to me either less rigorous or less equitable than myself."<sup>351</sup> In the rigorous self-critique evolves the security of foundation for the new objective truth of science.<sup>352</sup> Reason evolves in the self-critical reflection back on itself as a purified and unified consciousness amidst the variety of experiences.

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>349</sup> The *hodos* in *methodos* means *way*. (Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*. Curiously, the words *meditation* and *method* share the etymon *me-*, indicating the finding of *middle* in the meaning of an exactness of practice. (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com)) The word *method* evolves also *meta* and *hodos*; *meta* meaning (among other things) "after," "along" "beside", and "with" (Henry Georg Liddel and Robert Scott, "An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon," ([www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu): Perseus, 2014. (*meta* is also the etymon for the German *mit* (Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Freiburg: Carl J. Trübner, 1899).

<sup>350</sup> Descartes, *Discourse On The Method Of Rightly Conducting The Reason, And Seeking Truth In The Sciences*. 7.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid. 28–29.

<sup>352</sup> As pointed out by Gadamer, the *rules* traditionally associated with the name *Descartes* are not actually proscribed by Descartes. (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 464.) That is, Descartes proscribes *himself* certain rules, by declaring that these are proscribed to *others*: "My present design is not to teach the method which each ought to follow for the right conduct of reason, but solely to describe the way in which I have endeavored to conduct my own." (Descartes, *Discourse On The Method Of Rightly Conducting The Reason, And Seeking Truth In The Sciences*. 2.) Thus, the *method* of Descartes *meditation* evolves not in the rules of conduct to be imitated *directly*, but rather in the very appeal to the subjective *inner*. This opens an interesting perspective on the role played by the *written* demonstrations of Descartes; i.e. how he appeals to human reason in and through the demonstrations of a meditating *I*. On the role played by writing in Descartes, see Seip, *Form og fornuft - En filosofisk jakt på estetikkens formbegrep*. Chapter Four. 89 ff.



## Part Two. Writing and Perception

In Part One, we saw how the history of the word meditation expresses a tension between reading and perception within the Western philosophical tradition. The issues and questions of self-knowledge surrounding the words *meletē*, *medesthai*, meditation and self-knowledge are neatly entangled with literacy and questions on how to write in ways adequately describing the perceiving human being. The aim of Part Two is to expand on the issues examined here by exploring the contemporary philosophies of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. We will not seek a full-fledged hermeneutical analysis of *meletē*, *medesthai*, and meditation based on philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology, but rather sketch out how these philosophies typically situate themselves in light of tradition. The methodological motivation is to see how the history of meditation is reflected in philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology through the ways that questions regarding writing and perception are brought into the systematic and self-reflective philosophies of our contemporaries. The philosophical motivation is to gain additional perspectives on the following question, which has been asked in the Western philosophical tradition for a long time: what initiates moral life in the first place – is it writing or perception?

Part Two is organized as follows. Section 4a will begin with Gadamer's path of *Lesen* based upon his reading of Augustine. The goal is to situate Gadamer's way of reconciling the tendencies of dualism in the Western philosophical tradition in the hermeneutical initiative launched by Augustine. Section 4b will pursue a clue given in the context of Plato. Here, by following how Plato's *meletē* typically can be seen as echoed in philosophical hermeneutics, the goal will be to indicate how an analogous form of self-distance advocated in *meletē* can be seen in important and typical philosophemes of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode (Bildung and facticity)*. Section 4c will expand on the hermeneutical notions of *Anstoß* and *Text*



in light of Gadamer's active encounters with Augustine and Plato. Turning next to what we have called Merleau-Ponty's path of *perception*, we will follow the same sequential order as in Gadamer to illuminate how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy responds differently to the same issues handed over by tradition.

Section 5a will start by situating *Phenomenology of Perception* loosely in the Augustinian tradition. The goal is not to force an analogy not elaborated by Merleau-Ponty himself but to indicate how the phenomenology of perception already at the outset of tradition is a different enterprise than philosophical hermeneutics. Merleau-Ponty's way of reconciling dualist tendencies in Western thought leads him not into tradition ways analogous to Gadamer, but into a detailed account of embodiment. Section 5b we will seek to demonstrate that Merleau-Ponty typically emphasizes aspects which we (with Homer and Plato) saw belonged to *medesthai*. Here, a guiding difference between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology in terms of *circulation* will be articulated. Somewhat provisionally, circulation will here refer to the circulation of written texts but also of perspectives in the phenomenological sense. The theme of circulation was part of the tradition considered above. We saw (page 53-54) how Plato's metaphor of *writing in the soul* implied recourse to *logoi* not fixed to one situation, but rather comprising a dynamic and flexible feature. In the following, we will indicate how Gadamer's path of *Lesen*, taking paradigmatic recourse to the written word, relates to the potential circulation of perspectives in texts, whereas Merleau-Ponty locates an analogous circulation of perspectives in perception.

#### 4. Path of *Lesen* (Gadamer)

How are issues handed over with the Western philosophical history regarding the word *meditation* reflected in philosophical hermeneutics? Coincidentally or not, by pursuing this question, we come across many of the rationales Gadamer uses when embarking on the philosophical path of *Lesen*. Let us begin by evoking how Gadamer understands Augustine's nondualist initiative of language in the meditations of *The Trinity*.

##### a. *Verbum Cordis* Revisited. The Ahistorical More of *Sprache*

To understand Gadamer's reading of Augustine, it is fruitful to begin with the philosophical-hermeneutical motivation elaborated in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Gadamer's recourse to Augustine is explicitly integrated into a larger historical narrative starting with Plato (and continuing through Gadamer's contemporaries). As noted in Section 2a, Gadamer holds that the Attics in general – and Plato is no exception here but rather

an important contributor – suffered from a forgetfulness of language – a *Sprachvergessenheit*.<sup>353</sup> Language as a lived and dynamic order of material and expressive being was not properly seen as such. The concrete, material reality of the *logoi* and the process-element implied in linguistic understanding was either non-existent or considered insignificant compared to omnipresent and ahistorical cosmological order preceding the human inquiry in *logos*. Overall, the concrete and historical emergence of the human word means little.

In Gadamer's reading, Plato's tractate on language, *Cratylus*, expresses such a view on language. In this dialogue, writes Gadamer, the status of the verbal and written *logoi* are outlined by the model of *numbers* more than actual language.<sup>354</sup> This paradigm corresponds with the fact that the material and concrete emergence of words becomes secondary to what is expressed in the words.<sup>355</sup> On a more general level, as Gadamer demonstrates, Plato's conception of language is based on an idealist schema of linguistic life. The ideal order of the *logoi* belongs to a cosmic potentiality, without itself contributing to a process of knowledge as *words*. By the same token, the soul is believed to accomplish itself in a drastically nonlinguistic thought.<sup>356</sup> On the way to *logos*, the soul is assumed to transgress the human language.<sup>357</sup> According to Gadamer, Plato's conception of language corresponds to the Platonic-Pythagorean religious idea of the migration of the soul, based on an essential difference between the soul and the body. The soul retains its independent nature throughout all its embodiment, writes Gadamer, and the separation of the soul from the body was regarded as a purification of the soul.<sup>358</sup> The Greek religious idea of the gods appearing as human reflects the same schema. The gods do not become human in this religious conception but show themselves to humans by wholly retaining their superhuman nature.<sup>359</sup>

According to Gadamer, one historical impact of Augustine, together with Thomas Aquinas, is that language is brought properly into view for the first time in the Western tradition (without these writers, the *Sprachvergessenheit* would have been almost total, in Gadamer's narrative<sup>360</sup>). The impact of Christian theology in general and the *verbum*-teaching of these so-called Church-Fathers<sup>361</sup> in particular, alters both the conception of language and the correlated conception of embodiment. Christianity furnished new models of mind and body, distinct from the Greek religious ideas and models, writes Gadamer.<sup>362</sup> The

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<sup>353</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 422.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid. 417.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. 418.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid. 416.

<sup>357</sup> For a comment on the move from Plato to Augustine in *Wahrheit und Methode*, see Grondin, "Unterwegs zur Rhetorik. Gadamers Schritt von Platon zu Augustin in 'Wahrheit und Methode'."

<sup>358</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 422.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid. 422.

<sup>360</sup> Also after Augustine and Thomas, the *Sprachvergessenheit* in Western philosophy continued, according to Gadamer. Thus, the way language becomes visible in the *Verbum*-teaching is interchangeable neither with the Greek *Logos* nor with ideals later brought in with the Enlightenment. Ibid. 425.

<sup>361</sup> Gadamer frequently refers to Augustine and Thomas only as "die Kirchenväter". Our reading will mainly focus on Augustine, but as we follow Gadamer's reading, we also need to see the two Church-fathers in combination. For a completer and far more detailed discussion of the *verbum*-teaching in philosophical hermeneutics, see Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamers Hermeneutik*.

Trinitarian idea of the Son of God becoming a vulnerable and final man of flesh and blood is a radical idea of embodiment or *incarnation* [*Einkörperung*]. The nondualism of incarnation furnished for an altered view on language. Instead of being submerged in a cosmic potentiality, which is a static and idealist order, the word now emerges as intrinsic to the process of understanding. "[I]m Unterschied zum griechischen Logos gilt: das Wort ist reines Geschehen,"<sup>363</sup> writes Gadamer. Certainly, he adds, the language emerges only indirectly, as a human counterpart of the divine word. The important point is nevertheless that the mystery of the divine unity becomes reflected in the phenomenon of *human* language.<sup>364</sup>

We can approach Gadamer's reading of Augustine using the figure of unity and diversity. In the Greek context of many gods, philosophy (Plato) strives to gather a unity of the thinking mind within the diverse, nongathered ontological situation. In the Christian context with one God, by contrast, thinking strives to find the proper conception of diversity and plurality. From what we saw in *The Trinity*, Augustine's theology faces an apparent paradox in the singular status of the divine Word, the apparently nongathered organization of the Bible in enigmas and parables, the multitude of interpretations of the Bible, and in the diverse status the multiple historically conditioned, national tongues of humans. How can divine unity be reflected in these pluralities, without reducing either the originality of the divine unity or the originality of the diversity? Augustine's solution to the paradoxical situation, we can say, is to invert the problem. The plurality of human languages is itself what mirrors the divine Trinitarian unity. The pluralistic modes expressing the Word of God are themselves an accomplishment of the unity of God. In many ways, Gadamer's Augustine-reading follows the framework of this figure. The manifest human counterpart of the Trinitarian unity emerges nowhere else but in the diverse ways the human tongue interprets the Bible, and in the diverse ways the human understands the enigma of his or her situation.

With the pluralism of human tongues expressing the singular Word, the relationship between the inner language of thinking and the language of the tongue gains a new and altered paradigmatic status, as we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Whereas Plato's inner dialogue with itself (*Theaetetus*) had the status of the emergence of a static ideal order, the Christian conceptions of creation and the Son of God becoming man now conceptualize the concrete and dynamic event of linguistic emergence. "Einmal geschieht ja die Schöpfung durch das Wort Gottes,"<sup>365</sup> Gadamer explains, drawing attention to how the singularity of creating becomes reflected in language. For the Church fathers, creation is mirrored again and again in the process wherein thought breaches into spoken language, he demonstrates. The speaking of the word becomes just as miraculous as the incarnation of God. Man is always already in the word of God, as he opens his mouth and speaks.<sup>366</sup> "Das große Wunder der Sprache liegt nicht darin, daß das Wort Fleisch wird und im äußeren Sein heraustritt, sondern daß das, was heraustritt und sich in der Äußerung äußert, immer

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<sup>363</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 423. Gadamer speaks here at the outset of Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.* 423.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.* 423.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.* 423.

schon Wort ist."<sup>367</sup> This model was unthinkable in the context of Plato, writes Gadamer. It is un-Greek in the sense that the conception of emergence implies no secondary copy of a preexisting ideal order.<sup>368</sup> The emergence is itself the original. Analogous to how nothing about God was lost when he *once* created the world, nothing is lost when the Word emerges in the earthly life of man. "Das Werden, um das es sich [...] handelt, ist kein Werden, aus dem etwas anderes wird,"<sup>369</sup> Gadamer comments. The unity is not *used up* by emergence, as it were. "Weder handelt es sich um eine Abscheidung des einen vom anderen [*kat' apokopen*], noch um eine Minderung des inneren Wortes durch sein Hervorgehen in die Äußerlichkeit, noch überhaupt um ein Anderswerden, so daß das innere Wort verbraucht würde."<sup>370</sup> In the pluralist and historically determined realities of human kind, the ahistorical and unitary truth of God emerges. Or in expanding our reading of Augustine: the heartfelt reading performed by the individual subject is for Augustine a concretized moment wherein the Word of God reveals itself – originally and uniquely at the moment of reading.

With this moment of originality, the figure of unity and pluralism turns into a question of potentiality and actuality. Gadamer's reading accentuates what we saw in the *verbum cordis*. The crux of the Augustinian *verbum* teaching, we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*, is that inner *verbum* is no *real* word as such. No human tongue can fulfill the inner word. The truth of *verbum cordis* is for Augustine independent of any linguistic emergence.<sup>371</sup> The unity of God and His Son, and the enigmatic unity of man and God, we can say, is an order which qua itself is nonaccomplishable. *Verbum cordis/verbum interius*<sup>372</sup> is an order which runs *prior* to the concrete linguistic utterance but as such is not *uttered* as such.

The genius of the *verbum*-teaching, according to Gadamer, evolves in how it preserves a linguistic potentiality while avoiding idealist schemata analogous to Plato's *Cratylus* for instance. The unity of God's Word is not conceived as a nonhistorical ideality presumptively accomplishing itself in an ideal nonlinguistic being, but rather in historical language. In other words, the ahistorical Word of God is not *beyond* history but *in* history – and it is linguistic through and through. Qua potentiality, the Word is the principally nonaccomplishable unity. It is a unity that the human never can understand *all the way* – the human mind will always fall short. Precisely qua limited, however, the Word accomplishes itself as the enigmatic relationship between man and God. Phrased another way, the inner *verbum* – qua a mirror of God *in* a human – accomplishes itself by being essentially nonaccomplishable. As a final counterpart to the divine infinite Word, the human word is the limited expression.

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid. 424.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid. 423.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid. 424.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid. 424.

<sup>371</sup> According to Gadamer, Augustine dismissed the difficulty of the plurality of languages in his suggestion. (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode; Ergänzungen; Register*, Gesammelte Werke 2 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1993). 424.) In our context, we leave these critical perspectives out of the picture.

<sup>372</sup> The terms *verbum cordis* and *verbum interius* will be used more or less as synonyms. For a closer discussion of the two words, see Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamers Hermeneutik*. 18 ff.

*Wahrheit und Methode* follows the development of Augustine's *verbum*-teaching further than we will do here. Gadamer moves to Thomas Aquinas and explicates in some detail how this philosopher accomplishes the initiatives launched by Augustine, for instance by pursuing the philosophical consequences of the relationship between *thought* and *expression*.<sup>373</sup> In our context, pursuing Gadamer's reading in full would take us too far away from the path we are about to take, namely the juxtaposed co-reading of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. For now, let us examine Gadamer's philosophical concept of language in light of what we have seen with Augustine. Though unquestionably important, the *inner verbum* of philosophical hermeneutics can hardly be said to be explicit in much of the commentary literature on Gadamer. In a certain sense, the emphasis is often placed on the "outer" accomplishment of language, for example, the way language instantiates and fulfills ethical commitments in dialogue. What, then, is the role of an *inner* language in a contemporary philosophy striving to overcome a dualism of inner/outer in the Cartesian sense?

For us, one way to conceive of Gadamer's philosophy in light of Augustine's *Verbum Interius* is to read *Sprache* as a philosophical (and secularized) analogy to Augustine's divine Word.<sup>374</sup> *Sprache*, for Gadamer, is the omnipotent order of human life – the ultimate bond between the individual and limited self, and the infinite order of the world. *Sprache* is the bond of an agreeableness running prior to any verbalized expressions *in* or *of* the world. Thus, where the order of Augustine's God is the omnipresent order both running through the discourses *and* springing out of the heart of the individual, *Sprache* is for Gadamer an all-encompassing and existential order. From the inside of a human, to the outside of the world, language permeates understanding. *Sprache* is always already [*immer schon*] there: "Die sprachliche Welterfahrung ist 'absolut'," <sup>375</sup> writes Gadamer, "Die Sprachlichkeit unserer Welterfahrung ist vorgängig gegenüber allem, das als seiend erkannt und angesprochen wird."<sup>376</sup> All our doings, investments, practices, and issues take place *within* language. "Wir sind [...] in allem Wissen von uns selbst und allem Wissen von der Welt immer schon von Sprache umgriffen, die unsere eigene ist."<sup>377</sup> Language is both personal and intimate to ontogenetic self-understanding *and* a communal, transpersonal and phylogenetic order.

To avoid misunderstanding, we can note the following. Gadamer's contemporary version of Augustine's *verbum* implies no recourse to, for instance, an underlying logic or abstract system beneath or beyond the accidental expressions of everyday language. Language is what pre-forms any conceptions of an object whatsoever, but it is not itself an object [*Gegenstand*]. Nor is language a tool for thought, i.e. an instrument that can be used and put aside at will. Also, the idea that language consists of individual signs

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<sup>373</sup> One interesting track to follow here could be the elaborated nuances pertaining to how the linguistic mind *thinks* in the *Sache*. For Thomas and Gadamer, thought unfolds in and through the temporal singularity of the historical event, without thereby being reducible to terms of temporal succession (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 427. Cf. Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamer's Hermeneutik*. 61.)

<sup>374</sup> Gadamer, "Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge (1960)." 75.

<sup>375</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 453.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid. 454.

<sup>377</sup> Gadamer, "Mensch und Sprache (1966)." 149.

communicated from a linguistically unattached point of view is rejected.<sup>378</sup> Just as there is no *outside* of language, there is no *behind*. Language permeates the perspectives taken of oneself, of others and of the world in general. Everything which happens to the human is *in* the order of language. Saying does not mean that every percept, feeling or rudimentary thought of whatever kind is or must be expressed in language.<sup>379</sup> Gadamer's figure goes the other way: the rudimentary, almost raw human existence wherein no actual word fits in, is, if it makes sense to say so, qualitatively more language than the verbalized expressions of thoughts and conversation. The beginning of dialogue – what Gadamer calls *on the way to language* – is wherein language reveals itself its most potent ways. Linguistic idealism is also thus rejected, i.e. the idea of an all-encompassing totality wherein language is predestined within a higher order given on some abstract or ontological level.<sup>380</sup>

Hence, expanding on Augustine, the inner word of philosophical hermeneutics evolves in the limited perspective of a human, which is to say, in the factual nature of the human self. A human can never express him or herself fully. There is always more to say about the relationship to oneself, the relationship to others, and to the world in general. "Kein menschliches Wort kann in vollkommener Weise unseren Geist ausdrücken,"<sup>381</sup> we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*. The human mind is always dispersed, or nongathered – "von diesem oder jenem zerstreut".<sup>382</sup> The apparent paradox is that in the limited and never fully gathered perspectives of humans, the openness and nondogmatic nature of the linguistic mind emerges. Hence, no word can express the human mind completely.<sup>383</sup> An openness to the unsaid belongs essentially to the nature of the linguistic mind. The human self is doomed, so to speak, to always seek new articulations of his or her situation. Furthermore, the human is incapable – even in principle – of saying everything. The human being needs to transgress the concrete boundaries of his or her situation through ever new articulations. Otherwise, there is for Gadamer strictly speaking no human world [*Welt*].<sup>384</sup> In other words, there is a nonreducible *more* intrinsic to the human situation. This *more*, we could say, is the *inner verbum of Wahrheit und Methode*.

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<sup>378</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 421.

<sup>379</sup> This way of reading Gadamer can be said implicitly to guide for example the reading of Erika Fischer-Lichte, one of the more prominent theoreticians within the so-called *Performative turn* of contemporary aesthetics. According to Fischer-Lichte's reading, Gadamer's hermeneutics pertains to a notion of experience wherein understanding and interpretation are on par with a full-fledged semantic articulation of what is experienced (cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Aesthetics* (Routledge 2008). cf. Chapter 5 *The Emergence of Meaning*). By defining language as the medium in which all understanding occurs, Gadamer forwards an intellectualist notion of interpretation, Fischer-Lichte's reading indicates. Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutics captures only a small part of the complex situation of what an experience is, *in particular* what is being executed in the *performative arts*. By our account, the premise of this understanding is problematic. *Verstehen* does *not* equal intellectual, verbalized understanding. (If one takes into account Gadamer's concept of *Vollzug*, which, in many ways, is a performative concept, the critical remarks of Fischer-Lichte become even more difficult to accept.)

<sup>380</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge (1960)." 75.

<sup>381</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 429.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.* 429.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.* 429.

<sup>384</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 457.

In the following, we will uncover more sides of Gadamer's linguistic philosophy and investigate the implications thereof. For now, however, we conclude by briefly rephrasing the important points established on behalf of the hermeneutist. Another way to say that language encompasses and conditions the human life form is to say that practices and moral values are accumulated in the shared medium of language. Practices and moral values are taken up in language, so to speak, not necessarily in a direct sense, but as potential ways of expressing oneself as a human being. Taken as a historical whole, language accumulates a vast horizon of possible ways of doing and expressing the human life form. The historical accumulation of language will always and by necessity overthrow the understanding of the individual self. Language always harbors *more* than possibly can be expressed by the individual. Always pre-forming cognition and perception, language is what conditions human expressivity in the first place.

Simultaneously, as the *verbum cordis* was in Augustine, the *more* of Gadamer's *Sprache* is not external to the individual but permeates his or her gaze from inner to outer. The hermeneutical self *is* this inexpressible *more*, we can say. The subject is the relational and ambiguous transition between individuality and community, familiarity and foreignness, historicity and a-historicity. Language is the unity across the diversity involved. It is the bond that connects individuals with the community, the foreign with the familiar, and the bygone with the present. Crucially, language is what renders the originality of individual life possible. Language *is* the transformation wherein something stands out anew for understanding – independently and on its own clarified conditions.

Thus, one crux of understanding the unity of *Sprache* correctly is to avoid thinking of it as static or predetermining order. We saw how Augustine "solved" the unity and plurality by saying that God *is* the plurality – God mirrors Himself in the various forms of expression without ever being reducible to the actualities of these expressions. Analogously, the unity of Gadamer's *Sprache* is the dialectic *between* individuality and community, familiarity and foreignness, past and present, old and new. The transformative and emancipative power of understanding evolves in language. Language is the ahistorical, dialectical openness towards what is not yet expressed in the relations lived by humans. The infinite dialectical whole of *Sprache* cannot be expressed as such. Analogous to Augustine's *verbum cordis*, we could say the ultimate unitary order of language is accomplished in being unaccomplished, i.e. in the breaching open of new perspectives. In other words, language is accomplished in the process wherein humans as final being see themselves mirrored in the infinite order of language, not by trying to surpass it, but on the contrary, by taking to heart the finality of their singular ways of being reflected in the communal and individual-transgressive orders of language. Only with this recognition is the final being of humans potentially open to an ahistorical dimension of being. Truth dwells in life as it is – *here and now*.

#### b. Praxis and Self-Distance. Tendencies of *Meletē* in Philosophical Hermeneutics

Introducing typical concepts and emphases in Gadamer's path of *Lesen*, we illustrated in the introduction (Subsection 1a) how Gadamer is a spokesman for the need to recognize facticity in ways that go hand in hand with an emphasis on tradition and cultural practices. Gadamer draws on numerous sources when he develops these emphases. We just saw how Augustine is important for bringing facticity into view, whereas Hegel plays a pivotal role in Gadamer's recourse to tradition and cultural practices. In our context, we will view the moment of facticity and tradition in light of a word unvisited in *Wahrheit und Methode*, namely Plato's *meletē*. How is this word expressing the very early scriptural orientation in the Western philosophical tradition reflected (loosely) in philosophical hermeneutics?<sup>385</sup>

Let us paraphrase some of the moments harbored in *meletē*. *Meletē*, we recall, harbored explicit connotations to demarcate knowledge-based ways of doing something – i.e. a praxis. Plato described *meletē* as preparation for death. Gaining peace from the paralyzing fear of death was conceived as the acquisition of a "skill" which does not come by itself. A mode of being towards oneself attained through care and practice is needed. The metaphor of reading the inscription of the soul reflected a moment of accumulated cultural practice. *Meletē* also expressed a certain paradoxical notion of self-distance. By acknowledging and being close to the human destiny of being mortal, the soul could gain an adequate distance to the paralyzing fear of death. The soul gathered itself into a whole by accepting the finality of being.

Looking for the relevance of *meletē* in Gadamer's writings<sup>386</sup> we need to explore the initial philosophical connotations of the Greek word, not the development of gathering in the subsequent history of *meletē* in the Latin *meditation*.<sup>387</sup> Though Gadamer hardly can be called as insistent as for instance Heidegger in foregrounding the inescapable moment of death in life, the Introduction indicated how an existential honesty permeates Gadamer's philosophy. True openness to what *is*, is conditioned by the recognition of the limited perspectives of all personal plans and self-conceptions.<sup>388</sup> The limited perspective of finality is something a human learns through pain and suffering, Gadamer writes. Potentially learned in contexts of suffering is less this or that particular thing, than a general lesson regarding the limitations of human life [*Grenzen des Menschseins*].<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> The tentative answer to this question is inspired by Gadamer's reading of *Phaedo*, in Gadamer, "Die Unsterblichkeitsbeweise in Platons 'Phaidon' (1973)."

<sup>386</sup> A short discussion of Gadamer and *meletē* is found in Christian Moser, *Buchgestützte Subjektivität: Literarische Formen der Selbstsorge und der Selbsthermeneutik von Platon bis Montaigne* (Tübingen: Max Niermeyer Verlag, 2006). 15. Discussed here is Gadamer's conception of *rhetoric* which falls a little on the side of the existential dimension expressed in Plato's *meletē*.

<sup>387</sup> We saw (Subsection 2c) how *meletē*, in the tradition after Plato (e.g. with the translations of *meletē* into Latin *meditatio*) evolved in the connotative direction of a *con-centrated* mind. That development is not relevant in the context of Gadamer. In what we just saw in light of Augustine, the hermeneutical mind is a nonconcentrated mind.

<sup>388</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 362 ff.

<sup>389</sup> "Durch Leiden Lernen [*pathei mathos*]" *ibid.* 363.



Insisting on this perspective of existential honesty and learning to the very end of his career (and life) Gadamer describes in his last public lecture from 2001 how sickness needs not only be a problem. Despite the fact that pain and sickness demand much, he writes, they also represent a positive chance for a new and more genuine integration of what is oneself.<sup>390</sup> Sickness and pain harbor genuine chances to *encounter* one's own ways of neglecting what one de facto undergoes in life. "Hier gibt es offenbar die Möglichkeit, durch das eigene Sich-Wehren gegen den Schmerz in diesem einzugreifen, indem man sich dem ganz hingibt, was einem ganz erfüllt," Gadamer writes. "Nichts läßt den Schmerz am ehesten erträglich werden als das Gefühl, es geht mir etwas auf, mir fällt etwas ein."<sup>391</sup> By being close to oneself in the indubitable sense of pain, we have the possibility to confront vital issues that we elsewhere can keep at an arm's length away in everyday life. "In diesem Sinne ist der Schmerz eine große Chance, vielleicht die größte Chance, endlich mit dem 'fertig zu werden', was uns aufgegeben ist,"<sup>392</sup> Gadamer writes. Instead of seeking to overcome sickness the crux is to conceive of it as a valuable lesson about oneself and the way one lives. "Die eigentliche Dimension des Lebens wird im Schmerz erahnbar, wenn man sich nicht *überwinden* läßt."<sup>393</sup> One cannot conquer pain, so to speak, but by giving in to its impact on life, one can expand on the knowledge one has of oneself.

Thus, Gadamer's philosophical reflections on finality, pain and sickness forward what we can call an affirming or existentially honest attitude towards the challenge of life. Instead of denying the existential situation, rejecting, or fighting against it, or seeking to cut off the problem from the way one understand oneself, the hermeneutical self seeks the crux of the problem. Herein entails one way Gadamer can be said to re-actualize Plato's *meletē*. The delimitation of life is turned around as a prism which makes life emerge anew.<sup>394</sup> Where Plato described the self-distance of the *meletē* as a way for the soul to become free from the body, Gadamer emphasizes how insight into facticity involves a moment of escape, not from oneself, but rather from the captive and decisive perspectives on oneself. Genuine hermeneutical experiences of facticity makes all dogmatism proceeding from the human heart reach its barrier, writes Gadamer.<sup>395</sup> Potentially, the hermeneutical experience is "ein Zurückkommen von etwas, worin man verblendeterweise gefangen war".<sup>396</sup>

Loosely considered, this entails what we can see as an echo of Plato's *meletē* in philosophical hermeneutics. The hermeneutical self gains self-distance by acknowledging pain and suffering as a natural part of being human. In Gadamer's words, this existential self-distance is attained not by force or discrimination between the self and one's situation, but by affirming an extended view of oneself in a

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<sup>390</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Schmerz* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010). 27.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.* 29.

<sup>395</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 363.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.* 362.

broader, indecisive and existentially ambiguous sense. Apparently, what Gadamer describes does not come by itself. Learning from pain and suffering requires a reflective attitude towards oneself – not in the form of intellectual evaluations but in a willingness to expand and alter the view one has on oneself.

The next example of how *meletē* is echoed in philosophical hermeneutics brings the notion of cultural practice into better view. In Gadamer's overtaking of Hegel's *Bildung*, we find a discussion of how a free self-consciousness [*freies Selbstbewußtsein*] is attained through *Bildung*. *Bildung*, we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*, gives form to things instead of mere consuming. "Das arbeitende Bewußtsein findet in dem selbständigen Bestehen, das die Arbeit dem Ding gibt, sich selber als ein selbständiges Bewußtsein wieder."<sup>397</sup> The self-distance of *Bildung* is learned not through intellectual decisions but through a practical exercise and encounter with things. One learns self-distance in the practical doing of work, we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*. *Work* teaches us a lesson about distance to one's own particular needs and preferences. "Die Arbeit ist gehemmte Begierde," Gadamer writes. "Indem es den Gegenstand formiert, also selbstlos tätig ist und ein Allgemeines besorgt, erhebt sich das arbeitende Bewußtsein über die Unmittelbarkeit seines Daseins zur Allgemeinheit."<sup>398</sup> Being committed to a task of general and nonpersonal worth, is a way to learn a form of selflessness [*Selbstlosigkeit*] that eventually can become integrated in oneself. *Bildung*, we read, is "Abstandnahme vom Unmittelbaren der Begierde, der persönlichen Bedürfnisse und privaten Interessen und die Zumutung eines Allgemeinen."<sup>399</sup> The individual self learns to serve general purposes instead of his or her own.

Thus, what we elsewhere (Section 2b) spoke of as a maturing consciousness and human growth is accumulated in the cultural commitment of doing. A freer conduct of the self cannot be achieved as a quest or a goal set up in advance – an organization of means to an end. Only by giving up the personal and accidental goals can the attained learning be learned.

This is what we can currently call a loose, yet for Gadamer typical, echo of Plato's *meletē*. Instead of being submerged into spontaneous modes of undistinguished behavior, the hermeneutical self practices self-distance in a practical way by naturally including a moral community. Like Plato's *meletē*, the self-distance of *Bildung* does not come by itself; it is attained through active and committed involvement. The hermeneutical self both learns from others in doing so. He or she takes advantage of the accumulation of knowledge in the current field and executes this knowledge back in commitment to the moral community fosters this knowledge in the first place. A human needs the articulate order of a moral community to accomplish oneself as a human being. One cannot learn *Bildung* by just looking at a tree, to paraphrase Plato's *Phaedrus*.<sup>400</sup> Mere and indecisive perception is not enough, so to speak – only the moral being among humans can teach a lesson about what it is to be a human.

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>400</sup> "[T]he country places and the trees won't teach me anything, and the people of the city do" Plato, *Phaedrus*. 230d.

### c. Text and Openness

In the previous subsections, we have followed the clue of meditation within the Western philosophical tradition into Gadamer's *Sprache* and two exemplary emphases and concepts of Gadamer. Now we will follow how these concepts and emphases come together in the ways that Gadamer's more complete conceptions of *Sinn* and *Text* are exposed. Eventually, we will see how Gadamer's hermeneutical text concept is a hermeneutical reflection of Plato's conception of the written *logoi* – which, as we remember, was more or less directly related to Plato's conceptions of *meletē* and *medesthai*.

In Gadamer's philosophy, *Sinn* has an essential bond to an expressive dimension easily connoting oral communication. In one sense, there is no doubt that Gadamer "favors" the contact involving direct co-presence of humans compared to other forms of communication. In the living dialogue, or in the wordless communication between mother and child,<sup>401</sup> or even in the mere silent co-presence of another being,<sup>402</sup> reciprocal human contact initiates almost by itself the process of understanding, according to the hermeneutist's view. The crux of Gadamer's philosophical favoring of orality, however, is that it implies no explicit or implicit devaluation of the written word.<sup>403</sup> Oral communication and written text are for Gadamer not essentially distinct, but aspects within a larger generality of human expressivity.<sup>404</sup> Dialogue and text are expressive structures that *say* something. *Sinn*, so conceived, harbors an intrinsically communicative approach: somebody says something to somebody.

In the Gadamerian perspective, the expressive dimension of *Sinn* is not accidental. The expressivity of *Sinn* is one of *the* distinguished marks of being a human self. To be a hermeneutical self is to have an expressivity which goes from the inside and out, as it were. Something in the human strives towards articulations in a moral community. Somewhat paradoxically phrased: something inexpressible, yet potentially expressible, strives to be *said* in relationship to another human being. In this perspective, written texts are not neutral objects circulating around, but something like concrete and externalized manifestations of lived relationships. Texts are concrete manifestations of *Sprache*. They are articulations once done by a human being and express thus how life once was understood at a given time and place. By the same token, the written text opens and expands the range of possible understandings, both temporarily and geographically. The texts of authors like Homer, Plato and Augustine, can become as relevant today as they were *back then* because they express something genuinely true in what it is to be human.

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<sup>401</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Über das Hören (1998)", in *Hermeneutische Entwürfe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). 53.

<sup>402</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 432.

<sup>403</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer", ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>404</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 342.

Examining how *Wahrheit und Methode* elaborates on what we are saying here, we soon recognize Plato's conception of the written text (*Phaedrus*) is echoed with more or less explicit reference. "Die Seinsart von Literatur hat etwas Einzigartiges und Unvergleichbares," Gadamer writes. "Sie stellt der Umsetzung in Verstehen eine spezifische Aufgabe. Es gibt nichts so Fremdes und zugleich Verständnisforderndes wie Schrift."<sup>405</sup> The written text reinforces the moment of otherness always implied in inter-human communication; i.e. the otherness expressed in another's life and another view on the world. Actual meetings with other human beings cannot be compared with the strangeness and foreign character [*Fremdheit und Befremdung*] of the text, writes Gadamer. "[D]ie Sprache der Gebärde und des Tones [enthält] immer schon einen Moment von unmittelbarer Verständlichkeit [...] Schrift und was an ihr Teil hat, die Literatur, ist die ins Fremdeste entäußerte Verständlichkeit des Geistes."<sup>406</sup> What makes the written text very strange is that the *Sinn* being expressed is relieved from the emotional moments which otherwise always distinguish direct personal communication.<sup>407</sup>

Here, we recognize the theme of circulation introduced above. The circulation of text opens a form of detached communication between humans. Something in the shared being of humans is allowed to be expressed without the potentially disturbing moments of the direct shared co-being.

We note how the underlying metaphor in Gadamer's text is the fatherless being of Plato's written *logoi*.<sup>408</sup> For Gadamer, the written text moves freely from direct supervision of the writer. It is, the moment it is put on paper, externalized from the human mind producing the text in the first place.<sup>409</sup> "Nichts ist so sehr reine Geistesspur wie Schrift, nichts aber auch so auf den verstehenden Geist angewiesen wie sie [i.e. written text]."<sup>410</sup> The cutting loose of the individual mind of the writer is constitutive for something deserving to be properly called a text. In contrast to a private memorandum, or highly private letters, a text is written with the explicit or implicit openness for the potentially ignorant gaze of another person. The text cannot help itself, as Plato put it – this helplessness is what initiates the process of understanding, writes Gadamer. "Die Aufgabe des Verstehens stellt sich mit besonderer Klarheit, wenn man die Schwäche alles Schriftlichen erkennt, [daß] niemand zu Hilfe zu kommen vermag, wenn sie dem gewollten oder dem unfreiwilligen Mißverstehen anheimfällt."<sup>411</sup> The written form of communication simply comes with an irreducible risk of missed communication. The circulating written text is simply open to misunderstandings.

However, the crux of Gadamer's current recourse to Plato is that, while overtaking Plato's conception of texts, Gadamer also turns Plato's critique of the text upside down. In contrast to Plato, Gadamer sees no problem in the so-called weakness of the text. The openness to misuse and

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<sup>405</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 168.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid. 168–169.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid. 396.

<sup>408</sup> In Section 13b, we will pursue how the fatherless status of the hermeneutical text concept is radicalized in Gadamer's *post-Wahrheit und Methode* concept of *eminent text*.

<sup>409</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 353.

<sup>410</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 169–170

<sup>411</sup> Cf. Ibid. 396. Gadamer refers here to Plato.

misunderstanding represents not a danger for philosophical hermeneutics but is rather a positive moment. The fatherless status of the text is a constitutive moment of understanding. Precisely by being strange and genuinely open to other interpretations, the text initiates a positive revised understanding. The fatherless status of the text circulation is what potentially provokes the transformation of understanding to occur.

Here, something of Gadamer's awe of understanding [*Verstehen*] shines through. By reading a text, a miracle occurs, he writes. "In ihrer Entzifferung und ihrer Deutung geschieht ein Wunder, die Verwandlung von etwas Fremdem und Totem in schlechthinniges Zugleichsein und Vertrautsein."<sup>412</sup> This *Wunder* can only be achieved if the reader also steps aside from his or her private expectations of the text, i.e. only if the reader cuts loose from the too narrow fatherly supervision, so to speak. Only then can the text *speak*...

With these moments, we expand on our understanding of the hermeneutical text concept introduced above. In general, Gadamer speaks of texts in two ways which are important to keep apart terminology wise (although he himself often switches between the two without explicit transitions). Whereas the first harbors a conventional sense, the second is philosophical. In the conventional sense, text means for Gadamer what it means in any other context, so to speak: a piece of paper with letters and signs written on it. In the philosophical sense, on the other hand, *Text* designates a generalized and phenomenologically revised conception of text. *Text* expresses the core implication of what a text *is*, which is to say, the eidetic moment of what a text generates. The eidetic structure of what a text *is* reveals itself for Gadamer in the structure wherein an expression overthrows the pre-given understandings at first held by the individual. Thus, *Text* is not isolated to mere texts in the conventional sense but applies to everything causing what Gadamer calls an *Anstoß* to understanding. In Gadamer's explanation: *Text* applies to everything "wo mit einer primären Sinnvermutung an eine Gegebenheit herangetreten wird, die sich nicht widerstandslos in einer Sinnerwartung einfügt".<sup>413</sup> According to this definition, the sickness and pain we considered in the previous section are no less a *Text* than a poem or a philosophical tractate (as different as they otherwise are).

The essential moment of *Anstoß* makes *Text* for Gadamer correlate with the concept of *Interpretation*. *Text* makes the spontaneity of life, otherwise executed perhaps without even noticing it, *stand out* as a matter that claims an interpretation. Only in relation to interpretation, writes Gadamer, is *Text* constituted as a key concept in the structure [*Struktur*] of linguistic being [*Sprachlichkeit*].<sup>414</sup> *Text* and *interpretation* are thus moments within the same experience of being overthrown. When something gains a character of a *Text* it follows that interpretation is necessary to restore the process of understanding.

Let us rephrase what we are saying to underline the logic of Gadamer's hermeneutical-philosophical orientation. As we know, a text circulating across geographical and temporal borders is not

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>413</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 340.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.340.

always immediately understandable. In fact, the text can often speak in ways that are hardly conceivable at all (although being legible, which is a pre-condition of interpretation in the first place<sup>415</sup>). If a reader encounters a text of such and such difficulties, the hermeneutical process begins to restore *Sinn* of the text, to understand what it says. For Gadamer, this is a process of establishing a shared moment of human expressivity evolving between reader and the text. The process should not be seen as a process aiming to erase the differences involved, for instance, between what the text says and the personal understanding of the reader. On the contrary, seeking out the essential differences is in Gadamer's perspective rather the whole crux of the process. According to the logic of Gadamer's concept, revealing and taking the differences of the text into account is a way to let a larger whole of *Sprache* emerge for understanding. That is, the circulating text opens up the always larger – yet always also inconceivable – bond of understanding. The text brings forth the tacit, inexpressible bond between a human and world, by itself being a manifestation of the inexpressible inner word of language.

In this light, we see why Gadamer can say that a written text is an accomplishment of *Sprache*. The written text makes present the most genuine feature of *Sinn*, namely an ahistorical dimension. "In der Form der Schrift ist alles Überlieferte für jede Gegenwart gleichzeitig,"<sup>416</sup> writes the hermeneutist. "In ihr [i.e. in *writing*] besteht mithin eine einzigartige Koexistenz von Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, sofern das gegenwärtige Bewußtsein zu allem schriftlich Überlieferten die Möglichkeit eines freien Zugangs hat."<sup>417</sup> In the *making present* the true *Sinn* of the text emerges: "Der Sinn der hermeneutischen Erfahrung ist [...] der, daß die Sprache gegenüber aller sonstigen Welterfahrung eine völlig neue Dimension aufschließt, die Tiefendimension, aus der die Überlieferung die gegenwärtig Lebenden erreicht."<sup>418</sup> The profound aspect of the free admission [*freien Zugang*] of *Sinn* in the text, for Gadamer, is that the text initiates – and brings forth for what it is – the way the human harbors a potentiality of truth within its modes of expressivity. Despite the fact that language always and by necessity is formed by historical and accidental situations, there is also in the more basal aspects of linguisticity [*Sprachlichkeit*] a dimension that can harbor an ahistorical validity. Human expressivity can harbor a truth that is universal. The time-and-place independence of the text exemplifies a potential time-and-place independency of human understanding.

Gadamer's frequent encounters with religious or half-religious texts bear witness to a certain existential profundity seen, by him, in the process of understanding.<sup>419</sup> However, as we have already underlined, the fact that the ahistorical dimension revealed by Gadamer *can* be taken religiously or numinously does not mean that it *has* to be taken so. Certainly, Gadamer's way of understanding it is not religious but *philosophical*. The ahistorical dimension of experience reveals itself in the genuine and existentially honest recognition of one's limitations and possibilities. We saw how death for Plato, the

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid. 341.

<sup>416</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 393.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid. 393.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid. 466–467.

<sup>419</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge (1960)." 75–76.

allegories of the Bible for Augustine, and sickness and pain for Gadamer, all represented challenges that the human could not overcome as such. They can only be acknowledged as what they are, i.e. unsolvable challenges.

This altered understanding is for Gadamer one of the essential moments of understanding.<sup>420</sup> The moment of *understanding differently* is *Sprache* in the most genuine sense. A *Text* – i.e. something provocative forcing oneself to question the way one understands – is thus needed to *understand*. Understanding needs friction to understand in the genuine sense, instead of just going in mere circles of what is *understood*. "Es genügt zu sagen, daß man *anders* versteht, *wenn man überhaupt versteht*,"<sup>421</sup> Gadamer writes. Only by understanding differently can the horizon of the self be expanded. "[D]as verstehende Bewußtsein [gewinnt] eine echte Möglichkeit, seinen Horizont zu verschieben und zu erweitern und damit eine ganze Tiefendimension zu bereichern."<sup>422</sup>

For Gadamer, understanding differently is simultaneously a self-understanding. Being forced to handle an unsolvable *Text*, the person seeking understanding learns *how* one handles a challenge. Forced to handle a provoking structure *for what it is* – in its independent being – instead of reducing it, one gets the experience of what it is to alter one's attitude. That is, limitation and provocation make vivid what it is to understand differently, for its own sake. The *Text* is needed to make oneself question one's own resources anew, i.e. one's ability to alter attitudes towards a given situation or expression. At the same time, this human resource – i.e. the ability to alter understanding – is not an achievement of the *subject*, but ultimately the achievement of *die Sprache*. The alteration itself is, so to speak, the concretized manifestation of the *Tiefendimension* of understanding. The text concretizes and symbolizes [*symbolon*<sup>423</sup>] the linguistic historical-ahistorical whole in which it is a part [*Richtungssinn*].<sup>424</sup> It does so, however, not in ways analogous to how words designate an ideal object in the conventional sense. Rather, the text points towards (indicates) the inexpressible – and principally unfulfilled – whole of *Sprache* by opening a path of altered understanding in *der Sprache*. The transformed attitude of understanding is the opening towards the whole. Thus regarded, the concrete process of reading is where it all begins and ends. *Sinn* is accomplished in the *Vollzug*. The *Sinn* of expression emerges in the fragile moment of the situation before it sinks back into the inexpressible – not the same as it was before, but rather as understood anew.

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<sup>420</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 302.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid. 302. Italics original.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid. 393.

<sup>423</sup> In Gadamer's exposition, the word *symbolon* refers to a concrete counterpart of a larger whole. The part makes the whole relevant (cf. Ibid. and Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 122 ff.

<sup>424</sup> Gadamer's conception of *Richtungssinn* will be explained in Subsection 12c below.

## 5. Path of *Perception* (Merleau-Ponty)

With Gadamer, we have now explored how traditional moments connoted with reading are reflected in contemporary philosophy. Turning to Merleau-Ponty, the current section will emphasize the other path latent in the Western philosophical tradition: the path of *perception*. The reading strategy will be the same as it was above, in the hermeneutical context. Guided (more or less loosely) by moments handed over within the Western philosophical history of meditation, we will try to situate key phenomenological concepts in the same tradition. How can Merleau-Ponty's conception of body schema be said to be an accomplishment of possibilities latent in the Western philosophical tradition of meditation?

As we already know, turning to Merleau-Ponty means turning to a way of doing philosophy largely distinct from Gadamer's. Where Gadamer actively reads Augustine and Plato by creating grand narratives of the hermeneutical phenomenon, Merleau-Ponty actively encounters the empirical sciences of his contemporaries. In these readings evolves Merleau-Ponty's semi-Augustinian path of *perception*.

### a. Unity of Body Schema. Global Awareness and Spontaneous Formation

With *the Trinity*, we saw how Augustine launched an initiative expressing a unitary yet ambiguous conception of experience. The *verbum cordis* could be seen as a unity of language and perceptual life, we said, but it could also be seen as an impact of a modern dualism later accomplished by Descartes. The few explicit remarks on Augustine in *Phenomenology of Perception* indicate that Merleau-Ponty reads Augustine more the latter way. The phenomenologist is critical about what he refers to as the Augustinian idea of an *inner man*. "Truth does not merely 'dwell' in the 'inner man', or rather, there is no 'inner man'",<sup>425</sup> we read in *Phenomenology of Perception*. No *inner* human is ultimately present *beneath* the lived perceptual gaze on the world. There is no constituting power operative *before* the constitution of the subjective self; no invulnerable subjectivity exists prior to [*en deca de*] being and time.<sup>426</sup>

Interestingly enough, Merleau-Ponty does not read Augustine himself in *Phenomenology of Perception*, but bases his critical tone on Husserl's reading. Husserl, according to Merleau-Ponty, was a typical spokesman of such a hyperbolic, dualist, and ultimately idealist over-accentuation of the *inner*. The hyperbole is exemplified with this passage from the *Cartesian Meditation* (to which Merleau-Ponty apparently refers):<sup>427</sup> "Der notwendige Weg zu einer im höchsten Sinne letztbegründeten Erkenntnis oder, was einerlei ist, einer

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<sup>425</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Preface. Ixxiv.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid. Preface. Ixxiii.

<sup>427</sup> According to Donald Landes, this is the passage that Merleau-Ponty has in mind when he speaks of an Augustinian "inner man". *Translator's Endnote* 21. 493.



philosophischen ist der einer universalen Selbsterkenntnis, zunächst einer monadischen, und dann intermonadischen.<sup>428</sup> The quest for the universal truth of philosophy involves a move wherein the *Know Thyself* is accomplished through the ultimate phenomenological *epoché*. "Man muß erst die Welt durch *ἐποχή* verlieren, um die universale Selbstbesinnung wiederzugewinnen. *Noli foras ire*, sagt Augustine, *in te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas*. [Go back into yourself. Truth dwells in inner man.]"<sup>429</sup> In other words, the self-evident *inner* of the self – ultimately available in the Cartesian ideal of clarity and distinction the *cogitations* of the *Ego*<sup>430</sup> – is the foundation for all perceptual experience as well as the phenomenological description of experience.

Merleau-Ponty emphatically rejects not only that view on humans but eventually also the epistemic ideals expressed by Husserl and Husserl's Augustine. Properly conceived, writes Merleau-Ponty, "man is in and toward the world, and it is *in* the world that he knows himself."<sup>431</sup> Above all, the intentional *in* and *toward* the world implies that any inner of the perceptual self is a thoroughly ambiguous structure, or thoroughly intertwined with the so-called outer. Saying so is not to deny that humans have an inner psychological life that can be "rich" or "poor"; "in contact with itself" or "not in contact with itself", etc. It is only to emphasize that, structurally-phenomenologically considered, the inner physiological life is what it is because it involves an essential and unbreakable relationship with the so-called outer world. The inner is thoroughly relational in regard of the outer: inner and outer evolve qua dialectic dynamic and ambiguous transitions. Ultimately, to be a perceiving self is to *be* the dynamic relationships of *me* and *not-me*, *here* and *there*, *you* and *me*.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty illustrates the point in analogies to breathing and the sacrament in the Christian tradition. Analogous to how the breath constantly and literally speaking internalizes the outer air,<sup>432</sup> the whole being of the phenomenal body is in a constant internalizing and externalizing exchange with its perceptual surroundings. "[S]ensation is, literally, a communion,"<sup>433</sup> we read. "[S]lipping into the form of existence that is suggested to me, I relate myself to an external being, whether it be to open myself up to it or to shut myself off from it."<sup>434</sup> Herein evolves the phenomenological analogy to the Christian idea of sacrament. Merleau-Ponty. Let us read the current passage in some length, to gain an understanding of how *Phenomenology of Perception* describes what for Merleau-Ponty is the enigmatic nature of perceptual life. In, for example, perceiving the color *blue* or *red*, or hearing a tone...

... I offer my ear or my gaze with the anticipation of a sensation, and suddenly the sensible catches my ear or my gaze; I deliver over a part of my body, or even my entire body, to this manner of vibrating and of filling space named 'blue' or 'red'. This is just as the sacrament does not merely symbolize, in a sensible way, an operation of Grace, but is the real presence of God and makes this presence

<sup>428</sup> Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen: eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie*. 156.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. 161. Translation from Latin taken from Endnote 21 in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 493.

<sup>430</sup> Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen: eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie*. § 1.

<sup>431</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Preface. Ixxiv. Italics added.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid. 221.

occupy a fragment of space and to communicate it to those who eat the bread, given that they are inwardly prepared for it. In the same way, the sensible does not merely have a motor and vital significance, but is rather nothing other than a certain manner of being in the world that is proposed to us from a point in space, that our body takes up and adapts if it is capable, and sensation is, literally, a communion.<sup>435</sup>

To perceive is to *live* an existential exchange with the all-encompassing perceived world. It is to live the rhythm of a perceived world, a way of *taking up, adaption*,<sup>436</sup> or *coexisting*<sup>437</sup> with the physical and moral environment. The inner merges together with outer. The one expands into the other.

Precisely here, in the phenomenological idea of perceptual communion, we see the positive communication with Augustine. That is, in light of *our* reading of Augustine (instead of Husserl's), we see how closely and profoundly Merleau-Ponty echoes the unity of perception evoked by Augustine. One shared idea is how the inner life of the human occurs in unity with the outer. The inner expands outwards, while the outer permeates the inner. Loosely considered, the perceiving body and the perceived world evolves with Merleau-Ponty in the intrinsic unity that Augustine spoke of as *verbum cordis*. According to Merleau-Ponty, the unity is not necessarily best described with emphasis on language – as was the approach carried out by Gadamer. Emphasized in the phenomenological approach to unity is rather the mere co-presence of a perceiving body and the perceived world. The co-presence is itself the *verbum-cordis*, so to speak. "One's own body is in the world just as the heart is in the organism: it continuously breathes life into the visible spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within, and forms a system with it,"<sup>438</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. Thus for the communion of perception, we could say: the phenomenal body brings human life into the vital surroundings and accomplishes the possibilities herein. Rhetorically, in the direction of Gadamer's path of *Lesen*, we could add: no reading is needed to constitute a moral world, for Merleau-Ponty. It is enough to perceive.

Crucially, Augustine and Merleau-Ponty also share the idea that the organization of the phenomenal body is the key to the existential exchange with surroundings. "[I]n the consciousness it is not one thing to see and another to hear",<sup>439</sup> wrote Augustine. The way that consciousness constantly gathers sensations into a whole is a reflection of the way it lives in unity with its surroundings. This is why the Augustinian subject can *know*, from the bottom of its heart, the unity expressed in the Word of God. Created in the image of God, consciousness is itself the locus of the enigmatic co-merging of the whole world. Now minus the theological implications of Augustine, Merleau-Ponty pursues the Augustinian idea of an enigmatic likeness between body and world into detailed descriptions of exchange and overlap of behavioral structures between human and world.<sup>440</sup> Embodied life rests on a nontransparent yet existential mimicry. The way it organizes itself is rendered possible and complete in relationship to the physical and moral surroundings. In fact, as we will come

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid. 221.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid. 209.

<sup>439</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.3.18 / 410–411.

<sup>440</sup> Ch. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. We discuss the details of this book in Section 8 and Subsection 16a.

to see later, the relations to other human beings are *primary* in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. In the earliest years of childhood, the human self is constituted in contact with the parents or caretakers.<sup>441</sup> Formed here are basic behavioral traits of trust or nontrust in the world, effective more or less throughout the whole life.

Let us set aside Augustine and see how *Phenomenology of Perception* displays the unitary and organizing phenomenal body. (We return to Augustine with some preliminary conclusive remarks below). One exemplary concept is *body schema*;<sup>442</sup> a concept Merleau-Ponty overtakes from the neurologists Head<sup>443</sup> and Schilder.<sup>444</sup> The Merleau-Pontyan body schema expands on what we earlier introduced as the body proper, describing the body as a unifying and organizing structure. Body schema,<sup>445</sup> we can say, is the fuller system of sensory-motor capacities implied in the irreducible viewpoint of the body proper. The body schema involves a primordial knowledge of embodiment, a form of organization that goes on before anything is articulated in the mind in the form of an *I think*. "We discover beneath intelligence and beneath perception a more fundamental function," Merleau-Ponty writes, "a core function working prior to a seeing and a knowing of the object, all the more secretly bringing them into existence for us."<sup>446</sup> This *prior* to the body is not a prior in the idealist sense, naturally, but as a functional prior to a living organism inhabiting the world as a human lifeworld.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, emphasis is placed on the intentionality of body schema, rather than the complexity of behavioral structures implied in the concept.<sup>447</sup> As indicated, however, *intentionality* in this context must not be confused with a positional intentionality in Husserl's methodological sense. The intentionality of body schema is far less articulate and knowable in ways associated with clarity and distinction than what we can call proto-intentional or proto-linguistic. What Merleau-Ponty calls the intelligence of body schema involves a peripheral, rudimentary, and spontaneous form of consciousness. To borrow recent terminology from Ned Block, this form of intentionality is far less *access* consciousness, than *phenomenal* consciousness.<sup>448</sup> The intentionality of body schema is not to *have*

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<sup>441</sup> Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Child psychology and pedagogy: the Sorbonne lectures 1949-1952* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2010). Cf. Section 16 below.

<sup>442</sup> *Body schema* is today common ground not only with phenomenology, but also within sports medicine, robotics, psychology, neurology, and cognitive science. Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. In Chapter One, Gallagher reviews the status of the concept of *body schema* in today's discourses.

<sup>443</sup> Henry Head, *Studies of Neurology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920).

<sup>444</sup> Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body*. *Studies in Constructive Energies of the Psyche* (International Universities Press, 1935). On the history of the word in *Phenomenology of Perception*, see: Donald A. Landes, "Translator's Introduction", in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012). xlix.

<sup>445</sup> In *Phenomenology of Perception*, *body schema* is introduced and revised phenomenologically particularly in Part One, Chapter I, "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity." 100 ff.

<sup>446</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 137.

<sup>447</sup> In Section 8 and 16a, we will study closely how *Structure of Behavior* elaborates the behavioral complexity subsequently implied in the *body schema* of the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

<sup>448</sup> *Access consciousness* and *phenomenal consciousness* are terms that Merleau-Ponty himself does not use. Borrowed from Ned Block, "Perceptual Consciousness Overflows Cognitive Access," *Trends Cognitive Science* 15 (2011). In Block's definition: "a representation is *access conscious* if it is made available for cognitive processing". *Phenomenal*

a perception or belief about something, and not to consciously monitor such or such movement, but more to *be* the accomplishment or the capacity to execute the movements.<sup>449</sup> Merleau-Ponty speaks of intentionality as a *global awareness* of the embodied whereabouts;<sup>450</sup> a way that the phenomenal body radiates over its milieu,<sup>451</sup> or even a vague and inexplicit sensibility as in the so-called sixth sense.<sup>452</sup>

In no affirmed variant of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological demonstrations<sup>453</sup> is the perceptual intentionality described in terms of a mosaic of atomist impressions evolving after one another in a linear stream. Rather, perception is from the outset an organized, dynamic, co-merging field of order. Things of perception emerge as physiognomies, Merleau-Ponty often writes. They express a wholeness of being.<sup>454</sup> Things of perception are complexes, and each complex symbolizes or recalls particular ways of behaving that are either favorable or unfavorable.<sup>455</sup> Quite spontaneously and without the necessity of intellectual syntheses or cognitive operations as such, perception is just always already ordered. The body schema entails an *intentional arc*, writes Merleau-Ponty. The body schema is what "creates unity of the senses, the unity of senses with intelligence, and the unity of sensitivity and motricity."<sup>456</sup> Senses, motricity, and intelligence, are not capacities or powers evolving side by side, or in addition to each other. They are aspects evolving within one and the same basal, organizing function. "[T]he subject has his body not only as a system of current positions, but also, and consequently, as an open system of an infinity of equivalent positions in different orientations,"<sup>457</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. The body schema is what instantly transposes senses into intelligence, or motor powers into the senses,<sup>458</sup> by involving its own system of equivalences, and identifications.<sup>459</sup>

Typical examples used by Merleau-Ponty to illustrate this point phenomenologically are the following. To see an object such as a lemon, Merleau-Ponty insists, is to *see* the sour character of the fruit expressed in the yellowness,<sup>460</sup> and to see honey is to *see* the sticky quality of it.<sup>461</sup> Quite concretely, the sight of the lemon is immediately transposed into taste, and the sight of honey is immediately made equivalent with taste. According to Merleau-Ponty, there are no explicit cognitive operations happening in these transpositions. It just happens spontaneously through the equalizing and organizing role of the body schema.

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*consciousness*, on the other hand, implies no such explicit processing: It designates "what it is like for subject to have an experience". 567.

<sup>449</sup> Definition taken from Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. 24. According to Gallagher, Merleau-Ponty does not sufficiently differentiate between *body schema* and *body image* (which implies more conscious monitoring), though in practice he uses the term *body schema* correctly. Ibid. 20.

<sup>450</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 102.

<sup>451</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 161.

<sup>452</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 212.

<sup>453</sup> Merleau-Ponty's style of writing is very often a critical. He revises various concepts and models of experience by writing from within the perspectives, often with an ambiguous tone, before revealing their inadequacies.

<sup>454</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 145.

<sup>455</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The world of perception (1948)* (London: Routledge, 2004). 48 and 49.

<sup>456</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 137.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid. 143.

<sup>460</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The world of perception (1948)*. 48.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid. 47.

The evolving unities of perception are tied to the present moment, but in Merleau-Ponty's demonstrations they also transgress the moment in the narrow or punctual sense. The intentional arc underpins perception by merging together features and qualities across spatial and temporal co-presence, we read in *Phenomenology of Perception*. "[It] projects around us our past, our future, our physical situation, and our moral situation, or rather that ensures us that we are situated within all these relationships."<sup>462</sup> We note the words: the body schema is what *situates* the lived body in a spontaneous manner in the situation. The phenomenal situation is *always* relational in some form or another. Embodied consciousness lives qua a relational being and the basal noncognitive intelligence of the body is what renders the dynamic possible. Consciousness is constantly an activity of projection;<sup>463</sup> a way of relating oneself in the active sense of the word. "Consciousness is being toward the thing through the intermediary of the body."<sup>464</sup> Cognitive understanding in the explicit sense of articulation rests on, and involves an inexplicit continuum with, the proto-intentional, proto-linguistic, and vital operations of the body schema.

We said that an organizing role is intrinsic to the spontaneous throwing of body, in Merleau-Ponty's expositions. The current points expand on what this organization implies. The transposing and equalizing role of the body schema is a way that the phenomenal body organizes perception. Going *through* the body, the complexes of perception merge together with the organizing contribution moment of the phenomenal body. Thus, as the term body schema suggests, the phenomenal body *schematizes* or *forms* the perceived world according to its own standards.<sup>465</sup> The body is the first model of transposition, equivalences, and identifications,<sup>466</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. The way that the body perceives of itself is paradigmatic to the other ways that the body merges into relationships.

One way to expand on some of the dynamic implied here is to use the famous phenomenological example that Merleau-Ponty<sup>467</sup> overtakes and revises<sup>468</sup> from Husserl,<sup>469</sup> namely the example wherein one hand touches the other. Let us say that the right hand touches the left. If one pays attention to what goes on in this haptic event, one might experience how one cannot be equally *touching* and *touched* at the same time. In a certain sense, the hands oscillate between being active and passive in regard to itself. That is, the haptic event switches between i) being the one hand *touching* the other hand, or ii) being a hand that is *touched by* the other hand. Inevitably, one of the two modes of being in relationship to oneself merges into the foreground. The shift itself is ambiguous and transitive. No exact points or borders are given, yet at some point the shift has just occurred. The sensation of *touching* has been translated into *touched*. It passes through the

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<sup>462</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 137.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid. 140.

<sup>465</sup> In Subsection 8 we will explore the details of the formation as *symbol behavior*.

<sup>466</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 143.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid. 94 and 329–330.

<sup>468</sup> Cf. Figal, "Das Unsichtbare in der Wahrnehmung." 139 ff.

<sup>469</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff 1952). 144–145.

spontaneous interpretation of the body, so to speak; the active has been translated into its equivalence of being passive.

In Merleau-Ponty's demonstrations, the oscillation between the hands is exemplary by revealing a general trait in how the body schema organizes itself. We have already underlined how the embodied consciousness is relational through and through, in terms of *me, you, we, inner, outer, sensing, thinking* etc. By the logic of the hand-example, the structure of the phenomenal body is never *fully* one of these terms. That is, it is never fully *inner* or fully *outer, fully* subject or *fully* object, *me, you, or we*; or fully *active* or fully *passive*. Essentially speaking, qua relational structure the phenomenal body is rather always somewhere *in between* what we thus can phrase into dichotomies of being. The phenomenal body is a little more of the one, a little less of the other, but always both or everything. Instead of being fixable in this or that "pole" of organization, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates, the phenomenal body can be described as an ongoing foreground/background structure. In making this or that movement, or in thinking such and such, something emerges in the foreground, whereas something else merges into the background. The background is always there; it determines what emerges in the foreground precisely by being background. Either one thinks of oneself in terms of an *I* or *me*, as a *subject* or an *object*, as *active* or *passive*, the phenomenal body is *both* or *everything* at the same time. The phenomenal body *is* the ambiguous transition. Or as Merleau-Ponty puts it: the phenomenal body is the *third* aspect implied in the foreground/background structure.<sup>470</sup>

What we say here will be elaborated in lengthy discussions in the subsequent sections and subsections. The preliminary point to establish is this: for the most part, what is allowed to move into foreground, what evolves into background, and *how* this change occurs in the first place, is organized spontaneously by the body schema. The flexibility in making the shifts from foreground to background or the other way around, occurs without any explicit knowledge of the perceiver. The world is always already organized by the intelligence of the behaving body. At the same time, the perceiving body is always and by necessity more than what can be expressed in singular unambiguous poles of being. The phenomenal body is ambiguous per se. This represents no weakness of the phenomenal body, in Merleau-Ponty's account. On the contrary, it is a way that the body harbors inexhaustibly rich potential ways of being.

Let us conclude the current siting of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology within the theoretical initiative launched by Augustine's meditation.<sup>471</sup> We saw how Gadamer concretized the ultimate unity of understanding in *Sprache*. In pursuing the Augustinian path of *Lesen*, language is for Gadamer the ultimate horizon of being, the medium concretizing the limitations and possibilities of human life. By contrast, pursuing the path of *perception*, Merleau-Ponty exposes the horizon of humans as the concrete perceptual horizon that at each instant defines the situation of the perceiving body schema. As it was for Augustine, the phenomenal horizon of the world is for Merleau-Ponty the ultimate and anonymous background of the phenomenal

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<sup>470</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 103.

<sup>471</sup> We return to the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's semi-Augustinian path several times in the subsequent sections.

body.<sup>472</sup> In Merleau-Ponty's demonstrations, the world is just *there*, as an impersonal generality of boundaries and possibilities, even in principle inexhaustible to human knowledge. The perceived world is not chosen by the perceiver, and, ontologically speaking, the world is far less formed *by* the perceiver, than *forming* the perceiver. To be a human is to be born, formed, and accomplished qua human being in the vital interplay with the physical and moral environment. The body is shaped – *schematized* – by the living surroundings.<sup>473</sup> Simultaneously, the vast and for the most part unspecific field of limitations and the possibilities given with the perceptual world are not external to the body, but integrated in the innermost personal ways it moves and perceives the world. The generality of limitations and possibilities is the communion between the perceiving body and the perceived world. From inner to outer, the body schema lives the unity with the world of perception.

**b. The Logos of *Medesthai*. Self-Distance and Accumulation in Perception.**

In the context of Gadamer's philosophy (Subsection 4b), we saw how typical concepts in *Wahrheit und Methode* echo aspects found in Plato's conception of *meletē*. We said that Merleau-Ponty, by exploring the path of *perception*, typically sides not with *meletē* but rather with *medesthai*. *Medesthai*, we recall, was a way of mind not directly comparable to our notions of thinking or pondering on something and it lacked connotation to the accumulation of cultural practice and technique. Instead, the *medesthai* pertained to a form of spontaneous and dissociative mind associated with poetry and mythopoetic reality; a mind wherein past, present, and future crosses into fortune telling and shifting, indecisive modes of behavior. Plato criticized *medesthai* for being a helter-skelter and disorganized mind. According to him, *medesthai* meant the lack of proper self-distance. Instead of reading the situation of the soul (*meletē*), the mind of *medesthai* uttered whatever fell into it at the moment.

Merleau-Ponty does not share Plato's critical view on the dis-organized and spontaneous mind. What we saw in regard to the peripheral consciousness of body schema already represents an affirmation and accentuation thereof. That is, what Plato critically conceived as the helter-skelter spontaneous mind is for Merleau-Ponty a primary and essential way of being in the world. Occurring in the peripheral consciousness of body schema is a slumbering, dream-like dimension of experience. More articulated attempts of expressing something are inflicted by and intersected with unclear personal and impersonal motives and investments in behavior. "At each moment," Merleau-Ponty writes,

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<sup>472</sup> Gadamer shares much of the same view. Perplexing enough, the fact that Gadamer leaves out closer descriptions of the phenomenal can be read as a way that the hermeneutist respects the inconceivable Augustinian enigma of the phenomenal body. Cf. Subsection 13b below.

<sup>473</sup> As we will pursue in Section 16, Merleau-Ponty takes much interest in child psychology, to study how nascent consciousness is formed in interplay with its surroundings. Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Child psychology and pedagogy: the Sorbonne lectures 1949-1952*.

my perceptual field is filled with reflections, sudden noises, and fleeting and tactile impressions that I am unable to link to the perceived world and that, nevertheless, I immediately place in the world without ever confusing them with my daydreams. At each instant, I weave dreams around the things, I imagine objects or people whose presence here is not incompatible with the context, and yet they are not confused with the world, they are out in front of the world, or on the stage of the imaginary.<sup>474</sup>

Thus, we can say, it is the lived life of a body proper. Inner and outer life intersects in the being of imagination. More or less constantly, and in lesser or greater degrees,<sup>475</sup> everyday perception involves the dynamic of ever changing, translucent, and transitive structures of spontaneity. To expand on what Merleau-Ponty targets, phenomena such as spontaneous projections into the past or the present, either in the form of regrets, planning, worrying or brooding, the sudden emergence of ideas or solutions to problems, or phenomena of more direct social character such as imagined conversations with other people, are forms of expression gained by the spontaneous mind.<sup>476</sup>

In Merleau-Ponty's perspective, these expressions of the spontaneous mind are as real as anything. Though not real in the reductive sense of naturalism,<sup>477</sup> the spontaneous expressions involve a fully real dimension in the life of human being. The spontaneous, nongathered or nonorganized being of the body schema is a dynamic part of everyday life impacting how life is lived.

Plato associated self-distance with literacy and the ability to articulate oneself in and with *logos*. Without the ability to read the inscriptions of the soul, the human is submerged in the needs and fluctuations of the moment. Merleau-Ponty sees it differently. With his demonstrations, the "unorganized" perceptual consciousness always already implies a self-distance. To perceive is always already to possess an ability to *let go* of the privileged actualities of the current moment, in the service of a potential way of perceiving the same moment. More than being the schema of a possible state of being, the body is the schema of all possible activities.<sup>478</sup> "[T]he subject has his body not only as a system of current positions, but also, and consequently, as an open system of an infinity of equivalent positions in different orientations."<sup>479</sup> The spontaneous organizations of the body schema – the way it conceives aspects of perception in equivalence to each other, for instance by letting the smell of a lemon or the adhesive-tactile nature of honey be *seen* – are ways that the perceptual consciousness constantly transgresses itself.

The crux of the self-distance of perception includes an apparent paradox of human spontaneity. We can phrase the point thus: in human spontaneity, inexhaustible abilities exist to perceive things differently. One can foreground ever new aspects implied in the perceptual horizon. Self-distance is implicit

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<sup>474</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Preface. ixxiv

<sup>475</sup> In Section 10, we will extrapolate from the side of the empirical discourses on the spontaneity of this tangent as *mind-wandering*.

<sup>476</sup> Section 8 will extrapolate on the spontaneous throwing in the terms of *symbol behavior* (*Structure of Behavior*).

<sup>477</sup> We refer here to Merleau-Ponty's critique of the various models that ultimately describes perceptual reality in objective or positivist term. This perspective permeates the *Structure of Behavior*.

<sup>478</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Consciousness and Language Acquisition (1949-50)", in *Child Psychology and Pedagogy - The Sorbonne Lectures 1949-1952* (Northwestern University Press 2010). 44.

<sup>479</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 142.



in this occurrence. Instead of being fully invested in a unique position, the spontaneous-perceiving self is open to other ways of seeing the same thing.<sup>480</sup> "If man is not to be enclosed within the envelope of the syncretic milieu in which animals lives as if in a state of ecstasy, if he is to be conscious of a world as the common reason of all milieus and as the theater of all behaviors, then a distance between himself and that which solicits his action must be established."<sup>481</sup>

Hence, the apparent paradox: in the spontaneous self-distance of human, also the spontaneous ability to renounce spontaneity exists. Instead of doing every impulse, humans have the potentiality of distance in behavior. This distance *can* be connoted as control, willed inhibition or tamed behavior, but this is not primarily how Merleau-Ponty demonstrates it. Mainly, the self-distance of perception is precisely spontaneous. Belonging to the essential characteristics of the Merleau-Pontian body schema is the ability to let go of investments on *one* aspect of the situation in favor of a more general aspect for the same situation. Without this spontaneous ability, there would be no human experience in the first place.<sup>482</sup> The spontaneous self-distance is vital to human life – both in the biological sense and in the sense of being moral constituted in relationships with others.

Launching us further into the topic is the phrasing used by Merleau-Ponty. In a certain sense, the subject *has* its body, we read.<sup>483</sup> And: "Consciousness is being toward the thing through the intermediary of the body."<sup>484</sup> Why does Merleau-Ponty phrase it thus? Why speak of *having* a body and *intermediary* instead of just saying that the projective activity of consciousness *is* the body itself? In contemporary phenomenological discussions, we would recognize this approach to embodied consciousness as *identity theory*.<sup>485</sup> According to identity theory, there is a one-to-one relation between physical reactions in the living body (e.g. *brain*) and phenomenal consciousness, or perhaps better stated, a point-to-point identity between the projective nature of consciousness and its embedded reality. Is not identity theory the unavoidable consequence of a radical philosophical orientation towards the inescapable nature of human embodied life?

According to Merleau-Ponty's perspective, the answer is clearly negative. Identity theory (or *constancy hypothesis*, as he calls it in *Phenomenology of Perception*) misses the crucial dimension of human experience, namely the self-distance and the transgressive role of the body schema. Implied in everything from the minutest perceptual experience to the most abstract cognitive operations of epistemic knowledge, is a structure transgressive to what is conceived in a one-to-one identity between consciousness and bodily reality.

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<sup>480</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>482</sup> Cf. *Symbol behavior in Structure of Behavior*. We examine this in detail in Section 8 below.

<sup>483</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 142.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid. 140.

<sup>485</sup> For a brief and lucid explanation of identity theory see: Michel Bitbol, "Neurophenomenology, and Ongoing Practice of/in Consciousness," *Constructivist Foundations* 7, nr. 3 (2012).

We can illuminate this point by way of an example of perceiving a pen lying on the table. Seeing the pen, paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty's account, implies by necessity a structure transgressing what is mere actuality. However rudimentarily these aspects might be for the perceiving subject, an infinite specter of various perspectives potentially taken on the same object conceived with the actual gaze on the pen. For example, movements indicating how it would be to stretch out a hand and feel the pen, or of how it would be to turn the head in another direction whence the pen is no longer visible, or of closing one's eyes and imagining the pen instead of seeing it directly, are intrinsic to the simple gesture of perceiving the pen on the table. In other words, there are a multitude of possible acts that *could* be fulfilled in various bodily activities but which by no means *have* to be so.

Hence, where identity theory would hold that human experience *is* embodied actualities, perception in Merleau-Ponty's take involves no strict correlation to actuality. Perception is not "enclosed in the actual,"<sup>486</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty; it opens itself to a virtual dimension of the given.<sup>487</sup> "The normal"<sup>488</sup> subject's body is not merely ready to be mobilized by real situations that draw it toward themselves, it can also turn away from the world, apply its activity to the stimuli that are inscribed upon its sensory surfaces, land itself to experiments, and, more generally, be situated in the virtual.<sup>489</sup> To be situated in the virtual implies to be open to the imaginary dimension of the moment. It is to be in the environment not merely with reference to the concrete but also to verbal and fictional situations *in* the same concrete milieu.<sup>490</sup> "The normal person *reckons* with the possible," Merleau-Ponty writes; the possible "acquires a sort of actuality without leaving behind its place as a possibility[.]"<sup>491</sup> A plurality of possible bodily intentions is thus implied in the minutest movement: "each motor or tactile event gives rise in consciousness to an abundance of intentions that run from the body as a center of virtual action either toward the body itself or towards the object[.]"<sup>492</sup> The body constantly throws itself out by fulfilling or not fulfilling possible ways of expression.

We now see how perceiving the virtual in actual, or the abstract in the concrete, are essential features of the Merleau-Pontyan body schema. The diversity of expressive gestures sketches out zones of possible behavior, we can say. The expressive gesture *acts out* the *sens*<sup>493</sup> of the situation along a multitude of axes. Movement and its background becomes moments within a single whole: "The background of the

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<sup>486</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 111.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid. 111. Going through *Structure of Behavior*, we will in Section 8 and 16 pursue details implied in Merleau-Ponty's analyses of *virtual movements* and *categorial acts*.

