

Expanding Philosophical Hermeneutics Beyond its Ego-logical Elements: Highlighting Some Trajectories

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to highlight some of the varied efforts at expanding the basic foundation of philosophical hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics is the hermeneutic disposition specific to the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The contention of the paper is that Gadamer's hermeneutic project is exclusivist in that it limits the actualisation of the interpretative event to only articulated language. That is, language enunciated only in the forms of writing or speech can be interpreted. Thus, it has no place for unarticulated language in the form of bodily gestures and overtures. I argue that part of the reasons for this exclusion is the fact that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is grounded on a certain 'ego-logic' of knowledge which has held sway in western philosophy and science right from the inauguration of Rene Descartes' ego cogito. Major reactions to this exclusivist tendency in Gadamer's hermeneutics prioritises a form of 'bio-logic' of knowledge, in which the body, its life and place have very crucial roles to play in science and philosophy. These reactions insist that 'bio-logy' is also fundamental to the quest for hermeneutic interpretation. Some trajectories of this 'bio-logical' approach are couched in lines of thinking like: (i) pragmatist hermeneutics and (ii) carnal hermeneutics. These approaches to hermeneutics appropriate and expand Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in order to make his task of the fusion of horizons truly complete. The philosophical method of analysis is used in the paper.

Keywords: Bio-logic, Carnal, Ego-logic, Gadamer, Pragmatist

Introduction

The hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer is of concern in this essay because it is bogged-down by a paradox in a certain sense. The expression 'fusion of horizon' is a catchy and popular phrase contained in Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2004). The popularity of this phrase, in

contemporary scholarship, stems from the fact that it has been identified as the motivation as well as the aspiration for the various inter-domain discourses in recent scholarship. Some of these inter-domain discourses include: intercultural philosophy, interdisciplinary approaches, intersectionality, intergroup studies etc. These domains of discourse aspire to the fusion of horizons. While Gadamer's philosophy motivates such noble and lofty inter-domain aspirations, it is paradoxical that a close scrutiny of the internal dynamics of Gadamer's philosophy shows that it does not exemplify this ideal completely. His philosophical hermeneutics does not include the horizon of the unarticulated language of the body in the spheres to be fused. Only articulated language, in the form of the spoken and the written word, is included in the horizons of fusion. Unarticulated language forms are excluded. Even when Gadamer turns to phenomenology in his later works, he does not do so to show the vital value of unarticulated language. His turn to phenomenology was "...not wholesale adoption of Husserlian thought..." it was more of an attempt at augmenting "and extending of the concept of lifeworld to include language and linguisticity" (Keane, 2021, p. 386). Thus, Gadamer's purpose for phenomenology was to give a linguistic rendition of the lifeworld.

In this paper, I argue that part of the reasons for this exclusion is the fact that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is grounded on a certain 'ego-logic' of knowledge which has held sway in western philosophy and science right from the inauguration of Rene Descartes' *ego cogito*. Major reactions to this exclusivist tendency in Gadamer's hermeneutics prioritises a form of 'bio-logic' of knowledge, in which the body, its life and place have very crucial roles to play in science and philosophy. These reactions insist that 'bio-logy' is also fundamental to the quest for hermeneutic interpretation. Some trajectories of this 'bio-logical' approach are couched in lines of thinking like: (i) pragmatist hermeneutics and (ii) carnal hermeneutics. These approaches to hermeneutics appropriate and expand Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in order to make his task of the fusion of horizons truly complete. In what follows, attention will be given to what ego-logic is in knowledge quest and how Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics falls victim to it and the various attempts at expanding Gadamer's hermeneutics through the bio-logic of knowledge.

