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EXPERIENCE AND PLACE –  
PHENOMENOLOGY, ATOPOLOGY AND THE BODY

It has been very common to talk about French irrationalism and to say that the aesthetic experience is so central because after the critique of epistemic foundations (truth, meaning, values) there is only art left. Everything is “Dionysus and difference”, so the chant goes. As an answer to those claims I have in my argument two points which I shall try to combine. I try to explain how the body and the experience of the outside comes from the heritage of Husserl’s philosophy into French philosophy. There are certain paradoxes that lead us to think about the concept of the experience, namely as an experience of art. I argue that the model for phenomenology comes from aesthetic experience as a reflective or a disinterested judgement. I argue also that in that position one can refer to the primordial experience which constitutes experience and the subject. Due to this approach there is the centrality of the problem of art and aesthetics. In the last chapter I give an example of a rationalistic-subjectivistic philosophical interpretation of Derrida from the theory of negative aesthetic experience and deconstruction as negative experience – this is an important contribution to the theory of aesthetic experience since it tries to combine critical theory and deconstruction in the field of aesthetics and especially aesthetic experience.

1. To start with Husserlian phenomenology and the experience of the body: we have a pre-theoretical or pre-reflective starting point, i.e. the experience of the body. This “experience of the ground” means experience after phenomenological-transcendental reduction, where the transcendental is meant in the widest sense as the living flux which founds the experience. Pre-reflective does not mean here egological experience or identity between ego (as mental content) and pre-reflective (feelings) but structural layers between empirical ego,

pure ego or empirical body and transcendental body. The structure of experience is considered here in the frame of transcendental.

One of these articulations of the primordial body consists in Husserl's statement about something called "the Earth" which means the primary ground, not the earth in the common empirico-scientific sense. Indeed, Husserl claims that "the Earth does not move" because it is an experience of the body, a ground for all subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> Beginning from this subjectivity phenomenology, the senses and the human body (or experience as "embodiment") start to build up, and these remain quite distinct from the primordial ground which refers to the transcendental apriorical ground which also means the material apriori. Of course, this means the severing of the Cartesian mind/body distinction, which also avoids the traps of German idealism, be it early (Fichte) or mature (Hegel). In Heideggerean language this could be formulated as the substantiality of the subject (subsistence) which is the same as the distinction between Being and beings – so this is what is at stake in the Husserlian position. The Husserlian body is certainly not only built onto an experience of a human body: experience is determined by the possibility of an apriorical body which is before any concrete body, bodily experience or body as an object of science (*Körper*). The focus is on the ontological meaning of the body (*Leib*) and after that we could reach the meaning of the full living phenomenological body (*geistige Leiblichkeit*).

2. The second starting point is Husserl's claim that in phenomenology the aesthetic experience is something like the phenomenological reduction, in the sense of distance and presuppositionless perceiving. This claim was made as early as 1907.<sup>2</sup> Husserl speaks rather little about aesthetics. In general he uses the term in the Greek meaning of sensuous experience. Husserl also refers to the sensuous meaning in the transcendental phase of phenomenology speaking about an "aesthetic World", which is like the Living World, *Lebenswelt*. This is

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<sup>1</sup> This was noted by Juha Himanka "Does the Earth Move? A Search for a Dialogue between Analytical and Continental Philosophy", where he states that the Earth is a body but it is neither a lived body nor the physical body, *Philosophical Forum XXXI, 2000*. Reprinted in *Phenomenology and Reduction. Reports from the Department of Philosophy, University of Helsinki, No. 1, 2000*, 62 ff. See also Edmund Husserl, "Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum phänomenologischen Ursprung der Raumlichkeit der Natur" in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*. Edited by Marvin Farber (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1940). Maurice Merleau-Ponty interpreted this in *La phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 85, as a World (*Monde*).

