
The Enigma of Health: Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* and the hermeneutic experience of illness through film

O Enigma da Saúde: Memoria de Apichatpong Weerasethakul e a experiência hermenêutica da enfermidade através do cinema

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Oscar Davis¹

Bond University, Australia

odavis@bond.edu.au

ABSTRACT

The hermeneutic experience of illness involves a kind of displacement which estranges us from our own bodies and at the same time demands our sustained attention to our condition. Gadamer explores this disruption of our being-in-the-world in his work, *The Enigma of Health*, where he draws out the implications of this experience for the evolving understanding of health, care, and mortality. In this article, I argue that a phenomenology of falling ill, and the hermeneutic encounter with illness, is enacted in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's film, *Memoria* (2021). In this article, I explore how *Memoria* calls into question the very concept of health, offering cinematic meditations on Gadamer's lectures which explore the culture of care and the relationship between understanding and healing. I begin by exploring the potential for a Gadamerian film-philosophy. Then, applying these conditions to the case of *Memoria*, I argue that through the film's affective atmosphere, temporal structure, and sonic disruptions, Weerasethakul stages a form of aesthetic displacement for the viewer that mirrors the unhomelike experience of illness described by Gadamer and further developed by Svenaeus. The film does not depict illness in a conventional narrative sense but instead creates a sensory and ontological disturbance that invites the viewer into a shared attunement with the protagonist's condition. *Memoria* is a dialogical encounter in which illness is not merely represented but revealed as an interpretive event – one that addresses us to consider healing not simply as a return to a sense of internal harmony, but as a process of confronting our vulnerable, embodied being-in-the-world.

Keywords

Hermeneutics. Film-Philosophy. Phenomenology. Illness. Gadamer.

RESUMO

A experiência hermenêutica da enfermidade envolve um tipo de deslocamento que nos aliena de nossos próprios corpos e, ao mesmo tempo, exige nossa atenção constante à nossa condição. Gadamer explora essa ruptura do nosso ser-no-mundo em sua obra *O Enigma da Saúde*, onde expõe as implicações dessa experiência para a compreensão evolutiva da saúde, do cuidado e da mortalidade. Neste artigo, argumento que uma fenomenologia do adoecimento e do encontro hermenêutico com a enfermidade é encenada no filme *Memoria* (2021), de Apichatpong

¹ PhD at Bond University (2021). He has held research and teaching positions at the University of Queensland and began teaching at Bond University in 2018.

Weerasethakul. Neste artigo, exploro como *Memoria* questiona o próprio conceito de saúde, oferecendo meditações cinematográficas sobre as palestras de Gadamer que exploram a cultura do cuidado e a relação entre compreensão e cura. Começo explorando o potencial de uma filosofia cinematográfica Gadameriana. Em seguida, aplicando essas condições ao caso de *Memoria*, argumento que, por meio da atmosfera afetiva, da estrutura temporal e das rupturas sonoras do filme, Weerasethakul encena uma forma de deslocamento estético para o espectador que espelha a experiência inóspita da enfermidade descrita por Gadamer e posteriormente desenvolvida por Svenaeus. O filme não retrata a enfermidade em um sentido narrativo convencional, mas, em vez disso, cria uma perturbação sensorial e ontológica que convida o espectador a uma sintonia compartilhada com a condição do protagonista. *Memoria* é um encontro dialógico no qual a enfermidade não é meramente representada, mas revelada como um evento interpretativo – um evento que nos leva a considerar a cura não apenas como um retorno a um senso de harmonia interna, mas como um processo de confrontação com nosso ser-no-mundo vulnerável e corporificado.

Palavras-chave

Hermenêutica. Filosofia do Cinema. Fenomenologia. Enfermidade. Gadamer.

