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existential urgency: a provocation to thinking "different"

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abstract:

In this essay we expand the notion of thinking by emphasizing the provocation and urgency to think and by reconceptualizing thinking as an embodied practice. The aim is to expand Lipman and Sharp's approach to philosophical inquiry with children and show how other ways of thinking can be included. We strive to unfold a way of "thinking" that is both different from rationality (critical thinking) as well as from creative and caring thinking. In the first part of the paper, we discuss the merits of Lipman and Sharp's critical, creative and caring thinking within the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI). We then expand Lipman/Sharp's philosophical method through Ekkehart Marten's *Five-finger Model*, which allows for different philosophical approaches. In the second half of the paper, we draw on Martin Heidegger's *What is called thinking?* to develop his concept of the "call" to think together with its related notions of provocation and urgency. Building on this, we draw on Maurice Merleau-Ponty to show how this call is not an intellectual activity or mere exercise of the "mind" but rather affects our entire existence. As such, thinking becomes a response to an *existential urgency* that is an embodied practice. Using concepts like embodiment, affect, and sensibility, we try to widen our conception of thinking in a CPI. Finally, we hope this will allow facilitators to hear the unique voice of every child so that no one is left unheard.

keywords: Heidegger; Merleau-Ponty; embodiment; thinking; sensibility.

urgência existencial: uma provocação para pensar "diferente"

Neste ensaio, expandimos a noção de pensamento enfatizando a provocação e a urgência de pensar e também reconceptualizando o pensamento como uma prática corporizada. O objetivo é expandir a abordagem de Lipman e Sharp à investigação filosófica com crianças e mostrar como outras formas de pensar podem ser incluídas. Esforçamo-nos para desdobrar uma forma de "pensar" que é tanto diferente da racionalidade (pensamento crítico), quanto do pensamento criativo e cuidadoso. Na primeira parte do artigo, discutimos os méritos do pensamento crítico, criativo e carinhoso de Lipman e Sharp, dentro da Comunidade de Investigação Filosófica (CIF). Em seguida, expandimos o método filosófico de Lipman/Sharp através do *Modelo de Cinco Dedos* de Ekkehart Marten, que permite diferentes abordagens

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filosóficas. Na segunda metade do trabalho, baseamo-nos no texto *O que significa pensar?*, de Martin Heidegger, para desenvolver seu conceito de "chamada" para pensar, juntamente com as noções de provocação e urgência. Com base nisso, recorremos a Maurice Merleau-Ponty para mostrar como este chamado não é uma atividade intelectual ou um mero exercício da "mente", mas afeta toda a nossa existência. Assim, o pensamento torna-se uma resposta a uma urgência existencial que é uma prática corporizada. Usando conceitos como encarnação, afeto e sensibilidade, tentamos ampliar nossa concepção de pensamento em uma CIF. Por fim, esperamos que isto permita aos facilitadores ouvir a voz única de cada criança para que ninguém fique sem ser ouvido.

palavras-chave: Heidegger; Merleau-Ponty; encarnação; pensamento; sensibilidade.

urgencia existencial: una provocación a pensar "diferente"

En este ensayo ampliamos la noción de pensamiento haciendo hincapié en la provocación y la urgencia de pensar y reconceptualizando el pensamiento como una práctica encarnada. El objetivo es ampliar el enfoque de Lipman y Sharp sobre la indagación filosófica con niños y mostrar cómo se pueden incluir otras formas de pensar. Nos esforzamos por desplegar una forma de "pensar" que es a la vez diferente de la racionalidad (pensamiento crítico), y diferente del pensamiento creativo y cuidadoso. En la primera parte del artículo, examinamos los méritos del pensamiento crítico, creativo y cuidadoso de Lipman y Sharp dentro de la Comunidad de Investigación Filosófica (CIF). A continuación, ampliamos el método filosófico de Lipman/Sharp a través del *Modelo de los Cinco Dedos* de Ekkehart Marten, que permite diferentes acercamientos filosóficos. En la segunda mitad del artículo, nos basamos en la obra de Martin Heidegger *¿Qué significa pensar?* para desarrollar su concepto de la "llamada" a pensar junto con las nociones relacionadas de provocación y urgencia. A partir de ahí, nos basamos en Maurice Merleau-Ponty para mostrar cómo esta llamada no es una actividad intelectual o un mero ejercicio de la "mente", sino que afecta a toda nuestra existencia. Como tal, el pensar se vuelve una respuesta a una urgencia existencial que es una práctica encarnada. Utilizando conceptos como encarnación, afecto y sensibilidad, intentamos ampliar nuestra concepción del pensamiento en una CIF. Finalmente, esperamos que esto permita a los facilitadores escuchar la voz única de cada niño para que nadie quede sin ser escuchado.

palabras clave: Heidegger; Merleau-Ponty; encarnadura; pensamiento; sensibilidad.

existential urgency: a provocation to thinking “different”

[...] True, it's strange to dwell on earth no longer,
To cease practicing customs barely learned,
Not to give roses and other things of such promise
A meaning in some human future;
To stop being what one was in endlessly anxious hands,
And ignore even one's own name like a broken toy. [...]
Rainer Maria Rilke ([1923]2000), *The First Elegy*

1. Thinking “Different”

In one of his late seminars from 1951 the German philosopher Martin Heidegger³ writes: “The most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking.”⁴ The book that encompasses those lectures is entitled *What is called thinking?*, a question, which according to Heidegger ([1954]1968), we can only answer if we think ourselves. Yet, in order to think ourselves, we have to be “ready to learn to think” (p. 3). Heidegger’s claim here is twofold. Firstly, we can only know what thinking means if we do it ourselves. And secondly, thinking *calls* us, meaning that we “find ourselves” *urged* to think. When called into this urgency to think, it is not an activity of the “mind” or sophistic play. Rather, and in the words of Heidegger scholar and French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, it affects our entire existence: A thinking that responds to this existential urgency is an embodied practice.

