

TACIT TACT

– THE HIERARCHY, UNAVOIDABILITY, AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF SENSUAL METAPHORS BY GADAMER

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One of the most exciting aspects of both hermeneutics and so-called “non-hermeneutic” trends is that they cannot and do not want to avoid demonstrating their approaches with metaphors borrowed from the fundamental aspects of sensation. The considerable differences in the hierarchy of the organs of sense-perception (especially hearing and touching), however, are not negligible.

If one considers soma-aesthetics as the extensive art of correspondences between bodily experiences and thought (Shusterman 2003, 478–485), one not only can regard Gadamer’s hermeneutics from a critical point of view, but also make effective assignations by following Gadamer’s own train of thought, without confuting *Truth and Method*. Soma-aesthetics could do it, paradoxically, with a criticism which does not bring Gadamer to book for his relationship to sensual perception or to the role the body plays in aesthetic experience, but which interrogates his use of language. Thus, soma-aesthetics could avoid listing the (aforementioned) shortcomings – (which are consistent within the textual context of *Truth and Method*, since they are irrelevant from a hermeneutical point of view) and instead could raise questions that yield highly constructive readings of the text.

In this case, analytic soma-aesthetics should concentrate not so much on the *aesthetic potential of the body* (Shusterman 2003, 469), but rather on the bodily potential of language, which is at least as complex a question as the former regarding body-centered thinking.

It is of crucial importance to keep in mind that all the senses Gadamer brings into his argumentation are

metaphorical – as opposed to many non-hermeneutical approaches. Thus, from the viewpoint of *body consciousness, awareness, mindfulness* (see Shusterman 2008), it would be hard to interrogate the text, but we can ask questions regarding the consciousness, awareness and mindfulness of its sensual metaphors, regarding how the metaphors of sight, hearing and touch included in its language help him construct or further his argumentation, as well as how they undermine it.

While investigating Gadamer’s metaphors, I also make use of the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics, since the main concern of this line of research is figurative language and the ways in which embodiment underlies it. According to the cognitivist tradition (see the ‘cognitive turn’, initiated mainly by the work of Lakoff and Johnson), a certain set of cognitive mechanisms, such as metaphor and metonym, inevitably underlie our thinking and understanding. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), it is hardly possible to speak about the non-concrete aspects of our lives without figurative language. Over the years, several approaches to the use of figurative language and its functions in different discourses have emerged. Metaphorization became a main part of interest, especially highly schematic, general level metaphors that are deeply entrenched in our thinking and conceptual system and therefore give rise to a large number of specific-level metaphors, metaphors that are highly “influenced by specific subdomains of [sensual] experience” (Traugott 2009, 156, 169) because of the essentiality and the, let’s say, relative universality of these experiences.¹ Regarding the senses and sensual metaphors, cognitive linguists

¹ „Within the theory of conceptual metaphor, the claim has been put forward that metaphors and metonymies are grounded in bodily experience, hence the term embodiment (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987). Since the basic idea behind conceptual metaphor theory is that abstract terms are understood by using more concrete concepts, the body as such appears to be a primary source for this mapping. [...] The human body is an ideal source domain for metaphors, since, for us, it is clearly delineated and (we believe) we know it well”. (Kövecses 2002, 16)

claim that in most languages terms for seeing and hearing become intellectual terms for understanding, while “the sense of touch is not only linked to general sense: perception, but is also closely tied to emotional feeling” (Sweetser 1991, 37). According to Sweetser, this is because touch requires actual physical contact with the thing sensed, while vision and hearing are “distant senses” (Sweetser 1991, 44). In *Anthropologie der Sinne* [Anthropology of the Senses], Helmuth Plessner also refers to the fact that in the figurative language of cognition and understanding (and, I think, of making someone understand) there is a hierarchy among the senses. The categories of visuality predominate in thinking because of the false notion of the objectivity of vision, which is due to the distance of the object, whereas the sense of touch should have primacy, since in the case of touch our sensation of ourselves and our sensation of the other are interdependent (Plessner 2003)².

Another important aspect is that the text in question (that is, *Truth and Method*) was planned and written. Metaphorization therefore functions differently³ in it than it does in other (spoken, unplanned) discourses. From the perspective of this inquiry, the most significant particularity of the written, planned metaphors is awareness – the fact that Gadamer deliberately chose them as “master metaphors” for his theory.⁴ Then the question is the following: how do these sensual metaphors function or how does Gadamer want them to function, and what are the “metaphorical consequences” he cannot keep under control.

According to Gadamer, Being that can be understood is

language: “there is nothing that is not available to hearing through the medium of language” (Gadamer 2006: 458). Thus, he works with the dialogicity of interpretation and uses metaphors involving the exaggerated sense of hearing. Gadamer also lays particular emphasis on the thought that being addressed by Being (*belonging* [Zubehörigkeit]) is not optional: “It is not just that he who hears is also addressed, but also that he who is addressed must hear whether he wants to or not” (Gadamer 2006: 458), or: „[...] wer angeredet wird, hören muss, oder will oder nicht” (Gadamer 2010: 466) – so, *hören muss*: ‘must listen to’, not *schweigen muss*: ‘must become silent’. As a matter of fact, Gadamer’s intention of improving the strongest metaphor of “the unavoidable” is not fulfilled here, since he is simply mistaken when he supposes that hearing cannot be avoided.⁵ Just as we can cause blindness (real or metaphorical), we can just as easily cause deafness. The only sense that we cannot neutralize completely, the sense our perception of which is entirely independent of our will and the sense that we cannot de-activate, is our sense of touch.

