

Gustavo Gomez Perez

Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty : Art And the Bodily Emergence of Meaning

Studia Philosophiae Christianae 49/4, 109-136

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

GUSTAVO GOMEZ PEREZ
Boston College, USA
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogota, Colombia
gustavo.gomezperez@bc.edu

HEIDEGGER AND MERLEAU-PONTY: ART AND THE BODILY EMERGENCE OF MEANING

Abstract. The present paper explores parallels between Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's views on the body phenomenon problem, particularly considering the articulation between language, gesture and art. Initially, I argue that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty find similar connections between body and language, in light of an ontological approach to language in which language is considered to be a structural component of existence. Accordingly, I suggest that both philosophers introduce the notion of gesture in order to articulate the relationship between body and language, thus showing that meaning is inherent to bodily compartments, something that is particularly clear in artistic practices. Then, I conclude that both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty consider gesture to be a creative response to the world, which discloses latent meanings of things, just as happens with the work of art. In this sense, the notion of gesture alludes to a spontaneous or creative capacity that belongs to Being, that pertains to our background understanding of the world, and therefore cannot be confined either to the limits of a subject or to the limits of a body-object.

Keywords: Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, body, gesture, language, art, world

1. Introduction. 2. The ontological dimension of the body: the "living body"
3. Language and being in Merleau-Ponty. 4. Merleau-Ponty and the creative notion of gesture. 5. Heidegger and the bodily dimension of language. 6. Heidegger, gesture, and the handicraft of thinking.

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem concerning the body determines Merleau-Ponty's understanding of language and speech. Already in *Phenomenology of Perception* the body is understood in terms of its expressive capacities.¹ In this way, the body is not just a physical object, but rather directionality, intentionality, gesture and expression. This means, on the one hand, that the body is essentially a field of possibilities. On the other hand, this means that the body constitutes a background understanding of the world, which is equiprimordial with language. This approach to language and the body defines in important ways the entirety of Merleau-Ponty's work, even though after *Phenomenology of Perception* there is a rupture and a movement towards an ontological approach to language².

In *Phenomenology of Perception* a phenomenological perspective predominates in which the world is understood as the intentional object of the body and, according to Leonard Lawlor's reading, language is derived from "originary consciousness"³. In latter works such as *The Visible and the Invisible* the body is considered in terms of its intertwining with the world,⁴ and as expression of the "grammar of Being",⁵ which means that language is no longer "(...) secondary to and derived from originary consciousness"⁶. This rupture is the result of the influence of Heidegger's philosophy, particularly of his lectures on language, as Leonard Lawlor points out⁷.

¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, in: *Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Oeuvres*, ed. C. Lefort, Gallimard, Paris 2010 (English: *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. C. Smith, Routledge & Paul, London 1962).

² See L. Lawlor, *Essence and Language: The Rupture in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*, *Studia Phaenomenologica* 3(2003)3-4, 155-162.

³ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, Gallimard, Paris 1964 (English: *The Visible and the Invisible*, transl. A. Lingis, Northwestern UP, Evanston 1968). Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 143 (107).

⁶ L. Lawlor, *Essence and Language*, op. cit., 156.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Keeping in mind Merleau-Ponty's movement towards an ontology of language, I will draw a comparison between Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's views on language and embodiment. I will show that this comparison would not only illuminate Merleau-Ponty's ontology of language, the extent to which Merleau-Ponty develops a consistent determination of the origin of meaning throughout his work, but that it would also illumine Heidegger's own position on the body problem. In developing this comparison I will call attention to the notion of gesture and its role in understanding the bodily emergence of meaning. Taking as a point of departure some arguments outlined in *Being and Time*⁸, I will explore to what extent the notion of gesture corresponds to an ontological approach to language that takes language as a structural component of existence⁹. I will conclude by arguing that the notion of gesture articulates language and bodily being, an articulation that is paradigmatically revealed in the work of art.

This comparison and analysis will be structured in five parts. First, I will offer a brief account of Heidegger's approach to the body problem, and its point of contact with Merleau-Ponty's work. Second, I will examine Merleau-Ponty's ontology of language, establishing a contrast between the *Phenomenology of Perception* and his later works. Third, I will analyze Merleau-Ponty's concept of gesture as it is developed from *Phenomenology of Perception* to *The Prose of the World*¹⁰. Fourth, I will analyze Heidegger's approach to language considering points of coincidence with Merleau-Ponty's work. Finally I will conclude with

⁸ M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1977 (English: *Being and Time*, transl. J. Stambaugh, State University of New York Press, Albany 1996). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

⁹ See M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 213 (150).

¹⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le prose du monde*, ed. C. Lefort, Gallimard, Paris 1969 (English: *The Prose of the World*, transl. J. O'Neill, Northwestern UP, Evanston 1973). Hereafter cited with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

a section devoted to Heidegger's reflections on gesture in *On the Way to Language*¹¹, the *Zollikon Seminars*¹², and *What is Called Thinking?*¹³

2. THE ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE BODY: THE "LIVING BODY"

In the *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger provides an extensive analysis of the notions of gesture and the body problem¹⁴. In this way, Heidegger responds to the "French criticism", according to which questions concerning the body and perception are neglected in *Being and Time*, even though the project of the "fundamental ontology" presumably requires careful analysis of these subject matters¹⁵. Heidegger not only responds to this criticism, but he also provides an analysis of the lived body (*Leib*) that is important and "cries out for a careful comparison with the work of Merleau-Ponty", as Fr. William Richardson points out¹⁶.

In the course of these seminars Heidegger recalls some of the arguments from *Being and Time* that refer to *Dasein*'s existence as something that cannot be determined by the physical limits of the human

¹¹ M. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 12, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1985 (English: *On the Way to Language*, transl. P.D. Hertz, Harper & Row, New York 1982). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

¹² M. Heidegger, *Zollikoner Seminare: Protokolle-Zwiesgespräche-Briefe*, ed. M. Boss, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2006 (English: *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters*, transl. F. Mayr, R. Askay, Northwestern UP, Evanston 2001). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

¹³ M. Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8, ed. P.-L. Coriando, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2002 (English: *What is Called Thinking?* transl. J. Glenn Gray, Harper & Collins, New York 2004). Hereafter cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

¹⁴ See M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 117–118 (90).