Philosophy for Children as a pedagogical approach often claims to teach “thinking”. Throughout their lifetime, the two founders of Philosophy for Children (P4C), Matthew Lipman and Ann M. Sharp, have tried to expand the notion of “thinking”: from focusing on critical thinking at first and later widening the concept

³The authors would like to distance themselves from any political decisions and statements made by Martin Heidegger. We took extra care to only include quotes and ideas that are not in any way related to his political statements and ideas, which – again – we vehemently reject.

⁴ The lecture series was published as *Was Heisst Denken?* in 1954 by Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tuebingen.

towards creative and caring thinking⁵. But what preconceptions about thinking are still left in P4C? To what degree is “learning to think” still connected with the wish to teach the child to think “rationally” or “correctly” or “coherently”? Might such a conception exclude the diversity of voices (e.g., non-verbal utterances)? And further, is the goal to teach the child “to think like an adult” or, rather, to make the child’s voice heard in her own right (even in opposition to the adult view of the world)?

In this paper we will open the discussion by outlining the “three c’s” of thinking in Lipman and Sharp. We will show how the specific philosophical orientation is original and helpful to foster a specific kind of thinking in what is called a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI). However, and like every philosophical approach, as it opens the space for one sort of thinking, it might also close off others. We, therefore, try to expand Lipman and Sharp’s philosophical approach through Ekkehart Marten’s *Five-finger Model*, which allows for slightly more philosophical diversity. By using concepts like embodiment, affect, and sensibility, we try to widen our thinking about thinking in a CPI.

The underlying idea is to unfold a notion of thinking that is different both from critical thinking as well as from creative and caring thinking. A thinking that exiles us from everydayness, estranges us from what is familiar and thereby creating an *existential urgency* that cannot be “arranged”, but rather rearranges us: to turn our own existence into that question that stands into Being like an odd rusty nail. Or, as Merleau-Ponty⁶ puts it, “[...] to rupture our familiarity with it [the world], and this rupture can teach us nothing except the unmotivated springing forth of the world.” (Merleau-Ponty, [1945]2012, lxxvii). This rupture occurs in the encounter with the Other. Their gaze places us into the chiasmic questioning: an invitation to experience difference. Such thinking makes us “stand out” or “ex-ist” from Being and at the same time throws us back into this irreplaceable uniqueness of existence. To be *called* into

⁵ Often described as the three c’s.

⁶ We would like to note that Lipman himself might have been very sympathetic to that kind of enlargement of thinking, as he said in a private conversation in August 2015, how appreciative he was of Merleau-Ponty’s work; Lipman has met Merleau-Ponty in person while visiting Paris in the early 1960s.

thinking, cannot be made unheard and provokes a heightened sensitivity and affective, embodied capacity to respond. We hope that by exploring such a widened notion of thinking, we will also become more sensitive to the diverse philosophical utterings of children: hearing their ideas in their own right rather than correcting and assimilating them to what we call “rational” or “reason-able.”

2. *Context and Literature Overview*

The work of American pragmatist philosopher Matthew Lipman on philosophical inquiry with children emerges out of an analytical and pragmatist approach and as a way to introduce philosophical inquiry to education. Lipman (2003, pp. 28-63) points out that in North America, there has been an increased focus on reflective practices that led to the development of programs claiming to improve thinking, many of which were focused on critical thinking. Not only does Lipman consider this too limited but also not doing justice to all the previous philosophical work that had been done on thinking: “We need *a theory of thinking* because without it, our hard-won phrase “thinking about thinking” makes no sense. We need curricula that present mental phenomena in a unified and developmental manner, while letting students know that the actual connections are yet to be understood” (emphasis added; Lipman, 2003, p. 140). Within this context and stressing the need of teaching thinking at an earlier age, Lipman (2003) develops in the early seventies a comprehensive Philosophy for Children (P4C) program. As of 2017, it is practiced in over 60 countries worldwide, has an international body committed to its development and many regional organizations that connect academics, teachers and other actors while also having been recognized and promoted by UNESCO.⁷

At the center is the pedagogical approach called the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) which aims to cultivate a multi-dimensional thinking,

⁷ Gregory, M., Haynes, J. and Murris, K. (2017). *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children*, p. xxi.

encompassing critical, creative and caring thinking.⁸ A CPI can be described as a group of people who, by using philosophical dialogue with the guidance of a facilitator, explore the contentious borders of a puzzling concept.⁹ In *Thinking in education* (2003), Lipman’s main theoretical work, he gives a comprehensive theoretical overview of the CPI in addition to what thinking in education should and should not be. Some of the features Lipman (2003, pp. 95-100) describes are inclusiveness, participation, shared cognition, face-to-face relationships, a quest for meaning, feelings of social solidarity, deliberation, impartiality, modelling, thinking for oneself, challenging as a procedure, reasonableness, reading, questioning, and discussion. With this theoretical framework, Lipman defines the link between thinking and experience in a specific way, mainly based on analytic thinking and American Pragmatism¹⁰. He emphasizes this in his approach to philosophical inquiry when, for example, Lipman (2003) explains that “Dewey correctly identifies logic with the methodology of inquiry” (p. 92).

Since then, many others have widened the notion of thinking in P4C and what it means to theorize and practice philosophy with children. For example, Gareth Matthews played an important role in drawing attention to the philosophical potential of children’s literature and wrote the landmark *Philosophy of Childhood* (1994), opening up a critical inquiry into the concepts of child and childhood. These concepts have been further problematized by, for example, Walter Kohan (2011) who introduces the concept of ‘becoming-child (2006) and also problematizes notions of time in relation to CPI (e.g., KOhan, 2016; Kennedy & Kohan, 2008). Others have drawn on “play theory” (Kennedy, 2020), new ways of looking at emotions (Carvalho

⁸ Ann Margaret Sharp played a crucial role in the early development of P4C. As Gregory & Lavery (2018) note, “[f]rom the early 1970s until their deaths just five months apart in 2010, Sharp and Lipman collaborated closely in developing ‘Philosophy for Children,’ the school program that became a worldwide movement” (p. 1).

