SILENT LANGUAGE

FROM VOICE TO THE MOVING BODY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that our concept of language has been primarily determined by a vocal paradigm that conceives the speech uttered by the voice as the suitable medium to apprehend the real. This tendency is displaced by reflecting on language from the standpoint of movement, more specifically from the body's expressive kin(aesth)etic dynamics. The shift from the vocal to the motor signifying paradigm is carried out in three stages. First, framed within Jacques Derrida's philosophy, I review the critique of the phonocentric understanding of language that defines it as speech, and relates the *phonē* with the production of meaning, the grounding of rationality and the core of human identity. For Derrida, this idea of language reveals a phono-logo-centric model of thought driven by a metaphysics of presence. Against this tendency, deconstruction offers an alternative model of language thought of as a continuous movement of signifying references. In the second section, I shift from the critique of the language of voice to the proposal of the language of gestures suggested by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His phenomenology allows me to lay the foundations for a new characterisation of language based on a myriad of sense-giving movements created by the body that go from simple and almost unnoticed gestures like perception, to more complex motor patterns like the painter's brushstrokes. In this section I propose the concept of kin(aesth)etic *logos*, a type of silent (aphonic or non-vocal) rationality based on the body's moving and expressive powers. The last part of the thesis focuses on dance as a way to integrate the findings of the deconstructive critique of the voice and the phenomenological gestural theory. The central argument of this section is that dance provides a stage to deepen the problematisation of the links between the body, expression, movement and language in a way that philosophy is incapable of doing by itself. The closing remarks discuss the concept of vulnerability understood here as the capacity to move and be moved by kin(aesth)etic dynamics.

To Catherine, teacher and mentor.

If we want to understand language as an originating operation, we must pretend to have never spoken, submit language to a reduction without which it would once more escape us by referring us to what it signifies for us, gaze at it as deaf people look at those who are speaking, compare the art of language to other arts of expression, and try to see it as one of these mute arts.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

At the word go we are within the multiplicity of languages and the impurity of the limit.

Jacques Derrida

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This research would not have been possible without La Morris who taught me how to dance before I knew how to read and write. It would also have been difficult to come up with the ideas I propose here without the love for history that Rebeca and Rodrigo instilled in me. Thanks for your inspiration.

To my friends on both sides of the Atlantic who lent me their ears and extended their arms. Without your friendship it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to complete this project.

To my grandmothers, Bala and Carmelita, for their support during all these years, but above all for their example of perseverance. Thanks also to my grandfather Félix who accompanied me throughout this process even though he was unable to see the final result.

Thanks to my family for always being there, for their patience and affection. To Estefanía and Esteban for accompanying me on this journey. And to Esteban and Maruxa for their example, their infinite support and for believing in me and my (life) project.

ABBREVIATIONS

WORKS BY JACQUES DERRIDA

AEL	*Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*
D	*Dissemination*
T	*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*
LI	*Limited Inc*
M	*Margins of Philosophy*
OG	*Of Grammatology*
P	*Points… Interviews, 1974-1995*
PO	*Positions*
VP	*Voice and Phenomenon. Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*
WM	*The Work of Mourning*
WD	*Writing and Difference*

WORKS BY MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

PE	*La Philosophie de l'existence*
PP	*Phenomenology of Perception*
PrP	*The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenology, Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*
PW	*The Prose of the World*
SNS	*Sense and Non-Sense*
S	*Signs*
SB	*The Structure of Behaviour*
SW	*The Sensible World and the World of Expression*
VI	*The Visible and the Invisible*

INTRODUCTION

THE JOURNEY TO A (SET OF) QUESTION(S)

In most dictionaries we find two connotations of the word silence. Silence is either the absence of speech or the absence of noise. The difference between these definitions has its origin in two terms nowadays conflated in our understanding of silence. In Latin there is *tacere,* which names the action performed by a person that refrains from speaking, and *silere*, applicable both to people and to the rest of nature, which expresses a state of tranquillity uninterrupted by any sound.[1] Something similar occurs in Greek where *tacere* is *siôpan,* to be silent, and *silere, sigân,* a state of rest. Other cases include the Persian terms *jamoosh*, the act of refraining oneself from speaking, and *sukood*, usually used as quietness, or the Hebrew *sheqet*, to be quiet, and *shaqat* which describes a state of calmness and tranquillity.[2]

In contemporary philosophy the form of silence which has received most attention is the first one, what Barthes characterises as "verbal silence".[3] Thought of as the absence of the voice, this understanding of the term has led to its problematisation as a phenomenon related to language, playing a pivotal role in issues concerning the scope and limits of human communication and, more specifically, of discourse. In *El silencio en la palabra* (*Silence in the word*), the philosopher Max Colodro provides a historical context for the philosophical predilection for silence as *tacere*. He explains that since the seventeenth century, and particularly with the development of the Enlightenment, a moment in the history of thought was inaugurated in which language became one of the central themes for philosophy. The interest was such that it became "a decisive axis for ontological elaboration" in the twentieth century.[4] Colodro describes this by referring to a progressive "linguistisation of the real", which defended the idea according to which in order to grasp the real, it was necessary to

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[1] André Le Breton, *El silencio*, (Madrid: Ediciones Sequitur, 2001), 13-14.

[2] Marcela Labraña, *Ensayos sobre el silencio. Gestos, mapas y colores,* (Madrid: Siruela, 2017), 16.
See also: Marco Furrasola, *Una antropología del silencio. Un estudio sobre el silencio en la actividad humana*, (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 2001), 65.

[3] Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 22. Adam Knowles gives an account of the uses made of silence in contemporary philosophy in Adam Knowles, "A Genealogy of Silence: *Chōra* and the Placelessness of Greek Women", *philoSOPHIA: A Journal of Continental Feminism 5*, no. 1 (2015): 1-24.

[4] Max Colodro, *El silencio en la palabra. Aproximaciones a lo innombrable*, (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2000), 118 (the quotations from this work are my translation).

study the linguistic procedures by which the real was "accounted for" or "constructed".[5] One could think of this as a contemporary appropriation of the biblical passage from Genesis that states that God creates the world while he utters the things comprising it. As it can be recalled, God says "Let there be light", and there is light.[6] So, too, the sky, land, seas and presumably everything we now know as the real came into existence. In a tone that evokes this Biblical reference, today it is often said that as one names things, they become intelligible. To name is to grasp the world, it is often repeated. In this context, silence is conceived as a linguistic phenomenon and, more specifically, as the obverse side of the voice being usually thematised in terms of the repressed, the muted, the unfathomable, the unspeakable, the unrepresented. Subordinated to the workings of the voice, silence is everything that the voice is unwilling or unable to utter. Its meaning is bound to the idea of a lack, a verbal lack whose telos is the word.[7]

The initial set of questions that gave rise to this research emerged from this background: How to approach silence without subordinating it to a vocal phenomenon, yet still acknowledging it as something related to human communication? How to discuss silence as a problem of language without subsuming it to the traditional speech/absence of speech dichotomy? How to think of silence from an alternative perspective which is not that of the language of voice?

To address these issues the problem of silence was situated within the framework of the devocalisation of our concept of language, that is, within the framework of the critique of the phonic determination of language as a phenomenon of expression reduced to and determined by its vocal manifestation. It was necessary to take a step back and inquire whether it was possible to grasp another idea of language alternative to that which makes its vocal manifestation the emblem of the human capacity to express our being in the world. Guided by this impulse, I turned towards some of the text on the origin of human communication which referred to gestures as something that appeared in the opening scene

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[5] Ibid., 119.

[6] Genesis 1:3.

[7] Andrea Potestà, *El pensamiento del grito*, (Santiago de Chile: Metales Pesados, 2020), 62 (the quotations from this work are my translation). For a critique of the problematisation of silence made by contemporary philosophy see: Eugenie Brinkema, "Critique of Silence", *differences. A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 22, no. 2-3 (2011): 211–234.

of language, that is, as something that enabled the first communicative exchanges between human beings, but were later replaced by words, considered to be a higher form of rationality. Another set of questions emerged: Were gestures replaced by words or rather simply overlooked, as most narratives on the origin of language tend to argue? Is it possible to speak of a language of gestures nowadays? What turns something like the movement of the body into a phenomenon of language? Can an alternative conception of language capable of grasping expressivity as a motor rather than a vocal event contribute to renewing the foundations of thought? What are the issues and problems that philosophy would have to address if it were to consolidate a definition of language in terms of bodily-motor phenomenon?

These are some of the inquiries I pose throughout this research. They shape my discussion of language as a silent phenomenon of expression based on the kinetic nature and the kinaesthetic capacity of the lived body or, to phrase it differently, on our kin(aesth)etic expressive human constitution.

THE ROUTE

This thesis argues that our concept of language has been primarily determined by a vocal or phonic paradigm that conceives the speech uttered by the voice as the suitable medium to apprehend the real. This tendency is displaced by reflecting on language from the standpoint of the expressive movements of the body, capable of giving sense to human experience silently (without relying on the use of words) and operating as the basis of both vocal and gestural signification. The shift from the phonic to the motor signifying paradigm is carried out in three stages that correspond to the three sections of this thesis.

First, framed within Jacques Derrida's philosophy, I lay the foundations of a redefinition of the concept of language by examining deconstruction's critique of phonocentrism. As Derrida argues in his early works, phonocentrism is a paradigm of thought that through different rhetorical and metaphysical manoeuvres associates the speech uttered by the voice with the production of meaning, the grounding of rationality and the core of human identity. Under this regime, the language of the voice is regarded as the direct expression of sense, of truth and of the ontological feature that distinguishes the embodied subject from the rest of the

living species that inhabit the world. For Derrida, this idea of language reveals a logocentric model of thought driven by a metaphysics of presence which posits an allegedly central and stable sign (presence) as the figure of authority, such as it occurs with the concepts of essence, substance and man, to name a few. In contrast to this static paradigm, he proposes a dynamic one in which every sign is conceived as the trace of another sign which is, at the same time, the trace of another sign and so on. Critical terms of his philosophy such as *différance* and (arche)writing, prepare the ground for a re-definition of language understood as a continuous movement of signifying references. Thus, if in the phonocentric regime the concept of language is bound to the idea of the voice as the bearer of presence and to desire to preserve it as a fixed and stable sign, the understanding of the concept of language that can be outlined and extended from deconstruction is, on the contrary, a mobile one in which language is portrayed as a dynamic phenomenon of constant movement. This is the first motor reference to language that I propose in this thesis.

In the second section of this thesis I turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to shift from the critique of the language of voice to the proposal of a language of gestures. If in the first section the main aim is to denounce the metaphysics implicit in the phonocentric conception of language, in the second I present the foundations for a new characterisation of this phenomenon based on a myriad of sense-giving movements of the body. To do so, I offer a reading of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in which the body is grasped as a moving and expressive entity capable of producing a corporeal kinetic and kinaesthetic *logos*; a kin(aesth)etic *logos* that, as I seek to demonstrate, operates at the base of human communication and knowledge processes. In the two chapters that comprise this section I discuss Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the expressivity of the body as something with no necessary relation to linguistic (semantic) and conceptual categories. This expressivity is present in everyday phenomena that occur practically without us realising it, such as perception —analysed in the third chapter—, as well as in more complex and overtly expressive activities like painting —examined in the fourth chapter. I also discuss what Merleau-Ponty calls the "linguistic gesture" or the "vocal gesture", an expressive phenomenon that, like the others just mentioned, emerges as a corporeal event with the preparation of the phonatory apparatus, and then evolves into a grammatical activity.

In the third and last stage of the shift from the vocal to the motor signifying paradigm, I turn to dance, where the progressive devocalisation of the concept of language carried out in the previous sections reaches its most radical point. Here I integrate the findings of the deconstructive critique of the voice and the phenomenological gestural theory as a way to rethink the link between thought and movement. The central argument of this section is that dance provides a stage to deepen the problematisation of the links between the body, expression, movement and language in a way that philosophy is incapable of doing by itself. By positioning myself against the dualistic approach to this art that defines it as a sensible activity separated from any intelligible task, I argue that dance is both a sensible activity and a specific type of thought and knowledge triggered by kinetics and kinaesthesia with the power to displace sedimented patterns, being these of body movements or of thought and assumed beliefs. The analysis of some key moments in the history of contemporary dance allows me to approach this art as both an aesthetic practice *and* a critical tool capable of generating fundamental questions about our being in the world and our sharing it with others. Unlike the first two sections, in this one I explore the aforementioned problems relying on a corpus of authors such as Marie Bardet, André Lepecki, Gabriele Brandstetter and Laurence Louppe.

As stated before, throughout the three stages that compose this thesis I perform a progressive devocalisation of our concept of language along with its redefinition of it in terms of a kin(aesth)etic phenomenon, or what can be also thought of as a motorisation of language. I refer to this development as a process because throughout the chapters I move from studying silent grammar-based forms of language, such as Sign language, to other equally silent but no longer grammar-based manifestations of language, such as gestures, and then to choreographic bodily movements, understood here as the most distant expression of a possible grammatical assimilation of language. Throughout the thesis I follow very closely Merleau-Ponty's idea quoted at the beginning of these pages in which it is claimed that it is necessary to philosophise about language as if we had never spoken: comparing the language of the voice to other forms of silent communication, being these either the non-vocal communication of Deaf people or the aphonic and non-grammatical expressivity portrayed

by "mute arts"[8] (*S*, 46). In the attempt to carry out this task, I work with and insist on a paradox that crosses this whole research which is that of the thinking of a silent or non-vocal language and its discussion in a philosophical (worded) discourse.

It should also be noted that in this thesis the presentation of the philosophical projects of Derrida and Merleau-Ponty responds to a thematic rather than chronological aim. I am not interested in narrating the history of French philosophy in the twentieth century but rather using the findings of two of its proponents to discuss a subject that does not appear explicitly in their works. Neither Derrida nor Merleau-Ponty define silence in terms of the kin(aesth)etic language of the body here proposed. Nonetheless, their projects provide us with the material to construct such a novel understanding of language. Additionally, the dialogue between these two authors allows me to extend their works to a terrain in which neither of them consistently ventured, namely, contemporary dance, and in which they can be renewed and re-signified.

AN ONGOING DIALOGUE

While there are no works dedicated to a problematisation of silence in terms of the voiceless language of the moving body, there are authors who touch on several of the themes I develop to arrive at this conception. Such is the case of the philosopher, dancer and choreographer Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, who in her extensive study *The Primacy of Movement*, published for the first time in 1999 and then widely expanded in 2001, presents two key theses for this work: a) movement is the condition of possibility of animate life; and b) movement is the basis of any cognitive process. These ideas are analysed from the standpoint of what the author describes as a "corporeal turn" towards kinetics that is inspired by and opposed to the linguistic turn of the twentieth century, and which she associates with Wittgenstein and Lévi Strauss. Framed within an interdisciplinary phenomenologically driven approach merging philosophy, evolutionary biology, neuroscience and art, Sheets-Johnstone aims to establish movement rather than language as the central element from which it is possible to carry out any analysis of the human experience of the world. To achieve this, she criticises the mind-

[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voice of Silence", in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. and ed., Richard C. McClearly (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

body dichotomy which assumes that the rational workings of the mind are superior to the kinetic workings of the body. This is the followed by an attempt to outturn this dualistic conception of animate life through a phenomenological understanding of movement as that which structures our knowledge of the world and determines, among other things, human's sense of self-hood.[9]

In this comprehensive book Sheets-Johnstone dedicates one chapter to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological methodology, emphasising its transdisciplinary perspective based on the dialogue between science and philosophy. Sheets-Johnstone reviews at length the relationship between phenomenological reduction or *epoché* and pathology in the main works of the phenomenologist. This detailed methodological examination, however, contrasts with the superficial reading of the role of movement in his philosophy. The omission derives from, first, a misguided critique of the Merleau-Pontian concept of embodiment, which, according to Sheets-Johnstone, does not account for the crucial role of kinetics captured in her concept of animate life. In the second section of this thesis, I argue the opposite by offering an extensive analysis of the place of kinetics and kinaesthesia in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. And second, Sheets-Johnstone's omission is related to the fact that she remains bound to a narrower, Husserlian conception of phenomenology. Unlike her, in this research Merleau-Ponty is the main figure, so references to Husserl are made insofar as they are linked to the French philosopher.

Towards the end of *The Primacy of Movement*, there is a chapter relevant to the present research where it is argued that movement and thought are not different dimensions of human animate life, but that they operate as interwoven in a "kinetic bodily logos"[10]. Sheets-Johnstone explains this by pointing out to several human activities in which "thinking in movement" occurs, one of these being dance improvisation. According to the author, when a dancer improvises, she triggers a "kinetic intelligence" that does not involve words and "is tied to an ongoing qualitatively experienced dynamic in which movement possibilities arise

[9] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, 2nd expanded edition, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), xvii.
[10] Ibid., xxxi.

and dissolve".[11] While I agree that a kinetic bodily *logos* can be more accurately examined in movement-based activities such as dance, in fact I follow and defend this idea throughout this thesis, I disagree with Sheets-Johnstone's reason for proving such a thing because she maintains that this thinking in movement is a thinking that occurs outside language. As I claim in the following pages, it is impossible to separate thought from language since they are two events that co-implicate each other. There is a mingled or shared nature of the two phenomena that does not undermine the possibility of considering different forms of language and thought. This is precisely what is missing in *The Primacy of Movement* because language is conceived only in linguistic (phonic) terms. Thus, contrary to what Sheets-Johnstone claims, I maintain that just as there is a thinking in speech, there is also thinking in movement, and that just as there is a language of words, there is also a language of gestures and movement.

In line with the argument drawn by Sheets-Johnstone in the concluding section of her book, one can locate the work by philosopher, dancer and choreographer Marie Bardet titeled *Pensar Con Mover. Un encuentro entre danza y filosofía (Thinking with Movement. An Encounter Between Dance and Philosophy)*.[12] Published in 2012, this work offers a dialogue between two practices —dance and philosophy— that if analysed simultaneously, raise crossed questions that can be answered by attending to the discoveries made by each of these domains. Thinking and moving, Bardet claims, are not the defining attributes of either philosophy or dance, but two processes developed in each practice in very different ways. Philosophy, she claims, can be understood as the exercise of displacement of beliefs and sedimented knowledge. That is, philosophy can be grasped as the practice of a specific type of movement, while dance, on the other hand, can be understood not only as the art of the moving body but also as a form of thought originated in and through movement.

Unlike Sheets-Johnstone, Bardet's book does not seek to offer a general reading of movement in several areas like philosophy, science and art, but rather proposes a dialogue between some of the common problematics explored by dance and philosophy. In this regard, one of the most important contributions of her work is that she avoids subordinating one practice

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[11] Ibid., 424.

[12] Marie Bardet, *Pensar con Mover. Un encuentro entre danza y filosofía*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Cactus, 2012).

to the other and thus insists on approaching them in parallel, as independent forms of knowledge that invite a crossover but not an assimilation of one by the other. This pushes Bardet to equally analyse the work of different choreographers and philosophers that represent what has been called the contemporary tradition in both domains. Her primary references on the side of philosophy include Bergson, Deleuze, Nancy and Rancière, with no mentions to either Merleau-Ponty nor Derrida. On the side of dance, she turns mainly to the movement developed in the United States around the 60s and 70s in which names such as Merce Cunningham, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, were central.

One of the criticisms levelled at Bardet's work is the use of vocabulary that is difficult to understand on a first reading. Her metaphorical references demand from the reader careful consideration, for they are figures of speech not typical of theoretical works on dance. However, as she explains repeatedly, the reason for such a choice has to do with her commitment to avoid thinking of dance by imposing a philosophical vocabulary and vice versa.

In 2015 Nicolás Salazar Sutil published *Motion and Representation. The Language of Human Movement*.[13] Unlike the two previous authors, Salazar Sutil has not been trained as a dancer but as an actor. He is also a digital artist and a cultural studies scholar. The brief biographical notes of these three authors are relevant because one of the claims that I am interested in defending throughout this thesis is that the current works that propose the most innovative and complex questions around the re-evaluation of movement and its multiple functions in human communication, are in their majority elaborated by authors with an interdisciplinary background that somehow gives a particular physiognomy to their texts. In *Motion and Representation,* Salazar Sutil offers a rich analysis of various ways in which human movement is represented as a formal language and how this motor language has been mediated technologically. To achieve this, he examines a wide range of sources that include ancient and contemporary philosophy, media theory and motion capture technology, to name just a few. The central claim of the text is that movement, language and technology implicate each other:

[13] Nicolás Salazar Sutil, *Motion and Representation. The Language of Human Movement*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

technology transforms the representation of movement and vice versa representation transforms how our ways of moving and of understanding this phenomenon.

Salazar Sutil's work, like my proposal, seeks to think of language as not determined by semantics. As he puts it, "language should be understood from the outset as something other than speech, and something other than word-based communication".[14] His aim is to sidestep the phonocentric understanding of this phenomenon to reflect on it as a general category including both linguistic and motor languages. However, different from what I propose here, Salazar Sutil offers a formalistic approach based on the processes through which bodily dynamics are created out of a set of small and arbitrarily chosen movement units that are bound together according to different ruled-based criteria.[15] According to him, without this formal process whose ultimate manifestation is always a "written" piece — including the alphabet, motor notation systems like dance manuals, and motion capture technologies, etcetera— there is no (motor) language. For there to be language, Salazar claims, "there must by necessity be a form of script."[16] Although I disagree with the formalist conception of language that underlies the whole work, *Motion and Representation* is a key reference for this thesis because of the vast number and type of motor phenomena analysed.

Another important work in movement studies is Thomas Nial's recently published *Being and Motion,* whose core argument is the idea that we live in an "age of movement".[17] According to Nial, the presence of movement across the most diverse areas such as science, politics and aesthetics, demands a philosophical reflection on this phenomenon. *Being and Motion* offers a twofold one: a systematic ontology and a history of the philosophy of motion. To achieve this the author examines a comprehensive and varied list of thinkers that includes names like Lucretius, Marx and Bergson, who are presented as the historical precursors of the ontology of movement. In contrast to the weight given to these figures, there is a brief examination of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and a more expanded discussion on the problem of movement in Derrida's deconstruction (the latter is discussed in detail at the end of the first

[14] Ibid., 1.
[15] Ibid., 2.
[16] Ibid., 5.
[17] Thomas Nial, *Being and Motion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

chapter of this thesis). While I agree with Nial's idea of a "kinetic paradigm", the nature of our projects differs.[18] *Being and Motion* is based on what has recently been called "new materialism" and thus reflects on elements such as quality, quantity, relation and modality of movement that are not revised in my work. Correspondingly, due to its perspective, there is no mention of the relationship between language and movement which is, in contrast, a fundamental crux of my research.

Outside the field movement studies I am interested in highlighting the work of Jack Reynolds titled *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity*, which aims to produce a dialogue between these thinkers. To do so the author traces some points of intersection between their projects like the critique of philosophy as a tradition of thought that proceeds through dualistic hierarchies in its attempt to give an account of the real.[19] Merleau-Ponty develops this when he speaks of objective thought and Derrida when referring to metaphysics of presence (both of the topics are discussed throughout this thesis). Another contribution of Reynold's work is the description of Derrida's critique of phenomenology as something related to Husserl's philosophy but not (always) to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. As Reynold says, Derrida mentions the latter on few occasions throughout his corpus, for instance in *Memoirs of the Blind* and in *On Touching*, whereas Husserl is one of the central referenced of deconstruction. Thus, based on Merleau-Ponty's almost inexistent appearance, Reynolds rightly claims that it is essential to acknowledge that Derrida's characterisation of phenomenology as metaphysical applies, almost always, to Husserlian and not to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

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[18] Ibid., 7.

[19] Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida. Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004). There are other works that examine the philosophy of these two authors, like Hugh J. Silverman's *Inscriptions. After Phenomenology and Structuralism*, consisting of several essays on authors such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Derrida and Foucault and their concepts of the subject, language and interpretation. Unlike Reynolds' book, Silverman compiles a series of essays devoted to each author, which can be read independently, but he does not offer a strictly comparative reading of the authors. Something similar happens in the collection of essays edited by M.C. Dillon that gathers the texts of different authors about Merleau-Ponty and Derrida's philosophies. Hugh J. Silverman, *Inscriptions. After Phenomenology and Structuralism*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997). M.C. Dillon ed., *Écart and Différance: Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on Seeing and Writing*, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997).

One of the issues that is not extensively addressed by Reynolds although is suggested throughout his work is the possibility of thinking about a phenomenological deconstruction or a deconstructive phenomenology. This has been thematised more clearly by other authors such as Christopher Watkin who in *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?*, analyses the relationship between phenomenology and deconstruction through the problem of ontology. Watkin argues that a dialogic reading of these two philosophical discourses can offer a "timely way of considering our contemporary being in the world in a way that holds complexity and aporia with incisiveness and attestation in a concordant discordance".[20] The encounter between Derrida and Merleau-Ponty that I present in this thesis seeks to walk on the direction suggested by Watkin.

STRUCTURE: THREE MOMENTS, THREE MOVEMENTS

This thesis is composed of three sections in which I carry out a gradual process of devocalisation of the concept of language along with a redefinition of the phenomenon based on the expressive power of the moving body. Below is a summary of the themes to be addressed in each part.

SECTION ONE: ~~VOICE~~

The first chapter starts with a review of Derrida's claim according to which the history of Western thought has been framed by the determination of being as presence or what he calls metaphysics of presence. By referring to this initial critique, I discuss key concepts of his deconstructive project such as (arche)writing, *différance* and the trace. Later, I analyse the phonocentric critique focusing mainly on the so-called natural and essential connection of the voice with thought, as it appears in Derrida's reading of Aristotle and Husserl. This allows me to propose two models of language derived from his understanding of phonocentrism: one linked to metaphysics of presence, the other associated with the idea of expression as the

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[20] Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?*, *The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 209. In *The Purest of Bastards* David Farrell Krell poses a similar issue by asking: "If the scene of writing proves to be in and of the world, as Derrida insists it is, must not deconstruction run headlong into a phenomenology that is at the world and a thinking that is interlaced with the world?". Unlike Watkin, Farell does not pursue at length the discussion opened by his inquiry. However it is worth mentioning it insofar as it shows one of the several attempts that have been made to bring together the methodologies and findings of phenomenology and deconstruction. David Farrell Krell, *The Purest of Bastards. Works of Mourning, Art, and Affirmation in the Thought of Jacques Derrida*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

play or movement of signifying references. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion as to whether the deconstruction of the voice-writing dualism can be taken as representative of other dualisms, like that of mind and body, or whether, on the contrary, it is necessary to undertake a specific critique of each dualism. My position is linked to the second of these options. I argue that one of the ways in which it is possible to expand Derrida's invitation to think language as something not restricted to the domain of the voice is by deconstructing the mind-body dualism.

In the second chapter I extend the phonocentrist critique by turning to Sign language. I first analyse two moments in the history of deafness and sign languages recognition: one in the seventeenth century featured by a relatively unknown thinker, John Bulwer (1606-1656); the other, three centuries after, by William C. Stokoe (1919-2000), nowadays known as the Father of Sign Language Linguistics. These two figures allow me to examine two different definitions of sign language that, despite their significative differences, provide elements to continue the work on the deconstruction of the idea of language described in terms of speech. Moreover, the works of Bulwer and Stokoe offer key elements to reverse the phonocentric assumption that claims that the key feature of human identity lies in our capacity to produce oral discourse. This leads me to analyse a concept that has been developed in the last decades in Sign language studies, audism, which names the myriad of discriminatory practices to which Deaf people are subjected. I then review the extension and appropriation of the Derridean concept of (arche)writing made in the context of Sign language by Dirksen Bauman. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a brief analysis of an architectural movement developed at the University of Gallaudet in Washington, the first institution of higher education for the Deaf, called DeafSpace. This case study enables me to argue that a non-phonocentric concept of language can foster new and diverse ways of inhabiting space, using our bodies, and conceiving our being in the world.

SECTION TWO: GESTURES

In the third chapter I analyse Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory as it develops in the pre-reflexive and pre-linguistic level of embodied perception. I first present a general outline of his understanding of phenomenology and critical stance regarding what he describes in terms of objective thought. Then, I examine his conception of the lived body focusing on two issues:

its understanding as a motor sense-giving entity and its problematisation as something always already bound to a vital horizon. Finally, the last section of this chapter discusses the problem of ambiguity presented throughout Merleau-Ponty's corpus. This enables me to discuss some of the conceptual changes in his philosophy where issues posed in early works, such as the problem of reversibility, are revisited and reinterpreted in later texts like *The Visible and the Invisible*.

The fourth chapter of this thesis extends Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory beyond the level of the pre-reflexive being in the world. I examine increasingly complex forms of gestural expression where there is a deliberate and more refined stylistic or signifying aim on the part of the performing subject. I structure the chapter in two main sections that correspond to two significant issues Merleau-Ponty discusses when analysing gestures. On the one hand, the use of gestures in everyday life, as a phenomenon shared by the human species, in a myriad of motor events that include reflex movements, habits and words or, as he calls them, linguistic gestures. On the other hand, the problematisation of gestures in the context of art where they unfold both as a strategy through which a new sense of the world can be suggested by means of the displacement of routine and sedimented patterns of thought, and as the activity that best captures the phenomenon of reversibility between the embodied subject and her world. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the marginal place of dance in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. This argument allows me to indicate one of the possible routes in which his phenomenological findings can be extended beyond the limitations of his project interrupted by his sudden death.

SECTION THREE: MOVEMENT

The fifth and final chapter of this thesis represents a third stage in the definition of an aphonic motor language. Here silence is associated with expressive movement in the aesthetic realm of dance. The main aim is to discuss how the inscription of sense(s) is made possible in and through the dancing body by insisting on the refusal to subordinate language to a linguistic (semantic) scheme in which signification is restricted to worded meaning. I begin this chapter with a historical survey of some connotations given to the concept of "choreography" in the context of dance from the sixteenth century to the present day, emphasising the transformations of the different understandings of the terms dance, language and writing

(script *and* inscription) and their relation. This section is followed by one in which I define contemporary dance as a dance born at the end of the nineteenth century with a dual nature: aesthetic and critical. I claim that unlike other modalities of dance such as social dance or ritual dance, and even distinct to other genres like classical ballet, contemporary dance is a dance that triggers physical, kinaesthetic, affective and existential displacements that affect both those who perform and those who observe the performance. Here I analyse one of the many ways in which contemporary dance achieves this double activity, namely the still acts, the choreographic gestures in which the dancer remains immobile. I argue that the apparent absence of movement generates a profound kinetic and kinaesthetic exploration capable of challenging a myriad of processes that range from the use of repetitive and habitual movements to the sense of subjectivity of the performer. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the link between the critical potential of contemporary choreographic practice and the concept of vulnerability which ends with the invitation to think of dance as an exercise of the human capacity to be moved through movement.

To sum up, the path followed in this thesis is driven by a spiral reading around the same theme, namely, the devocalisation of language followed by a motorisation of language, and a reflection on the possibility of a novel conception of this phenomenon in terms of a silent or aphonic language. By relying on this spiral dynamic, I aim to detach at each turn, and each time more radically, language from its association with speech, thus broadening and widening its sense. This strategy seeks to offer a concept of language that would not confuse and conflate *langue* and *langage*, nor restrict it to a horizon of rationality, but suggest an elongated understanding of the phenomenon as the human capacity to be in the world and share that lived and ambiguous experience with others.

~~VOICE~~

A little over fifty years ago, Jacques Derrida claimed that the concept of writing was starting to lengthen, for it was no longer restricted to the act of graphically representing what was uttered by the voice, but also suggested a wider mode of inscription of marks, ideas and relations prior to any notational system. Writing, he argued in *Of Grammatology*, stood for the "play of signifying references" triggering the formation of any type of inscription including "old" or "literal" modes like "pictographic, hieroglyphic, ideographic, [and] phonetic" notation, but also other styles "alien to the order of the voice" such as choreography, cinematography, musical, pictorial and sculptural writing[1] (*OG*, 7-9).

The process of transformation of the term can be traced back to the last decades of the nineteenth century, when an incipient scriptural atmosphere began to develop, although it was not until half a century later that it gained significant force. In the post-war period, the advent of research and disciplines focused on what eventually became known as information technology studies displaced the epistemological frame of the two previous centuries based on the concept of energy and essentially oriented towards a scientific image of the world, to one characterised by a "formalistic, analytical, grammatical, [and] semiological" ethos.[2] If, for instance, Immanuel Kant's philosophy was associated with concepts derived from Newtonian physics, by the mid-twentieth century, words like data, code and text became key motifs in mathematics, linguistics, ethnology, political economy, biology and information technology, to name a few fields.[3] It was precisely in the emerging research area of information studies where one of the pioneering references to the extended version of writing was first suggested. In 1948 Norbert Wiener coined the term "cybernetics", an "artificial neo-Greek expression" defining the rising discipline focused on the study of "the entire field of control and communication theory whether in the machine or in the animal".[4] The main argument exposed in his *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine,* claimed that non-linear structures, whether electric or mechanical, natural or artificial, have

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 7-9.
[2] Christopher Johnson, *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2-3.
[3] For an extended analysis on Kantian philosophy and Newtonian science see: Ronald Calinger, "Kant and Newtonian Science: The Pre-Critical Period", *Isis* 70, no. 3 (1979) 349-362.
[4] Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), 11.

a schema of internal communication in which data is written or, more specifically, programmed and then transmitted as a set of instructions within the system.[5] Among the many effects Wiener's findings would have, one of them was the gradual establishment of a novel interpretation of the real in terms of a writing field.

Around the same time, biologists James D. Watson and Francis H.C. Crick discovered the structure of DNA, a genetic code or collection of rules containing the most elementary information within the living cell. Their work was followed by François Jacob and Jacques Monod's study on the existence of the RNA molecule, a partial copy of the gene substance of the DNA that carries genetic information to different parts of the cell, and then by other investigations on the biochemical basis of heredity that claimed that information passes from one generation to another as the product of molecular combination encoded in DNA. Like Wiener's cybernetic theory, biomolecular discoveries offered a new appreciation of the structure of living things understood not as an irreducible essence but as a set of directions written in genetic material.[6]

According to Derrida, cases like Wiener, Watson or Crick, started to challenge the "ideal of phonetic writing" that for centuries had defined this activity as a derivative or second-order process representing in graphic signs a discourse which, in turn, had been conceived as a full and intelligible mental expression (*OG*, 10). The new sense of writing made it possible to scrutinise a set of assumptions that had shaped the concept of writing as simple notation, and with it the idea of the voice as the embodiment of reason along with the understanding of language as a synonym of speech. Despite challenging the traditional sense of writing, the critique of the metaphysics associated to it and the analysis of the semantically enlarged version of writing was not meant to be realised by cybernetics nor molecular biology, but by a new discipline, grammatology, the "science" or "philosophy of writing" (*OG*, 93).

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[5] Ibid., 19.

[6] Johnson, *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida*, 3.
See also: Catherine Malabou, "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity", *The European Legacy* 12, no. 4 (2007): 436-437.

In this section I examine Derrida's critique of the privilege philosophy has given to the voice focusing on the so-called immediate link between *phonē* and *logos*. This allows me to suggest two models of language identified by deconstruction: one linked to phonocentrism, the other to deconstruction's understanding of signification as the movement of signifying references. Derrida's findings, especially those presented in his early works, are later taken to the field of Deaf studies as a way to extend his critique of the phonetic regime. Through the analysis of some moments in the history of the development of sign languages used by Deaf people, I criticise the conflation of language and speech along with the assumption according to which human identity is defined by our capacity to produce oral discourse.[7] I then analyse a concept that operates as a simile of phonocentrism in Deaf studies, audism. Finally, this section concludes with an exposition of the main principles of DeafSpace, an architectural movement developed by Deaf people that opens a discussion on how the speaking-centred view of the world has influenced the way in which we relate to and inhabit space.

[7] In Deaf studies it is common to distinguish between deaf and Deaf. The first referring to an audiological or physical characteristic that includes different degrees of deafness, the second, with an upper-case "D", to a cultural identification or sense of community between those who use Sign language as their primary means for communication and live according to the values, principles and norms derived from this language and its culture. In this thesis I use the term Deaf on the understanding that it includes both meanings. However, I make an exception in the section titled "John Bulwer" of the second chapter, dedicated to this figure of the seventeenth century, where such a distinction is anachronistic.

1. THE LANGUAGE OF VOICE

*Isn't the dream or the ideal of philosophical discourse, of philosophical address [*allocution*], and of the writing supposed to represent that address, isn't it to make tonal difference inaudible, and with it a whole desire, affect, or scene that work (over) the concept in contraband? Through what is called neutrality of tone, philosophical discourse must also guarantee the neutrality of at least the imperturbable serenity that should accompany the relation to the true and the universal.*

Jacques Derrida

This chapter begins with a review of the metaphysical assumptions that Derrida links to the hierarchical relation between speech and writing. I analyse the principle that, according to him, has dominated the history of Western thought, namely the determination of being as presence. This opens a discussion on some of the key concepts of deconstruction like (arche)writing, *différance* and the trace. Later, I examine Derrida's critique of the voice focusing especially on the allegedly natural, essential and immediate connection of the *phonē* (voice) with thought and the *phonē* with a self-present (master) subject, as it appears in his readings of Aristotle and Husserl. I then present two models of language derived from the critique of phono-logo-centrism, a term that combines phonocentrism and logocentrism: one linked to metaphysics of presence, the other to (arche)writing. The chapter ends with a discussion on the role of movement and the body in Derrida's philosophy, two elements tangentially problematised in his corpus that suggest a route to continue reflecting on language as something not restricted to the domain of the voice nor the horizon of rationality.

PRESENCE AND PLAY

Throughout his overture, set out in *Of Grammatology*, *Voice and Phenomena* and *Writing and Difference*, all published in 1967, Derrida claims that the great unifying principle of Western thought has been the determination of being as presence which has been captured in

concepts such as substance, idea, essence, man, consciousness, the "now" and the self-presence of the cogito, among others. Metaphysics, he states, "like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies"[8] (*WD*, 353). According to Derrida metaphysics operates as a historical rationality, that is, as a paradigm of thought that has revolved around the presentation of a presence infusing not only complex philosophical formulations but also everyday ideas and beliefs. Moreover, for him metaphysics is also a historical phenomenon or "era" developed in the West since the pre-Socratics.[9] Based on this twofold characterisation of metaphysics the task of deconstruction is to work against and within it. Against metaphysics because the aim of deconstruction is to disarticulate the founding principles of the rationality which determine being as presence, and within metaphysics because the task cannot be culminated in its totality and thus mark the end of an epoch, but only renewed through the analysis of other concepts and principles. Derrida describes this complex situation by saying that grammatology, the science of writing dedicated to the deconstruction of metaphysics of speech, is determined by the "historico-metaphysical epoch" of which it can "glimpse the *closure*" but not "the *end*" (*OG*, 4). Despite their possible synonymity "closure" and "end" do not refer to the same and, in fact, the slight difference between the terms is fundamental, for it implies that metaphysics will not be overcome in its totality, that is, there will not be a radical rupture marking a before and after metaphysics (closure), but nonetheless it is still possible to dislocate some of its key principles and so trace some limits within metaphysics itself (end). In *Of Grammatology* this is explained with the following words:

> The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way* … [and] operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms. (*OG*, 24)

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[8] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (London: Routledge, 1978).

[9] Johan de Jong, *The Movement of Showing. Indirect Method, Critique, and Responsibility in Derrida, Hegel, and Heidegger,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), 11-12. Although Derrida speaks of metaphysics of presence as an epoch that begins with the pre-Socratics, there is no detailed analysis of any philosopher that corresponds to this period of thought. In chronological terms, the first thinker Derrida studies systematically is Socrates.

One of the key mechanisms that sustains and maintains the metaphysical structure that deconstruction confronts is the use of dichotomies. In its "obstinate desire" for presence, Derrida explains, metaphysics aims to grasp our being in the world by erecting series of oppositions: being and nothingness, intelligible and sensible, good and evil, active and passive, male and female, nature and culture, model and copy, and so forth[10] (*VP* 43/*SP*, 51). The list is almost endless. The relationship between the terms is antagonistic and strictly hierarchical, for the concept that works as a metaphor for presence is "thought to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical", whereas its opposite is conceived as a "deviation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc."[11] (*LI*, 93).

Derrida focuses on one of these pairs, the one that privileges speech over writing, which shows how metaphysics of presence operates in structural terms throughout Western philosophical tradition while, at the same time, serves to delineate the fundamental principles of grammatology. In the traditional hierarchisation speech is granted a higher value than writing for it is believed there is an essential connection between thought and voice. It is assumed that "there would be first a natural bond of sense to the senses and it is this that passes from sense to sound" (*OG*, 35). The immediacy between these two dimensions, thought and voice, presumably attests that "we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said"[12]. Writing, on the other hand, is viewed as a derivative function that registers in a lifeless outer surface living speech. It is as a mere notational technique of transliteration of what is uttered by the voice; a technique that threatens to replace the present with the absent, elevate the artificial over the natural and oust identity with difference.

Against this conception and inspired by Ferdinand Saussure, Derrida offers a dynamic scheme in which signs, regardless of whether they are spoken or written signs, are not fixed in a

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[10] Throughout this thesis, the citations concerning the text of *La voix et le phénomène* each contain two page references. In the first instance the citation refers to Leonard Lawlor's 2011 translation titled *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011). The second reference cites the corresponding page number in David B. Allison's 1973 translation, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972).

[12] Barbara Johnson, "Translator's Introduction", in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London, The Athlone Press, 1981), viii.

dualistic and hierarchical structure. Rather, they are incorporated into an unceasing movement in which every sign used to grasp the world does not possess a meaning in itself, i.e. is not a presence in itself, but rather gains its sense out of its contrast with other signs. Meaning is portrayed not as the becoming present of a signified in its pure intelligibility before it has fallen into the exteriority of the sensible, as the metaphysical tradition would argue, but something produced out of a differential relation. From this it follows that every so-called "present" element is always already linked to "something other than itself", both synchronically, for its meaning says something insofar as it is associated with other signs, and diachronically, since every sign carries with it marks of past elements while at the same time it is "vitiated" by marks projected into the future[13] (*M*, 13). The sign is thus a substituted sign, a sign "under erasure" which is not "present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself" (*M*, 11). For Derrida, then, the act of signification becomes the infinite circulation and substitution of signs that delay the "moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence" (*M*, 9). This idea is captured in the neologism *différance,* which fuses the two senses of the French homophone *différence*, as differing or contrasting with, and as deferring or delaying something; spatial and temporal difference. *Différence* accounts for the endless "play of signifying references that constitute language" (*OG*, 7). Here it is crucial to stress the role given to the word play for it implies a dynamic logic distinct from that of metaphysics of presence that tends towards fixity, stability, immobility. Derrida writes on this subject in an essay titled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", published in 1970.

> Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around. (*WD*, 369)

The introduction of play to the critique of metaphysics of presence does not lead to a metaphysics of absence for, absence and presence coexist in the field of infinite substitutions

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[13] Jacques Derrida, "Differánce", in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982).

towards which *différance* points out. Play comes to show that there is no stable centre or origin but rather a "movement of signification" (*WD*, 365). This movement, also described as a "movement of supplementarity", operates as the condition of possibility of any signifying event (*WD*, 365). In short, it operates as the conditions of possibility of language.

