

# The Body in its Hermeneutical Context

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## 1. Dialogue as Formation of the Between

Martin Heidegger's *A Dialogue on Language* from 1953/54 has been discussed from a variety of perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, it is especially the dialogical form of thinking that allows one to recognize a postmodern attitude toward philosophy in this text, namely, that philosophy requires the presence of the other and is only possible through conversation with the other. Accordingly, the authentic subject of philosophical thought is the "in-between" between oneself and the other. The becoming of thought is to be understood as emerging from the in-between through which it is formed and developed.

On the other hand, this text has been characterized by East-Asian interpreters as an apparently successful example of dialogue between East and West. And, indeed, *A Dialogue on Language* is a text that provides us, in its theme as well as its discursive formation, with a significant example of intercultural communication. Despite this, or actually because of this, *A Dialogue on Language* makes apparent the paradoxes and contradictions of intercultural communication. This text confronts us with the question of *what or who* the hermeneutical other actually is.

In a dialogue which is entirely held in the German language and which explores the essence of language as a universal ontological topic, Heidegger attempts to bring about an effective play of difference-indifference. Heidegger is here concerned with transforming the factual differences, the various traditions of thought and aesthetic sensibility, into two hermeneutical horizons that can communicate with each other. This is also the problem of translatability between two linguistic systems, because such factual differences normally have linguistic references. In most cases of crosscultural communication the problem of translation is on the whole so determining that communication is at the same time a process of translation, that is, a process of running from one's own to the foreign, thus also the formation of the between. It is characteristic of *A Dialogue on Language* that such problems of translation do not appear at all. It is crosscultural communication in its ideal form, a dialogue between West and East without any linguistic barriers. There are only the two different hermeneutical horizons without any confrontation between two different linguistic horizons.

From the viewpoint of a Japanese reader, I must say that Heidegger uses in many places some well-known argumentative strategies to form the necessary in-between. Strategies such as the categorical dichotomies of “mind” (from European aesthetic theory) and body (Japanese aesthetic phenomena) or of philosophical universalism and cultural relativism and the delimiting game of identifying each grammatical subject as “we” and “you” are employed here in an effective manner. In doing this, Heidegger is actually speaking in one language but in two different voices, the voices of the questioner and the Japanese interlocutor.

For this reason, *A Dialogue on Language* is a fascinating and at the same time very problematic text. It is fascinating, because it enables a kind of philosophical communication between Europe and Japan which is more than a mere translation. For example, it presents some far-reaching critical insights of Heidegger into the essence of modern Japanese philosophy. Indeed, Ogawa Tadashi and Ohashi Rhyosuke employ this text as a theoretical framework for their understanding of Japanese philosophy.<sup>2</sup> A kind of philosophical orientalism provides Japanese scholars with the chance to display Japanese culture in a philosophical way, namely as a philosophical and categorical problem. For example, this is the case with Japanese films and the Noh-theater. These films and plays receive their place through the philosophical map-making of Heidegger’s text. The films of Kurosawa Akira show a metaphysical face here, because they are grasped in relation to Western modern realism. The meaning of a gesture of the hand in Japanese Noh theater is not only an aesthetic one but also philosophical. It indicates to us a hint or “Wink” concerning the essence of language. This hand is not fingering but rather gathering. You can therefore find multiple starting points in this text from which a kind of crosscultural thinking can be conceivable.

But *A Dialogue on Language* is also a problematic text, since it eliminates the natural and factual differences between two linguistic systems and in doing so it carries out linguistic relativization of the Japanese interlocutor. He exists only to the extent that he speaks in the German language and that what he says is expressible in German. The structure of the between between one’s own and the foreign is from the beginning of the *Dialogue* already fixed by the linguistic patterns of the German language. One must emphasize that the factual Dasein of the Japanese interlocutor appears here only in the reflected form of the German language. There is no direct guarantee for the factual Dasein of the Japanese professor Tezuka, except perhaps the fundamental word of Japanese aesthetics *Iki*. *Iki* remains in the text undisclosed and untranslated. This brings attention to the fact that language in the first instance only gives us access to that which is relatively foreign or a conditional other that is determined and reflected by the patterns of interpretation provided by that particular language. It is, however, the factual or authentically foreign like the strange sound *Iki* that makes the between possible. *Iki* is the foreign that our language does not include, that prevents the other from being only a confirmation or correction of our own prejudices. Heidegger was conscious of this problematic. He describes this problematic as

a danger, as the cutting-between and decisive moment of the matter to be thought.

