Recebido em 14-05-2024
Aceite para publicação em 24-06-2024

Revista Filosófica de Coimbra
vol. 33, n.º 66 (2024)
ISSN: 0872-0851
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14195/0872-0851_66_2

# A MELODY THAT SINGS ITSELF. PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE UMWELT

## UMA MELODIA QUE SE CANTA A SI MESMA. FENOMENOLOGIA DO UMWELT

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**Abstract:** In his lectures on the philosophy of nature, Maurice Merleau-Ponty interprets Jakob von Uexküll's notion of Umwelt as akin to a melody. This essay outlines von Uexküll's perspective on the feasibility of translating non-acoustic elements (optical: colours, shapes, and figures; haptic: tactile textures, flavours, tastes, and scents) into sounds or musical notes to compose a melody. It poses several inquiries: Does the link between melody and nature render natural entities as musical notes? Do the components of an entity constitute anatomical notes in the melody that defines the entity itself? Is it conceivable to distil every moment in life into a "note" symbol on a musical scale, characterised by specific duration, pitch, and volume? Melody, rhythm, and harmony are considered sophisticated "structures" that articulate and convey the essence of nature's existence. Moreover, every human, every living creature, be it animal or plant, possesses a subjective "biological" interiority. The inner realm of each living subject, along with the objects in the external world, are enveloped within an atmosphere—a musical Umwelt. Humans exist within this musical milieu or atmosphere.

**Keywords:** Umwelt, nature, melody, rhythm, von Uexküll, Merleau-Ponty.

**Résumé:** Dans ses conférences sur la philosophie de la nature, Maurice Merleau-Ponty interprète la notion d'*Umwelt* de Jakob von Uexküll comme une mélodie. Cet essai présente la perspective de von Uexküll sur la possibilité de traduire des éléments non

**Resumo:** Nas suas conferências sobre a filosofia da natureza, Maurice Merleau-Ponty interpreta a noção de *Umwelt* de Jakob von Uexküll como semelhante a uma melodia. Este ensaio descreve a perspetiva de von Uexküll sobre a possibilidade de traduzir ele-

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acoustiques (optiques : couleurs, formes et figures ; haptiques : textures tactiles, saveurs, goûts et odeurs) en sons ou en notes de musique pour composer une mélodie. Elle pose plusieurs questions : Le lien entre mélodie et nature fait-il des entités naturelles des notes de musique ? Les composants d'une entité constituent-ils des notes anatomiques dans la mélodie qui définit l'entité elle-même ? Est-il concevable de distiller chaque moment de la vie en un symbole "note" sur une échelle musicale, caractérisé par une durée, une hauteur et un volume spécifiques ? La mélodie, le rythme et l'harmonie sont considérés comme des "structures" sophistiquées qui articulent et transmettent l'essence de l'existence de la nature. En outre, chaque être humain, chaque créature vivante, qu'elle soit animale ou végétale, possède une intériorité subjective "biologique". Le domaine intérieur de chaque sujet vivant, ainsi que les objets du monde extérieur, sont enveloppés dans une atmosphère – un *Umwelt* musical. Les êtres humains existent dans ce milieu ou cette atmosphère musicale.

**Mots-clé:** *Umwelt*, nature, melodie, rhythme, von Uexküll, Merleau-Ponty.

mentos não acústicos (ópticos: cores, formas e figuras; hápticos: texturas tácteis, sabores, gostos e aromas) em sons ou notas musicais para compor uma melodia. Coloca várias questões: A ligação entre melodia e natureza torna as entidades naturais em notas musicais? Os componentes de uma entidade constituem notas anatómicas na melodia que define a própria entidade? É concebível destilar cada momento da vida num símbolo de "nota" numa escala musical, caracterizado por uma duração, altura e volume específicos? A melodia, o ritmo e a harmonia são considerados "estruturas" sofisticadas que articulam e transmitem a essência da existência da natureza. Além disso, todo o ser humano, todo o ser vivo, seja ele animal ou vegetal, possui uma interioridade subjectiva "biológica". O reino interior de cada sujeito vivo, juntamente com os objectos do mundo exterior, está envolto numa atmosfera – um *Umwelt* musical. O ser humano existe dentro deste meio ou atmosfera musical.

**Palavras-chave:** *Umwelt*, natureza, melodia, ritmo, von Uexküll, Merleau-Ponty.

*Le déploiement d'un Umwelt c'est une mélodie qui se chante elle-même.*
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La nature, Cours du Collège de France (1956-1960)*
Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2021, 297-898

## 1. Transformation of reality signs into notes of a melody we can sing

Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his courses on philosophy of nature interprets Jakob von Uexküll's concept of Umwelt as a melody. This paper sketches von Uexküll's take on how is it possible to reduce non-acoustic contents

(optical: colours, shapes and figures; haptic: tactile textures, flavours, tastes and fragrances) to sounds, or musical notes, in order to make a melody. Few questions are made: does the connection between melody and nature make natural beings musical notes? Are the parts of each being anatomical notes of the melody that each being is as such? Can each moment in life be reduced to a "note" sign in a scale, with a duration, pitch and volume? Melody, rhythm and harmony are higher "structures" that express and give to "understand" the meaning of nature's being. Also, every human being, every living being, animal and plant, has a subjective "biological" interiority. The inner world of every living subject and the objects in the outer world are comprised in an atmosphere[2], a musical Umwelt. The human lives in a musical element or atmosphere.[3]

The explanation of the world offered by physics is different from the biological one. Physics studies the causal relationship between two beings. Biology interprets the relationship between two beings from a plane that configures it. The relation between the percussion of the hammer on a piano string and the sound obtained is understood as a mechanical cause. However, the relation between the moment of that sound and the preceding moment

[2] T. Uexküll, *The Sign Theory of Jakob von Uexküll,* in *Classics of Semiotics* (Eds. M. Crampon, K. Oehler, R. Posner, T. A. Sebeok, T. Uexküll (New York, USA: Springer, 1987), 147-179; Martin Krampen, *Semiotics*. 1. date. Il. Title. III. Series. P99.W38l3 1987 001.51; B. Buchanan, *Onto-ethologies: the animal environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

For a contemporary approach, cf: J. Bauer, "Lebens-, Sozial- und Geisterwissenschaften: Die vielen Ursprünge systemischer Vorstellungen, 1880-1930", in *Zellen, Wellen, Systeme: Eine Genealogie systemischen Denkens, 1880-1980* (Mohr Siebeck: GmbH and KG, 2016), 37-44; B. Colby, O. Akhmanova, E. Albert, E. Banks, W. Chafe, H. Conklin, R. Wescott, "Ethnographic Semantics: A Preliminary Survey [and Comments and Replies]", *Current Anthropology, 7*(1), 1966, 3-32.8.

[3] Umwelt theory could be called eco-semiotic. The prefix "eco" in "ecology," "ecosystem," "economy," "ecobiology," and "eco-semiotics" expresses the way we interpret a being in a peculiar world context. The world of the scientific perspective is an impoverished one. A material, spatial, material thing, an artifact, a tool, a plant, an animal, or a person becomes an object composed of elements (chemical, geological, etc.). They exist in the broad, meaningful context of "Oikia". Planet Earth is our home. We can become homesick, feel at home, or be at home nowhere. The German word "Umwelt" (the world, around us or the environment) and the French word "milieu" express a perspectival change in the way exact sciences take the world to be an object. As humans, we usually do not take the sky for the universe, the astronomical cosmos. Instead, we exist under the sky, by the ocean, in the mountains, on the outskirts of town, or in a big city. We mainly live at home. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *Biologie Und Medizin* (Wien: Springer, 1947); L. von Bertalanffy, *Biophysik Des Fliessgleichgewichts; Einführung in Die Physik Offener Systeme Und Ihre Anwendung in Der Biologie* (F. Vieweg: Springer, 1953).

(silence or other sounds), as well as with the following moment (other sounds or silence), so that a melody is heard is already understood in conformity with a plan (*Planmässigkeit*).[4] Von Uexküll tries to reduce the whole presentation (and moments of that presentation) to musical notes (stimuli and impressions). Physics studies objects in causal relation. Biology, in this sense, studies the notes with which an object presents itself diachronically to the same subject and synchronically to various subjects (animal and human). The understanding of the relationship between two objects from the physical perspective is causal and mechanical. Biology reduces an object to the signals it presents. As we shall see, these signals are interpreted as musical notes making up a melody.[5]

> When the hammer strikes the string of a piano and a note sounds, that is a purely causal series [*eine reine Kausalreihe*]. If this note belongs to a melody, it is interpolated in a sound-series, which also exhibits arrangement, but not of a causal kind. (*Wenn dieser Ton aber einer Melodie angehört, so ist er in eine Tonreihe hineingestellt, die gleichfalls eine Ordnung darstellt, die aber nicht kausaler Natur ist*.)[6]

## 2. The cognitive embedded in an interventional design

From here this difference can be applied to the whole field of presentation. The causal explanation of physics does not understand the projection at play according to a plan.

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[4] T. Uexküll, *The Sign Theory of Jakob von Uexküll,* 270: "Instead of merely seeing in it a rule stretching across time and space, men have spoken of 'purpose' and 'purposefulness' in Nature; this introduced the idea of Nature as a sort of human being, foreseeing future events and acting accordingly. But where conformity with a plan is easiest to detect, we can find no trace of such human-like beings. It is advisable, therefore, to expunge from biology, for all time, expressions such as 'purpose' and 'purposefulness.'"

[5] J. von Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie* (Berlin: J. Springer, 1928), 83-84: "Physics maintains that the things of Nature around us obey causality alone. We have called such causally-ordered things "objects". In contrast to this, biology declares that, in addition to causality, there is a second, subjective rule whereby we systematise objects: this is conformity with plan [*Plannmässigkeit*], and it is necessary if the world picture [*Weltbild*] is to be complete (*Die Physik behauptet, dass die uns umgebenden Dinge der Natur nur der Kausalität gehorchen. Solche bloss kausal geordnete Dinge haben wir "Objekte" genannt. Im Gegensatz hierzu behauptet die Biologie, dass es ausser der Kausalität noch eine zweite subjektive Regel gibt, nach der wir die Gegenstände ordnen - die Plannmässigkeit, die notwendig zur Vollständigkeit des Weltbildes hinzugehört*.)"

