

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN PHENOMENOLOGY

Philosophy of Mind and Phenomenology

Conceptual and Empirical Approaches

Edited by
Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Andreas
Elpidorou, and Walter Hopp



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3 Lived Body, Intercorporeality, Intersubjectivity

The Body as a Phenomenological Theme

Dermot Moran

Phenomenological intentional description begins from the living body as subjectively experienced, or, simply, from what Husserl calls “lived experiences” (*Erlebnisse*) that are always necessarily embodied and subjective, that is to say, first-personal or “egoic” (in Husserlian language). Human consciousness is itself sustained by the pre-reflective and pre-objective unity of the lived body, as Merleau-Ponty points out (1964, 184/1968, 141–42). Embodiment and subjectivity, moreover, are not themes that can be treated fully in isolation from each other or from the wider context of the environing lived world (Husserl’s *Lebenswelt* or *Lebensumwelt*; Merleau-Ponty’s *monde de vie*). Although embodiment is always in each case *mine* (cf. Heidegger’s *Jemeinigkeit*), the experience of embodiment is *also* always already expressive and communicative, intersubjective and intercorporeal, and intimately and seamlessly integrated into and mediating the social and collective cultural and symbolic worlds.

Phenomenology begins from intentionality and the manner in which objects in the experiential field are constituted through intendings that are always sense-giving (*sinngebende*) or meaning-constituting. Human beings weave their elaborate meaning-constructions around events and experiences that are experienced “naturally.” Husserlian phenomenology in particular examines the manner in which the shared, objective, commonly experienced world that forms the backdrop for all possible experience is co-constituted by embodied intentional subjects cooperating together in meaning-making and who constitute even their own bodies and their selves in intentional interaction with one another (*Ineinandersein*), shaping and being shaped by their surrounding worlds.

Long before philosophy of mind and cognitive science started to talk of the human mind as extended, embodied, embedded, and enactive, the classical phenomenologists were carefully describing the nature of intersubjective embodied being-in-the-world. This life-world, furthermore, should never be understood objectively or naturalistically as the sum total of “the furniture of the universe” but rather as a set of living enfolding and unfolding contexts and horizons, presences and absences, open to the future and carrying the past. The life-world is through and through historical. Indeed, the

temporality and historicity of the body, its facticity, fragility and finitude, its closures and disclosures, are the themes of phenomenological inquiry. As we shall also emphasize in this chapter, the peculiar lived and subjective character of embodiment as understood within phenomenology puts it at a distance from the more naturalistic approaches to the body found in contemporary philosophy of mind (and indeed sometimes imputed to Merleau-Ponty).

The Husserlian phenomenological tradition (in which we shall include Merleau-Ponty) operates with two different and parallel approaches to human embodiment in the world. As Husserl puts it in the *Crisis of European Sciences* (1954/1970), the human being is both “in the world” and “for the world.” That is to say, the human conscious embodied subject is both an animate organism intimately connected to the organic biosphere, a “child of the world” (*Weltkind*), as Husserl says, and also a transcendental source of all “meaning and being” (*Sinn und Sein*). In the *Crisis*, Husserl calls this the “paradox” or “enigma” (*Rätsel*) of subjectivity (1954, 3/1970, 5), according to which human subjects must be considered both as transcendental subjects “for the world” as well as embodied subjects objectified “in the world.” All the major phenomenological figures—including Merleau-Ponty, as we shall see—defend this dual role of the human subject that is, as Husserl himself says, a deep paradox, but which also expresses a deep and mysterious truth. The lived body is at the intersection of the transcendental and the empirical (Taipale 2014). It is therefore worth reviewing the phenomenological conception of the body for its extremely rich and still not fully exploited dimension of phenomenological research (for an overview of this area, see Todes 2001 and Welton 1998, 1999).

It is a central claim made by Husserl, Stein, Merleau-Ponty, and other phenomenologists that the lived body (Husserl’s *Leib* or *Leibkörper*) is inextricably present in all perception and is an organ of sensation, action, and voluntary movement, although it is rarely noticed in this role “in the natural attitude.” The body, including its sensory, imagistic, and volitional capacities, also plays a role that is only now being made prominent in the phenomenology of cognitive experiences. The lived body plays a central role in the constitution of the physical objects encountered in the environment, in terms of their disclosed profiles, their resistance, visible and tactile surface character, and so on. The lived body also mediates the encounter with others in what phenomenologists, following nineteenth-century German psychology, call *Einfühlung*, or “empathy” (Moran 2004).

