

son and not even something that needs to be reluctantly accepted – the decentering of the subject is interpreted in terms of reception and gift. The dialectic of decentering and centering in Ricœur's philosophical anthropology also makes it possible to recognize "the hermeneutical function of distanciation in all communication" and the importance of distanciation for all kinds of appropriation.<sup>51</sup>

Third, Smith's critical realist personalism is founded on the conception of a *center with purpose*, a centeredness of the subject associated with a more stable ontology with frequent references to what is "natural". In Ricœur, we approach a much more unstable and fragile person who is disproportional with him/herself (in almost Pascalian terms) and constituted of a number of dialectical relationships that makes the person never more – or less – than a heterogeneous synthesis (*synthèse de l'hétérogène*). Due to the fact that Ricœur elaborates on a "broken" ontology, he always uses "mixed categories" so that the person is constituted in a conflictual way, according to the dialectics of the ideological and utopian functions of the social imagination, the dialectics of understanding and explanation. Since the real is constituted as a conflict, it is the intersection of ideology and utopia as two functions of the social imagination that make sense of each. Ricœur's concept of human time is thus full of tensions and appears as a hybrid, a "third" time only possible to establish in terms of a series of "connecting procedures" by which the phenomenological experience of lived time is re-encapsulated in the necessity of cosmic (universal) time. Because time, as human time, in the end only appears a "join" between the time of the soul and the time of the world, the person can never reach anything more stable than "incomplete mediations" from which there is no possible means of articulating that kind of unified theory that Smith asks for.<sup>52</sup> However, this lack of stability considering both philosophical anthropology and social theory is motivated by a dialectical approach that makes it possible to resist, cope with, and transcend academic schizophrenia.

<sup>51</sup> Ricœur, Paul *Du texte à l'action: Essais d'herméneutique*, II. Paris: Seuil 1986.

<sup>52</sup> One of the few places where we find a more dynamic, and almost dialectical approach in Christian Smith's presentation of personalism is on page 197 in *What Is a Person?:* "Humans, it turns out, exist in a state of dynamic tension between power and limits, action and reflection, capacity and finitude, perception and reason, truth and fallibility, ideas and materiality, knowing and not knowing, determination and freedom [...] complex, vibrant, interactive [...] our complex, dynamic, stratified, tension-activated reality."

## BETWEEN FLESH AND TEXT: RICŒUR'S CARNAL HERMENEUTICS

RICHARD KEARNEY

Paul Ricœur's philosophy expressed a double fidelity to questions of embodiment and textuality. In the 1940s and 50s he developed an existential phenomenology of flesh inspired by Gabriel Marcel and Edmund Husserl. But while this early philosophy was developing strongly in the direction of a diagnostics of carnal signification, once Ricœur took the "linguistic turn" in the 1960s he seems to have departed from this initial path in favor of a more explicit hermeneutics of the text. There are, however, some fascinating reflections in Ricœur's final writings which attempt to reanimate a dialogue between his seminal *phenomenology of the flesh* and later *hermeneutics of language*. I will take a look at these by way of suggesting new directions for what I call a 'carnal hermeneutics'<sup>1</sup> – directions which might bring together the rich insights of a philosophy of embodiment (in parallel with Merleau-Ponty) and a philosophy of interpretation (in dialogue with Heidegger and Gadamer). I believe that these new directions indicate important possibilities for rethinking the whole relationship between humanity and the natural environment, especially as it relates to Merleau-Ponty's notion of *la chair du monde*.

Let me begin with a word about Ricœur's early "diagnostics" of bodily expression. I will confine my remarks to a few summary points.

### A) DIAGNOSTICS OF THE BODY

Ricœur's main contribution here comes in the form of three important sections of his first major work in phenomenology, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, published in 1950, five years after Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. The sections in question are titled, "Motivation and the Corporeal Involuntary," "Bodily Spontaneity" and "Life: Structure, Genesis, Birth."

