

Heidegger and the Hermeneutics of the Body

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Abstract

Phenomenology, Feminist Studies and Ecologism have accused Heidegger repeatedly for not having taken into account the phenomenon of the body. Without denying the validity of such critiques, the present article focuses its attention first on the question of Dasein's neutrality and asexuality. Then it analyzes Heidegger's remarks on temporality as the horizon of all meaning, paying special attention to its significance for Butler's notion of performativity.

Keywords: body, Dasein, gesture, performativity, temporality

In *Being and Time* we find only one reference to corporeality in the context of Heidegger's analysis of spatiality. Therefore, his analysis of human existence is often accused of forgetting about the body. This criticism has particular force in the field of French phenomenology. Alphonse de Waelhens, for instance, lamented the absence of the fundamental role that the body and perception play in our everyday understanding of things. Jean-Paul Sartre expanded upon this line of criticism by emphasizing the importance of the body as the first point of contact that human beings establish with their world. However, in the context of the first generation of French phenomenologists, Maurice Merleau-Ponty was undoubtedly the first whose systematic analysis of bodily perception established the basis for a revision of Heidegger's understanding of human life (Askay, 1999: 29-35). His influence is particularly apparent in Anglo-Saxon literature and in the field of feminist studies,² especially following the publication of the pioneering essays of Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray.³ Nevertheless, besides recognizing the merits of such criticisms, we are interested in settling two fundamental issues: on the one hand, understanding why Heidegger overlooked the analysis of the body in the first place and seeing where such an analysis can be found in the context of his philosophical program; and, on the other hand, seeing to what point Heidegger's observations about temporality as the ultimate horizon of all meaning might be particularly fruitful for Butler's notion of performativity.

1. Reasons for the Absence of the Body in *Being and Time*

Heidegger's reservations about considering the body in his fundamental work, *Being and Time*, should be placed within the framework of his innovative analysis of human life; an analysis that dismantles the ontology of substance dominant in modern Philosophy. This ontology interprets all things—from trees, animals, and rocks, to numbers, ideas, and people—in terms of substance, as that which remains unalterable through change. It is an ontology that dates back to Cartesian dualism of mind (*res cogitans*) and body (*res extensa*).

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² For a general overview of Heidegger's feminist reception, see the volume edited by Nancy Holland and Patricia Huntington (2001), which brings together essays of Jacques Derrida, Iris Marion Young, Luce Irigaray, and Carol Bigwood.

³ Regarding Derrida, his essay on the concept of *Geschlecht*—a many-sided term that means "race", "gender" and "species"—is one of the first systematic interpretations of Heidegger's references on Dasein's neutrality and asexuality (see Derrida, 1990: 145-172). In the case of Irigaray, one needs to go back to her early publications in the eighties. In *L'Oubli de l'aire chez Heidegger* and *Ethique de la différence sexuelle* she establishes a fruitful dialogue with Heidegger and Nietzsche.

However, one of the main objectives of Heidegger's program consists of destroying what Derrida will later call "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida, 1989: 281). From this perspective, every being that exists, including human, is understood in terms of presence, which means grasping the ontological nature of beings in terms of substance. This assessment allows us to better understand Heidegger's efforts to overcome the classical metaphysical opposition between subject and object, I and world. The existential analytic of *Being and Time* destroys this kind of metaphysics. A human being is no longer understood in terms of "spirit," "subject," "ego," and "conscience", but rather as an entity that is characterized ontologically by a peculiar understanding of its own being and of Being in general. Heidegger refers to the openness of Being (*Seinserschlossenheit*) with the term "there" (*Da*). Hence, a human being receives the name "being-there," *Dasein*, because it is in its factic and concrete existence (*Da*) that the Being (*Sein*) is manifested. In other words, to exist means to understand. I understand myself, my social practices, my relations with other in the horizon of an already existing public sphere that gives meaning to my actions. From this point of view, one can counter that many of the aforementioned criticisms frequently stem from an incorrect interpretation of the meaning of the word "Dasein." Dasein, the technical name with which Heidegger characterizes the peculiar openness (*Da*) to Being (*Sein*), should be understood neither in terms of concrete human existence nor in terms of an autonomous and sovereign subject that constitutes itself through an exercise of introspection or self-reflection; on the contrary, Dasein is part of a historical context and belongs to a space of intelligibility that exists always already *before* the emergence of the human body and its sexual differences. What is crucial is that every somatic and bodily experience is always determined by the fundamental openness to the world characteristic of any Dasein. This does not mean that Heidegger denies the value of phenomenological research regarding the body, but such research ends up being irrelevant to his fundamental ontology. In fact, in *Being and Time*, "body," "life," and "man" are studied in regional ontologies such as biology, medicine, and anthropology. In this sense, fundamental ontology is more primary than any concrete analysis of the body.