Phenomenology carefully describes this insertion of the body in the world, of embodied being-in-the-world, this “incorporation.” Husserl himself speaks of it as an “en-worlding” (*Verweltlichung*, see Bruzina 1986, or *Mundanisierung*, Husserl 1954, 210/1970, 206), and as the “humanization” (*Vermenschlichung*, Hua XV/1973c, 705; Hua XXXIX/2008, 120) of transcendental subjectivity. Likewise, Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943/1995) and Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1962) both speak of this incorporation as “incarnation” (*incarnation*)

with all the implied resonance of Christian theology, albeit secularized (but see Frank 2014 and Henry 1996). Sometimes, it is suggested that embodiment is not a major theme in the phenomenological writings of Martin Heidegger (see Aho 2009), but his whole effort to describe Dasein's involvement in the world through care (*Sorge*), as well as his account of human practical comportment (*Verhalten*) in a world of pre-given significance, his accounts of *Vorhandensein* and *Zuhandensein*, are all ways of expressing embodied being-in-the-world (Dreyfus 1991, Overgaard 2004).

In the past two decades especially, embodiment has also gradually become a central theme in analytic philosophy of mind (Bermudez et al. 1998, Haugeland 1998, Proudfoot 2003, Rowlands 2010, Shapiro 2004), in the philosophy of consciousness and action (Noë 2004, 2010, 2012), in psychology, especially in discussions of the emotions (Prinz 2003), and in the cognitive sciences more generally (Clark 1997, Damasio 1999, Gallese 2014, Thompson and Varela 2000, Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991). Increasingly, it is an emerging theme in the medical humanities (Aho and Aho 2008, Matthews 2007, Svenaeus 2009), as well as in the arts and humanities more generally (Sheets-Johnstone 2009). There is a general concern that the medical sciences have objectified the body such that its subjective and intersubjective comportments are not fully appreciated.

While contemporary philosophical discussions of embodiment (Carman 1999; Dreyfus 1996, 1999) very often acknowledge the importance of the classical phenomenological discussions of the "body-subject" (*le corps sujet*), as found in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1962), and also recognize that Merleau-Ponty drew heavily on Edmund Husserl's unpublished research notes on the "lived-body" (*Leib*) and its "embodiment" (*Leiblichkeit*), especially as found in his *Ideas II* (Husserl 1952/1989), there is not a widespread understanding of the full depth of phenomenological treatments of the body. In fact, the phenomenological tradition has a very rich heritage of discussions of embodiment and indeed of the relations between bodies. Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeity (*intercorporéité*), Sartre's provocative analyses of the "body for others" (*le corps de l'autrui*), the "look" (*le regard*) of others, and the "caress" (*la caresse*, Sartre 1943/1995), and Levinas's conception of "the face of the other" (*le visage d'autrui*, Levinas 1961/1969) have all contributed to a much richer, more sensuous, emotive, and indeed sensual and erotic appreciation of lived embodied experience with other embodied subjects (see also Henry 1975, Leder 1990, Moran and Jensen 2013, Ratcliffe 2008, Strasser 1977, Welton 1999).

Phenomenological explorations of embodiment have also had an enduring impact outside of philosophy, influencing the writings of the neurologist Oliver Sacks (Sacks 1985) or the neuroscientist Francisco Varela (see Thompson and Varela 2000). Phenomenological accounts of the body have also deeply stimulated and influenced feminist discussions (see Butler 1989, Heinämaa 2003, Shildrick and Price 1998, Weiss and Fern Haber 1999,

Young 2005), including Judith Butler's critique of Merleau-Ponty for his alleged privileging of the male heterosexual body and its assumed erotic desire (Butler 1989). Butler praises Merleau-Ponty for recognizing the plasticity of the body and its normative character, but goes on to criticize him for assuming the priority of the heterosexual outlook and the implicit universalization of the male perspective as normatively "natural."