In order to prevent turning *différance* into a master word, the neologism is often exchanged by other words such as trace or (arche)writing which, as *différance,* preserve and accentuate the principle of the unsystematisable and unpresentable dynamic that constitutes language. *Différance* becomes not a (new) version of the belief in an original presence nor a transcending absence but, as Claire Noland suggests, "a virtual motor power never fully present-never appearing "*as such*".[14] *Différance* becomes a movement that places the trace (of a trace, of a trace and so forth) before the concept, and even before the constitution of conceptuality as such; an (arche)writing before the letter.

A CRITIQUE OF THE VOICE

It is often said that there is nothing more personal than the voice, for it is through it that we share our ideas, moods and feelings. The voice, some claim, is the embodiment of our innermost individuality.[15] In this regard it is habitually believed that what we have come to imagine as our inner voice contains the deepest concerns of our soul or mind. Not far from here rests the Christian belief in the creative power of the voice: God names the world with his voice and the world is created. The secular version of the fable defends the idea of a subject who, by naming things is able to grasp them, to make them familiar. In literature, to give another example, it is argued that an author reaches her artistic maturity when she has managed to find her own voice. These references, which are only a handful of a much larger universe of attributions conferred to the voice over the centuries, reveal one of the founding myths of Western culture, namely, phonocentrism.

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[14] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment. Performing Gestures/Producing Culture,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 114.

[15] Jonathan Rée, *I See a Voice. Deafness, Languages and the Senses. A Philosophical History,* (Metropolitan Books: New York, 1999), 1.

Phonocentrism is a paradigm of thought that by means of different rhetorical and metaphysical manoeuvres associates the *phonē*, in Greek voice *and* sound, with the production of meaning, the grounding of rationality and the core of human identity. Derrida describes it as an enclosed system of thought that aims to reach a relation of "absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning" (*OG*, 12). The *phonē* becomes the direct expression of thought and truth, the latter understood as the sense of a meaning that is present and self-evident, and thus has not gone through any external detour that could have interrupted or contaminated the clarity of its content. In Derrida's words, the essence of the *phonē* "would be immediately proximate to that which within "thought" as *logos* relates to "meaning", produces it, receives it, speaks it, "composes" it" (*OG*, 11). Ultimately, the closeness of the *phonē* and *logos* would make it impossible to distinguish phonocentrism and logocentrism. In fact, as Gayatri Spivak points out, it is rather a question of two different versions of the same "centrism", of the same "desire" to posit a central, fix and stable presence.[16]

In his corpus Derrida reviews several figures that participate in phonocentrism such as Plato, Rousseau, Saussure and Lévi-Strauss to name a few. Here I highlight two, Aristotle and Husserl, for they allow me to delve deeper into the type of voice associated with metaphysics of presence. Moreover, these authors enable me to discuss at length the typical phonocentric manoeuvre which reduces and confuses the concept of language with the idea of a rational speech uttered by the human vocal apparatus. Ultimately, the cases of Aristotle and Heidegger open a debate about the concept of subject implied in and defended by phono-logo-centrism.

Before proceeding it should be noted that Derrida's treatment of each of these authors is quite different. Aristotle is mentioned in several works but, unlike Husserl, is not one of his main interlocutors. To Husserl, on the contrary, Derrida dedicates an entire book, *Voice and Phenomenon*, and is also present in other texts. For this reason, the exposition of the phonocentric assumptions present in their philosophies has a different rhythm and composition. In the case of Aristotle, I start from Derrida's findings which are then

[16] Gayatry Spivak, "Translator's Preface", in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, lxviii.

complemented with what has been discussed on the topic by other authors. In the case of Husserl, on the other hand, I offer a close reading of Derrida's interpretation of his phenomenology as presented in *Voice and Phenomenon*.

ARISTOTLE

In the opening lines of *De interpretatione* Aristotle states that the "affectations in the soul" are manifested through spoken symbols and these, in turn, are represented through written marks. Both are considered signs, but their nature differs ontologically and chronologically. Speech, and more precisely, speech in voice, has the status of the first and purest source that gives shape to our mental workings.[17] As Derrida explains in *Of Grammatology*, it is assumed that there exists an inextricable unity between thought and the "transparent substance of expression", i.e., the voice, which guarantees the spontaneous production of the signified within the self. Created by means of an interior and unmediated auto-affection that effaces the external signifier, these union between thought and expression becomes the "condition of the very idea of truth" (*OG* 20). The phonocentric concept of truth revolves around the idea that there is no outer contamination compromising the clarity of the propositions nor something disrupting the saying and the wanting to say. This is not the case with written symbols which appear after signification has taken place, thus falling "into the exteriority of space, into what one calls the world, which is nothing but the outside of speech" (*OG*, 166). The *graphie* is considered to be a mere portrait of the *phonē* that lacks a constitutive meaning, a "signifier of the first signifier, representation of the self-present voice, of the immediate, natural and direct signification of sense (of the signified, the concept, the ideal object, or what have you)" (*OG*, 30).

The merging of phonocentrism and logocentrism in Aristotle is granted by the idea that the voice is not only one mode of expression among others, but the producer of signification itself. In *De Anima*, for instance, it is declared that the voice is "a sort of sound that has signification, and is not, like a cough, the sound of the air that is breathed in."[18] The conflation of voice and *logos* is present again in the *Poetics.* Adriana Cavarero describes it as follows:

[17] Aristotle, *De Interpretatione,* in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed., Jonathan Barnes, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1, 16a 3.
[18] Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2017), 420b.

> Aristotle says in the *Poetics* that logos is *phonē semantike*, signifying voice. The argument is of the highest importance because it evokes the famous formula of the *zoon logon echon* that defines man in the *Politics*. According to the current translation, this formula is rendered as "rational animal," but to the letter it means "the living creature who has *logos*." Rather than a "rational" animal, therefore, the definition names a "speaking" animal. Having logos distinguishes man from the other living creatures, or from the other animals. Like men, animals have voices; but these voices are different from the human voice. They are inferior to it because they are not *signifying* voices.[19]

Thus, what distinguishes a human voice from an animal voice is the former's signifying capacity, and to that extent the *phonē semantike* is a voice intended to be understood rather than just merely heard, a voice linked to speech that whenever it is detached from or independent of discourse becomes an "*a-logic* and *a-semantic* phonation."[20] For Aristotle this is the case of the voices of animals, but also that of deaf people and children which, as he claims, "can make vocal sounds, but they cannot speak".[21]

The term "infant" derives precisely from this semantic determination of the voice, for an infant is considered to be a being which is unable (*in*) to speak (*fant*) and for that reason addresses the world with proto-signifying signs produced by the movements of the body. Moreover, the etymology of the term is relevant in the context of this research because it allows a link to be made with dance, a subject addressed in the last chapter of this thesis. Jean-Luc Nancy and Mathilde Monnier use the word *infans* to describe dance as a mode of expression that does not rely on syntactic language.[22] Their description is framed not from a negative point of view that would associate the lack of the speech with an elementary or primitive mode of expression, but from a positive one that praises the distance of dance from the language of voice. Their interpretation allows me to present a claim to which I will be returning often throughout this research which is that outside the phonetic regime, it is possible to think of voiceless expressive dynamics capable of accomplishing a signifying function. As I will argue in the next chapters, dance as *infans* employs not only a different

[19] Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice. Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 34.
[20] Ibid. (Cavarero's emphasis).
[21] Aristotle, *History of Animals*, in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* Book IV, 536^{B}1.
[22] Mathilde Monnier and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Allitérations: conversations sur la danse*, (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 23-24, 90.

means of communication than the language of voice, but also supposes a *logos* different from the one supported by the phonocentric tradition, namely a bodily *logos* rather than a rational *logos*.

Let us return to the manoeuvre in which voice is conflated with language. In his book *Language and Death*, Giorgio Agamben distinguishes, as Aristotle, two senses of the term *phonē*, an acoustic one associated with sound, and an intelligible linked to conceptualisation. Agamben writes:

> A voice as mere sound (as *animal* voice) could certainly be the index of the individual who emits it, but in no way can it refer to the instance of discourse as such, nor open the sphere of utterance. The voice, the animal *phonē*, is indeed presupposed by the shifters, but as that which must necessarily be removed in order for meaningful discourse to take place.[23]

In phonocentrism, the voice is stripped of its sound so that speech, and more precisely rational speech, can take its place. Aristotle, being aware of this problem uses the adjective *semantike*, in order to distinguish his *phonē* (*semantike*) from the *phonē* in terms of the sound in general, regardless of whether it is a coherent conversation, a cry of pain, or the wind's effect on the leaves of a tree.[24] He insists on this difference several times, as when he mentions that every language has a *phonē* but not every *phonē* has a language.[25] Aristotle makes it clear: the object of his study is the semantic or what I call here the linguistic voice. However, with the passage of time, the differentiating mark will be lost, and since it will be assumed that in philosophy the matter to investigate is always the *phonē semantike*, it will no longer be necessary to indicate it. The voice of philosophy will eventually become a silent and rational one or, more precisely, a rational voice insofar as it is silent, that is, insofar as it is removed from the noisy outside world that could threaten its inner bond of immediacy with the *logos*.

[23] Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 35.
[24] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 54.
[25] Aristotle, *History of Animals*, Book IV, 536^{B}1.

Frances Dyson analyses the process of erasure of the acoustic dimension of the voice which has taken place in philosophy since the time of Aristotle. She explains that in order to characterise the voice as the bearer of thought, it has been necessary to remove all sonority and turn it into something "static and silent."[26] The philosophical *phonē*, Dyson claims, "immune to aurality" is unaware and in fact resistant to volume, rhythm, intonation, pitch, timbre and accent; it is resistant to all those elements that comprise the "grain" of the voice and grant it with its signature.[27] Once the voice of *logos* succeeds in erasing all these acoustic elements, all these elements allegedly foreign to the mind's inner workings, the body is completely blurred from the scene. The idealised and tacit voice of *logos* does not require a body to produce it. In Dyson's words:

> Speech is therefore resistant to the rhythm of the breath: moving through the body, sometimes within, sometimes without, setting up a flow that, while vital, is also a constant reminder of life's impermanence, the perishability of matter, and on a deeper level the flux of existence itself. Aristotle holds his breath in order that the soul might speak, and knowledge articulates the universe in the anechoic and now anaerobic nowhere of *nous.*[28]

For phonocentrism it is necessary to silence the voice in order to prevent it from interrupting discourse, from producing an uncomfortable sound capable of making the meaning of what is thought of get lost. But the voice, it is necessary to insist, is not just that anaesthetised *phonē semantike* that philosophy insists on defending. Mladen Dolar reminds us that the voice in arts, like opera, is a voice that recovers its aurality and sometimes even overlooks its semantic dimension. To prove this he explains that since its inception opera revolved around the dilemma "*prima la musica, e poi le parole*" [first music, then words], and this "dramatic tension between the word and the voice" has given its driving force to this art.[29] In opera we would be witnessing an inversion of the Aristotelian *phonē*, where the *phonē* without further adjective, what Agamben describes in terms of the animal voice, would be above the semantic voice. Phrased it differently, opera offers the possibility to think of the voice as something

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[26] Frances Dyson, *Sounding New Media. Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 20.

[27] Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice", *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977).

[28] Dyson, *Sounding New Media*, 24.

[29] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 30.

that is grasped acoustically and even aesthetically rather than just semantically. A spectator can enjoy a piece by attending to the qualities of the singers' voices without knowing exactly what those voices are saying. This is often the case when we watch an opera in an unfamiliar language. But even in cases where the language in which what is being sung is known, the form of the speech, its rhythm, accent, intonation and volume, is so different from everyday speech that the semantic content can be overlooked.[30] We could say referring to a distinction suggested by Jean-Luc Nancy in *Listening* that at stake are two ears: one that attends to sound and listens, the other that seeks to grasp truth and thus understands.[31] Although philosophy has preferred and defended the latter, it is necessary to insist and remember that it is not the only one.

HUSSERL

If in Aristotelian phonocentrism the emphasis is placed on the role of the voice as the presence of meaning and truth, in the modern adaptation it is the idea of the subject's self-presence that becomes fundamental. The change of focus from the object of the voice to the subject who utters it marks, according to Derrida, the transition from classic to modern metaphysics (*VP*, 53/*SP*, 63).

As stated before, unlike Aristotle, who is referred often but without being a main interlocutor, Husserl is a key figure for Derrida because of the close and critical relationship that deconstruction has with his phenomenology. To Husserl, and not Aristotle, Derrida dedicates a book focused precisely on the voice and its relation to consciousness: *Voice and Phenomena*. Here Derrida analyses Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, in particular the First Logical Investigation, in which the concept of the sign and the problem of the ideal meaning in logic are discussed. One of the scenes studied in more detail has to do with what Husserl describes

[30] An opponent to this idea of the acoustic over the intelligible dimension is Heidegger. He argues in *Being and Time* that it is very complicated, almost impossible, to separate the *phonē* in terms of something semantic and/or aural. According to him, we never hear "pure noises" or "complexes of sounds", since that would require a "very artificial and complicated attitude" instead, what we first attend to is not a simple sound but an idea such as a creaking waggon or a running motor-cycle. The same happens when we hear an unknown dialect or a foreign idiom and notice "*unintelligible* words, and not a multiplicity of tone-data." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 158. For a distinction between what it means to perceive, to hear and to listen, see: François J. Bonnet, *The Order of Sounds, A Sonorous Archipielago*. Trans. Robin Mackay, (London: Urbanomic, 2012).

[31] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 5-6.

as the "solitary mental life", an intellectual activity in which the subject establishes a self-talk or internal monologue.[32] This scene is derived from a distinction Husserl makes between two operations of the sign: indication and expression. The first refers to the process in which a sign "stands for" an object, that is to say, it manifests something absent, whereas the second refers to how a sign "shows forth" a meaning.[33] For Husserl, according to Derrida's reading, it is crucial to distinguish these two operations because only expression can give us access to logical meanings. In soliloquy, where one simultaneously speaks to oneself and understands the sense of what has been allegedly silently uttered by the mind, expression occurs with no indicative function, and therefore it becomes a field in which the question of sing's ideal meaning can be further explored. Derrida explains this scene as follows:

> Phonic signs ("acoustic images" in Saussure's sense, the phenomenological voice) are "heard" by the subject who utters them in the absolute proximity of their present. The subject does not have to pass outside of himself in order to be immediately affected by its activity of expression. My words are "alive" because they seem not to leave me, seem not to fall outside me, outside of my breath, into a visible distance; they do not stop belonging to me, to be at my disposal, "without anything accessory". (*VP*, 65/*SP*, 76)

At stake are three issues that unfold simultaneously: the ideality of meaning, the subject's immediate auto-affection and the idea of a master speaking subject owner of her words. Let us have a closer look at each one.

First, similar to what we saw in Aristotle, there is the assumption according to which the absolute proximity of the signifier and the signified triggers a form of expression uncontaminated by the exterior, which can, in turn, be endlessly repeated while remaining the same. Derrida writes:

> In the "solitary life of the soul," we no longer make use of *real* (*wirklich*) words, but only *represented* (*vorgstellt*) words. And lived-experience —about which we were wondering if it was itself "indicated" to the speaking subject— does not have to be thus indicated; it is immediately certain and self-present. While in real communication, existing signs *indicate* other existents which are only probable and mediately evoked, in monologue, when the expression is *full*, non-existent

[32] Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. I, trans. J. N. Findlay, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), § 8.
[33] Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, I § 6, § 2.

> signs *show* the signifieds (*Bedeutungen*), which are ideal and therefore non-existent, and certain, for they are present to intuition. (*VP*, 36-37/*SP* 43)

Expression in soliloquy is ideal because it is independent from exteriority and thus immediately (self) present. As Derrida explains elsewhere, it "does not fall into the world", it is heard and understood as soon as it is emitted, and thus it is only dependent on the subject's "pure and free spontaneity, requiring the use of no instrument, no accessory, no force taken from the world" (*PO*, 22).

The second argument derives from the first one, for when the subject speaks to herself, she is conscious of being present to what she utters and simultaneously understands. The "hearing(understanding)-oneself-speak" operation, the formula used by Derrida to capture this convoluted process, confirms the subject's self-presence as directly bound to the ideal signifier produced by her own voice (*VP*, 68/*SP*, 80). This change of emphasis from the object (of the voice) to the subject distances Husserlian phonocentrism from Aristotle's. Here, the emphasis is placed on the presence of the subject which is established by her capacity to attend to her own internal mental workings, thus merging into one and the same figure "the presence of meaning to consciousness and the presence of consciousness to itself".[34] This conflation of meaning and consciousness produces "an auto-affection of an absolutely unique kind" in which the subject can let herself "be affected by the signifier" that she produces in her solitary mental life without any "detour through the agency of exteriority, of the world, of the non-proper in general" (*VP*, 67/ *SP*, 78).

Dyson relates Derrida's critique of the circuit of auto-affection allegedly facilitated by inner voice to Descartes famous dictum *cogito ergo sum*. She argues that in Descartes, one just needs to *think* rather than *say* "I think, therefore I am" in order to establish "existential certainty".[35] In this case, as in Derrida's analysis of Husserl, the concept of inner speech conflates *logos* and *phonē* (*semantike*). Dyson continues her argument claiming that "the potentially eternal presence of the dictum *cogito ergo sum* is "uttered" to oneself in the presence of the infinitely presentable images of the mind's I/eye; formed from the intentions

[34] J. Claude Evans, *Strategies of Deconstruction. Derrida and the Myth of the Voice,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 24

[35] Dyson, *Sounding New Media,* 24. The emphasis is mine.

of the eternal soul".[36] Derrida states something similar referencing Husserl's description of the voice as the "spiritual flesh that continues to speak and be present to itself—*to hear itself*—in the absence of the world" (*VP*, 14/*SP*, 16). As the readings of Dyson and Derrida suggest, for Descartes and Husserl the mind is thought of as a soundproof room immune to the presence of the world.

According to Derrida, the idea of the immunity of the voice to the exterior world, that is to say, its capacity of being produced without any external detour from the mind, grants it a status that is supposedly impossible to replicate with other signifiers and modes of signification which must necessarily "pass through the non-proper or renounce universality" (*VP* 67/*SP*, 78). This is the case of the act of gesturing and, more specifically of what can be analogously to Husserl thought of as the operation of seeing-oneself-gesture. In this case I can only see my gestures back if assisted by an external tool, like a mirror, through which my movements can be reflected. The eye, unlike the (metaphysical) ear — which is not really an ear but a mind disguised as an ear—, can only partially perform the auto-affective operation because the "surface of my body" is already "exposed in the world" as "something external" to myself and therefore something that has already moved away from the sphere of pure intelligibility (*VP*, 68/*SP*, 79). When gesturing, as it occurs also when writing on a paper, the link between the signifier and the signified is always already disrupted and thus contaminated.

Derived from this point Derrida claims that for Husserl the prototype of expression is essentially phonic and therefore any other modality, like facial or bodily expression, must bring a meaning out from what is still held back or hold in reserve and enable a "latent expression to be *heard*" (*VP* 30/*SP*, 36). The voice grants and utters the meaning of gestures, and thus it becomes the only medium through which they can be considered as signifying signs. According to Derrida, Husserl extends this argument to other forms of motor communication that are conceptually more developed than everyday gestures, such as the language used by Deaf people. He argues that for Husserl whenever the Deaf want to engage in colloquy they can only do so by "shaping [their] acts in the form of words" (*VP*, 67/*SP*, 78).

[36] Dyson, *Sounding New Media*, 25.

Here it should be noted that although Derrida's critique points towards a common practice of the phonetic regime, namely the tendency to transform every sign into in order for it to have a (rational or logical) sense, in none of the main works on which *Voice and Phenomenon* is based, namely the *Logical Investigations I* and *II*, as well as the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl develops the theme of deafness and the forms of communication of Deaf people. Moreover, when this issue is discussed by Derrida there are no specific bibliographic references that could give a hint of where to trace the development of this idea. Despite Derrida's omission, the issue raised in this argument needs to be stressed because this propensity to structure all experience of the world based on the way hearing people do through words has, as I will discuss in the next chapter, major discriminatory implications for those who do not use voice as their primary means of communication.

Let us return to the scene of the soliloquy in Husserl as presented by Derrida. The third element that emerges from this scene is that of the knowing and self-conscious subject. In the circuit of pure auto-affection, Derrida claims, words never cease to belong to me, and this sense of ownership implies a idea of a master subject. Judith Butler explains this when she mentions that the "figure of the speaking subject presumed by phonetic language is one of mastery: the subject speaks, makes itself present, brings itself forth into being, and what the subject names or speaks of acquires an ontological effect by being named or described".[37] For Butler the idea of ownership and mastery that is implied in the concept of the subject framed within the phono-logo-centric paradigm is rooted in Judeo-Christian theology and, more specifically, in the belief of divine presence as something that becomes manifested through divine word which, in turn, produces and brings forth the world. This can be seen, for example, in Genesis, where it is argued that God's power relies in his voice: as he names things, they are created. God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. So, too, the sky, land, seas and presumably everything we now know as the real came into existence. Later, God gives Adam, the first man on earth, the same vocal power. In the context of Biblical phonocentrism, the voice "performatively brings about the world".[38] In the secular version of this belief what the subject names, comes into existence, becomes present. Whether it is "the

[37] Judith Butler, "Introduction", in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed. 40th anniversary, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), xv.
[38] Ibid., xiii.

voice of God declaring what is, bringing reality into being through that sovereign performative act, or the human voice, establishing its own being and presence through speech", and, to go back to Husserl, through inner speech as well, there prevails a pervasive line between *phonē* and being.[39] And just as the words seem to never stop belonging to the subject and to be always already at her disposition in order to bring about the world, so her sense of being seems to be self-evident, autonomous and self-sufficient. The mastery to which Butler refers is thus at stake both in the subject's possession of the world through words, and in the possession of her own being in the clarity and certainty provided by the voice.

Derrida replies to this scene by claiming that *any* relation of the subject, either in an interior monologue, a dialogue or while gesturing, is always already hetero-affective for there is no absolute proximity of the self to the self. The subject's so called self-presence is marked by *différance* to the extent that it is not a relation of the self to the self but a relation of the self to otherness. In his words: "The one is only the other deferred, the one differing from the other. The one is the other in *différance*, the one is the *différance* from the other" (*M*, 18). There is no pure contact of the immaterial, interior and mute voice of thought because, there is a "recourse through the materiality of the exterior world".[40] For this reason, the model that prevails, even when one believes that one is talking to oneself without contact with the outside world, is the seeing-oneself-gesture model; the model of what is always already exposed to exteriority. Derrida concludes this critique of the circuit of pure auto-affection captured in the voice by contrasting it with what he calls the "gesture of the arche-writing", which is nothing but the acknowledgement of the "loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence", a gesture that recognises the "loss of what has never taken place, of a self-presence which has never been given but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance" (*OG*, 112).

CODA: *PHONĒ* AND *VOIX*

When the role of voice in Derrida's philosophy is discussed, most of the references point towards his critique of phonocentrism disseminated in his reading of various authors, such as

[39] Ibid., xv.
[40] Vernon W. Cisney, *Derrida's* Voice and Phenomenon. *An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 152.

Aristotle and Husserl. Here the voice appears as a negative element insofar as it determines the subordinate position that writing, in its restricted sense, has with respect to speech in the history of Western thought. It is the metaphysical feature par excellence, "the very thing that metaphysics privileges, over and against writing, in order to construct itself as a system of presence".[41] However, in the Derridean corpus there is a group of works not as widely read as those from his overture, where we find an attempt to think of the voice otherwise, displacing the metaphysical connotation that marks it out as the bearer of a presence and thus searching for an alternative sense within voice itself. Most of these texts are written around and after the 80s and are dedicated to friends, colleagues and teachers who had passed away such as Louis Althusser, Emanuel Levinas, Roland Barthes and Paul de Man. In these farewell discourses, the voice is presented neither in terms of the immediate connection between signified and signifier, nor in terms of one's direct and pure encounter with oneself through consciousness, but as the possibility to exercise the thought of the other. María Teresa García Bravo analyses these two senses of the voice by distinguishing the *phonē*, typical of the phonocentric tradition and which she describes as a violent voice thought of and uttered *against* the other rather than *with* the other, and the *voix*, a voice presented or, better yet, "lent" to the other in order to articulate a non-violent thought of the him or her through the mourner's mouth. This other voice is the "voix of thanatoheterography", as García Bravo describes it (from the Greek *tanato*, death; *heteros*, other; and *graphia,* writing), which wanders around the possibility of thinking alterity within one's own voice.[42]

Bravo explains the main difference between *phonē* and *voix* by reflecting on Derrida's idea of the "impossible mourning".[43] In texts such as *Memoires for Paul de Man*, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, or "The deaths of Roland Barthes", written in memory of those friends and colleagues, mourning has a double structure: the writer, in this case Derrida, cedes his voice to the dead person, for instance by quoting him or her, as a way of giving chance for a last discourse to be spoken through the mouth of the mourner. Nonetheless, at the same time this discourse is one pronounced by someone who has not died and who remembers the one

[41] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 213.
[42] María Teresa García Bravo, "Retórica del duelo: el problema de la voz en Jacques Derrida", *Perspectivas Metodológicas* 9, no. 9 (2014): 63.
[43] Ibid., 66.

who has just passed away.[44] Derrida refers to this (im)possibility of giving one's voice to the other in the text he wrote on the occasion of Roland Barthes' death in 1980. Here he identifies "two infidelities" between which it is impossible to choose. One, that of the mourner who refrains from exercising her own voice, and thus abstains from saying anything that comes back to herself. The mourner, says Derrida, remains silent and lends herself to be "preceded in counterpoint by the friend's voice, … to be content with just quoting, with just accompanying that which more or less directly comes back or returns to the other, to let him speak, to efface oneself in front of and to follow his speech, and to do so right in front of him" (*WM*, 45). However, Derrida continues, by staying so close to the dead friend in this almost ventriloquist act, one runs the risk of saying nothing. The other option, which is equally impossible, is to avoid bringing the other's words into one's own. That is, not to appropriate the dead friend in my own voice. By avoiding any quotation, identification, or rapprochement, "what is addressed to or spoken of Roland Barthes truly comes from the other, from the living friend" (*WM*, 45). However, here too there is a risk of the erasure of the other, Barthes in this case, in the mourner's discourse. One risks making the dead friend disappear again, "as if one could add more death to the dead and thus indecently pluralize it" (*WM*, 45). What to do in the face of this double impossibility? We are left with a paradox, says Derrida, the paradox of "having to do and not to do both at once", correcting one infidelity by means of the other, and thus moving from one death to the other (*WM*, 45).

The aporia of mourning presented in the farewell to Barthes consists in keeping the other in me as another. By giving one's own voice to the other, García Bravo explains, I let the other speak through my voice, and my voice is no longer mine in its entirety but also the "resonance of the other in me".[45] Her reading of Derrida's voice(s) allows us to confront the *phonē,* allegedly capable of preserving both ideality and presence, uttered by a master subject conceived as an autonomous and self-sufficient being, with that other voice, the *voix* rarely heard. This other voice demands an exercise of alterity which involves the experience of a

[44] Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler and Eduardo Cadava, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes", in Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[45] García Bravo, "Retórica del duelo: el problema de la voz en Jacques Derrida", 66.

being divided between the mourner and the memory of the other, the dead friend, to whom the speaker lends her voice in a last farewell.[46]

The distinction between *phonē* and *voix* enables us to argue that not every reference to the voice in philosophy must be framed within the horizon of rationality. There is in the voice of the mourner, an antimetaphysical manoeuvre insofar as it works around and against the system of presence. If *différance* is placed against presence, and (arche)writing against the (phono-logo-centric) voice, here, in the writings to dead friends, we find an attempt to bring closer *différance* to the voice, to the other of the (metaphysical) voice, to the *voix*. Ultimately, these texts allow us to think of language beyond the horizon of rationality and the determination of *logos* based on logic. (*VP*, 7/*SP*, 8)

LANGUAGE, MOVEMENT AND THE BODY

In her introductory paper to the fortieth edition of *Of Grammatology*, Butler asks: "What model of language has overtaken us?"[47] Derived from the argument I have been drawing here, two models can be inferred. Derrida mentions them with two somewhat vague formulas: the "Western concept of language" and "language in general" (*OG*, 7). The first one is associated with phonocentrism, the second with (arche)writing. As he explains, the "Western concept of language" is based on the phono-logo-centric manoeuvre that merges the *phonē,* the *glossa* and the *logos*, that is, the voice, linguistics and thought. The translation of *glossa* by linguistics is suggested by Derrida himself and is crucial in this context because translating *glossa* simply by language would only perpetuate the assumption that language refers only to speech or a linguistic-(orally produced)-language.

If the "Western concept of language" is associated with a strategy that seeks to fix entities as immovable in order to structure reality using hierarchical pairs, as we have seen so far, "language in general" is, on the other hand, associated with mobility. Derrida suggests this characterisation when he argues that any process of signification viewed from the standpoint of deconstruction is subject to an endless "play of signifying references" (*OG*, 7). This mobile

[46] Ibid., 79.
[47] Butler, "Introduction", xiii.

feature of language pushes him to constantly use dynamic metaphors: detours, displacements, deferrals, folds and turns, circulation. Movement is always already present in language, it is what "produces difference" (*OG*, 62). And yet, as André Lepecki points out, although movement is necessary for the project on writing as *différance* and for the critique of metaphysics of presence, it is something Derrida rarely considers in his philosophy.[48] Why does Derrida not theorise on this element if it works as a condition of possibility for (arche)writing? There are at least two answers that can be proposed here.

One has to do with the problem of time and the other with the problem of the body. In *Being and Motion*, Thomas Nial maintains that Derrida's references to movement are subordinated to his ontology of time. For Derrida, he explains, time is "ontologically primary", its differential structure is what "introduces a gap or interval into being" and thus it operates as the condition of possibility of *différance*.[49] Nial interprets Derrida's *différance* as fundamentally temporal: "time is *différance* and *différance* is essentially the chronokinetic movement of oscillation and animation that brings time into being without itself becoming a thing".[50] Neither time nor *différance* can operate without motion. However, despite this requirement, Derrida remains silent on this issue. According to Nial he overlooks the "kinetic movement or kinetic flow needed for time to pass" because by problematising movement in this way, time would cease to be ontologically primary and would have to rely on motion as something previous to it. Moreover, Nial continues, motion would require thinking of a continuum that contradicts the concept of *différance*, and for this reason Derrida needs to limit his references to movement, which remain only a way of describing the inner workings of *différance*, a metaphor always subordinated to and determined by *différance*.[51]

There is another possible answer to the question of Derrida's silence with respect to movement. It has to do with the fact that when one considers movement as a phenomenon associated with expression, that is to say, as a phenomenon bound to "language in general", one needs to consider what produces movement in the first place. Noland formulates this

[48] André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance. Performance and the politics of movement*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 90.
[49] Nial, *Being and Motion*, 486.
[50] Ibid., 487.
[51] Ibid., 489.

idea clearly when she argues that *différance* operates as a "virtual motor power" which is prompted without considering the actual subject that triggers it. Derrida, says Noland, is a thinker of "the mark of movement before the being that moves to mark" appears on the scene; he is a thinker of the "trace prior to being."[52] Thus, the problematisation of movement as a condition of possibility of the extended concept of language requires examining the being that moves and, in so doing, activates the play of signifying references. This being is not that solipsistic subject who speaks and understands herself, nor the master subject owner of her words and thoughts that wonders in the interiority of her mental life immune to the sounds of the external world. Rather it is a subject thrown to the world. A subject that moves and, by doing so, expresses herself. A subject that has a body as the medium through which the play of signification is enacted. In short, an embodied subject in the world. The problem here is that in order to think of this being that moves one needs to discuss a topic on which Derrida is reticent: the body.

In this context it is worth remembering that Derrida proposes that the deconstructive analysis performed on the speech-writing pair can be extended to other dichotomies that share the same structural inner workings, such as that of the mind and the body, and for that reason he considers unnecessary to delve deep into these other examples of metaphysics of presence. In his words:

> [W]riting, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the *logos*. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems-conversely-to borrow its metaphors (*OG*, 35).

The problem of the body would thus derive from that of writing, it would be "tacitly related" to it.[53] While it is true that these are two linked issues which share some structural elements, such as the subordination of both to concepts that are assumed to be bearers of presence, like speech and the mind, it should be noted that each pair requires an independent analysis. The findings of the deconstruction of the relationship between speech and writing cannot

[52] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 114.
[53] Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida*, 31.

simply be transferred to another field and assumed to operate and develop in the same way. The pair mind-body requires its own examination.

It is symptomatic of this kind of assimilation of the problem of the body to the problem of writing, that in the text "Choreography", whose title would suggest an analysis of dance, movement or a dancing body, there are no significant references to the other topics. Produced as an exchange carried on during 1981 between Derrida and Christie V. McDonald, this work begins with a quote from the nineteenth century feminist Emma Goldman which goes as follows: "If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution". Inspired by this phrase the authors discuss the problem of the "woman question" and what constitutes the "feminine". Whenever the body is mentioned, it appears as the "body of text"[54] (*P*, 95). Something similar occurs with movement, described as the "movement of the reading" (*P*, 95), as well as with choreography, associated with the idea of a "choreographic text with polysexual signatures" (*P*, 107). This example shows that, as Catherine Malabou points out, under the scheme of (arche)writing, any attempt to think the link between thought and being, insofar as it is conditioned by the trace, it is never fully separated from its point of departure, namely the graphic scheme.[55] Derrida himself suggests this when he recognises that (arche)writing "essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing" (*OG*, 56). Both writings are conceived within the general framework of inscription and since (arche)writing remains attached to its empirical sense and retains some vestiges of the legible mark, it is difficult to think within this framework a nongraphic trace.[56]

Perhaps someone will object to me that the body does appear in Derrida's philosophy.[57] Some might argue that it is addressed when speaking of the ear at the beginning of *Margins of Philosophy* and in "Otobiographies", of the hymen in *Dissemination,* of the foreskin in

[54] Jacques Derrida, "Choreographies", in Jacques Derrida, *Points… Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed., Elisabeth Weber, trans Peggy Kamuff et. al., (Stanford, CA: University of Stanford Press, 1995).
[55] Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing. Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. Clayton Crockett, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 59.
[56] Deborah Goldgaber, "Programmed to Fail? On the Limits of Inscription and the Generality of Writing", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy 31*, no. 3 (2017): 448.
[57] This is the case of Jones Irwin who claims that deconstruction has the same affinity with discourse "than with the non-discursive, visual, spatial or performative dimensions of embodiment and sexuality", and that therefore it is possible to speak of a "writing of the body". Irwin Jones, *Derrida and the writing of the body,* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 13.

"Circumfession", and of the hand in both "Heidegger's Hand" as well as in *On Touching*, where there is a discussion of the mouth, eye and skin.[58] The body, in fact, appears in these writings. However, I would like to insist that the body is discussed in these texts insofar as it can be touched by writing. An analogy can help clarify the point I am interested in making: just as movement appears in Derrida's philosophy always in the shadow of *différance*, so too does the body appear in the shadow of (arche)writing. My proposal here is that one way of extending and renewing the findings of deconstruction is to bring these two elements that have remained in the background to the forefront of the stage and, from there, to continue the reflection on and defence of a non-phonocentric conception of language.

To conclude this first chapter I would like to return to the scene presented at the beginning. If more than five decades ago Derrida mentioned that there was a scriptural atmosphere that impacted areas of study as dissimilar as computing and biology, which in turn triggered a new way of understanding the real through an extended sense of writing, today that scenario has changed. In the early twenty-first century we have not a scriptural but a motor atmosphere. Every major domain of human activity has become increasingly characterised in terms of motion. Nial gives some examples that serve as a counterpoint to those mentioned at the beginning of this section. Suffice it to point out three of them. In social terms life has become increasingly migratory due to political, economic and environmental reasons.[59] Scientifically, our age is defined by continuously moving fields. At the macroscopic level, Nial explains, cosmologists have discovered that "the universe is not only expanding in every direction but also that the speed at which it is doing so is rapidly increasing. We live in what contemporary physicists call an "accelerating universe"".[60] This has enabled them to replace the "old paradigm of a static cosmos, linear causality, fundamental particles, and classical space-time",

[58] Andrew Bennett, "Language and the Body", in David Hillman and Ulrika Maude (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 73-87, 82. Derrida, "Tympan", *Margins of Philosophy*; Jacques Derrida, "Otobiographies", in Christine McDonald (ed.), *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation,* trans. Avital Ronell, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); Derrida, "The Double Session", *Dissemination*; Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession", Geoffery Benningon and Jacques Derrida (eds.), *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Jacques Derrida, "Heidegger's Hand", *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, 2 vols., eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, (Stanford, CA: University of Stanford Press, 2008), vol. 2; Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy,* trans. Christine Irizarry, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[59] Nial, *Being and Motion*, 1.

[60] Ibid., 2.

by one based on “cosmic acceleration, turbulence, and continuously vibrating fields”.[61] Finally, in aesthetic terms, in these first decades of the twenty-first century, “more written, spoken, and visual images [are] moving around the world, faster and farther, than anyone could have ever anticipated”.[62] This has been made possible by digital image which, as Nial points out, conferred a mobility to the image on a scale unprecedented in history.

In response to this motor atmosphere I propose to explore the relationship between an antiphonocentric conception of language and movement, between silent language and the kinetic and kinaesthetic dynamics produced by the embodied subject.

[61] Ibid., 3.
[62] Ibid.

2. THE LANGUAGE OF HANDS

For with our hands we sue, entreat, beseech, solicit, call, allure, entice, dismiss, grant, deny, reprove, are suppliant, fear, threaten, abhor, repent, pray, instruct, witness, accuse, declare our silence, condemn, absolve, show our astonishment, proffer, refuse, respect, give honour, adore, worship, despise, prohibit, reject, challenge, bargain, vow, swear, imprecate, humour, allow, give warning, command, reconcile, submit, defy, affront, offer injury, complement, argue, dispute, explode, confute, exhort, admonish, affirm, distinguish, urge, doubt, reproach, mock, approve, dislike, encourage, recommend, flatter, applaud, exalt, humble, insult, adjure, yield, confess, cherish, demand, crave, covet, bless, number, prove, confirm, salute, congratulate, entertain, give thanks, welcome, bid farewell, chide, brawl, consent, upbraid, envy, reward, offer force, pacify, invite, justify, contemn, disdain, disallow, forgive, offer peace, promise, perform, reply, invoke, request, repel, charge, satisfy, deprecate, lament, condole, bemoan, put in mind, hinder, praise, commend, brag, boast, warrant, assure, inquire, direct, adopt, rejoice, show gladness, complain, despair, grieve, are sad and sorrowful, cry out, bewail, forbid, discomfort, ask, are angry, wonder, admire, pity, assent, order, rebuke, savour, slight, dispraise, disparage, are earnest, importunate, refer, put to compromise, plight our faith, make a league of friendship, strike one good luck, take earnest, buy, barter, exchange, show our agreement, express our liberality, show our benevolence, ask mercy, exhibit grace, show our displeasure, fret, chafe, fume, rage, revenge, crave audience, call for silence, prepare for an apology, give liberty of speech, bid one to take notice, warn one to forbear, keep off and be gone; take acquaintance, make remonstrance of another's error, weep, give pledge of aid, comfort, relieve, demonstrate, persuade, resolve, speak to, appeal, profess a willingness to strike, show ourselves convinced, present a check for silence, promise secrecy, protect our innocence, manifest our love, enmity, hate, and spite; provoke, hyperbolically extoll, enlarge our mirth with jollity and triumphant acclamations of delight, note and signify another's actions, the manner, place, and time, as how, where, when, etc.

John Bulwer

In this chapter I extend the phonocentrist critique outlined previously by analysing two moments in the history of deafness and sign languages recognition: one in the seventeenth century featured by a relatively unknown author, John Bulwer (1606-1656), and his philosophy of gesture; the other, in the mid-1950s with William C. Stokoe Stokoe (1919-2000), nowadays known as the Father of Sign Language Linguistics. Through Bulwer and Stokoe's theories I examine two concepts of sign language that, despite their differences, provide elements to continue the work on the deconstruction of the idea of language described in terms of speech, as well as the assumption that human identity lies in our capacity to produce oral discourse. I then analyse a concept that has been developed in the last decades in Deaf studies, audism. Audism names the discriminatory practices to which the Deaf are subjected and which range from the phonocentric privilege of spoken language to the implementation of institutional practices that segregate them by considering them disabled people and not a cultural and linguistic minority. I then review the extension and appropriation of the Derridean concept of (arche)writing that Dirksen Bauman has made in the context of Sign language through the analysis of two Saussurean principles: the arbitrariness of linguistic (phonic) signs and the linearity of (phonic) signs. Finally, I conclude with a brief analysis of an architectural movement developed at the University of Gallaudet in Washington, the first institution of higher education for the Deaf, called DeafSpace, which shows how a non-phonocentric concept of language can foster a novel conception of space and use of our senses.

A LANGUAGE THAT REBELS AGAINST THE VOICE

The history of deafness in Western culture can be read in many ways. Jonathan Rée suggests one framed by the confrontations and ideological battles between the "oralist", who claim that Deaf people should be taught to speak and thus perpetuate the phonocentric manoeuvre where any expression is subordinated to speech's structure, versus the "gesturalists" or "manualists" who, by means of different sign methods defend non-oral techniques as a valid means of expression and thus promote an understanding of the language of the Deaf as autonomous.[63] The arguments drawn by gesturalists throughout centuries anticipate the Derridean critique of the voice and allow to extend it beyond its grammatological boundaries.

[63] Rée, *I See a Voice*, 9.

This can be seen in the works of the English philosopher and physician John Bulwer, who developed a theory of gesture as a universal language during the seventeenth century. More than three centuries later, the epitome of the gesturalist paradigm would arrive with the works on Deaf linguistics by William C. Stokoe, which would lead to the recognition of Sign as a complete and autonomous linguistic language. In what follows I analyse some of the contributions of these two authors to continue with the discussion around forms of silent linguistic-language based on the movements of the body.

JOHN BULWER

Trained as a physician and philosopher, John Bulwer (1606-1656) proposed what he described as a "Corporeall Philosophy" that would eventually lead to the establishment of a universal language based on the movements of the body.[64] Developed in five treatises, Bulwer's theory claimed that gestures, particularly those of the hands, head and face, gave rise to thought and thus it was necessary to study them as a language which, different from that of the words, "had the happinesse to escape the curse at the confusion of Babel".[65] In his philosophy he rejected the phonocentrist principle which describes the voice as the grounding of rationality, in fact, he found it dubious and misleading, and insisted on denying the definition of human identity in terms of speech and locating it on the movements of the body.

In his first book *Chirologia; or, The Natural Language of the Hand*, published in 1644, Bulwer focused on the study of the meanings of gestures and corporeal expressions, and presented two ideas that were key to his philosophical project: first, that speech and writing are not the only means of communication; second, that deaf people are capable of expressing themselves by means of their body gestures and, against a traditional misconception of the time, do not lack intelligence.[66] Bulwer explained these two points with the following words:

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[64] John Bulwer, *Pathonyotomia; or a Dissection of the significative muscles of the affections of the minde. Being and essay to a new method of observing the most important movings of the muscles of the head, as they are the nearest and immediate organs of the voluntarie or impetuous motions of the mind. With the proposal of a new nomenclature of the muscles,* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1649), A3.