Ricœur sets out in this work to explore the life of the "incarnate cogito," drawing on three seminal sources: the phenomenological notion of

<sup>1</sup> See our development of this notion in my essay, 'The Wager Carnal Hermeneutics,' in Kearney, Richard & Treanor, Brian (eds) *Carnal Hermeneutics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 15-56.

the *corps propre* (announced by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty), Gabriel Marcel's notion of incarnation, and Maine de Biran's analysis of the embodied cogito (as touch, effort, and resistance). From the outset Ricœur proposes an account of the body as a dialectical rapport between the voluntary and the involuntary in direct opposition to naturalism. Starting with the phenomenon of "affectivity," he notes that "*sentir est encore penser*," understanding *sentir* no longer as a representation of objectivity but as a revelation of existence.<sup>2</sup> Carnal affectivity is thus seen as a mediating bridge between (i) our flesh and blood existence and (ii) the "thinking" order of interpretation, evaluation and understanding. But if "incarnation" is the first anchor of existence, it is also the temptation of betrayal – for the affective body is always susceptible to reductive objectifying accounts.

Ricœur takes up the challenge, beginning with "need" as something to be phenomenologically experienced not as a natural event from without, but as a lived experience from within. It is here, right away, that Ricœur proclaims his diagnostics of the lived body: "the diagnostic relation which conjoins objective knowledge with Cogito's apperception brings about a truly Copernican Revolution. No longer is consciousness a symptom of the object-body, but rather the object-body is an indication of a personal body (*corps propre*) in which the Cogito shares as its very existence."<sup>3</sup> Affectivity and thought are thus connected from the outset by a tie of mutual inherence and adherence. The two bodies (inner and outer) are not separate realities but two ways of "reading" the same flesh – externally (as nature) and internally (as incarnation).

Ricœur then goes on to show how need relates to *pleasure* in terms of various "motivating values and tendencies" – evaluative discriminations that are not imposed by consciousness or reason but are already operative in our most basic affective relations. Nor is need to be reduced, naturalistically, to a mere reflex sensation translating an organic defect in the form of a motor reaction. It is not a "re-action but a pre-action" – an "action towards..."<sup>4</sup> Otherwise put, need reveals me not as a mechanism of stimulus-response but as a "life gaping as appetite for the other."<sup>5</sup> To have needs does not mean being *determined* by them; we are continually *discerning* between needs and pre-reflectively evaluating when best to

<sup>2</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim Kohak. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>4</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 91.

realize or suspend them. "It is because the impetus of need is *not* an automatic reflex that it can become a *motive* which inclines without compelling and that there are men who prefer to die of hunger than betray their friends."<sup>6</sup> As Gandhi's hunger-strikes or the sacrifice of countless heroes and saints attest, "man is capable of choosing between his hunger and something else."<sup>7</sup>

Need is thus revealed as a primordial spontaneity of the body where it mixes with a "first rank of values" which I have not engendered but which mobilize my feelings. The existing body, as living flesh, is the original source of what I call 'carnal hermeneutics'. It is what makes our first *savoir a savoir-faire*, a finesse of life, a form of wise savoring from the Latin, *sapere-sapientia*. "Through need, values *emerge* without my having posited them in my act-generating role: bread is good, wine is good. Before I will it, a value already appeals to me solely because I exist in flesh; it is already a reality in the world, a reality which reveals itself to me through the lack [...]. The first non-deductible is the body as existing, life as value. The mark of all existents, it is what first reveals values."<sup>8</sup> It is at this crucial point that Ricœur addresses the role of carnal imagination at the crossroads of need and willing. He explores how we imagine a missing person or thing (which we need or desire) and the ways towards reaching it. But the corporeal imagination is not just about projecting possibilities *from within*; it is equally a means of reading the "affective signs" of real sensible qualities *out there in the world*. The carnal imagination – witnessed in need, pleasure and desire – is already a 'diagnostics' in which primal judgments become both affective and effective. Imagining the world in the flesh is a matter of feeling, valuing, and doing. "We must not lose sight of the *sense* quality of imagination," insists Ricœur, alluding to sense as both meaning and sensation. "For it is our imagination mobilizing our desires and discerning between good and bad ways of realizing them that 'our life can be *evaluated*.'" Values mean nothing unless they *touch* me. Unlike Kant and the idealists, ethics requires the mediation of flesh. Ricœur concludes his reading of the body as primal field of evaluation with this manifesto:

The body is not only a value among others, but is in some way involved in the apprehension of all motives and through them of all values. It is the affective *medium* of all value: a value can reach me only as dignifying a motive,

<sup>6</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 99.

and no motive can incline me if it does not *impress my sensibility*. I reach values through the vibration of an affect. To broaden out the spread of values means at the same time to deploy affectivity to its broadest span.<sup>10</sup>

Ricœur spends the rest of his phenomenological analysis exploring this claim for affective sensibility as “medium” of evaluation. Suffice it for now to note that his initial sketch of corporal diagnostics offers what we might call a *proto-hermeneutics of the flesh*.

## B) THE TEXTUAL TURN

In spite of this promising early diagnostics of the body, however, Ricœur was soon to abandon this trajectory. After the “textual turn” in the 1960’s, we witness a surprising (and I believe regrettable) rift between a hermeneutics of texts, on one hand, and a phenomenology of affectivity, on the other. He now looks back on the whole emphasis on sensible experience as susceptible to the lure of “immediacy, effusiveness, intuitionism,” contrasting this with the more authentic “mediation of language.”<sup>11</sup> And he even commends the later Merleau-Ponty – in an obituary homage in 1962 – for moving beyond his initial phenomenology of “incarnation” towards a “second philosophy” of language as privileged medium of “distance” and “reflection.”<sup>12</sup> A commendation which, one suspects, is curiously applicable to himself.

This tension between flesh and text is nowhere more evident than in the 1964 essay “Wonder, Eroticism, Enigma.” Here Ricœur speaks of sexuality as contrary to language. He starkly opposes what he calls (1) the “immediacy” of the “flesh to flesh” relationship and (2) the “mediations” of language and interpretation. Simply put: Sexuality demediatizes language; it is eros not logos.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ricœur, *Paul Critique and Conviction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ricœur, Paul “Homage à Merleau-Ponty,” (1962) *Lectures 2: La Contrée des Philosophes*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1999, pp. 163-164. One of the aims of our carnal hermeneutics project is to bring Merleau-Ponty’s radical phenomenology of flesh (working forwards to a diacritical hermeneutics with his notion of diacritical perception) with Ricœur’s hermeneutics of the text (working backwards to his early phenomenology of embodiment in light of his later hermeneutic reflections on flesh as a paradigm of “oneself as another”). For a more detailed exploration of this idea see my essay, ‘The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics’ in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, ed Richard Kearney and Brian Trenaor, pp 15-56.

<sup>13</sup> Ricœur, Paul “Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma,” in Nelson, James & Longfellow, Sandra (eds) *Sexuality and the Sacred*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994.