[6] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 84.

> When the carpenter cuts and shapes wood into rails and rungs, and when the drill bores through the rails and the hammer drives the rungs into the holes, these are all in causal succession. "But the structure emerging from this process, the ladder, cannot be understood by causality [*Kausal nicht zu begreifen*]; it can be understood only from a knowledge [*Kenntnis*] of the planned arrangement [*planvolle Anordnung*] of the rungs in relation to the rails, and of all the parts to the whole. (*Das hierbei entstandene Gebilde, die Leiter, ist aber kausal gar nicht zu begreifen, sondern nur durch Kenntnis der planvollen Anordnung der Sprossen zu den Stangen und aller Teile zum Ganzen*.)[7]

We can now formulate the thesis that reduces an object to a musical note, a melody, strange as it may seem:

> We shall call objects [*Gegenstände*] those beings the construction of which is not to be explained by mere causality, since in them the parts stand in the same relation to the whole as the individual sounds do to the melody. (*Wir wollen nun diejenigen Objekte, deren Bauart durch blosse Kausalität nicht zu verstehen ist, weil bei ihnen die Teile zum Ganzen im gleichen Verhältnis stehen wie die Töne zur Melodie, "Gegenstände" nennen.*[8])

## 3. The elements in a musical atmosphere

Human beings exist in a world with other beings (humans, animals, plants, organisms, and non-organic things) throughout time. The subjective and non-objective elements[9] exist inside an "invisible soap bubble" (*unsichtbare Seifenblase*)[10] and more broadly in an "environmental tunnel"

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[7] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 84.

[8] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 84.

[9] Any scientific discipline has its elementary elements and operations. In arithmetic: numbers and the operations of adding and subtracting, multiplying and dividing. In geometry: point, line, plane, solid, and the elementary organization of height, width, and depth. In grammar: letters, and the elementary morphology: the relationship between vowels and consonants or consonant encounters, the elementary syntax of the sentence, which comprises the relationship between words. In music, too, there are elementary notes, and their organization: tempo, rhythm, harmony, and melody.

[10] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 62: "We have already arrived at a concept of space that allows us to create a space around each animal like an invisible bubble in which all its actions take place. (*Gelangten wir bereits zu einer Vorstellung des Raumes, die uns gestattet, einen Raum, um jedes Tier gleich einer unsichtbaren Seifenblase zu entwerfen, innerhalb der sich seine sämtlichen Handlungen abspielt*)."

(*Umwelttunnel*).[11] The way of understanding, interpreting and acting unique to each living being happens inside this temporal tunnel, structuring whatever appears from the inside out. According to Jakob von Uexküll, theoretical biology consists of a complex identification of elementary parts and functions that each animal carries (receptor organs and action organs). Each animal subject carries an apparatus for channelling other beings. The world is scanned and is ready for an active intervention, because each being (animal, vegetal, organic and non-organic) gets a "biological" meaning projected by each subject living in a bubble along the time channelling environment. Each object would be in itself an "incognita", for what each subject (animal, vegetal, human) "perceives" depends upon the bubble in which it exists in time, channelling content and possibility for action (rest and digest/ fight--or-flight). Each object and each subject (prey) as an object are reduced to signs. Each sign is double-sided. It is a sense perception accessed through receptor organs. On the other hand, each object has vital points, erogenous spots, which are channelled by effector organs. Therefore, an object can have multifaceted sense contents only to be perceived by some animal at some point in a given situation. Those can persist undetected by other animals or the same animal at different times. An object can be signalled as food for a fly and not for a human being. A fly effects its way to get the food. The human being avoids it or doesn't take notice of it. Von Uexküll's second order analysis elaborates upon this reciprocal interchanging between animal points

[11] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 220-221: "If we draw the environment from moment to moment in a two-dimensional plane, we gain the possibility of also taking subjective time into account, as we have done with the superimposed film images. In this way, what I would like to call an "environmental tunnel" is created, which permanently encloses the subject from birth to death, and in which the whole life of the subject takes place. In the environmental tunnel, all objects have become environmental things. But what do they look like? That is the task of biology. One thing we know from the outset is that in the dog tunnel there are only dog things, just as in the mosquito tunnel there are only mosquito things and so on. If we try to compare two such tunnels with each other, we find that places, moments and things are fundamentally different from each other. (*Zeichnet man die Umwelt von Moment zu Moment in eine zweidimensionale Ebene ein, so gewinnt man die Möglichkeit auch die subjektive Zeit in Betracht zu ziehen, wie wir das mit den übereinander geschichteten Filmbildern getan haben. Auf diese Weise entsteht das was ich einen "Umwelttunnel" nennen möchte, der das Subjekt von der Geburt bis zum Tode dauernd umschliesst, und in dem sich das ganze Leben des Subjektes abspielt. Im Umwelttunnel sind alle Objecte zu Umweltdingen geworden. Aber wie sehen sie aus? Das zu ergründen ist die Aufgabe der Biologie. Eines wissen wir von vorne herein, dass es im Hundetunnel nur Hundedinge gibt, wie im Mückentunnel nur Mückendinge u.s.f. Versuchen wir es, zwei solcher Tunnel miteinander zu vergleichen, so stellt sich heraus, dass Orte, Momente und Dinge, grundsätzlich voneinander verschieden sind*)."

of view with intervention capability and objects interpreted as bearers or carriers of sense contents and intervention handles. All beings exist inside a world-environment having the protostructure of a melody. The main aim of von Uexküll's theoretical biology is to reduce any acoustic and non-acoustic signs to a musical note in a melodic organization. While in western music we have seven natural notes (A, B, C, D, E, F and G), each having a duration, a pitch (from very high to very low), a volume, we also have harmony and rhythm. in a melody. The correlation between musical signs and sounds is the same that exists between the sounds of an idiom and its graphic appearance. The correlation between music, as well as between speech, conversation, thinking and time is evident, so evident that we don't think about it often. What we call proprioception enables us to find ourselves in a particular way at each moment of the day, as we connect to and import the outside world through a musical model. Each object sends a double sign received by sense organs and action organs in the animal subject. But we cannot say that this is a subjective approach to the way we live in the environmental world. On the other hand, a signal (sense and point of engaging) would be a blind spot and wouldn't even exist for any subject. Moreover, a real being can be experienced as a virtual being as when the situation we find ourselves in changes into a dream like dimension. "Si les regards pouvaient enfanter ou tuer, les rues seraient remplies de femmes enceintes et jonchées de cadavres."[12] The way we look at beings tends to project a possible behaviour and action. It is not only a cognitive approach. Or we can say a cognitive approach is embedded in a world that calls for action. Inaction has also its consequences. The reduction of the signs send by objects is a simultaneously cognitive and behavioural call for action.

A further question should be how are we to handle high level sensations or impressions that depend upon feelings, more than emotions? What we become to feel for somebody either love or hate, forgiveness and grudge, nothing at all or "the world" sketches at the same time possible actions. When we do something about it, what is the meaning of "doing" at stake here? We can talk to somebody and declare our love, saying how sorry we are for the way we've behave, or tell them how afflicted we are by the way somebody makes us feel so bad. Either we let go or we engage, either we forget or try to forget bad things that happened or we try to change them or the way we deal with them. In either case, when we come into somebody's life, or move way out of somebody's influence, the atmosphere is musical, the melody is sweet and beautiful or a chaotic cacophony of noise.

[12] Paul Valéry, *Tel Quel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), 86: "If looks could conceive or slay, the streets would be filled with expectant women and strewn with corpses."

## 4. Brief elementary analysis of a world structured by a musical environment

The most diverse kinaesthetic fields are accompanied by proprioception that conjugates all the elements or signs of objects "musically". Our atmosphere is musical. Learning to read identifies a projective structure in which perception is not limited to the original impression, but includes in itself retention of the past (just now) and protension of the future (in a moment). To read, we don't just focus momentarily on a letter, isolated from the previous and the following, but we read in blocks. We read more than a word. Some people read more than a line (scanning and skipping). But reading a book anticipates looking from left to right and top to bottom, the turning of the page, the shrinking of the page volume as the reading is done. To learn to read, we look at the letters, their connection to other letters, words, and their arrangement in lines, pages. The gaze sweeps the line, but does not fixate on each letter in isolation. Each letter is "understood" in its relation to the previous one. Even without spelling, we immediately read the sounds of words, of sentences. Maybe even of speech.

> When reading, when the eye must follow the lines of letters and numbers, only looking comes into play. By repeating the same sequence of directional signs repeatedly [*Durch das immer wiederholte Anklingenlassen der gleichen Folge von Richtungszeichen*], this sequence of signs becomes fixed in our memory like a melody. It enables us to recognize the familiar letter at any time and produce it in our imagination. Finally, we also establish the melody of the directional signs by copying the letter so that the impulse sequence for the arm muscles follows in the manner prescribed by it – then we can write. We have been able to convince ourselves that the same sequence of impulses in the mirror-image arms gives rise to a reversal of the lines [13].

