

Hermes Awards

International Institute for Hermeneutics
2001-2021

2001

Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Eine Biographie*

(Mohr Siebeck, 1999)

Hans-Georg Gadamer: Eine Biographie is a remarkable biographical account of Gadamer's intellectual inheritance, long life, and prolific academic career.

In an attractively vibrant and clear way, Grondin acquaints us with the biographical details of Gadamer's life and his luminous and tantalizing response to the pressing problems of humanity – his inimitable, dialogic mode of philosophizing, which profoundly influenced contemporary philosophy and inspired generations of interpreters.

Grondin's stylish book shows that Gadamer's life (1990-2002), which spanned the century troubled with two global conflicts and witnessed the inasmuch praiseworthy as jeopardizing advancement of technology, is a stimulating and rewarding journey to think the exigency of the hermeneutic inquiry and its application (*ars applicandi*) in the liveliness of human everydayness.

Grondin undertakes the most challenging task of answering the troublesome question of the relationship between Gadamer and Heidegger. Their confirmed collusion with Nazism ebbed the power of his philosophical stand while being filtered through the disagreeableness of his personal history. Responding to the necessity of providing a more thorough examination of the specificity of the historical moment

which heavily pressed on the two thinkers, *Eine Biographie* offers a detailed account of Gadamer's scholarly career which coincided with the period of National Socialism in Germany.

Grondin's book is a captivating example of the manifold possibilities which arise in compiling a biographical sketch and instantiates a particular problematization of what biography is or can be. Grondin's exceptional exploration of the intersecting paths of the two icons of contemporary hermeneutics, which began with Heidegger's supervising of Gadamer's habilitation dissertation, "The Interpretation of Plato's Philebus," sheds new light on the intense nature of Heidegger-Gadamer collaboration. This highly intriguing cooperation poses unending questions as to the extent to which the dazzling career of Gadamer's mentor influenced that of the equally brilliant student. Interestingly, by offering an insight into Gadamer's relationship with his phenomenal but uncongenial teacher, Grondin's biography becomes a fascinatingly paradigmatic study of the master and student relationship *per se*.

Grondin's book cogently emphasizes that Gadamer's concentration on the significance of tradition and prejudice for a hermeneutic interrogation demonstrates his moving beyond Heidegger's philosophy. Acknowledging the indispensability of tradition and pre-judgments in representing human historicity, Gadamer indicates that historicity is inescapably interwoven with the human perception of finitude. Gadamer, as Grondin lucidly explains, views tradition and prejudice as the pre-conditions of any act of understanding. With a real zest of the Gadamerian scholar, Grondin highlights the importance of Gadamer's notion of historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) as one of his major contributions to contemporary hermeneutic thought.

Without a shadow of a doubt, Grondin's dashing and comprehensive biography encourages us to delve deeply into Gadamer's awe-inspiring career and leaves us spell-bound in equal measure by the profundity of Gadamer's thought and the intimate portrayal of *the life of a philosopher*.

Paul Ricoeur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*
(Le Seuil, 2000)

Paul Ricoeur's, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, dedicated to the memory of Simone Ricoeur, addresses the fundamental question of the representation of the past by examining the reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting. The prevailing issue of the treatise is the possibility of the past's being made present again.

Ricoeur situates his philosophy of history in-between the mastery of memory and the force of forgetting.

As indicated in the title, the book has a threefold structure determined by the three key words: memory, history, and forgetting. Continuing the project that he previously developed in *Time and Narrative* (representation as part of a philosophy of time describing human existence as historical) and *Oneself as Another* (human being is *l'homme capable*, as capable of talking, narrating, acting, and making him/herself responsible), Ricoeur is adding to his philosophical anthropology a vision of a human being as one who is capable of making memory and making history. *Memory, History, Forgetting* is a “prolongation of [the] uninterrupted conversation” on memory and history by “returning to a lacuna in the problematic of *Time and Narrative* and in *Oneself as Another*, where temporal experience and the narrative operation are directly placed in contact, at the price of an impasse with respect to memory and, worse yet, of an impasse with respect to forgetting, the median levels between time and narrative.”

Ricoeur himself explains that his book is entirely closed and concluded before the epilogue itself. Adding the epilogue on forgiveness as a personal act, which happens from person to person, and does not concern juridical institutions, was for Ricoeur a matter of intellectual honesty. What holds the book together is the perspective of an appeased memory associated with forgiveness: the recognition of the past remembered without anger and prejudices. By emphasizing the fact that the relation between memory, history and forgetting is closed upon itself prior to the epilogue, Ricoeur opens up the question of a hermeneutic reading of his own work. As a philosopher who insisted that existence itself is essentially hermeneutic, he could hardly avoid endorsing the ideal of an ever-developing interpretation of himself. Ricoeur's is a truly polysemic voice, sacrificing neither truth nor variety. His voice has been made to the confused medley of voices that constitutes the tradition that we are.

Ricoeur's avowal that he cleanly avoided the admixture of philosophy and theology is at variance with the textual record of his *Memory, History, Forgetting*. This however is not a mistake. Selfinterpretation and textual record will always vary. This infinite variance is an invitation to an infinite task of self-interpretation. Brilliantly and eloquently moving between Aristotle, Sartre, Plato, Bergson, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, and Heidegger, while concluding with the Song of Songs's “Love is as strong as death,” Ricoeur invites us to a never-ending dialogue, leading us on the path “from memories to reflective memory, passing by way of recollection.” However methodologically rigorous Ricoeur is in separating philosophy from theology, his Christian facticity nonetheless determines the discourse. This is inevitable, given our

hermeneutic belonging to tradition. Ricoeur philosophizes as a Protestant Christian, because he must philosophize as Protestant Christian. He has no recourse to another voice. This voice cannot be denied or ignored. With his distinctive voice, Ricoeur lets other voices come to expression in an “unstable equilibrium.” An essential incompleteness is a horizon of writing history. This incompleteness, the receding of horizons, might open up a horizon of religious transcendence. This possibility of interpretation cannot be denied and should not be understood as a flight into the unknown or a dream for completeness, since Ricoeur placed his whole enterprise “from the start under the banner of the merciless critique directed against the hubris of total reflection.” In this sense, the facticity of our being is the provision (*viaticum*) for the journey of life. As such, it is also the provision for the passage out of this mode of existence into the totally unknown.

Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*
(Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Passion, from the Greek πάθος, suffering, experiencing, etymologically entails the passivity of intellect. In her enthralling book, Martha Nussbaum challenges the long-standing juxtaposition of the activity of reason and the passivity of emotions. She presents a powerful argument for treating emotions not as passive and passivity-inducing, but as crucial elements of practical rationality. Drawing on a wide array of disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, literature, and music, and on the observations of her own emotions, Nussbaum develops her cognitive account of emotions, which posits them as forms of intentional awareness and judgment. To say that they are forms of intentional awareness indicates that emotions, unlike moods or appetites, are directed toward an irreplaceable object have an irreplaceable object, and thus constitute the acknowledgment of its value and importance. As such, they are not only suited to address the particularity and concreteness of the sphere of action but also disclose to us our fundamental vulnerability as well as the vulnerability of our practical reason.

Re-conceptualizing our views about emotions, Nussbaum argues that they are kinds of beliefs and judgments. A well-formed emotion is related to a belief about the world: if a belief was found to be false, the feeling would not persist. The intimate connection between emotion and judgment entails that in a wise person, they coincide: emotions guide wise persons’ intuitive perceptions in situations of choice. As such, they can become guides for action. Emotions thus become intimately related to virtue.

Through her meticulous analysis, Nussbaum allows us to appreciate that there can be no adequate ethical theory without a theory of emotions.

Since emotions are cognitive elements, they should be subjected to critical scrutiny in the same way judgments are, for they can be based on false evaluations or social norms. With regards to political life, Nussbaum convincingly argues that not all emotions prove to be appropriate, and some (such as disgust, hatred, envy) are inadequate for a process of political reflection. But even appropriate emotions should be scrutinized. Exploring and illuminating a wide range of emotions, she gives particular attention to the analyses of compassion and love. In her prolific analyses, Nussbaum discloses the moral character, as well as the social and political significance of compassion and love, but is also attentive to the possibility of their perversion. Examining compassion in the context of political liberalism, Nussbaum allows us to appreciate it as central for the cultivation of contemporary democracies. Engaging in a creative dialogue with the works of literature and philosophy (Plato, Spinoza, Proust, Augustine, Dante, Emily Brontë, Mahler, Whitman, Joyce), we are led to comprehend the diversity of understandings of love.

In its appealing advocacy of the importance of emotions in our private and public lives, *Upheavals of Thought* encourages us to grasp that understanding emotions requires recognizing their complexity: their cultural, historical, and psychological background, their link to action, as well as their intrinsic relation to the rational-critical aspect of our intellect. It also requires the acknowledgment of animal emotions. This immense and ground-breaking study is an invaluable contribution to contemporary debates on rationality, and an invitation to appreciate, explore and marvel at the diversity and complexity of the emotions of our fellow human and non-human beings.

2002

Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life*
(Indiana University Press, 2001)

On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life takes up the question of the relation of art, truth, and ethical sense by pursuing the idea – one that has defined the philosophical consideration of art since antiquity – that tragedy represents the summit of the possibilities of art and the highest form in which art expresses something of human self-understanding. This idea is found in Plato, but first thematized in Aristotle. From this point in Aristotle through Hegel, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger this idea becomes something of an orthodoxy. Nietzsche expresses it perhaps most clearly when he defines all art as the product of the conflicted roots of human nature that are expressed as the Dionysian and Apollonian, and when he further defines the art that expresses this conflict as its theme – tragedy – as the highest achievement of art, one that reveals our nature in ways that philosophy can never reach. This struggle between philosophy and tragedy is a struggle that concerns our self-understanding. In the end, as Plato had argued, it is a struggle about how one can live and ethical life.

On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life investigates this struggle between philosophy and tragedy by means of a series of readings of philosophers who have taken this topic as a central theme. In particular, the importance of tragedy in the post-Kantian German tradition are considered since that tradition is profoundly shaped by its engagement with Greek tragedy. After discussions of tragedy in Plato and Aristotle and a brief discussion on the importance of Kant for this question despite the absence of any treatment of tragedy in Kant's work, close readings of the place of tragedy in the work of Hegel, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. While the axis of each reading is the question of ethical life, other themes persist throughout the book and come to define its most far-reaching concerns: strangeness, language and its limits, death, and political struggle. Above all, the concern is to formulate the questions of ethical life beyond any conception of good and evil.

The largest argument of the book is that in its engagement with works of art, above all with tragic art, philosophy is pressed to open itself beyond the prejudice that what is true is able to be captured by the concept, by the idea. In taking the question of tragic art to heart, philosophy is pushed to its limits and to become different.

Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*

trans. Kathryn Plant (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002)

The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer is an impressive introduction to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics written by an internationally renowned Gadamerian scholar. The volume aptly situates Gadamer's thought not only within the tradition of hermeneutical thinking but also in a broader context of contemporary philosophical debate.

Grondin's unparalleled and challenging guide engages a variety of themes pertaining to Gadamer's philosophy: the problem of method beginning with Descartes' philosophical inquiry, the universality of hermeneutics, the linguality of understanding, aesthetic experience as the model of hermeneutic investigation, but also the notions of pre-judgment, hermeneutic horizon, and the fusion of horizons (*la fusion des horizons*), to name but a few.

In the clearly defined chapters, Grondin not only addresses the most fundamental facets of Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics but also demonstrates his doing of hermeneutics (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*). Admirably and convincingly, the author explores the ways in which Gadamer continues but also substantially modifies the problematization of the *method*, which becomes his undeniable *tour de force*, and how he appropriates Heidegger's philosophy of language, both paying his debt and distancing himself from his mentor.

The insights provided in this significant contribution to the Gadamerian scholarship embrace diverse themes and have become exemplary in the explication of Gadamer's *understanding* of understanding, language, and the reading process. For Gadamer, language cannot be delimited to playing the role of a communicative tool. Gadamer emphasizes the dialogic nature of language – language is never completed, but rather it is endlessly open to transformations that arise from the interaction between the speaking partners. In conversation, the voice of the other challenges, undermines, deconstructs, and reconstructs, providing novel understandings and the ever-new possibilities of our re-orientation in the reality we are immersed in. Grondin's exceptional attunement to Gadamer's understanding of the linguality of human experience shines forth in his exhilarating interrogation of the “disturbing proximity” of speaking and thinking, which stands at the center of Gadamer's gloss on language. Language always remains “uncannily near” (*so unheimlich nahe*) to thought, and, paradoxically, the *unheimlich* is our “home.”

Gadamer's explication of the relationship between speaking and thinking is supplanted with his interrogation of the reading process. For Gadamer, as Grondin

meticulously explains, reading is always situated within the historical and cultural horizon. It is thereby affected by the ongoing “conversation’ between the reader and her tradition done in the reciprocal manner – the historically-effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*).

Undoubtedly, Grondin’s succinct, elegant, and comprehensive book demonstrates that if we follow Gadamer’s oft-quoted dictum: “We always understand differently, if we understand at all,” in the manner of its author, Gadamer’s brilliant student, we will remain sensitive to the inexhaustibility of the hermeneutic enterprise and the versatility of the realms which open themselves in front of us each time we attempt to understand.

Grondin’s supreme keeping vigil for the meaning which unfolds from attentive listening to Gadamer’s teaching deserves the highest praise.

Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*

trans, Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford University Press, 2002)

Being Given was first published in 1997 by the Parisian publishing house PUF and immediately aroused appreciation. One reviewer wrote then that although we do not know Marion’s future philosophical path, we are certainly dealing with his major achievement in this work’s characteristic strength, originality, the rigor of analysis, and fluent employment of examples from the history of philosophy. This is all true. Nonetheless, the more than two decades that have passed since its publication demand that we look at this work, as well as Jean-Luc Marion’s whole philosophical path, from a somewhat different perspective. Much has been written about this philosopher himself, mainly pointing to his three areas of interest: Cartesianism, theology, and phenomenology. Marion can be seen as a philosopher trying to restore to philosophy the forgotten phenomenon of love. Love is that singular inner force that drives Marion’s thought. And the stakes of such, including in the philosophical dimension, are immense, for restoring love to philosophy means restoring philosophy to itself, as philosophy is the love of wisdom.

Hence, we have Marion as a philosopher of love. Marion’s philosophy of love is a consistent opening and grounding of the pathways upon which love might be understood. Although we find love only in the final paragraph of its conclusion, the book *Being Given* is an extremely important stage along this way to understanding love. To this end, two assumptions should be taken up: firstly, love is something of absolute, utmost importance; secondly, love cannot be cultivated on the grounds of

metaphysics. Hence, only the path of phenomenology remains, yet this too must be appropriately modified. This operation was prefaced by Marion's work *Réduction et donation*, whereas *Being Given* seeks the grounds for developing a phenomenology of *donation*, of givenness. The latter, being significantly broader than in Husserl's presentation, encompasses at once giving and the very appearing phenomenon that leads to discovering giving as the most radical plane of phenomenalization as well as a phenomenon as a gift. Further research into this phenomenon yields extremely valuable discoveries, among which it is necessary to distinguish the typology and the *topos* of phenomena, especially the distinction between "over-saturated" phenomena, i.e., paradoxes, the operation of anamorphosis which testifies to the independence of the phenomenon, and above all changes in the concept of subjectivity. The subject is no longer the constitutive I, but the gifted I, which also draws its own self from the gift, from that which is given. It exists inasmuch as it is received. Is this not a definition of love? Thanks to *Being Given*, love is not merely a distant dream but a foundation upon which we can ascend to the dignity of its philosophical notion.

2003

Michael Forster, *Herder: Philosophical Writings*

(Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Michael Forster's translation of *Herder: Philosophical Writings* is a distinguished presentation of the work of Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder is an prolific scholar whose work influenced a wide spectrum of disciplines ranging from philosophy, linguistics, psychology, history, and politics. Forster astutely gives a wide berth to each of these areas of Herder's work. This volume presents a comprehensive selection of his writings in a new translation, with an introduction that sets them in their philosophical and historical context. Its opening section is marked notably with the inclusion of Herder's "How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People", which sets the stage both for Herder's personal political program as well as the nature of his future influence. Key among his ideas in this essay is that the "defensive wars over Metaphysics" leads to a concomitant metamorphosis of people and their judgements.

The inheritances of Herder's work encompasses the philosophical (Hegel, Schleiermacher, Nietzsche), literary (Goethe and Schiller), and linguistic worlds (von Humboldt). This survey contains essays that have not previously been translated, positioning it to be of use to both the layman and advanced scholar of the Enlightenment.

John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*

(Routledge, 2003)

John Milbank's *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* is a daring theological project which puts the classic theory of the Gift in conversation with contemporary engagements with the notion of divine reconciliation. His project is conceived in the light of recent works by Derrida, Levinas, Marion, Zizek, and other members of what he terms the 'Radical Evil' school. The presence of evil and violence in the world is conceived as a refusal of the gifts from the divine. By re-interpreting the world through theological completeness, we are able to receive the divine gift of forgiveness and find a pathway towards redemption for humanity.

Millbank's work is of interest to anyone who engages in the issues of language, culture, time, politics, and historicity. His critique of post-Kantian modernity keeps

the divine as infinite at the forefront of his interpretive process. Novel human undertakings are dependent on a subtle orientation towards God as that which gives us the potential for growing new capacities, understandings, and other forms of being-in-the-world.

James Mensch, Ethics and Selfhood: Alterity and the Phenomenology of Obligation
(SUNY, 2003)

According to *Ethics and Selfhood*, a minimal requirement for ethics is that of guarding against genocide. In deciding which races are to live and which to die, genocide takes up a standpoint outside of humanity. To safeguard against this, Mensch argues that we must attain the critical distance required for ethical judgment without assuming a superhuman position. His description of how to attain this distance constitutes a genuinely new reading of the possibility of a phenomenological ethics, one that involves reassessing what it means to be a self. Selfhood, according to Mensch, involves both embodiment and the self-separation brought about by our encounter with others. Others provide us with alternate viewpoints and actions. In the empathy that opens us up to them, we separate ourselves from our own embodied perspectives. Others, moreover, provide us with the experiential context needed for moral judgment. Buttressing his arguments with documented accounts of those who hid Jews during the Holocaust, Mensch shows how the self-separation that occurs in empathy opens the space within which moral judgment can occur, and obligation can find its expression. He includes a reading of the major moral philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Arendt, Levinas—even as he develops a phenomenological account of the necessity of reading literature to understand the full extent of ethical responsibility. Mensch's work offers an original and provocative approach to a topic of fundamental importance.

2004

Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*

(Ashgate, 2004)

On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva offers a superb survey of Ricoeur's philosophical journey, which unfolds throughout his long and fruitful life. Ricoeur's original, versatile, and wide-ranging input: from reflexive philosophy and phenomenology, through his engagement with psychoanalysis and the philosophy of language, to religion and political philosophy, is made explicit with a tactile vibrancy and outstanding depth of insight. The portrait of Ricoeur, which transpires from Kearney's cogent exploration, is that of a true sage – the deeply engaged in social and political matters thinker, whose generous, passionate, and powerful response to the fundamental issues of a human being feeds the creative imagination of generations of scholars. Beginning with an explication of the basic ideas that pertain to Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics, the book aptly weaves the manifold strands of his thought, guiding us to apprehend his inimitable *via longa* ("long route") of the hermeneutic inquiry. The first Part of the book is a sound analysis of Ricoeur's debate with a host of diverse themes: the symbolism of evil, politics, poetics, but also the issue of creative imagination and its ethical implications. This apt commentary is supplanted with the author's captivating dialogues with his former teacher in Part two. The interview section deserves special notice as it arises from Kearney's engaged listening to his mentor and the invaluable, vivid experience of intellectual exchange between two thinkers, spanning almost three decades.

In a novel and engaging way, Kearney's deep exploration of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and poetics leads us to apprehend and appreciate the relevance of the relationship between philosophy and ethics. Placing an act of philosophizing in the practical domain, Ricoeur revitalizes the Aristotelian notion of phronetic wisdom, espousing thus, at the same time, the relevance of the ethical dimension of our existence for our understanding and self-understanding. For Ricoeur, as Kearney powerfully emphasizes, philosophy and ethics are not only close to one another but remain in indissoluble oneness. It is impossible to talk about a human being without an ethical backdrop of her conduct. Human existence is always an ethical existence, riven with inner and outer conflicts. The situation of conflict, as Ricoeur explicates, also regards the inherently and dialectically contradictory standpoints and the resulting incongruity of interpretations.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the most enticing facet of Kearney's salient *Conversation* with his teacher is his gloss on Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics of the self. Kearney has the unique ability to sensitize us to the originality of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of selfhood and, more specifically, to his notion of *narrative identity*, which expresses Ricoeur's profound understanding of the human subject in her relating to herself and to others. The ethical dimension of human subjectivity rests on the mutuality of recognition which continually positions us in relation to others and transforms our lives. Recognition originates in love which can transcend the rigid confines and or even the drama of self-centered ego. The reciprocal nature of human recognition sparks off an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation, which bears on our everydayness and changes history.