Eros in our contemporary culture, Ricœur argues, has lost its old cosmic force in sacred mythology and assumed the form of a “restless desire.” It becomes a “demonism” that resists both the logos of understanding and the logic of instrumental rationality. “The enigma of sexuality,” he claims, “is that it remains irreducible to the trilogy which composes human existence: language, tool, institution.”<sup>14</sup> And if at times it articulates itself, it is “an infra, para-, super-linguistic expression.” Eros “mobilizes language,” admits Ricœur, but only in so far as “it crosses it, jostles it, sublimates it, stupefies it, pulverizes it into a murmur.”<sup>15</sup> Utterly de-mediatized in this manner, eros cannot be reabsorbed either in an “ethic” (like marriage) or a “technique” (reproductive or hedonistic technologies); it can only be “symbolically represented by means of whatever mythical elements remain.”<sup>16</sup> Left to itself, in short, the “flesh to flesh” relationship defies the order of logos: “Ultimately, when two beings embrace”, writes Ricœur, “they don’t know what they are doing, they don’t know what they want, they don’t know what they are looking for, they don’t know what they are finding. What is the *meaning* of this desire which drives them towards each other?”<sup>17</sup> Sexual desire does not, explains Ricœur, contain its own meaning but gives the impression that it participates in a network of powers whose cosmic connections are forgotten but not totally abandoned. Eros shows us that there is *more* to life than life – “that life is unique, universal, everything in everyone, and that sexual joy makes us participate in this mystery; that man does not become a person [...] unless he plunges again into the river of Life – such is the truth of sexuality.”<sup>18</sup> But this River of Life has, Ricœur notes, become obscure and opaque for us today. Like a lost Atlantis sunk within us long ago, it has left sexuality as its “flotsam” (*épave*). Hence the enigma of eros. The meaning of this submerged, dislocated universe is no longer accessible to us in terms of immediate participation, but only indirectly “to the learned exegesis of ancient myths.” There is no straight route to eros – only hermeneutic detours. And this is part of its contemporary crisis.

Ricœur concludes rather stoically that the best means to interpret the enigma of sexuality is a hermeneutics of ancient texts which record and represent this forgotten world of cosmic eros. The opposition bet-

<sup>14</sup> Ricœur, “Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma,” p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> Ricœur, “Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma,” p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> Ricœur, “Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma,” p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> Ricœur, “Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma,” p. 141.

<sup>18</sup> Ricœur, “Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma,” p. 141.

ween flesh and text could not be more explicit: "It lives again only thanks to hermeneutics – an art of interpreting writings which today are mute. And a new hiatus separates the flotsam of meaning which this *hermeneutics of language* restores to us and that other flotsam of meaning which sexuality discovers *without language*, organically."<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, *textual reading*, on the other, *organic feeling*. Two forms of flotsam at the limits of reason. A dualism of logos and eros.

### C) ONE'S BODY AS ANOTHER'S

But this was not to be Ricœur's last word on the matter. Fortunately, he returns to other possibilities of a hermeneutics of flesh in one of his last major works, *Oneself as Another* (1990). In a section of the final chapter, titled, "One's own body, or the Flesh," Ricœur defines flesh as "the mediator between the self and a world which is taken in accordance with its various degrees of foreignness."<sup>20</sup> As such, it reveals a certain "lived passivity" where the body, in the deepest intimacy of flesh, is exposed to otherness. How to "mediate" between this intimacy and this otherness, between the immanence of the lived body (Husserl's *Leib*) and the transcendence of the face (Levinas's *Visage*), becomes a key concern.

This dialectic of passivity-otherness signals the enigma of one's own body. Or to put it in phenomenological terms: how can we fully experience the human body if it is not at once "a body among others" (*Körper*) and "my own" (*Leib*)? We need both, suggests Ricœur. First, we need the experience of our own lived flesh to provide us with a sense of our individual *belonging*. This is what gives a corporeal constancy and anchoring to the self.<sup>21</sup> Flesh is the place where we *exist* in the world as both suffering and acting, pathos and praxis, resistance and effort. Com-

<sup>19</sup> Ricœur, "Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma," p. 141.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 318.

<sup>21</sup> See Ricœur's cogent critique of Derek Parfit's "puzzling cases" of consciousness without bodies as well as of technological fictions of disincarnate human identities (Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 150-151). Ricœur's main literary example is Robert Musil's *Man without Qualities*, but one could also add more recent sci-fi movies like *Simone* or *Her* where a virtual OS (computer operating system) is divorced from physical touch and taste, with dramatic existential consequences. Ricœur's basic point is that if one deprives the human of its terrestrial-corporeal anchoring one deprives the self of any perduring lived identity as constancy-in-change (*idem-ipse*). Ricœur argues that literary fictions, unlike technological fictions, remain imaginative variations on "an invariant, our corporeal condition experienced as the existential mediation between the self and the world" (*Ibid.*, p. 150). This invariant anchoring of lived corporeality testifies to the ontological condition of carnal selfhood in "acting and suffering persons" (*Ibid.*, p. 151).