<sup>488</sup> The contrasting example is the morbid behavior of the so-called psychic blindness characterized (by Merleau-Ponty) as an inability to perceive the virtual in the actual. Ibid. 107. We discuss the role of morbid behavior in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in Section 15 below.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid. 112. Italics original.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>493</sup> We use the French spelling of *sens* both to indicate that we are talking about Merleau-Ponty's term and to preserve the connotations of the French word. In a literal sense not heard in German *Sinn*, for instance, *sens* can mean *direction* in the concrete sense, for instance expressed in the *rue à sens unique* (one-way street).

movement is not a representation associated or linked externally to the movement itself; it is immanent in the movement, it animates it and guides it along at each moment."<sup>494</sup> The background is the intrinsic *telos* of the movement, so to speak. It is accomplished in and through the movement itself.<sup>495</sup>

Merleau-Ponty refers to the spontaneous throwing as a way the body proper spontaneously hollows out a zone of moral life in perception. "Within the busy world in which concrete movements unfolds, abstract movement hollows out a zone of reflection and of subjectivity," he writes; "it superimposes a virtual or human space over physical space."<sup>496</sup> The abstract or fictive structure of the gesture is a way the body "organizes before himself a free space in which things that do not exist naturally can take on a semblance of existence".<sup>497</sup> The throwing of the body is a dynamic power constituting moral life in the environment. It is a power that marks out the "borders and directions in the given world," Merleau-Ponty writes. It establishes lines of force, it arranges perspectives and organizes the given world according to projects of the moments by "constructing upon the geographical surroundings a milieu of behavior and a system of significations that express, on the outside, the internal world of the subject."<sup>498</sup> The body transforms and hollows out a zone of how to be a human in and through behavior. "[A] human productivity must appear through the thickness of being",<sup>499</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. The spontaneous throwing is a way that the phenomenal body expresses – from the inside and out – how the world is organized.

Later,<sup>500</sup> we will see how the fine-grained structure of action offered in *Structure of Behavior* is implied in what we here see at the outset of *Phenomenology of Perception*. Thus we will see how self-distance and flexibility are implied from the most rudimentary forms of behavior, to the symbol behavior characteristic of the human being. For now, however, we can use the point of self-distance to sketch a new point in the relationship between Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. One important analogy between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology involves how both the hermeneutical and perceptual selves are transformative beings expressing a relative – but vital – freedom of direction. For both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, the course of human life is staked out not primarily by causal orders, but in the processes wherein the human dialectically relates to his or her own situation. The human self interacts with the lifeworld: he or she transgresses – in various ways, and more or less constantly – the boundaries of what is given. *Wahrheit und Methode* describes this transformative dimension of the self as *Umweltsfreiheit*. Humans are *free* in regard to movement, and in this freedom – which is always relative to the given circumstances – emerges the moral world of humans [*Welt*].<sup>501</sup> In *Phenomenology of*

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<sup>494</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 113.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.* 140.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.* 115.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.* 115.

<sup>500</sup> Sections 8 and 16.

<sup>501</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 448

*Perception*, we have seen an analogous structure in behavior. In human behavior, wherein moral and self-conduct emerge in a way distinguished from any other being, a freedom of conduct and ultimately the human world exists. For both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, the freedom of life for humans is coupled with *meaning – Sinn* and *sens*: not (necessarily) in the sense that life has "content" in some form or another, but in the ways a human more or less constantly transgresses and transforms what *is* on the way to what *could be*. Ontologically speaking, in this transgression an ahistorical dimension of humans occurs according to philosophers: not *external to*, not *beyond*, or *behind* historical life, but *in* historical life, an ahistorical generality of the self exists in the ways it opens up to the possibilities of the moment.

The guiding difference between the philosophers pertains to how the self-distance of new perspectives are being described. We have already pursued how Gadamer's path of *Lesen* emphasizes the accumulation of tradition and cultural practices. In the next part, we will study how the path of *Lesen* is manifest down to minute levels of Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis. In an important sense, to *perceive* is for Gadamer to *read* the environment. The accumulation of tradition and cultural practices are intrinsic parts of *Wahrnehmung* and the articulations into *Sprache* are the accomplishment of the potentialities of *Wahrnehmung*.

With Merleau-Ponty, we now see a figure that is both analogous and different. Where Gadamer emphasizes how accumulation of experience occurs in tradition, cultural practices, and ultimately, in language, Merleau-Ponty locates the accumulation of experience in perception. The *body schema* concept is one prime example of expressing accumulation of experience – but so is nearly every affirmed concept in Merleau-Ponty's writings. Nearly all imply an accumulation of experience in perception, but the phenomenological accumulation is different from what we find exposed in the hermeneutical philosophy.

As we will see in Part Three, when Merleau-Ponty built up the structure of behavior "from below" (*Structure of Behavior*) revealed is how *sens* implies a moment of accumulation of experience – individually, communally, and ontologically – not as *Sprache*, *Text*, *Bildung* and *Tradition*, but rather in perception. Where Gadamer's accumulation of *Sinn* refers specifically to accumulated practices in traditions and culturally sediment expressions, *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* describe how accumulative orders of *sens* is (or *does*) always goes on a perceptual level. Seeing the color red,<sup>502</sup> for instance, is for Merleau-Ponty quite literally to *see* the accumulated orders of the color. This phenomenal accumulation of order is not linguistic in the Gadamerian sense, but proto-linguistic and *there* in and for the perceptual gaze.

In our semi-historical perspective on Merleau-Ponty, we can view the phenomenological account of accumulation in light of Plato's critique of *medesthai*. Where Plato disregards the *medesthai* for not being *logos*, Merleau-Ponty refers to the accumulation of experience involved in perception as the

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<sup>502</sup> Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining - The Chiasm," ed. Claude Lefort, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). 131–132.

fundamental *logos* – the *logos* of perception. "[T]he only Logos that preexists is the world itself,"<sup>503</sup> Merleau-Ponty's declares in the opening of *Phenomenology of Perception*. Describing perceptual life is the attempt to found *sens* where any form of expression starts, ends, and ultimately belongs: "The perceived world is the world always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value, and all existence. This thesis does not destroy either rationality or the absolute. It only tries to bring them down to earth."<sup>504</sup> The perceptual *sens* implies recourse to prime dimensions in life: "By these words, 'primacy of perception,' we mean that the experiences is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent logos; that it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the tasks of this knowledge and action."<sup>505</sup> In an important sense, the nascent *logos* of perception is just what it is. The order of perception is just there with the perceiving body.

Herein evolves the fuller sense of the perceptual communion touched upon above. The phenomenal body expresses the nascent *logos* of perception. The body schema is an ongoing response to the accumulated order of perception. The imaginative, dreamlike, associative way of the spontaneous peripheral consciousness is a way of being close to the world itself – the world of perception.

We can now draw out a profound philosophical difference between Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty that apparently has long roots in the Western philosophical tradition, but that we soon (next part) also will re-locate in the nearer phenomenological tradition of Husserl and Heidegger. Entangled with the differences regarding accumulation of experience is another difference – a difference that we now can ascribe to the moment of circulation.

In Subsection 4c, we saw how Gadamer's *Sinn* is intimately tied to the circulation of texts. Although intrinsically related to the social co-presence of humans, the accumulation of *Sinn* is elaborated not as phenomenal presence as such but with reference to how perspectives on one and the same *Sache* are accumulated in the circulation of perspectives. Written texts paradigmatically illustrate the dialectics of understanding by itself being a concretized dialectic of understanding. Thus in the moment of circulation, with the written text, a multitude of human perspectives are taken on the same *Sache* as a result of its circulating nature. As the text gathers meaning by circulation in public life (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), it potentially expands the world view of the individual. Additionally, Gadamer here follows Plato, which in a dual way reflects the aspect of circulation by using the metaphor (*meta-phora*) of *writing in the soul* (page 54-54). In expanding on Plato's *Phaedrus*, Gadamer's emphasis on *Lesen* sees the circulation of texts as *the* feature initiating the required self-distance of the individual seeking expanded knowledge. The circulation of the written texts is what makes the singular human expand his or her horizon by making him or her see

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<sup>503</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. ixxxiv.

<sup>504</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences (1946)." 13.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

the world from another perspective. The horizon of the hermeneutical consciousness is a horizon of circulating *Text*.

Merleau-Ponty's path of *perception* offers another take. In his painstakingly detailed demonstrations of perceptual life, the circulation of perspectives occurs in perception. Let us indicate how.<sup>506</sup> Being situated in the world of perception is for Merleau-Ponty to see the objects from one side. Things are seen *from here*. However, the limited view on things is according to the phenomenologist not only a limitation, but also an opening. Perspective is a way things organize themselves in foreground/background structures. "Although it [perspective] may be the means that the objects have of concealing themselves, it is also the means that they have of unveiling themselves."<sup>507</sup> To perceive is to grasp things according to the sides these other things turn toward the surrounding object.<sup>508</sup> Folded into the unique perspective of the onlooker is the object seen from the perspective of the surrounding objects. The objects of perception are not merely looked *at*; they do in a certain sense also *look*. "When I see the lamp on my table," Merleau-Ponty exemplifies, "I attribute to it not merely the qualities that are visible from my location, but also those of the fireplace, the walls, and the table can 'see.' The back of my lamp is merely the face that is 'shows' to the fireplace."<sup>509</sup> The objects of perception *mirror* each other.<sup>510</sup> To see an object from *this* perspective is implicitly (also) to see it in accordance with how it is to see it from the other side (for example, from the perspective of the object hidden by the one in front). In other words, a perceptual gaze is not merely to see the object from one's own privileged point of view, but (also) to displace this privileged positions. The virtual configuration of an object seen from *there* becomes an intrinsic part of the perceptual situation *here*. "I can see one object insofar as the objects form a system or a world, and insofar as each of them arranges the others around itself like spectators of its hidden aspects and as the guarantee of their performance", we read. "Each act of seeing that I perform is instantly reiterated among the objects of the world that are grasped as coexistent because each object just is all that the others see of it."<sup>511</sup> The phenomenal *here* is a decentered *here*. In relationship to the perceiver, and in relationship to each other, the objects of perception are expressive physiognomies potentially opening up a vast span of possible behavior.

Intrinsic to what we say here is a moral dimension of perception. According to the logic of Merleau-Ponty's demonstrations,<sup>512</sup> to see an object from *one* perspective implies the gaze of another person seeing the same object *from there*. Perception is co-perception – both in an anthropological and nonanthropological sense. As for the anthropological sense, the shared moral life of a human being is

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<sup>506</sup> We will return to the Merleau-Ponty's analysis in the context of Husserl's *Absolutes Hier*. Subsection 6c below.

<sup>507</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 70.

<sup>508</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 71.

<sup>509</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 71.

<sup>510</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 71.

<sup>511</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 71.

<sup>512</sup> Implied in what we indicate here are the analyses of *Structure of Behavior*. We evoke the details of this analysis in Sections 8 and 16 below.

constitutive for the evolving perspectives taken by the subject. Thus, the way that the objects determine each other is constituted by the ways that *one* perceives things in this or that historical, cultural and personal situation. However, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates an existential mimicry<sup>513</sup> occurring between the phenomenal body and the objects of perception. Something in the organization of the objects likens the organization of phenomenal body. There is an anthropomorphic dimension in the way the objects *stand* in horizontal directions, or *lie* in vertical directions. As for the nonanthological sense, all human perspective taken on the object is also determined by the perceived object itself. The object of perception is open to different ways of being seen; the object opens an inexhaustible richness regarding the ways of being looked at. In fact, as we will pursue in Section 16 below, developed in *Structure of Behavior*<sup>514</sup> is a radical nonanthropological concept of perception. In fundamental senses, the structures of human behavior are shared with physical objects (physical structures) and vital organisms (vital structures) in general. Ultimately speaking, morality means not only *human* morality but the genuinely shared ontological orders of the world.

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenal horizon of the perceiving subject is thus: to perceive is to be amidst the possible variations of perspectives. These possible variations are not external to but rather integrated in the peripheral consciousness of the body schema. In greater or lesser degrees, they involve the global and inexplicit awareness wherein the phenomenal body radiates over its milieu.

We conclude by underlining this point, soon to be revisited in the methodological context (Part Three): perceptual life, according to Merleau-Ponty, harbors the dialectic circulation of perspectives analogous to what Gadamer and Plato associate with written texts. Accumulated in perception are the perspectives circulating *in between* subject and object, *I* and *you*, *I* and *community*, *here* and *there*, *now* and *then*, *human* and *nonhuman*, *physical* and *vital*. This circulation was implied in Merleau-Ponty's *abstract movement*, or in the vague yet vital behavior wherein a zone of reflection and of subjectivity is hollowed out by superimposing a "virtual or human space over physical space",<sup>515</sup> as Merleau-Ponty put it. The circulation is the *logos* of perception: the inarticulate circulation of imagined presences in the present. In other words, whereas Gadamer sees the written text as an externalized expression of the human's relational expressivity constitutive for an expanded view on the object, Merleau-Ponty locates the externalized human expression in perception. Whereas the articulate questions accumulated in traditions and cultural practices for Gadamer are what initiate a dialogue on the enigma of being human, already the swift sight of a tree<sup>516</sup> harbors for Merleau-Ponty the same potential. It is all *there*, circulating in the perceptual field: the enigma of being one human in a shared world of perception.

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<sup>513</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 188. Details in Merleau-Ponty's demonstrations of existential mimicry will be pursued in Section 16 below.

<sup>514</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. Chapter III, "The Physical; the Vital; the Human Order".

<sup>515</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 114.

<sup>516</sup> Alluded to here is Plato, *Phaedrus*. 230d.

## Part Three. Body and Methodology

The previous chapters situated Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies in the Western philosophical tradition of meditation. We saw how philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology entail contemporary versions of an ambiguity between reading and perception that has been part of philosophy since the beginning (Homer-Plato). Pursuing issues handed over with the words *meletē*, *medesthai*, and meditation we saw how Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty emphasized different sides of the ambiguity. Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty bridge modern dualism by each taking their path (*Lesen* and *perception*) latent in Augustine's meditation. Also, Gadamer's emphasis on tradition and culturally accumulated knowledge echoed Plato's *meletē* and hence reading in the philosophical sense approved by Plato. Merleau-Ponty's *logos* of perception echoed the spontaneous mind of *medesthai*, according to Plato associated with perception in a nonorganized and disapproved sense. Lastly, we indicated how the differences between Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty came down to the question of circulation of written texts and perceptual perspectives. In Gadamer's path of *Lesen*, the circulation of *Text* is constitutive for an expansion of self-knowledge. In Merleau-Ponty's path of *perception*, an analogous circulation is demonstrated in perception.

Part Three will pursue related issues in the nearer tradition of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty and within the framework of methodology. As we know, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty present not only distinct emphasis on themes (*Text* vs. *embodiment*) but also ways of doing philosophy. The *what* of the philosophies comes with a *how*, as we said. Methodological issues permeate the various emphases taken up by the two philosophers. What, then, are the methodological rationales for these distinct paths taken? How do the paths of *Lesen* and *perception* impact the outcomes of their philosophical analyses of human experience?



A number of issues motivates the methodological questions; some of them are addressed in the subsequent sections. Above all, we remember that our prime object of analysis – the nondirective meditation – eventually will call upon a largely detailed conception of action. Merleau-Ponty has the descriptive resources required, we said, whereas Gadamer does not. Gadamer's philosophy will stand out as a little too abstract – or too categorial – to catch the nuances involved in the contemporary meditative practice. The reason why Merleau-Ponty has the descriptive resources required is because he lets phenomenology be informed by discoveries made in the empirical sciences. Merleau-Ponty's fine-grained vocabulary of action is not handed over by tradition as such. It expresses empirical discoveries not only recently but also emerging within discourses equipped with resources of investigation other than those of traditional philosophy. As we know, Gadamer's philosophy offers no analogous dialogue with the empirical discourses. In our context, when nondirective meditation makes apparent the lack of concepts of action in Gadamer's writings it apparently evokes more than "just a lack". Compared to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, Gadamer's lack of action stands out as the emblem of a contemporary philosophy which has turned its back to the empirical sciences. Why is this so? How can Merleau-Ponty offer a way of constructive dialogue with the empirical discourses, whereas Gadamer's philosophy is void of such a contact?

Perplexingly enough, these methodological questions will explore the ambiguity between reading and perception handed over together in the Western philosophical tradition of meditation. In the center of the different methods executed by Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty stands the age-old question discussed earlier: what should count as the main orientation for a philosophical investigation of the human situation – is it reading or perception?

Based on Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung* from 1900-1901, the current section will indicate how the question reappears in the various philosophical methodologies originating in Husserl's thinking. The *Kategoriale Anschauung* harbors a moment of pivotal importance for Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's ways of doing philosophy. The current section will seek to demonstrate how the two philosophers utilize – indeed *practice*, qua *Lesen* and *perception* – possibilities given in these earliest years of contemporary phenomenology. We will also pursue some of the possibilities and limitations thereof. In Husserl and Heidegger, we will locate textual loci wherein Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics once could have been taken more in the direction of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, i.e. more in the direction of embodiment and constructive dialogue with the empirical sciences. As for Merleau-Ponty, we try to better understand the methodological rationale practiced in *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty's semi-Augustinian phenomenological-interpretative strategy has a hermeneutical aspect, yet is not hermeneutical in the traditional sense of Gadamer's path of *Lesen*.

The course of action will be as follows. Subsection 6a will explore a Husserlian reading limited to *one* particular aspect relevant to our context,<sup>517</sup> namely how Husserl discovers a categorial surplus (*Überschuß*)

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<sup>517</sup> For a fuller discussion of Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung*, see: Dieter Lohmar, "Categorial Intuition", in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Milley-Blackwell, 2009).

potentially given in perceptual intentionality. Subsection 6b will follow Heidegger's critique of Husserl's significant stages of his earliest writings, *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus* (1914) and *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (1923, henceforth *Prolegomena*). Here, we will see how Heidegger articulates his version of phenomenology, by using and revising Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung* (partly by using Husserl against Husserl). Noteworthy, we also see how Heidegger in one and the same move turns phenomenology away from the empirical discourses, and away from closer phenomenological descriptions of perceptual life and embodiment, and to tradition. In effect, the move is a move *from* perception (*Wahrnehmung*-analysis), to reading (*Auslegung*). As we will come to see, Heidegger makes the move on the grounds of certain premises effective in his earliest analyses of perception, in ways that can be said to determine how philosophy considers the potentiality of *Leibliche Gegenwart*. In Subsection 6c, we will see how Husserl's *Ideen II* articulates the premise in question as the *Absolutes Hier* of perception. Moreover, we will also indicate how Gadamer follows Heidegger, by looking into the *Wahrnehmung*-analysis of *Wahrheit und Methode*. Eventually, we will seek to indicate a subtle but apparent *Absolutes Hier* in Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis. In effect, we will see how Heidegger's earliest *Wahrnehmung*-analyses has consolidated premises regarding how to conceive of perception in ways not even questioned by Gadamer.

By the end of Subsection 6c, Husserl's, Heidegger's, and Gadamer's accounts of *Wahrnehmung* will all be put into relief with Merleau-Ponty's account. In his so-called nascent *logos* of perception, we will see, there is no *Absolutes Hier*. Merleau-Ponty's fine-grained vocabulary of action allows him to demonstrate a de-centering of perspective potentially displacing the phenomenological idea of *Absolutes Hier* altogether. The difference between the three German philosophers and Merleau-Ponty will turn out to be philosophically intriguing. In effect, the nuances involved are the emblematic expressions of how philosophy relates to the empirical sciences. Merleau-Ponty's way of combining empirical results with phenomenological description allows him to demonstrate a fuller potential of perceptual life, compared to the German philosophers. The nuances entailed in this potential are what the previous section (in the outset of tradition) introduced as the moment of circulation in perception. In our overall engagement with nondirective meditation, these nuances will eventually turn out to be essential. In effect, described here are the descriptive resources that we need to demonstrate the enactive dimension of nondirective meditation properly.

In Section 7, we turn towards the methodological aspects of Merleau-Ponty's path, through a lecture entitled *Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man*, held by Merleau-Ponty in 1961. In this lecture, Merleau-Ponty outlines important rationales of the interpretative method practice for the empirical sciences, in ways retrospectively illuminating for *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*. In contrast to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty does not comment directly on Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung*. The moments we are after involve his double discussion of Husserl's *Wesenschau* and empirical *induction*. On the background of these methodological remarks, Section 8 will move into the details carefully elaborated by Merleau-Ponty in *Structure of Behavior*. Here, we will expand on what we previously have considered as body schema in the outset of *Phenomenology of Perception*.

## 6. From *Schlichte Wahrnehmung* to Hermeneutical *Sehen als...*

What are the philosophical rationales of the hermeneutical method of *Auslegung* practiced by Gadamer? In the previous chapter, we saw how Gadamer openly follows Augustine in elaborating his hermeneutically reflected concept of language (*Sprache*). One customary way of presenting this legacy is to say that Gadamer follows Heidegger in doing so. According to Grondin (and Gadamer<sup>518</sup>), Heidegger discovered in Augustine the hermeneutical dimension of the *Sinn des Daseins*. Augustine becomes for Heidegger the first real *Vollzugdenker* of hermeneutics. In Augustine, writes Grondin, citing Heidegger's *Ontologie der Faktizität* (1923), "gibt die erste 'Hermeneutik' großen Stils".<sup>519</sup> Augustine offers the first existential and all-embracing hermeneutics: *Dasein* comes to care for its being *in* and *through* the reading of the scripture (in contrast to, for instance, Schleiermacher's subsequent hermeneutics wherein hermeneutics is reduced to a "Kunst (Kunstlehre) des Verstehens".<sup>520</sup>) Citing Augustine (*On Christian Doctrine*), Heidegger writes: "A man fearing God diligently seeks His will in the Holy Scriptures. And lest he should love controversy, he is made gently in piety. He is prepared with a knowledge of languages lest he be impeded by unknown words and locutions. He is also prepared with an acquaintance with certain necessary things lest he be unaware of their force and nature when they are used for purposes of similarity."<sup>521</sup> In line with our hermeneutical reading of Augustine's *The Trinity*, Heidegger saw the *Wie des Faktizität* here evolving in the *Vollzug* of the Word.<sup>522</sup> Reading, in the form of a committed engagement with a text of ontological value (cf. the *Bible*) is what makes the existential *Wie* of *Dasein* emerge. "Dieses Wie," Grondin explains, "dieses Sein-können läßt sich nur als Vollzug ansprechen, denn es geht nicht um eine feststellbare Tatsache, um ein 'Objekt', das mir gegenüberstünde, sondern um eine Aufgabe, die ich aufzunehmen habe, die ich aber auch verfehlen kann, indem ich mich von anderen Beschäftigungen ablenken lasse, ablenken nämlich von der zentralen Frage, die ich für mich selbst bin."<sup>523</sup> The *Wie* of facticity is not a positive fact, but the enigma of self-understanding.

Grondin tracks down the Augustinian impact into the famous opening of *Sein und Zeit*, wherein Heidegger takes recourse to the *Seinendes* of which "in seinem Sein um dieses Sein geht".<sup>524</sup> Entailed in Heidegger's recourse to the *Frage*, Grondin demonstrates, is a revitalized turn towards the Augustinian

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<sup>518</sup> Gadamer, "Erinnerungen an Heideggers Anfänge (1986)." 21.

<sup>519</sup> Heidegger, *Ontologie der Faktizität*. 12.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid. 12. Heidegger cites Augustine in Latin – the current English translation is from Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994). 33.

<sup>522</sup> Point taken from Jean Grondin, *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001). 73.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>524</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006). 12.

enigma of humans.<sup>525</sup> Gadamer, according to Grondin's reading, follows Heidegger in the opening of his magnum opus of 1960. The very first sentence of *Wahrheit und Methode*, wherein Gadamer calls for the "hermeneutische Problem",<sup>526</sup> is a re-evoking of Heidegger-Augustine. The *Wie* of Gadamer's hermeneutical phenomenon – *how* it is handed over by tradition as a methodological crisis within the *Geisteswissenschaften* – is Gadamer's version of the Heidegger-Augustinian *Seinendes* of which "in seinem Sein *um* dieses Sein geht." In what we saw in Part Two, *Sprache* comes to harbor the ultimate *Wie* of understanding. The *Sinn* of language is the all-encompassing structure which motivates and accomplishes the understanding of the individual. Accordingly, by the logic included here, describing the eidetic aspects of *Sprache* is indirectly to describe the moments necessarily involved in any act of understanding – the embodied experiences as well as anything else.

We recognize from Subsection 4c how Gadamer's *Text* concept is entangled with the hermeneutical narrative thus indicated by Grondin.<sup>527</sup> Gadamer emphasizes in numerous works how the hermeneutical *Text* concept is a reflected concept occurring *out of tradition*. Not only are Plato and Augustine echoed here. According to Gadamer's overviews,<sup>528</sup> the hermeneutical *Text* concept is an accomplishment [*Vollzug*] of a development occurring in the fuller tradition of Bible exegesis, the practice of jurisdiction, as well as the contribution of numerous other philosophers of which Heidegger represents the apex. It was Heidegger's achievement, writes Gadamer, to draw out the existential dimension latent in the text conceptions inherited from tradition. Heidegger saw the latent path of reading in writers like Augustine and accomplished it in the fuller existential explications of phenomenology and hermeneutics.<sup>529</sup>

However, there is at least one complicating factor occurring in the middle of Grondin's, Gadamer's, and Heidegger's shared narrative. Without thereby questioning the legitimacy of their hermeneutical reasoning, their ways of conceiving the hermeneutical recourse to Augustine and *Text* can hardly be said to be the *whole* story. As we will come to see in the current section, when Heidegger, in 1923, approaches Augustine and discovers *here*, as Grondin put it, the hermeneutical *Wie der Faktizität*, Heidegger does so (among the multiple other analyses undertaken in these early years) by a certain analysis of perception. Heidegger's recourse to texts and tradition is entangled with a specific way of conceiving *Wahrnehmung*. The hermeneutical way of reading (for instance) Augustine is permeated with a premise established in a distinctive way of conceiving embodied experience. To understand *how* and *why*, we need to begin with the beginning, which in the context of the nearer phenomenological traditions means Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*.

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<sup>525</sup> Grondin, *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer*. Chapter III *Heidegger und Augustine zur hermeneutischen Wahrheit*. The current point is taken from 72.

<sup>526</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. Einleitung. 1.

<sup>527</sup> Grondin discusses and nuances Gadamer's quasi-teleological narrative of accomplishment. Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. 3 ff. Grondin does not scrutinize the phenomenological premises involved in the narrative the way we intend to do here, however. On Grondin's reading of Gadamer, see Subsection 13a below.

<sup>528</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 330–333.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.* 333.

a. *Kategoriale Anschauung* (Husserl 1900-1901)

We turn to Book II, Chapter Six of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*, entitled *Sinnliche und Kategoriale Anschauungen*, and read some pages of pivotal value in our context. Initially, Husserl investigates the relationship between *meaning-intentionality* [*Bedeutungsintention*] of linguistic expressions and *what is meant with the word*, the designated object [*Gegenstand*]. What, Husserl asks, does it imply to express [*Ausdrücken*] that one sees something: for instance, a white paper? Observing that the word *white* surely expresses the fact that the paper *is white*, Husserl rejects the idea that there exists a complete covering [*bloße Deckung*<sup>530</sup>] or parallelism<sup>531</sup> between the meaning-intentionality and object.<sup>532</sup> Recognizing [*Erkennen*] the fact that the white paper is white, the intentionality necessarily contains something *more* than a direct covering of intention and the object. "Gewiß kann man verständlich und für den Hörenden eindeutig sagen, *ich sehe, daß dieses Papier weiß ist*", Husserl writes; "aber die Meinung dieser Rede muß es nicht sein, daß die Bedeutung des ausgesprochenen Satzes einem *bloßen Sehen* Ausdruck gebe."<sup>533</sup> *White paper* does not mean – exclusively – "*white paper*";: "*Weißes, d.h. weiß seiendes Papier*."<sup>534</sup> The *being* of the white paper is also implied in the meaning-intentionality expressing that the paper is white.

This phenomenological observation leads Husserl to the conclusion that the intentional act in question implies a certain surplus (*Überschuss*) of intentions. Hidden (*Verborgenes*<sup>535</sup>) in the in the *Bedeutungsintention* is more than what we strictly speaking see. "Die Intention das Wortes *weiß* deckt sich nur partiell mit dem Farbenmoment des erscheinenden Gegenstandes, es bleibt ein *Überschuss in der Bedeutung*, eine Form, die in der Erscheinung selbst nicht findet, sich darin zu bestätigen."<sup>536</sup> In other words, both in the initial perceptual intentionality of the white paper, and in the expression of this fact, is something more than what can be confirmed in direct reference to the object.

In Husserl's analysis, the intentional surplus becomes an indication of a categorial level [*Stufe*] of perception. Husserl observes that the intentional act of *being* cannot be fulfilled [*erfüllt*] in what he calls *schlichte* [*mere or simple*] *Wahrnehmung*.<sup>537</sup> "*Sein sei schlechthin nichts Wahrnehmbares*,"<sup>538</sup> he writes.<sup>539</sup> "Die Farbe kann ich sehen, nicht aber das Farbig-sein. Die Glätte kann ich fühlen, nicht aber das Glatt-sein. Den Ton kann ich hören, nicht aber das Tönend-sein."<sup>540</sup> The categorial reality of *being* is in the meaning

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<sup>530</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. 659.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid. 661.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid. 659.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid. 660. Italics original.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid. 660.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid. 660.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid. 660. Italics added.

<sup>537</sup> "Die Erfüllungsform der schlichten Wahrnehmung kann als solche Formen offenbar nicht hinanreichen." *ibid.* 660.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid. 666.

<sup>539</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 79 ff.

<sup>540</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. 666. Cf. "Hier erinnern wir uns an den Kantschen Satz: Das Sein ist kein reales Prädikat." *ibid.* 665.

intentionality, and apparently it says something true regarding the object, yet it cannot be accomplished in *mere* perception.

What is the status of the categorial level exemplified with being? Husserl rejects the idea that *being* is located somewhere *in* or *by* the object. "[*Sein* ist] keine Qualität oder Intensivität, aber auch keine Figur, keine innere Form überhaupt, kein wie immer zu fassendes konstitutives Merkmal", he writes. "Das Sein ist aber auch nichts *an* einem Gegenstande, es ist wie kein reales inneres, so auch kein reales äußeres Merkmal und darum im realen Sinne überhaupt kein 'Merkmal'."<sup>541</sup> That is, although contained *in* the expression of meaning, the categorial level of *being* lacks an objective [*real*] correlate in the perceived object. "[E]ine Bedeutung wie die des Wortes *Sein* [findet] kein mögliches objektives Korrelat und darum in den Akten solcher Wahrnehmung keine mögliche Erfüllung."<sup>542</sup> Despite the fact that one certainly can see and express in words or in meaning-intentionality that the paper *is* white, there simply is no objective correlate for the percept and the expression.

Husserl generalizes the relevance of the current observation. What counts for the general concept of *being* must by necessity count also for any other mode of experiencing categorial dimensions in perception, he writes.<sup>543</sup> Language, Husserl adds, has many words designating levels [*Stufe*] of percepts not strictly perceived. Form words [*Formworte*] like for instance *das, ein, einige, viele, wenige, zwei, ist, nicht, welches, und, oder*<sup>544</sup> bear witness to a perceptual situation wherein *expressed* does not answer to aspects directly perceivable. What these words express have no possible objective correlate in perception.<sup>545</sup> The same holds for cases of *Kollektiva* and *Disjunktiva*. Husserl observes. When we for instance perceive *two* objects either of the same kind or of different kinds, we do strictly speaking not conceive any isolated *Sachverhalte*<sup>546</sup> but rather a "Zusammenhang von Sachverhalte":

Das, was den Worten *und* und *oder, beides* und *eins von beides* anschaulich entspricht, das läßt sich, so drücken wir es oben in etwas roher Weise aus, nicht mit Händen greifen, mit irgendeinem Sinn erfassen; wie es sich ja auch nicht eigentlich im Bilde darstellen, etwa malen läßt. Ich kann *A* malen und *B* malen, kann beide auch im selben Bildraume malen; aber das *beide*, das *A und B* kann ich nicht malen.<sup>547</sup>

The complex *Sachverhalte* of the *Sachlage* "*A und B*" as well as what is expressed in the "*oder, beides* und *eins von beides*" can be *meant* but not *seen, touched, or painted*. The complex relationship between the objects<sup>548</sup> evolves not on a level of *Schlichte Wahrnehmung* but on the level *Kategoriale Wahrnehmung*.

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid. 666.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid. 667.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid. 667.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid. 658.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid. 667.

<sup>546</sup> *Sachverhalte* is usually translated into *state of affairs*. We use the German expression to preserve the meaning of *Sache* which of course has a reference to Gadamer's *Sachlichkeit* of understanding.

<sup>547</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. 688.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid. 688–689.

In other words, side by side with the sensory intuition of *Schlichte Wahrnehmung*, there entails another form of intuition: a *Kategoriale Anschauung*.<sup>549</sup> The categorial level is *angeschaut*, it is fulfilled [*erfüllt*] in the intentional act [*Akt*] of meaning-intention, and it can be expressed in words, yet it is not perceptually given as such. In cases of concrete perception, the categorial intuition is a form of abstraction which is founded on the *Schlichte Wahrnehmung* yet which fulfils a level in the situation. "Der Gegenstand erscheint nicht mit neuen realen Bestimmtheiten, er steht aber dieser selbe, aber *in neuer Weise da*."<sup>550</sup> In other words, the *Kategoriale Anschauung* does not alter anything in the objects; it just set an order already given in perception. "Die Wahrnehmung bleibt Wahrnehmung, der Gegenstand ist, so wie er war, gegeben, 'nur' daß er eben 'in Beziehung gesetzt' wird."<sup>551</sup> Cases of *ideal intuition* of general ideas, such the idea *red* or an ideal *triangle*,<sup>552</sup> are both analogous and different from the perception of objects. Though lacking a level of *Schlichte Wahrnehmung*, intuited is nevertheless a determined and abstract object. "[W]ir erfassen *es*, wir *erschauen es*",<sup>553</sup> writes Husserl. The ideal object is *given* in intuition: "Der allgemeine Gegenstand ist dann nicht bloß vorgestellt und gesetzt, sondern er ist selbst gegeben."<sup>554</sup>

In contrasting the *Schlichte Wahrnehmung* and the *Kategoriale Anschauung*, Husserl evokes what he calls a "ganz allgemein" differentiation between the "'sinnlichen'" and "'übersinnlichen'"<sup>555</sup> ways of intuition. Here, the *schlichte* perception pertains to the *sinnlichen* form of intuition, whereas the *Kategoriale Anschauung* pertains to the *Übersinnlichen*. Now, what is not meant with the differentiation, we should note, is that the *Kategoriale Anschauung* is a mere intra-mental form of fulfilment in the Lockian sense of reflection.<sup>556</sup> That is, the complex level being intuited is not the result of a process where the perceiving subject *first* gains a sum of isolated impressions in the *Schlichte Wahrnehmung*, and *then*, subsequently, manipulates these input sense data into a complex.<sup>557</sup> Nor does the categorial level emerge as a result of a specific psychic acts (*psychische Akte*),<sup>558</sup> or in the domain of an apparent "inner perception" ["'inneren Wahrnehmung'"].<sup>559</sup>

According to Husserl, the mere idea of locating the categorial *in* the instance wherein the intentional act evolves is wrong. In the complex *Sachverhalte* exemplified above, the expression "*A und B*" expresses an abstraction given with the intentional object itself. "[N]icht in diesen Akten als Gegenständen,

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<sup>549</sup> The German word *Anschauung* can be translated as *to see*, *to watch*, or *to look*, in analogy to the English intuition, which stems from Latin word *intuire*. The word *Anschauung* has a longer history in philosophy, first and foremost from the impact of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Cf. Gadamer, "Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit (1980)." We soon evoke some points from this essay shortly.

<sup>550</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. 686. Italics original.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid. 668.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid. 691.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid. 692.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid. 693.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid. 673.

<sup>556</sup> Explanation borrowed from Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 78.

<sup>557</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. 677.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid. 688.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid. 688.

sondern in den Gegenständen dieser Akte finden wir das Abstraktionsfundament für die Realisierung der besagten Begriffe,<sup>560</sup> writes Husserl. In other words, the categorial intuition fulfils the categorial level occurring in the *object*, not in itself as an instance intuiting the categorial level. The fact that the categorial level lacks an objective correlate in perception does not make it self-invented or subjective in the relativist sense of the word. The foundation of the expressed is *there*, so to speak. The act of intentionality only accomplishes it into an adequate form of expression.

Husserl's analyses are very detailed, moving, for instance, into close investigations on how the intentional syntheses of the *Kategoriale Anschauung* are distinct from the *sinnliche*, and how they involve various forms of intuition implying various forms of foundations [*Fundierungen*]. In our context, we leave these investigations out, instead interested in the series of philosophical achievements happening *after* Husserl. In this respect, we already have the information we need from *Logische Untersuchungen*. Now, if we were to start directly with Gadamer, and comparing Husserl's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis with the analysis of *Wahrheit und Methode*'s,<sup>561</sup> we would soon see the a conceptual distance is as striking as essential. Husserl's *Wahrnehmung*-intentionality of the *Logische Untersuchungen* is not situated in ways analogous to Gadamer's *Verstehen*, as we know, and Husserl's parlance of *Akte* and *Erfüllung* is largely foreign to Gadamer's way of describing experience. Thus, although both philosophers are *Sinn* oriented, we must not confuse Husserl's *Sinn* with Gadamer's philosophical-hermeneutical *Sinn*. *Sinn* does not mean the same in the two contexts.<sup>562</sup> As has Figal stated, between Husserl and Gadamer, a philosophical revision occurs which brings Husserl's phenomenology radically into question. In many ways, Husserl's phenomenology and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics represent more counter-positions than a shared conceptual ground.<sup>563</sup>

Gadamer articulates important differences between him and Husserl in the essay *Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit* (1980). Explicitly drawing out a critique of Husserl's *Anschauung*, Gadamer criticizes what he outlines as an inadequate premise in Husserl's concept, namely the paradigmatic recourse to an "Unmittelbarkeit sinnlicher Gegebenheit".<sup>564</sup> Husserl conceives of *Anschauung* as a direct intuition of something *given*, Gadamer writes. Sensual [*sinnliche*] and intellectual modes of emergence are modeled around paradigmatic but also a hyperbolic model of perceptual givenness.<sup>565</sup> What Husserl conceives to be the intuitive fulfilment of intuition [*anschauliche Erfüllung der Intention*] is a pure border concept [*Grenzbegriff*], writes Gadamer.<sup>566</sup> Husserl's *Anschauung* is an abstraction of the mediated character of all

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid. 670. Cf. Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 79.

<sup>561</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 95 ff. We look into this in Subsection 5c below.

<sup>562</sup> Figal, "Hermeneutik und Phänomenologie." 180.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid. 177.

<sup>564</sup> Gadamer, "Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit (1980)." 192.

<sup>565</sup> Husserl is not alone in this, according to Gadamer. "Der Ausgangspunkt von der sinnlichen Gegebenheit führt das moderne Denken in die Irre ". Ibid. 192.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid. 191.



experience.<sup>567</sup> Husserl fails to recognize adequately how every *Anschauung* is thoroughly mediated, not direct, Gadamer writes. *Anschauung* is a linguistic feature, the hermeneutist underlines; it evolves *in der Sprache*. In other words, not this or that perceptual gaze of the perceiver, but *Sprache* is the prime locus of *Anschaulichkeit*. Thus, fully in accordance with what we have seen, Gadamer's prime example of experience is not perception as such (as it was in Husserl) but the encounters with written or spoken texts. "Dort, im Gebrach von Sprache, in der Rede- und in Dichtkunst, ist ja das Wort 'anschaulich' zu Hause," writes Gadamer; "und zwar als eine besondere Qualität des Beschreibens und Erzählens, so daß man das, was man nicht selber sieht, sondern was einem nur erzählt wird, sozusagen 'vor sich' sieht."<sup>568</sup> Language makes the perceiver intuit what is not given in the moment. Language raises into intuition objects that do not correlate with any object given to immediate perception, but which nevertheless are *there*.<sup>569</sup>

We have insinuated an unquestioned line of impact from Husserl's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis to *Wahrheit und Methode*. Given the differences between the two thinkers, what is the basis of such a claim?

#### b. *Sinn als Geltung. Wie der Gegebenheit* (Heidegger 1914 and 1923)

To understand the impact in question, we need to take a longer detour into the early works of Heidegger. Heidegger revises and expands on Husserl's analysis of the *Kategoriale Anschauung*, in many ways making the *Kategoriale Anschauung* a key to the hermeneutically oriented phenomenology. Heidegger's perhaps most famous encounter with Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung* occurs in a lecture held in 1923 (probably attended by Gadamer), later included in the *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*.<sup>570</sup> In this lecture, Heidegger appraises Husserl for initiating a path of concrete phenomenological description by expanding the idea of objectivity [*Objektivität*].<sup>571</sup> With Husserl's discovery of the *kategoriale Anschauung*, writes Heidegger, "ist zum erstenmal der konkrete Weg einer ausweisenden und echten Kategorienforschung gewonnen."<sup>572</sup> Husserl opens a path of abstraction and ideation in ways revealing, as Heidegger puts it, "den Boden für die Hebung der Strukturen dieser idealen Gegenstände."<sup>573</sup> The crux of Husserl's discovery, according to Heidegger, is the definitive discovery of the nonsubjective, categorial intentionality. "Es gibt Akte, in denen ideale Bestände sich an ihnen selbst zeigen, die nicht Gemächte dieser Akte, Funktionen

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid. 191. Please note that the sentence clause here emphasized with dashes is given in parentheses in Gadamer's original text.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>569</sup> Explanation borrowed from Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamer's Hermeneutik*. 231. We pursue further implications of Gadamer's linguistic conceptions of *Anschaulichkeit* in Subsection 13b below, with emphasis on *Inneres Hören*.

<sup>570</sup> Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. Heidegger also discusses the *Kategoriale Anschauung* elsewhere (Martin Heidegger, "Wilhelm Diltheys Forschungsarbeit und der gegenwärtige Kampf um eine historische Weltanschauung (1925)", in *Dilthey-Jahrbuch*, ed. Frithjof Rodi (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck/Ruprecht, 1992/1993).

<sup>571</sup> Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 98.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid. 97–98.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid. 98.

des Denkens, des Subjektes sind."<sup>574</sup> In other words, Heidegger explores how the categorial dimension of intentionality allows for a mode of intentionality not reducible to something being *done* by the subject, but rather something that the perceiving subject undergoes.

Heidegger's current relationship to *Logische Untersuchungen* is by itself worth pondering. Heidegger's explicit appropriation of Husserl's demonstrations occurs in the lecture much less as a direct comment on Husserl's text than as what we with philosophical hermeneutics could call a transformative interpretation of Husserl's text.<sup>575</sup> Heidegger's evoking of Husserl is ambiguous. Not seldom are the affirmed aspects of Husserl's analysis brought up in ways simultaneously implying a subtle critique of the same philosopher. One example of this is the way Heidegger from the outset evokes Husserl's analysis in a phenomenological context of lived perception instead of the strict methodological gaze aspired for by Husserl. In a comment tacitly referring to Husserl, Heidegger underlines that *Wahrnehmung* in the (already transformed) phenomenological meaning implies not "Wahrnehmung im betonten Sinne des nur funktionierenden Betrachtens" but rather the "Wahrnehmung alltäglicher Art."<sup>576</sup> Everyday perception, writes Heidegger, is an "exemplarischen, leichter zugänglicher Fall einer 'seelischen Verhaltung'".<sup>577</sup>

Die natürliche Wahrnehmung, wie ich in ihr lebe, wenn ich mich in meiner Welt bewege, ist meist nicht ein eigenständiges Betrachten und Studieren der Dinge, sondern geht auf die in einem konkreten praktischen Umgehen mit den Sachen; sie ist nicht eigenständig, ich nehme nicht wahr, um wahrzunehmen, sondern um mich zu orientieren, den Weg zu bahnen, etwas zu bearbeiten; das ist eine ganz natürliche Betrachtung, in der ich ständig lebe.<sup>578</sup>

Now this mode of perceptual "natürliche Betrachtung" of everyday life is for Heidegger the *Boden* for phenomenology. *Lived perception* is where the truth of phenomenology begins and ends. "Das ist der phänomenologische Sinn der Rede, daß ich in ihrer evidenten Wahrnehmung nicht die Wahrnehmung selbst thematisch studiere, sondern *in der Wahrheit lebe*."<sup>579</sup> Bringing this evident mode of perceptual truth into conceptual view is no easy task, as Heidegger admits. "Sachlichkeit dem Selbstverständlichsten gegenüber ist das Schwierigste, was uns gelingen mag, weil der Mensch das Element seiner Existenz im Gekünstelten, Verlogenen, immer schon von anderen Beschwatzten hat."<sup>580</sup>

Importantly, the current textual locus is an example of a locus where Heidegger apparently is very close to Merleau-Ponty's conception of perception. The evident and almost too familiar character of perception is for Merleau-Ponty a genuine enigma of human life. In the *Visible and Invisible*, for instance, Merleau-Ponty thematizes this as the *perceptual faith*, a deep-seated set of mute "opinions" implicated in

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid. 37–38.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid. 70. Italics original.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid. 37.

our lives in ways withdrawing from articulations into statements.<sup>581</sup> The perceptual faith is thoroughly ambiguous. Analogous to Augustine's famous observation on *time*, writes Merleau-Ponty, what perception *is* slips away the moment one tries to articulate what one knows of perception. One both *knows* and *not knows* what perception is.<sup>582</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, the indecisive feature of perception is not a negative. In some analogy to Heidegger's "Sachlichkeit dem Selbstverständlichsten gegenüber ist das Schwierigste", the way perception evades thematizing is for Merleau-Ponty the crux of perceptual faith. Nevertheless, by what we have begun to see, in what Heidegger describes as the inconceivable and practical "Umgehen mit den Sachen" Merleau-Ponty manages to demonstrate a *how* of phenomenal life. He manages to display a body that lives and moves. Why and how does the young Heidegger not follow an analogous ambition? Why is the phenomenal body left unvisited in what Heidegger calls "Sachlichkeit dem Selbstverständlichsten gegenüber"?

A draft of an answer begins in the interpretative movement between Husserl and Heidegger. To see this, we need to go even further back in the works of Heidegger. According to biographical sources, Heidegger studied *Logische Untersuchungen* intensively already in 1911.<sup>583</sup> What is interesting, then, is to observe that already in his first book of 1913, *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus*,<sup>584</sup> Heidegger uses moments of Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung*. He does so *tacitly*; in and through a critique of a positivist oriented psychologism<sup>585</sup> dominating his contemporaries. The general problem targeted in this first book by Heidegger is how to conceive of human *Erkenntnis* in an age increasingly dominated by the empirical sciences. Contemporary thought is threatened in the "Zeitalter der Psychologie", writes Heidegger. Phenomena as distinct as ethics, aesthetics, pedagogics and legal practice are conceived ultimately as psychological phenomena. Also *philosophy* and the "Lehre vom Denken"<sup>586</sup> (meaning *logic* in this context) is threatened by a cultural tendency to reduce *Erkenntnis* [*insight or knowledge*] to empiricism, either with recourse to intra-psychic or physical-mechanical processes. The means targeting the various ways psychologism becomes articulated, then, is the phenomenological path initiated by Husserl.

Again, this critical outset of the young Heidegger shares an apparent similarity with the early Merleau-Ponty, cf. *Structure of Behavior*. In analogy to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty can also be said to use (more or less tacitly) Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung* in and through the critique of the contemporary "scientification" of humans. However, in Heidegger's phenomenological critique of contemporary thought

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<sup>581</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible: followed by working notes*, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968). 3.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>583</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Heidegger Lesebuch*, ed. Günter Figal (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007). Note on chronological aspects of Heidegger's life. 375.

<sup>584</sup> Heidegger, "Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus."

<sup>585</sup> According to the definition, "Psychologism is the doctrine that the laws of mathematics and logic can be reduced to or depend on the laws governing thinking." Dermot Moran and Joseph Cohen, *The Husserl Dictionary* (London/New York: Continuum, 2012). 266. This orientation has a long history in the context of Husserl's writings. From the first volume of *Logische Untersuchungen* to *Krisis*, Husserl handles psychologism as a genuine challenge for phenomenology.

<sup>586</sup> Heidegger, "Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus." 63.

includes the decisive moment that we are searching for; the "nonperceptual" path staked out by the young Heidegger. That is, when Heidegger applies some of the insights of *Logische Untersuchungen* in his critique of psychologism, the critical undertaking is done in a way from the outset establishing a path distinct from Merleau-Ponty's, i.e. principally distinct from a phenomenology of the body informed by the empirical sciences. Established in the critical path of the young Heidegger is not only a path eventually leading away from perception but simultaneously a path leading away from the empirical sciences.

One decisive moment in the "choice" made by Heidegger comes in the way he launches *Sinn* as the pivot point of philosophical critique of the psychologism. Somewhat simplistically explained, the various problems evoked in the age of psychologism boil down for Heidegger to inadequate empiricist conceptions of the "Wirklichkeitsform des Sinnes"<sup>587</sup> Conceiving *Sinn* correctly is *the* defense of a philosophically adequate, nonempiricist conception of human experience. "*Sinn* steht in engstem Zusammenhang mit dem, was wir ganz allgemein mit *Denken* bezeichnen, wobei wir unter Denken nicht den weiten Begriff Vorstellen verstehen, sondern Denken was richtig oder unrichtig, wahr oder falsch sein kann. Jedem Urteilen ist also ein Sinn immanent mitgegeben."<sup>588</sup> We note the words: pursuing the immanent impact of *Sinn*, which is active in *every* form of judgment, is the key for philosophy in the age of psychologism. Philosophy must question the essence of judgment [*Wesen des Urteils*]<sup>589</sup> not in direct encounters discussing what a giving subject does in a situation of judgment, but from the perspective of what makes judgment possible in the first place. In other words, contemporary thought with the recourse to *Sinn* must evolve as a transcendental question of constitution.<sup>590</sup> "[W]elches sind die notwendigen und hinreichenden Elemente, die ein Urteil überhaupt 'allererst möglich' machen?"<sup>591</sup>

From the outset, Heidegger's critical *Sinn* analysis evolves on a categorial level tacitly echoing and reinterpreting what we saw in *Logische Untersuchungen*. Let us follow in some details one analysis of a perceptual event undertaken by Heidegger – the details we seek emerge in a more detailed description of *Wahrnehmung*. Echoing Husserl's analysis of what it is to see *white paper*, Heidegger expands this analysis to what it is to see a *yellow book*. Perceiving a book, and seeing that it is yellow, is not a result of a cognitive act of judging the book to be yellow, Heidegger notes. We simply see it as yellow: "Das 'Urteil' ist plötzlich in mir aufgestiegen, ohne daß mir die Absicht war, über den Einband des betr. Buches ein Urteil zu fällen."<sup>592</sup> In other situations, Heidegger adds, we can find ourselves somewhat absentmindedly comparing one yellow book with another one; or the occasional glance of a yellow pencil can make the thought of the yellow book imaginarily present at the moment despite the fact that the book itself is lacking. Surely,

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid. 172.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid. 172. Italics on *Sinn* and *Denken* original.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid. 65 Italics altered.

<sup>590</sup> Displayed by Theodor Kisiel is the Neo-Kantian impact on the young Heidegger, for instance Fichte and Emil Lask Cf. Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Part One.

<sup>591</sup> Heidegger, "Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus." 179.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid. 167.

Heidegger notes, the actual consciousness (*Bewußtseinslage*) is distinct in these various situations.<sup>593</sup> Nevertheless, there is also *identity*: "Ein Etwas liegt mit dem Identischen vor uns, ist da."<sup>594</sup> The identity of the yellow book is *Da*. It can both be perceived by the subject, and expressed and communicated to others. "Wenn ich spreche oder schreibe, sage ich *etwas*, möchte ich *etwas* mitteilen; im vorliegenden Fall ist es das Gelbsein des Einbandes, d.h. das statische Moment, das Mitgeteilte, der Inhalt oder der *Sinn* des Satzes."<sup>595</sup> Thus, the mere everyday judgment executed in the perceiving of a book as yellow involves a moment of understanding its potentiality of being yellow in a vast number of similar and dissimilar contexts. This continuum, we could say, is the *Sinn* of the current object.

In stark analogy to how Husserl conceives of the categorical aspects of the objects (e.g. its *being*), Heidegger now notes that the current *being* of the book cannot be grasped by recourse to the physical *reales* object available to perception in a direct [*wirklich*] sense. The "Gelbsein des Einbandes" cannot be *seen* or *touched* by the hand, nor handled in any other practical way.<sup>596</sup> Thus, writes Heidegger, the question becomes: "Existiert denn überhaupt dieses rätselhafte Identische, wenn es weder in die psychische noch in die physische Welt eingerichtet werden kann?"<sup>597</sup> Within the conceptual frameworks of the empiricism of psychologism, the question is critical. The enigmatic identity of the yellowness has no proper place within the realist language of empiricism, Heidegger writes.<sup>598</sup> The identity of yellow "ist ebensowenig ein physisches, räumliches und zeitlich determiniertes Ding, noch fällt es mit dem psychischen Geschehen zusammen."<sup>599</sup> Within the orientation of psychologism, the identical moment properly speaking does *not exist*, yet the identity *does exist*. "[D]och ist es da und macht sich sogar mit einer Wucht und Unumstößlichkeit geltend, dagegen die psychische Wirklichkeit nur eine fließende, unbeständige genannt werden kann."<sup>600</sup>

Thus, concerning *Logische Untersuchungen*, we can say that the *Sinn* evolving in the perception of yellow book is strictly speaking not part of the *Schlichte Wahrnehmung*. Nevertheless, it is *there*, as a surplus of intentions evolving in the current moment of perception.

However, Heidegger's application of Husserl's categorial dimension of perception is simultaneously an expansion of what is implied in the same dimension by Husserl. Where Husserl (as we indicated) seeks a conception of *Ausdruck* expressing the status of the categorial, the young Heidegger now steers the phenomenological analysis in another direction. In contrast to Husserl, Heidegger conceives of the *Sinn* of the perceptual event not in terms of expression but in terms of *Gelten* [*effectivity, or relevance*]<sup>601</sup> To

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid. 169.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>601</sup> Heidegger borrows the notion of *Gelten* from Lotze.

conceive of the *Daseinsform* of the *Sinn* adequately, Heidegger writes, one needs to seek the form of existence evolving besides [*neben*] the possible forms of existence involved in the psychic, physical, and the metaphysical.<sup>602</sup> In the current example, the sheer relevance of the yellow has such a modification of relevance. "Das Gelbsein des Einbandes gilt allenfalls, existiert aber nie."<sup>603</sup> In other words, the *Gelbsein* is *Da qua Gelten*; it is *there* as an effective moment in the perceptual situation. "Die Wirklichkeitsform des im Urteilsvorgang aufgedeckten identischen Faktors kann nur das Gelten sein".<sup>604</sup> This categorial dimension of the perceptual situation is according to Heidegger explicitly conceived as *Sinn*. "Die Wirklichkeitsform des Sinnes ist das Gelten; die Wirklichkeitsform des Urteilsvorgangs, an dem, in dem – oder wie man sich ausdrücken will – der Sinn vorfindbar ist, ist das zeitlich bestimmbare Existieren."<sup>605</sup>

Explained slightly differently, the sheer relevance of the yellowness of the example is for Heidegger the manifest *Sinn* of the perceived yellow book. Expressing that a book is perceived as yellow, is to express that yellowness of the book *gilt*.<sup>606</sup> Even an eventual negation of an expected yellowness would be a modification of the current *Gelten*.<sup>607</sup> The overall relevance of the *Gelbsein* would still determine the current perceptual situation.

Wenn etwas *nicht existiert*, kann ich *nicht* sagen: es existiert; nur ist dieses Existieren ein Nichtexistieren. Das, was dagegen *nicht* gilt, gilt trotzdem, nur *ist dieses Gelten ein Nichtgelten*. Wie der Mathematiker bei einer Geraden einen positiven und negativen Richtungssinn unterscheidet und die Gerade in der negativen Richtung genauso *mathematisch wirklich* ist wie in der positiven, analog kann man dem Gelten ein positives oder negatives Vorzeichen zuteilen.<sup>608</sup>

Thus, *Sinn als Geltung* harbors a moment of direction [*Richtungssinn*]. Whether or not it "exists" in the positivist sense, *something* would steer perception in a direction.<sup>609</sup>

Heidegger's expansion of Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung* does not stop there. A further step comes in a move wherein Heidegger targets the prime motive of the *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus*, namely, to reveal the continuum between logical judgment, on the one hand, and the feature of *Gelten*. According to Heidegger, the psychological approach to *Erkenntnis* takes the wrong path already from the beginning, namely, in the initial positivist conception of reality [*Wirklichkeit*]. Evolving

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<sup>602</sup> Heidegger, "Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus." 170.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid. 170 Cf.: *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie* (KNS) 1919: §11 *Das Problem der Geltung*.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid. 172.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid. 175.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid. 183.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid. 184. Italics original

<sup>609</sup> Ibid. 184. *Geltung* is illuminated in many other examples, as in the conceiving of a plan to be fulfilled, or in the experience of a work of a *Sinnvollen* sculpture of Rodin; the plan being "*beachtet und richtig abgewogen*", the sculpture effecting a "*seelischen Erlebens auszulösen*." (ibid. 171.) *Gelten* also comes to expression in a logical judgment. "Das Gelten [ist] die Wirklichkeitsform des Logischen; der Sinn ist es, der gilt. Also 'verkörpert' er das Logische; und als das dem Urteilsvorgang Immanente kann er, der *Inhalt*, die logische Seite des Urteilens genannt werden. *Das Urteil der Logik ist Sinn*." (ibid.172. Italics original.)

here is "ja so viel auf den Grundsatz zugute, das und nur das anzunehmen, *was wahrnehmbar ist*,"<sup>610</sup> writes Heidegger. "Wenn der Empirist das, was sich überhaupt darbieten kann, auf das *sinnlich* Wahrnehmbare einschränkt, dann ist das eine dogmatische Behauptung *a priori*, die ihm als Empiristen schlecht ansteht, für die er jederzeit einen *Beweis* schuldig bleiben muß."<sup>611</sup> By contrast, a proper philosophical conception of reality includes what is not *real* in this positivist sense, i.e. everything which "Gegenstand wird und in der Möglichkeit zur Gegenständlichkeit steht, also auch das 'Unwirkliche'".<sup>612</sup> In other words, reality includes categorical dimensions void of what Husserl called objective [*reales*] correlates. "Der Wirklichkeitsbegriff ist hier mit Absicht so weit gefaßt, um einem weitverbreitenden und tiefeingesessenen Vorurteil zu begegnen, als gäbe es *nur* Naturwirkliches, nur Natursachen,"<sup>613</sup> Heidegger underlines. The unreal in reality cannot be *proven* in the sense sought for in empiricism. It cannot be "*bewiesen*, sondern allenfalls nur *aufgewiesen*".<sup>614</sup>

What it implies, for Heidegger, to be *aufgewiesen* [indicated, described] comes in a passage wherein the philosopher takes up the topic of *expressed Sinn*, which is to say, the question of how the meaning of language relates to the *Gelten* of *Wirklichkeit*. Under the heading of the *Das impersonale Urteil*, Heidegger seeks to indicate how everyday ways of speaking about perception harbor ways of expressing judgments with reference neither to cognitive aspects *in* the subject, nor to any static, metaphysical feature of reality. When we are saying that *something* happens – the current example is "Es blitzt"<sup>615</sup> we are expressing precisely that "*etwas geschieht*", writes Heidegger. "'Das Blitzen ist wirklich', 'vom Blitzen gilt das Wirklichsein', genauer 'das Existieren'."<sup>616</sup> In the everyday expression saying that "Es blitzt" involves, for Heidegger, the profound dimension that the perceptual event *accomplishes itself*: "das mit dem Wort Blitzen Gemeinte *realisiert sich*; 'von dem Blitzen gilt das *jetzt* Stattfinden, das momentane Existieren'."<sup>617</sup> The perceived lightening itself, we can say, manifests an original motion wherein the life and truth of the subject become inscribed within a subject-transgressing happening. The *Es* of the sentence indicates an anonymous and impersonal feature of the all-encompassing *Wirklichkeit*.<sup>618</sup> The word *weist auf* to the dimension of an *unwirkliche Wirklichkeit*. What is *perceived* in a situation of lightening, and *expressed* in the impersonal judgment is more than the mere reality of nature [*nur Naturwirkliches*] or

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<sup>610</sup> Ibid. 165. Italics added.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid. 165. This sentence appears in a footnote in the GA 1 edition, but was included in the original text in the first edition.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid. 185.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid. 185.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid. 186.

<sup>618</sup> According to Kisiel, what Heidegger evokes in this "mysteriösen 'es'" of 1914 is the *sheer Event*; i.e. "the sheer fact of life, of being, of being here and now". With its Eckhartian overtones the *Es* designates a primarily and empowering *Etwas*, bringing itself into the Event of lightening by being subjectless as well as objectless. Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*. 24

mere states of facts concerning nature [nur Natursachen]. It is the occurrence of an existential event of *Geltung*.

In other words, the *Wirklichsein* of the perceptual event is lived in its singularity qua perceptual event but is harbored and expressed in an indicative grammatical form<sup>619</sup> expressing this as a pre-theoretical *something*. Thus considered, the impersonal *Es* is not indeterminate [*unbestimmt*<sup>620</sup>] but rather articulate to what happens in perception. "[D]er Sinn des Urteils liegt *in dem Krachen, in seinem jetzt [...]* *Stattfinden* [...]"<sup>621</sup> quite generally [*ganz allgemein*] saying that *Es* happens is to express the existence of the current *gelten*.<sup>622</sup> The generality and the relevance of the perceptual event is taken up and expressed in the statement.

Now on the background of these points from Heidegger 1914, we return to the *Prolegomena* from 1923. The first aspect to observe is how Heidegger starts by underlining that perceptual intentionality rests on no positivist grounds. The *Sich-richten-auf* of perception rests on "keine Zuordnung",<sup>623</sup> he writes. That is, there is not a one-to-one correlation between the intentional *Sich-richten-auf*, on the one hand, and the real [*reales*] objekt, on the other.<sup>624</sup> In isolation, this point is in firm accordance with what we saw in the *Logische Untersuchungen*. Husserl, we remember, explicitly rejected the idea of a parallelism between the meaning-intentionality and the designated object. However, Heidegger's point also expresses a transformation of Husserl's analysis. Removed from Heidegger's analysis is what Gadamer accused Husserl of, namely the recourse to perceptual givenness. "Intentionalität ist nicht eine Eigenschaft, die der Wahrnehmung zugegeben würde und in ihr in gewissen Fälle zukommt, sondern sie ist als Wahrnehmung *von Hause aus intentional*, ganz abgesehen davon, ob das Wahrgenommene realitär vorhanden ist oder nicht,"<sup>625</sup> writes Heidegger. Very often, everyday perception lacks a real relationship to a real object [*reales Verhältnis zu einem realen Objekt*].<sup>40</sup> "Es ist eine psychologische Tatsache, daß psychische Vorgänge auftreten, durch die etwas wahrgenommen wird – vermeintlicherweise –, was gar nicht einmal existiert."<sup>626</sup> In fact, seeing what is strictly speaking not *there* is less an exception of perception than one of the unquestionable facts of [*unbestreitbaren Tatsachen*] of everyday life.<sup>627</sup> The ambiguity of perceptual intentionality, in general, is what makes it possible that we sometimes judge what we see wrongly. "[G]erade nur deshalb, weil Wahrnehmung als solche ein *Sich-richten-auf* etwas ist, die Intentionalität der Struktur des Verhaltens selbst ausmacht, kann es so etwas wie Trugwahrnehmung und Halluzination geben."<sup>628</sup> Perceptual behavior *as such* is independent of the question whether or not one sees correctly.

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>620</sup> Heidegger, "Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus." 186.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid. 186.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid. 186.

<sup>623</sup> Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 38.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid. 40.



The fact that *behavior* – "die Verhaltung selbst" – is intentional according to its own structure [*ihrer Struktur nach*], the current *Sich-richten-auf* comes in a form which initially is free of questions of adequacy or inadequacy.<sup>629</sup>

Against the background of Heidegger's first book, we see how the *Prolegomena* is about to include a rather potent and expanded notion of perceptual and situated intentionality. An anonymous and impersonal categorial existential dimension is intrinsic to the perceptual *Sich-richten-auf*. Subjective behavioral intentionality is constituted by factors reducible neither to positivist schemata of empirical givenness, nor subjectivist conceptions of intra-mental events. Instead, *something* makes itself relevant in and through perception. In the ambiguity of everyday perception, a moment of subject-less *Geltung* forms perception from within.

Let us now read how the *Prolegomena* explicitly targets the terminology of *Kategoriale Anschauung*. Heidegger follows Husserl in stating that the perceptual act at any moment is the full and continuous execution of the perceived thing [*Ding*]. "In jedem Moment ist das ganze Ding leibhaft es selbst und dieses es selbst als dasselbe."<sup>630</sup> Perception is to perceive the *whole* and unitary thing. That is, perception is not, on some level before identification, a series of isolated syntheses that subsequently merge together into a whole. Rather: "[D]as Wahrgenommene dieser Wahrnehmungsfolge ist in *einer* Aktstufe da, das heißt, der Wahrnehmungszusammenhang ist eine einzige, gleichsam nur gedehnte Wahrnehmung."<sup>631</sup> Also, Heidegger follows Husserl in describing a level of *Schlichtheit* in perception. *Schlichtheit*, Heidegger explains, means *Einstufigkeit*. "Schlicht gesagt Fehlen von gestuften, erst nachträglich Einheit stiftenden Akten."<sup>632</sup> Within the phenomenological framework, Heidegger continues, the concept of *real* [as a German word, not English!] obtains its phenomenological definition by lacking these levels. "Ein realer Gegenstand ist definitorisch möglicher Gegenstand einer schlichten Wahrnehmung."<sup>633</sup> *Real* is thus "ein ganz bestimmter Begriff,"<sup>634</sup> Heidegger underlines; "den ursprünglichsten Gegenstand einer schlichten Wahrnehmung."<sup>635</sup>

Furthermore, Heidegger follows Husserl in contrasting the *Schlichtheit* of perception (now explicitly) with the categorial dimension of perception. In contrast to the *Schlicht* level of givenness, Heidegger explains, the *Kategoriale Anschauung* evolves an "Aufbau-Verhältnisse der Intentionen."<sup>636</sup> Herein speaks a conceptualization of perception that we have already seen (in Husserl and Heidegger both). The categorial dimension is correlated neither to the objective *reales* feature of the object nor mere intra-mental processes. The *Aufbau* of the categorial emerges in what Heidegger calls the "Strukturen der

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<sup>629</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid. 82. Italics altered.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid. 85.

jeweiligen Gerichtetheit auf die je eigenen Gegenstände."<sup>637</sup> (*En passant*, we note that the hermeneutically revised notion of *Aufbau* comes to play an important role in *Wahrheit und Methode* as well as in Gadamer's subsequent writings.)

While Heidegger follows Husserl, Heidegger also emphasizes an aspect of perception merely indicated in the corresponding passage of *Logische Untersuchungen*. We saw how Husserl emphasized that the object fulfilling the categorial level is not the intentional act [*Akte*] itself, but the intentional object<sup>638</sup> Based on a direct comment on Husserl's statement,<sup>639</sup> Heidegger stresses the phenomenological observation that the *schlicht* and *categorial* dimensions of perception evolve first and foremost in the different *modes* of revealing themselves in perception. That is, the difference between *Schlicht* and *Kategorial* is not so much the *what* of perception than the *how*. *Schlicht* and *Kategorial* are given as different *Wies* in the intentional acts:

Als Akte haben sie je ihr mögliches Seiendes, das sie selbst meinen, sie haben es in einem bestimmten *Wie* der Gegebenheit. Was in den gestuften Akten als Gegenständliches sich gibt, kann nie in den schlichten Akten der Grundstufe zugänglich werden, d.h. kategoriale Akte die Gegenständigkeit, auf der sie aufbauen – das schlicht Gegebene – in neuer Gegenstandsart zugänglich machen.<sup>640</sup>

The *Wie der Gegebenheit* is the crux of the moment. The categorial dimension of experience is not so much a question of *what* is given, as *how* it is given. The categorial *Wie der Gegebenheit* is what reaches expression [*Ausdruck*] in articulate attempts to express the feature of the situation. That is, the *Aufbau* of the categorial is correlated with the act of expressing: "[Das] neue Zugänglichmachen des schlicht vorgegebenen Gegenstandes bezeichnet man korrelativ auf die Akte auch als *Ausdrücken*."<sup>641</sup>

Importantly, indicated in these passages is a difference between the *schlichte* and *kategoriale* modes of givenness which soon will become important in our analysis of Heidegger and Gadamer. One important feature of the *schlichte* modification of the perceptual situation, we note in Heidegger's analysis, is its apparent character of being nontransferable to another situation. What is given on the level of *Schlichtheit* is given in its own *Selbstgegebenes*, Heidegger writes.<sup>642</sup> The *Schlichtheit* of the perceived thing is given as a moment of perceptual *Leiblichkeit*: "Im schlichten Erfassen ist die Gegenstandsganzheit explizit gegeben im Sinne der leibhaftigen Selbigkeit des Dinges."<sup>643</sup> Heidegger formulates the point almost as stating a truism. An object of intention is not necessarily given as *Leiblichkeit*, but when given as such it surely is given as *Leiblichkeit*, "Was selbst gegeben ist, braucht nicht leibhaft gegeben zu sein, wohl aber umgekehrt ist jedes leibhaftig Gegebensein selbst gegeben."<sup>644</sup> The categorial dimension of perception, by

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<sup>637</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>638</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. 670.

<sup>639</sup> Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 79 ff.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid. 84. Italics original.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid. 54.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid. 54.

contrast, is in Heidegger's analysis *not* tied to the given *Leiblichkeit* situation. The act of expression is *founded* [*fundiert*] in perception but also (relatively) independent of *Leibliche Gegenwart* of the object.

Gradually, we are about to relocate our theme of circulation of written text and phenomenal perspectives in the methodological context. Whereas an expression of the complex *Aufbau* of intentions is relatively unbound to *Leibhaftig Gegebensein*, the *Wie der Gegebenheit* of *Schlichte Wahrnehmung* is *always* given as *Leibhaftiges Gegebensein*. Stated differently, while the act of expressing the *Sachverhalte* possesses a flexibility in regard to contexts, the *Leibliche Gegenwart* does not. You can, so to speak, take your *meant Sachverhalt* away and let it emerge in ever new contexts but you cannot take your *Leibliche Gegenwart* of *this* thing into new contexts. You can move your expressed articulation of the categorial *Aufbau* into another situation, but you cannot move the bodily givenness of *this* singular into another situation. To underline what we just read: "*Was selbst gegeben ist, braucht nicht leibhaftig gegeben zu sein, wohl aber umgekehrt ist jedes leibhaftig Gegebensein selbst gegeben.*"<sup>645</sup>

In other words, whereas the categorial *Aufbau* can circulate into ever new situations, the *Leibliche Gegenwart* is distinguished by a decisive noncirculation of perspective. The categorial *Aufbau* possesses a richness of perspectives lacking in the *Leibliche Gegenwart*. Thus, we note the subtle reference to the relationship between *writing* and *perception* discussed in the previous part. In the current passage of Heidegger, there is no circulation of perspectives in perception. Shortly, Heidegger will tie the categorial *Aufbau* to *reading* while leaving out closer descriptions of *Leibliche Gegenwart* and perception. The subtle indications will be that the recourse to written texts is necessary due to the self-evident fact (for Heidegger) that *Leibliche Gegenwart* lacks a productive moment of circulation of perspectives. In other words, the possibility of a richness of phenomenal perspectives circulating in the perceptual field demonstrated in *Phenomenology of Perception* (considered on page 111 ff. above) is about to be overlooked by the young Heidegger. Or perhaps better stated, it is overlooked already<sup>646</sup> – what is left is to consolidate the way of conceiving *Wahrnehmung* in a method of philosophy.

Let us pursue how Heidegger discusses the point somewhat further before we return to the point. Saying that "*Was selbst gegeben ist, braucht nicht leibhaftig gegeben zu sein, wohl aber umgekehrt ist jedes leibhaftig Gegebensein selbst gegeben*" is not to say that the categorial act is correlative to the *schlichte* in a mere formal sense, Heidegger emphasizes:

Die fundierten Akte, die kategorialen, richten sich zwar mit auf die in ihnen mit-gesetzten Gegenständlichkeiten der schlichten Akte, der fundierenden, aber in einer Weise, die sich mit der Intentionalität der schlicht gegebenen Akte selbst nicht deckt, so als wäre der gestufte kategoriale Akt gewissermaßen nur eine formalisierte Wiederholung des schlicht gegebenen.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Ibid. 54.

<sup>646</sup> Instead of invoking Merleau-Ponty's analysis here, we will do so in the context of Gadamer's philosophy in the next section.

<sup>647</sup> Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 84.

In being expressed the categorial expresses *what is the case with the object*. It does so not merely by statically repeating what is the case, however, but as a mode of stating the case – *anew*. "Darin liegt," Heidegger writes, "daß die fundierten Akte die schlicht vorgegeben Gegenständen *neu erschließen*, so zwar, daß sie gerade in dem, was sie sind, zur expliziten Erfassung kommen."<sup>648</sup> The categorial "represents" the *Wie* of the object in a context transgressive sense. The object is present in the expression as *Sachverhalt*: it is present as *meant*.

Let us for a moment consider the current points of *Prolegomena* in light of the *Logische Untersuchungen* and *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus*. If we re-evoked Heidegger's all-encompassing notion of perceptual *Wirklichkeit* of 1914 (*Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus*) we see how Heidegger's *Kategorial Anschauung* of *Prolegomena* now has turned into something drastically more than what Husserl once introduced in the *Logische Untersuchungen*. What Husserl called *Überschuss* of intentions involved in Heidegger's conceptual appropriation of hidden features not only anticipating subjectivity but also anticipating the way the subject perceives. That is, the categorial *Wie* of *Wahrnehmung* is not only genuinely part of everyday perceptual life in the form of explicit expressions but also categorial modifications lived by the subject. The categorial is not merely something perceived but something encompassing perception, by always already pre-forming perception. Everyday perception is the ongoing realization, so to speak, of the *Aufbaus* or categorial *Wie's* already formed or initiated.

Curiously, where *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus* emphasized this categorial anonymity on a level of *Wirklichsein* of the perceptual event, *Prolegomena* adds a modification of historical, social life into this anonymous dimension being formative to the way the subject perceives. Any "eigentümliche Bestimmtheit der Welt und ihre mögliche Auffassung und Erfassung durch die Ausdrücklichkeit," writes Heidegger, is formed by "*durch das Schon-gesprochen-und-durchgesprochen-sein*".<sup>649</sup>

Faktisch ist es [...] so, daß unsere schlichtesten Wahrnehmungen und Verfassungen schon *ausgedrückt*, mehr noch, in bestimmter Weise *interpretiert* sind. Wir sehen nicht so sehr primär und ursprünglich die Gegenstände und Dinge, *sondern zunächst sprechen wir darüber*, genauer sprechen wir nicht das aus, was wir sehen, sondern umgekehrt, *wir sehen, was man über die Sache spricht*.<sup>650</sup>

We note that the categorial is always already interpreted; "[*W*]as man über die Sache spricht" is what determines the perceptual situation. The *Geltensein* of perceptual reality involves a *Sinn* genuinely formed by the way *one* speaks of these objects. The actuality of *Leibliche Gegenwart* is not what is prime and original. Prime is rather the anonymous and impersonal categorial dimension being effectuated in and through the subjective intentional act.

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<sup>648</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid. 75. Italics added.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid. 75. Italics on *ausgedrückte* and *interpretierte* original.

In our context, the current passage of *Prolegomena* is very important. Running the risk of exaggeration, the passage can be called *the* passage consolidating Heidegger's move away from close descriptions of embodiment. What we have called the theme of circulation makes us see this pivotal importance. In effect, Heidegger emphasizes that *language* is what circulates in the potent sense of understanding. "[W]as man über die Sache spricht" is always prior to the *Leibliche Gegenwart* of *Schlichte Wahrnehmung*. Language is accumulative in a way that perception is not. Language harbors within its own circulating being the complex and even impersonal surplus of intentions that defines – or acts on – the perceptual act. As we just read: "Wir sehen nicht so sehr primär und ursprünglich die Gegenstände und Dinge, sondern zunächst sprechen wir darüber[.]"<sup>651</sup> In other words, it is language qua circulating structure which harbors the categorial *Wie* of perception. Language *takes up* within itself the orders of perception. *Leibliche Gegenwart*, is always already formed by the categorial *Wie*'s of language. The *Leibliche Gegenwart* is just what is, so to speak. It is *schlicht* and *real*, but it harbors no potential richness of *as such*.

From Heidegger's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis to a hermeneutical philosophy that has left behind closer descriptions of an embodied dimension there is only a small step, that follows by the internal logic of the *Wahrnehmung*-analysis. By this logic, the dimension of embodiment is precisely not left behind. Rather, the categorial *Wie*'s of embodied life are preserved and accomplished in language. Thus, the conclusion is given: a philosophy aiming to pursue the eidetic features of embodied life must not target *Leibliche Gegenwart* as such, but through the categorial *Wie*'s of language harboring and preserving the eidetic features of *Leibliche Gegenwart*.