*A Dialogue on Language* can therefore be read as a text on the place of foreignness in language. In that sense it is a text on *Iki*. This word remains in the whole text factually foreign, because there is no equivalent in other languages. But the problem is not of translation, nor of categorical understanding. *Iki* is the foreignness of Japanese culture reflected in the German language; *Iki* reveals that which the German language cannot and may not comprehend.

However, as long as one naively holds onto the facticity of cultural differences and measures intercultural understanding according to the fusion of horizons, one will forget that the actual question here is that of the relationship between the linguistic and the hermeneutical.

This becomes clear in the following passage of *A Dialogue on Language*: When the Japanese interlocutor asks what one should understand by the hermeneutics, Heidegger replies that the hermeneutical enterprise is an attempt “to determine the essence of interpretation from out of the hermeneutical” (das Wesen der Auslegung allererst aus dem Hermeneutischen zu bestimmen).<sup>3</sup> Heidegger is bringing attention here to that which makes possible linguistically mediated interpretation. Proceeding from the text *A Dialogue on Language*, the question has arisen what the hermeneutical means here and in general. I think that the hermeneutical can be understood only structurally, that is only as a problem of the structure of our understanding. Concerning *A Dialogue on Language*, *Iki* crystallises the hermeneutical and this hermeneutical dimension enables the text to be a crosscultural communication. The whole linguistic dimension of the dialogue is structurally concentrated on this non-linguistic Being of *Iki*. With this impressive example, Heidegger points out the structure of our understanding, namely the restrictive and reflective character of interpretation and the necessary non-linguistic basis of understanding that only the factually foreign enables. He calls it the hermeneutical. In the following, I would like to try to articulate a philosophy of the hermeneutical in this sense.

## 2. The Human Body as Hermeneutical Question

To fulfill this aim, it would be helpful to read *Being and Time* as a task of unfolding the hermeneutical. This means to read *Being and Time* from the viewpoint of the place of foreignness, from the viewpoint of that which Heidegger cannot articulate but which determines his entire discursive formation. From this point of view, the reader of *Being and Time* is pointed to this empty or non-place, that always repeats itself at various metaphorical levels, namely the question of the body.

One can thus read *Being and Time* as a text that steadfastly and thoroughly explores the question of human understanding. Dasein is defined through its understanding of Being, which in each case reveals my own Dasein to be at issue. The surrounding world is disclosed in its significance and death is not disclosed through dying but through the fundamental attunement of Angst. However, *Being and Time* does not

proceed from a determinate paradigmatic type of understanding. This differentiates it from Dilthey's use of historical and Gadamer's use of literary understanding to conceptualize the whole of hermeneutics. Heidegger stretched his hermeneutical considerations over an extended area, one that does not only include forms of understanding such as the pragmatic and theoretical understanding of the environment or the linguistic explication and understanding of other humans (which remains a sociological understanding). Instead Heidegger brought more radically into play the fundamental modes of Dasein's attunement and comportment. That is, *how* Dasein finds itself in its world as in anxiety and, in *What is Metaphysics?* and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, in boredom. In considering Dasein's fundamental attunement, one cannot speak so much of understanding as such but rather this indicates much more the consequence of attempting to interpret the "limit-experiences and situations" which humans face. This consequence can be described as hermeneutical violence.

