CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: _____

Entitled: _____

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

_____

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair

_____ Examiner

_____ Examiner

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)

Approved by _____

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____

Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean

Gadamer's Fusion of Horizon(s) and its Ontological Implications via a case study with
SIKU: Knowing Our Ice

Guillaume Boucher

A Major Research Paper
in
The Department
of
Philosophy

Under the Supervision of
Prof. David Morris

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Philosophy) at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

August 2021

© Guillaume Boucher

1

Abstract

Gadamer's Fusion of Horizon(s) and its Ontological Implications via a case study with
SIKU: Knowing Our Ice

Guillaume Boucher

Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizon(s) accounts for the dialogical process of coming to shared understandings of the world. It also relates him explicitly to the phenomenological tradition. The paper explores this dialogical process through the concrete case of translations between the Inuktitut and English languages, in relation to sea ice and snow related vocabularies, gathered in the *SIKU* publication. This approach illuminates the inseparability of language and ontology for Gadamer, since *SIKU*'s gathering of ice and snow vocabularies and stories of translation shows how the translation process is anchored in horizonal relations to things. This provides concrete empirical material for developing the philosophical thesis that translation is always possible. It also supports an argument against Rorty's and Vattimo's readings of Gadamer's hermeneutics, which brush aside the ontological role of things in their respective pursuits of a pragmatist or historicist ethics of inclusivity. The paper holds that an ethics of linguistic inclusivity is not exclusive of an ontological role of things in language and translation.

La fusion de(s) horizon(s) est le concept gadamérien qui constitue le processus dialogique par lequel on arrive à une entente. C'est aussi par celui-ci que Gadamer se relie explicitement à la tradition phénoménologique. Une telle question d'entente dialogique, spécifiquement par le biais du cas concret de traductions, entre les langues inuktitut et anglais à propos de termes reliés à la glace marine et la neige, rassemblées dans la publication *SIKU*, est développée en étant guidée par une préoccupation constante pour ses implications ontologiques. Cette approche illumine l'inséparabilité du langage et de l'ontologie chez Gadamer, puisque les listes de vocabulaires ainsi que les histoires d'explication de termes rassemblées dans *SIKU* font voir l'ancrage du processus de traduction en des horizons aux choses. Ceci présente du matériel empirique concret dans le développement de la thèse philosophique soutenant que la traduction est toujours possible. De plus, elle renforce l'argument développé contre la lecture de l'herméneutique de Gadamer de Rorty et de Vattimo: les deux cherchent à balayer la notion d'ontologie dans leurs poursuites respectives d'une éthique d'inclusion pragmatique et d'une historiciste. Nous soutenons que l'éthique d'inclusion n'exclue pas le rôle ontologique des choses dans le langage et la traduction.

Wenn Sprache wirklich nichts anderes wäre als eine bloße Fixierung und Verlautbarung dessen, was im Denken bereits gedacht ist, dann müßte man in der Tat wünschen, es gäbe nicht mehr die Vielfalt der menschlichen Sprachen, die doch allesamt dem Ideal der genauen Fixierung nicht genügen.
—Gadamer, *Zur Phänomenologie von Ritual und Sprache*, GW X, 426

1. Introduction

This paper advances an account of the prominent Gadamerian concept of *Horizontverschmelzung*, here translated as "fusion of horizon(s)"[1], by presenting its ontological implications and underpinnings. The paper elucidates this connection between fusion of horizon(s) and ontology by engaging with a specific case study, *SIKU: Knowing Our Ice* (2010). *SIKU* provides an especially insightful case regarding fusion of horizon(s), because the collection seeks to document sea ice knowledge by cooperatively combining the expertise of the Inuit peoples, cultural anthropologists, and natural scientists, presenting these different perspectives as enriching each other insofar as they share a common concern. It thus provides concrete evidence supporting the paper's account of Gadamerian philosophy, where a truth about Gadamerian fusion emerges immanently within the publication. *SIKU* is also relevant because it connects with related debates concerning the plurality of languages and possible relativist conclusions.

These related debates are twofold. One debate concerns the philosophies of Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty who, drawing on Gadamer, developed their own hermeneutics, which are here understood as respectively leading to historicist nihilism and pragmatic nominalism. Both positions focus on a normative ethical principle of inclusivity, that is developed in contradistinction with traditional accounts of truth in metaphysics. Hence their views draw on a kind of weak ontology that cannot account for

the ontological implications of the fusion of horizon(s)[2]. This is because, rather than focusing on the things themselves (*die Sachen selbst*), as revealed differently in different languages, they focus on the ethical normativity arising from the recognition of 'other' ontologies. This recognition leads to a conclusion that brushes aside the significance of ontology, because it seeks to show that beings can be understood differently, depending on the context in which the understanding occurs, downplaying the role and being of things. Secondarily, *SIKU* leads to a related debate in linguistics concerning the (so-called) 'many words for snow'. This saying, which is referenced throughout the paper, would imply that Inuktitut would reveal the being understood in English as 'snow', through a multiplicity of linguistic terms that are non-commensurate with 'snow,' such that these multiple linguistic terms do not reveal the 'same' being. This saying would thus call for linguistic relativism, indicated by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, wherein the structure of the language itself directs the way of thinking of its speakers. This leads to a language related relativism, that is different from Vattimo's historicist nihilism or Rorty's pragmatic nominalism, because it tackles language as a scientific object of study, whereas the former agree with Gadamer's emphasis on ontology within the medium of language. Linguistic relativism holds an overly instrumental account of language and thereby misses the whole hermeneutical realm. The paper finds a common point of critique against these views: Vattimo's historicist nihilism, Rorty's pragmatic nominalism, and linguistic relativism all have a disregard for the things themselves. Throughout the paper, the expression "things themselves," is used in a phenomenological sense to indicate a concern for *die Sachen selbst*, the things of the world as what matters—but in their own way of presenting themselves.[3]

In approaching the question of the fusion of horizon(s) through *SIKU,* and in relation to issues such as linguistic relativism, my main focus is not whether there are 'many words for snow' in Inuktitut or exactly 'how many' there are, even though the literature in *SIKU* is clear concerning the incredible diversity of the Inuktitut language with regard to ice/snow related vocabularies.[4] The interest is rather the way that questions of translation become especially prominent in this case, where one vocabulary cannot directly be matched to or transposed onto another one. This enables and leads to further questioning concerning language as such and its differences in particular languages. Here my question is: what can *SIKU* reveal about particular languages that differ from one another (Inuktitut and English) and a shared deeper medium of language enabling conversation? In this way, my inquiry about fusion of horizon(s) is both supported by and illuminates the investigation of these questions about the particularity of languages, while pointing to such a shared medium; all these points are concretely embedded in *SIKU*. Crucially, this ground is not a universal language but a shared ontology, embedded in a medium of language.

Indeed, *SIKU* precisely allows me to connect these hermeneutical questions about language and relativism to *ontological* issues. This is because, as shown in the next section, *SIKU*'s study of concrete cases of translating what is meant by 'words for snow' reveals that such translations are not housed within language solely as an aggregate of instrumental words, but within shared horizonal relations to the world. I take up this link between what someone says in language, and the being that is revealed, by bringing to the fore Gadamer's sentence, "Being that can be understood is language" (TM 490). By pursuing issues of language, translation, and relativism, through the specific lesson of

SIKU, the paper seeks to approach the particularities and differences of languages, showing how these differences can be given due justice, yet also bridged, through attention to the role things themselves play in translation processes. This stands in contrast to Vattimo and Rorty, both of whom pursue an ethics of inclusivity, to do justice to linguistic difference—but in ways that, brushes aside ontology and the role of things themselves.

The underlying presupposition of the paper is that communication between languages, that is, a form of translation, is always possible. Additionally, my claim is that philosophical research into the plurality of languages, and into their inherent differences, opens a positive realization concerning a shared medium of language. Implicitly, this also means that the conclusion of historicist, nominalist and/or relative ontologies (in Gadamer's philosophy) as well as its counterpart in linguistics with linguistic relativism, is untenable. However, the way past these untenable positions requires attention to the shared medium of language being open to a shared world; it hinges on the connection between being and language in Gadamer's sentence. This is what the *SIKU* case helps reveal.