Introduction

Although Gadamer does not specifically consider a film-philosophy, I propose that his work on hermeneutics and the aesthetic experience of the artwork, of literature, music, and theatre can be extended to the filmic (Gadamer, 1980, 1986a, 1986b, 1991).² This extension rests on whether the encounter with film involves the same fundamental conditions of authentic and generative dialogue that appear in interlocution.³ The most fundamental of these hermeneutic conditions is whether film can call us as viewers into question. In Gadamer's analysis of Plato's *Meno*, he explores how the determination of the nature of virtue in the dialogue is only made possible by Meno's failed attempts at defining it. The experience of *aporia* which involves the recognition that one recognises what one does not know, is a precondition, Gadamer argues, for raising the question of what virtue is in the first place (Gadamer, 1986a, p. 52). In the act of seeking and learning, what is presupposed is that our desiring to know is motivated by a prior knowledge that what is being sought is not known already. To know this, one must be placed into question.

² In this paper, I draw predominantly upon Gadamer's writings. However, the intersection of hermeneutics and film has become a lively and steadily expanding field of inquiry within both film studies and philosophy. For example, Sinnerbrink (2022) sets out the potential for hermeneutic approaches to meet interpretative challenges emerging in film-philosophy discourse. Loht (2017) develops a Heideggerian account of film experience and Baracco (2017) develops a Ricoeurian method for film interpretation, but Gadamerian approaches remain underexplored.

³ Gadamer writes, "That a conversation occurs, no matter when or where or with whom, wherever something comes to language, whether this is another person, a thing, a word, a flame...this is what constitutes the universality of the hermeneutic experience." (Gadamer, 1988, p. 5), quoted in Grondin (1994, p. 124).

George (2020) refers to this experience of being-put-into-question as a kind of displacement. In the experience of displacement, he argues, we have the responsibility to uphold the capacity to converse which is, “the capacity to become interpretatively open by putting ourselves into question and holding ourselves in this openness in the face of the challenge it poses to even our deepest prejudices” (George, 2020, p. 47). In *Truth and Method*, in his explication of the hermeneutic priority of the question, Gadamer writes that to question is “to place in the open” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 376). In order to make the case that Weerasethakul's film *Memoria* enacts this condition of hermeneutic experience, it is first expedient to introduce how art more broadly is connected with this experience of displacement.

Displacement and the Hermeneutic Experience of Film

Gadamer's hermeneutic model of our encounter with art does not involve a categorisation of art-related concepts, nor does it seek to develop a criterion for aesthetic judgement. Rather, Gadamer's hermeneutics of aesthetic experience (*Erfahrung*) considers the possibility that art is a “way of truth in its own right” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 89). Gadamer is interested in the role that art plays in the wider project of *Bildung*, that is “...with the role that art plays in forming our culture, and its meaning in our individual and communal lives” (Sirowy, 2021, p. 182). Gadamer equates the generative and authentic experience of art with the mode of being of play (*spiel*) and the idea of a festival. When we engage in play, such as when we partake in a tennis match, Gadamer argues that the game has its own fundamental nature outside of the consciousness of the players. With the ball in play, each tennis player becomes subject to the movement of the ball and their participation in the game of tennis unfolds in this movement. Gadamer writes that, the “...players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 107). In the same sense, a work of art or a film is realised in its presentation – in its being actively interpreted and being brought into play by the viewer. Gadamer writes that the work of art is play in the sense that “its actual being cannot be detached from its presentation and that in this presentation the unity and identity of a structure emerge” (2013, p. 125).⁴ A Gadamerian film-

⁴ Loht makes some similar and prefatory remarks on how film “...is contingent on viewer comportment” and that “film-philosophy is afforded through the viewers disclosing projection into the film” (Loht, 2017, p. 126).

philosophy understands viewership as active and participatory in this sense, that we as viewers are interlocutors bringing the film into play through our interpretation of it.