[65] John Bulwer*, Chirologia, or, The naturall language of the hand composed of the speaking motions, and discoursing gestures thereof: whereunto is added Chironomia, or, The art of manuall rhetoricke, consisting of the naturall expressions, digested by art in the hand, as the chiefest instrument of eloquence, by historicall manifesto's exemplified out of the authentique registers of common life and civill conversation: with types, or chyrograms, a long-wish'd for illustration of this argument,* (London: T. Harper, 1644), 7.

[66] In this section I avoid using Deaf with a capital D because of its anachronistic character. The distinction between the two terms arose after the recognition of Sign language as a manually produced linguistic language,

> Nor doth the *Hand* in one speech or kinde of language serve to intimate and expresse our mind: It speakes all languages, and as an *universall character of Reason*, is generally understood and knowne by all Nations, among the formall differences of their Tongue. And being the onely speech that is naturall to Man, it may well be called the *Tongue and generall language of Humane Nature*, which, without teaching, men in all regions of the habitable world doe at the first sight most easily understand.[67]

He proves his first thesis by arguing that travellers in foreign lands, are capable of communicating through gestures despite speaking different languages from the local. Further on he mentions his position with regard to the deaf. Bulwer writes: "men that are borne deaf and dumbe; can argue and dispute rhetorically by signes, and with a kinde of mute and logistique eloquence overcome their amaz'd opponents; wherein some are so ready & excellent, they seem to want nothing to have their meanings perfectly understood".[68]

Jeffrey Wollock, one of the scholars who has studied Bulwer's works most extensively, suggests that the key to his position on the relationship between gesture and thought lies in the characterisation of gestures as "emblems" conveying a "natural similarity to the things and notions they represent".[69] Bulwer saw with suspicion spoken language because it tended to create its "own artificial, distorted version of reality", whereas the universal language he sought for needed to "avoid this by symbolising things directly."[70] This is precisely what he retained from gestures when he described them in his second treatise, *Chironomia; or The art of manuall rhetoricke,* as an intimate expression of the mind's working. In Bulwer's words: "while she [the mind] labours to be free in powering out her hidden treasures, she imprints

equivalent to orally produced linguistic languages, from the second half of the last century. It was only then that the term Deaf began to be used to refer to a cultural minority whose distinctive feature is the use of Sign language.

[67] Bulwer*, Chirologia,* 3 (Bulwer's emphasis).

[68] Ibid., 5.

[69] Jeffrey Wollock, "John Bulwer (1606-1656) and the significance of gesture", *Gesture* 2, no. 2 (2002): 231.
I would like to thank Prof. Wollock for his generous help and exchange for the development of this section.

[70] Ibid., 239.
Noga Arikha mentions that most of the foundational ideas of Bulwer's philosophy are taken from Francis Bacon's treatise *Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Humane*, published in 1605. Noga Arikha, "Deafness, Ideas and the Language of Thought in the late 1600s", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (2005): 243-245.

upon the body the active hints of her most generous conceits, darting her rayes into the body, as light hath its emanation from the Sun… a kinde of speech most consonant to the mind…”[71]

According to Bulwer the gestures of the hand and fingers were essential for communication and reasoning and thus he set about the task of recording as many of these bodily expressions as possible for their preservation, teaching and dissemination. (Figure 1 and 2).

Figure 1. John Bulwer, “Alphabet of Natural Gestures of the Hand”, in *Chirologia* (1644).

[71] John Bulwer, *Chironomia; or The art of manuall rhetoricke. With canons, laws, rites, ordinances, and institutes of rhetoricians, both Ancient and Modern, touching the artificiall managing of the hand in speaking. Whereby the natural gestures of the hand, are made the regulated accessories of faire-spoken adjuncts of rhetoricall utirance. With types, or chirograms: A new illustration of this argument,* (London: T. Harper, 1644), 24.

Figure 2. John Bulwer, "Alphabet of Natural Gestures of the Fingers", in *Chirologia* (1644).

Through his iconographic work, the self-appointed "Chirosopher" offers what for some scholars is the first (proto)description of British Sign Language (BSL), which began to be documented more systematically until two centuries later.[72]

If we recall one of the arguments drawn in the previous chapter on what Derrida calls metaphysics of presence, someone might object that Bulwer's position is in fact metaphysical insofar it assumes a link of proximity between the mind and meaning manifested through the movement of the body. However, Wollock reminds us that it is necessary not to lose sight that Bulwer was a philosopher of the seventeenth century aligned with the "demands of the

[72] J. G. Kyle and B. Woll, *Sign Language: The Study of Deaf People and their Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 48.

age for a rational unequivocal language of clear and distinct ideas", and that he was also a physician, formed within "the tradition of medical semiotics", linked to Hippocrates and Galen.[73] According to this medical tradition, the human body was conceived as a system of signs either of diseases, in the form of symptoms, or of health. It follows from this twofold background that Bulwer, as Wollock explains, would be "led to view universal language as a system of mental-physical actions expressive of a person's inner state whilst perceiving or thinking of things in the world... Gesture is natural because (in Bulwer's view) it is direct sign of nature unmediated by spoken language."[74] What should be noted here, is that for Bulwer the universal language of gestures is based on medical semiotics not grammar. Moreover, it is precisely the interest in the signs of the body that lead him to develop this argument more in detail in his following works, where we can appreciate an innovative appreciation of language as a motor phenomenon.

A few years after the publication of *Chirolgia* and *Chironomia,* Bulwer met two deaf brothers who allowed him to confirm and extend his research in *Philocophus; or, the Deafe and Dumbe Man's Friend.* The aim of this third treatise was to exhibit "the Philosophical verity of that subtile Art, which may inable one with an observant Eie, to Heare what any man speaks by the moving of his lips".[75] In this work Bulwer was determined to prove that people who are deaf can be taught to understand oral speech by reading the gestures and movements produced by hearing people. Moreover, with this treatise he hoped to lay the foundations for the first school in England for the education of the deaf which, unfortunately, did not came into existence at that time but more than a hundred years later, in 1760, under the leadership of Thomas Braidwood.[76]

The distinctive feature of *Philocophus* is the shift proposed from a philosophical and philological approach to sign language to practical one. Here, in contrast to the previous

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[73] Wollock, "John Bulwer (1606-1656) and the significance of gesture", 242-243.
[74] Ibid., 242.
[75] John Bulwer, *Philocophus; or, The Deafe and Dumbe Man's Friend. Exhibiting the philosophical verity of that subtile art, which may inable one with an observant eie, to heare what any man speaks by the moving of his lips. Upong the same ground, with the advantage of an historicall exemplification, apparently proving, that a man borne deafe and dumbe, may be taught to Hear the sound of words with his eie, & hence learne to speake with his tonge*, (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1648).
[76] Jeffrey Wollock, "John Bulwer (1606-1656) and Some British and French Contemporaries", *Historiographia Linguistica* 40, no. 3 (2013): 343.

treaties we find detailed notes on what today we could call fieldwork on the deaf's daily communication, as well as precise annotations on how the study of their language can contribute to their social development and, specifically, to the protection of their rights in legal terms.

Philocophus begins with a praise for the language used by deaf people: "[A]lthough some who understand not the mystery of your condition, look upon you as *misprisions* in nature; yet to me who have studied your perfections, and well observed the strange recompenses Nature affords you, I behold nothing in you but what may be a just object of admiration!"[77] Bulwer went on to explain that in his view deafness was not a privation nor a negative condition, but one "ranked with *honour*, *praise*, and *glory*" capable of having great influence upon hearing individuals.[78] In this regard Bulwer argues that although the deaf cannot express their "mindes in those verball contrivances of man's invention", they "want not *Speech*" for they have their "*whole Body* for a *Tongue*, having a language more naturall and significant, which is common to you with us, the *gesture*; the generall and *universal language* of *Humane nature*".[79] Bulwer's resistance to the pathologising view on deafness, his recognition of the language used by the deaf as valid as well as the invitation to hearing people to learn and use it, were profoundly novel and revolutionary for the time.[80]

In *Philocophus* gestures are characterised as motion, and more precisely as the motion of the mouth. This enabled Bulwer to argue that the deaf, through lipreading, could attain to an "Ocular Audition". In his words: "*Orall* and *Dentall Audition*, of which wee have discovered sufficient ground to raise a new Art upon, directing how to convey intelligible and articulate sounds another way to the braine then by the eare or eye; shewing that a man may heare as well as speake with his mouth."[81] This position on lip-reading was innovative at that time, but limited. Despite the fact that motions of speech can be perceived by the eye, sight can provide

[77] Bulwer, *Philocophus*, A3.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid, A3-A4.
[80] Elizabeth B. Bearden analyses Bulwer's treatises, especially *Philocophus,* from the perspective of disabilities studies and describes him as pioneer defender of Deaf rights. Bearden stresses the practical dimension of this work in which Bulwer sought to avoid legal discrimination of Deaf people. Elizabeth B. Bearden, "Before normal, there was natural: John Bulwer, disability, and natural signing in early modern England and beyond", *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 132, no. 1 (2017): 33-50.
[81] Bulwer, *Philocophus*, A5.

suitable clues to a person only if she has previous knowledge on the content of the movements and is capable of picturing them in great detail.[82] Nonetheless, beyond this limitation, the arguments given demonstrate the plausibility of the "Ocular Audition" are relevant in the context of this research as they re-evaluate the place of movement as an expressive phenomenon. In this respect, the "Chirosopher" says the following:

> *Hearing* is nothing else but the due *perception of motion*, and that *motion* and *sound* are not different entities, but in themselves one and the same thing, although expressed by different names and comp[r]ized in our understanding under different notion, which is proved by the observation of sounds which follow the lawes of *motion*, for every effect of them is to be demonstrated by *principles* and *proportions* of *motion*. So that *motion* alone is able to effect and give account of all things whatsoever that are attributed to *sound*, and *sound* and *motion* do go hand in hand together and whatsoever may be said of the one is likewise true of the other.[83]

The idea of listening as something based on the perception of the other's gestures while speaking, gives movement a primacy rarely acknowledged in language studies and in philosophy in general. Bulwer further explored this innovative kinaesthetic theory in *Pathomyotamia; or, A dissection of the significative muscles of the affections of the mind* (1649). The difference between human beings and all other living creatures, he stated in this work, is that the former can use muscles, also described as the "instruments of motion", for "the grace of elocution" voluntarily.[84] Without the expressive motions of the muscles, a person's "mind would be enforced to dwel in perpetual silence, as in a wooden extasie or congelation; nay his Soul, which is onely known by Action, being otherwise very obscure, would utterly lose the benefit of explaining it self, by the innumerable almost motions of the Affections and passions which outwardly appear by the operation of the Muscles."[85] This understanding of corporeal expressive movement, similar to what have occurred with his two previous treatises, led Bulwer to document the various muscles used mainly in facial expressions that served as teaching manuals for deaf people.

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[82] Jeffrey Wollock, "John Bulwer's place in the history of the Deaf" *Historiographia linguistics* 23, no. 1.2 (1996): 20.
[83] Bulwer, *Philocophus*, 71.
[84] Bulwer, *Pathonyotomia*, 3.
[85] Bulwer, *Pathonyotomia*, 3.

After his death, Bulwer's treatises continued to circulate especially in England, but without much resonance. He was soon forgotten until the nineteenth century when his theory was revived by some specialist circles but without much influence. Today his figure within the narratives of deaf history remains marginal. This is because most studies on the history of the systems of sign language used by the Deaf tend to focus on developments in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, and then in the achievements made in United States mainly after the second half of the twentieth century.[86] Despite this tendency, it is important to highlight Bulwer's work because of its inclusive comprehension of the Deaf. Furthermore, his attempt to formulate a universal language in which the phonocentric manoeuvre is reversed should also be emphasised, as it no longer sought to impose the structure of speech on the different forms of communication but, on the contrary, to make gesture the common referent. Finally, I would like to insist on a theme that will be developed more extensively in the following two chapters, which is Bulwer's elaboration of a theory of language no longer based on grammar, but on motricity and the signs of the body.

WILLIAM C. STOKOE

Three centuries later, in the mid-1950s, the question of the type of language used by Deaf people was asked again, this time no longer framed by the dream of finding a universal language nor its associated medico-semiotic view, but from the standpoint of Saussurean linguistics. The key figure of this other episode in the history of the recognition of Deaf modes of communication was William C. Stokoe, who would be acknowledged as the founder of Sign Language Linguistics.

Stokoe's project emerged in a context in which, with the gradual development of cybernetics, the concept of artificial language was reinserted in theoretical discussions. The term was not new, it was developed centuries earlier, largely due to the decline of Latin as international language which triggered the creation of rational and presumably universal systems of expression. These systems were considered artificial insofar as they were consciously devised,

[86] For a detailed account of the development and recognition of Sign language especially during the so called "deaf Enlightenment", this period of great progress and achievement in both teaching and research on this language developed in France between 1760 and 1880, see: Sabine Arnaud, ""Garments of Thought": Writing Signs and the Critique of Logocentrism", *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 272-305. See also: Gerald Shea, *The Language of Light: A History of Silent Voices* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017).

usually by a single creator, and thus synthetically constructed, planned or invented.[87] In the twentieth century the term became widely used in the disciplines related to the scriptural atmosphere pointed out by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, but it also triggered some doubts outside these leading domains. This was the case in the debate about the essence of the sign systems used by the Deaf: was it an artificial language, like the one used in computing, or a natural language such as English, Chinese, and Arabic?[88]

To answer the question Stokoe imported Saussurean theoretical instruments used for the analysis of linguistic-(orally produced)-language into the field of sign systems. He argued that linguistics could be applied not only to orally produced sign systems, but also to those manually created. Stokoe read Saussure's warning about linguistics and the need to focus on phonic signs as a case of study due to the limits and scope of the *Course in General Linguistics* in a different tone than Derrida. For him, the "differentiating kind of analysis, analogous to phonetics, has never been attempted for sign language. But it is quite obvious that the phenomena of the language could be thus treated were there any need for doing so. The visible phenomena of sign language need be no more limited in variety than the phonetic phenomena of speech."[89] By appropriating Saussure's findings and adapting them to the context of the communication systems of the Deaf, it would be possible to eradicate the predominant understanding of these systems as primitive and constrained to iconographic representation, and to assert their linguistic status by unveiling their bodily based grammatical structures.[90] Ultimately, this would disprove the rooted principle according to which humans have an innate faculty for speech as well as to refute the prejudiced conception of speech *as* language.

At Gallaudet University, the first college for the advanced education of the Deaf in the world, Stokoe published in 1960, a ground-breaking essay titled *Sign Language Structure* in which he

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[87] For detailed research on the history of the concept of artificial language see: Ida Stria, "Inventing Languages, Inventing Worlds: Towards a Linguistic Worldview for Artificial Languages", PhD thesis, (Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2015), 38-48.

[88] Rée, *I See a Voice*, 309.

[89] William C. Stokoe, "Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communication Systems of the American Deaf", *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 10, no. 1 (2005): 22.

[90] H-Dirksen L. Bauman, "Introduction: Listening to Deaf Studies", in H-Dirksen L. Bauman (ed.), *Open Your Eyes. Deaf Studies Talking*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1, 15.

presented the application of the conceptual framework of orally produced-language linguistics to the signs used by his Deaf students and colleagues. His aim was to "bring within the purview of linguistics a virtually unknown language, the sign language of the American deaf".[91] Stokoe argued that a "rigorous linguistic methodology applied to this language system of visual symbols" could discover its structure and "devise a method of transcription that will expedite the study of any gestural communication system with the depth and complexity characteristic of language."[92] To achieve this, the term "sign language" needed to be clarified, for even though it was not new in history, its changing and polysemic nature could be misleading in this kind of research. The formula "sign language", had been used to describe different semiotic motor dynamics such as mime, gesture, signing and sign language per se. These terms although often used as rough synonyms, needed to be distinguished. Stokoe defined the first three as follows: "Willing parties of an encounter, with no more in common than their humanity, can use mime to express ideas of some complexity. Gestures seem by comparison to signify parts instead of wholes. Signing, useful as a cover term, also suggests conventionalization of actions more referential than most gestures."[93] The feature common to mime, gesture and signing is that they convey a meaning without the need for a structure that determines how that expression is to be constructed nor performed. Beyond the cultural conventions given to the movements, there is no further indication. Nonetheless, this was not true of the meaning Stokoe gave to sign language.

> Human use of faces, hands, arms and other body parts to signal is of course universal, found not only in all cultures but akin also to behavior observed in other species. When organized into word-forming and sentence-forming systems, however, as happens in the natural languages of deaf people, these bodily expressed signals -and especially syntactic combinations of them- become linguistic signs belonging to a unique grammatical-lexical system. Not only do deaf people of different nations have different sign languages, deaf groups in large nations, or in smaller divisions where mobility is limited, often use mutually unintelligible languages or dialects.[94]

[91] Stokoe, "Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communication Systems of the American Deaf", 3.
[92] Ibid.
[93] William C. Stokoe, "Sign Language Structure", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9, (1980): 367.
[94] Ibid., 366.

Stokoe proved this by dissecting signs used by the Deaf with the same precision as Bulwer, but instead of concentrating on the muscles and the motor dynamics associated with them, he studied them dissecting their syntactic and semantic structure. His comparative method enabled him to identify the minimal unit of the Deaf's communicative system, named as the "chereme", the equivalent of a phoneme in orally produced languages. Stokoe then studied three types of cheremres: hand positions, handshapes or configuration and hand movements or motion. These elements were renamed by him as tabula (*tab*), designator (*dez*) and signation (*sig*). He argued that the sign system of the Deaf people he was examining in the United States, comprised a total of 55 cheremes (nineteen *tab*, twelve *dez*, and twenty-four *sig*), and then assigned a character to each of them. This allowed him to demonstrate that, by unveiling this underlying structure and understanding the rules that dictate how to link different units, it was now possible to create a writing system for gestural signs.[95]

A few years later, in 1965, Stokoe published with Dorothy Casterline and Carl Croneberg, two Deaf colleagues, *A Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles*, the first dictionary of its type. One of the most innovative features of this work, which compiled around 3000 different signs, was that its organisation was based on linguistic parameters rather than thematic (signs for food and signs for animals), as most of the manuals without a linguistic basis had done previously. Moreover, every entry provided information of the sign in symbols, of its variants, its nature, as well as some notes regarding usage indications.[96]

[95] Oliver Sacks, "Foreword", in Jane Maher, *Seeing Language in Sign: The Work of William C. Stokoe*, (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), xii.

[96] Dorothy C. Casterline, Carl G. Croneberg and William C. Stokoe, *Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles*, (Washington: Gallaudet College Press, 1965), xxiii.

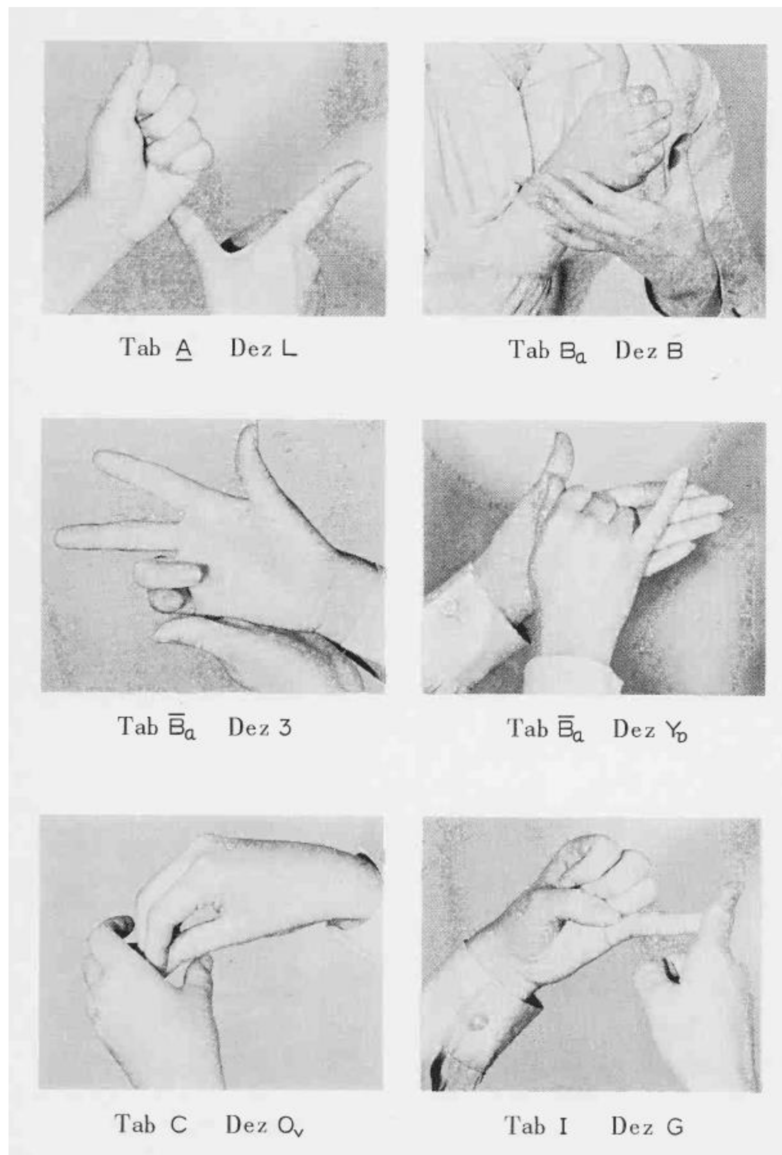

Figure 3. Dorothy C. Casterline, Carl G. Croneberg and William C. Stokoe,
"Illustration of *tab* and *dez* notation", in *Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles* (1965).
Image used with the permission of Sign Media/Linstok Press.

Casterline, Croneberg and Stokoe's research marked a turning point in the history of deafness because it laid the ground for the eventual recognition of sign systems used by the Deaf as Sign (linguistic)language. The use of the capital letter in the word "Sign" indicates the recognition of the Deaf's communication system as a (linguistic)language in its own right, no longer subordinated to speech nor conceived as a set of signs and gestures devoid of semantic

content.[97] Sign, and more specifically American Sign Language or ASL, was recognised and further studied as a three-dimensional channel of different gesture-spatial configurations which follow syntactic, grammatic and semantic principles. As the neurologist Oliver Sacks suggests, the *Dictionary* was seminal in triggering the acknowledgement of Sign as a language capable of "expressing not only every emotion but every proposition and enabling its users to discuss any topic, concrete or abstract, as economically and effectively and grammatically as speech …, lending itself equally to the rigorous and the poetic, to philosophical analysis or to making love".[98] In addition to its linguistic function, the *Dictionary* had a significant symbolic weight for the Deaf community as it provided it with identity, historical memory, and social cohesion. This became a first step towards the acknowledgement of the Deaf not as handicapped or disabled but both as a linguistic and cultural minority which had hardly been achieved in previous centuries.[99] The general acceptance of Sign was marked by its inclusion in the 1980s in the *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language*, as a "means of linguistic communication".[100] Eventually, during the following decades other variants of Sign such as British, Chinese, Venezuelan and Mexican among many others were officially recognised and started to be documented as it had been done with ASL.[101]

While today a narrative of success can be reconstructed with Stokoe's research playing a crucial role in leading this transformation of consciousness, Sacks warns that the situation was not always this positive. Back in the 60s and even during the following decade, Stokoes work was largely ignored. Sacks writes:

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[97] The term "Sign language" refers to the linguistically based language developed from the 1960s onwards. However, there are manual communication systems used by both Deaf and hearing people that do not have the formal grammatical structure that British Sign Language (BSL) or American Sign Language (ASL), to name two examples. For this reason, it is necessary to distinguish between Sign language, with a capital case, when referring to linguistically based sign languages such as BSL and ASL, and sign language, with a lower case, for any other type of manual language. In addition, there are hybrid schemas, such as Makaton, a language programme based on manual signs, symbols and words, widely used in the United Kingdom to help people, regardless of whether they are Deaf or hearing individuals, to communicate. For an analysis of Makaton and its use as a pedagogical tool, see: Malini Mistry & Danielle Barnes, "The use of Makaton for supporting talk, through play, for pupils who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the Foundation Stage, *Education 3-13* 41, no. 6 (2013): 603-616.

[98] Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices. A Journey into the World of the Deaf,* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 20. This work by Sacks has been key to the dissemination of sign language in non-academic circles.

[99] Ibid., 138, note 4.

[100] David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 219. Referred by Shirley Shults Myers and Jane K. Fernandes, "Deaf Studies: A Critique to the Predominant U.S. Theoretical Direction", *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 33.

[101] Rée, *I See a Voice*, 311.

> There was certainly very little impact among his fellow linguists: the great general works on language of the 1960s make no reference to it or indeed to sign language at all. More remarkable, in a sense, was the indifferent or hostile reaction of deaf people themselves, whom one might have thought would have been the first to see and welcome Stokoe's insights. But it was precisely signers who were most resistant to his notions.[102]

Stokoe, nonetheless, kept pursuing his studies at the Linguistic Research Laboratory he founded at Gallaudet University in 1971, where he worked with Deaf collaborators that were, for the first time, "employed as equals in fundamental research."[103] Full recognition would not come until the late 1980s when, as Sacks explains, the "revolution of the deaf broke out" and students at Gallaudet closed the institution for several days protesting against the election of a non-signing president who ignored what it meant to be Deaf, and was eventually removed.[104] According to Sacks, this movement had immediate political implications, but also, and more importantly, cultural and scientific implications that make it possible to recognise the work done by Stokoe and his colleagues in the area of Deaf linguistics.[105]

Stokoe continued his research on Sign language linguistics and gestural language in general. His last book, *Language in Hand*, takes a multidisciplinary approach to a long-standing discussion of the gestural origins of language. One of the main arguments of the work claims, supported by anthropological, ethnographical, linguistic and semiotic research, that in an evolutionary scale sign languages set the foundation for the development of spoken languages, and for that reason the human capacity for language was triggered by the use of gestures that relied on the voice only as an "accompaniment".[106] Over time, however, the model was inverted and language became a matter of "primarily vocal production" with a "gestural accompaniment".[107] Among Stokoe's conclusions it stands out both the re-evaluation of the role played by gestures in the origin of language as a means to contribute to the critique and further disarticulation of the assumptions which consider Sign languages

[102] Sacks, "Foreword", xiii. Sacks refers to the initial resistance of the Deaf community to Stokoe's research in *Seeing voices,* p. 145-147.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., xiv. For a detailed development of the Deaf revolution at Gallaudet University in 1988 see Sacks, *Seeing voices,* p. 151-163.
[105] Sacks, *Seeing voices*, 79-80.
[106] William C. Stokoe, *Language in Hand: Why Sign Came Before Speech*, (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2001), xiv.
[107] Ibid.

as primitive, as well as the recognition that speech is not necessarily superior to Sign. Like Bulwer's position, Stokoe maintained that the study of gestures, sign languages and Sign provided a deeper understanding of language and communication for both Deaf and hearing people.

AUDISM

Like any minority group, Deaf people have been compared unfavourably to the dominant group, the hearing people, regarding what is "normal" and what is not. There have been few communities that have suffered such severe and uncomprehending cruelty as this one. Proof of this is the formula "deaf and dumb" that refers "not only to a sensory disadvantage that deprives them of the experience of sound, but also shut them out from the human world of language".[108] For this reason, the recognition of Sign as an autonomous (linguistic)language was relevant not only in academic terms, but above all at the level of the social, for the community gained a sense of cohesion and belonging, as well as the strength that enabled it to demand from the hearing majority an inclusive and respectful attitude towards their language and culture. This gradual acknowledgement nurtured a movement of protest against what Tom Humphries named in 1977 "audism", which describes any idea or attitude of superiority based on the ability to speak and listen to speech which, as he argued, triggered throughout millennia detrimental assumptions and judgements towards signing and its visual perception.[109] Humphries created this concept to describe the "bias and prejudice of hearing people against deaf people"; a sort of analogy for racism or sexism which could help Deaf people to define the discriminatory and exclusionary practices they suffer.[110]

Harlan Lane extended Humphries' definition and referred to audism in terms of structural modes of oppression performed in different fields such as science, medicine and education. In his 1992 book *The Mask of Benevolence,* Lane examined the "hearing way of dominating,

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[108] Rée, *I See a Voice,* 85.

[109] Tom Humphries, "Communicating Across Cultures (Deaf/Hearing) and Language Learning", Ph.D. thesis, Union Graduate School, Cincinnati, 1977, p. 11. Quoted by Richard Clark Eckert and Amy June Rowley, "Audism: A Theory and Practice of Audiocentric Privilege", *Humanity & Society* 37, no. 2 (2013): 105. Here I follow the genealogy of the concept as well as the distinction of three types of audism (individual, institutional and metaphysical), proposed by H-Dirksen L. Bauman, "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression", *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9, no. 2 (2004): 240-242.

[110] Ibid., 13.

restructuring, and exercising authority over the Deaf Community'', paying special attention to how the attempt to take care of the Deaf from a so-called authorised and almost always hearing position, was detrimental and perpetuated the conditions of exclusion and discrimination towards this group.[111] Along with his first work, Lane's following investigations have given rise to a large number of debates ranging from the (mis)interpretation of deafness as an impairment, its role in the context of contemporary readings on disabilities, to the more controversial discussions such as those questioning the use of medical treatments through surgery or amplification, like cochlear implants, in Deaf children.[112] Brenda Jo Brueggemann raises a similar debate in *Deaf Subjects. Between Identities and Places*, where she criticises the use of terms like "assistive" or "adaptive" to describe devises to aid the deafened ear insofar as they perpetuate the positioning of the users as disabled.[113] As these and other authors have pointed out, the great challenge posed by institutional audism lies not only in the acknowledgement of Deaf people as a linguistic minority, but in the unconditional recognition of what is called "Deaf ways of being", that does not subject them to hearing-based social controls that unknowingly still defend the natural status conferred to speech.[114]

In addition to individual and institutional audism there is also, as H-Dirksen L. Bauman suggests, metaphysical audism.[115] The philosophical appreciation of audism from the standpoint of Deaf studies was first suggested by Ynez Violé O'Neill who, in a pioneering study about speech disorders during antiquity and the Middle Ages argued the following:

> For centuries speech and language were confused. This muddle produced a tangled web of ideas in which philosophical premises were used to establish physiological conclusions. These struggles to understand were integral to the

[111] Harlan Lane, *Masks of benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992), 43.
[112] These include: Harlan Lane, *When the mind hears,* (New York: Random House) 1984; and Harlan Lane, "Ethnicity, ethics, and the Deaf- World", *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education 10,* no. 3 (2005): 291–301.
[113] Brenda Jo Brueggemann, *Deaf Subjects. Between Identities and Places*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 17.
[114] Richard Clark Eckert, "Toward a Theory of Deaf Ethnos", *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 15, no. 4 (2010): 329. See also: Goedele A. M. De Clerck, "Deaf Epistemologies as a Critique and Alternative to the Practice of Science: An Anthropological Perspective", *American Annals of the Deaf* 154, no. 5 (2010): 438.
[115] In a similar vein Cindee Calton refers to "language ideologies" which she describes as cultural systems of ideas about linguistic and social relationships based on specific, although not always explicit, political and moral interests. See Cindee Calton, "What we learned from sign languages when we stopped having to defend them", in H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray (eds.), *Deaf Gain. Raising the Stakes for Human Diversity,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 113.

> development of Western ideas of human beings, and at the same time they furnished a basis for more modern conceptualizations, setting problems to be solved.[116]

The list of examples illustrating O'Neill's argument is frankly extensive, but it suffices to cite two cases. Kant in his *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view* (1796-1797) argues that people who are born deaf have no access to speech and thus "can never arrive at anything but an *analogue* of reason".[117] Something similar can be read in Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784-1791), where he states that deaf people are doomed to remain "like children or human animals" because they lack words to organise their experience and thus have no chance of emerging from their "brutal state" and becoming capable of ordinary humanity or morality.[118]

The problem to which O'Neil refers is not, however, a thing of the past. Speech and (linguistic)language are still, nowadays, confused. As Bauman asserts, to a large extent we still operate within the formula humanness-language-speech which has "silently informed the very categories that determine the limits of our existence" and continues to ascertain, as it has been since antiquity, "the porous line between the human and nonhuman, between civilized and savage".[119] The problem is not that language is considered to be one of the key human attributes, but that it is defined within a restrictive scope that renders as superior and unique one of its forms or manifestations —in this case the orally produced over the manual or gestural one. This does lead to metaphysical audism. Bauman turns towards philosophy, and particularly to Derrida's early works, as a way to criticise and annul the belief in the supposed natural status of speech in the Western history and, at the same time, to eradicate the denigration manual languages have suffered for centuries.

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[116] Ynez Violé O'Neill, *Speech and Speech Disorders in Western Thought Before 1600*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 3.

[117] Immanuel Kant, "Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view", in Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Mary Gregor, Paul Guyer, Robert B. Louden, Holly Wilson, Allen W. Wood, Günter Zöller, and Arnulf Zweig, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), §18 (Kant's emphasis).

[118] Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, (London: Luke Handford, 1803) vol. 1, Book IX, p. 419-420.

[119] Bauman, "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression", 242.

SIGN LANGUAGE READ THROUGH THE LENS OF DECONSTRUCTION

Bauman starts by referring to an opening passage in *Of Grammatology* where Derrida claims that writing in its semantically extended sense refers not only to graphic notation but also to any other thought, action, reflection and movement producing an inscription (*OG* 9). To the list given by Derrida that includes cinematography, choreography and sculpture, among others, Bauman adds Sign, understood as another mode of inscription that, just like the former ones, does not rely on the phonetic regime. The peculiarity of Sign with respect to other forms of expression, which is the reason why Bauman considers it requires specific treatment, is that it culminates the process of disidentification between language and thought begun by Derrida. Bauman explains this with the following words:

> If nonphonetic writing interrupts the primacy of the voice, deafness signifies the consummate moment of disruption. Deafness exiles the voice from the body, from meaning, from being; it sabotages its interiority from within, corrupting the system which has produced the "hearing" idea of the world. Deafness, then, occupies a consummate moment in the deconstruction of Western ontology. Further, deafness does more than disrupt the system of "hearing-oneself-speak"; it creates an embodied linguistic system which, unlike speech, is not fully present to itself.[120]

For Bauman, the study of Sign allows to illustrate the conflation of language and speech as well as language and sound, but also, and perhaps more importantly, it triggers a reflection on the existence of silent linguistic language.

It is worth noting that Derrida did not discuss Sign language in his corpus. The reasons that I can suggest for this omission are purely speculative. It may be due to lack of interest or, and this is the reason I prefer to stress, a historical issue. While it is true that in the mid-1960s Sign was recognised and ASL as well as other variants became gradually to be acknowledged, much of the research in Deaf linguistics remained in specialised circles. A key event that contributed to its wider dissemination was the foundation in 1970 of the Laboratory for Cognitive Neuroscience at the Salk Institute in California, directed by Ursula Bellugi, which began the exploration of the neurological underpinnings of Sign. Bellugi's work, and that of other

[120] H. Dirksen Bauman, "Toward a Poetics of Vision, Space, and the Body: Sign Language and Literary Theory", in Lennard J. Davis (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., (New York: Routledge, 2006), 356-7.

colleagues such as Edward S. Kilma, made it possible to think of Sign as not only a linguistic but also a neurological research topic, and this trans-disciplinary approach was instrumental in the founding several Deaf Studies departments as independent research areas in various universities.[121] The fact is that this process ran parallel to the development of the Derridean project and there is no indication in his work of any contact with this incipient but buoyant area of scholarship.

Bauman is the first to propose a dialogue between Derrida's deconstruction and Deaf studies, by focusing on two of the guiding principles of Saussure's linguistics, that Derrida criticises and links to phonocentrism: the arbitrary and linear nature of the signifier.

ARBITRARINESS

In his *Course on General Linguistics* Saussure explains that a sign is something that has no signification in itself but rather gains it as a result of its place within a system of differences. He uses an analogy between chess and language to illustrate this. "In both instances we are confronted with a system of values and their observable modifications… [A] state of the set of chessmen corresponds closely to a state of language. The respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard just as each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms."[122] By changing the position of the piece we change its value, which means it is not pre-given but relational. The same is true of the signs of language. The "bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary", which means that there is not a "natural connection" between them.[123] The arbitrariness of the sign, Saussure explains, "theoretically entails the freedom of establishing any relationship" between substance and idea.[124]

Derrida's concept of *différance* is indebted to this conception of language that desubstantialises the sign by attaching it to an endless movement of signifying references.

[121] See: Ursula Bellugi and Edward S. Kilma, *The Signs of Language*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).
[122] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, in collaboration with Reidlinger, trans. Wade Baskin, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 88.
[123] Ibid., 67, 69.
[124] Ibid., 76.

For Derrida, nonetheless, Saussure fails in taking the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign to its ultimate consequences because he restricts it to one of its forms, namely the phonetic one, and thus casts doubts on the radicality of the "*freedom* of establishing *any* relationship" which lies in his interpretation. The path that Derrida follows to arrive at this conclusion is long, but it is worth reviewing some of its key moments.

First, it must be noted that, for Saussure, linguistics is part of the general study of signs or semiology. He explains this at the beginning of his *Course*:

> *A science that studies the life of signs within society* is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it *semiology* (from Greek *sēmeîon* 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts.[125]

Now, of the broad spectrum of signs that can be considered in semiology, and which Saussure mentions as ranging from linguistic signs to the "alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc.", linguistic signs appear to him as the "most complex and universal of all systems of expression" and to that extent, "linguistics can become the master-pattern for all the branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system."[126] In the general outline of semiology both linguistic and non-linguistic signs are considered because for Saussure "what is natural to mankind is not oral speech but the faculty of constructing a language, i.e. a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas."[127] He emphasises this throughout the *Course* as when he mentions that it "is impossible for sound alone, a material element, to belong to language. It is only a secondary thing, substance to be put to use."[128] Or again when he says that "the thing that constitutes language is […] unrelated to the phonic character of the linguistic sign."[129] For Derrida, nonetheless, Saussure's clarifications have only partial effects because "for essential, and essentially

[125] Ibid., 16.
[126] Ibid., 68.
[127] Rée, *I See a Voice*, 309-310.
[128] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 118.
[129] Ibid., 7.

metaphysical, reasons" he ends up portraying sound as an intrinsic element to language (*PO*, 21). Derrida supports this critique with several quotes from the *Course,* one of the most frequent being:

> The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material," it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract. The psychological character of our sound-images becomes apparent when we observe our own speech.[130]

After making this description of the linguistic sign Saussure says that in order to avoid any confusion, he will replace the terms concept and sound-image for signified and signifier, respectively.[131] Derrida finds problematic the substitution because it reduces the expressive value of the signifier to a phonic dimension and, moreover, suggests a so-called natural bond between sense and sound. He explains this in *Of Grammatology*:

> [T]here would be first a *natural* bond of sense to the senses and it is this that passes from sense to sound: "the natural bond," Saussure says, "the only true bond, the bond of sound". This natural bond of the signified (concept or sense) to the phonic signifier would condition the natural relationship subordinating writing (visible image) to speech. (*OG*, 35)

For Derrida, the substitution reveals a major contradiction in Saussure's structural linguistics because the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign according to which the signified has no intrinsic value, is not followed to its fullest extent. The privilege of the phonic substance turns linguistics into the "regulatory model, the "pattern" for a general semiology of which it was to be, by all rights and theoretically, only a part" (*PO*, 21).

Bauman, who identifies his concept of metaphysical audism with that of Derrida's phonocentrism, extends this critique arguing that Saussure, by assuming that sound is an inherent element of language, is incapable of considering other forms of language such as the

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[130] Ibid., 66.
[131] Ibid., 67.

visual-kinetic-spatial modality of signs. In his words, "because Saussure and others were unable to see that manual signifiers could be just as arbitrary as spoken signifiers, it became assumed that only sound could be fully arbitrary and that any visual sign could be a "natural" or "iconic" sign".[132] Meandering outcasts of linguistics, Bauman concludes paraphrasing Derrida, "sign becomes the ''other'' of language, helping to determine what language *is not*."[133]

Bauman's interpretation is right when insisting that Saussure, by taking the phonic sign as a case study, turns it into a main referent of his linguistics. However, it is also an anachronistic interpretation in that it seems to require Saussure to identify as linguistic signs not only orally produced signs, but also the manual signs of Sign language. The problem is that it would not be until the mid-1960s that Sign language would be recognised as a language with a linguistics of its own and, in that sense, a linguistics comparable to that of speech. In other words, although it is true that there is a phonocentric tendency in Saussure, it cannot be forgotten that throughout the *Course* he makes several warnings about the direction his research will take without ignoring the existence of other signs including the manual alphabet.

In his critique Bauman touches on a point that has been the focus of debate in studies on Sign language linguistics: iconicity. As stated before, for Saussure the linguistic signifier has an arbitrary nature, which means that "there is no connection, for example, between the letter "t" and the sound it designates" because "signs function… not through their intrinsic value but through their relative position."[134] By insisting that the sign has no value in itself, linguistics has had a certain bias against any form of signification established by resemblance or imitation, in short, a bias against the iconic. The iconic would be the opposite of the arbitrary and therefore an element that would condition the linguistic status of a sign. For this reason it was thought that the status of Sign as a linguistic language could be endangered if it was associated to iconicity. Cindee Calton explains this as follows:

> Early linguists of American Sign Language avoided acknowledgement of iconicity in sign languages… Clearly, iconicity was viewed as problematic with regard to

[132] Bauman, "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression", 243.
[133] Ibid., 244.
[134] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 119, 118.

> establishing ASL's linguistic status. As two linguists put it [Clayton Valli and Cecil Lucas] «linguists had a definite sense that admitting the existence of iconicity in sign languages was admitting that sign languages were not 'real' languages».[135]

However, in recent decades scholars have shown that iconicity is present in both spoken and Sign languages, and that it does not compromise their linguistic status. As Thomas Russo claims, the role played by iconicity in Sign and speech can contribute to extend the available knowledge of the similarities and difference between two types of languages.[136] Studies like this can also foster a dialogical rather than confrontational reading of these languages that avoids falling into a dualistic schema and prevents a mythologisation of Sign language.

LINEARITY

According to Saussure the linguistic sign has two primordial characteristics: it is arbitrary and lineal. Derrida and Bauman claim that the principle of arbitrariness is compromised in Saussure when he decides to focus only on the linguistic signs of speech and suggests a natural link between signified (concept or sense) and the phonic signifier. Likewise, both authors make a similar critique of the principle of linearity to which Saussure pays less attention in the *Course*. Saussure exposes this as follows:

> The signifier, being auditory, is unfolded solely in time from which it gets the following characteristics: (a) it represents a span, and (b) the span is measurable in a single dimension; it is a line. While Principle II [linearity] is obvious, apparently linguists have always neglected to state it, doubtless because they found it too simple; nevertheless, it is fundamental, and its consequences are incalculable.[137]

The materialisation of this principle would be very simple, and this is the reason why Saussure does not go into too much detail: insofar as the "auditory signifiers" have "at their command only the dimension of time" they are "presented in succession; they form a chain".[138]

[135] Calton, "What We Learned from Sign Languages When We Stopped Having to Defend Them", 118. For a critique of the interpretation of Bauman of the Saussurean concept of linearity see: Shirley Shults Myers and Jane K. Fernandes, "Deaf Studies: A Critique to the Predominant U.S. Theoretical Direction".

