

The Non-signifying Gesture of the Living Body

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Abstract I intend to show that in several alternative biological conceptions inspired by hermeneutics of the 20th century the subject-object split is still preserved and that it is necessary to be inspired by other moments of the hermeneutical thought if a real alternative to Cartesianism should be formulated. Such attempt could be found in the philosophical hermeneutics of H.-G. Gadamer but it is not yet sufficient. I suppose that only on the basis of the idea of the human self-non-understanding and self-decentralization it is possible to grasp theoretically the “non-human” living being in an adequate way (inspiration found by Derrida, Deleuze, Blanchot).

Keywords Hermeneutics and posthermeneutics · Self-non-understanding · Self-decentralisation

It is well known that 20th century hermeneutics has served as a theoretical basis for many biological conceptions that seek to part once and for all from the Cartesian notion of animated nature. It is possible to study life forms, if we adopt a Cartesian notion of animated nature, only as dead objects and from the viewpoint of an independent observer, i.e. the general thinking human subject. As this is inadequate to these biological conceptions, some have turned to hermeneutical approaches. The human being is seen then not a subject who contemplates fully the truth about itself and the world but rather as an existence which understands itself and the world of its own meaning. The truth about what this is is never given in advance but happens in time and through interpretation. Hermeneutical theoretical biology is inspired by this concept and seeks to generalize it to the whole of animated nature. Instead of “we, people, understand one another”, it should rather be said according to this theory that

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“we, life forms, understand one another”. In this way, all living beings can be included in the category of “understanding existence”. Interpretation and understanding become a general way in which life forms relate to the world.

However, I intend to show in this article that theoretical biology cannot extricate itself in this way from the subject-object split and that the hermeneutic turn is, therefore, not a sufficiently convincing alternative to Cartesianism. A slightly more sophisticated theoretical basis for my theme can be found in the general hermeneutical conception of H.-G. Gadamer. It is interesting that Gadamer compares what we might call lived experience, or the experience of a life form which is manifested by understanding oneself and one’s world, to the experience of artistic creation. Lived understanding is in a sense artistic. The spontaneity and unpredictability of lived experience is peculiar to artistic creation and experience as well. I will retain the metaphor of art in this article and I will also introduce in addition to Gadamer’s description the interpretation given by J.-L. Nancy of the experience of modern dance. The basic difference between these two notions of artistic experience lies in the fact that Gadamer considers art to be an activity which refers to a certain thing and which presents (shows) its (even though incomplete) sense, while Nancy’s thesis is that (dance) art consists of non-representative gestures, i.e. from bodily movements, which, although they make sense, are not *about* anything. This distinction will make it clear subsequently that even Gadamer’s hermeneutics is unconvincing as an attempt to overcome Cartesianism.

We can easily move from this metaphor of artistic experience to a description of a life form’s experience because in both cases the sense of corporeality is significantly manifested. I would like to show here, with the help of Nancy’s explanation, that the animated body, the life form, does not communicate anything, does not point to anything by means of its gestures, and yet it *makes sense*. The speech of this animated body is not the speech of written texts interpreted through hermeneutic procedures, but can be experienced as the impulse of an alien sense within oneself. A life form has an auto-reference which is nevertheless neither egocentric nor narcissistic. The self-relationship of a life form has the form of an immediacy of the body and this immediacy means *being towards oneself in the sense of fully turning outwards* (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 30). To clarify this statement it will be necessary to focus on the issue of the structure of experience. Hermeneutics basically agrees here with phenomenology: experience is an event of a phenomenon’s giving of itself, where the phenomenon is a *unit* of sense. Sense is the meaning of that which appears. Hermeneutics holds that sense does not always give itself easily and immediately and that it has to be conquered through interpretation. However, it agrees with phenomenology in that sense exists and operates in the form of units which express a completed experience. The freshly-born or arisen sense is a signal that a phenomenon has just given itself in experience and that experience is therefore complete or at least temporarily terminated.

Biohermeneutic Criticism of bio-Cartesianism

When theoreticians of biological hermeneutics criticize the inadequacy of Cartesianism in the life sciences, it happens, in some cases, that they preserve Cartesianism in their

conceptions. The basic dualities of subject—object, human—inhuman, and self—non-self, are maintained in their hermeneutical conception of life even though they are partially displaced and renamed. This fact, quite paradoxically, follows from the effort of the given conceptions to show that so-called exclusively human qualities (for instance reason, speech, culture, situational understanding, etc.) are not so exclusively human but rather characterize life forms in general. Animals can also understand—they are able to read the text of their world and interpret it according to the situation at hand, speak their language, develop their kind of culture, etc. Cartesian dualism is, however, not canceled out in this consideration. Why is that? Because such a consideration is preceded by a primary conviction about the existence of a purely human quality which is highlighted from a list of possibilities and extracted into a substance—that is how the notions of the substantial soul, the significance of thinking and reason, a being's giving of itself, and understanding oneself and one's world, came into being. Having separated this quality from the rest, theoreticians subsequently tried to force this quality onto other life forms or, in short, to promote them to humans (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 2). What can be heard in these conceptions is this: animals are alive just as we are alive, and they, like humans, interpret their world. The duality of the soul (reason, or self-conscious subject) and the body *is supposed to be canceled* by the statement that soul (self-consciousness, reason) is actually a continual extension of the body and that body is self-consciousness, an understanding soul. The animal is *in fact* identical with the human being, i.e. nothing essential separates them from one another. To digress now a little, it reminds me of an early feminist way of thinking which asked whether woman is of the same substance as man or whether she is of a different substance. The problem with this approach is twofold. Firstly, there is an unshakeable certainty about a substantial duality concealed in its presuppositions—soul—body, human substance—inhuman substance, human-being—animal, subject—object, man—woman—which leads to the necessity to give an 'either-or' answer: either they are identical as to their substance and they are different only in their unimportant qualities, or they are completely different in their substance. Secondly, there is an unshakeable certainty inherent in the approach regarding the human being as a self (subject): I am aware that I am conscious and that I can, by means of thinking, discover those who are also conscious (even though they are not aware of their consciousness, they are not unconscious) and also those who are simply unconscious. I understand that I understand and that I understand myself. I can differentiate between those who understand neither themselves nor being, and those who understand but do not know about it. I live my life and I can also tell the difference between who is animate and who is inanimate. These thinkers continue using the categories of soul (subject, reason) and body in the classical form. The exclusivity of the human subject is preserved in their approach even though it is somewhat hazy and obliterated. An example of this approach can be seen in the biohermeneutics of Jakob von Uexküll (1921, 1956) or in the theory of life as interpreted by authors such as Clément, Scheps and Stewart (1997).