2. The issue of the body in the *Zollikon Seminars*

In September of 1959, Heidegger began a series of seminars with doctors and psychiatrists at the Medical Clinic of the University of Zurich. The austere and technological appearance of the new auditorium was not to Heidegger's taste, so the sessions were relocated to the house of Medard Boss, a colleague and friend of his who lived in Zollikon. These seminars continued on for more than a decade, and, among the different discussion topics, one which stood out was the answer, given for the first time, in response to the French criticism regarding the absence of the topic of the body in *Being and Time*. Unfortunately, Heidegger only partially responded to the criticism of Sartre, but made no reference to the work of Merleau-Ponty. This fact is frustrating, especially keeping in mind that Heidegger's thematization of the body in the so-called *Zollikon Seminars* (1959-1969) displays surprising similarities to that of the French philosopher.⁴ The *Zollikon Seminars* have a very concrete purpose: to show that the notion of the body as driven by the medical sciences, particularly psychiatry and psychology, still moves on Cartesian coordinates. Heidegger tries to break the naturalist conception of the body as an objective and material presence. Understood phenomenologically, the body is not a mere physical and material thing governed by pure mechanical laws. The scientific treatment of the physical body (*Körper*) or corporeality (*Körperlichkeit*) forgets that the lived body (*Leib*) or bodiliness (*Leiblichkeit*) extends beyond the skin. Our lived body is not a simple receptive organ but rather an expressive and communicative one, actively orientated towards the world and interrelated with others.

Thus, we are primarily not dealing with a subject who knows and represents the world from a detached epistemic attitude; rather, the individual is always already a part of a socio-historical context in which he or she makes practical use of surrounding things. And this happens without implementing a previous reflective act of consciousness. Actions take place along the horizon of a pre-reflective, a-thematic, pre-theoretical knowledge. The analysis of Dasein in terms of care clearly reveals that in the course of our daily life we are not subjects theoretically placed before an object, but rather we are being-in-the-world in the sense of being involved and familiarized with the things, situations, and persons that surround us. This interpretation of Dasein permits carrying out some preliminary observations about the role of the body in Heidegger's thought.

⁴ Richard Askay, the co-translator of the English edition of the *Zollikon Seminars*, acknowledges important converging points between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Among others, both highlight the role of gesture and the peculiar spatiality of the body. They also agree on rejecting the mechanistic vision of the human body (see further Askay, 1999: 31).

To begin with, the mechanistic resolve of the human body, which traces back to Descartes, is rejected. According to Cartesian interpretation, the body is composed of a certain mass, occupying a specific place on space-time coordinates and having a measurable weight. In the lectures on Nietzsche (1936/37), the dominantly naturalist and mechanistic interpretation of the body is already put into question. Heidegger affirms that we do not "have" a body in the same way we have a clasp knife in our pocket. Strictly speaking, we do not have a body; we are «bodily» (*leiblich*). We live to the extent that we are «bodying forth» (*leiben*) (Heidegger, 1989: 118-19). Heidegger persists in this idea in his *Letter on Humanism* (1946): "The fact that chemistry can scientifically explain humans as an organism is not sufficient proof that they are an "organic" thing [...] Human's essence resides inek-sistence." (Heidegger, 1978: 322). Indeed, as is later pointed out in the *Zollikon Seminars*, "everything we call our bodiliness, down to the last muscle fiber and down to the most hidden molecule of hormones, belongs essentially to existing. Thus, it is basically *not* inanimate matter but a domain of that nonobjectifiable, optically invisible opacity to receive-perceive the significance of what it encounters, which constitutes the whole Da-sein." (Heidegger, 1994: 293; engl. tr.: 232) Existence, then, should be understood neither as self-consciousness nor as an encapsulated body, but rather as an *ex-sistere*, a being-outside-of-self, a being beyond itself, a being always open to world. Opposed to the existentialist interpretation of Sartre, Heidegger insists that Dasein cannot be interpreted as a concrete subject that is *being-there*. Dasein is "there," that is to say, it exists on the meaningful horizon of Being before any reflective action or practical decision of the subject. Dasein is part of a space of intelligibility in which things become present and, in turn, end up being meaningful. In other words, human beings always interpret themselves from a perspective of assumptions, practices, institutions, and socio-historical prejudices that determine their hermeneutical situation. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty agree on the following point: human beings are not static substances; on the contrary, they are, first and foremost, activity defined by movement and praxis. In the same manner as Husserl, both study the phenomenological field of pre-scientific human experiences and conceive of life in intentional terms as a practical behavior which precedes any theoretical-reflective act of consciousness. Our understanding of ourselves is primarily founded upon our everyday tasks. For example, from the point of view of cultural anthropology, Pierre Bourdieu explains this phenomenon by asserting that practices and individual acts are mere structural variations of the public nexus of relationships, which he technically refers to as *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1997: 87). Our activities are materialized in a public space in which we have been born and with which we are familiar as an integral part of our everyday life.