This indeterminate expanse makes it difficult to articulate the relationship between individual types of understanding. Thus, if one tries to articulate, for example, how literary interpretation stands in relation to attunement for Heidegger, one comes to no clear result. Often one has the impression that the fundamental ontological movement submerges all such concrete hermeneutical considerations. There is also the danger, which the idea of a universal linguisticity suggests, of defining Being in terms of the concept of text, which would lead to an overinflation of this concept. Given this situation, it is difficult to sum up all of the individual types of understanding under one rubric. What is understood in each case of understanding varies.

All of the concrete questions of hermeneutics are necessarily related to fundamental ontology, but this relation is not as evident as Heidegger argues. Contrary to Heidegger's standpoint, the fundamentally ontological character of *Being and Time* sometimes seems to repress concrete hermeneutical reflection. The question of how concrete hermeneutical aspects are related to fundamental ontology as a fundamental analysis of the understanding of Being seems unanswered. It seems to me that *Being and Time* involves two parallel texts, namely a text of fundamental ontology with its formal and logical structure of the question of Being and a text of the concrete analysis of Dasein with its various socio-historical and cultural connotations.

Heidegger himself did not see such a discrepancy in *Being and Time*. He stresses the unity of his fundamental ontology. Heidegger wrote to his former student Loewith that the claim of fundamental ontology is not to be found in the first ten pages but rather in the entire structure of *Being and Time*.<sup>4</sup> But Heidegger also maintained in this passage that the analytic of Dasein is existential, to be derived from existence. This is because the preparatory analysis of Dasein (which is not an ontological anthropology) only aims at the clarification of the understanding of Being that belongs to Dasein. This understanding is to be explicated from out of Dasein itself. The question, according to Heidegger in this letter to Loewith, is where and how one locates the horizon for this understanding. Understanding characterizes

existence and thus the existential is central both because of content and method, but in such a way that it derives from the whole of the fundamental structure of Dasein.

Heidegger was obviously aware of the problematic relation between fundamental ontology and the analytic of Dasein. Heidegger explains in the same letter to Karl Loewith that he is himself convinced that ontology must be ontically founded and that no one before him had explicitly seen and said this. However, ontic founding (*Fundierung*) does not imply pointing or returning to any given ontic phenomenon. Instead the ground is only found for ontology when one knows what ontology is and lets it direct itself to the ground.

The ontological investigation needs an ontic foundation, which means, it needs a kind of ontic ground that is given prior to any theoretical reflection or any reflected form of the subject. Heidegger stresses that with the ontic ground the whole structure of ontological investigation appears at the same time. The reflective form is founded by the factual form; reflection begins in facticity.

In this stage of his philosophy, which was influenced by Kierkegaard, Heidegger seems to tend to a kind of existential philosophy in that the whole of philosophical reflection is concentrated in the problem of authentic existence. In this sense *Being and Time* is not a precise analysis of our Dasein in its manifold dimensions but only a philosophy of authentic Dasein. This means that the analysis of Dasein with its social and cultural components can be understood as preparatory reflections of the analysis of authentic Dasein. Each concrete hermeneutic consideration thus reflects the problem of the authenticity of Dasein. But the structural problem of the relationship between fundamental ontology and the concrete analysis of Dasein is still insufficiently clarified, if *Being and Time* is not to be rendered into an existential philosophy.

Instead of reading *Being and Time* as a coherent text we should perhaps understand the discrepancy between fundamental ontology and the concrete analysis of Dasein as one of its essential structures. I think such an open reading of *Being and Time* is especially important, if we want to see the real range of Heidegger's hermeneutics of Being. And in that sense we can say that Heidegger develops a kind of hermeneutics of the body, although this theme does not come out in its explicit form. One also should not expect a hermeneutics of the body to be a coherent theory of sensual and perceptual phenomena.