Another possible way of thinking about the animate and, at the same time, evading Cartesianism is to go on a journey of thought which will not confirm itself by its own performance and in whose centre there is no self-conscious subject, no human being *as* an animate (understanding, conscious) creature. This thinking understands the animal neither as something inhuman nor as an essentially conscious

creature—it does not relate the animal to a fixedly defined humanity. This thinking opens itself to the life form during a lived, unassumed, experience. Otherness announces itself in this experience within the performance of understanding. It leads to the idea that his or her own products and activities (concepts, experiences) lead the experiencer outside himself. Referring to the poststructuralist thought, to reflect an animate creature, to reflect an animal, and to think in general, can mean to lose oneself and to lose even the *primordial* idea of what an animal, a life form and anything else signifies. What we can do, at the most, is to think *along the animal*, outside of ourselves. This approach corresponds with thinking in which the difference is primordial to identity, in which there is not a seemingly central point of thought that would be always justified by the activity of thinking itself.

The question is, of course, what we can get from such an approach. The answer to this question is left open for the moment, in the same way that an art scene is usually open where a body is about to perform any minute but which never presents itself in the sense of a completed announcement of a clear and significant thought.

It is interesting, for the purposes of this article, that the theoretical journey which the hermeneutical philosopher H.-G. Gadamer pursues reminds us in many respects of the above-mentioned alternative to Cartesian philosophy. In contrast to the above-mentioned biohermeneutics, Gadamer explicitly sought in his hermeneutics the *cancellation of subject in favour of the process of historical realization of the “thing”*. What Gadamer’s hermeneutics deals with and what a new possible biohermeneutics could lean on is not an “I”, self-care, or understanding oneself, but a realization of the thing of history. This conception delimits itself critically against at least one notion of evolution which is based on an anthropological principle and on the idea of the development of previously given forms along a time-line. Gadamer supports his approach methodically by noting an important human experience: if we observe our own experiencing and seek self-understanding, we experience that we are not actually in the centre of what happens: we stand neither in the middle of the world nor “here” in the world, and we are, in a sense, alien, ungraspable and elusive even to ourselves.

This experience is illustrated by Gadamer through the examples of play and the creation of works of art. He shows that the subject of a play (work of art) is not the player (author) but the play (work) itself. I believe that only on the basis of this thought is it possible to describe theoretically “inhuman” life forms differently than in ways deduced from the human way of being (all animate beings are as animate as the human being is animate). However, it is necessary to add that Gadamer’s hermeneutical project remains grounded within a framework which makes it impossible to pursue the idea of problematizing the human subject to the end. How does this happen in Gadamer’s conception? How can it inspire us?

Gadamer’s Hermeneutics

The central statement from which Gadamer develops his hermeneutical conception is: “being that can be understood is language” (Gadamer 2006, 470). Language is essentially connected with understanding which does not have the form of a concrete *method* of interpretation, as it had in other hermeneutical theories, but which is an

actualization of possibilities of the interpreting being within its “being-in-the-world”. Gadamer connects the existential aspect of language with another theme—the theme of “corporeal” forms of language. What becomes vocal here are the themes not only of written (philosophical) text, but also (materialized) works of art and (factual) historical events: “Being toward text”... determined the direction of my inquiry... and also the incompletable question of the meaning of a work of art or of the meaning of history (Gadamer 1990, II, 335).

These three phenomena are characterized by their “corporeal” nature because they can all be understood as material, sensible *expressions* of language. Yet, in contrast to the other two phenomena, text occupies a more general attitude in the sense that a work of art and the world can be studied, in Gadamer’s interpretation, as certain kinds of texts. What plays an important role in the question of (corporeal) text is its relationship to (non-corporeal) language: “How is the text related to language? What gets from language to the text?... How could the notion of text attain such universal expansion? Everyone who puts the philosophical tendencies of our century in front of his eyes will see that what is at stake in this theme is a reflection rather than a method of philological sciences.” (Gadamer 2006, 106–136)

Although Gadamer has no intention of developing another regional hermeneutics (Dannhauer, Chladenius, Flacius) and he does not want to search for a method of the historical sciences (Dilthey), he believes that text is a significant theme of philosophy. If philosophy is to be built upon speech, then text together with the question of corporeal expressions of speech, art and history become a philosophical theme par excellence. It is important to focus mainly on the structure “something as something” of the hermeneutical explanations that deal with this bodily expression. What, in the case of text, is designated by the first “something” (what is interpreted when we read a text, when we create a work of art, when a historical event takes place?) and *as what* is this “something” of the text interpreted?

When searching for the answers to these questions, Gadamer comes to the conclusion that the understanding of philosophy and its texts, just like the understanding of history or art, presents such a significant experience that it has to be called *a basic experience as such*. Gadamer claims: “I did not search for the hermeneutical structure primarily in the experience which is elaborated in science, but directly in the experience of art and history ... What holds for a work of art is ... that it tells us something—in such a way that its enunciation can never be exhausted by means of a concept in a definitive way. It also holds for the experience with history that the ideal of objectivity is ... a secondary aspect of the matter. ... We stand in a certain process [in historical experience] without knowing how it happens to us ... The same basic experience holds for philosophy as well.” (Gadamer 1990, II)

The basic experience is an experience whose meaning cannot be exhausted by means of concepts. What characterizes lived experiencing has an artistic and historical nature. What is to be understood can never be actualized in this basic experience, which Gadamer understands as *an experience of meaning*, as “it itself”; it cannot terminate the dialogical process of hermeneutical explanation. Gadamer is inspired here by Heidegger, for he claims that “That is why I tried to capture the incompleteness of every experience of sense and to deduce, from Heidegger’s insight into the central significance of finitude, the consequences for hermeneutics.” (Gadamer 1990, II)

A text, a work of art, or an historical event *deals* primarily with (i.e. *refers to*) that which Gadamer calls a “thing”. It is the character of the text’s topic (where the notion of text also includes a work of art, historical event, or world) that has to be analyzed in detail. It holds, for this thing, that its thingness is not substantial and that it cannot be fully actualized by any form of definitive enunciation. The basic experience which always coincides with understanding and with language or speech is therefore the experience of such *sense on which one cannot focus directly*: “What comes out during speaking is not a mere fixating of an intended sense but a constantly changing attempt, or rather, continuously repeated tempting of something and running wild with someone. That means, however, to surrender oneself. Speaking is not mere ordering and applying of our prejudice but it, in contrast, throws them into game.” (Gadamer 1990, II)