The paper begins with an interpretation of *SIKU*, pointing to different concrete accounts of fusion of horizon(s) (albeit not labelled so) to provide examples and content for the argument. It then bridges into an exposition of Gadamer's philosophy, using these examples to ground it. This extensive exposition grounds the philosophical content of the paper in general, as well as the theory for the fusion of horizon(s) in particular. The fourth section introduces possible historicist and nominalist counter-responses from Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty. The conclusion shows how we can keep the ethical

contributions from Vattimo and Rorty, discussed in the fourth section, while showing that this is not mutually exclusive of a strong notion of ontology revealing the things themselves.

II. SIKU

Preliminary hermeneutical remarks are necessary concerning the *SIKU* publication itself and its history of coming together as a published work before approaching the philosophical argument. The hypothesis is that the *SIKU* publication contributes to the above inquiries because this text itself accomplishes a fusion of horizon(s), and does so in a way that gives a concrete account of how such fusions arise. Even if we did not approach the publication with the philosophical questions above in mind, a naive reading would recognize that *SIKU* reveals important points about the goals of cooperation and communication.

Published in 2010, *SIKU* represents the work of many individuals over some years, culminating in the International Polar Year (IPY) of 2007-2008. Those authors — ranging from long-time employees in the north, to traditional hunters, to different commission officers (sustainable development, research) to social science scholars of anthropology, sociology, indigenous and environmental studies, as well as natural science scholars (biology, geography, and geophysics), and several individuals who were interviewed throughout the process — show, from their different perspectives, how people can arrive at a fusion of horizon(s). *SIKU* can thereby show how such a fusion can arise, in a specific place, across people living in different languages, practices and traditions. Helena Ödmark's foreword is enlightening in providing context for this

account, as arising from the specific intention of integrating a "human dimension" into the IPY research. She writes: "I was not aware of the almost total lack of communication within the polar research community between scientists working in natural and physical sciences and those working in the field of social and human sciences. But I knew that a priority for the Artic Council was to 'strengthen cooperation in Artic research.'" (SIKU v) Attention to this issue, of the lack of communication, is bridged into a conscious effort to include the Artic residents in research, with a focus on the involvement of traditional knowledge. As the preface indicates, the effort was to publish a book that "will be a lasting record of what can be achieved when science and indigenous knowledge are brought together." (SIKU x) The book then, doesn't merely gather scientific and indigenous knowledges regarding ice, but is attentive to what it takes to gather and fuse these knowledges. In this respect it offers a concrete account of fusion of horizon(s).

This is so even if these remarks in the foreword, preface and other chapters are not directly concerned with the notion of fusion of horizon(s) as it would be applied to the case of translations from Inuktitut to English. Indeed, if we approached the *SIKU* publication in terms of abstract questions about translation or the related question of 'many words for snow', from a disengaged perspective, we would fall into an instrumental view of language that would miss a crucial ontological component that illuminates fusion of horizon(s) as happening between people, traditions, and places— within larger horizons—versus as happening in language as an instrument abstracted from such places. It is precisely because *SIKU*'s project draws together different people, practices, and languages, in relation to a place and common concern, 'sea ice,' that it can

help advance an account of fusion of horizon(s) that moves deeper into language and its ontological realm.

As a matter of contextualization, some remarks that go back to the origin of the so-called 'many words for snow' are appropriate. Beginning with Franz Boas' first expedition in the 1880s on the Baffin Island where he recorded in his journals key Inuktitut vocabularies for snow and ice, the popular opinion that this language would have 'many words for snow' was taken over under different academic disciplines and contexts, some of them responding to and contradicting each other's arguments. This belief was taken over in, roughly, three fields: anthropology, linguistics and other scholars who took on the task of 'debunking' the scholarly frenzy surrounding this example. In most of the cases, there was a scientific account culminating in the proposition of cultural and/or linguistic relativism (such as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis). Further, this debate has led to deepening questions concerning the status of words in languages and their relation to cultures. In some cases, the argument is that the traditional linguistic claims about what words are[5], cannot be easily applied to Inuktitut, because Inuktitut is a polysynthetic language. We might claim that there are 'many words' for snow, but in fact there far fewer words, because what we are counting are a few root words unto which prefixes, and suffixes would be added. Philosophically, the debate is interesting because it points to a deeper problem concerning the understanding of 'words'. In this respect it involves hermeneutics, as a philosophical subdiscipline dealing with understanding and interpretation.

In terms of general information, the *SIKU* project confirms that Inuktitut indeed has an extensive and diverse vocabulary for describing snow and other phenomena, and

shows that what Franz Boas from 1885 to 1894 gathered as a list is indeed substantial but "the remarkable richness of the Inuit ice terminology is barely visible in his material."[6] The contemporary lists and the work presented in the *SIKU* project, for example, is more comprehensive and evaluates Boas' work as contributing up to "25-30% of the total"[7]. Indeed, the vocabulary for ice and related phenomena is actually more diverse and richer than the one for snow. That is, together, both 'snow' and 'ice' related terms are more diverse in Inuktitut than in most other languages.

Chapter 13 of *SIKU* "The Ice Is Always Changing: Yup'ik Understanding of Sea Ice, Past and Present" provides a good example of how *SIKU* approaches ice/snow related terms. This is because it proposes an approach to translation that is descriptive and concretely accounts for what will be proposed further in the paper. This chapter is focused on "Yup'ik elders' observation of sea ice formation and change along the Bering Sea coast of Southwest Alaska" (SIKU 295). The discussion reported in the chapter is organized by a council, which is in part composed of 1,300 elders of 65 years and more. A section of the chapter describes the formation of *Imarpiim Cikulallra Uksuarmi/Fall Formation of Sea Ice*, especially through the testimony of Paul John: "Toward fall, when it starts to rain a lot, fresh water accumulates on top of the salt water. They say that leads to the ice freezing at a faster rate during fall." (SIKU 299) This is followed by a description of the authors: "Fresh water accumulating along the ocean leads to the formation of *cikullaq* (newly frozen ice, frozen floodwater on the ocean, lit. 'thing of *ciku* (ice)'), also known as *nutaqerrun* (new ice) or frazil ice or grease ice in English." (SIKU 299) Paul John's account is especially tied to advice and stories from kayaking and hunting while being in contact with this kind of ice. These concern the possibility of

tearing the older kind of kayak, with skin, or getting stuck in the ice, as well as ways in which one can find one's way through this kind of ice with a snowshoe. Moreover, the increasingly scarcer formation of this kind of ice (*Cikullaq*) is a sign of climate change and the warming of temperatures.

Another interesting account is a quote from John Eric, reported by the authors, concerning '*Elliqaun/Newly Frozen Ice Sheets Along Shorefast Ice*':

> *Elliqaun* is smooth, new ice that freezes at night. It is attached to the shore ice and gradually becomes thin as it extends out to the water. But the *tuaq* that is behind it is covered with snow.... After it got warm, when it got cold again, they called the ice that formed *elliqaun*. When *elliqaun* froze, the surface was always moist. And when snow covered it, the ice underneath didn't freeze, but only became solid when it was extremely cold out. (SIKU 301)

In this case, the kind of ice is 'translated' into English through extensive description, such that the whole world in and around the term can be opened as accurately as possible in another language. Further, elders describe the process and timing in which this kind of ice forms, as well as the situations wherein one can walk on it. Such descriptions are sometimes accompanied with pieces of advice. For instance, the *elliqaun* can be particularly dangerous because someone can sink into it. *Qapuut*, a kind of icy foam, can also be dangerous, because it is a sign that ice is melting. Someone would run the risk of falling through if they were walking on it.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that the terms used to communicate these kinds of ice are not strictly literally composed of (in the English translations) words concerning ice or water, but can also include other terms or images. For example, *Evunret/Piled Ice*, would literally be translated as "those that are piled" (SIKU 306). The word is related to the process by which the ocean forms *Evunret* by piling and breaking pieces of ice. This leads to further account, by Paul John, who introduces the term "dark-

11

coloured *evnuret* mixed with sand" (SIKU 307), which he explains as having a specific

name: *asvailnguut*. This is literally explained as: "ones that are solid and immovable"

(SIKU 307). Other related terms are "*marayilugneret* (from marayaq, 'mud') and

tungussiqatiit (lit., 'ones that are dark')" (SIKU 307). An interesting phenomenon

described by John Eric is "when the *evnuret* comes upon the *cikullaq*" (SIKU 307). This

can create really large pieces of ice, on which people can climb, sometimes up to fifty

feet. Another term that is transposed into English through imagery is *Akangluaryuut/Ones

That Roll*. These are described as "rounded sheets of floating ice that could tip over,

referred to as pancake ice in Western sea ice terminology" (SIKU 312). Again, this

account of ice comes with other advice, especially in situations in which one is kayaking

and the *akangluaryuut* comes close to the kayak and paddle, running the risk of capsizing

the boat. It usually forms in the spring when there is melting occurring. This close

connection between words revealing different sorts of ice, and words of advice about ice,

helps emphasize that the 'words for ice' arise in and around practices in places, and thus

anticipates the point that the fusion of horizon(s) is not merely a translation of words as

instruments from one language to another, but a fusion that involves the world of people

together in places that offer horizons of shared practice and knowledge.