Even so, critics lament that Heidegger, in his analyses of human life, did not include the body, which is already spatially oriented, surrounded by things, manipulating tools, and forming relationships with other bodies. In some way, Heidegger accepts that human beings can carry out all these bodily activities (Wahle, 1963: 18-9). However, as Merleau-Ponty points out, correctly carrying out our everyday activities requires an accustomed body, which is familiarized with its immediate surrounding world and that knows how to effectively get along with the people, things, and situations that it encounters in that world without needing to resort to the guise of a subjective consciousness that receives perceptible impressions from external objects. The body has a tacit knowledge of its place in the world. It is already woven into its environment, it is immersed in a phenomenological field of action that it understands before the inside-outside, subject-object distinction. This tacit knowledge precedes our objective consciousness of things: "Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a 'praktognosia', which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function'." (Merleau-Ponty, 1998: 164; engl. tr.: 162) To put it differently, human beings move in a network of relationships and not on the grid of fixed spatial coordinates. When Heidegger utilizes the concept of spatiality in *Being and Time*, it is basically a spatiality understood in existential and not physical terms, that is, it is a pragmatic and public living space, which refers to the sphere of action in which everyday life's activities are carried out and which is distinct from the physical, geometrical, and homogeneous space in which we simply measure the distance between objects. The spatiality of Dasein is the condition of possibility of space. To the extent that Dasein is being-in-the-world, it opens space and makes room for innerworldly entities. Space and time, in contrast with philosophical tradition, are not synthesized from the flow of experiences born here and now and anchored in the ego; instead, they have a public structure in which each artifact possesses a place for itself and carries out a concrete function: "*Space is neither in the subject nor is world in space. Rather, space is "in" the world since the being-in-the-world constitutive for Dasein has disclosed space.*" (Heidegger, 1986: 111; engl. tr.: 108) This means that the body is not a mere material thing that occupies a space, but rather it shows the horizon on which things always appear together interconnectedly. "The here of its actual factual location or situation never signifies a position in space, but the leeway of the range of totality of useful things taken care of nearby—a leeway that has been opened in directionality and de-distancing."

(Heidegger, 1986: 369; engl. tr.: 351) Then do the limits of bodily limit (*Leibgrenze*) and corporeal limit (*Körpergrenze*) overlap? The physical body's limit is the skin; the lived body, in contrast, extends beyond, with its movements and gestures: "The bodily limit and the corporeal limit are not quantitatively but rather qualitatively different from each other." (Heidegger, 1994: 112; engl. tr.: 86) When I point my finger at the door in front of me, my lived body does not end at my fingertip, that is to say, when I move, the horizon either moves farther away or comes closer, depending on my movement and activity. The limit of the lived body (*Leib*)—that is, the horizon formed by perception and gesture—is constantly changing inasmuch as we are "bodying forth" (*leiben*), inasmuch as we move in daily life's situations, while the physical limit always remains the same. Movements and gestures of the lived body produce constant change for our practical horizon of action. Things appear pre-reflectively when we "live our bodies", when we are "bodying forth": not in terms of an objective distance (e.g. the table is six feet away), nor in terms of geometric measurements (e.g. the table is two inches thick), but rather they initially present themselves in terms of a regional familiarity. Distance is not reduced to an external relationship between objects, but from a pre-objective involvement, from an a-thematic engrossment in the matters that keep us busy on a regular and daily basis. Therefore, "the limit of my bodying forth is the horizon of being within I sojourn." (Heidegger, 1994: 113; engl. tr.: 87) Despite this, there is the question of whether human beings are in space in the same way that things are. If not, how are human beings in space with regard to the lived body? In the specific case of a clock, I can grasp it with my hand and place it on top of the table. What happens in this case? Phenomenologically speaking, I perform a movement through which the clock is relocated to a different place. With this movement that I execute, I move my hand and I move the clock. Now then, is the movement of my hand and that of the clock the same? The relocation of the clock through the action of my hand is a curved movement that can be measured. What happens, then, with my hand? Let us submit for analysis the example of a student who rubs his forehead during one of my lectures. In this case I do not observe a change in the place and position of her or his hand, but instead I immediately understand that she or he is thinking about something complicated.⁵ How should we interpret this movement of the hand? As an expression perhaps? According to Heidegger, no, since that implies incorrectly interpreting the movement as an expression of something interior, rather than understanding the phenomenon of the lived body based on its relationship with other people.

