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AN INTERVAL OF GRACE: THE TIME OF ETHICS

Abstract

In the preliminary introduction, we point to Schopenhauer's ethics and philosophy of religion and to his peculiar understanding of the notion of freedom as grace. On the basis of this constellation, we then start with three Meadian analyses. We first introduce the topics of space and touch in the discussion of Mead's philosophy of intersubjectivity and the related problem of an ethical temporality. We try to demonstrate the importance of the so called "interval" in ethics, understood in a temporal as well as spatial sense. For this purpose, we offer three Meadian meditations by reading (in both a philosophical and a religious way) Ludwig Feuerbach's, Jean-Louis Chrétien's, and Watsuji Tetsurō's texts and by relating them to Mead's original inception of the philosophy of intersubjectivity. Finally, by reading Benjamin Libet's Mind Time in an ethical register, we argue for a "theological" extension of Mead's philosophy also by indicating the nature of the ethical "interval" and the related phenomenon of ethical temporality as grace.

"Yet, as Aristotle shows, the interval is never abolished, only forgotten. There always remains an intervening body between our flesh and what it touches, a three-dimensional layer of air or water" (Chrétien 2004, pp. 87f).

"This interval – and this medium – is first of all nature, as it remains left to itself: air, water, earth, and sun, as fire and light. Being par excellence – matter of the transcendental" (Irigaray 2008, p. 19).

"Libet's work has focused on temporal relations between neural events and conscience. He is famous in part for discovering that we unconsciously decide to act well before we think we've made the decision to act" (S.M. Kosslyn, *Foreword*, in Libet 2004, p. x).

1. Introduction

In my previous analyses of ethical gestures I have tried to reflect upon, in my opinion, one of the most important problems in ethics, namely, the constitution of an ethical

interiority. On this issue, I have first written two papers on Schopenhauer, discussing the role of body in his metaphysical conception of ethics. I have also brought Schopenhauer's thought closer to American pragmatism, to James' radical empiricism specifically. Why Schopenhauer? Allow me to briefly outline my interpretation. In his *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer writes the following:

“With these allusions to the metaphysics of ethics I must rest content, although an important step remains to be taken. But this presupposes that a further step be taken in *ethics* itself, which I could not do, because the highest aim of ethics is limited to jurisprudence and moral philosophy in Europe, and here no one knows, or indeed will admit, what is beyond these” (Schopenhauer 1998, p. 214).

Usually we think that for Schopenhauer, the ethics of compassion and sympathy (and thus, a kind of pre-critical intersubjective ethics) can only be affirmed metaphysically by acknowledging the Will in the world and its total denial in ourselves through the ascetic practice (i.e. the *quietening* of the will, which means surpassing the ego(t)istic will in ourselves). As a result, I realize that the others are actually the same as me and thus feel compassion with their suffering. But in this metaphysical model (designed in a clear anti-Kantian manner) there is a lacuna: namely, the body felt in its immediacy is for Schopenhauer the first object in the epistemological constitution of the self as will. My body is to me, paradoxically, the first external object. This is clearly traceable in the fourth book of *The World as Will and Representation*, where we are faced with the following ethical paradox: *in the moment* before we feel that the other has been wronged or before we act compassionately towards the other (i.e. “see” or “recognize” their pain) we *always already* feel the “secret presentiment” (*geheime Ahndung*) inside (our body) – as a “sting of conscience” (*Gewissensbiß*). When I realize that the others are the same as me, I already share in their pain. This suffering is “wholly direct and even instinctive (*instinktartig*).” (Schopenhauer 1969, p. 163) And ultimately, this is to Schopenhauer the exact essence of freedom, which is again understood as *grace*.

Now, some recent developments in scholarship devoted to G.H. Mead's philosophy have raised his thought to an equal standing in relation to other key philosophers, not only in American pragmatism but also in the context of Western philosophical tradition. Besides the undisputed role that Mead's thought has played in social sciences, it is clear that his philosophy has much to offer with regard to some key contemporary epistemological and ethical problems. Erkki Kilpinen, for example, has recently convincingly argued that Mead would need to be recognized as the forerunner of Lakoff and Johnson's philosophical project (*Philosophy in the Flesh*, 1999), calling Mead an *empirically responsible philosopher*. With his and other similar attempts, Mead's philosophy has become a part of the epistemological tradition dealing with the embodied mind. Others still have read Mead in an intercultural key or discussed some interesting comparative possibilities concerning the attunement of the body or the mind-body problem (e.g. Steve Odin in his paper on Mead in “Philosophy of East and West”, 42 (3/1992), or philosophers using Shigenori Nagatomo's thought for their philosophies). But Mead's most important contribution to philosophy is undoubtedly his theory of intersubjectivity. In my presentation, I wish to offer three epistemological meditations on these Meadian themes.