III. Fusion of Horizon(s) and Ontology in and through the Medium of Language

a. Fusion of horizon(s)

      In section 2.II Gadamer, while responding to the methodological approach in

objectivist historicism, presents truth in history through the cultivation of an historical

consciousness by the practice of hermeneutics. This is where the idea of a hermeneutic experience of reality is put forward and it thereby bridges to the next sections where language is presented as the medium through which this experience is actualized. Such a thinking of history and temporality is fundamental because it grounds the hermeneutical person that has, within its finite existence, horizons opened to them. Hence, in this section we develop the way in which Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience bridges into, as well as gives the whole sense of, the fusion of horizon(s).

Gadamer inscribes himself in a tradition where Heidegger proposed a fore-structure of understanding, which is characterized by the way in which things appear to one's consciousness through the lens of one's angle of questioning and concrete approach to things as what matters. Questioning opens the hermeneutical experience. Such an opening also implies that in directing one's question, one is always operating under a structure of pre-judgment. There is thus a dialectic where one becomes conscious of one's pre-judgmental structure in interpreting and one can thereby emancipate oneself from the tyranny of its structure. It is, however, important to note that these prejudices are not bad or evil. All understanding requires an angle or perspective, because understanding stem from one's existence in temporal finitude. This is why Gadamer can write that "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being." (TM 289) The true project concerning the hermeneutic approach to prejudices is therefore not their eradication, but the establishment of legitimate prejudices. Now this raises a question of normativity as to the way in which one ought to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate prejudices. This question is answered when

Gadamer proposes the exemplar of authority and classics as sources of generally accepted

normativity for adjudicating between differing prejudices. Thus, he writes on authority:

> Admittedly, it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge — the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence — i.e., it has priority over one's own. (TM 329)

Such normativity in authority brings a guide as to which kinds of prejudices lead to

fruitful interpretations and which do not. It recognizes the expertise of certain individuals

in certain interpretative domains.

We are now at a better place to understand the process by which a fusion of

horizon(s) is brought about. We can go back to the concept of 'situation' with the idea in

mind that a situation is grounded in a particular temporality, which is hermeneutically

deployed when questions, guided by certain prejudices, are asked. This opens a horizon, a

concept which Gadamer primarily understands from ordinary language, with the addition

of the ground-breaking development in the phenomenological tradition:

> The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. [...] A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition (TM 313)

The horizon, moreover, is never closed on itself; it is always moving us as we also move

it. It is always shaped and re-shaped by the way in which the hermeneutical

consciousness approaches the world. Dialogue, then, opens the possibility for horizons to

collide and be re-shaped by different views. In this process of understanding there is a

symbiosis by which one can put themselves into the position of another person, wherein

one comes to understand something from another person's hermeneutical situation. Such communication is not solely empathy nor the subordination of another to one's point of view. The dialogue Gadamer is pointing at raises one's consciousness to a higher universality. On this point, Gadamer presents the saying, "to acquire a horizon" (TM 316), to refer to the process by which one opens one's consciousness to another viewpoint. Understanding, therefore, should also be understood as the fusion of different horizons.

An account of dialectic is also present therein, a dialectic between the particularity of a horizon and the universality of higher understanding when fusion occurs. Further in the chapter, Gadamer also refers to the universality of the particular experiences themselves. Individual perceptions present themselves as universal, coherent reception of reality. When one encounters a novelty, its characteristic experience of the new presents itself as a negative, but a negative that has an essentially productive meaning. The negation occurs within the recognition that one's pre-conceptions were not exactly accurate in relation to the way the interpretation turned out to be. Gadamer writes, "The negation by means of which it achieves this is a determinate negation. We call this kind of experience dialectical." (TM 362) Again, rooted in the historical finitude of human beings, the experience of the negative comes as the further recognition of one's finitude, which is also a dialectic of self-understanding. These negative moments of consciousness form themselves in the acquisition of new horizons.

Such an experience of negativity rooted in one's historical finitude takes the form of an address by an other. Gadamer writes that tradition "expresses itself like a Thou" (TM 366). Now when a person encounters a tradition, which expresses itself in language,

one enters a conversation with an other. Such a conversation will come to clash and collide with different horizons, whereby the work of the negative will be at play. But the conversation itself is not part of either party. It is rather an happening of coming-together where both parties, beginning from their individual horizons, are ready to experience the negative of their prejudices through the address of the other, and thereby raise themselves to a higher universality that is cultivated by the dialogue itself. Effectively, then, this raising to higher universality concretizes itself in the individuals, being themselves more open to further experience of negativity. Such an account could be seen as another analogy for the fusion of horizon(s).

<u>b. Language</u>

This section presents language as the medium in which the fusion of horizon(s) occurs, that is, the medium by and through which interpretations are possible and enacted. It is also, even more concretely, the medium of conversation, the conversation wherein the languages of different persons enter in communion. Translation is a specifically telling case because it is a paradigmatic situation for a fusion of horizon(s). Translation is generally understood as a transposition from one language into another (say Inuktitut to English). But translation is also occurring when two persons are speaking English. One translates from one's understanding of the world into the other's understanding of the world. Thus, in translation one makes oneself intelligible to the language of the other person and vice versa. This is not an action of transposition, but rather the opening of a common world of understanding. The project of pure transposition would endlessly lead to failures, because it would not recognize the individuality of

languages; those would be boiled down to common properties. Seen from the instrumentalist approach of translation as transposition, a gap would always remain. However, this is not an impasse, and this is why translation is a paradigmatic case for hermeneutics. Translation rather points to the deeper universality of language as a medium, whereby an interpreter can express their understanding of texts or sayings from one singular language into another singular language. Translations are thus always shaped by the individuality of the translator who is practically engaged. That is, the translator's singular understanding of the piece with its intrinsic meaning will be displayed in the translation. We have, in other words, a fusion of horizon(s) between the horizon of the translator and the horizon of the piece to be translated. But translation itself already points to a rupture in the strict singularity of the initial text or saying.

Language opens the possibility for this hermeneutical practice to be enacted. Translation does not begin in abstraction; quite the contrary, the translator comes with their own historical baggage in their learning of the particular languages, which is applied to a specific hermeneutical intent of accomplishing the translation. Hence, we conclude that translations are never 'pure'. A 'pure' translation in this sense would attempt to translate some piece of text, but in abstraction from the things the piece of text is about, or differently said, in abstraction from the translator's understanding of the things revealed in the text. Given that translations are never pure, the event of translation must be described as concretizing the meaning of things. Things acquire a new meaning in the produced translation, while this 'new' meaning is inseparable from the 'old' or 'original' meaning. Language is the universal medium within which this concretization is enacted.

