

Hermeneutic Rationality La rationalité herméneutique

edited by

Maria Luísa Portocarrero

Luis António Umbelino

Andrzej Wierciński

LIT

Printing supported by:



Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Werkdruckpapier entsprechend
ANSI Z3948 DIN ISO 9706

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der
Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind
im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

ISBN 978-3-643-11549-2

© LIT VERLAG Dr. W. Hopf Berlin 2012

Verlagskontakt:

Fresnostr. 2 D-48159 Münster

Tel. +49 (0) 2 51-620 320 Fax +49 (0) 2 51-23 19 72

e-Mail: lit@lit-verlag.de <http://www.lit-verlag.de>

Auslieferung:

Deutschland: LIT Verlag Fresnostr. 2, D-48159 Münster

Tel. +49 (0) 2 51-620 32 22, Fax +49 (0) 2 51-922 60 99, e-Mail: vertrieb@lit-verlag.de

Österreich: Medienlogistik Pichler-ÖBZ, e-Mail: mlo@medien-logistik.at

Schweiz: B + M Buch- und Medienvertrieb, e-Mail: order@buch-medien.ch

offers his most sustained treatment of *phronesis*, Heidegger refers to character only to emphasize its critical function, that is, only to acknowledge that without a stable character one's passions would get the upper hand, which would result in the distortion of one's moral vision and inhibit *phronesis*.¹⁰⁰ For Heidegger too, then, character is a necessary counterpart to *phronesis*, but not a positive condition for discernment.¹⁰¹ Character or moral sense is not the guide to moral action, as it is for both Gadamer and Aristotle, but a purely critical element, which is therefore inessential. Dasein could do without character in principle, if not in fact. This insight allows us to formulate our primary objection to the Heidegger of *Being and Time*: unlike Gadamer's hermeneutic self, Dasein has no character.¹⁰²

Finally, we can also indicate that the hermeneutic self is able to overcome the solipsism that continued to beset both Heidegger and Levinas. While for Heidegger, authentic sociality is grounded in authentic solitude, for Gadamer, the other is the source or ground by which the self comes to understand itself. Alternatively, while for Levinas the self is given to itself in the approach of an other too transcendent to recognize, for Gadamer the other serves as the occasion for an act of understanding that would otherwise be impossible. That is, the understanding enacted in the hermeneutic encounter is grounded in the being of the other, and not in the prior cognitional activity of the subject. Gadamer's hermeneutic subject, as opposed to Dasein or the one-for-the-other of substitution, operates neither from out of the resolutions of its will, nor from a passive sensibility entirely beyond appropriation, but from a cultivated sensitivity to the particularity of the other.

¹⁰⁰ "If one of these (pleasure or pain) dominates a man the result is that it does not show itself from itself. The true no longer shows itself; it is thus concealed and must be uncovered through logos. In this way, therefore, *phronesis*, as soon as it is achieved, is involved in a constant struggle against a tendency to cover over residing at the heart of Dasein." Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 37.

¹⁰¹ This is especially clear insofar as Heidegger refers to pleasure and pain only as impediments to *phronesis*, and not as positive conditions for *phronesis*. See note 93. For Aristotle, on the other hand, the appropriate distribution of pleasures is the defining mark of a good man: "For besides the reasons given already, someone who does not enjoy fine actions is not good; for no one would call a person just, for instance, if he did not enjoy doing just actions, or generous if he did not enjoy generous actions, and similarly for the other virtues." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a/18.

¹⁰² Gadamer voiced this same concern when, after reading over Heidegger's lecture years later, was surprised to find that Heidegger had neglected the role of character: "What struck me most on the whole is the preponderance of the ontological interest which is apparent also in the entire *phronesis* analysis, so that the concept of 'ethos' is hardly mentioned at all in the programmatic text. Ethos, however, is precisely that which is not enlightenment (*Erhellung*) but habituation. Heidegger had certainly recognized habituation in his analysis of the facticity of life as constitutive, but characterized it as the inclination of life to decline/deteriorate (*verfallen*). It appears therefore not so much in the enlightening of Dasein but rather in its distortion and obscuring, against which the exertion of thinking must direct itself in order to become transparent to itself." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Preface," *Dilthey Jahrbuch*, 1989, trans. Michael Eldred, 233.

7. DIACRITICAL HERMENEUTICS

Richard Kearney

For K-

You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat. So I did sit and eat.
George Herbert¹

What is diacritical hermeneutics? First a word on what I mean by hermeneutics generally, then several words on the qualifier, diacritical.

I understand hermeneutics as an art of deciphering multiple meaning. In its most basic sense this relates to the human capacity to have 'two thinks at a time,' as James Joyce said. More precisely, it refers to the practice of discerning indirect, tacit or allusive meanings, of sensing another sense beyond or beneath apparent sense. This special human activity may in turn call for a method of second-order, reflective interpretation involving a process of disclosing concealed messages, either by a) unmasking covered-up meaning (hermeneutics of suspicion) or b) by disclosing surplus meaning (hermeneutics of affirmation). In short, I understand hermeneutics to be the task of interpreting (*hermeneuein*) plural meaning in response to the polysemy of language and life.²

Hermeneutics, thus viewed, is an activity carried out in the name of its founding spirit, Hermes: Messenger of gods, guardian of thresholds, and carrier of cryptic codes. The three original disciplines of hermeneutics, formulated by Friedrich Schleiermacher in the 19th century, were theology, law, and philology. Why these? Because each solicited an interpretation of dual meanings: a) divine and human (theology), b) prosecutorial and defensive (law), c) ancient and actual (philology). All three disciplines called for a method of discriminating between different and often conflicting readings. Wilhelm Dilthey would add 'history' to the list as a universal human science devoted to reading between past and present; a science, which he saw as a model for a general hermeneutics of life as it interprets itself. Whence the birth of philosophical hermeneutics.

Later, Heidegger broadened the definition further in speaking of an ontological hermeneutic committed to understanding the fundamental difference between Being and beings—a task based on a pre-understanding of our everyday existence as being-toward-death. The famous hermeneutic circle. And more recently, thinkers like Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Caputo have augmented the

¹ From George Herbert's poem, "Love bade me welcome." See Kascha Semonovitch's essay on this subject in "Incarnate Experience and Keeping the Soul Ajar," *Religion and the Arts*, vol 14, no 5, Special Issue: "Hospitality: Imagining the Stranger," ed. Christopher Yates (2010): 515-690. See also the commentary on this poem as a phenomenology of the embodied stranger in our joint essay, "At the Threshold: Foreigners, Strangers, Others," in Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, ed., *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 25-29.

² This outline of a general philosophical hermeneutics is particularly indebted to Paul Ricoeur, in the wake of the prior formulations of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger.

contemporary project of philosophical hermeneutics in various significant ways (semantic, psychoanalytic, deconstructive). But what all these different hermeneutic movements share is a commitment to the task of negotiating and adjudicating between different levels of meaning.

So where exactly does diacritical hermeneutics fit in? And how might it contribute to the hermeneutic legacy described above?

I have already sketched my project of diacritical hermeneutics in a few passages of *Strangers Gods and Monsters* and some subsequent interviews.³ But as John Caputo has remarked, this project has, to date, been more performed than explained. I will attempt to redress the balance here by addressing the question under five main headings:

1) In the most obvious sense, dia-critical involves a 'critical' function of interrogation. I mean this in the modern sense of the term from Kant's three *Critiques* down to the more contemporary movements of Critical Theory from Horkheimer and Benjamin to Habermas and Foucault. In this broad sweep, I would obviously include critiques of race, class, gender, power, and the unconscious: All critical philosophies, which carry on the legacy, amongst others, of the 'three masters of suspicion' (Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche). In short, I understand critique here as both a) an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of meaning; and b) a critical exposure of 'masked' power in the name of liberation and justice. This latter more socio-ethical-political aspect of critique is one I find lacking in most mainstream hermeneutic methods to date (Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer) until we arrive at Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion and Vattimo's hermeneutics of subversion.