Therefore, the difference lies mainly in the type of movement: in the case of the clock, it is a change of place, a moving through space; in the case of the hand, we are speaking of a gesture (*Gebärde*): "The term 'gesture' characterizes the movement as my bodily movement." (Heidegger, 1994: 116; engl. tr.: 89) What does *Gebärde* mean? Etymologically, it derives from *bären* ("to carry/bear"). *Gebären* also has the same origin as *bären*. The collective prefix *ge-* denotes "gathering, grouping, a collection of things," as in *Gebirge* ("mountain range"), *Gerede* ("gossip talk, rumours"), *Geschwätz* ("chatter, babble"), and *Geschwister* ("brothers and sisters, siblings"). From this point of view, *Gebärde* means "comportment", "a conducting of oneself" (*einSich-Betragen*). In philosophy, *Gebärde* is not limited to the meaning of "expression," but also characterizes all of human comportment as determined by its "being-in-the-world." In this sense, the living of one's body always belongs to the world. Moreover, it co-determines one's being-in-the-world, one's openness, and one's possession of the world. (Heidegger, 1994: 126; engl. tr.: 97) Every executed movement of my lived body that is understood as a gesture does not extend into an indifferent space; instead, comportment (*Betragen*) is always already maintained within a determined region that is open through the object and to which I am referred when I take up something in my hand. In addition to being a vehicle that mediates in our relationship with the world and being the subject of a primordial intentionality, the body also has expressive and meaningful ability. Obviously, it does not express itself through language signals, but by means of bodily gestures. As in the case of Merleau-Ponty, the movement of producing meaning is not typical and exclusive of language; on the contrary, meaning is expressed in the subject's action towards the world.

⁵ Regarding the movement of our own body, Merleau-Ponty points out that bodily movement anticipates the final situation; there is a germ of movement that only secondarily might develop into an objective run. Further, I move external objects with the help of my own body and move them from place to another. But my body is always with me; it comes with me wherever I go. Therefore, the limit of my lived body changes constantly through the change in the reach of my sojourn. In contrast, the limit of a corporeal thing does not change (see Merleau-Ponty, 1998: 106-110).

When I use chalk to write on the blackboard, I understand its meaning, when I cut meat with a knife, I understand its meaning, when I stop my car upon seeing the street officer raise his or her arm into a vertical position, I understand his or her gesture. Gestures, therefore, are movements with meaning. A gesture reveals an intentional comportment. Likely following the idea outlined by Max Scheler in his book *The Nature of Sympathy* (1913), Heidegger thinks that the meaning held by gestures is not understood by its similarity with meaning experienced internally; instead, the experience we have of others' anger or joy is already contained in their gestures. It could be said that we read the anger in another's gesture, obviously in a cultural context not too different from ours.⁶ The visible body has a special eloquence, by virtue of which an unobserved gesture has a requesting character—a questioning that elicits an answer. Another's gestures invite me to join in, and, in this joining, communication is achieved. Understanding gestures is dialogic and arises in a context of vital communication. Thus, for instance, it is phenomenologically evident when a person's blushing cheeks are due to rouge make-up, shame, a sudden temperature change, or an increase in blood pressure (Heidegger, 1994: 105-6; engl. tr.: 81). In our everyday coexistence we distinguish among these different types of blushing without any great problem. With that being said, what does Heidegger say regarding Dasein's sexuality? Very little. Furthermore, the few references to this question have often been interpreted incorrectly.