Here one sees a critical source in the possibility of re-interpreting the meaning of words insofar as they reveal things. Meaning is thus never set in stone, quite the contrary. Clearly, language and its sedimented meanings directs a kind of understanding, because it proposes an accepted horizon of signification from traditional interpretations. But, the critical source arises in relation to things, from the always already different horizons from which a person begins their interpretations. Here it is worth recalling Eberhard's emphasis on the middle voice in his book on Gadamer's hermeneutics.[8] This reminds us that the fact that the being of things is revealed by a person interpreting, and that the person's traditional interpretations can only be critically revised by a present account of these things, points to interpretation as a happening that occurs in the midst of the relationship between the person and the things. Thus, meanings are revised and refined, and this revision occurs precisely in language. Moreover, such an interpretative revision within a language can be easily bridged into a plurality of different interpretations in different languages, especially when they show important structural differences, say between Inuktitut and English. One could, then, claim that despite the words being drastically different, they are revealing the 'same thing'. But a critical account would argue that the 'same thing' is rather a 'different thing' because the hermeneutical situation is not exactly the same. Concerning this complex dialectic, as well as elaborating on the deeper medium of language, Gadamer writes:

> Hence language always forestalls any objection to its jurisdiction. Its universality keeps pace with the universality of reason. Hermeneutical consciousness only participates in what constitutes the general relation between language and reason. If all understanding stands in a necessary relation of equivalence to its possible interpretation, and if there are basically no bounds set to understanding, then the verbal form in which this understanding is interpreted must contain within it an infinite dimension that transcends all bounds. Language is the language of reason itself. One says this, and then one hesitates. For this makes language so close to

reason — which means, to the things it names — that one may ask why there should be different languages at all, since all seem to have the same proximity to reason and to objects. [...] The agony of translation consists ultimately in the fact that the original words seem to be inseparable from the things they refer to, so that to make a text intelligible one often has to give an interpretive paraphrase of it rather than translate it. [...] The work of understanding and interpretation always remains meaningful. This shows the superior universality with which reason rises above the limitations of any given language. The hermeneutical experience is the corrective by means of which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language, and it is itself verbally constituted. (TM 419-20)

Thus, the question of the plurality of languages revealing the world differently is an eye-opening case for language, because this question arises at the heart of the dialectic at play in hermeneutics. If language is understood to be the language of reason, how could there be different 'reasons'? Would that not contradict the universality thesis proper to language, that language is the middle medium that reveals the reality of the human world? But it was also clearly expressed that languages are always translatable between one another, despite the impossibility of a pure transposition. From the horizon of singularity that arises with an individual interpreter, to the particular language in which these interpretations are revealed, we come to recognize that a universality was always at play from the very beginning. That is, from the universality in which the world appears to the interpreter, to the universality of the particular language in which interpretations are revealed, the universality of language as such appears most drastically when the singular interpretation can be understood from the distance of another particular language.

But what about the cases where a vocabulary is much more diverse in one language, versus another one, specifically for accounts of the 'same' phenomena, say, snow or ice? Would that not imply that a particular language reasons differently about these phenomena? That it is only within the universality of such a language that these snow/ice phenomena can be understood? What I here call a critical account

acknowledges the individuality of such an understanding of snow/ice; it criticizes efforts to reduce them to 'just snow/ice' terms, where one would claim that these are a plurality of the 'same'. A philosophical account looks at the ways in which the understanding that arises from such a particular language can, despite all critical differences, still be shared into another particular language, albeit with sentence-like accounts of the descriptive understanding behind the original words. To be clear, the critical account that focuses on the normativity of things as well as the philosophical account that rises above such particular critiques, are both necessary: their interplay help us cultivate the fusion of horizon(s). Hence, it is now easier to see that the particular language (say Inuktitut) in which certain unique snow/ice phenomenon are revealed can themselves be interpreted and fused to another particular language (say English), whereby a speaker cultivates an understanding of the 'original', pointing to a universally shared medium by which this understanding is enacted.

Such a categorical account of language, which conceptualizes and analyzes language within the terms of the singular, particular, and universal, however, only does justice to a certain view of language. That is, we should recognize the conceptuality of these categories and their meaning to lie within the language that we speak in philosophy. Without a doubt, it would also require a fusion of horizon(s) to share this kind of account with speakers of other languages in which these categories do not hold an important logical place. Another way in which the same idea could be approached is by saying that languages open a view on the world: worldviews. In learning another language, one acquires another view of the world by being able to navigate the way in which the new language reveals the world. This is something true in itself, but also true for us. Another

language, true in and of itself, becomes true with its inherent worldviews for the person who is learning it.

The conclusion, however, does not culminate in relative worldviews grounded in each and everyone's verbal view of the world. These worlds are windows on reality, fundamentally open to the reification from one another's worlds. Moreover, there is no world in-itself to which a world could be compared. Each and every world, to the contrary, intends reality as if it was the world in itself. That the world is grounded in language leads to the conclusion that language becomes the horizon of the world itself and this horizon extends to ontology as such. Gadamer explains:

> Our verbal experience of the world is prior to everything that is recognized and addressed as existing. That language and world are related in a fundamental way does not mean, then, that world becomes the object of language. Rather, the object of knowledge and statements is always already enclosed within the world horizon of language. (TM 466)

The idea of objectivity, then, is not thrown away, in a call for relativity, but is rather understood as a modality within the hermeneutic world of language. There is such a knowledge that is qualified as 'objective', but this is to be understood within the world in which the word 'objective' makes sense, for example in science. However, the world of science, as a paradigmatic example for objectivity, is to be understood within the broader human verbal world. Such an 'objective' knowledge is often understood in contradistinction with the 'subjectivity' of another perspective. But the grounding of objective knowledge, as well as its counterpart in subjectivity, is, in both cases, presupposed within a verbal world wherein these notions make sense and are understood by the human beings of the world.

Language is the speculative record of human being's finitude in time.[9] Here language is most clearly presented as the medium of the world, our medium of encounter things in the world, and a medium arising out of and informed by the appearing of things as what matters, such that language echoes back things themselves and reveal their being in language. This relation between language and things is what Gadamer indicates with his concept of "speculation," a relationship in which things are revealed as beings in language. Words are not mere instruments, but they rather are the very revealing of the meaning of these things in the world, a way of sounding them out, we might say, or reflecting them (but not in revelatory a way such that this is not merely a mirroring duplication of things). We face another dialectic: the dialectic of the finite and the infinite. This is a dialectic by which the interpretations of the human being in its finite temporality echo the things themselves in a world as projected to infinity. Moreover, the tradition of meaning handed to the interpreter also presents itself as an infinity. On this paradox, Gadamer writes that "it is literally more correct to say that language speaks us, rather than that we speak it" (TM 479). Language speaks us, within its speculative structure, through the things acting themselves on us, but also through the records of meaning handed down to us in tradition. Gadamer thus refers to a 'speculative event'.

In terms of snow/ice related phenomena, *SIKU* brings the understanding that the English language is not exhaustive in revealing these, that there is another language, Inuktitut, which reveals them differently. Such an experience, i.e., another language revealing 'same' phenomena differently, presents itself as negative: the negativity in one's relationship to one's particular language. We thus claim that normativity is inseparable from the things themselves, in their presenting themselves to us; this is

because the only testimony to the accuracy of the interpretations in their revealing the

being of things remains the things themselves (TM 490). The correct or incorrect

interpretation is judged according to the thing interpreted.

c. Ontology

We now approach Gadamer's ontology as the realm within which the

hermeneutical experience understands itself in language, whereby things are revealed as

ontologically real. In the last section, "The universal aspect of hermeneutics," Gadamer

presents his universal ontology revealed in the medium of language. He writes:

> This activity of the thing itself [*Sache selbst*] is the real speculative movement that
> takes hold of the speaker. We have sought the subjective reflection of it in speech.
> We can now see that this activity of the thing itself, the coming into language of
> meaning, points to a universal ontological structure, namely to the basic nature of
> everything toward which understanding can be directed. Being that can be
> understood is language. (TM 491)

In this "activity of the thing itself" we gather the previous idea concerning the negativity

of the hermeneutic experience as well as the speculative effect things have on language.

The mind 'suffers', or perhaps it could be best explained in the terms of a *pathos*; that is,

the things themselves affect the thinking mind that interprets the world. Language is thus

revealed as the infinite, universal, medium within which ontology is understood — but

this medium is not abstract or self-contained; it is rather open to reformulations. The

relationship between human beings and beings is one of interpretation, housed in

language. This relationship is mediated through the pre-judgmental structure arising from

the finite existence of human beings, which can be critically brought to consciousness.