It cannot be denied that our way of reading Heidegger is a little tendentious. What we in effect are doing, is to pull, perhaps with too much force, the young Heidegger in the direction of Gadamer's much later conception of *Sprache*. Conceiving of the prior philosopher in light of the subsequent is a move not altogether unproblematic. For sure, language was not conceived by the young Heidegger the same way as Gadamer fifty years after articulated in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Exact selfsameness is not the point here, however. What is important is this: Heidegger's recourse to *Was man über die Sache spricht* is strikingly analogous to how Plato (*Phaedrus*) and Gadamer conceive of texts. The text circulates across all kinds of borders in ways that mere perception does not. The trans-contextual circulation is what makes texts a potent feature for philosophy, to the point of even being dangerous for Plato.

Strengthening the comparison between Heidegger's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis and what we describe as circulation of texts is the fact that, surely, Heidegger's orientation towards the categorial *Wie* comes together with a *hermeneutical* orientation. With Heidegger, phenomenology moves towards *Auslegung* instead of describing perception and embodiment. The recourse to *tradition* instead of perception is a natural consequence of what we just saw. In so far as *Leibliche Gegenwart* always already is formed by the categorial levels brought in with historical life, it becomes necessary for phenomenology to investigate the

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<sup>651</sup> Ibid. 75.

discourses forming how *one* perceives things. The categorial *Wies* of things evolves in the accumulated circulation of perspectives – i.e. in *Texts* handed over by tradition – not on the level of *Leibliche Gegenwart*. "In der Wahrnehmung ist das Wahrgenommene Seiend leibhaft da,"<sup>652</sup> writes Heidegger. Thus, if the ambition is to understanding the prime and original [*primäre und ursprüngliche*] *Wie* of this *Leibhaftiges Gegebensein*, phenomenology cannot merely contemplate on yellow books, lightning, or whatever object "explizit gegeben im Sinne der leibhaftigen Selbigkeit des Dinges."<sup>653</sup> To understand the eidetic feature of experience, phenomenology must turn into a practice of *reading*. Insofar as the perceptual objects are *immer schon interpretierte*, the circulation of texts is what entails the abundances of intentions ultimately determining the perceptual-interpretational gaze.

Heidegger's move does not imply a devaluation of *Leibliche Gegenwart*. It expresses the insight that insofar as the eidetic nature of perception is concerned, phenomenology must go to the sources of the abundant expressions always already evolving in perceptual intentionality. *Die Texte selber* – i.e. *tradition* – is where the eidetic nature of things evolves on a transcendental level of *Sachverhalt*. Herein evolves *being* in the form of subjectively experienced perception, but ultimately as a categorially conceived *Being*. Hence, Heidegger can conclude in *Prolegomena*: "Es gibt keine Ontologie *neben* einer Phänomenologie, sondern *wissenschaftliche Ontologie ist nichts anderes als Phänomenologie*."<sup>654</sup>

*The rest is history* – in more than one sense. From the perception analysis of *Prolegomena* there is a relatively small step to Heidegger's mode of reading (for example) Augustine. The *Wie der Faktizität* evolves in the hermeneutical dimension. The categorial determinations of *Dasein* evolve not in an analysis of embodiment but in the generalized question of *being*. So reads a famous decree, opening the *Sein und Zeit* (1926): "Die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein soll *gestellt* werden. Wenn sie eine oder gar *die* Fundamentalfrage ist, dann bedarf solches Fragen der angemessenen Durchsichtigkeit."<sup>655</sup> Recourse to the *Fundamentalfrage*, we can say, implies a reflected and "categorized" version of the questionableness always already evolving in the ambiguous everyday life of humans. The questionableness of *Dasein* reveals itself not in extravagant modes of seeking answers, but in a reflected turning back to what *Dasein* "*zunächst und zumeist ist*" – the "*durchschnittlichen Alltäglichkeit*".<sup>656</sup> The transparent [*durchsichtiges*] phenomenological explication – the "*explicite Fragestellung*" of the question of the "*Sinn von Sein*" – evolves as a categorial-phenomenological explication of the categorial *Wies* of everyday life. The required "*Durchforschung des Sachgebietes selbst*" must go through the determining fundamental concepts [*Grundbegriffe*]<sup>657</sup> always already evolving in tradition. In tradition the pre-condition of positive sciences

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid. 57. Italics altered.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid. 98. Italics original.

<sup>655</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. 5.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid. 10.

evolves, such as mathematic, physics, biology, or history.<sup>658</sup> Hermeneutical-phenomenological research surpasses the limited orientation of these positive disciplines. "Sofern [...] jedes dieser Gebiete aus dem Bezirk des Seienden selbst gewonnen wird, bedeutet solche vorgängige und Grundbegriffe schöpfende Forschung *nichts anderes als Auslegung* dieses Seienden auf die Grundverfassung seines Seins. Solche Forschung muß den positiven Wissenschaften vorauslaufen; und sie *kann* es."<sup>659</sup> Eventually, contemporary philosophy has turned into a reflected discipline of *reading*. It answers to no external threat of the positive sciences, but is independent and proud, turning towards its own foundation by turning to tradition.

c. *Absolutes* Hier of Understanding? Gadamer on *Wahrnehmung*

With Heidegger, we have pursued a line of reading indicating how the categorial and hermeneutical approach to experience is formed and consolidated in the early years of phenomenology. Gradually, *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus* and *Prolegomena* turn phenomenology away from detailed descriptions of embodied experience to the commitment of clarifying experience in categorial analyses. In the same process, phenomenology is turned away from the empirical sciences of the contemporaries to tradition. Because the categorial determinations of experience always already are formed by tradition, a hermeneutically reflected phenomenology must situate itself in these categorial determinations and question its own situation from here. Thus, instead of being a phenomenology of perception, philosophy turns into a *reading* practice reflected back on itself as a reading practice.

How is Heidegger's categorial approach to experience reflected in Gadamer's philosophy? To our knowledge, neither Gadamer nor the distinguished Gadamer-inspired tradition following him<sup>660</sup> discusses the question in close manners. Apparently, there is something here that goes without saying. Heidegger's recourse to tradition has opened up a potent horizon of philosophical investigation, without thereby bringing the categorial approach in the horizon into question again.

Let us try to identify typical aspects in what we from now on will refer to as a categorial approach in Gadamer's philosophy. Now, as noted in passing, Gadamer's thorough linguistic orientation cannot be directly compared to the *Wahrnehmung*-analysis *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus* and *Prolegomena*. Gadamer has moved the determining and transcendental formation of *Sinn* into an elaborate conception of language perhaps latent in this early analysis of Heidegger but in this case not accomplished in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Interestingly, however, Gadamer's *Sprache* is a prime example of categorial determination of experience. According to what we have seen, *Sprache* pertains to the concrete situation of individual everyday life, its possibilities and limitations as they evolve in a shared world of humans.

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<sup>658</sup> Ibid. 9–10.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>660</sup> We refer here loosely to the post-Gadamerian discourse discussed in Subsection 1d above.

*Sprache* represents a philosophical determination of the vital: humans need to express themselves in a communal situation and language is the accumulation of the possibilities to do so. Despite the essential relevance for concrete everyday life, however, Gadamer does not thereby describe concrete actualities of linguistic life. *Sprache* is rather a categorial determination of linguistic life. *Sprache* expresses relational and communicative life qua *Sachverhalt*. Here, the philosophical concept *Sprache* is in accordance with the categorial *Sprachlichkeit* of everyday understanding. In light of Heidegger, to move in the vital domain of human relations is, according to Gadamer, always already to move in categorial modifications of expression. *Sprache* entails a generality concerning *how* it is to be a human being in *this* concrete situation of expression. Or to explain Gadamer via Heidegger: *Sprache* harbors the *Wie der Gegebenheit*. It is what renders possible and preserves the "Aufbau-Verhältnisse der Intentionen"<sup>661</sup> of perception. The philosophical concept *Sprache*, we can say, is a revised and categorial expression of the categorial "Aufbau-Verhältnisse" of everyday linguistic life.

Moreover, the categorial approach is apparent in the way Gadamer encounters tradition. Methodologically speaking, Gadamer's way of revising and clarifying concepts inherited from tradition – for instance, *Sprache* – can by itself be called a way that Gadamer practices a Heideggerian form of *Kategoriale Anschauung*. Clarifying the *Grundzüge einer philosophischer Hermeneutik* is from the outset a categorial enterprise. The basic categorial *Wie* of facticity is raised into understanding, by clarifying the categorial *Wie's* of facticity always already evolving in factual life.

Thus, in the categorial approach there is one reason why there is no phenomenal body in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Just as *Sprache* is not brought down to a level of linguistic actuality, philosophical hermeneutics does not move on a level of *Leibliche Gegenwart*. This is not a loss for the hermeneutical theory, however. Embodied life is *taken up* and preserved in the ultimate categorial *Wie der Gegebenheit* clarified as fundamentals of hermeneutical experience. Clarifying the eidetic structure [*Struktur*] of the hermeneutical problem is clarifying the principle conditions of embodiment altogether. Clarifying the questionableness of being is clarifying the prime conditions of a phenomenal body turning towards itself. The categorial order of *Sprache* inscribes all aspects of the living, phenomenal body. Language – harboring its own *energeia*<sup>662</sup> – contains the categorial *Wie's* of movement and expression.

Of interest in our context, is how Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis reflects the categorial approach to experience. (Heading towards a philosophical description of nondirective meditation, we recall, the amount of details in perceptual analysis is significant.) In *Wahrheit und Methode*, which pursues a full-blown hermeneutical philosophy, Gadamer's interest in perception is sparse and indirect. One of the most detailed descriptions occurs in passages wherein Gadamer seeks to establish what he calls aesthetic consciousness

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<sup>661</sup> Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. 661.

<sup>662</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 446.



[*Ästhetische Nicht-Unterscheidung*<sup>663</sup>] in a critique of the so-called *aesthetic consciousness* [*Ästhetisches Bewußtsein*].<sup>664</sup> The aesthetic consciousness represents a fixation of a distinguished aesthetic dimension of the work, which is given methodological priority over the other aspects of the work. Thus, aesthetic consciousness entails an aesthetic difference [*Ästhetische Unterscheidung*].<sup>665</sup>

Gadamer presents a critique essentially related to how he criticized Husserl's *Anschauung* above (page 121). According to Gadamer, the theoretical baseline of the aesthetic differentiation is a hypostatized and dogmatic epistemology of *pure* perception. The aesthetic differentiation privileges specific sense organs or cognate faculties perceiving the aesthetic dimension of the artwork, writes Gadamer.<sup>666</sup> The privileging and the corresponding idea of mere reception of impressions are wrong from the outset. Perception is never a mere reflection [*Abspielung*] of the given in the sense here presupposed, writes Gadamer.<sup>667</sup> One cannot fixate perception into binary structures harboring a prioritized dimension positively perceived, and a nonprioritized dimension on the other. "Wahrnehmen ist nicht, daß man lauter verschiedene Sinneseindrücke sammelt, sondern Wahrnehmung heißt, wie das schöne Wort selber sagt, etwas 'für wahr nehmen'. Das heißt aber: Was sich den Sinnen bietet, wird *als etwas* gesehen und genommen."<sup>668</sup>

According to Gadamer, the moment of identification – the hermeneutical demonstrative of *Sehen als...* – is already more than a mere reflection of what is given to the senses.<sup>669</sup> To perceive *something as something* implies no static point-by-point contact between the sense-organs of the perceiver and the object, but rather to be engaged in a general, undividable, and more or less unspecific way of perceiving. In the mere act of seeing *something as something* a generality evolves. "In Wahrheit sehen wir, was uns sinnlich gegeben ist, immer auf ein Allgemeines hin an," writes Gadamer (with reference to Aristotle).<sup>670</sup> We see for instance a *human*, Gadamer exemplifies, not an emergence of such or such colors. The generalities of perception make the hermeneutical identification (*Sehen als...*) a process of perceiving something more than what strictly speaking shows itself. The *truth* of the fact that one sees a *human* (the *Wahr-nehmung*) trumps the fact that one strictly speaking just sees colors. Or to be precise, according to Gadamer, the idea that there is something like a strict perception of colors is wrong. It is a methodological construct. The methodological ideal of absolute reduction of perception in the service of controlled procedures is impossible to accomplish in practice.

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<sup>663</sup> Ibid. 94 ff. The *aesthetic nondifference* is a principle stressing the indissoluble continuum between art experience and life in general. Ibid. 122. Cf. Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 119–120.

<sup>664</sup> To avoid a misunderstanding, Gadamer's aesthetic consciousness is not a real consciousness, but an amalgam of theoretical perspectives evolving in the post-Kantian tradition of aesthetics.

<sup>665</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 95.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid. 96.

<sup>668</sup> Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 119.

<sup>669</sup> In Section 12, we will discuss Gadamer's *Sehen als...* in the outset of his reading of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.

<sup>670</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 95–96. Reference Aristotle *De anima*, 425 a 25.

Denn sie bliebe immer ein Auffassen als etwas. Jedes Auffassen als... artikuliert das, was da ist, indem es wegsieht von..., hinsieht auf..., zusammensieht als..., - und all das kann wiederum im Zentrum einer Betrachtung stehen oder am Rande und im Hintergrund bloß 'mitgesehen' werden.<sup>671</sup>

Thus, *Wahrnehmung* entails an articulation of potentialities in the perceptual field. The way things are perceived is a way of accomplishing various modalities evolving in the *something* being perceived. *Wahrnehmung* is an activity correlated with configurations evolving in the way things are organized in relation to each other, and in relation to the perceiver.<sup>672</sup>

Importantly, Gadamer now turns to *Lesen* when further explicating how the *Auffassen* of perception occurs. Perceiving *something as something* is a mode of *reading* the *text* of perception, he writes:

So ist es kein Zweifel, daß das Sehen als ein artikuliertes Lesen dessen, was da ist, vieles, was da ist, gleichsam wegsieht, so daß es für das Sehen, eben nicht mehr da ist; ebenso aber auch, daß es von seinen Antizipationen geleitet 'hinsieht', was gar nicht da ist.<sup>673</sup>

Qua *Lesen*, we can say, *Wahrnehmung* is an activity of a simultaneous differentiating and co-perception (*Zusammensehen*). In *Wahrnehmung*, what is *there* and what is *not there* merges into the articulate order of understanding. It is the dynamic *Vollzug* of ambiguous and abundant configurations evolving through a constant interplay of what is *there* ("was da ist") with *what is not there* ("was gar nicht da ist").

We see how Heidegger's analysis of the *Kategoriale Anschauung* here evolves in the background.<sup>674</sup> Gadamer's hermeneutical demonstrative of *Sehen als...* echoes Heidegger's self-determination of the identified *Etwas*.<sup>675</sup> In both accounts, perceptual intentionality harbors a potent and nonreducible *Überschüß* of intentionality. To perceive is to perceive *more* than one strictly speaking perceives, and *more* than a concept of static reception of impressions possibly can articulate. Otherwise lived perception would not be what it is, only a positivist and hyperbolic idea of perception. Curiously, Gadamer's analysis accomplishes the subtle indications of *Prolegomena* going in the direction of *reading*. That is, we observed an implicit and tacit association to reading in the way *Prolegomena* described the *Kategoriale Anschauung* as potentially open to circulation. The categorically expressed *Stufe* of *Wahrnehmung* could circulate in ways analogous to how a text circulates. *Wahrheit und Methode* takes Heidegger's implications into explicit descriptions of *Wahrnehmung* as a form of *Lesen*. In Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*, the perceiver *reads* the categorial *Stufe* of

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid. 96.

<sup>672</sup> Curiously, Gadamer provides a short reference to Wolfgang Köhler (among others), a gestalt psychologist playing an important role in Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of the foreground/background structure of perception.

<sup>673</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 96.

<sup>674</sup> Though not mentioning the *Kategoriale Anschauung*, Gadamer refers explicitly to Heidegger a few lines below the just cited passage. Ibid. 96.

<sup>675</sup> Heidegger, "Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus." 169.

perception or the "Aufbau-Verhältnisse der Intentionen."<sup>676</sup> The articulate *Lesen* of *Wahrnehmung* reads the perceptual *Wie des Gegebensein*.

However, the most interesting point is what escapes thematizing in Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis. By the time Heidegger turned to the prioritized categorical *Wie* of description, he not only left behind closer explications of embodiment in general. He also avoided problematizing the premise of the underlying conception of *Leibliche Gegenwart*. The statement of *Prolegomena* holding that "Was selbst gegeben ist, braucht nicht leibhaft gegeben zu sein, wohl aber umgekehrt ist jedes Leibhaftig Gegebensein selbst gegeben"<sup>677</sup> was left as a self-evident truism. Now Gadamer follows Heidegger's lead. There is no problematizing of Heidegger's way of conceiving the *Leibliche Gegenwart* in *Wahrheit und Methode*.

This nonthematizing begs a question: what, in the closer phenomenological analysis, does Heidegger's apparent truism of *Leibliche Gegenwart* express? What does the premise of Heidegger's account of *Leibliche Gegenwart* look like in detailed description? In the previous section, we tried to indicate some of the consequences, by using the terms circulation and flexibility. What is given to Heidegger's *Leibliche Gegenwart* does not circulate, we said. Apparently, *Leibliche Gegenwart* lacked a flexibility crucial for an expanded and eidetic understanding of human reality. In a subtle sense, evolving here was apparently a reason why Heidegger turned to tradition and reading. To understand the prime and original *Wie der Gegebenheit*, the philosophical recourse to texts was *needed*. Compared to circulating texts of tradition, expressing the categorical *Wie's* of facticity, *Leibliche Gegenwart* lacked the potential of accumulating multiple perspectives taken on the same thing.

Curiously, if the current vocabulary of circulation and flexibility seem a little forced in the context of *Prolegomena*, we will eventually find a new and intriguing resonance in Husserl's *Ideen II* (written in 1912). In effect, Husserl exposes the premise effective in Heidegger's *Prolegomena* for its own worth. Being a phenomenal body is to be situated in a *Nullpunkt* of experience, Husserl writes. It is to be an embodied *point zero around which* everything else becomes oriented. "Der Leib nun hat für sich die einzigartige Auszeichnung, daß er den *Nullpunkt* aller [...] Orientierungen in sich trägt."<sup>678</sup> The idea is apparently intuitive: to have a phenomenal gaze on the world is to possess a gaze *from somewhere*. Thus, everything else is apparently ordered around this stable point of view.

In *Ideen II*, Husserl generalizes the *here* of a concrete phenomenal perspective into a phenomenologically revised notion of *Absolutes Hier* or "letzten zentralen Hier."<sup>679</sup> The *Absolutes Hier* is the ultimate perspective. *Absolutes Hier* the ultimate point wherein every other perceptual perspective becomes fractioned, so to speak. Notions such as *on*, *below*, *right* and *left*, *here* and *there*, gain phenomenal sense only as relative possibilities of the *Absolutes Hier*, Husserl writes. "Einer seiner Raumpunkte, mag es

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<sup>676</sup> Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 85.

<sup>677</sup> *Ibid.* 54.

<sup>678</sup> Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*. 158.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.* 158.

auch kein wirklich gesehener sein, ist immerfort im Modus des letzten zentralen Hier charakterisiert, nämlich in einem Hier, das kein anderes außer sich hat, in Beziehung auf welches es ein 'Dort' wäre."<sup>680</sup> Thus, any perspective on things is organized by an intrinsic standard of the phenomenal body. Every moment of world orientation springs out from this *Nullpunkt* of orientation; every other aspect but one occurs as relative compared to the *Absolutes Hier*. "Ich habe alle Dinge mir gegenüber, sie sind alle 'dort' – mit Ausnahme eines einzigen, eben des Leibes, der immer 'hier' ist,"<sup>681</sup> writes Husserl. Let us read how the *Absolutes Hier* forms perspective:

Während ich allen anderen Dingen gegenüber die Freiheit habe, meine Stellung zu ihnen beliebig zu wechseln und damit zugleich die Erscheinungsmannigfaltigkeiten, in denen sie mir zur Gegebenheit kommen, beliebig zu variieren, habe ich nicht die Möglichkeit, mich von meinem Leibe oder ihn von mir zu entfernen, und dem entsprechend sind die Erscheinungsmannigfaltigkeiten des Leibes in bestimmter Weise beschränkt.<sup>682</sup>

As we see, the relationship between *Hier/Dort* is in a sense constant, or nonflexible. The *Absolutes Hier* counts as an ultimate background in experience. Every other locus in the perceived environment acquires status as the opposite term of *Hier*; the things are *gegenüber*, they are *dort*.

We must explain what we mean by saying that there is a static and nonflexible moment in the relationship between *Hier* and *Dort*. Obviously not meant is that Husserl's *Leib* is incapable of *moving* itself. "Dank seinem Vermögen der freien Beweglichkeit kann nun das Subjekt das System seiner Erscheinung und damit die Orientierungen in Fluß bringen,"<sup>683</sup> In so far as the *Leib* can initiate *Änderungen* in regard to its current positions, it is not locked up in its perspective in a direct sense. The perceiver can change positions and see the things from new perspectives.

Diese Änderungen bedeuten nicht solche der Umgebungsdinge, speziell nicht ihre Bewegung: der Subjekt Leib 'wechselt seine Stellung' im Raum; die Dinge seiner erscheinenden Umgebung sind dabei immerfort orientiert, alle Dingerscheinungen erhalten ihr festes System der Form nach; die Anschauungsform, die Gesetzmäßigkeit der Abschattungen und damit die Form der Orientierungsordnungen mit einem Zentrum bleibt notwendig erhalten; aber während das Subjekt immer in jedem Jetzt im Zentrum ist, woraus es alle Dinge sieht und in die Welt hineinsieht, ist der objektive Ort, die Raumstelle des Ichs, bzw. seines Leibes eine wechselnde.<sup>684</sup>

The world of perception is always open to alterations. Due the ability of the phenomenal gaze to vary how it perceives, the emergence of things will always vary. In other words, the phenomenal body can circulate the perceived objects.

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid. 158.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid. 159.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid. 159.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid. 158.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid. 158–159.

However, as we see, there is one feature of the *Dingerscheinungen* which is kept in a *set system* [*festes System*]. Although the objective locus [*objektive Ort*] of the spational position of the perceiving self [*die Raumstelle des Ichs*] can change, the intrinsic relationship in the *Hier/Dort* figuration remains unaltered. The *Absolutes Hier* remains constant – it is not open to circulation. Apparently, the relationship between foreground (*Absolutes Hier*) and background (everything else) is fixed and external to each other. There cannot be any genuine transformation of the *Absolutes Hier* initiated by the *Dort*. The *Nullpunkt* will remain unaffected.

Figuratively put, the relation between *Hier* and *Dort* acquires status comparable to two weights on a scale. They weigh the same no matter what happens. Regardless of what qualitative alterations are undergoing elsewhere in the environment (*Dort*) the *Nullpunkt* of perception is the ultimate weight upholding a balance of the scale. This, we can add, is the subtle premise in Heidegger's *Leibliche Gegenwart*. To say that "Was selbst gegeben ist, braucht nicht leibhaft gegeben zu sein, wohl aber umgekehrt ist jedes leibhaftige Gegebensein selbst gegeben"<sup>685</sup> is indirectly or implicitly to call upon a *Nullpunkt* of perception. *Leibliche Gegenwart* as such harbors no dynamic exchange of perspectives evolving *between* the *Hier* und *Dort*.

We return to *Wahrheit und Methode*. Is there a *Nullpunkt* of embodied experience left in Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis? According to Jean Grondin, the answer is negative. Gadamer's elaborate conception of historically situated understanding "schließt die Vorstellung eines Nullpunkts des Verstehens aus," Grondin writes. He gives no arguments or demonstrations in explicit to recourse of Husserl's *Nullpunkt*, however, only a re-evoking of Gadamer's dialectical and linguistic concept of understanding: "Das Verstehen ist stets die Fortsetzung eines schon vor uns begonnenen Gesprächs."<sup>686</sup> Apparently, the recourse to *Sprache* is enough to settle the discussion of a *Nullpunkt* in *Wahrheit und Methode* before it has begun.

One crucial concept of *Wahrheit und Methode* supporting Grondin's remark is Gadamer's *Verwandlung ins Gebilde*.<sup>687</sup> Loosely considered, *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* can also be called a Gadamerian version of Heidegger's *Kategoriale Anschauung* in the sense that the concept pertains to how individual notions are *taken up* in categorial expressions of understanding (cf. the generalities considered above). *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* stresses a dimension of *transformation* in ways comparable neither to Heidegger nor Husserl, however.<sup>688</sup> Genuine understanding, we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*, implies a

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<sup>685</sup> Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 54.

<sup>686</sup> Grondin, *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*. 163.

<sup>687</sup> We preserve here the German word due to a lack of any good English alternatives. The *transformation into structure* is suggested in the English translation Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 110 ff. *Structure* misses the *Bilde* in *Gebilde*, which, according to Gadamer is an important feature of the word (cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 16–17).

<sup>688</sup> We saw how Husserl held that the categorial expression articulates what is the case in the perceived object, but otherwise leaves the object as it was. Heidegger states more or less the same in Heidegger, *Prolegomena*. 84.

transformation [*Verwandlung*] of the *Sache* which is being understood.<sup>689</sup> Here, the word *transformation* must not be confused with *alteration* [*Veränderung*], Gadamer underlines. Transformation does not imply a change of some range, for instance in the sense of an alteration or particularly far-reaching character.<sup>690</sup> Rather, transformation means that something is *thoroughly* and *essentially* transformed. "Verwandlung [...] meint, daß etwas auf einmal und als Ganzes ein anderes ist, so daß dieses andere, das es als Verwandelter ist, sein wahres Sein ist, dem gegenüber sein früheres Sein nichtig ist."<sup>691</sup> In other words, when a transformation occurs there is no gradual transition leading from one point to the next, as in a mere sequence of succession, but rather a sudden denial of what it *was* prior to the transformation. When something is transformed, it leaves behind its former way of being in favor of a new and lasting order.

To say that something is understood is to say that understanding is thoroughly and essentially transformed into lasting order which is new compared to the old. The transformed understanding takes up, transforms, and leaves behind what previously was not understood. The *Gebilde* is in the transformation. The understood *something* – the *Sache* – stands out on its own independent terms *in* or *out* of the *Vollzug* transformation. The *Gebilde* emerges as given with a "schlechthinnige Autonomie."<sup>692</sup> It stands out and shows itself *as if* it were cut loose of the doing of the transformation itself.<sup>693</sup>

Surely, there is no affirmed parlance of *Schlichte Wahrnehmung* in *Wahrheit und Methode*.<sup>694</sup> Gadamer's critique of the epistemological dogmatism of aesthetic consciousness is indirectly to criticize the methodological abstraction involved in a division of *Schlicht* and *Kategoriale* modes of givenness. To say that transformation of understanding is *thorough* is to say that there is no *Stufe* in understanding. What is transformed is transformed: everything merges into a *whole* complex.

Thus, we can understand Grondin's negative remark regarding a *Nullpunkt* in Gadamer's philosophy. In contrast to *Logische Untersuchungen* or *Ideen II*, Gadamer's analyses of perception entail no positional *subject* looking at a perceptual *object*, and no point in understanding ultimately external to what it understands.<sup>695</sup> Permeated from inner to the outer of *Sprache* the perceiving gaze of *Wahrheit und Methode* is a radically nonpositional hermeneutical consciousness intrinsically intertwined with perception.

However, if we again focus our attention towards the details of Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis, things might not be as decisive as Grondin's remark states. Now serving as an example is another passage

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<sup>689</sup> Gadamer's *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* harbors a reference to Aristotle, cf. *Poetics IV*, 1148b. Another relevant passage in Aristotle would be *Rhetoric* 1371b.

<sup>690</sup> According to Gadamer, alteration implies that what is altered genuinely remains the same, i.e. that a substance is maintained in and through the more or less accidental process. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 116.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>693</sup> "... wie abgelöst von dem darstellenden Tun." Ibid. 116.

<sup>694</sup> Cf. Ibid. 353.

<sup>695</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Von Wahrheit des Wortes (1971)", in *Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage* ed. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke 8* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1993). 53; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Subjektivität und Intersubjektivität, Subjekt und Person (1975)", *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1995). 90.

from *Wahrheit und Methode* wherein Gadamer describes how the plurality of perspectives potentially taken on one and the same perceptual object is accomplished (*Vollzogen*) in language. With recourse to Husserl's perceptual *Abschattungen*, Gadamer observes: "In einem ähnlichen Sinne wie beim Wahrnehmen kann man von der 'sprachlichen Abschattungen' reden, die die Welt in den verschiedenen Sprachwelten erfährt."<sup>696</sup> However, the hermeneutist soon points out:

Doch bleibt es ein charakteristischer Unterschied, daß jede 'Abschattung' des Wahrnehmungsdinges von *jeder anderen ausschließend* verschieden ist und das 'Ding an sich' als das Kontinuum dieser Abschattung mitkonstituiert, während bei der Abschattung der sprachlichen Weltansichten eine *jede von ihnen alle anderen potentiell in sich enthält, d.h. eine jede vermag sich selbst in jede andere zu erweitern*. Sie vermag die 'Ansicht' der Welt, wie sie sich in einer anderen Sprache bietet, von sich aus verstehen und erfassen.<sup>697</sup>

Thus, fully in terms with what we have seen, *Sprache* is for Gadamer here the medium wherein the potentially unlimited historical variety of linguistic conceptions [*Abschattungen*] of things emerges and can be effective side by side. One and the same thing can come to articulation and be present in a variety of articulations, and language is the bond which holds them together. Language is the subject transgressive reality which in its permanent yet dynamic being holds the various perspective. "In ihr wird sichtbar was über das Bewußtsein jedes einzelnen wirklich ist."<sup>698</sup> The (constant) being of the perceived object is preserved in language. The object modulates the *Abschattungen* of language from within. Language preserves not only what is constant about the object, however, but also the changeability of the thing. "Im sprachlichen Geschehen findet daher nicht nur das Beharrende seine Stätte, sondern auch der Wandel der Dinge."<sup>699</sup> Language is the ultimate horizon of perceptual life. Language encompasses everything. Language is what reveals and preserves the order of things.

Let us ponder Gadamer's analysis from the perspective of a perceiving self. Apparently, the perceiving self of *Wahrheit und Methode* can *move* around objects and view one and the same object from different perspectives. Different *Abschattungen* of the object can be seen by perceiving the object from different perspectives. However, as we see in the current passage, it is not perception per se, but language which makes the object seen from various perspectives at the same time. Whereas the perceptual perspectives *exclude* each other, language makes the various *Abschattungen* of the object simultaneous. To phrase the point in Gadamer's words: the linguistic "Abschattung der sprachlichen Weltansichten" is what harbors "eine jede von ihnen alle anderen potentiell in sich" – not an exchange of perspectives involving "bei der Wahrnehmung". The potent exchange of perspectives does not occur in the perceptual *Abschattungen*, but in the *linguistic Abschattungen*.

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<sup>696</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 451–452.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid. 452.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid. 453.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid. 353.

This is where we see the contours of Husserl's *Absolutes Hier* or Heidegger's *Leibliche Gegenwart* in Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analyses. In a certain sense, the perceiving self of *Wahrheit und Methode* always sees the object *from here*. Moving around the object does not alter the fact that the perceiving gaze is bound to a point zero of perception. Language, on the other hand, is what expands the *Hier*, by making vivid how the object is from the perspective *Dort*. In other words, the circulation of linguistic expressions is required to expand the perspective on the perceived object. The relationship between the perceiver and the perceived object remains as it is, locked in a relationship analogous to the weights on the scale described above. Whereas the object seen from the embodied perspective *Hier* only is what it is, as it were, the circularity of language is what enriches the perspective. The circulation of language is needed to make the *Absolutes Hier* into a plural *Hier*.

We must avoid exaggerations of the current point. Above all, according to what we saw in Gadamer's critique of the so-called pure perception, the point is *not* that Gadamer operates with one level of perceptual impressions onto which language is placed (like butter on bread, to use a metaphor of Merleau-Ponty's<sup>700</sup>). It only means that Gadamer, as Husserl and Heidegger before him, misses a slight but potent detail in the perceptual-analysis, namely how perception as such can be the firm locus of a circulation of perspectives. *Leibliche Gegenwart* can be conceived as richer than what is recognized by the German philosophers.

The point becomes a little clearer by comparing Gadamer with Merleau-Ponty. By the end of Part Two above, we saw how perception, for Merleau-Ponty, implies being situated amidst the circulation of perspectives involved in perception. Perception harbors a vast variability implicitly present in the limited gaze. Accumulated in perception are potentialities regarding *ways of looking*. Though seen from *one* side, each perceptual object is immensely rich with nuances of perspective. In contrast to what Gadamer observes in his *Abschattung*-passage, Merleau-Ponty's *perception* is recognized as more than a feature wherein each perspective on the thing excludes the other. A wealth of perspectival possibilities is implied when one thing hides the other, and they evolve along a multitude of axes. An interplay of perspectives is opened when one object (with all *its* complexities) merges into the foreground, making the surrounding objects (with *their* complexities) merge into the background. "In vision", we read in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "I apply my gaze to a fragment of the landscape, which then becomes animated and displayed while the other objects recede into the margins and become dormant."<sup>701</sup> Involved in the periphery of consciousness, these dormant aspects do not cease to be there although they might not be perceived as such. They *are* the fuller sense of what it means to perceive. They are the horizon of perception. "[A]long with these other objects, I also have their horizons at my disposal, and the object I am currently focusing on – seen peripherally – is implied in these other horizons."<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining - The Chiasm." 155.

<sup>701</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 70.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.* 70.



In effect, Merleau-Ponty's analyses of perception have surpassed the idea of a *Nullpunkt* of experience in ways not recognized by Gadamer (or Husserl and Heidegger before him). Merleau-Ponty's perception implies no points whatsoever – either outspoken or more subtly. Perceptual *sens* – qua structure of behavior – implies dialectical displacement reaching to the core of what Husserl calls *Nullpunkt* of experience. The complexity of human behavior radically displaces Husserl's *System* of *Hier/Dort* from *within*. What Husserl calls the "letzten zentralen Hier" of *Leibliche Gegenwart* becomes in Merleau-Ponty's analyses an ambiguous and transformative transmission constantly evolving *between* the perceiving subject and the perceived world. Husserl's punctual *Hier* is permeated with a dialectical exchange of perspectives. *Here* and *there* are intrinsically interwoven with each other. The perceiver is present *here*; yet he or she perceives him or herself *from there*. This is what it implies to say that body radiates over its milieu, as Merleau-Ponty wrote (considered on page 101 and 112 above). Perceptual life is always perceived *from somewhere*, yet it is not locked up in an *Absolutes Hier*.<sup>703</sup>

Let us finish the current reading of Gadamer against the background of his nearer tradition by drawing out some conclusions. Due to the complexity of the questions we are dealing with, we will make the conclusions more suggestive than final. We have seen how Gadamer apparently misses a slight detail in perceptual life, described in terms of circulation of perspectives, which is recognized by Merleau-Ponty. The reason why Gadamer misses the detail is apparently his categorial approach to experience inherited from Heidegger. In effect, when Gadamer analyses perception in terms of *Lesen*, describing it as a "wegsieht von..., hinsieht auf..., zusammensieht als...." etc.,<sup>704</sup> the hermeneutist approaches perceptual life in terms insensitive to the current nuance of perception. The categorial approach is *too categorial* to reflect the detail in a philosophical description. Methodologically speaking, Gadamer's categorial approach starts from the outset on a level of description not oriented towards minute details of perceptual life but towards the more general features of experience. Descriptive focus is placed on the categorial pre-conditions of experience – what we have seen described as the categorial *Wie der Faktizität* – and not perception.

Indirectly, hence, there appears to be a relationship between Gadamer's way of analyzing *Wahrnehmung* and the critical stance taken towards the empirical sciences demonstrated by both him and Heidegger. In the early texts of Heidegger, we saw how the development of the categorial approach to experience is part of a process that simultaneously draws philosophy away from the empirical sciences. The latter point makes sense in light of Merleau-Ponty's more nuanced approach to perception. Because Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is thoroughly informed by the empirical sciences as a constructive dialogue with the empirical sciences, he manages to bring about a detail in human life overseen in the categorial and hermeneutical approach to experience. Merleau-Ponty's way of doing philosophy has furnished a sensitivity towards perceptual details missed in the hermeneutical, categorial and nonempirical way of doing philosophy.

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>704</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 96

## 7. Method of Phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty's Interpretative Approach

In the preceding sections, we focused on the development from the early phenomenology of Husserl, through the early Heidegger, up to Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*. Pursuing the *Kategoriale Anschauung*, we saw how Gadamer's path of *Lesen* is reflected in his way of doing philosophy. Also, by contrasting Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis with *Phenomenology of Perception*, we indicated how the Merleau-Ponty conceives of a slight but potential detail in perceptual life, not recognized in Gadamer's analysis. The reason why we take such an interest in the detail in question is more than indicated: later, when we will import nondirective meditation into philosophy, we will come to see that the detail of perception equals the enactive details needed to describe the practice properly. The detail overlooked in Gadamer's categorial approach is a minute but crucial form of action executed in the meditative practice.

The goal of Section 7 is to understand more of the methodological aspects behind Merleau-Ponty's detailed account of perception by consulting Merleau-Ponty's lecture entitled *Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man*. This lecture is not a direct comment on Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung* but sheds light on how Merleau-Ponty combines a revised version of Husserl's *Wesenschau* with a revised conception of the induction used in the empirical discourses. Apparently, the result is a way of describing experience that is not a categorial. Compared to Gadamer's path of *Lesen*, Merleau-Ponty's path of *perception* is strikingly more sensitive to nuances in perception. What are the methodological rationales given by Merleau-Ponty to pursue his way of describing experience? How can it be that Merleau-Ponty – in contrast to Heidegger and Gadamer – finds a way to combine phenomenology and a constructive dialogue with the positive sciences of psychology, sociology, behaviorism, physiology, and even physics?

### a. *Wesenschau* and Induction. Merleau-Ponty on Husserl and the Science on Man

Launching us into the topic of methodology is a short look at the Preface of *Phenomenology of Perception*. "Phenomenology," writes Merleau-Ponty, "is the study of essences, and it holds that all problems amount to defining essences, such as the essence of perception or the essence of consciousness."<sup>705</sup> The eidetic structures of phenomenology are themselves not the *goal* but the *means*, Merleau-Ponty underlies. The essences are the means of conceptualizing the perceptual world.<sup>706</sup> "Phenomenology's most important accomplishment is, it would seem, to have joined an extreme subjectivism with an extreme objectivism,"<sup>707</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. A distinguished form of rationality entails a combination of extremes:

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<sup>705</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. ix.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid. Preface ix.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid. Preface. xxxiv

"[P]erspectives intersect, perceptions confirm each other, and a sense [*sens*] appears."<sup>708</sup> In our context, the methodological aspects of what Merleau-Ponty here describes as an intersection between the extreme subjectivism (phenomenology) and the extreme objectivism (the empirical sciences) is what we need to understand.

Now, the first- and third-person perspectives are not difficult to spot in Merleau-Ponty's first books.<sup>709</sup> Comparing *Structure of Behavior* with *Phenomenology of Perception*, we see that the first book rests first and foremost on a level of third-person perspectives, i.e. "extreme objectivism", whereas *Phenomenology of Perception* sets out and maintains the first-person perspective on experience all the way, i.e. "extreme subjectivism". Upon closer inspection, we also see that *Structure of Behavior* harbors a switch. In the first half of *Structure of Behavior* (approximately), Merleau-Ponty works with extreme objectivism. Pretending to know nothing about humans,<sup>710</sup> as Merleau-Ponty writes, his analyses start within the perspectives of reflexology, psychology, and physics as a way of starting within the dualist perspectives dominating his contemporaries.<sup>711</sup> "Our goal is to understand the relations of consciousness and nature," reads the opening of *The Structure of Behavior*: "organic, physiological or even social. By nature, we understand here a multiplicity of events external to each other and bound together by relations of causality."<sup>712</sup>

Then, at some point in Merleau-Ponty's text, a peripety occurs: "[W]hat we have called nature is already a consciousness of nature," we read, "what we call life is already consciousness of life and what we call mental is still an object vis-à-vis consciousness."<sup>713</sup> Where consciousness initially was introduced as a region distinct from physical reality Merleau-Ponty's analysis ends up demonstrating how consciousness is *presupposed* in the conceptualization of any region of being (also, for instance in physics). In other words, Merleau-Ponty's minor thesis reveals an irreducible transcendental moment of embodied consciousness<sup>714</sup> evolving within what he calls Objective thought. This path, then, becomes further elaborated in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty's major thesis starts where the minor ends. Situated in the first-person perspective, Merleau-Ponty's writing demonstrates how the "extreme objectivism" and the "extreme subjectivism" are *both* fully integrated with each other *and* not completely overlapping. In the ambiguity itself, so to say, is the rationality of *sens*. Ultimately speaking, the *logos* of perception is the

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<sup>708</sup> Ibid. Preface. ixxxiv

<sup>709</sup> In Merleau-Ponty's own words, the difference between his minor and major thesis is that, whereas *The Structure of Behavior* is, as he puts it "present at the emergence of perceptual behaviors", "traced out" on the basis of modern physiology and psychology, in the analysis of *Phenomenology of Perception* "we install ourselves in them [i.e. perceptual behaviors] in order to pursue the analysis of this exceptional relation between the subject and the world." Merleau-Ponty, *An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962)* 4–5

<sup>710</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 184

<sup>711</sup> In a certain sense, the move is analogous to *Wahrheit und Methode*. Gadamer also starts off by situating analyses within the discourses about to be criticized. Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. Einleitung. 4.

<sup>712</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 3.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid. 184

<sup>714</sup> Cf. Ibid. 224. Cf. Thompson, *Mind in Life*. 81 ff.

rationality of phenomenology. This *logos*, we can say, is also the ultimate "categorical" of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

In the combination of first- and third person perspectives entails what we have called Merleau-Ponty's semi-Augustinian path. Merleau-Ponty prolongs the first-person perspectives of Augustine and Descartes, as it were, into the active encounter with the contemporary third-person perspectives. Merleau-Ponty spoke of the process as an archeological digging seeking to rediscover the unity of the perceived world.<sup>715</sup> Evolving here is a distinct interpretative strategy. Where Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics origins in the classical hermeneutical disciplines of Bible exegesis and jurisdiction, Merleau-Ponty's does not. Merleau-Ponty interpretative strategy emerges rather in the active and open-ended meditation between the extreme subjectivism and the extreme objectivism.

Admittedly, explaining Merleau-Ponty's method only by recourse to perceptual unity and perceptual *logos* can hardly be called very informative. To borrow a laconic comment of Gadamer's Augustine-reading; it runs the risk of using the unintelligible to explain the unintelligible.<sup>716</sup> Luckily, by turning towards the lecture *Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man* we can gain a more specific explanation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method.

In the lecture, Merleau-Ponty elaborates on some of the factors involved in his interpretative strategy towards the positive sciences, by targeting the relationship between Husserl's *Wesensschau* and the principle of *induction* implied in psychology. In contrast to what is openly brought forth in his first two books,<sup>717</sup> Merleau-Ponty begins by evoking key differences between Husserl and psychological science on humans, emphasizing how both parties lack a mutual understanding and acknowledgement of the other. Although Husserl, in Merleau-Ponty's reading, frequently proclaimed a parallelism between psychology and phenomenology,<sup>718</sup> and some psychologists oriented in phenomenology (e.g. Koffka) sought an implementation of phenomenological reflection into psychology, the fundamental homogeneity between the two disciplines are in fact adequately recognized by none of them.<sup>719</sup> Lacking in the self-understandings of both is a genuine affirmation of the other discipline. Both try to single out the ultimate principles of consciousness.

Husserl, according to Merleau-Ponty, aspires for a consciousness in the last instance not limited by actual experience; i.e. a consciousness that grasps itself in its ultimate ideal sense *prior* to the moment of being accomplished in perception.<sup>720</sup> Aspired for in the empirical studies, on the other hand, are externalist

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<sup>715</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962)* 5.

<sup>716</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 425

<sup>717</sup> In the presentation/interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology, more emphasis is placed on the distance between the empirical sciences and phenomenology, than the mediation (which Merleau-Ponty himself practices throughout the book; cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. ixxi ff.

<sup>718</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man." 72.

<sup>719</sup> "[The psychologists] almost constantly fall into the error of supposing that phenomenology wishes to lead them back to a psychology of introspection." *ibid.* 45

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.* 54

orders of mechanism and psychologism highlighted to a degree that threatens to undermine philosophy. ("Reason itself appears to be the contingent product of certain external conditions."<sup>721</sup>) Neither of them, however, sees that they execute these aims largely on the same underlying premises, Merleau-Ponty holds. The stark opposition is in any case merely apparent:<sup>722</sup> "[T]here cannot be any basic discord between the point of view of psychology and that of phenomenology," he writes. "It is always the same subject, man, that is being approached in the one way or another."<sup>723</sup> Meditation occurs between the two approaches as Merleau-Ponty reinterprets both in light of each other.

In its modern form, we know induction pertains to methodologically regulated procedures going from given amounts of observable singularities to the articulation of proclaimed laws regulating these observable singularities. Induction, so Merleau-Ponty explains it, is "a process by which, in considering a group of facts, we discover the common character and set it apart by an abstraction, regarding it as essential to the group of facts from which we started."<sup>724</sup> Induction thus defines "an operation which enables us to find the cause of a phenomenon among its various antecedents, by disregarding those which are neither constant nor unconditioned."<sup>725</sup> The method of induction is a natural part of psychology, Merleau-Ponty points out, in the sense that the psychologist "tries to see how man works out of his responses to certain situations and stimuli, and discover the laws which bind together such and such a group of stimuli with such and such a reaction."<sup>726</sup> In other words, empirical psychology works by studying consciousness as a *fact*, like physics or any other science on nature; or more precisely, psychology conceives of consciousness through an assembling of facts that eventually merges into the inductive inference.<sup>727</sup>

Compared to induction, Husserl's phenomenological *Wesenschau* is (as any reader of Husserl probably would know) more complicated to coin in a few words. One distinct feature of the concept, however, is that *Wesenschau* initially emerges as a particular species of the *Kategoriale Anschauung*.<sup>728</sup> Where *Logische Untersuchungen* introduces the intuition of the categorial *Wie* with recourse to nonsensuous intuition founded yet also independent of the sensuous act, the phenomenological method of *Wesenschau* is in the *Ideen* (1913) an aspiration to clarify further the categorial *Wie* by raising it up to a

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<sup>721</sup> Ibid. 44. Italics added. Herein evolves a prime motivation of the current lecture of Merleau-Ponty's. Evoked by Merleau-Ponty in the opening of the lecture is Husserl's long commitment with the problem of psychologism. Merleau-Ponty refers to how Husserl's *Krisis* describes an externalization of human rationality. Ibid. 42-43. Cf. "Bloße Tatsachenwissenschaften machen bloße Tatsachenmenschen." "Wissenschaftliche, objektive Wahrheit ist ausschließlich Feststellung dessen, was die Welt, wie die physische so die geistige Welt, tatsächlich ist." Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie, eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969). 4-5. We recognize the analogous motivation in Heidegger's critique of *Psychologismus* in *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus*, Section 6b above.

<sup>722</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man." 52 and 53.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>728</sup> Explanation borrowed from: Moran and Cohen, *The Husserl Dictionary*. 91.

definite understanding of *what* is given in the act. "In Wahrheit sehen alle und sozusagen immerfort 'Ideen' und 'Wesen', sie operieren mit ihnen im Denken, vollziehen auch Wesenurteile,"<sup>729</sup> Husserl writes in *Ideen I*. *Wesensschau* is to intuit, on a higher level of reflection, *what* is given in perceptual experience. Any perceptual *Individuum* can be understood with respect to its *Was*, Husserl writes. "*Erfahrende* oder *individuelle Anschauung* kann in *Wesensschauung (Ideation)* umgewandelt werden – eine Möglichkeit, die selbst nicht als empirische, sondern als Wesensmöglichkeit zu verstehen ist. Das Erschaute ist dann das entsprechende *reine* Wesen oder Eidos[.]"<sup>730</sup> In other words, there is an essential analogy between the way something is given in perception and the way it is given for the phenomenological gaze. "So wie das Gegebene der individuellen oder erfahrenen Anschauung ein individueller Gegenstand ist, so das Gegebene der Wesensschauung ein reines Wesen."<sup>731</sup> Understanding essences entails a dimension of generality in the emerging contingent and concrete life.

The essential continuum between perception and *Wesensschau* plays an important role in Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of *Wesensschau*. "In so far as the essence is to be grasped through lived experience; it is concrete knowledge," he writes. "But in so far as the essence is to be grasped through this experience which is more than a contingent fact, an intelligible structure that imposes itself on me whenever I think of the intentional object in question, I gain another kind of knowledge."<sup>732</sup> *Wesensschau* is a dual aspect operation: both concrete and ideal. To see an essence, Merleau-Ponty adds, one must begin by having a perception which serves as a base, or point of departure; not as the source of its validity but as a ground, or pedestal, on which the insight into essence is formed.<sup>733</sup> The ideal perception is attained at some point in the process. "[T]he insight into essence is an intellectual taking over, a making explicit and clarifying of something concretely experienced[.]"<sup>734</sup> In effect, the *Wesensschau* thus comes after something else, Merleau-Ponty explains. The procedure is based *on* observations which then, in the end, becomes essential to the fuller outcome of the analyses.<sup>735</sup> However, he adds, seeing essences also implies a free variation of the essence. "In order to grasp an essence, we consider a concrete experience, and then we make it change in our thought, trying to imagine it as effectively modified in all respects. *That which remains invariable* through these changes is the essence of the phenomena in question."<sup>736</sup> Thus, founded on concrete perception, the eidetic intuition varies the phenomenon in imagination until certain invariables stand out as essential to the phenomenon being perceived.

According to Merleau-Ponty, induction involves a moment profoundly analogous to the phenomenological intuition of essences. The way induction seeks to extract general epistemic structures

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<sup>729</sup> Husserl, *Ideen 1*. § 22. 49.

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid.* § 3. 13. Italics original.

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.* § 3. 14.

<sup>732</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man." 54.

<sup>733</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.* 70. Italics original.

out of a given amount of concrete examples indicates a certain *Wesenschau*.<sup>737</sup> Certainly, Merleau-Ponty writes, the cases of induction are "real", not "imaginary," as in the *Wesenschau*. Whereas phenomenology applies to imaginary variation of the examples in the more direct sense, empirical psychology refers to variations involving cases that are actually realized.<sup>738</sup> However, if pondering what induction *de facto* implies in the current abstraction, the relation between the two modi of consideration comes rather close, writes Merleau-Ponty. "For when you make an induction on the basis of facts which are very large in number, you do not examine every possible, individual case." On the contrary: "You will limit yourself to a finite number of experiments, and then you will then *single out one relation that you consider always to be true*, even for the intermediate values between those that you have verified."<sup>739</sup> Induction involves a conceptual formation; a gradual accomplishing of intelligible concepts which *then* is verified by showing how confused empirical facts can be understood by means of these concepts.<sup>740</sup> By means of certain "impure and imperfect phenomena", Merleau-Ponty writes, the inductionist *reads of* what is "theoretically conceived, or forged, by the intellect. It is not the *number* of facts involved that do justice to the founding notions of reasons, but rather the *intrinsic clarity* which sheds light on the phenomena which is under consideration."<sup>741</sup>

In other words, the inductive process implies a certain effort of imagination:

In a certain number of decisive experiments, you *perceive certain relations, and you imagine the rest* in function of these relations which are actually perceived in a finite number of cases. You *link together* the different examples effectively perceived by an *imaginary variation* which will lead from one to the other.<sup>742</sup>

The order of induction is not *given* as such; it involves imagination. The perceiver *sees* relationships in the material and varies these relationships in ways essentially analogous to the phenomenological *Wesenschau*. Therefore, according to Merleau-Ponty, there is no such thing as a *pure* abstraction of the notions shared by the facts being conceived – as is forwarded by the classical theory of induction by Mill.<sup>743</sup> Rather than being a neutral discovering of eidetic structures in the direct sense, induction involves a process of reading the *essences* involved in the situation.<sup>744</sup>

As noted, Merleau-Ponty's bringing empirical induction and the phenomenological *Wesenschau* closer to each other involves not only a philosophical re-consideration of induction but also of Husserl's conceptions. Merleau-Ponty speaks of his interpretation as a way of preserving the ambition of Husserl, yet by "pushing Husserl further than what he wished to go himself".<sup>745</sup> Merleau-Ponty utilizes a double

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<sup>737</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid. 70. Italics original.

<sup>739</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid. 72.

movement in Husserl's *Wesenschau* different than Husserl, namely the ideal *and* concrete nature of the essences. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates, eidetic analyses involve a certain ideal possession of the object, aspiring to what he calls an *enveloping* of the perceptual situation. On the other hand, he maintains, Husserl's eidetic insight always ties the concrete perception of experience to a *here and now* in ways which make vivid how it is the *situation* that precedes and envelops the ideal.<sup>746</sup> The ideal essences always come with a reference to the perceptual world, implicitly indicating how a formative and historical dimension evolved in the essences. Qua perceptual structure the intentional objects achieved in Husserl's analyses cannot be exact in strong terms. They are, rather, inexact by nature.<sup>747</sup> In Merleau-Ponty's account, this perceptual inexactness is obviously not a loss but a productive moment. Evolving is a certain "logic of things",<sup>748</sup> a way wherein the intentional object presents itself as spontaneous, self-organized, and aboriginal senses.<sup>749</sup>

According to Merleau-Ponty,<sup>750</sup> Husserl only partially understood the perceptual phenomenon adequately. Husserl sought the reflective orders of consciousness which ultimately speaking could incorporate the inexactness of perception. Leaving out Husserl's idealistic ambition, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates how precisely in the inexactness of Husserl's *Wesenschau* there is an opportunity to enrich phenomenological analyses with empirical facts. The inductive ways of effectuating variations of phenomena by methodological principles represents, we could say, positive ways of varying phenomena along axes not thought of in "imaginary" phenomenology. Thus conceived, the inductive ways of reading phenomena becomes not opposed to phenomenological considerations but rather expansions of the eidetic variation of *what* a current phenomenon is. Furthermore, empirical psychology is not only informative to phenomenology in the sense of adding numerically new information to a given eidetic structure but also potentially corrective to phenomenology.

*Gestalt* psychology is for Merleau-Ponty a prominent example of this: *Gestalt* psychology fulfills an ambition of Husserl, by demonstrating structures of "earthly" intentionality.<sup>751</sup> Where Husserl's *Wesenschau* runs the risk of conceiving the essences as pure scholastic essences *of language*, or "'idealizing fictions,'" <sup>752</sup> *Gestalt* psychology reveals (empirically) how the formation of meaning is *not* merely the product of a spiritual activity. *Gestalt* psychology thus brings in a corrective of "realism" to the phenomenological tendency of idealism. Hence, rather than being a threat to phenomenology, *Gestalt* psychology contributes to situate phenomenology in accordance with its own internal motivation.

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<sup>746</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid. 67.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>750</sup> Cf. Ibid. 75-77. e.g. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Preface. ixvii.

<sup>751</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man." 77.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid. 75.



The aim of Merleau-Ponty's lecture is not only to demonstrate how empirical psychology (here: *Gestalt* psychology) can contribute fruitfully in phenomenological studies of essences, but also how the potential correction works the other way. Eidetic investigation, according to Merleau-Ponty, can – or even *must* – contribute to a clarification of what is presupposed in the inductive operations in the first place. The crux of the clarification entails what we have referred to as induction, a third-person perspective undertaken as systematic generalizations. Implied in the conceiving of an inductive inference is (by necessity) a first-person perspective in these generalizations. In other words, the inductive inference is something like a manifestation of a perspective once had by a human. The generalizations of induction have not occurred in a vacuum but are manifestations of perceptual acts. Unavoidably, there is a contribution of the first-person human perspective in the objective third-person perspective.

Thus, clarifying the intersection of these perspectives is the task of a comprehensive phenomenology. "[I]nduction will remain blind", writes Merleau-Ponty, "if we do not know in some other way, and indeed from the inside of consciousness itself, what this induction is dealing with."<sup>753</sup> Phenomenology must contribute with reflected insights into the fundamental structures of perceptual life. Psychology constantly *uses* the insights of perception, yet the systematic knowledge of phenomenology is called for to clarify the ultimate premises and consequences of what it is to be a perceiving self.<sup>754</sup>

Here, Merleau-Ponty can be said to tacitly evoke and revise Husserl's *Kategoriale Anschauung*. "To imagine," Merleau-Ponty writes, "is always to make something absent appear in the present, to give a magical quasi present to an object *which is not there*."<sup>755</sup> In our parlance: to conceive of an inductive structure is to perceive (here: imagine) a categorial dimension in the perceptual situation. In contrast to Heidegger, however, Merleau-Ponty sees in the act of categorial imagination a correlative *embodied* perspective. The abstractions in perception and in induction always bear witness to the achievement of a body proper. Any incantation of an absent structure in the present data always and by necessity involves a correlative motor-affective situation of a perceiver.<sup>756</sup> The perceiver must set him or herself up to "a certain kind of relation with the absent thing," writes Merleau-Ponty. The perceived, objective data of induction are correlated with a structure of behavior which in some way or another actively projects the essence with his or her motor-affective attitude.<sup>757</sup>

In contrast to Gadamer's categorial way of conceptualizing experience, Merleau-Ponty rejects the conceptualization of the categorial dimension of experience into a categorial philosophical concept, such as, for instance, *language*. That is, whereas Gadamer's (categorial) *Sprache* takes up the ambiguity between (for instance) the first- and third-person perspectives taken on the world, Merleau-Ponty prefers

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<sup>753</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid. 60 *Italics added*. Merleau-Ponty refers here to Sartre's concept of imagination. This does not affect the general point currently being made.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid. 60.

to let the tension between the two forms of perspectives be left open. *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* exemplify this: Merleau-Ponty mediates between the two perspectives, but refrains from conceptualizing a take "over" on the mediations. The ambiguous intersection between the subjective and the objective perspectives are not merged together but occur in the painstakingly nuanced demonstrations of *how* and *where* the perspectives intersect. The benefit of this process is twofold. On the one hand, the eidetic variation of the positive sciences is allowed to inform phenomenology. On the other hand, phenomenology can contribute in drawing out the fuller phenomenological consequences of the inductive results of the empirical sciences.

Ultimately speaking, we can underline on behalf of Merleau-Ponty, it is *always* the phenomenal body that interprets. The phenomenal body is its own application moment, as it were. Any other perspective taken on the world implies that the perspective has relevance in an embodied situation. All philosophy seeking to stay true to facticity must take the consequences thereof.

Now we better understand why Merleau-Ponty describes his phenomenological-interpretative strategy as an archeological process seeking to rediscover structure of the perceived world. Exposing the implicit structures of motor-imaginary dimension in the empirical results has the character of the hermeneutical tradition called *Rückfrage*. In a certain sense, Merleau-Ponty *reads* the implicit aspects of imaginary variation of *Wesenschau* in the empirical sciences. In a profound sense, the phenomenologically demonstrated ambiguities between the first- and the third-person perspectives are the ambiguities of the perceptual phenomenon. Digging down to the pivotal moments of intersection is digging down to the ultimate "categorical" structure in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology: the unity of the perceived world. The world of perception is – in the active sense of the word – the inarticulate, ambiguous and unbreakable relationships in and between the first- and third-person perspectives taken on the world.

## 8. Multiphase Complexity: Structures of Behavior

In Subsection 6c, we pursued how Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung* evolves in the prolonging of Heidegger's *Prolegomena*. In light of Merleau-Ponty's methodological reflections, the current section will expand on Merleau-Ponty's conception of perceptual life. We will follow how *Structure of Behavior* elaborates on a complex concept of behavior, starting "from below",<sup>758</sup> with rudimentary or mere organic structures shared by living organisms in general, "up" to the distinguished *symbol behavior* unique to humans. Indirectly, looking into this, we will expand on what we have called the circulation of perspectives in perception. The crux of this circulation will be on the level of symbol behavior. However, elaborating on the details here

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<sup>758</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 4.

will also be a way of expanding – a little backwards, as it were – on concepts such as *body schema* and *abstract movement* introduced in *Phenomenology of Perception* (Cf. Subsection 5b above). When consulting *Structure of Behavior* we will see that when Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, for instance says that normal behavior is to be "situated in the virtual"<sup>759</sup> he draws heavily on resources established in his first book.

In our account here, this is a Merleau-Ponty-exegetic point. Though certainly recognized by many commentators,<sup>760</sup> the impact of *Structure of Behavior* on *Phenomenology of Perception* is not altogether common ground within the commentary literature on Merleau-Ponty. Figal, for instance, criticizes *Phenomenology of Perception* for being a little too unspecific in describing the orientation of the phenomenal body. "Etwas kann nur als 'vor' oder 'über' mir und dabei 'neben' oder 'unter' etwas anderem lokalisiert werden, wenn ich zu ihm den Abstand habe, der für eine Bezugnahme erforderlich ist", Figal comments on *Phenomenology of Perception*. "Ohne diesen Abstand ist das Sehen nicht möglich; man sieht nicht, was einem direkt vor Augen ist. [...] Doch wie dieser gelebte Abstand genauer zu denken sei, hat Merleau-Ponty nicht geklärt."<sup>761</sup> Apparently unrecognized by Figal, is that the distance he seeks – or *flexibility*, as we soon will come to call it – is very much explained by Merleau-Ponty, if not in *Phenomenology of Perception*, then in *Structure of Behavior*. In this book, Merleau-Ponty painstakingly elaborates how distance or flexibility permeates organic life from the "lower" to the "higher", i.e. from the slightest and minutest forms of behavior to moral and epistemic behavior.

That said, Figal's comment makes us aware of a certain leap also taken in our own reading of Merleau-Ponty. In Section 5, we established the phenomenal body as a unitary and expressive structure. In some senses, what we said here rested on postulates. Merleau-Ponty's major thesis presupposes the minor thesis. That is, the demonstrations of the *Structure of Behavior* are the foundation to understand the complex raster of structures taken up in the intentional analysis of *Phenomenology of Perception*. We could not begin with the *Structure of Behavior*, however, and then move to *Phenomenology of Perception*. The reason is methodological. *Structure of Behavior* draws heavily on empirical studies, and to large degrees, much of the book is immersed in the third-person perspectives on experience.<sup>762</sup> The empirical orientation of Merleau-Ponty's book would make the distance to Gadamer's philosophy almost too great to bridge conceptually. Now that we have gained a better understanding of Merleau-Ponty's interpretative strategy, however, these resources are available to us on a more reflected ground.

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<sup>759</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 111.

<sup>760</sup> The following reading of *Structure of Behavior* is indebted to Thompson, *Mind in Life*. Chapter 4 *Structure of Behavior* and Ted Toadwine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009). Chapter 1, *Nature as Gestalt and Melody*.

<sup>761</sup> Figal, *Gegenständlichkeit*. 158–159. In the sentences omitted here with ellipses, Figal ascribes Merleau-Ponty some positive points in how the *Abstand* is to be conceived. These points do not alter the conclusion, however, and are thus omitted to avoid unnecessary complexity in our context.

<sup>762</sup> Cf. Section 7 above. We return to this point below.

#### a. Syncretic and Amovable Forms of Behavior

We have said that Merleau-Ponty conceives of human behavior in terms of an essential continuum with the total feature of the surroundings. Behavior is the ongoing, thorough, and seamless integration between humans and the world. Other people, animals, other organic beings, or inorganic or physical features of the surroundings are all components essentially belonging within the structures exclusive to humans. Merleau-Ponty lets these differences be inscribed in a larger whole, without thereby downplaying or obliterating the differences involved. One crux of the following reading of *Structure of Behavior* will be to understand the conceptual combination of continuum and emancipation occurring in the differentiated structure of behavior demonstrated by Merleau-Ponty.

One particularly relevant classification of *Structure of Behavior* are the terms *syncretic*, *amovable* and *symbolic* forms of behavior. In many ways, this classification systematizes behavior in an accumulative and differentiated order. It also makes vivid the relationship between flexibility and conditioned inhibitions involved in behavior. The sequence starts from the "low" level of noncognitive instinct life (syncretic) ultimately leading up to the "higher" forms of human behavior (symbolic). Somewhat more precisely, whereas the syncretic (as the "lowest") and the amovable (as the "middle") forms of behavior are shared by all living beings, the symbolic form of behavior is restricted to human life.

Merleau-Ponty cautions us, however, to conceive of the classification as an expression of elementary and complex behavior.<sup>763</sup> Interpreting the classification of behavior thus, would amount to considering the classification in too teleological terms, as if every mode of vital conduct *strived towards*, and were *accomplished in*, the symbolic form of behavior. This way of seeing it is too anthropomorphic, according to Merleau-Ponty's perspective. In effect, it is to conceive of behavior too strongly in light of the standards of symbolic behavior, whence the interpretation is done in the first place. In addition, we should not consider the classification as strictly corresponding to three groups of animals either. "[T]here is no species of animal whose behavior *never* goes beyond the syncretic level, nor any whose behavior *never* descends below the symbolic forms,"<sup>764</sup> Merleau-Ponty underlines. In any form of symbolic behavior, thus, is an essential continuum to the "lower" forms of behavior. At the same time, the symbolic form of behavior emerges as a transformation of the lower. Each "higher" form of behavior presupposes and transforms the prior.<sup>765</sup>

A few more preparatory words are necessary before we move into the details of the *Structure of Behavior*. The classification of syncretic, amovable and symbolic behavior pertains to how – or in what regard – there can be said to be a self-reflexive relationship within behavior itself. Stated differently, the

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<sup>763</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 103.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid. 104. Italics original.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid. 104.

classification pertains to how and in what sense the structures of behavior can be said to be present for the organism itself.<sup>766</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, it is both possible and necessary to classify behavior "according to whether the structure in behavior is *submerged* [*noyée*] in the content or, on the contrary, *emerges from it* [*émerge*] to become, at the limit, the proper theme of activity."<sup>767</sup> To be fully submerged in an ongoing project of exploring the environment in the sense of, say, an ant, is to be locked up to the a priori specter of possible behavior in another sense as when a human being considers his or her behavioral response to a situation.<sup>768</sup>

Yet another way to explain the classification is to say that it expresses how various organisms are capable of learning, i.e. how it responds to, and itself develops, possible forms behavior. The differences go from forms of behavior that merely are capable of transferring behavior learned in one situation to another (a feature that necessarily occurs in all forms of behavior), and a behavior that takes account of the process of learning itself. In the latter form of behavior, behavior takes learning itself to be "the proper theme of activity", as Merleau-Ponty states. This entails a self-reflexivity within behavior occurring exclusively in the symbolic form. Learning about learning, we could say, is the distinguishing mark of this exclusively *human* form of behavior. Exclusively in the human form of behavior, certain structures potentially emerge as paradigmatic. Only in the symbolic form of behavior can *something* be taken as a concrete perceptual actualization of *something else*. A variety of structures executed under different circumstances may occur as manifestation of *the same* determining structure.

One last remark must be made on how we will read *Structure of Behavior*. Reading Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty in light of each other has the happy effect that they occasionally complement each other. Not *ontologically*, as we know by now (as if the paths of *Lesen* and *perception* targeted two "sides" of reality) but descriptively. Emphases made in one philosophical context, can make aspects overlooked or nonelaborated stand out in the other. In the current context of syncretic, amovable, and symbolic behavior Gadamer's concept of *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* (Cf. Section 6c above) will be a fortunate concept. Merleau-Ponty lacks an analogous meta-concept when describing the transformative nature of understanding. On his path of *perception*, apparently, *Structure of Behavior* avoids taking a step up, as it were, in such a philosophical expression. In the case of this first book by Merleau-Ponty, the fortunate aspect of descriptive details comes with a cost. *Structure of Behavior* is largely submerged in the analysis being executed. Merleau-Ponty writes from within the perspectives, sometimes at the cost of the intuitive legibility of the transitions involved. To borrow a comment from Bernhard Waldenfels: "There simply is no

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<sup>766</sup> Ibid. 103.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid. 103.

<sup>768</sup> To avoid a misunderstanding, what Merleau-Ponty describes in *Structure of Behavior* is behavioral life on a largely pre-intentional level. *Symbol behavior*, in this framework, is *not* the same as an intellectual self-consciousness. In Merleau-Ponty's perspective, saying so would be to fall back on the inadequate tenet of classical intellectualism.

straight and clear-cut development, to say nothing of a closed system which stands there once and for all," Waldenfels writes. The book is a "palimpsest in which various strata are superimposed on one another".<sup>769</sup>

In our context, we can borrow Gadamer's *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* to conceptualize some of the dynamic between the syncretic, amovable, and symbol forms of behavior. The transitions between the various forms of behavior are enacting "Gebilde", so to speak. Each occurrence of the other form of behavior transforms and liberates the other. In the case of humans, which are the only organisms with all three forms of behavior as possibilities, the "lower" is transformed when being integrated into the "higher". That is, with the emergence of symbol behavior there occurs an emancipation from the contiguously given with the (syncretic) framework. The "higher", on its hand, would however lack substance if isolated from the "lower". The symbol form of behavior is a transformation of the "lower". In our mode of reading Merleau-Ponty, the *body schema* of *Phenomenology of Perception* amounts to the "Gebilde" accomplishing the structures of behavior in *Structure of Behavior*. The term body schema designates the full integration of the plurality of more "local" structures of behavior that each "interprets" and "accomplishes" structures of *sens* potentially occurring in the environment.

Having made these methodological points, we turn now to some details in the *Structure of Behavior*. Considered in isolation, the syncretic form of behavior is what comes closest to the *punctual* notion of behavior which Merleau-Ponty explicitly dismisses in the atomist conception of behavior.<sup>770</sup> Syncretic form of behavior, we read in *Structure of Behavior*, is limited either by "certain abstracts of the situation or to certain complexes of very special stimuli."<sup>771</sup> Behavior is thus determined in advance by the biological accommodation of the organism itself to the environment. This means that, although the organism responds to complexities in the situation rather than isolable and concrete aspects, the behavioral responses occur only within the orders of instinctual life of the species. The organism is "imprisoned in the framework of its natural conditions,"<sup>772</sup> Merleau-Ponty writes, citing Buytendjic (Dutch anthropologist, biologist and psychologist). "[T]he reactions which the stimulus evokes are determined, not by the physical particularities of the present situation, but by the biological laws of behavior."<sup>773</sup> In other words, in mere syncretic behavior the flexibility and the register of responses of the organism occur as limited. The organism cannot respond to any new aspect possibly emerging in the situation. The organism, we read, "'treats unexpected situations only as allusions to the vital situations which are prescribed by it."<sup>774</sup> The stimulus is *there* for the organism only to the extent that it essentially resembles one of the dimensionally limited objects of

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<sup>769</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, "Perception and Structure", in *Perception, Structure and Language; A Collection of Essays*, ed. John Sallis (Humanities Press, 1982). 22.

<sup>770</sup> The first part of *Structure of Behavior* consists of a critique of the atomist and uni-directional conceptions of experience advocated by the early behaviorism. Cf. Thompson, *Mind in Life*. 66–72.

<sup>771</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 104.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.* 104.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.* 105.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.* 104. Merleau-Ponty cites Buytendjic.

the natural activity of the organism.<sup>775</sup> Thus we see how the syncretic form of behavior is fully *submerged* in itself. Strictly speaking, there is no phenomenal position whence the structure emerges. Hence, Merleau-Ponty can write that in this form behavior the organism is not actually "available for true learning"

Let us see what characterizes the amovable form of behavior. This form is distinguished by an orientation towards what *Structure of Behavior* exposes as *signals*. (Merleau-Ponty sometimes speaks of this form of behavior as *signal behavior*.) Where syncretic form of behavior is tied to the actual features of the situation, amovable behavior reorganizes the mere syncretic grouping of relations, insofar as one aspect of the current situation can come to signify *something else*. Thus, while syncretic forms of behavior are tied to actual proximity of such or such a feature, the amovable form is not. The amovable form of behavior executes vital aspects that are not necessarily temporally and spatially contiguous. They are actualized in the situation by the appearance of the signal. Also in contrast to the syncretic form of behavior, the amovable form of behavior is not conditioned by instinct alone. The organism can adapt to situations with a greater mode of flexibility.

That said, signal behavior is also conditioned by the biological norms of the organism. The behavioral aptitude towards the situation is by no means unlimited. Signals are taken into consideration only insofar as they contribute with vital value. To paraphrase an example studied by Merleau-Ponty: a chimpanzee may use a chair as a tool for resting, for reaching up to high growing fruits, or to jump further to the next object,<sup>776</sup> as well as many other things. But it cannot use the chair to, for example, read poetry or practice meditation. The appearance of the chair can signal a desired presence of a nonpresent mode of behavior only insofar as the prospective usages of the chair occur within the arrangement of the biological feature of the animal.

Amovable forms of behavior are not altogether tied to the concrete medium in which they are executed, but "relatively independent of the materials in which they are realized", Merleau-Ponty writes.<sup>777</sup> The structure is in certain degrees transgressive to the instinctual and physiological organization of the animal's adaptation to the surroundings. The structure of behavior is no longer fully submerged in the unfolding content, as in the syncretic, but manifests rather a reflexivity within its own order. The organism can thus detach itself from the immediacy of the situation. To borrow an explanation of Ted Toadwine, the organism can articulate the structures of the situation more fully and learn from the structures themselves.<sup>778</sup> In a new sense compared to the syncretic form of behavior, hence, the amovable form can be said to be unconditioned with respect to the actuality of the situation. In other words, the behavior of the animal manifests a certain freedom of conduct. Behavior is not *only* conditioned but also unconditioned in some respects.<sup>779</sup> Signal behavior thus is not restricted to the mere conceiving of *one*

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<sup>775</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid. 117.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>778</sup> Explanation is borrowed from *Toadwine, Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*. 29.

<sup>779</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 106.

distinct object as a "signal", and then the basis of this percept being able to follow the direction indicated in concrete behavior. To understand it thus would be an inadequate conception whereby signal behavior implies a simple transference of a de facto contiguity into behavior.<sup>780</sup> The adequate way of conceiving signal behavior, rather, is to say that it organizes the whole situation into a new gestalt wherein the whole configuration is transformed into a *sign gestalt*.<sup>781</sup> That is, when a signal is perceived the whole situation is altered: it is given a new direction (*sens*). Stated differently, insofar as *some* features of the situation enter into the background of the privileged signal, the whole situation is re-structured, or reorganized, or falling into a new configuration, manifested or *acted out* by behavior.

According to Merleau-Ponty, one thing a chimpanzee cannot do is to conceive of one object as the *same* in two distinct contexts. Nothing indicates that a box firstly deployed as a seat, and then used as an instrument to obtain a piece of fruit, is conceived as the same thing, we read in *Structure of Behavior*.<sup>782</sup> Apparently, the same object used in two contexts is not one but two objects. In so far as the goals intended are distinct and have unequal difficulty, also the structures of the perceived object are distinct.<sup>783</sup> "The animal cannot vary the points of view, just as it cannot recognize something in different perspectives as the same thing,"<sup>784</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. The animal cannot establish a "relation between relations";<sup>785</sup> it lacks a "multiplicity of perspective[s]"<sup>786</sup> internal to its proper singular perspective on the world. This fact, by Merleau-Ponty, means spatial relations are "accessible to animal behavior only in one direction".<sup>787</sup>

What the chimpanzee apparently lacks, we could add, is horizon intentionality. Distinct aspects of the thing are not the ongoing unfolding of an inner horizon of the object, but appear rather as sign gestalts each emerging as singulars. The animal cannot at each moment adopt two points of view as co-present in the object. In other words, the *amovability* of the amovable form of behavior concerns a genuine lack of flexibility within the structure of behavior. The organization of the figure/ground of the situation is invariant insofar as the organization of each task emerges as different in nature, instead of being modulations of the same nature.