Gadamer also introduces the notion of the festival to draw out this aspect of the hermeneutic experience of art. Take for example the Brazilian cultural festival, São João, celebrated annually in June. The festival that occurred this June is neither some other kind of festival nor the same as the first São João festival to take place. The festival is realised in its celebration. Both the concepts of play and the festival speak to the active and participatory nature of aesthetic experience. This notion of the festival extends to film in that the same film can be seen, rewatched, and watched by others, and while the essential presentation of the film is the same, it is realised in its execution – in the dialogue which emerges from the viewers active participation in the *festival* of the film's presentation.⁵ Film is thus an event of understanding occurring through its presentation bringing the viewer into play with it. In a word, film *addresses* us.

When we are addressed by art, and by extension film, the truth that we encounter is not truth as understood in a positivistic sense, as if we can discover fixed and objective facts about the world around us. In Gadamer's understanding of art as a "way of truth in its own right" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 89), he is developing Heidegger's account of truth as *aletheia* which can be described as *openness* or the "...letting happen of the advent of truth of beings" (Heidegger, 2002, p. 52). Truth is an event that unfolds in our dialogical engagement with what addresses us. In our engaging with film, as an interpretative and therefore dialogical act, we partake in the Socratic to-and-fro of question and answer. In order to understand the conditions of authentic and generative engagements with film, we need only consult the hermeneutic conditions of authentic and generative Socratic dialogue. It is for this reason that Gadamer saw as the central task of his philosophy the elucidation of the dialogical conditions of understanding, such as in differentiating Socratic and Sophistic speech. Socratic speech is directed towards the question of human good (*agathon*) and how this understanding is shaped through ongoing dialogical activity. In his 1931 essay, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, he argues that a distinguishing feature of Socratic dialogue is that in "...conceiving and comprehending it keeps itself on the way

⁵ For a further discussion of film in relation to the Gadamerian concept of the festival, see §4 in Pedro Júlio Santos de Oliveira and Thalyta Cristine Arrais. "A Hermenêutica Filosófica De Gadamer Em Cena: O Jogo Hermenêutico Na Arte Dos Frames." *Poiesis* 31, no. 2 (2025).

to the concept but also because, as a philosophy that conceives and comprehends in that way, it knows man as a creature that is thus 'on the way' and 'in between'" (Gadamer, 1991, p. 4). This idea is more fully developed in *Truth and Method* where Gadamer argues that prejudice is not an epistemic barrier to our comprehending but a condition for it. Our capacity to know is limited by our dependency on the conditions of our knowing (such as language and our effective history) – conditions which we cannot escape and even fully comprehend (despite the pretence of Cartesian methodological scepticism). Wachterhauser writes, "there is certain ineluctable inarticulacy and inescapable opacity in all our knowing" (Wachterhauser, 2021, p. 68). In Weinsheimer's words, "we are more than we know" (1985, p. 13). Our awareness of the finitude of our understanding makes possible our authentic and generative engagement with art because when art addresses us, Gadamer writes, "We cannot understand without wanting to understand, that is, without wanting to let something be said" (Gadamer, 2008, p. 101). That we are perpetually 'on the way' and 'in-between' in our 'conceiving and comprehending' is revealed to us in our being-put-into-question, and this fundamental task of aesthetic experience is one we must master ever anew. It is the encounter with this condition of human understanding, central to the aporetic conclusions of Socratic dialogue, that art can reveal to us.⁶

The capacity to place the viewer into question is the fundamental linguisticity (*Sprachlichkeit*) of the work of art. To extend this work to film requires that we draw upon the various modes of art that Gadamer considered, from poetry, painting, and architecture to music and theatre. When referring to linguisticity, Gadamer is referring to "the meaning of the concept prior to the event of the building of the tower of Babylon, prior to the multiplicity of languages."⁷ That is, the extra-conceptual dimension of the work of art, outside of the "artificial tradition of the conceptual language of metaphysics and philosophy – as in pointing toward what is worth knowing."⁸ In his analysis of Giorgione's painting *The Tempest*, for example, Gadamer argues that to interpret the painting merely iconographically would be to miss essential extra-conceptual features of the work, such as the affective atmosphere of the landscape, or the displacing gaze of the mother who looks towards the viewer. That the encounter with the painting "leaves a deep

⁶ In his discussion of Kant's, *The Ideal of the Beautiful* Gadamer asks, "is not art really defined by the fact that, whatever may be presented in it, humanity encounters itself?" (Gadamer, 1986b, p. 167).