On 'Ego-logic' in the Knowledge Quest

In very simple terms, the ego-logic of knowledge is a logic to knowledge

acquisition premised exclusively on the ego and the thinking capacity thereof. The ego as used here carries the direct sense of Rene Descartes' *ego-cogito*. This *cogito* is the pure thought of the *res cogitans* as distinct from the extension in space of the *res extensa*. The *ego-cogito* is the foundation for secure and sure knowledge which Descartes sought. It is this ego that pursues the methodic doubt (scepticism) that leads to sure knowledge. This thinking ego is completely insulated from the encumbrances of the body. In fact, its capacity to operate at a higher level from the entrapments of the body is what makes it a sure source of secure knowledge. The insulation from the encumbrances of the body makes knowledge seeking here objective and disinterested. Thus, it is the disinterested thinking capacity of the *ego-cogito* that makes knowledge. Knowledge based on this ego is what is referred to as the ego-logic of knowledge. Walter Mignolo refers to this as the 'ego-logical politics of knowledge' (2004, p. 459ff). The attachment of politics to this logic in knowledge acquisition suggest that the elevation of this approach to knowledge was not a natural process, but such was actualised through deliberate manipulations.

As mentioned above, this approach to knowledge is credited to Descartes. On this Ramon Grosfoguel (2009, p. 15) explains that:

The Cartesian *ego-cogito*, *ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) is the foundation of modern western science. By producing dualisms between mind and body and between mind and nature, Descartes was able to claim nonsituated, universal, God-eyed view knowledge.

By the non-situated disposition of this logic to knowledge acquisition, the insistence is that the body, the location and the life of the thinking subject does not matter in quest for knowledge production. What matters is that the thinking ego should rise above the encumbrances of its body, life and location. On this basis, the ego-politics of knowledge claims situational and disembodied neutrality to the possession of knowledge. Grosfoguel relates this *ego-cogito* of Descartes to what the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez (2021) called the 'point zero' perspective of Eurocentric philosophies. Grosfoguel (2009, p. 15) continues further that:

The *point zero* is the point of view that conceals

itself; that is, it is the point of view that represents itself as being without a point of origin. It is this *god-eye view* that always hides its local and particular perspective under an abstract universalism.

Here therefore, the ego becomes the sole determiner of true and universal knowledge. Nothing more contributed to the making of knowledge; for anything more, was considered as prejudice that should be dispelled out in the making of universal knowledge. This becomes *the point zero* ground for this kind of epistemology. Beyond the ego, nothing more contributes to the making of knowledge. “Western philosophy and science privilege the ego politics of knowledge ... Historically, this has allowed western man to represent his knowledge as the only one capable of achieving a universal consciousness...” (Grosfoguel, 2009, p. 15). In the following subsection, this essay will read Gadamer's hermeneutics as a representation of this form of the ego-logic of knowledge.

Linguisticity in Philosophical Hermeneutics

The idea of linguisticity in Gadamer's hermeneutic theory is poised to estah the position that “being that can be understood is language” (Gadamer, 2004, pp. xxxi-xxxii, 470). In this regard, Gadamer sets before himself the task of establishing why language has become central in the philosophical discourse since the seventeenth century. At an ontological level, Gadamer submits that, “language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world” (Gadamer, 1977a, p. 13). Premising the full thrust of the hermeneutic demand on questioning and establishing the fact that this ability to question is necessary to all aspect of knowledge production, Gadamer universalizes the hermeneutic problem. In his opinion, “the real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable. Now if what we have before our eyes is not only the artistic tradition of a people, or historical tradition, or the principle of modern science in its hermeneutical preconditions but rather the whole of our experience, then we have succeeded, I think, in joining the experience of science to our own universal and human experience of life” (Gadamer, 1977a, p. 13). With this opinion, Gadamer expresses the unity of all of the domains of production within human life and experience.

Sequel to the above, Gadamer takes the bold step of categorizing the entire attempt at knowledge production within the spheres under consideration as

linguistic. In his opinion, "...we have now reached the fundamental level that we can call (with Johannes Lohmann) the 'linguistic constitution of the world'. It presents itself as the consciousness that is effected by history... and that provides an initial schematization for all our possibilities of knowing" (Gadamer, 1977a, p. 13). By this, it becomes clear the fundamental role of language in the apprehension of the universe at any level. Gadamer goes ahead to use the example of how the small child learns to speak as the basic condition of all humans as regards language and its value. By implication, as the child learns new words he/she gets more acquainted with the world. He makes his case further when he submits that, "...we are familiar with the strange, uncomfortable, and tortuous feeling we have as long as we do not have the right word. When we have found the right expression (it need not always be one word), when we are certain that we have it, then it 'stands', then something has come to a 'stand'" (Gadamer, 1977a, p. 15). Commenting on this Schmidt contends that, "language is not a sign system used to designate already known beings. Language itself brings beings into presence within historically effected consciousness" (Schmidt, 2006, p. 126). This perspective to language and human experience in general shows how "...the claim to universality that is appropriate to the hermeneutical dimension is to be understood. Understanding is language-bound and this assertion does not lead us into any kind of linguistic relativism" (Gadamer, 1977a, p. 15). This is the case because there is absolutely no captivity within language.