In one of my previous analyses of Mead (Škof 2015), I offered an interpretation of ethical temporality in Mead. I elaborated on the temporality of gesture and tried to approach the problem of intersubjectivity by relating Mead's philosophy to Kierkegaard and Derrida's concepts of subjectivity, interiority, and time. I argued that only by reflecting upon the inner logic of ethical temporality we can balance the inner structure of his thought, which can be done precisely by securing the ethical interval between *interiority* as a philosophical core of Mead's philosophy and the role that *exteriority* and the social self played in various psychological or sociological interpretations of his thought. In the present attempt, I would like to further develop this argument by introducing into the discussion about Mead's philosophy of intersubjectivity the topics of *space* and *touch*. For this purpose I will offer three Meadian meditations by reading Ludwig Feuerbach, Jean-Louis Chrétien and Watsuji Tetsurō's texts and by relating them to Mead's original inception of the philosophy of intersubjectivity. I will try to demonstrate the importance of an interval in ethics, both in the temporal and spatial senses. In that, I will also refer to Benjamin Libet's book *Mind Time*, a fascinating account on the epistemological gap or interval, which deserves our attention. Finally, I will argue for a "theological" extension in Mead's original constellation by indicating the analogy or nature of the interval as love, compassion, or *grace*.

Much like Mead's role used to be underemphasised by the tradition of philosophy, Ludwig Feuerbach, too, was long considered a transitional philosopher to whom many authors ascribed significance for the later development of certain philosophical topics, such as criticism of religion, materialism, sensibility, etc., but to whom the Western tradition, nevertheless, did not wish to award a place of honour among other philosophical giants of the West. However, with the epistemological pre-eminence of *skin* and *touch* and his original philosophy of sensibility, Feuerbach paved the way towards the first Western theory of intersubjectivity. In the present analysis I will delineate the epistemological space of sensitivity in Feuerbach and compare it to Mead's genesis of an intersubjective self – in terms of gestures and as based on the primacy of "contact experience" in Mead. In his "phenomenology" of gesture, Mead ascribes great importance to the hand, which also opens interesting possibilities of interpreting him as a "haptic philosopher" (a remark made by his student David L. Miller; note also an elaboration of "hand" in Heidegger – as a gesture, carrying out the bodily-felt dimensions of meaning, as David Kleinberg-Levin asserts).

On the other side, there is Jean-Louis Chrétien, who in his *Call and Response* (1992) deals precisely with the bodily scheme as proposed by some interpreters of Mead. Chrétien's epistemological credo ("I never start by saying 'I', I start by being 'thou-ed' by the world"), together with his rehabilitation of touch (and space) is what I find to be a most interesting possibility today for extending both Feuerbachian and Meadian concepts of self to the contemporary philosophy of intersubjectivity. But Chrétien, in the ethical line of his argument, also mentions a related "nothingness" of self as a possibility for negating the old Biblical saying "I am, and there is no one besides me" (*Isaiah* 47:10). While here, both in his concept of touch as well as nothingness of the self, interesting intercultural possibilities open, it is through Watsuji Tetsurō's thought that I intend to eventually show the importance of the concept of *aidagara* ("relatedness",

“betweenness”) and climate, interpreted both as space *and* touch/contact, for the understanding of Mead’s philosophy.

2. *Coming to the Stage of Ethics*

Let me begin my reflection with a highly interesting citation from *Kakyo*, Zeami’s most important work on Japanese aesthetics. Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443) was a Japanese aesthetician, actor and playwright, influenced by Zen. *Kakyo* is his important work on the essence of Noh theatre. Symbolically, a reflection on theatre can, in my opinion, represent the essence of our intersubjective relations. The citation reads as follows:

“When [the actor] enters stage in a *sarugaku* [performance] and begins the [opening] speech or *issei* [passage], there will be a peak for that moment. [Too] early is wrong. [Too] late will also be wrong.