3. Dasein's Neutrality and Asexuality

Sartre was one of the first French phenomenologists to point out that "Heidegger does not make the slightest allusion to the body in his existential analytic, resulting in Dasein appearing to us as sexless." (Sartre, 1980: 433) Nevertheless, it is precisely this that is one of the main ontological features of Dasein. As determined by its constitutive openness to the world, Dasein does not refer to "man" or "woman" or their corresponding physiological attributes. In ontological terms, this openness is what makes corporeality and sexuality possible. As pointed out in *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, the lectures of the summer semester of 1928, exactly one year after the publication of *Being and Time*, Dasein is present there *before* any determination as "man" and "woman." In fact, "the peculiar *neutrality* of the term 'Dasein' is essential, because the interpretation of this being must be carried out prior to every factual concretion" (Heidegger, 1990: 171-2; engl. tr.: 136), this is to say, independent of its gender, class, religion, culture, or ethnicity. This neutrality also indicates that "Dasein is neither of the two sexes." (Heidegger, 1990: 172; engl. tr.: 136) One must not forget that the original purpose of Heidegger's analytic is none other than to articulate the fore-understanding that Dasein has of Being and not to develop a philosophical or ethical anthropology. For this reason, Heidegger does not use the word "man" or "person" but the neutral German term "Dasein."

3.1 Feminist Stance Regarding *Dasein's* Sexual Neutrality: the Gender/Sex Distinction

At first, it might seem strange to speak of Heidegger from the point of view of feminist theory, since its views on the meaning of Being are far from the real concerns of social, political, and ethical philosophy. At the beginning of the 1980s, the absence of the phenomenon of the body in Heidegger's thoughts was severely criticized.⁷ All the same, as Huntington comments, one could uphold the theory that the feminist appropriation of elements from Heidegger's thought is indirect, primarily through the influence of Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray (Huntington, 2001: 2, 6-9). It is worth recalling once more that Heidegger avoids a thematic discussion of the body since his analysis of human life centers on the ontological structures which make any significant bodily experience possible by virtue of its being-in-the-world. Moreover, these ontological structures, which we can also call conditions of possibility of any bodily experience, are asexual (*geschlechtlos*) and neutral (*neutral*), because they are more primary than the biological characteristics particular to men and women and more primary than any gender difference. Ever since Gayle Rubin's pioneering essay of 1975, many feminist philosophers have adopted the distinction between gender and sex (Rubin, 1984; Moi, 2005: 23-30). Sex has become a concept that describes the biological components that characterize men and women, while gender refers to the culturally constructed norms which are interpreted as masculine and feminine.

⁶ In Merleau-Ponty's opinion the body reaches its highest level of transcendence in expression. The body speaks throughout its gesture, it goes beyond itself by embracing the world and the others. For a detailed study of the expressive nature of the body, see Escribano (2004: 303-401).

⁷ It is generally accepted that Sandra Bartky was the first in discussing the possible affinities between Heidegger's philosophy and feminist theory (see Bartky, 1970: 368-381). Bartky focuses her criticism on the lack of social precision of human existence. On the other hand, in *Femininity and Dominations* she uses one of the fundamental concepts of *Being and Time*, namely disposedness. She pays special attention to the phenomenon of shame to describe the primary mode of women existence; a mood that defines how women feel in an androcentric society (see Bartky, 1990).

The category of sex tends to imply a universalist point of view in that it refers to the biological body as an invariable base; gender, in contrast, has a mainly anti-essentialist connotation in that social practices are not permanently fixed, but rather are determined by historical changes. Thus, feminists have long rejected the idea that biological differences between the sexes justify differences in social norms. Therefore, the problems of oppression and discrimination are not of biological nature. They are products of historically variable norms, practices, and institutions. This being said, to what extent does the sex-gender distinction correspond with Heidegger's conception of human existence understood as *Dasein*? Heidegger's reluctance to speak about *Dasein*'s sexuality should be understood based on his attempt to break down the classical metaphysics of substance. As has been previously pointed out, the individual is not a mere *res extensa*, a mere material body. The anatomical and biological characteristics of human beings are not crucial to the analytic of existence because such a materialistic approach does not pay attention to the question of what it means to be a "biological being". Interpreting human existence in materialistic and sexual terms means considering humans as things, but *Dasein* is a peculiar type of being. *Dasein* is not a static entity that is physically present there like a thing among other things; on the contrary, it is a dynamic being subjected to a constant process of fulfillment. Hence, it is a mistake to refer to *Dasein* in terms of a material body, as a physical thing, as a sexed being with biological properties which can be theoretically examined. Heidegger refers back to the everyday activities of human existence which make any theorization possible, including the one of the body and of sex.