In looking at letters, in seeing and reading them, there are thus several dimensions that correspond to temporally distended phenomena across

[13] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 25-26: "Beim Lesen, wenn das Auge der Linienführung der Buchstaben und Ziffern folgen muss, kommt nur das Blicken zur Anwendung. Durch das immer wiederholte Anklingenlassen der gleichen Folge von Richtungszeichen setzt sich diese Zeichenfolge wie eine Melodie im Gedächtnis fest und ermöglicht es uns, nicht nur den bekannten Buchstaben jederzeit wiederzukennen, sondern ihn auch in der Vorstellung zu erzeugen. Endlich gelingt es auch, durch Nachmalen des Buchstabens die Melodie der Richtungszeichen so festzulegen, dass die Impulsfolge für de Armmuskeln in der von ihr vorgeschriebenen Weise folgt - dann kann man schreiben. Wir haben uns davon überzeugen können, daß die gleiche Impulsfolge in den spiegelbildlich gebauten Armen zu einer Umkehrung der Linienführung Anlass gibt."

a sequence of moments. The gaze is fixed on a letter. There is a previous learning of the letters of the alphabet. The 23 letters of the alphabet that a Portuguese child learns. The learning is optical and acoustic. It can also be tactile (Braille). The reading eye does not detect only visual content, such as the difference between a lowercase "a" and an uppercase "A". The sound is different for consonants and for vowels and semivowels. Each letter of the alphabet is given a time that isolates it from the previous and the next. When reading, we identify the letter in a different way. We don't even identify only diphthongs and meetings between consonants or between consonants, vowels, semivowels and diphthongs. We spell to be able to pick up the sound of monosyllabic and polysyllabic words. It is more than the work of recognizing the identical and the different, the similar and the dissimilar. By reading we are catapulted into a world of meaning. The perception of reading is radically different from the sensitive perception of the visual or acoustic aspect of a word. When we read, we enter a world of meaning.

The same is true when learning a foreign language. We identify the visual aspect of the letters in alphabets as different from Latin as Greek, Arabic or Chinese. We then pay attention to sound and pronunciation, attend classes, take foreign language courses, read texts, use dictionaries or tutorials, subtitled movies in that language, etc., etc. The goal is always to be transported directly to the meaning. This is not the case if the font is illegible because it is small or distorts the usual appearance of letters, if there are typos, or if the text is in a language that we do not know. We can, however, identify Basque or Finnish, the difference between Korean, Japanese and Chinese just by watching a Netflix series spoken in those languages. We are, however, unable to understand what is being said, much less to speak it and even less to write it.

## 5. A non-stigmatic point of view and a mind always speaking in a never-ending conversation

We can extend the scope further.[14] Not all the sentences that fill the con-

[14] "The usefulness of semiotics in the production, reception, and analysis of cultural phenomena of all kinds has often been proven and is generally recognized. Semiotics is applied to sight and sound as well as to smell, taste, and touch in bodily communication and food culture, industrial design, and shaping of the environment; to acoustic (music) and visual communication (painting, graphics, design) as well as to multi-media sign processes (theater, cinema, opera, dance, and sports); to scholarly communication (the production, interpretation, and criticism of literature) as well as to sign processes in management, government, and legal institutions; to apparent sign activity as well as to its biological origin and historical development. The strengths of the semiotic approach

tent of our lives are spoken aloud. We have not told some people what we would have liked to. And yet we imagine those conversations and the situations in which we would tell someone what we think of them (good or bad). We can describe our past, as if it were a detailed report or log of everything that happened resorting to real and imaginary descriptions (objective and subjective), to dialogues, to what we think but don't say. Learning to read, and then actually reading, is possible because we have always heard and tried to speak. In our lives, the experience of saying how it is with us, of expressing ourselves and hearing others speak in the situation in which they speak (intonation, pitch, sound volume, way of speaking, words used), allows us to identify the situation even when we don't understand any words in that language. We know very well if we are being threatened, assaulted, what the mood is of someone who is questioning us without knowing that we don't speak the language in which we are being questioned.

> The same process that happens when we learn letters is repeated over and over again when we look at objects [*der gleiche Vorgang, wie beim Erlernen der Buchstaben, wiederholt sich immer und immer wieder beim Betrachten von Gegenständen*]". We see, hear, touch, smell and taste the same objects over and over again until a melody [*bis sich eine Melodie festgesetzt hat*] is constituted with the signs of the objects, directing us, guiding us. It is the qualitative and not strictly acoustic musical constitution of the melody (duration, intensity and volume) that allows the "surfing" of the wave of time. The original sequence involves coexistences of sequences that give meaning to all moments. Each moment is analysed in its content and in the sequence by which the contents of an object are distributed. There is a resemblance between each impulse, in fact, in the sequences of impulses. Although we do not have an immediate knowledge (*unmittelbare Erkenntnis*) of each impulse at the moment it happens, there is recognition through the melodies that constitute the signals of orientation or direction however lacunar they may be.[15]

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are demonstrated particularly well in questions beyond the competence of the individual specialized disciplines." (p. ix-x.) The investigation in context doesn't neutralize the scientific question of the cause-effect relationship but deepens its roots. Cf. E. Nagel, "Mechanistic Explanation and Organismic Biology", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 11*(3), 1951, 327-338.

[15] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 26*:* "The same process that happens when we learn letters is repeated over and over again when we look at objects. We scan the outlines of objects a thousand times with our visual pit until a melody of directional signs has settled in us. We use this melody to recognize the objects. Still, we use it only very rarely or in a very imperfect way to reproduce it in the imagination as a melody of memory signs. Thus, we remain very poorly informed about the number and relationships of the impulse sequences whose direct knowledge eludes us, and which we know only indirectly through the melodies of the directional signs. (Der gleiche Vorgang, wie beim Erlernen der

Each moment is the temporal element by which, however minute, the contents spread out and distend. A moment is always already distended. We have a tacit understanding of what happens with time and the lack of it, in the short, medium and long term. An object is interpreted from the signals (Zeichen) and impulses it emits and instils or can emit and instil. Similarly, a subject has the possibility to identify these signals cognitively without changing his behaviour. But he can also use those same signals not as "Merkzeichen" or "Merkmalzeichen" but as "wirkzeichen" or "wirkmalzeichen". Letters, syllables, words, sentences, pages, text do not just appear as a graphic blur or a sound. When reading, we want to understand. Understanding does not result from a connection between a sensation and the sensory visual or acoustic content. Understanding a text puts us in a certain mood: technical, theoretical or pragmatic, practical or even poetic. Reading comprehension takes place in a behavioural relationship, if you will. The effect that the text produces is not only optical, as if we were in a place where we would be unable to perceive the words with which street names are enunciated, for example. Knowing the name of the street serves to get us back to the hotel, to go where we want to go.[16] There is an instrumentalization of reading for survival in wanting to understand the language in which a conversation is held between kidnappers or robbers or traders.

Each and every object has more than a sight, touch, smell, taste and hearing conformation. It has a meaning. Each and every object means something, has something to say, even when it's tucked away in a corner of the

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Buchstaben, wiederholt sich immer und immer wieder beim Betrachten von Gegenständen. Wir tasten mit unserer Sehgrube die Umrisse der Gegenstände wohl tausendmal ab, bis sich eine Melodie von Richtungszeichen in uns festgesetzt hat. Diese Melodie benutzen wir zum Wiedererkennen der Gegenstände, dagegen benutzen wir wir sie nur sehr selten oder in sehr unvollkommener Weise, um sie in der Vorstellung als Melodie der Erinnerungszeichen zu reproieren. So kommt es daß wir über die Zahl und die Verwandtschaften der Impulsfolgen, deren unmittelbare Erkenntnis uns entzogen ist, und die wir nur mittelbar durch die Melodien der Richtungszeichen kennen, sehr mangelhaft unterrichtet bleiben)."

[16] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 26-27*:* "There is no doubt that the common use of writing, which regulates our every step, especially in cities, has diverted our observation from nature; one becomes aware of this at once when one has to find one's way in a city where the inscriptions are in letters that we do not know. Most people then lack the features by which they could orient themselves, for to them one house looks like another and one street like another. (*Zweifellos hat auch die allgemeine übliche Anwendung der Schrift, die besonders in den Städten einen jeden unserer Schritte regelt, unsere Beobachtung von der Natur abgelenkt; man wird das sofort gewahr, wenn man sich in einer Stadt zurecht finden soll, in der die Aufschriften in Buchstaben angebracht sind, die wir nicht kennen. Es fehlen dann den meisten Leuten die Merkmale, nach denen sie sich richten könnten, denn ihnen sieht ein Haus wie das andere und eine Strasse wie die andere aus*)."

house. It has various values or significance even when it is no longer used. The appearance of a city on first impression, even in the first months, is completely of the moment when we last see it, after having lived there. The beach of my childhood can be morphologically the same and yet it is now unrecoverable in adulthood. But it causes an effect, and my access to that place seeks to resurrect people and experiences that are unrecoverable.

## 6. The relationship between the elementary constitution of subjectivity and objectivity

We see how the animal subject, with its receptors (*Rezeptoren*) and effectors (*Effektoren*), encompasses the object. The properties of the object that act on the receptors constitute the "characteristic carrier" for the subject. (Wir sehen, wie das Subjekt Tier mit seinen *Rezeptoren* und *Effektoren* das Objekt umfasst. Die *Eigenschaften des Objekts*, die auf die Rezeptoren einwirken, bilden die "*Merkmalträger*" für das Subjekt[17].)

The receptors (sensors, sensory organs, ways of access of the animal or human subject) and effectors (ways of operative intervention of animal and human subjects manipulating or dealing with objects: things, plants, animals, humans). Receivers and effectors are abstractly dissociated. On the side of the object, which can be a living being (animal, plant, human) or a thing, we distinguish between the qualities captured by the sensors and the qualities they offer for intervention, that is, the various points of application, the handles of things. Objects have qualities that act on the subject.

> Under their influence, the subject sets its effectors in activity (*in Tätigkeit*), which in turn imprint their characteristics (*Wirkmale*) on certain properties (*Eigenschaften*) of the object. Thus, these become the subject's "effect bearers" (*Wirkmalträgern*). Characteristic-bearers (*Merkmalträger*) and effect--bearers (*Wirkmalträger*) are held together by the object's counterpart, which completes the functional circle. (*Unter ihrem Einfluss setzt das Subjekt seine Effektoren in Tätigkeit, die ihrerseits bestimmten Eigenschaften des Objekts ihre Wirkmale aufprägen. Diese werden dadurch zu "Wirkmalträgern" des Subjektes. Merkmalträger und Wirkmalträger werden durch das Gegenzüge des Objektes zusammenhalten, das den Funktionskreis abschliesst*[18].)