To being with, [the actor] leaves the greenroom, walks onto the *hashigakari*, [the bridge connecting the backstage to the main stage,] and stops; he [then] takes in all directions, and he should speak just when the audience holds with anticipation the thought, ‘There, he’s going to speak!’ This is ‘the opportune moment [that] corresponds to the feeling [of the audience]’, whereat [the actor] speaks after having caught the spirit of the audience. If this opportune moment is even a little bit late, the spirit of the audience will once again relax, and when he begins to recite after that, it will not correspond to everyone’s feeling. This opportune moment is, simply, [a reflection of] the [receptive] *ch’i* of the spectators. What is called ‘the opportune moment that is the *ch’i* of the spectators’ is a peak that the actor perceives by his intuition. This is the critical moment when [the actor] draws everyone’s rapt attention just to this state of concentration. It is one of the [most] important moments of a given day[’s performance]” (Zeami 1982, pp. 461f.).

This paragraph of Zeami is extraordinary: it brings to the fore the most important elements of the intersubjective and gestural conversation I wish to analyse in this presentation: the threshold between the Noh actor and audience (me and other(s) in Meadian terms), indicating the conversational (breath-)space (*aidagara* in Watsuji, *air* and *water* in Aristotle’s *On the Soul*, 423a 22¹ and, as we will see, in Chrétien) between them, and, importantly – in tune with Zen philosophy –, the role of *breath* in this process. For a Noh actor it is decisive to appear on stage precisely at the moment when his audience would expect him to appear – and raise his voice. He has to come to the stage and raise his voice accordingly to the “spirit of the audience” (German *Gemeingefühl*). This points at temporal as well as spatial problems of all intersubjective relations: if he is too late,

¹ “Let us assume that every body has depth, i.e. has three dimensions, and that if two bodies have a third body between them they cannot be in contact with one another; let us remember that what is liquid is not independent of body and must be or contain water, and that if two bodies touch one another under water, their touching surfaces cannot be dry, but must have water between, viz. the water which wets their bounding surfaces; from all this it follows that in water two bodies cannot be in contact with one another. The same holds of two bodies in air – air being to bodies in air precisely what water is to bodies in water – but the facts are not so evident to our observation, because we live in air, just as animals that live in water would not notice that the things which touch one another in water have wet surfaces. The problem, then, is: does the perception of all objects of sense take place in the same way, or does it not; e.g. taste and touch requiring contact (as they are commonly thought to do), while all other senses perceive over a distance?” (Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 423a 22–423b 4; Engl. transl.: Aristotle 1984, p. 673).

only for a moment, the common atmosphere/collective mood is lost. If he is there too early, again, the link with the audience is interrupted or broken. The actor must be a master of this *threshold*: he must know/sense intuitively, in his interiority and from the *breaths* and *hearts* of the audience, the exact time-space of his vocal appearance – a vocal gesture that, of course, is always an intersubjective or social act already.

Now, this short paragraph of Zeami shows the essence of what I understand as a fundamental layer of all intersubjective relations and especially ethics: the threshold (in theological-ethical terms, it will later be related to grace) as our time-space-between, as based on bodily signs in the course of our contact experience. We know that in Mead's philosophy from *Mind, Self and Society*, our body is itself a bridge to the other. We are also "reading the meaning of the conduct of other people, when, perhaps, they are not aware of it [...] just the glance of an eye, the attitude of the body [...]" (Mead 1967, p. 14)². But the bridge is always already a threshold that we need to address, both by intuition and cognition. Mead himself points to the first (pre-cognitive) layer in his 1914 *Lectures in Social Psychology*, in the chapter *Imitation and Imagination*, when he states that we can discern various bodily signs in ourselves/our self, which can help us first establish the threshold or difference between the ego and the alteri, and then also bridge the gap to the other – such as an "organic sensation, cyclopean eye, feeling in the throat that accompanies articulation, kinaesthetic and visceral ideas [...]" (Miller 1982, p. 65). All these elements are in the closest proximity to similar empirico-organic or process philosophies and theologies of our age. But their first predecessor was Feuerbach. Let us now first take a closer look into his philosophy.