From the perspective of the gender-sex difference, one could assert that Heidegger is critical of the essentialist category of sex. It is a mistake to interpret human beings in terms of a fixed and objective presence (*Anwesenheit*); instead, they are characterized by their "having to be" (*Zu-sein*) within the framework of the public norms that govern everyday life. In this context, the category of "gender" can be applied since this expresses precisely the social and cultural character of our constant process of self-interpretation. Nevertheless, the "There," the *Da* in *Dasein*, that is to say, the space of intelligibility, should remain sexless and neutral, since the "There" exists *before* we interpret ourselves in terms of gender practices, biological characteristics, religious preferences, and ethnic features. In the lectures of the winter semester of 1928/29, *Introduction to Philosophy*, we read: "In its essence, the entity we are, is neutral, (...) that is, it is neither masculine nor feminine: it is simply a sexual creature (*Geschlechtwesen*)." (Heidegger 2001: 152) This tension between a gendered *Dasein* and a neutral *Dasein* can only be relieved keeping in mind the philosophical program that is articulated in Heidegger's early work. *Dasein* is, in its factual existence, masculine or feminine. On this level, *Dasein* is a gendered creature that is part of a symbolic universe. As follows, these ontic and existentialistic classifications of each particular individual should be distinguished from the ontological and existential analysis that determines the constitutive structures of *Dasein*, regardless of its sex, social condition, religious affiliation, ethnic background, and cultural context. Therefore, we find ourselves facing two different, but interrelated, concepts of *Dasein*. On the one hand, *Dasein* is interpreted as factual—as a concrete being that embodies an activity or represents a role. Each individual—whether man or woman—is an instantiation of *Dasein*. On the other hand, *Dasein* should be understood as "Da-sein"—as the being where the "There" (*Da*) comes to manifestation. The emphasis is not on concrete activities and roles but rather on the "There" as a horizon of meaning and space of openness. The "There" is condition of possibility of our world understanding and of our own self-understanding. The purpose of *Dasein*'s analytic, as has already been asserted on different occasions, is to show the basic ontological and, by extension, neutral structures of *Dasein*.

Nevertheless, to accept public interpretation of things and people is problematic because it is guided by the acceptance of the prejudices of the social world into which we are thrown. Heidegger intends to go beyond the cultural classifications of man and woman with an interest to grasp the invariable structures which make it possible for each human being to give meaning to the world and, by extension, to itself. What is important to remember is that the structural conditions that comprise *Dasein* are asexual and neutral. *Dasein*, as thrown into an open space of meaning, not only *precedes* the particular characteristics and the concrete practices of individual human beings, but already always guides any interpretation that we can make about the world, making it possible that things appear as masculine and feminine. In contrast, the feminist perspective claims that, if the meaning of things is manifested in the "There," understood as a horizon of historically mediated social practices, that same horizon is already marked by androcentric criteria, favoring from the beginning a particular set of institutions and habits. Is perhaps the openness into which *Dasein* is thrown not already ordered into gender hierarchies?

This criticism is particularly sharp if we consider, as Heidegger maintains, that the origin of meaning is the "One" (*das Man*). In other words, our understanding of things is publicly ordered in an interconnected set of social relationships which determine beforehand possible ways of interpreting the world. Feminist criticisms generally agree with Heidegger that the understanding that we have of ourselves is not determined by biological differences but by the socio-cultural situation in which we live; however, they ask why Heidegger says nothing of the reigning social hierarchies and sexual asymmetries of this situation. As Iris Marion Young points out, these social practices and public networks of meaning into which we are born are patriarchal and embody a precise type of social domination. Modalities of feminine behavior are not of anatomical nor psychological origin, and much less due to a mysterious feminine essence; instead, their source is women's particular situation, as conditioned by the sexist oppression that contemporary society imposes (Marion Young, 1990: 153). Feminists cannot explain how Heidegger could overlook the fact that public patterns of gender domination are an essential part of the "public One." Keeping with this criticism, if the world is intelligible upon the basis of this "public one," it is correct to say that Dasein is not neutral, but rather marked for gender in a patriarchal order. In other words, if the "public One," as the generator of meaning, governs and regulates the possible ways of giving meaning to things— if this "One" favors masculine practices and speech, suppressing or undervaluing those which are not masculine—it is appropriate to say that Dasein is gendered. The neutral conception of Dasein ends up being still less problematic because it tends to equalize the sexes, ignoring differences in the feminine ways of understanding the world. Luce Irigaray agrees with Heidegger's idea that language opens the world historically. However, this historical song of language is not asexual but written in a masculine key (Irigaray, 1993: 35). Nevertheless, against this type of criticism, it is worth recalling once more, that to reduce the origin of meaning to the context of discursive practices is to disregard the background theory of Heidegger's program, that is, that temporality is the ultimate origin of all meaning. Moreover, the horizon of temporality is neutral because it is constitutive and ontologically precedes the "One" (Keller and Weberman, 1998: 369ff).