[136] Tommaso Russo, "Iconicity and Productivity in Sign Language Discourse: An Analysis of Three LIS Discourse Registers", *Sign Language Studies* 4 (Winter 2004), 165-167.

[137] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 70.

[138] Ibid.

Derrida criticises linearism because for him it not only entails a linear conception of language but also a specific rationality in which meaning is subjected to the successive "order of a logical time", as well as to the "irreversible temporality of sound" (*OG*, 85). This, he continues, affects the way in which the relationship between sign is conceived and, beyond the specific consequences to the semiological theory, it also impacts our conceptions of time, logic and thought. With regard to time, for instance, Derrida claims that the Saussurean model of the line is the basis of a "vulgar and mundane concept of temporality", which is considered to be something "homogeneous, dominated by the form of the now and the ideal continuous movement" whether it is straight or circular (*OG*, 86). Ultimately, he argues, linearity becomes the "determining concept of all ontology", the "form in which philosophy […] recognizes itself" (*OG*, 86; *PO* 57).

Derrida finds a way to deconstruct the linear paradigm in the work on the evolution of language, art and technology by the ethnologist and archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan. Inspired by the application of the linguistic model to various fields during the second half of last century, such as the case of Claudé Lévi-Strauss to sociocultural phenomena, Leroi-Gourhan presented in a two-volume book titled *The Gesture and the Word* (1964-5), an innovative research on Palaeolithic material culture and art.[139] Based on the analysis of the figures represented especially in Franco-Cantabrian caves, he argued that Paleolithic art was an ideographic art which used the mythogram as its main unit of expression. A mythogram, says Leroi-Gourhan, is "a significant assembly of symbols in which the eye and the intelligence are not obliged to follow the rectilinear progress of the written text" and thus can have an abstract sense which has no direct (pictorial) association with external reality.[140] To show how these signs operate he gives as an example the representation of "a cross next to a lance and a reed with a sponge on the end" which, is "enough to convey the idea of the Passion of Christ".[141] The example proves that the fundamental character of the mythogram is a two-dimensional spatial structure that has nothing to do with "phoneticized oral notation", and can nevertheless still communicate simple as well as abstract ideas, including the concept of

[139] Randall White, "Introduction", in André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), xvi.
[140] Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, 263.
[141] Ibid., 202.

"passion" as well as "the most complex commentaries on Christian metaphysics."[142] Leroi-Gourhan concludes on this point that "the chief distinguishing feature of a «mythographic» writing is its two-dimensional structure which put it at remove from linearly emitted spoken language."[143]

According to Leroi-Gourhan, in the development of material culture from the Paleolithic onwards "representative signs went from mythogram to ideogram and from ideogram to letter."[144] Over the course of a millennial process there was a "conversion of the two-dimensional mythogram not reducible to a phonetic phrase into a linear series of alphabetic signs". [145] This was then consolidated with the circulation of the first Western printed texts that, unlike ancient or medieval manuscripts restricted to a specialized public, found increasing audiences thus transforming the mentality of the time.

Derrida incorporates two elements of Leroi-Gourhan's proposal into his theory of writing. On the one hand, the empirical arguments in favour of the anteriority and priority of writing and gesture with respect to the word. The concept of the mythogram allows him to claim that the roots of phonetic writing are to be found in a previous, non-linear form of expression characterized by a multi-dimensional approach. A form of expression that, contrary to the traditional interpretation of the origin of language, was not restricted to speech or narrow (phoneticised) writing, but included all kinds of graphic representation. On the other hand, and derived from the above, Derrida integrates to his theory the idea that multi-dimensional thought was linked to a concept of time in which simultaneity was the main feature but, once phonetic writing came to the fore, this notion was transformed into one privileging an irreversible linear time-sequence. Derrida insists that although the model of the line claims universal validity it represents only a moment within Western history and that it is therefore possible to think of establishing a scriptural model capable of both depicting multi-dimensional symbolic thought and accessing to a delinearised temporality (*OG*, 87).[146]

[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid., 200.
[144] Ibid., 213.
[145] Ibid., 261.
[146] Carrie Noland suggests that it is typical from structuralist and deconstructionist readings of Leroi-Gourhan's work to emphasise the aspects related to writing, but that these readings miss a key point of his work which is the role given to the body by Leroi-Gourhan. For Noland, Derrida's focus on writing is based on both the attacks

Bauman agrees with Derrida that linearism has been such a foundational principle in Western metaphysics that any form of language that does not unfold in the single dimension of the line, is determined not to be considered as language. However, Bauman finds suspicious that although Derrida turns to Leroi-Gourhan's archaeological findings he overlooks more obvious examples of spatialized languages such as Sign, which "unfolds in a three-dimensional grammar that is not linear in the same way as speech and phonetic writing."[147] To explain and deepen this argument, Bauman refers to Sacks's description of the linguistic use of space made by Sign. In the neurologists' words:

> We see then, in Sign, at every level —lexical, grammatical, syntactic— a *linguistic* use of space: a use that is amazingly complex, for much of what occurs linearly, sequentially, temporally in speech, becomes simultaneous, concurrent, multileveled in Sign. The 'surface' of Sign may appear simple to the eye, like that of gesture or mime, but one soon finds that this is an illusion, and that what looks so simple is extraordinarily complex and consists of innumerable spatial patterns nested, three dimensionally, in each other.[148]

The spatiality of signed languages demonstrates that the notion of the line is not a natural or intrinsic property of language, but a specific tendency towards the voice.[149] Bauman concludes paraphrasing Derrida's idea that the linearist model represents only a particular model and that it is not the only one. Bauman wonders what would have happened if this model had not prevailed: "What would time have been in a world without speech? What would *space* have been? Would we have measured differently?"[150] The answer is yes, and although it is impossible to think of what that other world would have been like in which the

on logocentrism and Leroi-Gourhan's highlighting of linearization. Although useful, says Noland, Derrida's insistence on linear writing drives him to overlook the "knowledge-gathering and decision-making force of sensorimotor experience, the very aspect of movement that is highlighted in accounts by Leroi-Gourhan, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty" (Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 114). Furthermore, Noland stresses that Derrida fails to consider a fear Leroi-Gourhan associates with linearity: the loss of a more corporeal engagement with the world that could lead to an eventual immobilization of the body. This is suggested in the concluding chapter of *Gesture and Speech* where Leroi-Gourhan says the following: "Writing will enter the infrastructure without changing the functioning of the intellect, as a transitional stage that will have been dominant for a few thousand years. The loss of manual activity and the reduction of the human physical adventure to a passive one will cause more serious problems" (Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, 404).

[147] Bauman, "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression", 244.

[148] Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, 88.

[149] H-Dirksen Bauman, "Listening to Phonocentrism with Deaf Eyes: Derrida's Mute Philosophy of (Sign) Language", *Essays in Philosophy* 9, no. 1, (2008): 46.

[150] Ibid., 47.

linear paradigm would not have been imposed, today there are cultural expressions that suggest its physiognomy. Such is the case of Deaf-centred architecture.

In the last section I will address this issue, but before doing so it is important to make a clarification already suggested above that seeks to provide a measured reading which avoids falling into an overly rigid scheme of opposition between speech and Sign. Recent studies in both linguistics and cognitive sciences prevent us from caricaturing both languages, for they have proved that Sign and speech *both* use facial expressions, gestures and corporeal movements in different degrees, and thus *both* are to some extent three-dimensional modes of communication. As Sarah F. Taub suggests, speech does contain visual-kinetic-spatial elements such as gestures and other iconic movements that work as multichannels for meaning making which, although not as prominent as in Sign, are still fundamental for any communicative performance.[151] Furthermore, ASL linguists such as Scott K. Liddell and Wendy Sandler complement this by arguing that not only both languages have multidimensional characters but that both share some principles traditionally associated with linearity.[152] Although the analysis of these studies is beyond the scope of this research, it is important to point them out because it avoids falling into mythologising images of the Sign and overly simplistic readings of speech, while inviting points of convergence between these two languages.

DEAF ARCHITECTURE

In recent years a turn towards what are now known as "Deaf epistemologies" has suggested alternative lines of theorisation, critical of the way audism frames and influences the production of knowledge, that seek to create new modes of reflection in accordance with the different Deaf ways of being in the world.[153] To phrase it in Derridean terms, if the system of hearing-oneself-speak has "dominated the history of the world […] and has even produced

[151] Sarah F. Taub, *Language from the body: Iconicity and Metaphor in American Sign Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.

[152] Reference given by Shultz Myers and Fernandes, "Deaf Studies: A Critique of the Predominant US Theoretical Direction", 38. See Scott K. Liddell, *Grammar, gesture, and meaning in American Sign Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Wendy Sandler, *Phonological Representation of the Sign: Linearity and Nonlinearity in American Sign Language*, (Dordrecht: Foris, 1989).

[153] Goedele A.M. De Clerk, "Deaf Epistemologies as a Critique and Alternative to the Practice of Science an Anthropological Perspective", 436.

the idea of the world", that is, if phonocentrism is in fact a form of ethnocentrism, Deaf epistemologies can be a useful resource for dismantling this schema (*OG*, 8). Such has been the attempt of the architectural movement that has recently emerged at Gallaudet University called DeafSpace, which promotes, as Bauman states in a Derridean tone, a "Deaf-Writing into the landscape etching a visual-tactile orientation within the world."[154]

Architect Hansel Bauman explains that the origins of DeafSpace are associated with the fact that our environment, "largely constructed by and for hearing individuals", fails to address Deaf sensibilities.[155] Deaf people, he explains, "modify their environment to fit their linguistic, cognitive, and social sensibilities. Given the unique sensory and spatial dimensions of these fundamental aspects of deaf experience, they hold intrinsic architectural implications that make them the origins of DeafSpace."[156] The key principle of DeafSpace is not that it is an architectural theory or movement that engages with disability by adjusting buildings and other constructions to the needs of Deaf people, but the creation of an aesthetic emerging from Deaf culture. The motivation of Deaf architecture, as this movement is also called, goes beyond the criteria of adaptation for accessibility and seeks to (re)create "a new *vernacular* architectural sensibility that stands to redefine the way our society will build a more sustainable and livable world."[157]

Hansen Bauman explains that there are several principles that DeafSpace follows to meet the linguistic sensibilities of Deaf people. Some of these include the layout of building spaces and furnishings which are designed to keep clear the visual field of signers which need adequate space between them, normally greater than that used in a spoken conversation, to perceive their movements and facial expressions. This is also achieved by limiting the use of floor-to-ceiling walls only in spaces where they are indispensable and using half walls raised one metre

[154] Bauman, "Listening to Phonocentrism with Deaf Eyes: Derrida's Mute Philosophy of (Sign) Language", 46. Another example given by Bauman is that of literature. He argues that the "unique visual and spatial properties of sign language make it particularly rich medium for poetic image and metaphor". He also refers to the avant-garde movement that have tried to extend the visual and performative aspect of literature, by means of different experimental forms such as performance poetry. H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray, "Deaf Studies in the 21st Century: "Deaf-Gain" and The Future of Human Diversity", David (ed.), *The Disability Reader*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 251.
[155] Hansel Bauman, "DeafSpace: An Architecture toward a More Livable and Sustainable World", in Bauman and Murray (eds.), *Deaf Gain*, 378.
[156] Ibid., 379.
[157] Ibid., 377.

from the floor, which allow visibility of the upper half of the body. Other elements Bauman lists are what he calls “soft interjections”, that is, curved, rather than peaked termination (the peak formed when two walls intersect) of walls in corridors in order to lower the potential collision between people coming from different directions.[158] Additionally, lighting design is a key element since Deaf people, who make a different use of sight than hearing people, need to avoid poor lighting environments which can disrupt visual communication and cause eye fatigue. Just as vision is approached from another dimension, so are acoustics, for it is essential that acoustic reverberations and other sources of background noise which can distract and affect in various ways, sometimes even causing pain, Deaf individuals, especially those using devices like hearing aids or cochlear implants.[159]

This is just a small sample of an extensive, complex and multidisciplinary architectural programme applicable to both public and domestic spaces, that has been developed over the years and applied to buildings already built and not just models. Such is the case of Sorenson Language and Communication Center at Gallaudet University, designed by SmithGroup Architects, recognised as the first building in the United States constructed using DeafSpace principles.[160]

Through both its practical and theoretical activities the DeafSpace architectural movement has unveiled the intricate relation between physical constructions and mental constructions. This architectural movement has demonstrated in a novel way how architecture, and materiality in general, can induce epistemological displacements, and vice versa. To conclude, it is vital to acknowledge how Sign can challenge the phonocentric paradigm that has structured our world’s conception for millennia, foster new and diverse ways of perceiving and inhabiting space, as well as of making use of our senses and bodies. As Sacks acutely suggests, the situation of the Deaf can shed light on to the field of language in general as well as to our understanding of what it is to be a human being.[161]

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[158] Ibid., 386-388.
[159] For an extended study of the designing principles of DeafSpace, which include mobility and proximity; space and proximity; sensory reach; light and colour; and acoustics, see Julia Coolen, “DeafSpace and Disability. A research into DeafSpace design and its peculiarities in relation to other architectural adaptations for disabilities”, MA thesis, (Delft University of Technology, 2021).
[160] Bauman, “DeafSpace: An Architecture toward a More Livable and Sustainable World”, 391.
[161] Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, xi.

I close this chapter with a question posited by Socrates in Plato's *Cratylus.* The philosopher asks what should we do if "we had neither voice nor tongue, and yet wished to manifest things to one another, should we not, like those which are at present mute, endeavour to signify our meaning by the hands, head, and other parts of the body?"[162] The work made by linguistics and cognitive scientists over the last seventy years proves Socrates (Plato) right: any human being, regardless of whether she is born hearing or deaf, can produce and grasp manual language. We have always had the potential to be not the speaking animal, as Aristotle would argue, but the signing animal.[163]

[162] Plato, *Cratylus*, 423. I am quoting the modified translation offered by Oliver Sacks in *Seeing Voices*, 15.
[163] Bauman, "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression", 243.

GESTURE

In his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, Rousseau claims that language was created after two human beings recognised each other as sentient and thinking creatures and needed to externalise their feelings and thoughts. To achieve this, they used their bodies. They produced gestures that were directed to the eyes and created sounds with their mouths that were directed to the ears.[1] Although both means were equally natural forms of interaction, they had specific characteristics. The movements of the body were easier, more spontaneous, varied and depended less on conventions than vocal sounds. The language of voice, on the other hand, proved to be useful not only for communicating external needs with efficacy but also for "enflaming the passions".[2] As time went by, Rousseau explains, the "mute eloquence" of gestures was relegated to the language of voice. Could history have happened differently? What would a counter-narrative to the establishment of the language of voice have been like? He responds: "we might very well never have spoken and would have understood one another perfectly by the language of gesture alone."[3] Moreover, "we might have established societies little different from what they are today, or ones which might even have proceeded to their end better. We might have instituted laws, chosen leaders, invented arts, established commerce, and, in one word, done almost as many things as we do with the aid of speech".[4] To support his argument, Rousseau refers to Jacob Pereyre, a Spanish Jew who taught across France an unprecedented method that allowed the deaf to communicate and integrate into an eminently oral society. His activities were so important during the second half of the eighteenth century that he gained the title of the first teacher of deaf-mutes in France. Based on Pereyre's findings, Rousseau argues that the art of expression does not depend so much on the specific organs used to do so, but on the human faculty that enables human beings to use their bodies in several ways to engage with others.

After sketching this hypothetical alternative to phonocentrism, Rousseau returns to the historical-mythical reflection on the origin of language. He states that as the needs of the human species grew, language changed. It became more accurate and less passionate; feelings were replaced by ideas, and humankind stopped speaking to the heart to address the

[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music*, trans. and ed. John T. Scott, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 289-290.
[2] Ibid., 291.
[3] Ibid., 292.
[4] Ibid.

mind. At the end, Rousseau concludes, "ever since we learned to gesticulate we have forgotten the art of pantomime, for the same reason that with so many fine grammars we no longer understand the symbols."[5]

Rousseau is a representative case of the many authors such as Vico, Condillac and Herder, who during the eighteenth century set themselves the task of studying the origin of language and considered gestures as a key moment in its development. From then on it would become commonplace to argue that human communication began with manual and bodily movements that eventually evolved into vocalisations.[6] According to this evolutionary perspective, gestures would be considered as a first level of communication perfected over time until reaching its best moment with speech. Even today there are a vast number of studies that, based on methods other than those used by Rousseau and his contemporaries, like linguistics, semiotics, ethnography and anthropology, offer an evolutionary narrative of language that moves from gesture to speech.[7]

In the context of the studies that examine the link between language and gesture, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy represents a rare case, since it agrees with the theories that see the expressive movements of the body as the origin of our identification as living and sentient beings, but does not approach this problem from an evolutionary nor a historico-mythical perspective but a phenomenological one. For Merleau-Ponty, unlike Rousseau, gestures were not forgotten after the language of the voice turned into the privileged mode of communication rather, they were ignored even though they represent an essential element in any expressive event. His philosophy can thus be interpreted as an attempt to reinsert gestures as a fundamental component of our existence as social beings. For Merleau-Ponty, before there is a voice that utters speech, there is a body that moves expressively, and it is

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[5] Ibid., 290.

[6] Michael C. Corballis, "Gesture as precursor to speech in evolution", in Cornelia Müller et.al. eds., *Body – Language – Communication. An International Handbook on Multimodality in Human Interaction*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), vol 1, 467.

[7] Some works on the topic include: Gordon W. Hewes "A history of the study of language origins and the gestural primacy hypothesis" in Andrew Lock and Charles Peters (eds.,), *Handbook of human symbolic evolution,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). David F Armstrong, William C. Stokoe and Sherman E., Wilcox, *Gesture and the Nature of Language,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Michael Corballis, *From hand to mouth: The origins of language,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); William C. Stokoe, *Language in hand: Why sign came before speech,* (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2002); Michael Tomasello, *The origins of human communication* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

only due to these expressive kin(aesth)etic dynamics that any form of reasoning and language can emerge later on.

3. THE MOVING BODY, AN AMBIGUOUS MODE OF EXISTENCE

We used to pretend the body was uninvolved, that it remained mute and still while the mind thought. We even imagined that thought, once conceived, transferred itself effortlessly onto the page via a body whose natural role as an instrument facilitates the pen. Now we know that the caffeine we imbibe mutates into the acid of thought which the body then excretes, thereby etching ideas across the page. Now we know that the body cannot be taken for granted, cannot be taken seriously, cannot be taken.

Susan Leigh Foster

In this chapter I analyse Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory as developed in what he calls the pre-reflexive and pre-linguistic level of embodied perception. I first present a general outline of his understanding of phenomenology and the critical stance he takes towards what he calls objective thought. Then, I analyse his conception of the lived body focusing on the role played by movement in both its (kinetic and kinaesthetic dimensions, as well as his understanding of the body as something always already living in the world. At the end, I examine his concepts of ambiguity and reversibility presented in his early and late writings.

PHENOMENOLOGY: CRITIQUE, METHOD, PROMISE

Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory is disseminated throughout his corpus, although one of its most detailed expositions appears in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Published in 1945, the work seeks to explore an apparently simple but elusive phenomenon: the experience of the lived world as it is given in perception before being shaped by conceptual knowledge and scientific abstractions. To achieve this phenomenology of bodily perception, he begins by examining the body as the organ of perception and the condition of possibility for the subject's engagement with the world. The route followed is explained in one of his early unpublished texts in these terms:

> The perceiving mind is an incarnated mind. I have tried, first of all, to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world, going against doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as against those which insist on the autonomy of consciousness. These philosophies commonly forget in favor of a pure exteriority or of a pure interiority—the insertion of the mind in corporeality, the ambiguous relation which we entertain with our body and, correlatively, with perceived things.[8] (*PrP*,3)

For Merleau-Ponty, thus, perception occurs through an embodied or incarnated mind, which is situated in the world and maintains an ambiguous relation both with its surroundings and with the body itself that allows this phenomenon to occur. This characterisation condenses all the elements that I will be analysing throughout the chapter. Let me begin by saying a few lines about the concept of embodied mind.

Merleau-Ponty's idea of the "incarnated mind", which is gradually replaced by that of the embodied subject, is drawn from Gabriel Marcel with whom, unlike other important figures for his phenomenology, such as Husserl or Heidegger, maintains a close personal and intellectual relationship. Marcel used to gather weekly at his Parisian home a group of young intellectuals whom he inspired including Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.[9] This debt to Marcel, which gives a glimpse of the intellectual atmosphere in which some of his most important ideas were conceived, is something Merleau-Ponty referred to on several occasions. This happens, for instance, in his lecture titled *The Philosophy of Existence*, given in Paris in 1959, where he mentions that unlike idealist philosophies, either Cartesian or Kantian, Marcel's "philosophy of existence" placed at the centre of the debate a new concept, that of "incarnation", which brought fresh air to philosophical inquiry[10] (*PE*, 310). Marcel claimed that if the body is attentively considered, it is impossible to acknowledge it as an object, rather it manifests as my body. By conceiving it

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[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work", trans. Arleen B. Dallery, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception. And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

[9] Xavier Escribano, "La ruptura con el objetivismo en Gabriel Marcel y Maurice Merleau-Ponty", *CONVIVIUM. Revista de Filosofía* 24 (2011): 120-121. See also Sonia Kruks, "Marcel and Merleau-Ponty: Incarnation, Situation and the Problem of History", *Human Studies* 10, no. 2 (1987): 225-245

[10] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "La Philosophie de l'Existence", *Dialogue. Canadian Philosophical Review* 5, no. 3 (1966), 307-322 (The quotations from this work are my translation.).

in this way, Merleau-Ponty explains, Marcel placed under scrutiny the sensible world which was often overlooked by philosophy. Whereas previously, particularly under the influence of Kant's legacy, philosophy examined scientific objects, with Marcel the question of the "sensible and carnal presence of the world" posited through the idea of one's own body, became a subject of study for the discipline (*PE*, 312). In this respect, Merleau-Ponty explains that Marcel's philosophy, just like his, had as its problematic the "mysteries of life" and not abstract problems because it was not guided by a clear and unpersonal methodology aimed at solving an issue by considering the collected data but by a direct and intimate relationship with the embodied subject, that ultimately becomes involved in the inquiries posited (*PE*, 312).

In the description of the development of his research on the phenomenology of bodily perception, Merleau-Ponty argues that there have been two doctrines that have failed to grasp the "incarnated mind": empiricism and intellectualism (i.e., rationalism) or, as they will appear in later works, science and philosophy. According to him neither has been able to offer a comprehensive interpretation of the intertwinement between the perceiving embodied subject and the lived world in which she is immersed, because they come "face to face with the real world only at rare intervals" (*PrP*, 121). Despite their many differences, empiricism and intellectualism share an "admirably active, ingenious and bold way of thinking whose fundamental bias is to treat everything as though it were an object-in-general —as though it meant nothing to us and yet was predestined for our own use" (*PrP*, 159). Empiricism, for instance, studies the body as a biological system comprised of different parts related to each other through a mechanical logic. Treated as a "human machine", the body exists in isolation from other things which, if they affect it at all, do so only as sensory stimuli perceived independently of the subject's consciousness and intentionality (*PrP*, 160). Similarly, the world in which the life of the perceiving subject unfolds is conceived as a mere stage, playing a purely contingent role. Intellectualism, in contrast, attempts to grasp lived experience by means of abstract concepts of the transcendental intellect for which everything is constituted in terms of the mental activities of the thinking subject. The philosopher "believes that he knows what he sees better in reflection than he knows in perception", and for that reason considers the lived body as an entity with no inherence in the constitution of consciousness (*PP*, 302). Yet, Merleau-Ponty suggests, if the body is attentively looked at it cannot be

regarded simply as a biological machine nor a pure consciousness but as a "third genre of being", located between the poles of objectivity and subjectivity (*PP*, 366). And since neither science nor philosophy can formulate theories capable of grasping this middle ground, it is necessary to turn towards phenomenology.

"What is phenomenology?" (*PP*, lxx) This question, which is the opening line of the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, can be answered in at least three different ways: phenomenology is a critique of the objective thought that dominates scientific knowledge as well as traditional philosophy; phenomenology is a method for studying the lived world as it is given in its nascent or pre-reflective state; and, finally, phenomenology is a promise of a new way of making sense of our existence. Let us take a closer look at each of these three answers.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology stands in opposition to the different modalities of objective thought that examine the world from an external or third person point of view, allegedly neutral and alien to life's contingency. Described in similar terms to Derrida's critique of metaphysics of presence, objective thought is portrayed as a reflection that operates through dichotomies or mutually exclusive "pure concepts" (*PP*, 50). If Derrida criticises the strategy that places the *phonē* against writing, Merleau-Ponty criticises objective thought for opposing the soul —or mind— to the body. They both criticise the thinking that proceeds by simplifying the real and reducing it to two irreconcilable dimensions that fail to grasp the complexity and dynamism that characterises the real.

In *The Structure of Behaviour*, Merleau-Ponty's doctoral research on perception completed in 1938 and published in 1942, he states that the "truth of dualism" lies in the formula which considers "the soul as the «meaning of the body» [and] the body as the «manifestation of the soul»"; two terms apparently distinct and external to each other, whose relation is thought to be "invariable"[11] (*SB*, 209). For phenomenology, on the contrary, the soul and body can never be clearly distinguished for both require and even get confused with the other. The soul, continues Merleau-Ponty, "if it possesses no means of expression —one should say

[11] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fisher, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1983).

rather, no means of actualizing itself— soon ceases to be anything whatsoever and in particular ceases to be the soul", conversely, "the body which loses its meaning soon ceases to be a living body and falls back into the state of a physio-chemical mass" (*SB*, 209). The task to develop, thus, demands not focusing on unravelling the basic elements of each domain, but rather exploring the points of contact between both. Through such a holistic analysis it is possible to overcome the limitations of objective thought.

If science and philosophy are characterised by their immunity to the lived world, phenomenology, in contrast, echoing Husserl's famous dictum, seeks "to return to the lived world beneath the objective world" (*PP*, 57). Its main aim is to give back "to the thing its concrete physiognomy, to the organisms their proper manner of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its historical inherence" (*PP*, 57). By doing so, phenomenology can grasp "the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us" in its nascent state; a state where the phenomena have not yet undergone a conceptual analysis and the world is still that thoughtless chaotic realm "of which knowledge always *speaks*" and is dependent on (*PP*, lxxii). By describing phenomenology in these terms, Merleau-Ponty modifies the traditional conception that links it to the study of essences, and in turn situates it as a reflection of essences within existence and bodily involvement in the world. He describes this by arguing that although phenomenology is a "transcendental philosophy" it is also a "philosophy for which the world is always "already there" prior to reflection … and whose entire effort is to rediscover this naïve contact with the world in order to finally raise it to a philosophical status" (*PP*, lxxi). In this way, his project becomes an attempt to re-signify transcendental philosophy by bringing it into contact with "the very phenomenon of the real", finding a point of equilibrium where the lived world is grasped without stripping it from its "ambiguity" and constitutive "opacity" (*PrP*, 224). This tension between rational reflection and contingency, structures and crosses the whole of his philosophical enterprise.

Phenomenology, however, is not only an epistemology that stands against objective thought, but also a specific way of approaching the lived world as it is first given in perception. Merleau-Ponty suggests this when mentioning that "[p]henomenology is only accessible to a phenomenological method" (*PP*, lxxi). The method consists, on the one hand, in the suspension of the "intentional threads that connects us to the world" along with any

"consideration of its psychological genesis or of the causal explanations that the scientist, historian, or sociologist might offer"; explanations which tend to strip the world and our involvement with it from its "strange and paradoxical" nature (*PP*, lxxvii, lxxi). On the other hand, and derived from this first condition, the phenomenologist must offer a first person "direct description" of her "experience such as it is", without reflective analysis (*PP*, lxx). The real, says Merleau-Ponty, must be described not "constructed nor constituted", as science and traditional philosophy allegedly do so (*PP*, lxxii).

Although the bracketing of the beliefs —philosophical, scientific as well as everyday ones— and use of simple description to give an account of our being in the world might sound simple, in fact, the method turns out to be extremely difficult and, moreover, never fulfilled in its totality. The suspension or *epoché* is difficult because of the tendency to go beyond the world of perception and start providing analytical deductions, hypothesis and speculations in the way critical thought does. Moreover, it is always partial because the experience being described is always already framed by personal, cultural and historical factors of the perceiver-describer. Being aware of this, Merleau-Ponty claims that the suspension of the "affirmations of the natural attitude" should not pretend to be or aspire to an "an absolute transparency", for that is never attainable (*PP*, lxx). Thus, by touching on this (im)possible task, he anticipates and avoids Derrida's critique which claims that in phenomenology, specifically Husserlian phenomenology, experience is rendered as a self-evident and truthful presence. For Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, "the perceived is composed of lacunae", but this does not demerit or nullify a phenomenological study (*PP*, 11). On the contrary, it requires from the phenomenologist to be more precise and attentive in order to avoid the tendency of objective thought to present seamless objects of study that are artificial and distant from what is experienced in the lived world. With this idea in mind, Merleau-Ponty concludes his methodological explanation arguing that the "most important lesson of the [phenomenological] reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction", and that the philosopher, a "perpetual beginner", is invited to engage in an "ever-renewed experiment" (*PP*, lxxvii).

The characterisation of the phenomenological method as an (im)possible task leads to the third answer to the question announced above. What is phenomenology? Phenomenology is

a promise. From the standpoint of objective thought, phenomenology fails both methodologically and epistemologically. Its method is incapable of carrying out a total suspension of values and is therefore imperfect. Its epistemological value is also uncertain, since phenomenology "does not always encompass answers" (*PP*, 11). Nonetheless, it is precisely because of this "inchoate style" that phenomenology can be transformed into a promise, for it offers the possibility to let the recognition and understanding of things go in order to feel puzzled by what is perceived and moved by this estrangement. This feeling cannot be rationally grasped as something finished or complete, but as something that has the "air" of being always "a work in progress" (*PP*, 419), thus inviting the phenomenologist to continuously reshape and renew her activity. According to Merleau-Ponty this places phenomenology close to art for both exercise the "same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state" (*PP*, lxxxv). And so, like the works of Proust, Valéry or Cézanne, the examples given in *Phenomenology of Perception* (though not the only artists with whom Merleau-Ponty dialogues in his corpus), phenomenology becomes the promise of learning to sense —to perceive, to feel, to signify— the world anew.

A MOVING, EXPRESSIVE AND SITUATED BODY

The first and most basic way in which the phenomenal body is constituted as "my body", to say it with Marcel's terms, as a body of which I can speak in the first person, and not a body in general as objective thought would proceed, is movement. One must start from the fact that life, in any of its forms, is possible because of movement. This idea, which is the foundation of John Bulwer's "Corporeall Philosophy", is exposed by Aristotle when he mentions that motion (*kinêsis*) is the fundamental principle of nature. In his *Physics* it is stated that the things that exist by nature, "each of them has within itself a principle of motion" that triggers their "growth and decrease", enables possible transformations or "alterations", and determines their position "in respect of place".[12] He continues asserting that "nature is a principle of motion and change", and thus it is necessary to "understand what motion is; for if it were unknown, nature too would be unknown".[13] Although it is impossible to revisit

[12] Aristotle, *Physics,* in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* 192b:9–16.
[13] Ibid., 200b: 12–14.

Aristotle's complex theory of motion here, this brief mention serves to introduce a basic principle for the argument I will expose in this chapter: motion is a condition of possibility for life. Without the division of cells, the circulation of blood or the exchange of air, there is no life. Aliveness is a notion founded on movement.[14]

Aristotle's conception of movement applies for any living being in the world. However, in the case of human beings this "primal animateness" or "original kinetic spontaneity" is, as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone points out, complemented by an awareness of the "dynamic modifications" of our own body.[15] Corporeal movement is not just movement in itself, mere locomotion, but a movement we perform and of which we can be are aware of. The term kinaesthesia names this particular first-person bodily sensation and acknowledgement of movement and self-movement, which is distinct from kinetics. Born in the late nineteenth century from the association of the Greek terms *kine*, movement, and *aesthesis*, sensation, kinaesthesia initially referred exclusively to "the muscular sense of the body's movements", but during mid-twentieth century its meaning enlarged to include the idea of one's own awareness of the position and movement of the parts of one's body.[16] One of the first philosophers to make kinaesthesia a matter of reflection was Husserl. In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology,* a text to which Merleau-Ponty had access before its publication when he visited the Husserl Archives in Louvain in April 1939, he argues that we first experience our bodies as a living body and not as a physical object because of movement.[17] Husserl writes:

> In a quite unique way the living body is constantly in the perceptual field quite immediately, with a completely unique ontic meaning, precisely the meaning indicated by the word "organ" (here used in its most primitive sense), [namely, as] that through which I exist in a completely unique way and quite immediately as the ego of affection and actions, [as that] in which I hold sway quite immediately, kinesthetically— articulated into particular organs through which I hold sway, or potentially hold sway, in particular kinestheses corresponding to them. And this "holding-sway," here exhibited as functioning in all perception of

[14] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, 116.
[15] Ibid., 117.
[16] Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*. *Kinesthesia in Performance,* (Abingdon, NY: Routledge, 2011), 74.
[17] Herman Leo Van Breda, "Merleau-Ponty and the Husserl Archives at Louvain, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Texts and Dialogues*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and James Barry, Jr., (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), 155.

> bodies—the familiar, total system of kinestheses available to consciousness—is actualized in the particular kinesthetic situation [and] is perpetually bound to a [general] situation in which bodies appear, i.e., that of the field of perception.[18]

The body, characterised by Husserl as the organ of perception, has as its main distinctive feature the ability to move itself and, more precisely, to have a first-person grasp of its moving. Here, the traditional description of movement as simple displacement of an object from one place to another, is subordinated to the idea of the subject's awareness of the movement of her eyes, looking up or down, and the turn of her head going from one side to another while perceiving the world. For Husserl, therefore, the lived body is a "freely moved sense organ".[19] Merleau-Ponty agrees with Husserl's idea but instead of using the concept of kinaesthesia, he opts for that of the "global movement" of the lived body or simply movement (*PP*, 284).

From the phenomenological perspective, once movement is no longer understood as a simple biological or physical phenomenon, but as a kin(aesth)etic event, it becomes "our point of departure for living in the world and making sense of it".[20] As Sheets-Johnstone explains, motor self-awareness provides us with knowledge of the type of (moving) creature we are, and gives us information about "our ability to make our way in the world — to move knowledgeably in it — and to our knowledge of the world itself."[21] Movement, then, becomes both an ontological tool, as it provides information about the type of living being we are, and an epistemological tool, as it allows us to have a grasp of the milieu we inhabit. In this respect, Sheets-Johnstone claims that even though we may not remember the way in which we first "learned of the world through movement and touch, there is no doubt but that we came to know it first by moving and touching our way through it, in a word, through our tactile-

[18] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 107.
[19] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Second Book, trans. R. Rojcwicz and A. Schuwer, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 61.
For an extended analysis of Husserl's understanding of kinaesthesia see Chapter 3 of Sheets-Johnstone´s *The Primacy of Movement*, pp. 113-152. For a comparative reading Husserl and Sheets-Johnstone´s understanding of kinaesthesia see: Jonathan Owen Clark, "The intrinsic significance of dance: a phenomenological approach", in Jenny Bunker, Anna Pakes and Bonnie Rowell (eds.), *Thinking Through Dance. The Philosophy of Dance Performance and Practices*, (Hampshire: Dance Books Ltd., 2013), pp. 206-214.
[20] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, 118.
[21] Ibid., 52.

kinesthetic bodies."[22] In her description two phenomena that are also present in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology are brought into play: one, the idea of movement as an elementary knowledge about being in the world, and two, the characterisation of this knowledge as the first *logos* obtained by the subject in her experience of the lived world.

For Merleau-Ponty, thus, similar to Sheets-Johnstone position, movement is ontologically bound to the lived body. In *Phenomenology of Perception* it is argued that in order to comprehend this phenomenon in these terms it is necessary to stop thinking of it as if being guided by the "attitude of verification and reflective operations" typical of the mindset of objective thought (*PP*, 251). "If I attempt to gain a clear conception of movement, I fail to understand how it could ever begin for me or be given to me as a phenomenon…. Movement disappears at the very moment when it conforms most closely to the definition given to it by objective thought" (*PP*, 282). Instead of grasping it as an instrument or as a means, as objective thought would do, Merleau-Ponty seeks to understand it as a primordial and non-linguistic engagement of the subject to her vital milieu and as a way to establish a relation with her fellows. Thus, he continues, "beneath the objective thought of movement", which takes for granted the "experience of the world", there is "a pre-objective experience from which [movement] borrows its sense and where movement, still tied to the person who perceives, is a variation of the subject's hold upon his world" (*PP*, 280). In this non-conceptual sense-giving understanding of the phenomenon, movement is no longer or not only physical motion, but a signifying phenomenon with a structuring power which allows the embodied subject to situate herself in a horizon that acquires a certain familiarity because of her bodily motor dynamics. Movement, grasped from the phenomenological standpoint, thus becomes our primordial and most basic "anchorage" in the world (*PP*, 146). While revealing a certain "overall attitude of our existence", movement gains not only a kinaesthetic dimension, but also an expressive one (*PP*, 89), for it manifests the embodied subject's interpretation of her being in the world. An interpretation which does not pass through the conceptual register in order to become meaningful, and thus is based on a *logos* that is different from the rational *logos*.

[22] Ibid.

Most studies on Merleau-Ponty's redefinition of *logos* discuss it in terms of an opposition between a rational *logos* and a sensible *logos*. Such is the case of John Sallis who in his study of the phenomenologist's early works speaks of the sensible world's *logos*. His understanding of this logos is based on the idea that one of the most relevant contributions of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is the integration of the "rational" and the "irrational", in which the latter is "preserved rather than annulled" by the former. In his words: "reason is carried back to its *rootedness* in an opaque and irreducible irrational or pre-rational dimension".[23] It is this dimension that is distinct from that which is governed by logic and the "ideal of rationality" that Sallis links to the sensible.[24] Another case is that of Mari Carmen López Sáenz, who mentions that in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy the word "sense" should be grasped in its two meanings, as sensation and as (logical) meaning, operating simultaneously as a "re-flection": a folding or flexion towards sensibility and, at the same time, a reflection of this process.[25] This "re-reflection", explains López Sáenz, is the work not of an "analytical *logos"* but of one that "inhabits the interiorities of the sensible", a "sentient reason".[26] According to her, Merleau-Ponty's idea of this alternative sensible *logos*, which brings together the workings of the sensible and the intelligible, has its roots in Husserl's "logos of the aesthetic world".[27] Unlike Husserl, the author argues, Merleau-Ponty extends this concept beyond the aesthetic field, making it a central element of the critique against a dualistic interpretation of the experience of the lived world. In line with this interpretation, there is also the thesis of Mauro Carbone who speaks of a "thinking of the sensible" as one of the central themes of the phenomenologist's late philosophy. Although I agree with these authors that in Merleau-Ponty's work it is possible to find a redefinition of rationality that takes into account the knowledge obtained from the experience of the lived body, here I propose to speak not of a sensible *logos* but of a kin(aesth)etic *logos*. This kin(aesth)etic *logos* recognises the sensible

[23] John Sallis, *The Logos of the Sensible World. Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Philosophy*, ed. Richard Rojcewicz, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 7.
[24] Ibid.
[25] López Sáenz, Mari Carmen, "Merleau-Ponty y Zambrano: el "logos" sensible y sentiente", *Aurora: papeles del Seminario María Zambrano* 14 (2013): 105-106. In line with this interpretation, there is also the thesis of Mauro Carbone who speaks of a "thinking of the sensible" as one of the central themes of Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy. See: Mauro Carbone, *The Thinking of the Sensible*. Merleau-Ponty's A-Philosophy, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004).
[26] Ibid. 105.
[27] Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Carins, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 292.

dimension but makes manifest the primacy of movement in the Merleau-Pontian phenomenological proposal.

This brings us to consider an element I mentioned earlier. I said that the phenomenal body is a body that is always in movement because motion is both a condition of possibility for its biological constitution as a living being, and a crucial element for its existential constitution as a being in the world. It is a movement that is not mere locomotion, but a particular way of transforming the landscape into a vital horizon. In this pre-reflexive transformation, movement acquires an expressive dimension for it reveals the particular way in which the subject interprets her lived situation. Merleau-Ponty points towards this problem when he states that the body "is the very movement of expression" and that it "projects significations on the outside" at all times, without being capable of stopping such dynamic (*PP*, 147). Expression, he discusses elsewhere, is "existence in act" (*S*, 79).

The most elementary form of expression of the phenomenal body is perception. For Merleau-Ponty perception is neither the passive reception of external things that affect the body and produce different sensations, nor the abstract reflection or conscious thought about it, but something in between these two poles. Described sometimes in terms of the "inarticulate signification" or the "silent signification", this phenomenon unfolds as a motor, non-conceptual and spontaneous world-structuring activity that shapes the subject's milieu without consciously reflecting on the process[28] (*SW*, 157). One of the examples given to illustrate this understanding of perception goes as follows:

> A woman passing by is not first and foremost a corporeal contour for me, a colored mannequin, or a spectacle; she is "an individual, sentimental, sexual expression". She is a certain manner of being flesh which is given entirely in her walk or even in the simple shock of her heel on the ground —as the tension of the bow is present in each fiber of wood—a very noticeable variation of the norm of walking, looking, touching, and speaking that I possess in my self-awareness because I am incarnate. (*S*, 54)

[28] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Sensible World and the World of Perception. Course Notes from the Collège de France, 1953*, trans., intro. and notes by Bryan Smyth, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020).

Movement theorist Hubert Godard agrees with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception as an expressive event that reveals a certain attitude of the subject's existence. He problematises this almost unnoticed expressive acts by focusing on posture, which contains expressive elements "even before any intentionality of movement or expression".[29] This is because in Godard's theory, similar to what Merleau-Ponty proposes in the quote, movement's relation to weight and, more precisely, to gravity, already makes it a bearer of a "state of mind and a project about the world".[30] To demonstrate this, the theorist gives the example of our ability to recognise someone without seeing them by simply paying attention to the sound of that person while walking and the way in which their gravity shapes their walk. This sound varies from person to person and even within the same individual it is changeable with respect to their emotional state. The volatility of the posture makes something as simple as standing still a form of expression. Like Merleau-Ponty, with his example Godard manages to capture very clearly those small gestures which, because of their subtlety, go unnoticed to the untrained eye in the art of the analysis of perception.