Interestingly, according to *Structure of Behavior*, the inflexibility in question also holds for a limited understanding of the body proper in relationship to objects in perception. The amovability pertains to a crucial relationship between the inability to conceive plurality of perspectives in one and the same objects, and an inability in transposition skills acquired in one domain of experience into another domain. In Merleau-Ponty's demonstrations, the example of the chimpanzee shows this: although a chimpanzee

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<sup>780</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid. 117.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid. 117.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid. 117.



shows excellent balance abilities in finding corporal balance by means of reestablishing the vertical position of its body by appropriate movements, the same animal cannot balance an object.<sup>788</sup> That is to say, the chimpanzee cannot transpose the skill of coordinating the body proper according a global set of coordinates into the more local one. The challenge of balancing a stick is not recognized as a variant part of "balance" as a whole. In other words, what we just called a transformation and emancipation of structures from one level to the next thus meets a vital limitation. If a stick, to draw on Merleau-Ponty's example, does not appear as a signal for "balance object" this is thus not first and foremost because the task of balancing in isolation lies outside the stereotyped reaction of this current type of animal, but rather because the chimpanzee has limitations with respect to transformations of whole and parts. Merleau-Ponty phrases the point thus: "Learning acquired with respect to a 'part' of the situation is not acquired with respect to this 'same' part assimilated into a new whole."<sup>789</sup>

The amovability in question also concerns an important differentiation between body proper and the object perceived in regard of invariance and variance. "[I]n animal behavior," we read in *Structure of Behavior*, "the external object is not a thing in a sense that the body itself is," Merleau-Ponty writes, "that is, a concrete unity capable of entering into a multiplicity of relations without losing itself."<sup>790</sup> The point is this: whereas the body proper apparently appears for an animal as the locus of constant invariance, the perceived object, on the other hand, is the variance around which this phenomenal locus circles. Explained differently, the body proper is for the animal the movable position whereas the object is the constant around which the movable position moves. (In the current example: either it is perceived as box-as-a-seat, or as box-as-an-instrument; the object itself is not fluctuating between the modes of being perceived.) The body proper of the animal, writes Merleau-Ponty, is "a concrete unity capable of entering into a multiplicity of relations without losing itself," while the object is not. "[T]he goal is the fixed point, the organism the mobile point, and they cannot exchange their functions."<sup>791</sup>

From the preceding sections, we recall how *Phenomenology of Perception* demonstrated what we called a perceptual circulation of perspectives. To see an object, we said, is to imply a perspective on the same thing seen from another perspective, i.e. from the perspective of another human being. Taking full account of this phenomenological fact, Merleau-Ponty's analysis indicated how human perception is not locked up in an *Absolutes Hier*, but rather open to a dynamic displacement of perspectives. We contrasted Merleau-Ponty's analysis with Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer, all of whom, apparently, presupposed an *Absolutes Hier* of perception.

In light of *Structure of Behavior*, these points now get a slightly humorous twist. According to the empirical observations consulted in Merleau-Ponty's book, being "locked up" in a structure comparable

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<sup>788</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid. 117.

to an *Absolutes Hier* of Husserl is the distinguishing mark of amovable behavior. Or, to be more precise, Merleau-Ponty's book demonstrates how it typically evolves in *chimpanzee* behavior. In the demonstrations of *Structure of Behavior*, nothing in the behavior of the chimpanzee indicates that the animal is *out there* with the object, in the sense that the object "looks back". "The animal cannot put itself in the place of the movable thing and see itself as the goal,"<sup>792</sup> Merleau-Ponty writes. At each moment, the chimpanzee privileges its own movable position without being able to change perspective from within its point of view. It cannot see itself as a goal involved in a structure evolving from another point of view on itself. The chimpanzee, we read, cannot "find an invariant in the external object, under the diversity of its aspects, comparable to the immediately given invariant of the body proper and in order to treat, reciprocally, its own body as an object among objects."<sup>793</sup> The amovability displayed in chimpanzee behavior pertains to an essential lack of ability to loosen up the privilege phenomenal organization of the body proper as foreground in the structure. A limitation is displayed within the internal self-reflective transformations of the structure. Incapable of perceiving two aspects of the same object as co-present, the chimpanzee apparently cannot perceive its own behavior as constituted in relationships to the *other* gazes on the same object. Thus, the behavior is apparently locked up in an absolute position of behavior, *from where* the surrounding objects are perceived.

#### b. Symbolic Forms of Behavior

We have now considered what Merleau-Ponty describes as syncretic and amovable forms of behavior. With symbol behavior, we will now see how human behavior is ascribed as a form of flexibility lacking in animal behavior. That is, what is *amovable* – i.e. nonflexible – in amovable behavior now becomes *movable* in this exclusively human form of behavior. In the demonstrations in *Structure of Behavior*, the ability to perceive a multitude of possible actions involved in the same object is here paradigmatic. Perceiving something as a symbol is to see that the same object can be seen differently. The perceiver can juxtapose between various forms of perceiving the same object. Hence, the symbol of symbol-behavior entails the possibility of perceiving that object can *stand for* or *represent* an unspecific number of other objects. This ability reflects back on the perceiver: The perceiver can gain an *I*-consciousness associated with the human form of self-conception. Within the plurality of various expressions of the consciousness, an identity can emerge.

Thus, by the logic of *Structure of Behavior*, what we have called circulation of perspectives is opened up. From the perspectives of an *I*: I can see the object seen from the other side because I can become a symbol for the gaze of the other. The way I perceive, for instance, a tree, can symbolize how *one*

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<sup>792</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid. 118.

perceives a tree, or perhaps even how I *should* perceive a tree, because my behavior itself can symbolize something for myself as seen through the internalized gaze of the other.

We will return to the current point of symbol-behavior and self-conception in Section 15b-c below. Now, however, let us expand on symbol behavior in the prolonging of the syncretic and the amovable forms of behavior. One way to contextualize Merleau-Ponty's symbol behavior is to say that in human behavior, there are, obviously, a vast amount of bodily reactions that are regulated by biological laws. Syncretic and amovable structures organize life in relatively fixed ways. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the fixation in terms of biological a priories,<sup>794</sup> or a way of being is "imprisoned in the framework of its natural conditions."<sup>795</sup> However, the human – and the human alone, according to Merleau-Ponty – can alter and transform his or her attitude to one's biological a priories. That is, if the human cannot alter *what is*, he or she can always (potentially) alter how the given situation is *taken*. In a certain sense, the ability to transform one's attitude comes with symbolic behavior. The human can relate *to* one's own behavior; not only perceptual objects (such as box-as-a-seat or box-as-an-instrument), but also one's own spontaneous and volitional behavior can be perceived in different ways. In other words, a human is capable of creating a new behavior in behavior. "What defines man is not the capacity to create a second nature – economic, social or cultural – beyond biological nature; it is rather the capacity of going beyond created structures in order to create others."<sup>796</sup>

Understood on a continuum with syncretic and amovable behavior, we note how this potential transformation of attitude is not worked out *on* the "lower" forms behavior from a "higher" instance that in some way or another is external to their being. Rather, the potential shift of perspective comes from within these structures. The transformative switch of attitude wherein a human (as Merleau-Ponty states) goes beyond created structures to create others occurs *out of* biologically conditioned structures of behavioral adaptation to the environment.

As perhaps noted already, the symbolic form of behavior is analogous to what *Phenomenology of Perception* called *abstract movement*. From Subsection 5b we recall how the ability to perceive a plurality of possible acts occurs at the moment and thus also the virtual in the actual. With *Structure of Behavior*, however, we now contextualize the ability of abstract movement in a fuller perspective. We now see how the abstract movement occurs in a transformative continuum from the "lower" forms of behavior.

Let us evoke some details in how Merleau-Ponty demonstrates the being of symbol behavior. Merleau-Ponty evokes various forms of practices, and skill-based behavior describing typical parts of the human form of expression. It is natural to a human, so to speak, to act and become skilled in handling cultural use-objects made for human expression. Merleau-Ponty introduces symbolic behavior by calling attention to the enactive skills of typing on a typewriter or (the most prominent example) playing an

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<sup>794</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 90.

<sup>795</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 104.

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

instrument. One thing both of these examples underline, in *Structure of Behavior*, is that there are no essential connections between perceptual input and enactive response. That is, there is no static relationship between "such and such stimulus (a letter or a note) and such and such partial movement (toward this or that note on the keyboard.)"<sup>797</sup> A trained typewriter or instrumentalist may even be incapable of separately designating a relation between *one* movement and *one* letter and tone, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates. He or she just has it in the body, so to speak. "The keys are aimed at in behavior only as the transition points of certain motor ensembles corresponding to words or musical phrases."<sup>798</sup> By reaching towards the individual keys of expression, the writer or the instrumentalist executes already the more general structure of the expression. He or she is in the expressive structure being executed, not in a point-by-point mode of conceiving object and corresponding behavior.

We follow the case of musical expressivity further in Merleau-Ponty's book. Establishing the habit of expressive phrasing does not consist of establishing determined kinesthetic melodies corresponding to known visual ensembles, Merleau-Ponty writes.<sup>799</sup> Understanding musical expressivity adequately, one must not merely set aside a point-by-point model concerning object and behavior, but also the idea that the current behavior consists of a static learning of structures. Learning to play an instrument consists of learning to how to transgress, successively, what one already has learned. In other words, one learns how to improvise within the framework of the given:

A subject who 'knows' how to type or to play the organ is capable of *improvising*, that is, of executing kinetic melodies corresponding to words which have never been seen or music which has never been played. One would be tempted to suppose that at least certain elements of the new musical phrase or the new words correspond to rigid and already acquired sets. But experts are capable of improvising on instruments unknown to them and the exploration of the instruments, which is evidently a preliminary necessity, is to brief to permit a substitution of individual sets.<sup>800</sup>

Thus, the expert of musical expression possesses the ability to perceive, immediately, how to adjust the structures of behavior previously learned to the individual situation. Unknown instruments are integrated directly into the habitual schemas of expression. This is symbol behavior per se, we can say. The instrumentalist perceives in the various instruments a selfsameness of expression. Simultaneously, the selfsameness is not a static structure, but a dynamic structure adapted to the design of the individual moment.

As indicated, Merleau-Ponty uses the example of musical expression to reveal general traits of behavior. Thus, the recourse to improvisation coincides well with what we saw above. In greater or lesser degrees, improvisation belongs to any kind of vital behavior. *Structure* and *form* are transportable, we saw above. Something learned in one situation has by necessity relevance to new situations. The organism

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<sup>797</sup> Ibid. 120.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid. 120.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid. 120 – 121.

<sup>800</sup> Ibid. 121.

can "improvise" in "interpreting" the norms of the environment. However, with Merleau-Ponty's recourse to musical improvisation, he launches a new and more complex order of improvisation compared to syncretic and amovable forms of behavior. Eventually, the musical expressivity exemplifies a thorough form of flexibility, both with respect to the way behavior is executed, and with respect to the principles determining the situation. In Merleau-Ponty's words: "The new correlation of visual stimuli and motor excitations must be mediated by a general principle so as to make immediately possible the execution, not of determined phrases or pieces, but of an improvised piece if necessary."<sup>801</sup> In other words, the human improviser perceives her in accordance with a general standard that in itself is not fixed but flexible. The norm being acted out can be varied *if necessary*. Behavior *may* or *may not* be varied from what was done before. Spontaneously, human behavior evaluates and modifies the parts and wholes of the moment.

We expand on what is meant here by returning to the exemplarily musical expression. In the demonstrations of *Structure of Behavior*, the aptitude to play the instrument is in the spontaneous flexibility of adjustment. Thus anticipating what in *Phenomenology of Perception* becomes abstract movement, Merleau-Ponty writes: "[I]n the space where his hands and feet will play he 'recognizes' sectors, direction markings, and curves of movement which correspond, not to ensembles of definite notes, but to expressive values."<sup>802</sup> The organist recognizes an "abstract" space of possible musical expression, *between* the actual design of the instrument and the required notes to be played.<sup>803</sup> Spontaneously, the improviser recognizes expressive values in a moment across the multiple factors involved.

Here, again, it can be fruitful to borrow Gadamer's *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* in the reading of *Structure of Behavior*. Apparently, what Merleau-Ponty describes in the musical expression, is what we loosely can call the evolving of an enactive "*Gebilde*". The musical "*Gebilde*" emerges in and through the expressive act. The act is what makes the identical emerge. In Merleau-Ponty's example, the enactive "*Gebilde*" involves an emancipative structure, namely from conventions of expression. Or in line with Merleau-Ponty's words: in the musical expression, both conventional and nonconventional dimensions of musical orders merge. Compared to previously established executions (here: conventions) variations of behavior occur *if necessary*:

Doubtless the correspondence of such and such musical sign, of such and such gesture by the player, and of such and such sound is conventional: several systems of musical notation are possible as are several dispositions of the keyboard. But these three ensembles – between which there exist, term for term, only chance correspondence – considered as a whole communicate internally.<sup>804</sup>

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid. 121.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid. 121.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid. 120.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid. 121.

As we see, conventional forms of behavior are spontaneously integrated into the larger expressive structure evolving in the moment. They are evaluated in light of the expressive "*Gebilde*" occurring in the moment. The musician seeks the internal communication between bodily gestures, the sonorous register of the instrument, and the musical reality of the melody. Together, these features contribute with nuances belonging within the total singular expression of the music sought. In the total expressive gesture, conventional norms of behavior are taken up and transformed in the whole emerging in the moment into the total expressive and emergent order.

The character of the melody, the graphic configuration of the musical text and the unfolding of the gestures participate in a single structure, have in common a single *nucleus of meaning*. The relation of the expression to the expressed, which is one of simple juxtaposition of the parts, is internal and necessary in the wholes. The expressive value of each of the three ensembles with respect to the two others is not an effect of their frequent association: *it is the reason for it*.<sup>805</sup>

We note Merleau-Ponty's words: the *reason* for the expressive behavior evolves *in the whole being expressed*. We approached the reason as "*Gebilde*"; Merleau-Ponty speaks of it in terms of *sens* (here: *meaning*). The expressive execution of the moment nucleus is guided from within the emerging *sens*. The *sens* being expressed is the general principle making the act of expressive musical execution immediately possible. The diversity of bodily gestures intertwined with the execution of music involved are essentially correlated with each other, by the standard of the principle involved in the expressive act.<sup>806</sup>

Above, we said that the syncretic, amovable and symbolic forms of behavior designate various forms in which behavior is submerged or not-submerged in its own structures. Thus, the classification of the three forms of behavior comprises distinct forms of behavioral self-relation. Merleau-Ponty's current example of musical expression illuminates for us what this self-relation implies in the cases of symbol behavior. In the musical expressivity, symbol behavior creates *between* relations, or structure of structures. Pursuing the example of the organist, Merleau-Ponty writes:

Structure of structures [...] establishes an intrinsic relation between movements which are not superimposable is the musical significance of the piece. Thus genuine *aptitudes* demand that the 'stimulus' become efficacious by its internal properties of structure, by its immanent signification; and they demand that the response symbolize along with the stimulus. It is this possibility of varied expressions of a same theme, this 'multiplicity of perspective', which is lacking in animal behavior.<sup>807</sup>

We explain the passage by rephrasing it in light of what we saw above. First of all, the symbol behavior executed by the organist expresses the "*Gebilde*" or musical *sens* of the situation. The expressive "*Gebilde*" entails the total movements involved in the situation. That is, the expressive "*Gebilde*" is not only sensitive to but intrinsically related to the singularity of the here-and-now. In contrast to the here-and-now of

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<sup>805</sup> Ibid. 121. Italics added.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid. 121. Italics added.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid. 122. Italics added.

syncretic behavior, the expressive behavior is sensitive to differences in the unique design of the situation. In other words, the act of musical expressivity responds to, or *takes up*, what the current situation undergoes. The musical aptitude perceives the multitude of possible substitutions and variances emerging in the singular moment. To use Merleau-Ponty's words: the musical aptitude is able to perceive, recognize, and act out the "possibility of varied expression of a same theme". Second of all, in this possibility a self-relation in behavior occurs. Behavior becomes effected by the internal properties of the expressive structure, we read. Something immanent to the evolving structure symbolizes along with the stimulus. In other words, the expressive behavior folds back on itself qua expressive behavior. Thus new structures of behavior are created from within the structures of behavior. An immanent signification stands out, and becomes *acted out*, from within the expressive behavior and forms of behavior. In other words, the musical expression is not submerged in its own behavior but folds back and transforms the structures of behavior from within.

Generalizing these points of the musical expressivity into points valid for symbol behavior in general, Merleau-Ponty uses the self-relation in musical expressivity to articulate a moment of distinguished human freedom. In the ability to perceive a multitude of perspectives, and in the ability of folding back on itself qua behavior, the freedom of thought and the freedom of behavior emerge; we read:

*It is this* [e.g. the possibility of varied expressions of the same theme] *which introduces a cognitive conduct and a free conduct*. In making possible all substitutions of points of view, it liberates the 'stimuli' from the here-and-now relations in which my point of view involves them and from the functional values which the needs of the species, defined once and for all, assign to them.<sup>808</sup>

We note Merleau-Ponty's words: symbol behavior transgresses the "functional values which the needs of the species, defined once and for all." We can interpret the point thus: by folding back on itself, symbolic behavior can conceive of its intrinsic belongingness to the total situation. It can conceive of itself as an intrinsic moment of the total unfolding nucleus of meaning. It articulates its own *sens* folding back on itself. Simultaneously, symbol behavior is fragmented, so to speak, from within. The emergence of a multitude of perspectives possibly taken on the same emerges from within the structures of behavior.

Symbol behavior allows for signification in the proper sense of the word, Merleau-Ponty writes. "Here behavior no longer *has* only one signification. It *is* itself signification."<sup>809</sup> This intrinsic displacement in behavior is what Merleau-Ponty just called "a cognitive conduct and a free conduct." Spontaneously, the symbol behavior creates and expresses new structures at the moment in ways that no chimpanzee – or any other animal – possibly could do.<sup>810</sup> Thus, human behavior goes beyond the created structures to create new ones, as we said above.<sup>811</sup> Rather than being imprisoned in its biological and factual conditions,

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<sup>808</sup> Ibid. 122. Italics added.

<sup>809</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid. 175.

a human can transform the situation from within his or her own behavior.

With *Structure of Behavior*, we have now seen how Merleau-Ponty develops one axis of his fine-grained structure of behavior,<sup>812</sup> starting "from below". The form of behavior executed in symbol behavior does not start with the articulate forms of human expressivity, such as music, but evolves in a transformed continuum from the most rudimentary forms of behavior.

The important key word – for all the forms of behavior described by Merleau-Ponty – is flexibility. To learn something in the vital sense is not just the ability to repeat the same structure, but simultaneously to make the structure relevant in new contexts by flexing the structure being learned. "[T]o learn never consist in being made capable of repeating the same gesture, but of providing an adapted response to the situation by different means,"<sup>813</sup> Merleau-Ponty writes. The learned structures have general relevance.<sup>814</sup> There is something general in the responses.<sup>815</sup> In other words, acquired in learning is not the mere ability to adopt this or that response suited for *one* individual situation, but the ability to transpose what is learned to new situations.

The transportation and generalization of the structures being learned is crucial to understand what we elsewhere have spoken of as perceptual accumulation of experience. The movements are accumulated in the centers of the body,<sup>816</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. "In the nervous system there are only global events."<sup>817</sup> Learning implies a general alteration of behavior manifested not in a multitude of actions.<sup>818</sup> Experience is accumulated in the global way of being; not locally in such or such isolated domains of behavior.<sup>819</sup>

In these points, we recognize what we above (Section 5a) described as the transposable nature of body schema.<sup>820</sup> (We recall how *smell*, *taste*, and *tactility* immediately are transposed into *sight*.) With *Structure of Behavior*, however, we have now indicated how the current transportability implies a flexibility that goes to the core of the phenomenal body qua living organism. Flexibility is not only intrinsic to the structure of human behavior; it is *vital* for anything to a living organism what so ever.<sup>821</sup> The ability to learn, to interact with the environment, and to be flexible in various situations, are aspects of the same. The amovable, syncretic and symbol forms of behavior all involve this form of learning, interacting flexibility. What is unique about symbol behavior is that it can fold back on itself.

For an embodied hermeneutics seeking the genealogy of embodied self-understanding, the current points are crucial. The human ability to see one's own behavior differently – as is a typical possibility of symbol behavior – is prepared for in behavior in general. The flexibility executed in the transformed self-

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<sup>812</sup> As noted above, the second axis pertains to the *physical, vital, and human structures*. Cf. Section 16 below.

<sup>813</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 96.

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.* 99.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>817</sup> *Ibid.* 50.

<sup>818</sup> *Ibid.* 96. Cf. Toadwine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*. 28.

<sup>819</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 28.

<sup>820</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 142.

<sup>821</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 35–6.



understanding occurs in a dynamic and transformative continuum with a flexibility always already going on in the vital interaction with the environment.

Before we conclude the current section (and Part Three), let us briefly indicate how the considered demonstrations of *Structure of Behavior* typically would be seen in light of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*. With *Wahrheit und Methode*, what we just described as flexibility in behavior would amount to what Gadamer calls *Umweltsfreiheit*. The human is the world in ways not directly comparable to any other living organism.<sup>822</sup> Instead of just being immersed in the interaction with the environment, as are animals, the human can *have* a world. "Welt haben heißt: sich zur Welt verhalten,"<sup>823</sup> he writes. Where animals could move around the whole earth without expanding the limits of their behavior,<sup>824</sup> the human being has the ability to rise *above* the mere features of the environment as a mere habitat of life [*Umwelt*].<sup>825</sup> Fully in line with what we have seen above, Gadamer ties the ability in question to the potential of *Sprache*. The human is free to vary his or her speech;<sup>826</sup> he or she can articulate things from ever new perspectives. By articulating new perspectives on the world, one does not leave the environment as a habitat of biological life, but one gains a freer attitude towards it. In one and the same linguistic articulation, the human gains a freer and more distanced attitude to his or her behavior and the world in general.<sup>827</sup>

Viewed from the Gadamerian perspective, not only what Merleau-Ponty described as a symbolic form of behavior would amount to *Sprache*, but eventually also what evolves in the syncretic and amovable forms of behavior. In the life of the human, the rudimentary and biological forms of behavior are the achievement of *Sprache*, Gadamer would say. *Sprache* is embedded in these biological aspects of life that are and always will be hidden, yet *Sprache* is also what transforms the biological life of a human into *human* life.

From the Merleau-Pontyan perspective, however, the Gadamerian take on *Structure of Behavior* would be reductive to the details provided in the book. First, if we had stayed with Gadamer's standard recourse to *Sprache*, we would by now have lost many nuances in our understanding of human behavior. If we jumped right to the conclusion of *Sprache*, so to speak, we would know nothing of syncretic and amovable behavior in human behavior. We would have had Gadamer's concept of an *Umweltsfreiheit*, but not the closer demonstrations of *how* a flexibility of human behavior permeates the embodied reality from the "lowest" to the "higher" forms of behavior. The second point is more philosophical. The fact is, saying that the complex behavior displayed in *Structure of Behavior* equals language would simply not be an adequate way of understanding Merleau-Ponty's demonstration. In expanding on what we saw in Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis (Subsection 6c), this would be "categorializing" the finer distinctions

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<sup>822</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 446–447.

<sup>823</sup> *Ibid.* 447.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid.* 447.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.* 448.

<sup>826</sup> *Ibid.* 448.

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.* 448–450.

within human behavior. The rudimentary behavior displayed in *Structure of Behavior* does not equal language. They *are* rather structures of behavior. By the same token, language as symbol behavior is permeated from within by other forms of behavior. The syncretic and amovable structure of behavior evolve not before or beneath what firmly can be called human language, but rather *in* language. The fact that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy utilizes a constructive dialogue with the empirical discourses, as opposed to Gadamer, is what brings the current complexity in human experience to the fore.



## Part Four. Nondirective Meditation. Contemporary Discourse

Part One and Part Two focused on meditation within the Western philosophical tradition and pursued how this legacy is effective in the Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty philosophies. We saw how a theme of writing and perception is part of the history of meditation in ways that are later reflected in philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology. Part Three moved into methodological questions regarding philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology, and indicated how the theme of reading and perception is reflected in the ways that Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty do philosophy.

In Part Four, the philosophical perspectives will move more into the background as we now turn towards the contemporary meditative practice of nondirective meditation. From the Introduction, we recall that nondirective meditation is distinguished by a peculiar mode of inner hearing. The meditator hears a mantra or a meditation sound consisting of a short sequence of syllables; hearing not with the physical ears but by inducing the sound in thought. Also, we recall how the way that the sound is repeated matters. According to practical manuals,<sup>828</sup> the sound is repeated as unrestrained as possible in ways that allow everything else occurring in consciousness to come and go freely and spontaneously.

The goal of the current part is to expand our understanding of nondirective meditation through the contemporary discourses on meditation. What, in closer observations, does it imply to induce a meditation sound unrestrainedly in thought, and what are the contemporary rationales behind the activity? For a comparative view of the meditative practice, the current part will also discuss a style of meditation

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<sup>828</sup> Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*. Cf. Chapter 6 "Learning how to meditate." 79ff. Benson, *The Relaxation Response*. Chapter 7. Are Holen and Halvor Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion* (Oslo: Dyade Press, 2013).

diametrically distinct from nondirective meditation: concentration. In contrast to what we find expressed in manuals of nondirective meditation, the expressed goal of a concentration technique is to stop or lessen the impact of the spontaneous sides of consciousness.<sup>829</sup> What is the rationale behind the concentrated alternative, and what are the general and subtle differences between nondirective meditation and concentration?

The course of action will be as follows. In Section 9, we will approach nondirective meditation through a brief reflection on the various traditions involved. We will ponder the intriguing hermeneutical situation evolving when nondirective meditation is imported from an Asian religious or half-religious tradition into the Western secularized context of empirically oriented psychology and neurology. In Section 10, we will try to establish a fuller understanding of the mental attitude practiced in in nondirective meditation. Here, we will learn more of what is meant by *spontaneous activities* in meditation, by understanding the technical term *mind-wandering*. Comparing nondirective meditation and concentration we will see how the rationale of these two styles of meditation is supported variously in contemporary discussions of mind-wandering and *health*. Section 11 will gradually lead us back to philosophy, by pondering phenomenological details of nondirective meditation and concentration. By consulting practical manuals, we will try to indicate typical phenomenological structures of the two ways of exploring consciousness.

## 9. Nondirective Meditation. Hermeneutical Situation

What is today classified as nondirective meditation was until the 1950s first and foremost known as an Indian meditation practice called Transcendental Meditation (TM). This technique was (and still is, at least partly, as we will see) an integrated part of the ancient Vedic religion.<sup>830</sup> Not long after TM was introduced into Western culture, however, the technique began serving as the basis for the development of new and revised styles of more or less the same technique. Relaxation Response,<sup>831</sup> Clinically Standardized Meditation (CSM),<sup>832</sup> and Acem Meditation<sup>833</sup> are here the most prominent examples. In contrast to TM, these styles conceive of meditation in fully secular or religious-neutral terms. That is, instead of conceiving of the meditative practice within the horizon of a traditional religious account,<sup>834</sup> the three new-revisions

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<sup>829</sup> Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation"; Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness."; Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*.

<sup>830</sup> Jack Forem, *Transcendental Meditation* (London: Hay House, 2012); Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*; Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. Cf. Chapter 10, "The Mystery of the Mantra."

<sup>831</sup> Benson, *The Relaxation Response*.

<sup>832</sup> Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*.

<sup>833</sup> Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation*.

<sup>834</sup> Cf. Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living; Transcendental Meditation*.

understand the practice as a distinguished mental and psychological exercise. Integrated into frameworks of empirical psychology and neurology, it is how the technique *works* on the human mind and body – independently of beliefs and cultural heritage – which is of prime interest.

In effect, the interpretational process from East to West is itself expressed in the terminology *nondirective meditation*. This classification is relatively new,<sup>835</sup> and it is what we could call a hermeneutical concept. The classification expresses the hybrid of what was until recently a religious practice (i.e. TM) and contemporary Western empirical science. However, the classification represents also a Western, secular, and scientific interpretation of the religious practice. That is, when the term *nondirective meditation* is used to designate the whole class of the mentioned meditation techniques (*TM* included) it does so from the viewpoint of Western psychology and neuro-psychology.

Herein evolves a methodological point also to the evolving philosophical consideration of meditation. In effect, we will follow in the path of the new Western classification. That is, with the exception of where the differences between the various styles are of interest, we will refer to the current style of meditation merely as *nondirective meditation* – regardless of whether the cited author actually uses the same word or not. This is done not only to avoid unnecessary complications of terminology, but also to signal our take on the meditative practice. Our philosophical position is a Western, secular and rational account working in accordance with the new Western, secular and rational account of meditation. To the degree that religious assumption of meditation will be considered, this will be to gain phenomenological perspectives on the secularized meditative practice.

The merging of an Asian traditional practice and the Western framework of explanations opens up an intriguing hermeneutical situation. Emerging, directly or indirectly, are different ways of conceiving not only the technique but also the meditating subject. From being inscribed in a traditional world view, so to speak, the meditating subject is not only secularized but also scientifically interpreted. Let us pursue some practical and conceptual outcomes of this reinterpretation.

#### **a. Sonorous Practice**

We begin by expanding on our knowledge of the original, traditional context of *nondirective meditation*, which is Hinduism. In the Introduction, we indicated how this tradition, in general, had a distinguished *sonorous orientation*. The perspective is explored by Guy Beck. Orthodox Hinduism, according to Beck, had a strong orientation towards the ontological element of sound. Traditional mythologies described the universe as an emanation of cosmic sound, or the divine origin of sound, including speech, language, and

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<sup>835</sup> To our knowledge, the term was coined for the current style of meditation in Davanger et al., "Meditation-specific prefrontal cortical activation during acem meditation: an fMRI study".

music.<sup>836</sup> The practice of mantras is an integrated part of sonorous rituals and religious practices. (*Mantra* is a Sanskrit word. The prefix *man* means "to think", and the suffix *tra* indicates "tool".<sup>837</sup>) Integrated into what Beck describes as a sonic theology,<sup>838</sup> mantras were considered as concrete means to individual salvation.<sup>839</sup> Mantras were not directly comparable to recitation of prayers in the traditional Western sense, nor were they words in the more direct sense. Rather than being sounds expressing human thoughts (e.g. words) mantras were considered as sounds that generated an intimate and privileged closeness to the sacred, authoritarian and all-encompassing power of the divine. In other words, the mantras were sacred sounds – they embodied the divine presence.<sup>840</sup>

In contrast to what we saw in the Western context (Part One), the Vedic sonorous tradition was largely nonscriptural.<sup>841</sup> Typically, a written form of communication was considered worthless, or even forbidden.<sup>842</sup> "It is by mantra that God is drawn to you" reads a classical Hindu communique: "It is by mantra that He is released. By secret utterance these are mantras, and therefore, these are not to be published. Their form is not to be written and their features are not to be described."<sup>843</sup> Thus, the divine being was present in sounds, and the sounds were the only way to preserve and perceive the divine presence. It could not be conveyed in written words.

The legacy of Hinduism harbors an immense number of mantras<sup>844</sup> and a large and heterogeneous field of practices surrounding these sounds. By itself, the word *mantra* can, for instance, designate a song, a chant, a hymn, or a mystical verse, all of which could be produced in wide assortments of vocalizations,

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<sup>836</sup> Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. 7.

<sup>837</sup> Wade T. Wheeloc, "The Mantra in Vedic and Tantric Ritual", in *Mantra*, ed. Harvey P. Alper (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). 172.

<sup>838</sup> We borrow the term from Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. 3.

<sup>839</sup> Kohn, *Meditation Works; in the Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Traditions*. 49.

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.* 49.

<sup>841</sup> Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. 1. Here, we come here across a philosophical topic which could have been interesting to follow. What are the differences within the Western and Indian cultures, regarding the role played by orality and literacy in the formation of knowledge? In Part One, we saw how the sonorous dimension of mythos, exemplified with Homer's *medesthai*, was downplayed in the process wherein writing became implemented as the new form of technology for restoring and presenting knowledge. This move, we could have added with David Espinet, comes together with a favoring of the *visual* at the cost of the *audacity*. (David Espinet, *Phänomenologie des Hörens; eine Untersuchung im Ausgang von Martin Heidegger* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2009). Espinet discusses here what he call a *Hörvergessenheit* characterizing the Western philosophical context. Cf. Section 1 "Sehen und Hörvergessenheit.") In the dialogues of Plato, the visual is generally closer to being used in metaphors for rational *thinking*, than hearing. As exemplified in the cave parable, insight in the truth of *logos* is coupled with the ability to *see* how things are. Following the metaphor of vision into the Neo-Platonic Christianity, we could have traced how the visual orientation impacted on the Western philosophical traditions. The contrast to the Vedic sonorous orientation is here striking. What, we could have asked, would be relationship between the sensory emphases of the two traditions, and the way *meaning* and *bodily knowledge* are being understood? What, by closer inspection, would be the role played by writing in this hermeneutical picture? To pursue the question falls outside the scope of the current investigation.

<sup>842</sup> Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. 1.

<sup>843</sup> *Parama-Samhita* 6.2-4. Here cited from *ibid.* 1.

<sup>844</sup> There exists over seventy million mantras. Fritz Staal, *Rituals and Mantras* (New York: Peter Lang Publisher, 1993). xiv.

being mumbled, sung, or chanted.<sup>845</sup> They could be integrated into a great variety of communal services, accompanied by gongs, drums, bells, or flutes, etc.<sup>846</sup> However, existing side by side with the practices of "externalized" sonorous mantras here indicated were also practices of silent or fully "internalized" mantras not meant to be spoken out loud. These mantras were believed to be too pure and nonearthly to be verbalized directly.<sup>847</sup> The sonorous materiality of the voice was conceived to be too coarse, or accidental for the presence of the divine.<sup>848</sup> To borrow an explanation from Livia Kohn, the sound was (or is) believed to "[approach] the subtler layers of consciousness through the auditory system, creating vibrations [...] that have a calming effect and, especially if used in conjunction with deity devotion, lead[s] to a sense of selfsameness and connection to the divine."<sup>849</sup> Apparently, in the calm mind, and in the silence of the nonspoken sound, resounded the order of the divine creation.

However, to the axis of spoken/nonspoken mantras another axis of meaning/nonmeaning can be added. Within the tradition of silent mantras, a practice of meditation has developed that lacks meaning in any conventional sense of the word.<sup>850</sup> That is, whereas mantras in forms of hymns or mystical verses can have elements of metaphorical or enigmatic meaning, and while there also exist silent mantras that obviously *have* meaning,<sup>851</sup> the silent mantra-tradition also developed sounds that are meant to be radically meaningless. Emerging for the inner ear only, so to speak, and in a purified sonorous way void of earthly and accidental associations, the divine presence was considered to be all the purer.

We turn now to the contemporary Western situation of nondirective meditation. What has happened with the sonorous practice within this new, cultural context? Let us begin with some observations regarding practices of the meditation sounds. How are the traditional aspects of nonspoken and nonearthly sounds reflected in the contemporary styles of nondirective meditation?

Among the contemporary styles of nondirective meditation, we find different practices. Herbert Benson, the neurologist who founded the style called Relaxation Response, makes no particular concern regarding the type of sound used in meditation or how the meditator is to handle the sound. According to him, any word, phrase, prayer, or mantra can be used as a "mental device" of meditation.<sup>852</sup> Regardless of what these words, phrases, prayers or mantras mean or do not mean, they induce an effect on the mind and body – a *relaxation response*, as the neurologist calls it. For Benson, this response is *the* important

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<sup>845</sup> Cf. Wheeloc, "The Mantra in Vedic and Tantric Ritual."; M. D. Muthukumaraswamy, "Vedic Chanting as a Householder's Meditation Practice in the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta Tradition", in *Meditation and Culture*, ed. Halvor Eifring (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

<sup>846</sup> Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. 6.

<sup>847</sup> Cf. Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living; Transcendental Meditation*. xxvii.

<sup>848</sup> Bevan Morris, "Foreword", in *Science of Being and Art of Living; Transcendental Meditation.*, ed. Mahesh Yogi (New York: Plume/Penguin, 2001). xxvii.

<sup>849</sup> Kohn, *Meditation Works; in the Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Traditions*. 6.

<sup>850</sup> Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. 8. Cf. Halvor Eifring, "Types of meditation", in *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, ed. Halvor Eifring (University of Hawai, Forthcoming). Eifring and Holen, "The Uses of Attention." 17.

<sup>851</sup> Exemplified by Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*. 84.

<sup>852</sup> Benson, *The Relaxation Response*. Cf. 57 and 174.



dimension of the meditative practice; it helps to reduce stress.<sup>853</sup> In the style called *Clinically Standardized Meditation*, on the other hand, we find an interest taken in the traditional sound. Patricia Carrington has collected a series of traditional mantras from various religious contexts, some of which she presents in her book,<sup>854</sup> others being available on a CD.<sup>855</sup> Thus underlining the secular aspect of the sounds, Carrington makes clear that in the context of *Clinically Standardized Meditation* the meditation sounds are not supposed to be anything but a calming and resonant mental device. Each individual is encouraged to pick a sound preferred by how soothing<sup>856</sup> the sounds appear to be. In addition, Carrington advises a certain privacy in regard to the sound being chosen. The meditator is advised against reciting the sound in accidental social contexts and using the sound in contexts other than meditation. In contrast to the traditional account, the rationale for the practice is not a reference to a divine order, but merely a psychological. The meditation sound can bring the meditator into contact with subtle aspects in consciousness easily obscured in everyday activities. Keeping the sound out of direct or accidental communication with others is a way to preserve awareness towards these nuances.<sup>857</sup>

TM and Acem Meditation differ from both Benson's and Carrington's approaches. Here, the sounds being used are neither *anything* (Benson) nor publically accessible in books or CDs (Carrington). In the context of TM and Acem Meditation, the meditation sounds are taught only verbally, in face-to-face communication, by qualified instructors. The meditator is encouraged not to speak out the meditation sound in casual social contexts, to use it for purposes other than meditation, but also not to write it down. As for *TM*, the rationale for the practice is ambiguous. On the one hand, the style presents itself as a mere *technique* which is held to be effective independent of religious beliefs and metaphysical assumptions. On the other hand, the explanations and rationales of the technique are de facto largely religious or half-religious. Thus, the reason why the sounds are taught orally and the why one is encouraged to keeping them private is inscribed in a framework explicitly prolonging the traditional Vedic religious ontology into the contemporary context. The mantras embody the divine being: "These Primordial sounds are not sounds which can be heard by the human ear. Rather they are the sounds which Being makes when it interacts with itself, and which are automatically heard by the Rishis, because their awareness is fully awake and open to the field of Being."<sup>858</sup>

By contrast, in the case of the strictly secular Acem Meditation, the rationale of oral teaching and private sound is a methodological concern analogous to Carrington's. Keeping the sound both out of everyday social contexts and out of the visual sphere of writing is a way to preserving an openness towards

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<sup>853</sup> Ibid. The impact on stress-reduction is the basic claim pursued in Benson's book. We return to the point below.

<sup>854</sup> Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*. 84.

<sup>855</sup> Cf. Patricia Carrington, "CSM [Clinically Standardized Meditation] - Guidance for Health Professionals," UR.

<sup>856</sup> Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*. 24.

<sup>857</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>858</sup> Cf. Morris, "Foreword." xxvii. Rishis is explained to be part of the wholeness of Samhita; an unbound and all-encompassing field of consciousness. Ibid.

nuances in consciousness easily overlooked in direct social contact.<sup>859</sup> The basic idea being communicated is this: the fewer social and interpersonal associations attached to the sound, also in terms of scriptural associations, the potentially freer is the stream of spontaneous thoughts during meditation.

The point can be illustrated thus: if, for instance, meditating on the word *zebra*, associations would inevitably, in more or less subtle ways, be steered into a certain direction. So would also a nonlinguistic word like *abracadabra*; which would harbor connotations for instance of children's games, sorcery, or towards the original Aramaic meaning of the sequence ("I create as I speak"<sup>860</sup>). Keeping the sound void of "outer" associations – social, graphic, religious, symbolic, denotative or connotative, or whatever – is a way to preserve a neutrality in the meditation sound. To the degree that the sounds are also taught in neutral contexts, the meditation sound can be a pure sound – neutral of indications. Herein evolves the analogy to Carrington. The neutrality is held to furnish an increased awareness towards nuances in the spontaneous consciousness that evolves more or less independently of everyday consciousness. By means of the neutral sound the mind can set its own agenda.<sup>861</sup>

If we look into the three mantras cited by Carrington we soon see that there are certainly various connotations implied in the sounds. One mantra is the Sanskrit mantra *ah-nam*, meaning "nameless" or "without name" in Sanskrit, according to Carrington.<sup>862</sup> Speculating on this information in ways Carrington does not, we see that connoted with this sound is apparently something like a detachment from earthly naming; a belonging to a sphere of reality beyond determination. In tradition, apparently, repeating this sound was believed to induce a "nameless" experience. Another example cited by Carrington is the Hindu mantra *ra-mah*, which refers to the Hindu deity Rama associated with integrity and passion. Meditating on this word, we can say, was apparently believed to form a certain habitus akin to Rama. Yet another example is *shi-rim*, which means "songs" in Hebrew. Implied here, apparently, is something of a denotative evoking of the soothing impact made by songs, such as for instance lullabies or other peaceful songs.

From hermeneutical and phenomenological perspectives, *direction* in regard of associations is not any other accidental feature of these cited mantras, but rather an essential feature of their status of being *meaningful* in the conventional sense of the word. In explicit terms, Gadamer makes a point out of the connection between meaning and direction of associations. "Sinn ist, wie uns die Sprache lernen kann, *Richtungssinn*. Man sieht in eine Richtung, so wie der Uhrzeiger, der sich in einem bestimmten Sinne dreht. So nehmen wir alle, immer, wenn uns etwas gesagt wird, die Richtung auf Sinn."<sup>863</sup> Analogously, the French word *sens* contains a meaning of *direction*; a meaning that is utilized philosophically within the

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<sup>859</sup> Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*. 14.

<sup>860</sup> Lawrence Kushner, *The Book of Words: Talking Spiritual Life, Living Spiritual Talk* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998). 11.

<sup>861</sup> Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*. 80.

<sup>862</sup> Information from Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*. 84.

<sup>863</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Gedicht und Gespräch (1988)", in *Ästhetik und Poetik II: Hermeneutik im Vollzug, Gesammelte Werke 9* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1988). 340.

phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. Executing the act of expressing something, for instance, is to pursue the direction of the expressed. It is to be *led* by the direction of *sens*.<sup>864</sup>

Indirectly, with Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty we thus better understand the rationale of teaching nondirective meditation orally and keeping the sound private. Potentially, a neutral meditation sound can be a sound that does not *mean* in the more apparent sense of *direction*. The sound can be a sound that does not openly point in a direction in ways directly analogous to a hand of the watch (Gadamer). The question left to ponder in Part Five, however, is what such neutrality implies for philosophy. With Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, there is little doubt that the orally transmitted sounds would be of particular interest. Apparently, the mere idea of such neutral sounds embodies the borderline in the ambiguous relationship between the hermeneutical and the perceptual phenomena. Evolving here, it seems, is something like a thorough combination of *Text* and *perception*. The organized meditation sound associable with *Text* in the Gadamerian sense, is perceived in the Merleau-Pontian sense, so to speak. For apparent reasons, however, the neutral sounds in question cannot serve as the basis for a transparent philosophical analysis. To our knowledge, contemporary discourse on meditation simply offers no written sources on these nonwritten sounds – only the oral practice. What we will do in the philosophical analysis (Section 12), therefore, is to have recourse to the sound just cited by Carrington. If and where the difference between oral and written sounds should be pertinent for our overall perspectives, we can make the point on solid ground.

#### **b. Religious Transcendence – Relaxation Response**

Let us return to the contemporary hermeneutical situation of nondirective meditation. The different practices regarding the teaching of the meditation sound represent only one aspect of the secularization-process of nondirective meditation. Unlike many contemporary enterprises seeking to integrate, for instance, Buddhist meditation into the Western context, Relaxation Response, CSM and Acem Meditation are not founded on translations of the traditional *concepts* describing the meditative practice. That is, the revised styles offer not meditations between the Indian religious language and the Western languages; making the numinous experiences of Hinduism available, so to speak, for the Western subject. Rather, elaborated are series of whole new concepts to describing the practice. The Western revisions of TM are thorough – built up from the ground is an altogether new horizon of the meditative technique. In effect, the work of translation between the East and West has, in this context, evolved not on a linguistic level, but more on the level of first-hand experience. Sought, we can say, are ways to preserve the intuitive potential of the original meditation technique into a secularized and empirically informed contemporary context.

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<sup>864</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 452–454.

In the Introduction, we said that the revised styles of nondirective meditation come with a tendency towards solipsism in regard to the meditating subject. Philosophically considered, the subject emerging around this new meditative practice shows tendencies of emerging without a lifeworld, we said. What did we have in mind by saying so?

In elaborating an answer, we will consider a relatively small, but representative, assortment of books and articles describing nondirective meditation. First, we will conceive of the traditional account of TM, and second, we will evoke some variables within the (Western) secularized and empirically informed approach to the meditation technique. The goal will *not* be to present a comprehensive discussion of these discourses, only to locate typical tendencies that are of interest within our philosophical context. Somewhat simplistically, we will see that we are faced with three approaches: whereas the traditional (Indian) account pursues a religious idealism (TM), pursued in the secularized (Western) account are what we can call a scientific dualism (exemplified by Herbert Benson) and a scientific materialism (exemplified by Davanger et al).

We begin with the religious idealism. In the previous section, we indicated how the classical Hinduist mantra tradition pursues the religious idea of an ultimate merging of meditating consciousness and the divine order of the world. The meditation consciousness has an access to a subject-transgressing and all-encompassing order, so to speak, through the awareness of the inner ear. We also indicated how TM pursues a more or less similar account. Now we will see how basic tenets of TM imply an idealist and religious recourse to a primal, all-encompassing and divine consciousness. In the ontology of TM, the universe consists, ultimately, of a divine, omnipotent consciousness, a creative intelligence in the form of an Absolute and unmanifest order, the home of all knowledge and the total potential of all Natural Laws.<sup>865</sup> Ultimately speaking, individual life is an expression of the all-pervading, continuous and homogenous whole of cosmic, intelligent life.<sup>866</sup>

TM is presented as the path of a consciousness that deliberately and effectively transgresses – indeed *transcends* – the accidental being of subjective consciousness by moving into the true order of divine intelligence.<sup>867</sup> In meditation, writes Mahesh Yogi (former guru of TM), consciousness moves into ever deeper levels of consciousness, until it reaches a state of being wherein there ultimately exist no borders between the subjective consciousness and nonsubjective reality – in the widest sense of the word. Consciousness moves...

...from the surface level of ordinary thought to increasingly subtle levels, until the subtlest level is reached and then transcended. The meditator's attention goes beyond the finest level of thought to the *source* of thought – the pure, undifferentiated consciousness in which all thoughts and perceptions take shape.<sup>868</sup>

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<sup>865</sup> Cf. Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living; Transcendental Meditation*. Section 1, "What is Being."

<sup>866</sup> *Ibid.* 54.

<sup>867</sup> Morris, "Foreword." xxvi.

<sup>868</sup> Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living; Transcendental Meditation*. 45.

In meditation, the meditator practices limitless sonorous awareness, we read. In the act of repeating the mantra, the subjective consciousness merges fully and directly with the prime ontological order of the universe. The meditator dives into the "source of all creation", the "realm of life", and the "living origin of all creation, the wellspring from which all of creation rises".<sup>869</sup> In effect, consciousness moves into a pure state of being. "In its transcendental self-referral state, it knows only itself and nothing else. Knowing itself only, it is the knower, it is the process of knowing, and it is also the known – it is all three itself – it is the togetherness of the knower, knowing and known."<sup>870</sup> Here, the word *self-referential* refers not to self-referentiality in the limited sense of a subjective consciousness that reflects back on itself, but to the self-relation within the universal consciousness. Repeating the mantra is a way that universal *knower* and universal as *known* merge in the process of *knowing*.

Now, in no presentations of the Relaxation Response, CSM, and Acem Meditation do we find anything close to the parlance hereby demonstrated in TM. From all we know, the affirmed references to religious ontological notions such as "unbounded awareness", "transcendence", or "Absolute Being" is just *nil* in the revised versions of the meditative practice. The whole ambition of re-interpreting the meditative practice in the Western context, we can say, is precisely not to base the understanding of meditation on such religious and metaphysical conceptions.

Let's evoke some variables in how the meditative practice is presented in the new cultural context. Herbert Benson is not only the founder of the style of meditation called Relaxation Response, but also a pioneer in neurological studies on nondirective meditation. Benson's project is (or was, in the beginning of the 1970s) is a medical one. Studied is the psychological and physiological impact that meditation has on *stress* within the framework of a general interest in the relationship between stressful psychological events and their associated physiological effects.<sup>871</sup>

Benson's general claim is that stress generates the so-called fight-or-flight response in the body. Humans and animals react in certain predictable ways when acute and chronic stressful situations occur, he holds. Triggered is an inborn physiological response: "When we are faced with situations that require adjustment of our behavior, an involuntary rate of breathing, blood flow to the muscles, and metabolism, preparing us for conflict or escape."<sup>872</sup> Increased in stressful situations is activity in the sympathetic nervous system. (The sympathetic nervous system is an autonomous nervous system dealing with basic bodily functions in ways that normally do not even come into conscious awareness.<sup>873</sup>) The fight-or-flight response may have been a matter of life or death – in terms of evolution, writes Benson. When triggered inappropriately and frequently over longer periods of time, however, the same response will easily make

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<sup>869</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>870</sup> Morris, "Foreword." Xxvi.

<sup>871</sup> Benson, *The Relaxation Response*. 52.

<sup>872</sup> Ibid. 54.

<sup>873</sup> Ibid. 97.

people suffer illness such heart attack or stroke.<sup>874</sup> Unfortunately, the contemporary Western situation is a situation wherein the fight-or-flight modus is regularly triggered in large and unhealthy doses. Insecurity in a job, the inability to meet deadlines, or the shifting of social rules etc., are typical factors that hold the Western human in more or less chronic situations of stress.<sup>875</sup>

However, Benson demonstrates also something more: the human nervous system possesses not only a fight-or-flight response but also has an innate response that works in the diametrically opposite direction. In Benson's explanation:

Each of us possesses a natural and innate protective mechanism against 'overstress,' which allows us to turn off harmful bodily effects, to counter the effects of the fight-or-flight response. This response against 'overstress' brings on bodily changes that decrease heart rate, lower metabolism, decrease the rate of breathing, and bring the body back into what is probably a healthier balance.<sup>876</sup>

This response of healthy balance is termed by Benson the relaxation response. The body possesses an inborn and natural tendency to *relax*. Where fight-and-flight response increases activity in the sympathetic nervous system, the relaxation response leads to quieting in the same system.<sup>877</sup>

The discovery of the relaxation response is directly relevant to nondirective meditation. Normally, the neurological relaxation response evolves outside of the domain of the will, and it usually does not occur spontaneously.<sup>878</sup> However, Benson's discovery is that meditation is a way to trigger the relaxation response purposively and consciously. The concrete mental activity of a calm and unrestrained repetition of a word, a phrase, a prayer, or a mantra – i.e. a doing that has been routinely executed in Eastern and Western cultures throughout all ages, according to Benson<sup>879</sup> – generates a significant quieting of the sympathetic nervous system.<sup>880</sup> The repetitive, mental activity brings the body to a rest mode that shares some characteristics with sleep and (for animals) inhibition – without being synonymous with any of them.<sup>881</sup> The activity brings the body into a restful state of *hypometabolism*, according to Benson; a bodily state determined by notably decreased total oxygen consumption.<sup>882</sup> (The decreased oxygen consumption indicates that total bodily energy resources are taxed less during meditation than in normal activity.<sup>883</sup>) In addition, the mental activity in question induces a significantly faster drop of oxygen consumption

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<sup>874</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>875</sup> Ibid. 54–57.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>879</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>880</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>881</sup> Ibid. 110–118.

<sup>882</sup> Ibid. 110.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid. 112–113.

compared to normal rest and sleep. Also, the mediating consciousness moves faster into a state determined by the alfa-waves generally associated with the relaxed brain.<sup>884</sup>

Benson makes great effort not to devaluate the role of religion, yet his position is clear: qua neurological response, the effect of the relaxation response works independently of religious beliefs or metaphysical assumptions.<sup>885</sup> The activity of repeating the sonorous and mental device, practiced either within a religious or a secular context, generates measurable and definable physiological effects within the human body.<sup>886</sup> Up to recently, neurophysiological studies have exposed further the empirical consequences of the relaxation response discovered by Benson. In studies on Acem meditation, for instance, characteristic effects of the relaxation response are observed in for instance heart rate,<sup>887</sup> electric brain waves (along with other parameters than Benson had at hand),<sup>888</sup> and in typical physiological effects in breathing and skin conductance.<sup>889</sup>

In our philosophical context, the variable interesting to ponder in a comparison of the traditional vs. the secularized-empirical approach pertains to the relational consciousness, or to be precise the relational, *embodied* consciousness. With this phrase, a triad of general relationships is indicated: the *I-me*, the *I-others*, and the *I-world*. From what we can see, the TM account holds the meditating consciousness to be thoroughly relational in all the senses indicated here. Philosophically considered, the term *transcendental consciousness* seems to mean a relational, embodied consciousness. Mind and body, the inner and the outer, the individual and the community, the human and the Universe – everything seems to relate to everything, from the ground up. Curiously, this holds not only for the first-person experiences of meditation. Nothing seems to be more natural to the TM-account than to take what Benson's scientific third-person perspective describes as a physiological relaxation response as a direct proof of the divine Being of the Universe. When a mantra is repeated the brain functioning mechanism gives rise to the experience of a transcendental, pure consciousness not just because the brain – just as everything else – partakes in the divine order of Being.<sup>890</sup> A fortiori, the *telos* of the human nervous system is to embody the divine order by its innate capacity to relax at the sound of a mantra. "The nervous system is developed to the extent that through proper activity [which here means: Transcendental Meditation] man can contact absolute bliss, intelligence, power, and energy."<sup>891</sup>

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<sup>884</sup> Cf. Carrington et al., "The Use of Meditation-Relaxation Techniques for the Management of Stress in a Working Population". *Acta Med. Scand.* 660 (1982) 231– 237 (Suppl.). H. Benson, J.F. Beary, M.P. Carol, *The relaxation response*, *Psychiatry* 37 (1974). 37–46.

<sup>885</sup> Benson, *The Relaxation Response*. 174.

<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.* 56–57.

<sup>887</sup> Nesvold et al., "Increased heart rate variability during nondirective meditation".

<sup>888</sup> Davanger et al., "Meditation-specific prefrontal cortical activation during acem meditation: an fMRI study". Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing".

<sup>889</sup> Øyvind Ellingsen and Are Holen, "Modern Meditation in the Context of Science", in *Meditation and Culture*, ed. Halvor Eifring (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). 37.

<sup>890</sup> Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living; Transcendental Meditation*. 290.

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.* 49.

In Benson's approach, by contrast, the relational dimension of the embodied consciousness becomes more ambiguous. Here, we can say, the physiological relaxation response is precisely not relational in the sense held by TM. The relaxation response is "just" a causal-biological working mechanism of the physiological body – and as such, the mechanism does not relate to anything beyond itself. The tenet of TM holding that there is an intrinsic relationship between the physiological response of the body and the physical order of the environment is not even pursued by Benson. In Benson's secularized perspective, such a relationship would apparently come under the general heading of religious beliefs that any subject is free to have. Ultimately speaking, however, the belief is irrelevant for physiological response.

However, when it comes to the phenomenal aspects of the meditative consciousness, Benson clearly indicates a relational dimension to the relaxation response. Benson expresses the subtler benefits of practicing nondirective meditation regularly (apart from stress reduction) by describing how it can potentially impact on how life is lived. Nondirective meditation trains the ability to cope more effectively and in a more balanced way with the difficulties of life, both in relation to work and to others.<sup>892</sup> In other words, there is, potentially, an existential-relational dimension to the relaxation response. By being *relaxed*, the meditating subject can come closer to something within itself that potentially can have an effect on how it relates to self and others.

In what we say here evolves our first philosophical point: whereas the traditional, idealist ontology of TM saw the organic-physical responses in natural continuum with anything being done in meditation, the neurologist Benson has at hand no comprehensive systematics that can link, for instance, the organic-physiological response in the body to the relational dimension of the lived experience of the same response. In this sense, we can call Benson's approach a scientific dualism. As far as elaborate analyses are concerned, the relationship between the physiological relaxation response and the moral and existential dimension is left a little external to each other. The reason for this is not only that Benson advocates a secularized or religious neutral meditation technique. No less important is the fact that Benson's approach is *biomedical*. In calling upon the existential-relational aspects of the relaxation response, however, Benson has stepped into a domain that calls for a systematic philosophy.

Before we say more, let us look briefly at a more recent example – a study on Acem-meditation presented by Davanger et al,<sup>893</sup> which, in our context, exemplifies a scientific materialism. In the fMRI-study on neural activity in the prefrontal cortical activation during Acem-meditation we see the following. *First*, short indications are given in regard to the phenomenal "side" of the meditation technique. Evoked here is a series of relational terms. The authors point out that the technique practices a "relaxed attention" and indicate that the meditative practice can lead to stress reduction and an increased ability to "accept and tolerate symptoms of stress as a normal part of meditation as well as everyday life".<sup>894</sup> *Then*, focus is

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<sup>892</sup> Benson, *The Relaxation Response*. 181.

<sup>893</sup> Davanger et al., "Meditation-specific prefrontal cortical activation during acem meditation: an fMRI study".

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid.* 293.



switched to the neurologically observable features induced by the meditative activity.<sup>895</sup> The general methodological assumption is that every single experience is probably associated with a unique neuronal activity pattern, and that consciousness arises when these patterns are connected via specific centers in the brain.<sup>896</sup> From this methodological viewpoint, fMRI scans show how the relaxation response of Acem Meditation evolves as a relaxed yet wakeful brain functioning.<sup>897</sup>

However, the relationship between the phenomenal first-person perspective of acceptance, tolerance and everyday life, and the materialist third-person observations of neural activities is not a theme as such in the current scientific context. The scope and interest of neurology proper is not *here* – it is not in a systematic analysis of human *perspectives*. This is where the scientific materialism touches upon philosophy, we could say. We recall how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology evolves in expanded mediations between the first- and the third-person perspectives on experience. The nondualist phenomenology is the expanded third option, so to speak – the elaborated intermediary transitions between the extreme subjectivism and the extreme objectivism. From the Merleau-Pontyian perspective, the recent neurological discoveries on nondirective meditation harbor not only new information but also intriguing philosophical questions left to explore. What, in closer phenomenological analysis, does it imply to execute a relaxed attention in a body that de facto undergoes a relaxed yet wakeful neural activity? What does it imply to accumulate a more accepting and including way of being resulted by the same activity?

Perhaps we now see what is indicated by insinuating a tendency of solipsism in the contemporary secularized and empirically oriented discourses on meditation. In leaving behind the Indian idealism, the new approach has left the meditating consciousness a little hanging, as it were. The meditating consciousness is not fully situated in a comprehensive phenomenological analysis – there are unexplored phenomenological possibilities evolving in the new approach.

Curiously, importing nondirective meditation into Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology will mean to re-establish some of the all-encompassing relational dimension of the meditative consciousness left behind with the Indian account – only minus the idealist and the religious underpinning. From Section 5, we know that Merleau-Ponty's concept of body schema describes the phenomenal body as a thoroughly relational structure – along the triad of axes evoked above. For Merleau-Ponty, the perceiving body is the ambiguous intertwinement of the mind and body, the subject and others, and the subject and the world. In analogy to the Indian account, thus, the peripheral consciousness of Merleau-Ponty's body schema harbors an inexhaustible source of exchanged perspectives. The relational consciousness is an enigmatic and limitless potentiality, so to speak, never fully explored. That said, where TM can be said to model a whole ontology around certain privileged experiences had by the relational consciousness, Merleau-Ponty performs no

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<sup>895</sup> Ibid. 293.

<sup>896</sup> Definition taken from Davanger, Eifring, and Hersoug, *Fighting Stress*. 19. Reference given to P. Tassi and A. Muzet, "Defining States of Consciousness," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 2 (2001).

<sup>897</sup> Davanger, Eifring, and Hersoug, *Fighting Stress*. 19.

such inferences. Importing nondirective meditation into Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology will imply bringing the "Absolute mind" of TM drastically down to earth. Merleau-Ponty's conception of the limitless being of consciousness rests not on religious postulates and speculative inferences, but is a self-critical phenomenological account built from below. Whatever potentiality that can be said to evolve in nondirective meditation, it evolves, in Merleau-Ponty's perspective, in the vital yet inexplicit resources of the structures of behavior.

## 10. Free Mental Attitude and the Wandering Mind

In the previous section, we focused on the hermeneutical situation of nondirective meditation, and we indicated how the meditative technique has been imported into contexts of biomedicine and neurology. The aim of Section 10 is to expand our knowledge of the meditative practice based on more information from similar discourses. What are the implications of repeating a meditation sound unrestrainedly in thought, while every other kind of thoughts are allowed to pass freely? What, in effect, is the proclaimed rationale of letting thoughts pass freely?

Before we move into details, let's set the phenomenal framework of the meditative practice. From what we have seen, nondirective meditation can be described by the axes of volitional and spontaneous (involuntary) activities. In meditation, the meditator volitionally practices the task of repeating the meditation sound as unrestrainedly as possible. In the discourses on meditation, this mode of repetitive and unrestrained mental activity comes together with what is described as a *relaxed focus of attention*,<sup>898</sup> a *passive attitude*,<sup>899</sup> – or, as eventually will be our preferred description: a *free mental attitude*.<sup>900</sup> Mental attitude refers to the way that the current activity is being done – the *how* of the doing; the quality of the volitional activity. The meditation sound *can*, for instance, be repeated with much force, restraints and volitional usage of control. This would imply the usage of a concentrated attitude diametrically opposite to the free, unrestrained and relaxed attitude sought in nondirective meditation. By using as little cognitive effort as possible in repeating the sound,<sup>901</sup> and by keeping a resting mode of attention towards the sonorous aspect of the sound, the meditator executes a mental attitude of openness and noncontrol.

One decisive aspect of the free mental attitude pertains to the attitude taken towards the spontaneous activities of the mind. The meditation sound is to be repeated in ways that go with the

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<sup>898</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 2.

<sup>899</sup> Benson, *The Relaxation Response*. 57.

<sup>900</sup> Cf. Erifring and Holen, "The Uses of Attention."; Davanger et al., "Meditation-specific prefrontal cortical activation during acem meditation: an fMRI study". 293.

<sup>901</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 9.

spontaneous activity – not against it.<sup>902</sup> The meditation sound is the vehicle to practice a delicate balance between volitional and spontaneous (or involuntary) activities in the mind.<sup>903</sup>

In Subsection 10a, we will see how this attitude implies an accepting attitude towards a natural inclination of the human consciousness to wander off spontaneously. In Subsection 10b, we will contrast this accepting attitude with typical meditative concentration techniques. Concentration techniques, we will see, work not with spontaneity but against its impact. By conceiving the difference between nondirective meditation and concentration in the light of a general debate on spontaneous activities and *health* we will gain a fuller understanding of the rationales behind the two styles of meditation.

#### a. Crux of Mental Attitude: Encountering the Wandering Mind

In describing nondirective meditation, we have used words such as *acceptance*, *tolerance* and *including awareness*. What, then, is it that needs to be accepted, tolerated and included in meditation? What is it that needs to be *related to* in the ways hereby indicated? The general line of answer is already indicated: first and foremost, the meditating consciousness relates to *itself*. Nondirective meditation is a self-encounter, executed as it is with the eyes closed and with a self-induced sound. Let's see what this can imply within the framework of contemporary psychology and neurology.

It is often assumed that meditation leads to an "empty" or "silent" mind. Frequently described in the discourses on meditation, however, is the fact that that in practice – that is, in the actual execution of any other meditation technique – the inner psychological situation very often becomes full of all kinds of thoughts and impressions. In the empirical discourses on meditation, this phenomenon is described as *mind-wandering*. By one definition, mind-wandering is "thinking about something other than what one is currently intending to think about, or thoughts without a clearly identified proximate intention which initiated the thoughts."<sup>904</sup> In meditation, we read in another characterizing, the mind of the meditator can easily become "absorbed in spontaneously occurring thoughts, images, sensations, memories, and emotions unrelated to current volitional activity, more or less without really being aware of it".<sup>905</sup> Spontaneous thoughts of the wandering mind can also be vague associations, daydreams, or fantasies, more or less trivial thoughts about everyday life, more or less articulate anxieties, problems of whatever sort, or any colors or moods appearing in the mind.<sup>906</sup> In short, the term mind-wandering designates any spontaneously occurring cognitive or bodily

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<sup>902</sup> Cf. Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*. Cf. Chapter 6 "Learning how to meditate."; Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*.

<sup>903</sup> Davanger, Eifring, and Hersoug, *Fighting Stress*. 15.

<sup>904</sup> Amit Sood and David T. Jones, "On Mind Wandering, Attention, Brain Networks, and Meditation," *Explore* 9 (3) (2013). 137. Though for the most part used as a noncontroversial term, there are also voices that are critical to mind wandering as a generic term. Cf. Cristina Ottaviana, David Shapiro, and Allesandro Couyoumdjianb, "Flexibility as the key for somatic health: From mind wandering to perseverative cognition," *Biological Psychology* 94, 1 (2013). 42.

<sup>905</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 1.

<sup>906</sup> Davanger, Eifring, and Hersoug, *Fighting Stress*. 15.

feature. (In our context, we will use the terms mind-wandering and spontaneous activity more or less as synonyms.)

Mind-wandering is by no means a phenomenon exclusive to meditative practice. Most of us, perhaps, have experienced how the mind wanders off in situations when we initially have set out to do something else; for instance, reading a book or writing a paper. In the last decades, the all-relevancy of mind-wandering has come to the fore in contemporary psychology and neuropsychology. Mind-wandering is recognized as a genuine and general trait of human consciousness. Mind-wandering is observed to be a tendency of consciousness happening relatively independently of whether the mind is occupied with specific tasks or not.<sup>907</sup> The human propensity for mind-wandering is a phenomenon so self-evident that its existence can hardly be questioned; it is held.<sup>908</sup> Although not all minds wander to the same degree,<sup>909</sup> the presence of mind-wandering is nevertheless recognized to be a near-universal phenomenon. Statistically, close to 96 % of a large group studied experiences daydreaming (which is also taken to be a form of mind-wandering<sup>910</sup>) every day.<sup>911</sup> Mind-wandering occupies a third to a half of the time healthy adults are awake.<sup>912</sup> Mind-wandering also continues in sleep. Judged by both observable brain activity and self-reports, it is normal to have 90-120 min per night of so-called REM dreams, characterized by vivid, emotional, and dramatic experiences.<sup>913</sup>

Recent discoveries in neurology support the statistical observations of mind-wandering. Mind-wandering is linked to what in psychological and neurological discourses<sup>914</sup> are referred to as the *default-mode network* of the brain. That is, the stream of associative and disruptive thoughts experienced in the first-person perspective are in neurological studies associated with the basal functioning of the brain; or indeed, the brain's default mode of operation.<sup>915</sup> Simplistically approached, we can note two aspects of the default-mode network. First, the living brain is never a static being of full stillness and nonactivity – it is never "essentially blank",<sup>916</sup> as one author puts it. That is, when the brain goes from rest to task-specific occupations, it does not "start up" in ways analogous to a physical engine but from activities that always are on-going in the nervous system. More attentively supervised cerebral activity springs from a basic mode of neural activity,<sup>917</sup>

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<sup>907</sup> Benjamin W. Mooneyham and Jonathan W. Schooler, "The Costs and Benefits of Mind-Wandering: A Review," *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* 67 (2013). 17. Cf. Rebecca L. McMillian, Scott Barry Kaufman, and Jerome Singer, "Ode to positive constructive daydreaming," *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (2013). 1.

<sup>908</sup> Jonathan Smallwood and Jonathan W. Schooler, "The Restless Mind," *Psychological Bulletin* 6 (2006). 946.

<sup>909</sup> Malia Mason et al., "Wandering Minds: The default Network and Stimulus-Independent Thought," *Science* 315 (2007). 393.

<sup>910</sup> B.J. Baars, "Spontaneous Repetitive Thoughts Can Be Adaptive: Postscript on McKay and Vane," *Psychological Bulletin* 2 (2010). 1.

<sup>911</sup> Sood and Jones, "On Mind Wandering, Attention, Brain Networks, and Meditation". 136.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid. 136. Mooneyham and Schooler, "The Costs and Benefits of Mind-Wandering: A Review". 1.

<sup>913</sup> Baars, "Spontaneous Repetitive Thoughts Can Be Adaptive: Postscript on McKay and Vane". 1.

<sup>914</sup> Cf. Krzysztof J. Gorgolewski et al., "A correspondence between individual differences in the brain's intrinsic functional architecture and the content and form of self generated thoughts," *PLoS ONE* vol. 9, May 2014 (*Open Access Online Journal*) (2014).

<sup>915</sup> Matthew A. Killingsworth, "A Wandering Mind is an Unhappy Mind," *Science* 339 (2010). 932.

<sup>916</sup> Mason et al., "Wandering Minds: The default Network and Stimulus-Independent Thought". 393.

<sup>917</sup> Ibid. 393.

manifesting itself as a constant fluctuating activity in more or less continuously shifting areas of the resting brain.<sup>918</sup> In other words, spontaneous and fluctuating activity in the brain is not only statistically normal. It is, apparently, the default way of being of the human nervous system.

Second, there seems to be an apparent order within the spontaneity. Despite the fluctuating and apparently accidental structure, the spontaneous neural activity of the brain is not coincidental per se. The continuously maintained activity reflects a complex and vital network activity.<sup>919</sup> The fluctuating activities reflect activities in areas that are crucial to the total functioning of the brain. Observed in resting brains are activities in areas otherwise associated with specific tasks, such as speaking, hearing and executing movements.<sup>920</sup> The difference between the resting and the task-specific situation, then, is not primarily *where* the neural activities are but rather *how* they evolve. Whereas the actual execution of tasks activates given areas more systematically, the resting state's nondeterminate and vacillating activity shifts dynamically across various areas. In the fluctuating orders, there are neural networks: the default mode of the brain's activity reflects a complex, self-organized system distinguished by nonlinear dynamics. Principles of distributed, parallel processing coexist with serial operations within interconnected networks.<sup>921</sup>

In our context, moving further into the empirical studies on mind-wandering and neurological default mode networking of the brain falls outside the scope of the investigation. We use the perspective to underline the empirical support of the following claim: the spontaneous activity of consciousness is an essential trait of being a living, phenomenal body. The spontaneous activities are the baseline of the phenomenal body, so to speak; the background from which any other form of volitional and demarcated activity springs. Thus, we note how the recent empirical observations on mind-wandering and default-mode network support Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body, and tentatively feed his analysis of perception with newer empirical results. In Subsection 5b, we saw how he considers the phenomenal body as an energetic structure that never is *still*. In greater or lesser degrees, the impact of daydreams permeates the perceptual field.

Let's return to the nondirective meditation. From what we began to see, the goal of this meditative practice is not to experience a "silent" or "empty" mind freed from spontaneous activity – not even to attain a reduction of these activities. Rather, to practice nondirective meditation is to practice something like a deliberate and enhanced encounter with the spontaneously wandering mind. Recent observations on the practice show that spontaneous activity has a tendency to *increase* during nondirective meditation

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<sup>918</sup> Ibid. 393.

<sup>919</sup> Ibid. 393.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid. 397.

<sup>921</sup> Wolf Singer, "Cortical dynamics revisited," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* Vol. 17, No. 12 (2013). 616. Although this mode of conceiving the default-mode network as an active self-organized system is relatively new, it was anticipated already in 1929, by Hans Berger. Hans Berger, "Über des Elektroencephalogramm des Menschen," *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* 87 (1929). Cf. Abraham Z. Snyder and Marcus E. Raichle, "A brief history of the resting state: The Washington University perspective," *NeuroImage* 62 (2012). 903. In analogy to Merleau-Ponty's *Structure of Behavior*, Berger's perspectives evolve a critique of Charles Sherrington. On Sherrington's role in the narrative of the default-mode network see Georg Northoff, "Immanuel Kant's mind and the brain's resting state," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* Vol. 16, No. 7 (2012).

compared to normal rest. The unrestrained repetition of the sound apparently increases the biological tendency of wandering.<sup>922</sup>

From what we can see, the increasing is a result of what we called the dual impact on mind and body initiated by the repetition of the sound. To say that the meditation sound both initiates a relaxation response and provokes in ways describable with Gadamer's hermeneutical *Text* concept amounts to saying that the sound, simultaneously, furnishes an increased openness towards the wandering mind and a de facto increasing of mind-wandering. In any regard, executing the sonorous-mental activity of nondirective meditation implies a situation wherein the wandering mind can be encountered as such. In contrast to many other situations in life, how one handles the spontaneous activities of consciousness becomes a highly concrete question in meditation. Unless the meditator just interrupts the session, there is, so to speak, not much else he or she can do apart from relating *to* the spontaneous activities. How one relates to the spontaneous activities boils down to a practical question of whether the sound is induced in ways that include the spontaneous activities or in ways that exclude it in some ways or another.

Let's rephrase what we say here in terms of *attention*. In meditation, we now know, the meditator relates to the spontaneous activities indirectly and by voluntary action – namely by placing the sound in the foreground of a resting attention while letting the spontaneous activities evolve in the background. In effect, this means that the center of attention is defined by a volitional initiative characterized by very low energy level. The repetition of the meditation sound is effortless and rhythmic, and principally unconnected to breathing.<sup>923</sup> The repetition is made with just enough effort to sustain a relaxed focus of attention but without any special control or involvement in the same initiative.<sup>924</sup> In fact, it has been recently suggested that the sonorous repetition involves a *minimal* cognitive effort.<sup>925</sup> This minimal cognitive effort is enough to provoke the increase of spontaneous activity, but also enough to offer attention a *positive anchor* to rest upon while it *negatively* takes no stand regarding the spontaneous activities.<sup>926</sup>

This peculiar structure of meditative attention is also described in terms of *logic relaxation*. The term underlines that the mediator refrains from analyzing, explaining or rationalizing the possible psychological effects of what happens in the mind at the moment. It also means that the meditator refrains from judging as good or bad, right or wrong, pleasant or unpleasant, and from creating any expectations regarding what happens or should happen in the mind.<sup>927</sup>

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<sup>922</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 1 and 9.

<sup>923</sup> Davanger et al., "Meditation-specific prefrontal cortical activation during acem meditation: an fMRI study". 293.

<sup>924</sup> Ibid. 293.

<sup>925</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 9.

<sup>926</sup> Roberto Cardoso et al., "Meditation in health: an operational definition," *Brain Research Protocols* 14, 1 (2004). 60.

<sup>927</sup> Ibid. 59.

With these points, we begin to see what is implied by saying that the sonorous attention is a resting attention. It means both that attention seeks neither to avoid nor to focus on specific spontaneous activities, and that attention hears the sound without intentionally linking the sound to structured patterns, for instance to the pattern of breathing.<sup>928</sup> Attention is *nondirective* – it is not directed towards the spontaneous activities.<sup>929</sup> Sought for is an attentional awareness wherein spontaneous thoughts do not necessarily disappear, but where they are not encouraged by intentional engagements either.<sup>930</sup> However, to speak of a resting attention means also that the meditator avoids volitional attentional "clinging" to the meditation sound; neither to avoid mind-wandering happening nor to establish more clarity in sonorous attention. A natural consequence of the current activity is that the meditator will from time to time find herself thinking about something else than the sound. The mind is swept away, as it were, and become absorbed in the spontaneously occurring thoughts, images, sensations, memories, or emotions.<sup>931</sup> In nondirective meditation, this is neither wrong nor unfortunate. Whenever the meditator becomes aware that it has happened, attention is gently and nonjudgmentally redirected to the repetition of the meditation sound.<sup>932</sup>

We now begin to see the fuller structure of what we introduced as free mental attitude. In effect, the free mental attitude of nondirective meditation includes no less than four axes. It includes i) the volitional activity of repeating the meditation sound; ii) the biological effect of a relaxed and more open consciousness (relaxation response); iii) the freer flow of the activities provoked to the fore by the volitional activity, and iv) the resting attention directed towards both the sound and the emerging spontaneous activities.

Most important to note, however, is that the volitional and the spontaneous activities all work in the same direction. The nondirective process is not restricted by a priori principles, beliefs or intellectual ideas. The free mental attitude of nondirective meditation is open-ended. The wandering mind is allowed to wander as it may – freely and according to its intrinsic needs, possibilities and limitations. The meditative situation becomes an indirect yet strengthened self-encounter. Encountering the spontaneous activities with a self-induced sound and a resting attention is an enhanced yet non-normative encounter with oneself. Or to phrase it in Merleau-Pontyan terms: the volitional and non-normative way of hearing is a way to move into the peripheral consciousness – the proto-intentional and proto-linguistic being of the phenomenal consciousness.

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<sup>928</sup> Carrington, "CSM [Clinically Standardized Meditation] - Guidance for Health Professionals".

<sup>929</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 2.

<sup>930</sup> Ospina et al., "Meditation practices for health: state of the research". 27.

<sup>931</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 2.

<sup>932</sup> Ibid. 2.

#### b. Contrast to Concentration. Background Debate on Health and Mind-Wandering

In Subsection 2c, we mentioned how the contemporary connotations of the word meditation frequently go in the direction of concentration. According to general linguistic definitions, meditation is supposed to a way that the mind focuses on something by the centering of attention.<sup>933</sup> As we now have begun to see, such definitions fall short when it comes to nondirective meditation – at least if one speaks of concentration as a result of a voluntary act. In nondirective meditation, the meditative attention refrains from the exercise of volitional concentration. (In the next section we will see how nondirective meditation implies a moment of *nonvolitional concentration*, but we leave this out for now.) Where the word concentration describes a clear demarcation of what is inside and outside the ray of attention, the resting attention of nondirective meditation implies a flexible situation of what is center and periphery. The center (meditation sound) and periphery (spontaneous activity) are allowed to intertwine.