binning the pioneering work of Maine de Biran with the phenomenologies of the *corps propre* in Husserl and Michel Henry, Ricœur shows how it is through active "touch, in which our effort is extended, that external things attest to their existence as much as our own." It is the "same sense that gives the greatest certainty of one's own existence and the greatest certainty of external existence."<sup>22</sup> In the pathos of passivity and passion, "one's own body is revealed to be the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world."<sup>23</sup>

Here Ricœur makes the interesting point that it is not, as we might expect, in Heidegger – who ostensibly existentialised the phenomenological subject – that we discover the greatest ontology of the flesh.<sup>24</sup> It is rather Husserl who offers the "most promising sketch of the flesh that would mark the inscription of hermeneutical phenomenology in an ontology of otherness."<sup>25</sup> Ricœur's hermeneutic retrieval of Husserl runs as follows. In the *Cartesian Meditations*—written ten years after *Ideas II*—the founder of phenomenology had argued that in order to constitute a "foreign" subjectivity, one must formulate the idea of "ownness"—

<sup>22</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 322.

<sup>23</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 322.

<sup>24</sup> Ricœur argues that Heidegger never developed a real ontology of flesh, though he possessed all the ingredients for such a project. His notion of *Befindlichkeit* – affective state of mind expressed in our moods – was particularly promising in this regard (Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 327 and note 34). It is telling that Heidegger acknowledged Aristotle's interpretation of "affects" (*pathe*) as the "first systematic hermeneutic of the everydayness of Being with one another" (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York: Harper, 1962], p. 178); but he did not, alas, himself push this hermeneutic in the direction of an "ontology of flesh" open to the world of others. In spite of his investigation of Dasein as "thrownness," Heidegger did not develop a hermeneutic reading of "the properly passive modalities of our desires and our moods as the sign, the symptom, the indication of the contingent character of our insertion in the world" (Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 327, note 34). In Heidegger a temporality of disincarnate Dasein (transcendental ontology) ultimately trumped a spatiality of incarnate flesh (carnal "ontics"). Ricœur asks pointedly: Why "did Heidegger not grasp this opportunity to reinterpret the Husserlian notion of flesh (*Leib*), which he could not have been unaware of, in terms of the analytic of Dasein?" Ricœur's answer: "If the theme of embodiment appears to be stifled, if not repressed in *Being and Time*, this is doubtless because it must have appeared too dependent on the inauthentic forms of care – let us say, of preoccupation – that make us tend to interpret ourselves in terms of the objects of care. We must then wonder if it is not the unfolding of the problem of temporality, triumphant in the second section of *Being and Time*, that prevents an *authentic* phenomenology of spatiality – and along with it, an ontology of the flesh – from being given its chance to develop" (Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 328).

<sup>25</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 322.

namely, flesh in its difference with respect to the external body (of others seen by me or of me seen by others). Flesh opens up a realm of *Leibhaft* (immediate embodied givenness), excluding all objective properties. It is the pole of reference of all bodies belonging to this immanent nature of *ownness*. And it is by pairing one flesh with another that we derive the notion of an alter-ego.

But here we return to the deeper paradox: flesh as a paradigm of *otherness*. Flesh is what is both most mine and most other. Closest to me and furthest from me at the same time. This enigma of far/near is revealed most concretely, once again, as *touch*. As center of pathos, our flesh's "aptitude for feeling is revealed most characteristically in the sense of touch."<sup>26</sup> It precedes and grounds both the "I can" and the "I want." Indeed, it even precedes the very distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary. "I, as this man," explains Ricœur, "is the foremost otherness of the flesh with respect to all initiative."<sup>27</sup> Or to put it in more technical language, "flesh is the place of all the passive syntheses on which the active syntheses are constructed, the latter alone deserving to be called works (*Leistungen*); the flesh is the matter (*hulē*) in resonance with all that can be said to be *hulē* in every object perceived, apprehended. In short, it is the origin of all 'alteration of ownness.'"<sup>28</sup>