Kearney's unique accomplishment not only spells out the multifarious ways in which Ricoeur contributes to contemporary hermeneutics but proposes a deep delving into our human condition. With a real zest of an internationally acclaimed philosopher, Kearney invites us to follow in the footsteps of Ricoeur and indulge in philosophy. In Kearney's account, philosophizing truly shines forth as the portal to wisdom, and the owl of Minerva takes on an exceptional and unprecedented value.

Jean Greisch, *Le Buisson ardent et les Lumières de la Raison: L'invention de la philosophie de la religion*, 3 vols.

(Ed. du Cerf, 2002–2004)

In his trilogy *Le Buisson ardent et les Lumières de la raison* (2002-2004), Greisch engages in a genealogical and typological reconstruction of the great paradigms (speculative, critical, phenomenological, and analytical), which governed philosophy of religion as an academic discipline for two centuries. Philosophy of religion is one of the products of the process of secularization while also making it a subject of its reflection (*Le Buisson ardent*, I, p. 39). Through his typological reconstruction, Greisch advocates a hermeneutical paradigm which, while integrating the contributions of other paradigms, rests on the tripod of the notions of life, existence, and interpretation. In this respect, he aligns with Bergson, Nabert, Jaspers, Heidegger and Ricoeur. The hermeneutical paradigm of the philosophy of religion is critical because interpreting religious phenomena needs to articulate "spaces of experience and horizon of expectation." A "religion which offers us a space of experience determined in all respects is very likely to be a mere ideology, while a religion which speculates only on a bright future is an illusion without a future." Asking the Kantian question: "What can I hope for?" in the

context of religious phenomena inspires us to think anew about the problems of the essence of religion, the meaning of the plurality of religions, and a hypothetical absolute religion (*religion absolue*). Greisch attaches great importance to the distinction between *philosophy of religion* and *religious philosophy*, which allows a philosopher to justify his own religious choices – as Ricœur did when he defined his Christianity as a “chance transformed into fate by a continuous choice.” In this regard, philosophical reflection must guard against a double temptation: that of comparative relativism and syncretism in the context of the philosophy of religion, that of apologetics in the context of religious philosophy. Greisch’s works develop along three main axes.

The first, *Hearing with Another Ear* (*Entendre d’une autre oreille*) explores the mutually inclusive relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and biblical hermeneutics, focusing on the three hermeneutical ‘subtleties’ of reading, *understanding* and *application*.

The second axis, *From No Other to All Other* (*Du Non-autre au tout autre*) concerns the articulation of the philosophy of religion and philosophical theology in modernity. Far from concluding in a philosophical agnosticism, Greisch refuses to leave the question of God to the theologians alone.

The third axis, *To Live Philosophizing* (*Vivre en philosophant*) reconnects with the old tradition of philosophy conceived as a spiritual exercise, enhanced by Hadot, Michel Foucault, A.J. Voelke, and Martha Nussbaum. For Greisch, it is only if we admit the possibility of a spiritual experience underlying the philosophical act itself that the question of the status of spiritual experience in its religious specificity, or, in the context of Christianity, of the theological specificity, arises.

Judith Butler, *Precarious Life and Undoing Gender*

(Verso, 2006) and (Routledge, 2004)

Judith Butler’s status as a leading thinker in the hermeneutics of gender is solidified in the dual publication of *Undoing Gender* and *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning*.

These texts extended the genealogical and critical implications of her earlier writings on gender. *Undoing Gender*, specifically, calls into question the dominant notions of personhood as such. In other words, if gender and sexuality are a set of performances instead of biological characteristics, then they essentially belong to who we are, what we are doing, and how we are feeling. Gender is one facet of life, among many, that displays our indebtedness to the other, as a condition for the possibility of

learning to create the self, along with being a source for limitations we may ultimately reject. One of her most potent insights is that if gender is truly a performance of one's being, of interpreting and responding to social norms, then it always implies a potential for a subversion of the norm. The fulfillment of one's being through interpretation is thus an inherently radical act.

Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning* inverts the phenomenological locus of her early period. It marks a transition from studying how individual subjects relate to social norms to exposing how current events are predicated by problematic policies and cultural values. In *Precarious Life*, Butler focuses on the existence of Guantanamo Bay, anti-intellectual censorship as a wartime practice in the United States, and anti-Semitism charges leveled against critics of the Israeli state. Through these events, Butler astutely studies how modern states designate certain lives as worthy or unworthy of being grieved. Such practices arise from our collective inability to respond to loss. Her claim is that a new comportment towards violence and mourning would alter our collective interpretation of history and social policy. This new comportment can provoke fresh forms of solidarity and global political action.

2005

Kathy Eden, *Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and its Humanist Reception*

(Yale University Press, 2005)

Kathy Eden's *Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and its Humanist Reception* is a sophisticated historicizing of the hermeneutic tradition. Her aim is to disavow the notion that hermeneutics was conceived by German Enlightenment thinkers, even if it was popularized by their works. Eden revisits the work of classical rhetoricians (Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Cicero, and Quintilian) and theologians (Paul the Apostle, Basil of Caesarea, Augustine of Hippo, Erasmus, Philip Melancthon, and Matthias Flacius Illyricus) to demonstrate the period's longstanding commitment to both exegesis and interpretation. She traces the development of these practices from Republican Rome through Reformation Europe to show their influence on, among other schools of thought, the German Enlightenment. *Rhetorical Tradition* is at once a study of historical ideas and a vindication of the hermeneutic practice of allowing context to illuminate an ever fuller sense of the meanings we encounter.

Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*

(John Wiley, 2005)

The book consists of two parts, a re-written essay "Architecture of the Seven Senses" of 1994 for *Questions of Perception* by Steven Holl, Alberto Pérez-Gómez, and Juhani Pallasmaa, and his lecture in the *Questions of Perception Symposium* at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 1995, where the three authors lectured. The book became a textbook in architecture schools worldwide, and it has been translated into several languages. *The Eyes of the Skin* was originally published by Academy Editions in London in 1996. It was commissioned by John Wiley & Sons for their new Polemics series, along with books by Arata Isozaki and Robert Maxwell.

The text is a critique of the hegemonic position of vision in western thought and architecture, which has been further strengthened by numerous technical inventions. It focuses on the significance of the senses, the multi-sensory reality, and the existential meanings of experience. It is loosely based on phenomenological thinking, inspired especially by the writings of Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Eyes of the Skin* was followed by two other books, *The Thinking Hand*:

existential and embodied wisdom in architecture (Wiley, London, 2009) and *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (Wiley, London, 2011), which constitute a trilogy. The three books ground experience, thought, and poetic imagery in an embodied and multi-sensory grasp of the world. The writer's later interest in the interactions of neuroscience and architecture is exemplified by *Mind in Architecture: Neuroscience, Embodiment and the Future of Design*, eds. Sarah Robinson and Juhani Pallasmaa (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2015).

Architecture is one of the most complex of human endeavors, as it is simultaneously a utilitarian task and a personal confession, rationality, and emotive experience, aesthetics, and ethics, as well as the means and the end. In his attempt to see the art of building in a broader historical, cultural, biological, mental, and existential context, Pallasmaa has taken distance from the professionalist orientation in architecture. To understand the complex phenomenon of architecture beyond its current narrow dimensions, he has kept approaching architecture from differing vantage points. The human relationship with the world is proving to be much more complex than we have believed. We still think of the five senses, established by Aristotle more than 2000 years ago, but recent research suggests that we have over thirty sensory systems through which we are related and interact with the world. We think of vision as the visual image projected on the surface of the retina, and hardly know that the percept advances from the retina in three separate neural waves (movement, color and form) distanced from each other by 20 milliseconds. The image is finally a product of our brain and nervous system, not the eye, which serves as a mediator in the process.

The writer's interest has turned from isolated senses to their interactions and the multi-sensory lived reality. The senses have mainly been studied one by one under laboratory conditions in isolation from each other, rather than in the complexities of real-life situations. A fundamental fact is that our senses constantly and unconsciously interact. The book emphasizes the sense of touch, and its very title intends to express the significance of the tactile component in vision. Detached vision makes us outsiders and observers, whereas the interplay of the senses makes us experience ourselves as participants in 'the flesh of the world,' to use a suggestive notion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Maria Luísa Portocarrero Silva, *Horizontes da Hermenêutica em Paul Ricoeur*
(Ariadne, 2005)

Horizontes da Hermenêutica em Paul Ricoeur ["Horizons of Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics"] (2005) is a solid and stimulating approach to Ricoeur's philosophical project. Written in a rigorous and penetrating way, the book as the flair of an original introduction to the works of Ricoeur, but it is also, in fact, a solid contribution to a better – or alternative - understanding and philosophical appropriation of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of human condition by those already familiar with the works of this major contemporary philosopher.

The book is divided into five chapters: "Corporeality, Fall and Confession," "Identity, Sovereignty and Responsibility," "Phenomenology of Time and the Poetics of Narrativity," "The Long Path of Hermeneutics," and "From the Fusion of Horizons to the Conflict of Interpretations." The internal coherence of the book is granted by a specific critical option that illustrates Portocarrero's way of appropriating Ricoeur's thought. We can formulate it in the following terms. Without the understanding of the anthropological meaning of Ricoeur's project of a *Philosophy of will*, it is impossible to fully account for the depth and range of a hermeneutic path that is primarily determined by the topic of the *homo capax*. Thus, becomes clear the fundamental orientation of all and each one of the above-mentioned chapters: the more or less implicit starting point of each chapter is the Ricoeurian conception of human fragility (*fragilité*), as it resounds over a much-needed new conception of rationality – a hermeneutic rationality – for our times.

At the heart of such a model of hermeneutic rationality, Portocarrero suggests that we must find an *ethical ground*. This, the author argues consistently, is of crucial importance if we want to meditate on a "meaning" of human existence that does not start from the pure spontaneity of the cogito. We must begin elsewhere; we must begin by an interpretative temporal mediation (made by the *via longa* of the signs, symbols, texts, institutions) of the human condition itself. In other words, we must start *in media res*, within the infinite hermeneutic movement of interpretation of personal and intersubjectivity decisions, options, words, texts, promises, testimonies, etc. Hence, the ethical value of a hermeneutic recovery of the testimony, of history, of the treasures of cultural symbols that have influenced us.

Maria Luísa Portocarrero is one of the leading scholars in her field of study. In her native country, Portugal, those working in the field of hermeneutic philosophy will always be in her debt. The book *Horizontes da Hermenêutica em Paul Ricoeur* ["Horizons of Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics"] is, in this respect, an easy way to show why.

2006

Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*
(State University of New York Press, 2006)

The most notable achievement of Davey's study of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is its clear epistemological mapping of how the key epistemological and ontological categories of Gadamer's thinking interact in mutually transformative ways. Davey contends that philosophical hermeneutics has not always proved its own best advocate. In his understandable resistance to the strictures of philosophical "system," Gadamer underplays the systemic nature of his own thinking. It is one thing to employ the principles of both the finitude of knowing and an ontology of flux to disrupt the universal truth claims of science and technology but quite another to build an epistemology that can accommodate the truth-claims of art and literature without succumbing to the very epistemological critique that he deploys against the truth claims of the sciences. In other words, paradox and asymmetrical bodies of reasoning establish the creative tension at the heart of philosophical hermeneutics, and it is this which, as Davey argues, renders it an 'unquiet' but nevertheless productive mode of understanding. With care and a good deal of conceptual detail, the author reveals how philosophical hermeneutics has a tragic core to its reasoning. On the one hand, it seems as if Gadamer is building against nihilism and deconstructive critique, a robust defense of the place of truth in both the arts and historical understanding. Although he acknowledges that philosophical understanding can never contain the truth, which is an artwork, he insists that artworks can and do speak to us plainly in ways that offer both meaning and direction to our lives. Gadamer's defense of art's truth is certainly defensible on the grounds that without an acceptance of its powers of life-structuring revelation, nihilism, and the interminable play of deconstruction would incapacitate life as meaningless. And yet there is an inherent paradox in this position: the flux and becoming which art can render meaningful also undoes the permanence of such meaningful structures. The ability of art to give structure and sense to the finitude of our understanding is itself rendered finite by the transitory nature of all human experience.

What Davey's book uncovers is the dialectical unease at the heart of philosophical hermeneutics. The epistemological outlook of philosophical hermeneutics appears to be at odds with its ontological framework. The very historical and linguistic conditions which make hermeneutical understanding possible also serve to undermine that completeness of understanding which Gadamer's appeal to the

truth of art claims. This places philosophical hermeneutics within a formal impasse but only so long as the epistemological and ontological dimensions of Gadamer's thought are regarded as opposites rather than logical complementaries. To this end, Davey argues that philosophical hermeneutics is *philosophical* in that it strives to discern the ontological objectivities within subjective consciousness and *hermeneutical* in that it probes how hermeneutical consciousness both experiences and engages those objectivities and in the process of its engagement changes them. This emphasizes that hermeneutic understanding is not fixed but is essentially a process of movement, of inter-play, of transformation, and of transcendence. A substantial part of *Unquiet Understanding* defends the thesis that hermeneutical understanding is experiential in that it entails undergoing a *Bildungsprozess*. An unavoidable characteristic of this a process is that its formative powers are synonymous with a disruptive capacity.

The core *Leitmotif* of Gadamer's hermeneutics—the life of spirit and understanding is movement - suggests that the objective and subjective elements of hermeneutic experience are deeply inflected by instability, in-betweenness, and difficulty. On an epistemological level, this suggests that philosophical hermeneutics is a failure. Hermeneutical consciousness comes to know that its understanding is always in difficulty, can never truly grasp its object, is constantly caught in between what it has understood and what it might yet understand, and also that whatever it believes it does understand is always prone to the negativity of experience itself. However, Gadamer's commitment to the negativity of experience does not dissipate the possibility of understanding. To the contrary, the temporality that prevents complete understanding is, in fact, the condition of achieving a completer understanding. That which makes understanding difficult - the ability of the withheld to disrupt, defer and dissipate the meaningful - is also that which gives the meaningful its depth, its resonance, and its weight. The difficulty, difference, and distance emerge as constitutive of hermeneutic consciousness and establish the possibility of learning itself. This renders philosophical a hermeneutics a difficult and uneasy philosophical practice.

Davey's volume *Unquiet Understanding* faces up to the more radical and disconcerting aspects of hermeneutical engagement. That understanding entails a constant dialectical interaction between the objective and subjective aspects of our language and being reenforces the view that philosophical hermeneutics is a negative hermeneutics. It requires a practiced openness to the negativity of experience, a willingness to sacrifice the stability of our regularized conceptual understandings to the sometimes uncomfortable demands of hermeneutical engagement. Though difficult, the practice assures the one who is attentive to the other and otherness, the

possibility of transcendence. Philosophical hermeneutics affirms the dialectic of the word as opposed to the dialectic of ideas. It is not a logo-centric mode of thought but is unequivocally *logos* (word) centered. It is centered upon the play of the “word.” The task of understanding is, therefore, not to fulfill concepts but to transform the dialogical relations that constitute our being in the world. Davey’s study of philosophical hermeneutics offers a persuasive demonstration that it is a dialectic of negative experience that drives the possibility of transformative understanding.

Günter Figal, *Gegenständlichkeit: Das Hermeneutische und die Philosophie*
(Mohr Siebeck, 2006)

In this book, Günter Figal develops a foundation for hermeneutic philosophy. Interpretation and understanding are newly conceived. Interpretation shows itself to be the original reference to a subject matter; it is a reference to something which stands opposite and, as such, poses a challenge. As oppositionality, therefore, it stands at the center of hermeneutic philosophy. The critique of “objectification,” so commonly found in modern continental thinking, is here criticized. Figal shows that hermeneutic experience is but an intensified mode of human life. Life itself is generally dominated by the reference to objects which come to stand in opposition. This objectivity and oppositionality of life are possible in a world with hermeneutic dimensions. These dimensions can be phenomenologically described as freedom, language, and time.

Maurizio Ferraris writes on Figal’s book: “Derrida said that justice is the indeconstructible. Indeed, he renounced ontology in the name of ethics. With this epochal book, the greater hermeneutic philosopher of our days, Günter Figal, argues that objectivity is the indeconstructible. Certainly, objectivity alone does not guarantee solidarity, freedom, and justice. But without it we would have nothing, or rather, we would only have the illusion of solidarity, freedom, and justice.”

Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*
(The MIT Press, 2006)

Human desire has shaped the built environment, sometimes in ways that today we judge as unsuitable for the common good. Representing ideologies and institutions like false idols, historical architecture has often contributed to repressive

environments. Modernity has rightly judged this sort of building practice faulty and dangerous. As a pragmatic alternative it has proposed that buildings should fulfill the wishes of individuals in a democratic society: a desire for shelter and protection from the elements, for a home and a place to work where humans may live their lives in as pleasurable a way as possible.

Perez-Gomez argues that the materialistic and technological alternatives for architecture, however sophisticated and justifiable they may be in view of our historical failures, do not answer satisfactorily to the complex desire that defines humanity. Man's greatest gift is love, and he is invariably called to respond to it. Despite our suspicions, architecture has been and must continue to be built upon love. I will show how this foundation possesses its own rationality, one that the built environment will not follow if it is based on premises drawn from normative disciplines or abstract logical systems. While recognizing the dangers of traditional religions, moral dogmas, and ideologies, true architecture is concerned with far more than fashionable form, affordable homes, and sustainable development; it responds to a desire for an eloquent place to dwell, one that lovingly provides a sense of order resonant with our dreams, a gift contributing to our self-understanding as humans inhabiting a mortal world.

The overriding aim of this book is to interpret the relationship between love and architecture in order to find points of contact between poetics and ethics: between the architect's wish to design a beautiful world and architecture's imperative to provide a better place for society. Architectural meaning is interpreted beyond the traditional, often polarized understanding of aesthetics as an eighteenth-century science of beauty, and ethics as a collection of normative rules, clarifying architecture's quest for beauty and the common good. Ethics and aesthetics reduced to rules are useless: ethical action is always singular and circumstantial. It always seems miraculous and unique, a transformative experience that is significantly analogous to our encounter with beauty in works of art.

"Post-critical" discourses have expressed a deep dissatisfaction with formalist and "hard" computer-generated architectures as being unable to respond to the expectations of cultures in the early third millennium. For over two centuries, architects, critics, and theoreticians have been arguing functionalist and formalist positions, opposing art to social interests, ethics to poetic expression. Architectural writing ranging from popular professional journals to sophisticated theoretical books perpetuates this polarization that diminishes architecture's capacity to embody beauty and to promote social development. In stepping away from these prevalent oppositions, this book uncovers the deep connections between ethical and poetic values in the primary tradition of our discipline.

Built upon love architecture engages the inhabitant as a true *participant*, unlike the remote spectator of the modernist work of art or the consumer of fashionable buildings *cum* images. If this is not obvious, it is partly because architectural meaning has been “explained” through a deceptively simple assumption that confuses our human quest for happiness with hedonism. Love, in its multiple incarnations as desire, is as open-ended as life itself and remains the ground of meaning even in times of obsessive materialism. According to Plato, this erotic principle is operative among human souls and everywhere in the universe. Yet, love and our transcultural quest for beauty will never be reduced to a mere pursuit of pleasure. A poor understanding of this issue is evident in recent writings foregrounding the interest in algorithms to generate novel architectural forms, in critical practices that stress the social history of architecture emphasizing political correctness and a critique of “authorship,” and even in architecture driven by well-meaning ecological concerns. A partial or total ignorance of the deep relationship between love and architectural meanings has dire consequences, perpetuating the modern epidemic of empty formalism and banal functionalism, condemning architecture to passing fashion or consumable commodity, and the cultures it frames to their present dangerous pathologies. This book shows how the appropriate engagement of desire through the articulation of ethical and political positions in the form of seductive projects is the fundamental responsibility of architecture.