3. *Constitution of the Other in Feuerbach, Chrétien and Watsuji, as related to Mead's Conversation of Gestures*

Now, through some recent scholarship on Mead it has become clear that his philosophy is complementary to the field of embodied cognition or embodied mind. Moreover, in the *Introduction* to his already mentioned 1914 and 1927 class lectures, D.L. Miller calls Mead both a process philosopher and, even more importantly, a haptic philosopher³. In relation to the concept of the so-called "contact experience" in Mead, this is of great importance for my analysis. Namely, in this line of reasoning, we can easily think Mead's original constitution of the conversation of gestures in the language of the philosophy of skin (Feuerbach), touch (Chrétien) and the betweenness of persons (Watsuji; also a climate or *jūdo*). But even more importantly, all these reflections inaugurate a completely different layer in the relation between the "I" and the "me", between my self and the selves of the others, which now constitutes my social self. As K.J. Booth (2013, p. 137) argues, in this process "there must be a basic level of consciousness that is developmentally prior to taking the attitude of the other and that develops into self-consciousness" (here it would be interesting to point to B. Libet's experiments, but I will

² See also n. 9. On this aspect see W. Bergmann and G. Hoffmann's (1985) chapter *G.H. Mead und die Tradition der Phänomenologie*, p. 110.

³ I am indebted to Roman Madzia for kindly reminding me of this remark (on "haptic" see Miller's *Introduction* (1982, pp. 12 and 22)).

elaborate on them later). He refers to Shigenori Nagatomi's well-known distinction between the subject-body and the object-body, where the former is the body in the sense of epistemic centre of our consciousness. We can acknowledge this as a basic postulate for securing the place of *interiority* in our social selves. But what kind of logic constitutes this interiority? At this point, one step further has to be taken. We know that for Mead both attitude and gesture are fully embodied. But how does Mead, being a haptic philosopher, understand our intersubjective relations between embodied individuals or bodies that *touch* one another? I wish now to take a detour through three other philosophers and present three meditations on a Meadian theme only to be able to return to Mead and try to offer some answers to this question.

a) *Ludwig Feuerbach*

I have mentioned Schopenhauer at the beginning of this paper. His role in the history of philosophy has often been regarded as transitional, and the same can be said of Ludwig Feuerbach. But there is a more important similarity between the two that also distinguishes them from other mainstream idealistic philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries (Berkeley and Hume, Fichte, Kant and Hegel, but not Schelling). The role of the body in the constitution of the world of representation in Schopenhauer has been explained earlier.

According to Hans Joas (1985, p. 2), Mead is “the most important theorist of intersubjectivity between Feuerbach and Habermas.” But is there an even more substantive link between Feuerbach and Mead? Feuerbach's theory of intersubjectivity is not defined in “Meadian” terms, of course. But there are two important facts I wish to discuss: the very constitution of the other, on the one side, and the role of the body/skin, on the other. Analogous to Mead's constitution of the intersubjective/social self via “I” and “me”, is Feuerbach's statement, at the end of *Principles of Philosophy of Future*, that the true dialectic is posited not as a monologue of a solitary thinker to himself, but as a continuous dialogue between “I” and “Thou”. Moreover, Feuerbach bases his philosophy of sensibility on the elements of Nature. To these he adjoins the human being as another element of Nature, along with organs or body parts (eyes, head, heart, stomach, sexual organs) among which, in the preeminent position as the fundamental organ of perception, appears none other than the *skin*. Feuerbach as a haptic philosopher? Perhaps – for the philosophy of sensibility (or rather sensitivity) begins in the body, especially in the skin/touch. In an exceptional passage from his 1841 work entitled *Some Comments on the “Beginning of Philosophy” of Dr J.F. Reiff*, Feuerbach states the following:

“Through the body, the Self is not the Self, but rather an object. Being-in-the-body means being-in-the-world. So many senses – so many pores. The self is nothing other than the *porous* self.”⁴

The porous nature of our self now indicates something extremely important: our self (which is basically understood as the sentient being) is only constituted objectively or socially through its fundamental intersubjective act: just like we depend epistemologically