Here also we see the place of prejudice in this apprehension. The necessity of prejudice is hinged on the role of a historically effected consciousness, on the situatedness of the subject and the role such situatedness plays in knowledge production and the apprehension of the world. The weight of this claim can be better felt in Gadamer's assertion that "it is not so much our judgment as it is our prejudices that constitute our being" (Gadamer, 1977, p. xvii). These prejudices are also linguistic in their nature. This is the case because "we are always already biased in our thinking and knowing by our linguistic interpretation of the world. To grow into this linguistic interpretation means to grow up in the world. To this extent, language is the real mark of our finitude" (Gadamer, 1977c, p. 64). Through language, aspects of the world are revealed to us; a language view is a world-view. Schmidt writing on the connection between 'aspect' and 'view' as they function in German submits that, "the same German word that is translated here as 'aspect' was translated as 'view' in the discussion of language-view

being a worldview. This connection is important since just as a particular language only presents a particular worldview, so each correct interpretation also only presents only an aspect or view of the thing itself. Just as there is no perfect language that presents the world in itself, there is no perfect interpretation that presents the thing in itself, which can also be translated as subject matter in its totality. Both cases indicate the fundamental finitude of human understanding” (Schmidt, 2006, p. 124). Thus we see that man's living and operating within language is fundamental to his finitude and also it is this linguistic make up of man that fuels the need for a fusing of horizons. Gadamer puts it so well when he concludes his essay “Man and Language” in these words, “... language is the real medium of human being, if we only see it in the realm that it alone fills out, the realm of human being-together, the realm of common understanding, of ever-replenished common agreement — a realm as indispensable to human life as the air we breathe” (Gadamer, 1977b, p. 68). The realization of this being together is the starting point for the need for a fusing of horizons and hence the attainment of universality for Gadamer.

Besides the uniqueness of the role of language in human makeup as the pointer to the universality of hermeneutics, there is also the idea of questioning as yet another base for the universality of hermeneutics in Gadamer's philosophy. It is based on this idea of questioning that he expresses his suspicion for the statistical mode of data presentation. For him a fact is an answer to a question and the statistical mode of presentation stifles the asking of questions because of its propagandist tendency. But “what is established by statistics seems to be a language of facts, but which questions these facts answer and which facts would begin to speak if other questions were asked are hermeneutical questions. Only a hermeneutical inquiry would legitimise the meaning of these facts and thus the consequences that follow from them” (Gadamer, 1977a, p. 11). The bringing forth of new perspectives is fundamental to the universality of hermeneutics. In another place, Gadamer furnishes us that the “hermeneutical reflection fulfills the function that is accomplished in all bringing of something to a conscious awareness. Because it does, it can and must manifest itself in all our modern fields of knowledge, and especially science” (Gadamer, 1977c, p. 38). It is questioning that essentially guarantees this bringing forth of new perspectives. Little wonder Gadamer dedicates a section of his work *Truth and Method* to the concept of questioning (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 356-70). Here too the prejudiced natures

of the truths so sought are evident. For since statements or facts are answers to questions, and questions are direct products of our being historically effected with the view to raising new perspectives, question also showcase our finitude, situatedness and hence the necessity and positivity of prejudice.