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Briefe an Hoffmansthal", *Briefwechsel. Band VII* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993).

the grounding horizon for human experience as sensuousness and not a world of aesthetic objects. Thus, he refers to something that he calls “transcendental aesthetics” which means the pre-predicative experience before any judgement or proposition. This can be found in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and in *Experience and Judgement* which try to formulate transcendental experience in a wider sense than in Kant because Husserl’s theory also deals with material apriori and the empirical world.<sup>3</sup> Husserl speaks about aesthetics in two traditional senses: (a) aesthetics in general as Kantian transcendental aesthetics, (b) objects of fiction, (c) which are tied together as a synthesis of imagination as a living element. Husserl’s discourse does not then just signify that the meaning of the word aesthetic changes. There is a methodological analogy on the one hand, between phenomenology and aesthetics, and the central function of the aesthetic, or aesthetic experience in the post-Husserlian French phenomenology on the other.<sup>4</sup> I try to locate a place where these two phenomenological tendencies, the heritage of the phenomenological attitude and aesthetics as a model for experience (or attitude), intersect.

There was an attitude in the French reception of Husserl in the 30s and 40s – developed in a Heideggereian perspective – where phenomenology was conceived as fruitless Cartesianism, subject philosophy, because Husserl did not have a theory of intersubjectivity and secondly, neither had he a theory of aesthetics or of art. Well, the second claim may be true, but since Husserl’s writings on intersubjectivity have appeared, the first claim is simply false. There is almost a school for interpreting Husserl in an intersubjective way – and it is not simply a question of reading Heidegger from the perspective of Husserl. The Husserlian position could be formulated as Dan Zahavi does in his book on transcendental intersubjectivity where after the transcendental reduction the subject posits other egos as nonsymmetrical intersubjectivity.<sup>5</sup> This is not so bad as it sounds, because there is now some evidence that we must posit others before me, before my own existence, the other is constituted before me and my transcendental ego. Basically the Husserlian position could also be formulated: “nothing precedes the experience of the others”. This does not yet explain either what kind of experience the experience of the others is or

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1954), *Erfahrung und Urteil* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> For example, David Carroll called this development – the centrality of aesthetics in a certain discourse – as “paraesthetics”, in his book *Paraesthetics. Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida* (London and New York: Methuen 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Dan Zahavi, *Husserl und die transzendente Intersubjektivität. Eine Antwort an Sprachgrammatische Kritik* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995).

is the identity of the other reduced first to some subject, my identity as myself before any other. One could simply question whether language precedes subjectivity and whether the intersubjective relation is a function of language: phenomenologically one would also argue that they are equiprimordial.<sup>6</sup>

The other point, where the body and experience may intersect is the Husserlian theory of spatiality, about nearness and distance, or familiarity and non-familiarity, normality and abnormality. There is a lot of work done in this area, for example by Bernhard Waldenfels in a series in four volumes about *Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden*. The first book, *Topographie des Fremden*, starts from the experience of the non-familiar. He even refers to the field or place (*Orte*) of the non-familiar or strange in experience. This can easily be found in Husserl (for example, in *Cartesian Meditations*) and Waldenfels points out that neither Husserl nor phenomenology do ask ontological “what is strange” (*ti estin*) questions or “how we can know the strange”, but the topological question which paradoxically leads to the statement: “The place (*Ort*) of the strange in the experience is named in a strong sense a Non-Place (*Nicht-Ort*)”.<sup>7</sup> This also refers to the question of place in Heidegger’s “Topology of Being”.

There are certain differences in the topological terms between, say, Heidegger and Derrida. I prefer the latter term “atopology” in which *atopos* means “out of place”. Atopology means here something that cannot be reduced to the order of the same. One can, of course, like one of Waldenfels’ students, Anthony J. Steinbock has done, develop a generative phenomenology based on these concepts, familiar and non-familiar or, being in the world as facticity in “home and beyond”.<sup>8</sup> This means to point out how Husserl divides the Living world into the familiar world and the foreign world – and these are the possible modes of experience for a consciousness. According to Waldenfels, the thematisation of foreign and home should be carried out in a phenomenological sense, before talking how an experience is an experience of foreignness.<sup>9</sup> Surely, the terms of distance and nearness, the familiar and the strange of