But language remains the language of the things themselves: language arises from *die*

Sachen selbst in their own appearing, yet these *Sachen* are housed within the

interpretations of the finite human beings grounded in their prejudices. Language is thus simultaneously a record of finitude. Moreover, and not in contradistinction, the world is the human verbal world. This is because the world is understood as a world of the things themselves by human beings who have interpreted these things as constituents of the world. Another way in which the ontology could be phrased is this: the being of the relationship between the human beings understanding the world is language. Hermeneutics becomes the "universal aspect of philosophy, and not just the methodological basis." (TM 491) The universality of hermeneutics shares in modality with the universality of reason, being, language and speculation. Understanding, being and language have the character of an event. It is the event of truth. This event is experimented by the interpreter who undergoes, participates, or is drawn into it, rather than it being willingly produced or created.

Chapter 12 of *SIKU* "Knowings About Sigu: Kigiqtaamiut Hunting as an Experiential Pedagogy" gives an account that illuminates what has been presented in this section on Gadamer's philosophy. The author Josh Wisniewski describes his encounter with Clifford, a Kigiqtaamiu hunter, respected as an elder in his community. He reports a moment of conversation in his walk with Clifford that is especially relevant here. They were talking about the safety of ice, and in response to Josh's question, Clifford answered:

> Well, Clifford responded, in his characteristic laid-back style, a Winston cigarette balanced on his lip. 'I can't really explain it. I just know the ice, I can just tell, I watch it, you know, when it freezes up, so I know what it's doing. I don't know; I just know the ice. (SIKU 276)

Clifford's comment led to Wisniewski reflecting on the *kind* of knowledge proper to his friend's approach, which is also a telling case for the hunters of Shishmaref, Alaska:

"Their way of knowing is personal, intuitive, and experiential, a continuous process of coming to know." (SIKU 276) He then proposes the collapsing of "knowledge of and learning about," pointing to the practical origin of the hunter's knowing in their embodied encounter with the world. Interestingly, the plural "Knowings" in the chapter title wants to refer to strength of personal experiences and perspectives "as the basis for having developed an understanding of the world" (SIKU 276). Further in the chapter, the author proposes that the "Examination of the language of experience and the meanings inherent in the varied Inupiaq and English descriptions of sea ice phenomena are good openings to considering the experiential template that influence hunter's understandings" (SIKU 281). Again, what is key here is the inseparability of personal experiences and *local* terms that emerge in and around practices. That is why the author writes about "local contextual meaning of sea ice terms." Such a "language of experience" in and around its personal stories, is intimately related to rules and advice of practices and conducts around sea ice. These rules are described as "personal, continuous and flexible adjustments", because their main "significance [of Kigqtaamiut hunting rules] is application." Further, "there is no differentiation between knowing and applying, knowing in this hunting context *is* being." (SIKU 283) Later in the chapter, Wisniewski describes a particularly interesting moment for us, concerning translation of local terms pertaining to stories and accounts. While he received the help of "an elderly woman and fluent Inupiaq speaker" (SIKU 284), we read that "She was unable to translate the materials" (SIKU 284). The reason for this is relevant in showing how language emerges:

> Minor dialectical differences notwithstanding, the reason she could not understand what hunters were talking about, as she herself suggested, was because they spoke in their own language, used their own words, and made up terms directly connected to their personal experience. She found the hunters' discourse

largely impenetrable. Therefore, to understand the meaning imbedded in hunter's sea ice terminology we must focus on the manner in which different terms are used. (SIKU 284)

This quotation is followed by reported stories and a dialogue, showing the ways in which translation is approached, namely, as an encountering of the world in and around which the term has its most concrete signification. Finally, after key terms have been introduced, the author reports, "the meaning inherent in Kigiqtaamiut terminology goes far beyond translation and categorical organization. [...] emphasis is placed upon the importance of an individual term's specific contextual usage and the role of shared activity for fostering understanding." (SIKU 289)

In some ways, the three concepts from Gadamer's philosophy discussed above, fusion of horizon(s), language, and ontology, are concretely illuminated in this chapter of *SIKU*. Beginning with Clifford's account, one could read the way in which the horizon itself is bound to one's temporal finitude in a place and is therefore intimately personal. It grows and enriches itself over time, as the so-called "hermeneutical consciousness" develops itself. Clifford is thus presented as a figure of authority. That is how the "language of experience" from the hunter's practices arises as prominent, because we have therein an account of the medium in which these experienced people reveal their experience to other people — and it is *not* a medium that could be equated with a universal language that would be self-contained as language. The Gadamerian fusion of horizon(s) is present in the way in which sharing this experience implies a sharing of concrete horizons of pragmatic activity in a place. Moreover, the example of the situation where translation was required, even though it allegedly failed, shows clearly that a fusion of horizon(s) was attempted and in some ways succeeded. Here the success of a

fusion should not be measured by a 'completed' translation or a 'completed' understanding, quite the contrary: understanding that the sea ice terms are proper to one's specific practices and therefore harder to translate than usual is precisely the beginning of a fusing of one's horizon to the specificities of the other's horizon. This is because the translation that was required asked for the cultivating of a dialogue whereby the personal meaning of the hunter's own terms would be carried and shared to the understanding of Wisniewski's interpreter. But, it must be emphasized that this dialogue is not pursued solely linguistically: in the case above, it required walking, talking and practicing together in a place.

III. Vattimo and Rorty: Against Ontology, for Ethics

This section presents Rorty's and Vattimo's interpretation of Gadamer in relation to their own hermeneutics and pragmatism, with the aim of including their normative ethical conclusion, while laying the ground for keeping the notion of ontology against which they argue. They are both committed anti-foundationalists; their interpretation of the fusion of horizon(s) seeks to cultivate an ethical mindset. However, with regards to *SIKU* they would both miss a crucial point, namely that their positions do not give due justice to the things themselves, understood as the common concern of the publication that merge the different horizons: sea ice. Contrarily, we hold this common concern for what matters as foundation for the fusion.

Here, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis should also be remembered, for its concern with linguistic relativism. The claim would be that the Inuktitut consciousness of the world would be essentially different from the English one. In a Gadamerian sense, we criticize this approach as overly instrumental because it approaches language as a scientific object,

to be studied from an outside perspective, separated from its concrete reality where it is spoken by human beings in relation to their worlds. For instance, Whorf claims that speech habits would be so deeply rooted in the consciousness of one's linguistic mind that the drastic grammatical differences, also understood as "background phenomena and its systematic processes and structure"[10], between languages would justify the claim that people speaking different languages have 'different minds'. This is because the background linguistic structures would differ to the point where one would speak of a different logic itself. Again, this crucially misses the phenomenological account, which arises from and studies language in its appearing, as that which we primarily speak. While introducing his "principle of relativity" Whorf tackles the debate concerning snow/ice in Inuktitut and English:

> This class seems to us too large and inclusive, but so would our class 'snow' to an Eskimo. We have the same word for falling snow, snow on the ground, snow packed hard like ice, slushy snow, wind-driven flying-snow — whatever the situation may be. To an Eskimo, this all-inclusive word would be almost unthinkable; he would say that falling snow, slushy snow, and so on, are sensuously and operationally different, different things to contend with; he uses different words for them and for other kinds of snow.[11]

Studying the grammatical structure, as well as the words of Inuktitut, is an empirical evidence presented by Whorf to prove that all languages are relative to one another. His account of differences in these "classes" of kinds of object referred to in languages proves that the mind of speaker conceives the world differently. We hold this approach as overly methodical, thus missing a crucial truth about language, which we point at with questions: 'would Inuktitut even conceive of snow as a "class"?' 'would the theory that a "background linguistic system" itself be "the shaper of ideas"[12] accurately account for the experience of an Inuktitut speaker explaining snow/sea ice terms as shown in *SIKU*?