⁹ See for example, Kennedy (2012).

¹⁰ Philosophers and P4C experts Maughn Gregory and Megan Lavery (2018) give a helpful summary of Lipman’s approach that includes the analytic, psychological and pragmatist background, describing the CPI as “a variation on Socratic dialogue informed by Charles Peirce’s philosophy of science, John Dewey’s epistemology and political theory, the social psychology of George Herbert Mead and Lev Vygotsky, and Justus Buchler’s (1954) method of classroom discussion” (p. 1).

& Mendonça, 2017), concepts of embodiment (Weber 2011; 2013) or affect (Haynes & Murris, 2021; Sharp, 2014, 2017; Wolf, 2023). One critical issue concerns the problematization of the political nature of thinking. For example, Kohan (2002; 2018) contrasts Paulo Freire's pedagogy with Lipman's approach and concludes that the political aspect usually associated with critical pedagogy is not internal to the CPI as theorized by Lipman. Furthermore, Weber (2013) argues that in Lipman, the political is not sufficiently theorized in relation to philosophical reasoning (*Vernunft*) and empathy (*Mitgefuehl*)¹¹.

The German philosopher Ekkehard Martens is one of the few to have developed a comprehensive approach to philosophical thinking¹² that encompasses a wide variety of methods and traditions. Martens is even more careful than Lipman when it comes to creating a unified and universal concept to "define" what philosophy is when practiced with children. His first "go to" examples are the Socratic dialogues by Plato. Martens shows how difficult it is to say where in those dialogues, philosophy begins and where it ends. Nonetheless, and to develop some first criteria to identify 'traits of philosophy' in a dialogue with children, he suggests distinguishing between philosophical contents, attitudes and methods (Martens, 1999).

The philosophical content usually emerges through philosophical questions. However, the wording alone of a question is not sufficient in order to be classified as "philosophical". Rather, the philosophical substance always springs from the dialogical space between the questioner and the listener. Yet, to create such a dialogical space where such questions might occur, a general attitude of openness and wondering is beneficial. It requires an affective sensitivity for ambiguity, pseudo-knowledge, conflict and everyday "doxa" (opinions). Philosophy as a *cultural practice* begins right here: where the everyday life becomes dubious or opaque and generates curiosity as well as a desire to know. Such an openness to question and

¹¹ See *Vernunft, Mitgefuehl und Körperlichkeit: Eine Phänomenologische Rekonstruktion des politischen Raumes* [Reason, Empathy and Embodiment: A Phenomenological Reconstruction of Political Space], 2013.

¹² In German this field attends to the didactics of philosophy.

think further also entails a “philosophical attitude”, i.e., a readiness and courage to follow uncommon and unexpected ways of thinking and to tolerate the irritation and preliminary answers these might lead to. Moreover, it demands that theoretical insight and practical action go hand in hand. As such, these philosophical questions affect the way we think, feel, act and treat others. As the Ancient Greek scholar Pierre Hadot writes: “The lesson that there is no discourse which deserves to be called philosophical if it is separated from the philosophical life, and there is no philosophical life unless it is directly linked to philosophical discourse” (Hadot, 1999, p. 32; own translation). The judgments that are involved in relation to these questions are not understood as being absolutely true or right; rather, they concern a certain sensitivity or refined intuition (*Fingerspitzengefuehl*). Such intuition concerns both the problematic situation, as well as intersubjectively justifiable reasons. Although this dynamic can be seen as an inherent anthropological tendency to philosophize, Martens argues that this natural ability needs to be cultivated.

Such cultivation involves a “method” for which Martens (2003) takes into account a plurality of philosophical approaches that remain open to each other and to which “philosophy as a practice” cannot be reduced. They are more like a *techne* or craftsmanship that can be taught, practiced and learned.¹³ Martens (2003) suggests a five-finger model including phenomenology (looking), hermeneutics (understanding), analytic philosophy (deepening), dialectics and speculation (imagining) as methods to bring philosophy into pre-tertiary education (Marsal, 2008).¹⁴ For Martens, the educator can expose children to these modes of inquiry, modes that may occur within the same dialogue, and so may ignite a spark of

¹³ This goes back to the notion of ‘skill’ or ‘expertise’ within European culture. We suggest to expand this thought by proposing to see philosophy as potentially both: a *craftsmanship* that can be taught, yet also as a *form of art* that can only be reached by transcending the mere aspects craftsmanship: just like the difference between a hobby artist and Tiziano or Botticelli – i.e., many people might paint, some just a little bit, some in a sense of producing interior decoration, but only a few are artists.

¹⁴ The German philosopher Barbara Weber (2013) has further developed Martens’ approach. Drawing on a range of philosophers like Habermas, Rorty and Merleau-Ponty, Weber also includes concepts that especially emphasize the role of the body in reason like inter-corporeality, a body’s ability for resonance and the emotions.

philosophical thinking and speaking.¹⁵ These five methods, however, are not all-encompassing; rather, he urges us to remain open towards other philosophical methods (i.e., ways of thinking).¹⁶ And it is here, in this implicit imperative, expressed by Lipman/Sharp and Martens, to remain open towards the plurality of thinking, that this paper would like to investigate what provokes or pulls us into thinking. To approach this question, we first explore how Heidegger in his later work, opens up the meaning of the word “thinking” beyond rationality or logic. He thereby lays the groundwork for an embodied notion of thinking in Merleau-Ponty. Lipman (1967) himself had hinted at the interlacing of experience, art and embodiment in his very early works¹⁷, which includes a chapter on “The Response to the Body”. Lipman was obviously inspired by phenomenologists like Gabriel Marcel or Merleau-Ponty¹⁸. By using Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualization of the body and the carnal relationality of thinking, we hope that facilitators will become more sensitive to the diversity of philosophical utterings. We believe that the challenge and future of P4C lays here – to make the diversity of the voices heard.