⁴ For citations and elaboration on this see my *Breath of Proximity* (Škof 2015, p. 78).

on Nature (the role of elements and sensitivity), we *depend* ethically-socially on others. Feuerbach adds something else to this constellation: it is precisely and only through our intersubjective and social acts that we experience something infinitely bigger than we and our finite selves are: which is *love* (or *grace*)⁵. This excess of love in Feuerbach is precisely the missing link of all previous ethics: the interval of love/grace – as already shown by Schopenhauer and now posited by Feuerbach for the first time in the history of philosophy – as an intersubjective act. Löwith reminds us that even before I am aware, “I have already left *Nature*, the *unconscious*, founded on the *Dasein* of the Other” (Löwith 1976, p. 49).

To wind up this short reflection: in my book on intersubjectivity I have shown that there exists a profound proximity between Feuerbach and process philosophy or theology. Carol Christ, a process-oriented thinker, reflects upon our intersubjective/social relations as follows:

“In the process view, *the world is a web of changing individuals interacting with and affecting each other, co-creating the world. Relationships are the building blocks of life. In them we grow and develop.* In them we experience the joy of living. In them we are traumatized and suffer. Without them, we would not be. Personal relationships are embedded in a web of structural relationships that shape societies and cultures. *The world is social through and through.* When others are suffering, we suffer. When others are happy, we feel their joy. [...] If the air we breathe is clean, we may breathe more deeply. If it is poisoned, we may grasp for breath, cough, and eventually become ill” (Christ 2003, pp. 69ff.; *my emphases*).

We are now close to what I later refer to as the so-called riddle in the ethics of sympathy, based on our observations. But I have to take another step – towards the reflection on touch in the philosophy of Jean-Louis Chrétien.

b) *Jean-Louis Chrétien*

If we insist on the significance of contact experience in Mead, and put Feuerbach’s theory of sensibility (skin, sense organs, and nature) *qua* intersubjectivity into an *epoché* for a moment, then Chrétien’s philosophy of contact/touch as a key novelty in recent phenomenology (and philosophy in general) is of great importance for any constitution of intersubjective relations. Firstly, for Chrétien, we only live to respond – to the other, to our closest environment, and to God. In this, for him, the body is the highest representation of the spirit. But the most important of all experiences is the tactile/haptic experience, or touch. In this constellation, the call, our voice, our conscious response and act, always comes too late, or in Chrétien’s words:

“Does the call, upon which we have meditated at such length in our preceding chapters, not indeed always come too late, if it finds us already constituted without it, before it, in the silence of a sensing that is originally turned toward the self, even when the self is affected by another?” (Chrétien 2004, p. 84).

⁵ For this reason, Joas is probably not perfectly accurate in his statement that Feuerbach in his thought is only encountering the other in a *contemplative* way (Joas 1985, p. 13). I think that the constitution of intersubjectivity in Feuerbach already opens a path towards practical ethics, which, of course, is cosmologically underpinned. But Joas is certainly right in pointing at the corporeality of subjects, being in their everyday practical intersubjective relations (*ibidem*, p. 14).

The priority of our self-constitution is based on the *self-receptivity of touch*. Translated into Meadian terms, our desire to emit any kind of vocal gesture is already constituted prior to any reflexivity, in a milieu of touch. In Chrétien, touch exceeds tact, since it is not limited to a mere contact. In the paragraph by Aristotle, we have seen that no animal is deprived of touch and that “the sense of touch is inseparable from life itself” (*ibidem*, p. 85). Through touch we enter into relationships with others, since the experience of touch is a basic experience of contact (or, its precondition and milieu) that we all have in our life affairs. But it is important to acknowledge, as also Aristotle would already know, that the interval between us and others is never abolished, that our touch, paradoxically, never touches and thus, as it were, safeguards the difference and autonomy of the other person. The touch is of course present in a manner by which we generally address (same as in Feuerbach) our sensitivity. But there is another paradoxical element in the touch: as a sense organ (i.e. skin) it is oriented towards the outer world, for, as an organ, it “cannot be nor become an object to itself” (Chrétien 2004, p. 120)⁶. Here the intersubjective process begins (structurally, this is analogous to both Feuerbach and Mead):

“I feel myself only by favor of the other. It is the other who gives me to myself insofar as the return to myself and to my own actions or affections always supposes this other. The most intimate sensation, the sensation of my own sensitive life in act, is also the most open, and its intimacy is deployed only through its openness. To feel oneself is not a beginning, but a response to the appeal made by a sensible that is other than myself and that elicits the exercise of my acts. I never start by saying ‘I, I start by being ‘thou-ed’ by the world” (Chrétien 2004, p. 120).