Ricœur concludes accordingly that flesh is the support for selfhood's own "proper" otherness. For even if the otherness of the stranger could be derived from my sphere of ownness – as Husserl suggests – the otherness of the flesh would still precede it.<sup>29</sup> This paradox of flesh as ownness-otherness reaches dramatic proportions in a crucial passage from Husserl's "Fifth Meditation," where flesh is claimed to be a primordial space of immediacy prior to all linguistic or hermeneutic mediations:

Among the bodies [...] included in my peculiar ownness, I find my *animate organism* [*meinen Leib*], as *uniquely* singled out – namely as the only one of them that is not just a body but precisely an animate organism [flesh]: the sole

<sup>26</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 324.

<sup>27</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 324.

<sup>28</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 324. See Franck, Didier *Chair et Corps: Sur la phénoménologie de Husserl*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1981, pp. 109-111. Ricœur relies heavily on Franck's influential commentary for his reading of Husserl. He adds: "The kind of transgression of the sphere of ownness constituted by appresentation is valid only within the limits of a transfer of *sense*: the sense of ego is transferred to another body, which, as flesh, also contains the sense of ego. Whence the perfectly adequate expression of alter ego in the sense of a 'second flesh' ('*seconde chair propre*')" (Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 334).

<sup>29</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 324.

Object within my world stratum to which, in accordance with experience, I ascribe *fields of sensation* (belonging to it, however, in different manners – a field of tactual sensations, a field of warmth and coldness, and so forth), the only Object "in which" I "*rule and govern*" *immediately*, governing particularly in each of its organs.<sup>30</sup>

It is on the basis of this primordial materiality of immanent flesh that I found the "pre-linguistic" world of 'I can'. But it is also here that phenomenology reaches its limit, and Ricœur departs from Husserl. In seeking to derive the objective world from the "non-objectifying primordial experience" of flesh, Husserl went too far. He ignored that flesh is not just mine but equally a body among other bodies – both *Leib* and *Körper* at once. In order to make flesh part of the world (*mondanéiser*) one needs to be not just oneself but oneself as another – a self with others. And this means that the otherness of others as "foreign" relates not only to the otherness of my flesh (that I am) but also exists prior to any reduction to ownness. For the flesh can only appear in the world as a body among bodies to the degree that I am myself already an other among others – a self-with-another "in the apprehension of a common nature, woven out of the network of intersubjectivity – itself founding selfhood in its own way."<sup>31</sup>

So Ricœur concludes this highly intricate analysis by observing that while Husserl recognized the primordially of subjective flesh and the necessity of intersubjective language, he could not reconcile the two. "It is because Husserl thought of the other than me only as another me, and never of the self as another, that he has no answer to the paradox summed up in the question: how am I to understand that my flesh is also a body."<sup>32</sup> In short, Husserl could not adequately account for both the flesh's intimacy to itself (in the absolute immediacy of immanence: *Leib*) and its opening onto the world (through the mediation of others: *Körper*). He had a carnal phenomenology but lacked a carnal hermeneutics. Only the latter – uniting *Leib* and *Körper*, body and flesh – could provide a full account of the ontological relationship between flesh and world.

## D) BEYOND HUSSERL AND LEVINAS

In correcting Husserl it is important, however, not to go to the other extreme. And this is, according to Ricœur, where Levinas erred in traver-

<sup>30</sup> Husserl, Edmund *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969, p. 97.

<sup>31</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 326.

<sup>32</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 326.

sing flesh too quickly towards alterity. Identifying the carnal caress with a play of feminine immanence, Levinas, as we saw, redirected the virile self in the direction of an ethics of vertical transcendence in which the Face trumps Flesh. In contrast to both Husserl and Levinas, we might say (with Ricœur and Irigaray) that if flesh needs the other to save it from fragmentation and inner collapse, the Other needs flesh to save it from Platonic moralism and paternalism.<sup>33</sup> And here we return, finally, to the realization that we need to combine sensibility (flesh) and language (face) in a new carnal hermeneutics. The ultimate question stands: how to make sense of sense by making flesh a body in the world – that is, a face with an outside, a face for others.