¹⁵ See R. Askay, *Heidegger, the Body, and the French Philosophers*, *Continental Philosophy Review* 32(1999)1, 29–35.

¹⁶ See W.J. Richardson, *Heidegger among the Doctors*, in: *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, ed. J. Sallis, Indiana UP, Bloomington 1993, 52.

body, but rather as being-in-the-world¹⁷. Heidegger, thus, emphasizes that *Dasein* is in the world in an existential way, that is, *Dasein* is engaged and concerned with the world. In this sense, the notion of body is not simply neglected but considered in light of the phenomenon of being-in-the-world and the question of the meaning of being¹⁸, which means that the question concerning the body is a problematic that requires considering the human being as a whole¹⁹. In the *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger further explains that the problem concerning the body phenomenon is especially difficult because the existential ontological dimension of the phenomenon, which is the primordial one, is easily confused with ontic determinations of the body²⁰. This means that from an ontological point of view, the living body must be understood as the very unfolding of *Dasein*'s existence, and must be determined as relatedness to the world rather than as what is usually understood as body; whereas from an ontic point of view the body appears as an object detached from existence.

The confusion between the ontic and the ontological phenomena is prompted by the metaphysical interpretations of the body²¹, in which the existential dimension of the body is considered to be derived from objective physical conditions. This tendency is perpetuated by the concepts and words ordinarily used to characterize the body, which is why even the term "body" is problematic and requires a careful analysis. Indeed, Heidegger shows that Sartre's analysis of the body is misleading because the French expression referring to the body, "*le corps*",

¹⁷ See M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 71–73 (49–51); M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 156–157 (120); W.J. Richardson, *Heidegger among the Doctors*, op. cit., 51–53.

¹⁸ See K.A. Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2009, 6.

¹⁹ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 64–65 (48).

²⁰ See M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 232–235 (185–187).

²¹ The ontological dimension of the body as expression of existence, the body in its relation to being, whereas the ontic dimension would correspond to the appearance of the body as a being. See M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 234 (187).

emphasizes the interpretation of the body as a physical thing²². In this case, the ontological dimension of the body phenomenon is subordinated to ontic determinations. Heidegger calls attention to the distinction between the terms *Körper* and *Leib*. The term *Körper* refers to the merely physical dimension of the body, to the body as an object. On the contrary, the term *Leib* names the “boding forth of the body”²³, the body as it is experienced phenomenologically. Hence, the living body cannot be objectified because it is constituted in its relatedness to the world. According to Kevin Aho, “(...) it is here [in understanding the body in its relation to the world as »boding forth«] that Heidegger makes contact with Merleau-Ponty”²⁴.

Now, considering that the notion of the living body works as the point of contact between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and that the living body is to be considered as an ontological phenomenon that implies relatedness to the world, it is clear that this coincidence in relation to the notion of body reflects affinities at the level of their respective ontologies. Indeed, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty emphasize the primacy of the living body over the body object because the living body is the phenomenon that belongs to being-in-the-world. In this sense, the body is constituted as openness or relatedness to the world rather than as an isolable entity. Richard Askay shows, for instance, that in Heidegger bodily being is subordinated to being-in-the-world because bodily comportments presuppose an a priori openness to the world, that is, an implicit understanding of being²⁵. Of course, for Heidegger the preeminence of being-in-the-world over bodily being does not entail that bodily being is not necessary²⁶, but that it is determined by our implicit understanding of

²² See *Ibid.*, 115–118 (89–90).

²³ *Ibid.*, 113 (86).

²⁴ K.A. Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*, op. cit., 37.

²⁵ R. Askay, *Heidegger, the Body, and the French Philosophers*, op. cit., 31.

²⁶ Heidegger states that “all existing, all comportment, is necessarily a bodily comportment (...)” but also that “(...) existing must be determined beforehand as relationship to the world”. M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 258 (206).

Being²⁷. Similarly, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty states that just as speech precedes my actual act of speaking, "(...) the world is behind my body"²⁸; thus suggesting that my experience of the body implies a prior holistic relation to the world just as speaking implies the general understanding of a language. We may say, then, that Merleau-Ponty is mainly interested in determining the ontological structure of bodily being, and not only about the ontic determinations of the body²⁹, just as Heidegger determines bodily being in light of the phenomenon of being-in-the-world. In what follows, I will explore in more detail this parallel, particularly considering the notion of gesture. This analysis intends to show that Merleau-Ponty develops in his later works an ontological approach to language, and its bodily character, that echoes in important ways Heidegger's own position.

3. LANGUAGE AND BEING IN MERLEAU-PONTY

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty criticizes the metaphysical understanding of the body as a thing posited by an "I-Think" and proposes instead to conceive the body as a "(...) grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium"³⁰. The body is a grouping of meanings because it is experienced as a "(...) power of natural expression"³¹. This means that the phenomenon of speech and the act of meaning are grounded on the antepredicative life of consciousness³². In this way, Merleau-Ponty provides an account of the phenomenon of speech and the act of meaning that is opposed to intellectualist views pertaining to the Cartesian tradition³³. Hence, Merleau-Ponty's challenge is to find an approach to speech in which the word is

²⁷ See *Ibid.*, 260 (208).

²⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 156 (118).

²⁹ See *Ibid.*, 46 (27).

³⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, op. cit., 838 (177).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 868 (211).

³² *Ibid.*, 666 (xvii).

³³ See *Ibid.*, 866 (209).

not the conventional labeling of a “verbal image” determined by causal connections, for in Cartesian view of language “(...) speech is not an action and does not show up the internal possibilities of the subject: man can speak as an electric lamp can become incandescent”³⁴.

The intellectualist views consider language as an “entity of rational origin”³⁵, presuming that it is possible to understand language independently of our bodily relations to the world. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty argues that thoughts are constituted by the very enactment of speech, which means that, for instance, the orator does not really know what he wants to say before performing the speech³⁶. In this way, even what is usually considered as a mental or verbal image is a modality of my being in the world, “(...) presented with many others in the all-embracing consciousness of my body”³⁷.