The basic experience can be in a sense compared to play. What is decisive for the character of the play is that play *transcends the experiencing creature* by its course of events: “It is the game that is played—it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such.... The primordial sense of playing is the medial one.... Here the *primacy of the play over consciousness of the player* is fundamentally acknowledged.” (Gadamer 2006, 104–5)

In art, there is something on which we cannot focus directly. In the course of history, a meaning of something which is inaccessible to us occurs. We live within the sense of something which transcends us. This moment, in which the experiencing being is given to what it itself experiences, presents a significant shift in the reinterpretation of the classical (Husserlian) explanation of experience as a fulfilled intentionality. Gadamer reveals in the hermeneutical understanding such experience, which, as interminable and ungrounded in the subjectivity of the experiencer, problematizes the clear scheme of an *immediately fulfilled* intentional structure of every experience. In this way, Gadamer also interprets the structure of the hermeneutical “as” which characterizes every explanation and which has the form “something as something”. “What” the text deals with is not any entity but a *thing* which one cannot have easily at hand, to which one cannot implicitly relate and interpret it *as* something else. Every understanding of a text is according to Gadamer interminable and its “thing” cannot be attached to the self. It is a strange, constantly elusive “something” which is hidden and which is only in various ways *interpreted, embodied* as “something”. An inner dialogue in which the basic experience always takes place is an event in the space of meaning whose topology can never be appropriated by the interpreting being and in which an infinite process of always partial presentations (*Vorführung*), or actualization and embodying of what is being said, occurs. There is always something in a dialogue which transcends all previously found meaning of an encounter and which is a source of an infinite search for new actual forms of meaning of the given experience. “As the described experiences show there is something different in it, something like a potentiality—that it can be otherwise, which transcends that on which we agreed in our mutual understanding.” (Gadamer 1990, II)

The being of the thing about which we speak, the thing of a text, *does not have the character of being of an entity* in Gadamer’s philosophy. It is an infinity of potentialities grasped always with finite concepts and situational actualizations. In this sense, the interpreting being is related through interpretation to *something*,

although it does not know what it is. Life is an unknowable object of lived experience; art begins from something which is not an objectively anchored “something”. Gadamer’s claim that to understand means always to understand differently seems to point to the fact that basic experience does not manifest any mutual interconnectedness between the subjectivity of the interpreter and the objectivity of the interpreted. I believe, however, that the intentional structure of basic experience is questioned by Gadamer only partially and incompletely. Although the “thing itself” is never actualizable in the basic experience, it simultaneously plays the role of a leading arbiter—in Gadamer’s conception, a unified and coherent pole of interpretation which delimits the field of possible understanding. Understanding, lived experience and art deal exclusively with things which are characterized by a *unity of sense*. This wholeness and the unity of sense of the “thing”, the subject matter, is presupposed a priori by Gadamer, because he considers them to be formal presuppositions of understanding: “The formal presupposition which directs all understanding [is the fact that] what is intelligible is only that which constitutes a real and complete unity of sense.... The first of all hermeneutical conditions is still fore-understanding which follows from that we have dealings with the same thing. We determine from this condition what is actualizable as unified sense and in consequence also the application of the presupposition of completeness.” (Gadamer 1990, II, 299ff)

This condition is unmistakably related to two other hermeneutical presuppositions: on the one hand, the so-called universality of speech and, on the other, a conviction that an interpretation performed within the “something as something” structure is the only immediate givenness. Gadamer sums up these suppositions as follows: “A third feature is what I would call the universality of language. Language if not a delimited realm of the speakable, over against which other realms that are unspeakable might stand. Rather, language is all-encompassing. There is nothing that is fundamentally excluded from being said.... Every... break has an intrinsic relation to the resumption of the dialogue.” (Gadamer 1977, 67)

“It is interpretation which performs the never fully completable mediation between the human being and the world. What is the only real immediacy and givenness in this sense is that we understand something as something.... Interpretation is not an additional procedure of knowledge but an original structure of being-in-the-world.” (Gadamer 1990, II, 146–155)

As the thing, the subject matter, of a text (work of art, lived historical event) is something that can be understood and the being of that which can be understood is speech, the thing can be approached and interpreted at any time. The subject matter with which an interpretation is concerned retains its irreducible identity (*Dieselbigkeit*), unity (*Einheit*), completeness (*Vollkommenheit*) and relationship to the one who understands. Life is therefore only one, complete and related to living beings. Art concerns coherent unities of sense which stand behind every work of art.

The second point I would like to stress in connection with Gadamer’s explanation concerns the already mentioned corporeal nature of text in the sense of record. For it appears that the corporeal character does not belong to the subject matter of the text but only to its embodiment or presentation (*Darstellung, Vorführung*), i.e. as a record. Written texts (life forms, works of art) point beyond themselves towards the subject matter (towards life, matter of art) *which is not corporeal* and which is, as

such, a source of potentialities of sense which can never be presented in their completeness and all at once. The corporeality of the text is understood here as a *material expression* through which one has to go towards the original source of sense which is to be found in the ungraspable subject matter. Gadamer therefore pointed out the necessity of paying attention to the corporeal manifestations of speech, only to describe them later as finite, factual and therefore always somehow limited forms of speech, separated essentially from their source. Texts (life forms, works of art) are characterized by a kind of passivity, while their thing, their subject matter, is, in contrast, a source of an active sense-giving which acts on the interpretation. It is only the subject matter of the text (matter of art, life) which is the subject of understanding. In this sense the corporeality of the text is grasped again by means of a standard scheme which differentiates between a passive corporeal expression and an active non-corporeal source of sense.

It is therefore necessary to see three underlying implicit statements in Gadamer's claim that to understand means to understand differently every time. Firstly, one can always understand only *something*, that is, a "subject matter" which does not have the being of an entity and which cannot be grasped directly. Secondly, this matter can only be understood in *some way*, that is, in a concrete manner, *as something*; it can always be "somehow" actualized and embodied, in a way which never exhausts the character of the matter. Thirdly, if we always understand the subject matter differently, we have to remember that it is always the *same* subject matter which is understood by us *differently* (the otherness of different interpretations appears as otherness only because all mutually distinct factual explanations relate to one and the same thing). The thing, subject matter, is a non-corporeal unity of sense and it is never actualizable as a full unity. The subject matter itself will transcend every concrete interpretation. It is only in this sense that the hidden matter of understanding (life, the matter of art) remains *always itself*, in the same way that the interpreting being preserves its unity and subjectivity in its changes and various ways of potentiality-of-being. The space of interpretation is then in a sense limited negatively. The subject matter of a text is never graspable directly and in its wholeness, yet it acts on an actual (embodying) process of understanding in such a way that it disallows an arbitrary explanation and the transcending of certain implicit borders of a possible sense. The matter (life) delimits a space of freedom in the framework of pre-indeterminate and yet existing limits of interpretation. To interpret therefore does not mean to find a unique sense but to invent a maximum breadth of sense within a certain indeterminately delimited field of liability.