There are many other styles of meditation techniques existing today that can be called concentration techniques. Two scientists who have taken an interest in concentration techniques are Antoine Lutz and B. Allan Wallace. Using the example of various Buddhist meditation techniques, Lutz describes concentration in terms of *focused attention*.<sup>934</sup> Qua focused attention, meditation involves the sustaining of a selective attention that from moment to moment monitors the attentional presence of a chosen object, for instance, the breath running through the nostrils.<sup>935</sup> The quality of clear and vivid, stable and homogeneously focused attention is sought.<sup>936</sup> The goal is a mental state in which the mind is focused unwaveringly and clearly on a single object.<sup>937</sup> Wallace's examples point in the same direction. Meditation, he writes, involves the training of an attentional stability that increases the ability to sustain a fixed and homogenous focus over time.<sup>938</sup> Sought in meditation is an attention that ultimately consists of a purified center with no periphery – the clearly ascertained attentional presence.<sup>939</sup> In explicit terms, the attentive stability is in an analogy underlining the *centering* of the attention involved. "[T]he development of attentional stability may be

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<sup>933</sup> Concentration stems from Greek *Kéntron* (*Kentein*), *centre* originally means *tooth, spike, or sting*. <http://www.britannica.com>.

<sup>934</sup> Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation"; Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An introduction."

<sup>935</sup> Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation". 2.

<sup>936</sup> *Ibid.* 2. Please note that the current referring of the concentration technique by no means will do justice to the well-informed and nuanced descriptions of the meditative practices offered by Lutz and Wallace. Both of them present detailed descriptions of distinct stages of attentive presence, correlated with distinct states of mind which, according to them, can be reached during practice. In our context, these nuances are less interesting than the general structure of attention as concentration.

<sup>937</sup> Described here is a meditation technique translated (from Tibetan) as "*Focused attention*" or "*one-pointed concentration*" (*Tsé-cig Ting-ngé*); in Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An introduction." 511.

<sup>938</sup> Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness." 176–177. Wallace refers here to the meditative practice called *Samatha*.

<sup>939</sup> B. Allan Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness", in *The View from Within*, ed. Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 1999). 178.



likened to mounting one's telescope on a firm platform; while the development of attentional vividness is like highly polishing the lenses and bringing the telescope into focus."<sup>940</sup>

In the subsequent sections, meditation qua concentration will function as an important counterpoint in our evolving understanding of nondirective meditation. Both nondirective meditation and concentration techniques are meditation, obviously, yet the two practices are, along many parameters, essentially distinct. Hence, to avoid confusing and wrongheaded connotations as to what nondirective meditation is, we need to draw out the general guidelines of the differences in question. Besides, clarifying the difference between nondirective meditation and concentration will eventually (in Section 15a) also help us to locate an underdeveloped concept in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy: attention. The fact that we will have at hand a concept of attention radically different than concentration will make it apparent how we can evolve a hermeneutical form of embodied awareness from inside Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

For now, however, it is important to note how nondirective meditation and the concentration techniques described by Lutz and Wallace represent essentially different attitudes towards the spontaneous activities. In nondirective meditation, we have seen, the spontaneous activities are not a hindrance to meditation – they are not flaws of attention,<sup>941</sup> but a positive and integrated part of the technique. The volitional and spontaneous activities are of principally equal worth. By contrast, in the techniques described by Lutz and Wallace, the spontaneous activities are precisely hindrances and flaws.<sup>942</sup> The goal of meditation, according to Lutz and Wallace, is to achieve a mind free of spontaneous activities – a mind that is focused, clear and thoroughly calm and quiet.<sup>943</sup> Meditation is a path to overcome the potentially distracting impact of the wandering mind. The goal is to stop the mind from wandering off. Whereas the novice frequently becomes disturbed by mind-wandering, the skilled meditator can monitor the intentional object of meditation for longer periods of time without such distractions, and without the impact of tiredness and emotional reactivity.<sup>944</sup> In other words, instead of volitionally acting *with* the wandering mind (as the meditator does in nondirective meditation) the concentration techniques practice a volitional *counter-acting* of spontaneity.<sup>945</sup> Cultivated in concentration is an attentional monitoring that eventually automatizes an inhibition of spontaneity already on an initial level.<sup>946</sup> Eventually, the expert mediator can attain a serene silence of mind with a minimum of engagement. Only an initial impulse of will and effort is needed at the beginning of each meditation session – the rest is accomplished with the force of familiarization.<sup>947</sup> The mind has become silent.

Curiously, the contrast between concentration and nondirective meditation reflects a general debate within contemporary psychology regarding the health aspects of mind-wandering. Whereas it is

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<sup>940</sup> Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness." 177.

<sup>941</sup> Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An introduction." 507.

<sup>942</sup> *Ibid.* 507.

<sup>943</sup> Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness." 177.

<sup>944</sup> Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation". 2.

<sup>945</sup> Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness." 177.

<sup>946</sup> Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation". 2.

<sup>947</sup> Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness." 182.

uncontroversial to hold that the wandering mind de facto is a large and (apparently) essential part of normal human life, the question of how to conceive of this part of life is highly disputed – not only within the context of meditation but also regarding human health. Given the time that humans dedicate to mind-wandering, the looming question is whether or not mind-wandering as such is malignant or beneficial to the human. The answers vary from greatly negative (malignant) to greatly positive (i.e. beneficial).

Let's pursue the difference by beginning with the negative side of mind-wandering. Here, frequently highlighted are essential relationships between mind-wandering, dysphoria, depression, and general unhappiness. "[A] human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind," we read.<sup>948</sup> The spontaneous tendency of the mind to contemplate what has happened, what might happen, or what perhaps never will happen, has troublesome emotional consequences in everyday life.<sup>949</sup> The wandering mind can express damaging or catastrophizing interpretations of one's situation.<sup>950</sup> Subjects that are suffering from these thoughts are not only less happy, but also more predisposed to psychopathology and chronic stress. "The content of the inner dialogue is biased towards negative ruminations. Excessive ruminations predispose to increased risk of depression."<sup>951</sup> Mind-wandering is thus a risk factor for health: "[F]lexibility is lost, and the system is 'locked in' to a particular pattern," we read. "Under these circumstances, the individual becomes unable to inhibit the inappropriate response and, instead of adaptively fluctuating [...] he/she experiences intrusive thoughts."<sup>952</sup>

Besides the observation that mind-wandering can come with feelings and moods that themselves are unpleasant, mind-wandering is observed to reduce attentional presence in life. The fact that mind-wandering usually occurs with no awareness that one's mind has drifted<sup>953</sup> implies that attention slips away from the present *here and now*.<sup>954</sup> The mind-wandering makes drifts "away from the outside world,"<sup>955</sup> we read. A person suffering from mind-wandering lacks meta-awareness of his or her situation – the explicit awareness of the current contents of the experiences as they are undertaken.<sup>956</sup> Consequently, the subject gains superficial and inattentive representations of the environment.<sup>957</sup> By the same token, the random and unfocused<sup>958</sup> wandering mind impairs the levels of performances. In challenging situations, mind-wandering

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<sup>948</sup> Killingsworth, "A Wandering Mind is an Unhappy Mind". 932. Conclusion supported by Smallwood Jonathan and Rory C. O'Connor, "Imprisoned by the Past: Unhappy Moods Lead to a Retrospective Bias to Mind Wandering," *Cognition and Emotions* 8 (2011).

<sup>949</sup> Killingsworth, "A Wandering Mind is an Unhappy Mind". 932.

<sup>950</sup> Sood and Jones, "On Mind Wandering, Attention, Brain Networks, and Meditation". 137.

<sup>951</sup> Ibid. 137.

<sup>952</sup> Ottaviana, Shapiro, and Couyoumdjianb, "Flexibility as the key for somatic health: From mind wandering to perseverative cognition". 41. Please note that this article in fact concludes with a positive view on mind wandering.

<sup>953</sup> Smallwood and Schooler, "The Restless Mind". 946.

<sup>954</sup> Jonathan W Schooler et al., "Meta-Awareness, perceptual decoupling and the wandering mind," in *Trends in Cognitive Science* 15 (2011). 324.

<sup>955</sup> Smallwood and Schooler, "The Restless Mind". 947.

<sup>956</sup> Ibid. 946.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid. 951.

<sup>958</sup> Sood and Jones, "On Mind Wandering, Attention, Brain Networks, and Meditation". 137.

can increase the level of physiological stress responses and increase the presence of negative thoughts.<sup>959</sup> Mind-wandering hijacks the working memory resources needed for complex cognitive problem solving.<sup>960</sup> It lets the executive control shift away from a primary task to the processing of personal goals<sup>961</sup> and decreases thus the general ability to gather specific information<sup>962</sup> – often down to the level of reading a single sentence properly.<sup>963</sup>

Mind-wandering is dangerous, one article concludes. "From mundane events such as missing important points of conversations to more serious consequences such as traffic accidents, medical malpractice, and military mishaps, mind-wandering in all likelihood plays a significant and insidious role."<sup>964</sup> From an evolutionary perspective, it is suggested that mind-wandering represents a trait of humanity that once was a vital resource, but which in the contemporary context has become a dysfunction. "As hunter-gatherers, we foraged for food. Now we forage in our mind."<sup>965</sup> The foraging mind soon conceives of dangers where there might well be no danger whatsoever. The biological brain replaces the lack of real physical danger with another challenge – worries and emotional hurts.<sup>966</sup> These regrets and fears displace the order of the present, by rerouting the mind into the past or future. Consequently, we read, the human mind spends inordinate amounts of time "inside the head". Drawn away from the present moment, the mind is busy brooding and worrying.<sup>967</sup>

Indirectly, the negative evaluation of mind-wandering communicates well with the rationales of Lutz and Wallace's concentration techniques. Spontaneous reactions, such as dullness, tiredness, excitement or restlessness, seem to be negative aspects of the mind in Lutz and Wallace's presentation of meditation. A well-functional mind, writes Lutz, is a mind wherein a stability of a nondistracted mind is reached in perfect balance with a clarity of the attentional focus.<sup>968</sup> A similar point is made by Wallace. The undisciplined, wandering mind is a dysfunctional mind, we read in his presentation of meditation;<sup>969</sup> a poor instrument for examining anything – in particular consciousness itself. Meditation (concentration) trains the mind into a reliable and precise instrument of observation. "With no such training, it is certainly possible to direct one's awareness inwards, but the undisciplined mind [will] succumb very swiftly to attentional excitation, or scattering; and when the mind calms down, it tends to drift into attentional laxity in which vividness is sacrificed."<sup>970</sup>

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<sup>959</sup> Michael Mrazek et al., "Threatened to distraction: Mind-wandering as a consequence of stereotype threat," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 47 (2011). 1243.

<sup>960</sup> Ibid. 1243.

<sup>961</sup> Sood and Jones, "On Mind Wandering, Attention, Brain Networks, and Meditation". 137.

<sup>962</sup> Mooneyham and Schooler, "The Costs and Benefits of Mind-Wandering: A Review". 13.

<sup>963</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>964</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>965</sup> Sood and Jones, "On Mind Wandering, Attention, Brain Networks, and Meditation". 139.

<sup>966</sup> Ibid. 136.

<sup>967</sup> Ibid. 136.

<sup>968</sup> Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An introduction." 507.

<sup>969</sup> Wallace, "The Buddhist Tradition of Samatha, Methods for Refining and Examining Consciousness." 176.

<sup>970</sup> Ibid. 176.

We turn now to the discursive side positive to mind-wandering. Regarding the values and functioning of mind-wandering, conclusions are drawn that are opposite to those we saw on the negative side. Fortunately, mind-wandering allows dishabituation and relieves tedium in life, we read.<sup>971</sup> Mind-wandering incubates creative thinking, we read. Conditions that maximize mind-wandering can also be the most conducive to creative problem solving.<sup>972</sup> The ability to spontaneously plan and anticipate relevant future and goals is an important cognitive function.<sup>973</sup> The wandering mind can help in the process by opening more perspectives at the same time.<sup>974</sup> In fact, mind-wandering is the outcome of vital need, we read. "The ability to adaptively let our mind wander without ramification or worrying is critical to mental health."<sup>975</sup> Mind-wandering manifests a crucial functioning of the brain. "By storing, retrieving, and manipulating internal information, we organize what could not be organized during stimulus presentation, solve problems that require computation over long periods of time, and create effective plans governing behavior in the future."<sup>976</sup>

In sharp contrast to the conclusions drawn on the side negative to mind-wandering, then, a conclusion held on the positive side is that people who let their mind wander are happier – or "generally less unhappy" than those who don't.<sup>977</sup> The ability to have frequent and spontaneous switches in the mind does not "lock" it into one static system, but evolves a flexibility associated with health. Healthy systems are not fixed in static levels but are characterized by a flexible responsiveness.<sup>978</sup> Also, the suggestion in regard to evolutionary development differs from what we saw on the side negative to mind-wandering. Here, mind-wandering is associated with an evolutionary advantage of integrating past, present and future experiences into a coherent frame.<sup>979</sup>

Let's try to link what we see here to nondirective meditation and the rationale of the practice. Compared to the indirect and direct rationales of concentration, we now see a quite different figure. In one sense, the idea of letting spontaneous activity flow as freely as possible in nondirective meditation is fully in line with the discourse side positive to mind-wandering. Important to note, however, is that the meditative approach represents no denial of the potentially difficult and negative sides of spontaneous activity in life. The rationale of letting the mind wander in meditation, we can say, is that it is better to let the potentially distracting spontaneity unfold itself *in meditation* rather than dominating life in general. That is, nondirective

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<sup>971</sup> Mooneyham and Schooler, "The Costs and Benefits of Mind-Wandering: A Review". 14–15.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid. 14–15. Cf. B. Baird, J. Smallwood, and J. W. Schooler, "Back to the future: Autobiographical planning and functionality of mind-wandering," *Consciousness and Cognition* 20 (2011). 1604-1611.

<sup>973</sup> Baird, Smallwood, and Schooler, "Back to the future: Autobiographical planning and functionality of mind-wandering". 1604.

<sup>974</sup> Mooneyham and Schooler, "The Costs and Benefits of Mind-Wandering: A Review". 15.

<sup>975</sup> Ottaviana, Shapiro, and Couyoumdjian, "Flexibility as the key for somatic health: From mind wandering to perseverative cognition". 38.

<sup>976</sup> J. R. Binder et al., "Conceptual Processing during the Conscious Resting State: A Functional MRI Study," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 11 (1999). 85.

<sup>977</sup> Mooneyham and Schooler, "The Costs and Benefits of Mind-Wandering: A Review". 13.

<sup>978</sup> Flexibility Ottaviana, Shapiro, and Couyoumdjian, "Flexibility as the key for somatic health: From mind wandering to perseverative cognition". 42.

<sup>979</sup> Ibid. 38.

meditation is a situation wherein the mind is allowed to be rerouted away from the present moment, and allowed to brood and worry,<sup>980</sup> and to drift away from the outside world.<sup>981</sup> Apparently, herein evolves the benefits of stress reduction and mental health indicated for instance by Herbert Benson. Instead of decreasing stress and enhancing joy by cultivating mental stoppings of the wandering mind (cf. Lutz and Wallace), stress reduction and well-being can come as a result of the processes where all kinds of emotions and spontaneous thoughts have been allowed to play themselves out, so to speak.

The therapeutic effect of an empathetic and sympathetic dialogue is well known. One way to phrase this effect is to say that in a sympathetic dialogue, the interlocutors make room for troublesome perspectives. By taking the troubles out in the open, so to speak, some of the tensions in the psychological investment can loosen up.

Nondirective meditation can be said to harbor a moment analogous to dialogue. In meditation, the meditator meets the potentially troublesome spontaneity with something of the same attitude that characterizes a good, healthy and constructive social relationship. In contrast to the dialogue, however, the meditator is alone, and the whole process evolves in nonverbal silence, and with a sound that (potentially) does not mean anything. The crux of the inner situation of meditative *playing out* of spontaneity is not only that the flow is allowed to happen. No less important is that the fact that the free flow comes together with the distinguished form of volitional activity; the mental repetition of the sound and the free mental attitude. The meditator listens to the meditation sound *in* and *with* the stream of the spontaneous tendencies of the mind. He or she does not evaluate whether what occurs in the mind is "constructive" or "malign", but repeats – whenever this is a choice – the sound. In encountering the spontaneous activity with a sound and with an accepting mental attitude the meditator is actively present within spontaneous consciousness. He or she is *there*, in a way that is neutral and nonjudgmental to what happens – neutral not in a sense of indifference, but in the sense of human openness and care.

We conclude the current section by drawing out one last comparison between the concentration techniques of Lutz and Wallace and nondirective meditation. In effect, with the two styles of meditation, we recognize the contours of two distinct forms of self-encounter, or indeed two distinct forms of relating to human facticity. On the one hand, we have the concentration techniques that aim towards a state of consciousness potentially purified from the impact of spontaneous self. The meditator gains a form of potent self-distance by the stopping of the uncontrolled shifts of temporal perspectives, unnecessary worries, stressful feelings and fluctuating mood changes of the moment. In other words, the concentrated self-encounter takes the form of an active self-distance; a way of gaining control over the factual situation.

On the other hand, we have the nondirective meditation that allows spontaneity to evolve. Here, what are described as the potentially beneficial functions of mind-wandering, such as mental simulations of future situations, or the creativity in problem-solving, are allowed to be active in their spontaneous manners

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<sup>980</sup> Sood and Jones, "On Mind Wandering, Attention, Brain Networks, and Meditation". 136.

<sup>981</sup> Smallwood and Schooler, "The Restless Mind". 947.

alongside the eventually more troublesome aspects of mind-wandering. Regardless of the "content" of the spontaneous activities, the meditator is close to spontaneity; which in effect means: close to oneself. Paradoxically enough, however, in this closeness another (nonconcentrated) form of self-distance seems to evolve. In being close to oneself, the potential is given to alter the way one behaves towards oneself. That is, closeness to spontaneity (or facticity) seems to be the opportunity for self-understanding and alteration of behavior. Apparently, taking in how things are, in all their trivial and potentially unpleasant ways, can have the paradoxical effect of a freer attitude towards the same things.

## 11. Meditative Awareness and Quality of Perception

The previous sections expanded our knowledge of nondirective meditation and the rationales behind the meditative practice. We indicated how the practice induces a relaxation response, how it furnishes an increased mind-wandering, and how the practice furnishes a form of intensified yet open and accepting self-encounter. Lastly, we contrasted nondirective meditation with meditative practices of concentration. Contrary to what is expressed in the rationale of nondirective meditation, the expressed goal of concentration was to stop or reduce the attentional impact of mind-wandering. Both meditative approaches to mind-wandering are supported in contemporary empirical discussions of mind-wandering and health. In effect, where the idea of stopping or lessening mind-wandering (concentration) is supported by findings emphasizing the negative or unhealthy aspects of mind-wandering, the idea of releasing the wandering mind (nondirective meditation) is supported by findings emphasizing the positive or healthy aspects of mind-wandering.

In the current section, we will expand the comparative view of nondirective meditation and concentration, now with even more focus on phenomenological-structural details involved. One key word for the exploration is already given. In Subsection 2c and 10b, we insinuated that concentration somehow relates to what we conceived as a gathered mind – in the modern understanding of the word. We recall from Subsection 2b how Descartes' *Meditations* spoke of a consciousness that perceives its phenomenal object clearly and distinctly [*clara et distincta perception*]. This clear and distinct perception was less the achievement of the senses than the mind's eye – the *oculi mentis*.<sup>982</sup> In fact, the mind's eye was presumptively detached from the senses. It perceived from a point of consciousness "above" the senses, so to speak. Also, we recall how this point was presumptively nondiscursive and nonhermeneutical. The communicated ideal was a gaze that is ahistorical in the direct sense of the word. The potentially confusing history of childhood and formative years was set aside in favor of the purified gaze of the present onlooker.

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<sup>982</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. 25.

Interesting to observe, then, that the contemporary scientific interest in meditation frequently highlights techniques that pursue ideals analogous to what Descartes promoted – although the context and discussed theories, obviously, often have little to do with Descartes directly.

Let's indicate how we can say so. In recent years, various forms of Buddhist meditation have received an increasing interest within the field of neurology and cognitive science. Lutz and Wallace are here participants in a discursive field that also includes Varela<sup>983</sup>, Thompson,<sup>984</sup> and Richard J. Davidson,<sup>985</sup> to mention only a few. Simplistically observed, one feature of the interest seems to be that Buddhist meditation represents a trained first-person perspective.<sup>986</sup> Skilled meditators provide various forms of disciplined introspective awareness. The skilled mediators possess the ability to perceive their own consciousness in ways normally inaccessible for everyday consciousness. They can report experiences relatively detailed from the inside of subtle domains of consciousness. Within this orientation, selective and goal-directed concentration techniques are often the obvious choice of interest. As exemplified by Lutz above, concentration techniques *are* the cultivation of the monitoring skill per se.<sup>987</sup> The trained mediator of a concentration technique can rest in an undisturbedly monitoring state for longer periods of time, exercising a moment-by-moment attention to anything that occurs in experience.<sup>988</sup>

In effect, the Western science and Buddhist meditation meet each other in a shared interest in the practical cultivation of Descartes' ideal of clear and distinct perception. Regardless of the radical differences between the traditions, and the despite the vast differences regarding connotations and explanations, *knowing* is put on a par with focus and disciplined goal-directed behavior. So does, for instance, a monk trained in the Tibetan hard-wired concentration technique *Tsé-cig Ting-ngé-dzin* – literally meaning *one-pointed-consciousness*<sup>989</sup> – seemingly accomplish Descartes' ideal of a *point* of consciousness. In actual and concrete introspective experience, the monk seems to rest in a semi-Cartesian firm and amovable consciousness.<sup>990</sup>

Needless to say, concentration techniques represent a perfectly legitimate and known way of exploring and getting to know consciousness. What we seek to understand, however, is *another* way of exploring and getting to know consciousness. Sought in nondirective meditation is not the cultivation of Cartesian or semi-Cartesian ideals of clarity and distinction – and yet nondirective meditation appears to be a path to expanded self-knowledge. To be close to spontaneous activity in the ways described earlier seems to be a way of moving into the peripheral and ambiguous domains of consciousness, without seeking to establish

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<sup>983</sup> Varela and Shear, *The View From Within: First Person-Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*.

<sup>984</sup> Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being - Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*

<sup>985</sup> Richard J. Davidson and Antoine Lutz, "Buddha's Brain: Neuroplasticity and Meditation," *IEEE signal processing magazine* 25 (2008).

<sup>986</sup> Cf. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind; cognitive science and human experience*; Varela and Shear, *The View From Within: First Person-Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*; Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*.

<sup>987</sup> Lutz et al., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation".

<sup>988</sup> Davidson and Lutz, "Buddha's Brain: Neuroplasticity and Meditation". Unpaginated.

<sup>989</sup> Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An introduction." 511.

<sup>990</sup> Cf. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. 17.

clarity and distinction. The meditator simply refrains from the ambition of attaining a clear view of consciousness, in favor of the unrestrained hearing of a mentally repeated sound. Whether or not the sound is clear or unclear, distinct or indistinct, seems to be unimportant – what is important is just to hear the sound.

In effect, this is what we had in mind by dismissing the term *intro-spectare* in the Introduction, for a provisional neologism of *intro-audire*. Consciousness turns towards its nonvolitional, indeterminate and ambiguous expressions (mind-wandering) with an effortlessly yet volitionally induced sound. Also, with the affirmation of ambiguity, we gradually see how the meditative practice is in touch with the nonscientific way of knowing that we have evolved in the previous parts. Rather than being associable with modern epistemic ideals of stringency and control, the meditative practice seems to evolve to be a mode of knowing more associable with the nongathered mind of Homer's *medesthai*, the ambiguity of Plato's *logos*, the unsolvable enigma of Augustine's Word – or the ambiguities of the hermeneutical and perceptual phenomena of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty.<sup>991</sup> More on that in Part Five.

To understand more of the ambiguous form of knowing associable with nondirective meditation, the following subsection will explore the subtle differences between concentration and nondirective meditation. It is relatively easy to state the difference in principle, but what does it imply in practice? In exploring the question, practical manuals of the two styles of meditation will be consulted.<sup>992</sup> The practical manuals are here valuable sources insofar as they can describe relatively concretely what the mediator is supposed to *do* in meditation, and the typical challenges met in the inner psychological situation. In our context, the manuals will be interpreted phenomenologically. We will seek to indicate structures of behavior typical of each style of meditation.

#### a. Meditative Awareness. Some Phenomenological Observations

On the side of concentration, we will have recourse to a book of Varela and co-workers, entitled *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*.<sup>993</sup> (Since Varela is one of the early pioneers within the so-called Neurophenomenology encountered in the Introduction, we will cite the book in his name although Depraz is listed first.) The original approach of the book is not only that it pragmatically combines cognitive neuroscience, psychology, and a Husserl-inspired phenomenology into a comprehensive account of embodied consciousness, but that it also comes with a practical guide to meditation. The reader is invited to explore, in first-hand experiences, the thematized structures of consciousness. It would be wrong to label the form of

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<sup>991</sup> Cf. Part One and Two.

<sup>992</sup> Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*; Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*; Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*; Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation*.

<sup>993</sup> Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*. Please note that the current ambition is not to present the fuller account of Varela et al., only to locate typical features of a concentration technique.



meditation described a concentration technique in a hard-wired sense. Also, explicitly rejected is Cartesianism in the solipsist sense of a cogito cut off from the lifeworld,<sup>994</sup> That said, there is no doubt that the meditative practice both openly or subtly reflects some of the semi-Cartesian ideals of a concentrated mind mentioned above. As we now will come to see, meditation is for Varela et al. synonymous to the cultivation of the disciplined, stable and focused attention.

The main example of meditation discussed by Varela et al. is a style referred to as the Buddhist meditation *Shamatha*. In their presentations, meditation is practiced with the eyes open, using breath as it runs through the nostrils as a meditation object.

The meditative practice is outlined as a three-step procedure. The first step consists of an inducing what Varela et al., in analogy to Husserl's *epoché*,<sup>995</sup> call a holistic gesture of *suspension* and *breaking with* everyday perception.<sup>996</sup> The meditating consciousness practices a form of bracketing off or putting out of play of everyday consciousness. This implies a general suspension of prejudice. "Suspend your 'realist' prejudice that what appears to you is truly the state of the world," write Varela et al. "[T]his is the only way you can change the way you pay your attention to your own lived experience; in other words, you must break with the 'natural attitude'."<sup>997</sup>

In the second step, the meditator re-directs attention from the "exterior" to the "interior".<sup>998</sup> According to Varela et al., this re-direction implies that the normal way of perceiving is put to rest for an *apperceptive act*.<sup>999</sup> (*Apperception* means to grasps something *over* and *above* what is actually perceived.) In this step of the procedure, the meditator modulates the *quality* of attention, writes Varela et al. Attention goes from *what* is being perceived, to *how* it is perceived.<sup>1000</sup> Attained is also a passive attitude. Instead of "looking for something" the meditator takes up the mental attitude. "[S]omething comes to you" – meditation is "letting something be revealed".<sup>1001</sup> Perceived thus, *reality* gradually alters character, we read. What reveals itself in attention is not *real* in the ordinary sense of the word, but emerges in an abstract way – above reality.<sup>1002</sup> Similar alteration occurs with inner percepts, such as emotions and spontaneous thoughts. They become conceived from the viewpoint of an abstract observer – they are considered from afar "as clouds in the background".<sup>1003</sup> "You explicitly avoid engaging in their [i.e. the spontaneous thoughts] content but rather pay attention to their arising, their emergence into full form, and their subsiding into the background."<sup>1004</sup>

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<sup>994</sup> Cf. Ibid. 59-60.

<sup>995</sup> Husserl, *Ideen 1*. 72.

<sup>996</sup> Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*. 26.

<sup>997</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>998</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>999</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>1000</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>1001</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>1002</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>1003</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>1004</sup> Ibid. 33.

In the third step, write Varela et al., the meditator attains the stance of a neutral observer.<sup>1005</sup> That is, having (first) set aside every form of prejudice and (secondly) established a position "above" everything emerging in attention, the meditator perceives everything from a neutral viewpoint.<sup>1006</sup> Here, the meditator practices a mental gesture of *letting-go*, and *acceptance* of whatever comes into attention.<sup>1007</sup> "You have to accept and listen, you have to be filled with something about to come forth, you have to contemplate rather than looking for something in a predetermined manner."<sup>1008</sup> In contrast to everyday cognitive reflection, which is anything but passive and neutral,<sup>1009</sup> the meditator is able to observe his/her thoughts and emotions neutrally as they emerge in their initial forms. "You find glimpse the constant impermanence of your thoughts, regardless of content and texture. You find yourself going in and out of the composite nature of your mind and sense of self. You find yourself going in and out of the identification with a noncentered, nonego space with various degrees of expansion."<sup>1010</sup>

Overall, the meditative *epoché* described by Varela et al. can be called a reduction to a minimal positional consciousness. The practice aims towards the intuitive evidence of a minimal but self-sufficient cycle of the reflecting act, we read.<sup>1011</sup> This is where the semi-Cartesian approach becomes more and more vivid in Varela et al.

*Becoming aware*, in this context, means to attain enhanced stability of attention within domains of consciousness not accessible to everyday consciousness. Attention is to be like a lighted torch<sup>1012</sup> within nonthetic and pre-reflective<sup>1013</sup> domains of consciousness. The focused attention grasps the subtle nuances within behavioral impulses of perception, motion memory, motor, imagination, speech, and everyday social interaction, as well as domains of mental life fraught with meaning, such as dreaming, intense emotions, social tensions.<sup>1014</sup> "You may be the only one to have direct, first-person access to your subjective experience, but you can learn how to increase the stability of the attention which allows for the holding-in-the-grasp (*Im-Griff-Halten*) of such an experience."<sup>1015</sup>

From what we can see, the goal of Varela's meditation is to gain more focus within the prereflective domains of consciousness with less and less voluntary energy spending in holding the positional gaze. So conceived, the three "steps" pertains to the accumulation of the practical *know-how* required to rest in the stability of the attentional gaze. Also, what seems to be described is that the attentive gaze ultimately

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<sup>1005</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>1006</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>1007</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>1008</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>1009</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>1010</sup> Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear, "First-Person Methodologies: What, Why, How?", in *The View From Within - First Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, ed. Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 1999). 33.

<sup>1011</sup> Cf. Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*. 24.

<sup>1012</sup> Varela and Shear, "First-Person Methodologies: What, Why, How?" 33.

<sup>1013</sup> Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*. 2.

<sup>1014</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>1015</sup> Ibid. 90. German concept is a reference to *Ideen 1*, § 23.

is taken from an absolute neutral point of view – *from where* it perceives thoughts and emotions drifting by, afar – "as clouds in the background".<sup>1016</sup> Apparently, the accomplished mediator manages to set aside prejudices more or less completely so that the focused attention can *be* a pure and neutral gaze taken on the wandering mind and the outside world.

Let us bring this style of meditation into comparison with the sonorous oriented nondirective meditation. The basis of the comparison is the following. In analogy to the practice described by Varela et al. nondirective meditation can also be called a form of *epoché*. The nondirective meditator refrains from analyzing or rationalizing in the ways of everyday consciousness; which, in the phenomenological parlance, means that he or she breaks with the "natural attitude"<sup>1017</sup> by letting the cognitive powers of everyday consciousness rest.<sup>1018</sup> However, we soon see that the structures of the two meditative *epochés* are distinct. One obvious difference evolves in the choice of meditation object. In the technique described by Varela et al., the breath is the meditation object – and not a mantra, meditation sound. In effect, this means that the relaxation response described above (with Benson) here pertains only to nondirective meditation. Certainly, the lack of relaxation response is not really a *lack* within the meditative context of Varela et al. The goal of the meditation technique is not relaxation but (as we now know) the cultivating of the mental qualities of stability, focus and openness.<sup>1019</sup> In other words, practitioners of the two styles of meditation have from the outset set out on different explorative enterprises within consciousness.

In contrast to what Varela et al. describe, the *epoché* of nondirective meditation comes not first and foremost as a result of a decision but as the result of an innate physiological response in the nervous system. That is, although the choice of repeating the sound is a decision, the response of relaxation is not.

However, the apparent differences between the meditative practices pertain not only to the meditation object (breath/sound). No less important are the mental attitudes sought and being used (concentrated/nonconcentrated).<sup>1020</sup> As we know, there is no goal within nondirective meditation to achieve a focused and stable attention. In this context, the volitional usage of concentration is rendered counterproductive to the process of relaxation and the releasing of the wandering mind.<sup>1021</sup> Rather than being the sign of correct meditation (as it is for Varela et al), the volitional establishing of an attentional focus and stability is not the sign of "success" in meditation but rather the opposite – it indicates that the meditator volitionally has departed from the basic instruction of nondirective meditation.

Coincidentally or not (we recall Descartes' mind's eye), the differences regarding mental attitudes (concentration or nonconcentration) are paired with the distinct orientation towards mental "senses" – i.e. the ocular (Varela et al.) or the sonorous (nondirective meditation). In none of the manuals of nondirective

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<sup>1016</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>1017</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>1018</sup> Above, we made a similar point in terms of *logic relaxation*.

<sup>1019</sup> Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*. 32.

<sup>1020</sup> Cf. Eirfring and Holen, "The Uses of Attention." 19 ff.

<sup>1021</sup> Holen and Eirfring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*.

meditation consulted do we find an expressed goal analogous to what is being described by Varela et al: to volitionally seek or preserve an on-looker's position to what reveals itself at the moment. That is, the manuals of nondirective meditation do not encourage the meditator to perceive the spontaneous activities from "afar", as "clouds", or in an "apperceptive" way, etc., or to execute a mental gesture of *letting-go* or *acceptance* of the spontaneous thoughts.<sup>1022</sup> In short, the instruction of nondirective meditation is not to view the spontaneous activities in this or that way – only to hear the meditation sound unrestrainedly whenever this is an option.

From what we have seen, it is reasonable to expect that experiences analogous to what Varela et al. describe *can* occur in nondirective meditation. That is, it belongs to the nature of the spontaneous activities that thoughts (spontaneously) can occur as "clouds seen from afar", etc. However, to voluntarily *seek* such a positional, mental gaze would imply the usage of unnecessary cognitive energy. That is, it would imply an active concentration subtly working against the spontaneous activities – as also would the effort of volitionally abiding the occurrence of such a positional gaze.

The difference touched upon here is probably more intriguing than the current context can provide for. What seems to be the case, is that the nondirective and sonorous way of turning towards consciousness allows for a flexibility<sup>1023</sup> where the concentrated practice seeks for stability. That is, where concentration will seek to stabilize a positional view into the nonthetic and pre-reflective structures of behavior, the nondirective practice will destabilize and flex the same positional view. The positional view is just spontaneous activity, so to speak, emerging around the minimal cognitive effort of repeating the meditation sound. Does this imply that the nondirective and sonorous practice then moves further into consciousness than the ocular and focused practice? If concentration is the reduction to a minimal but self-sufficient cycle of consciousness, as Varela et al. writes, what does this say about a practice that apparently would destabilize the same self-sufficient cycle of consciousness? What structures of the human self does the sonorous practice move towards?

We leave these questions hanging for the moment. In Part Five, we will pursue some of the implications of the question only minus the comparative reference to concentration. Of current interest, is a last indication that pertains to how the two styles of meditation relate to what we can call acceptance of difficult emotions. Difficult emotions are ambiguity per se, we can say. They express something more or less nonunderstood in the psychology of the subject. The question, then, becomes how the mediator is encouraged to handle their challenging being.

Varela et. al. do not underplay that to meditate can imply contact with potentially difficult emotions like boredom or fear, or feelings of confusion, incompleteness, absence, emptiness, nothingness and unreadiness.<sup>1024</sup> Given with these observations are lengthy discussions of what it implies to *accept everything*

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<sup>1022</sup> Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*. 31.

<sup>1023</sup> This flexibility will be discussed further in Part Five below, cf. Section 14.

<sup>1024</sup> Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware; A Pragmatics of Experiencing*. 63.

(which is the goal of the third state of the procedure, as we recall.<sup>1025</sup>) However, the premise of the discussion can be paraphrased thus: the goal of meditation is to *overcome* the disturbing presence of emotions. Acceptance is linked to the mental gesture of breaking with, or inhibiting emotionality – i.e. "the most gross cognitive movements, those which totally cover over acceptance and make the reflective act impossible."<sup>1026</sup> Acceptance and strong emotionality are mutually excluding terms, so to speak: intense emotions *cover over acceptance*, yet the paradoxical outcome of acceptance is that it releases more of the intense emotionality. "[I]t is hard not to immediately succumb to the sort of fear and boredom [that] acceptance or attentive receptivity can bring about in you."<sup>1027</sup>

Thus, cultivating a focused and accepting attention means gaining contact with a positional view undisturbed from emotionality. The meditative *epoché* is completed when feelings of confusion, incompleteness, absence, etc. are left behind for distinctness, evidence, completion, and coherence.<sup>1028</sup> The trained meditator is finished with the disturbances of such spontaneous activities, so speak. He or she has found a state of awareness ultimately detached from the potentially difficult emotions and is "at peace" at the moment.<sup>1029</sup>

We turn to nondirective meditation. Frequently discussed in the secularized contexts of nondirective meditation<sup>1030</sup> is the natural occurrence of emotions that typically can be labeled as difficult. In the context of Clinically Standardized Meditation, Patricia Carrington (psychologist) underlines that nearly every practitioner who keeps up with the activity over time will experience discomfort and unpleasant situations.<sup>1031</sup> The meditative activity can typically release backlogs of tensions and stress built up over the course of life,<sup>1032</sup> moods of anxiety and guilt,<sup>1033</sup> or nausea,<sup>1034</sup> or the feeling of being emotionally out of balance.<sup>1035</sup> The mediator can even be faced with feelings of long-standing emotional problems or emotional residues of traumas.<sup>1036</sup> Similar points are made by Are Holen (psychologist and medical doctor) in the context of Acem Meditation. Meditation can evoke general uneasiness, overwhelming tiredness, deep-felt resistance towards meditation,<sup>1037</sup> negative self-images, and self-evaluations,<sup>1038</sup> or intense feelings of boredom and restlessness.<sup>1039</sup> Feelings of a compensatory character of an inadequate high self-esteem or grandiose self-

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<sup>1025</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 37 ff.

<sup>1026</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

<sup>1027</sup> *Ibid.* 38.

<sup>1028</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

<sup>1029</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

<sup>1030</sup> We leave the TM out here, due to somewhat one-sided focus on the *pleasurable* aspects of meditation. TM, it is held, is the path to "infinite happiness, creativity, intelligence and organizing power [and] maximum success and fulfillment in daily life". Morris, "Foreword." xi.

<sup>1031</sup> Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*. 101.

<sup>1032</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

<sup>1033</sup> *Ibid.* 174–175.

<sup>1034</sup> *Ibid.* 103.

<sup>1035</sup> *Ibid.* 92–93.

<sup>1036</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

<sup>1037</sup> Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*. 39.

<sup>1038</sup> *Ibid.* 54.

<sup>1039</sup> Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation*. 25.

evaluations can also be evoked.<sup>1040</sup> In general, Carrington and Holen's psychological approaches to meditation fit into the picture that we established in the context of mind-wandering and health. Releasing spontaneous activity means releasing all kinds of emotions.

We have indicated that there is a provocative aspect of the meditation sound by saying that the sound typically provokes to the fore more spontaneous activity. In effect, this means that the meditation sound easily can evoke more difficult emotions – a fact that, by itself, is diametrically opposite to what Varela et. al. seek. However, none of the manuals of nondirective meditation consulted express the idea of conquering or become finished with the feelings in the direct sense. Rather, appeals to the open-ended<sup>1041</sup> process of meditation encourage the meditator just to keep on with sonorous activity, as unrestrainedly as possible, amidst potentially difficult feelings. In other words, acceptance (whatever the word means) is in this meditative context not to be found in a locus of consciousness external to emotionality (Varela et. at.) but rather within emotionality.

Let's move further into the rationale behind the meditative practice to understand more of the proclaimed worth of being in emotionality. Pointed out by Are Holen is that the spontaneous activities often come with a structure of psychological defense mechanism.<sup>1042</sup> That is, while the activity of repeating sound unrestrainedly in thought is relaxing for mind and body, the same activity easily triggers unresolved and deeply irrational psychological issues of protection and self-dissociation; i.e. ways that the subject consciously or unconsciously protects itself from certain emotions and impressions. From this perspective, a humdrum phenomenon like restlessness or intense boredom can be an expression of a suppressed or unresolved psychological conflict or traumatic experience<sup>1043</sup> with long roots in the psychology of the person.<sup>1044</sup> Again, this approach is in accordance with the neurological and psychological discoveries on mind-wandering. We recall how the spontaneous activities reflect the structures of what is important and vital to consciousness. The stream of spontaneous thoughts is self-relevant. It harbors personal concerns, feelings towards others, hopes and dreams, unfulfilled goals and unresolved challenges, inner debates and self-monitoring, spontaneous coping reactions and typical traits of behavior, and intrusive memories.<sup>1045</sup>

In Holen's terminology, the fact that the spontaneous activities are invested with vital values implies that they typically come with a structure of *nonvolitional concentration*. This technical term designates a spontaneous tendency of centering of the openness of meditation – a way that a nondirective or free mental attitude spontaneously becomes directive and less free. Nonvolitional concentration is the paradoxical effect of executing a free mental attitude.<sup>1046</sup> Although the meditator

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<sup>1040</sup> Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*. 25.

<sup>1041</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

<sup>1042</sup> Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation*. 26.

<sup>1043</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

<sup>1044</sup> *Ibid.* 54.

<sup>1045</sup> Baars, "Spontaneous Repetitive Thoughts Can Be Adaptive: Postscript on McKay and Vane". 1. For other examples see Subsection 10b above.

<sup>1046</sup> Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*. 39.

initially sets out to meditate with a nonconcentrated and nonevaluative mental attitude, the meditator will sooner or later begin to concentrate nevertheless. In ways often not even recognized by the meditator, attention begins to steer *to* or *away from* certain feelings or thoughts.<sup>1047</sup> The presumptively accepting consciousness begins to act in a nonaccepting and discriminative way.<sup>1048</sup> In Holen's example, the meditator can typically begin to repeat the sound too rigorously, trying to adhere or "cling" to the meditation sound by using force,<sup>1049</sup> or begin to privilege certain states of consciousness, for instance, the feeling of being "relaxed".<sup>1050</sup> This is not tokens of a fault being made in meditation, but rather a natural consequence of the induced openness towards spontaneity. The free mental attitude tends to inspire its opposite, namely a bent for control and stability.<sup>1051</sup>

We now better see the contours of what it implies to say that nondirective meditation implies no unambiguous exploration of consciousness. Where the attentional gaze of Varela et al. is outlined as a presumptively pure and fully accepting gaze, the enterprise of nondirective meditation is strikingly not so. Potentially, the sonorous attention is thoroughly permeated by ambiguities of unresolved themes of life. Not even the attentional turn towards the ambiguity seems to be straightforward. With the impact of nonvolitional concentration, the nondirective meditator cannot simply access the prethetic and pre-reflective domains of consciousness in ways analogous to how one opens a door. Apparently, consciousness spontaneously works against such an enterprise. Spontaneously beginning to concentrate, consciousness spontaneously closes itself off from an exploration in ways not even recognized by the meditator.

Let's conclude the current section by expanding on what we said in Subsection 10b. From what we can see, the concentration presented by Varela et al. and nondirective meditation seems to express two distinct approaches to human facticity. The concentrated attitude that actively lessens contact with difficult emotions (concentration) is different from a free mental attitude that refrains from lessening the impact of difficult emotions (nondirective meditation). Along the various axes discussed in this section, the styles of meditation express distinct attitudes towards nonunderstood and ambiguous structures within the psychology of the subject.<sup>1052</sup> Where the concentrated meditation apparently seeks stability and focus that lessens the impact of the nonunderstood and ambiguous feelings, the sonorous meditation seems to be a way of exploring the ambiguity for its own sake.

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<sup>1047</sup> Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation*. 29.

<sup>1048</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>1049</sup> *Ibid.* 26.

<sup>1050</sup> Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*. 20.

<sup>1051</sup> Holen, *Inner Strength; The Free Mental Attitude in Acem Meditation*. 27.

<sup>1052</sup> The rationale of nondirective meditation is here fully in line with Merleau-Ponty. Cf. Section 4 above and Section 15 below.

## Part Five. Inner Hearing as Perceptual Interpretation

In Part One, we pursued words and notions of meditation within the Western philosophical tradition, while Part Two followed these words and notions into the philosophies of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. In the latter context, we saw how Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty bridge the modern division between the "inner" and "outer" of human life. Conceived via the philosophical paths of *Lesen* (Gadamer) and *perception* (Merleau-Ponty), the subject is a thoroughly relational being. To be a human is to be the ambiguous and dialectic orders between individuality and communality. By what we have seen, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty cannot be accused of putting forward a so-called post-modern conception of human life – if what is meant is that the subject is a mere product of conventions and culture. To be a subject is to be more than a mere product of conventions and culture, for both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. While thoroughly permeated by culture and conventions, the subject also evolves the potential of an ahistorical dimension independent of culture and conventions. This ahistorical dimension evolves not beyond, but in historical life. The fuller potential of human life is in the ongoing friction between the historical (conditioned) and the ahistorical (unconditioned) aspects of life.

The general idea of Part Five is to import nondirective meditation (elaborated in Part Four) substantially into philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology. This implies an expansion of the tentative descriptions given in the Introduction. Here, we said that nondirective meditation seems to belong somewhere in between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology. The meditative practice harbors both a moment of *Text* (Gadamer) and an embodied-enactive structure (Merleau-Ponty). What – in detailed descriptions – does it imply to call upon this middle ground between philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology?



We recall from the Introduction that there are two main methodological axes involved in this philosophical description of nondirective meditation. On the one hand, the philosophical concept will be applied to the meditative practice. By doing so, we can now pursue the fuller philosophical accounts of what we saw in the empirical discourses on nondirective meditation (Part Four). What, for instance, are the fuller philosophical implications of saying that a meditation sound is provocative in the senses indicated in the empirical discourses? What form of knowing evolves in the sonorous form of self-encounter? Pursuing these questions, we will use Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies as resources to describe nondirective meditation as a practical form of embodied hermeneutics. The meditator explores and accomplishes the potentials of consciousness.

On the other hand, we will continue to pursue questions that bounce back to philosophy, so to speak, in the process of application. From the Introduction, we recall the current methodological figure: nondirective meditation makes us aware of underdeveloped moments of perceptual experience in Gadamer's hermeneutics and underdeveloped moments of hermeneutical experience in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. More particularly, the meditative practice makes us locate an unfulfilled potential of embodiment in Gadamer's philosophy, and an underdeveloped concept of hermeneutical awareness in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. In effect, by elaborating these theoretical potentials, we will be moving towards an embodied hermeneutics.

Last but not least, Part Five will also elaborate what we introduced as a perceptual turn in Gadamer's late philosophy (works made after *Wahrheit und Methode*). The import of nondirective meditation into philosophy will help us locate how and where the turn evolves. The basis of the turn will be Gadamer's conception of inner hearing – *Inneres Hören*. Here, we will see how Gadamer himself has stepped in the direction of embodied hermeneutics. The combination of nondirective meditation and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology will make it possible to pursue Gadamer's initiative further than his own philosophy apparently has the descriptive resources to do.

The course of action will be as follows. We begin with Gadamer's path of *Lesen*. Section 12 will apply Gadamer's key concepts of *Wahrheit und Methode* – such as *Vollzug*, *Text* and *Sprache* – to nondirective meditation. Here, we will see how the meditative process is execution and accomplishment in the hermeneutical sense of the words. Section 13 will evoke Gadamer's *Inneres Hören*. Here, we will see how the concept both is a direct prolonging of *Wahrheit und Methode* and the introduction of a new interest of Gadamer, the explicit orientation towards linguistic *Klang*. Section 14 will study how Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* comes together with slight but significant revisions of *Wahrheit und Methode*, and a more explicit interest in *Leibliche Erfahrung* displayed in a series of texts on the nature of health offered by Gadamer. In Section 15, we turn to Merleau-Ponty's path of *perception* for further elaboration of nondirective meditation. Finally, Section 16 will pursue fuller implications of what it implies, from a Merleau-Pontyan perspective, to say that nondirective meditation is a sonorous exploration of embodied

consciousness. Evoking *Structure of Behavior*, we will pursue a new axis in the structure of behavior apparently relevant to nondirective meditation: the physical order, the vital order, and the human order.

## 12. *Text* and *Vollzug* of Sound. (Gadamer)

In Section 11, we insinuated that nondirective meditation has more in common with Plato's quest into the ambiguous *logos*, or Augustine's affirmation of the unsolvable enigma of the Word, than with modern epistemic ideals of stringency and control. The basic idea of the current section is to explicate some aspects of what it can imply to say so. We will not evoke Plato and Descartes directly, however, only indirectly – through the philosophy of *Wahrheit und Methode*. We recall from Section 4 how key philosophemes in philosophical hermeneutics echo Plato's *meletē* and Augustine's meditative *verbum cordis*. Loosely considered, everything we said here is reflected also in the concept that now will play a pivotal role in our understanding of nondirective meditation: *Vollzug*.

As we recall from the Introduction, the *Vollzug* pertains to the moment of execution and accomplishment in philosophical hermeneutics. Consequently, elaborating nondirective meditation as a form of *Vollzug* will view the practice as a process of accomplishment. Viewed in the light of Gadamer, the meditative process seems to involve a process of fulfilling rudimentary and nonunderstood moments in understanding. That is, meditating in the ambiguous domain of spontaneous activities (Sections 10 and 11) appears to be a way of being close to, and accomplishing, unfinished moments in the relational life of the subject. Thus, we will see in fuller exposition what it means to describe the meditation sound as *Text*. Studied in the light of Gadamer, the provocative role of the meditation sound is precisely to push – in the German sense of an *Anstoß* – a revising of understanding to occur.

A few preparatory words are needed before we turn to the work. Methodologically considered, it cannot be denied that there is a certain friction involved in the process of applying Gadamer's concepts to a practice like nondirective meditation. Applying Gadamer's *Vollzug* to a concrete practice means in effect to apply the hermeneutical concept of application. However, from what we have seen, *Vollzug* – and the correlated concepts of *Sprache* and *Text* – are philosophical concepts not really outlined for application as such. That is, *Vollzug* is not a descriptive concept delineating concrete details in phenomenal experience but a structure-moment [*Strukturmoment*] in Gadamer's categorial description of experience (Cf. Section 6). *Vollzug* expresses the essential and insurmountable moment of application, execution, and accomplishment of the *Text in* or *to* a concrete hermeneutical situation – not on the descriptive level of singularity and actuality, then, but on the categorial level of potentiality. Rather than describing how a given hermeneutical experience evolves, *Vollzug* outlines the categorial structure [*Structure*] of what makes understanding possible.

Far from setting aside this consideration, the subsequent analysis will take an almost naïve recourse to this apparently simple fact: it evolves within the logic of Gadamer's *Vollzug* to be *relevant* to concrete phenomenal experience had by humans. What should Gadamer's *Vollzug* be for, if not an expanded understanding of human experience?

The fact that Gadamer (as we know) lacks a concept answering directly to nondirective meditation, suggests that the subsequent analysis (Section 14) will read *Wahrheit und Methode from the viewpoint of* nondirective meditation. In practice, this means that the relevance of Gadamer's concepts (*Vollzug*, *Text*, *Sprache*) will be demonstrated in the outset of *Lesen*.<sup>1053</sup>

In the current section, we will also evoke another thinker from the Western philosophical tradition: *Kant*. Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* is crucial to understand the way Gadamer's philosophy supports a notion of nonrational, nonlogical – and nondirective – *knowing*. Though usually associated to art experience, the aesthetic experience of Gadamer's Kant goes much further than art experience. In revising Kant, Gadamer conceptualizes a genuinely human truth – a truth that preserves the essential ambiguity of the human being, rather than reducing it away in stringency and control. Thus, through Gadamer's Kant, we come to see how largely unclear and indistinct meditative experiences evolving in the ambiguous inner of a meditating subject, can be said to convey genuine and universal truth. Rather than being a flamboyant truth of self-security and brilliance, so to speak, the truth of meditation will evolve in silence and the openness towards the relational dimension of the subject.

#### a. Situating Nondirective Meditation

As heralded in Section 9a, the basis for the current philosophical analysis will be the three traditional meditation sounds cited by Carrington:<sup>1054</sup> the Sanskrit mantra *ah-nam*, traditionally meaning "nameless" or "without name"; the Hindu mantra *ra-mah*, traditionally related to the Hindu deity Rama who is associated with integrity and passion; and the Hebrew mantra *shi-rim*, traditionally meaning "songs". Following Carrington, we set aside the traditional meanings of the sounds, focusing primarily on their sonorous qualities. Carrington informs us that the letter *a* is usually pronounced *ah* in these sounds. Apart from that, however, Carrington does not specify any particular ways that these sounds are to be phrased melodically; which is to say, how they are to be heard in *Vollzug*. We soon hear how the sounds are open to several ways of phrasing. For instance, the vowels can be of various lengths, in the form of *aaaah-nam* or *ah-naaaam* etc., and the

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<sup>1053</sup> As noted in the Introduction, this indicates no one-to-one parallelism between reading and nondirective meditation – even by analogy. Differences between Gadamer's *Lesen* and nondirective meditation will be indicated as we go along, particularly in Section 13b below.

<sup>1054</sup> Carrington, *The Book of Meditation - The Complete Guide to Modern Meditation*. 84

hyphens indicate potential variations on where to put sonorous emphasis: *AH-nam*, or *ah-NAM*, or *AH-NAM*, or *SHI-rim* or *shi-RIM*, etc.<sup>1055</sup>

In ways that will be clearer to us in the following, these variations can be important enough for a meditator. The emphases manifest not only different musical phrasings but potentially also degrees of challenge. If *AH-nam* is conceived as the benchmark standard of phrasing, for instance, then this standard brings a qualitative moment into the act of meditation. It increases the amount of challenge, however slightly, to know that the outset standard is *ah-NAM* instead of *AH-NAM* (for example). Whenever the meditator returns to the sound after being carried away in spontaneous thoughts, he or she has to deal (practically) with the question of how to relate to the outset standard of phrasing. Indirectly, this point is also relevant to the question of oral versus written transmission of meditation sounds. To the degree that nuances in phrasing are recognized as important for the practice, oral transmission involves a dimension of reciprocal human contact and direct adjustment of sound. The difference here is analogous to the difference between learning to play a musical instrument by ear and with a teacher, and learning it alone and merely by reading instructions and sheet music.

Now to approach the sounds right we need to recapitulate a few more points established above. From Part Four, we know that the meditation sounds cannot be conceived in isolation. To function as devices for nondirective meditation, they must be used by reference to procedures outlining how to use them as such. We know that the idea of repeating the sounds volitionally yet unrestrainedly *in thought* is the key here. The sounds are not to be pronounced or sub-vocalized with lips or other speech organs but heard quietly in the mind of the meditator. Everything else that happens in the mind (spontaneous activities/wandering mind) is allowed to evolve freely. The theoretical concept of pivotal value is the free mental attitude. Free mental attitude is conceptualized both as the unrestrained repetition of the sound and the resting, nonjudgmental and accepting attitude taken towards the spontaneous activities. In the context of health and self-care (Subsection 10b) we indicated how the sonorous activity was held to furnish an almost paradoxical self-distance. Repeating the sound unrestrainedly amidst the spontaneous activities was described as a way of being close *to* oneself while also entertaining a certain freedom regarding oneself.

Herein evolves the question that will guide the hermeneutical analysis of the meditative practice. How can it be – in the first place – that a small sound consisting of just vowels and syllables can work on the human situation as indicated in the discourses on meditation? How can a subject *understand* anything at all on the basis of more or less meaningless sounds like *ah-nam*, *ra-mah*, or *shi-rim*?

From the previous chapters, we also know that one moment is almost self-evident in Gadamer's perspective. The process of self-understanding (eventually) going on in nondirective meditation might be unique in style, but the process of understanding as such is not unique. *Verstehen*, for Gadamer, is the essential trait of the human. "Verstehen ist der ursprüngliche Seinscharakter des menschlichen Lebens

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<sup>1055</sup> Ibid. 84.

selber.<sup>1056</sup> To be a human self, for Gadamer, is to live an ongoing quest for meaning, order and stability. "Verstehen ist nicht etwas, was das Dasein gelegentlich tut, wenn es Sinnhaftem begegnet, sondern Verstehen ist das, was es als Dasein definiert. Der Mensch ist etwas, das verstehen will und verstehen muß."<sup>1057</sup> Qua situated, one does not start a process of self-understanding. Self-understanding is a process that has always already begun, and always already implies vast forms of relational being.

What we say here have some consequences for how we will understand nondirective meditation from now on – first in the hermeneutical context of Gadamer (Section 12-14), later with Merleau-Ponty (Section 15-16). Nondirective meditation cannot be properly conceived in solipsist isolation. Whatever goes on in meditation cannot be isolated from what goes on outside meditation. To be a meditating subject is to be a self that lives a life in a moral world shared with other human beings.<sup>1058</sup>

Two general consequences can be deduced from this rather basic philosophical point. First, implied with the recourse to lived life is the hermeneutical fact that previously attained life experiences – by necessity – express themselves in meditation. This sits well with the discourses on meditation; it falls under what we saw described as nonvolitional concentration. We have seen how difficult feelings typically occurring in meditation, such as restlessness or intense boredom, can harbor psychological issues of self-evaluation and self-understanding. Expressed in these phenomena can be tendencies of self-dissociation, that is, self-distance not based on acceptance and inclusion, but denials or distorting self-views. In the vocabulary of *Wahrheit und Methode*, nonvolitional concentration amounts to what are described as *prejudices*. Prejudices express both ontogenetic and phylogenetic history. As such, prejudices manifest the for-structure of understanding [*Vorstruktur des Verstehens*], i.e., the way understanding always anticipates itself by the formation of constellations of order. In other words, accumulated through general experience are pre-expectations of order that pre-form whatever comes to mind.<sup>1059</sup>

Second, the recourse to lived life implies also that experiences attained outside or after meditation belong to the picture. Whatever experiences the meditator has during meditation, these experiences will *afterward* evolve in light of nonmeditative, everyday experiences. The meditative experiences will gain meaning from an ongoing life, lived in relationships with oneself, other people and the world in general. In other words, although the meditator is drastically alone in meditation, the subsequent understanding is lived in communal life. From a hermeneutical perspective, we thus have to do with a hermeneutical circle that both starts long before the act of meditation, and expands far beyond meditation. In the center of this circle evolve the meditation sounds repeated with a free mental attitude. *Past* and *future* become relevant as *present*; modes of understanding belonging to the past, determining how the future is perceived, are actualized by the repetition of the meditation sound.

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<sup>1056</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 264.

<sup>1057</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die deutsche Philosophie zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen (1987)", in *Hermeneutik im Rückblick, Gesammelte Werke 10* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1987). 366.

<sup>1058</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 450.

<sup>1059</sup> Cf. *Wahrheit und Methode*, II,1,a *Der hermeneutische Zirkel und das Problem der Vorurteile*. 270 ff.

In the introduction, we said that the ambition of our philosophical exploration is to preserve the genuine character of the meditative experience. Against the background of this ambition, we voice a potentially critical question to the current enterprise of application. How can Gadamer's philosophy, traditionally oriented towards meaning and interpretation, be at all relevant for sounds like *ah-nam*, *rah-mah* or *shi-rim*? Would not these sounds just be meaningless sounds (in the negative sense of the words) that in any case cannot be *understood* in the way a *Sinnvolles* text can? From everything we have seen, listening to the meditation sounds cannot be called *interpretation* in the sense of the "verstehendes Lesen" targeted in *Wahrheit und Methode*, let alone when the traditional meaning and connotations of these sounds are set aside. Certainly, Carrington occasionally refers to *ah-nam*, *rah-mah* or *shi-rim* as *words*, but to the degree that the sounds deserve this classification, they certainly are not words *joined* together in the traditional, Western philosophical sense associated with texts. In Gadamerian terms, the sounds are not an articulation of *logos* bringing (in Gadamer's words) "das Gefüge des Seiendes zur Sprache" into the present moment.<sup>1060</sup>

In the center of this potentially critical question evolves an apparent discrepancy between two essential factors: the linguistic emphasis of philosophical hermeneutics, on the one hand, and the potentially wordless and nonlinguistic character of nondirective meditation on the other. "Alle Formen menschlicher Lebensgemeinschaften sind Formen von Sprachgemeinschaften, ja, mehr noch: sie bilden Sprache," we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*. "Denn die Sprache ist ihrem Wesen nach die Sprache des Gesprächs. Sie bildet selber durch den Vollzug der Verständigung erst ihre Wirklichkeit."<sup>1061</sup> Gadamer's *Verstehen* implies the exposition in language – in the sense of an *Auslegung* – the *Sache* that is tentatively understood. "Verstehen und Auslegung sind auf eine unlösliche Weise ineinander verschlungen,"<sup>1062</sup> we read. "Verstehen enthält immer Auslegung."<sup>1063</sup> To understand something is to accomplish [*Vollzug*] the *Sinn* tentatively expressed in the text, item, object or whatever one tries to understand, in language. Classical philology works in this direction; according to *Wahrheit und Methode*, the philologist seeks to make the text legible in the interest of securing the adequate linguistic exposition of the text.<sup>1064</sup> Even silent and private reading is a form of *Auslegung*.<sup>1065</sup> Silent reading is to expose the initially *unsaid* into something *said*; it is to accomplish what was hitherto *unsaid* into the openness of linguistic understanding. In so far as both philology and silent reading are forms of interpretation evolving solely in the medium of language, both undertakings are exemplary versions of what any understanding is in the first place, namely linguistic: "Wo wir es mit dem Verstehen und Auslegen sprachlicher Texte zu tun haben, macht die Auslegung im Medium der Sprache selber deutlich, was Verstehen

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<sup>1060</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 460.

<sup>1061</sup> *Ibid.* 450.

<sup>1062</sup> *Ibid.* 403.

<sup>1063</sup> *Ibid.* 403.

<sup>1064</sup> *Ibid.* 403.

<sup>1065</sup> *Ibid.* 403.

immer ist: eine solche Aneignung des Gesagten, daß es einem selbst zu eigen wird. Sprachliche Auslegung ist die Form der Auslegung überhaupt.<sup>1066</sup>

On the other hand, the moment we have captured the sonorous qualities of *ah-nam*, *rah-mah* or *shirrim* we do not have to wonder what these sounds *say* as such. There are strikingly no *Sache* to expose in the sounds. Lacking words there is nothing to verbalize or *lay out* [*Auslegung*] in language. Another factor to consider is the *nonverbal* design of the meditative event. From what we saw in Part Four, what is understood *in* meditation is often largely nonverbal: something is understood by the close encounter with the tendencies of nonvolitional concentration (i.e. prejudices) but in meditation this precisely does not require the detour of language and interpretation. This fact separates the non-Western (in origin) form of meditative practice from (for instance) Gadamer's *Lesen*. The peculiar form of open, resting and sonorous attention described in the context of meditation is largely noninterpretative. The meditator seeks precisely not to "understand" what spontaneously evolves in the mind but to repeat the (presumably) meaningless sound amidst the spontaneous activities – unrestrained and uninterested in their intentional "content". The free mental attitude sought in nondirective meditation is to *be* in the wordless domains of the mind. Section 11 described the process as a distinguished form of *epoché*. The activity of repeating the sound unrestrainedly generates a form of relaxation response that puts everyday intentionality out of play, in favor of rest and an open mode of attentional awareness potentially "beneath" the formation of words.

How can Gadamer's linguistic philosophy of interpretation be apt to describe such nonverbal processes? Does not Gadamer's vocabulary miss the mark from the outset when applied on nondirective meditation?

#### b. Beauty, Linguisticity and Mimesis

Expressed in the question is a legitimate defense of the meditative experience being potentially external to the historically conditioned orders of everyday language. But what is "outside of language" supposed to mean, philosophically? We pursue the question by conceiving the meditative experience in analogy to what the philosophical tradition, after Kant,<sup>1067</sup> conceives as *beauty*. Here, we need a short look into Kant's *Kritik der*

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<sup>1066</sup> Ibid. 402.

<sup>1067</sup> Gadamer's reading of Kant is pivotal in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Examining the *Geisteswissenschaftliche* tradition in the first sections of the book (pp. 9–40), Gadamer finds that this tradition is fundamentally guided by four governing concepts: *Bildung*, *sensus communis*, judgment and taste. While representing positive and valuable alternatives to the methodological ideals of *Naturwissenschaften*, Gadamer notes, the humanist concepts are also threatened by the same methodological ideals. Kant played here a key role. On the one hand, Kant gathered the *Bildung*, *sensus communis*, judgment and taste into a systematic and powerful articulation that liberated *die Schöne Künste* from conceptual reason. On the other hand, Kant's aesthetic also undermined the potential truth of art. Aesthetic judgment was made into a self-confession of the subject, at the cost of the being of the object. Gadamer's move to Kant serves a double purpose. A hermeneutical revision of Kant marks the fundamental departure from the post-Kantian aesthetics which, for Gadamer, enhanced the unhappy tendencies towards subjectivism and relativism of art experience in the *Geisteswissenschaften* (hence the title of the section: "Subjektivierung durch die Kantische Kritik"). For comment on the role of this section

*Urteilkraft* as well as Gadamer's hermeneutical application thereof, before returning to nondirective meditation for substantial analysis.

In the opening sections of *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, Kant distinguishes between two forms of beauty: *dependent beauty* [*pulchritudo adhaerens*] and *free or pure beauty* [*pulchritudo vaga*].<sup>1068</sup> Dependent beauty, for Kant, pertains to beautiful objects that sort under concepts given in advance. The object serves a purpose; if not directly, then by way that the purposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*] are giving to the senses. The object *relates* to the subject by serving an end in some form or another (§19). The existence of dependent beauty is not neutral for the subject (§ 2) but implies a conceptual *telos*; an interest in the perfection of the object is given in the way that the object emerges for the subject.<sup>1069</sup> Free beauty, by contrast, pertains to objects that refuse to be subsumed under the concept of purpose. No rule can capture the being of free beauty.<sup>1070</sup> Pure beauty is beauty in its independent and self-sufficient form<sup>1071</sup> – "frei und für sich".<sup>1072</sup> "Es ist kein Begriff von irgend einem Zwecke, wozu das Mannigfaltige dem gegebenen Objekte dienen, und was dieses also vorstellen sollte, vorausgesetzt",<sup>1073</sup> writes Kant. Due to the freedom of its emergence [*Erscheinung*], free beauty also relates freely to the subject. Instead of demanding to be subsumed under a concept, free beauty initiates a free play of the cognitive powers [*Erkenntniskräfte*]<sup>1074</sup> of the subject. The power of imagination [*Einbildungskraft*], understood as the spontaneous organization of plurality of impressions into unity of *Vorstellung*, and the general power of subsuming diversity under a unitary concept [*Vernunft*], are brought into harmony. This harmony is anything but static: in encountering beauty, the cognitive powers reciprocally brings each other into an opening and reviving play [*Spiel*]. "Die Erkenntniskräfte, die durch diese Vorstellung ins Spiel gesetzt werden, sind hierbei in einem freien Spielen, weil kein bestimmter Begriff sie auf eine besondere Erkenntnisregel einschränkt."<sup>1075</sup>

By itself, the free mental attitude of nondirective meditation is strikingly analogous to the disinterested interest described by Kant. Instead of engaging in the purposiveness of the sound or in the "content" of the spontaneous activities, the meditator repeats the sound with a disengaged attitude. He or she is open to the free play of the cognitive powers. No rule or concept given in advance hinders the imagination (spontaneous activities), and the spontaneous organization into concepts that otherwise

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within *Wahrheit und Methode*, see Dennis J. Schmidt, "Aesthetics and subjectivity; Subjektivierung durch die Kantische Kritik (GW1, 48-87)", in *Wahrheit und Methode; Klassiker Auslegung*, ed. Günter Figal (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011).

<sup>1068</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*. 146.

<sup>1069</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>1070</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>1071</sup> According to Gadamer, Kant's doctrine of *free* and *dependent* beauty is not intended to exhibit beauty proper but a methodological abstraction intended to secure the moral freedom of aesthetic judgment, by ensuring that aesthetic pleasure is not based on the judgment of the perfection of the object. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 52. We return to this point in Section 12 below.

<sup>1072</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*. 146.

<sup>1073</sup> Ibid. 147.

<sup>1074</sup> For a discussion of the "necognitivist" implications of *Spiel*, see J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art; Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Polity Press, 1992). Ch. 1, "Judgement without Knowledge."

<sup>1075</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*. 132.



determines everyday understanding is brought into an open modus (cf. "logic relaxation"<sup>1076</sup>). How, then, does language come into the picture?

Kant does not elaborate a philosophy of language in ways directly comparable to Gadamer. Evolving "vor allem Begriffe",<sup>1077</sup> aesthetic experience is for Kant precisely what liberates the human understanding from the subsuming force of conceptual reason. Gadamer's reading of Kant,<sup>1078</sup> in the next step, pulls Kant's harmony of the cognitive powers in the direction of linguisticality [*Sprachlichkeit*]. Gadamer relates to a moment of pivotal value in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* – the a priori transcendental principle of aesthetic judgment. Experience of beauty, for Kant, is fully subjective, but not therefore reducible to a mere private feature. Beauty exhibits moments intrinsic to *Erkenntnis überhaupt*, we read in § 9.<sup>1079</sup> The free play of the cognitive powers initiated by beauty is *exemplary*,<sup>1080</sup> it is "wie es zu einem *Erkenntnis überhaupt* erforderlich ist".<sup>1081</sup> Beauty displays in perception [*Wahrnehmung*] the intrinsic agreement between the subjective mind and the order of the moral and physical nature. It reveals a pre-conceptual and nontheoretical harmony existing between subject and object; a purposiveness not committed to this or that particular purpose as such, but purposiveness *überhaupt*. Beauty reveals "daß es Dinge gibt, an denen man eine zweckmäßige Form sieht, ohne an ihnen einen Zweck zu erkennen,"<sup>1082</sup> writes Kant. "Schönheit ist Form der Zweckmäßigkeit eines Gegenstandes, sofern sie, ohne Vorstellung eines Zwecks, an ihm wahrgenommen wird."<sup>1083</sup> The role of *reflective judgment* is to see this universal potential given in the singularity of emergence. Reflective judgment sees the possible concept [*mögliche Begriffe*] evolving in the nonconceptual experience, by conceiving (in Kant's definition) "[die] gegebenen Vorstellung entweder mit andern, oder mit seinem Erkenntnisvermögen, in Beziehung auf einen dadurch möglichen Begriff, zu vergleichen und zusammenhalten."<sup>1084</sup>

Kant's transcendental moment of aesthetic experience is revised by Gadamer into philosophical hermeneutics as the transcendental condition of *Sprache*.<sup>1085</sup> Where Kant's *Begriff* was left the role of schematizing experience, Gadamer incorporates the plasticity of Kant's reflective judgment into his wider, all-encompassing conception of language. "Gewiß erscheint die Sprache oft wenig fähig, das auszudrücken, was wir fühlen," writes Gadamer in a passage clearly echoing *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.

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<sup>1076</sup> Cardoso et al., "Meditation in health: an operational definition". 59.

<sup>1077</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 47. Cf. Gadamer, "Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit (1980)." 196.

<sup>1078</sup> The following reference to Gadamer's Kant will not go into details foreign to the main object of analysis (nondirective meditation). It will first and foremost be on Gadamer, "Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit (1980)." and Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974).", yet in a way that is in accordance with Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. Section 1.2. *Subjektivierung der Ästhetik durch die kantische Kritik*.

<sup>1079</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 132.

<sup>1080</sup> Ibid. 149.

<sup>1081</sup> Ibid. 132. Italics original.

<sup>1082</sup> Ibid. 155. Footnote \*.

<sup>1083</sup> Ibid. 155.

<sup>1084</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>1085</sup> Cf. Ståle Finke, "Bildets hermeneutikk; Gadamer og kunstverkets språk " *Ekfrase* 1 (2013). Cf. the *verbum interius* elaborated in Section 4a above.

Unsere Erkenntnismöglichkeiten scheinen [...] viel individueller als die Ausdrücklichkeit, die uns die Sprache bereitstellt. Angesichts der sozial motivierten Einebnungstendenz, mit der die Sprache das Verstehen in bestimmte Schematismen zwingt, die uns beengen, sucht sich unser Erkenntniswille diesen Schematisierungen und Vorgeiflichkeiten kritisch zu entziehen.<sup>1086</sup>

Gadamer's tone is ironic. For him, the will of knowledge [*Erkenntniswille*] and ability to anticipate new orders [*Vorgreiflichkeiten*] are precisely the accomplishment of *Sprache* – not in the conditioned, but in the conditioning sense. In other words, while not denying that one can have genuinely truthful experiences outside the schematizing orders of everyday language, Gadamer sees these experiences as not really "outside" language, but rather "inside" – in an even more potent sense. Genuine hermeneutical experience pushing the borders of "language" implies not a transcendence of language but a transformation *within* language. In this perspective, the apparent meditative experience of being outside language is thus a determinate token of linguistic *Vollzug*. "Je mehr die Sprache lebendiger *Vollzug* ist, desto weniger ist man sich ihrer bewußt."<sup>1087</sup>

In our context, the transition from Kant to Gadamer harbors two moments that are particularly important – both typical Gadamer's path of *Lesen*. First of all, Kant's play of the cognitive powers is linguistic, for Gadamer, because it implies an irreducible moment of *Sehen als...* By what we saw in Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung*-analysis,<sup>1088</sup> something is recognized in the play; something comes to presentation in and through the experience [*Vollzug*] – even if it is not something conceptual, or useful, or purposive, but only the pure autonomous regulation of movement.<sup>1089</sup> Even the singular and transitory event passes by *as something*<sup>1090</sup> – if not in the articulate cognitive sense, then in the sense of something "nonunderstood". A posteriori, the singular event have some form of identity. It can be referred back to in language as something that once happened. For Gadamer, both the singular event and the subsequent interpretation are *on the way to language* [*Auslegung*]. (This will soon be an important point in the hermeneutical description of meditation.)

Second, while pulling Kant's play of the cognitive powers towards *Sprache*, Gadamer also emphasizes a moral dimension implied in Kant's reflective judgment. Kant, according to Gadamer, heads towards a notion wherein beauty is an autonomous emergence yet also relevant for moral life.<sup>1091</sup> In *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer displays the point mainly with reference to Kant's doctrine of *ideal beauty*,<sup>1092</sup> expressed in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* § 17. In Kant's ideal beauty, the human form is presented in ways that secure both the autonomy of art and its relevance for moral life. As Gadamer reads Kant, the aim of art is not to be a presentation of the ideals of nature [*Darstellung der Naturideale*] but to be a self-encounter of the human qua natural and

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<sup>1086</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 405.

<sup>1087</sup> Gadamer, "Mensch und Sprache (1966)." 151.

<sup>1088</sup> Section 5c above.

<sup>1089</sup> Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 115.

<sup>1090</sup> *Ibid.* 116.

<sup>1091</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 52–54.

<sup>1092</sup> *Ibid.* 52. italics original. See also *ibid.* 53 and 55.

moral being.<sup>1093</sup> In *Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit* (1980), Gadamer expands on the moral value of beauty, on the basis of *Kritik der Urteilskraft* § 59. Gadamer takes an interest in how Kant here elaborates taste as a receptiveness [*Empfänglichkeit*] to a supernatural [*Übersinnliches*] dimension transcending the mere pleasure of the sense impressions [*Lust der Sinneseindrücke*]. Taste commits to the moral worth and value of others.<sup>1094</sup> Without too great a leap [*ohne einem zu gewaltsamen Sprung*] taste makes possible the transition from the charm of sense to habitual moral interest.<sup>1095</sup> The freedom of imagination presents itself for taste as purposive to understanding [*Vernunft*], and thus teaches a way of finding a free delight [*freies Wohlgefallen*] apart from any charm of the senses.<sup>1096</sup> In effect, beauty becomes here a symbol of morality [*Symbol des Sittlich-Guten*]. It reveals that a freedom is *possible* – on account of both inner and external possibilities.<sup>1097</sup> Gadamer takes Kant's figure to the heart of the hermeneutical concept of *Text*. The provocative role of the *Text* is to let this possibility occur in its own right. The genuine *Text* does not *please* as such, writes Gadamer in a comment on Kant's supernatural freedom. "Es gefällt nicht bloß, es übt geradezu eine Nötigung aus, ihm zu verweilen, es wie eine Zumutung 'uns gefallen zu lassen'."<sup>1098</sup> The given situation of the *Text* harbors an intrinsic transgression towards the possible – in ways always implying a relation to a moral community.