3.2 Gender and Neutrality of Time

There is strong evidence to support the theory that the discursive practices of the "One" act as the condition of possibility of meaning, as in the case of Hubert Dreyfus: "For Heidegger, the source of intelligibility of the world are everyday public practices, the only ones which make any understanding possible." (Dreyfus, 1991: 161) However, Dreyfus forgets that this interpretation is also two-sided, and, above all, that the analysis of Dasein's ontological structures (such as the "One," "falling" "anxiety," etc.) has an eminently preparatory character until we arrive at temporality as the primordial horizon of all understanding (Heidegger, 1986: 18-19, 351).⁸ Dasein should ultimately be understood in terms of temporality. As is known, Heidegger favors the future to the detriment of the present. Dasein's being moves between the past as thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) and the future as a projection (*Entwurf*). Hence, Dasein is defined as a thrown projection (*geworfener Entwurf*). Projecting itself towards the future, Dasein returns to its past, adopting the beliefs and practices into which it is thrown. This return to the past allows things to become significant for Dasein. This double movement of foreseeing the future and returning to the past determines the horizon on which things come into play in the present. The movement of the present is already rooted in this forward and backward reaching. Simply living in the present, without looking backward and forward, that is, remaining unaware of the past and future, is an indifferent way of being and, therefore, inauthentic way of existing. Inauthentic life is entrapped by the routine of daily obligations, lives hanging upon rumors, and is easily fascinated by any kind of novelty. However, rarely do we ask ourselves where all these things come from and where they lead us. In the end, the present dominates us through social roles, power relationships, and structures of public opinion which give the appearance of a comfortable and safe life. Only the moment of anxiety allows a break from the certainties of everyday life and opens the possibility for an authentic resolution (*Entschlossenheit*). The phenomena of singularization or individuation that accompany anxiety allow Dasein, as it navigates erratically through the sea of the One, to become aware of its shipwrecked condition and to decide to take the helm of its existence.⁹ The emphasis that Heidegger places on the present as a way of being anchored in conformism and prisoner to everyday obligations not only overlooks basic bodily necessities such as eating, sleeping, and drinking, but also overlooks face to face relationships, the mother-child relationship, and sexual impulses.

⁸ For further information see Aho (2009: 62ff).

⁹ In this regard, Caputo and others have highlighted that the concept of "resolution" is not neutral but governed by masculinity values such as strength, heroism, and virility (Caputo, 2001: 154).

If one focuses exclusively on the instrumental treatment of the working world and ignores the aspects of the pains, the joys, and the sorrows of the present, it is difficult to explain the origin of desire, sexuality, and emotion. Paradoxically, Heidegger's criticism of the present holds great relevance for the concerns of feminist theory. As Judith Butler argues, if "feminist theory aims to distort the sexuality of those objectifying ideologies which freeze sexual relations into structures of dominance" (Butler, 1989: 86), perhaps Heidegger's thoughts on temporality have some explanatory potential. We have already seen that immersion in the everyday routine of the world results in a life oriented toward the present which increasingly determines our understanding of reality. Consequently, this temporal dimension of the present ends up cancelling all consciousness of contingency. As Butler comments in relation to Merleau-Ponty, we, being trapped in the present, have the tendency to repeat the beliefs and the prejudices of our socio-cultural tradition, by which we remain confined to a horizon of homogeneity that does not recognize the abysmal structure of time. For Heidegger, primordial temporality is abismatic, that is, it keeps open the possibilities of other horizons which are not subject to the metaphysics of the present. It explains why an individual always has the possibility to free herself or himself from her or his initial fall into the anonymity of the public structures which govern the present.