In fact Heidegger refuses to ask the question of the body and explicitly denies that the problem is a primary philosophical problem. He writes in paragraph twelve:

"Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein's Being; it is an existentiale. So one cannot think of it as the being-present-at-hand of some corporeal thing (such as a human body) in an entity which is present-at-hand."<sup>5</sup>

Heidegger warns against the traditional dualistic schema of "mind and body" and always tries to show the relativity of the bodily dimension of Dasein, to the being-in of Dasein. To be a bodily Dasein means to be the being-in of Dasein. The abstract ontological category of being-in should cover the whole dimension of our bodily

Dasein; it precedes every concrete recognition of the body. The fundamental ontology of Being leaves no space for a phenomenology of the body or of lived embodiment. He also claims in paragraph twelve:

“Hence being-in is not to be explained ontologically by some ontical characterization, as if one were to say, for instance, that being-in in a world is a spiritual property, and that man’s spatiality is a result of his bodily nature.”<sup>6</sup>

Here again we can find the same discrepancy between “being in” as a fundamental ontological category and embodiment as a concrete bodily dimension of Dasein.

### 3. A hermeneutics of the body

David Michael Levin, in *The Body’s Recollection of Being*, points out that Heidegger speaks of the body in a contradictory way in *Being and Time*.<sup>7</sup> Although various bodily capacities are discussed, Heidegger does not go further in the analysis of the body as such. It is true that a great part of the analysis of Dasein assumes a particular body that culture and sensual experiences require. This can be seen, for example, in his well-known account of hammering. A sentimental affinity to a world of handworkers can be pointed out here and the hammering is bound to the image of a strong working male body. Without the factual Dasein of such a body, the hammering has no ontological significance. In this sense, the culturally mediated understanding of one’s own body determines the sphere and quality of one’s understanding of being-in. The famous example of hammering in *Being and Time* could fully lose its explicitness if our life world lost the bodily connection with such physical work. Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein thus presupposes the modern isolated individual body that understands itself primarily in its functionality, ability and most of all in its finality. It is thus interesting that Heidegger does not thematize embodiment as a universal principle but conceives of bodily Dasein only from its socially and historically predetermined form. If Heidegger had conceptualized a coherent theory of the body from this modern viewpoint, he would have discussed the position of the body in the modern world that bodily evidence such as gender or ethnic identity especially demands. The body in modernity is the carrier of the most important interpretative possibilities.

Instead of talking about the body as a kind of primary evidence as Husserl often does, Heidegger is concerned with the “primordial understanding” that constitutes the Da of Being. He claims:

“We have, after all, already come up against this primordial understanding in our previous investigations, though we did not allow it to be included explicitly in the theme under discussion. To say that in existing, Dasein is there, is equivalent to saying that the world is there: its being-there is being-in.”<sup>8</sup>

The primordial character of this understanding is its simultaneousness with the understanding of the world. This primordial understanding is the understanding of being able to be (*Seinkönnen*) and at the same time it is the understanding of the

where-to (Woran) in relation to which this Being happens.

#### 4. Hermeneutical Intuition

In *Ontology: Hermeneutics of Facticity* there is an assertion of the fundamental task of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics should be defined as follows:

“Hermeneutics has the task of making the Dasein which is in each case our own accessible to this Dasein itself with regard to the character of its Being, communicating Dasein to itself in this regard, hunting down the alienation from itself with which it is smitten. In hermeneutics what is developed for Dasein is a possibility of its becoming and being for itself in the manner of and understanding of itself.”<sup>9)</sup>

It is interesting that Heidegger speaks here of a self-alienation that must be investigated in relation to the possibility of Dasein’s becoming and being an understanding of itself. It is not important for this understanding to ask what is understood. The task of hermeneutics is not to develop a framework of interpretation but to create the possibility of understanding as such.

Already in the post-war lecture course *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie* of 1919–1920, Heidegger used the concept of “hermeneutical intuition”. Heidegger tries in his early lecture courses to describe the unitary structure of the lived experience that is given prior to every reflection. It is interesting that in this archeological investigation of the question of the origin of theory, Heidegger uses the metaphor “mitanklingen” or sounding-with to express the Being in the world of Dasein. This very vivid metaphor is related to the linguistic as well as the bodily dimension of our Dasein. Being in the world has more to do with the bodily structure than with the temporal structure of Dasein. In *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, Heidegger suggested that it is only in the sounding-with of each one of one’s own lived experiences of the environment that it “worlds”; and where and if it “worlds” for me, I am somehow totally there.