The hermeneutical *Sehen als...*, and the moral dimension included here, will now be guiding figures as we return to nondirective meditation for more substantial analysis. In meditation, we will see, a language evolves which is not "language"; a schematizing which is not a "schematization" but rather an opening re-schematization of experience. Though wordless, the meditative event is productive of new understanding. This figure is preserved in philosophical hermeneutics. In nondirective meditation a spontaneous re-organization of thoughts evolves, letting what Gadamer called "Erkenntniswille und Vorgreiflichkeiten" form into an autonomous – yet morally relevant – *Gebilde* of understanding. In Gadamer-Kantian terms, the disinterested interest taken towards one's inner psychological situation is a minimal but nevertheless paradigmatic expression of moral life.

Let us proceed into the matter by having a closer look at the example of meditation sounds cited above. What we see here is that an indication of linguisticity within nondirective meditation has been implied all the way. From the perspective introduced above, *ah-nam*, *rah-mah* and *shi-rim* are all strikingly linguistic sounds. Perhaps more correctly, these sounds are strikingly *linguistic-like* sounds by nature and organization. Initially, the point is as simple as it will soon turn out to be philosophically intriguing. Whereas the meditation sounds can hardly be called onomatopoeic imitations of, for example,<sup>1099</sup> thunder, blowing winds, hailstones, cartwheels and rollers, trumpets, flutes or pipes, the barking of dogs and bleating of sheep,

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<sup>1093</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>1094</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 297, cf. Gadamer, "Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit (1980)." 201.

<sup>1095</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 298.

<sup>1096</sup> Ibid. 298–299.

<sup>1097</sup> Ibid. 297.

<sup>1098</sup> Gadamer, "Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit (1980)." 200.

<sup>1099</sup> For double reasons we use here the examples from Plato, *Republic (I-V)*, 397. Cf. Section 2b above. In Section 13b, we will return to Plato's conception of text in the context of *Inneres Hören* and nondirective meditation.

it seems natural to say that the sounds are *word-like* sounds that nevertheless are not words, but sounds. If the meanings traditionally associated with these sounds are set aside or not dwelt upon for their own sake, then *ah-nam*, *rah-mah* and *shi-rim* are simply two-syllable linguistic-like combinations of vowels and consonants – *and that's it*. (The oral and nonpublic practice of teaching meditation sounds can potentially increase this aspect of being "just" sounds.)

The sounds exemplified here are typical of meditative practice. Other meditation sounds can be shorter and based on other sound combinations, such as the well-known mantra *om* or *aum*,<sup>1100</sup> or they can be longer and consist of more syllables and/or other linguistic sounds and rhythms by combining other diphthongs, vowels, and consonants.

From the Gadamerian viewpoint, that the meditation sounds evolve in the medium in which understanding accomplishes itself<sup>1101</sup> is a fact whose importance can hardly be overestimated. With Gadamer, we can say that the sounds are minimal *Texts*, or minimized *Sinn-Gebilde*. For although the sounds qua sounds should lack any meaning in the conventional sense, the sounds nevertheless are articulated to a standard. They are organized sounds. The sounds are apparently not mere accidental sounds randomly put together, but ordered linguistic-like sound-units with a certain musical formation (hence *Gebilde*). Paying attention to the example sounds we hear this: *ah-nam*, *ra-mah* and *shi-rim* are sounds *in rhythms*. To illustrate, whereas the first two have the rhythm of short-long, the latter is more of a long-short rhythm. Moreover, the vowels have in themselves certain sonorous qualities. The *ah* and the *ee* [in the *shi-rim*] have *sound colors* (as it were).

Observing with Gadamer (and Kant), that the meditation sounds are linguistic-like is not to call upon a necessary one-to-one relationship between the sounds and empirical language. It is not due to any strict correlation between the rhythmic organization of the vowels, and empirical words akin to these, that the sounds can be called *Text*. On the contrary, it is of crucial importance that the sounds *resemble* language while nevertheless not being empirical language. To the degree that the sounds deserve the description *Sinn-Gebilde* in the more potent sense of *Text* forcing understanding to occur, the sounds are more than just sounds presumptively void of semantic meaning. The sounds resemble language more in a universal than a particular sense. Something of a musicality or phrasing intrinsic to linguisticity, in general, is coming to articulation in the organized sounds. Or, in Gadamer-Kantian terms, something of the *Erkenntnis überhaupt* is expressed in the sounds. Something of the *Erkenntnis überhaupt* comes to the fore when the sounds are repeated according to their own immanent standard of practice, that is, with a free mental attitude.

With its traditional meaning of *song*, a certain musicality of language is apparently recognized in the *shi-rim*. If less apparent, the traditional meanings of the other sounds also bear witness to a certain musicality of being. *Ah-nam* means "nameless" or "without name", we recall, and *ra-mah* relates traditionally to the Hindu deity associated with integrity and passion. From a hermeneutical perspective, the meanings of the sounds have evolved traditionally not as a result of any divine creation of the sounds, but as a result of human

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<sup>1100</sup> Cf. Beck, *Sonic Theology - Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. 7.

<sup>1101</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 392.

awareness of nuances evolving in the human situation. So considered, the fact that *ra-mah* is recognized as a potent sound of integrity and passion is not because the deity Rama created the sound; it is more the other way around. The deity is associated with the sound because the sound has the sonorous qualities it has. Such a quality of linguistic detachment of denotative correlations – a sensitivity for something beyond naming – is also apparently recognized in the *ah-nam*.

Now, according to Gadamer, what tradition (generally) draws out and galvanizes through the accumulation of practice are eidetic moments of phenomena. In our case, we can say that something essential for human life is *heard* in the sounds together with the gathering of practices preserving this essential. Although the cultural practice of meditation sounds is new for Gadamerian philosophy, the underlying philosophical point is the classical hermeneutical concept of mimesis.<sup>1102</sup> *Something* becomes present in the sound in the potent form of recognition [*Wiedererkennung*], however fragmentary or rudimentary. For Gadamer, *Sprache* – in general – has this quality; it always presents something more than itself, it lets something more than itself come into the present.<sup>1103</sup> "Das Dargestellte ist Da – das ist das mimetische Urverhältnis,"<sup>1104</sup> we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Gadamer develops this point under the heading of *Spiel* in the form of dance and art experience, yet the relevance is universal by ultimately preparing for the mimetic nature of language. "Wer etwas nachamt, läßt das da sein, was er kennt und *wie* er es kennt."<sup>1105</sup> We note Gadamer's words, in the *how* [*wie*] of presentation evolves the re-cognition of the essential.

From the Gadamerian perspective, hence, something of the *more* of understanding shines in the organizing of the sounds. Something of the general *how* [*Wie*]<sup>1106</sup> of linguistic life can be recognized. Despite the minimal character – or, as we are about to see – *due* to its minimal character of being a linguistic-like sound, all the more are traits of linguistic life provoked and made relevant for the subject meditating on the sounds. Resembling language, the sound brings to the fore attitudes and investments of order belonging to linguistic life<sup>1107</sup> while nevertheless evading being categorized too strongly into this or that *meaning*. To borrow Gadamer's (Kantian) words cited above: the sounds bring to the fore determined schemata [*Bestimmte Schematismen*]<sup>1108</sup> of everyday language, without themselves being these determined schemata in a direct sense. *What* the sounds resemble is left in *Schwebe*, as Gadamer would say; it just resembles an indeterminate *something* evolving in the course of life. Or, to phrase it with the Kantian impact evolving in the background, it is *as if* the sounds stood in a correlation to purposiveness in human life – "ohne Vorstellung eines Zwecks, an ihm wahrgenommen wird."<sup>1109</sup> What it resembles is left open to the understanding of the

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<sup>1102</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 118 ff. We return to the point below.

<sup>1103</sup> We touch here a complex feature in Gadamer's philosophy: *Sprache der Dinge*.

<sup>1104</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 118.

<sup>1105</sup> *Ibid.* Italics added.

<sup>1106</sup> We recall the role played by the categorial *Wie* in Gadamer's philosophy. Cf. Subsection 5c above.

<sup>1107</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 244.

<sup>1108</sup> *Ibid.* 405.

<sup>1109</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 155.

individual. In this specific sense, we will see below, meditating on the sounds is a form of *Auslegung*, although the sounds do not have *meaning* in the sense traditionally associated with hermeneutical tasks.

Now, Gadamer does not write about "spontaneous activity" or "mind-wandering" in the empirical senses discussed above (Part Four), and we must not naïvely import any empirical results into philosophical hermeneutics. Safe to say, however, is that the Gadamerian description of nondirective meditation is in accordance with the empirical observations.<sup>1110</sup> From what has been set out above, the spontaneous activities of consciousness are relational. However trivial they may appear from the first-person perspective, coming to expression in the spontaneous activities are issues not only of more or less vital importance for the subject, but also issues of how life is lived in relationships to oneself and others are expressed. Brooding and worrying about the future,<sup>1111</sup> autobiographical planning,<sup>1112</sup> and incubating creative thinking in problem solving,<sup>1113</sup> for example, is to be in relation towards something other than oneself in ways implying the being of other people.

Following Gadamer, what is described here are expressions of *Sprache*. *Sprache* is an expression of relational life. The empirical observation that mind wandering increases during nondirective meditation<sup>1114</sup> fits into the philosophical schema. Inducing the linguistic-like sound is to provoke the *in between of I-me, I-you, or I-world*. It is to move into one's innermost *how* [*Wie*] of lived relationships; i.e. into the dimension of how life evolves in the friction between being a singular subject and a moral being. Mirrored in the minimized linguistic self-encounter is one's general openness to take in *how things are*. The openness of free mental attitude is at each moment a concretized version of the self-distance always already evolving in moral life. The general *Können* of a *Welt-haben* and *Sprache-haben* are mirrored in the inner situation. Simultaneously, the free mental attitude sought for in meditation draws on the resources of the same *Können*. To meditate in and with the spontaneous activities is to encounter not only one's limitations and borders of understanding but also the positive resources of relational life.

### c. Knowledge and Question. Provocation in Silence and Indecisive Sound

Following Gadamer and Kant, we have now established the linguistic dimension of linguistic nondirective meditation. The apparent and important nonverbal design of the meditative practice is preserved in a wider and plastic conception of language (*Sprache*). From earlier, we recall that Gadamer's path of *Lesen* expresses

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<sup>1110</sup> Cf. Section 10 above.

<sup>1111</sup> Sood and Jones, "On Mind Wandering, Attention, Brain Networks, and Meditation". 136.

<sup>1112</sup> Baird, Smallwood, and Schooler, "Back to the future: Autobiographical planning and functionality of mind-wandering". 1604.

<sup>1113</sup> Mooneyham and Schooler, "The Costs and Benefits of Mind-Wandering: A Review". 14–15; Baird, Smallwood, and Schooler, "Back to the future: Autobiographical planning and functionality of mind-wandering".

<sup>1114</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 8.

an emphasis on cultural practice and accumulation of knowledge. (We associated the emphasis with Plato's *meletē* in Section 4b.) Moreover, we insinuated that nondirective meditation implies a form of knowledge formation. Meditative knowledge is a type of knowledge apparently not associable with eidetic security of control, yet, it still appears to imply the accumulation of a genuine type of human knowledge. How are we to understand these aspects of knowledge within the current philosophical framework of Gadamer?

First of all, from the perspective of Gadamer (and Kant), it is almost self-evident that the meditation sounds in question are man-made – not "just" perception. The accumulation of tradition and cultural practices is implied with the occurrence of the sounds. Saying, with Gadamer, that the sounds are articulate *Sinn-Gebilde* amounts to saying that sounds are concrete manifestations of accumulated human experience and articulate human knowledge. Their sonorous organizations are aimed *for* the purpose they serve; i.e. the practical usage in nondirective meditation. The empirically observed fact that meditation sounds have provocative and relaxing effects on mind and body is tied to the fact that they are mimetic to *human* language. To be soothing and provocative in the ways we have indicated, the sounds cannot be just found in nature, for instance, in the form of a beautiful bird song or (if less beautiful) the bleating of sheep.<sup>1115</sup> From the Gadamerian perspective, the idea that meditation sounds could just be found in nature is almost as impossible, in principle, as saying that the sounds could be generated randomly by a computer.<sup>1116</sup> To work on the human situation, the sounds must strike something genuinely human in the human ear. Only a sound made *as if* it was made by a human ear and *meant for* the human ear can speak *in* the human ear in the way that these sounds are acclaimed to do. The sounds and the meditative practice surrounding them enable the human to encounter itself both in nature and in the human, historical world.<sup>1117</sup>

From the Gadamerian perspective, this means that the sounds are articulate to a certain standard – they articulate a knowledge pertaining to what opens the linguistic mind in its questionableness. What we, above, spoke of in terms of beauty is, for Gadamer, in the incomprehensible and enigmatic nature of the question – i.e. the hermeneutical phenomenon. The sounds furnish for a questioning attitude within language. *Sprache* folds back on itself and reveals the horizon of the nonunderstood.

Reflected in these hermeneutical perspectives of Gadamer are the philosophical tradition discussed earlier – particularly the impact of Augustine and Plato. We recall how the enigmatic character of the Augustinian Word, for Gadamer, harbors a question that potentially goes to the core of what it is to be a human. In the insolvable enigma of the Word evolves the possibility of an expanded openness towards human facticity.<sup>1118</sup> Gadamer's Platonic text concept expresses an analogous questionableness. The

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<sup>1115</sup> In ways analogous to how one "finds" the bigger moon in the horizon and is taken by its size and color. Cf. *Phenomenology of Perception*.

<sup>1116</sup> The point could also have been made in analogy to the relationship between the beauty of art and the beauty of nature. Cf. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 194; Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 57.

<sup>1117</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 55.

<sup>1118</sup> Cf. Section 4a

otherness of the written word is the potential otherness of a human understanding that transgresses the concrete situation.<sup>1119</sup>

However, if these philosophical points are to be relevant for nondirective meditation, we must be able to draw them down to concrete experience. The philosophical perspectives must be relevant to recognizable and transparent experience, otherwise they are just empty words. Against this background, we ask the banal question: what is "questionableness" supposed to mean from the viewpoint of a meditating subject?

To answer the question, we must again take a look on the three example sounds, *ah-nam*, *ra-mah*, and *shi-rim*. If we try to hear the sounds in their proper medium – in the imagined voice of the inner ear – we soon note significant differences between the sounds. For instance, *ah-nam* and *ra-mah* are in many respects similar sounds, characterized as they are by the same vocal *a*. Listening carefully to the imagined sounds, however, we also note how the task of thinking the sound starting with an *r* is distinct from the task of thinking the sound starting with an *a*. *Thinking* the sound of *r* requires something slightly other of the inner ear than thinking the sound *a*. Analogous differences emerge elsewhere. Initiating the sound *shi* in thought is distinct from inducing the other sounds, both because the vowel *i* is different from the vowels *a*, *o* and *u*, and because inducing the sound *sh* by itself is something other than, for instance, inducing *r*. In other words, the vowels and consonants evolve differently in imagination. Their melodic and rhythmic potentials are different. What the sounds demand of imagination are different too.

These observations do not presuppose the act of meditation. It is enough to close the eyes and induce the sounds in thought, in order to test the observations empirically. However, as we know, nondirective meditation is not everyday consciousness; it involves the modification known as relaxation response. Repeating the sounds with a free mental attitude prompts the mind and body to relax. The amount of time spent on the current activity is important here. There are important differences between repeating the sounds unrestrainedly, say, two minutes, thirty minutes, or three hours. The longer the meditations, the more relaxed the mind and body becomes.<sup>1120</sup>

Taking these factors into consideration, let us assume that the example sounds are induced not only once or twice in the mind of a hearer, but repeated with a free mental attitude over some period of time – which is to say, in meditation. As with any phenomenological event, how the sounds are experienced in actual experience will involve individual differences. However, it seems safe to say, on a general basis, that the sounds being imagined with a free mental attitude, periodically or momentarily, will deviate from their benchmark standards. Their sonorous character will alter. More precisely, the sounds *can*, of course, occasionally evolve as clear and decisive if repeated with a free mental attitude – yet, it is very probable that they, at other times, will be largely unclear and indecisive. Syllables become vague or are missed altogether.

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<sup>1119</sup> Cf. Section 4c.

<sup>1120</sup> Holen and Eifring, *Acem Meditation; An Introductory Companion*. 31–33.



In our example, typical alterations would be that *ra-mah* becomes altered into *ah-ma*, or that the sound *shi-rim* alters into *i-rim* or *shi-im*. The sounds may still be heard, but in ambiguous, unclear and indecisive ways. These alterations are typical and natural consequence of the free mental attitude. Being close to the spontaneous activities is being close to spontaneous forces in consciousness easily affecting the voluntary repetition. Feelings and moods evoked by the sonorous activity will, almost by necessity, alter the quality of the sound. Although the meditator easily can counteract the occurrence of these alterations by smaller or greater efforts of volitional concentration, free mental attitude means refraining from doing so. Rather than directing the sound, the mediator presumptively just lets the sound be as it is.

What we say here is relevant to the provocative aspect discussed in Section 11. The alterations are, typically, difficult to tolerate in the relaxed context of meditation. The sound becomes something "other" within the field of attention – it is "deviation", not how it "should be". The incapability of inducing the sounds *r* or *sh*, for instance, can typically grow into issues. The relaxed, meditative consciousness is a vulnerable consciousness. As a result of the sonorous activity, the physiological guards are down, so to speak. Consciousness is easily triggered into contact with difficult emotions and unresolved conflicts within the psychology of the person.<sup>1121</sup>

From a Gadamerian perspective, the provocative aspect of the sounds makes sense, although his explanation is not psychological. When Gadamer writes that *Text* applies to everything "wo mit einer primären Sinnvermutung an eine Gegebenheit herangetreten wird, die sich nicht widerstandslos in einer Sinnerwartung einfügt", emphasis can be put on the *prime* [*primären*] *Sinn* assumption [*Sinnvermutung*] and expectation [*Sinnerwartung*]. To be a human is to need, and to expect, order and stability – it is to form a world which is in accordance with the expectations of how the world is supposed to be.

Against this background, the sonorous task accomplishes, almost by itself, Gadamer's description of *Text*. Taking up the task of repeating the sound with a free mental attitude is to put oneself deliberately in a situation that deviates from the vital need for order and stability. Understanding is textualized from within. With the mimetic character, the meditation sound resembles language enough to evoke expectations of order and stability intimate to everyday social and perceptual life. It triggers the way in which order is normally created in the life of the subject. At the same time, the evoked expectations and needs are left dissatisfied, as it were. Whatever form they may have, expectations and needs are encountered "only" as spontaneous activity. They are left hanging in an indecisive openness – in a *Schwebe*, as Gadamer would say.<sup>1122</sup> The sonorous *epoché* carries the expectations and needs out only indirectly – by letting them be present together with the sound.

We know that the provocative aspect of genuine *Texts*, for Gadamer, is a positive and fruitful dimension of human life. Challenging hermeneutical tasks force the hermeneutical subject to scrutinize its

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<sup>1121</sup> Section 10.

<sup>1122</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 369.

own understanding for a more determinate understanding of *how* one handles a challenge.<sup>1123</sup> The *Text* necessitates a more articulate contact with the intrinsic resources of understanding. Rather than just living in the formations of *Sprache*, as it were, the hermeneutical subject is forced to concretize the possibilities and impossibilities. Gadamer even spoke in favor of an affirmative approach to pain and sickness.<sup>1124</sup> Rather than conceiving these troublesome aspects of life as mere problems, Gadamer spoke in favor of conceiving them as a chance to understand oneself anew. "[D]er Schmerz [ist] eine große Chance," we read, "vielleicht die größte Chance, endlich mit dem 'fertig zu werden', was uns aufgegeben ist."<sup>1125</sup>

From the Gadamerian perspective, the mere idea that a meditator stays within the potentially difficult emotions, by just keeping on with sonorous activity, regardless of the sound quality, is a form of existential honesty. Gadamer's perspective suggests no recourse to ideals of absolute "acceptance". The honest *attempt* to include the spontaneous activities with an open attitude is what counts. By refraining from order and stability in meditation, and by tentatively seeking a free mental attitude within emotions that are difficult to accept, the meditator tries to deal with facticity as it is. For Gadamer, this is the key to what he consistently advocates as the prime dimension of understanding: the moment of *understanding differently*.<sup>1126</sup>

Gadamer's concept of the question is now directly relevant to nondirective meditation. To say, with Gadamer, that the sound leaves understanding in an indecisive openness – a sonorous *epoché*, as we have called it – is to say that the sound breaches open a question in understanding.<sup>1127</sup> In Gadamer's conception, a genuine question is a concretized question – a question that has a certain direction, by being both limited and opening at the same time. "Im Wesen der Frage liegt, daß sie einen Sinn hat," we read in *Wahrheit und Methode*. "Der Sinn der Frage ist mithin die Richtung, in der die Antwort allein erfolgen kann, wenn sie sinnvolle, sinngemäße Antwort sein will."<sup>1128</sup> Here, direction implies no determinism analogous to causal order. The question is open. However, it also implies no absolute openness: the question has a direction. "[D]ie Offenheit der Frage ist keine uferlose," we read:

Sie schließt vielmehr die bestimmte Umgrenzung durch den Fragenhorizont ein. Eine Frage, die desselben ermangelt, geht ins Leere. Sie wird erst zu einer Frage, wenn die fließende Unbestimmtheit der Richtung, in die sie weist, ins Bestimmte eines 'So oder So' gestellt wird.<sup>1129</sup>

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<sup>1123</sup> Cf. Section 3c.

<sup>1124</sup> Section 3b.

<sup>1125</sup> Gadamer, *Schmerz*. 27.

<sup>1126</sup> Cf. "Es genügt zu sagen, daß man *anders* versteht, *wenn man überhaupt versteht*." Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 302. Italics original. See also Subsection 4c above.

<sup>1127</sup> Just to avoid misunderstandings: A question in the hermeneutical need not be *verbalized* as such: The *Anstoß* is itself the question.

<sup>1128</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 368.

<sup>1129</sup> *Ibid.* 369.

In order for something to be opened, something must be *said* in a way that both opens and narrows the possibilities, by concretizing possibilities and limitations. "Fragestellung setzt Offenheit voraus, aber zugleich eine Begrenzung."<sup>1130</sup> The restriction of a question indicates why there is a close correlation between *Text* and question: a *Text* articulates a task – it narrows down the possibilities of the moment by claiming that the reader takes a stand in some form or another. If such a limitation is lacking altogether, no question would be raised. Instead it would only be inarticulate pseudo-questions, leading nowhere in regard to the expansion of knowledge.

Gadamer's approach brings attention to a profound aspect of the meditative process. From the Gadamerian perspective, the sonorous quality of meditation is concretized question within understanding. The sounds concretize understanding into a *So oder So* of inclusion or exclusion. How one relates to unclear sounds and how one relate to one's own spontaneous activities comes down to a concrete question of execution: what does "free mental attitude" mean in *this* situation? What, in practice, does it mean to hear *i-rim* (instead of *shi-rim*) with an open mental attitude that includes everything that expresses itself spontaneously in the mind?

To use Gadamer's words, the sonorous openness of meditation is not an *uferlose Offenheit* but an openness within the framework of a delineated task. The task of repeating the sound is a concrete playroom [*Spielraum*] for understanding.<sup>1131</sup> Though not steering understanding in specific directions given in advance, the mere task of taking up the sound with a free mental attitude whenever one has a choice to do so gives a certain direction to the situation. The meditator does not float around passively in the spontaneous activities, so to speak, but takes a stand whenever this is an option, by choosing to listen to the sound, whether clear or unclear.

Furthermore, in line with what we set out in the preceding section, the minute provocation of the sound has a general relevance. Following Gadamer and Kant, something is mirrored in the inner situation that transgresses the singular moment. The inner sonorous experience mirrors aspects pertaining to life in general. Consequently, for Gadamer, the questioning attitude towards the meditation sound is a questioning attitude towards life. To paraphrase what was suggested in the previous section: one's general *Können* of a *Welt-haben* and *Sprache-haben* are not only mirrored in the inner situation, they are also brought into the openness of a question.

In the introduction to this section, we asked for the relevance of the classical hermeneutical concepts of *Auslegung* and *Sache* for the context of nondirective meditation. Now we see better the positive ground for applying these concepts to the meditative process.<sup>1132</sup> Although listening to sounds like *ah-nam, rah-mah*

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<sup>1130</sup> Ibid. 369.

<sup>1131</sup> Cf. Gadamer's Kant-reading: "[Die] produktive Bilden der Einbildungskraft ist am reichsten nicht dort, wo sie schlichthin frei ist [...] sondern wo sie in einem Spielraum lebt[.]" ibid. 52.

<sup>1132</sup> In general, we can note that Gadamer's *Auslegung* implies not that each and every syllable in the evolving *Sache* is to be verbalized. In the *Vollzug* sense of *Lesen*, rather, *Auslegung* is to expose the *Text* by revealing the potent question of evolving between the text and reader.

or *shi-rim* in meditation certainly is not *Auslegung*, in the classical hermeneutical sense of reading texts, the general and mimetic feature is open to an indirect process of interpretation. The eventual difficulties evolving around the sounds can be translated into general questions of self-understanding. *With* or *around* the sounds a self-understanding comes to expression. What does it imply for *me* to encounter challenges of such-and-such unspecified nature? What does it imply for *me* to take up the existential challenge of living a life of decent moral order, of inclusion and exclusion? Taking seriously the mimetic aspect of the sounds is, thus, to allow the communication attempt in meditation to become relevant for the limitations and possibilities in life.

The Gadamerian perspective is in accordance with what we said in Section 11. The restlessness, boredom or difficult emotions typically expressing themselves in meditation can certainly be tokens of larger or underlying complexes of nonunderstood issues in life. In Gadamer's parlance, evolving in the apparently humdrum spontaneous activities are *Sachen* that are not yet understood. "Es sind Sachverhalte, die zur Sprache kommen,"<sup>1133</sup> Gadamer would say. If only nonverbally, something expresses itself in the spontaneous activities. The meditation sound provokes to the fore *Sachen*, invested with various forms of self-understanding.

However, the Gadamerian account of *Sachlichkeit* and *Vollzug* also emphasizes a certain teleology not expressed in the empirical context of nondirective meditation. With him, the nonverbal and nonunderstood strive to be accomplished as understood – they strive to be accomplished in the shared medium of language.<sup>1134</sup>

Following Gadamer, we can think of the meditative *Zur-Sprache-kommen* as a three-fold process of dialectical and interpretative nature. Somewhat schematically put, we can say that the nonunderstood tendencies of nonvolitional concentrations are, at first, merely lived without being understood at all. Then, through the course of practice, the *Sachen* might become more and more explicitly relevant in the inducing of the sound. A potential perspective of self-reflection or self-question emerges, not necessarily in the specific cognitive sense but in the sense of a gradual transformative self-distance. Rather than being fully submerged in the spontaneous activities, the meditator gradually develops a questioning relationship regarding their impact. This questioning attitude, in the last step, can be expanded into more articulate self-relationships. If not in meditation (given the distinguished nonverbal design of the practice) then afterward, the possibility of interpreting what the inner situation expresses is opened. The inner *Zur-Sprache-kommen* of meditation can be prolonged in the outer life, so to speak. Either this is done explicitly, in the form of guidance sessions on meditation, or merely by living the experiences that one had in meditation. From Gadamer's perspective, this is a form of *Auslegung* – a *self-Auslegung*.

The latter point can be strengthened. From the Gadamerian perspective, it is apparent that, whatever goes on in meditation, the detour through the gaze of another is at some point *needed*. The inner must, in some form or another, be extended into the outer, – the *self-Auslegung* of meditation must become relevant

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<sup>1133</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 449.

<sup>1134</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 118.

to the concrete *Auslegung* of practical life. From Gadamer's perspective, the communal dimension of understanding is not an accidental supplement to the meditative process but, rather, that which accomplishes it.<sup>1135</sup> The self-distance, potentially starting in meditation, must be brought into communal life to be fulfilled. Bringing the inner self-distance into contact with communal life will potentially strengthen the transformative and emancipative nature of understanding.

We can now conclude the current section by returning to the question of knowledge. In the Gadamerian perspective, what is attained in a process like nondirective meditation is the accumulation of knowledge. This is a form of knowledge not of security and control but of questioning. Though universally accessible, in one sense, the knowledge of questioning cannot be ordered, and it does not come by itself, Gadamer would say. "Um fragen zu können, muß man wissen wollen, d.h. aber: wissen, daß man nicht weiß."<sup>1136</sup> Gadamer's point is openly Socratic: to *know*, one must begin by learning to give up security and control and, thus, learn to embrace the potentially distressing dimension of the unknown. From what we have seen, nondirective meditation can be called a method for furnishing such questioning knowledge to occur. Learning to give up control in meditation is learning to know anew what one thought one already knew. Herein evolves also moral dimension. From Gadamer's perspective, the questioning attitude is a relational attitude. It brings the subject out of the solipsist order of self-evident and unquestioned truths and opens up new perspectives on oneself and others. However, the questioning attitude is also an attitude of freedom. Rather than merely overtaking orders established earlier in life or by others, the questioning attitude scrutinizes the world anew.

### 13. Modifications of Inner Hearing

In the previous section, we applied Gadamer's concepts of *Vollzug*, *Text*, and *Sprache* to nondirective meditation. Thus, we indicated how the meditative practice, from Gadamer's perspective, evolves a process of expanded self-understanding – a dynamic and ongoing process of *Selbst-Auslegung*. In the current section, we will initially set aside the meditative practice and turn towards Gadamer's essays on *Inneres Hören*. We already know that *Inneres Hören* is introduced after *Wahrheit und Methode* and that it comes to designate an intensified hermeneutical experience. What are the details in Gadamer's orientation towards inner hearing?

Having studied Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* in Subsection 13a, we will seek to draw out some distinctions between nondirective meditation and *Inneres Hören*. In Subsection 13b, we will evoke some of the points made in the reading of Plato in Part One. Indicatively, this move will also situate nondirective

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<sup>1135</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 401.

<sup>1136</sup> *Ibid.* 369.

meditation in Plato's writings. More importantly, we can then differentiate between nondirective meditation and *Inneres Hören* from within Gadamer's perspective, and thus avoid a superficial comparison between the two modifications of inner hearing.

The goal of the current section is twofold. On the one hand, comparing nondirective meditation and Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* is, obviously, a way of gaining an expanded understanding of what sonorous and silent way of hearing generally can imply. It surely is intriguing that two largely distinct traditions – the Asian, nonscriptural tradition of mantra meditation, and the scriptural tradition from within which Gadamer writes – have fostered a strikingly similar interest in the inner modification of hearing. Perhaps the modification of hearing is a way of gaining contact with something genuinely and universally human? On the other hand, introducing Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* is also a way of preparing for the other track in our philosophical investigations – the track where we pursue the questions raised by the task of describing nondirective meditation in philosophical terms. We have insinuated that *Inneres Hören* exemplifies an increased interest, on Gadamer's part, in the sonorous dimension of hermeneutical experience. We have called the interest a perceptual turn in Gadamer's works. Indirectly looking into the details of *Inneres Hören* is preparing the grounds for a fuller explication of what the proclaimed turn is supposed to mean.

a. *Lesen*: "....nicht ein bloßer Durchgang zum Sinn"

We approach the *Inneres Hören* via Gadamer's concept of the *eminent text*. Just as the *Inneres Hören*, this concept is introduced by Gadamer after *Wahrheit und Methode*. *Inneres Hören* and eminent text appears as conceptual correlates, analogous to the more renowned pair of concepts *Text* and interpretation.<sup>1137</sup> Eminent text is used to classify literary texts in general and – as soon will be our main interest – poetic texts in particular. Literary texts are for Gadamer eminent due to their distinguished and almost condensed form of being *Texts*. In extension of what we have seen from *Wahrheit und Methode*, literary texts paradigmatically exemplify, almost by themselves,<sup>1138</sup> what a hermeneutical *Text* can be in its fruitful and potential otherness [*Potentialität des Andersseins*<sup>1139</sup>]. Literary texts, for Gadamer, are texts that do not withdraw qua texts as soon as their meaning information is extracted. "[D]a gibt es *Literatur*," he writes: "Texte, die nicht verschwinden, sondern allem Verstehen gegenüber mit normativen Anspruch dastehen und allem neuen Sprechenlassen des Textes bevorstehen."<sup>1140</sup>

We recognize the figure from the hermeneutical analysis of the meditation sounds (Section 12). The *Anstoß* of the literary text is for Gadamer not a retrospective feature, but a prospective event. The text does not refer back to a statement once expressed, but forwards to new contexts of speech and

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<sup>1137</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 340.

<sup>1138</sup> Ibid. 351.

<sup>1139</sup> Ibid. 336.

<sup>1140</sup> Ibid. 351. Italics original.

understanding.<sup>1141</sup> One can never read a literary text once and for all; the eminent text claims to be read ever anew. It is properly speaking only in the repetitive return to the text. The eminent text is *im Vollzug*: "Sie sind immer erst im Zurückkommen auf sie eigentlich da."<sup>1142</sup>

The moment of return [*Zurückkommen*] is what gains the character of meditative reading when poetic texts are considered. Though Gadamer makes no strict delineations between poetic texts and literary texts in general there is little doubt that the poetic text represents an enhanced orientation towards the nonreducible character of textual nonwithdrawal.<sup>1143</sup> Reading poems, in silence, and over and over again, is described by Gadamer as a way of slow and patient dwelling, a progressive digging into nuances of the text. "Man kommt immer tiefer hinein,"<sup>1144</sup> he writes. The reading goes "immer wieder". Fragments shape into more lasting orders of understanding as the reader begins anew again and again. Ever new *Sinnbezüge* are allowed to emerge in the text; not in the form of a secure and stable notion of something being understood once and for all but, contrariwise, in the gradual enriched understanding of the *Sache* emerging in the text.<sup>1145</sup>

Gadamer's interest in silent and meditative reading harbors a certain polemic. "Das ist in Wahrheit eine mehr und mehr verschwindende Kunst", he regrets, "bei etwas zu verweilen, statt durch Texte durchzueilen und die Informationen abzuernten, die in ihnen gespeichert sind."<sup>1146</sup> Reading slowly, and in silence, is the path to profound depth of human expressivity; the way to gain contact with a dimension independent of the modern focus on productivity and quick solutions.

In the meditative reading evolves also the heralded qualitative new moment in Gadamer's writings: Gadamer's increased interest in the perceptual aspects of hermeneutical experience. In ways only implicitly present in *Wahrheit und Methode*, the eminent text now involves a phenomenal and resonant dimension of *Sinn*. With the eminent text, *Sinn* is nearly always thematized with the conjunction *und*: *Sinn und Klang*. The poetic text crystallizes this feature – the irreducible sonorous dimension of the poem is essential for its status as poetry.<sup>1147</sup> Poetic text, according to Gadamer's new emphasis, is "nicht ein bloßer Durchgang zum Sinn".<sup>1148</sup> A poetic text is "ein Text, der in sich selbst durch Sinn und Klang zusammenhält und zur Einheit eines unauflöselichen Ganzen schließt."<sup>1149</sup> The poetic text is a continuous sonorous harmony

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<sup>1141</sup> Ibid. 352. Italics added.

<sup>1142</sup> Ibid. 351.

<sup>1143</sup> Gadamer discusses the qualitative *Sprung* when a text gains shape of *Dichtung* in the more specific sense of poetic text, for instance, in Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 248 ff.

<sup>1144</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 358.

<sup>1145</sup> Ibid. Italics added.

<sup>1146</sup> Gadamer, "Hören - Sehen - Lesen (1984)." 271.

<sup>1147</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 248 ff.

<sup>1148</sup> Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)." 267. Gadamer's reflections are more nuanced than we wish to take into consideration here. For instance, the citation refers to Rilke, Hölderlin and Trakl, as examples of a way of writing that differentiates itself from the orally transmitted rhapsodies.

<sup>1149</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 254.

[Zusammenklingen] of a meaning monitoring [*Sinnerfassung*] and a sensual emergence of sound [*sinnlicher Klangerscheinung*].<sup>1150</sup>

Let's read more of how Gadamer describes the poetic text. "Das ist ein Gedicht", he writes: "Sprache, die nicht nur etwas bedeutet, sondern das ist, was sie bedeutet."<sup>1151</sup> The sonorous way things are phrased is recognized to be just as important as the meaning "content" of what is said in the poem. The *Sinn* of the poem is not "meaning" in a one-dimensional sense associated with logic and argumentation, but more with a multidimensional reverberation chamber [*Klangräume*] associated with music.<sup>1152</sup> The poem has a musical dimension.<sup>1153</sup> The sonorous emergence harbors a polyphony [*Vielstimmigkeit*] wherein the sonorous parts and the meaningful whole continuously weave into each other [*Gewebe*].<sup>1154</sup> A poem is e-minent in so far as it intensifies this form of woven being [*Geflecht*].<sup>1155</sup> Thus, the poem holds itself together into an indissoluble unity,<sup>1156</sup> by means of a correspondence [*Entsprechung*] of *Sinn* and *Klang*.<sup>1157</sup> It is as if these features were held together by a reciprocally determining and balancing gravitational center.<sup>1158</sup> The rhythm and physiognomy of each individual word together is always more than the sum of the parts.<sup>1159</sup> No accidental alterations can be made to the poem without essentially ruining it. It is impossible to paraphrase a poem without coarsely reducing the presentation.<sup>1160</sup>

Now in the intrinsic correlation of *Sinn und Klang* is where Gadamer locates the inner ear [*inneres Ohr*]. Inner hearing, we can say, emerges as a kind of sensibility<sup>1161</sup> towards the emergence of the poetic text. In fact, the inner ear is necessary condition for the *Sinn und Klang* to emerge. "Nur im inneren Ohr sind Sinnbezug und Klanggestalt ganz eins,"<sup>1162</sup> Gadamer writes. "Das innere Ohr vernimmt das ideale Sprachgebilde – etwas, was keiner je hören kann."<sup>1163</sup> The inner speaking-with (*innerliches Mitsprechen*) of the poem is wherein the *Dasein* of the literary text truly is.<sup>1164</sup> "Ohne die Bereitschaft des Aufnehmenden, ganz Ohr zu sein, spricht kein dichterischer Text."<sup>1165</sup> In other words, the inner hearing is the fulfillment (*Vollzug*) of the interwinement of *Sinn und Klang*.

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<sup>1150</sup> Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)." 267.

<sup>1151</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 248.

<sup>1152</sup> *Ibid.* 254.

<sup>1153</sup> We take this word, which Gadamer does not often use, from Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Höhe Erreichen (1988)", in *Ästhetik und Poetik II: Hermeneutik im Vollzug, Gesammelte Werke 9* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1993). 330, and Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)." 268.

<sup>1154</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 254.

<sup>1155</sup> *Ibid.* 253.

<sup>1156</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 254.

<sup>1157</sup> Gadamer speaks of *Einheit* in *ibid.*, 253 and Gadamer, "Der 'eminente' Text und seine Wahrheit (1986)." 291.

<sup>1158</sup> Gadamer, "Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung (1964/1978)." 149.

<sup>1159</sup> Gadamer, "Die Kunst des Wortes (1984)." 278.

<sup>1160</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 253.

<sup>1161</sup> Playing in the background here is the sensibility that we saw Kant elaborated as *Geschmack*.

<sup>1162</sup> Gadamer, "Der 'eminente' Text und seine Wahrheit (1986)." 290.

<sup>1163</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 247.

<sup>1164</sup> *Ibid.* 247.

<sup>1165</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 359.



These points have consequences for what we now understand by Gadamer's quiet and meditative reading. For him, dwelling upon a poem is a way that the inner ear perceives a sonorous dimension of human expressivity. Attentive to the fragmentary orders of *Sprache*, the inner ear perceives a certain otherness in language. The inner ear perceives the tension between the *said* and the *unsaid*, between mute signs of expression and their mode of coming into being as something expressed.<sup>1166</sup> The inner ear is the medium that translates a nondynamic silence into dynamic and vivid experience – not by reducing the silence but, contrariwise, by letting a silence of linguistic life emerge as what it is.<sup>1167</sup>

To understand more of this form of inner perception it is informative to ponder yet again the way Gadamer writes about the inner hearing. One aspect to note is that Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* is by no means fixed to the concrete experience of reading a poem. Gadamer speaks of the inner ear in a plastic sense, and often with a general scope of meaning. Any art experience worthy of the name, we can say, is *there* [*Da*] for the inner ear.<sup>1168</sup> In accordance with how the word *Text* is generalized to hold for any kind of *Anstoß*, *Inneres Hören* hence designates the general attention – *Wachheit* is the word Gadamer often uses – implied in art experience in general.

Another aspect to note is that Gadamer's general sense of *Inneres Hören* thus describes a hearing which is "hearing" more in metaphorical terms than is the case when Gadamer speaks of hearing a poem. Only the concrete reading of poems is inner *hearing* in the sense of an actual phenomenal perception of a linguistic expression. The general sense, on the other hand, pertains more to a mode in which the art work resonates<sup>1169</sup> (another sonorous metaphor) in the perceiver. In line with the comments made above, Gadamer himself makes no effort to elaborate on the difference in question. He moves rather seamlessly from the concrete to the general, avoiding too determinate explanations of how the two ways of using the same concepts are related.

Let's pursue in some detail how Gadamer typically makes these transitions. A passage from *Die Aktualität des Schönen* from 1974 – which is where Gadamer introduces the concept of *Inneres Hören* more substantially<sup>1170</sup> – serves as a good example. The context is a discussion of how to perceive the organic unity of an art work. *Any work of art is like a living organism*, Gadamer writes. The art work has its own temporality; it has its own way of gathering itself into a unity. "Man muß die Zeit richtig nehmen, d.h. so, wie es von dem Werk verlangt wird."<sup>1171</sup> Now *only* the inner ear perceives of this unity; *only* the inner ear perceives the proper "Differenzierung des Spielraums zwischen Identität und Differenz" evolving in the self-organization of the art work:

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<sup>1166</sup> Gadamer, "Hören - Sehen - Lesen (1984)." 274.

<sup>1167</sup> Gadamer, "Lesen ist wie Übersetzen (1989)." 284.

<sup>1168</sup> Cf. Grondin, "Gadamer's Aesthetics - The Overcoming of Aesthetic Consciousness and the Hermeneutical Truth of Art."

<sup>1169</sup> Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 112.

<sup>1170</sup> As noted above, Gadamer mentions – in one sentence only – the *Inneres Hören* in a lecture from 1964 (published as an essay: Gadamer, "Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung (1964/1978)."

<sup>1171</sup> Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 134.

Jede Reproduktion, jedes laute Aufsagen oder Hersagen eines Gedichtes, jede Theateraufführung, in der noch so große Meister der mimischen und Sprechkunst oder Gesangskunst auftreten, vermittelt eine wirkliche künstlerische Erfahrung des Werkes selber nur dann, wenn wir mit unserem inneren Ohr noch etwas ganz anderes hören als das, was wirklich vor unseren Sinnen geschieht. Erst das in die Idealität dieses inneren Ohres Erhobene – nicht die Reproduktionen, Darstellungen oder mimetischen Leistungen als solche – liefert die Bausteine für den Aufbau des Werkes.

Das ist eine Erfahrung, die jeder von uns macht, z. B. wenn man ein Gedicht besonders gut im Ohr hat. Keiner kann ein Gedicht auf befriedigende Weise laut sagen, auch man selber nicht. Warum ist es so? Nun, offenbar treffen wir wiederum auf die Reflexionsarbeit, die eigentlich geistige Arbeit, die in dem sogenannten Genuß steckt. Nur weil wir in dem Transzendieren der kontingenten Momente tätig sind, ersteht das ideale Gebilde. Um ein Gedicht in reiner Aufnahmehaltung angemessen zu hören, dürfte der Vortrag keine individuelle Stimmfarbe haben. Eine solche steht nicht im Text.

Aber jeder hat eine individuelle Stimmfarbe. Keine Stimme der Welt kann die Idealität eines dichterischen Textes erreichen. Eine jede muß in gewissem Sinn durch ihre Kontingenz beleidigen. Sich von dieser Kontingenz zu befreien, macht die Kooperation aus, die wir als Mitspieler in diesem Spiel zu leisten haben.<sup>1172</sup>

We see how the dynamic of the passage goes. Initially, the *Inneres Hören* is described as something of a discriminating sensibility [*Vernehmen*]. The inner ear perceives, as it were, a dimension of the art work lying "behind," "beneath," "within", or *in between* what is actually present in the sensual situation. The inner ear sorts out, so to say, what is "noch etwas ganz anderes [...]" als das, was wirklich vor unseren Sinnen geschieht". What the inner ear perceives – or senses is perhaps the best word here – is the *Gebilde* of the expression. The inner ear perceives a whole, organic unity in the differentials given to the senses and, contrariwise, it differentiates in the unitary expression given to the senses. Thus the inner ear mediates – it *vermittelt*, which is the word Gadamer uses – the real art work evolving in what is given to the senses. "Erst das in die Idealität dieses inneren Ohres Erhobene [...] liefert die Bausteine für den Aufbau des Werkes",<sup>1173</sup> we just read; not the reproduction, presentation or mimetic achievement as such. *Only* because we are capable of transcending the contingent moments of expression is it possible for us to perceive this ideal order or what is expressed. The inner ear is the locus of the required *harvest*. It is what *picks up, collects, or gathers together* the nuances which together form the current *Gebilde* expression.<sup>1174</sup>

We also note how seamlessly Gadamer makes the concrete experience of reading a poetic text as paradigmatic to what he tries to explain. Immediately after evoking the *Aufbau des Werkes*, Gadamer writes that this is an experience "die jeder von uns macht, z.B. wenn man ein Gedicht besonders gut im Ohr hat."<sup>1175</sup> We see how small and yet significant this step is; for the rest of the passage the experience of having a poem *besonders gut im Ohr* will function as a paradigm of art experience. Here, Gadamer's small *zum Beispiel* does not mean something like "one example among others". It is rather an indication that the concrete hearing of the poem *covers for* or *takes up* also what evolves in the other mentioned art experiences such as music and theater.

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<sup>1172</sup> Ibid. 134–135. The passage is divided into three in order to make clearer the subsequent points of discussion.

<sup>1173</sup> Ibid. 134. Italics added.

<sup>1174</sup> Gadamer, "Wort und Bild - 'so wahr, so seiend (1992)." 393

<sup>1175</sup> Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 134. Italics added.

Why does Gadamer take the concrete experience of hearing a sonorous expression for one's inner ear as a paradigmatic example of art experience in general? Surely, Gadamer's paradigmatic emphasis on poems implies no favoring of the poem, in the way, for instance, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and perhaps also Merleau-Ponty operate with various privileged forms of the arts (poems, music, painting). The poem is not *more valuable* for Gadamer; it does not stand on the top of a hierarchically ordered sequence of various forms of arts.

Rather, Gadamer's recourse to poems is *phenomenological*. The poetic expression makes vivid its phenomenological moments of general worth. It displays essentials regarding human expressivity in general. In other words, the reading of poems is an *example*. The experience is, as Gadamer puts it in an essay, "Das handgreiflichste Beispiel für die Bemühung, etwas wieder sprechen zu lassen".<sup>1176</sup> With Gadamer, this means that the reading of poetic texts is a paradigmatic exposure of *Sinn*. Reading is a model experience<sup>1177</sup> displaying how *Sinn* emerges in human life. For Gadamer, everything – from *Wahrnehmung* to the study of sculpture and music – is *Lesen*; yet only the concrete reading of poems is reading in the strongest sense of the word.

As indicated, the implications of the paradigmatic role of the *Inneres Hören* plays on much of the same conceptual ground as we (in Section 12) elaborated on behalf of the meditation sounds. Eminent texts are textual formations not only *in* language in the general sense but *of* language in the very particular sense.<sup>1178</sup>

Interestingly enough, in elaborating the paradigmatic role of the *Inneres Hören* Gadamer brings forth descriptions of substantial similarities to nondirective meditation. We remember how the mentalized sound, that is, the sound repeated unrestrainedly in thought, was the vehicle within the meditative practice. Now, for Gadamer, the act of reading the poem is paradigmatic for a similar reason. Whereas every other art form is limited by material conditions,<sup>1179</sup> Gadamer writes, the poetic expression is not limited by materiality. "Da ist kein Stoff, der als die dumpfe Widerständigkeit der Materie durch die Form gebändigt wäre."<sup>1180</sup> The poem moves in the abstract ideality of language; it fulfills the very potentiality of language. "[D]ie Poesie [scheint] in dem luftigen Hauch der Sprache und in dem Wunder des Gedächtnisses allein zu existieren."<sup>1181</sup> The poem *is* in the fragmentary nuances of *Sprache*; it is in the transgressing medium speaking in the innermost subjective experience.

We indicated how the meditative experience of nondirective meditation moved towards what can be called an autonomous dimension of understanding. Now Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* points in the same

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<sup>1176</sup> Gadamer, "Gesammelte Werke 8." 333.

<sup>1177</sup> On the role of the *model* in hermeneutics, see Günter Figal, "Modelle und Intensitätsgrade", in *Verstehensfragen* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>1178</sup> Gadamer, "Der 'eminente' Text und seine Wahrheit (1986)." 289.

<sup>1179</sup> "Alle andere Künste [...] sind an materiell einschränkende Bedingungen gebunden." Gadamer, "Hören - Sehen - Lesen (1984)." 274.

<sup>1180</sup> Gadamer, "Dichtung und Mimesis (1972)." 82.

<sup>1181</sup> Gadamer, "Wort und Bild - 'so wahr, so seiend (1992)." 379.

direction. The inner ear perceives and accomplishes a normative ideal in expression which cannot be perceived or expressed in any other way. No voice in the world can reach the ideality perceived in the inner ear. This is for Gadamer the breath of language – the "Hauch der Sprache". The inner voice cannot be materialized as such; it can only be *heard*. "[E]s ist wie nur wie eine zu hörende Stimme und muß, ja kann keine wirkliche Stimme sein."<sup>1182</sup> The inner hearing is the only adequate response to the textual claim made by the poetic text:

[D]as ideale Sprachgebilde verlangt von der menschlichen Stimme Unerreichbares – und eben das ist die Seinsweise eines literarischen Textes. Diese Idealität macht sich natürlich geltend, wenn man selber versucht, etwas vorzulesen oder laut vor sich hinzusprechen. Wir sind uns mit unserer eigenen Stimme und dem Grad, wie ihr Modulation und Betonung gelingt, genauso zufällig.<sup>1183</sup>

We note Gadamer's words: if the inner ear is something of a discriminative ability, then this ability is effective not the least in regard to oneself. One's own material voice is too coarse, as it were, and the habituated ways of speaking and modulating the voice are too accidental to convey the fragmentary orders evolving in the *Gebilde* of the text. Only the inner ear is capable of perceiving the nuances and following the normative indications given in this ideal dimension of language. "Diese nur zu hörende, nie sprechende Stimme ist im Grunde ein Muster und Maß," writes Gadamer. "[D]ie Form, in der die Stimme da ist, muß nicht die materialisierte Stimme sein, sondern ist primär etwas, was in unserer Imagination modellhaft wie ein Kanon ist, der uns erlaubt, jede Art der Ausführungen von Rezitation zu beurteilen."<sup>1184</sup> The inner voice of imagination is *wie ein Kanon*: it harbors and expresses the accumulated and accumulating standard of understanding. It expresses the expansion of one's own understanding as it becomes modulated through varieties of ever new expressions.

What we have seen in the current section demonstrates Gadamer's awe for quiet and slow *Lesen*. For him, the silence of inner hearing is both potent and important. Taking the time and effort to dwell on the fragmentary sonorous nuances of the poetic expression is a way of cultivating a kind of certain habitus; a discriminating sensibility in understanding. The meditative *Lesen* is a way of expanding the resources of language from within. The silent reading of inner hearing enriches the way that the reader is toward him- or herself and others by gaining a subtle contact with a nonfixable and inexpressible standard that one always already carries in oneself.

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<sup>1182</sup> Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)." 267.

<sup>1183</sup> Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 247.

<sup>1184</sup> Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)." 267.

#### b. Father of Sound. Action in Inner Hearing?

We now have at hand two modifications of inner hearing. One evolves in the cultural practice called nondirective meditation; the other evolves in the philosophical approval of silent and slow reading (*Inneres Hören*). The shared recourse to a silent hearing of an inner voice is striking. Where the meditator hears the imagined meditation sound, Gadamer's reader hears the imagined inner voice accomplishing the poem. "[A]lles liegt in der 'inneren Stimme' und ist da für das 'innere Ohr' des Lesers,"<sup>1185</sup> writes Gadamer. Though inexpressible for the material voice, the inner voice is there as something heard.

In the Introduction, we established that *two* main perspectives are needed if the practice of nondirective meditation is to be preserved in philosophical analysis. Not only is the *Text* moment that we elaborated in Section 12 is required but also the moment of subjective action. Part Four expanded on what action implies in the meditative context, by elaborating how nondirective meditation is a voluntary repetition of the sound. The crux of the meditative practice is to do as little as possible, yet the sound is a self-produced and self-enacted sound. The sound is voluntarily acted out amidst the spontaneous activities. Lastly, we saw how the sonorous activity induces a physiological relaxation response, describable as a sonorous and enactive *epoché*. Investments in everyday consciousness are loosened as the voluntary action and the physiological response work in the same direction of free mental attitude.

How are we going to understand this moment of action in relation to Gadamer's *Inneres Hören*? We recall the general fact that Gadamer's philosophy expresses a solemn silence when it comes to detailed descriptions of subjective action. The Gadamerian *Vollzug* includes the moment of execution, but it expresses no elaborate account of the modes of doing involved in the process. The comparison of nondirective meditation and *Inneres Hören* makes Gadamer's conceptual silence apparent. Where the cultural practice of nondirective meditation comes with detailed practical manuals regarding the doing of inner hearing, Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* leaves the question fully open as to what the reader does when he or she reads. From a Gadamerian perspective, the mere idea of conceptualizing *Lesen* into a practical manual is almost improper. "Wir fragen jetzt nicht mehr, was ein [...] Vollzug eigentlich ist, wie er anfängt, endet, wie lange er dauert, wie er einem nachgeht und am Ende absinkt und doch irgendwo bleibt und wieder auftauchen kann. Wir fragen so nicht."<sup>1186</sup>

Pondering the variables implied in the two modifications of inner hearing, we soon recognize that the difference regarding practical manuals of doing is intrinsic to the difference regarding the forms of *Text* involved. What we described as minimal *Sinn-Gebilde* of meditation sound consists of linguistic-like sounds that, in a sense, require a form of practical manual to be usable as meditation sound. The sound is not self-explained as a device for free mental attitude. Some form of meta-discourse is needed to understand and

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<sup>1185</sup> Gadamer, "Lesen ist wie Übersetzen (1989)." 284.

<sup>1186</sup> Gadamer, "Wort und Bild - 'so wahr, so seiend (1992)." 392.

pursue the role and potential of free mental attitude and its difference to concentration. By contrast, the poetic texts in which Gadamer takes an interest are not linguistic-like, but openly linguistic. The poems are determined precisely by the features that are lacking in the meditation sounds: words and relations between words. This does not only mean that poems are readable in ways that a meditation sound is not; it also means that a poem does not require a practical manual analogous to the meditation sounds. Reading poems is not the execution of one, specific *technique*. Naturally, as we saw in Part One, the practice of reading is conditioned by cultural circumstances, but as long as the poetic text is legible and evolves in a culture of literacy, it has a strikingly more self-explainable character than a meditation sound. Where the meditation sound potentially is "just" a neutral sound, the poem conveys its own meaning – it is its own practical manual, as it were.

For Gadamer, the poetic text has an intrinsic *telos*.<sup>1187</sup> Something in the poetic text strives to be understood. Gadamer's emphasis on *Sache* and *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* implies an emphasis on the independent self-presentation [*Selbstdarstellung*]<sup>1188</sup> of the poem. The transformative nature of understanding is the emergence of an autonomous formation. Against this background, *Inneres Hören* evolves as the ability to preserve the unique expression of the poetic text. The Gadamerian reader evolves and cultivates a sensitivity toward the normative claim of the text. Each and every text has its own, unique standard of how it should be read. The reader catches the nuances of the standard, adapts the way of execution to the text itself, and accomplishes the text *Im Ohr*. Herein evolves the currently significant difference to the meditative practice: where Gadamer's approach to inner hearing put emphasis on the autonomous and transformative nature of the *poetic text*, the meditative practice strikingly links freedom and understanding to the sonorous-enactive initiative of the *subject*. The practical manuals of nondirective meditation can indicate how to repeat the sound but it is the subject that has to do the task. A certain amount of cognitive and enactive initiative is simply needed to hear the sound. The meditating subject chooses by own free will to take up the task of inducing the sound and thus encounter what is with a free mental attitude.

Let's try to bring the current differences between nondirective meditation and *Inneres Hören* better into view by working from the inside of Gadamer's tradition-oriented philosophy. We do so by pondering the two modifications of inner hearing in light of Plato and Kant. Here, we will come to see that the differences that we now have touched upon harbors themes that are classical in Western philosophy. The differences between nondirective meditation and *Inneres Hören* evolves an age-old question of literacy and self-distance, as well nuances in the modern conceptions of beauty and subjective action.

We recall how Plato's *Theaetetus* described thinking as a "talk which the soul has with itself",<sup>1189</sup> and how the *Sophist* articulated the distinction between a material and immaterial *logos* in terms of a

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<sup>1187</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 118.

<sup>1188</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

<sup>1189</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*. 189e. Cf. Section 2 above.

"silent inner conversation of the soul with itself".<sup>1190</sup> Plato's discussion of the soul was intimately tied to questions of literacy. Expressed was an ambiguous and critical attitude toward the written word. The fact that a written word could circulate from context to context unaccompanied by a fatherly soul evaluating the aptitude of expression made it problematic. Both *Phaedrus* and *Republic* gave detailed suggestions as to what counts as good and bad for the soul. Linguistic rhythm and sonorousness were considered powerful to penetrate the soul at its deepest. Fine language of elegance, good rhythm, and melodiousness was held to increase and cultivate the nobler side of the soul by creating a proper self-distance of the soul.<sup>1191</sup> Bad writing, on the other hand, was associated with helter-skelter writing, and bold and disorganized utterances of the soul.<sup>1192</sup> Provided with bad writing was no proper self-distance in the soul. Potentially, a soul inflicted by bad writing could end up imitating barking dogs, thunder and trumpets.<sup>1193</sup> Plato's critique of the mythopoetic mind of *medesthai* expressed the same concern. *Medesthai* was associated with a consciousness fully submerged in spontaneity and helter-skelter utterances. It lacked self-distance and contradicted itself from moment to moment.

The sparse commentary literature on *Inneres Hören* situates this late concept of Gadamer in Plato's philosophy and the self-talk of the soul.<sup>1194</sup> Left unvisited by the commentators, however, is how Gadamer's new and intensified emphasis on *Sinn und Klang* implies a strengthening of his Platonic *Text* concept. We recall how already *Wahrheit und Methode* conveyed a reversal of Plato's concept of text, in the sense that the fatherlessness feature of the written text was revised into a productive moment for human understanding. With *Inneres Hören*, however, Gadamer can be said to intensify and concretize the hermeneutical affirmation of the fatherless status of reading. In many ways, *Inneres Hören* is an explicit affirmation of the precisely those linguistic features that Plato considered potentially dangerous: linguistic rhythm and sonorousness.

Gadamer's most radical example of the poetic text, the lyrical *poésie pur* of Mallarmé,<sup>1195</sup> puts the Platonic reversal to the fore. *Poésie pur*, in Gadamer's presentation, is a poetic practice that sings more than speaks – a form of pure *Sinnmelodie* and *Klangbewegung* (melody of *Sinn* and sonorous movement). Gadamer describes the *poésie pur* as texts almost completely impenetrable to everyday understanding. The poems lack all forms of everyday language rhetoric, and the grammatical and syntax means are used as sparsely as possible.<sup>1196</sup> It is impossible to get a form of understanding meta-grip on the lyrical poem.

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<sup>1190</sup> Plato, *Sophist*. 263d.

<sup>1191</sup> Plato, *Republic (I-V)*. 400d-e.

<sup>1192</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 264b.

<sup>1193</sup> Plato, *Republic (I-V)*. 397.

<sup>1194</sup> Among the few commentators that have taken an interest in Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* are Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik."; Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamers Hermeneutik*. Chapter 6.2. Oliva's thorough discussion of the *verbum interius* in Gadamer's philosophy sees *Inneres Hören* in not only light of Plato, but also Augustine's *verbum Interius* and Kant. Ibid. 222–237.

<sup>1195</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur (1981)." 249 ff.

<sup>1196</sup> Ibid. 249.

The text evolves as an almost a completely sonorous *Anstoß*. Reading is formed into the pure form of linguistic-musical event.<sup>1197</sup>

Thus, what Plato conceived as the potentially dangerous musical reverberation of the soul is in fact privileged in Gadamer's concept. Quite concretely, Plato's "talk which the soul has with itself"<sup>1198</sup> has in Gadamer's essays evolved into a linguistic-musical event. The reader apparently *listens* to his or her "immaterial" voice in reading. Simultaneously, phrasing out the poetic style of expression makes it impossible to get the self-distant position of a father. Where Plato warned of the danger of using linguistic rhythm and sonorousness for being able to lead the soul badly astray into helter-skelter disorder,<sup>1199</sup> Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* affirms these features of linguistic expressions all the way. The mimetic order of language is allowed to play itself out in the sonorous event. Fulfilling the *Gebilde* of poem, the inner ear participates in the impenetrable and nonunderstandable orders of the lyrical poem. In a certain sense, the Gadamerian reader thus moves toward the nongathered mind of *medesthai* dismissed by Plato. Being fully in the organizations of the poetic text, the reader explores mythopoetic and nonrational dimensions of linguistic understanding from within.

Gadamer's trust in the fatherless status of the *poesie pur* must be seen against the background of his general conception of *Sprache*. One valued dimension of language, for Gadamer, is that language is its own father. Every language – in order to *be* language – harbors a reflection back on itself. Language harbors its own meta-discourse, so to speak; it harbors the resources to question and expose itself. By what we set out earlier, this intrinsic meta-language of *Sprache* is less associable with specific semantic contents than the *how* of linguistic expression. It evolves in the all-encompassing, dialectical, and ahistorical bond of linguistic life – or in the categorial *Wie* of *Sprache*. From the Gadamerian perspective, the poetic text always will preserve something of the self-reflection of language within its own organization. Regardless of how abrupt or impenetrable a poetic text of *poesie pur* might be, it embodies something of the self-reflection that makes language into language. The musicality of the poem is the musicality of *Sprache* reflecting back on itself. The rhythm of the text mimes the rhythms and *Takt* of linguistic life.

In various ways and various degrees, what holds for *poesie pur* holds for poems in general, in Gadamer's conception. Any genuine poetic text hollows out a zone of genuine questioning of how [*Wie*] life is lived in ways analogous to what we saw in Section 12.<sup>1200</sup> In one essay, Gadamer uses a discussion of a poem of Mörike, *Auf eine Lampe*, to illustrate the point in concrete manners.<sup>1201</sup> Mörike's poem makes everyday objects of life emerge in a new light, Gadamer writes. Described through the rhythmic and melodic presentation, the light of the lamp shines both in the poem and in the life of the ordinary. "Das Scheinen wird nicht nur verstanden, sondern es strahlt über das Ganze der Erscheinung dieser Lampe, die

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<sup>1197</sup> Gadamer, "Wort und Bild - 'so wahr, so seiend (1992)." 392.

<sup>1198</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*. 189e.

<sup>1199</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 401d and 411a-b.

<sup>1200</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)."358.

<sup>1201</sup> *Ibid.* 359



in einem vergessenen Gemache unbeachtet hängt und nirgends mehr scheint als in diesen Versen."<sup>1202</sup> In the sense of *Anschauung*, the reader sees, in the language of the poem, what he or she cannot strictly speaking see.<sup>1203</sup> In the rhythmic and sonorous intuition of the lamp, the Gadamerian reader loses him- or herself in the productive otherness of the *Text*. He or she becomes fully one with the rhythm and sonorousness shining of the lamp. "Der Interpret, der seine Gründe beibrachte, verschwindet, und der Text spricht."<sup>1204</sup> Private ways of creating orders of fatherly surveillance withdraws and the truer father of linguistic life emerges: the universal orders of *Sprache*.

Let's try to view nondirective meditation in the light of what we have set out here with Plato and Gadamer. One interesting figure evolves in the observation that nondirective meditation apparently strengthens the development towards a pure linguistic rhythm and sonority seen in Gadamer's *Inneres Hören*. That is, to the degree that the meditation sounds are *minimized Sinn-Gebilde* void of meaning and linguistic associations altogether, they apparently come across as a *Sinnmelodie* and *Klangbewegung* more "purified" than Gadamer's *poésie pur*. Although Gadamer's poetic examples are radical in their lack of rhetorical means and everyday linguistic rules, the meditation sounds are even more so, "purified" as they are also of *words*. The banal lack of words makes the nonreference to everyday language more or less complete. The lack of words means no steering of consciousness, however subtly and poetically, into such or such domains of association; for instance, toward the golden-green color of a lamp (as in the poem of Mörike). By the same token, the mere sonorousness of the inner event comes all the more to the fore. Even the discrete association of ocular modi of understanding evolving in Gadamer's *Anschaulichkeit des Inneres Hören* is not there. The sound is just a sound.

What we say here can be rephrased in Plato's metaphor of the father. If it makes sense to say so, meditation sounds like *ah-nam*, *ra-mah*, and *shi-rim* seem to be even more fatherless than Gadamer's *poésie pur*. Though associable with the Gadamer-Kantian *Erkenntnis überhaupt* (as we saw in Subsection 12b), the sounds convey no meta-linguistic or fatherly features other than those spontaneously emerging in consciousness around the sounds. Rather than being part of the internal organization of the sounds, the fatherly meta-discourse is handed over in the practical manuals guiding the meditative practice, we could say. The practical manuals, and not the sounds in isolation, guide the meditator into an open-ended process of execution. The manuals preserve the nonfatherly aspects of the sounds by indicating how the moment of fatherlessness can be a progressive feature. They potentially indicate how the practiced skill of inducing the meditation sound with less and less cognitive energy is the mental skill of moving freer and freer into the helter-skelter orders of consciousness. They contribute in making the fatherless sound circulate freely from context to context, so to speak, – if not first and foremost in social contexts, then in the consciousness of the meditator.

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<sup>1202</sup> *Ibid.* 360.

<sup>1203</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Anschauung und Anschaulichkeit (1980)." 190. Cf. Section 6a above.

<sup>1204</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 360.

In an intriguing sense, the reference to Plato's fatherless text brings to view an enactive moment of the meditative practice from within Gadamer's philosophical foundation. For Plato, a text is enactive almost in the literal sense. Organized as it is with "a body of its own"<sup>1205</sup> the text is a living organism that is born of a soul and that acts, from moment to moment, as it circulates.<sup>1206</sup> Loosely considered, in Gadamer's way of engaging Plato, the enactive role of the text is the *telos* of the text; it is the *energeia* of *Sinn* working from the inside of the textual organization.<sup>1207</sup>

When it comes to the Platonic perspective on nondirective meditation, however, the Gadamerian recourse to a *telos* stands out as somewhat inadequate. The meditation sound embodies no intrinsic standard of a linguistic father that regulates how the sounds should be heard in ways analogous to how Gadamer's poem claims to be read; yet the sound is enactive in ways analogous to Plato's fatherless text. What is more, the fatherless meditation sound seems to contribute to the formation of another form of father than what Gadamer's philosophy responds to. The unrestrained repetition of the meaningless sound seems capable of creating a certain wholeness in the helter-skelter order of consciousness. From what we set out earlier, the voluntary act is apparently a way of forming a more unitary subject. Insofar as the self-dissociating tendencies of nonvolitional concentration are processed with the meaningless sound, a freer, and more unified self-understanding is allowed to emerge in behavior. Thus, formed is not necessarily *Sinn* in the Gadamerian sense, but just a freer and more unitary way of acting in relationships with self and others. The fatherless text of the meditation sound forms a *Text-less* father, so to speak; a subject that acts in the world with less psychological conflicts and fewer inhibitions in spontaneous life.

To indicate what this means from the perspective of the meditating subject we turn the last time to Kant's concept of beauty and Gadamer's hermeneutical incorporation thereof. We know already that Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (§16) relates free beauty to objects that are supposed to be without themes (*ohne Thema*). Now Kant's famous examples are drawings *à la grecque*, foliage for frameworks, wallpaper, and music without lyrics and determined themes. These examples are meant to illustrate objects that have no intrinsic meaning or purpose [*Zweck*]: "sie stellen nichts vor, kein Object unter einem bestimmten Begriffe."<sup>1208</sup> As also indicated, these objects of free beauty are for Kant dissociated from action (*Handlung*). Securing free beauty an independent domain outside the schematizing role of the concept is a way Kant secures the independency of beauty from the purposiveness of actions. This dissociation of beauty and action is strongly related to the way Kant equates action with concepts and purpose. For him, action has the form of a *Wozu*. Action accomplishes the purpose of the object; it aims at and carries out what also can be formally articulated in the *Begriff*. Thus, by the logic of Kant, aesthetic beauty evolves in a domain independent of subjective action and conceptual argumentation. One cannot produce or

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<sup>1205</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 264b.

<sup>1206</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy", in *Dissemination* (Chicago: The Athlone Press, 1981). 84.

<sup>1207</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 116.

<sup>1208</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. § 16. 146 ff.

experience beauty by arguments or reason. To know what aesthetic beauty is about, one simply has to experience it first-hand, as it evolves freely in the receptivity of the subject.

Gadamer (as many others in his tradition) notes that Kant's examples of free beauty are not as independent as Kant initially wants them to be. In Gadamer's explanation, the differentiation between free and dependent beauty is a methodological abstraction meant to secure the moral freedom of aesthetic judgment. The division between the two forms of beauty is a way of ensuring that aesthetic pleasure is not based on the judgment of the perfection of an object – which is to say, a purposiveness in a teleological sense – but exclusively the free play initiated by the object.<sup>1209</sup> However, Gadamer sees no weakness in Kant's apparent failure to distinguish between free and dependent beauty but positively affirms it. Gadamer's hermeneutical *Sehen als...* incorporates the unclear distinction between free and dependent beauty as a positive moment of friction. To recognize something as something implies the concrete formation evolving between the free and the dependent beauty. For Gadamer, this friction is what is exemplified in Kant's somewhat feeble illustrations of free beauty, not the unattainable ideal of free beauty as such.

In Gadamer's presentations, *Inneres Hören* accomplishes the productive friction between free and dependent beauty. The inner ear senses the mimetic dimension of the poetic text as it evolves in rhythms between the said and the unsaid.<sup>1210</sup> The inner ear perceives an independent and self-sufficient being of things in their conditioned order. It perceives a beauty of everyday life that evolves outside of the trivial purposiveness of usefulness. "[U]nser Ohr [in the form of inner hearing]<sup>1211</sup> hört und unser Verständnis vernimmt den Schein des Schönen als sein wahres Wesen."<sup>1212</sup> It is by articulating this determinate yet independent way of living in language that the fatherless poetic text opens a play room of understanding beyond rules and established conventions.<sup>1213</sup>

Here, Gadamer implicitly follows Kant's linkage between action and purposiveness. The presentation [*Darstellung*] of the poem is not the result of a doing of the subject but beauty emerging for understanding. The beauty evolving in the friction between the dependent and independent orders transgresses the actions of the subject. In the helter-skelter play of *Lesen* an atemporal, autonomous and impersonal *something* gathers form. "Es kommt heraus – und das ist das, was wir Wahrheit nennen."<sup>1214</sup>

Certainly, Gadamer's underlining of the necessary mixture of independent and dependent beauty of *Sehen als...* makes good sense in the illustrative context of poems. But how are things when it comes to the practice of nondirective meditation?

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<sup>1209</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 52. Cf: Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest (1974)." 111.

<sup>1210</sup> Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 360.

<sup>1211</sup> Cf. "Ohne die Bereitschaft des Aufnehmenden, ganz Ohr zu sein, spricht kein dichterischer Text." *ibid.* 359.

<sup>1212</sup> *Ibid.* 360.

<sup>1213</sup> Gadamer, "Grenzen der Sprache (1985)." 355.

<sup>1214</sup> Gadamer, "Wort und Bild - 'so wahr, so seiend (1992)." 384. We recognize the impersonal *Es* from Heidegger. Cf. Grondin, "Gadamer's Aesthetics - The Overcoming of Aesthetic Consciousness and the Hermeneutical Truth of Art." 9.

As indicated in the Introduction, nondirective meditation apparently revises the Kantian association of action and purposiveness. One aspect of the revision evolves in the fact that the sonorous, meditative action is not an act of the Kantian *Verstand*, but of the *Einbildungskraft*, or imagination. Or to be precise: the sound is an imagined-enactive sound but minus the implicit reference to *vision* effective in the German and English words *Eibildungskraft* and *imagination*. The meditative practice purifies the sonorous moment of the *Erkenntnis überhaupt*, so to speak, by being *merely* a way of hearing. Another aspect of the revision evolves in the fact that the overall *Wozu* of nondirective meditation is precisely to give up the *Wozu* of doing. To practice free mental attitude is to practice – in sonorous doing – the skill of giving up the investments of everyday life. The delineated purpose of the meditative practice is to train the mental skill of giving up purposes. The meditative process is a way of de-learning, as it were, the spontaneous and habitual ways of forming understanding into specific purposes. What we have called the fatherless sound evolves in this progressive dynamic. To phrase the point in Kant's terms of the play of the cognitive powers: evolving is the delicate balance between the enactive initiative of "imagination" – the sonorous *Einbildungskraft*, if it makes sense to say so – and the spontaneous tendencies of subsuming diversity under a unitary concept [*Vernunft*]. Acting with spontaneity is to expanding the scope and flexibility of the subsuming power of consciousness. New ways of action are allowed to emerge and gain form from within the established.

In the current context, the moment of meditative action must be put in context with Kant's and Gadamer's distinction between free and dependent beauty. Conceived in analogy to Kant's beauty, the worth of meditation cannot be explained or argued for. The meditative experience is precisely an *experience*: it needs to be experienced first-hand to be known in strong terms. Interestingly, then, the nonassociative sounds of nondirective meditation seem to push the idea of free beauty much further than Kant's and Gadamer's empirical examples. The "purification" process indicated above can be seen as a process towards free beauty. The nonassociative sound lacks purpose, not only in principle but in actual practice. The fact that nothing is *seen* or *heard* in the sound in ways analogous to Gadamer's poem makes the organized yet fatherless sound into a *just a sound – ohne Thema*. In the Western context, the process of sonorous "purification" can be seen in analogy to the purification seen in modern art, seeking for the pure, autonomous and meaningless experience. Another analogy can be seen in the development of literacy, which is described as a historical development towards a silencing of the lifeworld.<sup>1215</sup> From being tied to communal and oral practices, the conceiving of texts has moved in the direction of being an silent and individualized experience. Thus, against the background of art and literacy, the meditative experience stands out as radically "purified" into a productive meaninglessness and silence.

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<sup>1215</sup> Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Global Publications, Binghamton University, 2000). Section 6, Man's Word and God's Presence. Cf. Gadamer, "Stimme und Sprache (1981)." 269; Gadamer, "Text und Interpretation (1983)." 342.

By the same token, what Gadamer describes as friction between the conditioned and the unconditioned is in the meditative practice moved into the psychology of the person. The lack of words makes the sonorous self-encounter of meditation all the more direct. Between *I* and *myself* stands no linguistic associations but only the sound as it is acted out toward myself. The freedom of the subject evolves in the sonorous and minimal act toward one's own everyday investments, tensions, and psychological conflicts.

In Section 15c and 16, we will pursue what we here have conceived with Kant's free beauty and sonorous "imagination" in the context of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Here, we will see how the sonorous process can be conceived as an embodied practice; a way of re-schematizing the structures of the phenomenal body. For now, how, let's conclude the current comparison between Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* nondirective meditation. We started by noting that both modifications of inner hearing evolve in the medium of an immaterial sound. Then we saw how the meditative practice can be called a strengthened version of *Inneres Hören*. The lack of words, in particular, makes the meditative practice into a thoroughly sonorous practice that emphatically lacks aspects that Gadamer's *Lesen* emphasizes. Last, by comparing *Inneres Hören* and nondirective meditation we saw how the moment of subjective action emerged from the inside of the Gadamerian perspectives on the meditative practice.