2) Second, dia-critical involves the 'criteriological' function of discerning between competing claims to meaning. This comprises hermeneutic retrievals of previous memories and testimonies as well as future oriented projects—utopian, messianic, eschatological. 'Emancipation is itself a tradition,' as Ricoeur says; it is a form of 'anticipatory memory.' The idea of emancipation does not erupt *ex nihilo*. It does not start with modern revolutions and the Enlightenment; rather it draws from a whole palimpsest of prior narratives of liberation going back, in the West, to biblical stories of exodus and the Socratic awakening. Aristotle addresses the question of ethical criteria already in the *Rhetoric* when he remarks that if you wish to communicate the meaning of a virtue you recount the story of someone who embodies it—e.g., Achilles for courage, Penelope for constancy, Tiresias for wisdom. Such narratives—ancient or modern—provide *phronesis* with exemplary paradigms and patterns by which to measure, judge, and act. Otherwise how could

³ For my previous descriptions of dia-critical hermeneutics see Introduction to *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London: Routledge, 2003) and *Debates in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 249-250.

one tell the difference between just and unjust actions? These differences require careful criteriological discriminations. And there are obviously other significant criteria apart from the narrative one mentioned (e.g., rational evaluation, virtue ethics, pragmatist judgment, phenomenological intuition of values, feminist and ideology critiques, wisdom traditions and so on). In short, *pace* deconstruction, I endorse the use of criteria as long as they involve vigilant discernments and distinctions.

3) Third, in keeping with the more precise dictionary definition of 'dia-critical,' I refer to a grammatological attention to inflections of linguistic marks. In this technical sense, dia-critics provides rules for differentiating between minute units of language (signifiers, graphemes, accents). Think, for example, of the difference which the following accents—grave, acute, circumflex, and diaeresis—make on the same letter in the French language: é è ê, ë. Or think of how 'où' with an accent (meaning 'where') differs from 'ou' without accent (meaning 'or'). These silent, discreet signs distinguish between values of the same character. Small graphic demarcations thus serve to avoid confusion between otherwise identical letters, helping us differentiate between distinct meanings. In this sense, diacritics is about micro-reading. And here, I think, I share common ground with John Caputo's radical hermeneutics and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction.⁴

4) In addition to this technical usage in linguistic and semiotic practice, dia-critics also has the older meaning of reading the body. The Greek terms, *dia-krinein* and *dia-krisis*, referred to the medical or therapeutic practice of diagnosing symptoms of bodily fevers, colorations, and secretions. In this respect, the word designated the hermeneutic art of telling the difference between health and disease. Such a skill to read between the lines of skin and flesh—in order to sound the movements of the soul (homeopathic or allopathic)—was often a matter of life and death. Needless to say, this model of micrological reading of somatic and psycho-somatic symptoms has deep implications for the practice of philosophical reading in its own right. (I agree with Wittgenstein that philosophy is therapy). In sum, diacritical hermeneutics should do you good!

⁴ I am particularly indebted to John Caputo and Jacques Derrida on this question of micrological reading and the attendant notion of our textured experience as a basic form of *écriture*, which for me rejoins in interesting ways the old medieval idea of the *liber mundi* ('semiological ontology') and the earlier Greek idea of the logos of nature as a primary tacit language (*logos endiathetos*) calling out for a more articulate verbal language (*logos prophorikos*). Heraclitus and the stoics were obvious proponents of this notion of *logos-in-phusis* which, of course, was later retrieved in the Christian notion of *ensarkosis*, the Stoic doctrine of *logoi spermatikoi* and the Kabbalistic notion of the world as traced by the secret letters of Creation (*Sefer Yetzirah*). In his late work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty offers an interesting hermeneutic retrieval of the *logos endiathetos/prophorikos* distinction from the point of view of what I am calling a carnal-diacritical phenomenology. See our discussion of Merleau-Ponty below.

5) These four characteristics—*critical, criteriological, linguistic, and diagnostic*—comprise the basis of what I call, finally and most primally, ‘*carnal hermeneutics*.’ Here we are concerned with a hermeneutics that goes all the way down. It covers diacritical readings of different kinds of Others—human, animal or divine. Such carnal hermeneutics has a crucial bearing, to take just one example, on how we ‘sense’ subtle distinctions between hostile and hospitable strangers (the same term, *hostis* can refer to guest or enemy). And pursuing this example I would say that diacritical hermeneutics has two patron saints—the god Hermes and the dog Argos.⁵ For if Hermes discloses hermetic messages from above, Argos brings animal savvy from below. The former guides our deciphering of cryptic messages and masks (Hermes disguised as a beggar). The latter, Argos, imparts a canine flair for recognizing the friend or enemy in the visitor (e.g., Odysseus returned to Ithaca to oust the false suitors).⁶

Diacritical hermeneutics may thus be defined as both sacred and terrestrial in so far as it ranges up and down—in ascending and descending spirals—from the highest hintings of the absolute to the lowest scents of the abyss. While hands reach up, feet reach down. But no matter how high or low hermeneutic ‘sense’ goes, it never leaves us totally in the dark. It is not blind but half-seeing and half-believing. It is a sort of incarnate *phronesis* which sounds, probes, scents, and filters. Something akin to Wittgenstein’s seeing-as in our most ordinary perceptions or Heidegger’s understanding-as in our most basic moods (see his analysis of *Verstehen-Befindlichkeit*). This fundamental form of existential sensibility and sensitivity is further radicalized in Merleau-Ponty’s more embodied notion of ‘dia-critical perception’ to which I shall see below.⁷

⁵ The name of the true dog, Argos, who recognizes Odysseus in Bk 17 of the *Odyssey* is derived from the Greek word *argos* meaning gleaming, shining (from which the Latin term for silver, *argentum*, is derived). The word *enargeis* is used by Homer in Bk 16 to mark the ‘shining’ of the goddess Athena which transforms Odysseus from a beggar-stranger back into himself. But unlike the dog Argos, his own son, Telemachus, does not at first recognize his father, mistaking him instead for a god. It is telling, I think, that this connection between *argos/enargeis* and diacritical hermeneutics occurs in one of the oldest texts in Western literature: A lesson in how to discern between mortal and immortal strangers through our carnal senses; indeed a lesson which, Homer suggests, dogs may well have to teach men! With hermeneutics, it all comes down to smell in the end. As it was in the beginning. Canine flair. I am grateful to Richard Capobianco for bringing the passage from the *Odyssey* to my attention in Martin Heidegger, “On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking,” trans. Richard Capobianco and Marie Göbel, *Epoché* 14:2 (Spring 2010): 213-23.

⁶ It is telling that the first thing father and son do in the moment of mutual disclosure is to eat a meal, the two ‘strangers’ (*hospites*) becoming host (*hospes*) and guest (*hospes*) to each other. One finds the same polysemy at work in the Greek term *xenos*. Diacritical hermeneutics as hospitality (*xenizein*). See our discussion of these terminological and etymological variations in *Anatheism*, 27-28, 47-49.