Ego-logic and Philosophical Hermeneutics

The point to establish here is that Gadamer's prejudicial philosophy is characterized by a hegemony of verbal understanding/factual modes of expression, hence there is an exclusion of non-verbal modes of understanding/communication from the realm of interpretation. This does not just betray Gadamer's commitment to openness within his philosophical hermeneutics, but also signals an exclusivist tendency within his philosophy. The hegemony of verbal understanding in this regard has to do with Gadamer's contention that 'language is the only being that can be understood'. It is also within this context that Gadamer develops his idea of the universality of the hermeneutics. Thus, hermeneutics is universal but only in its philological or linguistic form. The ego-logical element in this subsists in the fact that philosophical hermeneutics downplays the body in the interpretative quest. Following Descartes, there is a "reduction of the body to an object" (Schuster, 2013, p. 196), which lacks the capacity for any form of articulation that is worthy of hermeneutic attention. By this token, the linguistic emphasis of philosophical hermeneutics, "tend to veer away from the carnal site of meaning, replacing the body with book, feeling with reading, sensing with writing" (Kearney, 2015, p. 100). Via this replacement process, the feeling and sensing body is covered up by the disembodied book and its corollary activities of writing and reading. Thus, the written text (book) to be read subsists at the level of the rational and superior ego, while the feeling and sensing body subsists at the level of extension which has no place in the quest for sure and secure knowledge. In this regard, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, in a fundamental way, continues the *res cogitans* and *res extensa* dichotomisation. To this extent, philosophical hermeneutics is ego-logical.

Writing on this ego-logical tendency in Gadamer's hermeneutics, Shalin (2010, p. 19) contends that "it is not the emphasis on prejudices that raises red flags, but the emphasis on language and textual analysis as the focal point of hermeneutical inquiry, the emphasis that limits the scope of

hermeneutics and dulls its critical thrust.” Here then, the fixed word is the genuine context for the Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and for interpretation. The obvious implication of this universalization of the hermeneutic experience, especially in its linguistic form, is that it excludes non-verbal forms of communication from the network of interpretation. In the words of Lorraine Code (2003, p. 19) “the conversations of marginal voices are inaudible in Gadamer's work, nor does he address the issue of embodiment as it is apparent in the ways male and female participants are differently situated in their claims to occupy speaking positions.” This is indeed an exclusivist tendency in Gadamer's prejudicial philosophy.

But Shalin goes on to note that, “sometimes actions, or inactions speak louder than words” (2010: 20). Kieran Owens words are even stronger in this regard. He maintains that “...understanding extends beyond the verbal into gestures, embodiment, and perception and therefore that Gadamer's emphasis on the verbal factualness prevents him from fully grasping the nuances of understanding and its genesis” (2011, p. 4). Hence, he thinks that the hegemony of verbal understanding in Gadamer's schemes is at once theoretically and ethically dubious. In fact, the limitation of understanding to the verbal word though important

...are bound to mislead if taken outside the far larger universe of what has been secreted, emoted, expressed, embodied, produced, manufactured, and created in any given era. Textualized forms cannot fully capture the vibrancy of lived experiences reduced to a thin-gruel abstraction of linguistic lifeworlds. Written traditions tend to distort voices incompatible with dominant discourses, edit out incongruent sentiments from the annals of history, tidy up and prettify the rough edges of affective experiences (Shalin, 2010, p. 20).

In line with these objections therefore, it becomes pertinent to spell out a better part other than that spelt by Gadamer in this regard.

This lack which is apparent in Gadamer has been taken up and dealt with quite appropriately in the works of some philosophers writing at about the same time with Gadamer. Notable among them are Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. Writing on the congruity between hermeneutics and ethics,

Gerald L. Bruns contends that “Levinasian ethics is not easily translatable into Gadamer's language, but it is not outside his philosophical horizon” (Burns, 2004, p. 40). Levinas in his ethics of the face recognizes the value of the unspoken word in the communication and understanding process. In his estimation, the face of the other is the starting point of all forms of interaction with alterity. For him, “the face speaks” (Levinas, 1969, p. 66), the face is not just a phenomenon - not something given to perception like a mask; rather the face is a language without words, a primordial language that signifies of itself. It is in the presence of the face that language opens up a world. For

language as the presence of the face does not invite complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient 'I-Thou' forgetful of the universe; in its frankness it refuses the clandestinity of love, where it loses its frankness and meaning and turns into laughter and cooing. The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice. It is not that there first would be the face, and then the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice; the epiphany of the face *qua* face opens humanity (Levinas, 1969, p. 213).