For Merleau-Ponty, art is a paradigmatic example for understanding a non-intellectualist approach to speech and its relation to embodied consciousness. He remarks, for instance, that in music or the actor’s performance we perceive the meaning as something that cannot be separated from the sensible dimension of the work³⁸. The work of art shows that meaning is immanent to bodily expressions, that the gestures captured in the painting are meaningful just as the bodily movements of the actor in stage. This means that the body is essentially gestural, and that its expressive power is manifest in all of its movements and actions. In this way, Merleau-Ponty concludes that “the spoken word [insofar as it is an expression of the body] is a genuine gesture, and it contains its meaning in the same way as the gesture contains its. This is what makes communication possible”³⁹. This means that at the basis of any form of communication there is an embodied comprehension of the world. Precisely, language cannot be explained in terms of

³⁴ Ibid., 861 (203).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Ibid., 866 (209).

³⁷ See Ibid., 867 (210).

³⁸ Ibid., 869–870 (212–213).

³⁹ Ibid., 870 (213).

causal relations, or as a reflex movement determined by a physiological mechanism, because meaning depends on the singularity of our actual experience of the world, an experience that is fundamentally felt or lived. In this sense, emotions reveal an experience of meaning that cannot be separated from the actions and situations that constitute our gestures: “The fact is that the behavior associated with anger or love is not the same in a Japanese and an Occidental. Or, to be more precise, the difference of behaviour corresponds to a difference in the emotions themselves. It is only the gesture which is contingent in relation to the body’s organization, it is the manner itself in which we meet the situation and live it. The angry Japanese smiles, the westerner goes red and stamps his foot or else goes pale and hisses his words. It is not enough for two conscious subjects to have the same organs and nervous system for the same emotions to produce in both the same signs. What is important is how they use their bodies, the simultaneous patterning of body and world in emotion”⁴⁰.

This passage shows that gestures are experienced as meaningful, and that their meaning is dependent on an emotional and cultural background. Merleau-Ponty claims that there is a “simultaneous patterning of body and world in emotion”, suggesting that from the very beginning, from the very openness of existence there is an embodiment of structures of significance that link us to the world and the others. Therefore, bearing in mind a parallel with Heidegger’s arguments in *Being and Time*, it could be said that for Merleau-Ponty the origin of meaning depends on a common world that is inherited and that is prior to any particular experience of the world⁴¹.

Now, although Merleau-Ponty’s description of speech and the act of meaning intends to overcome “once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy”⁴², his *Phenomenology* still perpetuates subjectivist

⁴⁰ Ibid., 876 (219).

⁴¹ See Ibid., 881–882 (225–226); F. Dastur, *World, Flesh, Vision*, in: *Chiasms, Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh*, eds. F. Evans, L. Lawlor, State University of New York Press, Albany 2000, 28.

⁴² M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, op. cit., 861 (203).

views⁴³. In relation to this point, Aho claims that in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty is unable to offer a deep account of the origin of meaning because he takes as a starting point the subject-object distinction and, therefore, overlooks the a priori conditions of the possibility of meaning⁴⁴. Considering our hypothesis that for Merleau-Ponty the central question concerns understanding the body in its relation to the meaning of being in general, that is, how is it possible that language and understanding come to be incarnated or present in bodily being, then it is not enough to say that the body displays forms of understanding that depend on a cultural background; it seems necessary to explain how are we to characterize or determine the essence of the world itself as source of meaning⁴⁵. I would like to suggest, then, that in his later works Merleau-Ponty explains the connection between meaning, body and world by showing that the world is a field of meaningful possibilities that is constituted prior to the experience of the world as the counterpart of bodily perception. For this reason, even though the notion of perception is still important in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty intends to avoid the term in this later work because the notion of perception somehow implies a separation between body and world, just as Françoise Dastur's reading suggests⁴⁶. Precisely, in the working notes for *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty himself claims that in his previous work he remained caught in the philosophy of consciousness and that now it is necessary to bring the results of *Phenomenology of Perception* "to ontological explicitation"⁴⁷.

According to Lawlor, "the later Merleau-Ponty grounds essence in existence or even facticity, but this facticity is that of language," rather than an originary consciousness⁴⁸. It seems, however, that Mer-

⁴³ See D. Low, *Merleau-Ponty's Criticism of Heidegger*, *Philosophy Today* 53(2009)3, 273–293, 272.

⁴⁴ See K.A. Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*, op. cit., 48.

⁴⁵ See F. Dastur, *World, Flesh, Vision*, op. cit., 28.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 234 (183).

⁴⁸ L. Lawlor, *Essence and Language*, op. cit., 9.

leau-Ponty formulated this ontological approach to language as early as 1952, for already in *Le langage indirect et les voix du silence* he claims that “speech always comes into play against the background of speech”⁴⁹, suggesting that the experience of meaning depends on the movements of differentiation and articulation that language makes on its own. In fact, also in *The Prose of the World*, a book which was left unfinished in 1951, in a footnote explaining how language is based on a sort of natural communicability – a language of nature or the world itself – Merleau-Ponty argues that language is founded in the phenomenon of a “carnal generality: what warms me, warms him; it is founded on the magical action of like upon like (the *warm* sun makes me *warm*), on the fusion of me embodied – and the world”⁵⁰.

Thus, although in the *Phenomenology* the notion of gesture referred to an embodied experience of meaning, an incarnate consciousness, Merleau-Ponty did not explore to what extent conscious perception and bodily compartments are conditioned by ways of articulation and communication that pertain to the world itself. Indeed, after *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty moves towards an understanding of meaning as something that is not dependent on an incarnate consciousness somehow opposed to the world, but rather as something that arises from the world itself, a “(...) sensible world which already ceased to be a private world”⁵¹. Precisely, in *The Prose of the World* Merleau-Ponty states that “(...) every use of the body is primordial expression” inasmuch as it expresses the intangible structure of the history of the world⁵².