3. *Martin Heidegger on Provoking Thinking*

“We said: ‘man still does not think,’ and this because what must be thought about turns away from him; by no means only because man does not sufficiently reach out and turn to what is to be thought” (Heidegger, 1968, p. 8).¹⁹ It was this “great thoughtlessness” (*grosse Gedankenlosigkeit*) that concerned Heidegger deeply.

¹⁵ For more the igniting of a ‘spark’ in relation to philosophy see, for example, Plato 7th letter.

¹⁶ For example, such a philosophical inquiry might flow as follows: first, the description of a problem or how it appears to us (phenomenology); second, the disclosing of the meaning of different lifeworlds or discovery of underlying prejudices through the process of sharing our perspectives with the group (hermeneutic); third, the exploration of pros and cons as well as potential syntheses or overarching new concepts (dialectic); fourth, the critical analysis of the meaning of a concept, including various criteria (logic); fifth, the speculation about other possible concepts or theories that transcend this specific concept or a discussion about how this concept might affect our life and lead to different new ways of seeing/interpreting the original phenomenon (speculation).

¹⁷ Lipman, M. (1967). *What Happens in Art*. Appleton Century Crofts.

¹⁸ Again, Lipman met Merleau-Ponty in Paris shortly before Merleau-Ponty’s death.

¹⁹ “Wir sagten: der Mensch denkt noch nicht und zwar deshalb nicht, weil das zu-Denkende sich von ihm abwendet; er denkt keineswegs nur darum nicht, weil der Mensch sich dem Zu-Denkenden nicht hinreichend zu-wendet.” (*Was heisst Denken?*, p. 5).

Yet, what is it that is turning away from man? And why should man turn towards what is receding?

For Heidegger, our relatedness to Being is in danger. Heidegger expresses his concern most clearly when he talks about “calculative thinking” [das rechnende Denken] ([1959]1966, p. 46), a thinking that is goal-driven, productive and “races from one aspect to the next” (p. 46). Thus, there is a “growing thoughtlessness [Gedankenlosigkeit]” (1966, p. 45), because we are “in flight from thinking” (p. 45).” Heidegger explains that “[t]houghtlessness is an uncanny visitor who comes and goes everywhere in today’s world. For nowadays we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly.” The emphasis is on a criticism of speed and quick answers at the expense of sustainability and complexity. And he ponders: “Perhaps there is a thinking which is more sober than the irresistible race of rationalization and the sweeping character of cybernetics [...] Perhaps there is a thinking outside of the distinction of rational and irrational still more sober than scientific technology, more sober and thus removed, without effect and yet having its own necessity” ([1969]1972, p. 72). What has led us into this “race” away from thinking? Is it possible to learn to “think” again?

An opening arises with a question because a question is what invites us to think. And in order to keep open what has been brought into suspense, we must not fill it with an answer, but rather a response that calls further into question; it remains within the calling: “We are thinking. To say it circumspectly, we are attempting to let ourselves become involved in this relatedness to Being. We are attempting to learn thinking” (Heidegger ([1954]1968, p. 86). This means that by responding, we are not staying “outside” of what has been opened; rather, we are becoming entangled with Being itself. We are face-to-face with the abyss of Being, the groundless groundedness of existence. To such a degree that our own existence turns into this question to which only we can respond²⁰ as Dasein²¹. What does such a thinking entail and how does

²⁰ The term “respond” comes from the Latin “spondere”, to pledge, to promise, and ‘re’, in return.

²¹ Dasein, a term Heidegger uses instead of Human, emphasizes the intensity and irreplaceability of the ‘being there’.

Heidegger set it apart from rationality? Is, in fact, the “wachsende Gedankenlosigkeit” (growing thoughtlessness) a function of our focus on rationality? Are we not responding to the call of Being? Even more, are we un-learning this response to the call of Being?

According to Heidegger, “we can learn thinking only if we radically unlearn what thinking has been traditionally” ([1954]1968, p. 8). Part of how thinking has been understood “traditionally” depends on the translation of related words. Thinking, involves allowing something new to appear and furthermore, thinking needs to be provoked. The English word “provoke” comes from the Latin *provocare* “to challenge”, a synthesis of *pro-* “forth” and *vocare* “to call”. It is not a provocation as with a challenge that needs to be overcome, but there is something that calls us into thinking like a sense of doubt. Thus, thinking might occur in our humbleness, fragility and sensibility toward what has become questionable and in doubt. In other words, it has been brought into suspense.

Heidegger goes back even further into the language used related to thinking and how the notion of thinking has changed. Looking at Ancient Greek, he claims that “[t]hinking becomes the λέγειν (*légein*) of the λόγος (*logos*) in the sense of the proposition. At the same time thinking becomes the νοεῖν (*noein*) in the sense of apprehending reason ([1954]1968, p. 210). They are coupled and distilled into the Latin *ratio*, which comes from the verb *reor* meaning “to take something for something” ([1954]1968, p. 210). Here thinking becomes a kind of representational logic. However, Heidegger finds another meaning of “thinking” in the Greek fragment by Parmenides: here νοεῖν (*noein*), has the connotation of *scenting* (Heidegger, ([1954]1968, p. 207). This “animalistic” trait obscures the separation of *human* being from other beings. But more so, it highlights an underlying capacity of connecting with the beings in the world by being *through* the world. He finally translates it as “taking-to-heart”.