From a feminist perspective, the temporal extasis of the past and future contain the possibility to think outside the margins of essentialism. The recovery of past and future horizons allows for the opening of new socio-cultural horizons which are able to overcome gender dichotomies. It is true that initially each individual is subject in advance to a certain factual corporeality and sexuality in his or her concrete thrownness and coexistence with others before having decided for him or herself what body and what sex he or she wishes to be: "Factualbodiliness and sexuality are in each case explanatory only to the extent that a factual Dasein's being-with is pushed precisely into this particular factual direction, where other possibilities are faded out or remain closed." (Heidegger, 1990: 175; engl. tr.: 139) Nonetheless, temporality is the ultimate condition of possibility of transcending all particular determinations of life, both authentic and inauthentic, including those which are marked for sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, and class. Hence, we can say that temporality is the original source of all intelligibility and the horizon of all possibility: "The intrinsic possibility of transcendence [and, by extension, of the openness to the world, J.A.] is time, as primordial temporality." (Heidegger, 1990: 252; engl. tr.: 195) In this sense, the horizon of temporality is *neutral* with regard to sex, precisely because it precedes it and makes an understanding of sexual difference possible. Because of this, Heidegger speaks of metaphysical neutrality through which Dasein is not determined beforehand, but that encloses the possibility of all determination (Heidegger, 1990: 172; engl. tr.: 137). Heidegger recognizes that on an ontic and phenomenological level we are sexed creatures, that every individual lives in a body, but we have already observed that his research aims to go beyond the body and the hierarchies based on sexual differences in order to establish the formal conditions of meaning and refer back to the sphere of ontological possibility of choice and freedom. Paraphrasing Simone de Beauvoir's famous quote, Dasein is not born as a man or a woman but rather becomes a man or a woman through its actions, decisions, and deliberations.

Heidegger's defense of Dasein's sexual neutrality should be situated within the framework of his methodology, which aims to think of human beings as existing in a holistically structured world. This method of holistic analysis allows going beyond the classic body-mind problem, where perception and cognition stop being the main sources of knowledge. Dasein transcends things in their empirical distinctive features in that it has a fore-understanding of their being as a constitutive element of its existence as being-in-the-world. Dasein is fundamentally indeterminate –it is an open field of thrown possibilities. This means that, despite being personified in sexed bodies as a typical feature of its mundane existence, Dasein's sexuality can take on multiple meanings and be shaped in different ways beyond socially established gender differences. In this regard, Dasein is neutral. Heidegger's insistence that Dasein is neutral implies that gender does not define everything that one is and suggests that an authentic relationship with one's own body includes a moment of transcendence which counters one's fall into the conventional ways of understanding the body and sex. For this reason, this moment allows one to distance oneself critically from gender conventionalisms and think on new forms of existence and coexistence. An interesting and fruitful connection can be established here with the notions of "performativity" and "chiasm" developed by Butler: "Understanding performativity as a renewable action without clear origin or end suggests that speech is finally constrained neither by its specific speaker nor its originating context. Not only defined by social context, such speech is also marked by its capacity to break with context."

Thus, performativity has its own social temporality in which it remains enabled precisely by the contexts from which it breaks." (Butler, 1997: 40) With this conception of performativity comes the intention to avoid falling into excessively constructivist standpoints which reduce the body to a simple discursive reflection. The speech act cannot entirely grasp the materiality of the body. The relationship between speech and body is that of a chiasm: body and speech constantly cross over each other but do not always meet up. The possibility of this non-meeting, this excess, this unstable territory, is what allows setting in motion a strategy of re-signification. Therefore, internalizing social roles requires time. Butler is of the opinion that the meaning given to the body can both be produced and become unstable in the course of its repetition. Thus, in each act of repetition, each iteration, there exists the possibility of escape, of not complying with or of rejecting a norm, that is, questioning the validity of it, however much it has been repeated previously (Butler, 1993: 2-9). In conclusion, there exists a space of uncertainty which allows for the incorporation of corrective practices. The existence of this space of uncertainty allows for the reexamination of the hegemonic power of regulatory ideals (Butler, 1997: 135-48, 154-9). The body, though undeniably codified partly by the institutional rules of all society, is also capable of provoking certain temperaments in the individual, of forming elements of one's character which escape the strict control of socio-cultural categories, of disputing society's prevailing values. This process of re-signification is only possible on the horizon of temporality.

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