The early lyric poets invented Eros, an invisible force that remains at the root of our capacity to create and comprehend the poetic image. Both Eros, the name of the divinity that accompanies Aphrodite (Venus for the Romans), and *philia*, the love of friendship that entails mutual responsibility among equals, was born during the cultural transformation that culminated in classical Greece. The first part of this book examines the nature of architectural form in the light of *eros*, seduction, and the tradition of the poetic image in Western architecture. Successive chapters examine relationships between *eros* and creation, *eros* and the Western understanding of space, *chora*, and limits, and the relationship between love and the primary modes of recognition and representation in architecture.

Philia, perhaps drawn from geometry by philosophers and politicians, is the emotional link that allows for the participation of equal citizens in the new democratic polity and its institutions, both sacred and profane. After a brief interlude arguing the common ground among seemingly diverse forms of love, the book discusses the connections between *philia* and architectural program, tracing its history through ritual and exploring the position of architecture at the limits of language. A chapter is dedicated to the examination of linguistic analogies that underscore the inception of

modernist theories, followed by a comparative study of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century theories of the Viel brothers, who articulated complementary positions concerning the communicative capacity of architecture as a political act. The book concludes by drawing points of contact between ethics and poetics that can be gleaned for the contemporary practice of architecture under the sign of love, incorporating both *eros* and *philia*, drawing especially on the notion of the project as a promise driven by a quest to further humanity's spiritual evolution.

2007

Daniel M. Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science*
(The University of Chicago Press, 2006)

The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science is a classic work in rhetorical studies, and a foundational work in the field of Affect & Emotion Studies. In the book, Gross develops the compelling argument that emotions are not biological but rather are *rhetorical*. Why, Gross poses, did Princess Diana's death provoke global mourning while the death of an un-housed person is most often met with apathy? His answer takes his readers across an expansive rhetorical and literary tradition to provide a history that denaturalizes emotions as biologically adaptive mechanisms – the dominant perspective now most famously argued by the cognitive neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. By way of contrast, Gross's critical reading of Aristotle, Seneca, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Sarah Fielding, and Judith Butler provides an spacious terrain through which to explore how emotions are unevenly distributed across power lines, thus displacing psychophysiology's triumph. Subject and psyche thus take a new form in Gross's work, as he shows how power relations circumscribe the social boundaries through which feeling travels. By relocating emotion this way, the book marks a victory for the humanities, reclaiming for critical rhetoric the compelling category of emotion from its current security in the sciences.

In terms of its home academic field, *The Secret History of Emotion* has been credited, amongst other things, for shifting academic attention away from “the rhetoric of figures and tropes” back to a more substantial tradition: “the rhetoric of the passions.” At the same time, the book serves as a powerful rejoinder to currently dominant ways of researching basic human activity. It does so – perhaps surprisingly – by revitalizing an ancient tradition of rhetoric that turns out to be more intelligent and nuanced than most late modern accounts. Particularly influential has been the historical argument that demonstrates in detail how European early modernity saw emotions that were once political, like anger, fear, and compassion, “sucked up into the brain.” Offering this new history and inspiring a new cross-disciplinary method, the book has been highly influential across the Academy and beyond. It is regularly cited across the humanities, social sciences, and in the professions – in over 50 academic fields and counting. At the same time, it has been reviewed and discussed across the globe and in numerous publications both academic and journalistic,

including over twenty-six book reviews emanating from among other places the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*
(Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2007)

In *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*, Elizabeth Fiorenza shows an elegant connection between the power of words and how words are put into the service of those with power. She puts herself to the task of confronting a potentially devastating question: What kind of power does scripture exercise? Fiorenza notes that, in a historical sense, the Bible's inheritance as an artifact of the Roman Empire is palpable in its usage as a source of legitimacy by the Christian Church for its colonial exploits. She counters the Bible's historical legacy with a feminist, hermeneutical reading of the Scriptures. This provides Schussler provide a platform for a Biblical denouncing of colonialist expansion, racist exploitation, and heterosexual discrimination. Moreover, this reading divulges an aperture in Scriptural studies: what direction will the scholarship takes if the Bible is viewed as a document of liberatory potential?

Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*
(MIT Press, 2007)

This ground-breaking inquiry into the centrality of place in Martin Heidegger's thinking offers not only an illuminating reading of Heidegger's thought but a detailed investigation into the way in which the concept of place relates to core philosophical issues. In Heidegger's *Topology*, Jeff Malpas argues that an engagement with place, explicit in Heidegger's later work, informs Heidegger's thought as a whole. What guides Heidegger's thinking, Malpas writes, is a conception of philosophy's starting point: our finding ourselves already "there," situated in the world, in "place." Heidegger's concepts of being and place, he argues, are inextricably bound together.

Malpas follows the development of Heidegger's topology through three stages: the early period of the 1910s and 1920s, through *Being and Time*, centered on the "meaning of being"; the middle period of the 1930s into the 1940s, centered on the "truth of being"; and the late period from the mid-1940s on, when the "place of being"

comes to the fore. (Malpas also challenges the widely repeated arguments that link Heidegger's notions of place and belonging to his entanglement with Nazism.) The significance of Heidegger as a thinker of place, Malpas claims, lies not only in Heidegger's own investigations but also in the way that spatial and topographic thinking has flowed from Heidegger's work into that of other key thinkers of the past 60 years.

2008

John T. Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language*
(Columbia University Press, 2008)

In the romantic tradition, music is consistently associated with madness, either as cause or cure. On this theme, which spans from classical antiquity to the modern imagination, Hamilton investigates the way literary, philosophical, and psychological treatments of music and madness challenge the limits of representation and thereby create a crisis of language. Particular focus is given to the decidedly autobiographical impulse of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where musical experience and mental disturbance disrupt the expression of referential thought, illuminating the irreducible aspects of the self before language can work them back into a discursive system.

The book begins in the 1750s with Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau*, and situates that text in relation to Rousseau's reflections on the voice and the burgeoning discipline of musical aesthetics. Upon tracing the linkage of music and madness that courses through the work of Herder, Hegel, Wackenroder, and Kleist, Hamilton turns his attention to E. T. A. Hoffmann. Their writings of the first decades of the nineteenth century accumulate and qualify the preceding tradition. Throughout, Hamilton considers the particular representations that link music and madness, investigating the underlying motives, preconceptions, and ideological premises that facilitate the association of these two experiences. The gap between sensation and its verbal representation proved especially problematic for romantic writers concerned with the ineffability of selfhood. The author who chose to represent himself necessarily faced problems of language, which invariably compromised the uniqueness that the author wished to express. Music and madness, therefore, unworked the generalizing functions of language and marked a critical limit to linguistic capabilities. While the various conflicts among music, madness, and language questioned the viability of signification, they also raised the possibility of producing meaning beyond significance.

Since its publication, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* has received numerous outstanding reviews. John Neubauer, a leading scholar on Music and Literary Studies, cites this study as “a key text for those interested in the genesis of the idea of ineffable music.” For Herbert Lindenberger, it is a “superb book, a living testimony that philological learning and literary sensibility can be happily compatible.” Finally, the book has appeared in German translation as *Musik, Wahnsinn und das Außerkräftsetzen der Sprache* (Tübingen: Wallstein, 2011).

Douglas Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*

(t&t clark, 2008)

This text was composed as an exercise in hermeneutical metaphysics. The author is a student of S.T. Coleridge and The Cambridge Platonists. It explores the cognitive significance of the religious imagination as based upon the Romantic/Platonic theme that we ‘half create/half perceive the world’ (Wordsworth) on the underlying assumption of a profound correspondence or bond between the mind and reality. Such a bond between the microcosm of the human mind and the macrocosm of the universe is the very basis of aesthetics, ethics, and science: the beautiful, the good, and the true. Meaning, Hedley claims, cannot be willfully ‘spread onto the world’ as the Neo-Humeans assert, nor can it identifiable with the methods of natural science as the positivists insist, but must be grounded in a transcendent Logos. This divine Logos bestows the finite imagination with cognitive power.

In part, the book is a rehabilitation of Romantic Platonic perspective and a critique of naturalism and constructivism; in part, it is a reflection upon the rich seam of Platonic thought among explorers of the human psyche and religion in the last century, not least C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade and C.S. Lewis and their interest in indirect apprehensions of transcendent reality through symbols, rituals, and narratives. Such experiences point to an unseen reality, like icons and images. These are not to be viewed as crude representations of sterile abstractions but as living forms of the imagination that furnish a chariot for the soul to return to the Divine.

John Sallis, *Transfigurements: On the True Sense of Art*

(University of Chicago Press, 2008)

Comprised of an Introduction and eight chapters, John Sallis’ *Transfigurements: On the True Sense of Art* is a fascinating and gratifying study. Here the author puts forth the thesis that contemporary art is marked by the breakdown of the Platonic distinction between the sensible and the intelligible. Such being the case, the essence of art needs to be rethought “from the ground up.” The fundamental ambition of this remarkable study is precisely that of rethinking the essence of art.

Sallis contends that the phenomenological work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others has blazed the trail for a philosophical response to the breakdown

of the distinction mentioned above. Sallis' own goal is to further follow this path by opening a hermeneutical dialogue with ancient and modern thinkers.

Many chapters in this book focus on Kantian aesthetics and the question posed in Kant's work. The distinction mentioned above between the sensible and the intelligible plays a fundamental role in Kant's writings, while at the same time, Kant's analysis signals its impending breakdown. Sallis traces various aporias opened up by Kant's work, and especially with regard to music's status as compared to other arts as well as nature. According to Sallis, music has a distinct status among the arts, even though Kant did not acknowledge it.

Hegel is another important partner in dialogue in this study. Just like in the conversation with Kant, so also in the conversation with Hegel, the true meaning of art and the breakdown of the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible is at stake. In this framework, Sallis addresses not only music and painting but also sculpture, which Hegel understood as the classical mode of art, which attained its height in Greece at the time when religion took the form of art. By contrast, painting is a specifically romantic art that follows the classical age. Painting marks the decline of the highest embodiment of spirit in a sensible medium. Yet, at the same time, the spirit's departure from painting is indicative of the fact that spirit leaves religious imagery behind and attains its own proper plane. Paradoxically, this departure of the spirit from painting brings to light painting's essential element: *coloration*. Precisely at this point, painting can attain a new height while portraying human flesh. We see here how Hegel's account of the development of paintings comes into conflict with the constraints of the system. Hegel's famous claim that art for us is a thing of the past does not do justice to his own description.

Among other themes, the book addresses the relation between comedy and philosophy. Shakespeare, Hegel, and Plato play major roles in this context. According to Sallis, comedy undermines self-identical presence, which bears comparison with the gesture that is proper to the beginning of philosophy.

The concluding chapter, "The Promise of Art," is focused on Heidegger's philosophy of art. Here the "sense of sense" is in question. Sallis suggests that artworks in which the future of art is harbored in terms of their *promise* may already be in our midst.

John Sallis' *Transfigurements: On the True Sense of Art* has already made an important contribution to the philosophy of art, which will continue in the years to come

2009

James Mensch, *Embodiments: From the Body to the Body Politic*

(Northwestern University Press, 2009)

How does the body politic reflect the nature of human embodiment? To pursue this question in a new and productive way, James Mensch employs a methodology consistent with the fact of our embodiment. Doing so, he turns to Merleau-Ponty's concept of "intertwining"—the presence of one's self in the world and of the world in one's self—to understand the ideas that define political life. Mensch begins his inquiry by developing a philosophical anthropology based on this concept. He then applies the results of his investigation to the relations of power, authority, freedom, and sovereignty in public life. This involves confronting a line of interpretation, stretching from Hobbes to Agamben, which sees violence as both initiating and preserving the social contract. To contest this interpretation, Mensch argues against its presupposition, which is to equate freedom with sovereignty over Others. He does so by understanding political freedom in terms of embodiment—in particular, in terms of the finitude and interdependence that our embodiment entails. Freedom, conceived in these terms, is understood as the gift of Others. As a function of our dependence on Others, it cannot exist apart from them. The singular accomplishment of Mensch's book, *Embodiments*, is its explanation of how both public space and civil society presuppose this interdependence of self and Others. The result is a phenomenological grounding for a new type of political philosophy.

Holger Zaborowski, *Spielräume der Freiheit. Zur Hermeneutik des Menschseins*

(Verlag Karl Alber, 2009)

Friedrich Schiller once said that the human being is only fully human where he or she plays. Human existence is, indeed, a playful existence. Human play is intrinsically related to human freedom. For there is no freedom without play, and no play without freedom. Freedom is a specific relation that humans have to their own nature, to their own selves, to other human beings, to artefacts and nature, and to God. *Spielräume der Freiheit. Zur Hermeneutik des Menschseins* (*Leeways of Freedom. On the Hermeneutics of Being Human*), written by the German philosopher Holger Zaborowski, is a study that explores these relations in several beautifully and persuasively written essays. Zaborowski thus examines what it means to be human: the dignity, the challenges, and

the greatness of human existence. In doing so, he provides an outline of an anthropology that focuses on the singularity of human life, on what he calls "existence as an icon," as an image of the Other who calls one to respond to, and to take care of, the Other.

The first foundational chapters explore the meaning of freedom. They convincingly show the limits of a naturalistic understanding of the human being that denies the very fact of freedom, rigorously examine the relation between freedom and responsibility, and forcefully discuss the significance of divine freedom for an adequate view of human freedom. It is the performance of human existence that needs to be taken into account in order to understand the meaning of being human. Any kind of generalizing abstract anthropology, Zaborowski presupposes, does not suffice to gain such an understanding. For the performative "essence" of being human can never fully be analyzed and explained. It can, however, be explored hermeneutically and thus requires a hermeneutics of human life in its givenness that takes its own presuppositions and perspectives seriously and invites the readers to do hermeneutics themselves.

Other essays focus on concrete human acts to show what it means to be human. One of these chapters focuses on playing itself and its relation to freedom and time. It makes a plea for a kind of thinking that is itself playful—of which the book itself provides a wonderful example. Thinking playfully, Zaborowski devotes a chapter to eating and drinking. Against the background of a famous idea proposed by Ludwig Feuerbach, he raises the question as to whether or not the human being is (*ist*) what he or she eats (*isst*). Another chapter focuses on dwelling and its human dimensions. For Zaborowski, human dwelling is a "caveat without caveat." Human beings want to dwell somewhere. There is, therefore, a deep desire for a home, a place of one's own. But human life is finite. As humans, we cannot dwell forever, but only for the time being. Our dwelling thus shows what it means to long for eternity while irrevocably being finite and facing death. Death and dying stand at the center of another essay that focuses on the creation and the gift of death. It is the present itself that death bestows on us. Whoever wants to understand the present moment and our relation to it, needs to take into consideration the end of human life, too.

Spielräume der Freiheit. Zur Hermeneutik des Menschseins is an important and impressive contribution to the hermeneutics of human existence. In developing a hermeneutics of human life in action and in thus thinking about the human being, Zaborowski also thinks about thinking and delineates the outline of a way of philosophizing that can do justice to the performative dimensions of human life in its singularity. Zaborowski draws on the classical tradition and particularly on

contemporary phenomenology and hermeneutics, but also on art, literature, and popular culture. In that he helps to see more deeply and clearly, his book is truly phenomenological, too. Whoever thinks about the human being, will have to consider this book and many of Zaborowski's subsequent writings that expand and develop his hermeneutics of the human being.

Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: Ein philosophisches Porträt*

(Mohr Siebeck, 2009)

Di Cesare's portrait of Gadamer succeeds because it exemplifies, amplifies, and exceeds our previous understanding of Gadamer. The emerging portrait is at once challenging and provocative.

Di Cesare begins by arguing that scholars have mistakenly conflated Gadamer's philosophical contributions with *Truth and Method* (TM), missing the distinctiveness of his work that preceded and followed the publication of his signature book. In a short chapter, Di Cesare offers an account of how Gadamer "constructed" hermeneutics by strongly (and sometimes inaccurately) reading the modern tradition of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger against a backdrop that extends from the ancient Greeks through Vico. If he was too one-sided in casting Schleiermacher as an exemplar of the romantic/psychological branch of hermeneutics, Gadamer also was too respectful of his debt to Heidegger. Against Habermas's claim that Gadamer urbanized the Heideggerian province, Di Cesare shows how Gadamer broke with Heidegger in many important respects, but also how he hewed to the early Heidegger of the *Hermeneutics of Facticity* against Heidegger's later increasingly "solipsistic disquiet" (80). Situating Gadamer in the tradition of hermeneutical thinking and reassessing his effective history in the light of historical distance proves to be one of the most helpful features of the book.

The key to Gadamer's philosophy is his questioning of truth. The event of truth is revealed by distinguishing "understanding" as a way of being from "interpretation" as an activity that one might take up in response to a problem. The hermeneutical tradition, as reconstructed by Gadamer, sought to find the key to valid interpretation. As methodologism spread from the sciences to the humanities, scholars subjected the traditional exegetical rules of biblical and legal hermeneutics to more exacting expectations. In the end, the truths that might be derived by methodological interpretive strategies were elusive. The signature insight of philosophical hermeneutics is that the humanities need not bend to the rigor of method or remain

content with the subjectivism of aesthetics. Gadamer confronts the Kantian dilemma by recovering the event of truth in understanding. Di Cesare emphasizes this starting point: “Understanding means not conceiving, dominating, or controlling. *Understanding is like breathing*. And one does not decide not to breathe anymore. Understanding is not a matter of knowing, but of being” (p. 38). In chapter five, “The Constellation of Understanding,” the portrait begins to lose definition and to resemble a collage. Building on Heidegger’s recovery of the hermeneutical circle as a positive account of understanding, Part II of TM seeks to uncover the event of truth that the humanities foster. Gadamer’s wide-ranging discussions of “prejudice,” “tradition,” “history of effects,” “application,” “the classical,” “fusion of horizons,” and “experience” are rich and learned. However, in this small volume, it would have been best to orient these themes and provide more focus to the arc of Gadamer’s philosophy. Di Cesare concludes the chapter by correctly noting that the concept of understanding “reaches its greatest extension with the concept of experience after that of application” (106). The concluding part of TM concerns the linguisticity of human understanding, anticipating the later “linguistic turn” that captivated philosophy in succeeding decades. Di Cesare concedes that Gadamer’s discussion is unsatisfactory and perhaps largely ignored because he was at the forefront of the turn to language. In one of the longest chapters of the book, Di Cesare reconstructs Gadamer’s linguistic philosophy in light of his later work and subsequent developments in the field. Of particular importance is her discussion of Gadamer’s famously misunderstood statement: “Being that can be understood is language.” Gadamer does not equate Being with language and emphasizes the limits of language and the excess of Being in the experience of the ineffable. The experience of the boundaries of language is thus the experience of the boundaries of our existence and our finitude. The search for the right word appears to be an endless task. On the other hand, it is the word that always carries us *above* and *beyond* ourselves (157).

The chapter emphasizes that language is dialogue, a dialogue that is always already underway and never completed. The voice of the other is a persistent challenge to the pretense of the subject who uses language as a tool because, in dialogue, both conversation partners are continually transformed. The philosophy of finitude is rooted in language, in which each participant is drawn outside herself. There never is a first or last word in dialogue.

It is in the everydayness of the now that both the finitude of every spoken and every understood word, as well as the finitude of the speaker who must rely on the word, are experienced. In this way, there arises the unquenched and unquenchable desire for another word, which would give a voice each time to what is unsaid and not

understood. But this is possible only because the word in its finite presence evokes the absent infinitude of what still remains to be said and what lets itself be said. The limit of every word is thus always the beginning of something infinitely new. For every word demands another word -- in an infinite dialogue (185). Gadamer does not deconstruct the metaphysical tradition but instead philosophizes an ontology of language from within the hermeneutic tradition.

Hermeneutics has never campaigned for consensus and reconciliation. The 'agreement' from which all speakers proceed is the harmony of a common language. For speaking is always a *coming-to-agreement*. The other is already recognized here: even before every agreement with oneself, each speaker comes to an agreement with the other. Hence, to speak means to articulate the linguistic commonality further and otherwise. That does not prevent language, however, in its always open movement between familiarity and foreignness, understanding and nonunderstanding, from offering not only the starting point but also the paradigm of an ethics, a politics, or justice, which can be thought on the basis of its hospitable, common, and nevertheless differentiating in-between. This in-between is the space for the other and with the other, the undetermined of hermeneutic truth, and the finite meeting point of common words, which opens participation in the infinitude of the dialogue (212-13).

2010

Gianni Vattimo, *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*

ed. Franca D'Agostini (Columbia University Press, 2010)

The Responsibility of the Philosopher is an intriguing piece of scholarship by Gianni Vattimo, a powerful voice in contemporary philosophical hermeneutics (he is emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Turin). His output encompasses a wide range of problems present in today's philosophical, theological, and political debates.