Feminist discussions of embodiment often take their starting point from critical analyses of the foundational analysis of the female condition in Simone de Beauvoir's classic *The Second Sex* (1949, 2009). Although not explicitly a committed phenomenologist in her methodology, Beauvoir draws heavily on phenomenological insights, especially those of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, in discussing the nature of gender and male and female identity in that work (see Deutscher 2008, Heinämaa 2003). As Merleau-Ponty puts it in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body is a "historical idea" rather than picking out a natural kind or species (1962, 170). The body, for Merleau-Ponty, as Judith Butler puts out, is a "place of appropriation" and a mechanism of transformation and conversion (Butler 1989). Although Butler finds fault with a certain assumption in Merleau-Ponty concerning the "natural" aspect of human embodied desire, she approves of his conception of the social constitution of the body.

For phenomenologists in general, indeed gender is "constructed" or "constituted"; that is to say, it is meaning-loaded and shaped by cultural norms and societal practices (including those of the current medical sciences), rather than belonging exclusively to whatever might be construed as "biological" nature ("sex" is used by some theorists to refer to the biological differences between male and female, but see Butler 1990 and 2004, who argues that both sex and gender are discursively constructed; see also Edward S. Casey, "The Ghost of Embodiment: Is the Body a Natural or a Cultural Entity?" in Welton 1998). Phenomenology, however, also recognizes human finitude and frailty.

The starting point of the phenomenology of embodiment is that the body is never *simply* a physical object or body (*Körper*) in nature, although it certainly *is* a natural physical body that is governed by the laws of nature, physics (e.g., gravity), causal interaction with other bodies, and so on. The living organic body is not purely a spatial material object that has its "parts outside of its parts" (*partes extra partes*), as Merleau-Ponty puts it (1962, 73). As Merleau-Ponty constantly underscores, the body is that which mediates world to the experiencing subject:

My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven (*la texture commune de tous les objets*), and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my "comprehension" (*l'instrument general de ma 'compréhension'*). (1945, 272/1962, 235)

The body is indeed an object in space but it is also an object that *inhabits* space, *creates* space, *defines* its place and space. As Merleau-Ponty writes

in his wonderful essay dedicated to Husserl, “The Philosopher and His Shadow”:

And yet my body must itself be meshed into the visible world; its power depends precisely on the fact that it has a place from which it sees. Thus it is a thing, but a thing I dwell in. It is, if you wish, on the side of the subject; but it is not a stranger to the locality of things. (1960, 210/1964a, 166)

The body not only is acted upon but also acts. Just think of the different scenarios that unfold between a body falling out of a window or jumping out of a window (as in the horror of the World Trade Center attack). The body domesticates space into place (Casey 1998, Malpas 2012), and indeed orients space from the “zero-point of orientation” (Husserl’s *Nullpunkt der Orientierung, Ideas II*) of its own body. As Edith Stein writes in *On the Problem of Empathy*, “bodily space” (*Leibraum*) and “outer space” (*Aussenraum*) are completely different from each other (Stein 1917/1989, 43).

Following Fichte and earlier German idealism, the phenomenological tradition—i.e., Husserl, Scheler, Stein, Schutz, and others, e.g., Helmuth Plessner, *Ich habe meinen Körper, ich bin mein Leib* (Plessner 1981, 1982, 1983)—speaks of the animate, “lived body” (*Leib*) and distinguishes this from the physical material “body” (*Körper*). Furthermore, the German term *Leib* is rendered as *la chair* or “flesh” in Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the French tradition generally (indeed Husserl’s favorite adjective to characterize the presence of the object in direct perception, i.e., *leibhaftig*, “bodily present” is rendered in French as *en chair et os*, literally: “in flesh and bone”). In fact, it was Sartre who, in *Being and Nothingness* (1943/1995), first introduced the terminology of “flesh” (*la chair*) now more usually associated with Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968). For Sartre, flesh is “the pure contingency of presence” (1995, 343). We experience ourselves, Sartre claims, as a living flesh, neither pure thing nor pure consciousness, but as something in between, *sui generis*, what Merleau-Ponty will speak of as the “monism” of flesh. Husserl will write on a research note written on holidays in St. Margen, Switzerland in 1921: “My body is among all things the closest, the closest in perception, the closest in feeling and will. And so I am, the functioning I, before all other worldly objects united with it [the body] in a special way (Hua XIV/1973b, 58).