⁷ We could also include here Max Scheler’s account of embodied ethical feeling in *The Nature of Sympathy*, Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic reading of semiotic unconscious experience in *Desire in Language* and later work; and Emmanuel Levinas’ ethico-phenomenological analysis of pre-conceptual ‘sensibility’ in *Otherwise than Being*. See, for example, how Levinas describes the relation of subjectivity as one of ‘sensibility’ and ‘vulnerability’ to pleasure and pain (ibid., ch. 3)—a form of radical carnal ‘contact,’ ‘proximity,’ and ‘exposure’ prior to intentionality or consciousness. “The exposure to another is,” he writes, “proximity, obsession by the neighbor, an obsession despite oneself, that is, a pain.” (ibid., 55) Levinas does not deny this is already a form of language: but it is a language in its most primordial expression/

At this stage, and by way of addressing one of the most recent discussions of hermeneutics, we might ask how our fivefold model of dia-critical hermeneutics compares with John Caputo’s method of ‘radical hermeneutics’ inspired by Derrida’s deconstruction. While the diacritical and radical approaches share a common commitment to micro-logical reading, there are also significant differences. In contrast to deconstructive *sans-savoir*, diacritical hermeneutics practices a certain *savoir*, which goes beyond and beneath Derrida’s maxim of ‘reading in the dark.’ Diacritical *savoir* should, I suggest, be understood in its original etymological sense of tasting: *savourer, sapere, sapientia*. It is not knowledge, in the purely cognitive or theoretical attitude (here I agree with deconstruction); but it is some kind of sense nonetheless. Sense as primal interpretation, reading between the lines of skin and flesh. A sensing which makes sense in the three connotations of the French *sens*: sensation, direction, meaning. I am concerned here, in short, with a multilayered sensing which goes all the way up and down—like Jacob’s ladder—from thought to touch and back again.⁸ Meaning ascending and descending in open-ended spirals.

And let me add this: The *dia* of dia-critical is crucial. It’s sensing is fundamentally dia-logical. It sounds and resounds across differences between self and other (human, animal or divine). *Dia-legein*—a reading between, through, across (*dia*), an inter-signifying in relation, a welcoming of alterity.

*

By way of elaborating further on the different inflections between diacritical hermeneutics and deconstruction let me explore for a moment the implications of what I call ‘diacritical sensation.’ I refer here to the way the body reads. Or more precisely, the way we read bodies and bodies read us. In a trivial, obvious way we are familiar with phrases like ‘I don’t know how to read you?’ or ‘your face betrays your feelings’ or the proverbial ‘the eyes are the mirrors of the soul.’ Lady Macbeth puts it well to her husband, ‘your face is like a book, my Thane, where men may read strange matters.’

Mostly such phrases are used in relation to facial expressions—glancing or shading of eyes, widening of pupils, raising of eyebrows, altering of complexion, stiffening or loosening of lips, smiling or grimacing of mouth. But facial vision, as bearer of inner moods, deep feelings and moral emotions, is not the only (if in the West privileged) medium of expression. In addition to our ability to see, we also have the ability to hear, touch, smell and taste. Each sense has its own special

obsession: An ethical ‘saying’ before the ‘said’ of thematization and representation, a language where the self does not give signs but is itself a sign of saying. (Ibid., 47) This is what Levinas means when he says that sensing is ‘saying’ (*le dire*) or pre-thematic ‘signifying’ (signifyingness or *significance*). I am indebted here to James Taylor’s essay, “After the Modern Subject: Between Activity and Passivity in Heidegger, Levinas, and Gadamer” in the present volume. See also the recent work of Kelly Oliver, Karmen McKendrik, and Catherine Keller for interesting contributions to a hermeneutics of the flesh.

⁸ For earlier sketches of a carnal hermeneutics of discernment see *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, chs 3-5 and 7, and *Anatheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), chs 1-2, 5.

savoir/saveur and is deeply structured in terms of body mapping, orientation and negotiation. Sensing is never neutral. Every sense possesses its particular *symbolique*, as Lévi-Strauss demonstrated in his structural anthropology of *la pensée sauvage*. Even the most basic culture of food is a way of carving up our universe into good or bad to eat, raw or cooked, herbivorous or carnivorous, hostile or hospitable. Matters of taste are often matters of inclusion and exclusion, even of life or death. And taste here is as literal as it is figural (since it subverts the distinction); or, more accurately, it is not just a matter of aesthetic judgment but of actual savoring upon the lips, tongue and palette. Man is what he eats, as the old adage goes; but he is also *how* he eats. The contents of the menu are less important than how one chooses each dish, or why one sits down to the meal in the first place. *Chaque un à son goût*.

Taste (along with smell) is the most primordial sense of carnal hermeneutics. The most alimentary is the most elementary. For tasting is already, *ab initio*, a transfiguring of nature into culture. It involves a splitting of the world into binaries which may be left opposed or symbolically recombined.⁹ A dialectic of sundering and revealing through food is to be found in most wisdom traditions. Adam and Eve taste the apple. Abraham and Sarah dine with sacred strangers. Krishna swallows the puff of rice giving fullness back to emptiness. Jesus breaks bread in Emmaus restoring his broken body. Isis's fish consumes the dismembered flesh of Osiris. Each great wisdom tradition is, it seems, marked by such moments of inaugural eating. Let me say a few words about just one of these foundational scenes before returning to a more phenomenological account of diacritical sensation.

*

One of the oldest records of sacred eating in the Indo-European tradition is to be found in the Taittiriya Upanishad. Here we read how the divine manifests itself in

⁹ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Penguin, 1968). It might be noted here that the primal reading of food is also related to ancient practices of 'reading' animals and fish. Herman Melville captures this well in his carnal reading of the diacritical marks on the skin of the great Leviathan, one of the oldest creatures known to human kind: "In life, the visible surface of the Sperm Whale is not the least among the many marvels he presents. Almost invariably it is all over obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array, something like those in the finest Italian line engravings. But these marks do not seem to be impressed upon the isinglass substance... but seem to be seen through it, as if they were engraved upon the body itself. Nor is this all. In some instances, to the quick, observant eye, those linear marks, as in a veritable engraving, but afford the ground for far other delineations. These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious ciphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to use in the present connection. By my retentive memory of the hieroglyphics upon one Sperm Whale in particular, I was much struck with a plate representing the old Indian characters chiseled on the famous hieroglyphic palisades on the banks of the Upper Mississippi. Like those mystic rocks, too, the mystic-marked whale remains undecipherable." Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Random House, 1930), 443. Is it not in such primal indecipherable marks, such 'mysterious cyphers' which provoke our desire to decipher, that we witness the first origins of human hermeneutics? Later on in the novel (503), Melville draws an analogy with the famous hermeneut, Champollion, who decrypted and deciphered the Rosetta Stone.

the offering and eating of food.¹⁰ 'Treat your guests like gods' (1.11.2) when giving food, we are told, for 'that (food) is Brahman.' (3.1) The true self of mind and vital breath was considered to dwell within food, considered as an interconnection between the cosmic elements of air and earth. (3.9) The task of the host is to discern this culinary 'correspondence' and thereby recognize the god within the guest. Offering hospitality to the guest is a sacred act in that it reminds us of the integrity of body and soul illustrated by the equation: Food=true happiness-Brahman. The Upanishad concludes with a resounding paean to the transfiguring power of food. The self becomes sacred in a sacramental identification with eating: 'I am food! I eat him who eats the food! I have conquered the whole universe! I am like the light in the firmament.' (3.10.6) This ancient belief found classic expression in the formula: 'Anna (food) is the manifestation of Brahman'; and it later became the basis for a long Vedantin tradition of hospitality where saintly figures offer themselves as food and reveal themselves in the act of eating and being eaten. The unexpected guest (*a-thiti*) who asks to be fed is a god waiting to become manifest. In feeding the guest we greet the divine and taste its food. A primal act of carnal hermeneutics.