Let us recap. In order for my flesh to engage upon an intersubjective world with others and empathize with them, I must have both an intimate body for me (*Leib*) and a physical natural body among other bodies (*Körper*). This involves a complex intertwining (*Verflechtung/entrelacs*) whereby I experience myself as someone in a shared world. Thus Ricœur, challenging the Sartrean dichotomy of flesh versus body, asks: “To say that my flesh is also a body, does this not imply that it appears in just this way to the eyes of others? Only a flesh (for me) that is a body (for others) can play the role of first *analogon* in the analogical transfer from flesh to flesh.”<sup>34</sup> And this reveals in turn that intentionalities that are aimed at the other – as strange and foreign to me – go beyond the sphere of my immanent ownness in which they are rooted and given. The other is revealed to my flesh as *both* inscribed in my embodied relation through flesh *and* as always already transcendent. Or to put it in more technical terms, the other is not reducible to the “immediate givenness of the flesh to itself” in originary presentation, but only in appresentation – as another’s body. The gap can thus never be bridged between “the presentation of my experience and the appresentation of your experience.”<sup>35</sup> And this *interval* is confirmed in the fact that the pairing of your body over *there* with my body *here* always retains a certain distance. The analogizing grasp between two embodied selves is never complete or ade-

<sup>33</sup> In addition to Ricœur’s critical reading of Levinas in this regard, we should note again here Luce Irigaray’s pioneering feminist-psychoanalytic critique of Levinas’s phallocentric metaphysics as well as the new feminist hermeneutics of the semiotic lived body in such thinkers as Kristeva, O’Byrne, Rambo, and McKendrick, all represented in this volume. Kristeva’s new feminism of the body is linked to her project for a new humanism informed, in part, by a retrieval of the deep unconscious resources of the “sensible imaginary” in writers like Colette, Duras, and Teresa of Avilla.

<sup>34</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 333.

<sup>35</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 333.

quate. Total assimilation is impossible. “Never will pairing allow us to cross the barrier that separates appresentation from intuition (immediate presentation). The notion of appresentation, therefore, combines similarity and dissymmetry in a unique manner.”<sup>36</sup> It is this double fidelity of flesh to both near and far that is captured in Ricœur’s felicitous formula, “oneself as another.” And it is precisely because of the irreducible distance of another’s body at the very heart of our flesh that hermeneutic mediation is always operative. This is where phenomenology reaches its limit and calls for more. It is the vital site where the analogical transfer of flesh to flesh, through an intersubjectivity of bodies, “transgresses the program of phenomenology in transgressing the experience of one’s own flesh.”<sup>37</sup>

So what does all this mean for the hermeneutic relationships between self and other? It means, first, that the other who is stranger is *also* my “semblable,” a counterpart who, like me, can say “I.” The transfer of sense shows how “she thinks” signifies “she says in her heart: I think”; and at the same time it reveals the *inverse* movement of “she thinks and feels in a way that I can never think or feel.”<sup>38</sup> I am called by the other who comes to me in a way that I cannot assimilate to my immanence. I can only respond by “reading” their transcendence in immanence, across distance and difference. Ricœur actually speaks of a hermeneutic interpreting of the body by the body which precedes the work of inference through formal linguistic signs. He refers to it as a primal “relation of *indication* in which the interpretation is made immediately, much as the reading of symptoms.” And the “style” of confirmation to which this reading of indications belongs involves, says Ricœur, “neither primordial intuition nor discursive inference.”<sup>39</sup> It entails a special grammar of carnal hermeneutics across distance, gaps and differences. Carnal hermeneutics as diacritical hermeneutics.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 334.

<sup>37</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 335.

<sup>38</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 355.

<sup>39</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 336.