The subject intervenes on the object. On a strictly operational level, the characteristics of objects appear to the subject not only as sensible qualities (optical, acoustical, tactile, with fragrance and taste contents), but by

[17] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 105.
[18] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 106.

eliciting action: attractive or repulsive appearance, emitting pleasant or unpleasant sounds, being soft or hard, hot and cold, smelling and tasting good or bad. An object is a carrier of perceptual signals and points of possible intervention. An object can remain invisible to all possible subjects and be seen only by one subject. An object appears to a subject if and only if the subject has interest in it. The subject is capable of detecting perceptual notes on the object with a view to intervene on it. The qualities of the subject are thus sensory and operative, qualities that are in an intrinsic correlation with certain objects. An object does not exist in itself, but only according to the sensibility and operativity of a given subject. A subject exists only when exposed to objects that present themselves with certain perceptual and operative characteristics. A complete circuit arises. A subject exists for an indefinite multiplicity of objects. The objects that exist for a subject have sensitive notes and points of application for all subjects who have perceptual access and operational capacity to intervene on them.

> The effects that pass from the characteristic-bearers to the receptors take place in the "characteristic-world" (Merkwelt) of the subject. The effects of the effectors on the effect carriers of the object play out in the "effective world" of the subject. The transfer of effects from the receptors to the effectors takes place in the "inner world" of the subject. (*Die Wirkungen, die von der Merkmalträgern zu den Rezeptoren übergehen, spielen sich in der "Merkwelt" des Subjektes ab. Die Wirkung der Effektoren auf die Wirkmalträger des Objektes spielen in der "Wirkwelt" des Subjektes. Die Übertragung der Wirkungen von den Rezeptoren auf die Effektoren vollzieht sich in der "Innenwelt" des Subjektes*)[19].

The inner world of a subject turns inside out to the outer world. The outer world itself is not independent in meaning. There are as many outside worlds as there are possible subjects who can access it. Thus, the functional circuit has perceptible and operational features that are the qualities of objects. Beings can become different objects according to the different living (plants, animals, humans) subjects they relate to. The different modes of being a living subject open and detect perceptible features in objects while triggering possible modes of intervention. An animal can use a part of its body or the body as whole as an operative functional way of intervention in its world. Each person takes the various objects of everyday life and adjusts their body to the objects in their world: sitting in chairs, lying on beds, going up and down stairs, entering and exiting spaces. Each object is de-formalizable in the way it appears to each subject with its own perceptual and operational characteristics. There is thus a room in the house for each member of a

[19] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 105-106.

family: for children and for parents, for each child and for visitors. There are different rooms for humans and for animals: insects (flies, ants), pets. Throughout the day, the living room is different, as it is across the seasons and the time one lives in that particular house. From an affective point of view, too, the house is different for each person and for the same person throughout his or her life. This is the case of the experience we have of a house which we live in from childhood to adulthood. In this case, the sensitive characteristics of a house present themselves in a sentimental structure. Does a sentimental structure also have an operational field for a subject? Or does the possibility of sentimental change operate a metamorphosis in the way the living room appears? The way we feel transforms our being in the room. To be well is to inhabit the space well. To be unwell is to be nowhere, or to be all-over-the--place. Being is always an activity. Even when one is apparently not well, there is a location in the room, where someone is lying but doing nothing.

The descriptors apply most comprehensively to tools and objects of use in the human world (*Gebrauchsgegenständen*).[20] A technical feature has certain perceptible contents which make it noticeable (*Merkding*). On the other hand, it offers a possibility to operate it (*Wirkding*). An object is the bearer of notes and effects (Merkmalträger, Wirkmalträger). A subject has feature receptor organs (*Merkorgan*) and operative organs (*Wirkorgan*). There is a complex relationship between sensory organ and sensory contents, as well as between operative organ and operable contents. Sensory organs and operative organs pick up sensory and operative contents. The relational structure of the functional circuit is a priori. Let's consider a ladder. It looks like the inverted letter V, the rungs are parallel planks, but they are far apart from each other, from the first(lowest) to the last (highest). Looking at a portable ladder,

[20] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 219: We begin with the objects we know best, namely our human objects of use (unseren menschlichen *Gebrauchsgegenständen*), which are always connected to us by a functional circuit (*Funktionskreis*). A ladder, for example, is not just an active thing (Wirkding) that we use to climb, but also a characteristic thing (Merkding) that we see and feel. Through its optical and tactile properties, it is a characteristic carrier (Merkmalträger) and through the arrangement of its rungs, an effect bearer (Wirkmalträger) of the human being. Like all our utensils and machines, the ladder is built exclusively to serve. Without the functional circle in which we include them, they would not exist at all. (Wir beginnen mit den uns am besten bekannten Objekten, nämlich unseren menschlichen *Gebrauchsgegenständen,* die stets durch einen *Funktionskreis mit uns verbunden* sind. Eine Leiter z. B. Ist nicht ein blosses *Wirkding*, das wir zum Klettern benutzen, sondern auch ein *Merkding*, das wir sehen und fühlen. Sie ist durch ihre optischen und taktile Eigenschaften ein *Merkmalträger* und durch die Anordnung ihrer Sprossen ein *Wirkmalträger* des Menschen. Die Leiter ist wie alle unseren Gebrauchsgegenstände und Maschinen ausschliesslich auf *Fremddienlichkeit* gebaut. Ohne den Funktionskreis, in den wir sie einbeziehen, würden sie gar nicht existieren.)"

we see that it resembles a trellis. However, by opening the ladder and placing it against the wall, we can change a light bulb or paint a wall. The point of application is the rungs: boards are points of support for the feet. We grasp the outside rails with our hands or rest our hands on the top steps. It is when we have to climb up and down that stepladders fulfil their meaning. The features are connected to the effect that is produced and which is expected. We can extend the scope to household appliances, pieces of furniture, means of transportation, clothing, books, records, highways, railroads, lighting systems, equipment of all kinds. As well as to the city and the countryside, the coast and the mountains. Every space is immersive. The sofa and the chair where I sit to work are pieces of furniture, albeit completely different. The sofa in the living room and the chair in the office are different because what I do in those places is different, although I can watch TV sitting on the chair and study in the sofa. From the moment we wake up until we go to bed again, our body adapts to the most diverse props. We identify their different points of application. The following are cognitive contents and points of application for our intervention: taps, showers, toilets, coffee pots and toasters (in the kitchen), offices, living rooms, bedrooms, apartments, classrooms, hospital rooms, churches, meeting rooms, shopping malls, beaches. All these objects have perceptual characteristics and application points, they are functional, we deal with them already in the operational opening. There is a tuning and fine-tuning with them. We await an expected time for their possibilities to be offered. When it takes a long time for hot water to come out of the showerhead, we think the water heater is broken. The time it takes us to get ready in the morning has its normal duration. From the time we jump out of bed until we leave the house dressed, showered and having had breakfast, there is a complex set of operations that result from clearly identifying objects, appliances, and performing tasks and functions.

Our intervention on an appliance identifies points of application, a zone of intervention, a grip on the object. There is a rhythm of our own to the way we deal with instruments, tools, implements, living beings (plants, animals). There is a choreography according to which the game of interaction between subjects and the objects of their world is projected. The use of claws, beaks, fangs, legs, wings, fins, feet allows us to understand that there is a rhythm to the way of walking, flying, swimming, just as there is a specific way of resting. The use of screwdrivers, or hammers, implies a technical understanding (of how to move the wrist, of which direction to apply pressure). The use of the hammer relies on hitting the nail head in order to drive the nail in. When we go up and down stairs, we instil rhythm, rely on timing, hold onto the handrail, or jump down skipping whole flights of stairs. Choreography is the way we link our bodies to objects: dressing and undressing, going up

and down, sitting, lying down and getting up, walking, running, jumping, bending and stretching implies our intervention on our own bodies when we are immersed in a world (*Umwelt*). As we will see, the operational plane corresponds to a rhythmic form, harmonic or not, consonant or dissonant, of intervention on our life and on the world.

## 7. Reducing the presentation to sound

The structure of the active synthesis is compared with artistic activity.[21] We do not want to reflect on art at all, but to follow Von Uexküll's indications that allow us to understand the unique character in which our life is constituted in our world. Just as the artist traces and sketches reality by accentuating certain aspects and leaving others in the background, so our presentation of the world is tailored to our interest, to the structural or circumstantial constitutive availability of the situations that constitute themselves each time.[22] The drawing follows its course, just as writing has a writer who anticipates meanings that he then expresses with chosen phrases and words. He writes what occurs to him and then edits it. Writing is re-writing.

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[21] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 26: "It is only given to the artist who draws to make the melodies of the directional signs come alive in his imagination in order to control the impulse question of the drawing hand through the directional signs of the eye until the melody of its directional signs has also become established for it and it masters the impulse sequence with certainty." (*Nur dem zeichneten Künstler ist es gegeben, die Melodien der Richtungszeichen in seiner Vorstellung lebendig werden zu lassen, um die Impulsfrage der zeichnenden Hand durch dir Richtungszeichen des Auges so lange zu kontrollieren, bis auch für sie die Melodie ihrer Richtungszeichen sich festgesetzt hat und die Impulsfolge mit Sicherheit beherrscht*).

For a contemporary interpretation of Uexkülls theories in aesthetics and art criticism, cf I. Pollmann, "Invisible Worlds, Visible: Uexküll's Umwelt, Film, and Film Theory", *Critical Inquiry, 39*(4), 2013, 777-816; I. Pollmann, "The Interweaving of World and Self: Transformations of Mood in Expressionist and Kammerspiel Film", in *Cinematic Vitalism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 2018), 163-206.

[22] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 27: "It is not only inferior talent that is to blame for our inferiority, but also an obvious neglect of our observation of the outside world that leads us to form inferior melodies. How many are content to form a single melody for all the trees, which can only be quite meaningless, because it suppresses all the differences characteristic of the forms of the various trees. (*Aber nicht bloss mindere Begabung ist an unserer Minderwertigkeit schuld, sondern auch eine offenbare Vernachlässigung unserer Beobachtung der Aussenwelt führt dazu, dass wir minderwertige Melodien ausbilden. Wie viele begnügen sich damit, eine einzige Melodie für alle Bäume auszubilden, die nur ganz nichtssagenden sein kann, weil sie alle Unterschiede, die für die Formen der verschiedenen Bäume charakteristisch sind, unterdrückt*)."