We find clear echoes here of similar acts of sacred hospitality in biblical literature. Recall again Abraham and Sarah feeding the three strangers at Mamre (Gen 18); or Christ offering his body as Eucharistic bread at the Last Supper and at Emmaus, or returning as the stranger (*hospes*) who asks and receives food from passersby (Matt 25). I have treated such inaugural scenes of sacred transformation between hosts and guests elsewhere, so I will not dwell further on them here.¹¹ Suffice it to note that the sacred sharing of food is not confined to Hindu or biblical traditions but is also found in other cultural myths of gods appearing as guests at the table of hospitality. On studying such recurring motifs one might be tempted to infer the existence of some trans-cultural, or quasi-universal, practice of gustatory hospitality. And one might be right. But such comparative theologies of the tongue themselves involve a work of diacritical hermeneutics—a second-order methodical interpretation of first-order interpretations of carnal communication between hosts and guests.¹² All such primal scenes of eating, across diverse

¹⁰ See Francis Clooney, "Food, the Guest, and the Taittiriya Upanishad: Hospitality in the Hindu Traditions," in Richard Kearney and James Taylor, ed., *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 139-146.

¹¹ See chapters 1, 4 and 5 of *Anatheism*.

¹² For comparative cultural/religious examples of gustatory hospitality see also the recent essays of Kalpana Seshadri, Andy Rotman, Joseph Lombard, and Marianne Moyaert in Kearney and Taylor, ed., *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions*. The example of the classic Graeco-Roman myth of Baucis and Philomen is also relevant here in that it tells how this old poor couple became hosts to Zeus and Hermes who first appeared as beggars and only revealed themselves as gods when Baucis offered them her best herbs and Philomen his precious goose. Here is a passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* book VIII which shows the central transformative role of 'food' in this primal scene of carnal hospitality: "The old woman (Baucis), her skirts tucked up, her hands trembling, placed a table there, but a table with one of the three legs unequal: a piece of broken pot made them equal. Pushed underneath, it countered the slope, and she wiped the level surface with fresh mint. On it she put the black and green olives that belong to pure

religions and cultures, bear witness to common practices of tasting the divine in the human and the human in the divine. They offer us choice ingredients for a gourmet guide to the gods. Delicate *dégustations* of hidden things.

It might be noted, finally, that if gustatory hospitality is one inaugural practice of great civilizations, sexual hospitality is another. Note, for example, how in biblical scripture Sarah and Mary both experience 'miraculous conceptions' (Sarah is barren, Mary a virgin) when they receive strangers into their hearts-wombs (*chora*), while many heroines of Hellenic, Celtic and Eastern mythologies

Minerva, and the cornelian cherries of autumn, preserved in wine lees; radishes and endives; a lump of cheese; and lightly roasted eggs, untouched by the hot ashes; all in clay dishes. After this she set out a carved mixing bowl for wine, just as costly, with cups made of beech wood, hollowed out, and lined with yellow bees' wax. There was little delay, before the fire provided its hot food, and the wine, of no great age, circulated, and then, removed again, made a little room for the second course. There were nuts, and a mix of dried figs and wrinkled dates; plums, and sweet-smelling apples in open wicker baskets; and grapes gathered from the purple vines. In the center was a gleaming honeycomb. Above all, there was the additional presence of well-meaning faces, and no unwillingness, or poverty of spirit. Meanwhile the old couple noticed that, as soon as the mixing bowl was empty, it refilled itself, unaided, and the wine appeared of its own accord. They were fearful at this strange and astonishing sight, and timidly Baucis and Philemon murmured a prayer, their palms upwards, and begged the gods' forgiveness for the meal, and their unpreparedness. They had a goose, the guard for their tiny cottage: as hosts they prepared to sacrifice it for their divine guests. But, quick-winged, it wore the old people out and, for a long time, escaped them, at last appearing to take refuge with the gods themselves. Then the heaven-born ones told them not to kill it. 'We are gods,' they said." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk VIII: "Philomen and Baucis," trans. Anthony S. Kline (University of Virginia, 2000). In "Departures: Hospitality as Mediation," Kalpana Seshadri offers a hermeneutic commentary on an analogous story in the Bhagavata Purana (Bk 10, cantos 80-81). It relates how a poor man Kuchela offers a meager bowl of puffed rice to his friend Krishna who gleefully eats the mere nothing and returns the gift of a nothing that is the ultimate fullness. This emptiness in fullness recalls the emptying/filling wine bowl of Philomenon and Baucis, as well as the Buddhist notion that 'emptiness' is the highest form of fullness. Seshadri offers this commentary: "The poor scholar (Kuchela) gathers together, in a piece of clean sari torn from his wife's shoulder, a heap of puffed rice, itself borrowed from a kindly neighbor—emptiness itself, rice with kernels removed, with nothing inside. And this he sets out to give to him, the friend who had the great capacity to receive.... The friend sinks his palm in the heap of rice and opening his mouth wide eats a fistful with sheer delight, of the emptiness and the nothing, and reaches for more, and yet more... and as the friend empties the emptiness within the puffed rice, the scholar feels himself filling up. His satisfaction is immeasurable. Incalculable happiness and fortune accrue to him, the more he gives of what he does not have, the more he finds himself receiving what he could not imagine. Can something come out of nothing? Is it possible to give, eat and be full of the nothing? Is this the meaning of grace? And is this also the time of hospitality?... Later Kuchela recalls that he had asked nothing, indeed he needs nothing.... He is again blessed." Kalpana Seshadri, "Departures: Hospitality as Mediation," in Kearney and Taylor, ed., *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions*, 52-53. It might also be interesting to do a comparative analysis on the role of the goose as a sacred bird in other cultural-religious myths, for example, the "Paramahansa" in both Buddhist and Hindu scriptures, referring to the divinely enlightened sage. For Kabir, the Sikh-Sufi-Hindu poet, the Hamsa or Himalayan Goose was considered to be a wandering migrant soul who bore secret messages and we also find the Goose-Swan playing a key role in the *Rig Veda* story of Puru Ravas and his wife Uruvasi. The goose that flies over Mount Kailash, and bathes in the lake of Manasarova (the lake of the mind, Manas) remained a recurring poetic theme. The goose-swan also plays a key role of 'transformation' in the popular story of Nala and Damayanti from the *Mahabharata* as well as in Celtic and Greek mythologies and popular folktales like Grimm's *Goose Girl*. I am indebted to my colleagues, Francis Clooney, Jyoti Sahi, and Kalpana Seshadri for this information.

have carnal congress with guests-as-gods. In such founding narratives, touch, smell, sight and sound are often synaesthetized with taste in the meetings of gods and mortals. From the beginning, Word is Flesh in multiple ways. The polysemy of such primal enfleshment is, I submit, a key task of diacritical hermeneutics.

*

We do not, however, have to look to the ancient narratives of great civilizations to find evidence for the diacritical connoisseurship of the senses. We already find examples of such carnal hermeneutics in our everyday sensations. Here we might take special heed of the pioneering phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, and in particular his notion of 'diacritical perception.' This idea was first developed in his Collège de France Lecture courses, *La Conscience et l'acquisition du langage* (1950) and *Le Monde sensible et le monde de l'expression* (1953, henceforth MSME). Borrowing liberally from Saussure's notion that words only signify by virtue of their differences with other words, Merleau-Ponty argues that meanings are never given as isolated terms or objects but always as parts of a mobile interaction of signs involving intervals, absences, folds and gaps (*écarts*). This is not just a function of language, however, but the very structure of perception itself. In so far as perception is thus structured like language in its nascent state it is dia-critical.