#### 14. Gadamer's Discrete Return to *Leibliche Gegenwart*

In Section 12, we applied the philosophy of *Wahrheit und Methode* to the concrete, phenomenal experience of nondirective meditation. Here, we studied how Gadamer's categorial concepts of *Vollzug*, *Sprache*, and *Frage* gained relevance in the description of the meditative process. Section 13b re-evoked the point launched in the Introduction: when it comes to the enactive details of the meditative practice, Gadamer's philosophy apparently falls a little short. With Gadamer, we can principally state that nondirective meditation is a form of *doing*, but we cannot demonstrate *how*. The methodological reasons for this were pursued in Section 6 above. We recall how Gadamer, following Heidegger, evolves philosophy not first and foremost on the detailed level of *Leibliche Gegenwart*, but on the categorial level reflecting the *Wie der Faktizität*. Ultimately, the categorial *Wie* of language is what harbors and preserves the eidetic features of *Leibliche Gegenwart*.

Against this methodological background, Gadamer's new interest in *Klang* becomes all the more interesting. The sonorous aspect of *Inneres Hören* evolves on a descriptive level that was not found in the categorial approach of *Wahrheit und Methode*. Accompanying *Inneres Hören* are concrete phenomenal qualities of hermeneutical experience: the *Wie* of hearing is not merely indicated in categorial *Wie* of

description analogous to the (ocular) "wergsieht von..., hinsieht auf..., zusammensieht als..."<sup>1216</sup> discussed in *Wahrheit und Methode*, but quite concretely the musical *Wie* of linguistic phrasing and rhythms. Gadamer's *Vollzug* is now concretized into perceptual examples virtually absent in *Wahrheit und Methode*. It is as if Gadamer, after *Wahrheit und Methode*, has started to apply the categorial *Vollzug* of *Wahrheit und Methode* to the concrete phenomenal example of reading in ways analogous to what we did with nondirective meditation.

We have suggested that Gadamer's heightened interest in perceptual details indicates a perceptual turn in Gadamer's writings. In light of the shorter phenomenological tradition, this amounts to saying that the late Gadamer, in some senses, moves back to the *Leibliche Gegenwart* once left behind by the early Heidegger. The new interest in perceptual details suggests a discrete transformation of Gadamer's thought: from *within* his categorial and hermeneutical approach to experience re-appears the philosophical interest in perceptual details. In light of the longer philosophical tradition, we can say that Gadamer moves towards the path of perception latent in Augustine: Gadamer has begun targeting *Lesen* as a form of concrete perception, where *Wahrheit und Methode* targeted perception (*Wahrnehmung*) as a form of concrete form *Lesen*.<sup>1217</sup>

The aim of the current section is to demonstrate more of what the proclaimed perceptual turn in Gadamer's philosophy can imply. Let there be no doubt that the subsequent reading involves a certain risk. What we will try to indicate in Gadamer is not a straightforward development. It is important not to exaggerate the points. At stake is more of a latent tendency, often observable in small alterations, than in accomplished articulations. Just as Gadamer does not problematize the categorial approach as such, he does not *thematize* the transformations that we will try to consider. He just launches certain independent initiatives that apparently not fit seamlessly into his general categorial approach. Something new emerges in philosophical hermeneutics. The *Grundzüge* of *Wahrheit und Methode* has transformed into a perceptual dimension.

In the current section, nondirective meditation will move to the background as a methodological means to display the proclaimed turn in Gadamer's philosophy. The crux of this function is the enactive aspects of the meditative practice. What we will try to do, is to study certain passages from Gadamer from the viewpoint of nondirective meditation qua enactive structure. The meditative example will be a model that makes us see Gadamer's philosophy from the perspective of action. The fact that nondirective meditation apparently is a minimal cognitive act of expression will make it suitable as a radical example shedding light on tendencies pointing in the same direction. Thus, nondirective meditation will make us see the initiatives occasionally launched by Gadamer as steps towards perception and action.

The course will be as follows. First (Subsection 14a), we follow a Gadamer-reading suggested by Jean Grondin,<sup>1218</sup> wherein Gadamer's *Inneres Hören* is put into context with Gadamer's subsequent revisions of *Wahrheit und Methode*. Second (Subsection 14b), we turn to a series of texts wherein Gadamer

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<sup>1216</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 96. Cf. Section 6c above.

<sup>1217</sup> Cf. Gadamer's *Wahrnehmung* analysis pursued in Section 6c.

<sup>1218</sup> Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik."

discusses the nature of health, now gathered in the book *Über die Verborgenheit der Gesundheit*.<sup>1219</sup> Here, we will see that Gadamer goes much further in the heralded direction of action than he does in his regular writings.

a. "Wachsamkeit des inneren Ohrs" – "Abstand in uns selbst..." Grondin's Observations

Jean Grondin targets *Inneres Hören* more directly than Gadamer. However, rather than accentuating the sonorous dimension of *Inneres Hören*, as we did above, Grondin universalizes the concept even further than Gadamer. That is, where Gadamer linked *Inneres Hören* to *art experience* in general, Grondin links the potential of *Inneres Hören* to *truth* experience in general. "Es gibt keine ästhetische Wahrheit – ja keine Wahrheit schlechthin, sofern die ästhetische Erfahrung hier Universalität in Anspruch nimmt – , ohne die Wachsamkeit des inneren Ohrs."<sup>1220</sup> The chief moral and epistemic role of the inner ear evolves in an attention [*Wachheit*] towards the unexpressed dimension of the *Sache*. The inner ear catches what is tentatively expressed in the complexity of human communication and practices, by being sensitive towards ambiguities or otherness evolving in oneself and others.<sup>1221</sup> The inner ear builds a unitary meaning in the complex of the given – the ear evolves "eine Reflexions- oder Aufbauarbeit, die jeder auf seine Weise und nach seinen gegebenen Möglichkeiten vollzieht."<sup>1222</sup>

Before we say more on Grondin's reading of *Inneres Hören*, let us put his approach into context. Grondin sees *Inneres Hören* in light of slight but significant revisions of *Wahrheit und Methode* (originally published in 1960) made by Gadamer in 1986. In the first four editions of Gadamer's book, Grondin observes, the hermeneutist reserves the genuine separation of true and false prejudices to *time*. So reads Gadamer's original text: "*Nichts anderes* als [...] *Zeitenabstand* vermag die eigentlich kritische Frage der Hermeneutik lösbar machen, nämlich die *wahren* Vorurteile, unter denen wir *verstehen*, von den *falschen*, unter denen wir *mißverstehen*, zu scheiden."<sup>1223</sup> In the 5th edition (1986), then, the exclusive clause is altered. The sentence now reads: "*Oft vermag der Zeitenabstand* die eigentlich kritische Frage der Hermeneutik lösbar machen, nämlich die *wahren* Vorurteile, unter denen wir *verstehen*, von den *falschen*, unter denen wir *mißverstehen*, zu scheiden."<sup>1224</sup>

This slight alteration has some consequences for Gadamer's general conception of prejudices. When reading Gadamer in the language of the first four editions, we note that the chief hermeneutical

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<sup>1219</sup> Gadamer, *Über die Verborgenheit der Gesundheit: Aufsätze und Vorträge*.

<sup>1220</sup> Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik." 332.

<sup>1221</sup> Ibid. 332.

<sup>1222</sup> Ibid. 331. We recognize the Kantian aspect of hermeneutics elaborated in Section 12.

<sup>1223</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* 4. Aufl. 1975. 282. Here cited from Jean Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik." 327. Italics on "*Nichts anders*" is here altered, the rest is original. The parenthesis excludes a *dieser*, referring back to the preceding passage.

<sup>1224</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 304. The current edition is the 6th edition, unaltered compared to the 5th.

point being made is that *only* through time evolves the historically reflected distance necessary to evaluate the prejudices. *Only* through the distance of time can this happen:

Es wird die das Verstehen leitenden eigenen Vorurteile bewußt machen, damit die Überlieferung, als Andersmeinung, sich ihrerseits abhebt und zur Geltung bringt. Ein Vorurteil als solches zur Abhebung bringen verlangt offenbar, *es in seiner Geltung zu suspendieren*. Denn solange ein Vorurteil uns bestimmt, wissen und denken wir es nicht als Urteil.<sup>1225</sup>

The process of seeing, giving up, or letting go of a prejudice [*Abheben*] requires that the prejudices are allowed to become *relevant*:

Ein Vorurteil gleichsam vor sich zu bringen, kann nicht gelingen, solange dieses Vorurteil beständig und unbemerkt im Spiele ist, sondern nur dann, wenn es sozusagen gereizt wird. Was so zu reizen vermag, ist eben die Begegnung mit der Überlieferung.<sup>1226</sup>

This relevance can come into being, then, *only* when a certain time has passed, creating a distance between the initial and the subsequent context.

Mit der negativen Seite des Filterns, die der Zeitabstand vollbringt, ist aber zugleich die positive Seite gegeben, die er für das Verständnis besitzt. Er läßt nicht nur die Vorurteile, die partikularer Natur sind, absterben, sondern auch diejenigen, die ein wahrhaftes Verstehen leiten, als solche hervortreten.<sup>1227</sup>

In short: Time and only time makes the true *Sinn* of the *Sache* emerge as it is. Time and only time makes it come out *in full* [*voll herauskommen*].<sup>1228</sup>

When Gadamer subsequently revises the phrasing into *Oft vermag*... these points gain new meaning. Time brings in something that *can* also be acquired in other ways. Grondin observes how Gadamer emphasizes in a footnote: "es ist Abstand – nicht nur Zeitenabstand – was diese hermeneutische Aufgabe lösbar macht".<sup>1229</sup> Grondin also observes how Gadamer here brings a new word in *Wahrheit und Methode*, used exclusively here: *Wachheit* [vigilance, wakefulness]. Where the first four editions hold that the controlled *Vollzug* is an *Aufgabe* for understanding,<sup>1230</sup> the 5th edition now reads: Understanding evolves in the "*Wachheit* des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins."<sup>1231</sup>

These revisions represent a pregnant example of philosophical self-critique, Grondin writes. Gadamer's revisions are adequate. For while one cannot criticize Gadamer for holding that time distance *can* be fruitful for the hermeneutical process to attain self-distance, Grondin writes, making time exclusive

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<sup>1225</sup> Ibid. 304. Italics added.

<sup>1226</sup> Ibid. 304.

<sup>1227</sup> Ibid. 303–304.

<sup>1228</sup> Ibid. 303.

<sup>1229</sup> Ibid. 304, footnote 228.

<sup>1230</sup> Cf. Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik." 332.

<sup>1231</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 312. Italics added.



in this regard would de facto express an improper tradition optimism [*Traditionsoptimus*].<sup>1232</sup> Merely trusting time to establish distance could easily end up in a situation wherein new perspectives in understanding are repressed for what is already established.<sup>1233</sup> Grondin's emphasis on the freedom of understanding is supported by Gadamer's subsequent explanation of *Wachheit*. "Wachheit schließt ein, daß man sich nicht einfach dem, was herandrängt, unterwirft, sondern, daß maninhört," Gadamer writes in a late essay. "Darin liegt die eigentliche Freiheit des Menschen, dies oder jenes zu meinen, auf dies oder jenes hinzuhören oder gerade wegzuhören."<sup>1234</sup> How the subject chooses to hear does matter. The freedom of the hearing subject evolves in the *Hinzuhören* or *Wegzuhören*. The same point actualized in *Wahrheit und Methode*: the *Wachheit* of the interpreter is what ultimately defines whether a prejudice is recognized or not.

This leads us back to the *Inneres Hören*. According to Grondin, *Inneres Hören* and the subsequent revisions of *Wahrheit und Methode* into *Wachheit* ultimately point towards the same essential feature of understanding: self-distance. The *inneres Ohr* equals (more or less) the wakeful ability to gain proper distance to the prejudices. "Im inneren Ohr liegt ein Gewinnen von Distanz, obwohl man ganz bei sich selbst bleibt,"<sup>1235</sup> writes Grondin. The inner ear evolves distance not so much *to* ourselves as *within* oneself – "einen Abstand *in* uns selbst."<sup>1236</sup>

Gemeint ist die Distanz, die wir, unserer Endlichkeit eingedenk, von unseren eigenen Vorurteilen unterhalten können. [...] Täglich sind wir de facto mit anderen Verstehensmöglichkeiten als den unsrigen konfrontiert: es sind die Gesichtspunkte Anderer, diejenigen von denen wir hören, für die etwas spricht, ob sie in uns selbst integrieren können oder nicht.<sup>1237</sup>

The *inneres Ohr* is the discriminating wakefulness towards the unfulfilled *Gebilde* evolving within oneself and the other; a way we are able to *let go* of our own privileged perspectives and hence tune into the perspective of the other.

Now, when Grondin speaks of an "Abstand *in* uns selbst"<sup>1238</sup> he also has in mind what he describes as an Augustinian and Cartesian *inner* dimension of self-dialogue.<sup>1239</sup> The *Wachheit* of the inner ear is an inner of the hermeneutical subject, so to speak – it is the locus of experience wherein the complexities of *Sachverhalte* are brought into consideration with each other. In Grondin's narrative, the original context

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<sup>1232</sup> Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik." 327.

<sup>1233</sup> Ibid. 327.

<sup>1234</sup> Gadamer, "Über das Hören (1998)." 49. It can be noted that Gadamer here contradicts what he states on behalf of *Hören* in *Wahrheit und Methode*. "[W]er angeredet wird, [muß hören], ob er will oder nicht. Er kann nicht in der gleichen Weise weghören, wie man im Sehen dadurch von anderen wegsieht, daß man in eine bestimmte Richtung blickt." Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 466.

<sup>1235</sup> Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik." 332. Italics added. *Ort* in the original text is altered to *Ohr* in line with the Grondin's subsequent publishing of the same text in Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr in Gadamer's Ästhetik. Distanz und Selbstreflexion der Hermeneutik."

<sup>1236</sup> Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik." 328.

<sup>1237</sup> Ibid. 328.

<sup>1238</sup> Ibid. 329.

<sup>1239</sup> Ibid. 329.

of *Wahrheit und Methode* made it difficult to elaborate properly this inner instance of hermeneutical experience. The positivist and atomist climate of the *Geisteswissenschaften* anno 1960 necessitated an anti-subjectivist tendency of philosophical hermeneutics.<sup>1240</sup> After *Wahrheit und Methode*, however, things were different: the polemic need was lessened. Against this background, *Inneres Hören* and the revisions of *Wahrheit und Methode* are ways Gadamer discretely rehabilitates the hermeneutical subject initially lost in the polemic rejection. Rather than being a mere flickering in the larger circuits of historical life, as Gadamer states elsewhere in *Wahrheit und Methode*,<sup>1241</sup> the *Selbst-Besinnung des Individuums* does in fact count. The *Wachheit* of the subject is crucial for understanding to occur.

In our context, Grondin's reading is of interest both due to what it says and what it does not say. As for the first, Grondin's linking of inner hearing to the self-distance of *Wahrheit und Methode* informs our understanding of both *Inneres Hören* and *Wahrheit und Methode*. The unsaid evolves in the questions that are not asked by Grondin. For instance, Grondin does not scrutinize the exemplary role played by the poetic text in Gadamer's essays. Grondin quickly generalizes Gadamer's *Inneres Hören*, but does not ask the banal question of why a concrete modification of *hearing* an organized linguistic unit (here: a poetic text) with an imagined voice, has the paradigmatic potential of self-distance in the first place. What is it about the concrete sonorous experience that makes it associable with the suspension of prejudices? By leaving out this question, Grondin simultaneously omits questions regarding enactive aspects of *Inneres Hören*. Right where the question of the enactive dimension of *Inneres Hören* could have been asked there is silence. Grondin uses the *Inneres Ohr* to call upon a distance *within ourselves* but leaves out any questions about what the subject does to attain the required self-distance. What the hearer does – quite concretely – in reading a poem silently for the inner ear is not even a theme of investigation.

As far as we can see, the reason why Grondin omits the questions of action evolves in the fact that he follows Gadamer's categorial approach to experience. For Grondin, *Abstand in uns selbst* means self-distance not in the form of a concrete doing but as the emergence of a *question*. *Die Frage* is the categorial expression of what goes on when a prejudice is revised within one's inner ear. "Im Gespräch, das wir immerfort mit und um uns selbst führen, lernen wir Abstand von unseren Meinungen zu gewinnen, und bleiben dennoch bei den Fragen, die uns als Selbstgespräch angehen. Diesen Abstand meint die Hermeneutik, wenn sie in ihm eine unerläßliche Bedingung des Verstehens anerkennt,"<sup>1242</sup> writes Grondin. The point is fully in accordance with Gadamer's conclusion in the revised passage discussing the prejudices. "Alle Suspension von Urteilen [...] hat, logisch gesehen, die Struktur der *Frage*. Das Wesen der *Frage* ist das Offenlegen und Offenhalten von Möglichkeiten."<sup>1243</sup>

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<sup>1240</sup> Ibid. 331.

<sup>1241</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 281; Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr - Distanz und Selbstreflexion in der Hermeneutik." 330. Cf. Section 1b above.

<sup>1242</sup> Grondin, "Das Innere Ohr in Gadamer's Ästhetik. Distanz und Selbstreflexion der Hermeneutik." 130.

<sup>1243</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 304. Italics original.

In our context, there is no need to question the philosophical validity of Grondin's approach to inner hearing, question, and self-distance. The previous hermeneutical analysis of nondirective meditation evolved more or less the same point as what Grondin articulates: the mental way of hearing the meditation sound is potentially a way to opening new perspectives taken on oneself, others, and the world. However, with the example of nondirective meditation we potentially also see Grondin's observations a little differently. We recall how nondirective meditation is describable as an enactive and sonorous *epoché*. The gentle and unrestrained activity of repeating the sound silently in thought emerged as a physiological relaxation of everyday investments. The sonorous activity prompts the mind to rest and opens for a freer flow of spontaneous activities. In other words, the sonorous volitional activity evokes – quite concretely and almost by itself – what Gadamer just described as *Abhebung* and suspension of prejudices.<sup>1244</sup>

Indirectly, nondirective meditation puts here a certain perspective on Grondin's observation. Is it altogether impossible that a physiological, sonorous, and enactive *epoché* analogous to nondirective meditation also evolves in Gadamer's *Inneres Hören*? Perhaps a hitherto unvisited reason why the inner hearing experience is a paradigmatic example of self-distance evolves precisely here? That is, perhaps one reason why *Inneres Hören* is intuitively linkable to self-distance evolves in the banal fact that the doing of the inner ear initiates a suspension of prejudices – quite concretely and almost by itself, as part of the physico-biological response of the phenomenal body?

Rather than answering these questions directly, we note the following. From what we can see, only a slight alteration of Grondin and Gadamer's perspectives would be needed to conceive of *Inneres Hören* as a perceptual doing. It makes sense to do so. The consequence of such a view on *Inneres Hören* is also a rather intriguing perspective on the revisions of *Wahrheit und Methode*. We need only view Grondin's remarks of an Augustinian-Cartesian *inner* emerging in *Wahrheit und Methode* a little differently to see it as the contours of an embodied subject. Apparently, with *Wachheit* the contours emerge of perceiving subject amidst the categorial determination of *Lesen*.

#### **b. Health, Rhythm, and Equilibrium**

To gain a fuller perspective on the suggestion made here, we turn to Gadamer's health texts. These texts are interesting as something of a parallel track to Gadamer's elaborate philosophy of *Lesen* and *Sprache*. One point is that Gadamer here targets questions about embodiment more directly than he does elsewhere. Another is the fact that most of these lectures are not included in Gadamer's *Gesammelte Werke*.<sup>1245</sup> Gadamer has chosen to leave them out; they are not part of his "official" philosophy, so to

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<sup>1244</sup> *Ibid.* 304.

<sup>1245</sup> Only the text *Die Erfahrung des Todes* is included in the *Gesammelte Werke*. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Neuere Philosophie II: Probleme, Gestalten*, *Gesammelte Werke* 4 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1987).

speak. Gadamer's ambition is still hermeneutical, however – though with another accent than the regular sense of text-*Auslegung*. The modest goal of Gadamer is not to draw out extraordinary analyses of health and embodiment, but rather to bring to the fore "was im Grunde alle wissen"<sup>1246</sup> – that is, evoking the knowledge that we all possess simply by being more or less healthy human beings.

To be a healthy and vigorous human being is to be a body that spontaneously throws itself into the world, Gadamer points out. Constantly, and with a certain ease, the healthy body loses and re-discovers balance and equilibrium [*Gleichgewichtverlust und neue Gleichgewichtslagen suchen*].<sup>1247</sup> The healthy body *lives* the dynamic and rhythmic processes. These processes evolve everything from physico-biological rhythms of metabolism to the dynamic and natural shifting of moods and emotions. The balancing process of everyday life, Gadamer writes, is to be in the peculiar duality of lofty and impassionate spirits [*Aufschwungen*] and oppression [*Niederdrücken*].<sup>1248</sup> Now and then a certain lightness of being [*leicht, Leichtigkeit*] shifts into more troublesome moods of various characters.<sup>1249</sup> This emotional and biological movement of life [*Lebensbewegung*]<sup>1250</sup> is inscribed into other rhythmic phenomena of life such as breathing and sleep – "deren Ablauf Lebendigkeit, Erfrischung und Energieaufbau bewirkt,"<sup>1251</sup> as Gadamer writes. Then again, however, these personal-biological rhythms of life are carried out within the organization of an even more fundamental rhythm. In Gadamer's perspective, the mundane experience of *waking up* in the morning conveys a profound rhythm with an existential horizon. "Erwartungen, Sorge, Hoffnungen, Zukunft, all das liegt im Erwachen, und dem entspricht das Geheimnis des Schlafens und des Einschlafens, eine besonders geheimnisvolle Verborgenheit, die an die des Todes rührt."<sup>1252</sup>

Apparently, what Gadamer designates with the word *Gleichgewicht* is what today is called *homeostasis* in biological discourses. Gadamer's observations are *philosophical*, however. In Gadamer's perspective, the rhythmic *Lebensbewegung* of the individual transgresses the being of personal life in an atomist sense. The equilibrium of the individual is not a mere private issue but a relational and moral issue – it transcends the mere self-preserving of the individual. Equilibrium encompasses not only the ability to come to oneself [*mit sich auszukommen*] but also the ability to come together [*miteinander auszukommen*].<sup>1253</sup> Everything from the impersonal physico-biological balancing processes of metabolism, to the emotional dynamic of ups and downs, to the breathing, sleeping, and waking up are all inscribed in the rhythmic orders of a communal life. "Immerfort geht es darum, wie man seine eigene Selbstbalancierung in ein größeres soziales Ganzes einfügt, in dem man Mitwirkung und an dem man Teilnahme gewinnt."<sup>1254</sup>

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<sup>1246</sup> Gadamer, "Leiberfahrung und Objektivierbarkeit (1986)." 95.

<sup>1247</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>1248</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>1249</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>1250</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>1251</sup> Gadamer, "Über die Verborgenheit der Gesundheit (1991)." 145.

<sup>1252</sup> Gadamer, "Behandlung und Gespräch (1989)." 165.

<sup>1253</sup> Gadamer, "Leiberfahrung und Objektivierbarkeit (1986)." 106.

<sup>1254</sup> Ibid. 109.

Seeking to describe this communal and moral aspect of health, Gadamer evokes the Attic word *Oikos* – *das Heimatliche Haus*, as he translates it.<sup>1255</sup> Finding equilibrium in life is being *at home* in the world, Gadamer writes, both in the practical and mundane sense and in the more existential sense.<sup>1256</sup> Learning to be a human among other human beings implies a formation of the deepest modes of instinctive reactions into shared orders of behavior.<sup>1257</sup> In the inner rhythms of communal life [*inneren Lebensrhythmus*] evolves the possibility of finding in oneself an instinctive trust and belief in the world – "einer instinktiven Entspannung und Wiederfindung der Leichtigkeit des eigenen Daseins und Könnens".<sup>1258</sup>

For Gadamer, human health is the deeply individual *and* trans-individual rhythm, and the physico-biological *and* moral rhythm of spontaneously organized life. "[Gesundheit] ist die Rhythmik des Lebens, ein ständiger Vorgang, in dem sich immer wieder Gleichgewicht stabilisiert."<sup>1259</sup> From Gadamer's perspective, feeling *just well* harbors something of the magic of health [*die Wunder der Gesundheit*].<sup>1260</sup> "Gesundheit [...] ist Da-sein, In-der-Welt-sein, mit-den-Menschen-sein von den eigenen Aufgaben des Lebens tätig oder freudig erfüllt sein."<sup>1261</sup>

Gadamer's texts on health express a certain polemic towards naïve recourse to medical treatment. From Gadamer's perspective, pain and sickness are the ontological counter primate [*ontologische Gegenprimat*] of health.<sup>1262</sup> Pain and sickness disturb the spontaneous dynamic of equilibrium – life becomes *unbalanced*. The ordinary and spontaneous life suddenly stands out as a challenge. We recall the figure from Section 3b: life becomes *Text* – it forces to the fore an active interpretation of what normally goes on spontaneously, precisely without interpretation. In such a context, it is crucial to work *with* the natural ways of finding equilibrium in life, Gadamer writes.<sup>1263</sup> Medical treatment and therapy cannot replace the human ability to create a meaningful and healthy context for itself – it can only support the process. "Es liegt im Wesen der Gesundheit, daß sie sich in ihren eigenen Maßen selbst erhält,"<sup>1264</sup> we read. For him, a proper process of convalescence is not a process of conquering the pain and sickness but a new discovery of the resources evolving in the relationships of everyday life. To find oneself anew in the factual situation by existential honesty is the key to human health. Herein evolves the independent and self-sufficient standard of health.

If we now try to apply Gadamer to nondirective meditation, we soon see new aspects compared to what we saw with *Wahrheit und Methode*. Gadamer's philosophical reflections are now directly applicable to the enactive aspects of nondirective meditation. The health lecture situates the meditative practice in

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<sup>1255</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>1256</sup> Ibid. 108.

<sup>1257</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>1258</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>1259</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>1260</sup> Gadamer, "Über die Verborgenheit der Gesundheit (1991)." 133.

<sup>1261</sup> Gadamer, "Wohlsein und die Wunder der Gesundheit (1991)." 144. Italics added.

<sup>1262</sup> Gadamer, "Leiberfahrung und Objektivierbarkeit (1986)." 99.

<sup>1263</sup> Gadamer, "Über die Verborgenheit der Gesundheit (1991)." 139.

<sup>1264</sup> Ibid. 139.

a phenomenal body not in categorial manners but suggests concrete details in the enactive structure. With Gadamer, the minimal act of repeating the meditation sound in thought seems to be acting in the dynamic of embodied equilibrium. That is, the process of losing and regaining a free mental attitude in meditation seems to be related somehow to the physico-biological rhythm of the phenomenal body.

In one sense, Gadamer's perspectives appear to be almost a direct echo of what we saw in the empirical context of health and mind-wandering (Section 10b). Nondirective meditation is a form of relaxation working *with* the biological power of re-gaining homeostasis and equilibrium in life. That said, Gadamer's health texts simultaneously expand on what we saw in the empirical context. From a Gadamerian perspective, finding enactive equilibrium in meditation harbors an irreducible moral, ontological, and relational dimension. Being *at home* in meditation mirrors being *at home* in life. Gaining contact with the inner life rhythm [*inneren Lebensrhythmus*] is gaining contact with vital power that ultimately and by necessity transgresses the being of the individual subject. The equilibrium of life is a shared order. "Die nicht offenkundige Harmonie ist stärker als die offenkundige,"<sup>1265</sup> writes Gadamer (citing Heraclitus). The stronger human connections evolve not in the apparent agreement and nondifference; but contrariwise, in the relationship wherein differences and otherness are allowed to grow in freedom and reciprocity. "Das ganze Geheimnis der 'Harmonia', dieses Zusammenstimmen und Zusammenklingen des einander Widerstreitens klingt auch in dem uns vertrauten Ausdruck an: Es ist die Fügung des Dissonanten."<sup>1266</sup> According to Gadamer, the relational *Fügung* of human existence can be denied, forgotten, or hidden, yet it is always *there* – together with the givenness of the world.

From the Gadamerian perspective, it is not far-fetched to suggest that the practice of nondirective meditation is a way of acting in relation to this fundamental and relational dimension of human life. Despite the fact that the existential equilibrium obviously cannot be *proven* by empirical studies, its foundation evolves in the knowledge we all possess simply by being relatively healthy human beings.<sup>1267</sup> The foundation evolves in the enigmatic and almost elusively obvious nature of health.

Let us now return to *Wahrheit und Methode*. Against the background of Gadamer's health texts, also Gadamer's subsequent revisions look a little different. What Grondin calls an Augustinian-Cartesian inner has not only a phenomenal body but also an inner equilibrium. The executed *Wachheit* towards the prejudices emerges as a form of sensibility towards unbalance or disequilibrium.

However, here we also note a slight mismatch between Gadamer's "official" philosophy of *Wahrheit und Methode* and his "unofficial" writings. From the perspective of *Wahrheit und Methode*, what the health texts describe as *Gleichgewicht*, *Inneren Lebensrhythmus* or "instinktive Entspannung und Wiederfindung der Leichtigkeit" soon becomes *Sprache*. If we take a last short look into the many essays elaborating the linguistic philosophy of *Wahrheit und Methode*, we see how Gadamer frequently makes

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<sup>1265</sup> Gadamer, "Leiberfahrung und Objektivierbarkeit (1986)." 102.

<sup>1266</sup> Ibid. 101-102.

<sup>1267</sup> Cf. "was im Grunde alle wissen". Ibid. 95.

points strikingly similar to what evolves in the health texts – then behalf of *Sprache* instead of embodiment (*Leiblichkeit*). *Sprache* is the "Vollzug unserer Leiblichkeit und Lebendigkeit im Ganzen,"<sup>1268</sup> we read. *Sprache* enables the human to be *at home* in the world: Gaining basic linguistic competence is "ein wahres Sich-Einhausen in der Welt." "Das wortlose Verstehen von Mutter und Kind, die Jahre des Sprechenlernens, das sind die ersten Prägungen der Weltorientierung, die den Menschen lebensfähig macht."<sup>1269</sup> *Sprache* furnishes us with the possibility of having a world we can call *ours*. "Wir wachsen auf, wir lernen die Welt kennen, wir lernen die Menschen kennen und am Ende uns selbst, indem wir sprechen lernen."<sup>1270</sup> *Sprache* is even a *vital* dimension in the life of man – it is the pre-condition for a natural, human life. "[Sprache ist] dem menschlichen Leben so unentbehrlich [...] wie die Luft, die wir atmen."<sup>1271</sup> Ultimately speaking, we can say, *Sprache* is what harbors the resources for the individual human to find something conceivable as *Gleichgewicht*, *Lebensrhythmus*, or *Entspannung*.

In our context, Gadamer's standard philosophical turn to *Sprache* is understandable, yet also limiting. *Sprache* manifests a "categorializing" of the enactive nuances suggested in Gadamer's "unofficial" writings. *Sprache* evolves not quite on the same level as *Gleichgewicht*, *Lebensrhythmus*, and *Entspannung* but schematizes away, as it were, the concrete nuances of the enactive subject. In other words, if we want to explore further the intriguing initiatives and indications given by Gadamer we cannot turn to *Wahrheit und Methode*. We need to find descriptive resources elsewhere – we need Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception.

## 15. Attention – Awareness – Embodied History (Merleau-Ponty)

The previous sections analyzed nondirective meditation in light of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. In effect, we here took the philosophical analysis of nondirective meditation as far as we can via Gadamer's path of *Lesen*. Gradually, it became apparent that we need another philosophical approach to the nondirective meditation than Gadamer's elaborate philosophy can offer. The enactive dimension of the meditative practice cannot be fully explored in Gadamer's categorial approach to experience.

Against this background, we turn now to Merleau-Ponty and the path of *perception*, as we called his way of doing philosophy. We recall from Parts Two and Three how the difference between the Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's approaches to experience came down to a question of circulation of perspectives. Only Merleau-Ponty's noncategorial philosophy was fine-grained enough to recognize and describe slight but potent detail in perceptual life, destabilizing the phenomenological conception of

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<sup>1268</sup> Gadamer, "Zur Phänomenologie von Ritual und Sprache (1992)." 419.

<sup>1269</sup> Gadamer, "Über das Hören (1998)." 53.

<sup>1270</sup> Gadamer, "Mensch und Sprache (1966)." 149.

<sup>1271</sup> Ibid. 154.

*Absolutes Hier*. Evolving here was action conceived as structure, we recall – a multiphase and complex structure of behavior built up "from below". The human flexibility of symbol behavior evolved in continuum with the syncretic and amovable forms of behavioral flexibility.

From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, it is this dimension of behavioral life that Gadamer has touched upon with *Inneres Hören*, the revisions of *Wahrheit und Methode*, and his health texts. *Sinn* has been transformed in the direction of *sens*; *Sprache* has been transformed in the direction of *structure*; *Vollzug* has been transformed in the direction of *behavior* – or in short: *Lesen* has been transformed in the direction of *perception*. By turning to Merleau-Ponty, we can accomplish the initiatives made by Gadamer into fuller descriptions of behavioral life. Merleau-Ponty has the noncategorical descriptive resources to do so.

The goal of the current section is to import nondirective meditation substantially into Merleau-Ponty's complex notion of behavior. In practice, this means to elaborate on the philosophical description given with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics – only from a new angle. With Gadamer's health texts, we anticipated the enactive approach to nondirective meditation. Carried out phenomenologically, what we apparently touched upon here is the behavioral flexibility expressed with Merleau-Ponty's sequence syncretic, amovable, and symbol behavior. In the literal as in the transposed sense, what Gadamer calls human equilibrium [*Gleichgewicht*] presupposes the ability to flex between positions – otherwise, there is not balance but imbalance. Although the current section will not discuss Gadamer's notion of equilibrium directly (this will be done in Section 15), the phenomenological analysis of nondirective meditation will carry implications of Gadamer's initiative. Thus, indirectly, the current section will be relevant to the question of health: the meditative process of encountering and caring for unprocessed psychological issues will evolve as a way of expanding the horizon of health from within.

As indicated, the turn from Gadamer to Merleau-Ponty is implicitly a turn from one Augustinian subject to another. However, the turn from *Lesen* to *perception* implies also a turn in the Kantian subject introduced through Gadamer's reading. Although Merleau-Ponty offers no Kant-reading analogous to Gadamer, the Preface of *Phenomenology of Perception* contextualizes the phenomenological approach in ways worth having in the background as we proceed into the topics. For Merleau-Ponty, what Kant calls reflective judgment is intrinsic to the proto-intentional or prethetic structure of the phenomenal body (Section 4). To see a tree, stone, hand, or whatever, is always to act out the unity of what Kant calls *Einbildungskraft* and *Vernunft* – before even the object is identified as something. "[T]he unity of the world, prior to being posited by knowledge through an explicit act of identification, is lived as already accomplished or as already there."<sup>1272</sup>

Implicitly, what we say here is a comment to Gadamer's *Sehen als...* Following Merleau-Ponty, the *Sehen als...* is now transformed in in the direction of an *enacted als...* , if it makes sense to say so. In *Sehen*

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<sup>1272</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Preface. lxxxi.



*als...* evolves the *Gebilde* of behavior elaborated in Section 8. *Sehen als...* is transformed into dynamic and transitional orders of syncretic, amovable, and symbol behavior.

Keeping track of the sonorous activity of nondirective meditation the current section will work its way into what Merleau-Ponty (interpreting Kant) just describes as the spontaneous organization of the perceptual world. Compared to the Gadamerian-hermeneutical analysis, however, we now need to invert the figure of the procedure. While the Gadamerian reading started directly by applying the hermeneutical philosophy to meditation and gradually observing how a perceptual dimension of embodiment emerged, we must now begin by locating the proper hermeneutical locus to importing the meditative practice into phenomenology. A Merleau-Ponty-reading of Richard Shusterman<sup>1273</sup> will help us find the right locus in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to do so (Subsection 15a). Though his project serves a slightly different aim, Shusterman identifies an underexplored hermeneutical dimension in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy; more precisely in Merleau-Ponty underdeveloped concept of *attention* (*Phenomenology of Perception*). By a slight revising and accomplishing of Shusterman's initiative, we will then be in a position to read *Phenomenology of Perception* from the viewpoint of nondirective meditation (14b). By doing so, we will execute what we finally could call embodied hermeneutics in the fuller sense of the word.

**a. Attention, Awareness and Alteration of Habit. Shusterman and Feldenkrais**

Shusterman launches us into Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Shusterman is generally sympathetic to the overall project of *Phenomenology of Perception*,<sup>1274</sup> but also identifies critical weaknesses in Merleau-Ponty's book. To Shusterman, Merleau-Ponty proposes a polarizing dichotomy of behavior. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty operates with a conception of normal behavior that is smooth, spontaneous and unproblematic.<sup>1275</sup> On the other hand, there is *abnormal* behavior distinguished by grave pathological dysfunctions. Morbid and dysfunctional behavior (as exemplified by the unfortunate patient Schneider) is used as a contrasting category of discussion.<sup>1276</sup> Consequently, Shusterman argues, Merleau-Ponty ends up in a descriptive schema claiming that unless we are pathologically impaired, like the exemplary Schneider or other neurologically diseased individuals, our bodily functions are fully accurate and miraculously functional.<sup>1277</sup>

Shusterman, then, disagrees with the premise of Merleau-Ponty's division. So-called normal behavior, he writes, is always dysfunctional in greater or lesser degree. "[M]ost of us so-called normal, fully functional people suffer from various incapacities that are mild in nature but that still impair

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<sup>1273</sup> Richard Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy", in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>1274</sup> *Ibid.* 151.

<sup>1275</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

<sup>1276</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

<sup>1277</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

performance.<sup>1278</sup> There need not necessarily be injuries or accidents involved, only the banal fact that bad habits, unreflectively, are established just as easily as good ones.<sup>1279</sup> For most of us, Shusterman points out, our bodies could be *used* better. We believe we do something in efficient and healthy ways, though we in fact very often do not.<sup>1280</sup>

Shusterman also criticizes Merleau-Ponty for displaying a striking lack of interest in the possibility of practices aiming to alter unwanted habits of the body. While thematizing in length the role played by basal habits in body schema, Merleau-Ponty leaves out the question of how to alter bad, unhealthy or unconstructive habits. "Once bad habits are acquired, how do we correct them?" Shusterman asks:

We cannot simply rely on sedimented habit to correct them, since the sedimented habits are precisely what is wrong. Nor can we rely on the unreflective somatic spontaneity of the moment because that is already tainted with the trace of the unwanted sedimentations and thus most likely to continue to misdirect us.<sup>1281</sup>

*Phenomenology of Perception*, according to Shusterman, offers a simplistic either/or orientation to behavior. Either the embodied self is incapable of altering itself once the bad habits are established, or alterations are just unnecessary unless people are seriously injured, traumatized, or sick. Shusterman misses in *Phenomenology of Perception* a third combination: the phenomenological design of practical disciplines aimed not so much at *knowing* behavior as at *changing* behavior, with relevance for morbid and as well as so-called normal behavior.<sup>1282</sup>

According to Shusterman,<sup>1283</sup> important ways to alter behavior are found in what he just calls "ancient Asian meditation practices" (the lack of specific is original<sup>1284</sup>) or (which appears to be his favored disciplines) by contemporary education systems such as the Alexander Technique or Feldenkrais Method.<sup>1285</sup> These are disciplines aimed not to erase the level of unreflective behavior by the impossible effort of making the practitioner explicitly conscious of all perceptions and actions, but, more modestly, to improve unreflective behavior that hinders our experience and performance.<sup>1286</sup> In Shusterman's reference to the practices, the crux of these otherwise distinct paths is an "explicit awareness and conscious control" and a "self-conscious somatic focusing".<sup>1287</sup> In order to improve the use of the embodied self, he writes,

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<sup>1278</sup> Ibid. 166.

<sup>1279</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>1280</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>1281</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>1282</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>1283</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>1284</sup> Shusterman's lack of terminological awareness is unfortunate. From Chapter IV, we know that "ancient meditation practices" can mean anything from the hardest concentration technique imaginable to the nondirective meditation that we are trying to understand here.

<sup>1285</sup> Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement* (New York, Hegerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977). Moshe Feldenkrais, *The Potent Self; a Guide to Spontaneity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1985). Following the clue of Shusterman, we will look into the principles of the Feldenkrais Method in a brief moment.

<sup>1286</sup> Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy." 165.

<sup>1287</sup> Ibid. 165.

the unreflective habit or behavior must be brought into "conscious critical reflection (although only for a limited time)".<sup>1288</sup> That is, practicing an attentional awareness of bodily feelings, and gradually increasing the knowledge of bad habits and how they influence everyday activity, is a way to alter unwanted behavior.

Merleau-Ponty, according to Shusterman, demonstrates a striking lack of interest in the principles behind such practices. That is, if meditation and education systems were unknown to Merleau-Ponty due to empirical reasons, he nevertheless shows a more general noninterest in the validity and worth of consciously thematized approaches to the body. "Merleau-Ponty hardly wants to listen to what the body seems to say about itself in terms of its conscious somatic sensations, such as explicit kinesthetic or proprioceptive feelings."<sup>1289</sup> While elaborating at length on the fundamental and expressive nature of the body, Merleau-Ponty neglects the role and worth of explicitly conscious bodily feelings;<sup>1290</sup> i.e. modes of consciousness wherein perceptual consciousness *practices* a specific and delineated way of behaving towards itself. The spontaneity of embodied consciousness is displayed only when it unfolds as a tacit, unthematized and unreflective bodily self but not when formed into practices of a focused, self-conscious awareness, reflecting back on the unreflective bodily self.<sup>1291</sup>

Shusterman's claims and observations must be seen in the context of the opening sections of *Phenomenology of Perception*.<sup>1292</sup> Here, Merleau-Ponty discusses – and explicitly dismisses – a concept of attention structurally similar (apparently<sup>1293</sup>) to what Shusterman finds lacking.<sup>1294</sup> Merleau-Ponty describes attention as a "searchlight beam" and a "spotlight." Attentional awareness is to hold onto specific experiences, and to sort out what is *inside* and *outside* the attentional grip: "The primary operation of attention is to create for itself a perceptual or a mental field that can be 'surveyed' or 'dominated' (*Überschauen*)".<sup>1295</sup> Now, what Merleau-Ponty criticizes is not the operation of attention as such, but the empiricist and intellectualist privileging and misconception of attention as a perceptual activity. For empiricism, in Merleau-Ponty's analysis, attention represents a privileged mode of consciousness revealing stimuli or sensations otherwise passing by unnoticed; like a "spotlight illuminating preexisting objects hidden in the shadows."<sup>1296</sup> In the empiricist schema, attention is principally withdrawn from the object towards which the "spotlight" is directed. Attention, so considered, "creates nothing:" it "is the same throughout all acts of attention, just as the searchlight's beam is the same regardless of what it illuminates."<sup>1297</sup> Creating nothing, attention is comparable to a "general and unrestrained power," Merleau-Ponty writes: "it can at any moment indifferently cast its light upon any of the contents of

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<sup>1288</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>1289</sup> Ibid. 151.

<sup>1290</sup> Ibid. 152.

<sup>1291</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>1292</sup> *Phenomenology of Perception*, Section III, "Classical Prejudices and the Return to Phenomena".

<sup>1293</sup> We will soon question the various concepts of attention that are in play in Shusterman's reading.

<sup>1294</sup> Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy." 153.

<sup>1295</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 31.

<sup>1296</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>1297</sup> Ibid. 28.

consciousness."<sup>1298</sup> For empiricism, according to Merleau-Ponty, attention can thus represent an apparent mode of absolute freedom of the subject. The subject can *take notice* (Merleau-Ponty uses the German *Bemerken*) of whatever he or she likes to focus on, bringing clarity to a world that *is what it is*.

In contrast to the empiricist conception of attention, Merleau-Ponty adds, the intellectualist conception of attention brings in a moment of fecundity in attention. Along the reasoning favoring intellectual syntheses, attention both *does* and *achieves* something. It makes something explicit according to distinct criteria. "The new appearance of the object subordinates the previous one and expresses everything that the previous one meant."<sup>1299</sup> What intellectualism thus seeks for, according to Merleau-Ponty, is the core relationship between the attending consciousness, on the one hand, and the thing being attended, on the other. With reference to the Cartesian wax example, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates how the subjective act of (intellectualist) attention extracts or *draws out* an intelligible structure from the object perceived.<sup>1300</sup> Attention brings clarity into confused perceptions of the thing in a way in which consciousness simultaneously comes to self-clarity. "Consciousness only begins to exist by determining an object".<sup>1301</sup> Thus: "In order to take possession of attentive knowledge, consciousness need only return to itself, in the sense intended when we say that a man who has fainted 'comes to [consciousness]'. "<sup>1302</sup>

In line with the general critical schema of *Phenomenology of Perception*,<sup>1303</sup> Merleau-Ponty's key critique is that empiricism and intellectualism fail to situate perception adequately in their recourse to attention. Neither of the approaches manages to grasp consciousness in the act of *learning*, Merleau-Ponty holds.<sup>1304</sup> For *if* attention was properly situated, this modus of perceptual consciousness can no longer, in Merleau-Ponty's words, "exist as a general and formal activity"<sup>1305</sup> (the way it does for intellectualism and empiricism). Rather, it needs to be taken as a manner in which a consciousness learns "a *new* way for consciousness to be present toward its objects."<sup>1306</sup> Being present towards its object implies a "transformation of the mental field",<sup>1307</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. Attention is a way in which the body not only turns towards the object but also *creates* a structure in what is given:

To pay attention is not merely to further clarify some preexisting givens; rather, it is to realize in them a new articulation by taking them as *figures*. They are only pre-formed as *horizons*, they truly constitute new regions in the world. The original structure that they introduce is precisely what makes the identity of the object before and after the act of attention appear.<sup>1308</sup>

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<sup>1298</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>1299</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>1300</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>1301</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>1302</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>1303</sup> Cf. Section 7 above.

<sup>1304</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 30.

<sup>1305</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>1306</sup> Ibid. 31. Italics added.

<sup>1307</sup> Ibid. 31. Italics added.

<sup>1308</sup> Ibid. 32.

In other words, an adequate phenomenological conception of attention must describe how the mental field implies a transformation in the way attentional directedness is executed. Something is learned in attention when a certain mode of behaving in the perceptual world is taken up in the way these are allowed to merge into acting into new figures. Only with these revisions is attention situated in the perceptual field: "Consciousness must be brought to face with its unreflective life in things and awaken its own, forgotten, history – this is the true role of philosophical reflection and this is how a true theory of attention is established."<sup>1309</sup>

Now, Merleau-Ponty does not elaborate the theory of attention of the kind hereby indicated. The moment the critical points about empiricism and intellectualism are made, and the moment he has indicated in positive how the establishment of a theory of attention *should* have been designed, Merleau-Ponty leaves the concept of attention out of further discussions. This move, then, is what is regretted by Shusterman. Though Merleau-Ponty's critical points on empiricism and intellectualism surely are right in isolation, so is Shusterman's point, Merleau-Ponty throws out an important baby with the bathwater, as it were. Merleau-Ponty misses the opportunity to thematize the fecundity of an "explicit attention" towards the body,<sup>1310</sup> and the profound aspects of a "focused attention."<sup>1311</sup> In other word, he misses the perspective of the increasing richness and pleasures that heightened awareness can bring,<sup>1312</sup> and a phenomenological orientation that *could* have been a useful supplement to the ontology of the embodied self.

In our context, Shusterman's claims and observations on *Phenomenology of Perception* are both problematic and fruitful. To start with the problematic, Shusterman's claim that Merleau-Ponty advocates a polarizing dichotomy between normal and morbid behavior appears to be based on a misunderstanding. Misunderstood, by what we can see, is the phenomenological role played by morbid behavior in Merleau-Ponty's analyses. From the methodological reflections above (Section 7), we know that Merleau-Ponty's recourse to the empirical sciences is a way he performs his original phenomenological version of *Wesensschau*: eidetic structures of perceptual life are displayed through the phenomenological interpretation of the empirical sciences. As we will soon see in the example of the phantom limb (Section 14b), what Merleau-Ponty demonstrates in the analysis of dysfunctional behavior are universal structures of behavior. The cases of illness are paradigmatic examples that make vivid structures that in various ways and in greater or lesser degrees are parts of perceptual life in general.

Contrary to Shusterman's claim, hence, *Phenomenology of Perception* demonstrates how variabilities and displacements and dysfunctions certainly are distinct features of "normal" human behavior. Merleau-Ponty is even critical to a view of humans based on frictionless "normality". Pointed out

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<sup>1309</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>1310</sup> Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy." 153.

<sup>1311</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>1312</sup> Ibid. 165.

in a subsequent lecture, is how this idea of normality communicates a distinguished and problematic ideal of humankind; a *Western, mature, nonmorbidity behavior*.<sup>1313</sup> (See, below, how Merleau-Ponty's affirmed conception of mature behavior runs counter to this historical idea.)

Moreover, the reason Shusterman judges Merleau-Ponty for neglecting attention as a valued form of perceptual experience is also problematic. Speculating on why Merleau-Ponty ignores the worth and value of practices that aim to alter bodily habits, Shusterman writes:

Merleau-Ponty did not really want to affirm the value of consciously thematized bodily feelings because he presumed that such recognition could actually challenge his philosophical project of defending the adequacy of the body's tacit, unreflective mode of perception and because he thought that greater attention to explicit somatic feelings could hamper not only the understanding of our perception, speech, thought, and action, but even the efficiency of their performance.<sup>1314</sup>

In other words, when Merleau-Ponty rejects thematizing the value of thematized and heightened focus on bodily feelings, this is because such a perspective could pose a threat to his prime philosophical orientation towards proto-intentional bodily formation in perception. The perspective of conscious alteration of behavior would undermine Merleau-Ponty's ultimate phenomenological orientation and goal. The nonthematizing of explicit conscious control-taking is, so to speak, an expression of a philosophical self-protection. "Indeed," writes Shusterman, "to recognize differences and changes in the primary experience of different people might even seem to challenge the very idea of a fixed and universal primary perception."<sup>1315</sup> In other words, Merleau-Ponty's thorough commitment to primordial phenomenological experiences in the domain of phenomenal consciousness represents a fixation of thought; a philosophical hyperbole excluding from consideration practices that threaten its conceptual foundation.

According to our reading of Merleau-Ponty, however, these reasons speculatively ascribed Merleau-Ponty seem strange, if not downright inadequate. Why should any specific kind of bodily attentive exercise *challenge* Merleau-Ponty's description of embodied experience? The premise of Shusterman's claim is dubious: Merleau-Ponty's philosophical conception of the primacy of perception is not a "fixed idea" based on an exclusion of experiences of this or that sort. It is, rather, the consequent phenomenological observation that in human life there simply is *no outside* of perception. Claiming that there is something *fixed* in the "primary of perception" runs counter to what is elaborated at great length by Merleau-Ponty already in *Structure of Behavior*. The all-encompassing dimension of perceptual life is thoroughly dynamic, dialectical and flexible.<sup>1316</sup>

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<sup>1313</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Structure and Conflicts in Child Consciousness (1949-50)." Merleau-Ponty finds in the writings of Head, Guillaume and Piaget among others, evolving parallels (variously exposed and with various emphases) between the conceptions of the mentally ill, the so-called primitive person, and children.

<sup>1314</sup> Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy." 153.

<sup>1315</sup> Ibid. 168.

<sup>1316</sup> Cf. Section 8 above.

Why, if we leave out Shusterman's speculation of a philosophical protectionism, does Merleau-Ponty then neglect attention as a prioritized perceptual experience to analyze? Our suggested answer is: Merleau-Ponty does so because attention – in the form that he takes the term from his contemporary discourse – is synonymous with *focused attention*, or *concentration*. By what we saw in Part Four, Merleau-Ponty follows in the traditional and (partly also) contemporary path by operating with an un-nuanced conception of attention. Automatically, so to speak, he connotes attention to stringency, control and epistemic procedures of methodology. As is indicated in his brief hint to Descartes's wax example, attention is put on par with *scientific* consciousness. In other words, when attention gains a privileged status in Merleau-Ponty's versions of empiricism and intellectualism, this is because attention presumptively pertains to a mind gathered on its own *clear* foundation. Thus Merleau-Ponty can write that, "Perceptual consciousness is mistakenly identified with the precise forms of scientific consciousness, and the indeterminate is not allowed into the definition of the mind."<sup>1317</sup>

Instead of elaborating a theory of attention, Merleau-Ponty's short analysis "deconstructs" (phenomenologically) the presumptive clarity of attention. By situating it, he indicates how a principal indeterminacy of the perceptual world is also effective *in* the figure of (concentrated) attention. (Cf: "We must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon."<sup>1318</sup>) Ambiguities of perception evolve within the most stringent figures of spotlight attention. Having made this point in the introduction of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty thus leaves the concept of attention in favor of a phenomenology residing in what he just called the "unreflective life in things". But perhaps Merleau-Ponty would have chosen differently if he had had at hand a concept of attention working in the opposite directing of control, stringency and determinacy, that is, if he knew about practices of *nonconcentrated* attentional awareness?

Now that we have made these points in regard to concentration, it seems pertinent to turn the question back to Shusterman. Does Shusterman demonstrate a sufficient terminological awareness when he calls for practices of "*explicit* awareness and conscious *control*" and "self-conscious somatic *focusing*"; i.e. practices that bring "unreflective habit or action [...] into *conscious critical reflection*".<sup>1319</sup> In our terminology, what Shusterman designates with this parlance is precisely the *con-centrated* attention of stringency and control. Analogous to what we saw in the context of Lutz, Wallace<sup>1320</sup> and Varela et al.,<sup>1321</sup> words like "explicit" and "focused" signal a perceptual modification moving from a phenomenal consciousness to a determinate access consciousness in a form analogous to a searchlight's beam that lights up an object by delineating an inside and an outside of the rays.

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<sup>1317</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 31.

<sup>1318</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>1319</sup> Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy." 165. Italics added.

<sup>1320</sup> Cf. Section 10b above.

<sup>1321</sup> Cf. Section 11a above.

By what we saw, this is a form of attention that works (in smaller or greater degrees) against the spontaneity of perceptual life. Concentration does not perceive *in* the unreflective life in things, to use Merleau-Ponty's words, but considers instead the unreflective life from a position external to the spontaneity of the moment. In our terminology, hence, Shusterman's "explicit awareness" and "self-conscious somatic focusing" denote a positional consciousness external to what it apparently is supposed to gain heightened awareness *of*. Is this really what Shusterman wants to heighten in his original re-reading of Merleau-Ponty? Does he really want to re-situate the mode of attention connoted with stringency and control while describing the phenomenological design of body alteration and better uses of the embodied self?

The ambition of Shusterman's article clearly indicates a negative answer. What Shusterman *seems* to defend and want from Merleau-Ponty, for instance by differentiating the preferred practices from an inadequate "intense focus on somatic sensation",<sup>1322</sup> is apparently not a cognitive stance standing "over" the body (i.e. explicit self-conscious somatic focus, e.g. concentration), but an open and inclusive self-awareness that moves *in* the body.

We see this when we follow the initiative taken by Shusterman, and evoke some principles in one of his favored disciplines for behavior alteration; namely the Feldenkrais Method. The Feldenkrais Method is interesting because positive determinations of an embodied process of understanding will be evolving that we, in the next step, will also ascribe to nondirective meditation. The Feldenkrais Method is not meditation, but a form of somatic education that is taught either in group sessions or in nonverbal, individual sessions that seek to improve the movability of the body through gentle movements and increased awareness towards the body proper. "Awareness" as Feldenkrais defines the term, "is consciousness together with a realization within it or what is going on within ourselves while we are conscious."<sup>1323</sup> Awareness is to be attentive and aware, obviously; but not necessarily in the form of an explicit conscious focus or concentration. In fact, Feldenkrais underlines, concentration works in the opposite direction of what the more fruitful expansion of bodily awareness can imply. Whereas concentration per se is aim-oriented,<sup>1324</sup> the awareness he seeks implies an open-ended expansion of awareness that moves *in*, and is formed by, the spontaneous movability of the body. By doing practical exercises with a certain resting, gentle and inclusive awareness one can eventually both increase the knowledge of what one is doing and gradually alter the same tendencies. Whereas a spontaneous body *without* awareness tends to slip into pre-established and almost automatic habits and patterns of

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<sup>1322</sup> Cf. Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy." 153. Shusterman's article elaborates on the need for a differentiated concept of self-perception that is open to the insights of Moshé Feldenkrais and F. Matthias Alexander, without thereby being an "intense focus" in the form targeted and criticized by Merleau-Ponty. As will be clearer in the following, Shusterman apparently stands in need of a concept of attention more suited for the practices that he wishes to defend.

<sup>1323</sup> Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement*. 50.

<sup>1324</sup> *Ibid.* 82.



behavior,<sup>1325</sup> a bodily action *with* this mode of awareness can slow down the execution of the action and eventually re-route the neurological patterns of spontaneous habits.

With the principle of increased awareness Feldenkrais calls upon a certain plasticity of the nervous system. "The human nervous system is the least rigid of all structures," he writes; "it grows and forms itself while we undergo experiences."<sup>1326</sup> Thus, gaining increased awareness through practical exercises is a way of using the intrinsic flexibility of the nervous system to gain new and enhanced ways of using the embodied self. The human frame is by nature organic, thus the embodied self has an intrinsic potential for unfolding itself along a much wider scale of doings than it normally unfolds. One "expand[s] the boundaries of the possible" writes Feldenkrais; one "turn[s] the impossible into possible."<sup>1327</sup>

Curiously, Feldenkrais conceives of this increased awareness in the framework of a historical body that is *on the way to* a more mature way of behavior. The adult human, Feldenkrais underlines, has the existential responsibility for an adequate handling of uncontrolled and spontaneous modes of behavior.<sup>1328</sup> Maturity as such, however, is not a form of growth that ends at some point in life, for instance, when one turns twenty years of age. "[T]he maturing process should never come to a stand in any plane of human activity if life is to be a healthy process", Feldenkrais underlines. "Maturity itself is a process, and not a final state; it is the process whereby past experience is broken up into its constituent parts and new patterns are formed out of them to fit the present circumstances of the environment and the present state of the body."<sup>1329</sup> Becoming more aware, we can say, is becoming more mature. This process, according to Feldenkrais, involves an attentive quest into structures of behavior that are established and formed from the earliest years of life, as well as those more explicitly relevant in the present. Bodily and psychological restraints that express themselves in spontaneous behavior are the manifestations of one's ontogenetic and phylogenetic history.

Feldenkrais moves into specifics. Our spontaneous ways of acting towards ourselves and others are sedimentations of how we once were met by parents or caretakers,<sup>1330</sup> he writes. So also are social and cultural expectations of the formative years manifest in self-image as well as bodily postures. However, the fruitfulness of becoming aware is most potent when one does not naïvely set aside one's history, Feldenkrais underlines. Concentrated will-power does not work. Maturity comes when one's history is *embraced*. "When you have learned to accept the past and you have made peace with it, then it will leave you in peace."<sup>1331</sup> Only by working *with* the psychological and embodied restraints of embodied history is there the possibility of harmonious development.<sup>1332</sup>

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<sup>1325</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>1326</sup> Feldenkrais, *The Potent Self; a Guide to Spontaneity*. 103.

<sup>1327</sup> Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement*. 57.

<sup>1328</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>1329</sup> Feldenkrais, *The Potent Self; a Guide to Spontaneity*. 8.

<sup>1330</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>1331</sup> Ibid. ix.

<sup>1332</sup> Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement*. 52.

Feldenkrais describes the learning process as a form of *de-* or *re-*learning; a way of learning to use the body anew in more healthy and self-caring ways. In Feldenkrais's vocabulary, the process implies a gradual and unrestrained revealing of parasitic actions that unnecessarily accompany the spontaneous ways of action. The key to a better usage of the self, Feldenkrais demonstrates, is to re-discover the ability in oneself to do things with *less energy*. Where cultural formation often takes the form of an inhibition of spontaneous freedom through the usage of will-power and restraint, the practical process of becoming aware anew is to discover the fecundity of an opposite strategy. Less energy, and less usage of forced will-power, imply being able to unfold activities more spontaneously and in greater freedom. The potentiality of this freer mode of being is already given with the body. Guided by the concrete and delineated ways of acting one can discover – in one's spontaneity – the resources of a more potent self.

We return now to Shusterman, Merleau-Ponty and our reading of *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty's view shares many essential features with those articulated by Feldenkrais. In particular, the positive orientation towards childhood experiences as a key to understanding mature behavior pinpoints a shared ground of understanding. So also does the emphasis on the plasticity of the nervous system, i.e. the insight that the human body is structured by continuous learning, integration and re-integration of experience.

That said, of Merleau-Ponty and Feldenkrais, only the latter develops the more determinate view on how the embodied being through practice and attentional awareness can actually alter sedimented structures of behavior. Feldenkrais's approach is *practical*, not theoretical and he *does* the practice of change and plasticity, that is, he possesses and describes insights into how the continuous learning of the body evolves. Merleau-Ponty does not explore this domain of practical alteration within the plasticity of the body. As Shusterman notes, there are no detailed conceptions of bodily *improvement* in *Phenomenology of Perception*, no elaborations of how revision of sedimented habits or inadequate behaviors occurs through practice. *Phenomenology of Perception* puts emphasis on the rather rudimentary and pre-intentional dimension of experience but does not explicate how alterations *within* these structures might be conceived through practice and knowledge.

Certainly – and especially if *Structure of Behavior* is also taken into consideration (which Shusterman does not do) – Merleau-Ponty's philosophy offers a wealth of conceptual resources to articulate the alterations in question. In particular, the alterations can be described with the dynamic between syncretic, amovable, and symbol behavior. In various ways and in various degrees, the plasticity of behavior thus goes to the core of the vital behavior of human beings. The more healthy and adequate ways of using the embodied self (as Shusterman and Feldenkrais call it) involve (with Merleau-Ponty's conceptual apparatus) a flexibility that always already moves in the biological and cultural framework. In addition, the concept of possible movement (*Phenomenology of Perception*)<sup>1333</sup> is also apt for this purpose.

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<sup>1333</sup> Cf. Section 5a above.

Practices of behavior alteration deliberately engage in processes that hollow out a zone of reflection and of subjectivity, as Merleau-Ponty called it, by evoking a virtual or human space in the actuality of the moment.<sup>1334</sup> Though offering these apt indications, however, Merleau-Ponty himself does not unpack these resources of *Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* into the elaborate phenomenological design of the moment.

Shusterman rightly identifies the lack of these potentialities of a maturing embodied self that turns towards itself guided by a cultural practice. Unnoticed by Shusterman, however, is that what he calls for in *Phenomenology of Perception* is a hermeneutical dimension of the body. In a crucial sense, Feldenkrais's practically oriented descriptions of embodied life are hermeneutical in the sense that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological descriptions are not. Crucially, the hermeneutical dimension is here the practical way in which consciousness folds back on itself; by means of a delineated practice that aims to transform its own foundation of behavior from within. So considered, we can see Shusterman's critical reading as a support of what we have said in the previous chapters, namely that Merleau-Ponty avoids extrapolating on practices analogous to the hermeneutical *Zuhandenheit*, *Tradition* or *Bildung*; which is to say, the accumulation of practice and knowledge gathered in the moral community by circulation of language.

In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's dismissal of attention can be called paradigmatic. When Merleau-Ponty dismisses attention, what is left out is an exemplary chance to thematize in detail how revisions of body schema take place guided by a determinate practice. To paraphrase Merleau-Ponty's words: what is left out is the practice of a nonconcentrated attention that attends the indeterminacy of the "unreflective life in things" and that *learns* while doing so. What is left out is an attentional awareness that does *not* "create for itself a perceptual or a mental field that can be 'surveyed' or 'dominated' (*Überschauen*)," i.e. a mode of attention that does *not* seek to clarify "some preexisting givens" by subordinating the perceived to a specific criterion already given. In other words, what is left out is the elaboration of an attentional awareness that is not interchangeable with stringency and epistemic procedures of control, but that nevertheless accomplishes – gradually, spontaneously, and in accordance with the "unreflected life in things – new figures within the attentional field by letting them emerge as what they are: *indeterminate figures*.

Precisely here is the conceptual locus where nondirective meditation is imported into *Phenomenology of Perception*; that is, in the unaccomplished modification of attention latent in Merleau-Ponty's book. Elaborating on the phenomenological structure of nondirective meditation (in the next section), we will see that the meditative practice shares many of the features of human growth just indicated by Feldenkrais. Nondirective meditation is also practical awareness that seeks a heuristic ideal of *doing less*; that is, a way of learning – by doing – the principle of using less and less force in activity. What is more, nondirective meditation is also a way of re-routing patterns of spontaneous habits by means

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<sup>1334</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 114.

of a gentle and unrestrained awareness, and this practice is also a dynamic way maturing through activity: a way of forming one's general attitude towards the world as it becomes expressed in behavior.

The differences between the Feldenkrais Method and nondirective meditation are of course important enough. Where the Feldenkrais Method involves direct and actual movements of the physical body, nondirective meditation is a mental and sonorous practice of doing. In nondirective meditation the habitual body is encountered indirectly, we also know. Directed with ease towards the self-induced sound, attentional awareness is not directed towards spontaneity as such but a little on their side, as it were. Analogous to how the physical eye can perceive very dim light only when looking a little to the side of the light source, awareness can perceive peripheral expressions that otherwise would be inaccessible. Expression of otherwise largely pre-intentional structures can come into awareness in ways which would be closed if one tried to access them too directly.

Nevertheless, the Feldenkrais Method and nondirective meditation share the essential positive approach to the spontaneous activities. The spontaneous expressions of the body represent a source of embodied knowledge that needs to be embraced.

Let us formulate more positive indications of how nondirective meditation would look from a Merleau-Pontyan perspective. As it was in the hermeneutical continuum of Gadamer's *Verstehen*, of pivotal importance is that the meditative awareness is a modification of the general everyday awareness entertained by the body proper. We remember how the body schema outlined by Merleau-Ponty implies a global and inexplicit awareness that evolves on the proto-intentional level of phenomenal consciousness – or the periphery of consciousness.<sup>1335</sup> Merleau-Ponty speaks of bodily self-awareness in terms of an intentional arch. Constantly going on in the periphery of consciousness is a formation of unity, between (as Merleau-Ponty puts it) the senses, between the senses and intelligence, and between the sensitivity and motricity.<sup>1336</sup> The unity evolving in the proto-linguistic awareness is self-relevant, and evolves not only "in" the body but in how the body organizes itself in spatial, temporal and moral situations. The dynamic of the intentional arch is the projection of the past and future, in relationship to the concrete as well as the virtual, in relationship to itself as well as in relationship to others.<sup>1337</sup>

From the Merleau-Pontyan perspective, then, the meditative awareness of free mental attitude evolves in continuum of this bodily awareness always already there as a resource in the general understanding of the lifeworld, but also (as we know) a way consciousness then turns towards itself. Qua sonorous awareness the meditative awareness is a reflection back on a structure which already is reflecting back on itself, i.e. the intentional arch. Awareness is operative within the general system of equivalences always already going on within the body schema (cf. Section 5 above).

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<sup>1335</sup> Cf. Section 5 above.

<sup>1336</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 137. Cf. Section 5a above.

<sup>1337</sup> Cf. i.e. Ibid. 137.

Moreover, we recall how the meditative attention involves the all-important relaxation response, and how this modification could be conceived in terms of phenomenological *epoché*. Interestingly enough, then, importing nondirective meditation into Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, is to re-actualize Merleau-Ponty's version of the phenomenological *epoché*. "Because we are through and through related to the world," we read in the opening of *Phenomenology of Perception*, "the only way to catch sight of ourselves is by suspending the movement, by refusing to be complicit with it (or as Husserl often says, *ohne mitzumachen*), or again, to put it out of play."<sup>1338</sup> Nondirective meditation cultivates this *out of play* not in a phenomenological-interpretative practice (as Merleau-Ponty) but in concrete and delineated perceptual practice wherein the phenomenal body turns towards itself. The meditator puts everyday perception out of play, and follows the spontaneous expressions of the body.<sup>1339</sup> Inducing the sound with free mental attitude becomes what we, with Merleau-Ponty, can call a "digging down to the perceived world".<sup>1340</sup> Meditation is a way of restoring<sup>1341</sup> the world of perception – a way to re-discover the body, to use more of Merleau-Ponty's expressions.<sup>1342</sup> Structures of the perceived world are brought into relevance in the meditative awareness, "through a process similar to that of an archeologist." Meditation is a way to seek for structures of the perceived world buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge.<sup>1343</sup>

The image of the archeological excavation will be a guiding figure in the subsequent elaborations of the indications hereby given. At the outset of Merleau-Ponty's unelaborated concept of attention we will thus pursue the initiative launched by Shusterman, though taking a route slightly different than him. As more than indicated, the open-ended dynamic of awareness and habit alteration of nondirective meditation is not (as Shusterman suggests) that of explicit awareness and conscious control, but rather the in-explicit awareness and the process of giving up of conscious control. However, we must also revise the subtler implications of this. Shusterman, as we saw above, underlined that a subject wanting to alter unwanted behavior cannot *rely* on sedimented bad habits to correct the same bad habits, in so far as the unreflective somatic spontaneity is already *tainted* with the traces of the unwanted sedimentations.<sup>1344</sup> Undermined in this phrasing is precisely the hermeneutical dimension involved in habit alteration. Indicated by Shusterman's parlance is a model wherein awareness becomes positional also in regard of *time*. To say that the *old* habits are *wrong* (*tainted*) and the new are *right* (*adjusted*), is to say that the new and preferable habits are to be applied *on* the old habits. An a priori idea of how embodied life *ought to be* – established in the present situation – is to be applied *on* the bodily habits established in the past. The

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<sup>1338</sup> Ibid. Preface. lxxvii.

<sup>1339</sup> Cf. "Not wanting to prejudge anything, we will take objective thought literally and not ask it any questions it does not ask itself." *ibid.* 74.

<sup>1340</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962)*" 5.

<sup>1341</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>1342</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Cf. 54 and 74.

<sup>1343</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962)*" 5.

<sup>1344</sup> Shusterman, "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy." 165. Cf. Somatic spontaneity will "most likely continue to misdirect us". *ibid.* 165

spontaneous activity of the habitual body embodying the history of the subject is to be subordinated to a determinate goal of experience concretizing the ideal future version of the embodied self.

Thus, a mode of historical continuum is apparently lost in the analysis of Shusterman. The present self does not expand on the knowledge acquired in being a relational self previously in life, but sets this knowledge aside in favor of a present ideal of how bodily spontaneity ought to be from now on. Taken to its extreme, Shusterman's phrasing is thus the model of the habit alteration of bodybuilding<sup>1345</sup> more than the organic process of maturation through hermeneutical continuum.

Nondirective meditation, like the Feldenkrais Method in Feldenkrais's own presentation, rests not on the model indicated by Shusterman. In meditation and in the method of body improvement, spontaneity is acknowledged to be tainted with the traces of unwanted sedimentations of behavior (nonvolitional concentration). The taint is affirmed; unwanted behavior is allowed to flow freely, not in accidental contexts, however, but in a psychological context determined by acceptance and mature attitude. We note the difference in regard to embodied hermeneutics. In contrast to Shusterman's model, potential alterations of bad habits come in nondirective meditation from *within* the same bad habits. Potentially new ways of behaving are found in the "taint" of behavior.

By the same token, what is at stake is not a fixed goal of behavioral alteration applied *on* the spontaneous body, but a nonfixed mode of awareness moving *in* the spontaneous activities. Hence, while being a practice potentially altering habits from the past, nondirective meditation does so by listening to what the body has to say (to borrow Shusterman's words) but also in these unwanted sedimentations of behavior. Awareness is allowed to move in the spontaneous guiding and navigating feelings of being in the world, established in the past. Awareness is here also a nonpositional awareness in regard to time. Instead of perceiving from a position *now* to the habits established *then*, the meditator is awake and aware *now* *within* the behavioral traits of accumulated, embodied history.

Indicated now is how nondirective meditation can be called a practice of embodied hermeneutics. The relevant transformation into understanding occurs in nondirective meditation from within the cross-temporal structures of spontaneity. The subsequent sections will expand on the phenomenological design of the indirect and resting, sonorous and hermeneutical awareness of nondirective meditation. First, however, a few detours are needed. Let us initially take a brief step backwards to one of the leading perspectives elaborated in the previous chapters on tradition and contemporary philosophy. What we are about to see is the fuller contemporary relevance of the traditional concepts of *meletē* and *medesthai*. We recall how *meletē* was associated by Plato with the *good* scripture of the soul while also being described as an articulate practice; a "skill" aimed to learn or cultivate decisive existential and ethical the soul habits. *Medesthai*, by contrast, evolved a more perception-based spontaneity of action (criticized by Plato).<sup>1346</sup>

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<sup>1345</sup> Cf. Joe Weider, *Ultimate Bodybuilding* (McGraw Hill 1989).

<sup>1346</sup> Sections 1.

The philosophies of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, we said in the next step,<sup>1347</sup> each pursue their side of the schema given with these words. Whereas Gadamer communicates more with the *meletē* of tradition, Merleau-Ponty communicates better with the *medesthai*. Finally, we see what this has been leading up to.

Nondirective meditation qua embodied hermeneutics brings the combination of writing (*meletē*) and perception (*medesthai*) into one and the same phenomenon. It is an accumulated practice (*meletē*) aimed to unleash the helter-skelter, nongathered mind of a nonpractice (*medesthai*). The sonorous and hermeneutical awareness of the meditator is the locus of the synthesis in question. The usage of attention itself implies an accumulation of practice through the affirmative contact with the spontaneous activities. Differently put, the meditator practices a skill of free mental attitude by diving (as it were) into the expressions of the bodily spontaneous activities. The resource which potentially gathers itself into the expanded skill of free mental attitude evolves in the spontaneous activities. In the disorganized, historically determined leaps of orders going on spontaneously in understanding evolves the possibility of an ahistorical transformation of understanding. To phrase it with both Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer, a potentiality of the body proper is raised to understanding. Something old is understood *anew*, something in the hermeneutical body is transformed into a greater flexibility of self-relation.

#### b. Temporal Displacement in Perception

Going through Shusterman's reading of Merleau-Ponty, we have now located the proper locus to import nondirective meditation into Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Before conceiving more of the meditative practice, we turn to *Phenomenology of Perception* for concrete analyzes of behavior. Studying the case of the phantom limb we will see how Merleau-Ponty thematizes the temporality in behavior not primarily with recourse to everyday experiences as such, but by recourse to morbid behavior – precisely as was called in question by Shusterman. As we know, a phantom limb is the subjective experience of a limb that de facto is not there; for instance, after an amputation. The phantom limb is the cognitive and emotional presence of a part of the body that lacks an objective correlate.<sup>1348</sup>

Now, in contrast to what Shusterman claimed, we will also see how Merleau-Ponty uses this example not to create a polarizing dichotomy between morbid and normal behavior (Shusterman), but in order to display a general, temporal dissociation in behavior. In an important sense, we can say, we all have "phantom limbs" in some form or another. We perceive, and have actual feelings and sensations from, various aspects of life that lack objective correspondence. To allude to what we saw in Part Three, it

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<sup>1347</sup> Section 4b and 5b.

<sup>1348</sup> For an updated presentation of empirical-scientific findings regarding the phenomenon of phantom limb, with today is also interesting for the phenomenology of embodiment, see: Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. cf. Chapter 4 "Pursuing a Phantom". Our interest in the phenomenon restricts to general points made by Merleau-Ponty in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 83 ff.

is part of the *Kategoriale Anschauung* of symbol behavior to intend aspects that are strictly speaking not *there*. Methodologically speaking, hence, the case of the phantom limb is a condensed version of an existential dimension of perception in general. By being a heightened and abrupt variant of normal perception (i.e. what Gadamer would call a *Text*), this case reveals a modification latent and realized variously in general behavior.

Let us move closer to how Merleau-Ponty exposes the phenomenon of the phantom limb and its general relevance. Merleau-Ponty begins by evoking the morbid case of actually having lost an arm. "To have a phantom limb," as Merleau-Ponty explains the case in question, "is to remain open to all of the actions of which the arm is capable and to stay within the practical field that one had prior to the mutilation."<sup>1349</sup> The body schema continues to live in the schema once established. That is, the body perpetuates being united with its surrounding milieu, and continues to merge or to be occupied with objects in action although the situation objectively has changed. This is by no means a result of a deliberate decision involving the thematic weighting of possibilities evolving in the order. The phantom limb is "available" for the subject not in athetic sense of "I think that...", writes Merleau-Ponty,<sup>1350</sup> but rather present in the form of an "indivisible power".<sup>1351</sup> It is sensed and experienced as "vaguely implicated" in the global modi in which the subject orients itself in the world.