Λέγειν (*légein*) is also translated as to gather, arrange or collect, and its Latin connotation of *legere* or reading, becomes “letting-lie-before-us”. Thus, and instead of

seeing a text, gathering the letters and making it ours, it now becomes a more fragile process. Here, Heidegger suggests replacing the “is” with “present”, thereby challenging the question of what is *is*. “[T]he presence of that which is present” ([1954]1968, p. 236) is less static than something that *is*. Even more so, Heidegger explains that such “presence” in Greek has the trait of “being present and abiding” ([1954]1968, p. 236) or coming closer (παρά or pará) and going away (ἀπό or apó). Consequently, there is a movement of *to and fro*. As Heidegger poetically writes when describing the view of a mountain range, it “has risen from unconcealment” ([1954]1968, p. 236). It is always already there, as a geological entity, and so never concealed, but only when we give our attention to it, does it come closer.²² Even though the coming closer and going away of unconcealment *in* unconcealment “remains concealed” ([1954]1968, p. 237). Maybe it can be described as a movement within a larger movement.²³ What is being concealed comes to us as presencing of un-forgetting or *a-letheia* (truth). As such, Heidegger asks:

But what if we take what was said and adopt it unceasingly as the guide for our thinking, and consider that this same is not even anything new, but the oldest of the old in Western thought: that ancient something which conceals itself in *a-letheia*? That which is said before all else by this first source of all the *leitmotifs* of thinking gives voice to a bond that binds all thinking, providing that thinking submits to the call of what must be thought ([1969]1972, p. 24).

Being “provoked” to think, then, means nothing else than being “called upon” to live. Not any life, and certainly not the life of “das Man” or the “they” (man). It is not the call of an online social network to “present” ourselves to the world or the call of a new product to express our freedom. Rather, we are called upon in our own groundlessness from which we stick out in this awkward way. We are called upon to

²² Discussing Hölderlin’s *Mnemosyne*, Heidegger writes about the link between myth and telling as something that becomes present to us or the rising of unconcealedness: “*Mythos* is what has its essence in its telling—what is apparent in the unconcealedness of its appeal. The *mythos* is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which makes man think of what appears, what is in being” (p. 10).

²³ In his *Discourse on Thinking* Heidegger discusses a similar movement with regard to a region, its *regioning* (gegenen) and *that-which-regions* (Gegnet).

respond to the question of our own existence. No one can give this response for us, just as no one can eat for us, love and die for us or live this life for us. If we can “take what was said”, “submit to the call” and “respond to the question” we could say with Heidegger that only we ourselves are respons-able. This opens up an important political and ethical aspect regarding such an ability to respond. Together with the capacity to “take-to-heart”, we could say that everyone has the *right* to be called upon and to respond to what is presented to them: the child, the voice-less and the Other. It raises questions about what it means to be called upon, how the ability to respond changes as well as how it might be learned.

We can return to the claim Heidegger makes throughout his lectures: “Most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking” (p. 6; 17; 28; 60). What is this *time*? Is it the time of our being? Is it *our* time? And, can we learn to be provoked? From that perspective, being provoked to think will depend on the way in which a person is embedded into and attuned to a spatio-temporal dynamic. We are always, necessarily “Being-in-the-world” and part of a continuous “worlding”. In other words, each of us unfolds and resonates with and in a context that cannot be understood according to a general measure. Each is called upon in their unique embodied existence that has fallen into the fabric of this world and now “times”²⁴. Our sense of being, our human finitude, exists within this horizon of temporality. But we are not condemned and can be released. As we respond, we do not respond from the outside, but rather are being pulled into this world, into the presence-ing of the moment as this authentic Dasein, which Heidegger also calls the *Er-Eignis*²⁵ or *Event*. Such Er-eignis relates to the older meaning of *er-äugen* with *äugen* meaning eyes. The German “es er-eignet sich” then can be read as “to show itself.” Our response becomes a kind of coming-out or expression as an *Event*. But such “[t]hinking must first learn what remains reserved and in store for thinking to

²⁴ Here ‘times’ or ‘to time’ are understood as the verb of ‘time’; to disclose the biggest misunderstanding, i.e., that time has become a noun, while it is in its essence a verb and only a verb and not a ‘timing’ or an act done by a subject/agent.

²⁵ In German Er-Eignis is both, event, but also owning our Dasein.

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get involved in. It prepares its own transformation in this learning” ([1969]1972, p. 60). Such learning can therefore be related to the earlier-mentioned question that which calls for thinking. The question puts something before us that we need to learn to “let-lie-before-us” or, as Heidegger writes, “to endure in the encounter” ([1954]1968, p. 234).

By calling into question the concept of thinking, our understanding of CPI changes. The facilitator’s task becomes more challenging. On the one hand, the facilitator will now try to “provoke” thinking which requires children to be “called upon”. On the other hand, the facilitator also needs to respond to their own question of existence to be respons-able with regard to the children. Drawing on Hölderlin’s poem *Mnemosyne*, Heidegger writes that “we are a sign, a sign that is not read” (p. 11). Language plays a critical role here. The child’s utterances are not to be mapped according to a rational framework. Instead, they are modes of disclosure that demand a humble facilitator with a sensibility to the fragility of emergent meaning. A meaning that may easily slip away. As Heidegger, in his later works, might say, language calls things into being.²⁶ That is why poets are so important, or in our case, facilitators. But this can only happen if we “[...] hear what language really says when it speaks [...]” (Heidegger, [1954]1968, p. 119). The facilitator is, therefore, not only *with* the children but also *through* them.

Amongst other things this leads to the importance of remaining with the question: not falling into pre-fabricated answers and keeping a child’s question and the “evental” quality of its presencing open. As such, a learning to think is connected to a learning to let-lie-before-us. But how does the “letting-lie-before-us” change from person to person or body to body? How does the event of showing itself occur? Even more so, what does it mean to have fallen into the world as embodied?

We can start by understanding the violence that occurs when we force the utterance of the child, the different-abled, the stranger into a preconceived form.