In her book *Pensar con mover* (*Thinking with Movement*), Marie Bardet deepens this interpretation of perception as an expressive act through the figure of the composition. She argues that when we perceive, we cut some figures out of the background rather than others, we pay attention to one sound instead of another, we stress some sensitive points of the body rather than others.[31] Through perception the gaze, hearing and touch *compose* a scenario. Phrased it differently, the senses bring together a unique way of standing in, responding to and merging with the world. For his part, Merleau-Ponty explains the phenomenon of perception by referring to the concept of style. He explains this in an essay of 1952 titled "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence", where perception is discussed as the bodily capacity to immediately organise the milieu inhabited by the subject in such a way that some of its elements "take on the value of dimensions to which from then on we relate all the others" (*S*, 54). Perception, he continues, makes a non-linguistic "coherent deformation" of the world so that it becomes a familiar milieu. This reshaping of the milieu turns this

[29] Hubert Godard, "Le geste et sa perception", in Isabelle Ginot and Marcelle Michel (eds.), *La Danse au XXme siècle*, (Paris: Bordas Editions, 1995), 227.
[30] Ibid., 228.
[31] Bardet, *Pensar con Mover*, 130.

phenomenon into a stylising activity. Perception "stylizes" (*S*, 54). Here style is not thought of as an aesthetic category that would group according to a specific technique some objects, like when referring to the style of Baroque paintings. Style is not something that can be a posteriori attributed to an object. Rather, it operates as a generalised structure of existence. In Linda Singer's words, the Merleau-Pontian style describes "that persistent and characteristic manner of appearance that we recognize in things and other people, without having to constitute it explicitly".[32] Style, thus, lays at the basis of the singular way in which one engages with the world in every activity, from something as elementary as a reflex movement to a conceptually more elaborate activity like speech. All of these events are marked by the signature of the perceiving subject, by her stylising perception. Merleau-Ponty supports this when, speaking about reflex movements, its is stated that even these almost unnoticed movements "have a sense, and the style of each individual is still visible in them just as the beating of the heart is felt even at the periphery of the body" (*PP*, 87).

By claiming that there is a phenomenon of stylisation in every act of perception, perception is thus turned into something creative and not, as empiricism and intellectualism would argue, a neutral apprehension of the world. This allows Merleau-Ponty to bring into the discussion the problem of art, and more specifically, of the style of a painter, described as a certain shaping of the horizon that is identifiable by others but is practically invisible for the perceiving subject (*S*, 53). Style is hidden from the performer because it is not a conceptual activity that can be reflected upon a priori. Rather, it is determined by biological, historical and cultural conditions which affect each individual in a specific manner but which cannot be identified and catalogued in the way that objective thought usually organises its objects of study. What makes a style appear as such, Merleau-Ponty continues, is the fact that it can be recognised by others. It is, therefore, an intersubjective phenomenon. Each of our perceptions is engaged in a shared process of signification for it expresses to both ourselves and others, sometimes in very subtle ways, our unique project of being in the world.[33] By

[32] Linda Singer, "Merleau-Ponty on the concept of style", in Galen A. Johnson (ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader. Philosophy and Painting*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 234.
[33] Carolyne Quinn, "Perception and Painting in Merleau-Ponty's Thought", *Perspectives: International Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 1: 2009, 16.

conceptualising every kin(aesth)etic sense-giving event in terms of a social process, we are led to consider another key element of the concept of the lived body: its situatedness.

Merleau-Ponty refers to this by drawing on Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world, which describes Dasein's ways of existing. As explained in *Being and Time*, being-in-the-world is not a "property" of Dasein, which it can sometimes have or not, nor a relationship towards the world that it can chose to establish or not, rather, it is Dasein's ontological structure formed by an indissoluble reciprocity between being, the world —understood both as the totality of entities that form the "world", as well as the factual "place" where Dasein unfolds itself—, and the relation of being-in or its continuous involvement with other entities.[34] For Merleau-Ponty this concept is key for it allows us to break with a dualistic conception of the subject as something that defines itself in opposition to the world and its objects. By being *in* the world, Dasein is already bound to its milieu and to other beings, hence the relevance of the "in" of the formula. In the appropriation and reinterpretation of the Heideggerian formula, Merleau-Ponty emphasises this sense of relationality by saying that "the body is the vehicle of being in the world and, for a living being, having a body means being united with a definite milieu, merging with certain projects, and being perpetually engaged therein" (*PP*, 84). The encounter with the world is not that of being one in front of the other, but rather of co-existing: the world ceases to be "the other," alien to myself and my bodily existence, and so blurs the dividing line between one and the other. This intertwining between the body and the world, is something upon which Merleau-Ponty will insist throughout his overture.

Unlike Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty's understanding of being in the world is bound to the lived body shaped both by its own sense of being, first suggested by movement, as well as by the sense of belonging gained in relation to others. It is a body in the world both in the sense of a milieu which it inhabits, but also an existential one in which it is linked to other beings and engaged in different projects. This involvement or, to use a term Merleau-Ponty refers to, this "ensemble," is precisely what prevents the body from being thought under the logic of subject and object or under that of pure exteriority and pure interiority (*PP*, 107).

[34] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §18.

Furthermore, in his reading of the Heideggerian formulation Merleau-Ponty describes this phenomenon as a twofold "movement of being in and toward the world" (*PP*, 81). A movement that involves two different though related activities, one of "solicitation" and another of "projection", that constitute the subject's responsiveness to and engagement with her vital milieu. The first, solicitation, is related to the demands that the situation imposes on the embodied subject and involves an answer on her side. It is, in other words, a response to the call of the world. Projection, on the other hand, describes the bodily power according to which specific situations are created or "conjured" (*PP*, 115). The body shapes something as a situation, it generates a horizon of meaning, through projection.[35] These two processes are performed simultaneously, almost unnoticedly, constituting a "sort of inner diaphragm" that shows what our "perceptions will be able to aim at in the world, the zone of our possible operations, and the scope of our life" (*PP*, 81). The metaphor of the sketch is also used to describe this twofold process of being in and towards the world: it is something that "sketches out a certain manner of taking a position" on the part of the subject with respect to her milieu (*PP*, lxxxiii). And yet, this "diaphragm" or "sketch" is never "accomplished in the transparency of a consciousness", it appears just as a "latent knowledge that my body has of itself" (*PP*, 81, 241). In the re-examination of this opaque, latent and bodily knowledge we are led to a redefinition of the word "sense". The sense offered by this meaningful activity is not associated with a reflexive and conscientious intellectual elaboration, but rather to a bodily sense framed within and determined by the kin(aesth)etic *logos*.

Just as movement is not understood as a mere physical or biological phenomenon, so sense is not reduced to an operation limited to an event developing exclusively within the horizon of rationality. To explain this enlarged "new "sense" of the word sense", Merleau-Ponty turns towards art (*PP*, 148).

> It is well known that a poem, if it carries a primary signification that can be translated into prose, also leads a secondary existence in the mind of the reader

[35] Gabrielle Benette Jackson refers to these two processes of solicitation and projection as dynamics that occur not in this perceptual dimension, but in more complex motor activities, which he calls "skilful activities". It seems to me that her reading, however, can also apply to this argument about the constitutive elements of the Merleau-Pontian concept of being in the world. Gabrielle Benette Jackson, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of motor intentionality: Unifying two kinds of bodily agency", *European Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 2: (June 2018), 763-779.

> that defines it as a poem. Just as speech does not merely signify through words, but also through accent, tone, gestures, and facial expressions, and just as this supplemental sense reveals not so much the thoughts of the speaker, but rather the source of his thoughts and his fundamental manner of being, so too poetry – while it may be accidentally narrating and signifying – is essentially a modulation of existence…. In this sense, like every work of art, the poem too exists in the manner of a thing and does not eternally subsist in the manner of a truth. (*PP*, 152)

The knowledge provided by the body in this pre-reflective world-shaping perceptual activity is, like the poem, just a certain "manner of being", a "modulation of existence" for which the classical concepts of signification and truth do not operate (*PP*, 152). The body, like the work of art, *secretes* sense and provides an engagement with the world that is "more ancient than thought" (*PP*, 265). In this regard, Andrea Potestà explains that for Merleau-Ponty before "logical-categorical signification" there is a "gestural expressivity".[36] Here gesture is not grasped as an incomplete or impoverished meaning, as most of the phonocentric descriptions of the term that figure it as something that has not been yet expressed in a verbal discourse, maintain. Rather, gesture reveals another relation to sense that does not go through the register of linguistic language. In its specificity, gesture is not a deficient signification, "gesture is the *other* of the word and not its *lack*".[37]

Potestà's interpretation interests me because it allows us to understand what I have called here the expressive movement of the body in terms of gesture. In most of the theoretical discussions on this issue it is common to find a distinction between bodily movement and gesture. They both refer to the body's sense-giving faculty, but the former is thought as a more encompassing phenomenon while the latter is often restricted to the expressive motor dynamics of the upper limbs of the body and the face which, as David Michael Levin explains, explicitly intend to communicate "specific figures of meaning".[38] Here I propose to avoid such a characterisation for two reasons. First, because implicit in it is the idea that gesture is a pantomimic action that emits a message that has been simply translated from a vocal to a bodily medium. This pantomimic regime assumes that the telos of the gesture is the word.

[36] Potestà, *El pensamiento del grito*, 69. See also Chapter X "Merleau-Ponty: Visión, cuerpo, expression", of Potestà *Pensar el arte. Un recorrido histórico por las ideas estéticas*. Santiago de Chile: ChileEdiciones U.C, 2019.
[37] Ibid.
[38] David Michael Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being. Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 93.

Contrary to this understanding I propose to think of an idea of language that does not seek to transform all human experience into words. The second reason why I distance myself from this conception that distinguishes bodily movements from gestures is because in Merleau-Ponty these two motor and sense-giving dynamics function as synonyms in that for him, as stated before, any movement of the body is already an expressive movement. They form part of what he describes as a "global [expressive] movement" (*PP*, 284).

Now, as already discussed, for Merleau-Ponty the meaning offered by a gesture is not, as the pantomime regime assumes, something that appears instead of a verbal message, something that is supplanting the place of words, but a meaning with a sensitive and bodily basis whose meaning is not resolved in the horizon of rationality. This does not prevent, as will be seen in the following chapter, that there are indeed gestures that end up mixing with words. There are occasions when the language of gesture and the language of voice meet. But for Merleau-Ponty it is important to identify the first of these two languages and to constitute it as something distinct from and not subordinated to the phonetic regime. In this regard, as Noland explains, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology gestures are the "inescapable medium in which animate forms navigate environments and enact intentions".[39] There is thus in his philosophy a primacy of movement that lies at the heart of his redefinition of the embodied subject. Merleau-Ponty recognises movement not only as a central element of the experience of the lived world, but as a condition of possibility of being in the world. At the end, perception, movement and expression are intertwined in such a way that it is impossible to clearly distinguish the boundaries between them.[40] These domains of the life of the embodied subject co-implicate each other.

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[39] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 56.

[40] For Bergson, similar to Merleau-Ponty, perception is characterised in terms of movement. In *Matter and Memory,* he refers to this phenomenon as the function of the internal movements that occur in the brain. Bergson writes: "My perception is, then, a function of these molecular movements; it depends upon them. But how does it depend upon them? It will perhaps be said that it translates them, and that, in the main, I represent to myself nothing but the molecular movements of cerebral substance". Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 22. Moreover, in *The Creative Mind* he radicalises his stance towards movement and speaks of it as a "vital force". See: Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2013), 53. In *Being and Motion* Nial characterises Bergson as a precursor in the ontology of motion. Against the readings that emphasise Bergson's vitalist proposal or that describe him as a philosopher of time and duration, he proposes to think of him as a philosopher of motion. See: Nial, *Being and Motion*, 40-43. There is another coincidence between Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, since for former similar to what is proposed in *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body is a centre of action that receives and returns movements. As Bergson explains in *Matter and Memory*, the body is

To conclude this section, let us return to Rousseau's *Essay* glossed above. For Rousseau, as it can be recalled, gestures and bodily-based sense-giving activities were originated at the same time as speech, however, over time the language of voice was preferred and gestures were relegated to a second plane, eventually falling into alleged disuse. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology offers a counter-narrative: it is not that gestures were a fundamental part of the inaugural scene of language and then disappeared. For him, gestures never disappeared, they were simply overlooked. The moving body projects a sense that exists at every moment but which, precisely because of the preponderance that has been given to the language of the voice, has been ignored. The *epoché* and its meticulous and attentive look, in its quest to study the way in which things appear to us in their nascent state, allows us to rediscover bodily expressive movements in this way and place them as a sense-giving phenomena once again.

AN AMBIGUOUS MODE OF EXISTENCE

Two years after the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Fernand Alquié published an article titled "A Philosophy of Ambiguity", where he argued that Merleau-Ponty's most substantial contribution to philosophy is the attempt to overcome dualism by breaking the subject-object dichotomy. This becomes possible through his concept of the lived body, which appears as a third term that reveals a fundamental characteristic of human existence, its ambiguity.[41] Alquié's reading is accurate but not new. Merleau-Ponty touches this point on several occasions in *Phenomenology of Perception,* like when he claims that "ambiguity is essential to human existence, and everything that we live or think always has several senses" (*PP*, 172). Or elsewhere when he says that "life is undeniably ambiguous, and there is never any way to know the truth meaning of what we do. Indeed, perhaps our actions have no single true meaning"[42] (*SNS*, 34).

"the very materiality of our existence…, a set of sensations and movements", with the power to influence matter through movement as well as to allow matter to influence it (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 20). The figure of Bergson in the Merleau-Pontian corpus has an ambivalent position, for if in *Phenomenology of Perception* he is criticised for his position on intuition, in his later writings Merleau-Ponty vindicates his work. Part of Merleau-Ponty's re-reading and re-evaluation of Bergson's work is explained by him in "La Philosophie de l'Existence", as well as in "Bergson in the making", a 1959 essay compiled in *Signs*, pp. 182-191.

[41] Ferdinand Alquié, "Une Philosophie de l'ambiguité. L'Existensialisme de Maurice Merleau-Ponty", *Fontaine* II, no. 59 (April, 1947), pp. 47-70.

[42] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel", in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans., Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

Alquié's text is relevant nonetheless because, as Hugh J. Silverman claims, it established the "locus of ambiguity" within the commentators of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology.[43] This locus was followed, for example, by Alphonse de Walhens in the preface to the second French edition of *The Structure of Behavior*. Here De Walhens discusses the problem of perception as ambiguous for it is not pure consciousness nor pure experience, but a merge of these two dimensions effectuated in the primordial layer of "natural and ingenuous experience" that provides the basis for all rationality.[44] Moreover, De Waelhens' reading provides a detailed discussion comparing Merleau-Ponty's ambiguous stance to the Heideggerian concept of being-in-the-world, as well as the Sartean duo of in-itself and for-itself. De Waelhens claims that although Heidegger and Sartre strive to think outside of dualism, they are overcome by idealism because they fail to consider the presence of the lived body in their projects. His interpretation, however, falls short in examining the of the role of ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. To give an account of this encompassing sense of ambiguity and the fundamental role it plays in his philosophy, I propose to review the arguments around the touching-touched hand in some moments of his corpus. Originally taken from Husserl's *Ideas II*, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, the scene is discussed in the following terms:

> I can palpate my right hand with my left while my right hand is touching an object. The right hand, as an object, is not the right hand that does the touching. The first is an intersecting of bones, muscles, and flesh compressed into a point of space; the second shoots across space to reveal the external object in its place. Insofar as it sees or touches the world, my body can neither be seen nor touched. What prevents it from ever being an object or from ever being "completely constituted" is that my body is that by which there are objects. It is neither tangible nor visible insofar as it is what sees and touches. (*PP*, 94)

Almost fifteen years later, in 1959, the subject appears again in an essay titled "The Philosopher and His Shadow" where it is claimed that when "I touch myself touching" my body effectuates "a sort of reflection" that forbids any "unidirectional relationship of the one who perceives to what he perceives" (*S*, 166). This relationship is reversed, for the touched hand becomes the touching hand and, ultimately, the body becomes a subject-object.

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[43] Silverman, *Inscriptions. After Phenomenology and Structuralism*, 64.

[44] Alphonse De Waelhens, "A Philosophy of the Ambiguous", in Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, xxv.

Most of the readings of this scene suggest that through the figure of the touching-touched hand Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that the body is both an instable entity being simultaneously active and passive, moving from the interior and the exterior with no clear boundaries between these domains. In line with Alquié's locus, these readings often focus on Merleau-Ponty's critique of dualism, especially the Cartesian version articulated around the distinction of the body and the mind. It is said that for Descartes the human being is a composite of thinking substance and extended substance, or *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, where the first can discern between good and bad and perform intellectual roles, while the second one, identified with the body, is determined by the environment and is reduced to mechanical laws. Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty's understanding of dualism in general, and particularly of the variant identified with Descartes, is much more complex than this caricatured idea. Descartes, who was not only a philosopher but also a scientist, two facets that Merleau-Ponty examines, is one of his most important interlocutors, but also one of the most complex. His reading is meticulous and subtle, as, for example, when it is argued that Descartes had already managed to glimpse something related to what he will later identify and thematise precisely in terms of the ambiguous mode of existence of the embodied subject:

> The experience of one's own body, then, is opposed to the reflective movement that disentangles the object from the subject and the subject from the object, and that only gives us thought about the body or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality. Descartes was well aware of this, for in a famous letter to Elizabeth he distinguishes between the body as it is conceived through its use in life and the body as it is conceived by the understanding. (*PP*, 205)[45]

[45]In her essay "Un uppercut al dualismo" ("An uppercut to dualism"), based on the analysis of five letters written between Descartes and Elisabeth of Bohemia between May and June 1642, Marie Bardet analyses two elements that appear in this quotation: one, the relationship between these two figures, emphasising the important role played by Elisabeth of Bohemia as an active interlocutor of the philosopher; and two, the idea that Descartes has a more complex conception of the body than is suggested by Cartesian dualism. Similarly, Jean-Luc Marion proposes a vindication of Descartes in his re-reading of the philosopher where he examines his theory of morals and passions from a holistic perspective that opposes the misinterpretation of his work. See: Marie Bardet, "Un uppercut al dualismo" en Elisabeth de Bohemia y René Descartes, *Correspondencia*, trans. Pablo Ires, ed. Marie Bardet, (Buenos Aires, Cactus, 2018). Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Passive Thought. The Myth of Cartesian Dualism*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

The problem, however, is that even if Descartes glimpsed these two dimensions, his overall concept of the body remained subordinated to the idea of God as the "rational author of our factual situation" laying behind the subject thus making incapable of recognising "our irrational condition" (*PP*, 205). Hence, he manages to suggest something ambiguous about the subject's bodily condition but falls short in pursuing this idea. Something which, later, Merleau-Ponty, is capable of radicalising.

The touching-touched hand scene, however, triggers a deeper discussion than that focused on the critique of Cartesian dualism. If the scene is traced in some of Merleau-Ponty's texts, a radicalisation of some of the elements already suggested in *Phenomenology of Perception* can be observed. Such is the case of the alignment of the body's unity with the dynamic of reversibility. This problem appears in "Eye and Mind", an essay written in 1955, dedicated to Cézanne's painting.

> The body's animation is not the assemblage or juxtaposition of its parts. Nor is it a question of a mind or spirit coming down from somewhere else into an automation —which would still imply that the body itself is without an inside and without a "self." A human body is present when, between the see-er and the visible, between touching and touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand a kind of crossover occurs, when the spark of the sensing/sensible is lit (*PrP*, 163).

The description of the body as something animate brings to the discussion an argument previously drawn in relation to the characterisation of movement, in its most primary biological sense, as that which gives life to a body and transforms it into a lived entity. Here Merleau-Ponty adds to the biological description the phenomenological finding: what makes a lived *and* expressive body appear as such is the never coinciding intersection between the touching and the touched hand. In *Phenomenology of Perception* this non-coinciding crossover is described in the terms of a "thickness of being" (*PP*, 211) and a "thickness of the world" (*PP*, 311) which "prevents my experience from being clear for itself" (*PP*, 224). This thickness is what makes it impossible for the body to be defined in terms of an object or a subject. It is not a presence that can be categorised one way or the other. This shared thickness of being and the world is also what prevents us from making a clear and stable distinction between these two domains for they are co-implicated.

The metaphor of thickness appears again in *The Visible and the Invisible*, a manuscript and working notes published posthumously in which Merleau-Ponty was working at the time of his death in 1961. Here he speaks of the "thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing"[46] (*VI*, 135). This characterisation brings into the discussion the theme of the flesh, which is central in the later texts and marks a shift in his philosophy towards a more radical stance on existence. Merleau-Ponty himself says so in a working note written in the late 50s where he mentions the necessity of bringing the results of *Phenomenology of Perception* to "ontological explicitation" of the sensible experience (*VI*, 183).

In the main manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible*, drafted between 1959 and 1960, flesh is understood not as a physical entity but, as Emmanuel Alloa rightly puts it, as the "ontological fabric of the visible world."[47] This idea was already suggested in *Phenomenology of Perception* when we read that there is an "atmosphere of generality" that connects one's own body to other bodies that coexists in the world (*PP*, 223).[48] However, in the posthumous manuscript Merleau-Ponty radicalises his position.

> When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible

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[46] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968). According to several scholars the main text of *The Visible and the Invisible*, know as the manuscript, which is then followed by the working notes, was worked over at length. Claude Lefort argues that it is possible to infer from the multiple erasures and corrections of the text, that it was probably rewritten several times. Nonetheless, we can only make hypothesis regarding what would be like if it had reached its definitive state. It is therefore necessary to treat the text with certain reservations, given its character as an unfinished work. See: Claude Lefort, "Editor's Foreword" and "Editorial Note", in Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. xi-xxxiii, and xxxiv-xxxix, respectively.

[47] Emmanuel Alloa, *Resistance of the Sensible World. An Introduction to Merleau-Ponty*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 13.

[48] A considerable number of scholars tend to divide his thought into three stages: a phenomenological one, with *Phenomenology of Perception* as the most important work, another of a rather structuralist character, when he integrates his interpretation of Saussure into the question of language in texts dated in the 1950s, and finally, a third stage which they usually describe as an "ontological turn". In this last stage, issues such as reversibility, which I discuss here, are essential. I am interested in stressing this because it seems to me that throughout the Merleau-Pontian corpus, especially in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, there is already an ontology implicit in his phenomenology. Although in "The Eye and Mind" and later in *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty addresses in detail the ontological implications of some of his ideas developed in earlier works, it seems to me that these can be traced back to earlier texts and thus offer a less segmented reading of his philosophy.

> sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible. (*VI*, 136)

The sensible sentient body becomes a case study or archetype that illustrates the workings of the flesh, depicting the ontological binding or intertwinement between subject and object whose defining trait is its characterisation as a reversible phenomenon. In Merleau-Ponty's words: "I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh" (*VI*, 135). To avoid falling into an objectivist or subjectivist understanding of the flesh, he proposes to think of it as an element. "The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element," in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being" (*VI*, 139).

At this point I would like to make a detour and turn to Derrida because, framed within his overall critique of phenomenology, he discusses the touching-touched scene which considers to be symptomatic of a type of metaphysical reflection that leads back to concepts like essence, origin and presence. Derrida addresses this in *On Touching —Jean Luc Nancy*, a book that reviews the role of touch in the history of Western philosophy by analysing diverse authors like Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty, among many others. Here it is stated that most philosophies of touch presuppose, in a greater or lesser extent, some kind of intuitionism, a "haptological intuitionism", that amounts to an immediacy or self-presence[49] (*T*, 121). The allegation against Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of ambiguity is that it implies a defence of self-presence and a desire for coincidence rather than non-coincidence.[50] Yet, there are passages in *The Visible and The Invisible*, the work to which Derrida mostly refers, that would seem to indicate the opposite. Here is one example that is worth quoting extensively:

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[49] Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 144-145.

[50] Jack Reynolds, "Touched by Time: Derrida's Engagement with Merleau-Ponty in *Le Toucher*", *SOPHIA* 47 (2008), 314.

> Already my body as stage director of my perception has shattered the illusion of a coinciding of my perception with the things themselves. Between them and me there are henceforth hidden powers, that whole vegetation of possible phantasms which it holds in check only in the fragile act of the look. No doubt, it is not entirely my body that perceives: I know only that it can prevent me from perceiving, that I cannot perceive without its permission; the moment perception comes my body effaces itself before it and never does the perception grasp the body in the act of perceiving. If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand. But this last-minute failure does not drain all truth from that presentiment I had of being able to touch myself touching: my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement, its sensory-motor circuits, the return ways that control and release movements, it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives. (*VI*, 8-9)

Both hands, says Merleau-Ponty, never reach coincidence. The left one, is "always on the verge" of touching the right one, but they never reach coincidence, that instant "eclipses at the moment of realization" (*VI*, 147). He insists: "there is not a coinciding" but a "privative noncoinciding", a "divergence" (*VI*, 125). This divergence framed by the "hidden powers" and "possible phantasms" of the body constitutes the experience of ambiguity as a mode of existence that I have traced in this section (*VI*, 9). Derrida, however, disagrees with this reading. According to him, Merleau-Ponty's position on the non-coinciding experience of the touching-touched reveals a twofold confusion: a confused reading of Husserl's account on touch, as presented in *Ideas II*, from where Merleau-Ponty takes and expands the scene; and a confusion of non-coincidence *with* coincidence, that ends up prioritising the latter (*T*, 194-5). Regarding the latter, the ultimate expression of this preference for coincidence would be precisely the notion of the primordial, gestural and un-reflected life in which sense is secreted through one's own experience of the lived world without a priori linguistic conventions. My interpretation opposes Derrida's. As I have discussed here by insisting on the theme of ambiguity, Merleau-Ponty´s understanding of the embodied subject is framed by the idea that this living being, precisely because it is a living *and* situated being, never manages to reveal itself in its totality. Hence the importance of his concept of ambiguity. To account for this, he uses several metaphors: thickness, lacuna, opacity, hollows of silence, and so on. These metaphors name a process of non-coincidence that occurs even in the pre-linguistic

dimension that Derrida deploys. Even there, opacity persists. The "picture of the world", it is claimed in *Phenomenology of Perception,* "will always include this lacuna that we are and by which the world itself comes to exist for someone" (*PP*, 215). The reason for lack of transparency has to do with the fact that there is always a detour through the materiality of the world, a detour through exteriority, that prevents coincidence from taking place. Thus, although Merleau-Ponty relies on concepts that have a significative metaphysical weight and history, his reading of ambiguity as a constitutive feature of the subject, prevents him from thinking these concepts in terms of a metaphysics of presence.[51] At this point, a comparison can be drawn: if metaphysics defends the figure of the subject capable of hearing herself speak in her solitary mental life; if metaphysics assumes the idea of a master subject in which there is a coincidence of consciousness with itself; if in metaphysics it is not necessary to utter words because they are self-evident and intelligible in the mental life, that is to say, they are "pronounced" and understood immediately without the need to pass through the exteriority of the world alien from the inner workings of the mind, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology another figure is suggested. His study on the body shows that for the embodied subject that moves in her being in the world this coincidence of consciousness with itself never takes place, it is "always imminent and never realized in fact" (*VI*, 147). The embodied subject is therefore a being that, before identifying itself as a stable entity, is confused with the world; a being whose thickness, shared with the thickness of the world, compromises any attempt at transparency. In the following sections I will continue to build on the idea of the subject that can be inferred from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and from a philosophy that defends the primacy of movement. The aim will be to think of a subject always thrown into the world, confused with it, exposed to the exteriority of the landscape. A subject who is already always in movement and who has the capacity not only to move herself as well as the things in his vital horizon, but also to let her milieu move her on the physical plane, but above all on the affective and existential plane.

Before concluding this section, I return to the closing remarks of *The Visible and the Invisible* where Merleau-Ponty terminates his analysis of the flesh with a theme that leads us back to the opening question of this chapter, the question around the origin of language. Here it is

[51] Nancy J. Holland, "Merleau-Ponty on Presence: A Derridian Reading", *Research in Phenomenology* 16, (1986): 115.

stated that the crossing point between the touching and the touched, the seeing and the seen, is the point where perception emerges. Perception understood as the pre-objective and non-linguistic sense-giving event triggered by the movements of the body in its being in the world. Now, for Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenon of reversibility that sustains "mute perception" is the same as the one that constitutes the phenomenon of language (*VI*, 155). In a sense, he argues, "if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it" (*VI*, 155). This "mute world" to which Merleau-Ponty refers is the aphonic dimension that I have traced throughout this chapter. It is here that Merleau-Ponty locates the origin of language. And this drives us back to Rousseau's *Essay* glossed above. For Merleau-Ponty, the problem of the opening scene of language must be posed from this non-reflexive background in which the body becomes one with the world but without completely fusing with it. According to him, it is not that there was first a gestural dimension that was overcome with the advent of speech, but that speech itself is born from and within the motor, non-linguistic and ambiguous embodied experience of the lived world.

In what follows I continue the analysis of Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory by focusing no longer on the perceptive level, but on other expressive dimensions with greater "stylistic" weight. I begin first with an examination of the reflex movements of the body, then move on to habitual movements, then to what Merleau-Ponty calls "phonic gestures", and end with a reflection on gestures in art.

4. LANGUAGE EMBODIED IN GESTURES

Is there, we ask, some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and, if so, could this be made visible to the eye? Is there any characteristic which thought possesses that can be rendered visible without the help of words?

Virginia Woolf

In the previous chapter I examined the genesis of expressive bodily movements by focusing on subtle, almost imperceptible sense-giving events like perception. Here I continue in the same direction analysing increasingly complex forms of gestural expression by identifying two broad categories of this phenomenon present in Merleau-Ponty's theory: one related to everyday gestures such as reflex movements, bodily patterns or habits and words, these last ones described in terms of "verbal gestures" insofar as they are originated by the corporeal arrangement of the phonatory apparatus and then, only then, transformed into a coherent and linguistically meaningful sound; the other category related to aesthetics and more specifically to the role of gesture in painting. I conclude this chapter posing a series of questions about the place of dance in Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. To do so, I take up the characterisation of dance in *Phenomenology of Perception* as a habitual motor movement, and compare it with the expressive, poetic and creative physiognomy that, in opposition, is attributed to painting. The aim in this last section is to discuss why, in a theory with such a robust kin(aesth)etic basis, dance has such a marginal role.

This chapter takes up some of the elements already mentioned in the previous sections of this thesis like the idea of the kin(aesth)etic *logos*, as well as the discussion around gesture understood not from the pantomimic regime that thinks of it as the caricature of a verbal message represented through bodily movements. I am interested in insisting that for Merleau-Ponty there is a form of signification that does not need to be translated into words in order to be understood. Gestures do not have as its ultimate purpose to become a verb. Nonetheless, there may be cases, as in the case of phonetic gestures, where there is a gesture-word relation. These gestures represent only one modality within the Merleau-Pontian

encompassing gestural theory. As I will discuss here, Merleau-Ponty's contribution to the critique of the phonocentric conception of language is the recognition of expressive and meaningful kin(aesth)etic activities that does not develop within the linguistic horizon. Finally, it remains to be said that the different modalities of gestures analysed in this chapter have been taxonomically divided for study purposes, but in everyday life they coexist and are performed simultaneously most of the time.

EVERYDAY STYLISING MOVEMENTS

The body, it is said in *Phenomenology of Perception,* is the "very movement of expression" (*PP*, 147). It creates a myriad of motor sense-giving acts that go from almost imperceptible ones, like the simple posture of a person which reveals a certain "attitude" or "anchoring" of this person to her vital milieu, to complex conceptual constructions (*PP*, 316, 103). Merleau-Ponty gives some examples of the gestures he has in mind when he argues that there are "gestures necessary for the conservation of life", gestures that shift from "their literal to their figurative sense" offering a "new core of signification through them", and gestures whose signification "cannot be reached by the natural means of the body" and thus rely on external instruments such as a canvas and paint to achieve the expressive task (*PP*, 147).

Despite the variety and significant differences among the many expressive bodily movements considered under the term "gesture", they all share a constitutive ambiguity because they cannot be strictly defined as natural or cultural, instinctive or social, necessary or conventional. They all have, in different degrees, both components. A gesture is "always something other than what it is … always rooted in nature at the very moment it is transformed by culture; it is never self-enclosed but never transcended" (*PP*, 205). Moreover, their diffuse ontology makes it impossible to conceptually delimit their boundaries. In *Agency and Embodiment*, Noland argues that this broad conception of gestures is both, a strength and a weakness of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It is a strength because by rejecting the distinction between the natural and the cultural, Merleau-Ponty is able to integrate into his gestural theory expressions commonly associated with the idea of gesture, such as frowning, but also others that would not normally be considered as such, like the case of words. This, says Noland, gives his phenomenology its richness and relevance as a way for thinking about

the nature of the gestural in today's context.[52] Yet, it is precisely this variety, and more specifically, the refusal to mark differences between the types of gestures within the broad spectrum considered, that ultimately fails to convince. Noland reproaches Merleau-Ponty because in his attempt to make "a kind of metaphorical traffic between registers", blurring the boundaries between the gestures, the force of logical argumentation is somewhat lost.[53]

As Noland rightly points out, in Merleau-Ponty there is no explicit definition of the concept of gesture. The reason of this has to do with the aim of his study, which is not to make a theoretical development of gestures and the different categories or types into which they can be divided, but to limit to a first-person description of experience as it is first given to perception, avoiding falling into the reflective analysis typical of objective thought (*PP*, lxx). The phenomenological nature of the work demands, as is announced in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, to limit oneself to the description of the phenomenon. While I agree with Noland that this encompassing proposal makes it difficult to think of gestures as varied as a reflex movement or a painter's brushstroke, beyond this potential taxonomic limitation, the value of Merleau-Ponty's theory lies in the critique of the linguistic determination of both rationality and language. By bringing to the fore the idea of a kin(aesth)etic *logos*, first given in world-structuring phenomena as simple as perception, he manages to offer a counter position to the dominant phonocentric paradigm and thus allows us to think of ways in which language can be defined not as an exclusively orally produced linguistic phenomenon.

Even though Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly offer clear guidelines to distinguish the different types of gestures he has in mind, there are two main categories that can be suggested: one pertaining to everyday gestures, the other to gestures in aesthetic contexts. In the case of the first, it is possible to infer some specific modalities by relying on the structure of *Phenomenology of Perception*. We would have first reflex gestures ("The Body as Object and Mechanistic Physiology"), followed by gestures dealing with habit and skill acquisition (Chapter 3. "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility"), and then words

[52] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 61.
[53] Ibid.

(Chapter 6. "The Body as Expression, and Speech").[54] The distinction between these different modalities, as aforementioned, corresponds to an analytic demand and in no way suggests a kind of gradual development that would culminate in the words. The second broad category that I propose to analyse here focuses on gestures in aesthetic context, mainly in painting, the field to which Merleau-Ponty dedicates most of his writings on art.

REFLEXES

In classical biological theories, it is explained in *The Structure of Behavior*, a reflex is often described as an action performed in response to a stimulus which causes, by means of a chemical or physical variation, a specific response (*SB*, 9). Regarded as unplanned and automatic, traditional reflex theories portray the image of a passive body corresponding to a mechanistic view typical of objective thought in which neither the subject nor her circumstances has any influence whatsoever on the event. Merleau-Ponty criticises and aims to overthrow this conception by turning to the work of the psychiatrist and neuropsychologist Kurt Goldstein's works, especially his critique of psychology's dualistic conception of the subject that depicts it as an being with two different dimensions, a physical and a psychical.[55] In *The Organism*, published in 1934, Goldstein proposes a new way of thinking of the human organism in which the somatic and the psychic are taken as two complimentary spheres of its living structure, both harmoniously integrated. He calls this the "holistic method".[56] Informed by his training as neurologist and especially by his practice diagnosing and treating brain-injured patients, Goldstein rejects the artificial and compartmentalised classical perspective in the light of an encompassing approach aware of the patients' physical injuries, their

[54] This categorisation is proposed by Noland in *Agency and Embodiment*, 57.

[55] Like Merleau-Ponty, Georges Canguilhem was also influenced by Kurt Goldstein whose work was fundamental for his study of reflexes. In *The Formation of the Concept of Reflex*, his doctoral thesis submitted in 1955, Canguilhem provides a conceptual history of the notion of the reflex. Here, similar to Merleau-Ponty, he criticises the understanding of the term that portrays the image of the organism as mechanistically conditioned by the milieu. Canguilhem claims that the organism should not be conceived as an isolated entity responding to an external milieu through reflexes. Its behaviour, moreover, should not be regarded as a set of reactions or "involuntary actions" to the environment mechanically regulated, but as Goldstein suggests, as something bound to the surroundings in which the organism lives. In his thorough study, Canguilhem also rejects the thesis according to which Descartes was the inventor of the concept of the reflex, and attributes this to Thomas Willis. See: Georges Canguilhem, *A vital rationalist: selected writings from Georges Canguilhem*, ed. François Delaporte, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (New York: Zone Books: 2000). Stuart Elden, *Canguilhem*, (Cambridge: MA Polity Press, 2019).

[56] Kurt Goldstein, *The Organism. A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man*, (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 19.

psychological symptoms, as well as their context of life. Following this theory, Merleau-Ponty substitutes the concepts of stimulus and response used in classical reflex theories for those of situation and behaviour to provide an integrated and comprehensive interpretation of these type of gestures.

The redefinition of reflex movements brings to the discussion one of the founding theses of phenomenology, namely, that the body cannot be grasped as a conglomerate of elementary units with specifically predetermined and isolatable functions potentially analysable into different parts, but as an entity in which a "multitude of conditions" are always at play (*SB*, 17). These conditions which inscribe the body range from those internal to the organism, such as chemical, secretory and vegetative conditions, as well as those external to it like the historical, cultural and social conditions affecting every subject. In this regard, when I move my hand to prevent an object from falling down, the series of movements performed to achieve such a task are not entirely natural nor biological, they oscillate between what Merleau-Ponty calls the "blind automatism" that drives us to react instantly in a specific way, and the "intelligent behavior" that reveals an incipient interpretation of the event and thus adaptation to the overall sense of the situation (*SB*, 43, 105). There is, therefore, not a mechanical response of the body promptly moving to avoid the accident, but one framed by perceptual, reflective, cultural and social factors which, for instance, suggest that it is not advisable for a thing to fall down untimely to the ground because it can break. Such a holistic understanding of reflex movements breaks with the schema that strives to maintain clear distinctions between instinctual and intellectual activity, for as Merleau-Ponty claims, in everyday life there is no such thing as a "laboratory behaviour", but a certain adjustment to a "global situation" that if one wants to grasp it holistically, one needs to "renounce all forms of causal thought" (*SB*, 44, 51).

The act of knitting the brows in order to protect the eyes from the sun, to give another example presented in *The Structure of Behavior*, becomes a gesture insofar as it demands a certain attunement and interpretation of the subject with respect to her milieu. By performing a series of specific bodily movements the subject orients herself "toward a 'behavioral milieu'" and, at the same time, responds to the "action of the 'geographical

milieu'" upon her (*PP*, 81).[57] At stake is an incipient expressivity of the body in this twofold activity of solicitation and projection that, whether intentionally or unintentionally produced, offers a first meaningful sketch drawn by the subject upon her vital horizon that would otherwise remain disorganised.[58]

The fact that every expressive bodily movement is both biological and social, instinctive and cultural, prevents us from thinking of gesture as a natural sign whose meaning stays the same in all of its performances regardless of context. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this by referring to an emotional gesticulation denoting a state of mind such as anger. At first glance one would think that all around the world the reaction to such a feeling is identical, as it would be considered a natural response to a certain displeasure and irritation, but there are "no natural signs for man", and so, the conduct related to anger varies historically and geographically speaking (*PP*, 194). In *Phenomenology of Perception* this is explained with the following words:

> It is not 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. The psychophysiological equipment leaves a great variety of possibilities open, and there is no more here than in the realm of instinct a human nature finally and immutably given. The use a man is to make of his body is transcendent in relation to that body as a mere biological entity (*PP*, 219-220).

The interpretation of anger as a gesture whose meaning is determined because of the lived context in which it develops, allows us to contrast Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory with that of John Bulwer. As it can be recalled, Bulwer's aim was to establish a universal language based on the movements of the body. In *Chirologia; or, The Natural Language of the Hand* (1644), he aims to demonstrate that gestures had the fortune of escaping Babel's confusion, and thus

[57] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 58-59.
[58] Jackson, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of motor intentionality: Unifying two kinds of bodily agency", 772-773.

could be used as a common language to all humankind needless of any translation process. Bulwer supported his theory by claiming that merchants who travelled to West Indies in order to establish commerce with Orient were capable of communicating through gestures despite speaking different languages from the local one. Merleau-Ponty's position differs from Bulwer's because even though he argues that there is something universal in gesture, insofar as these expressive events can be produced by any human living body, he does not confer to gestures a universal *meaning*. Unlike Bulwer, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes two facets of gesture, one of its production and the other of its meaning emerging out of its use in practical and everyday life. In that sense they are universally created by the human species, but contextually framed by the lived horizon of the subject that uses them.

HABITS (AND THE HABIT OF A CERTAIN DANCE)

The second modality of gestures that can be inferred from the structure of *Phenomenology of Perception* is habit. Located halfway between reflexive behaviours and reflective actions, Merleau-Ponty dedicates a significant space in his work to these gestures. Habits share with reflex gestures the capacity to confer some sense to the perceived horizon but, unlike the former, they presuppose an active reworking and renewal of the subject's awareness of her posture, movements and capabilities of her body in response to what the milieu solicits from her. As contemporary phenomenologists Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi explain, the world in which the subject is thrown and of which she forms part, provokes certain questions and problems that must be solved. At every moment there is a sort of motivation on the part of the world to which the subject replies. Habit enables the subject to determine from the corpus of kinetic dynamics available those which are the most appropriate for responding to a specific situation. In other words, they trigger a set of suitable relations between the subject and her world without any logical prior reasoning.[59] The constant repetition of a movement appropriate to act in response to a specific situation, the routine execution of the gesture, is what eventually turns it into a habit. To explain how this process occurs, Merleau-Ponty gives the example of dance. The reference is peculiar because this art rarely appears in his corpus. This is not the case with painting, for example, which is central to his phenomenological proposal. Despite its marginal place, it is important to analyse the arguments related to dance

[59] Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind. An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*, (London: Routledge: 2008), 138.

because it is precisely there that I find a way of extending the proposal of the kin(aesth)etic *logos*.

Merleau-Ponty argues that when acquiring the "habit of a certain dance", it is not necessary to search for the specific formula nor exercise any sort of abstract representation of the movements to be performed (*PP*, 142). All it takes is to rely on a repertoire of acquired movements like walking and running, which conform the subject's body schema and modulate them until they respond to what is demanded by the situation. The acquisition of the habit corresponds to "the grasping of a signification, but it is specifically the motor grasping of a motor signification" (*PP*, 144). Habits, he says, are a matter of a "knowledge in our hands", given through the bodily effort "between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the realization", which cannot be translated by means of an "objective designation" (*PP*, 145).

The relationship established between habit and dance enables Merleau-Ponty to characterise this art as a motor activity related to the tacit awareness and understanding of the subject's being in the world and her use of the kin(aesth)etic *logos*. In this regard, habits and dance are silently or aphonically meaningful, as they manage to create a signification under a non-phonocentric logic for which the voice is not a necessary condition to endow the experience with a sense. As it can be recalled, in Derrida's critique of phonocentrism, I mentioned the description of the dancer and choreographer Mathilde Monnier of dance as an aphonic mode of signification. Like Monnier, Merleau-Ponty has a positive consideration of silent sense-giving events based on the movement of the body.