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reply to Graeme Nicholson," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, The Library of Living Philosophers (Open Court, 1997), 322.

⁸ Gadamer, "Reply to Graeme Nicholson," 322.

impression on anyone who has ever seen it” and that in the painting, “one senses something mysterious, something complex which does not let one go” refer to this extra-conceptual linguisticity.⁹ We may not each interpret the artwork in the same way, but Gadamer resorts to the metaphor that the artwork “begins to speak”, and that the hermeneutic conditions of the authentic and generative dialectical experience involve this art of “letting something speak again.”¹⁰ The event of understanding in this encounter with the work of art consists in our recognition of *something* and *in such a way* that we come to know that which is being represented outside of the ‘artificial tradition of conceptual language’. The extra-conceptual language in *Memoria*, I will argue, is the disturbance of the ordinary rhythm of viewership through the film’s juxtaposing of the durational scene and auditory disruption.

The phenomenon of rhythm as extra-conceptual linguisticity in art has been explored through the medium of musical phrasing. On the particular sense of *phrasing* here, Gadamer writes:

In music we speak of phrasing and recognize thereby that the musical recital includes a rhythm over and beyond the purely musical fixing through notation. [...] The negative and positive colours which lurk within the concept of the phrase obviously point to a twofold pliability of the aspect of language itself.¹¹

In the case of lyric poetry, for example, it is this phrasing and rhythm that differentiates the poem from another form of exposition, as the *sense* of the poem “comes from the very rhythms of the language in which it is written... the very musicality of language itself.”¹² Risser refers to this formation of meaning as part of the *movement* of language. This language without sentences, he writes, extends beyond poetry to the “core of the event of meaning in the hermeneutic experience.”¹³ In his analysis of Gadamer’s writing on rhythm, Risser highlights how the work of art’s festival-like temporal structure – its timelessness and temporality – involves a kind of dwelling or *tarrying* (*Verweilen*)

⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language*, ed. Pol Vandavelde and Arun Iyer, vol. 2, *The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, (Bloomsbury, 2024), 96.

¹⁰ Gadamer, *Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language*, 2, 97.

¹¹ Gadamer, *Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language*, 2, 184.

¹² Arun Iyer, "The Situated Truth of the Work of Art," in *Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language*, ed. Pol Vandavelde and Arun Iyer (Bloomsbury, 2024).

¹³ James Risser, "Language without Sentences: The Rhythmic Nature of Art," in *Gadamer on Art and Aesthetic Experience: Rethinking Hermeneutical Aesthetics Today*, ed. Stefano Marino and Elena Romagnoli (SUNY Press, 2025), 112.

on the part of the spectator.¹⁴ In the case of music, for example, the spectator actively takes time outside of the ordinary rhythm of life to *rhythmize* themselves with the temporality of the music. Risser writes, “[i]t is a temporal experience of a repose in which one is able to abide with what is occurring and presenting itself – a releasement into a conversation of sorts with the artwork that would hold together the unity of the formation and thereby be itself rhythmic.”¹⁵ This rhythm of the work of art, which exists uniquely in all works Risser maintains, forms an “imprint” in the unity of the elements of the work. When brought into play, this rhythm forms part of the structure which is mediated in the activity of interpretation and is thus a characteristic of the to-and-fro movement of dialogue. Referring to the experience of music and art more broadly, Nielsen writes:

...as we tarry [*verweilen*] with the work of art, a while [*eine Weile*] opens through the *Vollzug* or performative enactment of the artwork, suspending our ordinary experience of time such that it is experienced as a timelessness within time and thus as fulfilled or festive time.¹⁶

This temporal structure is particularly evident in film, whereby events unfold to the rhythm of the presentation of the work.