When we move house, when we build a quotidian, there is a repetition of routines; we stop going to certain places and start going to others. If we move abroad, we stop being with the people we left behind and start being with other people. The surrounding objects, circumstances, situations, the interaction between us and things and people are reduced to impulses, series of impulses, signals, series of signals. Behaviours are designed, innovated, renewed, fall into disuse, become obsolete. The reduction of objective and subjective contents to impulses, their reception and exportation, the temporal sequence according to which they are constituted, make it possible precisely to actively change lives, innovate, anticipate, find solutions to problems or improve conditions. Interrogative impulses (*Impulsfrage*) lead to an interpretation of the direction of signals (*Richtungszeichen*). This interplay produces the melody. Melody is being presented here not as the affective reproduction of the past that is gone, but as the very invention of melody, the creation of melodies that are not yet constituted, not yet discovered, or created, and are being rehearsed at the same time that they are being invented.

> If we assume that in the greatest artists the ability to reproduce the melody in the imagination and the control of the hand are pushed to the extreme limit of what is possible, the finished drawing provides us with the material to form a judgement about our own melodies as well, for we see in the drawing the essential marks in the characteristic lines of the object much more clearly pronounced than we have ever noticed them in the object itself. From this we may conclude that in the artist the melodies are much purer and stronger than in us, and that they therefore enable him to reproduce them in a way which we are quite incapable of. (*Nehmen wir an, bei den grössten Künstlern sei die Fähigkeit, die Melodie in der Vorstellung zu reproduzieren und die Kontrolle über die Hand bis zur äußersten Grenze des Möglichen getrieben, so liefert uns die fertige Zeichnung das Material, um uns auch über unsere eigenen Melodien ein Urteil zu bilden, denn wir sehen auf der Zeichnung die wesentlichen Kennzeichen in der Linienführung, die für den Gegenstand charakteristisch sind, viel deutlicher ausgeprägt, als wir sie je am Gegenstand selbst bemerkt haben. Daraus dürfen wir folgern, daß beim Künstler die Melodie viel reiner und stärker sind als bei uns und sie ihn deshalb zu einer Wiedererzeugung befähigen, deren wir ganz unfähig sind*[23]).

While reading the newspaper paying attention to the news, we may come across a picture that fills us with nostalgia. There it is, the place where we used to spend our holidays with our parents when we were kids. We feel the change from the concerned attentive reading to the emotional emerging of a summer long gone. In fact, on physical record, or mentally in our imagina-

[23] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 26.

tion and recollection, we realize that we remember aspects that others, who were also present at the same time, do not remember. Others have contents in their memory that perhaps have gone unnoticed or that we don't remember. But the active relationship with what is happening, the preparation for a vacation, for a course, the artistic, scientific or philosophical creation, the important conversation we are going to have with someone, all of this also accentuates aspects in prospect that anticipate, in an unreal, but no less effective and affective dimension, what is going to happen. In our head, we create future scenes that have their musicality.

The beginning, the unfolding, and the ending of every action, circumstance, or situation in which we are involved has a qualitative duration. To correlate this description to music, to a song, for example, requires us to find common aspects in the first place, even though they may seem forced. We cannot say that everything is musical, that any bit of action in everyday life can be put to music or be the subject of lyrics for a song. But there are common elements. The rhythm with which we perform everyday tasks often choreographs them into a dance. Coming and going, shaking, cleaning, washing, setting the table and doing the dishes, getting ready for bed and getting up, getting ready and going out. There is a rhythm, a tempo, a speed with which we do all our actions. The interaction between the organ of perception and the organ of operation and, on the other hand, the content of perception and the content of operation exists in the environment that is our very existence: the house, the street, workplaces, places of leisure, gymnasiums, performance halls, means of transportation, etc. The quality of duration can be an instant: putting on your shoes, buttoning your coat. Or it can last longer: making coffee, toasting bread; or have longer time frames: preparing a conference, preparing for a sports competition, anticipating a vacation, retirement, and so on and so forth.

> Here, we face the astonishing fact [*erstaunliche Tatsache*] of being utterly ignorant of one of the main characteristics of objects, certainly no less important than colour or smell, of which we become conscious only when we make use of it, and then in virtue of the accompanying quality. We always employ impulse-sequences, yet they remain concealed [*verborgen*], like the impulses to our larynx when we sing; of these we become conscious only when they are translated into sounds either in reality or in our imagination. Here we get to know a very real factor in our organization, a factor which, in order to become apparent, must find expression either in time as a melody of sounds, or in time and space as a melody of direction-signs. (*Wir stehen hier vor der erstaunlichen Tatsache, dass ein Hauptmerkmal der Gegenstände, das ganz gewiss nicht minder wichtig ist wie die Farbe oder der Geruch, uns als solches völlig unbekannt bleibt und erst bei seiner Anwendung dank der begleitenden Qualität zum Bewusstsein kommt. Wir benutzen die Impulsfolgen*

*in jedem Augenblick, und doch bleiben sie verborgen wie die Impulsfolgen für unseren Kehlkopf beim Singen, die uns gleichfalls rest zum Bewusstsein kommen, wenn sie sich in der Wirklichkeit oder in der Vorstellung in Tönen abspielen. Hier lernen wir einen sehr reellen Faktor unserer Organisation kennen, der sich entweder in der Zeit als Tonmelodie oder in Zeit und Raum als Melodie der Richtungszeichen abspielen muss, um in die Erscheinung treten zu können*[24].)

Von Uexküll's strategy is to identify our relationship to musical content. What are the elements that make up a melody? How is it possible to hear, or listen to, a song? A melody is not restricted to a sum of sounds. Each sound corresponds to a moment. In the scale C, D, E, F, G, L, B, each note sounds at a given time. Without a minimum time to vibrate, a note does not sound. Melody, rhythm and harmony are involved in the duration, intensity and pitch of each sound. Some strictly acoustic phenomena are not considered music, but they have their own melody: the sound of things, the familiar noises and the noises of everyday life, the sound of life. Timetables, calendars, planners attest to our understanding of time. We are continuously facing the future, in the short, medium and long term. Physical, virtual, or just mental, diaries attest to this. Schedules and calendars are reserved for the distribution of activities in the course of our daily lives. For von Uexküll each moment has its own tone. Circadian rhythms, breathing, heartbeat, blood flow, the most diverse biorhythms also go beyond the parts of the day, they are present in the seasons, in the phases of our individual and collective lives.

Time is the common element to capture a musical phrase and the exchange of words in a conversation. From this time horizon we can perceive that there are rhythms in our day-to- day life, in the most diverse activities we engage ourselves in, from the most complex to the simplest, such as doing nothing. There are moments that demand concentration and others when we relax. When the day ends, we have behind us the comet's tail of what happened during its course. We anticipate the dinner and the evening, the period of rest and what will happen the next day. Without having to express it, we think the day was good or bad. As we say, it went well or it went badly. There are good phases of life, and we also go through difficult times. There are also good phases when we seem to be riding the wave, or reach cruising speed. Thus, the rhythm of the time of life also has its duration, intensity, volume. It is somehow a melody, or else the condition for the possibility of having melodies expressed with musical instruments. The human voice with its tone, pitch, rhythm, is an instrument for speaking and singing or at least for humming.

[24] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 27.

Understanding nature as a melody is not entirely a "lofty" and far-fetched model. Tides, the phases of the moon, the position of the sun, the sequence from night to day, food and digestion, fatigue and rest, an urge and the pleasure of satisfying it, but also preparation, effort, work, production and result, everything is rhythmic in nature's beat. But we can understand that there are also strictly acoustic phenomena beyond reducing the presentation of a thing, plant, animal or person to a sound content. We listen to a cavalry squadron, the flight of birds, insects, the footfall of domestic animals or people, the roar of an engine, a gust of wind, the noise of machinery in operation, the barking of a dog, the waves of the sea, and so on and so forth. In their inertia, or in the place where they are stored, quiet objects also have their own temporality: books and records sitting quietly on bookshelves, for example, have been read and listened to and are waiting to be read and listened to again. But also to the noise that we hear coming from the kitchen, which may not be immediately identified as a shopping bag that has fallen to the floor. We can identify duration, intensity, volume, in every object that appears as well as the rhythm, the beat, the cadence, the graceful harmony with which an animal moves or lies down. Each surrounding object, and each situation, has its own melody.

So, it seems that there is a melody unique to each situation, to each circumstance or confluence. Each object has its own melody. In this sense, and in the same way that a duration is more than the moments that constitute it, i.e., the sequence of "nows" that pass one after the other, the irreversible, yet repeatable passage of time, so also each note is organized with all the others in a scale, in an order and organization such that the first note presupposes all the following ones up to the last. Every moment of our life has elements, has moments, just as melody has notes, tones, sounds, duration, intensity, volume, as well as rhythm and harmony. Is there a melody unique to each person or animal? Is there a natural melody? If so, what is the possible attuning between the melody of my life and the melody of Life? There isn't always attuning among humans, it takes tuning, which isn't always achievable. [25]

[25] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 27: The melody of the directional signs, obtained when looking at the outlines, forms for us one of the main features from which the objects are built. Usually, only a part of this melody needs to sound in order to recognize the object. For many objects we have to form several melodies if we want to recognise them from all sides at first sight. If we have not done this for one side of the object, we do not recognize it, but content ourselves with the indication that there is an object there whose outline, when touched with the gaze, does not trigger a familiar melody." (*Die beim Betrachten der Umrisse gewonnen Melodie der Richtungszeichen bildet für uns eines der Hauptmerkmale, aus denen sich die Gegenstände aufbauen. Meist braucht nur ein Teil dieser Melodie anzuklingen, um den Gegenstand wieder zu erkennen. Für viele Gegenstände müssen wir mehrere Melodien ausbilden, wenn wir sie von allen Seiten auf*

## 8. Characterization of the musical atmosphere (our bubble and time-tunnel environmental world)

This is exactly what is at stake here, in von Uexküll's hypothesis and in Merleau-Ponty's interpretation. The psychoid effect that causes an action, a set of actions, a constellation of actions, done over the course of a day, is musical. We feel that we are going through a good time or a bad time, that the day went well or went badly. To be out of tune or in tune with one's life, the feeling that everything is in tune, happens on a plane identical to the production of music when we listen to a musical piece or play an instrument.