Considering Vattimo's notable engagement with issues pertaining to ethics, the Christian faith, and Truth, and his prominently active participation in contemporary political life (he is a member of the European Parliament), the book on the vocation to philosophy and the responsibility of philosophy comes as a potent response to the pressing question of the place of philosophy in the humanities, and the task (*Aufgabe*) of a philosopher in a world fraught up with the polyvalent and divergent political and ethical standpoints.

The question of the philosopher's role in a society, which for centuries has been considered as that of a sage, comes as especially timely in a world that eagerly follows the pathway of calculative thinking – Heidegger's salient distinction of calculative and meditative thinking (*berechnendes* and *besinnliches Denken*) – and which is somewhat hidden behind the façade of the exigency of pragmatic solutions, but overwhelmingly resurfacing in the continuous abiding to the policy of measurable ends, also, or perhaps, most acutely felt in the academic environment.

The synthesis of Vattimo's distinguished academic research and his influential political activism results in a book that amply enters the discussion of the possible ways to untangle the knots of the multitudinous problems we face today. In the five neatly constructed chapters, Vattimo cogently explores the intersections of philosophy, science, and literature but also offers his state-of-the-art reflection on the philosophy of logic and logic in philosophy, and the fidelity to Truth, only to end up with his seminal deliberation of the vocation to philosophy and the responsibility of philosophy.

Navigating his unique intellectual path through the meanders of the highly complex socio-political problematic, Vattimo creates a vision of philosophy whose power rests on the hermeneutic, attentive listening to the problem at hand and on participation through a dialogic responsibility (*re-spondeo*).

Andrzej Wierciński, *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology: The Imperative to Think the Incommensurable*
(LIT Verlag, 2010)

Wierciński's inspirational *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology: The Imperative to Think the Incommensurable* undertakes an outstandingly demanding task of interrogating the possibilities of *conversation* between the apparently separate disciplines of philosophy and theology. Addressing the arguable exclusion of theology from philosophy and the severance of the philosophical and theological discourses, Wierciński sensitizes us to how they retain their autonomy, being, at the same time, compellingly interdependent and co-influencing. The hermeneutic "path of mediation," which Wierciński follows, encourages us to view philosophy and theology as "dynamic historical disciplines that are animated by the specific and very individual philosophers and theologians who practice them." Defying the misleading and simplistic idea of philosophy and theology as "static disciplines in need of logical connection," the book ingeniously explores the hermeneutic *in-between* which inspires us to acknowledge the anti-authoritarian openness of philosophy and theology to one another, as well as to recognize the inconclusive possibilities of cross-fertilizing that inhere in the two disciplines' orientation toward one another.

Wierciński substantiates his reflection with meticulous and enchantingly wide-ranging readings of Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, John Paul II, and John Milbank, and with elating references to St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Karl Barth. Treating us to this tremendously engaging array of thinkers, Wierciński places a particular accent on Heidegger and Ricoeur's iconic figures. He interprets Heidegger's philosophical project of disentangling religious consciousness and experience from its dwelling in metaphysical discourse as a renewed impetus for theology. With a similarly powerful zest, he pursues Ricoeur's detached, agnostic philosophizing and his practicing of Christianity "in the mode of a philosopher."

Wierciński shows that hermeneutics' open, non-reductive, and sensitive mediation between philosophical and theological discourse is hope-inducing and hope-enhancing. Working patiently and with the dedication to understand the inexhaustibility of the ways that philosophy and theology employ in approaching the issues that pertain to human existence and intuit into the subtle fabric of the interconnections between them bears significant fruits. In the captivating journey to ponder more (*etwas denken* rather than *denken von etwas*), discover more, and dwell in the horizon of Truth, the world of a theologian and the world of a philosopher, engagingly

immersed in the inexhaustibility of understanding, pose an unflagging challenge to think the *Incommensurable*, to which Wierciński's book appealingly and captivatingly responds.

Anne O'Byrne, *Natality and Finitude*

(Indiana University Press, 2010)

Natality and Finitude is a stirring work by Anne O'Byrne that juxtaposes entrenched philosophical projects on finitude and death against the human struggle to make sense of life. O'Byrne challenges the philosophical tradition to set its work on death, dying, and finitude against the context of the lived experience of meaning across generations. In her estimation, thinkers such as Dilthey and Heidegger have set the stage for a sophisticated engagement with our situatedness within time is marked by our comportment towards death. However, apart from Hannah Arendt, the tradition has yet to account for the role that natality plays as a signifying factor in understanding the meaning and impact our actions will make during life. Natality, she argues, has been disastrously under-theorized in the history of Western philosophy.

Throughout *Natality and Finitude*, O'Byrne takes a fresh, feminist approach to classic and contemporary topics such as such as creation, time, inheritance, birth and action, embodiment, biological determinism, and even cloning. She engages deftly with canonical thinkers ranging from Heidegger and Dilthey to Arendt and Nancy to show how the world becomes ours and how meaning emerges from our orientation to both past and future generations.

2011

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Stimmungen lesen: Über eine verdeckte Wirklichkeit der Literatur*
Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature
 (Carl Hanser Verlag, 2011) and (Stanford University Press, 2012)

In this extraordinary and highly personal collection of essays, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht develops his groundbreaking understanding of literature and the arts as generators of *presence*. In *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (2003), Gumbrecht exposed the idea that Western modernity was a “meaning culture,” that is, a paradigm that gave priority to intellectual-linguistic signification rather than to bodily-sensorial experience. In more philosophical terms, hermeneutics rather than presence has been pursued in modernity. Gumbrecht develops this idea in *Stimmungen lesen* by focusing on the “mood,” “atmosphere,” or “ambiance” that the literary text engenders in the reader. In this way, Gumbrecht develops his philosophical proposal by analyzing the physical-affective aspects of literary communication. That this has been a carefully matured project is clear from the fact that it is also a continuation of Gumbrecht’s interest in the notion of *materiality* (cf. the edited book *Materialities of Communication* (1994)). Through these and other works, he shows how the Western intellectual tradition too often has lost sight of the concrete and sensual dimensions of experience. In this way, Gumbrecht’s thinking represents a change of paradigm in relation to the typically modern focus on meaning and abstraction. In his *presence paradigm*, the aesthetic experience is restored to its perhaps primeval function, that is, to create a certain *Stimmung* rather than to produce a more or less precise meaning to be deciphered through endless interpretations.

Stimmungen lesen consists of two main parts, on the one hand, “Momente,” which is a series of close readings of classical works of literature and culture, and, on the other, “Situationen,” which aims at representing collective moods from the past. As regards “Momente,” Gumbrecht reads Walther von der Vogelweide’s poetry, the first picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Shakespeare’s sonnets, Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew*, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis’s *Counselor Ayres’ Memorial*, and Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*. Special mention should be made of his reading of María de Zayas’s *Novelas ejemplares y amorosas* (1637). Gumbrecht’s reading of this author – who should be part of the international literary canon – is extremely congenial with what can be assumed to be her literary and social intentions. Zayas is a feminist *avant la lettre* who both rhetorically and narratively creates an emotional and psychic intensity

– the existential proximity of death and love – that Gumbrecht analyzes with extreme perspicuity. In addition, also visual and musical expressions are explored in *Stimmungen lesen*, specifically the painter Casper David Friedrich’s pictorial production and Janis Joplin’s song. Gumbrecht thus proves his extraordinary sensitivity as regards aesthetic expression. His readings combine sharp intuitions with a thorough philosophical and literary erudition. The second main part of the work, “Situationen,” pursues to recuperate or recreate the experience of living at a particular historical moment (similar to the intention behind the wonderful work *In 1926 – Living on the Edge of Time* from 1998). Gumbrecht uses, as the primary motif for the circumscription of the European mood during the twentieth century, the notion of the *crisis of representation*. During this historical period, the world is perceived as impossible to depict, an experience that causes a feeling of drama. Through a series of space-time sequences running from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, Gumbrecht shows the attitudes governing this historical epoch. From Surrealism to Existentialism ending with Deconstruction, the evocation of the *Stimmung* belonging to a certain historical period is highly convincing. Gumbrecht’s emotional-historical reconstructions thus represent an achievement that is both aesthetic and philosophical at the same time. The value and fruitfulness of Gumbrecht’s work cannot be questioned, as it already is, and will remain, a central reference for many academic disciplines.

Paul Fairfield, *Philosophical Hermeneutics Reinterpreted: Dialogues with Existentialism, Pragmatism, Critical Theory, and Postmodernism*
(Bloomsbury, 2011)

In this important study, Paul Fairfield examines a number of issues of central importance to philosophical hermeneutics. His aim is less to reexamine the basic hypotheses of hermeneutics (Gadamer’s hermeneutics in particular) than to understand it in relational terms by bringing it into closer association with existentialism, pragmatism, critical theory, and postmodernism. Fairfield contends that there are essential affinities and areas for critical exchange between hermeneutics and these four schools of thought which have, until now, remained underappreciated.

Philosophical Hermeneutics Reinterpreted examines several of these connections by interpreting hermeneutics in relation to specific themes in the writings of key figures within each of these traditions. In so doing, he both clarifies some outstanding issues in hermeneutics and advances the subject beyond what Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur have given us.

Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture*
(Wiley & Sons Publishers, 2011)

Three of Pallasmaa's books: *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (1996), *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (2009), and *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (2012), published by John Wiley & Sons in London, can be seen as a distinct entity, a study of the role of perception, embodiment, and existential meaning in creative thinking and work, as well as in our sense of self. This three-part survey was not pre-conceived. It simply came about. One serendipitous idea led to the next one. The third book arose from his interest in mental imagery as the ground of language, as well as artistic and architectural expressions. All images have to be embodied and internalized in order to obtain their poetic magic; the poetic image must become part of ourselves. Emotions, thoughts, and experiences are hiding as images in words, forms, pictures, and spaces. Images are not only perceived. They are felt, lived, and identified with. This is suggested in the brilliant title *Image in Form*, a collection of essays by the British painter and art essayist Adrian Stokes.

Pallasmaa's interest in the senses, the multiple capacities and tasks of the hand, and the role of bodily mimesis, internalization, and silent wisdom, has emerged gradually through his design work as much as through reading and writing. After the three books, his curiosity has continued to atmospheres, the role of peripheral and unfocused perceptions, and vagueness in the processes of thought. To believe that we should always aim at precision might have been lousy advice. In creative work, we also need vagueness, mist, and the skill to tolerate and suspend uncertainty. A notable neural discovery that of the mirror neurons has also awakened his interest, as these specialized neurons suggest ways of understanding why art, and especially non-representational art, like architecture, can have such evocative power on our senses and feelings.

Pallasmaa believes in understanding architecture which takes us beyond the boundaries of current thinking. These interests are leading away from the fixation with pure form and rationality, which have been characteristic of modern artistic and architectural thinking. Pallasmaa defends the view that we are the result of millions of years of evolutionary and biological adaptation. These acquired qualities and characteristics still prevail in our biological nature, our true human nature. The embodied, mental and intellectual capacities are an inseparable part of the way we exist, function, and act in the world. We need to acknowledge and respect the indivisibility of the human being, which includes our aesthetic and ethical capacities, emotions, intuitions, and imaginations. It is likely that our greatest quality, and at the same time,

our most humane capacity, is the gift of imagination. Without imagination, the capacity to imagine the consequences of our alternative choices, we would not even have ethical judgment.

2012

James Risser, *The Life of Understanding: A Contemporary Hermeneutics*
(Indiana University Press, 2012)

James Risser's *On the Life of Understanding: Platonic Gestures for a Hermeneutics After Gadamer* is an outstanding work of scholarship, contributing no less to the discipline generally than to the philosophical study of hermeneutics. More than enriching or clarifying issues in the current debate, Risser's work pushes this field toward a genuinely new stage of development. In this—as the subtitle of his book suggests—he opens up new lines of inquiry that move beyond the philosopher most associated with hermeneutics in our times, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Erudite, elegant, and consummately argued, *On the Life of Understanding* is the work of an advanced scholar in full possession of his subject matter, who is thus able to stake out prescient questions and claims sure to guide research in the field for some time to come.

Risser's original contribution coalesces around his novel approach to the hermeneutical conception of understanding. It is an approach that develops in a new direction what is sometimes called the 'ontological turn' in hermeneutics first made by Heidegger and developed further, sometimes almost tacitly, by Gadamer. The modern study of hermeneutics arises in no small part from the idea that understanding names a distinctive cognitive ability, one that offers knowledge of human life as it is lived and not simply in the abstract. Heidegger makes the 'ontological turn' with his claim that understanding is not simply a manner of knowing human life but is the definitive manner of being human. Taking things from here, Risser invokes motifs from Plato to further examine the relation of understanding and life. In this examination, we learn that the life of understanding involves an interminable “convalescence”—a recovering from the loss of meaning. It is also a life that ventures into the foreign without domesticating the foreign. It is also a life in which the work of language, as the “fabric” of life, suffers in its own way the loss of vitality and with it an inability, an impotentiality, to produce meaning. Risser's approach to these themes is referenced not only to the complex relations among Gadamer, Heidegger, and Plato, but also to contemporary figures such as Derrida and Agamben. Through it all, this approach sheds new light on the radical finitude involved in the life of understanding. It stresses the central place of openness to otherness and difference within the life of understanding.

Tomáš Halík, *Night of the Confessor: Christian Faith in an Age of Uncertainty*
(Doubleday/Image, 2012)

This inspiring book is an intimate and unfeigned confession of Tomáš Halík-the-confessor. As the author explains, being a Catholic priest for more than a quarter of a century, he has lent an ear to several thousand people who came to the sacrament of reconciliation, or for a “spiritual chat” (since many of them were anabaptised or nonpracticing Catholics). In his capacity as a confessor, he has been helping people – to use his own somewhat poetic phrase – “seek the narrow, conscientious path between the Scylla of the harsh and uncompromising ‘thou must and thou shalt not’ that cuts heartlessly like cold steel into the flesh of painful, complex, and unique life stories, and the Charybdis of the wishy-washy, speciously soft-hearted ‘everything’s OK so long as you love God.’” This experience has shaped him over many years and allowed him to acquire a distinct lens through which to view not only particular stories encountered in the confessional but the entire world process, with all its extrinsic and intrinsic aspects. It is precisely this fresh and unassuming perspective of Halík-the-confessor, who *hermeneutically* applies his spiritual experience to the contemporary (post)secular culture and Christianity’s paradoxical place in it, that makes this book one of a kind.

On the most basic level, the author’s frank witness about the process and the attitude required of a confessor in order for the act of confession and reconciliation to bring desirable fruits can be read as a lesson in listening that is at once penetrating and non-judgmental. But since Halík draws a persuasive analogy between this “maieutical” art of accompanying people on a spiritual journey (as “care of the soul” in the Socratic sense of the term), and a midwife-like act of being emphatically present in the world with a view to enabling reality as such to *birth meanings* into our existence, the actual lesson turns out to be far broader and more universal in scope. In fact, Halík’s insight goes even deeper as he suggests that there is some sort of mysterious link, a mutual correlation between the shifts occurring in the spiritual lives of many people that he encounters as a confessor and what lies beneath the surface of individual stories and belongs to a kind of “hidden face” or “mood of the times,” i.e., their “inner tuning.” From an epistemic perspective, however, what deserves special attention is the fact that the book offers guidance, albeit mostly implicitly, on how to listen *and* respond to multiple, often conflicted and utterly confusing voices in the postmodern culture. Halík masterfully describes how the unique “mode of perception” expected of a confessor like himself can be, and should be, *transposed* into our attitude *vis-à-vis* all that is. In this context he speaks, for example, of an endeavour to

listen patiently and attentively, to discriminate and do one's best to understand (so as to obviate the risk of asking seemingly prying questions that might be wounding), to try to "read between the lines" to discern what others are unable (and often slightly unwilling) to say, etc.

Like his other books, *Night of the Confessor* offers readers an insight into Halík's *deep theology* that emphasizes "the hiddenness of God" (hence the recurring reference to the "night" which serves as a metaphor for the darkness, or as the book's subtitle puts it, the "uncertainty" of our age). Halík's reflection is contextual through and through. Joining the long line of the "theologians of paradox," including Saint Paul, Augustine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard, among others, he situates it at the crucial moment in the history of Western civilisation in general and Christianity in particular. Halík labels our epoch as post-optimistic. In contrast to the conservatives' romantic nostalgia for an imagined glorious past and the liberals' naïve optimism about an illusory future, he insists that Christian interpretation of the "signs of the times" should rather be grounded in the realism of the Cross, but always seen in the light of the "Easter paradox." Ours is the time when evil is becoming globalized in a striking fashion – international terrorism and the intensification of natural disasters due to climate change being perhaps its most blatant manifestations. What is more, Halík's reflection on faith comes at the time of a great crisis of Christianity when religion that many were accustomed to is truly "dying off." But for him, to interpret the current situation of faith either *optimistically* or *catastrophically* is to miss the point altogether. While the first option leads to various "technical solutions" like a return to premodern religion or its facile "modernization," the second speaks (yet again) of Christianity's final demise.

Instead, the author of *Night of the Confessor* believes that, like in the biblical parable about the seed, faith has to undergo radical diminution both in human experience and in the course of history. In the spirit of the Gospel's paradoxical logic, in which diminution means openness to the advancement of God's work and where loss is profit, such a crisis proves to be also the "time of visitation," the Kairos, i.e., an opportune moment for a new kenotic Christianity to emerge. In terms of a broader hermeneutic circle, this "paschal mystery" of the faith itself cannot occur, however, unless an adequate theological interpretation is offered that enables the church to identify and reflect on "the signs of the times," thus opening up new scope for the life of faith. It is worth reiterating that, for Halík, the interpretation of "our present crisis" (as Christians and as a species) needs to be centered on what is the very nub of Christianity, namely the "enigmatic Easter story – that great paradox of victory through defeat." The author thus posits the paradox of faith itself, not simply as a

topic for theological speculation, but primarily as a matter of lived experience which, as such, becomes a hermeneutic key to understanding the spiritual situation and challenges of our times.

It does not come as a surprise that the German version of the book (*Nachtsgedanken eines Beichtvaters*), published the same year as the English edition, was selected to be the best theological book of July 2012 in Germany. *Night of the Confessor* has the potential to speak not only to Christians who have a settled place in the church but also to spiritual seekers both within and without the church. To the former, it will offer, above all, a *blessed disruption* and disillusionment, an opportunity to recognize certain aspects of their Christian life as an expression of what Halík labels a “religious clownery”—a deeply humbling realization, no doubt, but a liberating one insofar as it creates space for a genuine Christian hope. Halík describes the latter as “an openness and a readiness to search for meaning in what is to come,” and juxtaposes it with a naïve enthusiasm of the Left and Right which, by contrast, relies on “a cockeyed assumption that we always know in advance, after all, what is best for us.” To the spiritual seekers, the book may be an invitation to accept, with gratitude and relief perhaps, that their current search and lack of certainty are characteristic of the very attitude that Jesus urged his disciples to adopt when he called them to have the “little faith” the size of a mustard seed. Once again, Halík extrapolates this view of faith to identify it as the only adequate “mode of perception” *vis-à-vis* not only the mysteries of faith but the Mystery of Life itself.

The “great faith” (or credulity), Halík warns, easily degenerates into a religious fundamentalism, fanaticism or a triumphalist ideology based on false certainties, i.e., idols – in this context, the author reminds Augustine’s famous dictum: *si comprehendis, non est Deus* (“If you understand it, it is not God”). By contrast, a “discreet faith,” with “a touch of skepticism, irony, and commitment to critical reason as a permanent corrective,” offers an antidote to all sorts of parochialism and idolatry. The tandem of faith and doubt (two sides of the same coin which Halík considers organically connected), has, therefore, one major advantage over the “great faith” of false certainties, one that – from his dialogical perspective – can hardly be overestimated, namely its potential to bring believers, seekers and even non-believers together. In philosophical terms, it could be claimed that this model of faith relies on, and also carries within itself a potential for developing, a *hermeneutic of empathy*. As Halík himself points out, the “little faith” allows believers to “feel the absent God of those who do not pray, so that the latter may catch an intimation of the God who is present.”