The “true locus of hermeneutics”, Gadamer argues, is in the in-between (Gadamer, 2013, p. 306). Film can place us precisely within such a space: it can displace us while simultaneously drawing us into recognition of our condition. In *The Enigma of Health* Gadamer emphasises that health only becomes visible through its disruption. It is when illness interrupts our taken-for-granted existence that we are compelled to attend to our condition. The same movement of displacement – the disruption of rhythm – that structures the film’s address is at work in the experience of falling ill. To bring Gadamer’s hermeneutics into dialogue with film, then, is to explore how cinema can stage this displacement.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* and The Enigma of Health

Memoria (2021) follows the story of Jessica (Tilda Swinton), a Scottish expatriate and botanist who lives in Medellín, Columbia. The film begins with a durational shot of

¹⁴ In relation to *Verweilen* and the experience of art more broadly, see: Roberto Wu, “A mutualidade entre o demorar-se e o ser-movido: Arte e retórica na hermenêutica tardia de Gadamer,” *Kriterion* 149 (2020).

¹⁵ Risser, “Language without Sentences: The Rhythmic Nature of Art,” 114.

¹⁶ Nielsen, Cynthia R. *Gadamer's Hermeneutical Aesthetics: Art as a Performative, Dynamic, Communal Event*. Oxford: United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022. 66. [add brazil ref Poesia here]

Jessica asleep. The length of this shot is long enough for the viewer to be brought into the quiet of the night. Abruptly, a loud thump is heard, a sound Jessica will later describe as like “an enormous ball of concrete that falls into a metal well which is surrounded by seawater” (21.58). The sound is deeply confronting and unexpected. Jessica is startled out of her sleep and attempts to locate the source of the noise to no avail. We get the sense that this is the first time Jessica has heard this noise and, importantly, we as viewers hear it with her. The rest of the film plays out Jessica's hermeneutic pilgrimage to understand the noise that seemingly only she can hear. Over the course of the film, Jessica comes to accept that the noise is a symptom. The cause and severity of her affliction are never revealed, we only share this individual symptom with Jessica at completely random moments throughout the story. We are left to speculate if the final scenes represent Jessica's death, just as she is coming to terms with her illness, she, perhaps, succumbs to it. This symptom of Jessica's illness disrupts her being-in-the-world. As viewers we can never anticipate when we will hear the noise, and this disruption to our viewership brings us into play with the film. Alongside Jessica, we are addressed and befallen with this auditory disruption. Through the film's affective atmosphere created through temporal structure and sonic disruption, Jessica's displacement is mirrored for us as viewers. Before further developing this connection between *Memoria*'s displacing effect and the hermeneutic experience of illness, I will first set out the *unhomelike* experience of illness described by Gadamer and further developed by Svenaeus.

It is “illness and not health which ‘objectifies’ itself” Gadamer writes, as illness “confronts us as something opposed to us and which forces itself on us” (Gadamer, 1996, p. 107). Health on the other hand “sustains its own proper balance and proportion” (1996, p. 107) and “manifests itself precisely by virtue of escaping our attention... it belongs to that miraculous capacity we have to forget ourselves” (1996, p. 96). Health is an inner accord and an internal harmony within us (our well-being) that we sense in its lack when that harmony is disturbed. Svenaeus (2022, p. 72) writes that the “homelikeness of health... must phenomenologically refer to the way human being finds its place in the world as a meaning pattern – a being-*in-the-world*.” Svenaeus describes illness as the disruption of this meaning pattern manifest in our awareness of the obstruction to our attunement to our being-in-the-world. This disrupted attunement is thus a kind of displacement. Our awareness of our unhomelike condition calls us into question, and we

are prompted to seek the equilibrium of health that ordinarily remains forgotten in the transparency of everyday life.