What is heard is different from an audible acoustic content to an auditory sensation. And yet the way we feel is identical in every way. The question can be asked in another way, by reversing the state of affairs. Could it be, rather, that we hear a melody, a harmony, because our being has the capacity to be affected by the feeling that music provokes, and not only by the acoustic content?

No doubt that without sound there is no perception of sound, and without the ability to hear, there is no experience of sound. But isn't it true that to be carried away by music, in a waking dream for example, we need much more than the auditory sensation? What if we were intrinsically musical, affectable by melodies, harmonies, consonances and dissonances? This step allows for an interpretation of the Kantian a priori from a musical point of view.[26]

The atmosphere of the human being is musical and therefore feels the tuning of what is happening when the human is active or is passively exposed to what is going on. The characteristic of an action is melodic and its operational plan has to do with musical tuning. When everything goes well, or when everything goes wrong, we feel that we experience moments akin to

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*den ersten Blick erkennen wollen. Haben wir das für eine Seite des Gegenstandes nicht getan, so erkennen wir ihn nicht, sondern begnügen uns mit der Angabe, dass dort ein Objekt sei, dessen Umrisse bei Betastung mit dem Blick keine bekannte Melodie auslöst*).

[26] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 4-5: "The order in which we immediately take in every sound and which establishes its relationship to all other sounds with certainty, is a "qualitative regularity" that exists in our mind. To speak with Kant, it is a "transcendental form" of our cognition, in relation to which the individual tones constitute the "matter" of cognition. (*Die Ordnung, in die wir jeden anklingenden Ton sofort aufnehmen, und die seine Verwandtschaft zu allen übrigen Tönen mit Sicherheit festlegt, ist eine in unserem Gemüt vorhandene "qualitative Planmässigkeit." Sie ist, um mit Kant zu reden, eine "transzendentale Form" unserer Erkenntnis, der gegenüber die einzelnen Töne die "Materie" der Erkenntnis ausmachen*.)

"How can the qualitative plannedness of the mind and the extensive plannedness of the brain be summarised conceptually?" (*Wie lassen sich die qualitativen Planmässigkeiten des Gemüts und die extensive Planmässigkeit des Gehirns begrifflich zusammenfassen*?)

someone who is listening to music and is transported by the emotions, feelings, and thoughts that it provokes. Our attempt to intervene in order to change dissonance into consonance, lack of harmony into harmony, rhythm without cadence into a rhythm with cadence, with groove, is entirely musical. The instruments are different, but the meaning is the same. To take up a physical training activity. To engage in physical activity for the sake of wellness. To feel good to be happy. Routine leads to a musical pattern. Every task we perform, every action, every conversation we have, book we read, show we watch, has the same effect that we feel when listening to music.

> Music gives us an idea of subjective space. When we are so strongly seized by it that we forget the origin of the sounds that come from this or that instrument and surrender to the rhythm, the subjective directional signs come awake in us even without bodily moving along, and now seem to fill the space belonging to them together with the sounds. (*Eine Vorstellung des subjektiven Raumes vermittelt uns die Musik. Wenn wir von ihr so stark ergriffen werden , dass wir die Herkunft der Töne, die aus diesem oder jenem Instrument stammen, vergessen und dem Rhythmus hingeben, werden auch ohne Körperliche Mitbewegen die subjektiven Richtungszeichen in uns wach, die nun mit den Tönen gemeinsam den ihnen zugehörigen Raum zu erfüllen scheinen*[27].)

There isn't always attuning between what each of us is and what we have to do, or between us and what the day brings. But the element common to all beings without exception, the atmosphere that constitutes the world--environment of life, is time. One of the possible expressions of time is melody. Von Uexküll claims that we inhabit a psychoid atmosphere. There is no content that is not psychoid. Carl Jung says the same mutatis mutandis. The atmosphere that the human inhabits is psychological. This does not mean that a stone is psychoid (a stone is devoid of world and can never have world [Heidegger]). But the universal access that the human carries is psychoid.[28]

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[27] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 42.

[28] For the distinction between the world as an "extension" and as the environment (Umwelt) in the phenomenological tradition, cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986); M. Heidegger, J. Stambaugh & D. J. Schmidt, *Being and time: a revised edition of the Stambaugh translation*. For an explicit connection with Jakob von Uexküll (Excelsior: Suny Express, 2010), cf. M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983); M. Heidegger, *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics: world, finitude, solitude* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). For a cognitive rather than a dispositional, emotional, and affective approach, cf: E. Husserl, *Ideas about pure phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2014); E. Husserl & K. Schuhmann, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie*

The ordering or organization of our being in time is the ordering of each of our actions and each moment that constitutes them in time. Just as we immediately grasp each echoing sound and the congruence with all the sounds that follow and precede it, we have the perception of a qualitative planning, a preordained harmony that projects itself into each sound and puts each sound in relation to the previous and the next. There is, in the mood, a project according to a plan.

> A difference between thoughts and feelings on the one hand and sensations on the other could not be established, because these could not become properties of objects. We would then be solipsists in the true sense of the word. (*Ein Unterschied zwischen Gedanken und Gefühlen einerseits und den Sinnesempfindungen andererseits liesse sich nicht feststellen, weil diese nicht zu Eigenschaften von Gegenständen werden könnten. Wir wären dann im wahren Sinn des Wortes Solipsisten.*[29])

But when listening to music we are affected by melody, rhythm, harmony, the duration of sounds, intensity and volume. The cadence and rhythm vibrate in us like an impulse has an effect. We may become effusive and want to dance, we follow the rhythm with our foot, hand or the whole body. But we may become melancholy, sad, emotional, dreamy. Music has a physiological effect (Nietzsche).[30] In the same way, the contents of our surroundings, our places, our things, our people, instil in us a certain vibration. Some people are very intense and others are discreet, each person has their moments, which can become almost hysterical, or else cancel each other out. The most diverse situations in which we find ourselves also have the ability to affect us, awaken emotions, elicit feelings. The language of emotion is the same

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*und phänomenologischen Philosophie: Erstes Buch Allgemeine Einführung in Die reine Phänomenologie* (Dordrecht: Springer Science Business Media, 2013).

[29] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 43.

[30] F. Nietzsche, *Nachlass Frühjahr* (1888), 14 [170]: "Every inner movement (feeling, thinking, affect) is accompanied by vascular changes and consequently by changes in colour, temperature, secretion; the suggestive power of music, its "suggestion mentale"; 3. the need to imitate: an extreme irritability in which a given model communicates itself contagiously, – a state is already guessed and represented according to signs ... An image that emerges from within already acts as a movement of the limbs... a certain expression of the will... (Schopenhauer!!!!)". NF-1888,14[170]. *"Jede innere Bewegung (Gefühl, Gedanke, Affekt) ist begleitet von Vaskular-Veränderungen und folglich von Veränderungen der Farbe, der Temperatur, der Sekretion; die suggestive Kraft der Musik, ihre "suggestion mentale"; 3. das Nachmachen-Müssen: eine extreme Irritabilität, bei der sich ein gegebenes Vorbild contagiös mittheilt, - ein Zustand wird nach Zeichen schon errathen und dargestellt ... Ein Bild, innerlich auftauchend, wirkt schon als Bewegung der Glieder... eine gewisse Willens -Aushängung... (Schopenhauer!!!!)".*

both in music listened to acoustically and in the most diverse situations in which we find ourselves. The way we each find ourselves opens us to this melody, cadence, rhythm, beat, duration, intensity, volume.

> Here we become acquainted with a very real factor of our organization, which must take place either in time as a melody of sound or in time and space as a melody of directional signs in order to be able to appear. We cannot do more than observe its effectiveness and determine its existence. As soon as we want to place it in the organization of our mind or ask ourselves whether we could find a sign of it in our brain, it slips between our fingers. (*Hier lernen wir einen sehr realen Faktor unserer Organisation kennen, der sich entweder in der Zeit als Tonmelodie oder in Zeit und Raum als Melodie der Richtungszeichen abspielen muss, um in die Erscheinung treten zu können. Mehr als seine Wirksamkeit beobachten und sein Dasein feststellen können wir nicht. Sobald wir ihn in die Organisation unsres Gemüts einordnen wollen oder uns die Frage stellen, ob wir in unserem Gehirn ein Zeichen von ihm auffinden könnten, entgleitet er uns unter den Fingern*)[31].

The factor of our musical organization in the world of life results from the perception of the melody to which each object can be reduced. The melody of tones inserts each of them in time. The form of presentation in space, our orientation in it, imply an openness to the Gemüt and its organization. The co-extensiveness between brain and mind is indeed problematic. We do not have an immediate access to impulses. We interpret signals from objects like musical notes in a melody. We may not hear music and yet there is a melody, rhythm, harmony constituting our being in the world.

> Nor can we reassure ourselves that the melody is a mere rule or order of division which we subsequently determine in the sequence of directional signs and which cannot exist without the appearance in which it was found. No, the sequence of impulses certainly forms the series of signs, quite unconcerned about whether we take note of their existence or not. (*Wir können uns auch nicht damit beruhigen, die Melodie sei eine blosse Regel oder Einteilungsordnung, die wir in der Reihenfolge der Richtungszeichen nachträglich feststellen, und die ohne die Erscheinung, an der sie gefunden wurde, gar nicht existieren kann. Nein, die Impulsfolge formt mit Sicherheit die Zeichenreihen, ganz unbekümmert darum, ob wir ihre Existenz zur Kenntnis nehmen oder nicht*)[32].