For the ideologically polarised public sphere of our age, such a *hermeneutic of compassion* appears particularly critical with regard to a dialogue between faith and

science. Halík emphasizes in this context how significant it is, for both believers and scientists, to deliberately and reflectively adopt and articulate a *philosophical position* that creates the condition of the possibility of any such dialogue. He shows the similarities between the attitude of the (pseudo-)scientists who attempt to do without the strenuous work of philosophical reflection and derive a would-be “philosophy” or “world outlook” directly from scientific knowledge, and that of the (pseudo-)believers who, waving the Bible in one hand, and a hamburger in the other, harangue their audience at stadiums or from the TV screens with information about what God’s current intentions are. In this regard, a *hermeneutics of empathy* purported by Halík serves as a reminder that neither in faith nor in science “can one yearn for ‘fixed systems’ of secure knowledge.” With this realization in mind, prejudice and suspicion accumulated throughout the centuries of misunderstanding between faith and science will be more likely to succumb to “the courage to trust” and the shared desire to build bridges.

Jane Shaw, *A Practical Christianity: Working on Transforming Our Lives*
(SPCK Publishing, 2012)

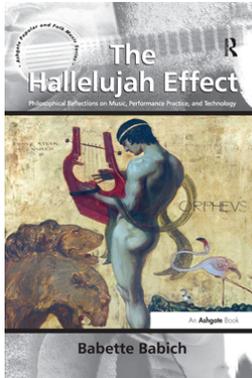
As an Anglican priest, as well as an historian, Shaw draws on strands in the Christian tradition that emphasise the practice of Christianity. In her book, *A Practical Christianity* she proposes that Christianity is something that we do, not merely a chunk of undigested doctrine that we accept without questioning. Hermeneutics is therefore given a practical focus. Using fiction, poetry, art and music, as well as scripture and theology, she reconsiders the central doctrines of Christian faith through the lens of how we practice them. She explores five themes: dust, forgiveness, time, doubt and love—devoting a chapter to each. This thematic approach is a way of presenting (covertly, since it’s not revealed until the end of the book) the doctrines of Creation and Sin, Forgiveness, the Trinity, Salvation, and finally Love.

Show’s book is a brilliant example of the hermeneutics in enactment (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*), when we live Christianity versus formally debating on the different ways of living religious life. She has a talent of a virtuoso to make explicit that religion grows under circumstances that are, in themselves, a matter of interpretation. The humility of a Christian is essential to her thinking God, and not just thinking of God. As human beings, and particularly, as Christians, we need what she calls “the moral imagination.” Only then, we can live responsibility as the mode of responding to God’s universal calling.

Shaw's *Practical Christianity* is a masterpiece of writing focused on lived religion. It opens a horizon of possibility of kairological thinking that will bring us, the readers, into a dialogue on the future of Christianity.

2013

Babette Babich, *The Hallelujah Effect: Philosophical Reflections on Music, Performance Practice, and Technology*
 (Ashgate, 2013) Paper: (Routledge, 2016)



The Hallelujah Effect is three books in one, examining music and media in each iteration: social and digital, broadcast (particularly radio), and ancient Greek tragedy.

The first part explores recorded, social media, and digital transformations of music including Facebook and YouTube. The focus is on Leonard Cohen, particularly the eponymous ‘Hallelujah’ including a hermeneutic of its theological undercurrents and the sexism of Cohen’s lyrics, John Cale’s interpretation and scoring of the song as this first made Cohen’s song a hit, the tension between interpreters, mostly male, of the song, from Jeff Buckley to a bootleg version by Bob Dylan and, including a discussion of other songs by Joan Baez, Madonna, and Lesley Gore. This section also explores some of the reasons for the relative lack of attention to k.d.lang’s version(s) of *Hallelujah*, including a hermeneutic of her music videos not only of Cohen but Patsy Cline’s *Johnny Get Angry*, examining the differential object of desire, male and female as female desire tends to be eclipsed in favor of the male, condemned to nescience (even, famously so, for Freud).

The second part of the book pursues this with a reading of the Frankfurt School and the ‘Culture Industry,’ particularly Adorno’s phenomenological hermeneutics of television and film and especially radio, including the physiognomics of the ‘radio face.’ The dimension of performance practice and technology is here also a matter of cultural manipulation and social control, including a discussion of the community-forming power, as Adorno explores the notion, of the symphony. The

difference between live and recorded, a difference ablated in digital-social media, is key to the time-space of that community.

The third part of the book further explores the technology of sound by way of a musicological reading of *mousikē technē*, the educational culture and practice of music in antiquity, as Plato speaks of this and specifically in terms of the ‘technology’ that is the Ancient Greek language as a means for recording sound and *qua* phonetic achievement, as a means for *reproducing* sound, in addition to a dedicated discussion of the musical culture of the tragic work of art, as Nietzsche argued that ancient tragedy was an expressly *musical* form which he explored in terms not only of the nature of the tragic work of art as a cultural legacy but also in terms of myth (Oedipus and Prometheus) by contrast with more theatrical modern, tragic forms (Shakespeare, via Schlegel and Tieck, Schiller, and Goethe) and in the context of what he called the ‘becoming human of dissonance’ via an analysis not of Wagner’s music as many scholars continue to assume but a hermeneutic of Beethoven and the voice as absolute music.

Gary B. Madison, *On Suffering: Philosophical Reflections on What It Means To Be Human*
(McMaster Innovation Press/Les Erables, 2013)

This outstanding and, in some ways untimely book, written in non-technical language for a broad audience, is concerned with a problem that lies at the heart of philosophical anthropology: *what does it mean to be a human being?* It is a deeply personal book—the last book the author ever wrote, which he himself identifies as a “philosophical will.” Yet it is by no means a book of merely personal significance. Rather, the book is focused on human suffering, which, according to the author, is an irreducible feature of human existence. Drawing a sharp distinction between suffering and physical pain, Gary B. Madison maintains that suffering is not a neurological, but an existential, or spiritual, phenomenon. It is not bodies, but persons that suffer, which means that suffering constitutes not a physiological, but a moral-philosophical problem. Suffering cannot be confronted physiologically but must be encountered philosophically. The author argues throughout this study that suffering is part and parcel of human existence (in this regard, it is unlike various diseases or other physiological phenomena). The question is not whether we shall suffer but *how* we shall suffer. The goal of the book is to show how philosophical reflection prepares us to confront our own suffering. While we cannot help but must confront it, it is ultimately up to us to

see how we relate to it. The book aims to show that the history of philosophy provides us with highly valuable guidelines to confront suffering successfully; should we follow these guidelines, suffering would provide us with a possibility to achieve genuine selfhood.

In his analysis, the author engages in a confrontation with various forms of reductionism that, he maintains, make up the modern worldview. Under attack is the bio-technological conception of a human being, which essentially understands a human being as a neurobiological, homeostatic machine. By contrast, according to the author, being human is a matter of *becoming* human; a life worth living is a life in pursuit of virtue.

The book provides a critique of technoscience within a broader historical-cultural context. This critique is of crucial importance both for our understanding of suffering as well as for our understanding of what it means to be human. What is at stake is finding a properly humane way of dealing with suffering. Within such a framework, the author engages in reflections on the human condition, the epistemological basis of modern science, the project of domination and control over nature, the mind/body problem, the nature of consciousness, the nature of rationality, also the relation between faith and reason. The analysis of these issues is undertaken with the goal of spelling out a human way of confronting suffering.

Methodologically, the book is an existential-phenomenological and hermeneutical investigation. It is set against metaphysical speculation; its object is the human existence as regards some of its essential features; its goal is to discern what it means that human existence is necessarily prey to the realities of pain, suffering, and adversity. The stoic background is especially strongly articulated in this book. The principal cause of suffering is our inability to manage our own thoughts. Written in a profoundly dialogical fashion, the book engages in a discussion with ancient and modern thinkers, both from the West, and from the East.

At the time when academia's interests are directed at posthumanism, the book provides a welcome challenge by dialogically articulating a passionate defense of classical humanism in the framework of technological as well as ecological concerns. Written in the age of specialization, the book demonstrates that thought-provoking philosophical reflections can be written in a non-technical language for a broad audience. *On Suffering* is an extraordinary contribution to philosophy and, arguably, the most important of Gary B. Madison's philosophical works. It is a real masterpiece, which will retain its philosophical significance for many decades.

Barbara Weber, *Zwischen Vernunft und Mitgefühl: Jürgen Habermas und Richard Rorty im Dialog über Wahrheit, politische Kultur und Menschenrechte*
Vernunft, Mitgefühl und Körperlichkeit: Eine phänomenologische Rekonstruktion des politischen Raumes
 (Alber, 2013)

On the one hand, the idea of universal human rights is—from a Western perspective—self-evident and people wonder why its global implementation is that problematic. On the other hand, the dialogue about which concrete rights a human being ought to have seems to push a globalized society to the edge of its capabilities. From a philosophical perspective, however, we are witnessing two opposing modes of discourse: the communicative rationality-based ideal discourse situation (Jürgen Habermas) and the sympathy-based “Cultivation of Human Rights” (Richard Rorty).

In the first volume, *Zwischen Vernunft und Mitgefühl: Jürgen Habermas und Richard Rorty im Dialog über Wahrheit, politische Kultur und Menschenrechte* (Freiburg: Alber 2013), political philosopher and phenomenologist, Barbara Weber, engages in a forensic search for the epistemological foundations of those two modes of dialogue. Carefully examining the differences and similarities of both theories, she concludes that what is missing is the grounding of reasoning and sympathy in embodiment. Surprisingly, she finds the role of the body in political philosophy as marked mainly by absence. Hence, her second volume *Vernunft, Mitgefühl und Körperlichkeit: Eine phänomenologische Rekonstruktion des politischen Raumes* (Freiburg: Alber, 2013) tries to attend to this gap.

Due to embodiment, an irreversible rift occurs, rending the fundamental condition of human existence. Through its spatiotemporal relationality, the body functions as the backbone of grammar—such as in speech and the grammar of space: I and Not-I, Here and There. Further, the public space is based on seeing and being seen: because our bodies are submerged into the same fabric of the world, we create a shared meaning and become sensitive to the gaze and existence of the other.

This book is a fundamental phenomenological reconstruction of the political space on the basis of embodiment. Thus, reconstructing political space in a phenomenological manner is much more than meeting a desideratum for research. It is, in fact, the disclosure of a blind spot in intellectual history. Its disclosure brings forth a reversal of meaning for many constitutive terms of political science, such as freedom, violence, and political space. To become aware of the vulnerability of the concrete human being and their embodiment sets the foundation for any ethical awareness and political responsibility.

This book concludes that the public space is dependent on the other's gaze: that a space occurs in the midst of our shared gazes that are different and, by being different, connect us all. By contract, retreating into the monad of the self leads inevitably to the destruction of the public space. At the same time, this retreat prevents the self from enhancing its own power and freedom. Such withdrawal opposes the evolution of the self because an individual who is reduced to dwell in a private space is also deprived of that space's social functions. Thus, this book is a plea for the function and importance of embodiment as the grounding of public space – a space that is welcoming of the Others and Otherings.

2014

Nicholas Davey, *Unfinished Worlds. Hermeneutics, Aesthetics and Gadamer* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013)

When Sebastian Gardner (University College, London) wrote, “In this excellent work, Davey gives a superlatively clear, sharp-edged and analytically precise account of Gadamer’s hermeneutic aesthetics, which makes clear both the capacity of Gadamer’s thought to meet stringent philosophical demands and its distinctive appeal as an approach within aesthetics. A more engaging and persuasive account could not be asked for,” Gardner had perceived but the aspirations driving this innovative study of Gadamer’s aesthetics. In this acclaimed volume, Davey explores Gadamer’s key but contentious assertion that artworks ‘address us.’ This suggests that artworks are not visual phenomena alone but have meaningful cognitive content. For philosophical hermeneutics, that meaning is relational. The experience of art addressing us can therefore be a transformative one that entails the cognitive relations within a spectator’s outlook being transformed by those which constitute the work. Davey’s book argues that this is made possible because of the surplus meaning attached to visual signs, symbols, and the mental images of literature and poetry. Symbols and poetic ideas serve as placeholders across a variety of discourses such that the meaning of a central term in one’s own framework of understanding can be transformed when it meets different deployments from within a foreign horizon. In a transformative encounter, the spectator’s horizon is significantly not displaced but achieves a new and significant permutation of its form. The transactional capacity of symbols, poetic images and what Gadamer calls subject-matters (*Sachen*) to act as placeholder terms across contrasting frameworks of meaning offers not just an insight into how transformative experiences of art are structured but also an understanding of how the transformative capacity of interdisciplinary study depends precisely upon the movement of shared placeholder terms across practices. Philosophical hermeneutics points towards an account of aesthetic attentiveness as a practice, a practice not concerned with the passive appreciation of art and its aesthetic qualities in any standard sense but with actively facilitating movement between significant semantic placeholders in the horizons of both the artwork and the spectator so as to promote the possibility of transformative experience.

Unfinished Worlds primarily concerns the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and visual art: it is not an examination of Gadamer’s analysis of the ‘poetic work’ but offers a ‘poetics’ of the visual, an exploration of the antecedent

cultural and historical conditions which allow an image to communicate effectively. Whilst this poetics must involve an analysis of the elements at play within a work. It must also consider how they combine to render the work an effective communication. The notable value of this hermeneutical poetic lies in its answer to the fundamental question, “How do art works *work*, and how is this working to be understood?” The answer which this study proposes is a response to a riddle at the heart of Gadamer’s aesthetic: how do silent images speak?

The principal value of hermeneutical aesthetics lies in its participatory account of the experience of art. Gadamer’s dialogism is widely appreciated, but this study proposes that the consequences of dialogism for a relational aesthetics are not fully understood. Focusing on the cognitive content of an artwork, dialogism deprives the theoretician and practitioner of any privileged interpretive position. This is because Gadamer’s ontological orientation transfers effective agency from subjective consciousness to its ground in language and tradition. Emergence, transformation, and transmission demand participation. Subjectivity is not dissolved but serves as a catalyst for the reception, mutation, and development of the cultural subject matters that both inform and transcend subjective consciousness. This suggest that intense aesthetic insight does not transcend its informing language but must be interpreted as a transformative variant. Dialogism implies that the content of such insight is expressible in public terms. What *Unfinished Worlds* makes clear is that artworks can address us individually precisely because of shared ontological structures. Works offer different perspectives on shared phenomenological contents (structure, narrative, delicacy, sensitivity). Indeed, it is these very differences of perspective regarding common content that allow artworks to be of such unquestionable educative value: our individual visual and cognitive horizons are continually expanding because of their interaction with different perspectives. Indeed, Davey argues that in the sphere of the aesthetic, it is the difference that communalizes. It is the emergence of different perspectives regarding a subject matter that discloses some that is a thing common. This does not establish a common perspective but manifests a common interest in a subject matter. In other words, it is the moments of difference within the collectivity of aesthetic experience that are crucial. It is they that promise the possibility of a communality grounded in and enabled by a common interest in its very differences.

Davey’s study of Gadamer’s aesthetics concludes by showing that Gadamer’s ontology of art is directly linked to his critique of the subjectivism of aesthetic consciousness. To deny that the transformations of consciousness achieved within our experience of art are not reducible to subjective consciousness alone, he has to demonstrate e their ontological status. This is done by claiming that the disclosive

power of both word and image reveals the procedural nature of reality itself and that, furthermore, the transformative capacities of art allow the real to become more real by achieving a greater historical effectiveness. This achieves a major ontological shift in the relation of art to reality: art becomes a mode of Being's self-presentational nature. As a 'showing,' Being discloses itself through the emergence of word and image, not because either capture it but because both exhibit its processual features. Gadamer's ontology of art is participatory: experiencing art (interacting with it) is a mode of art's being. This supports the claim that aesthetic attentiveness is not a passive contemplation of the real but, rather, contributes to the actualization of the real. In this respect, Davey's book reveals that it is Hegel's rather than Plato's argumentation that drives Gadamer's analysis of art. In allowing reality to become more (*Werden zum Sein*), art's images enhance rather than distort the real. This exposes the extent to which traditional aesthetics has been too long in the thrall of the ancient Greek metaphysical assumption that Being is complete and without any need to regenerate its forms. By contrast, Gadamer's presentational aesthetics is Promethean in nature: the movement of Being is revealed in the bringing forth and the withholding of aesthetic presentation. What makes Davey's study of Gadamer's aesthetics notable is its offering of both a clear and acute analysis of the traditional and somewhat opaque categories of phenomenological categories of representation, presentation, and likeness and its realignment of these categories in a poetics of ontological increase.

Donatella Di Cesare, *Utopia of Understanding: Between Babel and Auschwitz*
(SUNY, 2013)

Utopia of Understanding is a book written in Heidelberg in the years in which Di Cesare was conducting her research at the Institute of Philosophy at Marsiliusplatz. It is therefore affected by that period in which an extraordinary period of continental philosophy was drawing to a close, characterized by the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida. Of that constellation is also the testimony. The comparison between hermeneutics and deconstruction, the attempt to highlight their affinities, ties, unacknowledged understandings, despite the basic differences, seems to me even more valid today, considered from that distance that helps to focus better.

Already in the title *Utopia of Understanding*, this book aims to link the question of language and that of politics. Therefore, it represents a turning point in her path since it recapitulates previous works, largely inherent to the philosophy of language

while inaugurating further themes and perspectives. At the juncture between different horizons, it effectively marks a transition, or rather, a return to politics. It is no coincidence that from these pages, which she has repeatedly taken up, subsequent books and articles were born.

Translating, interpreting, understanding mark the stages of a hermeneutic that is distant in many respects from the Italian versions, in particular from weak thinking which, hypostatizing the interpretation and following a nihilistic vertigo, has ended up giving rise to many superfluous misunderstandings and sterile contrasts. The question of understanding, in its links with translating and interpreting, remains the basic knot of hermeneutics, that is, of a post-foundationalist philosophy that starts from the decisive role of language.

The knot of understanding, which emerges here in the Hebrew watermark of the text, is put to the test in two limit situations, two concentrationary universes, which constitute the ends of the itinerary: the construction site of Babel, where the totalitarian project of a single language and a single will had led to ignoring the value of human life, and Auschwitz, a twentieth-century re-edition of that project, where the "total language barrier" is, according to Primo Levi's testimony, the device of power that marks dehumanization in the concentration camp.

Revised in the light of the anarchist readings of Gustav Landauer and Paul Celan, utopia, that place that no longer exists, is not there yet, but will still be there, stands out across the border, in the "revolution of breath" that it breaks the silence, in the opening of a word, which is not a fixed abode and is not static, but is nomadic, migrates, is a precarious and insecure tent, the only refuge in planetary exile and the desert of promise. This meeting tent, already the challenge of another living, is the word of the conspiracy.

John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*

(Indiana University Press, 2013)

The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps makes the audacious claim, in the tradition of Tillich, that God does not "exist," not as an individual entity, but instead God "insists," that is, the name of God is the name of a "call" that summons us beyond ourselves. With this, Caputo pushes past Tillich by claiming that God is not only not an existent being but also that God is not the "ground of beings." He proposes a new "divine name," that the name of God is the name of "perhaps," not in the sense of something indecisive but in the sense of what pushes us beyond the possible to the hitherto

unimaginable. “Perhaps,” he says, is not a “sleepy indifference” but “a steely, indefatigable, resolute openness to what seems to have been closed off” to an unforeseeable future. The book, which he describes as an exercise in “theopoetics,” is a bold new view of God, arguably the boldest and most original statement about God since Tillich himself.

The book stands at the heart of the contemporary conversation going on in what has been called the “post-secular” environment of today, one where theology has become once again a respectable topic of discussion by secular intellectuals. Caputo enters into a detailed dialogue with and critique of two leading theorists of the day, Catherine Malabou and Slavoj Žižek, both of whom have resuscitated in their own way a new version of the “death of God” theology that descends from Hegel. Caputo positions himself (for the first time), like Malabou and Žižek, in the Hegelian tradition, but he pursues a more religiously affirmative version of this tradition. The radical view he sets forth, neither evangelical nor militantly atheistic, belongs to what he calls a radical theology or what Derrida would call a religion without religion.

Moreover, the book pushes continental philosophy of religion beyond its old boundaries by entering into dialogue with what is variously called the “new materialism,” or the “new realism,” or “speculative realism,” centered around the work of Quentin Meillassoux, a student of Badiou. Meillassoux spearheads a new generation of French and Anglo-phone philosophers who charge continental philosophy with subjectivism and call for a new realism, respectful of the mathematical sciences. Surprisingly, Caputo agrees with much of this criticism. In the final section of the book, he makes use of the work of Bruno Latour, re-situates his “theopoetics” within a “cosmo-poetics.” The result is not a cosmic nihilism, what Nietzsche called the “cosmic stupidity” (the stars don’t know we’re here) but what Caputo calls the “nihilism of grace,” not the cosmic stupidity but the cosmic luck or grace of life, which intensifies the unique value of life instead of undermining it.