Jessica's disrupted attunement is foreshadowed in an early scene in the film in a hospital where Jessica's sister, Karen (Agnes Brekke), is recovering from an unknown illness. Karen shares that, before coming into hospital, she had found a dog on the street that had been hit by a car. She took the dog immediately to a vet, who told her that the dog requires a blood transfusion or will otherwise need to be put down. Karen leaves the dog with the vet while she decides what to do and drives home to consult her husband, Juan (Daniel Giménez Cacho). It is on the way home that Karen began to feel her symptoms. Confronted with her own illness, she forgets completely about the dog. It is only in this moment speaking with Jessica, that she remembers him. The forgotten dog is emblematic of Karen's disruption to her being-in-the-world. Her ordinary meaning patterns are disturbed by the onset of her symptoms, reminding us that to fall ill is not only to suffer physically but to become estranged from the ordinary rhythm of homelikeness.

A phenomenology of falling ill construes health and illness as not merely medical-biological states measured objectively but lived realities – life-historical and social processes – inseparable from our self-understanding. Gadamer writes, health “is not a condition that one introspectively feels in oneself. Rather, it is a condition of being involved, of being in the world, of being together with one's fellow human beings, of active and rewarding engagement in one's everyday tasks” (1996, p. 113).¹⁷ Illness, then, must be understood phenomenologically as well as medically, because it is a lived disruption of our sense of well-being rather than just a physiological malfunction. It is for this reason, Gadamer emphasises, that it “still remains meaningful [for the doctor] to ask the patient whether he or she *feels* ill” (1996, p. 108). The art of healing must be directed towards both the body and the patient.

Weerasethakul enacts the phenomenological perspective through the character of Hernán. There is both a younger Hernán (Juan Pablo Urrego) and an older Hernán (Elkin Díaz) in the film. Nearing the end of act one, Jessica's interpretive encounter with her

¹⁷ Gadamer, citing Plato's *Phaedrus* (270b), notes that this holistic conception of health is acknowledged in ancient medical writings (1996, p. 132). In the dialogue, Socrates insists that one cannot heal the body without knowledge of the “whole” or the “unity of being itself”. Dallmayr (2000) explores Gadamer's discussion of the *Phaedrus* in more depth than space permits here.

illness begins with a sustained attention to the source of her disruption. Becoming increasingly disturbed by the sound, which is now also preventing her from sleeping, Jessica seeks out Young Hernán, a sound engineer. Jessica visits his music studio with the goal of recreating the sound through digital effects. After a series of attempts, Hernán eventually succeeds in replicating the sound of an 'enormous ball of concrete falling into a metal well...', but this exercise doesn't appear to bring Jessica any sense of relief. The significance of this scene becomes apparent when at a later point of the film we learn that Young Hernán does not actually exist. Hernán is a representation of Jessica's inner dialogue. Jessica's visit to the studio and her attempt to replicate the sound represent her contemplation of her condition. The disruption of the equilibrium of health, Gadamer writes, "can only be redressed by the introduction of a counterforce" (1996, p. 13). Jessica has begun to attend to the illness which has confronted her, but this is only the beginning of her treatment.

In the experience of illness and the disruption to our normal place in our lives, we identify the lack of what was previously enjoyed and orient ourselves towards recovering the feeling of being-oneself-again (Landes, 2015). Our capacity to attend to our bodies, to listen to what takes place within us, is the means by which we "discover and preserve what is 'appropriate', appropriate for oneself and appropriate for each one of us, namely that internal condition of equilibrium" which is crucial to how we care for ourselves (1996, p. 101). Act two begins with Jessica reaching this critical realisation.