Here is how Merleau-Ponty puts it in an important Note from his 1953 lectures:

Diacritical notion of the perceptual sign. This is the idea that we can perceive differences without terms, gaps with regard to a level (of meaning) which is not itself an object—the only way to give perception a consciousness worthy of itself and which does not alter the perceived into an object, to the signification of an isolating or reflexive attitude. (MSME, 203-204)

In a subsequent note entitled 'Diacritical perception'—no longer merely a 'notion' but now a quality of perception itself—Merleau-Ponty adds this intriguing example of reading a face. To see another's visage is to interpret it carnally 'as' this or that form of expression:

To perceive a physiognomy, an expression, is always to deploy diacritical signs, in the same manner as one realizes an expressive gesticulation with one's body. Here each (perceptual) sign has the unique virtue of differentiating from others, and these differences which appear for the onlooker or are used by the speaking subject are not defined by the terms between which they occur, but rather define these in the first place. (MSME, 211)

This logic of diacritical perception is alien to the classical approach of difference presupposing identity. Here the identity of terms emerges in the tension of their

differences, their contours arise from the *encroachment* (*empiètement*) of things on things. We always read between (*dia*) the lines.

Merleau-Ponty departs from the Aristotelian perspective which tended to define something new in terms of a preexisting genre or foundation. Diacritical perception across gaps reveals the illusory character of the traditional one-to-one correlation between consciousness and object; for this derived correspondence arises only in retrospect and ignores the fact that there never was an object in the first place but only several 'things'—and at the very minimum a reversible interplay between figure and ground (*fond*). This plurality of 'infra-things' is irreducible to the dualist framework of an isolated mind faced with an isolated object. Diacritical perception is, Merleau-Ponty insists, the sensing of meaning as it expresses itself in the intervals between such infra-things. It involves our sense of identity through differentiation rather than differentiation through identity.¹³

Our most basic carnal sensations may thus be said to be structured diacritically in so far as they are structured like the phonetic differentiations of language. "To have a body capable of expressive articulation or action and to have a phonetic system capable of constructing signs, is the same thing." (MSME, 204) Our body schemas, Merleau-Ponty claims, operate like phonetic systems which function according to principles of which they are not conscious (e.g., *parole* is not conscious of *langue*). But to compare carnal perception to linguistic structure in this way is not to reduce the latter to the former (naturalism), nor to reduce the former to the latter (structuralism). Nature does not make the body any more than it makes phonetic systems. And it would be a mistake to construe the perceptual capacity to play with principles of which it is not immediately aware as some kind of 'unconscious.' Perception of figure is not simultaneously perception of ground—but rather 'imperception': The sensing of the invisible in and through the visible, '*sentir en profondeur*,' by negations, absences, gaps (*écarts*). Or as Merleau-Ponty puts it in Gestalt language: 'Consciousness of the figure is consciousness without knowledge of the ground (*fond*).' (MSME, 204)

We may say, therefore, with Merleau-Ponty that diacritical perception witnesses the birth of expression as a form of awakening or reawakening of meaning. Against an unformed background emerges a meaning which begins and re-begins, an expression which takes the form of a figure that is prefigured and refigured again and again, now fore, now aft, now here, now there.¹⁴ Hence the

¹³ I am very indebted to Emmanuel de Saint Aubert for bringing these passages to my attention, and especially those in his edited edition of Merleau-Ponty's Collège de France Lecture Notes of 1953, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, edited and introduced by Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, 2011. In his "Introduction," 19 f., de Saint Aubert offers a very illuminating commentary on this important notion of 'diacritical perception' in the later work of Merleau-Ponty. I would also like to express deep gratitude to my close colleague and friend, Kascha Semonovitch, who first introduced me to the later Course Notes of Merleau-Ponty, especially those on 'Nature.'

¹⁴ See our development of this play between prefiguration and refiguration in our *Poétique du possible* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984) and *The God who May Be* (Bloomington, Ind.:

importance of Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of modulation: "Consider sensation itself, the act of sensing (*le sentir*), as the intervening of a figure on a *fond*. Modulation. As a sound modulates silence. As a color modulates an open space by varying it. Every sign is diacritical." (MSME, 206) And Merleau-Ponty adds significantly, "This is Valéry's idea," thereby indicating that his use of the term 'diacritical' is as indebted to literary poetics as it is to structural linguistics. Either way, this birth of meaning occurs not in the manner of a foundational cause (as in the old metaphysics) but as a diacritical play of visible and invisible, an embodied vigilance capable of signaling and resuscitating full being (*l'être total*) on the basis of a fragment. (MSME, 204-5) This diacritical interplay between figure et ground represents an endless reversibility—for what is one perceiver's figure is another's ground and vice versa. The diacritical art of perception, enacted in the advent of sensing, ultimately amounts to the displacement of nature (cause) by culture (expression).

In the 1953 lecture Notes, Merleau-Ponty offers one further telling illustration of the diacritical isomorphism of perception and language. He compares the perception of movement to the comprehension of a sentence. We only understand the beginning of a sentence from its end, he says, just as we only perceive movement in light of its goal. Perception does not follow something as it displaces itself from one fixed place to another, as if one solid object succeeded another; it proceeds rather as a wave which stretches back and forth across distances in the same manner as a sentence circulates through a whole linguistic field. Carnal sensation is a fold (*pli*) in the moving flesh of the world; there is no world without it and it cannot be without a world. "Like signs in language," writes Merleau-Ponty, "the points traversed in movement have only a diacritical value; they do not function in themselves as places but rather as passages in the same ways as words of a sentence are traces of an intention which (invisibly) transperces them." (MSME, 205) Or to put it another way, perception operates like language in that it does not confront an object head on, but senses things which speak to it laterally, on the side, provoking one's 'complicity' in the manner of an 'obsession.' Less objective than obsessional, then, the thing perceived 'solicits' us (Valéry). Like an epiphany that calls for remembrance (Proust); or a poetic word which invites *co-naissance* (Caudel); or a pregnancy that yearns for birth and rebirth (Bachelard); or a frosted branch whose every crystal signals a whole order of emergent meanings (Stendhal). In all these examples, mostly drawn from literature, Merleau-Ponty is suggesting that each perception of the world constructs itself on the basis of an emerging part which solicits our co-creation of this world; just as language constructs itself in terms of a circular movement between a present part and absent whole. (Merleau-Ponty also uses the analogy of film montage where each frame functions in the movements between gaps across an invisible background).

Indiana University Press, 2001). See also Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol 1, chapter 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

But it is important to remind ourselves here that the diacritical model of carnal interpretation is not a matter of voluntarist invention (à la Sartre). It is not a question of reading *into* something but of reading *from* something. We are solicited by the flesh of the world before we read ourselves back into it. Carnal reading and listening is as much reception as creation. And this is why I think Merleau-Ponty insists that the solicitation of our body schema functions symbolically, laterally, indirectly, like a sexual or ontological 'surprise.' Diacritical sensation, across distances and intervals, comes not just from us but from another person or thing that meets us 'like a stranger in the dark.' Merleau-Ponty cites Paul Valéry to make his point. "A man is nothing so long as nothing draws from him effects and productions which surprise him." (MSME, 205) But to be surprised one must be ready to receive, open to solicitation, prepared to partake of the thing sensed and symbolized. Every sense, as Merleau-Ponty concludes, has its own *symbolique*. Every carnal act and organ inscribes its own *imaginaire*. From sexual expression down to the act of eating itself. Nature is already culture as soon as we sense it as this or that. Sensation is expression and expression sensation. Flesh is word and word flesh. Hence the significance of Merleau-Ponty's description of perception in terms of a diacritical Eucharistic communion:

Just as the sacrament not only symbolizes, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but is also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread, provided that they are inwardly prepared, in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion.¹⁵

What we have here is a basic analogy of proper proportionality: A is to B what C is to D. Namely, the sacrament of Eucharist is to the responsive communicant what the sensible is to the capable perceiver. Merleau-Ponty goes on to delineate this quasi-eucharistic power of the sensible as follows:

I am brought into relation with an external being, whether it be in order to open myself to it or to shut myself off from it. If the qualities radiate around them a certain mode of existence, if they have the power to cast a spell and what we called just now a sacramental value, this is because the sentient

subject does not posit them as objects, but enters into a sympathetic relation with them, makes them his own and finds in them his momentary law.¹⁶

In other words, each sensory encounter with the strangeness of the world is an invitation to a 'natal pact' where, through what we might call diacritical sympathy, the human self and the strange world give birth to one another. Sacramental sensation is a reversible rapport between myself and others, wherein the sensible gives birth to itself through me.