Here then, the presence of the face is a language that calls us to responsibility and responsibility here is “not an office or a function. The face of the other faces me with an exigency that cannot be worked off like a debt” (Burns, 2004, p. 39). Responsibility in this case is prior to dialogue, to the exchange of question and answer, the thematization of what is said and this is the point where Levinas addresses a lack which Gadamer does not deal with in his philosophical hermeneutics. Here, the imperative of responsibility to the other is the unspoken language which conditions the question and answer that constitutes Gadamer's dialogue and the articulation even of the spoken word.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty further develops this idea of the unspoken as genuine paths to communication and understanding in his ontology of embodiment. For him “Existence realises itself in the body” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 192). The body is not to be seen as a barrier between the perceiver and the world. Rather, as in the case of prejudiced thrownness for Gadamer, our openness to the world is only possible *on account of the*

thickness of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 135). For Owens, “an ontology of bodily understanding allows us to make better sense of the ready-to-hand” (Owens, 2011, p. 5). But most importantly, contrary to Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty's ontology suggests that what we most fundamentally need, if the world is to speak to us, is embodied perception. With echoes of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty writes, “this voracious vision, reaching beyond the 'visual givens,' opens upon a texture of Being of which the discrete sensorial messages are only the punctuations or the caesurae. The eye lives in this texture as a man lives in his house” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 166). The point here is not even to create hierarchies among modes of expression. For no single form of expression has priority in terms of its access to truth - “speech is as dumb as music, music as eloquent as speech” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 455). We here arrive at a notion of language in a broader sense, loosened of Gadamer's verbal shackles. Within this context then, meaning is not just mere verbal articulation and since this is the case, then we must remain open to expressions of moral injury of all kinds, even when such expressions challenge our capacity to translate the relevant claims into a verbal form. We must remain open to the possibility of *being moved*, that is, of having our understanding altered, by such communications of moral experience. In the end Owen writes that “Gadamer's theory poses the risk of a systematic disregard for such expressions leads me to suggest that we are dealing with a kind of *differend*. Coined by Lyotard, a differend arises when a moral injury cannot be claimed since the claimant is unable to participate in the dominant discourse in which such claims are made” (Owens, 2011, p. 10). The key point here therefore is that Gadamer's separation of the articulated from the unarticulated word is unnecessary and could even complicate and derail the hermeneutic quest.

Bio-logic and the Trajectories of Expanding Philosophical Hermeneutics

Aside the ego-logic of knowledge, there is the bio-logic of knowledge which reintroduces the ambient of the body, life and place into the quest for knowledge. In this approach to knowledge seeking, the relationship between place and thinking is brought to the heart of epistemology; that is the geography of the thinking subject is vital knowledge. Grosfoguel (2009, p. 13-14) calls it the 'body-politics of knowledge' and Mignolo (2002, p. 58ff) calls it the 'geopolitics of knowledge' as against the ego-politics of knowledge. The geo/body-politics of knowledge claims

situatedness as a fundamental and constitutive element in knowledge production. The basic argument is that, the thinking subject (*ego cogito*) has a body and this body has a specific space in place. To insist that the *ego cogito* can accomplish knowledge that is not influenced by the encumbrances of its body is not a correct approach to knowledge. The contention of this essay is that any form of the interpretative quest that ignores the ambient of the body and focuses only on the articulated word is not a complete or correct approach to interpretation. In what follows, pragmatist hermeneutics and carnal hermeneutics are discussed as attempts to expand the purview of philosophical hermeneutics to encompass the mute musings of bodily gestures and overtures.

a. Pragmatist Hermeneutics

In line with all the above and with the specific aim of dealing with the deficiency in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Dimitri Shalin develops his idea of a pragmatist hermeneutics as against what he calls structural hermeneutics in the works of Gadamer. His work, in this regard, is rooted in the works of social scientists who have been criticizing the disembodied view of society and human agency. Mary Douglas contends that, "we now realize that we have unduly privileged the verbal channel and tended to suppose that it could be effective in disembodied form" (1978, p. 298). In a similar spirit, Richard Shusterman challenged "philosophy's image as an essentially linguistic discipline" and called to refocus philosophical investigation on "the nondiscursive somatic dimension of life" (1997, p. 31). Kindred sentiments reverberate throughout the social sciences where scholars express their dissatisfaction with "the text metaphor [that] has virtually . . . gobbled up the body itself" (Csordas, 1990, p. 46), highlights "the crucial role of emotion in the being of the body in society" (Lyon and Barbalet, 1994, p. 63), and advocates "the turn to the body as a primary site of social and cultural theorizing" (Turner, 1994, p. 32). Following from this Shalin writes that, his "article takes a clue from the incipient movement in the social sciences aiming to complement the traditional concern for discursive dimensions of cultural life with the embodied forms of social phenomena. In particular, it seeks to extend the 'paradigm of embodiment' and the pragmatist notion of 'body-mind' to interpretation theory, suggesting the way in which we can turn body and emotion into a hermeneutical resource" (2007, p. 194). Here,