²⁶ For example, when Heidegger (1971) writes in *Poetry, language, thought* that “language alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time” (p. 71).

Maybe then we can stop forcing the Other to speak in our ways, and rather learn to listen to what has remained unsaid ... and unheard.²⁷

4. *Merleau-Ponty: Carnal Embodiment*

To be provoked to think, therefore, is not merely an intellectual exercise, but rather entails to be called upon in our existence. This existence stands into this world twofold: embraced and separated, indwelling and exiled²⁸, familiar and estranged. But, as Heidegger ([1954]1968) asks, “[w]hat is *That* which calls us into thinking?” (emphasis added, p. 215). In the following, we would like to explore the embodied, sensual connotations of being “provoked to think” by referring to the works of French phenomenologist and Heidegger scholar Maurice Merleau-Ponty. As for the CPI and the role of the facilitator, we would like to focus on qualities of affect, fragility, and sensibility, which allow us to become affected in our bodily being-*towards-the-world*. Or, as Heidegger writes in his later works on teaching: “The teacher must be capable of being more teachable than the apprentices” ([1954]1968, p. 15).

4.1 *Perception and the “I can”*

In his main work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty sets out on an ambitious project, challenging both empiricists and rationalists. Without going into details here, his main argument is that we never just see “what is”, nor do we analyze (or categorize) each piece of perception in order to then reintegrate them together into one picture. Rather, we always see a situation (Gestalt), that is, each piece of our perception receives their meaning in relationship to the whole. This applies to colors, shapes and movements. For example, in the following well-known illusion of the young woman and old lady, the ear of the young woman, becomes the left eye of the

²⁷ To leave behind these preconceived ideas might be the only way something absolutely new may enter our Dasein/existence. To question what it means to have, what Heidegger ([1954]1968) calls, an *idea*: “In any dialogue with the nature of prevailing thinking, then, the *essence* of idea-forming is probably the first thing that must be put into the language of thinking. If we respond to that language, not only do we come to know thinking in its historic nature and destiny – we come to learn thinking itself” (emphasis in original; p. 55).

²⁸ See Parmis Aslanimehr’s research project on “Exilic Subjectivity” (unpublished manuscript).

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old lady. Thus, the centerpiece of the image takes on a different meaning within different contexts. Likewise, it is impossible to continue seeing the eye as an ear, when we switch over to see the old lady.



And even though it might first appear as an odd detail, Merleau-Ponty shows how this Gestalt-Seeing sits at the foundation of our being-toward-the-world, affecting profoundly our speaking and thinking. He writes that “perception does not come to birth just anywhere,” but “emerges in the recess of a body” ([1964]1968, p. 9). Through the body, we are open *to* and embedded *in* the world. As Merleau-Ponty describes it, “[...] the body is our anchorage in a world” ([1945]2012, p. 146), meaning that we always see the world from somewhere and within a certain context. For example, the illusion of the young-old lady can be related to how we think and feel differently according to our cultural context. The body thinks and feels what it is attuned to.²⁹ Therefore, and to put it in yet other words, we never are able to disclose the world from a “pensee du survol” and have “the impression that this situation is being surveyed from above” ([1964]1968, p. 87), rather: “The body is our general means of having a world” ([1945]2012, p. 169). In that sense, we do not *have* but *are* a living bodily perspective. For human beings, as Heidegger puts it, *to be* is to be *in the*

²⁹ Here, we also see a link to Heidegger’s concept of attunement or mood (*Stimmung*). In German, its meaning is related to the tuning of an instrument and the human voice. The human body in Merleau-Ponty becomes attuned to and in a milieu. See also Weber (2013), who describes a similar approach to the body as ‘sounding board’ (*Resonanzboden*).

world. We stand into the world as existence, and by doing so, we bring out what is within the world through our bodily understanding and projects.³⁰

From here, Merleau-Ponty discloses the central role of embodiment: He replaces Descartes' "Cogito" (as the Archimedean point), with what he calls the "I can", where the body becomes a vehicle towards the world. He writes: "Consciousness is originally not an 'I think that' [in the sense of Descartes' cogito] but rather an 'I can' [...] Vision and movement are specific ways of relating to objects and, if a single function is expressed throughout all of these experiences, then it is the movement of existence, which does not suppress the radical diversity of contents, for it does not unite them by placing them all under the domination of an "I think," but rather by orienting them toward the inter-sensory unity of a 'world'" ([1945]2012, p. 139). Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "I can" is the enactment and actualization of meaning through the medium of the body. Thus, it can entail anything from "I can ride a bike" to "I can pick a flower" to "I can make friends." The body becomes like an "instrument"³¹ for understanding as it discloses the world according to our intentions and projects (Mensch, 2009)³². This also fundamentally affects our acquisition and usage of language. The "I can" lies at the heart of concept formation because we do not know, learn or discover concepts abstractly, but rather discover them through our bodily engagement with the world and with others. "Language takes on a sense for the child when it creates a situation for him" (Merleau-Ponty, ([1945]2012, p. 423). For example, we learn the concept of a flower while going for a stroll and smelling it with our family. Within the same context, we might also learn that some plants belong to the category of flower, but that there are also other plants called mushrooms, trees and so forth. Each concept functions like a joint that we place into the perceived world around us in order to distinguish one thing from the other.

³⁰ At the same time, the world stands "into" our existence in its thickness, resisting our all-encompassing wishes. We will unfold this idea in the second half of this section.

³¹ The word "instrument" we borrow from Barbara Weber's esteemed mentor and friend Richard Morthouse who is presently working on a book on "Reading the world", where he describes the researcher as an 'instrument' (unpublished manuscript).

³² Much of this particular interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's "I can" are based on the phenomenologist and Merleau-Ponty scholar James Mensch (2009).