Moreover, by linking dance and habit phenomena Merleau-Ponty portrays a conception of dance as something that can be incorporated to the body schema and constantly reproduced. Dance would be grasped in this sense in two different ways. Either as a choreography that is staged and is comprised of a series of successive, previously organised movements that are always performed in the same way, as is the case with a piece of music such as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Or dance understood as a social dance, composed of a series of basic steps which are associated with a specific type of music, and which are usually performed more or less in the same way, such as when one dances salsa. Although it is possible to infer these two

ideas of dance related to the concept of habits, it is impossible to know which dance Merleau-Ponty is referring to because the example does not develop this issue and in fact after offering this introductory illustration of how habits operate, there is no further mention to dance in the main text of *Phenomenology of Perception*. There is, however, another mention of dance in a footnote in which Merleau-Ponty writes the following:

> It could be shown that dance unfolds in a space without goals or directions, that it is a suspension of our history, that in the dance the subject and his world are no longer opposed, are no longer detached from each other, that consequently the parts of the body are no longer accentuated in the dance as they are in natural experience: the torso is no longer the foundation from which the movements arise and into which they sink once they are completed; rather, the torso directs the dance, and the movements of the limbs are at its service. (*PP*, 546)

The idea of dance outlined in this footnote has little to do with the idea of dance as habit developed in the main text. In fact, it operates in the opposite way, as something that suspends a habit, suspends a customary way of responding to the world's solicitation. Dance in this case is not only the choreographic structure, but an exercise that by means of a suspension of everyday life allows us to displace historically assumed and rarely questioned patterns of movement and concepts. The use of the term suspension here evokes the great contribution that Merleau-Ponty sees in phenomenological research, which is precisely the bracketing of the natural attitude. Here it seems as if Merleau-Ponty would expand the phenomenological reduction attributing to dance the capacity to perform such a suspension. If that were the case, dance would operate as a sort of *epoché*, a kinetic *epoché*. However, Merleau-Ponty does not develop the subject. The omission, nevertheless, is relevant because it indicates a route towards which the findings of phenomenology can be taken and expanded.

As aforementioned, after the reference to dance as a habit in the main text of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty does not return to the subject. He then continues the development of his understanding of this modality of gestures by turning to pathology. He refers to the case of Johann Schneider, a 23-year-old mineworker turned soldier during World War I, who after being wounded on the occiput in the battlefield developed a series of brain

injuries that damaged both his motor skills and reasoning.[60] Schneider's case allows Merleau-Ponty to continue the exploration of habits by contrasting their development in the life of a non-injured subject and in Schneider's life where his capacity for "motor signification" is compromised. (*PP*, 113).

In examining Schneider´s case, Merleau-Ponty follows the studies conducted throughout several years by Kurt Goldstein and Adhémar Gelb and focuses specifically on two types of movements that the patient was incapable of performing as a non-injured subject would perform namely, concrete movement, linked to a specific circumstance and abstract movements that arise in virtual scenarios. Regarding the first category, it is explained that when Schneider was instructed to perform a movement, normally executed with great speed and without any conscious evaluation of its trajectory, such as touching his nose with a finger, he failed to do so. Schneider could not immediately perform the instruction, as to execute it he needed to reiterate the order in an interrogative tone, accommodate his body into the position required for the task, have a sense of the movements required end to end, and only then, perform the gesture. Moreover, if the situation was suddenly interrupted, he lost track of it, and his dexterity disappeared. Schneider had to restart the movement by finding his arm, then his hand, his finger, and so on, gradually reflecting upon the request through these different preparatory movements that anticipated the final goal of the instruction received. When fulfilled, Merleau-Ponty points out, the "melodic character" of his gestures were irremediably lost and the "blind adhesion" of his body to the world was cracked (*PP*, 107, 265).

Schneider's need to reiterate vocally the command given is, for Merleau-Ponty, a symptom of his pathology. The non-injured subject does not need to utter the instruction because she has a motor understanding of the situation, or what he calls the "motor grasping of a motor signification", which is not structured around the language of the voice and therefore does not need a verbal explanation in order to be grasped and then executed (*PP*, 144). Moreover,

[60] Here I am following Georg Goldenberg interpretation of Schneider's case who refers to the various articles and works produced on the topic by Kurt Goldstein and Adhemar Gelb. Georg Goldenberg, "Goldstein and Gelb's Case Schn.: A classic case in neuropsychology?", in Chris Code et. al., eds., *Classic Cases in Neuropsychology*, Vol. II, (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 281-229.

this analysis of Schneider's incapacity to perform concrete movements under command shows that, for Merleau-Ponty, habitual gestures are doubly silent for they do not need words to acquire meaning and because its ultimate purpose is not to become a word. Habits are gestures which are not performed to be translated into the language of the voice because they have a motor meaning that can be grasped by the body, by the kin(aesth)etic *logos*.

Schneider, however, was not only incapable of performing these simple tasks upon command, his impairment also concerned movements that were not directed towards an actual situation but required some projection and involvement of imaginary situations. One of the examples discussed refers to the patient's incapacity to recognise the point where his arm, leg or head is touched if he has his eyes closed. If Schneider was not allowed to actually see the limb being touched, he could not acknowledge the event without creating "touch-jerks" of the part being touched.[61] The same occurred if an object was pressed against his body with his eyes closed. As Schneider had to reflect on the situation, he could not account for it. He needed to see the object being pressed toward his body because he was incapable of projecting himself within a hypothetical event without transforming it into a real one. His lived experience of bodily movements was sustained in a thetic or conscious relation, something which does not occur in the case of the normal subject, capable of mobilising her body in both real and virtual contexts following an "originary intentionality" lacking any "conscious interpretation."[62] Ultimately, the instructions given to the patient had an "intellectual signification", for he understood what was requested, but they lacked a "motor signification" (*PP*, 144). Schneider was not missing thought nor movement in themselves, for he performed both activities independently: sometimes he thought of the formula of the movement requested, other times he threw his body into blind motor attempts. And yet, he still lacked a pre-reflexive knowledge that would allow him to recognise his body as both something inserted in a lived world and related to it and its objects through differently bodily movements needless of any conscious representation (*PP*, 143-144).

Merleau-Ponty concludes his examination of Schneider´s case arguing that his impairments, related to both concrete and abstract movements, show that "motor experience" of the non-

[61] Ibid., 289.
[62] Donald A. Landes, *The Merleau-Ponty Dictionary*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 134.

injured subject is not a specific type of reasoning or particular case of knowledge, but a "manner of reaching the world and the object, a «praktognosia», that must be recognised as original, and perhaps originary" (*PP*, 141). Formed by the terms *praxis* and *gnosis*, praktognosia is a concept developed by the neuropsychologist A.A. Grünbaum in his study on aphasia where motricity is described as a basic or elementary power of sense giving (*Sinngebung*). Merleau-Ponty follows this characterisation and refers to motricity as the "primary sphere in which initially the meaning of all significations is engendered" (*PP*, 143). Motricity has a chronological and ontological privilege over the other modes or strategies of signification. This is what allows my body to grasp its being in the world through movement without having to go through "representations," or without being subordinated to a "symbolic" or "objectifying function" (*PP*, 143). This is precisely the function that is affected in patients like Schneider, for whom movement in its kinetic, affective or existential and cognitive dimensions is compromised. What I am interested in emphasising here with the integration of this new concept into the argument is that Merleau-Ponty strives to create not only a kin(aesth)etic theory of being in the world, but also a vocabulary that accounts for this way of responding to the world and sharing this experience with others through means that are not based on verbal signification. There is thus an attempt not only to identify a silent language, but also to offer the theoretical and conceptual tools to apprehend it.

WORDS

Perhaps one of the most innovative strategies used in *Phenomenology of Perception* to overlook the dualistic tendency that insists on separating the intelligible from the sensible is that which refers to words as vocal, phonetic or even sometimes linguistic gestures. Like a reflex or a habit, this third modality of gestures represents a "certain modulation of existence" that begins and develops as a bodily event, and then, unlike the first two, culminates in a conceptual activity (*PP*, 199). Speech, says Merleau-Ponty, is initiated as a "certain manner of playing with our body": the throat contracts, the tongue moves and air flows between the teeth (*PP*, 200). There is an eminently kin(aesth)etic, almost always unnoticed, preparation of the anatomical and phonatory apparatus. He extends this description by claiming that the word is not first "inspected, analyzed, known, and constituted", but rather, just as it occurs with a reflex gestures, "caught and taken up by (…) a motor power that is given to me along with the very first experience of my body and of its perceptual and practical field" (*PP*, 425)

Thus, before it becomes the "indication of a concept", the word is "an event that grasps my body, and its hold upon my body circumscribes the zone of signification to which it refers" (*PP*, 244). This point is reiterated when it is argued that, as in the case of habits, the linguistic gesture sketches out a sense not first given as an abstract thought but as "a certain manner of relating to the world" (*PP*, 197). In this sense, Merleau-Ponty continues, the first signification provided by vocal gestures "has to do less with judgement than with the milieu in which judgement is born, less with spontaneity than with the holds of this spontaneity upon the perceptible world and our power to imagine any intention whatever in the world" (*PP*, 198). Once the linguistic gesture is being uttered, what is obtained are not just abstract words, but words always accompanied by bodily movements: hands that swing, eyebrows that frown, eyes that widen. In short, gestures —muscular expressive contractions in Bulwer's vocabulary— that gloss speech while this is being produced.

The evolutionary neurobiologist Terrence Deacon echoes and extends this argument in *The Symbolic Species*, where it is argued that our "auditory processing of speech sounds" is not based on "extracting basic acoustic parameters of the signal … before mapping them onto word sounds", but rather is based on the prediction of the "oral-vocal movements" that produce a meaningful sound.[63] In that sense, the first step performed in the grasping of the meaning of a speech is similar to physician when auscultating a body, attending to the sounds generated by the patient's internal movements as the sign of some misfunction. Like the physician, our first exploration of the sense of speech is not guided by the listening of the sounds produced by the voice and immediately translating them into a coherent discourse, but by the interpretation of the bodily movements producing them.[64] In this perceptual process that is effectuated almost automatically, beyond conscious analysis, we first perceive speech as a set of "articulatory gestures", and not just sound in itself.[65]

By considering the word as something that has both a semantic as well as a corporeal dimension, Merleau-Ponty inverts the phonocentric paradigm that claims the relation

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[63] Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species. The co-evolution of language and the brain,* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), 359.
[64] Brian Rotman, *Becoming Besides Ourselves. The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 23.
[65] Deacon, *The Symbolic Species,* 361.

between gesture and speech is a progressive one with the former an incomplete modality of the latter. As Potestà explains, Merleau-Ponty undermines the understanding of language as an evolutionary process in which gestures are replaced by complex semantic abstractions, and which understands gestures as the absence of speech or, more precisely, the absence of a higher rationality located above bodily immanence.[66] In "Indirect Language and the Voice of Silence" this problem is exposed in the following way:

> If we want to do justice to expressive speech, we must evoke some of the other expressions which might have taken its place and were rejected, and we must feel the way in which they might have touched and shaken the chain of language … In short, we must consider speech before it is spoken, [acknowledging] the background of silence which does not cease to surround it and without which it would say nothing. Or to put the matter another way, we must uncover the threads of silence that speech is mixed together with. (*S*, 47)

This background against which spoken discourse is placed is precisely the language of silence, of meaningful wordless signifying events based on the kin(aesth)etic *logos* that I have been referring to in this and the previous chapter. A horizon composed both of a pre-reflexive knowledge given from the subject's experience of being in the world, and a more rationally developed level, which in the specific case of vocal gestures has to do with the capacity to interpret these movements of the body as meaningful movements, in order to then translate them into words.

In the quote aforementioned, Merleau-Ponty proposes the metaphor of the "threads of silence" which I wish to further explore as a way to emulate the dialogue between philosophy and art that he maintains throughout his corpus. The artist Lorena Mal eloquently captures this figure of the "threads of silence" in *Invisible Structures* (2010-2012). The piece is taken from a series of interviews made by the artist with a large group of people from various parts of the world —Mexico, Cuba, Perú, Argentina, United States, Russia, and South Korea— asking them to describe meaningful places of which they have memories. The participants, who are being filmed but are not aware of the aim of the exercise, respond without time restrictions, speaking in the tongue they feel more comfortable. Then, Mal creates a frame-by-frame line

[66] Potestà, *El pensamiento del grito,* 67.

drawing tracing the movements of the participant's hands while describing their memories.[67] These lines are later superimposed on the original film (Figure 4).

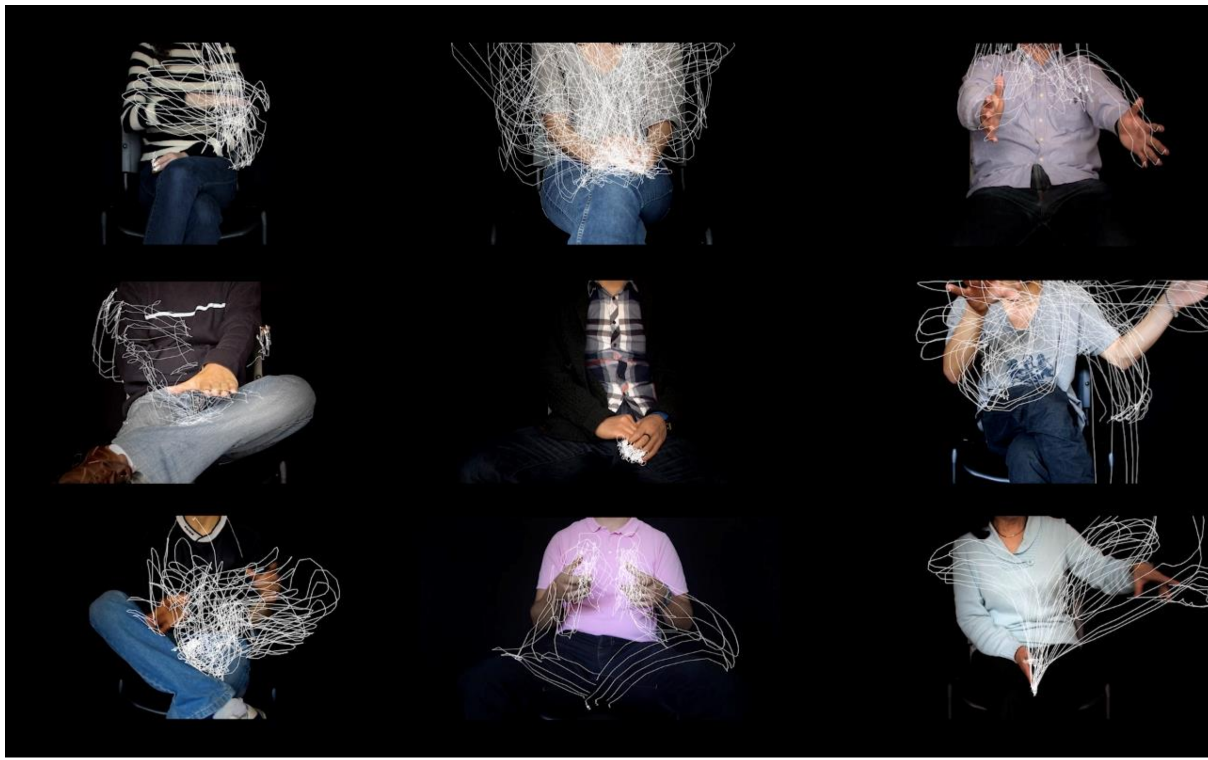

Figure 4. Lorena Mal, "Estructuras Invisibles" (polyptych), 2011-2012.
Multi-channel video installation without sound, variable duration.
Still from video courtesy of the artist.

By doing so, Mal captures the trajectory of the participant's gestures that render visible those threads which Merleau-Ponty refers to, and that tend to be overlooked in normal life when attention is focused on the meaning of the words and not the movements that accompany the language of voice (Figure 5 and Figure 6).[68]

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[67] Lorena Mal, "Estructuras Invisibles", *LorenaMal*, accessed September 30, 2021, https://lorenamal.com/es/obra/estructurasinvisibles.html
I would like to kindly thank the artist for the use of the images as well as for the exchange about her work.
See also: Jorge Carrera, "Entre Líneas / Lorena Mal", *MöbiusTV* 2013, Vimeo, accessed September 30, 2021, https://vimeo.com/63290136

[68] Another example that allows us to materialise this metaphor of gesture as a thread of silence are the famous photographs Gjon Mili took of Pablo Picasso in 1949 known as the *Light Drawings* published in *LIFE Magazine*. Mili, famous for his action shots of dancers, developed transdisciplinary research in which, through the use of rapid-firing photography and specific lighting techniques made it possible to capture multiple images shot in a single frame. Through this technique Mili depicted in a single photograph the trace of a gesture that, due to the speed in which it is executed in real time, is impossible to capture. To achieve this, Milli used a small handheld electric lightbulb, that Picasso moved through the air, outlining some shapes typical of his iconography such as the minotaur.

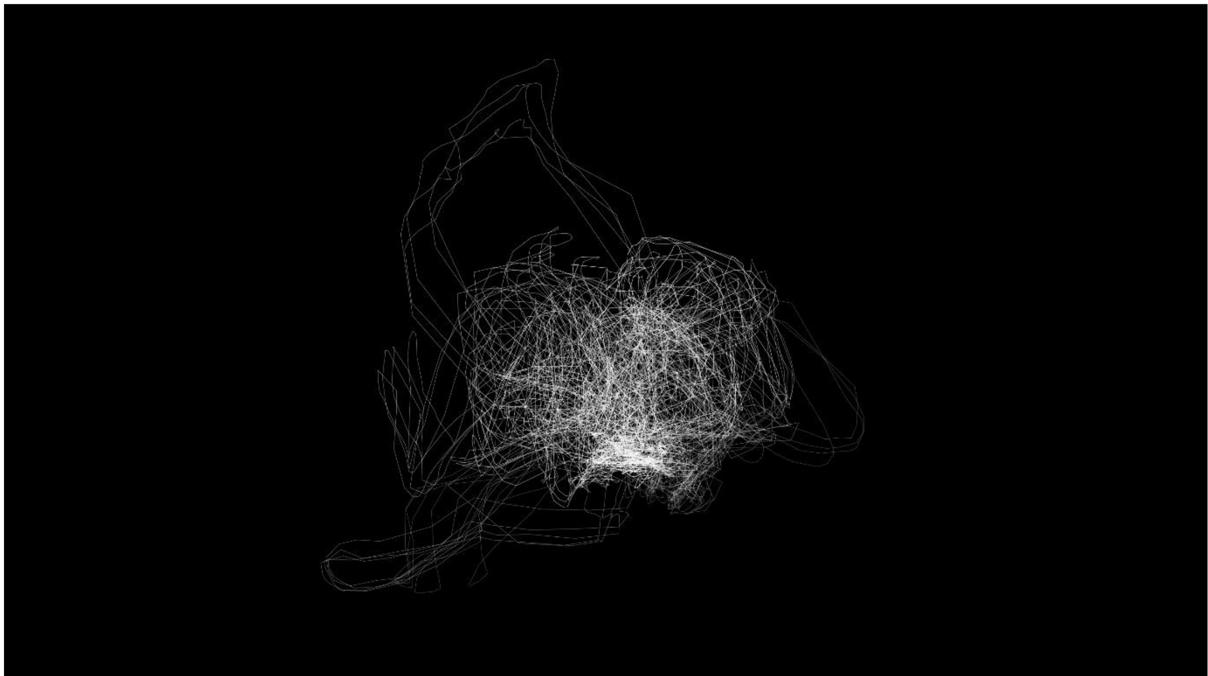

Figure 5. Lorena Mal, “Estructuras Invisibles” (Isla: Isla Mujeres), 2011-2012.
Two-channel video installation without sound, variable duration.
Still from video courtesy of the artist.

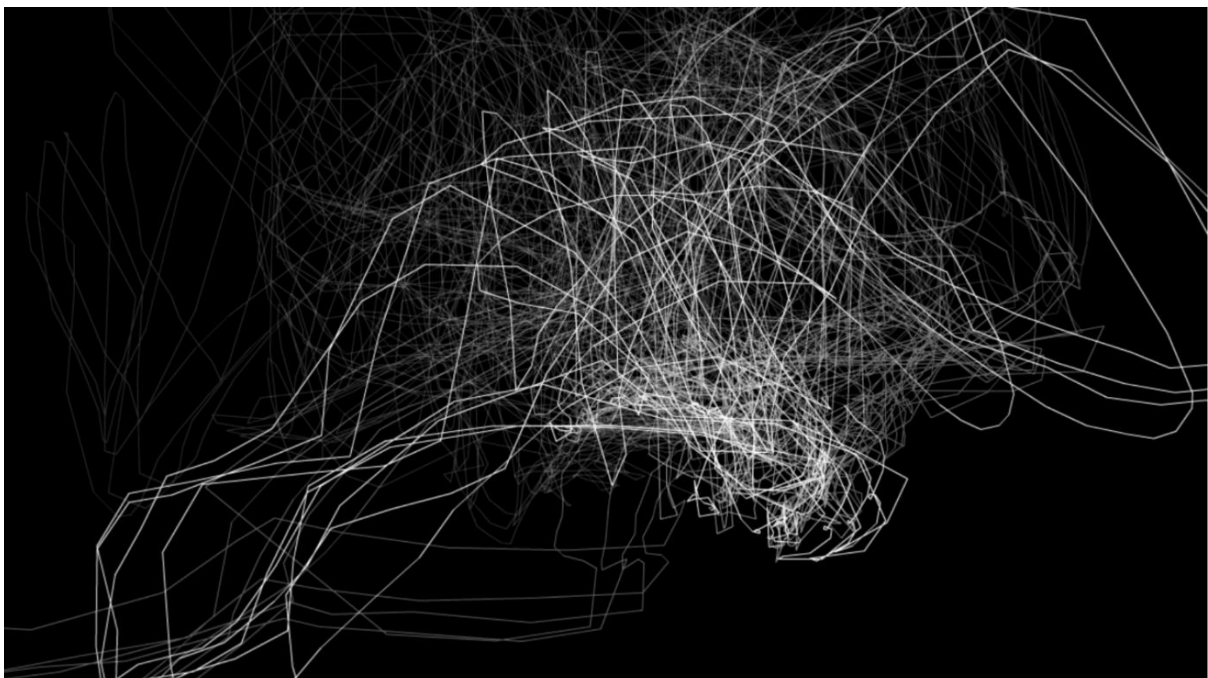

Figure 6. Lorena Mal, “Estructuras Invisibles” (Isla: Isla Mujeres), 2011-2012.
Two-channel video installation without sound, variable duration.
Still from video courtesy of the artist.

After this example, I return to the discussion of linguistic gestures. In *Phenomenology of Perception* the argument around these complex modality of expressive bodily movements leads to a reflection on thinking and, more precisely, on what Merleau-Ponty calls the "tacit cogito" (*PP*, 422). This concept is framed within a critique of Cartesian dualism according to which the notions of the soul and the body correspond to two dimensions that are opposed and placed against each other, one interior, the other exterior, one being "the transparency of a subject who is nothing other than what it thinks it is", the other being "the transparency of an object without folds" (*PP*, 204). Accordingly, says Merleau-Ponty, there would be two "senses of the word "to exist": one as a consciousness, the other as a thing". (*PP*, 204). From the picture of existence in terms of a consciousness that is present to itself, there follows the famous Cartesian dictum "I think, therefore I am". Existence would be confirmed through a repeated thought within the subject that seems to have nothing to do with the bodily dimension. However, Merleau-Ponty tells us that the "I" who thinks can never be considered as a "first-hand" cogito, as it has erroneously been defended for centuries, but as a second-hand cogito, insofar as the subject, before being able to utter the phrase has already relied without noticing it on a bodily knowledge. As he explains, the "*Cogito* that we obtain by reading Descartes … is thus a spoken *Cogito*, put into words and understood through words; it is a *Cogito* that, for this very reason, fails to reach its goal, since a part of our existence – the part that is busy conceptually determining our life and conceiving of it as indubitable – escapes this very determination and conception" (*PP*, 423). This part of life that is overlooked by to the spoken cogito is precisely a "silent *Cogito*, which animates and directs all of the expressive operations" (*PP*, 424). Thus, in order for the subject to be able to say that she thinks, the subject first follows the path that I have outlined in these two chapters: a path of different degrees of bodily knowledge, ranging from the perception of being in the world, to the physical preparation of the phonatory apparatus and then to the pronunciation of the phrase in dispute.

The analysis of the Cartesian cogito allows us to propose two ideas. On the one hand, Descartes would seem to suffer from a lack of "praktognosia", that would push him to rely on the voice in order to grasp the world.[69] Descartes seems to forget, as Merleau-Ponty explains,

[69] Thomas Bernhard refers to this issue in his short story titled "A Famous Dancer". Bernhard writes that there was once a famous dancer in the Paris Opera who, while performing Handel's *Raphael*, especially choreographed

that "for the "linguistic ceremony" to take place, it is necessary to create a situation in which "language takes on a sense" (*PP*, 422). Such a situation is triggered by the kin(aesth)etic *logos* that animates every expressive operation that philosophy, insistently seeking to detach from experience and preoccupied with reducing knowledge to a discursive reflective analysis, fails to grasp. This leads us to a second issue I would like to raise here and continue to develop in the next chapter, which is the figure of the thinker that can be inferred from phenomenology. Alongside the figure of the thinker as an individual that, as Descartes explains in his *First Meditation*, sits solitary by his fireplace to think, or as Michel de Montaigne that secludes himself in a tower in his country house near Bordeaux so that he can work in isolation, in Merleau-Ponty another figure is suggested, that of the thinker that gets out of the library and moves in the world, and by doing so founds ways to explore that mystery of life that is pointed out in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*.

THE BRUSHSTROKE

Throughout his corpus, Merleau-Ponty reiterates that art achieves what neither science nor philosophy in their scattered encounters "face to face with the real world" can do: depicting the kinaesthetic and voiceless sense-giving events which go unnoticed in everyday life where things, available at hand, require no further consideration concerning how they are first given to perception and grasped by the subject (*PrP*, 159). Art enables the artist to perform a suspension of the routine course of perception in practical life. Such a characterisation of the artist as a phenomenologist enables us to speak of an aesthetic *epoché*, working against sedimented routines of perception, patterns of movement and forms of reasoning, able to trigger new modes of shaping and stylising the world.[70] As Glen Mazis explains, for those of us immersed in everyday routines framed within a "problem-solving manipulative regimen", it is difficult to keep ourselves "open to the beckoning of the world's depths of sense through

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by him, suddenly stopped uncapable of finishing the performance. Since then, says Bernhard, the dancer was paralysed and needed a wheelchair to move. His misfortune lay in the fact that "for the first time in his career he had thought about the complexity of a combination of steps". The dancer could not perform ever again. Thomas Bernhard, "A Famous Dancer", in *The Voice Imitator*, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 45. If Schneider had lost the capacity to perform gestures without interrupting their melodic character because he had to reflect on them, Berhnard's dance was incapable of performing them at all.

[70] Rudolf Bernet speaks of a "pictorial *epochē*". See Rudolf Bernet, "Phenomenological and Aesthetic *Epoché*": Painting and the Invisible Things Themselves", in Dan Zahavi (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 564-583.

the primal contact of perception."[71] The artist, nonetheless, is open to this phenomenon and thus is capable of distorting the "watchwords of knowledge and action" which, in her hands —or better yet, through her body—, "lose their meaning and force" (*S* 76, 78; *PrP* 161). Once this coherent deformation has been performed, a "brute meaning" of things, invisible in the everyday and routine experience of the world, emerges (*PrP*, 161). One of the examples given to illustrate this is that of a painting of a woman which, as explained in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence", does not depict just the figure of a woman, but rather "the emblem of a way of inhabiting the world, of handling it, and of interpreting it by a face as by clothing, by the agility of the gesture and the inertia of the body —in short, the emblem of a certain relationship to being" (*S*, 54).

And yet, one might ask: How does creative expression emerge out of everyday movements? In "Cézanne's Doubt", written in 1945, Merleau-Ponty explains the genesis of the creative scene. It all starts with a body performing a series of movements without reflecting on them nor the specific actions being executed: eyes stare, hands grab an object, feet change their position. These actions are "not a decision made by the mind, an absolute doing which would decree, from the depths of a subjective retreat", but responses to an existential and pre-reflective demand; not an "idea" but a "vague fever" (*SNS*, 19). The artist begins without knowing if she will be able to separate herself from "the flow of individual life" in which her expression emerged in order to acquire an "independent existence" (*SNS*, 19). This is the first step so that an everyday gesture can become an artistic one, so that its meaning can be separated from its original context and transferred to another horizon. But just as reflexes are never a totally instinctive or biological corporeal dynamics, for they are always inserted in a socio-cultural context that affects them, so too the artist's gesture is not a purely autonomous and free choice movement. Rather, it is a "lived negotiation of an *implicit* multitude of forces" ranging from her technical and physical aptitude, life circumstance and historical horizon.[72] Forces inscribed in the artist's movements that are simultaneously spontaneous and inherited, unique and ordinary, secret and familiar.

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[71] Glen Mazis, "The Artist's Gestures of Fascination in "Eye and Mind"", in Ariane Mildenberg (ed)., *Understanding Merleau-Ponty, Understanding Modernism*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 76.
[72] Donald A. Landes, *Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 143.

Artists, explains Merleau-Ponty, offer new interpretations of the world by playing with two extremes of expression dependent on each other, the empirical and the creative, or as he calls them elsewhere, the direct and indirect uses of language. The first one describes expressions with an already acquired sense, like "ordinary gestures", that suggest that the means used to refer to the world correspond "point for point to figures, forms, and established words" (*S*, 46). These preestablished signs somehow nurture the illusion that the world is a "familiarly constituted" milieu to which one can refer directly, with "no apparent gaps or expressive silences", and that it can therefore be perfectly reproduced (*S*, 46). Merleau-Ponty recalls a metaphor of Mallarmé apropos this issue: the empirical sense of language is like a "worn coin placed silently in my hand" (*S*, 44). And yet, despite this sense of intimacy and transparency, "language is oblique and autonomous", and if it manages to mean a thing directly, it is only because there is a "secondary power" that, it can be said, runs "between the words", and feeds its internal gearing (*S*, 44, 45). This other, seemingly secret dimension of language is precisely what is at play in each work of art. It is, as Merleau-Ponty explains it, a "tacit language" always "in the process of being accomplished", and thus never "possessed for good", constantly confronting both the artist and the spectator (*S*, 47, 46; *PrP*, 189). The artist, for instance, just when she has become expert in some area, realises that she has revived another area where everything that was once said "must be said again in a different way"; for what is found through the process is the remainder that there is something else which "remains to be sought out; the discovery itself calls forth still further quests" (*PrP*, 189). The world is thus always yet to be photographed, danced, painted, for "even if it lasts millions of years … it will all end without having been completed" (*PrP*, 189). There is an echo of this idea already mentioned when Merleau-Ponty claims in *Phenomenology of Perception* that life is intertwined with a power that prevents it from a definite closure and gives the sense of an endless "work in progress" (*PP*, 362). The artist, to some extent, becomes spectator of her own work. Ultimately, the goal of a creative expression is to "makes us dwell in a world we do not have the key to" and contribute to expanding the other we sometimes call ours (*S*, 77).

The scene started by the artist, ends with us, the spectators, who after being reached by the contours of a sculpture or the colours of a painting, are invited to "reorganize our significations according to the indications of the signs" suggested by the piece (*S*, 51, 45). As

Merleau-Ponty explains elsewhere, “those gestures, those paths which he alone can trace” become “revelations to others” (*PrP*, 167). The spectator joins in the activity of making the invisible visible. The accomplished work, Merleau-Ponty suggests, is not that piece which seemingly exists in itself like a thing, but the piece that touches the spectator and invites her “to take up the gesture which created it and, skipping the intermediaries, to rejoin, without any guide other than a movement of the invented line (an almost incorporeal trace), the silent world of the painter, henceforth uttered and accessible” (*S*, 51).

For Merleau-Ponty the art par excellence capable of exploring the “secret and feverish genesis of things in our body”, invisible to the profane eye, is painting and more precisely modern painting (*PrP*, 167). Like modern thought, the works of Cézanne and Klee, two of his most frequent references, but also Delaunay, Picasso, Matisse and Kandinsky, unveil a truth that does not seek to resemble things and yet is still true. Its truthfulness is given by the fact that their works penetrate “right to the root of things, beneath the imposed order of humanity” (*SNS*, 16). By doing so, these artists perform a “magical theory of vision” which through their gestures portray things in their appearance but also, and perhaps more importantly, portray the invisible threads which enable these things to be seen anew (*PrP*, 166). Merleau-Ponty explains this other sense of vision by distinguishing between two understandings of “vision”. There is the “narrow and prosaic sense” of vision that thinks of the phenomenon as the registration of sense-data through the eyes (*PrP*, 166). This sense of the term tends to portray a supposedly passive activity for the seer that aims to set up before her mind the representation of “a world of immanence and of ideality” (*PrP*, 162). The other connotation of vision depicts it as the “metamorphosis of things themselves into the sight of them”, that is, a phenomenon inaugurated by the eye that not only moves anatomically speaking but, moreover, moves because “some impact of the world” exerted on it incites the rest of the body to trace that which has impacted it in the first place (*PrP*, 171). Beyond that which “reaches the eye directly”, there is another understanding of vision which reaches it “from above” (*PrP*, 187). The painter captures and renders visible this second sense of the phenomenon. Through it, she destabilises the domains between the visible and the invisible. With her “clairvoyant” gaze, the artist makes it possible to see things that go unnoticed in

everyday life and, even more importantly, “makes us aware of the fact that the perception of a visible thing necessarily includes an awareness of invisible aspects of the same” (*PrP*, 162).[73]

Through his analysis of painting, Merleau-Ponty returns to a fundamental theme in his philosophy: reversibility. This is announced in “Cézanne´s Doubt” when he claims that “the landscape thinks itself in me … and I am its consciousness” (*SNS*, 17). This problem is posited again in “Eye and Mind”, where it is claimed that in art it is “impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted” (*PrP*, 167). At some point, Merleau-Ponty continues, the roles of the painter and the world become confused. The painter is "caught in the fabric of the world” (*PrP*, 163). This is why the artist does not hesitate to affirm that things look at her or that things offer her gestures. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this by quoting Paul Klee, who says the following: “In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me… I was there, listening… I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it… I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out.” (*PrP*, 167)[74] Painting thus celebrates the enigma of reversibility through which the distinction between the subject and world dissolves, and both dimensions become confused.

The aesthetic gesture, therefore, unlike gestures in everyday life, would allow three things: one, to create moments of suspension of the everyday flow of perception, as well as a suspension of concepts and ideas with respect to the lived world, in other words, to exercise *epoché* outside the parameters of philosophy; two, to render visible those things that everyday perception is unable to grasp and, through this, to insist that there is always another way of looking, of listening, of feeling; and three, to make tangible the phenomenon of reversibility that constitutes our ambiguous existence as something always already mixed up with the "thickness" of the world.

[73] Bernet, “Phenomenological and Aesthetic *Epoché*”: Painting and the Invisible Things Themselves”, 570.
[74] Mazis refers to these and other quotations from Merleau-Ponty in “Eye and Mind” and compares them to Virginia Woolf's fascination with the artist's ability to deform reality. The comparison is relevant because it allows us to take phenomenological gestural theory beyond the field of painting. Cf: Mazis, “The Artist’s Gestures of Fascination in “Eye and Mind””, pp. 74-85.

AND DANCE?

In painting, says Merleau-Ponty, the maps of the subject's motor project and the maps of her visible world become "total parts of the same Being" (*PrP*, 162). He goes on to ask: "What would vision be without eye movement? And how could the movement of the eyes not blur things if movement were blind?" (*PrP*, 162) Painting is constituted by the intertwining between movement and vision. However, it seems as if at some point in his argument movement is overlooked or subordinated to vision. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that painting is a plastic, primarily visual art. Now, the question I propose to raise is: If the expressive and moving body has a fundamental role in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, why are there so scattered mentions of the possible contribution that an artistic expression such as dance, could make to his theory? Even more briefly: Why is painting an art and dance a habit?

I will try to answer this question by emulating a strategy used by Merleau-Ponty when he argues that even though Descartes said little about painting, and that it might be unfair to ask him to do so, the scattered mentions to the topic are themselves revealing (*PrP*, 171). The same could be said of Merleau-Ponty's sporadic references to dance. References which are striking not only because of the primacy given to movement in his theory, but also because some of the authors he refers to, especially in his works on aesthetics, like Mallarmé and Valéry, both write texts on dance.

A first answer to the question about the absence of dance could point to the historical context in which Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emerges. It could be argued that at the time Merleau-Ponty wrote his texts, dance did not have the exposure and recognition that it has gained in recent decades. This is only partially true. A brief chronological survey of the history of dance in the previous century indicates that this was a period of much dance creation. By mid-twentieth century dance as a performing art was undergoing an intense and critical evaluation of its foundational principles that by the 1960s reached one of its peak moments, unleashing what conventional narratives describe as postmodern dance. This revision was forged at the end of the nineteenth century with figures such as Loïe Fuller and Isadora Duncan, pioneers in the creation of both new forms and a new vocabulary that sought to confront the classical ballet tradition. These names were then followed by those of American

artists like Martha Graham and Katherine Dunham, who created choreographies but also developed theories of movement and dance training systems. Moreover, during the years in which works such as *Phenomenology of Perception* were published, José Limón, Merce Cunningham and Anna Halprin intensely explored the phenomenon of improvisation and introduced openly anti-figurative sets of movements to the field. The point I want to make here with this very schematic history of contemporary dance, which I will expand in the next chapter, is that some of the questionings and problematics posed by this art developed around the same moment when Merleau-Ponty was working on his phenomenological project. In other words, dance in the middle of the last century was not an unknown art and in fact its reconfiguration succeeded in putting it in a special spotlight. Moreover, it can even be argued that some of the concerns of the two are related. If so, why doesn't Merleau-Ponty turn to this other side of the arts stage?

The question has no answer, only conjectural suggestions. As Merleau-Ponty himself says of Descartes, at some point it is somewhat unfair to insist on asking about the subject if it does not figure in his interests. The fact that he does not address the issue does not mean that his philosophy does not already suggest a route to follow. Perhaps it is this very omission that allows us to reappropriate his philosophy and, as it occurred with the appropriation of Deaf studies of deconstruction, to seek grounds into which to expand his findings. Dance unveils an area in which the theory of the expressive body, which moves at every moment and stylises its perception of the world through its gestures, can be enlarged. Here we can continue to deepen this re-signification of language outside the phonocentric paradigm that reduces it to a vocal phenomenon. This is the aim of the next and final chapter of this thesis.

MOVEMENT

5. TO DANCE, TO WANDER, TO WONDER

The dancer is fortunate indeed for he has for his instrument the most eloquent and miraculous of all instruments, the human body.

José Limón

To be a dancer is to choose the body and its movement as one's relational field, as one's instrument of knowledge, thought and expression.

Laurence Louppe

During the Baroque period, a genre of court ballet known as geometrical dance gained force in France. Its name referred to the creation of symbolic figures portrayed by the dancers, which were meant to be deciphered by the spectators, as if they were reading them on a page. Dancers represented a living alphabet capable of forming letters, words and even sentences through their postures.[1]

Figure 7. Giovanni Battista Braccelli, "Alfabeto figurato" in *Bizzarie di varie figure* (1624).

[1] Mark Franko, *Dance as Text. Ideologies of the Baroque Body,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5, 8.

This was portrayed, for instance, in the A*lfabeto Figurato* (*Figured Alphabet*)*,* an illustration created by Giovanni Battista Braccelli in 1624, which depicts one of the ways in which baroque dancers used their bodies as linguistic entities and thus turned dance into a written text (Figure 7).[2]

One of the geometrical dances performed at that time, of which there is still record, is *Le Ballet de Monseigneur le Duc de Vandosme* (Paris, 1610). The piece narrates the story of twelve knights transformed into nymphs which indicate their metamorphosis by the "choreographic spelling" of the word "Alcine", the magician's name responsible for their transformation.[3] The dancers' bodies first form a figure identified as an "A"; they hold it for a moment and then change their postures in order to form a second letter, "L", and so on until the word "Alcine" is read.

This scene, which dates from the moment when dance began to establish itself as an autonomous artform independent of theatre, captures three elements that, as I discuss in this chapter, are always present in various degrees in any theoretical reflection on dance: the body, movement and the expressive scope of dance. The questions surrounding the relationship between these elements are numerous: What does a dancing body express? How does movement inscribe sense? Is there a language of dance based on bodily movements? Here these inquiries are reviewed following the two themes that are at the bases of this thesis: language and movement. As I have showed in this work, language and movement implicate each other. There is no language, not even linguistic orally produced language, without bodily movement. Conversely, every bodily movement, even the most simple and unnoticed one, is always already expressive, for its shapes a certain manner of being in the world. On this basis, this chapter begins with an examination of the transformations that the term "choreography" has undergone as a way to problematise different conceptions of language and of the expressive phenomenon that is at play in dance throughout time. The second part of the chapter offers an analysis of movement, in particular choreographic

[2] Giovanni Battista Braccelli, *Bizzarie di varie figure,* (Paris: Brieux, 1963). Quoted by Franko, *Dance as Text,* 17.
[3] Ibid. See also: Jennifer Nevile, "Dance Patterns of the Early Seventeenth Century: The Stockholm Manuscript and 'Le Ballet de Monseigneur de Vendosme'", *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 19, no. 2 (Winter, 2000): 186-203.

movement, framed within the ontological renewal made by contemporary dance on this issue. I discuss that movement, especially when it is taken to the extreme, either to be executed rapidly and relentlessly or, conversely, when it slows down to the point of seeming to disappear, turns into both a compositional strategy and a critical tool, capable of displacing sedimented kin(aesth)etic routines as well as assumed ideas. Finally, I close this chapter by presenting a dialogue between dance and philosophy on the re-evaluation of the experience of vulnerability here understood as the capacity to move and be moved through movement.

By way of warning it should be noted that the aim of this chapter is not to present a history of dance but a problematisation of two specific themes that have been present in the development of this art form. The genealogical references as well as the very limited number of artists, pieces and genres here mentioned, are considered to the extent that they mark transformations that are pertinent to the argument drawn here.

In the general framework of the thesis, this last section represents the third area of exploration of silent language. The path followed so far has been driven by what could be called a spiral reading around the themes of the devocalisation of language and the reflection on a motor-based language. Through this spiral method I have aimed to detach at each turn, and each time more radically, language from speech. So, in the first section I addressed the problem from the standpoint of the phonocentric critique which seeks to provide an alternative notion of language not restricted to its phonic orally produced manifestation. This opened the door for the examination of Sign language as a voiceless linguistic mode of communication. The second section focused on gesture and its appearing in a wide range of sense-giving events shaping our being in the world: from perception to reflex movements and aesthetic gestures such as those performed in painting. Finally, in this last section, silent language is associated with the expressive movement of the dancing body. The main aim here is to discuss how movement performed within an artistic context is not simply a physical activity associated the production of specific shapes, traces and steps, but also one capable of generating mental processes, specifically, of triggering questions and fostering conceptual displacements.