pragmatist hermeneutics starts with the premise

that embodied human agency signs itself in the verbal-discursive forms, as well as its somatic-affective markers and behavioural - performative traces. The pragmatist perspective implies that historical temporality is transmitted through the somatic-affective media as readily as in the discursive symbolic forms. Every tradition has its somatic-affective a priori inscribed in its agent's brain circuitry, hormonal pathways, and emotional structures that came to the fore in practical deeds and wide-ranging behavioural forays – the embodied forms of agency bearing the imprint of an era passed on from one generation to another through extra – textual channels. It is the task of pragmatist hermeneutics to expand the scope of hermeneutical analysis so that it can accommodate all the semiotic resources of the body (Shalin, 2010, p. 20).

Given this perspective, that is the pragmatist ethos, hermeneutics in this context should explore the word-body-action nexus. This, pragmatist hermeneutics does using triangulation to find meaning on the intersection of these three primary signifying media and that is why pragmatist hermeneutics portends more comprehensiveness than structural hermeneutics.

b. Carnal Hermeneutics

Carnal hermeneutics represents another trajectory in the quest to further expand the hermeneutic project of Gadamer. Carnal hermeneutics relates directly to the project of Gadamer in that it begins its task by raising issues with the hermeneutic projects of Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. While the hermeneutic project was preceded by phenomenological inquires that could open new doors to a hermeneutics of the flesh, the explicit inauguration of the hermeneutic turn in the philosophies of Gadamer and Ricoeur embraced language at the expense of the body. By this token, “language as the 'destiny of Being' came to overshadow life of singular being...” (Kearney, 2015, p. 100). Thus, one of the aspirations of carnal hermeneutics is to “suggest ways of undertaking a return journey – way that might help us recover the body as text and the text as body...”

(Kearney, 2015, p. 100). In this recovery of the body, the ultimate aim is to restore the ambient of the flesh back to hermeneutics. Particularly, philosophical hermeneutics. As McCaffery (2021, p. 3) declares, “Hermeneutics, as a question of sense making in every sense, thus is always carnal.”

In the first instance, carnal hermeneutics understands the flesh as existence. That is, the flesh presupposes existence and vice versa. “They are each other – flesh as solidified existence and existence as perpetual incarnation” (Kearney, 2015, p. 100). Thus, to exist is to be so in the flesh, that is to be incarnated. Here, the abstract nature of existence is solidified by the concreteness of the flesh. The flesh gives empirical veracity to human existence. Better credence is given to this position when it is understood that, “life and death manifest themselves through the body” (Pereier, 1997, p. 235). In this case, the absence of the means the absence of both life and death. Underscoring this foundational role of the flesh is important because this foundation is what begins any human enterprise. Human agents to whom interpretation is very vital cannot begin the hermeneutic quest without being incarnated. Thus, their incarnation becomes the first foundation upon which the hermeneutic quest will build.

The flesh is not only existence; the flesh is also understood in carnal hermeneutics as medium. That is, the flesh is the avenue which gives us access to the world. In the thinking of Gadamer, language is considered as the medium by which we gain and express our access to the world. That is, the word is the medium of access to the world. But carnal hermeneutics makes bold to declare the ‘word as flesh’ (Kearney and Treanor, 2015, p. 2). That is, language is also flesh. Hence, “all experiences, from birth to death, is mediated by our embodiment and only makes sense of sense accordingly” (Kearney and Treanor, 2015, p. 2). This understanding of the flesh as medium is the point where carnal hermeneutics appropriates the works of Aristotle in its project. Following Aristotle’s thinking in the *De Anima*, Kearney declares that, “with respect to touch, flesh (sarx) is the medium (metaxu) that gives us space to discern between different kinds of experience – hot and cold, soft and hard, attractive unattractive” (Kearney, 2015, p. 102). This capacity of flesh makes it a medium and not an organ. The touch effected by flesh is not immediate. Some form of mediation operates in this touch. It is in this mediating that interpretation can also happen. “When the child moves to the touch of its mother or opens its