We may say, then, that for Merleau-Ponty there is a carnal generality that precedes the body, a silent capacity of communication that pre-

⁴⁹ See M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le langage indirect et les voix du silence*, in: *Signes*, Gallimard, Paris 1960, 44 (English: *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*, transl. R.C. McCleary, in: *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, eds. T. Toadvine, L. Lawlor, Northwestern UP, Evanston 2007, 244). Hereafter, with reference first to the French, then to the English translation.

⁵⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 29 (20).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 60 (42).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 110 (78).

cedes our particular bodily expressions and languages,⁵³ and there is also a pre-artistic creativity or capacity of disclosure that grounds our artistic works. In this sense, the ground of existence is not an original presence, but a “silent” field of possibilities. In relation to this point, Merleau-Ponty argues that “(...) it is through our body that we have the first experience of the impalpable body of history prior to all initiation into art”⁵⁴. This impalpable body of history, which in *The Visible and the Invisible* is described as a body which is “less heavy, more transparent” than the body of the visible world, mysteriously resonates in our body and our language⁵⁵. Hence, the expression of the body, its gestures and languages, reduplicate or repeat historical gestures – the gestures developed by the communal work of people through history. Still, these gestures are not mere repetitions, for they are renewed through spontaneous expressions of the body in artistic practices or creative writing. In this way, “language is the double of being”⁵⁶, it reflects the meanings pervading things themselves and, at the same time, “is the gesture of renewal and recovery which unites me with myself and others”⁵⁷.

At this point, it is important to notice that for Merleau-Ponty there is an essential affinity between language and art, considering particularly the example of painting, because language is a way of showing something in which the existential connection between my body and the world is disclosed. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty echoes Heidegger’s formulation according to which art is essentially poetry, and poetry is the expression of the disclosing powers of language⁵⁸. Merleau-Ponty

⁵³ Merleau-Ponty argues that if there is no “original” behind language, then, this means that all language is indirect and, therefore, silence. See M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*, op. cit., 45 (245).

⁵⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 117 (83).

⁵⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 198 (153).

⁵⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 10 (5).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 (17).

⁵⁸ See M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, in: *Holzwege*, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 5, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1977 (English: *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, transl. A. Hofstadter, HarperCollins, New York 2001), 62 (72); cited with reference first to the German, then to the English translation.

states, for instance, that “if we press the meaning of the little word ‘say’ and bring into light what constitutes the price of language, we would find that it is the intention to unveil the thing itself and to go beyond what is said to what what is said signifies”⁵⁹. Still, language has the particular capacity to reflect on itself⁶⁰, and, in so doing, it makes manifest in an explicit manner our understanding of the world. Hence, Merleau-Ponty concludes with an affirmation that recalls Heidegger’s famous formulation on language⁶¹: “Man feels *at home* in language in the way he never will in painting”⁶².

The experience of feeling at home in language depends on an articulation of the world that is provisional and tentative. Indeed, the “doubling of being” that occurs in language, as well as that which occurs in painting, never reaches the state of full coincidence or perfect overlapping. This distortion, this mediation and temporality that constitutes language as a repetition or redoubling of Being, is at work even at the most basic levels of bodily perception. Indeed, bodily perception is never complete or absolute, for the body is the medium of a perception that “dawns through it”⁶³. In this way, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty abandon any philosophical pretense of absolute clarity or transparency; as Dastur remarks, “Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty pose the same question to Husserl concerning the *right* of the phenomenological reduction to be completed and the *status* of the subjectivity which with it leaves us”⁶⁴.

⁵⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 145 (102).

⁶⁰ See Ibid., 148 (105).

⁶¹ See M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 181 (226); M. Heidegger, *Brief über den Humanismus* (1946), in: *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 9, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1976, 333 (English: *Letter on Humanism*, in: *Basic Writings*, ed. D.F. Krell, HarperCollins, New York 1993, 237).

⁶² M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 156 (110) (emphasis added).

⁶³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 24 (9).

⁶⁴ F. Dastur, *World, Flesh, Vision*, op. cit., 27.

4. MERLEAU-PONTY AND THE CREATIVE NOTION OF GESTURE

In *The Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty explores the essence of language in light of a comparison with painting because he finds that in painting we experience the primordial language encrypted in our bodily perception of the world. This parallel with painting reveals the ontological dimension of language, the fact that language emerges as disclosure of the world. In this sense, the basic or more fundamental meaning of words is essentially captured as a silent experience that can only be evoked vicariously. For this reason, later on in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty endeavors to find new names for the element in which the visible and the invisible sides of Being are articulated, a new name for the event of Being. Merleau-Ponty calls this element “flesh,” but it is essentially a name that corresponds to nothing we can determine objectively, it “has no name in philosophy”⁶⁵. In this way, Merleau-Ponty shows the ontological ground of language as an irreducible or simple event that cannot be enframed in philosophical categories, just as happens with Heidegger’s notion of Being, or what he also calls the “manifestness of beings”⁶⁶, which implies an experience of silence or withdrawal.

Taking into consideration the elusive character of the notion of *Flesh*, Dastur points out that “Being is not a plenitude into which one would have to sink and dissolve oneself,” but rather is a background that can only be indirectly and fragmentarily experienced through our creations⁶⁷. An ontological perspective on the body, a glimpse into the relationship between body and Being, requires that we perform a sort of experimental or performative thinking, because for Merleau-Ponty, “(...) I can see no light concerning the world except by consulting, by making explicit, my frequenting of the world, by comprehending it from within”⁶⁸. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty genuine thinking is the bodily

⁶⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 191 (147).

⁶⁶ See M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 96 (74–75).

⁶⁷ F. Dastur, *World, Flesh, Vision*, op. cit., 31.

⁶⁸ See M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 52 (32).

or gestural response to a singular situation. In this he comes close to Heidegger's position, for Heidegger would say that "(...) the limit of my bodying forth changes constantly through the change in the reach of my sojourn"⁶⁹. In what follows, I will argue that this creative dimension of language, this capacity of language to renew itself in its exposure to latent and unexplored possibilities, is in Merleau-Ponty's later works articulated through the notion of gesture. Later on I will show that something similar happens in Heidegger's work.