On the other hand, Rorty and Vattimo agree with the focus on conversational hermeneutics. Their position accounts for the strong role played by language in grounding worlds, but they do not approach it instrumentally. Rather, their conversationalist account concludes in an ethical cultivation, seeking to weaken the traditional understanding of ontology and truth, because these universalist notions would close the conversation rather than open it. Here we agree with their emphasis on ethical cultivation. We will, however, conclude that such an ethical principle does not necessarily disqualify ontology. Quite the contrary, it is the proper hermeneutical attitude for approaching a fusion of horizon(s) concerned with the things themselves and their ontology.

a. Richard Rorty

Rorty's account of hermeneutics and of Gadamer more specifically should be understood in relation to his own pragmatic philosophy, which he mainly argues in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, calling for an edifying, abnormal, conversational, philosophy in opposition to traditionalist, essentialist, normal and systematic one. The main argument consists in doing away with a 'glassy essence' (or the mirror of nature; i.e. mind), a metaphor for the tradition of philosophy, that was increasingly polished over time to better mirror the 'thing out there'. This is replaced by a conversationalist model of philosophy where people recognize that things are simply metaphors working in a pragmatical context of reality. The conversational model cultivates the virtue of accepting the different socio-cultural understandings of the world; similarly acknowledging their pragmatical efficacy. No set of metaphors is 'truer' than another.

Hence, Rorty proposes a reactive[13] understanding of philosophy, grounded in a form of historicism, seeing history as an ongoing ordinary conversation. This view calls for edificatory practices cultivating the interlocutor's understanding of the simple meaning of words that ground the pragmatic reality of things, while doing away with the claim that there be an 'accurate or actual' representation of reality. Normativity does not lie in relation to the things themselves, but rather according to the success of fused horizons. Rorty writes:

> To do that we have to understand speech not only as not the externalizing of inner representations, but as not a representation at all. [...] We have to see the term 'corresponds to how the things are' as an automatic compliment paid to successful normal discourse rather than as a relation to be studied and aspired to throughout the rest of discourse.[14]

His understanding of hermeneutics, then, comes to be presented in contradistinction to epistemology. Gadamer's hermeneutics would be much more suitable to the spirit of humankind with its conversational model; it would propose the virtue of openness to other cultures as a sign that conversation is always ongoing, relegating the monopoly of truth in hard scientific practices to a simple illusion, itself created by humankind. The goal shifts from better understanding reality to entering into a relationship with someone else's world. Hence the goal of edification, to cultivate openness: "the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our own culture and some exotic culture or historical period."[15] Such an encounter with 'exotic culture' would reveal to one culture and its members that their pragmatic conception of reality works, but is not absolutely true. This has a productive effect on philosophy because it opens the conversation rather than closes it. *SIKU* would thereby show that one's pragmatic context of snow/ice terms (say English) ought not to claim any specific hold on the truth of these things, because

another context (say Inuktitut) could also function very well pragmatically despite being drastically different in its structure.

Rorty then presents his account of Gadamer's[16] language ontology, specifically within the paradigm of nominalism, which he defines as "the claim that all essences are nominal and all necessities de dicto. This amounts to saying that no description of an object is truer to the nature of that object than any other."[17] Hence, such a position calls for brushing aside ontology as a concern. Again, this is in line with his understanding of hermeneutics as a conversational form of philosophy, wherein the strong notion of ontology has no substantial status, since ontology is replaced by given names understood in pragmatic contexts. These are simple descriptions, which any human beings can produce, without one standing as a prominent 'truth'. There is no "object as it is in itself"[18]. Rorty presents the fusion of horizon(s) when he writes,

> the progress made by modern science consists in formulating novel descriptions of the physical universe, and then fusing the horizons of these new discourses with those of common sense and of older scientific theories. More generally, to understand something better is to have more to say about it — to be able to tie together the various things previously said in a new and perspicuous way. What metaphysicians call moving closer to the true nature of an object, nominalists call inventing a discourse in which new predicates are attributed to the thing previously identified by old predicates, and then making these new attributions cohere with the older ones in ways that save the phenomena.[19]

His understanding of conversational hermeneutics claims that there is no 'true horizon' which would reveal the 'essence' of something: both these notions should be dropped to the profit of a conversational sharing of descriptions of the world in a fusion of horizon(s).

b. Gianni Vattimo

Vattimo's account of Gadamer's ontology is post-modernist and embraces a form of historicist nihilism. It consists in a radicalization of Gadamer's hermeneutics, where he seeks to propose a weakened hermeneutic ontology, actualizing itself in a prominently ethical thought. This focuses on Being as an *event* — and its pluralities — rather than its classical metaphysical universalist understanding. Hence, Vattimo would agree with the accounts of translation from *SIKU* reported above, because it would confirm that the event of ontology (i.e., the event of language) would manifest itself differently in different place and time. Moreover, he would say that the translations themselves (Inuktitut speakers explaining terms in English), opens a new, albeit different, ontology than the one which is presumably to be understood solely within the Inuktitut context. Thus, the very notion of a strong ontology should be dropped, for the purpose of easing conversation (and within the purpose of the present argument, translation), concluding that the proper ethical coming-together is the sole robust philosophical position to be held.

Vattimo claims[20] that, insofar as there is something truthful that appears, one understands a world, within which beings ground hermeneutic contextual significance. There is however a further implication, that in its understanding, the world is simultaneously changed, because it is constantly re-appropriated. As one understands a world, one brings a historicist transformation to such a world (for instance *SIKU*, as the opening of a common world between different perspectives). The things of the world thereby carry a certain meaning that is coextensive with the world in and from which they abide. When one understands a world differently — thereby changing the world — the things of the world appear differently because their beings carry the difference of the

world. For example, Vattimo writes, "Daß die *Wirklichkeit* der Dinge in Wahrheit *Wirkungsgeschichte* ist, wird nicht in einem deskriptiven Satz behauptet; es ist der Sinn des Entwurfs oder der Sinn des Seins, im Horizont dessen die Hermeneutik die Welterfahrung interpretiert."[21] The effectivity of the things is precisely to be understood in their temporal effectivity because of the belonging of the interpreter, who within their own proper terms interpret this world, in this same historical framework. Hence, there is only being because there is language; that is, because historically effected interpreters who, through language as the medium of ontology, live in a world in which there is beings. Another article[22] directly tackles the key sentence "Being that can be understood is language", for which Vattimo argues the stronger role of language, claiming that there is no being outside of language. Vattimo writes[23] that the *kann* of the sentence should be understood as a *darf* and a *soll*. This is for Vattimo an argument for concluding in nihilism: since one should equate language and being, one should conclude that the metaphysical thought of a universal thesis on being should simply be thrown away, because we always face linguistic understandings that are particularized in specific situations.

Vattimo's main hermeneutic concern increasingly shifts away from ontology to language, having primordially an ethical sense. A being is revealed in the customs of a people, which is embodied in a language, hence its being is shaped within the ethos of that people. He writes that "language is for Gadamer a locus, or a place of concrete realization of the collective ethos of a historically determined society, and thus it functions as a total mediation of the experience of the world."[24] From this arises an imperative to reduce violence, which arises when someone's conception of universal truth

goes on to impose itself on others and thereby reduces to silence another's claim to truth. The idea behind the ethical imperative of hermeneutics is the understanding of other people's conception of the world, which cultivates one's self-edification of the idea that universal claims of ontology do violence to others. Implicit in the reduction of violence is Vattimo's thought of 'optimistic nihilism', which is a response to the dissolution of metaphysics.[25] Attached to this proposition is his *penserio debole*, weak thinking, which seeks to weaken the universalist intentions behind ontology and metaphysics. Hermeneutics and its dialogical actualization present itself as the proper mindset to the post-metaphysical/post universal truth world. Therein Vattimo does not claim to expose the truth of the world qua world, but rather of truths that are self-acknowledged as being part and produced by a certain tradition of interpretations. Conjointly, this also implies the recognition that none of the truths that claim to be universally valid actually are so. Such a weak self-understanding of hermeneutics translates itself quite easily in a form of anthropology analogous to Rorty's. An anthropology, namely, which cultivates a critical consciousness for the other as other. This 'other as other' is central insofar as anthropology itself, as a science of the human beings in its different cultural deployment, runs a similar risk of falling back into objectifying universalist anthropological theories. Hence cultivating an acceptance and acknowledgement of the alterity of the other amounts to cultivating a consciousness for authentic dialogue.