What refuses the mutilation or the deficiency in us is an I that is engaged in a certain physical and inter-human world, an I that continues to tend towards its world despite deficiencies or amputations and that to this extent does not *de jure* recognize them.<sup>1352</sup>

In other words, the phantom limb is no isolable issue in the life of the subject, and not primarily an "inner" feeling, but rather involves the general world orientation of the subject. The objects of perception continue to appeal to the body although the body cannot respond to them. The perceptual world is, in some ways, unaltered, but the actual capabilities to *act out* these possibilities are restrained. "Manipulable objects, precisely in so far as they appear as manipulable, appeal to the hand that I no longer have."<sup>1353</sup>

We see how the subject suffering from phantom limb inclines to what we can call a temporal displacement in perception. The body evolves a discrepancy between what Merleau-Ponty calls the *habitual body* and the *actual body*.<sup>1354</sup> Gestures and spontaneous movements that belong to the habitual body, sedimented in the basic bodily formation of childhood, adolescence and so on, continue to emerge in the situations, although ability to accomplish these possibilities has disappeared from the actual. The habitual body and the actual body are not synchronous, so to speak. "The phantom limb is [...] a previous

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<sup>1349</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 84.

<sup>1350</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

<sup>1351</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

<sup>1352</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

<sup>1353</sup> *Ibid.* 84.

<sup>1354</sup> *Ibid.* 84



present that cannot commit to becoming a past,"<sup>1355</sup> Merleau-Ponty writes. Thus, there is a discrepancy between the initial, spontaneous dimension of the body, and corporal dimensions effectuating the initiatives. "The memories called back before the amputee's mind induces a phantom limb not in the manner in which one image calls forth another in association, but because every memory reopens lost time and invites us to again take up the situation that it evokes."<sup>1356</sup>

The phantom limb exemplifies not only a potential time displacement in experience but also how this displacement comes in the form of a selection (or nonvolitional concentration, as we can call it.) "Regions of silence are [...] marked out in the totality of my body," Merleau-Ponty writes. "The refusal of the deficiency is but the reverse side of our inherence in a world, the implicit negation of what runs counter to the natural movement that throws us into our tasks, our worries, our situation, and our familiar horizons."<sup>1357</sup> In an ambiguous sense, thus, this "implicit negation," or refusal to acknowledge the situation, becomes a *positive* part of the perceptual field. Although the world presents itself for the subject with a familiarity motivating immense specters of practical intentions belonging to the habit-body which spontaneously throws itself into the projects of the world, the face of the world also makes apparent that a full range of spontaneous actions are in fact (for the person lacking the limb) impossible. "At the same moment that my usual world gives rise to habitual intentions in me, I can no longer actually unite with it if I have lost a limb."<sup>1358</sup> Exemplified thus is what the phenomenologist calls a "middle ground between presence and absence."<sup>1359</sup> The body perceives objects that are both *there* and *not there*, and in what ways that make it both unite and not unite with these ambiguities.

Thus, in the discrepancy between the habitual and the actual body are ways the body spontaneously refuses to "take in" the situation, by maintaining distance from the situation. For Merleau-Ponty, the rejection is done more or less actively (not volitionally, but spontaneously and in action). The temporal displacement in perception harbors a moment of spontaneous negation to various aspects of the lifeworld. In the case of the phantom limb, as Merleau-Ponty demonstrates, the bodily integrity of the present becomes threatened from within, so to speak, by the problematic knowledge of his or her deficiency. The subject *knows* of the incapability, in one sense; yet he or she manages not to integrate the knowledge into the present body schema. Forces of restraint are thus used in keeping the insight away: "The patient knows his disability precisely insofar as he is ignorant of it, and he ignores it precisely in so far as he knows it."<sup>1360</sup> In other words, the spontaneously emerging feelings and sensations of the habitual body still come together with an active tendency of downplaying the fact that the body can no longer accomplish what it once did. The cognitive and emotional downplaying of the deficiency harbors a positive

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<sup>1355</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>1356</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>1357</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>1358</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>1359</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>1360</sup> Ibid. 84.

reality of insights held at a distance. In the "dis-synchronicity" between the habitual and the actual body evolves, so to speak, an ignorance proportional to a knowing of what one does not want to know.

In our terminology, what Merleau-Ponty describes here are typical examples of nonvolitional concentration.<sup>1361</sup> With a certain amount of psychic energy, something is spontaneously and nonvolitionally held away from being perceived, while nevertheless being a positive part of what is perceived. A spontaneous sorting of perceptual impressions occurs; nonvolitional concentration of what is inside and outside of the perceptual field. Describing this sorting as nonvolitional concentration is apt to Merleau-Ponty's original phrasings. There is, for Merleau-Ponty, a close connection between the phenomenon of the phantom limb and what is called *repression* in the context of psychoanalysis. In both phenomena, he writes, the subject commits to fixated paths in behavior: he or she has the power neither to overcome obstacles encountered in the present nor to abandon modi of behavior established in the past. "New perceptions replace previous ones, and even new emotions replace those that came before, but this renewal has only to do with the content of our experience and not with its structure,"<sup>1362</sup> Merleau-Ponty writes. Being fixed in structure, the subject also throws himself into future events in fixed ways: "The subject still remains open to the same impossible future, if not in his explicit thoughts, then at least in his actual being. Impersonal time continues to flow, but personal time is arrested."<sup>1363</sup> *Time is arrested*; the subject perceives *now* with the historical gaze established back *then*. The gaze is concentrated by sorting according to temporal structures sedimented in the body schema.

The latter points make vivid the more universal relevance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological interest in phantom limb and repression (and for us, nonvolitional concentration). Thus supporting what we said above, regarding the general relevance of the cases of morbid behavior, we are all "locked" in patterns of behavior that belong to the past in some way or another. "We remain the person who was once committed to this adolescent love, or the person who once lived within that parental universe," writes Merleau-Ponty. "Even if we claim to understand our past better than it understood itself, it can always deny our present judgment and enclose itself within its autistic evidentness."<sup>1364</sup> Or, as Merleau-Ponty illustrates a related point in his first book, behavior consists of "segments of behavior", or "stereotype attitude, an acquired and durable structure of consciousness":

A situation which could not be mastered at the time of an initial experience and which gave rise to anguish and the disorganization which accomplishes failure is no longer experienced directly: the subject perceives it only through the physiognomy that it assumed at the time of the traumatic experience.<sup>1365</sup>

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<sup>1361</sup> Cf. Section 11.

<sup>1362</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 85.

<sup>1363</sup> *Ibid.* 85.

<sup>1364</sup> *Ibid.* 87. See also Merleau-Ponty, "Structure and Conflicts in Child Consciousness (1949-50)."

<sup>1365</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 177–178.

Analogous to cases of phantom limb and repression, hence, the foreground/background structure of "normal" perception is a personal or ontogenetic hermeneutical filter, so to speak, manifested in ways and manners past events of the body intertwine with present and future. The way things emerge for the body proper in figures of foreground/background is permeated by historicity both opening and closing off to the face of the world. The modes and manners in which the body is open to the world harbor a historically determined externalization or rejection of things. Perception becomes thoroughly distinguished by a "fragmented life of consciousness which does not possess a unique significance at all times", Merleau-Ponty writes in *Structure of Behavior*. "This weakening, which allows a partial conduct to have an apparent autonomy, which brings back the stereotyped attitudes and this conditions the alleged efficacy of the complex [is] at the same time [what] allows it to remain equivocal."<sup>1366</sup> Instead of recognizing itself as a whole, by embracing history, as Feldenkrais put it, the subjective consciousness sees itself and others by dissociation and apparent autonomy fixed in stereotyped behavior.

The general points of fixation can fruitfully be seen in the context of Merleau-Ponty's notion of *symbol behavior*. Symbol behavior, we recall, is behavior sensitive to the gaze of the other person, while also being a form of behavior wherein *something stands for something else*.<sup>1367</sup> Symbol behavior is open to fixations in behavior wherein I see and evaluate myself in light of the standards set out and behaved by others. I can, for instance, evaluate myself in light of this or that moral norm of behavior,<sup>1368</sup> or I judge my strengths and weaknesses in performance thus and thus.<sup>1369</sup> Thus, my own behavior symbolizes, for myself, failure or success, by making me see myself as myself as a looser or as a genius; as a loving and kind person or as an aggressive ape; as an erotically desirable person or a disgusting pig.<sup>1370</sup> Or to use Plato's laconic remark in *Phaedrus*: I can see myself as a gentle and simple creature, "to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature" or I can be a monster "more complicated and more furious than Typhon".<sup>1371</sup> Be that as it may in the empirical manifold, judged from what we saw in the discourses on mind wandering, having such fluctuating shifts in self-evaluation is very common. The fluctuation is a sign of mental health in itself. The tendency to fixation, for instance, in negative patterns of self-evaluation, on the other hand, can be symptoms of depression and other psychological disorders.

For Merleau-Ponty, the structure shared in all the empirical examples mentioned here is that they permeate not only self-evaluation in isolation but also object perception in general. That is, in the circulation of perspectives evolving in perception, the body proper becomes a symbol for itself through the gaze of the other. I see the object through or with the gaze of the other. The gaze of the other person

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<sup>1366</sup> Ibid. 178.

<sup>1367</sup> Cf. Section 8b above.

<sup>1368</sup> Mrazek et al., "Threatened to distraction: Mind-wandering as a consequence of stereotype threat". 1243.

<sup>1369</sup> Cf. Ibid. 1243 and Mooneyham and Schooler, "The Costs and Benefits of Mind-Wandering: A Review". 13 and 14. Cf. Section 10 above.

<sup>1370</sup> Cf. *Phenomenology of Perception*, Part One, Section V, "The Body as a Sexed Being".

<sup>1371</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 230.

is present in *my* behavior as a symbolic dimension in *how* I perceive the world. The other person forms my behavior from the inside out. The gaze of the other is the cost of growing up and living in a moral community, so to speak. My body schema is formed in a process of *living up* to the standards set by others. The formation of the self goes through years of full dependence on carers towards the gradual achievement of autonomy.<sup>1372</sup>

In any case, as we can say on behalf of Merleau-Ponty, the adult human is not *one* finished and stable way of being in the world, but rather a principally unfinished structure. Reaching adulthood does not qualify one to be a neutral onlooker on the world,<sup>1373</sup> but embodies many ways of being in the world<sup>1374</sup> – many *wills*, as it were. Adult perception is permeated by "dreamlike" formation evolving in the "stage of the imaginary"<sup>1375</sup> wherein irrationality and immaturity intersect by necessity, regardless of how accomplished and mature the perceiving subject might be for itself and others.

Last, but all the more profound, as it evolves in the opening section of *Phenomenology of Perception*, the universal structure displayed in the examples discussed here also has an existential dimension. Analogous to how the subject suffering from phantom limb actively holds at a distance the insight of his loss, everyday perception is permeated with an active and spontaneous rejection of an anonymous constitutional totality surrounding individual life.

What kind of anonymity is this? Following Merleau-Ponty's semi-Augustinian path, we spoke of the unity of the perceived worlds as an indeterminate and all-encompassing horizon.<sup>1376</sup> Expanding on what we indicated there, anonymity is the incomprehensible existential fact that to be a human self is to be born, formed and situated – to the moment of death – in a historical world that will always transgress the knowledge of the individual. Just as one even in principle cannot know the historical world or phenomena like *time* or *death* through and through, the human self cannot know itself through and through. An incompressible dimension of personal reality thus permeates the perceptual horizon. "[My] life is made up of rhythms that do not have their *reason* in what I have chosen to be, but rather have their *condition* in the banal milieu that surrounds me",<sup>1377</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. "Around the human world which each of us has fashioned, there appears a general world to which we must first belong in order to be able to enclose ourselves within a particular milieu[.]"<sup>1378</sup>

Now in contrast to Gadamer, who reflects this existential anonymity in *Sprache*, Merleau-Ponty draws out the existential dimension in questions of concrete bodily adjustment. The ways that the body

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<sup>1372</sup> In the next section (Section 16), we will expand on this perspective going through Merleau-Ponty's interest in child psychology.

<sup>1373</sup> Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others", in *Child Psychology and Pedagogy; the Sorbonne Lectures 1949-1952* (Northwestern University Press, 2010).

<sup>1374</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 125

<sup>1375</sup> *Ibid.* Preface. ixxiv

<sup>1376</sup> Section 5.

<sup>1377</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 86. Italics original.

<sup>1378</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

from moment to moment adjusts to the world in its ongoing dynamic is itself permeated by an anonymous dimension. The general impact of the world is a formative power that overthrows subjectivity yet is also constitutive to and permeates subjectivity:

Just as we speak of repression in the restricted sense when I preserve through time one of the momentary worlds that I have passed through and that I make into the form of my entire life, so too can we say that my organism – as a pre-personal adhesion to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence – plays the role of an *innate complex* beneath the level of my personal life.<sup>1379</sup>

In other words, behavior, in general, involves a self-relation which simultaneously is a self-distance. In order to furnish a personal world, the anonymity and incomprehensible nature of human conditioned life – which in effect is formative to personal life – are held at a distance. "What allows us to center our existence is also what prevents us from centering it completely[.]"<sup>1380</sup> That is to say, self-identity, including the formation of the personal world each one of us establishes around ourselves, is established in a dialectic between self-relevancy and anonymity. What is marked out and privileged as self-relevant comes together with a negation of the incomprehensive existential totality. While being part of the total symbolic formation, certain fields within the global perceptual field of awareness are ignored or cut off from being *taken in*. It is there as the innate proto-linguistic complex beneath the personal life, yet not perceived. Hence Merleau-Ponty can write: "[T]he anonymity of our body is inseparable from both freedom and servitude."<sup>1381</sup> While being the condition of the relative freedom lived by the body, the anonymity is always there in the form of regions of silence marked out in the totality of the body.

The current passages of *Phenomenology of Perception* lead us to a re-evoking of Gadamer's notion of health referred to in Section 14b. Health, we saw here, was described by Gadamer as a form of lived equilibrium. The healthy body lives in a dynamic of losing and regaining equilibrium along a variety of axes of vital value. This observation of the hermeneutist pinpoints in a happy phrasing the profundities of what Merleau-Ponty just elaborated in *Phenomenology of Perception*. In an important sense, what Merleau-Ponty brings to reflected light through the example of the phantom limb and repression are forms of creating equilibrium in existence. The habitual body of the phantom limb sufferer is fixated, so to speak, on preceding ways of forming equilibrium in life; that is, equilibrium of the past. The actual body lives in a historically conditioned equilibrium which in various ways is not adequate to the present situation. The actual body creates actively and uses forces to uphold an emotional balance: *not* wanting to *see* is a way of keeping up order in life.

So is it for all of us, from the Merleau-Pontyian perspective. In various ways, there is something "untimely" in the way equilibrium is created in everyday consciousness. Holding away the existential

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<sup>1379</sup> Ibid. 86. Italics original.

<sup>1380</sup> Ibid. 87.

<sup>1381</sup> Ibid. 87

anonymity permeating one's lifeworld and self-conception is a way of creating equilibrium in life by preserving through time one of the momentary worlds we once had. Or to use Merleau-Ponty's words: "Impersonal time continues to flow, but personal time is arrested."<sup>1382</sup>

### c. Temporality and Potentiality

What does it imply, from the Merleau-Pontyan perspective, to induce a meditation sound with a free mental attitude amidst temporal and anonymous structures of behavior? Above all, we must here keep in mind the dual aspect of provocation and healing involved in the meditation process – i.e. the hermeneutical logic of Gadamer's *Text* established above. Saying, with Gadamer, that the meditation sound provokes one's general *Wies* of understanding, amounts, with Merleau-Ponty, to saying that the multitude ways in which the body proper creates for itself a balanced life in behavior comes to expression in the spontaneous activities. Both adequate and inadequate ways of creating emotional and psychological equilibrium become *relevant*. The linguistic-like sound conjures up, so to speak, both possibilities and impossibilities in behavior. Simultaneously, these general tendencies of spontaneous behavior are *met* in a distinct way – with a free mental attitude of acceptance, inclusion and sonorous expression. While the volitional activity of inducing the sound with a free mental attitude has the ability of provoking nonunderstood and potentially problematic issues in understanding, the same activity also has the potential of being a psychological process of healing and self-care.

"The entire world is ambiguous", writes Merleau-Ponty in a lecture on child psychology, "but what is important is the manner in which one deals with this ambiguity."<sup>1383</sup> As we will now see, nondirective meditation is precisely a way of working with the general manners in which the meditator deals with the ambiguity of embodied life.

Let us continue to use Merleau-Ponty's case of the phantom limb as an illustration, by saying that the subject that suffers from a phantom limb begins to practice the current form of meditation. What, typically, would happen in this situation? Apparently, sooner or later, a more determinate encounter would be provoked with the suppressed loss of the limb. To meditate with unclear meditation sounds that we described in Section 12c would typically draw the subject into contact with the general psychological field of *not making it*. The painful horizon of a handicapped being, or the sorrow that *my* situation has changed while the rest of the world is unaltered, would pull closer. Feelings and symbolic constellations belonging to the lower scale of self-evaluation would be provoked, but also structures of the existential dimension of being in an anonymous world with others and with Otherness.

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<sup>1382</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>1383</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others." 244.

However, simultaneously furnished in this provocation would typically also be the gradual acceptance of the lost limb and a gradual re-orientation of a perceptual being more apt to the actuality of the situation. To borrow Feldenkrais's words, being present in the fixed forms of behavior with an unrestrained meditation sound would be to embrace the personal history (or just facticity). Naturally, the example subject could very well reach the same insight without nondirective meditation. Yet, allowing spontaneity to move freely while being aware with the meditation sound would be to amplify the emotional processing of the situation.<sup>1384</sup> In our case, the process happens not as a result of a specific wish to fix the problem of the repressed phantom limb. The open-ended and general process is the whole crux of the practice; insights come whenever the meditator is ready for them.

To study more closely the gesture that enables this process to happen, we need to understand more of the meditative awareness of nondirective meditation. Pondering the variables implied, we see that the sonorous repetition can be described as a minimal and internalized expressive-enactive initiative. At once, the meditator is the *speaker*, the *hearer* and the *source* from which the spontaneous activities evolve. The meditative awareness and the sonorous repetition cannot be separated. In one sense, they are intrinsic to each other as one and the same mental gesture. They are part of the volitional activity that in sum generates the meditative consciousness described in terms of relaxation response. However, we also note that there is a differentiation operative also within the gesture of repeating the sound. A minute moment of self-relation seems to evolve on the volitional side of the situation; in the activities which actively encounter the spontaneous activities. That is, there seems to evolve a "loop" of self-relation not only towards the spontaneous activities but also in the volitional activity.

In sketch, we can thus describe the meditative situation as follows. The minimal gesture of nondirective meditation evolves a threefold structure of (i) a *volitional* induction of the meditation sound, (ii) the free flow of *spontaneous* activity, and (iii) the attention *volitionally used* towards *both* sound and spontaneous activity. Regarding awareness, in the loose center of attention evolves the self-induced sound, while the dynamic periphery of attention is the spontaneous activities; whereas the attentional awareness is what monitors the whole complex. That is, awareness implies a moment of open, nonevaluative and resting monitoring that allows center (sound) and periphery (spontaneous activities) to "intermingle" freely. The sound moves *in* the spontaneous activities while the resting and nonjudgmental awareness is *with* the sound and *with* what expresses itself in the spontaneous activities.

Let's import this minute description of the meditative gesture into our example case. For the subject who suffers a phantom limb, a hermeneutical continuum between the general awareness of the intentional arch and the meditative situation could typically evolve as follows. Initially, outside meditation, the subject always already perceives the complex of the lost limb as an "indivisible power" that makes the limb "vaguely implicated," as Merleau-Ponty put it. In meditation, in the next stage, the meditative

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<sup>1384</sup> Xu et al., "Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing". 8.

awareness expands on – or enhances – this moment of vague embodied self-awareness. Because the enactive initiative of inducing and hearing the sound is minimal, the meditative awareness can be more receptive to swift and rudimentary nuances of the vaguely implicated impulses. The monitoring of the sound in spontaneous activities implies that the sensitivity towards the peripheral consciousness increases. Perceiving the sound amidst the spontaneous is to perceive from the inside of the vaguely implicated impulses of spontaneous action.

The crux is here the intermingling between center and periphery of attention. The impulses of spontaneous behavior are allowed to express themselves in and through the influence they have on the volitional activities of the moment. The resting situation of quietude and the relaxation response together with the fact that the impulses are allowed to *act themselves out* is a situation that furnishes a reception of the "indivisible powers" of the habitual body as they spontaneously come to the fore.

Herein evolves the archeology of meditative awareness, as mentioned above. Being attentive *in* and *with* spontaneity to a self-induced sound is to let awareness "dive" freely into the temporal structures of behavior. That is, awareness moves by deliberate activity into the spontaneous and nonvolitional temporal displacement of the body proper. Temporally speaking, the meditator is both *here* and *there*, as it were. The meditative awareness attends *now*, though from within the forms of behavior initiated and fixed in past experiences. To use Merleau-Ponty's words, the subject is present, awake and enactive within the "middle ground between presence and absence."<sup>1385</sup> He or she dwells and acts from within the behavioral structure "once committed to this adolescent love" or within "the person who once lived within that parental universe". Perception is determined by fixations belonging to an earlier phase of life.

We can reformulate this with recourse to the hermeneutical-transformative nature of the meditative awareness. To be attentive in the form described here, we can say, is to actively bring a form of caring, nonverbal initiative into the moment of "untimely" behavioral equilibrium. Due to the minimal and caring action, the inner ear becomes a locus of a perception and potential revision of past modes of behavior. Equilibrium is potentially established *anew*, this time in ways potentially more adequate to the situation. The imbalance in the historical mode of creating equilibrium can *now* be acted out while being perceived by a caring awareness.

Yet again formulating the point in Merleau-Ponty's words, nondirective meditation is a method for reopening lost time; a way of inviting in – and taking up anew, in a caring psychological climate – the situation that once evoked the fixation of behavior.<sup>1386</sup> Instead of remaining open to "the same impossible future", as Merleau-Ponty wrote, "if not in his explicit thoughts, then at least in his actual being", the subject loosens up the behavioral impact of the past. This does not imply that the meditator claims to understand the past "better than it understood itself", as Merleau-Ponty wrote, but to loosen up the way experience becomes relevant in the form of denying "present judgment" and enclosing behavior into

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<sup>1385</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 82.

<sup>1386</sup> *Ibid.* 88.



"autistic evidentness."<sup>1387</sup> In other words, while meditation in some senses furnishes new and perhaps a little more flexible behavior in this or that domain of individual life, it does so not by inducing new schemas of behavior *on* the old. It rather draws on resources of self-care always already evolving in biological, human life.

So conceived, in what Merleau-Ponty just described as regions of silence that are marked in the general being of the body proper evolve not only problems and inapt fixations but also solutions and flexibility, that is, perspectives that genuinely can enrich the perception of the present. In the "impossible future",<sup>1388</sup> or in the tendencies of enclosing behavior "within its autistic evidentness"<sup>1389</sup> evolve *human* perspectives on the world; which is to say, ways of *being in the world*. That is, in the anonymous rhythms of freedom and servitude formed and fixated in one historical situation of life, evolves the creativity and freedom of *this* way of perceiving life. In what Merleau-Ponty called the "stage of the imaginary"<sup>1390</sup>, there evolves significant resources of understanding, namely in the potential form of a plurality of consciousness in consciousness. "[T]here are *several ways for the body to be a body, and several ways for consciousness to be consciousness*."<sup>1391</sup> The meditative awareness of nondirective meditation harbors a moment of being *in* these resources of the *several*. To be aware with the unrestrainedly repeated sound is to reveal possible movements in the actual situation of tensions of fixation. Impossibility turns into possibility, to borrow Feldenkrais's phrase. Or to use Merleau-Ponty's words: "Within the busy world" of the spontaneous activities there becomes hollowed out a "zone of reflection and of subjectivity;" revealed is "virtual or human space."<sup>1392</sup> The space in question is always already *there*; as a latent or unresolved possibility. The caring sonorous awareness is what accomplishes it into more articulate resources of behavior.<sup>1393</sup>

With Merleau-Ponty's amovable, syncretic and symbolic forms of behavior in the background, the process towards an expanded freedom of conduct springs out from a source evolving in everything from the innermost rudimentary forms of behavior to the distinguished human forms of moral behavior. From the rudimentary flexibility of syncretic behavior, through the more extended flexibility of amovable behavior, to the symbol behavior, the possibility evolves of a little more flexibility in the attitude taken towards oneself. The meditative process, we can now say, actualizes these resources of flexibility. The potentialities are brought into the present, making flexibility of behavior expand within the spontaneous organization of the body proper. In other words, the learning process of sonorous awareness is to get a more articulate enactive relation to the form of knowledge always already latent in behavior.

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<sup>1387</sup> Ibid. 87. Italics original.

<sup>1388</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>1389</sup> Ibid. 87. See also Merleau-Ponty, "Structure and Conflicts in Child Consciousness (1949-50).".

<sup>1390</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*., Preface. ixiv. See also Section 5b above.

<sup>1391</sup> Ibid. 125. Italics original.

<sup>1392</sup> Ibid. 114.

<sup>1393</sup> Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement*. 57.

From the Merleau-Pontyan perspective, to meditate close to limitations and unfulfilled possibilities of spontaneity is to get in touch with the flexibility permeating behavior at all human-organic levels of behavior. Freedom of behavior is expanded, not by force and not by command, but organically – in and through the free play of volitional and nonvolitional modes of conduct.

In effect, the minimal and sonorous gesture of nondirective meditation implies a rather complex enactive structure in the form Gadamer could describe as a dual mimesis.<sup>1394</sup> On the one hand, we have seen how typical features of behavior can be said to express themselves in meditation. The minute activity of repeating the sound is mimetic to the fuller existential being. To use Merleau-Ponty's words, *how* the meditator encounters the existential challenge of living a life whose rhythms do not have their reason in what the meditator has chosen comes to expression in meditation. The existential strategies of living in the ambiguity of the banal milieu that surrounds the meditator<sup>1395</sup> are provoked. The strategies of fixating certain privileged self-conceptions in the fluxes of everyday life are made relevant (nonvolitional concentration). In other words, the symbol behavior of the meditator becomes relevant in a concrete situation, provoked by the linguistic-like (or *symbol-like*) character of the meditation sound.

On the other hand, the momentary relevance implies not that the meditator simply *re-enacts* past moments. The subject *does* something *new* in the moment;<sup>1396</sup> he or she is voluntarily present with a sound and with an attitude of self-care. The meditator is *there*, as an adult, so to speak, with a nonjudgmental and inclusive awareness. The meditator is aware within the field of habitual impulses, and accomplishes these impulses in awareness – that is, not by carrying out the impulses in full-blown actions but just by encountering them in their initial forms, with a readiness to hear what they have to say (as we said with Gadamer). Awareness encompasses the unaccomplished structures of behavior and lets these play freely and accomplish themselves. Mimetically present in awareness is thus not only in this or that historically fixated behavior (nonvolitional concentration) but also within a dissolving of the fixation (hermeneutically) present within the same fixations. The free mental attitude of the present moment is a mimetic accomplishment of an ahistorical solution that is always already latent in behavior. Or, to borrow apt philosophical phrases of Gadamer: "[G]erade diese doppelte Mimesis ist *eine*. Was in der einen und in der anderen zu Dasein kommt, ist das Gleiche."<sup>1397</sup> In the pluralism of spontaneity evolves the unity of embodied consciousness ready to be rediscovered. This amounts not to saying that the meditator simply knows again what is familiar. "Die Freude der Wiederkenntnis ist vielmehr die, die *mehr* erkannt wird als nur das Bekannte,"<sup>1398</sup> Gadamer would say. The joy of giving up accidental fixations and thus opening up

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<sup>1394</sup> See below, evolving in the background here is Gadamer's notion of "doppelte Mimesis". Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 122 ff.

<sup>1395</sup> Rephrasing of Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 86.

<sup>1396</sup> This does *not* imply the simple model wherein the meditator first (at one historical moment) gained a fixation in behavior, and *then* later induced a dissolution of it with nondirective meditation (i.e. Shusterman's model).

<sup>1397</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 122. Italics original

<sup>1398</sup> Ibid. 119.

to the richness of spontaneous life is to expand on – and transform from within – the knowledge of the embodied self.

## 16. Morality and Equilibrium in "Subtle Layers of Consciousness"

We have now brought into view important aspects of the enactive self-care of nondirective meditation. To meditate is a way to care for one's situation in practice – by an unrestrained, sonorous doing. Encountering the spontaneous activities with an inclusive sonorous awareness is a way to discover new perspectives and forms of behavior latent in the same activities. From the Merleau-Pontyan perspective, we indicated how the self-care implies a potential contact with a flexibility of vital importance in behavior. The free mental attitude of meditation is an accomplishment of a potential self-distance whose roots evolve in the plasticity of all "levels" of behavioral life. Unique in form and phenomenological design, nondirective meditation thus draws on universal human resources. By the same token, the meditative practice is one path among others to an expanded flexibility in self-understanding. A therapeutic dialogue or the Feldenkrais Method would follow other paths, we know; but so would also a sympathetic conversation with a friend,<sup>1399</sup> love and equality experienced in relationships between adult partners, or the wordless care of a child.<sup>1400</sup>

Obviously, these examples unfold along distinct axes in concrete experiences. Still, they all harbor transformative processes analogous to what we have seen in nondirective meditation. The shared essential here is *human care*. The transformed, healthy and morally sound perspective on oneself and others evolves in the dimension of a constructive human co-being. The freedom of human, spontaneous expression lives, flourishes – and gains proper, moral direction – in the caring human contact. The human self expands in the framework of communal care and order.

The aim of the current section is to pursue the moral dimension implicit in nondirective meditation, by expanding on the notion of *equilibrium*. In the previous sections, we saw how Gadamer's notion of equilibrium [*Gleichgewicht*] gained increased relevance in the closer discussions of nondirective meditation. Somewhat under-communicated here, however, was the fact that equilibrium also plays a pivotal role in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

In *Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty complements the sequence of syncretic, amovable and symbol behavior with a second, ontological axis of behavior, that is, the physical, vital and human form.<sup>1401</sup> Where the first sequence demonstrates variabilities within organic behavior, the second pursues structures

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<sup>1399</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 131.

<sup>1400</sup> Cf. Gadamer, "Über das Hören (1998)." 53.

<sup>1401</sup> In *Structure of Behavior* the words *form* and *structure* are used as synonyms. The words can also be interchanged with *Gestalt*, notably, in the phenomenological, revised sense of *behavior* emerging in Merleau-Ponty's critical interpretations of the empirical discourses. See Section 7 and 8 above.

of behavior in physical organization, the impact of life, and human existence within these structures. In a crucial sense, then, the human life form is elaborated as a self-regulating equilibrium.<sup>1402</sup> The dialectic correlation between the body and its moral and physical environment is a balanced order; what Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* called the communion of sensation is a lived equilibrium of perception. Body and world intersect.

In general, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty are fully in agreement over questions about equilibrium and moral life. For both philosophers, whatever counts as equilibrium for one human is essentially speaking a communal project. We established this with the paths of *Lesen* and *perception*. Freedom and servitude of individuals are constituted by a differentiated yet continuous whole of a trans-individual scale, as it were; dialectic orders whose components reciprocally determine and are determined by each other.

That said, we know that Gadamer's *Lesen* comes with a heightened emphasis on morality that has no direct correspondence in Merleau-Ponty. That is, the morality of shared cultural practices is certainly reflected in Merleau-Ponty's structures, yet, as was the case with the hermeneutical dimension of embodiment, morality is also somewhat inarticulate. At least, this appears from comparing Merleau-Ponty with Gadamer. The latter, we recall, thoroughly advocates the intrinsic intersection of the *Sachlichkeit* of understanding, the morality of shared life, and how these features then become manifest in the equilibrated orders of moral life. We followed these hermeneutical perspectives into the event of nondirective meditation. With Gadamer, the process of finding a new equilibrium towards oneself in meditation was seen as a process mimetic of moral life. The linguistic-like meditation sound actualized morality. Giving up subjective investments in meditation was a way to gain a more articulate knowledge of the morality always already latent in understanding. The most rudimentary emergence of a new insight evolving around the meditation sound reflected a dimension of moral life.

The current section will follow Gadamer's initiative of a morally reflected equilibrium into the elaborations of the *Structure of Behavior*. What are the phenomenological implications of Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective of *Gleichgewicht* and nondirective meditation? Or, phrased as a philosophical question: what are the *enactive* structures of the *moral* equilibrium as it expresses itself in the minimal activity of nondirective meditation?

We will pursue the question in two stages. First (16a), we will elaborate a short genealogy of morality and equilibrium by going through Part III of *Structure of Behavior*, which is entitled "The Physical Order; the Vital Order; the Human Order." Here, we will see how Merleau-Ponty demonstrates the human order (i.e. equilibrium), as being intrinsic the physical and the vital order in general. By itself, this perspective expands on what we have indicated elsewhere<sup>1403</sup> as the existential mimicry of the phenomenal body. Ontologically speaking, the order of the body shares essential structures with physical

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<sup>1402</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 155. What equilibrium implies in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy will be discussed at length in the current section.

<sup>1403</sup> Cf. Section 5.

objects and living creatures in general. The human equilibrium weaves into, as it were, the dynamic presence of physical objects and other living creatures. Hence, *morality* gains the implications of a holistic and ecological meaning. Human morality is anything but an add-on, set upon the rest of the world. Rather, it springs out from amidst the shared ontological orders – in the widest sense of the word *shared*.<sup>1404</sup>

Second (16b), we will actualize these points in the transformative context of meditation. In effect, we thus pursue our ongoing (Western) phenomenological "translation" of the traditional (Asian) account of meditation one step further. We recall how nondirective meditation traditionally was seen as a springboard to an all-encompassing, ontological order. The mantras were believed to create vibrations not only with a calming effect on mind and body but also leading to what was described as a "sense of selfsameness and connection to the divine." Moving into the "subtle layers of consciousness"<sup>1405</sup> meant moving into an embodied dimension not only of human morality in the narrow sense but structures of embodiment in the wider, universal sense of co-being. With Merleau-Ponty, then, we investigate what "sense of selfsameness" and "subtle layers of consciousness" can imply – though minus the reference to the divine order, of course.

Curiously, by accentuating the perspective of an enactive morality in a practice like nondirective meditation we also touch on a possibility unaccomplished not only in Gadamer's hermeneutics (cf. Section 14) but also in his traditional foundation, i.e. in Kant's doctrine of beauty and morality (which plays a pivotal role in Gadamer's reading of Kant, as explained above). The ideal of beauty (*Kritik der Urteilskraft* § 17) is, properly speaking, only in the expressivity of the human body. According to Kant, it is unthinkable to exemplify ideal beauty with a beautiful flower, a suite of furniture, or a beautiful view. These objects are not sufficiently defined and fixed in appearance; their form of purposiveness is too vague to exemplify beauty.<sup>1406</sup>

By contrast, writes Kant, the human figure [*menschlichen Gestalt*]<sup>1407</sup> has the necessary determinative character. Here, the purposeless purposiveness of human life becomes relevant and apparent. The human figure *is* a concretized idea of purposiveness *überhaupt*, by the fact that the human possesses the end of its own existence. Only the human is able to determine his ends by reason, or, where he has to derive his ends from external perception [*Wahrnehmung*], he can compare these perceptions with essential and universal ends, writes Kant.<sup>1408</sup> Against this background, the human figure personalizes the supernatural freedom of morality and judgment. "[D]ieser Mensch ist also eines Ideals der Schönheit, so wie der Menschheit in seiner Person, als Intelligenz, des Ideals der Vollkommenheit, unter allen Gegenständen in der Welt allein fähig."<sup>1409</sup> Everything we connote to the moral good, such as benevolence,

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<sup>1404</sup> This is not the time and place to pursue this holistic perspective of morality and nature in full. For a fuller discussion of Merleau-Ponty's conception of nature, see Toadwine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*.

<sup>1405</sup> Kohn, *Meditation Works; in the Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Traditions*. 6.

<sup>1406</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 151.

<sup>1407</sup> *Ibid.* 154.

<sup>1408</sup> *Ibid.* 151.

<sup>1409</sup> *Ibid.* 151.

purity, strength, or equanimity, becomes visible in the bodily manifestations – as external expressions of the "Wirkung des Innern".<sup>1410</sup>

So conceived, the human figure is an expressive physiognomy that immediately reveals its moral interior in ways perceivable by others. By means of its mere appearance, the human body determines morality; between the one and the second subject there evolves an embodied mimetic dimension of morality.

Kant, like Augustine before him and Gadamer after him, does not elaborate on the phenomenological implications of these philosophically potent observations of embodied life. The Kantian body is a categorial postulate, we can say, leaving unvisited the question of how the moral mimesis of embodiment is constituted, for instance, in physical surroundings, biological life, and the formative history of the individual human being (i.e. perspectives that we will soon see are elaborated in *Structure of Behavior*). More problematic, in Merleau-Ponty's perspective, is the anthropocentrism hereby expressed by Kant. Morality is *human* morality – morality with the human in the center. Anthropocentrism is a natural consequence of Kant's starting point in the schematic domain of *Begriffe*. Taking the *Begriffe* for granted, the human being itself can become the ultimate concept – the ideal of perfection, alone in the world as such. The human becomes the emblematic ideal source from which the super-natural freedom springs in the first place. In *Structure of Behavior*, on the other hand, Merleau-Ponty turns the situation of morality upside-down. Here, the nonhuman situation is what constitutes human morality; morality is *prepared for* in the decentered perceptual field.

Actualizing Merleau-Ponty's points in the context of nondirective meditation will indicate how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological demonstrations can be parts of moral practice. From the Merleau-Pontyan perspective, nondirective meditation will be to explore the domain of nonhuman constitution of morality. The meditating consciousness has the chance to explore its relational being in concrete encounters and dissolve eventual anthropocentric orientations of the subject. The practice of sonorous awareness moves into the "Wirkung des Innern",<sup>1411</sup> as Kant put it, and discovers there, from within the innermost being, the potential source of a more nonanthropomorphic way of being.

#### a. Physical and Vital Orders. Introduction to Humanity

In line with his critical interpretative strategy discussed above,<sup>1412</sup> Merleau-Ponty approaches the physical, the vital and the human forms a little indirectly, i.e. in his combined affirmative and revisionary reading of

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<sup>1410</sup> Ibid. 154.

<sup>1411</sup> Ibid. 154.

<sup>1412</sup> Cf. Section 7.

the empirical discourses. We, however, go directly to the positive outcomes of Merleau-Ponty's analysis that are relevant to our context.

Starting with physical form, Merleau-Ponty notes that the empirical discourse from the outset defines *form* in analogy to a physical system.<sup>1413</sup> Form, so conceived, is defined as an ensemble of forces which are reciprocally held in a state of equilibrium, or of constant change. No law is formulable for a part taken in isolation, because each vector becomes determined in size and direction by all the others.<sup>1414</sup> The physical form is a dynamic structure defined by a constant interplay between forces that reduce a state of tension by advancing the system towards rest, and forces that increase the state of tension.<sup>1415</sup> In other words, implicit in the notion of physical form there is a taxonomy of equilibrium. Being what it is, physical form is a balanced order. Merleau-Ponty writes:

The physical form is an equilibrium obtained with respect to certain given external conditions, whether it is a question of topographical conditions, as in the distribution of electrical charges on a conductor; or of conditions which are themselves dynamic, as in the case of a drop of oil placed in the middle of a mass of water.<sup>1416</sup>

Physical form gains its determinate being in a play of forces, analogous to how a singular object is determined by its surroundings. However, for Merleau-Ponty, external conditions are not the absolute condition for the physical form. Changes in a physical form also occur from within its own organization. The physical form can also modify the very conditions upon which it depends by an internal evolution.<sup>1417</sup> In other words, the equilibrium of physical form is a dynamic of forces working both from the outside and the inside. Changes of the physical form *occur with and within* the system. The dynamic is itself the crux; the physical structure is the manifest order wherein everything that happens at one point is immediately determined by what happens at all the others.<sup>1418</sup>

[E]ach local change in a form will be translated by a redistribution of forces which assures the constancy of their relation; it is this internal circulation which *is* the system as a physical reality. And it is no more composed by parts which can be distinguished in it than a melody (always transposable) is made of the particular notes which are its momentary expression.<sup>1419</sup>

By what we saw in Section 8, Merleau-Ponty's allusion to *melody* (i.e. the physical form is *composed*, and it is *transposable*, there are *notes* and *expression*) is more than an empty metaphor. Evolving in the physical form, we can say, is expressive signification of physical reality. The internal circulation of forces constitutes together an expressive unit. Physical form is organized, we can say; it evolves as structured in ways making the whole an expressive unit of more than a mere sum of parts.

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<sup>1413</sup> As we did earlier, we skip the critique in Merleau-Ponty's text, seeking the positive outcomes of his analysis.

<sup>1414</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 137.

<sup>1415</sup> *Ibid.* 145.

<sup>1416</sup> *Ibid.* 145.

<sup>1417</sup> *Ibid.* 145

<sup>1418</sup> *Ibid.* 131. Italics original.

<sup>1419</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

Let us move a little further into the expressive organization of physical form. Qua unitary organization, as Merleau-Ponty demonstrates, physical form is manifest as individuation. Physical form possesses an internal unity in a segment of space, he writes, and it resists deformation from external influences by its circular causality; hence, physical form is individual.<sup>1420</sup> In other words, the *thisness* of the physical form is a way it expresses itself as a unit. The distinct features of the various individuals are their momentary expressions. Each individual *is* its proper circular causality of forces, distributed according to their own organization. Each form is determined by a resistance proper to its own physical organization. "It can happen", Merleau-Ponty writes, "that, submitted to external forces which increase and decrease in a continuous manner, the system, beyond a certain threshold, redistributes its own forces in a qualitatively different order which is nevertheless only another expression of its immanent law."<sup>1421</sup> The qualitative alteration occurs within the immanent law of the individual: the redistribution of internal forces comes as an expressive dimension of the form.

With the dynamic redistribution of forces is also given an intrinsic historicity. "[W]ith form," Merleau-Ponty writes, "a principle of discontinuity is introduced and the conditions for a development by leaps and crises, for an event or for a history, are given."<sup>1422</sup> Being individuated in space, physical form is open to a historicity proper to each individual. The physical form is a local event, dispersed in several places, even if the individual events mutually determine each other.<sup>1423</sup> Something happens in the *one* spatio-temporal locus, and creates a form of "crisis" or disruption both internally and externally. Qua physical (and historical) *form*, hence, individuation, discontinuity and distribution of forces, are not absolute. "[E]ach form constitutes a field of forces characterized by a law which has no meaning outside the limits of the dynamic structure considered, and which on the other hand assigns its properties to each internal point so much that they will never be absolute properties, properties *of* this point."<sup>1424</sup> That is, equilibrium of physical form is individuation and nonindividuation in both time and space. Physical form is relational through and through. The singular physical form is inscribed in a network of being, both determining singularity and determined by singularity.

The current moments harbor information valuable to our quest for a genealogy of moral equilibrium. Whatever moral equilibrium of the human is or is not, it springs from within a dialectic shared by physical objects and living bodies. The borders between physical objects and living bodies are both determinate and nonabsolute. Consequently, it is part of the internal organization of the human body schema to know physical form from within. In other words, the individuation, resistance and equilibrium of physical form are components of the existential mimicry<sup>1425</sup> of the phenomenon body. Now we recall

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<sup>1420</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>1421</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>1422</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>1423</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

<sup>1424</sup> *Ibid.* 137–138.

<sup>1425</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 188.



how Gadamer's *Gleichgewicht* harbored a notion of *Harmonia*. The current perspective of *Structure of Behavior* expands on how the harmonizing orders hereby touched upon. With Merleau-Ponty, what Gadamer calls "Fügung des Dissonanten"<sup>1426</sup> is not an empty philosophical postulate (as it in practice ends up being in Gadamer's *Gleichgewicht*), but a fine-grained structure demonstrating the occurrence of physical organization.

We move now to what Merleau-Ponty calls vital form. In so doing, we must evoke a principle of transition analogous to what we saw with the syncretic, amovable and symbol behavior. The new order is not added onto the previous, but is expressive features that dialectically transform the initial dynamic from within. Interestingly enough, Merleau-Ponty locates the transformation brought in with life within notions associated with equilibrium. In effect, the equilibrium of physical form gains a thoroughly new meaning the moment life is involved. Equilibrium is now *lived*. Let's read in some length how Merleau-Ponty describes the vital equilibrium:

We speak of vital structures [...] when equilibrium is obtained, not with respect to real and present conditions, but with respect to conditions which are only virtual and which the system itself brings into existence; when the structure, instead of procuring a release from the forces with which it is penetrated through the pressure of external ones, executes a work beyond its proper limits and constitutes a proper milieu for itself. In a system of this kind the equilibrium that the internal reactions tend to produce is not an equilibrium gained at any cost nor the simple conservation of an established order, as in the distribution of electrical charges. The privileged state, the invariant, can no longer be determined as the result of reciprocal actions which actually unfold in the system.<sup>1427</sup>

Let us rephrase the current passage to bring its points into view. Vital structures, we see, occur in a structure when an organism constitutes a milieu for itself, by obtaining equilibrium for itself by executing a work "beyond its proper limits" and by bringing in conditions which are "only virtual". The leap into the virtual (considered as *life*<sup>1428</sup>) implies a tendency towards a "privileged state". This "state", then, is not gained at "any cost", but precisely in the establishment of equilibrium within the life milieu. In other words, vital form is *formative*: it "brings into existence"; it executes "by itself" a "work" which is neither accumulating endlessly ("at any cost") nor being a mere upholding of already established orders.

For Merleau-Ponty, the organism is itself what measures the actions of things and delimits its own milieu. This is done by a circular process which lacks analogy in the physical.<sup>1429</sup> In contrast to the physical, he

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<sup>1426</sup> Gadamer, *Über die Verborgenheit der Gesundheit: Aufsätze und Vorträge*. 101–102.

<sup>1427</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 145–146.

<sup>1428</sup> In the transition between *amovable* and *symbolic* structures, there now seems to be a contradiction brought in with Merleau-Ponty's current conception of vital form. How can Merleau-Ponty state on behalf of life *in general* that it has the ability to transgress the limits of actual into the virtual, when he (in the just mentioned other axes of description) reserved the transgression into the virtual exclusively on the symbolic behavior (i.e. the human)? Resolving the implicit contradiction here is to conceive of the two axes of description (the *syncretic* etc. and the *physical* etc.) right in relationships to each other. The two axes conceptualize distinct aspects of the living organism (interrelated, of course). Whereas the axis if *syncretic* etc. describes the *modus operandi* forms of living behavior, the *physical* etc. conceptualize the general contribution of life *within* physical form. Hence, the axes are not quite on the same "levels". The second is more general and encompasses the first.

<sup>1429</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 148.

writes, vital form brings about the appearance of new relations – "truly dialectical relations"<sup>1430</sup> – which cannot be compared to those of a system. Whereas inorganic structures can be conceived by laws of nature, vital structures are understood *only by a norm*.<sup>1431</sup> Vital structures have their internal standards determined by the vital needs of the moment; a standard that from the inside forms how new structures are brought into emergence. Merleau-Ponty describes the norm as "a certain type of transitive action which characterizes the individual".<sup>1432</sup> The individuality and historicity expressed with physical form thus gains a transformed sense. Vital form executes an *autochthonous* sense,<sup>1433</sup> which intrinsically holds together the "parts" of the organism. Partial phenomena describable as psycho-chemical processes intersect with the sense *lived* by the organism. They are bound together by means of an original relationship.<sup>1434</sup>

The point can be reformulated in terms of expressivity (or *signification*, as Merleau-Ponty also calls it<sup>1435</sup>). Vital structures *express* vital engagement in the wholeness of organism and environment. That is, every partial phenomenon participates in a single structure of behavior expressing the organism's way of modifying the physical world to a milieu in its own image.<sup>1436</sup> Gestures and attitudes entertained by the living organism has [indeed *must have*] a proper structure in form of an immanent signification. "[F]rom the beginning the phenomenal body must be a center of actions which radiate over a 'milieu'; it must be a certain silhouette in the physical and in the moral sense; it must be a certain type of behavior."<sup>1437</sup> Immanent to the expressions of vital form is thus a certain nucleus of signification; an essence of specific behavior expressing the specific adaption to its milieu.<sup>1438</sup>

We remember how both Gadamer (*Leichtigkeit*) and Feldenkrais favored the value of spending less energy in interaction and movements – a principle which in our context represents a crucial aspect of free mental attitude. On this background, it is highly interesting that Merleau-Ponty's vital equilibrium and norm go together in an analogous principle. For Merleau-Ponty, equilibrium functions as a norm within the living organism,<sup>1439</sup> not so much by the upholding of force and restraints, but, contrariwise, in the economical usage of *less* energy. Equilibrium is a norm in vital behavior by indicating what counts as *preferred* behavior for the living organism. "Any behavior which is not preferred will be judged by the subject as difficult or imperfect behavior."<sup>1440</sup> Preferred behavior, then, is established not by bringing more energy into an initially

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<sup>1430</sup> Ibid. 148.

<sup>1431</sup> Ibid. 148.

<sup>1432</sup> Ibid. 148.

<sup>1433</sup> Ibid. 154. Merleau-Ponty adds an "as it were", which, of course, does something with the claim.

<sup>1434</sup> Ibid. 154.

<sup>1435</sup> Ibid. 161. The idea of *signification* avoids the philosophical and dogmatic traps of vitalism and mechanism latent in the notion of autochthonous while nevertheless preserving the "category of life". Ibid. 155.

<sup>1436</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 154.

<sup>1437</sup> Ibid. 157.

<sup>1438</sup> Ibid. 157.

<sup>1439</sup> Note Merleau-Ponty's reservation: "By 'norm' here one does not mean a 'should be' which *would make* it be; it is the simple observation of a preferred attitude, statistically more frequent, which gives a new kind of unity of behavior." *ibid.* 159.

<sup>1440</sup> Ibid. 147.

difficult and imperfect mode of behavior, but rather *less*. The norm of equilibrium qua preferred behavior is established by the "*least expenditure of energy*".<sup>1441</sup>

For the most part preferred behavior is the simplest and most economical *with respect to the task in which the organism find itself engaged*; and its fundamental forms of activity and the character of its possible action are presupposed in the definition of the structures which will be the simplest *for it*, preferred *in it*.<sup>1442</sup>

As we see, an intrinsic ease, facility or flexibility thus belong to what Merleau-Ponty describes as preferred behavior. The relevance of these terms does not (necessarily) imply a de facto deployment of little energy, however – as if the organism possessed some kind of innate or natural laziness. "[T]he preferred behavior is the one which permits the easiest and most adapted action",<sup>1443</sup> writes Merleau-Ponty. Compared with laziness, "easiest and most adapted action" implies that a relationship between preferred behavior and the "least expenditure of energy" must be conceived the other way around. "It is not because behavior is simple that it is preferred; on the contrary it is because it is preferred that we find it simple."<sup>1444</sup>

Preferred behavior is economical regarding what is of vital importance. Energy is spent on what *counts* for the organism. In light of *this* norm, we can say, preferred behavior counts as simple. That is, preferred behavior tends towards ease, not necessarily by the shortest paths of executed behavior<sup>1445</sup> but rather towards a form of behavior that together expresses the internal necessities of a vital equilibrium.<sup>1446</sup> Striven for, thus, is a general *being* which is neither determined by the conditions of a physical equilibrium with the milieu, nor by other local conditions, but rather by the total activity of the organism.<sup>1447</sup>

[T]he preferred behavior is the one which permits the easiest and most adapted action: for example, the most exact spatial designations, the finest sensory discriminations. Thus each organism, in the presence of a given milieu, has its optimal conditions for activity and its proper manner of realizing equilibrium; and the internal determinants of this equilibrium are not given by a plurality of vectors, but by a general attitude towards the world.<sup>1448</sup>

Thus, expressed in vital form is a general position taking towards the world – i.e. general attitude – which implies a striving towards equilibrium. The general attitude of the organism is manifest in the orientation towards the facile and equilibrated engagement in the milieu.

We recall how Kant spoke of a morality present in the expressions of the body and immediately perceivable for others. Kant's point is underpinned by the current demonstrations of Merleau-Ponty: a

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<sup>1441</sup> Ibid. 147. Italics added.

<sup>1442</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 147. Italics original.

<sup>1443</sup> Ibid. 148.

<sup>1444</sup> Ibid. 147.

<sup>1445</sup> Ibid. 147.

<sup>1446</sup> Ibid. 147.

<sup>1447</sup> Ibid. 147.

<sup>1448</sup> Ibid. 148.

shared dimension of vital form has in effect has been implied all the way, i.e. already from the physical and the transformation into the vital form. Life is a shared form – immediately perceivable to others. In contrast to Kant, however, Merleau-Ponty conceives of all kinds of understanding and co-action of vital beings – either within the same species or between species – as constituted in and by the shared dimension of vital form. Life in physical form is comprehended immediately by another example of life within physical form, so to say. Vital form directly suggests the interference relevant for the moment, writes Merleau-Ponty.<sup>1449</sup> Life forms the perceptual event as an intrinsic, shared norm; an expressive signification grasped not first and foremost as an intellectual idea (in case of human behavior) but rather as a direct interference of the body. "The gestures and the attitudes of the phenomenal body", writes Merleau-Ponty, "must have [...] a proper structure, an immanent signification; from the beginning the phenomenal body must be a center which radiates over a 'milieu'; it must be a certain silhouette in the physical and in the moral sense; it must be a certain type of behavior."<sup>1450</sup> As Kant suggested on behalf of the human body, then, the internal norm of vital behavior harbors a moment of direct communication of a universal moral norm of life – a way in which a moral norm is suggested and perceived directly by the fellow vital being. Vital structure implies a fellow apprehension of the moment; a co-perception of a norm relevant to the singular situation.

The shared dimension of vital form becomes even more interesting if the implications of equilibrium are heightened. By the logic of Merleau-Ponty's exposition, the expressive signification of life contains an inner orientation towards equilibrium. That is, the shared norm of vital behavior is a striving towards an equilibrium which simultaneously pertains to an "inner" orientation of the individual (the "Wirkung des Innern",<sup>1451</sup> for Kant) and the "outer" situation with others. Phrased with Merleau-Ponty's words, the general attitude of fellow organisms is apprehended directly by the standard of "least expenditure of energy". One perceives immediately if the amount of energy spent in the moment is more than required, less, or just right. In so far as the phenomenal body has a "center of actions which radiate over a 'milieu'", as Merleau-Ponty put it, the expressive radiation of "equilibrium" or "nonequilibrium", or "facility" or "nonfacility" of one organism impacts on the attitude of the other.

Before considering aspects relevant to human morality in the narrow sense, a moral dimension has already begun in the dimensions physical and the vital.<sup>1452</sup> From within physical structures the vital

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<sup>1449</sup> Ibid. 154.

<sup>1450</sup> Ibid. 157.

<sup>1451</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 154.

<sup>1452</sup> In *Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty makes a transcendental phenomenological point in the emergence of the human in the vital. "[W]e have already introduced consciousness [in so far as] what we have designated under the name of life was already the consciousness of life." (Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 162) Conscious life has begun long before it wakes up to itself in the phenomenological viewpoint, so to speak. The reflected orders of human structures evolve in seamless continuum with the physiognomies evolving within the more unspecified vital structures. "[W]hat we call nature is already consciousness of nature, what we call life is already consciousness of life, and what we call mental is still an object vis-à-vis consciousness." (ibid. 184). Phenomenology is mimetic to conscious life. Perceptual consciousness (in its most rudimentary sense) is the transcendental condition for saying *anything at all* in regard of physical or vital nature.

expresses a moment analogous to what Gadamer described as an inner life rhythm [*inneren Lebensrhythmus*], i.e. the moment of instinctive "Leichtigkeit des eigenen Daseins und Könnens".<sup>1453</sup> *Leichtigkeit*, in the sense of shared vital behavior, is a communal project. As we read: "Es umfasst nicht nur die Fähigkeit, mit sich auszukommen, sondern auch, miteinander auszukommen."<sup>1454</sup>

Gadamer's words mark a good opportunity to turn towards Merleau-Ponty's notion of *human form* (or the *third dialectic*). In many ways, we have already considered at some length many of the key aspects that characterize the human form. For instance, Merleau-Ponty's notions of abstract movement or symbol behavior are key aspects ascribed to the human form. The human form, writes Merleau-Ponty, is the "recognition, beyond the present milieu, of a world of things visible for each 'I' under a plurality of aspects, the taking possession of an indefinite time and space[.]"<sup>1455</sup> That is, human form is (among other things) symbol behavior in self-understanding; i.e. the ability to form a plurality of perceptual experiences into the more permanent consciousness of an "I". However, in the expanded sense of manifest behavior, human form is also the human capacity of orienting oneself in relation to the possible<sup>1456</sup> by the accumulation of practices (*work*<sup>1457</sup>). The human equilibrates its situation by planning and inaugurating practices of threshold that care for the situation in longer perspectives and along other axes compared with the habits of animals.

Now there is one last perspective on human form that we need to expand on (if only briefly) before we return to nondirective meditation. In Section 15, we indicated with *Phenomenology of Perception* how behavior harbors a moment of time displacement. Investments formed in critical phases of childhood (often) become determinant of adult behavior. This perspective, which Merleau-Ponty later expands in several lectures dedicated to child psychology,<sup>1458</sup> is introduced in *Structure of Behavior* by ways that can be called brief and indicative. The perspective nevertheless brings in a profound dimension in the question of morality and embodiment. For how, if we borrow Gadamer's words, is the primal and instinctive human ability to find a *Leichtigkeit* regarding oneself and others formed in the first place?

Merleau-Ponty's answer is that the basic ability to form an equilibrated human situation is formed in early childhood, in the period from birth to three years of age;<sup>1459</sup> that is, in the process of development from being in an absolute dependency of care to the acquisition of language and initial independence. With

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<sup>1453</sup> Gadamer, "Leiberfahrung und Objektivierbarkeit (1986)." 106–107.

<sup>1454</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>1455</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 175.

<sup>1456</sup> Ibid. 175–176.

<sup>1457</sup> Ibid. 162.

<sup>1458</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Child psychology and pedagogy: the Sorbonne lectures 1949-1952*. Here, Merleau-Ponty discusses in detail the works of Guillaume, Frenkel-Brunswik, Klein and Lacan, among others, and explores the phenomenological consequences of their observations.

<sup>1459</sup> Strictly speaking, already the specifics of years of age are information not taken from *Structure of Behavior* but from the subsequent lectures. For expanded discussions of Merleau-Ponty's approach to child psychology, see Talia Welsh, *The Child as Natural Phenomenologist: Primal and Primary Experience in Merleau-Ponty's Psychology (Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy)* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2013). Finke, *The Body of Gesture and Imitation – Merleau-Ponty and the Enactive Approach*.

nascent perception is established a prime emotional or affective bond with the world.<sup>1460</sup> How one is encountered by the caretakers in the earliest years of life comes together with the establishment of a basic trust or nontrust of living. (The following presentation refers for the most part to *Structure of Behavior*, while complementing also general perspectives made clearer in Merleau-Ponty's subsequent lectures.)

Nascent consciousness, for Merleau-Ponty, is not so much a cognitive and disinterested operation (least of all in forms directly comparable to adult perception) as the center of an unspecified and general interest directed towards human expressivity. In its rudimentary and formative phases, consciousness is an affective intentionality evolving the global atmosphere of the moment. Being in this atmosphere, then, the relational tone of the moment becomes the most determinate feature. "Nascent perception", Merleau-Ponty writes, "has the double character of being directed towards human intentions rather than towards objects of nature or of pure qualities (hot, cold, white, black) of which they are the supports, and of grasping them as experienced realities rather than as true objects."<sup>1461</sup> That is, rather than perceiving a paratactic mosaic of sensations (as empiricism would hold), consciousness perceives from the outset human physiognomies. In general, thus, the expressions of the human world into which the child is about to grow is what emerges into the foreground, whereas the "material support" of the events, i.e. the colors, lines, and curves, etc. very easily just moves into the background.<sup>1462</sup> In practice, this means the infant attaches itself to the expressions of gestures and faces, first and foremost to those of the mother.<sup>1463</sup> In these gestures, writes Merleau-Ponty, the child understands a wide spectrum of emotional expressions, such as the joyful meaning of a smile, expressions of menace or of melancholy<sup>1464</sup>, or as he later adds, nuances in the tone of the adult voice<sup>1465</sup> – which is to say, gestures that the child never had the chance to execute by itself or even has the cognitive ability to understand.

In contrast to *Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty's lectures on child psychology explore in detail the various stages in the formation of child psychology, for example, by an explicit interest in the manner in which the child assumes relations with the family constellations and how these relationships impact on an understanding of self and others.<sup>1466</sup> What we have said in regard to the affective and atmospheric nature of nascent perception, however, is enough to specify the points of crucial value in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Nascent perception is formed in the atmosphere of absolute dependency while also forming the situation with its inborn capacities; i.e. with structures that are prefigured in the consciousness of the child.<sup>1467</sup>

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<sup>1460</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 176–177.

<sup>1461</sup> Ibid. 166.

<sup>1462</sup> Cf. Ibid. Quite literally, Merleau-Ponty observes, one can see the expression on the face without noting the colors of the eyes, hair or even face. These alleged elements are present only in virtue of the contribution which they bring to the physiognomy and it is from the latter that they are reconstituted in memory with great difficulty. Ibid. 166–167.

<sup>1463</sup> Ibid. 166.

<sup>1464</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>1465</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others." 249.

<sup>1466</sup> Cf. Ibid. 249

<sup>1467</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 169.

In the dynamic between child and caretakers, for Merleau-Ponty, a human mimicry evolves<sup>1468</sup> which is basic to the process of becoming a moral being. That is, an emotional mimetic contact between the child and mother (or caretaker) is a necessary condition for the process of becoming human. Smiling and babbling to the child while the child smiles and babbles back, for instance, are ways in which the child learns to be in the human relational field by direct mimesis of care and playful gentleness. The child learns human receptivity, so to speak, while miming the expressive gestures of the mother. However, Merleau-Ponty's point is that to be in this relational field of contact over time is also to be in an ambiguous atmosphere wherein minute changes in tones or expressions also are mimetically present. That is, while the child might not have cognitive capacities to understand frustration or irritation in the adult expressions, for instance, these expressions are nevertheless sensed and mimetically integrated into its deeming self-understanding. The emotional mimesis plays itself out in the whole complex of inclusion or rejection, emotional warmth or coldness, acceptance or demands, etc. In various ways and in various degrees, the emotional expressions of the adult behavior mimetically leave traces in the nascent structure of behavior about to be formed in the child. The general point is this: the *I-me* relationship formed in these earliest years of human life is mimetic to the *I-mother* and *I-family* members. The style of being relationally attached in communal life is internalized as a way of being towards oneself.

Let us reformulate these points of Merleau-Ponty's interest in child psychology into terms of equilibrium. The emotional and mimetic contact experienced in the earliest years of life is a way human self-understanding gradually forms into an equilibrated structure of behavior. A self is formed and its world is equilibrated; ways of keeping certain difficult emotions at a distance, while playing out others, are formed. How the spontaneous expressions of the child are met is here of pivotal importance. Affirmation and rejection in the form of a laughing smile or a frustrated face, for instance, shapes the ways spontaneity is allowed or not allowed to express itself. In other words, the self and its world are equilibrated either by expressions going outwards or expressions held back and thus going inwards, or into other, more indirect modes of expression. The balancing *how* of a general, unspecific and thoroughly ambiguous foreground/background structure is formed. Self-understanding and understanding of others are here thoroughly intermingled. Or to be more precise, the relationship to the other (i.e. mother or caretaker) is basic to the ways in which the world becomes equilibrated. How to form a balanced relationship to other people and to unknown features in oneself becomes formed in the dynamic interplay with the mother (caretaker) and family life (communal life).

Emerging with perspectives of child psychology amidst physical and vital form is a rather complex notion of moral intersubjectivity. Ontologically and ontogenetically considered, the orders of conscious life have begun long before it wakes up to itself as an adult consciousness with moral duties and supernatural freedom (Kant). Moral life, in the wider sense suggested by the demonstrations of *Structure of Behavior*,

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<sup>1468</sup> Ibid. 156.

evolves in the equilibrated relationship to largely unknown structures within the physical vital and the human. The "wild Logos" of the spontaneous mind, the mind of *medesthai*, as we have also called it, let everything merge together in the peripheral, embodied consciousness. Un-organized as it is, the peripheral consciousness is nevertheless thoroughly permeated with morality.

#### b. Rediscovery of Spontaneity

We turn now to nondirective meditation for our final analysis. By what we have seen in previous demonstrations, to the degree that nondirective meditation implies a heightened awareness of what always already goes on in the periphery of consciousness, it follows, with the current perspectives of Merleau-Ponty that the technique furnishes an increased awareness of the spontaneous organizations of the physical, vital and human orders. Although the activity, with Merleau-Ponty, is an advanced human practice (symbol behavior) it nevertheless moves into orders which are not *merely* the orders of humankind. Simultaneously, as we have underlined with Gadamer, the meditative situation is not a mere repetition of what was already present in consciousness. Something is understood – and acted out – anew in the so-called subtle layers of consciousness.

Let us try to describe the process with a particular view on the nonanthropological morality involved.<sup>1469</sup> Following the presentation of *Structure of Behavior*, we start by deducing some consequences in the grounds of what Merleau-Ponty called physical form. Moving into the spontaneous activities the way one does in nondirective meditation implies that the meditating consciousness moves into the *sens* of physical structure. Consciousness moves into the expressive orders of the body qua physical structure. It moves into its "leaps and crises,"<sup>1470</sup> as Merleau-Ponty called it. It moves into the conditions upon which physical form can be modified by its own internal evolution,<sup>1471</sup> and into orders of being an organized physical structure which is formed from the outside, while also creating its own independent history from within. What does this mean in practice?

The pregnant combination of terms is here the *mental* and the *physical*, i.e. the mental activity of repeating the sound volitionally going on in the physical. What we can say is that meditating with a mentally induced meditation sound is to meditate in a *thought* relationship to a *nonthinking* dimension of one's being. That is, the meditator thinks the sound and is aware of its sonorous qualities, and executes as such a relationship with tensions and relaxations of the body qua physical structure. In other words, thinking the sound implies a moment of executing the relative freedom of thought in physical structures which

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<sup>1469</sup> Now it cannot be denied that the following descriptions will be speculative, and perhaps not only in the positive, philosophical sense of the word. We will use Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of embodiment in ways neither intended by the author, nor provable as such. The correct status of the preceding descriptions is perhaps *suggestions*. That is to say, within the logic of *Structure of Behavior* we can say the following of the meditative consciousness.

<sup>1470</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 137.

<sup>1471</sup> *Ibid.* 145.



generally determines the embodied mind, yet the meditator does it volitionally and with the specific intention of encountering everything with a free mental attitude. In effect, the meditator does something actively and volitionally in intrinsic relationship to one of the prime conditions of facticity, namely the singular and irreducible givenness of one's physical body. No meditator has chosen the physical structure his or her body. Like any other human being, he or she is situated in the anonymity of an organizing principle which is inescapable in the strongest sense of the word. What the meditator does choose, however, is how to relate to the anonymity. He or she chooses to balance the volitional (mental) activity to the nonvolitional (nonmental) physical situation.

We need to proceed further into the delicately balanced encounter between the mental and the physical. Apparently, evolving in the meditative balance is a moment of sublimation. That is, something of the physical form can be said to be "taken up" [*Aufgehoben*] and executed in the unrestrained mental sound. The *sens* of physical form becomes reflected – and in a hermeneutical sense, accomplished – in the unrestrained mental sound.

The notion that concretizes what we try to conceive here is equilibrium. With Benson, we saw how the unrestrained and mental repetition of the meditation sound represented a volitional induction of a relaxation response physically (as well as psychologically) bringing the body to rest. In the current context, Benson's observation supports the idea that nondirective meditation implies a modification of consciousness that works in accordance with the general tendency of equilibrium in physical form. That is to say, if the physical body (as Merleau-Ponty held) generally is a structure of constant interplay of forces advancing it to rest,<sup>1472</sup> it makes sense to say that the meditative activity of relaxation response accomplishes something of this "striving" towards equilibrium by advancing the physical system to *more* rest.

Thus conceived, rediscovering a free mental attitude within the *sens* of physical form is to gain contact with the equilibrium of physical form and allow this order to become part of the volitional activity. However, the unrestrained mental activity also transforms the *sens* of physical structure into something *understood*. The emancipative power of understanding<sup>1473</sup> gains a concrete meaning of an expanded freedom of volitional initiative within the nonvolitional physical form. The sonorously executed free mental attitude is potentially a way of lessening the fixations of a static way of being physical structure while increasing the contact with the dynamic expressions of physical form. We note the philosophical consequences hereby indicated. Thought – and by the logic of the linguistic-like meditation sound, this means volitional initiative in general – gains a freer movement from the internal physical form. Something in the physical form is transformed, namely, how the volitional-mental activity interacts with this nonchosen and conditioning dimension of reality. Almost in a literary sense, the style of phrasing the meditation sound evolves a transformed continuum from the inner of physical being.

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<sup>1472</sup> Ibid. 145.

<sup>1473</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 116.

Herein evolves an aspect of the decentered, nonanthropocentric moral potential of nondirective meditation. The process of *letting go* of psychological-individual investments is to expand from within the awareness of nonhuman orders of expression. The existential mimicry is expanded from within. The human self is prolonged into one of its existential conditions; the physical orders that permeate life from within.

We turn to the relevance of vital form in the context of nondirective meditation by outlining the overall idea conceivable with the demonstrations of Merleau-Ponty. Meditating within the *sens* of vital form apparently implies an expanded contact with what the phenomenologist described as the autochthonous sense of being a living creature. That is, it is to be present with a volitional expressive activity within the inborn norm of vital expression; i.e. within the norm *from which* dialectical relations of life themselves are brought into existence. Now the norm of life is (of course) always already there; yet, by what we have seen, it seems to make sense to say that the activity of meditating is a way to gain increased contact with the bodily and psychic energies implied. This contact implies simultaneously a strengthened relation to the norm of life within oneself and with the expressions it has in within the being of others.

Again, the notion concretizing the essential evolution here is equilibrium – now as the invariant norm of lived relations. Moving into the spontaneous activities is moving towards equilibrium as a norm of vital behavior; i.e. the norm of what counts as "the simplest and most economical with respect to the task in which the organism find itself engaged."<sup>1474</sup> Now we have already elaborated important aspects evolving here. In light of Gadamer's *Gleichgewicht* and Benson's "healthier balance",<sup>1475</sup> for instance, we saw how the relaxation of nondirective meditation is a way to re-discover within oneself the potential of a more relaxed and healthier way of spontaneously throwing oneself out into the ongoing dynamics of life. The process of loosening the fixations of nonvolitional concentration was seen as a way of going from a fixed and closed mode of creating equilibrium to a more dynamic and open mode. In the current terms of Merleau-Ponty, then, evolution was a move from a static, rigid and concentrated way of establishing preferred behavior, to a preferred behavior in the more flexible sense associated with ease, facility, and (as by Gadamer, Feldenkrais, and Benson) with health.

Now Merleau-Ponty's vital form makes us see the enactive aspect implied in the process from fixated to nonfixated equilibrium, and how it relates to a moral dimension of vital equilibrium. In fixation (nonvolitional concentration), the meditator acts out an inflexible attitude towards the design of the present situation. By the logic of Merleau-Ponty's vital form, spontaneous expressions of life are inhibited in behavior. Instead of accomplishing the norm of life relevant for the moment, the inflexible attitude canalizes the vital energy of expression into substituting projects of denial and repression. By the same logic, the inhibited orders are of both individual and communal relevance. In a certain sense, the fixated behavior is immoral; not in a cognitivist sense of failing to accomplish the duties of reason (Kant), but in the concrete sense of inhibiting the expansion of spontaneous, vital expressivity. Fixations inhibit the

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<sup>1474</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 147. Italics altered.

<sup>1475</sup> Benson, *The Relaxation Response*. 56.

dialectical process that brings the "truly dialectical relations"<sup>1476</sup> into appearance, as Merleau-Ponty put it. Instead of expanding communal orders of possible behavior, the fixed structure hinders the dynamic interplay between individuals.

By the same token (and also by the logic of Merleau-Ponty), the flexible form of vital equilibrium implies a dissolution of the limiting aspects of inhibition. That is, finding in oneself the more flexible norm of equilibrium is moral in the sense of opening up a wider span of possible behavior, towards both oneself and others. Discovered, eventually, is the possibility that one does not *have* to live in the fixed mode of being that excludes spontaneous expressions of life; i.e. that one *can* do things in ways that permit an easier and more adapted action. In other words, it can be discovered that life *can* be lived in accordance with how it is right and now; not by force and concentrated attitude, but in the spontaneous initiatives of behavior. As we saw with the illustrative subject who suffered from a phantom limb, instead of using psychic energy to keep the troublesome insight away, the subject could move more freely by going *with* the difficult emotions.

In the current perspective of Merleau-Ponty, the process of self-affirmation in the sense illustrated with the phantom limb subject is affirmation of an expression of life. That is, gaining increased contact with difficult emotions implies to find within oneself a norm of behavior inclusive to spontaneous, vital expressions, instead of exclusive ones. Increased sensitivity in the subtle layers of consciousness is to become more aware of the spontaneous expressivity bringing dialectical relations into appearance. Or, to use more of Merleau-Ponty's words, the norm that executes "by itself" a "work" which is neither accumulating endlessly ("at any cost") nor upholding already established orders. The latter clause is important. Gaining increased awareness within the ordering dimension of life is not necessarily affirmative in a self-diminishing way. That is to say, being open to the expressions of communal life does not equal subordination. By the logic of Merleau-Ponty's presentation, the vital norm is a force of expression preserving the legitimate needs of the individual; the norm is the locus of individuality, differentiation and communal life. The meditating consciousness, thus conceived, moves into the balanced order of these features; into the dialectic and reciprocal relationship between the needs of the individual and those of the moral society.

We have already discussed main guidelines for how Merleau-Ponty's perspective of child psychology becomes relevant in the context of nondirective meditation. Following Feldenkrais, we saw how the dynamic of sonorous awareness harbored a moment of psychological maturation: something in behavior matures and accomplishes itself through the activity of sonorous awareness. As the case of the phantom limb subject demonstrated, something *grows* by accepting the challenge of the sound (*Text*) and the potentially unpleasant psychological issues it provokes, and by just being with the sonorous-attentive activity.

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<sup>1476</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. 148.

The general philosophical point is this: the fact that the ambiguous equilibrium established in the earliest years of childhood is the ultimate standard in adult behavior does not necessarily imply that it is static standard. Hermeneutically speaking, something within the standard can be transformed by being understood anew, namely, the *way* one acts towards oneself as an ambiguous and historically conditioned body proper, as well as towards others and the world in general.

The point of transformation can be reformulated in terms of spontaneity. In the earliest years of childhood, in Merleau-Ponty's presentation, the child is spontaneous in ways that are gradually lost with the acquisition of language and the general process of psychological growth and maturation. From being fully in the impulses in the moment, by babbling,<sup>1477</sup> smiling, crying and shaking arms and legs, etc., the growing consciousness gradually adjusts spontaneity to the moral and physical environment into the adult body schema. Nondirective meditation, then, is a way to rediscover spontaneity – but now in the context of mature self-care, instead of infantile dependency on others. In other words, a rediscovery of the direct behavioral interaction with the world, within the adult situation, occurs. In a certain sense, the meditating consciousness gives itself anew the care and acceptance that perhaps were lacking in nascent consciousness; or which then always had the ambiguous and fragile tone of dependency. Regaining equilibrium within oneself is to lessen the emotional dependency on others, while increasing one's ability to participate in communal life (cf. vital equilibrium). Philosophically speaking, consciousness gains contact with a ahistorical standard within itself; an autonomous and independent way of being, transgressing – by the relative freedom of the human mind – the boundaries of the given.

With these perspectives we conclude the philosophical discussion of nondirective meditation. In the Introduction, we asked the question of what it implies to know oneself. By the end of the investigation we have a clue of what self-knowledge can imply. Studying nondirective meditation, we have seen that it can imply an exploration of consciousness through an unrestrained repetition of a sound. It can imply a sort of gathering of mind in the sense of a closer and more spontaneous interaction within relations. It can imply an inexplicit yet significant contact with ambiguities of life, evolving in transitional borders between *I* and *me*, *I* and *you*, *I* and *world*, *here* and *there*, *now* and *then* – or between the physical, vital, and human orders.

The philosophical account called embodied hermeneutics has been there all the way. Evolving in between Gadamer's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, embodied hermeneutics is not a position, not a set of decrees, not a handbook of a priori principles but rather a way of doing philosophy. Embodied hermeneutics is a comprehensive and interdisciplinary way of describing the human situation by means of philosophical hermeneutics, phenomenology, and empirical studies. Reflected in regard of philosophical methods, the account combines resources of the Western philosophical tradition and contemporary neurological research. It positively engages the hermeneutical *Text* and the phenomenological description

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<sup>1477</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Consciousness and Language Acquisition (1949-50)." 9.

of action, and it evolves between categorial and noncategorial philosophical approaches to describe experience. Moving toward a philosophical understanding of nondirective meditation has been moving toward an increased understanding of the possibilities of embodied hermeneutics.





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