<sup>40</sup> See the current development of diacritical hermeneutics and diagnostics by Emmanuel Alloa, Ted Toadvine, and Brian Treanor (all featured in this volume) as well as our own recent publications, Kearney, Richard “What is Diacritical Hermeneutics?,” cited above; “Eros, Diacritical Hermeneutics and the Maybe,” *Philosophical Thresholds: Crossings of Life and World, Selected Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, Vol. 36, Special SPEG supplement, *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 55, ed. Cynthia Willett and Leonard Lawlor, 2001; and “Diacritical Hermeneutics,” in Wierciński, Andrzej *et al.*

With this final fundamental insight, Ricœur retrieves some of his most radical early investigations into a *diagnostics of affectivity*. He charts a middle way between Husserl's phenomenology of carnal immanence and Levinas' ethics of radical transcendence. While the former addressed the movement of sense from me to the other (through analogy, transfer, pairing, appresentation), the latter addressed the movement of the other towards me. But in Levinas, as we saw, the other goes too far in instigating a rupture of separation: the face of the Other is one of radical exteriority to the exclusion of all mediation. "The Other absolves itself from relation in the same movement by which the Infinite draws free from Totality."<sup>41</sup> So if Husserlian phenomenology veers at times towards an excess of egology (the haptic circle of the hand touching its hand, critiqued by Derrida in *On Touching*), Levinas veers toward the opposite extreme of heterology. The ultimate "evincing" of the Levinasian face, as Ricœur notes, lies apart from "the vision of forms and even the sensuous hearing of voices."<sup>42</sup> To the extent that a call remains, it is the voice of the Master of justice who teaches but does not touch. For Levinas there is no primacy of *relation* between the terms of flesh and face. No communication or communion possible. No *metaxu*. "No middle ground, no between, is secured to lessen the utter dissymmetry between the Same and the Other."<sup>43</sup> Put in more affective terms, the Levinasian Other persecutes, summons, obsesses, offends; but it does not love. And it is against this paroxysm of absolute separation that a diacritical hermeneutics of dialogue proposes itself. "To mediate the opening of the Same onto the Other and the internalization of the voice of the other in the Same, must not language contribute its resources of communication, hence of reciprocity as is attested by the exchange of personal pronouns (I, you, he, she, us)?"<sup>44</sup> And must not this basic linguistic mediation call in turn for an even more radical hermeneutic exchange – "that of question and answer in which the roles are continually reversed?" In short, surmises Ricœur, "is it not necessary that a dialogue superpose a relation on the supposedly absolute distance between the separate I and the teaching Other?"<sup>45</sup>

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(eds) *Hermeneutic Rationality/La rationalité herméneutique*. Munster: LIT Verlag, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 366.

<sup>42</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 337.

<sup>43</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 338.

<sup>44</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 339.

<sup>45</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 399.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Is it not precisely the task of carnal hermeneutics to find the just balance between the movement of same toward other and the other toward same? A balance which would not only bridge the divide between Husserl and Levinas, but also, by extension, between Merleau-Ponty's reversible *chair* and Derrida's irreversible *différance*?

The answer, we submit, is yes and raises further on-going questions. For what kind of language are we talking about? One not only of words and writing, but also of sensing and touching. And what kind of dialogue? One not just between speakers but also between bodies. And what kind of sense and sensibility? One not only of intellectual "understanding" but also of tangible "orientation." Thus does the simplest phenomenon of touch lead to the most complex of philosophies. Because the simplest *is* the most complex and remains the most enigmatic. In posing such questions, Paul Ricœur opens a portal where phenomenology and hermeneutics may cross in the swing-door between body and flesh. An opening onto new horizons of understanding regarding our aesthetic and ethical relationship to nature and the environment. This marks a new beginning. But, as Ricœur himself says, the last word of his work is '*inachèvement*'. The project of carnal hermeneutics will always be unfinished business. There is always more to be done when it comes to our responsibility for the health and well-being of *la chair du monde*.