For instance, we learn to perceive the leaf as different from the branch, the branch as different from the tree, the tree as different from the giraffe eating the leaf, and so on. But we can also see a similar dynamic with intangible concepts like friendship or politeness. When children play with each other, they learn about friendship through the variety of responses and the rich inter-sensory unity that emerges as a result.

Yet, these concepts are only filled with meaning to the degree that they are tied to our bodily projects – we can use a leaf as a boat that floats on the river or can dry it to help start a fire or combine it with flowers to make a bouquet. Only through these bodily enactments of the projects to which they are tied (in the form of “I can’s”) do these concepts gather meaning and create a grid that is placed onto the perceived world around us. Each element, however, becomes meaningful *only* within these various contexts of our bodily projects. And because of the central role of the “I can” in this complex, contextual disclosure of the world, Merleau-Ponty writes that “[c]onsciousness is being toward the thing through the intermediary of the body” ([1945]2012, p. 140).

The Japanese writer Sayaka Murata describes a simple yet powerful example of this in her novel *Convenience Store Woman*. Through her work, the convenience store becomes “a world of sound” (p. 1) to which her body becomes attuned. The sounds and her body react to each other. Whether in the refrigerator “the faint rattle of a new plastic bottle rolling into place” (p. 1) meaning that a customer is likely to come to the checkout till, “a faint clink of coins” (p. 2) meaning that a customer is likely to buy cigarettes or a newspaper, or the sound of heels around the store, the body begins to resonate with the microcosm within which it exists. Beyond integrating into the sonorous life of the store, her body also “becomes” the store in other ways. Consuming the store’s water and food on a daily basis, it dawns upon her that “the moisture in my skin” (p. 129) and “the membrane over my eyeballs” (p. 129) are formed by the convenience store. And so, Murata writes, “my body is entirely made up of food from this store, I feel like I’m as much a part of the store as the magazine racks or the coffee machine” (p. 23). Even when she is not at the store her

body continues to “live” its microcosm, and so Murata concludes that “[m]y body had belonged to the convenience store even when I wasn’t at work” (p. 125).³³

Merleau-Ponty’s simple sentence of being through the intermediary of the body already entails his later concept of flesh (*chair*), which elaborates on the intertwining of senses, meaning and world. We are visible beings who see, we are feeling beings who can be felt by others, and we are embodied beings who understand the world through the medium of the body. As Merleau-Ponty explains,

[o]ne can say that we perceive the things themselves, that we are the world that thinks itself—or that the world is at the heart of our flesh. [...] there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside, between my inside and its outside” (Merleau-Ponty, [1964]1968, p. 136, fn. 2).

In other words, the body sees and is seen in an auto-affective dynamic. Through this dynamic we are in the world and have a world: “the world is made of the very stuff of the body” ([1964]1964, p. 163). We think with the world and according to it. As such, I am both thinking and being thought, as I am plunged into this world. Connecting this back to the notion of the “I can” and following such an auto-affective dynamic, we can say that there is a “map of the ‘I can’” ([1961]1964, p. 162), a dynamic topography of corporeal capacity, where the qualities of the world may “awaken an echo in our body” ([1961]1964, p. 164).

In summary, Merleau-Ponty sees the body not as an obstacle that is standing between us and the world, but rather as a “vehicle to the world.” And, while the body is this instrument that is “reading the world”³⁴, there is at the same time a provocation at work, something that is calling upon us and demanding a response.

4.2 Resistance, Flesh and Thinking

³³ As Murata would later say in an interview: “It was as if there was a convenience store God” (Louisiana Channel, 2020).

³⁴ See Richard Morthouse “Reading the World” (manuscript in process).

This intimate, sensual interlacing of meaning, words, embodiment and world is being unfolded more in Merleau-Ponty's later works like *Eye and Mind* as well as his unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible*. Instead of the body being an unhindered, unquestioned vehicle towards the world, disclosing its meaning according to the person's own projects, the world has now gained some resistance or *thickness* ([1964]1968, p. 127). A dialogue arises in this resistance. Merleau-Ponty writes:

It is that the thickness of the flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. [...] The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh (Merleau-Ponty, [1964]1968, p. 135).

Hence, there is a kind of tension between the body and its exterior. Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes this in several ways and from that perspective suggests that the perceiving body and perceived world must be separated by a thickness ([1964]1968, p. 127), a dehiscence or fission ([1964]1968, p. 146), a divergence (*écart*) ([1964]1968, p. 153), or a distance—without which exteriority would be impossible. Considering the previously mentioned map of the “I can,” there now is a relation between a body's topography and its interaction with the world. More precisely, its thickness is an expression and emerges out of it. That which it expresses or emerges out of, and is simultaneously part of, is the flesh. In this sense, the “making them flesh” is the “interiorly worked-over mass [...] as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being” (Merleau-Ponty, [1964]1968, p. 147). The flesh, then, concerns this intertwining or chiasm out of which we begin.³⁵ Or, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, the flesh is “the dehiscence of the seeing into the visible and of the visible into the seeing” ([1964]1968, p. 153). The body is now not just a thing that sees or is seen, nor is it just an idea. Instead, it is “the measurant [*le*

³⁵ See also, Barbara Weber ‘Another Beginning: On Birth, Childhood, and the Existential State of Being Human’ (to be published).

mesurant] of the things” ([1964]1968, p. 152) that gives the flesh “its axes, its depth, its dimensions” ([1964]1968, p. 152).

Of course, with this “incessant escaping” ([1964]1968, p. 148) we feel compelled to bridge the fissure as quickly as possible, and yet it is this gap that allows for an opening toward the thing itself (see [1964]1968, pp. 101–2). That which separates us from being is, at the same time, what allows us to access it. And vice versa, if the world, the thickness of the world were already within me, there would never be any Otherness in the world, no question, no suspense, no openness. It is so, because not only do we provoke the world in its being through the intermediary of the body, but we are also called upon by the Otherness and thickness of the world. This entails the social world as well as the world of things: both call upon us to bring out what lies within. And as the world resists our projects, intentions and demands, we are called upon to become a bit more thoughtful as our own existence is being brought into suspense. It is through resistance that we receive our existence as a question. As such, Otherness presents itself to us as resistance. And it is this resistance that calls me into question and opens the space within which only I can place a response: “A question can dishevel the sediment of our being” (Weber & Wolf, 2017, p. 78). In short, it is this gap that provokes me to think.