This statement, written in the phenomenological language, is very close to Mead’s constitution of gesture as a social act. But perhaps it is only in its excess that the logic of touch can really be understood. In his final words in the chapter *Body and Touch*, Chrétien goes as far as to refer to the *touch* of God: Saint John of the Cross, namely, speaks of “God’s touch” and interprets it as the “‘merciful hand of the Father’ with which he touches the Son.” (*ibidem*, p. 130) This is a caress, an ethical gesture of sympathy and compassion. And it is Aquinas who understands this touching as *grace*, an excess we cannot understand or – properly speaking – condition. Isn’t Mead’s elaboration of sympathetic gesture in the closest proximity to this mystical constellation? He states:

“The other is a different person and, being different, his suffering is different from mine, but he is a suffering being to whom I react immediately” (Mead 1967, p. 62).

It is now time to address our third example, Watsuji Tetsurō’s philosophy of *aidagara*.

c) *Watsuji Tetsurō*

In his excellent study of Mead and Watsuji Tetsurō’s (1889-1960) philosophy and communitarian ethics, Steve Odin (1992) points to a deep structural proximity between

⁶ Earlier in his phenomenological constitution of the touch, Chrétien mentions W. Wundt and his elaboration of touch as *Gefühlssinn*, and stresses the inappropriateness of the term *Tastsinn* for touch (Chrétien 2004, p. 104).

both thinkers⁷. For Watsuji, the main problem in philosophy is related to the question of personhood (*ninjen*) and betweenness (or, relatedness; *aidagara*) – as our social self. For him the substance is multiple, not solitary. Influenced by Heidegger, Watsuji's philosophy aims at addressing the neglected problem of spatiality (as we know, temporality was in the forefront of Heidegger's analyses). As Odin (1992, p. 479) states, "the notion of self as a substance with a fixed essence is abandoned for a relationally defined self which is fluid, shifting, open, decentred, multiple, and social in nature." Since Watsuji's philosophy is closely linked to Japanese aesthetics, it is of no coincidence of course that there is a close analogy between the constellations of Zeami's *Kakyō* on the one hand and Watsuji's on the other. Watsuji (as a Confucian and a Buddhist) has devoted his entire thought to the communitarian problem in ethics: being-with-others in community is now the basic mode of our self-constitution. In his analysis, Odin shows this in a convincing manner, also by addressing all of the most important elements of Mead's philosophy⁸. It is also important to acknowledge – as Odin (1992, pp. 490f.) presents to us in his paper – various essays and analyses on the topic of Buddhist emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the interrelated existence as an organismic process in Whitehead and American pragmatism.

But to be able to go one step further and prepare the ground for an analysis of Feuerbach, Chrétien and Watsuji *with* Mead, I would like to take a closer look at Watsuji's work *Climate* (*Fūdo*), which gathers all of the most important themes of his philosophy and relates them to a unique cosmological constellation, which is nevertheless similar to our pragmatist process-oriented thinking in Whitehead, Dewey or Mead. For Watsuji, climate "includes both society and living nature," (p. 495) and *aidagara* as an interval (and the main "function" of climate) is structured on the basis of the Buddhist ontological mode of emptiness – which thus "empties" our self and establishes a new *space* of interrelatedness or betweenness of persons. Some critics saw this as a weakness of Watsuji's theory, possibly leading to fascism or strong communitarianism as compared to Mead and his model, based on communicative or symbolic interaction. But in a more positive reading, the climate as an interspace can be of great value for our intersubjective relations. It can become the matrix of a new ethics, based on touch, sympathy and humility. Norman Wirzba (2010) addresses *humility* as a key consequence of Chrétien's philosophy of touch: we have to empty ourselves of our egotistic nature of the mode *I am and there is no one besides me*, and enter the ethical relations with other based on humility, and thus reciprocity and responsiveness: "I feel myself only by the favor of the other" (Wirzba 2010, p. 235) and, even more importantly, "We need the space between self and other, so that we can learn to act on another's behalf" (*ibidem*, p. 247). This space is the *climate* of our intersubjective relations, based on contact experience and touch. For Watsuji (1992, pp. 12-20), climate is what constitutes and underpins our self-understanding. We can never begin with a Cartesian or even Kantian gesture since we are always situated in an interspace – i.e. climate. Here we must return to Feuerbach: his philosophy of the elements as natural habitats of our