Moreover, one’s flesh interacts with and even *constitutes* the other’s flesh, especially in the acts of touching and caressing as Sartre writes:

The caress reveals the Other’s flesh as flesh to myself *and to the Other*. But it reveals this flesh in a very special way. To take hold of the Other reveals to her her inertia and her passivity as a transcendence-transcended; but this is not to caress her. In the caress, it is not my body as a synthetic form in action which caresses the Other; it is my body as flesh which

causes the Other's flesh to be born [*qui fait naître la chair d'autrui*]. (1995, 390)

Sartre in fact offers a phenomenological analysis that distinguishes three different levels of encounter with the body in his famous chapter on "The Body" in *Being and Nothingness* (see Moran 2010a). There is the body as it is lived and experienced by me. This is, in Sartre's terminology, the body "for me," the body as it is existed or lived (*le corps-existé*). This is equivalent to Husserl's experience of the body as "governing" (*walten*) over its organs. The body is experienced under the mode of "I can." I can move my limbs, I can turn my head, and so on. As Drew Leder puts it, there is the experience of a "tacit command over my body, accomplishing without the slightest difficulty actions I could not begin to comprehend or carry out in a reflective fashion" (Leder 1990, 20). As Merleau-Ponty says, echoing Husserl, my experience is not first and foremost an "I think" but an "I can."

There is, in Sartre's provocative analysis, also the body as it is experienced by and for others, the body "for the other" (*pour l'autrui*), "*le corps-vu*," the body as seen from the perspective of the other (1995, 358). These two ontological dimensions are, according to Sartre, "incommunicable" and "irreconcilable": "Either it [the body] is a thing among other things, or else it is that by which things are revealed to me. But it cannot be both at the same time" (1995, 304). The third dimension is more difficult to characterize adequately—it is my body as I experience others experiencing it. As Sartre says, "I exist for myself as a body known by the Other" (1995, 351). This is the body in its intersubjective, intercorporeal, and interactive dimension. It is this body that I experience in shame or in anorexia and other conditions. For Sartre, for instance, "I cannot be embarrassed by my own body as I exist it. It is my body as it may exist for the other which may embarrass me" (1995, 353).

One cannot discuss the phenomenological experience of embodiment without adverting to Emmanuel Levinas's evocative description of the experience of the "face" (*le visage*). As made clear in current legal and political discussions in many countries about the wearing of full head cover (e.g., the Muslim *niqab*) that conceals the face, the face has a special resonance in the experience of the person (the European Court of Human Rights recently upheld the French ban on wearing the full *niqab*, saying that the court "took into account the state's submission that the face played a significant role in social interaction"). In *Totality and Infinity* (1961/1969), Levinas contrasts the experience of the "face" with the way in which humans relate to things in the world, the manner in which objects are "represented" in our intentional acts (Husserl), and the way tools are used for certain purposes (Heidegger). Against this region of utilization and representation, Levinas wants to invoke the manner in which others appear to us, presenting us with an ineliminable ethical demand. Levinas explains the face as follows:

The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name face. . . . The face of the Other at each

moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure. . . . It expresses itself. (1969, 50–51)

And he goes on to say:

The face is a living presence; it is expression. The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated. The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse. (1969, 66)

The other breaks through and threatens my being-at-home with myself. For Levinas, “the face is present in its refusal to be contained,” “the face resists possession, resists my powers”; “it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed [*englobé*]” (1969, 194, 197). Levinas uses the term “face” to refer both to the real concrete presence of another person, as for example when we “confront” someone “face to face” (*face à face*), but in his writing the term blossoms into a metaphor for all those aspects of human personhood and culture that escape objectification, which cannot be treated in the manner in which we treat objects in the world, which cannot be the object of an intentional act. He even claims paradoxically that the face is not a concrete entity but something “abstract”; it is “signification” itself. In fact, the “face,” in Levinas’s sense, escapes all categorical representation. Levinas’s phenomenology describes the experience of being confronted by the other, but not in terms of some abstract or universal demand to respect persons, but rather in the experience of the face of the stranger, of the beggar, of the sick, of those who need our assistance, of those to whom we are called and to whom we must respond. The experience of the other—*not* self-experience (Husserl’s *Selbsterfahrung*)—is primary for Levinas.

