

Introduction: Possibilities of Embodiment

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The phenomenological tradition has been addressing the theme of embodiment from the very beginning. Indeed, Husserl was already describing the kinaesthetics of vision even before the *Logische Untersuchungen* appeared (see *Husserliana* XXII, pp. 275ff. and 416–19, for texts from around 1893 and 1894). His lifelong investigations of the structures of embodied experience tended to gravitate around two main poles: on the one hand, the necessary role of embodiment in the constitution of our practical/perceptual world, and on the other hand, the necessary implication of embodiment in the experience of others. His chief findings in the former context are well known, focusing on the body as the central here or “null-point” (*Nullpunkt*) around which the practical/perceptual world is oriented; the kinaesthetic capability (“I-can”) through which I am able to “govern” (*walten*) my own movement in unparalleled immediacy; and the body as organ of perception, not only in terms of the various sensory fields through which I can experience both my own body and other items in the world (for example, I can see, hear, or touch myself as well as other things), but also in terms of the unique somaesthetic sensations (*Empfindnisse*) through which one and only one phenomenon is given: namely, my own lived body, uniquely felt as mine. All this, however, also comes into play in the second major context of Husserl’s work on embodiment, for when I see the physical body (*Körper*) of another, I do not see a *merely* physical body, but a lived body (*Leib*) that stands at the center of its own lived world, that is capable of self-movement, and that is uniquely felt as “mine” by the person concerned. For Husserl, then, my own body participates in a “bodily intersubjectivity” (*Husserliana* IV, p. 297) arising in a pre-reflective “coupling” (*Paarung*) between the body I live directly and the other embodied lives with whom I share the world.

As the tradition has developed, work on the theme of embodiment has continued to flourish, both within the phenomenological community itself and through interactions with thinkers and disciplines situated at various

distances from “classical” phenomenology. At the same time, the range of types of bodily experience thematized in these efforts has continued to expand, whether the accent lies on description or on interpretation, and whether it is a question of concrete investigations focused on the phenomena in their own right or analyses undertaken in service of a particular philosophical problem or position. In the French tradition in particular, the choice of topics has moved well beyond Husserl’s inaugural emphasis on the most basic structural features of embodiment to encompass such complex and compelling issues as suffering and vulnerability, nudity, eros and sexuality, and the role of the Incarnation in Christian theology. But in addition, as the phenomenological literature on embodiment has grown ever richer, phenomenologists themselves have increasingly engaged in various critiques of this work, including critiques of its basic concepts and terminology.

The initial essay in our collection provides an example of the latter type of contribution to the field—Chris Nagel’s “Phenomenology without ‘the body?’” Taking the French existential-phenomenological tradition as a point of departure, he wonders whether repeated attempts to solve the ontological “mystery” of the body have foundered because the very term “body” inevitably reinstates a dualism that does violence to the lived texture of experiencing, and he offers an alternative approach to embodiment in terms of his own notion of “subjection.” Now each essay in our collection was, of course, written independently of the other essays included here. We have nevertheless placed Nagel’s article first in order to suggest the possibility of reading the contributions that follow as responses to the field of questioning he opens up. And our series of possible responses begins with a group of essays primarily dealing with various figures, whether they are central to the phenomenological tradition or remain “peripheral” to it precisely because they continue to refer to it in departing from it.

Gunnar Declerck’s “Incarnation, motricité et rapport au possible” is framed in terms of the traditional notion that “the body” is what roots us in actuality, focusing first of all on Husserl’s descriptions of the fundamental correlation between kinaesthetic capability and the horizon of potential appearances that are essentially connected with the currently actual appearance of the thing in question. Yet even if I become paralyzed, so that my freedom to move of my own accord is severely limited, things still appear as having other sides and the world retains its depth, for as the author indicates, the correlation between the “I-can” and a world that is explorable in principle is a genetic acquisition that persists even if my factual condition changes: once we have experienced kinaesthetic freedom, we never lose our relation to the possible. Next Diego D’Angelo’s “Die Schwelle des *Lebe-Wesens*. Überlegungen zur Leibinterpretation Heideggers in der Nietzsche-Abhandlung” takes up the transformative shift from “body” as a noun (*Leib*) to “bodying” as a verb (*leiben*), discussing, among other themes, Heidegger’s reading of the will to power in terms of the capability of an active, corporeal life that is always on the way, always at the