What finer example of a carnal hermeneutics. Everyday perception as sacred food of the world.

Diacritical Readings of God after God

In the second part of this essay, I wish to address some key differences between Caputo's deconstructive reading of the 'Weak God' and my own diacritical reading of 'God after God.' The similarities are multiple and well rehearsed elsewhere, so here I confine my remarks to some variations of emphasis and inflection which demarcate our hermeneutic positions.

In our Montreal dialogue (SPEP 2011), Caputo asks about the relationship of our respective approaches to a 'poetics of the im/possible' —deconstructive and diacritical. We clearly agree that the notion of possibility which interests us transcends the binary opposition between the actual and the possible: an opposition which, in traditional metaphysics and modal logic, placed the former above the latter. Both of us endeavor to go beyond these conventional models of possibility as *potentia* (Aristotle and scholasticism) and *possibilitas* (Leibniz and the rationalists) following Heidegger's claim that 'in phenomenology possibility stands higher than actuality.' We concur on this and gesture toward a notion of 'possibility beyond the impossible' (as Angelus Silesius put it). So we are really aiming at the same phenomenon.

But where Caputo emphasizes the im-possible, I emphasize the hyper-possible. The hyper-possible, which is also a micro-possible, is something I have been seeking to explore from *La Poétique du Possible* (1984) to *The God who May Be* (2001). It is 'poetic' in proposing an imaginative crossover between an ontology of the 'loving possible' (after Heidegger's *das mögende Vermögen*) and an eschatology of the Perhaps (after Cusanus' *Possest*). Such 'onto-eschatology,' as I put it in *The God who May Be*, seeks to overcome the rigid metaphysics of presence twice (both as 'being-as-presence' and 'God-as-presence'). In terms of the second move, I propose a hermeneutic retrieval of the 'possible beyond the impossible' in keeping with Silesius and Cusanus. The latter's term *Possest* combines both *posse* and *esse* in a manner which opens both to a 'surplus of

¹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002), 246.

¹⁶ Ibid.

meaning.' So understood, *Possest* has nothing to do with the Omni-God of absolute and immutable sovereignty—the *Ipsum esse subsistens* or *ens causa sui*. It is a far cry from the Scholastic *actus purus non habens aliquid de potentialitate*—for it is so superabundant in possibility (beyond the impossible) that it calls for an endless possibilizing of what 'is' in the light of what 'is to come': the God who may be. This Perhaps (*Peut-être*) is the powerless power which capacitates all living things, enabling what-is-not to become. The Maybe is this not-yet which promises to become flesh if we respond to its call. It calls like 'the cry of a child in the street' (Cusanus). For divine *Possest* is, paradoxically, a powerlessness which empowers us to become what we could not otherwise be. In short, it makes the impossible possible. When Joyce describes God as a 'cry in the street' (*Ulysses*), I believe he has something similar in mind.¹⁷

Let me offer some illustrations. Think of an AA meeting where the addict invokes a 'higher power' to enable him/her to overcome addiction—in other words, to make the impossible possible. The higher power ('however one wishes to understand it' as AA says) operates as a sacred non-sovereignty which enables a person, enslaved to habit, to surmount the disease and say yes to a healing power. But this healing cannot happen if one does not consent to its ostensibly impossible 'possibility.' The first step of AA recovery, in sum, is the recognition of one's 'helplessness' which in turn opens the possibility of receiving a promise of healing from someone or something 'other' than oneself. And equally important is the twelfth step: Namely, the recognition—witnessed by a community of AA members—that this possibilizing of what is impossible does not stop with the recovered person but opens onto an endless healing process for others. Having been healed one becomes a sponsor of other addicts. Not surprisingly, Thomas Merton describes AA as one of most important spiritual movements of the 20th century.

This powerless power of *Possest* finds important testimonies in the great wisdom traditions of Western culture (our limited scope here alas) from ancient to modern times. Recall again the primal biblical scenes where Sarah under the Mamre tree and Mary in Nazareth are approached by strangers who announce that the impossible act of conceiving a child is possible. Each welcomes a higher power which makes the impossible possible: they give birth. ('For what is impossible to man is possible to God' as Luke says). This sacred Maybe is another name for 'God After God,' the ana-God who is always coming after the God who has already come, the sacred stranger who is forever still to arrive. *Deus adventurus*. But this phenomenon is by no means confined to biblical traditions. Similar scenes can be found in Greek culture, to wit, the famous exchange between Glaucus and Diomedes in the *Iliad* where they lay down their arms in the name of the sacred

¹⁷ For discussions of a hermeneutics of epiphany in Hopkins, Joyce, Proust and Woolf see *Anatheism*, ch. 5; and "Epiphanies of the Everyday," in *After God*, ed. John Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). On the notion of 'sacramental imagination' see *Anatheism*, ch. 4.

promise of hospitality. (*Xenia* is the highest virtue of Hellenic culture and the greatest god is Zeus *Xenias*). Here as elsewhere, the handshake is the inaugural gesture of civilization where enemies become guests and hostility converts to hospitality. A gesture repeated throughout the ages down to the famous handshakes of recent history where, in bold moments, impossible peace becomes possible—Gandhi, Mandela, Sadat, Havel, Hume.

But what, Caputo asks, distinguishes this divine possibilizing from Hegelian becoming? Why is the dia-critical poetics of the possible not just one more dialectical system? Why does not the double departure of God—the double AA of 'ana' signaling the death of the death of God—not fold back into an Hegelian synthesis? How does this differ from the negation of negation reaffirming itself as Absolute Concept? The *Aufhebung* of Spirit as new Self-identity?

First, unlike Hegel's system, the Perhaps is about *little things*. It expresses itself in what I call a 'micro-eschatology' of the Maybe where infinity incarnates in infinitesimal thisness (*haecceitas*). Witness the poets: Hopkins' celebration of the divine in the smallest 'dappled things,' Proust's 'petits miracles' of sacramental surprise, Joyce's epiphanies of unexpected advents like 'a cry in the street.' All of these escape the totalizing 'Ruse of Reason.' Where Hegel's dialectic reduces the stranger to the Same, diacritical hermeneutics unfolds as a carnal hospitality to the stranger as Other; it embraces the alien or outcast who escapes the System.

The Perhaps contests the Dialectic's claim to full adequation. It resists the lure of Total Resolution. Far from being some 'immutable rock of ages' or 'unshakeable warrantor of a promise' (as Caputo suspects), we find here the fragile risk of May-Be, the possibility to be that cannot be unless we incarnate it. As such *Posse* is an invitation rather than an invasion of human freedom. (And here, if there were more time, I would express some reservations about the violent terms associated with the Divine not only in Hegel but also in some of the later writings of Levinas and Derrida). For if the Perhaps connotes an *eschaton* it is as micro as the cry of a street child. The *micro-eschaton* is the opposite of the *Macro-Telos*. It refuses the speculative synthesis of a God-in-itself-for-itself. Understood diacritically, the *Posse* is not some dialectical conflation of the human and the divine: a temptation, we might note, not just for Hegel and the Idealists but also for any Process theology which construes God as an immanent becoming culminating in some Final Being.