The anonymous melody allows us to understand the being of the sound, the being of the sequence. But we cannot be satisfied when we interpret

[31] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 27.
[32] J. Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 27.

melody with a mere rule (eine blosse Regel) or integral ordering of the parts (*Einteilungsordnung*). The order or organization can be further refined by following the series of directional signals (in der Reihenfolge der *Richtungszeichen*). The sequence of the impulses forms the signal series with certainty, completely unconcerned with whether we become aware of their existence or not. The sequence, the series, is given in a constitutive ordering of direction or orientation.

> We are only able to state that, with frequent repetition of the same series of tonal qualities or directional signs, an X is formed in our mind which combines the entire sequence of tones or signs into a unity which, at the sounding of the first tones or signs, announces their existence as an already existing whole, and which, secondly, at the time of reproduction, prescribes their order to the tones as well as to the directional signs. (*Wir vermögen nur festzustellen, dass bei häufiger Wiederholung der gleichen Reihe von Tonqualitäten oder Richtungszeichen in unserem Gemüte ein X sich bildet, das die gesamte Ton- oder Zeichenfolge in eine Einheit zusammenfasst, die beim Anklingen der ersten Töne oder Zeichen ihr Vorhandensein als ein bereits bestehendes Ganzes bekannt gibt, und die zweitens bei der Wiedererzeugung den Tönen wie den Richtungszeichen ihre Reihenfolge vorschreibt*[33]).

We are bearers as subjects of the Gemüt (or mind) qualified as the psychoid in us. Our atmosphere or element is that which allows us to filter objects, things, animals, plants, humans, organic and inorganic beings, real and unreal as sound signals that leave a musical impression on us.

> When we look at a known object or listen to a known piece of music, we learn nothing other than a corresponding unity is present. Only the fact of the already completed formation of this unity becomes known to us; we learn nothing about the unity itself and about the formation process that formed it. And yet this unity, which we have called the impulse sequence, is itself a living and active factor which, in reproduction, imprints its mark on the qualities it controls. (*Wir erfahren bei Betrachtung eines bekannten Gegenstandes oder beim Anhören eines bekannten Musikstückes nichts anderes, als dass eine entsprechende Einheit vorhanden ist. Nur die Tatsache der schon vollzogenen Bildung dieser Einheit wird und kund; über die Einheit selbst und über den Bildungsprozess, der sie formte, erfahren wir nichts. Und dabei ist diese Einheit, die wir Impulsfolge nannten, selbst ein lebender und tätiger Faktor, der bei der Reproduktion den von ihm beherrschten Qualitäten sein Gepräge aufdrückt*)[34].

[33] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 27-28.
[34] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 28.

The unity of meaning comprises not only "receptors" and "effectors" but also the carriers of perceptual notes and intervening notes that, in the most diverse objects of our ambient world, enable the melody of melodies.[35] The unity of meaning is qualified already since always in this sequential, oriented, directed a priori. The subject is the bearer of this sensor that is cognitive access and a condition for the possibility of intervention in his or her world. No object can appear to us that does not have an elementary and simple level of perceptual content and field of application. But the way in which the unity of meaning is constituted is in a reciprocal interaction and action that accentuates a musically qualified time. The impulses are reduced to ontological notes already founded in a melodic sequence. Is Nature this melody?

> Thus, the most important processes of life do not take place on the other side of appearances, but on this side, in the deepest secrecy. One thing can be recognized with complete certainty from this: the secret of the world is not to be sought behind the objects, but behind the subjects. *So vollziehen sich die wichtigsten Lebensvorgänge zwar nicht jenseits, wohl aber diesseits der Erscheinungen in tiefster Verborgenheit. Eines ist daraus mit voller Sicherheit erkennbar: das Geheimnis der Welt ist nicht hinter den Objekten, sonder hinter den Subjekten zu suchen*)[36].

And we can extend this consideration to a complex abyss of infinite and indefinite multiplication of sequences, series and coexistences, of a melody of melodies, of a symphony. The time of each object is the time of its duration. But duration is qualified as the sequence that integrates in a diachronic unity of meaning, and that synchronizes the parts of objects. A circumstance has several objects with several parts. Our interaction with an object is never exclusive. But there are as many objects as there are living beings.[37] There

[35] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 33-34: "Thus, something is more at stake here than positing a symbiotic relationship. What Uexküll describes is a way of accentuating the relations between things, where the relations demonstrate a certain 'otherness' within each organism. The bee is flower-like, and the flower is bee-like. If they were not, there would be little room for connection; each would pass by the other without significance. The only way the bee and flower can have significance for the other is if each is already the other. Uexküll does not speak in ontological terms, but the descriptions he offers have an ontological tone. The bee, in a sense, becomes flower-like, and the flower becomes bee-like through the relationship they create together. They can only become the other insofar as they already have an affinity for the other. Thus, they become a new ontological unit, a meaningful system greater than their 'individual' parts. At the bottom, an organism is what it can become, insofar as it already is the other that it becomes in the harmonious relation."

[36] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 28.

[37] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 210: "Just as the melody breaks down into individual tones, the line breaks down into individual directional steps. Just as the tones combine to form a melody, so the directional steps combine to form a line. Just as the directional

are living beings that exist and we know of, and a majority of them that we don't, just as there are generations and generations of living beings that have inhabited and will inhabit the planet. The symphony is the a priori of the relationship between nature, world, animality, humanity. There is nothing that escapes the musical content, time and its rhythm.

> In music, a distinction is made between melodies and symphonies. Melody is understood to be the planned succession of notes, symphony is understood to be the planned sounding together. Symphony and melody together result in harmony. Suppose we have compared certain regularly repeating rhines of directional signs with melody when we look. In that case, we may call the rules which become recognizable when all the local signs of the eye sound together the symphony teachers of looking. (*In der Musik unterscheidet man Melodien und Symphonien. Unter Melodie versteht man das planvolle Nacheinanderklingen der Töne, unter Symphonie das planvolle Zusammenklingen. Symphonie und Melodie zusammen ergeben die Harmonie. Wenn wir beim Blicken bestimmte sich regelmässig wiederholende Rhein von Richtungszeichen mit Melodie verglichen haben, so drürfen wir die Regeln, welche beim Zusammenklingen aller Lokalzeichen des Auges kenntlich werden, als Symphonielehrer des Schauens bezeichnen*)[38].

## 9. The melody that sings itself

At each moment, there is the constitution of a proto-melody that harbours melodies, an arch-symphony that embraces symphonies. The being of the sequence is ontological. The reduction to the moment in which the impulse lasts is an abstraction and is constructed from the sequence itself. The temporal delimitation of a melody to a song, or to the qualitative duration of an object, of an aspect of an object, or of a circumstance depends on the understanding of the hermeneutic situation, to use an operator from another provenance. To understand the being of time is also to be in time. To be in time is to understand oneself in the temporal course, in the path of sequence and articulation between what was and what is not already, and what will be next, but is not yet. The atmosphere in which life happens and each of us exists in the world is the non-negotiable sequence of time. Time manifests itself *as it is being* and gives itself to be understood musically. It remains to be asked whether

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steps that form the line of an arabesque or the outline of any object are objective. (*Wie die Melodie in einzelne Töne zerfällt, so zerfällt die Linie in einzelne Richtungsschritte. Genau wie die Töne sich zu einer Melodie verbinden, so verbinden sich die Richtungsschritte zu einer Linie. Genau so objektiv sind die Richtunsschritte, die die Linie einer Arabeske oder den Umriss irgendeines Objekts bilden*)."

[38] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 28.

the direction of the sequence points to infinity (and how could we experience a sequence that from the first conscious instant would be indefinite to infinity?). Or whether the direction of the sequence is something else entirely. If we have the perception of passing time, wouldn't it be possible to understand the direction of the being of the sequence as that of the passing? The direction of the being of the passage is not that of the irreversibility of the irreversible and the insurmountable. These are legitimate questions that we hardly know how to raise, much less answer. But let us return to Merleau-Ponty, who accentuates Uexküll's interpretation in such an extreme and radical way.

> The notion of Umwelt is destined to join what we usually separate: the activity that creates the organs and the activity of behaviour, lower as well as higher. From animal-machines to animal-consciousness, there is everywhere an unfurling [*déploiement*] of an Umwelt. What is unfurled, and of what is there an unfurling [*qu'est-ce qui se déploie, et de quoi y a-t-il déploiement*]? At the beginning, Uexküll is agnostic: he speaks of a Naturfaktor whose nature would not be known: "Driesch wants to establish an entelechy, but I'm attached to von Baer." "The unfurling of an Umwelt as a melody that sings itself." [*Le déploiement d'un Umwelt c'est une mélodie, une mélodie qui se chante elle-même*]. This is a comparison full of meaning. When we invent a melody, the melody sings in us much more than we sing it; it goes down the throat of the singer, as Proust says. Just as the painter is struck by a painting which is not there, the body is suspended in what it sings [*est suspendu à ce qu'il chante*]: the melody is incarnated [*s'incarne*] and finds in the body a type of servant. The melody gives us a particular consciousness of time[39].

When a melody happens to us, the duration, intensity and volume, the rhythm and harmony constitute each and every situation in which we find ourselves as well as the surrounding objects, the others and ourselves. In saying how it is with us, it is not necessary to verbalize or utter it, like Ivan Illich's apology in the cradle of his death. We may try to say it and fail. But we know very well how the heart of life vibrates in us, how the universal sensor that we carry is also the active element of our intervention, of the understanding of the being that is being and reveals itself to us as the melody that comes to be sung, and sung perhaps only in our mind. A painting also happens like this to a painter. It did not exist before it came to him in his fantasy or imagination, or only in formal indications that he then externalizes in colour and form. Perhaps that is also how others happen to us and transfigure

[39] M. Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature. Notes. Cours du Collège de France*. Texte Établi et Annoté par Dominique Séglard suivi des Résumés de cours correspondants (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 2021), 297.

our whole life.[40] Because what was there before someone to be loved appeared to us is completely different afterwards. Making a friend, finding a love, comes with the promise of an initial chord, then it passes without our being responsible for what happens afterwards. All of life is this symphonic moment that happens. Most of the time it happens primarily under the dictatorship of the present and the actual, the tactile and the optical, but, as we have seen, it is actually transposable to the musical. What is the complex structure of this universal melody that is immortal from the moment we become aware of it, but "changes" before we come to life and is then impossible to turn off, at least on this side of life?