Gadamer's understanding of the relationship between the subject matter of the text and an interpreting being is affirmed also by Günter Figal in his essay *On the Silence of Texts*. Here Figal advocates Gadamer's position against the Derridean idea of "deconstructive", or "disseminating" reading and writing. He claims that texts have a character such that they are essentially silent about that which they are "substantially" concerned with (we could paraphrase it as follows: life forms are essentially silent about what life is). This silence, however, does not mean that texts are mute or that they can be manipulated at will. *Texts are always silent about something (life forms are always silent about life)*. They refer to something which is hidden, but which could always somehow flash through, become apparent, even if only in an indirect way. The silence of texts about this hidden "matter" is

therefore *solemn* because it is exactly this silence that is the presupposition and a directing mechanism of any interpretation: “The “solemn silence” of texts,..., proves itself to be, on closer inspection, the necessary presupposition of every interpretation. If texts were dumb we would not want to learn anything from them; in the silence lies the possible but reserved and withheld speech.... It is not possible, therefore, to interpret a text without having an expectation of what the text means (Figal 1997, 2).

Every concretely articulated meaning of a text is a presentation of that *about* which the texts are silent (every intelligibly acting living being keeps silent about the life which characterizes it). It is impossible to develop anything other than a partial actualization of meaning within the framework of any interpretation. For this reason, Figal can claim that “no text speaks that liberating word which would confirm the interpretation that this and nothing else was meant.... Interpretation, therefore, depends upon the silence of texts.” (Figal 1997, 3)

The advocates of hermeneutics are moreover convinced that to interpret a text means not only to invent the meaning but also to *find* it, within the two essential dimensions of obligation and freedom. The definiteness of a work is given by the existence of a unified “matter of the text” which binds the interpreter to interpret the work freely within certain boundaries. The non-actualizable and yet definite subject matter is interpreted as “something”—as a finite actualization or a situational performance. This hermeneutical dimension Figal contrasts with his idea of deconstruction which, according to him, bases an interpretation on mere infinite interpretational variations during which no finding of sense of the given text is performed. Instead what occurs is merely an arbitrary inventing and shifting in an indefinite openness of a language system: “The indeterminate openness could not be presented; presentation is only there where something determinate is actualized, and this must, as determinate, direct any presentation.” (Figal 1997, 4–5)

To interpret means to *invent* a breadth of sense within the space of the work and, subsequently, to *find* this broad sense. To interpret means neither to find an unambiguous point-determined sense nor to invent an arbitrary sense of the text. The diversity of individual presentations stays bound to the unity and the unity has to be developed into the greatest possible number of nuances. As Figal writes: “It (interpretation) must do justice to both the unity and the multiplicity of a text;...the multiplicity of nuances which can be discovered by an interpretation remain tied to the unity of the text, and that, conversely, the unity of the text will unfold itself in as many nuances as possible.” (Figal 1997, 7)

It follows from this interpretation that we still have to understand the encounter with a text in (Gadamer’s and Figal’s) hermeneutical conceptions as an intentional, even if to a certain extent reformulated, experience. The presupposition of the universality of language and understanding, i.e. the fact that a non-actualizable matter of basic experience *can always be somehow* presented in a bodily form and can somehow be understood (as something), leads to the fact that someone is always connected with something in any given experience in a mutual pre-harmony which is a formal presupposition of understanding. The intentional structure of basic experience is such that “the interpreting being interprets the interpreted text” while the subject matter of the given text is being revealed. The identity of all poles of this relationship is a priori *presupposed* (in the form of self-preserving dynamic identity

(ipseity), sameness of the thing and the material identity of the text) and Gadamer takes it, during his explanation, as a certain immediate point of departure. The second starting point which he does not question in his exposition of the above-mentioned basic experience (experience of a text, work of art and historical event understood as an experience of sense) is permanence and continuity of the relationship between the experiencing and the experienced, interpreting and interpreted. The continuity and unambiguity of the relation is, in fact, a guarantee that the process of interpretation is successful even if the subject matter will always be hidden, the text silent and the subject lacking a substantial character. Thanks to these presuppositions, an eternal dialogue between various sides of interpretation can be maintained, various partial misunderstandings can be overcome and at the same time a mutual understanding can be repeatedly reached in this process. This partial understanding, which Gadamer designates with the concept of “merging of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*), does not present an unambiguous agreement but a temporary consensus between a text and an interpreter with respect to one mutually shared “matter”.

Consequences for Biohermeneutics

How can we sum up the theoretical consequences of Gadamer’s hermeneutics for an alternative notion of life? Living beings would be, according to the above-mentioned conception, a corporeal performance of life which is a non-objective source of the meaning of all that lives. Life is not graspable conceptually, one can never focus on it directly, one can never “grasp” it. Yet it is possible and even necessary to begin to speak about it. To speak about life means to speak about what living beings remain silent about in a solemn and significant way. Living beings are silent about the hidden unity of sense which, in an ungraspable way, delimits the borders of the space of potential living embodiments. It concerns borders, or rather a horizon, of freedom within which everything is alive and beyond which everything corporeal is lifeless. The reality of the living is therefore a compact and limited realm. Living beings are silent about the leading idea of aliveness—about non-corporeal life—but they express through their existence life itself. To show life as a living being is an immediate act. The subject of a lived experience and understanding of the living is always this life which is not imaginable in its full breadth by any living creature. Life is an identical, complete “matter” to which every living being is related. To live means to give oneself to this life, to surrender and let oneself be lived by it. It also means to invent the variations within the realm determined by life. We live without knowing in what sense we are alive. Non-actualizable life always manifests itself somehow in living beings; it is always possible for it to live in embodiments which we experience as living. There is a permanent continuous relation between a living being and life, which guarantees that the process of embodiment will be successful and meaningful.

It follows from this interpretation that living beings are only heterogeneous embodiments of the same thing while no living being fully exhausts its idea of life. Living beings are works of art which are the performance of the same thing in different contexts. The work of art has its idea and bodily form; the idea is present

even though it is not graspable to perfection. That is why it is necessary to interpret every work of art and every living being anew in new situations.