So, far from collapsing horizons, ana-theism keeps them open and overlapping. Far from resolving conflicting interpretations, ana-theism preserves the hermeneutic circles in motion. It renounces the romantic nostalgia for some original oneness (of being, meaning, intention, authorship), declining to end the story, happy or unhappy. And it does this out of fidelity to an endless interplay between transcendence and immanence. As such, ana-theism is diacritical in holding that two is better than one and that three (or four) is better still.

Let me conclude with a last illustration of a diacritical poetics of the possible. Where might theo-poetics find a figure to describe the play of 'ana'? Where locate an image to depict the double A-A of release and return, of leaving and arriving, retreating and advancing, withdrawing and inviting, ceding and receiving? What might this double move look like? Here I propose to hermeneutically retrieve the metaphor of *perichoresis*.

The God who-may-be is not, as Caputo critically suspects, a God who will 'be' as full self-identical presence at the *eschaton*. It is an *ana*-God who, after the last God, would continue forever in the mode of may-being, resisting always the lure of sovereign self-presence. Hence the fertile resonances of *perichoresis*: *Perichora* meaning a movement around, a circling about a center which, as *chora*, remains empty, a centerless center, a free space for the three persons to move in and out, back and forth, up and down. In this spaceless space of 'ana'—as a movement 'back, up, again, in time or space' (OED)—each divine person remains in part a stranger to the other, refusing to conflate or collapse into a fusion of totalizing identity. The trinitarian figures of Father, Son, and Spirit themselves refigure the earlier trinity of strangers who appear to Abraham and Sarah under the Mamre tree. And this primal scene of hosting the three strangers (*hostes*) marks the inaugural moment of Abrahamic hospitality: A moment which prefigures Andrei Rublev's famous icon of the three divine persons seated as guests around the bowl/*chora*/womb/chalice. Thus we witness a mutual, chiasmic mirroring between New and Old testaments of the God-who-may-be and the humanity which enables this Word of promise to become flesh (in Sarah and Mary). The circular dance around the *chora*-center is guaranteed by the free space between each of the dancers. They move toward and away from each other ceding place to the other so that each may sit down as guest at the table.

The Latin translation captures this ingeniously by offering a double graphemic rendering of the phonetically identical terms—*circum-in-cessio* and *circum-in-sessio*. The swing-door of inward and outward hangs on the diacritical hinge of this *c/s* exchange. In the first option, the verb *cedo* conveys a gesture of surrendering one's place to the incoming other, offering a free space in an act of self-emptying and self-giving. In the second option, the alternative spelling *sedo/sessio* describes a complementary gesture of moving inward, taking a seat as one moves towards the other's place and receives the gift.¹⁸

¹⁸ For former discussions of *perichoresis* see *The God Who May Be*, 109-111; *Strangers Gods and Monsters*, 207 and *Debates in Contemporary Philosophy*, 26 and 288-290. By a felicitous double play, the letters of AA may be related to ana-theism as a two-step departure from the Omni-God of metaphysics—the first departure of a-theism from theism, and the second departure from this a-theism by way of a turn to ana-theism. The *à-dieu* which bids farewell to God is followed by a second *a-dieu* (in sense of *ad-deum*) which returns 'toward' a God after God. God here simply serves as a name for 'what we hope for' (Augustine), a name with many names (as the multiplicity of religions testify), names which seek to express the transformative

Here we find diacritical hermeneutics at work in the naming of the *eschaton* in motion. A naming which is at once *dia-krinein* (reading through) and *ana-phorein* (repeating again).

In this diacritical metaphor of Greek Eastern mysticism, we find a powerful rendering of the double play of immanence and transcendence, of position and disposition, of appropriation and disappropriation: The delicate and fecund tension between belonging and letting go. *Imnigkeit* and *Gelassenheit*. If this perichoretic tension is broken one risks lapsing back into the polar extremes of dogmatic theism (pure presence) or dogmatic atheism (pure absence). *Perichoresis* serves as a theopoetic image of the interplay between being and non-being, resisting both the ontological temptation of 'total being' as much as the meontological temptation of 'no being at all.' The *chora* at the heart of *perichoresis* is that chiasmus of empty fullness and full emptiness so powerfully attested by the mystics of the great wisdom traditions, and famously captured in the Buddhist Heart Sutra—'emptiness is form, form emptiness.' *Chora* thus becomes the sacred 'container of the uncontainable' (*chora achoraton*), celebrated in Greek murals of the Madonna's womb as carrier of a child-to-come.¹⁹ And the mention of Greek here is also a reminder of how the *chora* of Plato's *Timaeus* finds its place in Jerusalem. When it comes to *chora* we follow James Joyce's formula: 'Greekjewis Jewgreek. Extremes meet.'

The feminine womb at the core of the three-personed dance represents the perpetuation of human flesh, space and time at the heart of divinity. It signifies an eschatological May-be forever dedicated to *amor mundi*—love of the world. This inexhaustible space in the *eschaton* is what Gregory of Nyssa called *epektasis*: A cleft in the body of God which ensures that the promised Kingdom is a place of perpetual desire, of *dunamis* rather than *stasis*, of endless giving and receiving. And it is precisely this cleft which enables hosts to become guests and guests hosts in circles of endless motion.²⁰ At the *eschaton*, at any moment, the more desire is answered the more it is reborn as desire: A desire beyond desire which foments desire. What is imagined here is open-ended *eros*. Excess breeding ceaseless natality, re-turning to life again and again, to God after God after God. But such an *eschaton*, I repeat, may be only if we allow it to take flesh. If we say yes. Like the Shulamite, like Sarah, like Molly Bloom. That is the wager of ana-theism. The risk of *eros*.

promise of the Perhaps.

¹⁹ On the *chora achoraton* see *Anatheism*, 24-26 and *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (including the mural illustration of Mother and Child from the Monastery of Khora, Istanbul), 191 f. I am indebted to John Manoussakis for this reference. See Simone Weil on analogy between Plato's *chora* in the *Timaeus* and the Christian Madonna in *Letter to a Priest* (1945) (New York: Penguin, 2003), 21.

²⁰ On Nyssa's notion of *epektasis*, see my debate with Jean-Luc Marion, "Hermeneutics of Revelation," in *Debates in Contemporary Philosophy*, 24, John Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2007), chs 5-6; and Tamsin Jones, *A Genealogy of Marion's Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2011), 31-32, 43, 49.

Let me respond finally, in summary fashion, to Caputo's main questions.

1) Caputo claims that the ana-God of diacritical hermeneutics is 'untouchable.' It is anything but. It begins with touch and taste (*sapere*)—the primary sensings of the infinite in the infinitesimal. Diacritical hermeneutics goes all the way down. It is carnal in its ascent and descent between gods and dogs.

2) Far from interpreting history as guaranteed by 'divine warrantry,' ana-theism interprets every moment of human history as radical responsibility. The Ana-God is the opposite of the Alpha-God in that it promises a kingdom which cannot come unless we risk everything. Nothing is given in advance. *Posse* needs us for its *esse*. It is up to us. Hence the irreducibility of atheism as hermeneutic wager.