⁷ In this chapter, I will also refer to Watsuji Tetsuro's *Fūdo – Wind und Erde* (1992).

⁸ It can, of course, be of no coincidence that Mead's closest pragmatist colleague, John Dewey, was entitled by Chinese philosophers upon his lecturing in China as "Second Confucius." On this, see Hall and Ames (1999); see also J. Grange (2004), J. Dewey (1973) and J. Ching-Sze Wang (2007).

body-self (especially water and air) and also the related Aristotle's echo in Chrétien – as an insistence on a medium (also consisting of water or air) between our “touch” and its “object” is now the main argument for a new understanding of an ethical constellation of gestures in Mead, as well. There is an analogy with our example from the Japanese Noh theatre – as in art and our conversational processes, so in atmospheric phenomena: according to Watsuji, we cannot feel the cold of the outer world or exist in it without *always already* being exposed. Analogically, we live in a social climate with its rituals. But the question still remains: which impulse in *ourselves* enables us to enter intersubjective relations, or, how is it possible to move our hand toward the other within the betweenness, time-space (*aidagara*, climate) of an ethical gesture? These are the questions that I wish to address in the final part of my essay.

4. *An Interval of Grace*

“For there to be gift event (we say event and not act), something must come about or happen, in an instant, in an instant that no doubt does not belong to the economy of time, in a time without time, in such a way that the forgetting forgets, that it forgets itself, but also in such a way that this forgetting without being something present, presentable, determinable, sensible, or meaningful, is not nothing” (Derrida 1992, p. 174).

We have seen that in Chrétien's phenomenology the basic intersubjective constellation (“I start by being ‘thou-ed’ by the world”) is accompanied by the notion of humility (emptying of our self), in a space that we both/all share. In the final part of my presentation I intend to argue that *behind the scene*, as it were, there appears a possibility in Mead for an inauguration of a space of interiority where our “social” time (communication as a mode of reciprocity or reflection of the reactions of others in me based on one-dimensional or successive time) similarly reverses into an ethical time – as an impossible time of grace as gift and hospitality. This grace, or this absolute and impossible gift, as Derrida (1992, p. 166) observes, “interrupts economy” and thus does not permit us to lean on any vulgar form of the economy of exchange and reciprocity. Economy is circular, says Derrida. Intersubjectivity based on economy and exchange is also circular. But the gift of ethical gesture in us is an interruption, an impossible act that inaugurates the time and space of interiority⁹. Only within the atmosphere of this interruption is an ethical act possible.

Let me point out an interpretation of the problem of consciousness offered by American neurophysiologist Benjamin Libet (2004) in his famous work *Mind Time*. In this book, Libet convincingly argues that there is a 500 msec delay in our conscious sensory awareness between our subjective feeling and its unconscious beginning in the brain. This surprising observation of Libet's bears important consequences on our

⁹ On this space and Kierkegaard as related to Mead, see my exploration in *Breath of Proximity* (ch. 4.5 on Mead).

knowledge of human agency, free will and the very logic of the awareness of our conscious (including ethical) acts. The very essence of his argument goes as follows:

“If you tap your finger on a table, you experience the event as occurring in ‘real time.’ That is, you subjectively feel the touch occurring at the same time that your finger makes contact with the table. But our experimental evidence strongly supports a surprising finding that is directly counter to our own intuition and feelings: The brain needs a relatively long period of appropriate activations, up to about half a second, to elicit awareness of the event! Your conscious experience or awareness of your finger touching the table thus appears only after the brain activities have become adequate to produce the awareness” (Libet 2004, p. 33).