Merleau-Ponty's reflection on gesture in *The Prose of the World* expands on the reflections developed in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, now in light of his concerns about the nature of the world. Thus, the notion of gesture should not be interpreted just as the expression of originary consciousness but rather as a creative effort to extend the limits of the world itself. In this sense, a genuine gesture is like a new organ that reveals latent possibilities of existence, and is therefore opposed to the thoughtless, mechanical expression that we can find, for instance, in the child prodigy.

"There exists the improvisation of child prodigies who have not learned their own gesture. They allow themselves to be possessed and dissolved by the movement and, on the pretext that a painter is a hand, think it is enough to have a hand with which to paint. They extract small wonders from their bodies, as a morose you man who observes his body with sufficient complacency can always find some little peculiarity in it to feed his self-worship or his religion of psychoanalysis. But there is also the improvisation of the artist who has turned toward the world, whose work is a bridge to the other, and who has finally composed for himself an expressive organ, like an acquired voice which is more its own than any of these first efforts"⁷⁰.

Merleau-Ponty shows that our own gestures are to be learned precisely because they are developed as a singular effort to respond to the world and others. In contrast, the child prodigy exemplifies the possibility of using the body in order to repeat a formula that lacks existential depth, i.e., that does not "say" something. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty

⁶⁹ M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 113 (87).

⁷⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 78 (56).

considers that learning one's own gesture is making it a substantive part of one's way of being in the world, one's style, which means that it becomes part of a background understanding of the world. It could be said, then, that the thoughtful gesture strives to gather or bring unity to experience in light of the experience of new events or encounters, and this unity amounts to the constitution of a style that replicates and deforms inherited background structures. In this sense, art is neither the production of an original object nor the expression of a subject, but rather a movement towards the world, which expresses the singularity of that which is encountered in the world. The work of art, for instance painting, reveals the dignity or singular value that belongs to the things that populate our existence. Indeed, in *The Prose of the World* Merleau-Ponty argues that in painting "(...) everything has a value, and the uses of objects count less than their capacity for composing all together, even in their intimate texture, a valid emblem of the world with which we are confronted"⁷¹.

Since our stance in the world is expressed through the living body, through its gestures, then each of the body's expressions tends to reflect the irreducible singularity of existence, the fact that it cannot be ruled or determined by concepts. Hence, Merleau-Ponty concludes that "(...) there is in all expression – even in linguistic expression – a spontaneity that will not tolerate commands, even those I would give to myself"⁷². This means that, since the living body is essentially gestural and pervaded by significance, with no other ground different to language itself, it is never determined or grounded on an original presence, it has no other ground than the non-ground of the internal differences and the silence pertaining to language itself. For this reason, the living body cannot be determined objectively or grasped directly, since it is not a presence it can only be grasped indirectly through its manifestations, through its traces in art and language.

⁷¹ Ibid., 90–91 (64).

⁷² Ibid., 122 (87).

5. HEIDEGGER AND THE BODILY DIMENSION OF LANGUAGE

According to Lawlor's interpretation, the shift towards an ontology of language in Merleau-Ponty's position was motivated mainly by Heidegger's lectures on language, particularly by Heidegger's formulations according to which "man does not speak; speech speaks"⁷³. Heidegger's own thinking undergoes a similar transformation, for it passes from considering language as a structural component of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*, to considering language as founded on the saying of Being. This means that for Heidegger, after the "turning", language is grounded on the Saying of Being and, at the same time, Being is determined as essential Saying. Thus, after the "turning" language is understood as disclosure, unconcealment, that is, it is essentially poetic. Already in *Being and Time*, however, it is possible to find some first formulations of the ontological determination of language as poetic disclosure, in ways that resonate in Merleau-Ponty's own reflections on the bodily dimension of language.

In *Being and Time* language (*Sprache*) is founded on the articulation of discourse (*Rede*). Understanding, attunement and discourse are equally original determinations of *Dasein*'s existence, which is conceived from the very beginning as openness to the world, not as subjectivity. This means that *Dasein* is in the world as a meaningful field of possibilities, which unfold in correspondence with its sojourn in the world. *Dasein* is thrown in the world and this belonging to the world is manifested through attunement and "expressed" in discourse. This is, precisely, what the following passage explains: "All discourse about (...) which communicates in what it says has at the same time the character of *expressing itself*. In talking, *Da-sein* expresses itself not because it has been initially cut off as 'something internal' from something outside but because as being-in-the-world it is already 'outside' when it understands. What is expressed is precisely this being outside, that is, the actual mode of attunement (of mood) which we showed to pertain to the full disclosedness of being-in. Being-in and its attunement are made

⁷³ L. Lawlor, *Essence and Language*, op. cit., 161.

known in discourse and indicated in language by intonation, modulation, in the tempo of talk ‘in the way of speaking’. The communication of the existential possibilities of attunement, that is, the disclosing of existence, can become the true aim of ‘poetic’ speech”⁷⁴.

Heidegger argues that *Dasein* expresses itself in discourse, which means that communication is dependent on attunements or moods, which are not subjective psychological states but rather belong to the “outside” of being-in-the-world. Put otherwise, what is expressed in discourse and language is precisely the way *Dasein* stands outside in the world and relates to things and others, that is, *Dasein*’s attunement. The intonation or modulation of the voice is the bodily dimension that reveals the mood or attunement in which something is said. The notion of attunement, then, refers to the particular way we stand in the world and the way the world is disclosed to us. Attunements reveal the world as a field of possibilities opened in correspondence with existential concerns. In this sense, Heidegger’s reflection parallels Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the relationship between emotion and gesture, for Heidegger emphasizes that the body expresses with its own voice an affective engagement with the world.