The turn towards dance at this stage of the research becomes necessary for two reasons. First, it allows me to expand the phenomenologist's findings on the ambiguous experience of being in the world framed and fostered by the body in movement. In dance, more than any other bodily-centred activity, like sports, a permanent research and challenge of the body's physical, expressive, affective and reflective powers *through* movement, is at play.[4] Second, there is a specificity of dance with regards to its materiality which cannot be found in other aesthetic expressions like painting, music or sculpture, where the artwork is a physical object independent from its creator. In dance, there is no such separation for the artwork and the performer, for both constitute the same entity. The dancing body is at the same time the subject, object and medium through which it is possible to work on a renewal of perception and of our sensible involvement with and in the word.[5] Thus, unlike in painting, where the register of vision is unveiled, or in music, where the aural dimension becomes present in an enhanced and sharpened form, in dance there is not a focalised intensification of one dimension of the sensible. Rather, what is rendered tangible is the kin(aesth)etic register which, unlike the other cases, does not privilege one sense such as vision or hearing, but the whole body as a sensing and self-sensing entity.[6]

CHOREOGRAPHY: NOTATION, GESTUROLOGY AND POETICS

Since the Renaissance, the development of dance as an autonomous artform has been bound to the emergence and several transformations of the term "choreography". In its narrowest sense, choreography refers to the act of writing in a paper a set of bodily movements that can be performed with or without musical accompaniment. However, similar to the analysis of the restricted understanding of writing made in the first chapter, choreography implies much more than just the recording of the motor patterns of a dancing piece. At stake are the many connotations attributed to the words "writing", "dance", "(dancing) body" and "(danced) movement". A genealogical sketch of some of the meanings attributed to choreography can shed light on the changing links between these words and allow me to indicate the reading I give to the term in the context of this thesis.

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[4] Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing History*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana university Press, 1995), 15.

[5] Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, trans. Sally Gardner, (Alton: Dance Books, 2010), xxii.

[6] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Dance as Image – Image as Dance", in Gabriele Brandstetter and Holger Hartung (eds.), *Moving (across) Borders. Performing Translation, Intervention, Participation*, (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017), 45.

The word choreography was born in the Renaissance. Its date of birth varies among specialists. Some set it at 1589, with the publication in France of a manual by Jesuit priest Thoinot Arbeau titled *Orchesographie,* writing ("*graphie*") of the dance ("*orchesis*").[7] Framed as a dialogue between master and pupil, this work provides information on social ballroom etiquette, notes on the interaction of musicians and dancers, and some illustrations with extensive written instructions regarding the execution of the steps (Figure 8).[8]

Figure 8. Thoinot Arabeau, "Reverence" in *Orchesographie* (1589).

Arabeu's manual, however, lacks a system of notation representing the movements, trajectories, forms and postures to be danced by the performers. For this reason, some specialists consider it a predecessor of choreography and thus prefer to mark its birth in 1700 with Raoul-Auger Feuillet's treatise *Chorégraphie, ou L'art de décrire la dance* (*Choreography;*

[7] Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchesographie. Et traicte en forme de dialogve, par leqvel tovtes personnes pevvent facilement apprendre & practiquer l'honneste exercice des dances*, (Lengres: Imprimé par Iehan des Preyz, 1589). Foster specifies that the Greek word *choreia* refers not only to dance but to the synthesis of dance, rhythm and vocal harmony manifest in the Greek *chorus*. Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 30.

[8] Some scholars speak of a prior work, the *Manuscript of the Basses Danses*, published in Spain in 1495. Usually referred to as the *Cervera's Manuscript*, this work contains displayed in two pages the first known use of signs representing five well-known steps at that time: reverencia (reverence), continencia (restraint/moderation), paso (step), doble (double), represa (hold), used in Renaissance Italy, France, and Spain to register popular court dances. However, in this brief manuscript there is no use of the word choreography as such, something which has divided specialist between those who consider it a proto-choreographic manual, and others that consider it the first manual of its kind. Ann Hutchinson Guest, *Choreo-graphics. A Comparison of Dance Notation Systems from the Fifteenth Century to the Present*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 37-39.

or, the art of describing dance) [9]. As Ann Hutchinson Guest explains in *Choreo-graphics,* a comparative study that examines different dance writing systems from the fifteenth century onwards, Feuillet's manual is one of the first fully-fledged systems of dance notation containing both detailed indications and graphic inscriptions representing floor patterns and traces to be followed by the performers though the sequences of actions (Figure 9).

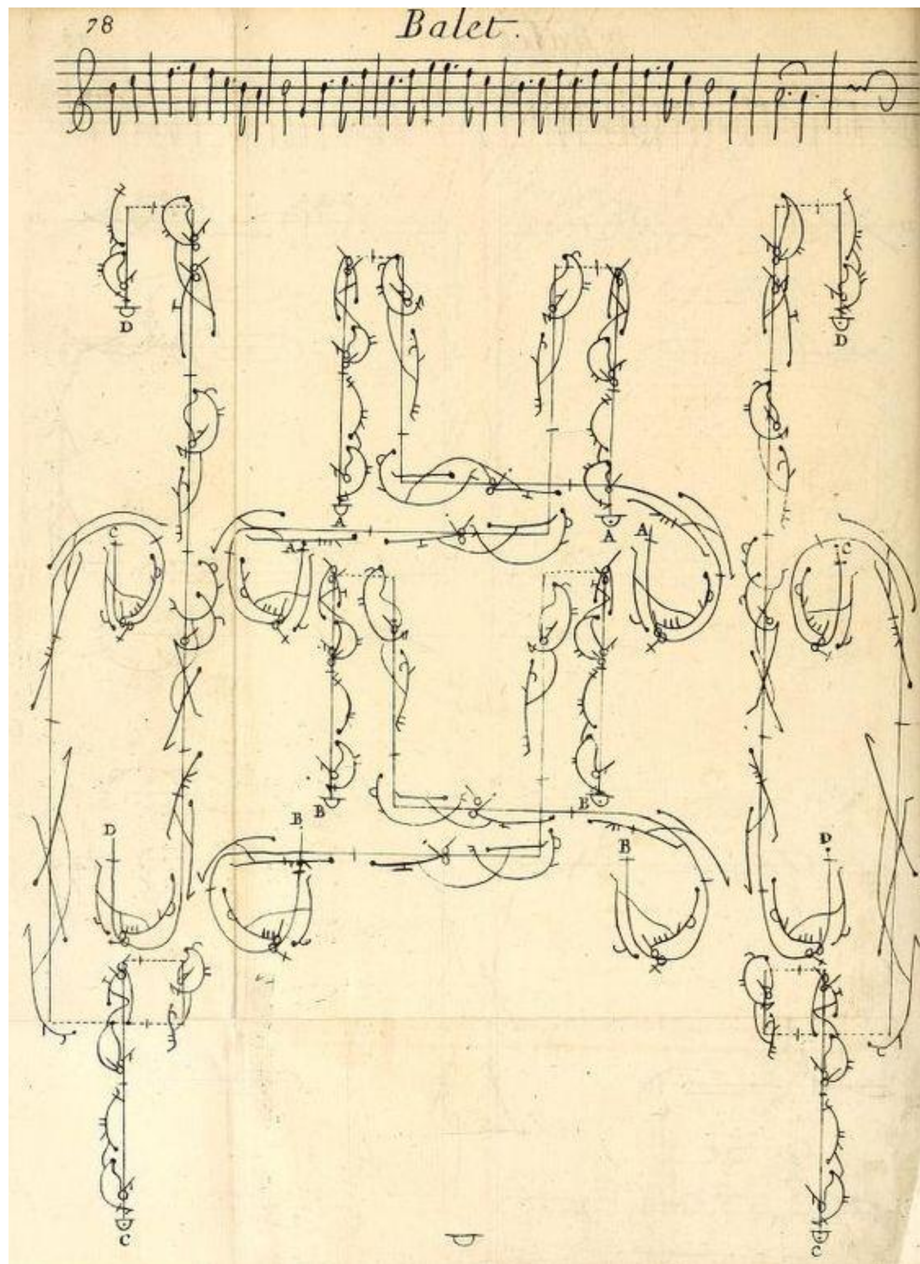

Figure 9. Raoul-Auger Feuillet, "Balet" in *Orchesographie* (1589).

[9] Raoul-Auger Feuillet, *Choreographie, ou L'Art de Décrire La Dance, par Caractères, Figures et Signes Demostratifs. Avec lesquels on apprend facilement de foy maîtres à Dancer & à toutes les personnes qui s'appliquent à la Dance*, (Paris: Chez l'auteur et chez Michel Brunet, 1700).

Chorégraphie, ou L'art de décrire la dance also provides notes on corporeal posture detailing the placement of the feet and arms, as well as some basic movements —plié, releveé, sauté, cabriole, tombé and glissé.[10]

Despite their technical differences, Arabeau and Feuillet's work share a conceptual and metaphysical horizon. Dance and performance theorist André Lepecki claims that both manuals are configured around the assumption of a "semiotic symmetry" between dancing and writing that allegedly ensures the "unproblematic traffic" from one register to the other.[11] Lepecki explains this relationship as follows:

> Compressed into one word (writing, *graphie,* of the dance, *orchesis)*, morphed into one another, dance and writing produced qualitatively unsuspected and charged relationalities between the subject who moves and the subject who writes. With Arbeau, these two subjects became one and the same. And through this not too obvious assimilation, the modern body revealed itself fully as a linguistic entity.[12]

Although the quote only mentions Arabeu, Feuillet's case can be added to the argument insofar as it is also representative of a tendency in theatrical or stage dance in which the dancer's body, through her movements, becomes a kind of text that can be captured through graphic inscription. Moreover, Lepecki's description allows me to make a distinction that I will follow throughout this chapter between dance that is staged —mainly in theatres although, as we will see throughout the history of this art form, these spaces will change and diversify over time— and social dance or ritual dance, to which I will not be referring in this thesis.

According to Lepecki, the fusion of dance and writing led to a novel understanding of choreography as first and foremost a model of writing and reading, and then, in a second level of movement. It is symptomatic that in this context, a practice was developed in which the dancing masters, paper and pen in hand, composed choreographies, written compositions of movements to be performed as dance pieces, that were sent to the Académie Royale de

[10] Hutchinson Guest, *Choreo-graphics,* 54-70.
[11] André Lepecki, "Inscribing Dance", in André Lepecki (ed.), *Of the Presence of the Body. Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 126.
[12] Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance,* 7.

Danse in Paris to be judged, classified and only then staged.[13] The written text set the tone for what the moving body had to do. The performer's body complemented or illustrated a process whose value was determined beforehand in the written text. In this way of understanding choreography there is an echo of the definition of writing condemned by Derrida. As it can be recalled, the narrow sense of writing takes the sign as a mark that endures after the moment of its inscription. This practice of the eighteenth century privileged the graphic trace because, unlike what occurs with the signs expressed by the moving body, the graphic trace was not ephemeral and could be preserved in the paper.[14] The writing of dance would allow what Derrida describes as an "iteration in the absence and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it" (*LI*, 9); it would allow us to have the "dance" without the performing body. Thus, by succeeding in transcribing on paper a set of movements to be executed aesthetically on a stage, dance was, first, preserved from the dangers of its ephemeral presence, second, made available as a text ready to be read and endlessly repeated thereafter and, third, perhaps the most important point for their creators, dance could improve its art status, as it could have a record of both its repertoire and its historical development, just as had happened with music.

Nonetheless, the assumed symmetrical relationship between dance and writing became murky quite quickly. As Lepecki argues, one of the first to doubt it was Pierre Rameau, author of the manual *Le Maître a Danser (The Dancing Master),* published in 1725, only twenty-five years after Feuillet's work.[15] Organised around a Cartesian inspired systematic fragmentation of the body and movement down to their most detailed components, Rameau relied on different types of illustrations of the dancing body as a supplementary tool for his notation.[16] The weight given to the more than three hundred drawings that appear in the manual alongside their detailed descriptions, reveal a profound suspicion of phonetic writing's capacity to convey movement.

[13] Lepecki, "Inscribing Dance", 126-127.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Pierre Rameau, *Le Maître a danser qui enseigne la maniere de faire tous les differens pas de danse dans toute la regularité de l'art, & de conduire les bras à chaque pas*, (Paris: Chez Jean Villiette, 1725).
[16] Lepecki, "Inscribing Dance", 128.

Figure 10
Pierre Rameau,
“Reverence droite venue de Face”
Le Maître a danser (1725).

Figure 11
Pierre Rameau,
“Troisiemetems des bras du Menuet”,
Le Maître a danser (1725).

Clarity, as Lepecki claims, “could only arrive with the supplementation of writing with the image of the body” (Figure 10 and Figure 11).[17] Rameau’s doubts unveiled the problem of transferring the three-dimensional properties of the dancing movement —spatial, rhythmical, motor and postural— into a plain surface like paper by means of abstract graphic signs. A problem, or better yet, a paradox that would never leave the practice of dance notation.

In the nineteenth century, several notation systems appeared not only in France but in other countries such as Russia. This was the case of the ballet manual of Friedrich Albert Zorn titled *Grammar of the Art of Dancing* (1887), created in order to provide a “system analogous to those employed in teaching language” that would define the principles of dance later to be taught and learned by their practitioners.[18] To achieve this, Zorn analyses different constitutive elements of a choreographic structure or dancing piece, such as position, movement, figure and measure, in semantic terms. Thus, he speaks of the dancing steps as

[17] Ibid.
[18] Friedrich Albert Zorn, *Grammar of the Art of Dancing. Theoretical and Practical Lessons in the Arts of Dancing and Dance Writing (Choreography) With Drawings, Musical Examples, Choreographic Symbols and Special Music Scores*, trans. Alfonso Josephs Sheafe, (New York: Burt Franflin, 1905), 15.

words, steps' combinations as sentences or phrases, and the combination of "*enchaînments*" or groups of steps´ combinations as paragraphs. Simple figures, he continues, should be thought of as verse lines, compound figures as stanzas, and the combination of these as a poem.[19] According to Zoron, his system enabled two things: first, the establishment of "a universal method for teaching dancing", applicable to every type of stage dance, although he has in mind particularly classical ballet; and second, the "invention and demonstration of a satisfactory system of dance script, by means of which the movements of any and all dances may be definitely and intelligible shown."[20] Zoron's notational method consisted of categorising each of the movements (Figure 11), which were then assembled into a choreographic structure accompanied by musical notations (Figure 12).

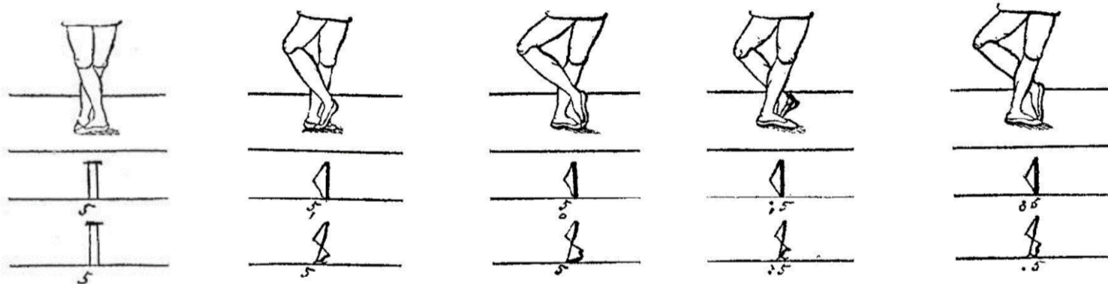

Figure 12. Friedrich Albert Zorn, "Choreography of the Principal Positions. First Positions", *Grammar of the Art of Dancing* (1887).

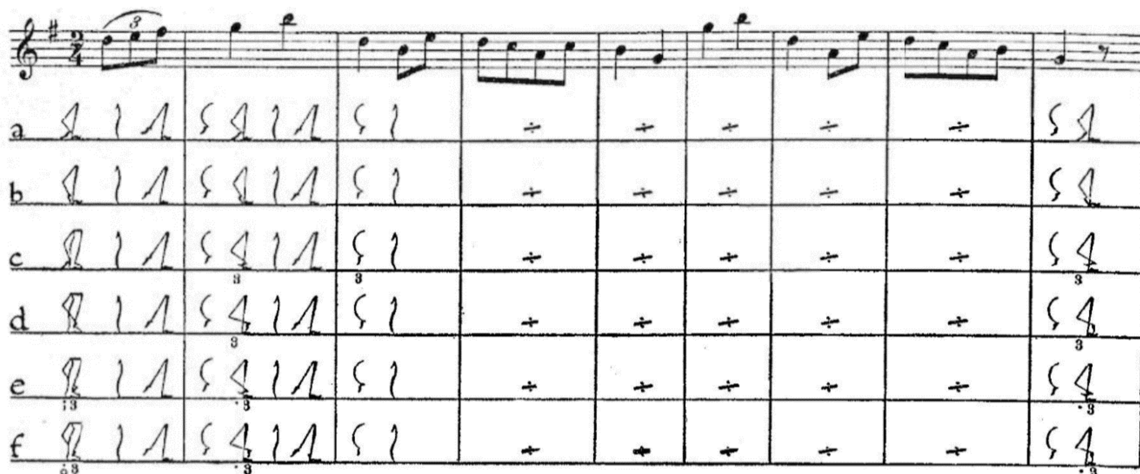

Figure 13. Friedrich Albert Zorn, "Intermediate Simple Beatings", *Grammar of the Art of Dancing* (1887).

[19] Ibid., 165.
[20] Ibid., 267.

Through writing, and more precisely grammatically based choreographic writing, dance thus became an intelligible art. For Zoron, who is representative of a spirit or tendency seen in many other manuals of the time, the assimilation of dance to the concept and principles of linguistic language consolidates dance's ontological status.[21]

Alongside this turn towards an increasingly linguistic understanding of the movements observed in dance notation, this period also began a tradition of philosophical discussion about dance that has continued to grow in complexity over the years. One of the key figures in this theoretical practice, which from that moment onwards would run parallel to the development of dance manuals, is Mallarmé. Mallarmé, a pioneer of dance theory, turns to this art in several of his essays where he addresses different issues, one of which is precisely the problematic relationship between dance, movement, writing and sense.[22] This is the case of "Ballets", a work inspired by the Italian dancer Elena Cornalba. After watching Cornalba perform in Paris, Mallarmé writes that *"the dancer is not a woman dancing"*, but a "metaphor" or "emblem" of things as varied as a knife, a goblet or flower, that "suggests, through the miracle of bends and leaps, a kind of corporal writing."[23] The argument continues with a characterisation that evokes Rousseau's description of the efficacy of gestures in ancient history. In his *Essay,* Rousseau claims that in the past, the most vivid messages were not expressed by words but by signs; ancients "did not say it, they showed it."[24] Likewise, Mallarmé argues that Cornalba's corporal writing expresses something that "would take pages of prose, dialogue, and description to express if it were transcribed".[25] Cornalba is, according to Mallarmé, a "poem independent of any scribal apparatus"; a poem that does not need a surface on which to inscribe the message because she carries it in her body, because she is the sign.[26]

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[21] Such is the case of Ivanovich Stepanov´s manual titled *Alphabet des mouvements du corps humain: essai d'enregistrement des mouvements du corps humain au moyen des signes musicaux*, (Paris: M. Zouckermann, 1892).
[22] Mallarmé inaugurates a long list of thinkers who have taken on the task of reflecting on dance, including Nietzsche, Valéry, Badiou, Agamben, Rancière and Nancy, to name but a few.
[23] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 130.
[24] Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, 290.
[25] Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 130.
[26] Ibid.

At first sight, Mallarmé's text suggests some resemblance to what Lepecki calls the modern body: a body conceived as a linguistic entity ready to be read as someone reads a novel. However, Mallarmé takes an ambivalent view of this characterisation since he specifies that the dancer's body *suggests* a signification.[27] That is to say, it is not a reading of a text in the manner of the geometric dance in which the dancers were creating letters and words with their bodies, but another type of reading because at stake is another kind of writing (and of "text", to that matter). It is not a discourse to be read as a sentence, but a sense *suggested*, a sense which can be understood through the dancer's bodily movements without the aid of any "scribal apparatus". Two different arguments can be drawn from this characterisation, one related to the sense that this corporeal writing suggests, another with the type of writing Mallarmé describes here. Let us look at each one.

First, the sense evoked by Cornalba is like the sense that, according to Merleau-Ponty, can be grasped by kin(aesth)etic *logos*. As can be recalled, in the analysis of the phenomenological concept of the body I argued that for Merleau-Ponty there is a bodily sense that sketches out meaning in a way that is different from the process of signification triggered by rational thought. In this regard, Mallarme's idea of Cornalba as someone who *suggests*, but does not affirm or declare, as someone who does not speak but moves and while doing so transforms into a metaphor, bears some resemblance to the phenomenological characterisation of how the body secretes sense and creates new "senses" of the word sense. The second argument drawn from Mallarmé's interpretation of Cornalba is related to the "corporeal writing" he ascribes to the dancer. It is almost impossible not to read Mallarmé's *ecriture corporelle* without hearing a distant announcement of Derrida's (arche)writing, that is, without hearing the idea of a playful movement of the signifying references that is not restricted to the act of graphically translating what is uttered by the voice. Just as Mallarmé speaks of writing that takes place without a "scribal apparatus", so Derrida speaks of (arche)writing as the dynamic that allows the inscription of sense independent of the medium in which this inscription is then traced.

[27] Susan Jones, "'Une écriture corporelle': The Dancer in the Text of Mallarmé and Yeats", in Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude and Jane Macnaughton (eds.), *The Body and the Arts,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 241.

A hundred years after Mallarmé, in the context of the so-called "textual turn" of the late twentieth century, the question about the link between dance and writing is once again up for scrutiny. This time the discussion is framed from the standpoint of the linguistic conception of language and, more specifically, from the question of whether dance can be considered a language or not.[28] Although not the only one, an illustrative case is that of Francis Sparshott, who denies recognising dance as a language by arguing that the systematic structure of orally produced linguistic discourse cannot be equated with the structure of dance. In *A Measured Pace,* Sparshott gives around twenty theses supporting the denial of the status of language to dance. Here I mention one which give us a general sense of his position.

Sparshott claims that while linguistic expressions can be broken down into small units either according to their signification, like in the case of morphemes or according to their sound, as in the phonemes, in dance, regardless of the style, movement cannot be reduced to a minimal unit.[29] So, even when the steps seem to be clearly defined, and the dancer can exactly describe, name and reproduce them, there are a series of minor gestures like breathing, the preparation of the feet, hands and torso, or the variations in the thorax due to its contraction or expansion, which are already part of the movement itself and make the existence of a phoneme-like unit impossible. According to Sparshott, dance notators face the challenge of arbitrarily deciding the cuts between the movements to create symbols that resemble steps. Still, these steps, he claims, are impossible to standardise across the various styles of dance and dance notation and even vary from dancer to dancer.[30] This can be seen in the comparative study of Hutchinson Guest, where she discusses four contemporary dance notation systems: the first Rudolf von Laban's *Schrifttanz* or *Written Dance* (1928); Margaret Morris', *The Notation of Movement* (1928); *Kineseography* by Eugene Loring and D. J. Canna (1955); and Eshkol-Wachmann's system entitled *Movement Notation* (1958).[31] Hutchinson

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[28] Ric Allsopp, "Some Notes on Poetics and Choreography", *Performance Research* 20, no. 1: (2015), 6.
[29] Francis Sparshott, *A Measured Pace: Toward a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 258.
[30] Ibid., 253.
[31] Rudolf von Laban, *Schrifttanz. 1, Methodik, Orthographie, Erläuterungen*, (Wien: Universal Edition, 1928). Margaret Morris, *The Notation of Movement* (London: Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928). D. J. Canna and Eugene Loring, *Kineseography. The Loring System of Dance Notation*, (n.p.: The Academy Press Publishers, 1955). Noa Eshkol and Abraham Wachmann, *Movement Notation* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1958).

Guest uses the same parameters across the different systems, which are all published with only 30 years difference between the two most distant ones, and shows the many differences both in the graphical depiction as well as in the verbal descriptions around the same topics including the characterisation of the body, feet's position, indications of processes like bending, rotating or jumping, as well as their different conceptualisations of timing, among other criteria. The significant variations that Hutchinson Guest founds across these four dance notation systems prove Sparshott's thesis right: there are no shared criteria for the codification of movements that could provide the basis upon which to construct a general system of sign-signification equivalences available across different genres. As Sparshott concludes, "the linguistic series represents radical differences in function on a way that the dance series does not".[32] The dilemma that opens up here poses two options: either we deny the status of language to dance or we think of another concept of language, more encompassing, capable of integrating these two series. Sparshott opts for the first of these alternatives; I, on the other hand, suggest exploring the second one.

José Gil picks up on Sparshott's discussion and states that despite several attempts to construct a science of "gesturology", which would be equivalent to linguistics, danced movements cannot be "grammatised"; therefore, dance cannot be considered a language.[33] In *Movimento Total: o Corpo ea Dança* (*Total Movement: Body and Dance*), Gil states that one of the things that makes it impossible to grammatise danced movements has to do with the fact that in dance there are at stake two different processes: the "over-fragmentation" of movements, and the "over-articulation" of the meaning of those movements. A movement, says Gil, is never a stable unit because it contains traces of other movements, which triggers a never-ending over-fragmentation process. Regardless of the situation in which it takes place, a movement is a corpus of movements, a collection of small bodily dynamics that are in themselves sets of other motor dynamics and so on. He does not give details as to why the motion of the body is of this nature. However, an argument outlined in chapter three may help answer this question: the body's movement is incessant because it gives life to the body, which turns it into a living body and not a corpse. Movement animates the living being and is constantly present as long as the being is alive.

[32] Sparshott, *A Measured Pace*, p. 258.
[33] José Gil, *Metamorphoses of the Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 112.

Now, according to Gil, this process of over-fragmentation present in any bodily movement can be pushed to two opposite extremes. In everyday life over-fragmentation is driven by a functional aim that seeks to perform increasingly complex productive tasks. Motivated by this criterion of operability, Gil explains, the child's motor education develops from simple isolated movements to complex sets of movements. In this context, the fact that a movement is always a collection of movements does not represent a problem as the focus is not on its composition but on the task capable of being accomplished through it. Movements become "absorbed by the discipline of the body" and lose their expressive richness in favour of the "clear language of social functions".[34]

Gil's description resembles Valéry's exposed in *Philosophy of Dance.* Here Valéry states that in the "practical world our being is nothing more than an intermediary between the sensation of a need and the impulse to satisfy the need. In this role, it proceeds always by the most economical, if not always the shortest, path: it wants results".[35] Hence, there is an unspoken demand for resource-efficient activities that operates as a guiding principle. A practical person, Valéry continues, "has an instinct for such economy of time and effort, and has little difficulty in putting it into effect, because his aim is definite and clearly localised: an external object."[36] Derived from this thesis he argues that in dance movement breaks away from its utilitarian configuration and in fact opposes it. His "simplified notion of dance" is grounded precisely in this idea of a movement capable of being, first, detached from its ordinary and practical characterisation, and then trained and perfected.[37] Gil agrees with Valéry. According to him, the aim of a danced movement is not functional but expressive. If in the case of daily movements, the goal is to perform tasks that require more and more complex movements, in dance, one seeks to complexify the body's expressiveness, taking it to its limits. For, as Gil explains in a tone that echoes Merleau-Ponty's, if the body is always already an expressive entity, it is "even more so when it dances".[38] Dance aims to explore this limit of the body's

[34] José Gil, *Movimento total. O Corpo e a Dança*, (Lisboa: Relógio D'Ấgua, 2001), 92 (The quotations from this work are my translation.).
[35] Paul Valéry, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Volume 13. Aesthetics, trans. Ralph Manheim, ed. Jackson Mathews, (London: Routledge & Kegan Pal, 1964), 206.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 207.
[38] Gil, *Movimento total,* 89.

expressiveness, to raise it to a higher level so that the dancer's body can become ""saturated" with meaning".[39]

Gil's concept of over-articulation describes this capacity of the dancing body to saturate itself with meaning. So, "[i]f dancers reach the point of saturating their bodies with meaning, even if the functional or utilitarian movements express only precise meanings, this happens because dance, "tells a world"; whereas the gesture of cleaning a glass, if it were not danced, tells only of a function."[40] In dance, movements do not "fall back on the verbal sign" for they are no longer driven by a functional ethos that demands from them total translatability into "general meanings"; instead, they tend towards a "singularity" that the "discipline of the body cannot capture".[41] Danced movements tend "towards the incarnation of meaning (in the singular gesture, irreducible to a code)", and in that sense, they can "tell a world" beyond all syntax.[42] Gil closes his argument with an ontological claim about the nature of dance framed within his linguistic agenda:

> Basically dancing means confusing lexicon with grammar, such that gestures do not relate back to any meaning outside of corporeal movements.… It is like an act of defiance, or a transgressive device keeping signs from being too serious. In a parody of linguistic systems, and in the flash of immediate liaisons, it wipes out at one blow laborious constructions like "figures". Dance is the quintessential mockery of signs and forms that set themselves up in the place of meaning or the body.[43]

Thus, to the idea already outlined by Sparshott, which denies dance the title of language because no gestural unity can be isolated, Gil adds there cannot be a gesturology or science of the signs of the body, because the meaning of these signs cannot be related to any sense determined beyond themselves. At this point, one might be entitled to ask: So why are the expressive movements of the dancing body still "signs"? Gil's argument seems to crumble in the face of this question. The reason for this possible cracking lies in the fact that he manages to see something of the singularity of the expressivity of the dancing body. Still, the linguistic

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 92.
[42] Ibid., 91, 89.
[43] Gil, *Metamorphoses of the Body*, 169.

paradigm that surrounds his proposal does not allow him to radicalise his position. This "linguistic parody" of which he speaks fails to be consummated, since his conception of dance, and the meaning offered by this art, ends up tied, in a negative way, to the idea of language as a linguistic system of signs that can be written down as one writes down a sentence. In Gil's argument, a phonocentric predisposition still makes him seek to transform gestures into words. There is, therefore, still a trace of that choreographic conception described above in which a certain symmetry between the subject who writes and the subject who moves, between the writing in its constrained sense and dance, is assumed. Even when he refers to dance as a "mockery of signs", he still maintains a link, albeit a negative one, with the idea of the world as a "semantic horizon", to use a Derridean phrase (*LI*, 20).

It seems, then, that the reason behind the tendency to dissociate dance from language does not have to do so much with movement, specifically with its so-called never-ending nature or over-fragmented structure, which forbids any attempt of "grammatisation", but with the concept of language itself. It is a concept framed within a phonetic regime and thus based on the metonymic strategy according to which the language of voice is conceived as equivalent to the human capacity to stylise or give a sense to the subject's experience of the lived world and its sharing with others. As argued before, in this regime language responds to a normative approach aiming at a certain universality and driven by a rational objective, or, in Derrida's words, to a metaphysics of presence that dreams of a direct relationship between sign and signification. Sparshott and Gil's proposals, in their attempt to apply the principles of general linguistics to kinetic activity, ignore that dance has its own language not reducible to the devaluating formula that merges *phonē-glossa-logos*.

Once disengaged from the phonocentric paradigm, language becomes *infans*, as Monnier and Nancy point out in the conversation they have in *Allitérations*.[44] In the words of the latter:

[44] *Allitérations* is the name of a performance presented by Mathilde Monnier and Jean-Luc Nancy in 2001 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, as well as the title of a book containing the written exchanges of the meeting between the choreographer and the philosopher. The initial correspondence, preparatory to the 2001 performance, was first published under the title *Dehors la danse*. It constitutes a simple copy of the messages exchanged between 2000 and 2001 between Monnier and Nancy. Three years later, in *Allitérations*. *Conversations sur la danse*, these messages are rewritten and organised under thematic headings. For a detailed analysis of the performance *Allitérations* see: Noémie Solomon, "Relational Gestures: *Allitérations* and the Limits of the Choreographic", in André Lepecki and Jenn Joy, *Planes of Composition. Dance, Theory and the Global*, (Calcutta, Spectra Graphics, 2008), pp. 160-174. See also: Mathilde Monnier and Jean Luc-Nancy, *Dehors la danse*, (Paris: Rroz, 2000).

> In a dance, you can put a few words and fragments of phrases, examinations, but not an ongoing speech. It's not possible to create a choreography where the dancers say a theatrical text during the whole performance … is it? I would say that dance is "infantile" in essence, not in the sense of "childish" [*puéril*], but in the sense of *infans*, understood as "one who does not speak".[45]

Dance, as Nancy claims, does not speak linguistic language though it nevertheless creates forms of signification that do not deal with conceptual contents or semiotic operations (except for the case of geometric dances that could be described, using a vocabulary alien to its conception, as a performative writing rather than a dance). In dance, the language of voice gives way to the language of gestures and movements. The question that remains to be answered is what and how does the silent or *infans* language of dance expresses? One of the possible answers to this issue is found in Laurence Louppe's poetic approach to dance.

In *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, Louppe provides a theory of dance based on the understanding of the writing, or the sense-giving activity involved in choreography, in terms of a poetics of dance. Poetics, says Louppe, focuses on that which can touch us by affecting our sensibility and animating our imaginary. Its aim is to examine the set of creative actions that trigger an experience of aesthetic awareness in both the performer and the spectator.[46] Different from what occurs in a linguistically driven approach, concerned with imposing a linguistic structure on a dance composition, Louppe is concerned not with what a dance says, nor with what can eventually be turned into words and organised as a verbal discourse, but with what dance does, with what is created in and through it. Her attention is directed towards the path followed by the artist in order to "reach the point where the artistic act is available to perception", and where "our consciousness can discover it and begin to resonate with it".[47]

By making the problem of art, specifically dance, a problem of perception, Louppe implicitly takes up part of the legacy of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which aims to examine the moment in which the world is presented to and stylised by the subject. In a similar vein

[45] Mathilde Monnier and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Allitérations. Conversations sur la danse,* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 90 (translation is mine).
[46] Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, xxi
[47] Ibid., 4.

Louppe explores the instant in which the experiment or play of movement becomes present to the perception of both the dancer and the witness of the dance, and continues to trace what this experiment "makes of the body" as well as how and to what extent it triggers "another perception, another consciousness of the world and above all a new way of sensing and creating".[48] For Louppe, this renewal of perception is different from the renewal offered by other arts, because in dance there is no external instrument through which this experience can be performed. The subject is in her movement directly, by means of her own body. There is no supplementary tool, like the canvas of the painter or the piece of marble of the sculpturer. The danced movements, she argues, inscribe themselves in the performer's body, thus conferring to dance poetics the particularity of being located at this particular crux in which a sensibility is "directly touched by the object of its study, involved in the different phases of its sensing, [and] reworking this sensing through experience of the work".[49]

Louppe's proposal is close to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with respect of the primacy given to perception, but also because of its conception of the dancer as a subject in the world capable of transforming her perceptive field along with that of the other beings who share her vital horizon. The danced movements are in this regard also inscribed in that other body that perceives them and is willing to be touched, or better yet, moved by them. For this reason, the choreographic process is not restricted to the realm of the dance studio and the stage of the performance, nor to the activities exclusively performed by the choreographer and the dancers, but includes any other person whose perception, sensibility and imaginary are touched by the play of movement. In this sense she speaks of a holistic choreographic practice that integrates the creation of a piece in a studio by a choreographer in dialogue with one or more dancers; the performance of the piece by the dancer in a place that, beyond its specific physical characteristics, is turned into a stage during the performance; the spectator who is affected by the dance at the precise moment of performance, and finally that other "spectator" who approaches the piece after it has been performed by any means of audiovisual, photographic and/or written mediums and is touched by it. On this last point in particular Louppe says that "the very body of anyone who writes on dance is worked on by the dance; that all of the movements, the choreographic processes seen, integrated,

[48] Ibid., xxii.
[49] Ibid., 7.

approached also through practice, end up woven into the very frame of our perception".[50] The ways in which dance affects each of the bodies involved in the practice are obviously different, but for Louppe, it is enough that there is a body being touched by dance for there to be a choreographic practice.

I return to the question underlying this section: What is choreography? Choreography is the historical tradition of dance notation elaborated since the Renaissance and formed today by hundreds of movement-recording systems. It is also the name given to a series of successive pre-arranged body movements that are learned and performed in almost the same way every time the piece is executed. And choreography is also a poetic practice that explores the ways in which bodily movements renew our perception by intensifying our sensible register of kinetics and kinaesthesia and produce an affective and, as I will discuss in the next section, existential displacement.

FROM MOVEMENT TO STILLNESS & FROM STILLNESS TO MOVEMENT

In her book *Poetics of Dance,* Gabriele Brandstetter explains that by the end of the nineteenth century there arose a generalised "*crisis of representation*" that questioned the scope and limits of language, knowledge, sense and expressivity in almost every realm of life.[51] In dance, as in the rest of the arts, this crisis was accompanied by an intense critique of what was considered to be the traditional forms of representation. In this case, the attacks were directed at the dominant form of concert dance that had been the main referent of dance for at least the past two centuries, namely, classical ballet. From that moment on, classical ballet acted as an anti-referent. Ways were sought to break with its values, such as virtuosity, beauty and lightness, its favour for compositional symmetry, its disciplinary techniques and ultimately its concept of art. In opposition to ballet, the avant-garde dance born out of the crisis of representation conceived itself not only as a performance but also as an art constantly questioning itself. Some of the issues raised, as Brandstetter explains, included a critical work on the matter of the self and the creation of ongoing enquiries into subjectivity, otherness,

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[50] Ibid., 11.

[51] Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance. Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes,* trans. Elena Polzer, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6.

patterns of movement, concepts of meaning and body imagery[52]; the production of new compositional methods, such as improvisation; the reliance on a vast and continuously expanding corpus of somatic knowledge and practices derived from its dialogue with other dance traditions, such as butoh, and other epistemologies of the body such as Feldenkrais, Alexander and Ideokinesis methods; and finally, a transformation of the role of the viewer, now taking an active role when challenged by new representations of the body, like through nakedness, as well as by novel patterns of movement, such as pedestrian ones.[53]

Regarding the rejection of classical ballet values that Brandstetter comments, Nancy explains in *Alliterátions* that contemporary dance has shifted and in fact detached from the "representational model" which he associates with a "pantomimic" spirit in which gestures are the bearers of a verbal discourse, a discourse which is spoken through bodily movements that operate as words.[54] Against this model, contemporary dance, says Nancy, works with an autonomous, "non-representational gesture" whose telos is not the word.[55]

The term "contemporary dance" refers both to artistic proposals currently being produced and thus are contemporary temporally speaking, and to the stage dance that emerged after the crisis of representation pointed out by Brandstetter as an alternative to classical ballet. In the latter sense, the term includes modern dance, formed in the very last years of the 1800s and the first half of the twentieth century, postmodern dance, produced during the 1960s and 1970s, and the so-called new dance, developed from the 1980s onwards. Here I overlook these internal divisions and speak of contemporary dance in general, understanding it as a phenomenon that emerged during the crisis of representation, whose distinctive sign is the creation of pieces that have an aesthetic value but also play a critical role insofar as they produce displacements of both bodies and ideas. In my understanding of contemporary dance, this inquisitive and challenging spirit that runs parallel to the actual choreographic performance is the base of contemporary dance's creative and poetic power. To put it another way, contemporary dance creates new motor dynamics, but also new images,

[52] Ibid., 7, 22-23.
[53] Ibid., 22-23.
[54] Monnier and Nancy, *Allitérations*, 26-27.
[55] Ibid.

narratives, concepts and ways of intensifying the register and acknowledgement of movement on both its kinetic and kinaesthetic levels.

In the vocabulary of dance studios and classrooms, it is often said that someone "marks" a choreography when the piece is rehearsed without fully executing all the steps that make it up. Marking is a way of emphasising the key gestures of a work. I propose to do something similar here by marking some motifs of the history of contemporary dance highlighting a few scenes in which movement as well as the seeming absence of it, has been used as an aesthetic, exploratory and critical tool. The development followed goes from one extreme to the other, starting with the movement in its most exacerbated version and ending with its most radical slowing down.

UNDISCIPLINED CEASELESS MOVEMENTS

Mallarmé describes Loïe Fuller's famous performance *Serpentine Dance*, presented in Paris in 1893 in the following terms:

> In the terrible cascade of cloth, the figure swoons, radiant, cold; illustrating many a spinning image tending toward a distant unfolding: a giant petal or butterfly, uncrumpling, all according to order, clear and elementary. Or she fuses with the rapid nuances transmuting their crepuscular or grotesque phantasmagoria of air and water into a rapidity of passions —delight, mourning, anger. One needs, to set them off, prismatic, violent, or diluted, the vertigo of a soul that is as if cast into the air by an artifice.[56]

In the visual records of the piece, a pioneering film of the same name recorded by the Lumiere brothers a few years after the premiere of the dance, Fuller is seen moving with a broad white dress unfolded through a hidden system of two bamboo poles mounted underneath the fabric and attached to her arms. Her enveloping, repetitive and continuous dance creates waves, circles and spirals that form "ephemeral sculptural figurations", changing their colour according to the light projected onto the fabric.[57] Fuller's face sometimes disappears; it gets lost in the movement. Her body is an amorphous entity: it is no longer the virtuous, slim and tall body portrayer of feelings and dramatic winks typical of classical ballet, but a short and

[56] Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 135.
[57] Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance,* 271-272.

curvy anatomy that becomes the motor of free-floating shapes wandering in an empty and dark stage. Fuller fascinates and confuses her audiences with this, her most famous piece, and other "serpentine style" performance such as *Butterfly Dance*, *Lily Dance* and *Fire Dance*, all created in Paris between 1892 and 1894. The novelty of her proposal had to do not only with the technical innovations used, like beam projectors and modified stages to achieve specific illumination, nor with the parallel scientific incursions made during the creation of the performance.[58] For instance, it is known that Fuller asked Pierre and Marie Curie to impregnate the fabric of her veil with a powder they used to work with that reacted to light, none other than radioactive powder. The novelty was, as Jacques Rancière claims, in the "invention of a new body" through movement.[59]

In his study on Fuller, Rancière states that the dancer "engenders forms by placing itself outside itself": Fuller becomes a serpent, a butterfly, a flame.[60] His interpretation echoes that of Mallarmé when watching Cornalba perform in Paris and arguing that she can turn herself into the metaphor of a knife, a goblet or a flower. Both Mallarmé and Rancière, coincide in characterising dance as an art in which the performer becomes another being through movement. Mallarmé, for example, captures this sense of dance when he describes it as an art of depersonalisation.[61] At stake is the question of what it means to be an embodied subject and to what extent movement, when sublimated in this way, can displace sedimented ideas about what is assumed to be a body-subject.