> We think naturally that the past secretes [*sécrète*] the future ahead of it. But this notion of time is refuted by the melody. At the moment when the melody begins, the last note is there, in its own manner. In a melody, a reciprocal influence between the first and the last note takes place, and we have to say that the first note is possible only because of the last, and vice versa [*réciproquement*]. It is in this way that things happen in the construction of a living being. There is no priority of effect over cause. Just as we cannot say that the last note is the end of a melody and that the first is the effect of it, neither can we distinguish the meaning [*sense*] apart from the meaning where it is expressed[41].

The unfolding of the melody has a complex formal structure. In the first instant the last instant is present in some way. When it begins to sound, we can even perceive the music already in the middle, as we surprise ourselves midway upon the journey of our life. In the same way, the last moment, with its sounds, does not finish the complex logic of the end of the music. We transport the song or poem into a realm of the soul. Like with a day, from the break of dawn to the falling of dusk. We transport the length of the day and its goings on into a realm of the soul.[42]

It is not without reason that Merleau-Ponty thinks of St. Augustine, notably in book XI of his *Confessions*, which we shall paraphrase. When I

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[40] T. Orel & S. Willis-Altamirano, "The Technologies of Self-Fashioning: Beyond Universality and Variance of the Industrial Product", *Design Issues*, 4(1/2), 1988, 38-51. Can we transform ourselves? Do we have the flexibility to do so? Do the world and others change me? Can I change the world and other people?

[41] M. Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature*, 298.

[42] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 29, clearly highlights that an animal's identity can never be approached other than through its intersubjective relations. He explains this in the following manner: "The theory of the composition of music can serve as a model; it starts from the fact that at least two tones are needed to make harmony. In composing a duet, the two parts that blend into harmony must be written note for note and point for point with each other. On this principle, the theory of counterpoint in music is based."

am about to sing a song, even before I begin, my entire attention covers the whole. Once I have started, the part I have begun to sing soon transitions into the past tense. The flow of memory increases. Expectation is reduced, until it is exhausted. After I sang the song, what was a future possibility about to happen transited into memory.

The three ecstasies are formulated in that one is waiting for something to which one gives one's attention and then transits by passing into what one will remember later [nam et expectat per id quod adtendit transeat in id quod meminerit. quis igitur negat futura nondum esse]; the expectation of the future (expectatio futurorum) and the memory of things past (*memoria praeteritorum*) are somehow felt in the mood (in animo). Each and every situation (*actio*) in life, my life, the lives of those who are part of my generation, my generation, and past and future generations is structured by this temporal distention.

The more time passes, the shorter the expectation and the more prolonged the memory, until all expectation is consummated when a whole lifetime has passed into the memory of the past (*quod quanto magis agitur et agitur, tanto breviata expectatione prolongatur memoria, donec tota expectatio consumatur, quum tota illa actio finita transierit in memoriam*).

> And what takes place in the entire psalm, takes place also in each individual part of it, and in each individual syllable: this holds in the longer action, of which that psalm is perchance a portion; the same holds in the whole life of man, of which all the actions of man are parts; the same holds in the whole age of the sons of men, of which all the lives of men are parts. (*et quod in toto cantico, hoc in singulis particulis eius, fit atque in singulis syllabis eius, hoc in actione longiore, cuius forte particula est illud canticum, hoc in tota vita hominis, cuius partes sunt omnes actiones hominis, hoc in toto saeculo filiorum hominum, cuius partes sunt omnes vitae hominum*.)"[43]

Life is a *distentio animi*, a distention of the spirit, of the mind, between past time that is no more and future time that is not yet. It exists between the first instant and the last. The qualitative understanding of the beginning, of short, medium, and long terms, of outcomes or open situations, of the end of situations does not require clocks or stopwatches, but rather the existence of these objects requires the presupposition of the understanding of time as the dimension of the distension that stretches towards disappearance or elongates towards overabundance. We are never mere observers, or least not unscathed observers; we never come out unscathed from the analysis of time.

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[43] Augustine, *Confessions*, Liber XI, 28, 38.

Source: Translated by J.G. Pilkington. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

And everything that happens is already with our eyes set on the finish line, on the end. We ask what time is it to know how much time is left, not to know the exact time at that moment of asking the question.

Thus, when night falls, it happens not only at a certain time, but it also happens for me; night also falls upon me. In the same way, when the day breaks, it is not only daybreak, day breaks for me, day has broken for me. Everything that happens is interwoven point by point in the complex fabric that weaves the texture between me and what is not me, but everything is already inside this totality that always moves forward even when the nightfall and the night falling for me do not coincide, when the break of dawn and the moment in time when I wake up do not coincide. What is important to underline is that whatever happens has this musical dimension, because it is inexorably distributed in time. By all accounts, there has to be a minimum time of at least eighteen eighths of a second for time to offer enough consistency for an event to constitute itself, to last enough to settle, to come into being, to take hold. Without this minute amount of time, without this very brief lapse of time, even we would be unable to secure enough consistency to account for ourselves.

Regardless of whether we are looking at a still life or a moving object, the tension in the expectation of a predator on the hunt is anything but a frozen motionlessness, it is dramatic. No photograph of a fighter or a dancer is without this explosive dynamic of temporality that points outward from the protagonists' seemingly crystallized body. The same thing happens to a stationary object as happens to an object travelling at high speed. But the tubular horizon is structural, it morphologically modifies everything that falls under its purview, it is an invisible force field that does not act only on perception but lasts for the time of life, distends itself throughout time.[44]

[44] The question can be asked even more radically. Each of us may exist on a world scale or, better, on a universal scale. At the same time, we live individually and distinctively from each other. St. Thomas Aquinas expresses a radical way of putting the problem: quidquid percipitur ad modum percipients percipitur, whatever is understood in the form of one who has understood what he has understood. Thus, each of us as human selves and each living being with its self understands things radically differently. The mobile horizon in which every living being has always existed has this atmospheric element in Leibniz's formula: a monad. But if everything that appears is understood in each one's way, how does one share the "same" world? Our starting point is this basis of understanding. The analysis isolates us from asking how to return to the familiar horizon. Is there a shared typical horizon? But what is the radical structure that morphologically constitutes the tubular horizon of the ambient world that, as we have seen, is not static but multiform? It unfolds diachronically into multiple worlds with different qualities, not juxtaposed, in different ages but also synchronically admits many differences. C. Ristau, "Cognitive Ethology: Past, Present and Speculations on the Future" (PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association, 1992), 125-136. Edward S. Russell, *The Interpretation of Development and Heredity: a Study in Biological Method* (Freeport – NEW York, Books for Libraries Press, 1972).

In every appointment on our calendar, which we mark so as not to forget it, the complex structure of the living, of the being that is alive, of the being that lives, that is present. Life is never static. In the human, the beingness of living is never reduced to the present, because it is defined by absence. Absence is not an unreality, unable to make happen. The past may live back there, but it is neither dead nor buried. As for the future, it is both that of melancholy and sadness and defeat, and that which gives time to time and can smile upon us. If the future were a not yet, an absent unreality, if the past were an unreality – the horizon where we find the spent tickets of all our journeys – if only the present existed, the time of life would be that of the most oppressive claustrophobia, which is curiously the very time of evidence, the time of science, the time of demonstration, the time of causality, of the past that confidently keeps things rolling towards the present, but also represents utter devitalisation, the darkest eclipse of the spirit.

Each of us can be seen as the tubular horizon, impermeable to one another. In each moment of time there are completely different contents because they are morphologically structured by each being in a singular way, as if each human being had its own tone, its own accent, its own melody, its own sound, as if it had its own soundtrack of which it was the author, without ever having played any instrument or even been good at singing, because the vocalization we are talking about here is different from the popular version of music, as Socrates called it.[45] If not symphonic it is surely polyphonic. Even without harmony or melody it is a complex arrangement of different tones, interrupted by complex silences and rhythms. But the tubular horizon is temporally constituted, it is on a universal scale, it encompasses everything and encompasses itself.

There are as many universes as there are living beings. How is it possible to know what every other person's world is like? How is the intersection of these tubular channels possible, a dynamic and living intersection that is continually making and remaking itself after it is undone? The living being is in fact already a platform, an interface, a node of relationships. No human being exists without others. Nothing and no one exists outside this mutating lens that holds in it all of the ten billion faces of our generation and of all the generations of humans, from the first to the last, contracted into a compact complex that sometimes expands into a gaze that sees us in a blink of an eye without which reality could still be itself, albeit unrecognizable to the human gaze, the only gaze that is.

And yet, none of this is enough to account for what it is to be and to live. Because even with all this complexification, we have not exhausted all the possibilities of thinking about what constitutes the world-environment of the

[45] Pl. *Phd*. 60d8-61ª8. Socrates did not know whether what he had been commanded in the dream was not the popular version of music (dēmōdē mousikē).

living being that is the human being, how it finds itself, and is, in life, how it understands or grasps the complex and lucid structure whose dynamics accord with the existential project of the beginning that comes from the end and therefore always seems to surprise and anticipate us.[46] The path is made by walking. There is no path.[47]

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[46] Uexküll, *Theoretische Biologie*, 213: "The scope of the phenomena to be expected is already so limited that one cannot expect any sensational surprises. Everything will seem to proceed in a purely mechanical way, the super-mechanical interventions will never become clear to the senses. The only thing that can be detected is the intervention of an automatic rhythm in the formation of the bridge ... (*Der Spielraum der zu erwartenden Erscheinungen ist bereits so eingeschränkt, dass man keinerlei sensationelle Überraschungen erwarten darf. Alles wird rein mechanisch vorzugehen scheinen, die übermechanischen Eingriffe waren niemals zur sinnlichen Deutlichkeit gelangen. Das einzige, was man wird feststellen können, ist das Eingreifen eines automatischen Rhythmus in der Brückenbildung ... einer Art selbsttätiger "Bahnung*").

[47] Antonio Machado, "Proverbs and songs", *Lands of Castile and Other Poems* (UK: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 93.

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