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<sup>6</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics” in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, *Topographie des Fremden. Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony J. Steinbock, *Home and Beyond. Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*. (Evanston; Northwestern Univ. Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 24-30. My own account can be found in *Atopologies of Derrida. Philosophy, Law and Literature. Reports from the Department of Philosophy, University of Helsinki, No. 2, 2000, 13-18.*

strangeness are one of the founding terms or “operative concepts” of philosophy. Structurally we can refer to the function they take in Heidegger’s philosophy as the terms *Unheimlichkeit* or estrangement and authenticity.<sup>10</sup> It is more a question of how you develop these terms because it is entirely familiar to say nowadays that we are “strange even to ourselves” instead of posing an existential question how to carry on one’s own authentic life before the unauthentic mass of others.

## BODIES

It would be naive, then, to argue that it is the body that is strange, or the place of strangeness. Still in phenomenology, the body has become one of the central terms in the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty, who talked about the strangeness of the body. But it was also Merleau-Ponty who recognised in the fifties, when the second volume of *Ideas* came out, that Husserl had a theory of the body.<sup>11</sup> This is important, for Merleau-Ponty is usually referred to as the initiator of the current discussion about the body.<sup>12</sup> In the language of topology, Husserl says that the living body is the zero space for experience, *Null-punkt*.<sup>13</sup> It basically means the terminology of this here and this there; and I think that one could also understand *Da-sein*’s ontology as being-there and being-here according to the account Husserl gives of his phenomenological ontology in the twenties. Of course, Heidegger developed later *Da-sein* in the meaning of “in-between” as he stressed the spatiality of *Da-sein* in the thirties.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Gerald J. Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements. Language, Truth and Poetry in the Later Writings* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) and Husserl, *Ideen II*, (*The Hague: Nijhoff, 1954*). Merleau-Ponty, of course, had a theory of the body (*corps*) in *La phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 108, where he refers to the manuscript of *Ideen II* when he says about the experience of a body that a body is not an object completely constituted. See also note 37.

<sup>12</sup> I stress this because for instance Sara Heinämaa traces the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and then back to Husserl, and not (only) to Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism as it is usually reduced. See Sara Heinämaa, “Wonder and Sexual Difference: Cartesian Radicalism in Phenomenological Thinking” in Tuomo Aho and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (eds.): *Norms and Modes of Thinking in Descartes* (Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica, 1999) and “Merleau-Ponty’s Modification of Phenomenology: Cognition, Passion and Philosophy” in *Synthese 118*, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Husserl, *Ideen II*, 158. cf. Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 195.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1927) and *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 1989)

We use here topological terminology, because it fits well the language of spatial experience (distance etc.), which also refers to the phenomenological seeing of objects and not just naive perceiving. This means a reflective philosophical account. The phenomenological reduction means here the reduction of a particular experience in order to get to the structures of the consciousness – a familiar move in transcendental subject philosophy. In a Husserlian sense, in *Experience and Judgement*, this consciousness gives intersubjectivity and the sphere of judgement (logic). This is implied in the concept of evidence because the evidence is founded in vision (*e-videre*) or perception. Or better, it is the transcendental intersubjectivity that should also give us the possibility of judging or making judgement. But also, in experience, the primordial experience or perception is passive, not simply that perceiving is passive and the expression is active but that the primordial synthesis between this activity and passivity which is in itself passive. Therefore we could speak on the level of arche-synthesis of pure passivity and in Derridean language that arche-writing is pure passivity before any activity of passivity. This could also mean the primordial constitution of the subject, or something that was first called the “transcendental field without a subject”, as it was put by Sartre in *The Transcendence of the Ego* in 1938.<sup>15</sup> The field of aesthetic experience that grounds the aesthetic judgement must imply the place between the judgement and the sensuous experience – be it the subject or not.

## AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

This is not a strong argument but I claim that in post-Husserlian phenomenology there was no misunderstanding of the work of Husserl; the problem was rather that he was too well understood. It could be said that the modes of experience are just outside the scope or the limits of phenomenology. The primordial experience, or the concept of experience is based on the phenomenological concept of experience. Now, there is of course the distinction between primordial experience and experience of the ground. The model for phenomenological experience (or phenomenological reduction) is the

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre *La transcendance de l'ego. Esquisse d'une description phenomenologique*. (Paris: Vrin, 1965). See Christina Howells, *Derrida. Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 125ff. Sartrean subjectivity could be developed quite otherwise, as the work of Manfred Frank has shown.

aesthetic experience as Husserl said in his famous letter to his distant relative Hugo von Hoffmannsthal.<sup>16</sup> There is a gap to be filled after this remark where Husserl compares the work of a phenomenologist to the work of an author's or artist's imagination, and one claim is that he followed this model. It is often said that Husserl never worked out a theory of literature, but he continually refers to non-existent or fictional objects. In *Ideas I* he stated that fiction is the life giving experience of the phenomenological life.<sup>17</sup>

The aesthetic experience is thought of in Husserl's philosophy as somehow distant like Kantian disinterestedness, as D. Giovannangeli, a Derridean aesthetician, has shown in his book *La passion de l'origine*.<sup>18</sup> I will not go into the details of these fragments but there are some hints about how one should develop Husserl's aesthetics from the above mentioned works of Husserl about making judgements and perceiving objects in consciousness without claims of existence and value.

In one way or an other we cannot avoid the aesthetic experience even if we speak about "the end of aesthetic experience" as a critique of differentiating immediate experience.<sup>19</sup> The concept of experience has its history and here this means reconstructing the relation between Husserl's and Derrida's philosophies, especially concerning the level of pre-reflexive experience in the phenomenological sense. In the later Derrida the experience of impossibility (death and literature) is developed. Derrida's terminology "the experience of impossibility" could be, if there is such an experience, developed in terms of the place of this experience, as Blanchot spoke about the space of literature. I would suggest that there is an atopolitical place – not a Morean *u-topos* or *eu-topos* meaning a not-existing place which is a good place, an utopia. This atopolis, a nonexistent place, is the place of impossibility. *Atopolis* refers to the absurd, but is also means the wonder that is said to be the beginning of philosophy.

Now there is the task of trying to combine the phenomenological and topological discourse of distance and nearness and intersubjectivity (ego and others) with this place of impossibility. And if it is art, or the aesthetic

<sup>16</sup> See supra note 2.

<sup>17</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, translated by F. Kersten (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1983) See also Françoise Dastur, "Husserl et la neutralité de l'art", *La part de l'Œil*, no. 7, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Giovannangeli, *La passion d'origine*. Paris: Galilée, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Shusterman, "The End of Aesthetic Experience", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1997: 55, No. 1., 30. He sees the phenomenological experience as "an immediate experience" and then he rightly finds critical theory and deconstruction in opposition to phenomenology although the phenomenological experience is more complex in its neutrality.

experience, or as an experience-limit, it also points out the limits of the phenomenologisable (everything cannot be reduced to intentional living consciousness or to the non-intentional but there is the "in-between") and crucial tendencies of modern French philosophy. In this philosophy aesthetic experience is considered as a limit experience (since Bataille and Blanchot) – experience as such has already the distance and nearness as its possibility. The concept of experience which refers to the outside, is a quite good candidate for an atypical place. And usually we find again that it is the poetic experience that is privileged as 'an experience of estrangement and foreignness.

Maurice Blanchot and Paul Celan, for example, have thought along these lines as Gerald Bruns has shown.<sup>20</sup> In Celan it is not always clear if the poem is speaking to anybody alive (to stones, to the dead); in Blanchot the discourse has a relation to the other as incessable murmuring. In short, philosophy tries to conceptualise the experience of the unsayable and noncommunicable, but art could say something about this un-speakable, which could mean the experience of impossibility. Blanchot, for instance, in his *Inawoable Community* refers to Bataille's writings about community, going outside and *ex-stasis*: which means going outside the order of experience (*Erfahrung*), about what is outside experience (*Erlebnis* which is in the order of being present and presence in founding a community). Blanchot has also used the term "experience limit", where the experience refers to the most ordinary and not to such "limit experiences".<sup>21</sup>