mouth to feed from the breast, it is already interpreting. It is not merely reacting to stimulus but responding to a call. In the natal context of flesh on flesh, there are already tiny seizures and exposures of joy and fear, desire and anxiety... so the first touch is not neutral, but already a reading between the lines of skin and bone, of soft and hard, of hot and cold, of far and near” (Kearney, 2015, p. 104). Thus, we see that as medium, touch does not simply record sensible properties; “it grasps and immediately feels their noxious or useful character, their relevance to the preservation of our being” (Chretien, 2004, p. 98). Though this touch is not immediate, it is everywhere. “The work of Hermes is everywhere – from the inner capillaries of our heart to the nerve ending of our fingers – sounding and coding, ciphering and signifying through every touch of skin” (Littlejohn, 2020, p. 108).

The medium of touch which is specific to the flesh, as described above, also give some impetus to the idea of interaction with strangers. In this regard, the interpretative act is guided by touch to either be hostile or hospitable. The disposition attached to hostility or hospitality is the basis for civilisation as a whole. In the words of Kearney, “civilisation begins with the handshake. Instead of reaching for a sword, one offers one's hand. The fist unfurls into an open palm. The *hostis* (enemy) becomes *hostis* (friend)” (Kearney, 2021, p. 49). Notice here that the same word for enemy is the same word for friend. *Hostis* both represents enemy and friend; what makes the difference is the hermeneutic act of the touch. This touching process helps us discern among diverse embodied beings.

The vital role of the flesh in the hermeneutic project also has an erotic dimension. Erotic in this context carries the sense of sexuality and “is not just genital, but also a general intentional (albeit pre-conscious) way of being-towards-the-world” (Kearney, 2015, p. 113). By this understanding, sexuality is a mode of bodily presence in the world. And this mode of presence cannot be ignored in the efforts at understanding. Being erotic in this context is not in the base sense, rather erotic perception has a specific significance not as a cogito aiming at a cogitatum, but as an existential body aiming at another in the world. Some opinions have tried to explain this erotic dimension through the category of 'carnal knowledge' or 'carnal epistemology'. Within this framework, “it has been argued that carnal knowledge from Medieval canon law, suggest that embodied knowledge of oneself and another human being can be attained in the intimacy of

lovemaking” (Doniger, 2000, p. 2). Foucault underscores the values of this erotic aspect of knowledge when he writes:

We also admit that it is in the area of sex that we must search for the most secret and profound truths about the individual; that it is there that we can best discover what he is and what determines him. And if it was believed for centuries that it was necessary to hid sexual matters because they were shameful, we now know that it is sex itself which hides the secret parts of the individual: the structure of his fantasises, the roots of his ego, the forms of his relationship to reality. At the bottom of sex, there is truth (Foucault, 1980, pp. x-xi).

The above is informative for the purpose here because the carnal, in the form of sex, also has epistemic value. While sex can always be categorised as base and trivial in the quest for knowledge, particularly rational knowledge, it is important to highlight that there is a sense of the true in the carnality of sex. This sense of the true which can emerge from the carnal act of sex is part of the emphasis that carnal hermeneutics, albeit carnal epistemology is drawing the attention of philosophical hermeneutics to. This carnal site is also part of the horizons that needs to be fused in the philosophical hermeneutic purview.

Conclusion

The focus of the paper has been on expanding the frontiers of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Efforts have been expended to establish that the inarticulate gestures and overtures of the body are also vital in the quest to understand and interpret. The ultimate point to underscore is that a true fusion of horizon cannot occur when certain horizon is excluded from the spheres of fusion. Thus, emphasis on the carnal as a genuine hermeneutic site indeed completes the horizons within Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and expands it in an appropriate manner.

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