This is the boldest, most powerful, and most original work of constructive theology to appear in many years. It will significantly contribute to keeping the work of constructive theology alive and well, threatened as it is by the growing interest in sociological and anthropological approaches to religion. It will also be an important impetus in moving continentalist approaches to religion into a deeper dialogue with the mathematical sciences and contemporary physics.

2015

John Sallis, *Senses of Landscape and Klee's Mirror*

(Northwestern University Press, 2015)

During 2015, John Sallis published two books that were both meditations on works of fine art and on the disclosive capacity of which fine art is capable.

In *Klee's Mirror* Sallis takes up the task of reflecting on Klee's dictum that "art does not represent the visible but makes visible." Studying Klee from intellectual and biographical perspectives, Sallis is able to provide a deft account not only of the work that Klee was doing with his art but, rather, the subterranean work that is always at play when we encounter the work of Art. Winding between Klee's art and theoretical writing gives Sallis the room to engage in a brilliant style of writing that challenges widely held distinctions between perception and the intellect.

Klee's Mirror is complimented later that year by the publication of *Senses of Landscape*. In *Senses of Landscape*, Sallis examines the landscapes of Paul Cezanne, Caspar David Friedrich, Paul Klee, and Guo Xi in the light of these artists' own writings about art in general and landscape painting in particular. From the fertile ground of this juncture, Sallis is able to draw on canonical texts from the philosophy of art (Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and Heidegger) to elaborate a sophisticated grounding for a hermeneutics of the beautiful. His analytical work presents for a wide audience a profound sense of how the landscape as a work of art echoes the earthly abode of the human.

Sallis' work in these texts serves as a sterling example of how one might approach a hermeneutic reading of painting. The continuity of thought between these two books represent a mature exploration of how to conduct a hermeneutic study of painting. The winding thread conjoining them is an inquiry into the ecstatic experience of a human drawing near to beauty.

John Caputo, *Hoping against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim*

(Fortress Press, 2015)

In *Hoping against Hope*, Caputo grafts an autobiographical story upon a philosophical and theological argument, all figured around three voices, the "Jackie," the little boy growing up in a very Catholic neighbor of Philadelphia, which it turns out to be birth name of one Jackie Derrida; "Brother Paul," the name he took when he entered a

Catholic religious order where he spent four years of his life, and “John D. Caputo,” the professor of philosophy and the author of many books. He is a master of communicating ideas of deep theological import in readable American English and made available for intelligent, literate people who cannot spend a lifetime trying to read the philosophers and theologians behind them. Writing in the tradition of classical American stylists like William James, the professor is a figure of theology meeting philosophy, of someone from a religious tradition daring to think, just as the Enlightenment urges, but one with a feel for religion and theology from the inside. So instead of an Enlightenment Critique, Caputo undertakes a rereading, a reinventing of religion, repeating its tropes, its mood, its heart, its confessions, its inner life, but in another way.

He cuts through to what the name of God really means, in practice, in life, what it is doing, what is getting done in speaking and thinking of God—but without illusion. The name of God is the name of a form of life, a way of living in the world, and the “kingdom of God” is what the world would look like if the name of God held sway. To be faith to itself this name must be extricated from the system of rewards and punishments, which is religion in a puerile state. This problem is condensed in Matthew 25, where the hungry are fed and the naked clothed—why? Because the hungry are hungry.

Taking up medieval mystics like Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart, he builds a theology around this insight by saying that love is “without why,” we love because we love, not because we will be rewarded if we do and punished if we don’t. Life is a pure gift, and it is not given to us *for* something else. It does not have a trade-in value. We live because we live, for *nothing* else that comes in exchange for life. The “nihilism of grace” means that life is a pure gratuity to be celebrated for itself, a marvelous, mysterious cosmic event, a grace which we have good reason to think may be widespread in the universe. The religious sense of life is to honor the depths of this mystery. The specifically Biblical version is that this takes the form of the folly of the cross, of lives lived with uncompromised mercy and compassion and forgiveness.

The name of God is not the name of a Big Being in the Sky who is coming to save us, to make straight the crooked, and see to it that all turns out well, which means that the economy of rewards and punishments is going to be strictly enforced. This theology is done from below, not like something that has dropped from the sky and fallen into our laps, but built up from the difficulty, the messiness, the confusion of life. The name of God puts us on the spot, calls upon us, and asks us to transform our lives and uplift the lives of others, without illusion, without the mythology and the semi-blasphemy of this Big Being. The book is written for people who are making the

kingdom of God come true in the concrete, community organizers and peace and justice activists, pastors, “recovering” fundamentalists in search of a vocabulary of a conceptuality, which will assist in their recovery.

William F. Pinar, *Alterity*

(Routledge, 2015)

This magnificent collection of selected works from world-renowned curriculum theorist William F. Pinar, compiled from his most significant books, articles, and keynotes, centers phenomenological hermeneutical concerns with educational experience as lived through illuminating relations among knowledge, history, and alterity. Academic knowledge essential to education becomes animated through study to understand and interrelate historical conditions, everyday life, and subjective reformation. In this volume, history not only involves individual biography, social history, and the history of nations but also maps the disciplinary trajectories of curriculum studies as a field. Alterity is embedded in the radical difference that cannot be assimilated, which is also multidimensional at the psychic, cultural, and international levels. The author’s extraordinary excavation of subjugated knowledge from the past to transcend the present, along with courageous and ethical engagement with alterity for reconstructing the self and the world, sets into motion a complicated conversation that is curriculum.

Introducing the author’s own intellectual life history first, this book portrays the lived experience of exemplary individuals situated in time, place, art, and culture, such as Ida B. Wells, Frantz Fanon, Robert Musil, George Grant, and Jane Addams as the educational site for study. Positioning study (rather than learning or instruction) as intellectual, subjective, ethical, prayerful, and central to understanding educational experience, the author interweaves his phenomenological re-formulation of curriculum as *currere* (the running of the course of the study) half a century ago and the recent conception of allegory in which the autobiographical directly meets the public to transform both realms. Affirmative of self-difference, subjectivity, not identity politics, runs deeply through these threads.

The temporality of lived experience is performed through reactivating the past to enable a radical openness to the future that does not coincide with the present, conceptually, individually, or collectively. Time is infused with relationality in the coming together of intrapsychic complexity, psychosocial dynamics of place, and the communally shared traumas in this volume to perform hermeneutic unveiling for

opening up alternative possibilities. A few examples include historical excavation of the intertwined gendered and racialized nature of U.S. school reform, a queered understanding of alterity, and the indigenous otherness in the national identity internationally.

Affirming curriculum as a complicated conversation for simultaneous subjective and social reconstruction, Pinar further enacts internationalization and cosmopolitan education through lived connections among historicity, knowing, and ethics. In studying the disciplinarity of curriculum studies through the verticality of intellectual history and the horizontality of present circumstances in South Africa, India, Mexico, Brazil, and China, Pinar foregrounds dialogical encounters within and across nations. Similarly, critiquing the role of technology in education—now at a global scale—and its erosive effects on subjectivity and spirituality, this book compellingly affirms the primacy of the human subject, embodied presence, and dialogical engagement in educational experience.

This book reflects Pinar's lifetime contribution to phenomenology and hermeneutics, which has irreversibly re-directed the shifting landscape of curriculum studies—now a worldwide field with his leadership—from instrumentality to understanding as the primary task of education. This collection is crafted in a series of in-depth hermeneutic studies of important texts (persons, events, and literatures) through eighteen related conceptual knots to un-conceal the hidden from within, provoke the unthinkable, evoke memories and visions, and interweave a dynamic web of educational experience. A philosophical, scholarly, and educational *tour de force*, this book has set and will continue to set new directions for the worldwide field of curriculum studies in the 21 century.

2016

Jeffrey Andrew Barash, *Collective Memory and the Historical Past*

(University of Chicago Press, 2016)

Collective Memory and the Historical Past was first published by the University of Chicago Press in the autumn of 2016 and it was reprinted in a second, paperback edition in 2020. Its principal aim is to elaborate a philosophical basis for the concept of collective memory and to delimit the scope of this concept in relation to the historical past. The book is divided into an historical introduction and two sections. The historical introduction explores the principle significations different traditions of Western thought have accorded to memory. According to its central premise, the predominant philosophical arguments in given historical periods regarding the significance and scope of memory are more than abstract speculations, for they owe their persuasive force to fundamental convictions they convey concerning the sense of human existence and of human interaction in the socio-political sphere.

This historical introduction culminates in an examination of our *current* situation, and of the theoretical significance of memory not only as a faculty or a cognitive function, but in the contemporary role that is attributed to it under the heading of "collective memory." This role is far from transparent: the phenomenon of group remembrance is as old as human social existence itself, whereas the concept of collective memory and the term itself are of recent vintage. How might the contemporary preoccupation with collective memory be accounted for? Barash relates the rise of theoretical concern for collective memory to the decline of more traditional ways of accounting for collective cohesion in the socio-political sphere. Its conceptual visibility has followed the weakening of the conviction that immutable metaphysical ideas or, in a more modern perspective, all-encompassing philosophies of history or ideologies might definitively account for human identity and socio-political existence. The loss of plausibility of traditional theoretical frameworks has been fueled by the experience of historical contingency, discontinuity, and dislocation that became ever more pronounced following the demise of the *ancien régime* in the 18th century, industrialization, urbanization, and the advent of mass society. It was dramatically confirmed by the cataclysm of the First World War. At this precise juncture, the concept of collective memory, as it emerged in the pioneering works of authors like Maurice Halbwachs and Walter Benjamin, began to reoccupy the place left vacant by the decline of traditional ideas of human identity and it has subsequently been called

upon to frame the discourse of socio-political cohesion. In this situation, the concept of collective memory requires an appropriate theoretical foundation.

The second section of this work highlights the *difficulty* of constructing such a theoretical foundation. This difficulty arises due to the paradox the concept of collective memory immediately entails, above all where it is extended beyond small groups or associations to encompass the public sphere of collective interaction. This paradox comes to light where it is acknowledged that memory in its *original* sense always transpires in the personal sphere of individual rememberers and that, at a fundamental level, it involves direct encounters among individuals and groups in the context of a life-world. All secondary or indirect forms of remembrance presuppose this original experiential source. Nevertheless, beyond the scope of small groups and associations, direct experience and remembrance of *publicly* significant events is usually possible only for a tiny minority of witnesses. Remembrance of publicly significant events is almost always based on indirect reports or accounts diffused among the vast strata of contemporary mass societies. This indirect quality of public remembrance underlies the essential difference in kind between all forms of remembered experience in its original sense and collective remembrance of actions and events in the public sphere. In view of the gap between original remembrance in the life-world and what is indirectly retained in the diffuse representations of vast collectivities, in what sense might it be claimed that they share a common basis of "recollection"? In what way might the seemingly nebulous concept of "collective memory" be distinguished from mere figments of the social imagination? In the different chapters of this section, Barash elaborates an original answer to these questions, according to which the possibility of drawing such a distinction, and of delineating the collective reach of memory, depends on an adequate conception of the *imaginative* potency which memory deploys: it requires that we distinguish between the multiple functions of the imagination which, far from limited to the production of fantasy or fiction, engenders *symbolic* interaction through which remembered experience is made communicable among vast groups. In this perspective, the symbolic embodiment of experience, far from a secondary addition that would be tacked on to interpreted actions and events, lends it immediate spatio-temporal and conceptual configuration through which it is collectively conveyed and remembered. In this broad sense, symbols confer meaning on experience as it is communicated through language, gesture, or style and is embodied in memory. As such, they lend spontaneous intelligibility to the public world in which more particular forms of communication among small groups and individuals are deployed. Collective memory is rooted in a many-layered web of interwoven shared symbolic structures that orient spatio-

temporal awareness and the conceptual logic it deploys. The continuity of this web attests the ongoing link between past and present in the shared context of experience recalled by overlapping living generations.

The third section of *Collective Memory and the Historical Past* deepens and extends the general theory of collective memory proposed in earlier sections of the work through analysis of its *temporal* articulations. This analysis engages an elucidation of the *passive* preconditions of shared remembrance that are primary sources of social cohesion and interaction. According to this interpretation, the passive temporal preconditions of shared remembrance compose a many-layered web of collectively communicable symbolic configurations interwoven in the shared context of contemporaneous living generations: a common “horizon of contemporaneity.” However fragmented the memories shared among different groups may be, communication among them depends upon the network of immediately graspable symbols that defines the finite contours of their contemporaneity and sets it apart from the historical past beyond the grasp of all living memory. According to the central hypothesis of this book, providing its seminal contribution to historical theory, the passage of the collective memory retained by living generations into the historical past is the matrix that brings to the fore the *historicity* of human experience.

With the emergence of increasingly anonymous and fragmented conditions of public existence in the contemporary world, the disparity between publicly significant forms of remembrance and the life-world of direct encounters has tended to increase. The second chapter of this section examines this phenomenon in relation to the ever-growing predominance of the mass media and of their ways of shaping the public sphere. Here the gap between remembered experience rooted in the “horizon of contemporaneity” of the immediate life-world and reports communicated by the mass media appears not only as a difference between experienced events and their representation, but as a reframing of events in terms of an autonomous symbolic order constituted by the virtual spatio-temporal pattern and logic of mass communications. This leads Barash to the important argument according to which this autonomous symbolic order draws its potency from an uncanny ability to simulate direct experience while *dissimulating* the gap which separates it from the immediate life world in which it originates. In this chapter a number of examples, such as the televised Romanian revolution of 1989 and media representation of the Balkan wars of the 1990s, serve to illustrate the unprecedented role of the media in configuring the contemporary public sphere by virtue of the singular media format through which communicated experience is symbolically embodied and remembered.

The final chapter of this section, and of the book as a whole, focuses on the difference between the horizon of collective remembrance shared by living generations and the historical past that stands outside its scope. The argument is advanced that the kind of historical skepticism that has arisen in recent decades, initially espoused in the work of Roland Barthes and of Hayden White, depends upon a tacit blurring of the essential *disparity* between the two temporal orders of collective memory and the historical past. From this standpoint, the capacity to identify differences between these two orders depends not only on a correct portrayal of the factual record of past events, but also on the possibility of discerning symbolic nuances in the contextual structures from which actions and events draw their meaning. This leads to an analysis of the much debated question concerning the “reality of the historical past,” to which the author's analysis provides a singular contribution: beyond the role of factual evidence, the author identifies the contours of this reality in discontinuities in temporal horizon that distinguish the contextual structure of a recent past recalled by contemporary generations from an historical past reaching beyond the pale of living remembrance. This leads to a consideration, not of historical works, but of *temporal discontinuity* portrayed in the modern novel. Where skeptics attempt to lay bare fictive elements in historical writing, Barash highlights the novelists' capacity to reveal, in different periods and a multiplicity of forms, the contextual shifts underlying what he equates with the real contours of group experience and group remembrance. To this end, he draws on the historical novels of Walter Scott and Victor Hugo, the subtle ruminations of Proust in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and on more recent reflections on the burden of remembrance of the past elaborated by W. G. Sebald in his novel *Austerlitz*. According to Barash's highly suggestive conclusion, if the concept of the “reality” of the historical past is indeed meaningful, its significance depends on the possibility of according a measure of reality to discontinuities in temporal horizon that separate living memory from the historical past.

The contribution of *Collective Memory and the Historical Past* lies in its pioneering investigation of the finite scope of collective memory in a socio-political realm punctuated by ongoing and ever more radical forms of discontinuity. It succeeds in providing a ground-breaking theoretical basis for the interpretation of the concept of collective memory, while critically analyzing the central role this concept is called upon to play in forging the discourse of social cohesion in the contemporary public world.

Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*
(Harvard University Press, 2016)

Charles Taylor gave birth to many expressions, which have entered the contemporary debate. It is precisely the situation of disdain and perhaps contempt—as in *The Malaise of Modernity*—that he captures as propitious—republished then as *The Ethics of Authenticity*—because the situation is perplexing, therefore capable of attracting attention and progressing towards a “metaphorical” meaning, that is, “translatable” in the broader context. His particular focus is recently on language as a phenomenon of meaningful expression. In his 2016 book *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* Taylor attempts to distinguish and give voice to languages within language, i.e., theories, that arise due to the idea in the modern era with claims about the use of language itself in a meaningful way. But perhaps even more he devotes to the role of discourse in speaking, the articulation of significance, and its counterpart, that is, “finding the meanings which can make sense—bearable sense—of our lives” (p. 63).

His insightful analysis leads to the dilemma of the moral dimension of language and its significance. Taylor points out, that the attempts of regimented languages of the post-Galilean natural science “have in the end a normative thrust” (p. 131). As a result, all acceptable sentences—as obvious in Robert Brandom’s “naturalism”—have to obey “ontological requirements which may be imposed.” (p. 131) In this way, the norms that emerge in the descriptive-explicative account are reduced to instrumental usage, thus deprived of the functions of thought in humans and culture. If the analysis in *The Malaise of Modernity* started from worries to provide ample space for the recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon under scrutiny, so as to arrive at a program of *The Ethics of Authenticity*, in *The Language Animal* Taylor already sketches new worries. They will resonate even more in the recent broadcast entitled “What does it Mean to Live in a Secular Age?” Reading Our Times (Oct 27, 2020), hosted by Nick Spencer, namely the mismatch between a country’s official ethics and its practice, and similarly in regards to politics. As if one could never again believe in words, because they delude. Taylor has already acknowledged the conditions for authenticity, or better yet, growth toward “soft authenticity,”—so to speak—which knows how to adapt oneself without getting lost or canceled out. One of these is on the one hand, the articulation of meaning, on the other hand, the recognition of significance in the extended sense of learning and approval. The challenge of contemporary philosophy therefore seems to be to restore to language the capacity to communicate in the sense

of constituting human relationships. Without being at the word this would be impossible. Thus, the thesis of the book, which expresses the second part of the title, that is “The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity” is that of the quest for the true dimensions of language, instead of flat communication. Charles Taylor not only earned the reference point through the vocabulary he invented, but he also took the place of the vanguard and provides us with the insight and efficacy of that dimension of discourse.

Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation (Gifford Lectures)*
(Oxford University Press, 2016)

Jean-Luc Marion’s Gifford Lectures, delivered in 2014 at the University of Glasgow and published under the title *Givenness and Revelation*, not only treat the event of revelation, but themselves become an event. To speak in Marion’s terms, they saturate our hitherto knowledge and notions with a new look and content. Marion begins such with the words: “*Givenness and Revelation*: this title may provoke, or rather *must* provoke, a certain amount of surprise” (p. 1) - and indeed it is astonishment, shock, and surprise that are the first heraldings of an event.

In line with Lord Gifford’s original intent, the lectures named after him are meant to explore natural theology and broaden knowledge of God. This is indeed the case with Marion’s lectures, as he undertakes to develop the notion of revelation by way of his phenomenological tools, such as givenness (*donation*), anamorphosis, and the saturation of phenomena. Over the course of approximately 130 pages in four chapters, we receive a poignant analysis of the possibility of the phenomenon of revelation. This is not yet theology, although the phenomenology of revelation outlined therein might become a method for a new, more adequate theology. Already in the 1970s, Marion had noted that theology cannot be cultivated within the shackles of metaphysics, that is as onto-theology. Ever since, he has developed such categories as distance, the non-being of God, love, and now revelation. The latter notion has long been at work: it already appeared in Marion’s 1992 article “Le phénomène saturé” and subsequently in the book *Being Given* from 1997. The lectures that make up the volume *Givenness and Revelation* testify to an ever-deeper immersion into this issue that would ultimately break out in Marion’s 2020 work *D’ailleurs, la révélation*.

Taking revelation to be a philosophical or even phenomenological category might cause surprise - after all, revelation is considered to be a basic theological category. However, just as the very content of revelation, its “effectedness,” is

important to theology, so does the phenomenologist strive to investigate the very possibility of revelation. For Marion, it is obvious that it is not the subject that constitutes phenomena, but rather the latter come from elsewhere, on their own terms, proceeding forth from themselves, i.e., revealing themselves. Moreover, this phenomenon, coming from elsewhere and revealing itself, brings its own selfhood to the receiving subject (as witness?).