Heidegger closes this passage with an enigmatic remark about “poetic” speech. Presumably, poetic speech is particularly able to communicate the existential possibilities of attunement because it preserves the unity of meaning and sound, it makes explicit the immanence of meaning in the tonality of the “way of speaking”. We just saw that Merleau-Ponty calls attention to this embodiment of meaning as something that occurs in a paradigmatic way in painting or music; in this case Heidegger seems to have in mind a similar argument. Poetry communicates “existential possibilities” precisely insofar as it reflects potential attempts to bring unity to the world, to consolidate our relations to things by naming it. Poetry creates a territory in language, a stylistic configuration of words that might be inhabited by anyone else, and which therefore grants the possibility of communication. This point could be illuminated by recalling Merleau-Ponty’s argument, according to which “with my throat, my voice, my intonation, and, of course,

⁷⁴ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., 215–216 (152).

with the words, with my preferred constructions and the time I allow each part of the phrase, I compose an enigma that has only one solution such that the other person, silently accompanying this melody bristling with changes, with switches and falls, can manage to take it into his own repertoire (...)”⁷⁵. Our voice composes an enigma with only one solution because meaning is something that belongs to the singular occurrence of speech, the singular performance that makes it alive.

In the lectures on language Heidegger further emphasizes the importance of considering the word as a unity of sound, meaning and emotion. In relation to this idea, Heidegger suggests that language is not metaphorical, and that the metaphorical conception of language is metaphysical; presumably because it presupposes that the word is just the vehicle of an idea that could be transferred from one context to another⁷⁶. Hence, borrowing Merleau-Ponty’s formulation, we may say that language does not speak of a signification but rather is signification, “speaks it”⁷⁷. The word is, as Hölderlin indicates, the flower of the mouth, that is, expression of the tongue that emerges in a region, in a singular locality, which entails more an existential space than a physical place⁷⁸. In this way, Heidegger suggests that language is rooted in a historical – and geographic situation – for he calls attention to the importance of examining the diversities of dialects in different regions, *Mundarten*. Hence, for Heidegger the experience of meaning is intrinsically related to an embodied relation to the world in which we experience the “Saying” of Being. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty argues in *The Visible and the Invisible* that “(...) there is no essence, no idea, that does not adhere to a domain of history and of geography”⁷⁹.

Language is, therefore, the language of Being (*Die Sprache des Wesens*)⁸⁰, the unfolding of Being as something that occurs and pre-

⁷⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 42–43 (30).

⁷⁶ See M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, op. cit., 195 (100).

⁷⁷ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 1475 (118).

⁷⁸ See M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, op. cit., 193–197 (97–101).

⁷⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 152 (115).

⁸⁰ See M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, op. cit., 174 (80).

vails in time⁸¹. In developing this idea, Heidegger claims that language, just as Being, is not a being or a thing, precisely because it is experienced as the capacity to “give” something⁸². The word is the flower of the mouth presumably because it comes out of the silence of the earth, a silence that as a primal language is full of latent and inexhaustible significations. This silence, precisely insofar as it is silence, calls for a poetic work or labor of disclosure. For this reason, Heidegger suggests that we can only experience the essence of language when the words are missing, when “(...) we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us”⁸³. Indeed, when we cannot find the right word for something that is still “meaningful” to us we are forced to become poets, we are forced to look for ways of expression that have a fragile and unique significance. In these cases, meaning can only be intuited or felt; for the words we manage to say are not fully clear, they are in a certain sense still “silent”. Merleau-Ponty would say that this is the price we must pay for understanding language, the experience of this limit or silence, for “(...) language is expressive as much through what is *between* the words themselves, and through what it does not say as much as what it says (...)”⁸⁴. Presumably, when we have no words at our disposal or when we do not find the right word, language manifests its capacity to say something unexpected or unforeseen, a singular event. Put otherwise, words say something, are meaningful, only against the background of silence, which as a substantial dimension of language itself, should be determined as ground that accompanies any spoken word. Thus, just as Merleau-Ponty indicates, in order to see the emergence of meaning, the source of language, “(...) we must give up every signifi-

⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the importance of Heidegger’s temporal conception of being as a certain *Wesen*, for it makes evident that all individuality is expression of more general, ontological structures. See M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, op. cit., 152 (115).

⁸² See M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, op. cit., 182 (88).

⁸³ M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, op. cit., 151 (59).

⁸⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 61–62 (43).

cation that is already institutionalized and return to the point of a non-signifying world”⁸⁵. Indeed, considering the beginning of his lecture on the essence of language (*Das Wesen der Sprache*), it could be said that for Heidegger the essence of language cannot be simply understood but must be experienced. This means that language is given as such only when we expose ourselves or respond to something that shows itself, says itself, and we find ourselves incapable of reducing this phenomenon to something else, that is, we find it impossible to ascribe to it an ideal, metaphysical meaning. In this sense, as will be argued in what follows, the essence of language is gestural, immediate, intuitive.

6. HEIDEGGER, GESTURE, AND THE HANDICRAFT OF THINKING

Taking into account the parallel with Merleau-Ponty’s work, in order to conclude I will examine whether Heidegger articulates the experience of the bodily emergence of meaning, the origin of signification, through the notion of gesture; considering initially the way this notion is introduced in *A Dialogue on Language*. In the course of this dialogue there is a reflection on the meaning of the gesture of the hand in the *No-play*. Here, the gesture of the hand is said to resonate against the emptiness of the stage in order to bring forth a mountain landscape⁸⁶. This means that the hand makes something visible at the same time that it becomes invisible as hand, in such a way that it turns to be the bearer of multiple meanings. For this reason, Heidegger’s Japanese interlocutor states that the „gesture subsists less in the visible movement of the hand”⁸⁷, thus suggesting that what is merely visible is not what constitutes the essential meaning of the gesture. The meaning of the gesture is at work in the movement of the hand that breaks the silence of the stage in order to make a mountain appear. In this way, the meaning of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 82 (58).

⁸⁶ See M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, op. cit., 102 (18).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

the gesture is something to be captured *in situ*, not through the application of general concepts or categories.