The human being is the only being which is able to reveal and understand the above-sketched structure. We know that an uncoverable matter is hidden behind works of art which is characterized by a unity of sense. We know that ungraspable life determines all graspable living expressions on this earth and that it places them in an enclosed field of a unified sense. We know that there is a region of inanimate objects stretching beyond the borders of the living. We know all this from somewhere. From where? We know it because we live and also contemplate. We contemplate a fixed truth in a continuously changing life. We contemplate in our human exclusivity that we as people are also living beings and that we share, together with animals, plants and other expressions of life, various identical characteristics. At the same time we are able to identify clearly an inanimate object because we can touch even its essential substance, even though it is inhuman and lifeless. We can identify the way of being of everything that exists. We share our world with everything that exists; we have a continuous experience—it is this basis from which we identify the differences of other corporeal presentations of the same thing. We then give living beings the status of resembling human beings, the privileged living beings.

Life and living beings are interpreted in this conception on the basis of a metaphor of *art which is inscribable*. Every work of art is according to Gadamer a *text* which is fixed and preservable, a text which we can begin to read and understand somehow at any moment. Art refers beyond itself to that which it leads into presence, which it represents without any possibility of succeeding in it fully and definitely.

J.-L. Nancy—The Dance of the Non-Signifying Body

Another notion of art is developed by Jean-Luc Nancy in the collection of texts entitled *Allitérations* (Monnier and Nancy 2005) published together with choreographer and dancer Mathilde Monnier. These texts are related in various ways to the Alliterations project which began with Nancy's philosophical text *Séparation de la danse* (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 139ff). Monnier writes that when she heard Nancy's text for the first time she had an impression that while writing the author had imagined himself as a dancer. Nancy's effort was to think from one's own body, not to think *about* body. His interest was not to interpret the body as a text that is solemnly silent about something which is beyond the body. Nancy stayed in the body and he thought. Monnier decided to develop a choreographed dance from this text which would express Nancy's specific solo dance (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 14). The performance which was developed from this impulse, in cooperation with other artists, took place on parallel stages as mutually resonating procedures of reading, movement, dance and music. It carried within itself elements of improvisation on all levels—text and movement changed from performance to performance.

Many inspiring thoughts which I would like to use for understanding the theme of lived experience and life arise from the connection between artistic work with the

body and philosophical thinking of the body. I would like to focus on two questions. Firstly, it is important to ask what *sense* is carried, created and given by corporeal experience. Secondly, it is interesting to study how the meaning of basic thought—body dualism changes through the connection of dance and philosophy. It seems, to put it briefly, that the distinction between thinking and the body works because it makes it possible to describe the *experience of sense*. As the sense of bodily experience is not a stable meaning of a ready phenomenon, and is not a sense of something (idea, things) expressed in something or as something (in the body, as the body), it is necessary to describe thinking and the body in a different way than by means of an identification of their mutual sameness and otherness. It makes no sense to ask whether thinking is identical with the body or whether it is essentially different. This condition, together with the idea of a sense that happens, will lead to a reinterpretation of the three mentioned concepts.

Let us begin with the question of the sense of bodily experience. Nancy's well-known claim about sense and the body goes as follows: "The body is a place through which sense escapes." (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 18) What does this statement mean? As the author writes, it is usually held that sense arises in the moment of completion, the termination of an experience. A sentence can be meaningful only when it is complete. A gesture becomes a meaningful gesture in its culmination. Our vision has a meaning as soon as we have seen "something" which is somehow complete. In the moment of pronouncing a sentence, completing a gesture, seeing a picture, a certain phenomenon is being completed and the unit of sense is transmitted. Sense of this kind exists only when an action is *stopped* and terminated. It concerns a fixed, graspable and often petrified sense. Nancy writes that such sense, nevertheless, bypasses the richness of human experience. We know, in experience, that events in our life are somehow meaningful, and yet we are unable to stop their occurrence in any way, for any period of time, to get a distinct and unified sense out of them. This does not mean, however, that we should arrive at sense only dynamically, as when one circles around a hidden thing and discovers its innumerable meanings from various perspectives and contexts. It also means more than that something gives itself only *as* something. The sense of many events exists only in escaping and as escaping. We can approach this idea, for instance, by means of the metaphor of an inflatable balloon. An inflatable balloon is full of air thanks to which it has a certain form. The air outlines the sense of the balloon. This sense, the sense of an inflated balloon, is fixed and it belongs to a certain unified phenomenon. It can easily be denoted and described. Yet Nancy is not interested in the description of this kind of sense. He is much more interested in the process which would correspond metaphorically to the escape of air from the balloon through a randomly created puncture. The process of this escape also makes sense even though it constantly proceeds and does not complete itself in any form. This process exists in its occurring. Although it could not proceed without the previous existence of the inflated balloon, it does not belong inside it. Escaping is the contact of the interior with the exterior and a dissolving of a distinct border between the two realms. The process of crossover, or encapsulating the exterior in the interior by means of escaping occurs thanks to the interior and exterior. Thanks to the puncture, the exterior is somehow inside the balloon and the interior is outside. Yet their independence is not destroyed completely. We can say that the interior is as a whole

turned outwards, and yet it remains an interior. What we deal with here is not a pouring of one part of the content of the interior into the exterior, but the sense of escape. The sense of a given process is the process itself, the escape. This process and its sense is something *added and something beyond* the interior and exterior. It did not dissolve the fixed sense completely. It did not sublimate into itself the static description, the distinction between the interior and the exterior is still functioning, but the status of the two concepts has changed. The process of escaping makes it impossible for the exterior and the interior to have borders. They are in contact but they do not merge into one. The exterior touches the interior directly. This occurs in the process. They are neither delimited by a border nor do they become a unity. They cease to be enclosed regions delimited by the rubber surface of the balloon. They are forces in contact. As soon as the exterior immediately touches the interior in the process of escaping, or outflow, there comes a moment of birth. That through which sense flows during birth is called the body, or rather the improvising, dancing, non-representing body. The body becomes a body as soon as it begins to be the place of an outflow of sense which characterizes the contact between the exterior and the interior after they have lost their mutually fixed delimitation. The body is not a homogeneous mass but an outbreak in which an outflow, crossover and movement occur. The body is an emptiness within a certain process.

The metaphor of the balloon leads us to the idea of the body as a spatial concavity. The concavity functions only as an empty space within a certain process; as a split of escaping. When speaking about the birth of the body, it means that there will be a new opening generated through which sense will leak. It is there that the contact between the exterior and the interior—which hitherto existed only as two distinctly separated, closed and fixed realms—takes place. The exterior existed as a region of the so-called inner contents of a concrete individual (“I”) and the exterior as its so-called external environment (“non-I”), that which is separated from the individual. In relation to this external environment the individual lives as an individual. The contact of these two realms signifies the cancellation of their delimitation, but not their difference. Let us imagine another example: a sheet of paper which initially lies still on a mat. The front side and the reverse are an exterior and an interior for one another. As soon as this sheet is ruptured a process occurs which belongs neither to the exterior nor to the interior. It is a process of escaping which, nevertheless, puts the exterior in contact with the interior. This process transcends the hitherto classified regions and events in them; it puts them in contact with each other without canceling them.