threshold, as a being that is always in becoming. Then in “Signifiante éthique et corporéité dans *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*,” Jan Bierhanzl addresses the way in which Levinas develops a thoroughly embodied notion of responsibility, tracing the trajectory of ethical signifying from the tenderness of the caress through the vulnerability that is already implied in the immediate contact with another’s skin to the maternal body, whose skin shelters and harbors another’s body, concluding with the voice exposed in a saying where nothing is said, a language not yet dispersed into words.

Our collection continues with contributions focusing on further figures from the French tradition, beginning with three essays that deal, each in their own way, with the notion of the *corps propre*—my own body, lived as mine. Anne Gléonec’s “Corps animal et corps humain: l’effacement de la propriété. À la naissance de l’institution chez Merleau-Ponty” outlines the ontology of nature that Merleau-Ponty was developing in his later lectures, in order to show that what is proper to human embodiment is not that it is a *corps propre* by virtue of being inhabited by a “consciousness” or “rationality” that non-human animals do not possess, but that it presents *another way of being a body*, a decentered centering, as it were, a style of behavior that is both rooted in its own past and radically open to an emerging future. In “Corporéité et existence: Patočka, Merleau-Ponty, Maine de Biran,” Emre Şan takes a different approach, comparing Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the relation between embodiment and existence with Patočka’s and presenting the latter’s critical reading of Maine de Biran on the “first-person” body of effort and resistance; the aim throughout is to show how Patočka thinks existence as movement, taking the bodily as the very dimension of the own—understood in terms of an embodied efficacy that is not derived by first assuming some form of dualism, then attempting to overcome it. Still another approach is found in Luka Nakhutsrishvili’s “Corps propre et corps technique(s). Jean-Luc Nancy et la phénoménologie,” which traces Nancy’s critique of the classical phenomenological notion of the *corps propre*, demonstrating how his personal medical history allows him to speak not only from a uniquely situated standpoint, but as someone circumscribed by a predicament that demands a philosophical response; a body with a heart transplant, with cancer, with a failing immune system is no longer simply one’s “own” body, but a locus of interventions defined in terms of medical technologies: the “natural” is entirely replaced by the ubiquity of an “ecotechnics” to which the body is exposed and through which it is produced.

The conversation with figures whose relationship with the phenomenological tradition remains controversial continues with the contribution by Corry Shores, “Body and World in Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze”; here what is at stake is the contrast between Merleau-Ponty’s “integrationist” model, in which a habitual body, with its native synaesthetics, is geared in with a familiar, coherent world, and Deleuze’s appropriation of Leibniz and Spinoza, which offers a way to address experiences in which intense—and perhaps

destructive—waves of affective alteration sweep through us, dislocating our current connection with the world. Next we turn to James Mensch’s “Public Space and Embodiment,” which examines Arendt’s negative attitude toward the body: she not only sees “labor” and “work” as lower forms of human existence tied to bodily needs, but takes the realm of the bodily as essentially private, versus the higher sphere of public action carried out predominantly by speech; in contrast, Mensch proposes that our own situated, bodily “I-can” is not a matter of a merely private inwardness, but discloses and is continuous with our shared practical/perceptual world, including the zones of democratized political action embodied in the Arab Spring or in the Occupy movement. Thus the unique “inwardness” that is linked with a direct awareness of our own embodied life need not sever this life from others or from our surroundings.