Conclusion

  SIKU's chapter 20, "Epilogue: The Humanism of Sea Ice," serves as a helpful closing point that lets us derive a philosophical result that preserves the ethical argument

from Vattimo and Rorty while integrating it with and keeping the Gadamerian notion of ontology outlined in section II above. This chapter would help us see that Vattimo would be right in referring to an Inuktut world in terms of an 'ethos' and similarly Rorty in referring to it as a 'world of pragmatic descriptions'. But we would add that it arises precisely from the phenomenological actuality of the human being's connection to things. In the first sub-section of the chapter, "The Inuit *Ontology* of Sea Ice," the author M.T Bravo presents Inuit knowledge within the traditional terms of reality. The chapter and *SIKU* thereby point to the intimate relationship between an 'Inuit world' and the things that bring this world to actuality. Drawing from the accepted fact that sea ice "is at the core of traditional coastal Inuit cultures" (SIKU 446), Bravo further describes the kind of reality it has in terms of "an existence as a social object by virtue of the deep-seated meanings and relations that connect to Inuit life." (SIKU 446) Countering the claim that sea ice would rather be solely an object of the natural world, Bravo justifies its inclusion in the social world because of its intricate and profound role in the Inuit mode of living. Sea ice's very reality, as encounterable, in other words, is grounded in the Inuit world in and around the different practices belonging to this world. By providing a comparison, through a brief history of the ontology of sea ice in the Western tradition, Bravo indicates that in the Western tradition it was mainly understood as potential risks for the navigation and potential economic consequences. He claims that there has been an under-evaluation of sea ice in our tradition, which could potentially arise from "a basic lack of knowledge or alternatively to a western scientific tradition that has been preoccupied with the mechanical properties of nature, ignoring its spiritual qualities." (SIKU 447) The strong focus on integrating the humanities in the publication could be seen as the beginning of a

challenge to the latter approach. Related to this approach is a challenge in recognizing

Inuit social ontologies. Such a recognition could be understood in terms of a

"collaborating in partnerships in national and international deliberations" (SIKU 451). It

goes without saying that in both these accounts of sea ice (Inuit/Western), a philosophical

hermeneutic account would judge that ontology cannot be brushed aside, because, as we

see here, it is intertwined with the notion of world wherein persons can meaningfully

point out things in discourse.

Ontology could thus be understood from the particular point of view of Inuit and

Western ontologies, as well as from a more universalist point of view where both these

particular ontologies would be merged. These two accounts are not mutually exclusive.

Quite the contrary, they are mutually enriching. Here we connect with the philosophies of

Vattimo and Rorty: the ethics of openness to another account of reality is necessary. Two

particular ontologies ought not to be seen as competing for getting hold of 'the truth' but

rather as different horizons of a shared reality. This realization is made easier through the

recognition that things (such as sea ice as common concern) are co-intended in dialogue.

There is thus a reality in and of itself (say Inuit ontology) that could as well be

understood in terms of a part of another reality (say Inuit and Western ontologies in

conversation with one another). Language is the medium within which these realities are

revealed. But it is precisely a question of reality being revealed in language. Moreover,

the dialectic between things themselves and language echoes the dialectic between two

particular languages.

Exploring the ontological implications of the fusion of horizon(s) via the concrete

accounts in *SIKU* has been productive because it confirms that a dialogical notion of

ontology grounds these accounts, while simultaneously pointing to the enactment of the

cooperative aim of the publication. Hence, this does not call for a dissolution of ontology,

such that language would take on the greater role, over and above things, as implied by

Vattimo and Rorty. Contrarily, *SIKU* provided examples where the reality of two

languages, each housing different realities of sea ice, can nonetheless open themselves to

one another in the processes of translations. That is, the text itself, in its self-presentation,

shows examples of fusions that are grounded in a common concern. We therefore think

that, for example, in the numerous reports of dialogue within which translations were

enacted, there was an event by which two realities came together and opened themselves

to one another, leading to the grounding of a shared reality, while this pointed to the

notion of reality and language in and of themselves already at play in one language.

References

List of abbreviations

TM: Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and
    Donald G. Marshall. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

SIKU: Krupnik, Igor, Claudio Aporta, Shari Gearheard, Gita J. Laidler, and Lene Kielsen
    Holm, eds. *SIKU: Knowing Our Ice; Documenting Inuit Sea-Ice Knowledge and
    Use*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2010.

On the 'many words for snow' in Inuktitut

Boas, Franz, and Müller-Wille Ludger. 1998. *Franz Boas among the Inuit of Baffin
    Island, 1883-1884 : Journals and Letters*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
    ———. 1911. *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Bulletin / Smithsonian
    Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, 40. Washington: Government Printing
    Office.
Cichocki, Piotr, and Kilarski, Marcin. "On 'Eskimo Words for Snow'. The life cycle of a
    linguistic misconception." *Historiographica Linguistica* v37, n3, (2010): 341-377

Krupnik, Igor. "How many Eskimo words for ice?' Collecting Inuit sea ice terminologies in the International Polar Year 2007-2008" *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien* 2011, 55(1): 56-68.

Martin, Laura. "'Eskimo Words for Snow': A Case Study in the Genesis and Decay of an Anthropological Example." *American Anthropologist* 88, no. 2 (1986): 418–23. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1986.88.2.02a00080.

Müller-Wille Ludger, and Zumwalt Rosemary Lévy. 2014. *The Franz Boas Enigma : Inuit, Arctic, and Sciences*. Montréal: Baraka Books.

Pullum, Geoffrey K. *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax, and Other Irreverent Essays on the Study of Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Regier T, Carstensen A, Kemp C. "Languages support Efficient Communication about the Environment: Words for Snow Revisited." *PLoS ONE*, v11, n4, (2016): 1-17.

Steckley, John. *White Lies about the Inuit*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee, John B Carroll, Stephen C Levinson, and Penny Lee. 2012. *Language, Thought, and Reality : Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* 2nd ed. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Primary Sources - Hans-Georg Gadamer

———. *Reason in the Age of Science*. Translated by Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press.

———. *"Sein, Das Verstanden Werden Kann, Ist Sprache": Hommage an Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006.

———. *The Gadamer Reader a Bouquet of the Later Writings*. Translated by Richard E. Palmer. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2011.

———. *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.

———. *Hegel's Dialectic. Five Hermeneutical Studies.* Translated by P. Christopher Smith. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.

———. *Les chemins de Heidegger*. Traduit par Jean Grondin. Paris: VRIN, 2002.

———. *La philosophie herméneutique*. Traduit par Jean Grondin. Paris: PUF, 1996.

———. *Gesammelte Werke VIII: Ästhetik und Poetick I, Kunst als Aussage*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985.

———. *Gesammelte Werke X: Hermeneutik im Rückblick.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985.

Palmer, Richard E. *Dialogue and Deconstruction the Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Edited by Diane P. Michelfelder. Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1989.

Secondary Sources

Caputo, John D. *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*. UK: Penguin Random House, 2018.

———. *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000.

Eberhard, Philippe. *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics : A Basic Interpretation with Some Theological Implications*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.

Figal, Günter. "The Doing of the Thing Itself: Gadamer's Ontology of Language." In *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002.

———. "Der Sinn des Verstehens. Zur Komplexität philosophischer Hermeneutik*" Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (1995): 3-15.

———. "The region of Being in word and concept." *Continental Philosophy Review*, v33, n3 (2000): 301-308.

———. "Hermeneutics as Phenomenology" *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, v40, n3 (October 2009): 255-262.

———. *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Wahrheit und Methode*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011.

Grondin, Jean. *Hans-Georg Gadamer. Une biographie*. Paris: Grasset, 2011.

———. "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding." In *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002.

———. *L'herméneutique*. Paris: PUF, 2006.

———. *L'universalité de l'herméneutique*. Paris: PUF, 1993.

———. *Introduction à Hans-Georg Gadamer.* Paris: Cerf, 1999.

———. "L'universalité de l'herméneutique et les limites du langage. Contribution à une phénoménologie de l'inapparent." *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 53 (1997): 181-194.

———. "La thèse de l'herméneutique sur l'être." *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 4 (2006): 469-481.