Heidegger says, then, that gesture is the “gathering of a bearing”, that is, gesture is an effort to keep the unity of that which is given or offered in the world. Accordingly, the Japanese says, “thus you call bearing or gesture: The gathering which originally unites within itself what we bear to it and what it bears to us”⁸⁸. Hence, the notion of gesture alludes to the very experience of the emergence of meaning as a redoubling or transfiguration of things, a movement of exchange or dialogue, which takes place in front of us and is to be simply intuited or felt – the mode of “understanding” that belongs to the body. Merleau-Ponty would say, in this regard, that “we must therefore recognize that what we call a ‘glance’, a ‘hand’, and in general the ‘body’ constitute a system of systems devoted to the inspection of a world and capable of leaping over distances, piercing the perceptual future, and outlining, in short, a meaning (...)”⁸⁹.

It could be said, then, that meaning emerges as a singular configuration of the body’s response to the world. In the *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger explains how this existential relation to the world is experienced as an immediate intuition by alluding to art. Heidegger argues that in perceiving Cezanne’s painting of Mont Ste. Saint Victoire, for instance, we cannot separate the mountain given from the colors and the canvas, we intuitively grasp the painting as a unity⁹⁰. Just as was stated above in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of gesture, this unified experienced is particularly clear in our interpretations of emotions and their bodily manifestations. Heidegger states that when seeing tears, we do not see water plus something else, for instance a “psychic element”, but tears. Moreover, we can distinguish tears of happiness from tears of desperation or sadness, just as we see immediately a face blushing with embarrassment or fever⁹¹. Heidegger suggests that from

⁸⁸ Ibid., 102 (19).

⁸⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 110 (78).

⁹⁰ See M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 103 (79).

⁹¹ See *ibid.*, 105–107 (81–82).

an ontological perspective, that is, considering the unity and totality of existence, bodily phenomena are given as a unity in which the physical, measurable aspects are just inert fragments. The phenomenon of tears cannot be measured, it surely has nothing to do with measures, and the same happens when we reflect on what makes a mountain a mountain, either the mountain in Cezannes' painting or the one of the *No-play*.

In the course of these seminars, Heidegger calls attention again to the notion of gesture in order to underscore this coincidence between thinking and bodily movement. Reflecting on how one of the participants of the seminar passes his hand over his forehead evoking a difficult thought, Heidegger says, "if it is a movement that expresses something which is internal, then this characterization only states the effect of the movement. But nothing whatsoever is said as yet about the kind of movement itself as a hand movement. We specify this hand movement as »gesture« (*Gebärde*)"⁹². This example of the movement of the hand shows that the unity of the "psychic" and "bodily" dimensions of the phenomenon is given in the simplest gestures of the hand, just as happens in perceiving a work of art. This means that the living body is immediately experienced in relation to the totality of existence. In this respect Heidegger argues that the living body cannot be detached from my being, when the body moves "it is *my* movement. I moved myself"⁹³. Accordingly, the living body could be essentially characterized as gesture, keeping in mind the characterization of gesture as the capacity to gather and carry on something, and keeping in mind also that *Dasein's* existence is essentially characterized as relatedness to the world. In order to clarify this latter point, it is important to take into consideration Heidegger's etymological analysis of the notion of gesture: "And now let us return to our discussion of gesture. What does the word 'gesture' [German: *Gebärde*] mean? Etymologically, it comes from *bären* [cf. *Latin ferre*: to carry, to bring]. To bear or to bring forth [*gebären*] comes from the same root. The German prefix *Ge-* always refers to a gathering, to a collection of things, as in *Ge-birge* [mountain

⁹² Ibid., 115 (88–89).

⁹³ Ibid., 115 (89).

range], which is a collection of mountains. From its human origins, 'gesture' means one's gathered [*gesammelt*] bearing and comportment. Within philosophy we must not limit the word 'gesture' merely to 'expression'. Instead, we must characterize all comportment of the human being as being-in-the-world, determined by the bodying forth of the body. Each movement of my body as a 'gesture' and, therefore, as such and such a comportment does not simply enter into an indifferent space. Rather, comportment is always already in a certain region [*Gegend*] which is open through the thing to which I am in a relationship, for instance, when I take something into my hand"⁹⁴.

This interpretation of the concept of gesture characterizes it as a "relationship" in which something is "brought forth", thus suggesting that the living body is not passive in our relation to the world, it opens up a field of possibilities, just as happens in the *No-play*. When we experience something the body disappears in the same way the word makes itself silent in order to let the meaning appear. In this sense, just as the example of the hand in the *No-play* shows, the body is essentially a redoubling of language and Being because it displays the same paradoxical structure, it unfolds its essence by becoming silent, inconspicuous, in letting something else appear. This phenomenon is explained by Merleau-Ponty as follows: "I look where the goal is, I am drawn by it, and the whole bodily machine does what must be done for me to get there. Everything happens in the human world of perception and gesture, but my 'geographical' or 'physical' body obeys the requirements of this little drama which never ceases to produce a thousand of natural miracles in my body"⁹⁵. Indeed, the body obeys or listens to what is offered in the world, and in doing so it transfigures itself to become meaning or perception. Precisely, in the *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger states that "verbal articulation [*Verlautbarung*] is given by the fact that existing is bodily existing"⁹⁶, thus suggesting that the word is grounded on the communicability that connects the living body with the world.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 117–118 (90).

⁹⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, op. cit., 109 (77).

⁹⁶ M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, op. cit., 272 (217).

In sum, language redoubles a sort of primordial language – showing or saying – that is already at work in bodily perception, just as Merleau-Ponty's analysis suggests.

This analysis of the notion of gesture shows that our living body is constituted or shaped in correspondence with *Dasein's* fundamental openness to the world, in such a way that "(...) everything we call our bodiliness, down to the last muscle fiber and down to the most hidden molecule of hormones, belongs essentially to existence"⁹⁷. In this way, the body is essentially constituted as a unity of meaning or significance to the extent that every single part of the body is determined in terms of its capacity to respond to the world. Indeed, Heidegger states that "it is a basic determination of Da-sein to be open for being claimed by the presence [being] of something"⁹⁸, which means that there is an existential apprehension or intuition of the world that constitutes bodily perception: "we are not able to 'see' because we have eyes; rather we can only have eyes because, according to our basic nature, we are beings who can see"⁹⁹. Thus, the body itself is the unfolding of thinking capacities, that is, a relatedness to Being, a capacity to respond to what addresses us and concerns us.