A few years after Fuller's performances, Mary Wigman followed the exploratory route opened by the serpentine dances with her whirling pieces. In 1926, Wigman created *Drehmonotonie* (*Monotony Whirl*), a solo comprised of a simple movement: her continuous circling around

[58] There are several authors who interpret Fuller's dances as pre-cinematic performances, emphasising her use of protocinematic devices like light beams as well as her collaborative work with the Lumiere brothers. See: Marie Bardet, "La danza de Loïe Fuller y el cine", *Boletín de Estética* 42, (2017): 79-105. Tom Hunning, "Loïe Fuller and the Art of Motion Body. Light, Electricity, and the Origins of Cinema", in Richard Allen and Malcom Turvey (eds.), *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida. Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), pp. 75-90.
[59] Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul, (London: Verso, 2013), 95.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Mallarmé, "Scribbled at the Theatre", *Divagations*, 120.

her axis accompanied by Oriental-like piano and drum music.[62] Wigman describes her dance in the following terms:

> Fixed to the same spot and spinning in the monotony of the whirling movement, one lost oneself gradually in it until the turns seemed to detached themselves from the body, and the world around it started to turn. Not turning oneself, but being turned, being the center, being the quiet pole in the vortex of rotation![63]

Wigman emphasises the flatness of simple circular endless movements but, perhaps more importantly, the sudden transition into self-loss while rotating around her axis. As Brandstetter explains, in the whirling dance, "the subject disappears in the center. The ultimate climax of this ex-centric movement is the disintegration of the self and the associated physical collapse analogous to a state of insanity".[64] Wigman identifies this phenomenon with what she describes as a "lascivious annihilation of corporeality", in which she becomes "one with the events of the cosmos for a few seconds".[65] If Fuller loses her face behind the vaporous dress that creates ephemeral sculptures, Wigman does so through the ongoing spiral movement. In both cases, what is witnessed are movements and moments of self-dissolution; moments in which what can be called "I" disappears momentarily, it is lost in and through movement.[66]

With these two examples it is possible to draw a contrast between two figures or conceptions of the subject that I have traced in this research: the master speaking subject and the dancing subject. As will be recalled, the critique of the model of language defended by phonocentrism was linked to the figure of the master subject. A subject which, through the so-called immediacy of the voice and thought, presumably attests that she knows what she speaks about and means to say what she speaks about. Phonocentrism portrays the image of a subject as a knowing and self-conscious being, owner of her thoughts and words. In Fuller and Wigman's choreographic practice, another figure emerges. The dancing subject is no longer a self-conscious being but one that loses her sense of self in and through movement. After the

[62] Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance,* 215.
[63] Mary Wigman, *The Language of Dance*, trans. Walter Sorell, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), 39.
[64] Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance,* 216.
[65] This quote is provided by Brandstetter who refers to Wigman's manuscripts. Ibid. 215.
[66] Ibid., 200.

pioneering incursions of Fuller and Wigman, to name two cases, the exploration around the displacing powers of movement continued in the most varied ways. It was clear that movement had opened a door to unsettle assumed routines, patterns and ideas.

SOMATIC AWARENESS AND THE REMAPPING THE BODY

One of the foundational elements of contemporary choreographic practice is the use of a large number of somatic techniques focused on kin(aesth)etic awareness for training and performance. Nowadays, dancers deepen their knowledge of the body through a vast array of corporeal epistemologies including Alexander, Feldenkrais, Body-Mind Centring, Bartenieff, Contact Improvisation, pilates and yoga, to name a few. This diversity has shaped contemporary dance as an essentially hybrid and interdisciplinary art, up the point that it is not an exaggeration to say that it is impossible to find two dancers with the same professional training.

From these various somatic methodologies, the Feldenkrais Method, created by Moshe Feldenkrais in the mid-twentieth century, is relevant for the discussion on movement I expose here. Usually associated with physiotherapy and alternative medicine procedures to repair impaired connections between the motor cortex and the body, the Feldenkrais method, whose vocabulary resonates strongly with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, focuses on the examination of habitual movement patterns considered to be inefficient. The method aims to detect kinetic dynamics that once broken down into their constitutive parts can be disarticulated and then turned into new motor associations. This is achieved by using slow, gentle and repetitive movements performed by the method's practitioner on the body of the dancer or by the dancer herself. The aim is to trigger a remapping of her body schema by turning movement in both its kinetic and kinaesthetic dimensions, into an exploratory resource. Practitioners of this method describe it as a "nonverbal communication" that is established with the body in order to disarticulate "stereotyped patterns".[67] This same principle is followed in another of the method´s essential strategies consisting of the restriction of the body's postures and motor sequences, in order to break bodily routines that

[67] Yochanan Rywerant, T*he Feldenkrais Method. Teaching and Handling*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 19. See also: Robert Sholl (ed.), *The Feldenkrais Method in Creative Practice. Dance, Music and Theatre*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

have been sedimented in the body's memory. This is often done through a focalised and thorough examination of a specific part of the body, like hands, shoulders or arms. By moving in a motion-range restricted way, the practitioner can direct her attention to a specific part and become aware of it in a way which it develops in order to modify it. For the Feldenkrais method, as Louppe points out, the perception of the inner or minimal movements of one´s own body has a great transformative power.[68]

The Feldenkrais Method, like most of the somatic practices used in dance formation, is developed in pairs or groups. As Louppe explains, by examining the other's persons "supports, points of contacts, and own tactile or visual observation", I can have a sense of my own body.[69] This type of exploration has, in turn, triggered a limited use of mirrors in workspaces so as not to work relying on a visual reflection but through the kinaesthetic awareness of the body schema and motor patters. According to Louppe, this has enabled contemporary dance to work not on the projection of images and figures, but in the identification of sensations and intensities. She illustrates this by referring to an exercise used by the American choreographer and dancer Trisha Brown:

> The dancer explores by touch all the parts of his body as if to examine its structure, the location of its visceral and energetic points, but also its contours, its epidermal periphery. It is an exercise that corresponds to the field of sight, but also to the field of drawing. As if by traversing my body with my hand, at once sighted and blind, I were tracing and reading its distribution: cavities, hollows, interstices, faults or profiles, at once landscape and text, which already contains, in its deployment in the visible-tactile, touching-touched, seeing and seen (according to the dual categories of Merleau-Ponty in *The Eye and the Spirit*), all the poetic potential, where the slightest movement can generate the imperceptible event.[70]

Through the hands, Brown says, one reads the body. Hands auscultate the body, perceiving the unnoticed rhythms that have been silenced by daily routine; they become a form of sensible registration capable of reconstructing the map of the body and, more importantly, of transforming it. There is something in Brown's exercise that evokes what Merleau-Ponty says about Cézanne's paintings when he claims that though his pieces the painter renders

[68] Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 85.
[69] Ibid., 39.
[70] Ibid., 40.

tangible the phenomenon of vision. Something similar occurs here, where the kinaesthetic power of the body is intensified through touch.

The great contribution of somatic techniques focused on the exploration of the corporeal landscapes is the recognition that the body that dances is not a neutral or original body, it is not a body given in advance, but one ready to be discovered, remapped and reinvented. The dialogue between contemporary dance and these somatic epistemologies opens the door to what Louppe describes as a "multitude of corporeities" which were for a long time "reduced to invisibility".[71] This, she continues, leads us to the recognition that in ourselves there lies the "presence of 'another body' that, through the slightest movement, might suddenly appear".[72]

THE ART OF NOT MOVING: DISPLACING SEDIMENTED IDEAS

So far, I have related dance to an event where a body moves and while doing so produces shapes, figures, patterns, but also mental displacements such as the one suggested by the somatic techniques regarding the idea of the neutral body. However, one should ask, what happens when movement stops? According to Lepecki, during the period here referred to as contemporary dance, stillness earned a place within the choreographic practice. It went from being an indication that a piece had ended, or that the dancer had made a mistake and interrupted the choreography, to something more than a simple conclusion or error. Dancers, Lepecki points out, started to play with the tension between the "still figure" of plastic arts and "moving image" of cinema, and renewed the ontological grounds of dance traditionally linked to the idea of the art of virtuous movements.[73] Lepecki offers a brief genealogy of this process that is worth reviewing.

With the advent of the crisis of representation in dance, stillness was pushed from the background to the foreground. At first, it came to the spotlight as a catalysing power or primordial impulse which triggered the emergence of a piece. The American dancer and

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[71] Ibid., 42.
[72] Ibid.
[73] André Lepecki, "Still. On the Vibratile Microscopy of Dance", in Gabrielle Brandsetter and Hortensia Völckers, eds., *ReMembering the body*, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 342.

choreographer Isadora Duncan, for instance, conceived it as the creative and primal source of dance and claimed that she could stand still for several hours just seeking and ultimately discovering “the central spring of all movement.”[74] However, as Lepecki explains, Duncan’s body was seized by motion only after this silent and solitary auscultation. Stillness, thus, took the role of dance’s “generative matrix”, but did not have a performative role to play beyond that of being the invisible originary force of dance.[75] In other words, although stillness was already on stage, its presence was limited to marginal spaces in the scene where the piece was gestated but not to the space where the dance, once created, was performed.

It would not be until the early 1970s that stillness became openly recognised, thus gaining the title of a choreographic motif in its own right. This acknowledgement was similar to that triggered by John Cage in the field of music a few decades earlier when he gave silence a physiognomy of its own, characterising it no longer as the absence of sound but as the sounds that go unnoticed. This idea was triggered by the famous anecdote of the musician who in the early fifties entered an anechoic chamber at Harvard University, a soundproof room created during World War II for secret military operations that, according to the catalogue of that time, absorbed 99.8 percent of the energy in a sound wave. The room was conditioned only with a small bench, a microphone and a strange lamp that, unlike those used in the rest of Harvard's labs, avoided the slightest buzz. It was said that the frothy grey three-dimensional forms lining of the walls prevented the entry of any sound.[76] After sitting down for a few minutes Cage discovered two noises: the first, with a louder tone, that of his nervous system, the second, lower, that of his blood circulation.[77] This pushed him to recognise that silence as the absolute absence of noise cannot be apprehended by the human ear. Instead, the musician found a room filled with the sounds produced by his living body, sounds as simple as breathing that go unnoticed in everyday life. Thus, even in the place technologically conditioned to recreate that state of mind of total isolation dreamt of by many philosophers, “[t]here is always something to see, something to hear”.[78]

[74] Isadora Duncan, *My lif*e, (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927), 75.
[75] Lepecki, “Still. On the Vibratile Microscopy of Dance”, 342.
[76] Kyle Gann, *No such Thing as Silence. John Cage 4’33’’*, (New York: Yale University, 2010), 160-162.
[77] John Cage, *A Year from Monday,* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 134.
[78] John Cage, *Silence. Lectures and Writings by John Cage*, 50th anniversary edition, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press*,* 1973), 8.

According to Lepecki, something similar occurred in dance when movement was "stopped". Steve Paxton's research on somatic methodologies, which eventually led to the development of the technique known as Contact Improvisation —a technique in which points of physical contact trigger the exploration of movement through improvisation—, made it possible for dance to finally embrace those explorations that the earlier generations of dance had exposed and shyly utilised, and turned them into a compositional strategy. Paxton brought stillness into "full phenomenological and ontological status as dance (and not just "potential dance", or dance's origin, background or other)."[79] Lepecki illustrates this achievement referring to an exercise proposed by Paxton for his piece *Magnesium*, first performed in 1972, in which the body is brought to the state of greatest possible immobility, and is still used in dance studios nowadays. Lepecki writes:

> As the subject stands still, listening, sensing, smelling its own bodily vibrations, adjustments, tremors streaming through, across, within the space between core subjectivity and the surface of the body, there is nothing more than the revelation of an infinite, unlocatable space for microexploration of the multiple potential for other-wise unsensed subjectivities and corporealities one harbours. The "small dance" happens in that nowhere; the dancer must explore the unlocatable *there* between subjectivity and body-image.[80]

The minor tensions, hesitations, pulsations, imbalances, expansions and contractions, in short what Paxton calls the "small dance", shows that movement is composed not only of an immense variety of dynamics but also of a wide range of motor intensities. The recognition of the different intensities that are brought into play through the standing still body trigger a "«new sensorial» by means of intensification of perceptual thresholds."[81] Thus, if Cage discovered by entering the anechoic chamber that, as his famous dictum says, "There is no such thing as silence", Paxton, by bringing the body to a still state, discovered that there is no absolute stillness but layers of minuscule and microscopic moves.[82] In both cases, the dualistic thinking that distinguishes between silence and sound or between movement and non-movement is compromised, for neither Cage nor Paxton's proposal can be read through binary oppositions. Their projects offer two different ways of recognising that the sensible

[79] Lepecki, "Still. On the Vibratile Microscopy of Dance", 344.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 345.
[82] Cage, *Silence*, 51.

cannot be reduced to a scheme of presence-absence, but to one of intensities and tonalities.[83] In Paxton's case, in particular, what is revealed is not only that movement is always composed of micro-movements, but that these can be apprehended through a refinement of perception. Perception acts on levels so subtle and minuscule that they go unnoticed or sometimes even denied in everyday life. Through stillness dance offers a different way of proceeding capable of producing a "microscopy of perception" that renews this phenomenon.[84]

The use made of stillness by Paxton and others after him like Jérôme Bel or María La Ribot unveils a compositional strategy, a conceptual conquest that not only enlarges the definitions of both dance and movement, but, and perhaps more importantly, offers a critique.[85] Just as Louppe pushes the discoveries of the body as a body in becoming made through the dialogue

[83] Lepecki, "Still. On the Vibratile Microscopy of Dance", 346.
One of the pioneers of this aesthetic of micro perception is undoubtedly Marcel Duchamp. His concept of "inframince" points towards the awareness of the minimal differences, the small perceptions where, as Maurizio Lazzarato claims "the laws of the macroscopic and, in particular, those of causality, of the logic of non-contradiction, of language and its generalizations, and of chronological time no longer hold. It is in inframince that becoming occurs, in the micro that changes take place". Maurizio Lazzarato, *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work*, trans. Joshua David Jordan, (Los Ángeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2014), 19.

[84] Lepecki, "Still. On the Vibratile Microscopy of Dance", 344.

[85] In the Mexican context, the dancer and choreographer Evoé Sotelo has developed the *Danza Mínima* (Minimal Dance), a "methodology for choreographic and interpretative research and experimentation within the field of the living arts" which has as its main principle the creation of a "corporal discourse" based on the minimum movement of the body and the exploration of its maximum expressive value. *Danza mínima* departs from the idea that bodily movement is the basis of knowledge of ourselves, the world and others. Evoé Sotelo and Ximena González Grandón explain that in order to turn movement into an "epistemology of consciousness" *Danza mínima* relies on three axes: a constrained use of space in movement, the enhancement of the energetic values, and the elongation of the temporal score. Against what the authors describe as the "forgetfulness of the body" in our sedentary contemporary way of life, *Danza mínima* triggers an "intense mental and physiological activity that is the main basis for the production of both movement and the argumentative and sensitive content of the bodily proposal. […] The dance movements de-automatise ordinary movements and turn them into acts of creative expression in their projection into real, possible or impossible spaces". This experience, Sotelo and González Grandón continue, "is not only a state of consciousness or the typical cerebral rationality —from the purest logocentric prejudice—. It is a form of poietic consciousness composed of bodily revelation and a feeling that restores the mystery of being as a body in movement. Poiesis gives rise to the emergence of creative patterns based on kinaesthetic possibilities, it empties everyday life, takes it out of balance, out of comfort; it seems to be a double consciousness, similar to feeling with the body in order to be another body". The authors conclude their exposition by linking the strategy proposed by *Danza Mínima* to the problem of silence: "It is in silence that the body says what really matters; that which is only revealed in the conflict of immobility and in the precarious and vivid balance of the pause. Silence is not absence, or lack of something. Silence is a full state of presence that reveals our predisposition to inertial movement and our proclivity for continuous rationalisation. In the performative act of improvisation, we assume the moments of mobility as those routes that are laboriously forged as paths to access the maximum expressive goal of silence." Ximena González Grandón and Evoé Sotelo, "Danzas Mínimas", *Revista de la Universidad de México 869* (February 2021): 106-110. Translation is mine.

between dance and several somatic practices, so too Lepecki sees in stillness a way to "reinvent embodiment, subjectivity and the sensorial by reclaiming corporeal attitudes otherwise discarded as in/significant."[86] To support this Lepecki turns to the anthropologist C. Nadia Seremetakis who describes stillness as "the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen. It is the moment of exit from historical dust".[87] According to Seremetakis in our societies there are different controlling regimes that determine what is culturally framed and accepted as perceptible. There is a "politics of the senses" that creates different zones of "devaluation, forgetfulness, and inattention" and various "techniques of distraction" through which certain ways of feeling and thinking are imposed.[88] The "still acts" such as those performed by Paxton, disrupt the historical flow and the politics associated with it. Based on Seremetaki's concept, Lepecki points towards the political scope of stillness.

> It is within these dusty folds of agitation in the name of progress that dance's embracing of still acts can be perceived as resistance. Standing still against the busy background of historical agitation (an agitation that nevertheless, stays put), the dancer does not betray dance, but rather proposes another dance, one under which time expands immensely, awakening discarded memories to flood, allowing sedimented yet necessary gestures, thoughts, feelings, sights, to emerge once again in the social surface… In stillness one suspends sensory and historical anaesthesia.

Thus, to turn movement into something almost imperceivable, to bring it to the edge where it is thought to cease to exist, is to transform it into a (political) "performance of suspension", a critique reclaiming a space of recognition for the gestures, ideas and feelings, that have been castoff as insignificant.[89]

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[86] André Lepecki, "Undoing the Fantasy of the (Dancing) Subject: 'Still Acts' in Jérôme Bel's The Last Performance", Steven de Belder and Koen Tachelet eds. *The Salt of the Earth. On dance, politics and reality*, (Brussels: Vlaams Theater Instituut, 2001), 2. Victoria Gray offers a similar interpretation of stillness in contemporary dance focusing on the work of Maria La Ribot, especially her performance Another Bloody Mary (2000). See: Victoria Gray, "Re-Thinking Stillness: Empathetic Experiences of Stillness in Performance and Sculpture", in Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason (eds.), *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, (Bristol: Intelect, 2012), 201-217.

[87] C. Nadia Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses, Part II: Still Acts", in C. Nadia Seremetakis (ed.), *The Senses Still. Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity,* (London: Routledge, 1994), 12.

[88] Ibid., 12-13.

[89] Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, p. 15.

The micro perception triggered by still-acts suggests a connection with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, in particular to his idea of *epoché* described also in terms of suspension. *Epoché*, the bracketing of the "natural attitude", of the ideas unconsciously accepted about the world, suspends these assumptions in order to return to the lived world with fresh eyes. In both cases there is a pause that operates as a critique of the daily flow of life. Thus, framed within the ontological re-evaluation contemporary choreographic practice has made of movement, we can speak of a motor *epoché* or, better yet, of a kin(aesth)etic *epoché*.

In what follows, I consider more explicitly the disruptive and the creative potential of stillness by focusing on the dance of contemporary flamenco dancer Israel Galván, who plays with it as a compositional strategy that challenges the ontology of this genre, and the sedimented beliefs around the body, the subject and embodiment.

"INMOBILE DYNAMISM", SILENCE AND VULNERABILITY

Israel Galván is a contemporary flamenco dancer with an aesthetic proposal based on a confrontation with traditional flamenco, or "pure flamenco" as is often said, and a relentless challenge to the limits of the genre and dance in general. It is precisely because of this that Galván describes his style as a "dirty flamenco", a flamenco contaminated by other genres, techniques and disciplines in the search for new forms of expression.[90]

In *Le danseur des solitudes* (*The Dancer of Solitudes*), Georges Didi-Huberman offers a thorough study on Galván's dance, focusing on one of his most iconic pieces: *Arena,* premiered at the Seville Biennial in 2004. Based on this piece and in a set of conversations maintained offstage, Didi-Huberman describes Galván's dance as a dance of paradoxes, confronting fluid and rhythmic gestures with deformed, contorted and irregular displacements. Galván, he argues, has the "ability to make dislocations and smoothness, ruptures and connections, contrasts and continuities, effects of fragmentations and flows

[90] Thierry Demaizière and Alban Teurlai, *Move*. Netflix, 2020.
For an explanation of the different flamenco styles and their historical development see: Corinne Frayssinet-Savy, *Israel Galván. Bailar el silencio. Una antropología histórica del baile flamenco*, trans. Idoia Quintana, (Madrid: Editorial Continta Me Tienes, 2015).

work together".[91] According to Didi-Huberman, these paradoxes emerge from the appropriation and reinterpretation Galván makes of a classic element of the structure of both dance and flamenco music: the "remate". Derived from the verb "rematar", which means to end or to conclude, for Didi-Huberman, this element captures the essence of Galván's proposal, which lies in the gesture that knows when and how to stop movement and, by doing so, turning that stop into a counter-performance or counter-movement.[92] According to this reading, Galván's philosophy of dance interpretation would thus be that of an aesthetics of the "remate", of movement's arrest.

In technical terms, the "remate" is a choreographic gesture performed mainly with the feet, but ultimately involving the rest of the body, indicating either the end of a set of movements or accentuating the song's lyrics accompanying the dance. In both cases, its physiognomy is never the same, for it varies between each artist depending on the way the tapping of the feet is combined with the rest of the movements and postures of the body. Didi-Huberman traces a small genealogy of flamenco dancers, singers and musicians, who have worked on this element culminating with Galván's "immobile dynamism", which he describes in the following terms:

> The "remates" through which Galván never ceases to make his gestures cease, to interrupt or to accentuate his gestures, show that dance is by no means reduced to the execution of "graceful movements that obey a rhythm", as Bergson supposed. Every dance is always *polyrhythmic*, just as every poem is always polysemic. That is why stammering can be hypostasised, not as a deprivation of rhythm, but as an *alteration of rhythm*, by which I mean its inclination towards otherness, multiplicity, complexity. A man who stammers only makes more audible the rhythmic complexity that in his body dissociates the heartbeat from the respiratory movements, and these from the blinking of the eyes, and so on. The dancer is the one who will know how to make this organic complexity visible, to make it a *work*, to extend it to the whole of space, beyond himself.[93]

Beyond the aesthetic power of the "remate" that allows marking a piece, Galván's "immobile dynamism" triggers ontological and existential questions. In this sense, if Lepecki draws on

[91] Georges Didi-Huberman, *El bailaor de soledades*, trans. Dolores Aguilera, (Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2008), 131-132 (The quotations from this work are my translation.).
[92] Ibid., 131.
[93] Ibid., 97.

the figure of silence proposed by Cage to set the foundations of his concept of stillness, Didi-Huberman turns to stutter to feed his concept of immobile dynamism. The dancer that stops and remains standing in silence reveals something like the stammerer in the case of verbal language: he revels the "other" within dance. Here, one might add a note rather than an odd coincidence: Galván himself is a stammerer. In the various filmed interviews, he can be seen struggling to say sentences fluently, giving the impression of looking up every word just to utter it with immense hesitation. When everything stops all at once, Didi-Huberman explains, Galván's standing still body "does not cease to move, to tremble, to dance".[94]

Although Didi-Huberman succeeds in capturing through the concept of "immobile dynamism" an element of Galván's dance that links him to the genealogy traced by Lepecki with respect to contemporary dance, it is necessary to outline a critique of the place to which Didi-Huberman takes this argument. For Didi-Huberman, Galván's use of the "remates" leads him to a solitary dance. Hence the title of his work, *Le danseur des solitudes*. Galván, says Didi-Huberman, is someone who, by refusing to fold his body to a pre-established concept of it, ends up dancing alone, dancing in his solitudes.[95] Galván, nonetheless, against Didi-Huberman's interpretation, does not dance alone because in his pieces he is usually accompanied by one or more musicians and singers. Moreover, even in the cases when these other people who make up the compositional structure of his pieces do not appear on stage, he dances using different objects which, as he himself has stated on several occasions, allow him to form a choral proposal.[96] This is also argued by Pedro G. Romero, a great connoisseur of his work, who says that when Galván remains on stage without accompanists or objects, he does not dance alone, but dances "accompanied by his silence".[97]

Corinne Frayssinet-Savy agrees with Romero in her study of the dancer titled *Israel Galván. Bailar el silencio* (*Israel Galván. Dancing the silence*) where she states that immobility does

[94] Ibid., 113, 115.
[95] Ibid., 43, 44.
[96] Demaizière and Teurlai, *Move.* See also: Jose Maria Velázquez Gaztelu, "Israel Galván en su realidad", *Nuestro Flamenco*, accessed 20 September 2021.
https://www.rtve.es/play/audios/nuestro-flamenco/nuestro-flamenco-israel-galvan-su-realidad-04-12-12/1599643/
[97] Pedro G. Romero, "Epílogo: Israel Galván: «sí, un bailaor enciclopédico»", in Frayssinet-Savy, *Israel Galván,* 93 (translation is mine).

not lead to a solitude dance, but rather to a renovation of the genre, to another flamenco dance. In Frayssinet-Savy's words: "His dance, which becomes imperceptible, moves away from the extrovert expression, from the over-interpreted feeling" typical of traditional manifestations of this genre.[98] Galván's flamenco does not exhibit high dramatic and grandiloquent gestures, but explores the limits of the dancing body through silence. Silence, Frayssinet-Savy argues, "dwells at the heart of Israel Galván's choreographic language," and triggers a turn towards an interiority which gives it one of its signature features.[99] Thus, by stopping his dance and listening to silence, Galván puts stillness at the centre of his moving explorations and fosters new languages and new assemblages remapping the limits of both this genre and dance in general.

There is one more element to add to the effect of Galván's immobility which, to a certain extent, both Didi-Huberman and Frayssinet-Savy touch on, but without going into it in any depth. By taking movement to its minimal expression, slowing it down up to the point it seems as if it has disappeared, Galván triggers what here I propose to describe as an aesthetics of vulnerability. Galván himself has referred to this when in an interview conducted in 2018 he stated the following: "There are efforts that push my body and create something like a shock. This has pushed me to the point of madness, which has caused me to hurt myself. Nonetheless, I think I have to share this: the fact that I, as a dancer, feel like I could give my life for this dance."[100] Galván's movements not only abandon that level of self-preservation that both Valéry and Gil attribute to this phenomenon in everyday life, but touch the other extreme to the point that, as he claims, he has been hurt. Through this exploration, Galván surrenders to an experience of vulnerability, of a selfless exposure, in order to create new assemblages. Didi-Huberman has a phrase that I modify to sum up this point. Whilst he claims that to see Galván dance is to see "someone who has forged - at what price, we will never know, and it would be inelegant to try to find out - a great art of disjunction", I prefer to call this a great art of vulnerability.[101] An art in which a body-subject plays with its own

[98] Frayssinet-Savy, *Israel Galván*, 47 (The quotations from this work are my translation.).
[99] Ibid., 78.
[100] Demaizière and Teurlai, *Move* (translation is mine).
[101] Didi-Huberman, *El bailaor de soledades*, 89.

strangeness, exposes it, aggravates it.[102] of oneself, exposes it, aggravates it; and art in which a body-subject disarticulates, finds and loses itself, closes itself in its intimacy and makes itself vulnerable to the eyes of others.

PAS DE DEUX: DANCE AND PHILOSOPHY

Contemporary choreographic practice is traversed by a simple question: What subject-body is at stake? Before analysing the figures, postures and movements presented on stage, one has to pose this inquiry as essential. Not doing so implies assuming the idea of a neutral or original body that, as I argued here, is detrimental to the discoveries and conquests of choreographic practice since Loïe Fuller's serpentine performance caused as much commotion as strangeness. Louppe answers to this question by mentioning that it could only be that of bodies, in the plural. Bodies that free themselves from the "conceptual phantasm" of the already given body; bodies constantly being transformed, reformed, deformed; bodies that carry with them "like a secret score, the immense range of their poetic possibilities and tonalities".[103] In short, bodies in becoming that trigger dance's power to touch and transform the sensibility and imagination of both dancer and viewer. Gil, for his part, revisits this same question and answers it with the concept of a "paradoxical body". He writes:

> Here we no longer consider the body as a "phenomenon", a concrete, visible perception, evolving in the objective Cartesian space, but as a meta-phenomenon, visible and virtual at the same time, a cluster of forces and a transformer of space and time, emitter of signs and trans-semiotic, gifted with an organic interior ready to dissolve as it rises to the surface. A body inhabited by, and inhabiting other bodies and other minds, a body existing at the same time in the permanent opening to the world through language and sensorial contact, and in the solitude of its singularity, through silence and non-inscription. A body that opens and closes itself, that connects itself ceaselessly with other bodies and other elements, a body that can be deserted, emptied, robbed of its soul, and traversed by the most exuberant flows of life. A human body because it can become animal, become mineral, vegetable, become atmosphere, hole, ocean, become pure movement. In short, a paradoxical body.[104]

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[102] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus II. Writings on Sexuality,* trans. Anne O'Byrne, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 92.
[103] Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 45.
[104] Gil, *Movimento total,* p. 68-69.

The dance between the poles of the actual and the virtual through the performance of movements that differ in their quality, strength, pace and intention, results in new "assemblages of the body".[105] Here I propose to think of a joint concept that integrates Louppe and Gil's ideas. In this way we would speak of contemporary dance as a medium that offers the possibility of encountering paradoxical bodies that, not being previously given, demand constant exploration for their constitution is an endlessly transformed, displaced, moved. It is in this sense that I have spoken of dance as an art of displacement. It is the art of the paradoxical bodies that displace on a stage, but also the art that displaces stereotyped motor dynamics, sensible routines and sedimented ideas. A practice incessantly dancing between doing and feeling, practice and discourse.[106] It is precisely at this point where dance meets philosophy. The poetic approach to the choreographic practice makes it possible to bring it close to dance and philosophy and to explore both dimensions as research routes around movement —the movement of bodies, of thoughts, of bodies of thought, of thoughts around the bodies, of sedimented concepts, of recurring corporeal patterns and motor organisations, of subjectivities— with different cartographies. Let us look in detail at this.

One of the distinctive elements of the poetic approach, as aforementioned, is the idea that choreographic practice leaves its marks both on the performer and the spectator. This configures dance as a practice of a resonant and shared sensorial reordering. Movement theoretician Hubert Godard discusses it as follows:

> The movement of the other brings into play the spectator's own experience of movement: the visual information generates, in the spectator, an immediate kinaesthetic experience (internal sensation of movements in his or her own body), and the modifications and intensities of the dancer's body space find their resonance in the spectator's body.[107]

For Godard, therefore, the perception of dance on the part of the viewer is comprised of at least two intertwined moments, one of immediate apprehension of the other's movement and a second phase in which the observer is kinaesthetically affected by what is being perceived. He describes this second moment in terms of a "kinaesthetic empathy", or one's

[105] Ibid., 71.
[106] Ibid., 11.
[107] Godard, "Le geste et sa perception", 227.

capacity to partake in another's sensory and affective experience of movement.[108] Marie Bardet sums it up very incisively when she says that watching someone dancing forces a tendency to "con-moverse", to be moved with and by the other.[109] Bardet uses the Spanish concept "con-moverse", which is lost in its English translation, that implies, on the one hand, the idea of being sensitively or affectively touched by something or someone (*conmoverse*), and, on the other hand, the idea of causing something to leave the place it occupies and move to another place (*moverse*). Thus, Bardet confers to dance the power to existentially displace the embodied-subject through movement: to dislocate its traditional footholds, bases and grips, to disarticulate previously agreed functions, to unlearn endlessly repeated dynamics, and ultimately to promote a conception of itself open to "permeability".[110]

Bardet works this process of permeability in close dialogue with Suely Rolnik's understanding of vulnerability. Vulnerability is the sensitive capacity and existential disposition to be altered and displaced. It allows one to cease grasping oneself and others as mere "pre-established images" to become "living presences" with embodied subjectivities opened to be touched and transformed.[111] Rolnik's concept is developed in opposition to perception, understood not in Merleau-Ponty's sense but close to what in this thesis has been associated with the logic of the language of voice. Perception aims to grasp the world in terms of stable signs and forms upon which specific meanings can be projected and keep their content without much transformation in order to maintain "the map of reigning representations".[112] Perception, says Rolnik, is thus associated with "the history of the subject and with language" from which arises classical notions like that of subject and object, depicted as two entities "clearly delineated" and with a "relationship of exteriority to each other".[113] Unlike perception, vulnerability, interprets the world as a "field of forces that affect us and make themselves present in our bodies".[114] Hence, in contrast to the conceptual stability offered by the first capacity, vulnerability dissipates the representations of object and subject as well as the

[108] Ibid.
[109] Bardet, *Pensar con Mover*, 229.
[110] Ibid., 97.
[111] Suely Rolnik, "The Geopolitics of Pimping", trans. Brian Holmes, in Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (eds)., *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*, (London: MyFlyBooks, 2011), 25.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

disassociation of the body from the world. Vulnerability, concludes Rolnik, allows us to project ourselves as resonant or vibratile bodies, as bodies that have the "power of resonating with the world".[115]

The acknowledgement of these two capacities does not imply that one needs to choose one or the other but to trigger a dialogue not always free of tensions between two utterly distinct ways of stylising and grasping the world. This is perhaps Rolnik's greatest contribution: not to think of a supplanting of one capacity by another, since this would simply reverse the scheme, but to try out ways of meeting between the two, to look for points of connection. It is evident, though, that the crossing of these two capacities generates friction. This certain discomfort and puzzlement far from being interpreted in negative terms becomes the germ of what Rolnik calls the "potential of thought/creation". In her words:

> Between the capacity of our body to resonate and its capacity of perception there is a paradoxical relation, for these are modes of apprehending reality that work according to totally distinct logics, irreducible to each other. It is the tension of this paradox that mobilises and galvanises the potential of thought/creation, to the extent that the new sensations that incorporate themselves in our sensible texture carry out mutations that are not transmittable by our available representations. For this reason they throw our references into crisis and impose on us the urgency of inventing new forms of expression. Thus we integrate into our body the signs that the world gives us, and through their expression, we incorporate them to our existential territories.[116]

According to Rolnik, in the course of this operation, we are led to remap preestablished references and create new shapes, figures, outlines. In other word, we are forced to "think/create". This practice, she continues, has the "power to intervene in reality" and to transform our "subjective and objective landscape".[117]

The paradoxical and irreducible link that Rolnik attributes to the encounter of perception and vulnerability develops a dual process of simultaneous creation and thought which is present in contemporary dance and, specifically, in contemporary choreographic practice. As I argued

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[115] Ibid., 26.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

here, this practice is not limited to the dancing steps executed on stage, but to the exploration and ultimately reinvention of the elements constitutive of this art like the body-subject, movement and language. It is precisely in the latter sense that contemporary choreographic practice acquires a political scope, for the interplay between perception and vulnerability that is capable of triggering becomes a stage in which to explore and ultimately transform our vital horizon.

For Bardet, in line with Rolnik's theory of vulnerability, the exercise of "thought/creation" enables us to bring together dance and philosophy. It is not a matter of substituting one for the other, nor assimilating one through the other, since these are two practices with their own genealogies, resources and paradigms. Rather it is a matter of creating displacements through the "diffracted echoes" that emerge when a problem that touches both practices is treated through the "singularities of each of them" and in "the friction of their concepts".[118]

In this sense, Bardet maintains, it is incorrect to say that when one dances, one "leaves one's head to one side".[119] The opposite is true. It is enough to recognise that most of the time a dancer mentally keeps track of the beats of the rhythm while dancing. The example is simple, but it serves to argue that when one dances it is not that one stops thinking but that one stops thinking in a certain way. Something similar happens here to the problem of language that I have been tracing in this thesis. They are really two sides of the same coin. From a phono-logo-centric conception, thought has a logical, rational physiognomy. Here, when we start from a motor regime, we find another type of thought based on kin(aesth)etic logic. So, coming back to the subject of dance, when the body in movement ceases to be an exaltation of virtuosity and becomes a means and a motive for exploration, it is no longer simply a body given to spectacle but a body that, while dancing, displaces sedimented patterns and ideas. Contemporary choreographic practice is inseparable from thought. When dancing, therefore, one does not stop thinking but, as Bardet points out, unleashes other rhythms, dynamics and relations that contribute to creating "hybrid" thoughts, constantly shaking current maps of representations.[120] Ultimately, by approaching contemporary choreographic practice in this

[118] Bardet, *Pensar con Mover*, 240.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.

way, it is possible to engage in an ongoing dialogue with uncertainty, granting an epistemological value to procedures and reflections that are founded and insist on the ability to move and be moved, or, as Bardet would say, to think by moving and to move by thinking.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A CHOREOLOGY

In the early 1950s John Cage visits the anechoic chamber at Harvard University to investigate silence. The room, constructed in such a way as to prevent any noise from entering, was considered one of the quietest spaces in the world. Cage says that when he entered the chamber, he did not hear the absolute silence he had dreamt of but perceived instead the noise caused by the internal movements of his body. In contrast to the abstract idea of silence as a phenomenon of total absence of sound, the musician found a living body. A body that moves and, by doing so generates sounds. The path followed in this thesis bears a certain similarity to Cage's famous anecdote. This work began as an enquiry into silence and ended up as a work on the body in movement. Initially, the aim was to answer the question: What is silence?, without resorting to a strategy typical of those who had already posed this question before which is to think of silence as absence of speech and by doing so addressing problems such as that of the ineffable, the undecidable and the unrepresented, to mention a few examples. The distinguishing element of this approach to silence is its subordination to speech. Silence is the other of speech, what remains to be uttered. The logic behind this conception is a rather dualistic one which determines silence's meaning as opposed to and derived from the meaning of words. In short, silence is thought of as the reverse of the language of the voice.

In order to think of silence as something that did not depend on the workings of speech, it was necessary to take a step back. The problem had to be addressed by redefining the idea of language. The research, then, became a study on language. The initial question was transformed by the need to inquire about silent forms of language capable of producing a signifying event without the need of grasping it under the phonetic regime. The task needed to recognise, maintain and work on and through a paradox: to think of wordless modes of language using the words of philosophical discourse. I decided to stress and deepen this tension by adding an additional element to the now modified question, namely, the analysis of the body and, more precisely, of the body in movement as the condition of possibility of expressivity. The initial inquiry was strengthened. It was no longer only a matter of seeking an alternative definition of silence, but of proposing a gestural theory capable of integrating different forms of human engagement based on bodily movements. The result, as Derrida

says in one of the epigraphs at the beginning of this thesis is that we are immediately immersed within the multiplicity of languages.

The above gives an account of the origin and basis of this research in which I criticise the philosophical manoeuvre that constrains language to a linguistic phenomenon produced mainly through the voice, according to a set of logical rules trigger the creation of meaning that is portrayed as rational. The primacy of this understanding of language has been such that any other form of expression outside the phonetic regime is thought of as meaningful and intelligible only insofar as it can be transported or translated into speech. In other words, there is a tendency towards pantomime. Here I showed that language is not limited to the sphere of speech, nor even to the sphere of the linguistic. To account for the former, I studied Sign language, a form of communication that allowed me to argue that not all linguistic language has to be produced orally, but that there are other systems, as structured as speech, which do not require the voice to signify the world. The examination of terms proposed in the field of Deaf Studies such as audism, allowed me to disarticulate the phono-logo-centric idea that links speech with the essence of human identity. Likewise, one of the most relevant contributions of the study of Sign language to the problem here posed was the claim that the ways in which we communicate directly impact the ways in which we imagine and even construct the world. Based on this idea I referred to the case of DeafSpace, the architectural movement promoted by the University of Gallaudet that rethinks architecture from the particular ways in which the Deaf community inhabits space.

In this thesis I not only argued for a conception of language that would recognise voiceless linguistic forms of communication, like Sign, but also a conception that would not be restricted to the linguistic determination of language, regardless of its specific form of production (orally as in the voice of language or manually as in Sign). My aim was not just to find one form of silent language, but several, and so after the analysis of Sign language I focused on expressive manifestations with a non-linguistic basis. I thus turned to different sense-giving actions which announce an incipient interpretation or stylisation of the real by means of bodily movements like perception. In the context of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, perception is an expressive activity that accounts for the way in which an embodied subject highlights some elements of the environment in which she is immersed to

transform it into her vital horizon. I complemented this with the analysis of other modalities of gestural language such as reflex movements, habitual movements and the movements involved in painting.

The third and final twist I gave to the idea of silent language came from of dance. The shift was motivated by the need to go deeper into two key elements framing this journey towards the devocalisation of language and its gradual motorisation: on the one hand, the problem of the body which, although already raised in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, was further explored through the discoveries made by dance and specifically by the inquisitive spirit of contemporary dance; on the other hand, dance as a vast archive or reservoir of motor dynamics as well as discussions about the limits and scope of corporeal movement. The tripartite spiral journey ended with a dialogic encounter between philosophy and dance which can provide useful tools for re-evaluating the phenomenon of vulnerability, or our capacity to be moved (physically, emotionally and conceptually) by experimenting with the human body's motor powers.

Ranging from perception to the immobile dynamism of a dancer, gestures operate apart from the semantic horizon, yet this does not diminish their expressive capacity. The fact that these other forms of non-linguistic language are not reduced to the phonocentric regime, does not imply that they do not fulfil an essential function of language, which is to foster the encounter with the other. Thus, if phonocentrism has the idea of a master subject who is self-present to herself and who directly expresses her thoughts through her voice. In the kin(aesth)etic we find a subject who moves in order to turn the surrounding environment into a vital horizon, a familiar space. By moving, she discovers the body as that which has been ignored by the language of voice. A body that is not given but is in continuous becoming, always thrown into the world. A body that moves, remaps itself, reinvents itself.

The transition from the devocalisation of language to the identification of the primacy of movement in language allowed me to argue that movement is not simply a physical phenomenon of displacement, but a complex phenomenon of thought. Movement is a carrier of thought in different levels: kinaesthetic, perceptive, aesthetic, affective and critical. The thought that proposes new ways of conceiving the world is necessarily a thought that

displaces. By turning to dance and analysing the ways in which this art proposes not only to move the body on a stage, but also to unpack the ideas we have assumed of ourselves, we find new inquiries to explore in philosophy.

This conclusion would be incomplete if it did not raise some of these future questions to explore. On the side of linguistically based silent languages, there is a vast ground to be explored around the history of deafness and the struggle for recognition of Sign languages in countries other than the usual focus of such works, like France and the United States. In addition, the detailed analysis of manuals registering the forms of communication of the Deaf community from the sixteenth century onwards, opens a rich field of research into the problem of translating a multidimensional motor language onto the surface of the page. A similar point can be made regarding choreographic manuals, where the analysis of these notation systems can offer great resources for further exploration of the constitutive elements and scope of bodily movement as an expressive phenomenon.

Another route opened through this research has to do with the place that movement has had in the history of philosophy. In this respect, it is possible to propose a work that traces the position of various authors in relation to this phenomenon. The figure of Merleau-Ponty can serve as a model to be replicated in other traditions of thought other than phenomenology. Such a work would allow us to re-evaluate, for example, the philosophies of Aristotle and Husserl reviewed in the first chapter of this research, not as representative of a phonocentric paradigm, but as pioneers of a philosophical reflection on kinesis and kinaesthesia. This project could also be expanded to include thinkers beyond those usually associated with Western philosophy. Much of my motivation for using sources recently published in Spanish by Latin American publishers such as Marie Bardet and Andrea Potestà has been this.

Finally, it is important to mention that this research outlines some political ideas regarding language. In the case of Sign language, I discussed the problem of audism, stressing in particular some practices of discrimination and misrepresentation suffered by the Deaf community. In the case of dance, I talked about vulnerability in terms of the recognition and positive evaluation of our capacity to be displaced, puzzled, to feel uncertain. Both issues can

be furthered explored in order to offer a more inclusive and also more sensitive understanding of the human condition.

The findings exposed in these pages as well as the future inquiries that can be posed through this research open an area of study yet to be developed which I propose to call choreology. Formed by the terms *choreo*, which I understand here as the expressive movement of the human body that goes from perception to artistic gesture; and *logos*, understood in the sense of the kin(aesth)etic *logos* here discussed. This area of study would address the analysis of the different styles of human movement (the taxonomy that Merleau-Ponty sketches but which must be completed, extended and complexified), the different forms of knowledge of one's own body and the environment through kinesis and kinaesthesia, as well as the different languages of embodiment that would complete the collection that, in this research, has been restricted to a few of its manifestations, but which can certainly be further extended.

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