Staying with the tension of Otherness in the world, in the social world, resistance allows for encounter. I am not transparent to myself, and therefore, another perspective enters my own. It is this being “called upon” that leads into thinking. A thinking, however, that is not merely intellectual, but rather has its foundation in our embodied being-towards-the-world, where we are provoked to respond in our uniqueness. The voiceless child, the troubled, the different-abled, the loud and mute, they each are called upon to think and respond without closing this opening, without having to answer a question, without meeting a goal. Instead, they are invited to each bring out what has not been perceived before in this world. Their response might be in the form of a movement, a gesture and gaze. We argue that in order to give space to this sort of “thoughtfulness” we have to let go of a narrowing rationality, a critical

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thinking, including a creative and caring thinking, and rather become sensitive to the various forms of how Being is disclosed by Dasein.

This has consequences for the way we think about CPI. The qualities of a question resonate with our body and so initiate a “carnal formula of their presence” (Merleau-Ponty, [1961]1964, p. 126). Carnal comes from *carn-* “flesh”,³⁶ meaning that there is a thickness to our perception, that is created by sedimentation: much like different layers of sediment accumulate, change and influence each other, perception also functions through a dynamic process of sedimentation, creating complex memories and histories of meaning. And it is through pushing against those layers that creative expressions become possible. In other words, the friction of sedimentation allows for expression. As such, a question resonates differently for different children and cannot be pushed into a predetermined structure. Even more so, it emphasizes the complex layering of potential meaning. A facilitator, therefore, needs to be wary of the commonsensical and learn to fine-tune their sensibility in a CPI.

For facilitators, such practice can begin by studying other disciplines. An example is Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the painter Paul Cézanne. He writes that “[i]t is by lending his body to the world that the painter changes the world in paintings” (p. 162). What might such lending of one’s body mean? For Merleau-Ponty, everything we see is “the result of a dehiscence of Being” ([1961]1964, p. 187). In other words, “we” are an expression of Being and this expression is connected to a dynamic of sedimentation. The work of the painter is a kind of embodied thinking. Merleau-Ponty describes it as an “inspiration and expiration of Being” ([1961]1964, p. 167) as a kind of “continued birth” ([1961]1964, p. 168); or also a depth that “is my participation in a Being without restriction” ([1961]1964, p. 173) and the opening of a window “upon the absolute positivity of Being” ([1961]1964, p. 173). Thus, the painter “breathes” the carnal universe and liberates perception from its ‘common sensical’ limits. Tying this back to the *flesh* and sediment, the role of the

³⁶ Husserl’s concept of “Leib” (meaning body and an etymological connection to ‘leben’ or living) in *Ideas II* was translated into French as “chair” (la chair du monde) or flesh.

painter is related to a kind of sensitivity that facilitators of CPIs can cultivate. A sensibility concerning this “dehiscence of Being” ([1961]1964, p. 187). Instead of the painter, we can also read the philosopher, facilitator or child lending their body and so changing the world into philosophical ‘problems’. Through thinking, the thinker explores the ways in which a problem makes itself visible and enriches and enlarges our rapport with reality. To do so, the thinker must develop a sensitivity to the carnal elements of a problematic experience. The aspiration for facilitators then becomes to cultivate and learn the openness to perceive this, to become able to tune in to this carnal relationality, to become sensitive to the aspects of reality that escape us. Perhaps the facilitator, who can help liberate the child’s and their own perception from its limitations, then becomes a revelator.

5. *Existential Urgency: Provoking Carnal Relationality*

Heidegger shows how being provoked to think is something we can only learn by leaning into a question and allowing us to linger, eventually becoming a question to ourselves. With Merleau-Ponty, we tried to show how thinking is not an activity of the mind, but rather consciousness involves disclosing the world through our embodied response to the world. The world is given to us in situations and contexts (Gestalt). And yet, the thickness of flesh resists the eager “I can” giving rise to a tension. Here, the world lures us into this chiasm, to which we have to respond through our existence. Thus, thought’s carnality, the provocation, the existential urgency to think is of an embodied nature.

Finally, Heidegger suggests in his late work, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* (in *On Time and Being*) how the question of what it means to think has yet again changed. He ([1969]1972) writes: “We all still need an education in thinking, and before that first a knowledge of what being educated and uneducated in thinking means” (p. 72). Therefore, “[t]he task of thinking would then be the surrender of previous thinking to the determination of the matter of thinking” (p. 73). Therefore, we suggest that the future of philosophical inquiry requires a commitment to

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continue to rethink what it means to think. To be wary of fixed methods, definitions and formulas that claim to know what thinking is. Such preconceptions, cherished they may be, must be questioned by facilitators of CPIs. To learn to listen to the uniqueness of every child, every voice, and every utterance is maybe the greatest challenge we yet have to face. To hear what has remained unheard. And in our response to this call, we too, are irreplicable. If we fail to hear the call, there is no other to hear that call for us.

[...] And we: Spectators, always, everywhere,
Looking at, never out of, everything!
It overfills us. We arrange it. It falls apart.
We rearrange it, and fall apart ourselves.
Who has turned us around like this, so that
Always, no matter what we do, we're in the stance
Of someone just departing? As he,
On the last hill that shows him all his valley
One last time, turns, stops, lingers-,
We live our lives, forever taking leave.
Rainer Maria Rilke ([1923]2000), *The Eighth Elegy*

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