Is it possible to work with this sense at all when it can be neither named nor stopped? Is there a speech which does not denominate, which does not designate, and yet reaches processes of this kind? The answer which Mathilde Monnier and Jean-Luc Nancy offer is not directed primarily at the theme of speech. The experience concerning the sense of escaping, in which this sense is not reduced for the benefit of the sense of fixed forms, is the experience of dance—a modern form of improvised artistic movement. This kind of dance was developed originally by Mary Wigman, who refused, according to the representative model of the orthodox account, to understand dance as a pantomime (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 26). Dance that works with the autonomy of non-representational gestures *does not express* any idea, does not translate sense of the hidden thing into the disclosed language of the

body. This kind of dance develops a sense which is generated in escaping and which is born directly as this escaping in the ruptures of the utilitarian body. Dance whose gestures do not aim at expressing anything makes *sense beyond sense* (*faire du sens hors du sens*). In contrast to the utilitarian movement formed by conventional thoughts, customs and social norms, which makes sense in its completion (I move my hand to greet somebody, I walk in order to bring something, I wave to give the clear signal ‘Attention!’), the dance movement is not strengthened by means of its completion, but is canceled, dissolved by it. The sense of this movement is not even in itself—it is not a movement for movement itself. Modern dance makes the transformation of the body into a rupture through which possible sense flows. It is not satisfied by its process. On the contrary, it cancels and exhausts itself. The strategy of this movement lies in the ability of the body to become empty. The human being, by dancing, not only expresses nothing in a pantomime way but it is also not simply by itself, it is not a proceeding of itself in itself. The dancing human being simply loses its movements. What is enabled in this loss is escaping, outflow, birth. We can use the metaphor of a shining star to describe this process. When we go against the direction of the shining to find *what* emanates the sense that we perceive, we do not find anything. The given source no longer exists because it has consumed itself in its own emanation. The sense of escaping assumes a shape in the moment when the emanating agent has been dissolved already. The human being dances in a very specific way—its customary body and its “inner contents” open up, create an opening amidst themselves and dissolve themselves in this process. The emanated sense carries a *trace* of the one who was dissolved. We live, as dancers, in a way similar to emanating and emanated stars. This means that though dance can try to express something which we consider an inner content, in that case it is not an experience of the emanation of sense; it does not concern a living body. This body stays on the level of an order which acts normatively, which classifies and ranks. The event of the emanation of sense occurs when a dancer “dances out” his inner contents to the borderline where he gets completely lost. At this moment he begins to emanate something absolutely unexpected, something which surprises the dancer. He is only an opening for the outflow. There is no original cause at the end (or rather at the beginning, in the roots) of experience, but emptiness. What emanates is a huge elemental sound which does not express anything in this emptiness.

What is left after this movement is the necessity for the dancer to take up this lost movement and to invent it again in a completely different movement. Dance is a repetition, a novel re-generation of movements that were already there in the form of completely different movements. It concerns the development of bodily memory without any possible suspicion that “this has been here already”. The body is constantly generating sense with no reference to a principal transcendental source of this sense. The sense is not a sense of something that hides itself behind it. The body as emptiness is the sense itself. Emptiness as the emptiness of the dancer’s body is manifested in the fact that some sense eludes at all. The dancing body is not a material into which an immaterial idea is carved and which gives form to an ungraspable thing. The body becomes, in a dance, a space, a place which is communicated to itself—it is a gap that affirms itself as a gap by the fact that sense flows through it. It is in this sense only that the dancing body is a medium of communication.

This character of the empty place through which sense flows can, however, be widely generalized. We could say that the empty place is the whole lived world. The lived world is a sphere which is beyond sense in the ordinary sense of the word. The meaning of experience in the lived world cannot be split into the meaning of what is already known and a new meaning; its meaning is always already a repetition in a completely singular form. The lived experience does not proceed in a purely utilitarian body but needs to be understood as an experience of the body that dances in the above-mentioned sense. What follows from this is that experience communicates itself in non-representative bodily gestures and that its sense escapes through the ruptures of the utilitarian body. The lived experience concerns in an essential sense also a non-usable body and non-representative communication. The lived world described in this way always stems, as an empty space, from certain regions of utility. We could, together with Nancy, designate metaphorically the two basic types of fixed regions as heaven and earth. As living beings we move constantly in a world that is generated by the heaving and rupturing of the petrified world of earth and the eternal world of heaven. There is a relationship of exterior and interior between heaven and earth. Stagnation in the pure interior (immanence), or exterior (transcendence), means the end of dance, the mortification of movement for the living being. The living creature either dies and dissolves in the earth, or it rises above the material and lives an eternal life in one, unchangeable spiritual form (or as a complete dissolution of any form, if we understand heaven from a different perspective from that of the Christian cultural tradition). In neither case, however, is it alive. Life in the world makes sense only when the exterior breaks through into the interior and the interior flows out when the border between them is broken and when sense begins to leak through the ruptures. This *process* of contact between heaven and earth therefore keeps itself in a dynamic form and creates sense in the lived world. The world consists of holes, openings, ruptures, splits in fixed frameworks of significance where sense could have freely developed itself. The corporeality of lived experience is a corporeality of a “glorious” body (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 22)—a body that functions as a glaring, emanating opening in the middle of the world, as a radiant emanating chasm, as a form of escaping and contact in the process.

Another metaphor, the metaphor of childbirth, might help us better understand this idea. The specific medium of the womb bearing an embryo is created gradually in the interior of the maternal body. The womb is sufficiently large an emptiness as is required for the development of the embryo—as a new living being. It is not ingrown and separated by an organic wall from the external environment. It is rather a pushing of the exterior into the interior, a strange exterior in the middle of the woman’s body. This exterior, however, is not a completely pure exterior; it is the exterior of an interior—exterior accepted by the interior. It is a place where something grows which is not the interior and which is, nevertheless, in a strange harmony with the interior. This crevice is ruptured in the moment of birth and what escapes through the space of rupture is a hitherto unknown sense, *life*. This sense affirms neither the existing exterior, nor interior. The child is neither a part of the mother, nor is it something which all of a sudden lies next to her, separated and foreign. It is an intimate foreignness. It is a sense that was born from the contact of the same and the other, as a process of their crossing. The maternal body is nothing else, in the moment of giving birth to this sense, than an empty opening of a flowing sense.