3) Caputo contrasts my ana-theist reading of Perhaps with Derrida's deconstructive version. He claims the latter may be a 'promise or a threat'; and this, he says, constitutes the 'may-not' of undecidability inscribed within the May-be. For me, the may-not is, by contrast, a matter for us to decide on, not something intrinsic to the Maybe itself. The promise of *Posse* is, I hold, trustworthy in entrusting us with the task of enfleshment. Unconditional in its call but conditional on our response. The God-who-may-be is not itself a 'threat,' a 'monster,' a power of 'terror' or 'destruction';²¹ not even in part or in *potentia* as in some Gnostic-Jungian-Schellingian notion of dark deity. What threatens destruction is uniquely 'our' free decision to refuse the promise of justice and goodness. The threat, if it comes, comes from us alone by not heeding the call of justice-to-come or by replacing it with our own construct of a sacrificial Omni-God. *Posse* invites reception and risks rejection—by us. *Posse* says 'let me become.' But we are the ones who say yes or no. In this respect, diacritical hermeneutics remains not just phenomenological—in its fidelity to lived experience—but profoundly existentialist in its commitment to human agency and freedom (often subverted, I find, in thinkers like Levinas and Derrida whose notion of the Other-in-me trumps human initiative and choice).²²

²¹ See Derrida on the question of the stranger as a potential 'monster,' murderer or traumatizing intruder in our discussion "Hospitality, Justice, and Forgiveness," in *Questioning Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999) and "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion moderated by Richard Kearney," in John Caputo and Michael Scanlon, ed., *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press, 1999), 73-77. Unlike *ana-theos*, Derrida's *chora*, like the abyssal deity of Schelling, does not love or care. It is indifferent.

²² See Derrida's discussion of the 'other in me' in "Hospitality, Justice, and Forgiveness" and Levinas's discussion of the traumatizing invasion of the Other in "Diachrony and Representation," in John Caputo, ed., *The Religious* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

4) As noted above, Caputo suspects that ana-theism is ultimately a crypto-Hegelianism. Before ending, I need to respond more precisely to this serious challenge. The 'ana' is, on Caputo's reading, about a third moment which comes to dialectically reconcile the opposed positions of theism and atheism. He thus reads the 'return' of ana-theism as a restoration of theism, albeit a second more mature version. Instead of such a 'sublated' God, Caputo proposes a deconstructive *chora* 'before' God.

But my position has always been that 'ana' refers to *both* a God before and after God—that is, a God of possibility who calls us prior to our wager of response, prior to becoming 'flesh' in our lives. Atheism is not Hegelian 'recomposition,' as Caputo claims. It is a radical *dis-position* which both precedes and follows the opposed positions of theism and atheism. As such it can lead, again and again, to new re-positionings (ana-theist theism or ana-theist atheism); but it never represents a Terminal Solution. If there is a choice of faith after theism and atheism, it is not a restoration of some propositional belief in divine being but rather a *fides* that expresses itself as *fidens*. Or better still as *confidens* in the sense of entrusting oneself to the promise, having confidence in the possibility of its impossible arrival, confiding in the word becoming flesh. And if one wishes to extend atheist faith to the question of truth, I would say it is a matter of truth as trust ('by my truth') and betrothal (*fiançailles*). God as confidant and fiancée! As in the nuptial theo-erotics of the Song of Songs. So, re-turning to God after God should be read not as Hegelian re-collection (*Erinnerung*), but as perpetual turning anew in ever extending circles. This is what defines the re-turning (the 're-' understood as 'ana') as a perpetual desiring and seeking 'after' God. Not only *ab-deo* but *ad-deum*, in the double 'a/à' of *a-dieu* (a crucial dia-critical accent!). Hence a God of 'hope against hope'—as Caputo rightly claims.

5) So let me return, finally, to the question of the 'third.' Caputo writes: "By 'Hegelian' I mean that everything culminates in a moment of the 'third'... of a more mature correction of two moments that, taken by themselves are one sided and... letting their momentum unfold into a third, higher, concrete unity." I have answered the charge of abstraction under 1) above. Now let me address the question of the 'third.' Ana is not about three but four. It opens from and onto the 'fourth' dimension of *chora* which alone keeps the three persons free and mobile.²³

²³ We might think of an analogy here with the role of a fourth dimension in physics where it is only in an extra dimension that three-dimensional partial spatial views can be brought together to give an entire view. Since one sees only slices at any given time (e.g., circles of different proportions), it is in the extra fourth dimension that they are brought together to constitute a full perspective. In the four-dimensional analogy, solid three-dimensional objects change shape as we view three-dimensional slices of their full four-dimensional shapes. I am grateful to my friend and physicist from Harvard University, Leon Golub, for this suggestion. Notions of a pivotal Fourth dimension or 'Fourfold' (*das Geviert*) are also to be found in depth psychology (Jung) and fundamental ontology (Heidegger). I am grateful to Amy Bentley Lamborn for bringing the Jungian notion of the Fourth to my attention, in relation to our own hermeneutic proposal of a Fourth Reduction (in addition to the phenomenological reductions of Husserl, Heidegger and Marion), see Richard Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward

Without the *chora* of Sarah's womb (represented in Rublev's iconic bowl offered to the three strangers under the Mamre tree) there would have been no Isaac, Jacob or prophets. Without the *chora* of Mary's womb there would have been no Christ. And, by extension, without the *chora* within each one of us—open to receive strangers every moment of our lives—there would be no landing site for the advent of the Maybe. The Fourth dimension is what keeps the door ajar. And it is telling, I think, that the highest level of meaning in classic hermeneutics is anagogy, a fourth mystical-ecstatic meaning which surpasses and subsumes the other three (literal, moral, and allegorical).

So when I say *ana* is the figure of four, not three, might I be coming close to what Caputo calls the "innumerable"? Where we differ, I suspect, is on the question of 'decomposition.' "In radical hermeneutics," says Caputo, "one seeks not a higher composition but a decomposition, a deconstruction of each one (of the three) in its place."²⁴ Diacritical hermeneutics tries to avoid both alternatives—of composition and decomposition—in the name of a dis-position that comes before and after these 'positions': A disposing toward the Maybe that never stops coming as the Fourth which promises, knocks, calls and—if we open the door—becomes the stranger at our table. "You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat. So I did sit and eat." (George Herbert). The Fourth is the time-space where host and guest exchange places, without end. Four is the cardinal number of *perichoresis*.

6) And *kenosis*? I fully share Caputo's critique of classical *kenosis* as the act of an Omni-God only willing to give up absolute Power so as to get it back with interest. Here *kenosis* is no more than divine investment in a rigged market. The *ana*-theist understanding of *kenosis*, by contrast, fully accepts a Maybe exposed to 'fragility, contingency and provisionality.' For while the Maybe is unconditional in its loving it is utterly conditional upon us for embodying and realizing this love.²⁵ God is impotent without us. The God-who-may-be calls. The rest is up to us.

Micro-Eschatology," and John P Manoussakis, "The Fourth Reduction: Toward a Fourth Reduction," in John Manoussakis, ed., *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). The Fourth Reduction leads us back before/beneath/beyond the first three reductions (Essence, Being and Gift) to the sacred-profane Flesh. Here we find the source of carnal hermeneutics in the 'least of these' (*elachistos*): The highest in the lowest, the first in the last, the infinite in the infinitesimal. One might mention here, finally, the Fourth as the ultimate level of meaning in traditional hermeneutic readings: namely, the 'anagogical' or mystical/spiritual meaning of a word or passage beyond the three standard meanings, literal, moral and allegorical. Anagogy comes from the Greek terms *ana* (up) and *agein*, to lead.

²⁴ See my discussion with Derrida on our respective (hermeneutic and deconstructive) readings of resurrection and reconciliation in "Terror, Religion, and the New Politics," in *Debates in Contemporary Philosophy*, 3-14.

²⁵ See my frequent discussions of *kenosis* in *Anatheism*, 52-53, 133-137, 159-160. The *eschaton* opens *kenotically* onto the innumerable, constantly amplifying the inter-personal circles as it safeguards the inexhaustible *chora*, womb, emptiness at its centerless center. It thus expresses the gap of distance and difference—the cut and cleft of *kenosis*—between each of its personas in a dance without end.