Interestingly, in spite of the absolute primacy of hearing as a metaphor in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer does not eliminate tactility and its universality and metaphorical potential entirely, but he makes it part of his argumentation in a more mediated way. However, the fact that he speaks of tact, not of touch [or tactility] does not eliminate sensuality from his metaphorical repertoire entirely. It means merely that language itself has already made a metaphorization: the relationship between the sense of touch and the ability of tact is at least as clear as the one implied etymologically between the sense of sight and the ability of insight.

Among the guiding concepts of humanism, Gadamer devotes pages to descriptions of *tact* [der Takt], which functions in the human sciences as a “special sensitivity

² Which corresponds to the simultaneity of human body as Leib-Sein/Körper-Haben (Plessner 2003, see also Shusterman 2008, 3).

³ In his 3-way model of functional meaning, Halliday (1994) calls it the ideational function. Boyd (1993) also wrote on metaphors that are useful in the articulation of new theories.

⁴ To some extent, of course, he needs to adopt the metaphors of the tradition of philosophy that he follows.

⁵ Nota bene, Plessner tends to arrive at the same conclusion.

and sensitiveness” (Gadamer 2006, 14), but “not simply a feeling and unconscious, but is at the same time a mode of knowing and a mode of being” (Gadamer 2006, 15) that includes *Bildung*.⁶ He concludes as follows: “[...] this sense is not simply part of one’s natural equipment, we rightly speak of aesthetic or historical consciousness, and not properly of sense.” (Gadamer 2006, 15) Later, however, Gadamer remarks that this cultivated consciousness has in fact more the character of a sense, but – as opposed to our natural sense, e. g. the sense of sight – it is *universal* [allgemeiner Sinn], not restricted to a particular field. (Gadamer 2006, 16)

For Gadamer, the main particularity of tact is that it is “tacit and unformulable” and it “helps one to preserve distance” (Gadamer 2006, 15) – that is, *tact* according to Gadamer is a metaphor from the field of tactility characterized, however, from the point of view of audible language and hearing. It is even more striking that Gadamer does not later return to the concept of tact. He never relates it to the notion of ‘being addressed by tradition’ or the hearing-centred argumentation of *Truth and Method*. Whereas Gadamer’s metaphorical statement on the unavoidable being-addressed and listening-to, – which demand of unavoidability, as explained earlier in this paper, the sense of hearing itself does not meet – can only remain relevant if the unavoidable sense of touch (in the form of tact as cultivated consciousness) as disposition contributes to it. The tacitness of tact is what guarantees the compulsory force of “hören muss”, of “must listen

⁶ On the remaining bodily connotations, see: “Even what earlier usage, with reference to physical appearance, called “‘perfection of form’ is not so much the last state of a development as the mature state that has left all development behind and makes possible the harmonious movement of all the limbs. It is precisely in this sense that the human sciences presuppose that the scholarly consciousness is already formed and for that very reason possesses the right, unlearnable, and inimitable tact that envelops the human sciences’ form of judgment and mode of knowledge as if it were the element in which they move.” (Gadamer 2006, 13–14)

to”. In the disposition of tact, the one who is addressed is already, *a priori* tacit, mute, passive – is in the disposition to listen.

Thus, although in *Truth and Method* ‘being addressed by tradition’ and listening to tradition is passive and unavoidable, its unavoidability rests on the unavoidability of tact as its disposition. Otherwise, the whole metaphorical framework of the sense of hearing could not fulfil Gadamer’s intentions, since he credits this sense with a particularity (namely, unavoidability) that it does not possess.⁷

Gadamer leaves the two metaphors unconnected despite their potential to strengthen each other and help him attain the goal he has set for his inquiry. As a consequence of the unawareness and inattention to the metaphorical working of these basic-level sensual metaphors, being misaligned, they begin to work against each other. It seems to be an illuminating example to demonstrate the double-edged nature of sensual metaphors in philosophical texts: as master-figures of theories, they provide strong, foundational and almost universal semantic ground, hence they are convincing and easy to understand. Yet, their transparency is not so evident, since at a certain point their bodily determined

⁷ What Gadamer calls tact is quite similar to another disposition which has a long tradition dating back to medieval philosophy. In his *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger turns to a disposition that was marked as ‘*caritas*’ by Augustine in the process of interpreting the Scriptures: love is the disposition that is able to let something be, i.e. preserve something in its own essence. “To embrace a »thing« or a »person« in their essence means to love them, to favour them. [...] Such favouring [*Mögen*] is the proper essence of enabling [*Vermögen*], which not only can achieve this or that but also can let something essentially unfold in its provenance, that is, let it be.” (Heidegger 1998: 241) It is worth recalling the reasoning of Sweetser and her ideas regarding why metaphors of touch – as opposed to metaphors of vision, for example – are rare in intellectual semantic domains: because in touch the physical perception is inseparable from the domain of emotions. In the aforementioned dispositions (tact, love, favouring), emotion seems to play the main role.

nature works against arbitrary abstract thinking. So without strict consistency and comprehensive awareness of their implications, they begin to live their own lives in the body of text – as decomposing bacteria.

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