In the first two chapters of his work, Marion engages the epistemological interpretation of revelation, whose main representative is St. Thomas Aquinas, and demonstrates the need for a phenomenological framework. In a word, we do not know God, for then He would be an idol; instead, we accept Him as He is given. The paradigm of revelation is Jesus Christ, whom Marion describes in the third chapter as the icon of the invisible God. In the fourth chapter, the philosopher at last takes up the logic of the manifestation of the Holy Trinity. The main message and principle of the work is expressed in the affirmation that “Revelation manifests God insofar as he gives himself” (p. 117). Although manifestation is inherent in the logic of oversaturated phenomena, or paradoxes, it is still a gifting of itself, i.e., love. The authors of the wonderful preface to the book under consideration are right on this account: “Discourse begins and ends in love and (...) God is known and therefore loved, by revelation” (p. xi). Theology, then, cannot be cultivated otherwise than within an erotic paradigm. And Marion’s showing of this is a genuine event.

2017

Frederick G. Lawrence, *The Fragility of Consciousness: Faith, Reason, and the Human Good*

ed. Randall S. Rosenberg and Kevin M. Vander Schel
(University of Toronto Press, 2017)

Frederic Lawrence's outstanding contribution to philosophy and theology is internationally well respected and treasured. His interdisciplinary engagement with theology and hermeneutic philosophy associated with three eminent academic centers, Rome, Basel, and Boston is a testimony to the call for thinking as the focus on the very possibility and radical responsibility to think that which needs to be thought. The volume addresses three major themes of Lawrence's academic work: The practice of conversation, the interplay of faith and reason, and the crisis of culture. Following Gadamer's primacy of the conversation in philosophical hermeneutics, Lawrence understands conversation as praxis, as the way in which we do hermeneutics (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*).

Lawrence adapts Lonergan's notion of theology as a collaborative and interdisciplinary enterprise mediating the Christian tradition and its cultural contexts. Such an understanding allows for practicing theology in a critical engagement with the historical development of the faith tradition. As the personal response to the Word of God, it calls the believers to know and to witness the truth in the rapidly changing global environment.

Lawrence's bringing together conversation and conversion is particularly inspiring from the hermeneutic perspective. If conversation means placing oneself in different horizons, it always requires conversion, a real change of human heart (*μετάνοια*). Entering redemptive tension in a personal encounter with God calls for a constructive engagement with the conversational life of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. This means active participation in a divine dance (*περιχώρησις*, *circumincession*), which opens up a new horizon of meaning and new possibilities for personal development. Understanding the intrinsically conversational nature of God discloses the essential plurivocity of understanding. By overcoming the historical, cultural, and religious barriers, the new outpour of divine energy at the Pentecost into the created world makes evident the universality of hermeneutics. The mystery of the Trinity as a *comm-unio* of life and love to which a human being is invited calls for understanding.

Reading Lawrence on crucial philosophical and theological insights is always an intellectual delight and a challenge. It requires undivided attention to what calls for

thinking and does not allow for any shortcuts. Rather, it is an invitation to think together, to engage each and every aspect of the matter to be addressed, and to welcome the other into the community of inquirers, marveling at the beauty of creation. The diversity of views addressed by Lawrence is not only a demonstration of his erudition. Neither is it a methodical trick in order to lead the reader into sheer ambiguity. It is rather a form of discourse, which I call the internal logic of the argument. This methodologically indefinable logic of the discourse often obliges us to search for an understanding *per viam longam* (Ricoeur), and not to succumb to the temptations of shortcuts. Lawrence allows himself to be seduced by the internal logic of the discourse, and with radical responsibility, patiently attempts to uncover what wants to be disclosed, unveiling for us, and maybe even more importantly for himself these dimensions of theological philosophy, which can be easily obscured by petrified formulas on the one hand, and by sheer entertainment of the variety and diversity of cultural trends.

The fragility of consciousness reminds us of the essential incompleteness of any human action and as such calls for humility as the conscientious endeavor to (re)discover our place in the created universe: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.” (1 Cor 3, 6) Growing (αὐξάνω) with the grace of God is the key to authentic discipleship. Giving voice to our inner world, we welcome the blessings bestowed by divine and human intimacy. This requires a willingness to be vulnerable as a condition for healing and transforming a personal life and community. And this is the key to an authentic being-in-the-world in the realm of constant personal development.

Yvanka B. Raynova, *Sein, Sinn und Werte:*

Phänomenologische und hermeneutische Perspektiven des europäischen Denkens

(Peter Lang, 2017)

In her book *Sein, Sinn und Werte: Phänomenologische und hermeneutische Perspektiven des europäischen Denkens*, Yvanka B. Raynova refers to a long discourse on the so-called “crisis of philosophy.” Even today, philosophy is accused of being in a crisis of meaning, of being abstract and unworldly, and without practical application nor connection to reality. Thus, philosophy cannot serve the needs of society. Raynova's book is directed against such reproaches, with which already Brentano, Husserl, and Heidegger had to deal in regard to the s.c. “crisis of philosophy.” Unfolding the diverse facets of this discussion in the phenomenological schools, Raynova displays how the

crisis of reason led to a crisis of meaning and of being. According to her, this axiological insecurity came to a head in the area of responsibility, human dignity and human rights and led to the necessity of a rethinking of history and community. The hidden purpose of her analyses is to show that philosophy is or can be useful, as a basic knowledge without which the concept of the fundamental values and the history of human rights, upon which the European Community is based, cannot be understood and further developed.

Maurizio Ferraris, *Postverità e altri enigmi*

(il Mulino, 2017)

Although there is a strong temptation to say that hoaxes have always existed, that lies are an inescapable ingredient of politics and life, and that there is therefore nothing new under the sun about what is called 'post-truth'; although one might want to cut a long story short by saying that - at most - it is a matter of paying attention to what one reads just as one pays attention to what one eats and drinks, I am convinced, on the other hand, that post-truth is a concept distinct from those of hoax or lie, and that its emergence (because no one has decided in some room "today we launch post-truth") highlights issues that concern us all, and that can teach us at least three things.

The first concerns the responsibility of intellectuals in relation to the world. We are used to thinking that they are an irrelevant and ornamental fringe, yet in some way, sometimes perversely, ideas can come to fruition in the world, often in unexpected and undesirable ways, but they do come to fruition, in other forms and contexts, and perhaps with catastrophic outcomes. Political post-truth as the fulfilment of philosophical postmodernism is a shining example of this principle.

The second illumination of post-truth concerns the importance of technique in the emergence of ideas and behavior. We are used to thinking of technique as the realisation of a project with a deliberate and circumscribed purpose (I need to open a cork, I invent the corkscrew) but this is not the case. Technique is not goal-oriented, like other human knowledge. On the contrary, it is autonomous and creative: whoever invented the steam engine did not think that it would give rise to an entire social order that has regulated the lives of human beings for almost three centuries: capitalism. And whoever invented the web did not imagine that it would give rise to an apparatus even more powerful than the one that preceded it, a complex apparatus that I propose to call "documediality," a compound term designating the fusion between the binding and constitutive form of documents in the social world, and the mobilizing force of

the media. Documediality has laid (along with many other things, good and bad) the material premises of post-truth just as postmodernism had elaborated its ideal premises.

The third revelation of post-truth, which is the result of the first two, concerns the idea of democracy that emerges from the encounter between post-truth and documediality. It can be summarized in a very simple consideration: post-truth constitutes a moment of mass mobilization with few precedents. Every web user expresses his or her own truth, with a freedom that is technically sovereign compared to any other instance - one is worth one, in politics as in knowledge, and if I claim that the moon is made of cheese, it is undemocratic to object that perhaps it is not so. But the question, at this point, is very simple: can there be a democracy without shared truth? And, conversely, what can be the characteristics of democracy in the age of post-truth.

What to do? The best corrective to post-truth is truth, i.e. culture. Awareness of the fact that truth does not lie at the beginning, but at the end, when it exists, and when it arrives, perhaps out of spite towards post-truth: suffice it to say that it was the unmasking of a fashionable nonsense like the Donation of Constantine - the forgery that sanctioned the temporal power of the Popes - that led to the birth of humanistic philology. In short, although the truth sooner or later surfaces, the search for truth can hardly be carried out with bare hands and without cultural training. Augustine says this in the Confessions: I want to do the truth, not only in my heart, but also in writing and before many witnesses. What does he mean by this? That one makes the truth as one makes coffee? No. I would propose to interpret this sentence as follows: truth is nothing self-evident, and requires technical training, as well as a good dose of good will and sometimes even personal courage. Ideas are as cheap as apples, said Hegel, and the documedial explosion of the web demonstrates this as best we can. How to distinguish good ideas? Not by subjecting them to asphyxiating fact-checking, but - with a philosophical and political eye - to the demanding test proposed by William James: "True are those ideas which we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. Ideas to which it is not possible to do all this are false."

2018

John T. Hamilton, *Philology of the Flesh*

(The University of Chicago Press, 2018)

As the Christian doctrine of Incarnation asserts, “the Word became Flesh.” Yet, while this metaphor is grounded in the Christian tradition, its varied functions far exceed any purely theological import. It speaks to the nature of God just as much as to the nature of language. In *Philology of the Flesh*, John Hamilton explores writing, reading, and hermeneutic practices that engage this metaphor in a range of poetic enterprises and theoretical reflections. By pressing the notion of philology as “love” (*philia*) for the “word” (*logos*), Hamilton’s readings investigate the breadth, depth, and limits of verbal styles that are irreducible to mere information. While a philologist of the body might understand words as corporeal vessels of core meaning, the philologist of the flesh, by focusing on the carnal qualities of language, resists taking words as mere containers.

By examining a series of intellectual episodes—from the fifteenth-century Humanism of Lorenzo Valla to the poetry of Emily Dickinson, from Immanuel Kant and Johann Georg Hamann to Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka, and Paul Celan—*Philology of the Flesh* considers the far-reaching ramifications of the incarnational metaphor, insisting on the inseparability of form and content, an insistence that allows us to rethink our relation to the concrete languages in which we think and live.

Since its publication, the book has received noteworthy reviews: “Approached as a series of discrete meditations, *Philology of the Flesh* delivers what are likely to become canonical readings of a wide-ranging corpus of texts and authors; taken as a whole, it is a tour de force—and one that makes a compelling case for philology itself, for a loving struggle with language even and especially when it refuses to grant easy access to fixed meaning” (*German Quarterly*); “*The Philology of the Flesh* is comparative literature at its best: always attuned to word and sound play, sensitive to veiled metaphors and allusions, an incorporation of love of words and love of earthly, contingent, mortal truths” (*Comparative Literature Studies*); “Reading this book is more like practicing meditations among muses, all centered on the difficulties of reading and eventually the impossibility of ‘any secure destination.’ The central theme throughout is the materiality of textuality. ‘Philology’ for Hamilton is reading by pressing against tissue that ‘gives’ a bit, but never completely ‘gives way.’ The flesh of all texts pushes back and never truly surrenders a soul” (Dale B. Martin, Yale University); “With breathtaking historical erudition, exemplary conceptual clarity, and stylistic verve, John

Hamilton guides the reader through the carnal career of words in the Western tradition. *The Philology of the Flesh* tracks the incarnational metaphors at work in literary and philosophical texts from late antiquity to the present to model a way of reading that is joyously too close for (academic) comfort, one that libidinally implicates the reader in the life of words. Hamilton's remarkable sensitivity to the *carnal* dimension of this contact is—perhaps paradoxically—nothing less than *inspiring*" (Eric L. Santner, University of Chicago).

Hans Ruin, *Being with the Dead: Burial, Ancestral Politics, and the Roots of Historical Consciousness*
(Stanford University Press, 2018)

With the numbers of people dying and the legacies left behind, one wonders what is our future in relation to our past. How we move forward with the past is not abandoned but reconciled and understood. Our recent experience with the separation from those who are dying due to Covid restrictions shines a peculiar light on the notion of death and dying. Hans Ruin examines and compares the traditions of the notion of death in his book *Being with the dead*. Our coexistence with the dead is the main aspect of the present and the future. The intertwined relationship also influences our social and political lives of communities.

Ruin's book is wrapped around Sophocles' stories that serve as a mean to show our relationship to the dead in the light of the future of our communities. It is in our relationship to the dead, Ruin claims that our understanding of the past stands out. One can also see the connectedness between our present state to the past traditions and cultures.

Ruin's cross-discipline approach allows him to enter a dialogue with Heidegger's notion of "being with the dead." Ruin goes beyond Heidegger's understanding of the notion of having limitations to the realization that we live in togetherness with the dead which serves him as an avenue to make a claim about living historically along with the dead. The present does not allow us to live fully without our memories of the dead.

Ruin's concept of "necropolitics" leads him to the claim that the political sphere is not the dominion of the living but rather both, living and the dead. Ruin draws from Alfred Schütz the importance of what communities share with those who died. Those who had gone before us belong along with the living to the sociopolitical world that continues to be part of the living activity. Ruin is preoccupied with the

notion of carrying on the legacy from the past into the future for the benefit of communities.

Ruin's book is engaging and insightful and opens up the notion of the dead to a further dialogue. It also allows interdisciplinary conversation that would be beneficial to different disciplines and most of all to the future of communities and cultures. It touches a lot of long-studied notions like historical consciousness, tradition, the pastness, and engages us in a new way of conversation about them.

Engaging with Heidegger in the dialogue about the dead, Ruin also moves to Derrida's notion of the awareness of the past as the living guidance for our future. His significant contribution to the historical consciousness is the idea of contemporary people caring for and remembering the dead and the places of their burial. Our responsibility towards the past helps us connect in a more meaningful way with the present and future and allows a better understanding of what we have inherited.

Thomas Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain: The Phenomenology and Biology of the Embodied Mind*
(Oxford University Press, 2018)

Overcoming the brain centrism of current neuroscience, "Ecology of the Brain" develops an ecological and embodied concept of the brain as a mediating or resonance organ. Accordingly, the mind is not a product of the brain: it is an activity of the living being as a whole, which integrates the brain in its superordinate life functions. Similarly, consciousness is not an inner domain located somewhere within the organism, but a continuous process of engaging with the world, which extends to all objects that we are in contact with. The traditional mind–brain problem is thus reformulated as a dual aspect of the living being, conceived both as a lived or subjective body and as a living or objective body. Processes of life and of experiencing life are inseparably linked. Hence, it is not the brain, but the living human person as a whole who feels, thinks, and acts.

This concept is elaborated on a broad philosophical, neurobiological, and developmental, and psychopathological basis. Based on a phenomenology of the lived body and an enactive concept of the living organism as an autopoietic system, the brain is conceived in this book as a resonance organ, mediating the circular interactions within the body as well as the interactions between the body and the environment. Above all, a person's relations to others continuously restructure the human brain which thus becomes an organ shaped by social interaction, biography, and culture.

This concept is also crucial for a non-reductionist theory of mental disorders, psychiatry, and psychotherapy, which is developed in a special chapter.

A highlight of the book is that it does not shy away from asking the big questions of human neuroscience that have also puzzled philosophers through the ages: how is free will possible? What is the relationship between the conscious mind and unconscious matter? In addressing these questions in an interdependent manner, Fuchs develops a daring proposal that breaks with a number of ingrained beliefs about consciousness and nature. Effectively, he argues that our experience is opaquer and more constrained by its embodiment than typically assumed, and our body derives much of its spontaneous order from its animacy. Thus, by assigning priority to the person as a whole, with its dual aspects of lived and living body, the gap between subjectivity and nature becomes less prominent.

The upshot of Fuchs' theory of dual aspectivity is that the dominant strategy of theoretically collapsing Cartesian mind-body dualism into its material aspect, and then empirically locating the mind inside the brain, is misguided and bound to fail. He proposes two complementary methodological remedies: on the side of subjectivity, we must consider not just higher-level mental processes, but the person's whole being-in-the-world, and on the side of nature, we must consider not just the brain, but the person's whole organismic embodiment in interaction with the ecological and social world. In this way, Fuchs decisively converts enactivism's original neuroscientific research program, neurophenomenology (Varela, 1996), into a long overdue neuro-physio-socio-phenomenology.

2019

Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal*
(Harvard University Press, 2019)

Recent decades have been marked by a rapidly progressing internationalisation and the subsequent surge in nationalisms. The latter has led many thinkers to reemphasize the importance of cosmopolitanism. In her fascinating study, Martha Nussbaum, far from uncritically accepting or sceptically rejecting the cosmopolitan ideal, explores it as a noble but flawed one. The seriousness of engagement with the topic testifies to her devotion to think not only about, but with, the cosmopolitan tradition, and to interrogate it from the perspective of today's challenges.

Drawing on her previous scholarship on cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum dialogues with the Stoics, Hugo Grotius, Adam Smith, and various contemporary thinkers, exploring the tensions inherent in the idea of the world citizenship from the perspective of the two notions fundamental to her thinking: dignity and vulnerability. Those reflections go back as far as to her first books, whereby, while endorsing the Stoics' stress on the universal notion of human dignity and their philosophy of *Kosmu polites*, Nussbaum allows us to appreciate that the Stoic ideal is abstract and fails to acknowledge the vulnerability of dignified beings and the material implications related to it. Stoic's stress that the soul can be free and nourished from within, even under the conditions of external enslavement, can be interpreted as dismissive of the importance of material conditions. Nussbaum, in turn, encourages us to grasp that from the universal dignity of vulnerable human beings stems the universal right to have access to the resources that allow people to live dignified lives. In rooting dignity in vulnerability, and not reason, Nussbaum effectively subverts the Stoic privileging of the moral intellect and makes an argument for the inclusion in the community of rights of the nonhuman animals.

Following Grotius and Smith in criticising the idea of the world state in the light of the notion of autonomy, Nussbaum further argues that the world-state can lack in resources of accountability and scrutiny. National sovereignty and individual autonomy are closely connected and hindering one would hinder the other. Drawing attention to the importance of material concreteness to the abstract ideals, Nussbaum discloses that the cosmopolitan ideal is, for many of us, too abstract to inspire attitudes of self-sacrifice and real help. However, what remains central to Nussbaum's reflections is the Stoics' stress on the universal and equal dignity and humanity of our fellow human beings, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, social class and level of

ability. Her Capabilities Approach, based on the notions of vulnerability and dignity, is a unique contribution to furthering the ideal of equality and a fruitful perspective from which to reflect and act on today's cosmopolitanism.

Andrzej Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics: Understanding as the Mode of Being in the World Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education*
(LIT Verlag, 2019)

Existential Hermeneutics: Understanding as the Mode of Being in the World is an unrivaled work of scholarship, exploring the multifarious ways in which philosophy, theology, and poetry meaningfully interweave. Wierciński's exhilarating meditation on our being-in-the-world ingeniously captures the ubiquity of the hermeneutic character of human existence. The book reveals that by *thinking-the-difference*, hermeneutics make displays its unique welcoming gesture toward the investigation of the heterogeneous nature of human thinking. Recognizing the empowerment of thinking that arises from *Differenzdenken*, *Existential Hermeneutics* powerfully rejuvenates philosophical hermeneutics' inimitable contribution to the Humanities.

Addressing a vast range of themes, the belonging-together of language and understanding, forgetfulness of Being, self-understanding, metaphysics, Trinity, atheology, and the pivotal Incarnation as the empowerment of *thinking-the-difference*, Wierciński draws on insights from an impressively dexterous readings of the whole host of thinkers: Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Ignatius of Antioch, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and Richard of St. Victor, Hans Urs von Balthasar, as well as the less known Gustav Siewerth and Bernhard Welte. Orchestrating diverse voices, Wierciński places his prescient reflection on the lingual character of understanding at the heart of the book. Following Heidegger, he cogently asserts that language and human understanding belong together: "Human *Dasein* resides within language: 'Language is the house of Being.'" Wierciński's captivating explication of the relationship between language and understanding comes to its climax in a superb gloss on Gadamer's revalidation of Augustine's *verbum interius*. Arguing that Gadamer commences an original engagement with the nature of language as situated in the onto-theological perspective, Wierciński, makes a new foray into our apprehension of language, providing an ample stimulus

for contemporary hermeneutics to rediscover and rearticulate the deep-seated connections between philosophical and theological discourses.

Acknowledging the importance of Gadamer's appropriation of Augustine, the book sensitizes us, at the same time, to hermeneutics' vital concern of reaching out for understanding as both rooted in and transcending Tradition. Dwelling in the hermeneutic *in-between* of the past and the present, experiencing our being as finite, contingent, and provisional, continually facing the challenges of understanding, we partake in Being's disclosing itself to us in the back-and-forth movement of the concealed (*das Verborgene*) and the unconcealed (*das Entborgene*), enacted *in* and *through* language. Wierciński affirms that the imperative to understand and interpret, which is embedded in our embracement and dynamic responding to the dialectic of familiarity and strangeness, indicates the unfolding of human existence as *existentia hermeneutica*, i.e., *existentia interpretativa*.