Heidegger thus seeks the primordial sphere, which he called the pre-worldly something, from which the world is experienced as meaningful and theoretical reflection as objectivity stems. It is the origin of language and reflection. He has apparently something in mind that functions as one indifferent ground for every clear articulation. Heidegger points out the moment in which such a ground can be conceivable. He claimed in a language influenced by Dilthey:

“It is a fundamental phenomenon that can be interpretatively experienced (*verstehend erlebt*), for example in the lived situation of slipping from one lived-experienced-world into a genuinely different one or in moments of especially intensified life”.<sup>10)</sup>

Heidegger here describes the significance of the moment in which interpretative frameworks collapse, but in which our understanding still works. It is the astonishing moment in which we are open to every possible interpretation and at the same time torn away from every given possible interpretation. In that moment the origin of understanding is experienced. I must point out that such alienation, as the decisive

moment for understanding itself, is given as slipping from one experienced world to a totally different world, and therefore self-alienation is in coincidence with sensual experience. Heidegger's argument at this early stage is obviously based on sensual bodily experiences and is not determined by the temporal structure of Dasein.

Thus, he also argues in 1919 that pre-worldly and worldly functions of meaning essentially express event characters (Ereignischaraktere), and these functions move with lived experience, living in life itself. Thus they come forth and carry the past. They are a fore-grasping that is equally a grasping-back, that is, they express from out of life its motivational tendency and its tendential motivation.

This metaphorical language awakens a strong association between primordiality and the body. The hermeneutical that has to determine the essence of interpretation and is called here hermeneutical intuition is closely connected with a body that moves as one, swings as one and moves through boundaries.

## 5. Conclusion

Heidegger's concept of "hermeneutical intuition" releases hermeneutics from the absolute dominance of the linguistic model and makes it possible to consider more precisely the relationship between the hermeneutical and the linguistic. *Iki* symbolizes the hermeneutical in crosscultural communication. It is the foreign that is reflected in language. The analysis of our bodily Dasein seems to have the same structure. The body appears in *Being and Time* in its manifold meaningfulness and interpretations. But the body as such is something that escapes being grasped. It remains the foreign in our understanding of the world. Communication works only across a gap, a gap of incomprehensible foreignness.

*Iki* in *A Dialogue on Language* manifests this foreignness. Heidegger speaks of many bodily phenomena and requires that we use these in understanding his text. Simultaneously he denies its ontological importance. But which body is it that he denies? It is the body as we know it in theoretical reflection. But there is another body, one not accessible to our reflection, which is ruled out as part of our understanding even as it is invoked. This body always has to remain foreign to us. It might be the authentic foreign which we must invoke in order to understand and yet which can never be appropriated. A reading of *Being and Time* which does not reduce all the concrete hermeneutical considerations to one fundamental ontology, but allows both, gives us a glimpse of this body.

We can thus begin to respond to questions such as the following: to what extent can we identify and articulate the connections between the linguistic and the bodily experience of our understanding? Or how can interpretation be limited, where the linguistic dominates the bodily, so that the factual basis of interpretation can be recovered? Such questions seem to me especially important, since our current world is characterized by an increasing discrepancy between what can be said and what is experienced.



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- 2 See Pappenfuss u. Pöggeler, O. (ed.): *Im Gespräch der Zeit. Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*. Frankfurt am Main, 1990.
- 3 *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 93.
- 4 See Pappenfuss u. Pöggeler, *Im Gespräch der Zeit*. p. 36.
- 5 *Sein und Zeit*, p. 79.
- 6 *Sein und Zeit*, p. 82.
- 7 Levin D. M., *The Body's Recollection of Being*, London, 1985.
- 8 *Sein und Zeit*, p. 182.
- 9 *Ontologie. Hermeneutik der Faktizität*, p. 15.
- 10 *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, p. 116.