Let us note that Jacques Derrida also uses the metaphor of maternity when he tries to describe how an understanding is based on the contact of the participants, and not on fusion (making them the same). Derrida claims that no encounter (in our case no lived experience) occurs in a pre-shared world. The world of everydayness is not a region where one being encounters another in a pre-established harmony, just as heaven and earth do not merge in their mutual contact and they do not dissolve in their unity. The encounter in an unshared world always proceeds as a crossover, a chiasmus, which functions as an escape of sense. Derrida uses, for the elucidation of his claims, the metaphor of a pregnant woman who carries within herself an unborn child. This experience is an experience of encounter with someone who, in the classical interpretation, does not exist (in the shared world of everydayness). Derrida wants to show that the pregnant woman does not carry in herself “her own” child primarily, but that there is revealed in the middle of her own body another world, a difference, a rupture. There is otherness in the world of a pregnant woman which excludes the simple existence of one world: “The world disappears; the world is far away, it remains the partially excluded third, between the mother and the child, between one in the other and one for the other, in this singular couple of solitary beings, in the shared solitude between one and two worlds.” (Derrida 2003, 72)

The child in the womb is not an extension of a woman’s self-presentation (*Selbstdarstellung*), but a reference beyond the fixed meanings. The child is not a fellow creature living in perfect symbiosis with the woman’s own world. One can claim, of course, that the child belongs to the woman and that the rupture which took place in her self-understanding will be overcome on the basis of a more original understanding generated from an immediate connection between herself and “her” child. In this case, however, we will always deal with a secondary appropriation of the child by its mother, a reduction of sense that would be born from understanding of another kind.

Dance, lived experience and motherhood are ways of investing oneself, the success of which will not be shown in mere satisfaction deriving from a job well-done, the “right” results and reactions of entrusted people (spectators, close friends, a child), official expressions of recognition and other such superficial things. It is an activity which is a gift for the actor. The initiator of the whole event suddenly discovers that she gets something unexpected which affects and changes her. She can feel a sparkling joy and gratitude at the same time.

Consequences for the Concept of the Living

What is it then that Nancy’s interpretation of modern dance offers for our understanding of lived experience? What alternatives, in contrast to the hermeneutical conception, are shown regarding our understanding of the living?

We might simply say laconically that the body is alive to the extent to which it is a dancing body. As such, the body is an *emptiness* that glows and in which a contact between hitherto separated regions occurs through the outflowing of sense. It is not *something* which glows in the emptiness; it is an opening of glowing. It makes no sense to ask, in connection with a body understood in this way, *what is the life* that makes the given body alive, but rather what sense it makes. The life of a dancing

body, an escaping sense, cannot be grasped conceptually in any way. Life emanates from empty openings in the middle of the world as a sense beyond sense. It makes sense in a constant rupturing of the hitherto fixed life.

The sense of life therefore occurs as an escape or outflow in which hitherto separate regions of heaven and earth, body and soul, man and woman touch one another. It is a process that does not eliminate the soul (heaven) or the body (earth) and does not translate one into the other; rather it enables their contact. This contact happens through a pulling-in of a part of the earth's interior into the heaven's exterior and a pushing-in of the heaven into the interior of the earth.

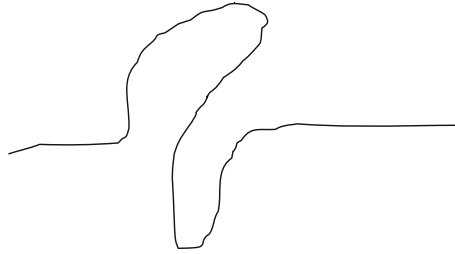
A wave arises on the earth's surface and a concavity is deepened inside the earth. A specific environment beyond the exterior and the interior is created in the wave and concavity. It is an interior of an exterior and exterior of an interior; a world beyond the world. Sense begins to escape beyond sense by means of a rupture of these specific emptinesses. To dance and to live means to rise beyond the earth and plunge heavenly into the earth in such a way that the empty places generated begin suddenly to function as huge chasms (Figs. 1, 2, 3 and 4). Life is not a pantomime about some hidden idea of a principal 'Thing', but rather it functions in an energetic dance. Life is not characterized by "signs"; it cannot be deciphered by interpreting animate nature's texts. It is impossible to create a list of signs which distinguish an animate creature from an inanimate one. A living creature does not convey anything, it does not want to narrate anything, *and yet* it makes sense. Life escapes only in a lived experience which, however, occurs as a process of suddenly created emptiness. It is not important for the vitality of the lived experience *who* experiences it, to whom it happens. Lived experience does not belong primarily to "us, living human beings". It is an experience of life, i.e. the experience of giving birth. We are nothing in that moment, only an opening for the outflow of sense, a glowing emptiness. The lived experience is not experienced by any subject—animate or inanimate, any object—neither a man nor a woman, because it takes place in the chasm of the already mentioned categories. Lived experience is a process of contact between man and woman, heaven and earth, animate and inanimate, body and soul as an escape of sense beyond these categories. These dualities are not canceled out by it, but their status is changed. They are intense forces in that moment among which are a discharge of potential, a glowing of emptiness, an escape of sense by means of rupture of the realm which is the heaven in the earth and earth in heaven, man in woman and woman in man, the soul in the body and body in soul.

Can we speak about the self-relationship of a living creature, as biohermeneutic conceptions do, if lived experience is without a subject? What are we to imagine under the concept of the autoreference of a living creature? For instance a spontaneous dancer? How can we speak about autopoiesis in the realm of animated nature?

The hermeneutical interpretation of self-relationship works with the concept of a relationship between a living creature and its world, through which the living creature comes back to itself. To understand oneself means, in hermeneutics, to project oneself, to project one's possibilities in the world. To be oneself therefore

Fig. 1 Simple separation of heaven and earth, exterior and interior

Fig. 2 Wave of earth toward heaven, concavity of heaven in



means to be one's possibilities and to take care of them. A living being is primarily and irrevocably concerned about itself. It always somehow understands itself, i.e. it always already projects possibilities in its own world; it is always already a possibility. It lives always as something, understanding the things of the world as its own means. In other words, the living creature reads the text of its world, one of whose main authors it actually is. But here again the duality of the reader and the text is reasserted, in terms of the animate creature—interpreter—and the lived world—object of interpretation. The world is what is materially written, what is recorded somewhere. As a medium the world refers beyond itself, to a Thing which we deal with. The DNA string can also play this role of medium that refers to a Thing that is then reflected in the world. What is at stake here is not matter but what it represents. It is not about a concrete CD containing burnt signs, but about who makes these signs and to what they point. Corporeality is understood, in this sense, again instrumentally, as a medium, as a text referring beyond itself to the thing. This thing can be an object of eternal dealings, unending dialogue, situational interpretations, perspective explanations, but it is still the Thing.