In the overwhelming struggle to make sense of our being-in-the-world, we incessantly attempt to describe, re-describe, and interpret reality as profoundly stranded between finitude and infinity. The task of interpretation encompasses lived experience, and thus the possible risk of misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Locating understanding in the practical dimension of life, in our situatedness, Wierciński potently revives the significance of *phronesis* for hermeneutics, sensitizing us to the intimate connections between the unique unrepeatability of the self, his/her existential situation, and radical responsibility (*re-spondeo*).

Pondering hermeneutics' endeavor to position us in the horizon of thinking about what happens *to* us and *in* us when we understand, Wierciński makes an enticing recourse to poetry which he deems "a zealous search for a 'magic formula' in which the whole truth about our existence could be accommodated and shine out brightly." His splendid interpretations of poetry by Hölderlin, Celan, Rilke, and Miłosz that both intersperse and are an integral part of his philosophical-theological discourse aptly show that the poetic word is the portentous locus of the disclosures of Being. Integrating the miscellaneous insights afforded by a stunningly meticulous interrogation of the pregnant but often overlooked and underrated intersections of philosophy, theology, and poetry, *Existentia Hermeneutica* is a superb achievement that remains attuned to its momentous, interdisciplinary, and far-reaching character.

Wierciński's *Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education* is a supremely powerful and thought-provoking hermeneutic response to our being-in-the-world in the dynamics of its formation and transformation. Instead of offering one more examination of some voguish teaching methodologies or treating us to a purely theoretical stance, Wierciński places

hermeneutic hospitality and the prodigy of our being a gift to one another in the very center of educational endeavor, sensitizing us thus to its dialogical, reciprocal, and phronetic dimension.

Advocating for the relevance of the hermeneutic triad of understanding, explaining, and applying (*subtilitas intelligendi, explicandi et applicandi*) for the educational enterprise, Wierciński focuses on application (*An-wendung*, turning toward something) that results from a dialogic encounter in the teaching environment, in its fundamental and compelling openness to the inexorable *μετάνοια*. In the fusion of the horizons of the teacher and the student (*Horizontverschmelzung*), education *happens* a hermeneutic conversation, and opens a unique possibility to discover the otherwise unfeasible. As Wierciński evocatively underlines, education in its conversational character allows us to unravel those areas of meaning and unknot those problems that we would not be able to solve on our own. Therefore, hermeneutic education is the time of a momentous unveiling (*revelatio*), in which a given phenomenon speaks to us *differently* each time we undertake the invaluable task of understanding in the true spirit of Gadamer's oft-quoted dictum of *immer-anders-verstehen*. In its nourishing and strengthening of our need to understand and to interpret, education cannot be narrowed down to an instrumental multiplication of the possible and versatile answers to a given question or to a facile accumulation of data. Hermeneutic education shifts the accent from a mere quest for knowledge to a persistent but also life-affirming and life-changing cultivation of a willingness to understand, which calls for welcoming unpredictability and risk. Instead of eliminating and suffocating different and complicated voices, hermeneutic education stimulates and fosters patient encounter with what needs to be understood without any shortcuts and cutoffs.

Fostering Heidegger's crucial distinction between calculative and contemplative modes of thinking (*berechnendes* and *besinnliches Denken*), Wierciński encourages us to follow the path of *vita contemplativa*. He flashes out its unquestionable positivity by excellently combining the medieval care of the soul, encapsulated in St Bonaventura's plea to expand on our contemplative work by sharing the fruits of contemplation (*contemplata tradere*) with the hermeneutic call to implement that which has been learnt (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*). Wierciński magnifies his most precious invitation to cultivate meditative thinking by sensitizing us to the beauty of the poetic word. His penetrating and erudite interpretations of Milosz, Herbert, T.S. Eliot, Hölderlin, Szyborska, and Rilke enhance our imaginative response to Being disclosing itself to us, as well as help preclude our falling prey to the narcissistic and complacent apprehension of the self.

With a hand of a virtuoso, Wierciński brings into conversation the insights of contemporary hermeneutic anthropology, philosophical hermeneutics, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis, and bridges them with the theological traditions of St Augustine and St Aquinas, inspiring us to see the indispensability of the hermeneutic dialogue of the past and the present and to recognize the power of the pedagogical enterprise as both embedded in the wisdom of the past and as happening in the now (*hic et nunc*). Enthusing us to apprehend the profundity of the *event* (*Ereignis*) of education as the genuine *locus educativus* of our intellectual and spiritual growth, Wierciński rejuvenates in us the important and exhilarating truth that when we understand, we always self-understand (*Verstehen ist Sichverstehen*), and that education is always self-education (*Erziehung ist Sich-Erziehen*). Facing and honoring the reality of our vulnerability and fragility, *l'homme capable, agissant et souffrant* is a being capable of a more astute and compassionate response to the Other (*répondre à la vulnérabilité*) in situations which call for phronetic wisdom. In its intensely sensitive and consequential attunement to the possibilities inhering in the *eventing* of education, Wierciński's remarkable *tour de force* of education encourages us to rejoice in the inexhaustibility of understanding and the beauty of the unpredictability of what happens *to us* and *in us* when we learn and understand.

Saulius Geniusas, *The Phenomenology of Pain*

(Ohio University Press, 2019)

The Phenomenology of Pain is a remarkable book, which relaunches and renews the phenomenological approach to the irreducible facticity of embodied suffering. There is a plethora of literature on pain, yet little has been written on pain experience. In effect, we now know a great deal about neurological mechanisms correlated with pain, and this knowledge often enable us to weaken or even eliminate pain, yet we know little about pain experience. *The Phenomenology of Pain* aims to counteract this limitation. The book is guided by the three tasks. It aims to 1) establish a phenomenological methodology, which would be appropriate to the study of pain; 2) give an account of what the experience of pain is, and 3) demonstrate the relevance of this explanation for philosophical anthropology.

Methodologically, the book is grounded in classical phenomenological principles: phenomenological epoché, the phenomenological reduction and imaginative variations. In an original and hermeneutically relevant way, the author supplements the method of imaginative variations with that of factual variations. Such

a supplementation allows the author to identify his phenomenological approach as *dialogical phenomenology*. “Phenomenology need not be the victim of its own purity: it must be open to the developments in other sciences—natural, social, and human—as well as to the advances in literature, poetry, cinema, and fine arts. Insofar as phenomenology is cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural, it merits being called *dialogical*” (12).

Building on the basis of such a methodological orientation, Geniusas develops a new phenomenologically oriented conception of pain: *pain is an aversive bodily feeling with a distinct experiential quality, which can only be given in original first-hand experience, either as a feeling-sensation or as an emotion*. This conception entails many components and throughout the study, Geniusas carefully explicates their meaning. What does it mean to claim that pain is embodied? What can be said about the temporality of pain? What does it mean to qualify pain as a feeling? These are the questions that guide his analysis.

According to Geniusas, the concept of the *person*, as developed in classical phenomenology, provides a solid basis to conceptualize embodied subjectivity (and not the physiological body) as the subject of pain, and even more importantly, it enables us to analyze the de-personalizing and re-personalizing nature of pain experience. Moreover, the study demonstrates that a phenomenological approach, which recognizes the life-world as the ultimate horizon of pain experience, enables us to conceptualize such processes as somatization and psychologization, which so often affect the human experience of chronic pain.

Such a way of conceptualizing pain experience carries a number of important implications. First, it enables us to recognize that philosophical reflections on pain can provide us with fundamental insights into the nature and limits of human existence. Second, it enables us to pursue a dialogue between phenomenology and other disciplines, such as cultural anthropology, cultural psychopathology, history, psychoanalysis, sociology, etc.

Genusas is the first to have developed a systematic and comprehensive phenomenology of pain, only fragments of which had been available before the publication of this book. Any future philosophical investigations of pain will have to pay very serious attention to this study. *The Phenomenology of Pain* is an original, thorough and subtle book, which articulates its deepest philosophical presuppositions, and which spells out the fundamental phenomenological principles that must guide phenomenologically-oriented pain research. It sets a new standard for philosophical and phenomenological reflections on our own experience and marks Geniusas as a leader in the area of phenomenology of pain.

2020

Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*

(Verso, 2020)

Judith Butler's *The Force of Nonviolence* is a masterfully crafted call to reinterpret the notion of nonviolence. Butler claims that our understanding of the distinction between violence and nonviolence rests upon a discursive paradigm limited by instrumentalism and individualist thought. Building upon her previous work in *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning* (2004), Butler argues that this discourse encourages contradictions and differences in how violence and nonviolence are defined. Such confusion can lend credence to the idea that violence should be monopolized by the state. Moreover, it conceals over the state's tendency to designate certain lives as "unworthy of grief". Both of these limit the efficacy of nonviolence as a political and ethical position. Butler argues that a politically meaningful understanding of nonviolence can be conceived. Such an understanding would honor aggressivity as an essential feature of the human psyche and work to provide an outlet for this emotion. More importantly, it would reframe the grievability of life through social equality, interdependence, and a need for mutual support. This new understanding of nonviolence is a fecund basis for a more egalitarian social imaginary.

David Leatherbarrow, *Building Time: Architecture, Event, and Experience*

(Bloomsbury, 2020)

While most books on architecture concentrate on spatial themes, *Building Time* explores architecture's temporal dimensions. Through a series of close readings of buildings, both contemporary and classic, it shows why an understanding of time is critical to understanding good architecture.

All buildings exist in time. Even if designed for permanence, they change, slowly but inevitably. They change use, they accrue history and meaning, as do the movements of the human body from room to room. Time, this book argues, is the framework for our spatial experience of architecture, and a key dimension of a building's structure and significance.

Michael Benedikt writes, "*Building Time* is a graceful, timely, and purposeful walk through a garden of architectural knowledge, offering an account—in all, a theory—not just of human spatial experience through time (first we go here, then we

go there...), but of the world experiencing *itself* through the medium of buildings, especially buildings which, in having long-term ethical projects as well as complexities of their own, are works of architecture. With Proustian intimacy and often dizzying insight, Leatherbarrow enlarges the very language we use to understand architecture. Buildings are indifferent only apparently. In marking time, in accommodating the fleeting, in witnessing and in suffering, they bring up the future.”

For Billie Tsien, “When Leatherbarrow writes about time he is also writing about the slow and then ever faster passage of our own lives. Even as we visit the Pantheon to watch time literally move before our eyes and we are reminded that it also measures the span of our own existence. This is a dense, lyrical, and heartbreaking book about our lives and our buildings.”

David Tracey, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time: Selected Essays, vol. 1*
(The University of Chicago Press)

Missing Laudatio

2021

Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense*

(Columbia University Press, 2021)

Kearney's inspirational *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* exquisitely explores our most primordial, and yet, especially recently, most neglected of the senses – touch. This outstandingly demanding task of interrogating the possibilities to “get us back in touch with touch” appears particularly urgent today, not only due to the new challenges to corporeality brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic but also in the midst of our increasingly disembodied manner of being in the world.

Kearney's book comes out at a time when touch is in crisis. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the progressing digitalization was making us more and more alienated from the flesh in almost all dimensions of human life: in dating, politics (war), medicine, to give just a few examples. The digital world, in which we are separated from one another by our screens, allows us to contact without *tact*. It enables a unilateral, excarnate communication whereby we can see others without being seen, heard or scented, that is, without being exposed in our basic vulnerability. The new pandemic has only accelerated this progressing excarnation, adding an ethical component to it by social distancing to apparently protect others from infection. Considering the current challenges, how can we find a way back into the tactile world and into our bodies?

Kearney sees in the “twin therapy” of storytelling and touch a true possibility of responding to today's crisis of carnality. His insights into the topic of trauma lead us to appreciate the potential of this twin therapy for the working through (*Durcharbeiten*) at the symbolic level what remains unattainable or intimidating at the level of lived experience. Rethinking the theme of healing, he elucidates how touch can be therapeutic: in trauma therapy (the “tactile” act of dance can help PTSD patients), depression treatment (a deep-tissue massage can stimulate the right neurotransmitters), and disability aids (Braille as word-touch).

Touch is about so much more than a response to a current crisis of carnality. Kearney's reflections on touch are, through and through, also reflections on our vulnerability and relatedness. Considering touch's etymological, literary, religious, mythic, and psychoanalytic interpretations, and entering a productive dialogue with authors such as Aristotle, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Luce Irigaray, Leïla Slimani, Shakespeare, Don DeLillo, and Julia Kristeva, to name but a few, Kearney discloses that touch is the most universal yet complex of the senses, which constitutes our basic

openness to the world. It also forms our fundamental exposure, since to touch is to be touched simultaneously (unlike in the case of the other senses, where I am not necessarily heard by what I hear or seen by what I see). This basic openness and exposure of flesh through touch also discloses that flesh is where we most experience our vulnerability, insecurity, and fear. Tactility, thus, “is the ability to experience and negotiate the passion of existence, understood etymologically as *pathos/πάσχειν*—suffering, receiving, or undergoing exposure to others who come to us as this or that. To touch and be touched simultaneously is to relate to others in a way that opens us up.” It is also a discerning sense since flesh is also always a medium through which we perceive something as this or that.

Kearney invites us to re-think our philosophical prejudices regarding the flesh and imagine new possibilities to live sensibly and sensitively, thoughtfully, and tactfully. He also uncovers the complexity of touch beyond being merely one of the senses. Indeed, touch is an “an embodied manner of being in the world, an existential approach to things that is open and vulnerable, as when skin touches and is touched,” and thus is also present in “visibility, audibility, and so on.” With a lyrical and argumentative power, Kearney allows us to appreciate tactility as the primordial existential mode of being and relating to another, and pivotal to being a human being.

Jeff Malpas and Kenneth White, *The Fundamental Field: Thought, Poetics, World*
(Edinburgh University Press, 2021)

The Scottish poet Kenneth White and the Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas came together by chance when Malpas heard an interview with White on ABC radio. Malpas contacted White, and from there they exchanged books and ideas. They arranged to meet at White’s place on the Breton coast, where a conversation about poetry and philosophy developed over four days. Inspired by poets from John Donne to Hölderlin, and philosophers from Nietzsche to Heidegger, they discussed the world, place, narrative, language and politics. This book records that conversation in the form of two long essays, one by White and one by Malpas, making up the two main parts of the book, together with three of White’s philosophical poems.

William Franke, *Dante’s Paradiso and the Theological Origins of Modern Thought: Toward a Speculative Philosophy of Self-Reflection*
The Divine Vision of Dante’s Paradiso: The Metaphysics of Representation

Dante's Vita Nuova and the New Testament.***Hermeneutics and the Poetics of Revelation***

(Routledge, 2021) (Cambridge University Press, 2021)

(Cambridge University Press, 2021).

William Franke has long pursued a line of inquiry that follows up on Dante's constant penchant for theorizing and develops philosophical, theological, and literary-critical reflection continuing in the vein of Dante's own works. In this seventh centenary year of Dante's death in 1321, Franke's work has been crowned by the publication of three major monographs bringing into unified focus the capital importance of Dante for our own time.

The exegesis of Dante is integral to Franke's apophatic philosophy as worked out in another series of books (*On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourse in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, 2 volumes, 2007; *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*, 2014; *Apophatic Paths from Europe to China: Regions Without Borders*, 2018; *On the Universality of What is Not: The Apophatic Turn in Critical Thinking*, 2020), which proposes also a speculative philosophy of self-reflection. On the basis of apophasis as unlimited self-critique, self-reflection turns a critical eye on the self, dissolving its supposedly static contents into dynamic relations with others. Conjugating speculative self-reflection with the radical negation of apophasis, Franke pursues critical philosophy to the point where, critical of itself, it breaks open into a philosophy and even a theology of revelation as unlimited openness to the Other. The driving force of thought in modern times has been self-reflection, and it can be turned in this self-reflective manner on itself so as to break its frame and open itself to what former epochs of culture understood as manifestation of divinity, the uncanny, and even theological revelation.

The current postmodern and specifically post-secular media revolution comes to sharp focus and a certain transparency when aligned with the revolution in poetic language of preceding centuries, which started for modern times with Dante. Franke's tack is to interpret this communications *revolution* as a mode of *revelation* that demands to be understood in light of theological paradigms including the Trinity and the Incarnation. Dante's intellectual revolution/revelation begins with the *Vita nuova* and culminates in the *Paradiso*, while it is also variously elaborated in every one of Dante's philosophical and theoretical works in between. This trajectory extends further beyond Dante's oeuvre into the tradition he gathers together and makes canonical from classical Greco-Roman and biblical Judeo-Christian antiquity, on the forehand, to the poets that follow in Dante's wake in the vernacular language traditions, on the other

hand. Dante's progeny includes essentially all modern poets pursuing the highest aspirations for literature as a revelation of human life and cosmic reality in a phenomenological sense. This sense, however, is best illuminated by reference to theological transcendence, which is thought through most profoundly in the theology of the Trinity as refracted through the self-reflexive poetics of Dante's *Paradiso*.

Self-reflection, as the hallmark of the modern age, originates more profoundly with Dante than with Descartes. Franke's books rewrite modern intellectual history, taking Dante's lyrical language in *Paradiso* as enacting a Trinitarian self-reflexivity that gives a theological spin to the birth of the modern subject. Such an emergence can be described already with the Troubadours when seen retrospectively from the vantage point of Dante. Dante's thought and work indicate an alternative modernity along the path not taken. This alternative shows up in Nicholas of Cusa's conjectural science and in Giambattista Vico's new science of imagination as alternatives to positive empirical science. Franke traces the latter paradigm leading to our techno-scientific culture back to Dante's exact contemporary Duns Scotus (born, like Dante, in 1265) and his new metaphysics based on univocity rather than on the analogy of being and the concomitant analogical vision of the cosmos. He traces Dante's revolution forward to Schelling's philosophy of revelation and to Fichte's essential insight into the limit of reflexive, Kantian philosophy. He delineates Dante's anticipations of Derrida's deconstruction of the sign, as well as of Levinas's ethics of the Other, and Blanchot's discovery of the space of literature in the bursting open of signification to contact experienced as the vision of God (*visio Dei*) in the performances of poetic language at the height of Paradise.

Franke works as a philosopher of the humanities addressing the toughest intellectual problems of our time, including postmodern identity politics versus cosmopolitan conviviality, cognitive science as a challenge to humanistic modes of knowing, intercultural philosophy, etc., in terms of his apophatic philosophy, which also converts into a speculative theology.

The Dante Society of America (DSA) recently recognized Franke's work with this message (12/1/2021) from secretary Christian Dupont: "Dear friends, Fellow member William Franke, professor of comparative literature at Vanderbilt University, has been especially prolific during this 700th anniversary year overlaid by the rigors of Covid. He has published not just one, or even two, but three new monographs—all in continuity with his previous books, which interpret Dante through the lenses of hermeneutic and deconstructive theory, engaging philosophical, theological, and critical reflection upon the thought at work in Dante's poetry and prose in terms informed by the speculative resources of our own era, including media studies, art

theory on word and image (iconography), political theology, apophatic poetics, and phenomenology after the theological turn.”

These books are unified in their vision of poetry as theological revelation in Dante’s work from the lyrical love poems of the *Vita nuova* to the mystical lyric verses of the *Paradiso* and its insistent poetics of ineffability. Among Franke’s newest books, the one on self-reflection analyzes the self-reflective structure of lyrical language in its original invention by Dante subsuming Troubadour models and then outlines self-reflection’s repercussions through the course of modern cultural history, with its endemic Narcissism. The book maps out an alternative modernity that is already indicated by Dante’s invention of self-reflexivity as a reflection of divine (Trinitarian) transcendence.

Franke reads literary classics as revelations of truth that can be valid for us still today. Dante is key for his claim to reveal a theological truth that has universal existential validity beyond sectarian dogmas and culturally specific teachings.

The distinctive achievement of Franke’s work—its unique contribution not only to Dante studies but also to the philosophical thought of our time—lies in his treating Dante as engaged in conversation with the great speculative challenges of all times. Dante addresses the perennial issues of ethics and metaphysics in the terms available to his own age of culture and in poetically specific and concretely historical detail. Dante’s medieval cultural horizon and its special terms need to be acknowledged and discerned in order for us to envision the sublime verities revealing humanity and its Others poetically in his work. But to be truly understood they also need to be placed into relation with the speculative issues proper to our own times – our own (self)reflective quest to encounter our Others. Through Franke’s mediation, Dante becomes much more than a cultural icon or a historical monument. He stands out as a living voice of prophetic revelation in the present. The inspired truths of his vision belong to all ages, but we constantly lose sight of them, and “the divine vision darkens.” Through mediation such as Franke offers, this type of visionary seeing in a perspective of the infinite can and needs to return to consciousness for our own survival, not to mention salvation.