And as the following articles show, there are a number of ways in which bodily awareness may become thematic in the course of everyday lifeworld experience. In “New and Old Approaches to the Phenomenology of Pain,” Agustín Serrano de Haro takes up Christian Grüny’s phenomenological account of pain in light of Ortega y Gasset, Henry, and Husserl, demonstrating that the lived experience of undergoing pain from which one cannot escape, no matter how one twists and turns, is a variety of self-affection in which any sort of sensuous excess is transmuted into the intra-tactile, somaesthetic register, afflicting us in our most intimate depths. Then, in “The Appearance of the Body: On Body Awareness in Combat Sports,” Alexandru Dincovici brings to light certain highly differentiated modes of bodily awareness that are swung into play in learning different combat sports, emphasizing that such disciplined awareness not only changes our style of embodiment, but can modify the very look and sense of the world this skilled body inhabits. A different aspect of embodied awareness is revealed in “Kinästhetisches Bewusstsein und sinnliche Reflexion in Tanz,” by Mónica Alarcón Dávila; here it is not a matter of some sort of conceptual reflection, but of a type of truly sensuous reflexivity that need not be taken as ineluctably retrospective (as if a dancer would have to pause in order to become aware of the movements preceding the pause), but can inform every phase of our movement with a kinaesthetic appreciation of its ongoing dynamics, living it from within, in the act.

But, as the examples drawn from sport and dance indicate, embodied awareness can be honed, fine-tuned, developed in many directions. Thus, as Denis Francesconi and Massimiliano Tarozzi suggest in “Phenomenological Pedagogy and Embodiment: Perspectives for a Collaboration,” a potent next step for the Italian tradition of phenomenological pedagogy would not only involve integrating findings from the “embodiment” paradigm in the cognitive sciences, but would also embrace the kind of attentive presence or mindfulness in which we as sentient beings can practice truly being-there, in the flesh, for the world that comes to manifestation in correlation with our embodied openness and attunement to it. In other words, what Marcel Mauss famously

called “techniques of the body” can be thematized, critiqued, and transformed within the very institutions that have in many ways perpetuated a Cartesian legacy and trained us all too well to accept an impoverished, “disconnected,” or disembodied way of life. But we can broaden the focus still further and consider the relevance of a phenomenology of embodiment in an even wider sphere. In “The Environed Body: The Lived Situation of Perceptual and Instinctual Embodiment,” Adam Konopka extends the term *Resonanz*, which Husserl uses to describe coincidence of similarity at a distance (see *Husserliana* XI, Beilage XVIII), to include the more general notion of the associative intention through which objects always point beyond themselves to further objects (see *Husserliana* XI, Beilage XXV); this allows Konopka to discuss instinctual drive-intentionality in terms of its conjunction with the environing world, understood not merely as a concordant unity, but as a nexus of references articulated into specific horizons of relevance that support instinctual embodiment’s drive toward self-preservation. Thus here it would seem that embodiment and ecology must be thought together.

Nevertheless, we are living in an age of habitat loss, and this too can be understood in an extended sense. What is the native habitat of the body (*Leib*) lived as a verb (*leiben*) rather than a substance? What are the contexts, the environments, that might unfold, nurture, and sustain the possibilities of embodiment—of motility, responsivity, and awareness—that our authors describe? It may be the case that the web of biotechnological attitudes and interventions that Jean-Luc Nancy documents is increasingly expropriating the “mineness” that so many phenomenologists have seen as crucial to embodiment, or we may find that Deleuzian shock waves of affective intensities are increasingly disrupting the concordant world so carefully described in classical phenomenology. However, our purpose in bringing this diverse collection of essays together in the present issue of *Studia Phenomenologica* is not to take sides in any debate on such issues, but to demonstrate the range and power of phenomenological work, which is capable not only of bringing the lived texture of embodiment to heightened awareness, but also of questioning the sedimented—and emerging—traditions that inform the shifting horizons of freedom within which embodiment is lived today.¹

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