The topological approach to some central concepts of philosophy leads to atypical, a nonexistent or impossible place. Since the concept of *Er-fahrung* involves a distance and going away (*fahren*) in a Heideggerean sense,<sup>22</sup> experience must be considered in the terms of distance and nearness, also in the sense of closeness and foreignness, homeland and exile. What can be made of this topology of experience, if the possibility of experience involves the concept of space and distance? The notion of distance is incorporated in the aesthetic experience in itself, although it is not very clear, how such an experience is constituted as an aesthetic experience. Maybe we should consider the order of

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<sup>20</sup> Gerald Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot. The Refusal of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *La communauté inavouable* (Paris: Minuit 1983), 33-37, and *L'entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Métailié, 1992), where Nancy refers to something called *ex-cription* when he speaks of outsideness and continuity of the body.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung" (1942/43) in *Holzwege* (Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 1950).



moods, *Stimmungen*, as Rodolphe Gasché points out when he refers to German idealism and to Kant's Third Critique, where transcendentalism determines the intersubjectivity of aesthetic judgement as a harmony (*Einstimmungen*).<sup>23</sup> It is the question of *Bestimmung*, constitution and determination, which can be related to the ground tonality, as Heidegger says in his writings after *Sein und Zeit*. Philosophy begins, as a philosophical experience, with *Grundstimmung* which means dullness and loneliness (*Einsamkeit, Langweile*), and of course, distance.

## SOVEREIGNTY AND EXPERIENCE

Here I try to focus on the Menke-Eggers' interpretation of Derrida in his book *Souveränität in der Kunst. Ästhetische Erfahrung nach Adorno und Derrida* in order to discuss certain developments of Derrida.<sup>24</sup> Menke-Eggers' interpretation is interesting because it is one of the rare comparisons of deconstruction and critical theory. He says that Derridian aesthetics is "negative aesthetics", in Adorno's sense of negativity or negative dialectics. Deconstruction is negativity in virtue of undoing the very oppositions, although Menke-Eggers is not satisfied with the results of deconstruction.

Menke-Eggers' book has been recently translated into English as, *The Sovereignty of Art*, as it was translated earlier to French and one could also see that the same problematics that occur in the context of critical theory are very much alive in the discussion about the meaning of criticism and deconstruction in the United States in the 90s. For example Peggy Kamuf says that the determination of aesthetic experience always means a decision of experience<sup>25</sup> – the experience should be pure but the pureness or specificity means that this decision, always has a character, or a distinction between the species of experience.

This concept of autonomy is problematic because Menke-Eggers speaks a lot of sovereignty and he means simply sovereignty in art, or the autonomy of

<sup>23</sup> Rodolphe Gasché, "Transcendentalism, in Play", in *Kant's Aesthetic*, edited by Herman Parret (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Christoph Menke-Eggers, *Die Souveränität der Kunst. Ästhetische Erfahrung nach Adorno und Derrida*, English translation by Neil Solomon *The Sovereignty in Art. Aesthetic Experience in Adorno and Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 1998.)

<sup>25</sup> Peggy Kamuff, *The Division of Literature or the University in Deconstruction* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997).

aesthetic experience. The political and the theological aspect of sovereignty should be emphasised – in classical Hobbesian manner, it is the sovereign (the king) who decides. The concept of sovereignty implies a decision of sovereignty, subjectivity and an order of experience in the history of subjectivity. This means that the topology of experience could already be decided, as it is in Carl Schmitt's political philosophy where the sovereign decides and founds the law, according to Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*.<sup>26</sup> The sovereign experience does not then mean the experience of the sovereign.