In the self-reflection involved in the awareness of one's illness, Gadamer maintains, "one is thrown back on oneself...because there is a disturbance which is already orientated towards finding a resolution, even if this is to be achieved by submitting oneself to the diagnosis and intervention of a doctor" (1996, p. 54). Illness is, ultimately, not established in the instance of its attribution by a doctor, but through the experience of the person afflicted by it. The phenomenological experience of illness involves this juncture whereby the individual recognises the disturbance *as* illness, and thus as something that can no longer be ignored. This moment is staged in act two, where Jessica is out at dinner with Karen and Juan. The camera is positioned as if we are seated at the table opposite them, and it remains fixed throughout the nearly six-minute shot. The absence of cuts and movements in the position of the camera, further absorb us as viewers into the character's reality. Jessica is listening attentively to Karen, who is

speaking about the potentially supernatural causes of her illness which she appears to have now overcome. Alongside Jessica, whose gaze is fixed on Karen as she speaks, we are following the to-and-fro of dialogue until the sound abruptly thumps, splitting Jessica's attention and our own. As she attempts to recover without expressing her discomfort, the sound appears again, and then again. The durationality and sonic disruption in this scene stages an unhomelike experience for the viewer, mirroring Jessica's experience of her affliction. The rapid succession in the presentation of the sound in this moment, represents Jessica's recognition that her illness can no longer be ignored. This experience prompts Jessica to visit a doctor.

For the doctor, the art of healing involves caution, consideration and the building of the patient's trust in the doctor's skill. The authority and power imbalance which already exists between the doctor and the patient should not be played upon. Gadamer writes, "Dialogue and discussion serve to humanize the fundamentally unequal relationship that prevails between the doctor and patient." (1996, p. 112). That the doctor addresses the patient in the right way requires a care and recognition for the patient's freedom and the acknowledgement that the appropriate mode of treatment demands an attentiveness to the individual's experience.¹⁸ There is therefore a tension in the hermeneutic understanding of treatment. On the one hand, the "scientific and medical experience is primarily orientated towards forcibly 'overcoming' the manifestations of illness, to gain control over it" (1996, p. 105). Yet, on the other hand, understanding illness as the patient's experience of their disrupted attunement in their being-in-the-world, necessitates a recognition of "the other in their otherness...Only by means of such recognition can we hope to provide genuine guidance which helps the other to find their own, independent way. Treatment also involves a certain granting of freedom" (1996, p. 109). The art of healing involves this perception and attending to not just the body of the person, but the person as an embodied being-in-the-world (Svenaesus, 2013). Jessica's visit to the doctor is a failure because these conditions for authentic and generative dialogue which pertain to the art of healing are absent.

¹⁸ Gadamer writes, "What takes place here between the doctor and patient is a form of attentiveness, namely the ability to sense the demands of an individual person at a particular moment and to respond to those demands in an appropriate manner" (1996, p.138).

The dialogue between Jessica and her doctor begins with the doctor's question, "Are you in pain?" (1.12.32). To which Jessica responds that she is not – her displacement in her experience of illness is not reducible to the physical marker of pain. The doctor then, without asking further questions about Jessica's own experience, surmises, "Sometimes, at elevation, blood pressure can cause a 'pop' sound" (1.12.44). It is certainly not just a 'pop', Jessica responds. The doctor proceeds to ask about what kind of pillows Jessica is using and recommends that she try an orthopaedic pillow. After suggesting that the sound is probably just a hallucination, the doctor then asks about Jessica's husband, to which she does not respond. The absurdity of this encounter is dramatized, but what is hermeneutically significant is that this scene is illustrative of the failure of doctor-patient dialogue (and dialogical understanding more broadly). The doctor reduces Jessica's experience with a clinical objectivity foreclosing any possibility of communicating meaningfully.

Not only is doctor-patient dialogue the subject of a number of Gadamer's lectures in *The Enigma of Health*, in his explication of the hermeneutic elements of understanding in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer also then analyses the instance of misunderstanding between a doctor and a patient. His analysis begins with the hermeneutic condition that to understand in dialogue means to reach a mutual understanding, he argues:

Understanding is, primarily, agreement (*Verständnis ist zunächst Einverständnis*). Thus people usually understand (*verstehen*) each other immediately, or they make themselves understood (*verständigen sich*) with a view toward reaching agreement (*Einverständnis*). Coming to an understanding (*Verständigung*), then, is always coming to an understanding about something (2013, pp. 186-7).