———. "Vattimo's Latinization of Hermeneutics. Why did Gadamer resist Postmodernism?" Published in S. Zabala (ed.), *Weakening Philosophy. Festschrift in Honor of Gianni Vattimo*, McGill-Queens University Press, 2007, 203-216

———."Nihilistic of Metaphysical Consequences of Hermeneutics?" Published in J. Malpas and S. Zabala (dir.), *Consequences of Hermeneutics*, Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 2010, 190-201.

———. *Du sens des choses. L'idée de la métaphysique.* Paris: PUF, 2013.

———. "La Fusion Des Horizons La Version Gadamérienne De L'adæquatio Rei Et Intellectus?" *Archives De Philosophie* 68, no. 3 (2005): 401–.

Risser, James. *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-Reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1997.

———."The Incapacity of Language." In *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology*. (2009), 40(3): 300-311.

———."A (New) Paradigm For Hermeneutics." In *Journal for Chinese Philosophy*. (2016), 42(1-2):49-61.

———."From concept to word: On the radicality of philosophical hermeneutics." In *Continental Philosophy Review.* (2000), 33: 309-325.

———."In the Shadow of Hegel: Infinite Dialogue In Gadamer's Hermeneutics" In *Research in Phenomenology*. (2002), 32(1): 86-102.

———."Hearing the Other: Communication as Shared Life" In *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics*. (2019), Article 8: 1-17.

Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979.

Taylor, Charles. "Gadamer on the Human Sciences." In *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002.

———. "The Dialogical Self." *In The Interpretive Turn.* Ithaca and Londonn: Cornell University Press, 1991.

———. *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016.

Vattimo, Gianni. *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*. Translated by David Webb. Standford: Standford Univ. Press, 1997.

———. "Gadamer and the Problem of Ontology." In *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*. London: The MIT Press, 2002.

———. *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*. Translated by Jon R. Snyder. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.

———. "Histoire D'une Virgule Gadamer Et Le Sens De L'être." *Revue Internationale De Philosophie* 54, no. 213 (3) (2000): 499–513

———. Vattimo, Gianni, Santiago Zabala, and Yaakov Mascetti. "'Weak Thought' and the Reduction of Violence: A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo." *Common Knowledge* 25, no.1(2019): 92–103.

Wachterhauser, Brice. "Getting It Right: Relativism, Realism and Truth." In *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002.

Warnke, Georgia. "Hermeneutics, Ethics, and Politics." In *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002.

———."Experiencing Tradition versus Belongig to It: Gadamer's Dilemma." *The Review of Metaphysics.* (2014) 68(2):347-369.

———."Solidarity and Tradition in Gadamer's Hermeneutics." *History and Theory.* (2012) 51: 6-22.

———."Hermeneutics and Constructed Identities." In *Feminist Interpretations of Gadamer.* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2003.

———."Walzer, Rawls and Gadamer: Hermeneutics and Political Theory." In *Festival of Interpretations*, *Essays in Honour of Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

---

[1] Fusion of horizon(s) will be written, throughout the paper, with the (s), to show that this notion is concerned with one as well as many horizons. This decision is inspired by Eberhard's interpretation of the fusion of horizon(s), which he derives from the Ancient Greek middle voice. This voice implies that the person is not the one acting (active) on something which is being acted upon (passive), but the middle voice rather points to a situation wherein the person is especially implied, such that its implication has a lating effect on them (ex. getting married). As Eberhard puts it, "The subject/object dichotomy and the focus on the subject fade. The middle voice underscores the location of the subject with respect to the verbal process. Locality not identity is key." (13) What is especially relevant here is that this locality is the 'in the midst of' or 'in the middle of' the

action wherein the subject finds itself. Moreover, it should be noted that the German *Horizontverschmelzung* does not necessarily demand the English plural translation fusion of horizon<u>s</u>. *Horizont*, written in the singular, is pluralized with an (e), but *verschmelzung*, melting, fusing, implies more than one component. This is why Eberhardt proposes the rendering with the (s).

[2] The argument concerning ontology in Gadamer and hermeneutics more broadly finds great inspiration in the articles of Jean Grondin, specifically in his debate concerning the place of metaphysics and the possible nihilist conclusions with Vattimo, G. and nominalist ones in Rorty, R. See Grondin, *L'herméneutique*, "Nihilistic or Metaphysical Consequences of Hermeneutics?", "Vattimo's Latinization of Hermeneutics. Why did Gadamer resist Postmodernism?" and "La thèse de l'herméneutique sur l'être". The argument of the paper is generally in agreement with Grondin's conclusions; however, we have some reservation concerning the metaphysical theory. For instance, in *Du sens des choses*, Grondin presents hermeneutics as called for diving back into traditional metaphysics. We hold that the strong focus on things themselves, as well as its counterpart in the reality of being, accurately accounts for the examples of translations in *SIKU*, where the discourse is normatively conducted by the common concern (sea ice); however, the metaphysical conclusions do not appear to be necessarily suggested.

[3] This is Husserl's concern in hi maxim "zu den Sachen selbst." It is also Gadamer's concern. For Gadamer's account of the *Sache* as it appears in Husserl and Heidegger and its relation to philosophical hermeneutics, see *The Gadamer Reader*, 413, 416-418. For more on the topic see Figal's excellent essay "The Doing of the Thing Itself: Gadamer's Hermeneutic Ontology of Language."

[4] The author of this paper does not speak Inuktitut. Hence, the author does not claim any practical knowledge in the Inuktitut language nor does the paper claim any contribution to debates concerning the grammatical structure of Inuktitut and its different accounts in scholarly publication. The prominent interest, and the contribution sought, is purely philosophical. The interest for the Inuktitut language arises from the several publications on this specific debate; for instance, in anthropology through Franz Boas and in linguistics Sapir-Whorf and others who took over from Boas' publications. The philosophy practiced in this paper seeks primordially to philosophize with the contribution of this concrete case. The author acknowledges the reference in *SIKU* of *'The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax'* (Chap. 16 and from Geoffrey Pullum's article with the same title), where I. Krupnik and L. Müller-Wille write that it is completely irrelevant to simply debate on the 'counting' of words for snow in Inuktitut. We seek, in this paper, while still accounting for papers who simply sought to count words, to primarily understand philosophically what this particular case taken over in different scientific disciplines raises in terms of philosophical thought on language.

[5] See Martin, "Eskimo Words for Snow": A Case Study in Genesis and Decay of an Anthropological Example.

[6] *SIKU*, Chapter 16 Franz Boas and the Inuktitut Terminology for Ice and Snow: From the Emergence of the Field to the "Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax" 388.

[7] Ibid, 388.

[8] Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics : A Basic Interpretation with Some Theological Implications*. See note 1 above.

[9] Finitude and speculation are two key terms that require further explanation. The former should be understood from the finiteness of the human existence (i.e., being mortals), to which we could relate the fact that our temporality is thus demarcated by the finitude of existence. For more on it see for example (TM 492), as well as (TM 570) where Gadamer connects finitude to the limitation of our human capacities. The speculative structure of the human mind through the medium of language intends beings as intended to infinity. In (TM 481) explains the speculative in terms of its Latin meaning 'speculum', which refers to the mirror relation. Pointing to the infinity of meaning through the speculative structure of language opens the possibility for language to remain meaningful in time, and this is why it can be called an infinite record of human finitude.

[10] Whorf, "Science and Linguistics", 271.

[11] Ibid, 276.

[12] Ibid, 272.

[13] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 366 and 377.

[14] *Ibid*, 372.

[15] *Ibid*, 360.

[16] Rorty, "Being that can be understood is language" in *Sein, Das Verstanden Werden Kann, Ist Sprache*.

[17] Ibid, 2.

[18] Ibid, 3.

[19] Ibid, 3.

[20] Vattimo, "Weltverstehen — Weltverändern" in *Sein, Das Verstanden Werden Kann, Ist Sprache*.

[21] Ibid, 59.

[22] Vattimo, "Histoire d'une virgule Gadamer et le sens de l'être".

[23] Ibid, 513.

[24] Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 132.

[25] Vattimo, "'Weak Thought' and the Reduction of Violence: A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo." 463.