According to Libet, we are therefore always *a bit late* in our conscious activities or responses. There is a gap (an interval) between reported and real time. This causes the fundamental problem of defining “the present moment” in ourselves: it seems that “the experience is actually one of an event 0.5 sec in the past” (*ibidem*, p. 88)¹⁰. In my opinion, this scientific evidence of Libet’s also supports an ethical intervention at the very core of various theories related to Mead’s symbolic interactionism.

Let me return to my introductory example: we have seen that in Schopenhauer there is a gap between our conscious (in ethical terms *egoistic*) act, which follows my will (and is, in turn, part of the metaphysical Will), and our pure altruistic action (like sympathy, compassion, *agápe* or *caritas*), which is based on the denial of the Will. This gap cannot be explained in logical terms, and is only possible when the very rational (volitional) logic is reverted: in order to be able to act ethically, we have to deny our will. It is precisely in this act of the denial of the Will that Schopenhauer (1969, p. 404) discloses freedom *qua* grace (and quotes Malebranche: “la liberté est un mystère”)¹¹. Interestingly enough, like Schopenhauer, Libet, too, has been charged with the original sin of annihilating free will in humans. But these charges are based on a vulgar understanding of free will. Both Schopenhauer and Libet share one extremely important insight: that we act before we have consciously decided to act. Translated into ethics of intersubjectivity, and in relation to our constellation above (with Feuerbach, Chrétien and Watsuji as three peaks in our new interpretative space), this means that there is a shared ethical space in our interiority or within our ethical core that we can call the *climate* or *atmosphere* of ethics. Beyond the more common *inside-outside* divide where dualistic logic leads us towards old dualisms, we rather seek for a processual ethics of reciprocity (call, response, anticipation, common climate), but with one important feature: that ultimately, our ethical act and our touching of the other (with the *touch/direct/contact* experience understood more broadly and not merely in the sense of “tact” and tactile experience) is always already situated within an ethical interval or gap in a time-space.

¹⁰ Note also this example, which is already more closely related to the problem of ethics: “You are driving along in your car at 30 mph on a city street. Suddenly, a young boy steps into the street in front of your car, chasing a ball. You slam your foot on the brake pedal to bring the car to a screeching halt. Were you consciously aware of the event before stepping on the brake? Or was that an unconscious action that you became aware of after you hit the brakes?” (Libet 2004, p. 90).

¹¹ “For just what the Christian mystics call the *effect of grace* and the *new birth*, is for us the only direct expression of the *freedom of the will*.”

Let us remind ourselves once more of our example from *Kakyo*: I think Mead is actually very close to this constellation: our act is always attuned to the very response of the other. Mead does not use words such as the *ch'i* of the audience (society), but from his thought it is evident that he knows perfectly well we have to secure our inner space or interiority (embodied mind, embodied cognition) to be able to enter, as it were, the stage of epistemology or ethics. Upon discussing sympathy, in his 1914 class lectures, Mead gives an interesting passage:

“The idea of looking into the eyes of one who is suffering involves an inner idea. [...] The other is a different person and, being different, his suffering is different from mine, but he is a suffering being to whom I react immediately. Other individuals exist for us as having inner ideas, which in a certain sense we can never penetrate. [...] It is because the material is the same that other persons have an inner idea of us. [...] The child is conscious of the hard floor long before he is aware of the introdermal self that is injured by the hard floor” (Miller 1982, p. 62).

I will end my interpretation here. In this synchronistic reading of Mead’s philosophy I wanted to explore the possibility of another time-space in ethics, one closely related to Mead’s fundamental insights, but still situated within the excess, surplus, gap, or interval which cannot simply be explained by ordinary epistemological tools that Mead had been using in his works. There is a further need to explore this secret and paradoxical time-space of ethics, and today I have only taken the first step in that direction. We can never become other persons and this fact secures their and our autonomy and freedom. There always exists an interval between us, one that Aristotle mentioned in his *On the Soul*. But there is another gap or interval, one that cannot be observed epistemologically since it evades its very logic: it is best visible in a caress, and the *behind the scene* logic, as it were. Like the actor from *Kakyo*, who must know, even before coming on stage, what he is to expect from the audience, we too, precognitively *know* well before his appearance how we would act. But the mystery of all ethics that I wanted to point to with this essay, lies precisely in this infinitely short moment before our ethical act. Finally, I will call this moment an *interval of grace*.

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