One way and a more phenomenological way to emphasise the negativity is – in order to get to the structures of art (or texts, or ontology of literature) – that one must recognise the necessity of the phenomenological reduction in deconstruction. This means that reduction in the sense of annihilation: it denies all claims about existence, or it neutralizes all claims about existence, as in Husserl's *Ideas I*.<sup>27</sup> I do not know how far this analogy should be developed, since the annihilation of the world (from *Ideas I*) is of course not a possibility in later phenomenology.<sup>28</sup> In speaking about Derrida's *Of Grammatology*<sup>29</sup> Menke-Eggers recognises Derrida's move to the transcendental experience, which means the suspension of the totality of natural experience and regional experience that leads (in a Husserlian tradition) to the transcendental experience. Menke-Eggers describes Derrida as "ultratranscendental" because he neither falls into naive objectivism nor phenomenological transcendentalism but goes beyond them.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately the relation to phenomenology is not developed more, but one could point out that this leads to the origin of experience, which is a passive synthesis between activity and passivity, as arche-synthesis.

To put it clearly, Menke-Eggers' interpretation is based on the concept of negativity and the semiotic articulation of Adorno and Derrida as simple code/message, content/expression distinctions leads to constitutive differences or negativity. Derrida is read in the context of *Vernunftkritik* and dialectics. In regard to Adorno's negative dialectics it must be remembered that it was Kojève's Hegel whose influence for Bataille and Blanchot lead French

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<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, translated by George Collins (London: Verso, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Husserl, *Ideas*, §§ 111-199.

<sup>28</sup> Rudolf Bernet, *La vie du sujet. Recherches sur l'interprétation de Husserl dans la phénoménologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994), 95ff.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976).

<sup>30</sup> Menke-Eggers, *Souveränität*, 209; ET 197.

philosophy to the concepts of the work of negativity and of death in which the double affirmation continues in literature because it means death (signification in language). It is just not enough to claim that Derrida simply follows Bataille and Hegel in the negativity, or the work of negativity. Language means death for Hegel and literature is the work of death but for Derrida this is also a way to point to non-existence (for example, the famous death of the author). Menke-Eggers recognises that in Derrida there also occurs affirmation, the double affirmation, which means a non-synthesis in the movement of Hegelian dialectics. Of course, through this negativity or these differences there is a structure for texts (or art). Menke-Eggers says that Derrida mixes the genres of aesthetic and non-aesthetic in order to achieve a negative aesthetic experience. This means first that there are no superstructures (genres) for texts but it does not yet mean that there are no differences (for example between philosophy and literature, or poetry and narrative). Menke-Eggers states that negative means the transformation of aesthetic experience (*Erfahrung*) into other categories of experience.<sup>31</sup> According to Menke-Eggers, the sovereign, aesthetic experience of negativity is always simultaneously non-aesthetic cognition (*Erkenntnis*) of negativity if one wants to clarify Derrida in relation to Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.<sup>32</sup> The aesthetics of negativity, or the aesthetic difference means the distinction between aesthetic and not-aesthetic (*Nichtästhetischen*) which is aesthetic negativity.<sup>33</sup> To summarise Menke-Eggers' thesis: for him sovereignty means "aesthetic experience" that is the aesthetic which is not in the order of reason as one differentiated and autonomous form of reason. This is not escapism but "the exceeding of reason" because for Adorno the second version of autonomous aesthetic experience, the concept autonomy of aesthetics from romanticism to surrealism, promises that the absolute is present in art.<sup>34</sup> The thesis of the autonomy of aesthetics, or aesthetic experience in the concept of negativity must be reformulated in Derrida as semiology that criticises the relation between aesthetics and other types of negativity. This means that it is through difference that the negativity of aesthetic processes (experience) could be determined and not from an origin in society.<sup>35</sup> It means that a non-negating and a non-sublating negativity (*Unaufhebbare Negation*) is aesthetics.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 180; ET 168.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 190; ET 177.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 19; ET 3.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 10; ET VII.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 13; ET XI-XII.

Earlier in his book Menke-Eggers refers to Monroe C. Beardsley who determines the non-aesthetic as something that does not produce “aesthetic experience” instrumentally.<sup>36</sup> It should be an empirical experience which determines intense aesthetic experience; and besides there are aesthetic objects which are not works of art. The lack of aesthetic experience is taken as a negation and not in the form of a more general object theory (be it phenomenological or psychoanalytical) where the lack or privation of the object (or experience of the object) does not mean that the object ever existed and such a lack could be fulfilled.