In the case of the doctor and patient, not unlike the case of an oral examination, what can occur (sometimes necessarily) is that the dialogue becomes monologue – that the object of the conversation is not to reach understanding, but to 'get to know' certain facts about someone's standpoint and horizon. In such cases, understanding is not directed towards agreement. The aim of the conversation becomes to discover the standpoint of another absent of regard for their claim to truth. The monological encounter necessitates the suspension of agreement, and thus the interlocuter becomes "the object of objective knowledge of the other" (2013, p. 314). For Gadamer, however, this is a diminished form of understanding, for it interrupts the dialogical movement of question and answer in which the disclosure of meaning (that we are 'on the way' and 'in-between') comes into

play. The doctor may indeed succeed in gathering information, but what is lost is the very hermeneutic core of understanding as *Einverständnis* – a mutual openness to meaning and thus a dialogical recognition of “the other in their otherness” (1996, p. 109). For Jessica, the doctor objectifies her experience and in doing so fails in the moral task of attending and responding to Jessica appropriately. The doctor lacks the “sympathetic understanding” required to make possible the proper consideration of the particularities of Jessica’s experience of illness (2013, p. 332).¹⁹ The art of healing, Gadamer argues, requires that the doctor “take the whole of [our] nature into view” (1996, p. 42).

In the final act of the film, Jessica ventures out alone into the thick forests surrounding the city. She encounters the older Hernán, and they speak about their connection to the earth and to the past. As younger Hernán was discovered to not exist, we encounter older Hernán with incredulity. As partners in dialogue with the film, bringing the film into play through our interpretation of it, we are left to make sense of the final act ourselves. Nearing the end, Jessica sits by a window and listens to the sound of the wind. Far from an ocean and any other people, we then hear the sound of waves crashing, children playing, faint conversations, and then the sound again. But this time, Jessica is less affected by it. She walks closer to the window and listens to the wind again, and the sound – once abrupt and disruptive – becomes interposed with the sounds of the world. Jessica’s coming to terms with her illness in this scene is a reminder, as Svenaeus highlights, of the importance “to health of being able to *adapt* to an altered embodiment and environment in order to stay healthy or become healthy again, when life is obstructed by diseases or other threatening events” (2013, p. 121). Weerasethakul does not resolve Jessica’s illness but portrays her reorientation to it. What emerges is a cinematic enactment of Svenaeus’s claim that “To become homelike in the face of unhomelikeness: this would be the health in illness” (2013, p. 121). Illness is an experience of displacement – of being-put-into-question – in which we identify that we lack what we previously enjoyed (the equilibrium of health that ordinarily remains forgotten in the transparency of everyday life). The orientation towards recovering the feeling of being-oneself-again therefore requires that one tend to the unity of being itself.

¹⁹ Gadamer develops this notion of sympathetic understanding as the practical deliberation involved in the comprehension of the lifeworld of another. Gadamer draws upon the translation here of ‘consideration for others’ or ‘fellow-feeling’ in Nicomachean Ethics, *συγγνώμην* (VI, xi, 1).

Conclusion

The “true locus of hermeneutics”, Gadamer maintains, is in the upholding of the in-between in the event of understanding (Gadamer, 2013, p. 306). I have argued here that our engagement with film is an interpretive and dialogical encounter, and that film can displace us while simultaneously drawing us into recognition of our condition. The same movement of displacement that structures the film's address is at work in the experience of falling ill. It is when illness interrupts our taken-for-granted existence that we are compelled to attend to our condition. Bringing Gadamer's hermeneutics into dialogue with Weerasethakul's *Memoria* illustrates how cinema can stage a form of aesthetic displacement for the viewer that mirrors the displacement in the unhomelike experience of illness. *Memoria* is a dialogical encounter in which illness is not merely represented but revealed as an interpretive event – one that addresses us to consider healing not simply as a return to a sense of internal harmony, but as a process of confronting our condition as beings ‘on the way’ and ‘in-between’.

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