This idea of thinking as embodied is further developed in the lectures of 1951–52, *What is Called Thinking?* In the course of these lectures Heidegger remarks that just as we cannot learn to swim by reading a treatise but only by jumping into the water, we cannot think without entering in a relationship with things themselves¹⁰⁰. In this sense, "(...) thinking is the handicraft *par excellence*"¹⁰¹, for we cannot think about something without presupposing a bodily experience. Thus, strictly speaking, any bodily relation to the world is thoughtful, for "thinking guides and sustains every gesture of the hand"¹⁰². This means that the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 293 (232).

⁹⁸ Ibid., 272 (217).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ M. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, op. cit., 22 (21).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 25 (23).

¹⁰² Ibid.

body is essentially gestural because it is experienced as the capacity to give and receive something, a capacity that is paradigmatically illustrated by the hand. For this reason, the body cannot be represented but only experienced in its practical dialogue with things, just as thinking the essence of language entails undergoing an experience with it¹⁰³. In this way, Heidegger argues that when I “encounter” a tree I experience the vision of a tree and not a representation within my head¹⁰⁴, what is given to me is the unity of a phenomenon in correspondence with my existence, my movements. In this way, my body’s gestural response to what is given in the world is something that involves my existence as a whole.

Heidegger argues that thinking is a handicraft taking into consideration the example of the cabinetmaker, showing that this handicraft is thoughtful insofar as it implies “the relatedness to wood”¹⁰⁵. Here, Heidegger has in mind a contrast between handicraft and modern industrial technology. The worker at the machine does not embark in a process of learning, for his work is subordinated to the mechanical reproduction of objects instead of the exploration of latent possibilities of the materials. Hence, Heidegger remarks, it remains obscure whether in the industrial work there is a relation to something at all¹⁰⁶. One is tempted to say that in the mechanical, industrial work the body is not bodying forth, is not in a relationship to something, at least not insofar as it remains subordinated to a set of instructions and is thus unable to encounter something new or to produce a singular being. In the industrial work the body’s gestures are meaningless because they cannot be appropriated, they don’t belong to someone’s singular body but to an impersonal body, just as happens to the child prodigy in Merleau-Ponty’s example. Hence, we may conclude by emphasizing that Heidegger’s notion of gesture alludes to the possibility of understanding the body as a phenomenon that cannot be commanded or controlled.

¹⁰³ M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, op. cit., 149 (57).

¹⁰⁴ M. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, op. cit., 45–47 (42–44).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 (23).

¹⁰⁶ See *Ibid.*, 26–27 (24–25).

The body does not “tolerate commands”, just as Merleau-Ponty would say, precisely because it is openness to the world. In this sense, art is a paradigm to understanding the living body in opposition to mechanistic models, precisely because for Heidegger the living body is essentially thoughtful and so is essentially opened to unforeseen latent meanings and things. Indeed, as we just argued, to say that thinking is a handicraft means that in artistic, or productive activities in general, the body is enacting its fundamental capacities to relate to something, to carry on a relation to Being. Just as the word withdraws itself in order to let its meaning appear, the body in its bodying forth is defined as the capacity of transformation and relation that lets something appear or be perceived beyond any predetermined rule or expectation.

REFERENCES

Aho K.A., *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2009.

Askay R.R., *Heidegger, the Body, and the French Philosophers*, *Continental Philosophy Review* 32(1999)1, 29–35.

Dastur F., *World, Flesh, Vision*, in: *Chiasms, Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, eds. F. Evans, L. Lawlor, State University of New York Press, Albany 2000, 23-49.

Heidegger M., *Letter on Humanism*, in: *Basic Writings*, ed. D.F. Krell, HarperCollins, New York 1993, 213-266.

Heidegger M., *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, transl. A. Hofstadter, HarperCollins, New York 2001, 15-86.

Heidegger M., *Sein und Zeit, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1977 (English: *Being and Time*, transl. J. Stambaugh, State University of New York Press, Albany 1996).

Heidegger M., *Unterwegs zur Sprache, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 12, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1985 (English: *On the Way to Language*, transl. P.D. Hertz, Harper & Row, New York 1982).

Heidegger M., *Was heisst Denken?, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8, ed. P.-L. Coriando, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2002 (English:

What is Called Thinking? transl. J. Glenn Gray, Harper & Collins, New York 2004).

Heidegger M., *Zollikoner Seminare: Protokolle-Zwiegespräche-Briefe*, ed. M. Boss, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2006 (English: *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters*, transl. F. Mayr, R. Askay, Northwestern UP, Evanston 2001).

Lawlor L., *Essence and Language: The Rupture in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*, in: *Studia Phaenomenologica* 3(2003)3-4, 155-162.

Low D., *Merleau-Ponty's Criticism of Heidegger*, *Philosophy Today* 53(2009)3, 272–293.

Merleau-Ponty M., *Le langage indirect et les voix du silence*, in: *Signes*, Gallimard, Paris 1960, 49-104 (English: *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*, transl. R.C. McCleary, in: *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, eds. T. Toadvine, L. Lawlor, Northwestern UP, Evanston 2007, 241-282).

Merleau-Ponty M., *Le prose du monde*, ed. C. Lefort, Gallimard, Paris 1969 (English: *The Prose of the World*, transl. J. O'Neill, Northwestern UP, Evanston 1973).

Merleau-Ponty M., *Le visible et l'invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, Gallimard, Paris 1964 (English: *The Visible and the Invisible*, transl. A. Lingis, Northwestern UP, Evanston 1968).

Merleau-Ponty M., *Phénoménologie de la perception*, in: *Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Oeuvres*, ed. C. Lefort, Gallimard, Paris 2010, ***** (English: *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. C. Smith, Routledge & Paul, London 1962).

Richardson W.J., *Heidegger among the Doctors*, in: *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, ed. J. Sallis, Indiana UP, Bloomington 1993, 49-63.