In the work of Derrida this empiricism is clearly reduced in order to get to the general structure of experience – the question should be “What is a work of art in general?”, or topologically “Where is or where does a work of art exist?” before any concrete works of art or the effect they are producing or supposed to produce are considered. Of course, Derrida points to the singularity of art, and the possibility of singular experience, or to the “experience of impossibility”. There cannot be a place for a sovereign determination of aesthetic experience. Menke-Eggers’ work is valuable in pointing to the sovereignty of art – of course, for Derrida the sovereignty is the subjectless field, without subject, *ek-stasis*, going outside subject, as in Bataille. For Derrida, this is singularity of experience; in this sense aesthetic experience could be sovereign, as sovereignty without the subject. If this means hopeless negativity and the denial of aesthetic experience one could then wonder – why the discourse of art in relation to epistemology is so important?

## NEGATIVITY AND EXPERIENCE

Ordinary experience and empirical locality must be reduced or negated even if negativity and subjectivity is a starting point for thinking experience and place. Still in the experience of the body we can distinguish several levels: the primordial body with an atotopological origin, then some ontic body or concrete body – but I would not claim that this is the place of the experience of negativity. That would involve the body proper and that also leads to the possibility of unauthentic *Doppelgänger* which haunts the original and proper body or corporeality. Menke-Eggers’ account would lead first to a cultural

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 142-143; ET 130-131.

critique or a new historical interpretation of the body as a truth of the body. I propose that the experience of the body is an impossible meeting at an atypical place without any original truth of the body's being as substantial, intentional or existential. Even Rudolf Bernet interpreted Merleau-Ponty as pointing to this direction when he speaks about the body as *non-lieu* or a-topos: if everything is in nature or everything is in culture, so the body (*corps*) would be a non-place.<sup>37</sup> We do not have any cultural or biological origin for the body.

The aesthetic experience, it could be situated in between the foreign and familiar, but the foreignness is not a necessary condition for an aesthetic experience or a limit experience. It could be said, at least against Habermas, that this kind of thinking about aesthetics or art does not mean that it is Dionysus again, and irrationalism again that is proposing "aesthetics" as a solution. I doubt that it is Habermas who defines the contexts for a critique of aesthetic experience that depends on the rationality of a subject. The subject is posited here as constituting the experience and not in the sense of the object of a cultural critique. One could also mention Peter Dews, who praises Derrida for being a dialectician like Adorno, but incapable of any proper subject philosophy with materialistic determination, because in accepting the Husserlian transcendental point, in *Of Grammatology* he falls back on *Identitätsphilosophie*.<sup>38</sup> But yet, there is no affirmed identity between the subject and the object because the body is not posited as an object to the subject which should have some kind of identity, be it weak, strong or certain.

Negativity, or negative experience, seems to be too easy an answer, as Menke-Eggers defines the aesthetic experience of negativity meaning foreign or "alien": "The aesthetic object is the ground of an experience of aesthetic negativity only insofar as it shows itself to be that which is alien (*das Fremde*) to attempts at understanding *in these very attempts at understanding it*."<sup>39</sup> Negativity and understanding is not yet the answer if the body, or the materiality of the body, is the place of the experience of the foreign and familiar, or the non-place of aesthetic experience as a chiasmatic difference between bodies and a

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<sup>37</sup> Bernet, *La vie*, 178. There are of course, difficulties in presenting a coherent view of Merleau-Ponty from *La phénoménologie*, 275, where the body is a strange (*étranger*) object in relation to signification, to *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 170ff., about the relations of *corps* and *chair*.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment. Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1995.), 31-32. One can find similar arguments in Manfred Frank, *What is Neo-Structuralism?*, English translation by Sabine Wilke and Richard Gray (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>39</sup> Menke-Eggers, *Souveränität*, 158; ET 146.

transcendental body. Where is the place of such a transcendental body, where to situate such a place of the experience of transcendentality?