Nancy's interpretation leads me to suggest another notion of self-relationship and the question of the body as a medium of communication. He writes, together with Monnier, that the dancing body does not speak; it is infantile in the sense of *infant*—the one who does not name (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 23). The body cannot be, in this sense, likened to a text. The body is not a medium transferring the meaning of a hidden, non-corporeal Thing of life. It is not a means of reaching an end of a different order. The body of a dancer is simultaneously both a means and an end. The body conveys the body. The dancing body is immediate, non-medial. This immediacy, however, does not signify a homogeneous fullness of immanence (like water in water), being in itself for itself, purely being of oneself within oneself. Neither does it mean a narcissistic, egocentric relationship which cultivates the region it seeks to appropriate, limit and call "I" (with the parallel birth of

Fig. 3 Creation of the specific environment of interior in exterior, exterior in

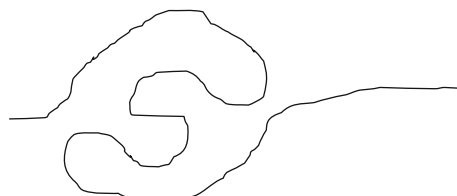
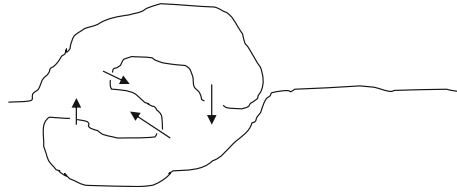


Fig. 4 Rupture of borders and contact of exterior and interior in an escape of sense



inconsolable anxiety arising from the fact that someone seeks to disrupt my borders, or that I have not yet appropriated everything that belongs to me). The immediacy of the dancing body is *being towards oneself in the sense of fully turning outwards* (Monnier and Nancy 2005, 30).

What is this fully turning outwards and simultaneous fully being oneself? It is necessary to reject the traditional interpretation again and to resolutely exclude the idea of the body as an object. The dancing body is never an object enclosed in itself and exposed to outside view! It is, on the contrary, a kind of immediacy that actualizes itself fully outside itself. The immediate being outwards means that this being is alone, it has no mediator, and yet it is in its solitary state fully in the other and with the other. The relationship to oneself does not take place through the other, in a circular interpretational movement through otherness, in relation to another being, but as a resonance. It seems that to be oneself means to be present in many places simultaneously, to resonate in many centres at once. To concentrate on oneself means to defocus the eye thanks to which the dancer (living creature) perceives himself to be in many places at the same time, in many beings. I resonate, i.e. “I am” simultaneously in myself and outside, in space. The more I am myself in this way the farther and more extensively I exist, and the more I act as a contact with the exterior. It is the opposite of a narcissistic and egocentric being oneself when the more one is oneself the more one is an isolated, delimited concreteness, the more one is an individual, i.e. an indivisible inflation of the so-called inner contents into the borders of a utilitarian normativized body. What is at stake in the dancing being oneself is not one’s own exceptionality in comparison with other exceptional individuals, but a perception of oneself as oneself with others, including the spectators, the emptiness and the walls, and not only with the other dancers.

The resonance about which I speak means that there opens, next to the immediate being, in the other his deep inner otherness; it opens empty places of the outflow of sense in him. That is why it is in fact impossible to look at a dancing body disinterestedly. It cannot be known as a thing in the distance. Looking at the dancing body has the character of an *internal non-representative gesture*. To watch the dance means to stretch and relax the muscles of one’s whole body in a subtle way, to feel the need to move and to move without knowing about the movement or any concrete moving force. The inner gesture does not refer to the dancing body; it does not represent it. It is a gesture of the birth of the living body in the beholder. What makes me become a body is the view of the dancing (living) being.

What is the sense of life? Life, just like the dancing body, has no communicable meaning. An encounter with life proceeds as a development of an inner non-representative gesture, lived experience, or as a resonance during which an empty space is opened for the outflow of sense. It is a non-individual process. That is why I

neither register nor identify a living creature in any way. What is developed in me is rather a lived experience, and the sense that begins to flow out through my muscles I may not want to express, interpret, or convey at all. We cannot watch a living being and remain uncommitted. Our lived experience with a living creature provokes the creation of openings for the outflow, a de-focusing of perception, an immediate being in many places simultaneously, a wide existence.

My living self-relationship is an immediacy in which the body feels bifurcated into a body and an empty opening of the sense's outflow—it is multiplied in space. The body is an immediacy that is directed outwards as a whole—the body exists as if beside or beyond itself, in self-transcendence. This self-transcendence in the sense of the outflow of sense from a gap created in the span between the utilitarian body and the body of non-representative gestures is, in the right sense of the word, the soul. The soul is a pure exterior of the body without the interior—*an expression of the full turn of the immediate body outwards*. The soul is a name for the experience which is the body. The body feels that it is the soul. The body almost comes to itself, even though it does not have itself—that is the meaning of “feel”. It touches itself in such a way that it, as the soul, gropes and thinks open-endedly and simply goes out. Otherwise it does not think, it is a body without soul, without life. The living body is a body which thinks. Yet, this thinking body cannot touch “what” it touches. Its thinking is not in any sense an egocentric touching of the touch. Touching is untouchable. The self-relationship of the living body is not narcissistic; the body does not care primarily about itself.

It is necessary, however, to deal with the self-relationship of the soul as well if we are to talk about self-relating. The case of the soul is similar to that of the body. The soul (thought) has the character of immediacy turned fully outwards. It functions as a non-representative gesturing to the extent to which it ceases to be utilitarian. It makes sense when it does not signify or name anything. Instead, it traces a thought until it reaches experience. The soul, as the thought of the self-transcended body, begins to feel that it is the body. The soul feels that it is being transcended, that an empty fold of the lived sense's outflow is generated in the middle of it, in the span between representative thought and emotional thought. The body knows itself as a thinking body and the soul knows itself as a corporeal soul. Their immediacy begins to develop each in the other as their own transcendence. The soul and the body are not connected by means of knowledge, but by a strange sort of contact, touch. This touch occurs as a resonance with life and not as an interconnection, belonging to a common ground, world, context and categories. The lived body is an earth in heaven, a wave on the surface of the earth. The living soul is a heaven in the earth, a concavity under the surface of the earth. It makes sense to keep the distinction of the body and the soul even though it signifies neither their radical separation nor their radical homogenization. Life makes sense as a sounding and resounding of empty places, souls and bodies, exteriors and interiors, men and women—and as an immediate existence in many places at the same time.

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