Husserl’s *Leib* which experiences itself in a series of “I can’s” (*Ich kann*), Sartre and Merleau-Ponty’s flesh (*la chair*), and Levinas’s “face” (*le visage*), all highlight aspects of the phenomenological experience of the embodied subject. It is clear, furthermore, that, in the phenomenological tradition, the lived organic expressive body cannot be naturalized. Phenomenology resists naturalization and indeed the current projects to naturalize phenomenology misunderstand the complex manner in which the embodied subject both is incarnated in the world and in a sense gives birth to the world (see Moran 2008, 2013a). Indeed Husserl’s first move is to reject all naturalism with regard to the body. He is here seeking to overcome several centuries of modern philosophy and science since Descartes that regarded the body as a machine, a highly intricate piece of biomechanical clockwork. Descartes’ account of the muscles and the nerves and Julien Offray de La Mettrie’s *L’homme-machine* (1748/1996) are typical of this movement to understand the body as a thing in nature. But the lived body always transcends its embeddedness in nature.

The phenomenological description of embodiment is very subtle and detailed. The human bodily subject’s self-presence is, for instance, permeated

by absence. There are, for example, memories that color and inform our experience, and projections and protentions that make us already participate in the future to come. There is, moreover, a mix of empty and full experiences such that every full experience is surrounded by a “halo” or “horizon” of emptiness, of possibility, anticipation, presentments of further disclosure, and so on. The self, moreover, is never given in a complete self-disclosure but it experiences itself as mediated through others.

In terms of the embodied being in the world, phenomenology emphasizes that consciousness reaches down into unconscious living experience. The self “sinks its tap roots into nature,” as Edith Stein says (2000, 115). In this regard, one has to accept a certain legitimate naturalization of the body (see Bernet 2013). The body belongs within organic nature and is affected by it—by changes in temperature, pressure, and so on. But the way the body responds and adapts, the way pains, feelings, and emotions are taken up by the embodied subject speaks to the nature of the body as expressive or, as Merleau-Ponty will say, ambiguous. As Husserl puts it, the body is involved in its own self-constitution.

The self-constitution of the body is a very complex theme and phenomenologists—including Sartre—have recognized that self-constitution is not produced by a monadic consciousness operating on its own but is interwoven with the experiencing of oneself by the others in one’s environment, others who interact with the conscious subject in struggles of domination, submission, and mutual recognition, analyses that were inspired by a certain existential reading of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic. There is a level of self-constitution of the body understood as bodily self-expression—experienced in one’s own personal style (Husserl’s *Stil*). Each of us develops environmentally and in relation to others, one’s own style of walking, of talking, individual accent, vocabulary and inflexion, individual ways of holding one’s posture, of listening, and so on. Moreover, the body is constituted and its meaning articulated and expressed in acts of bodily enhancement, modification, or alteration. This can take place through hairstyle, makeup, clothes, tattoos, piercings, and physical activity or through intentional bodily modification. A guitarist’s fingers have a flattened thickness at the tips; a dancer will walk differently from a farmer, and so on. The body is cloaked in practical cultural significance.

Classical phenomenology takes for granted that all experience not just involves and depends upon embodiment but is radically inflected by it. Perception is an embodied intentional action, especially when one considers that one needs to make a range of bodily movements in seeing, touching, smelling, and indeed in all sensorily based perceptual engagements with the world. But embodiment is not just the framework for perception and for the lived fleshly encounter with objects and with others in the world. Husserl, Scheler, and Edith Stein paid close account to the layerings of the self, including the domains of sensation, passive affectivity, drives (*Triebe*—the same term as used by Freud), and tendencies, through the levels of pain and pleasure, feelings, moods and desires, right up to the highest spiritual

experiences of love, longing, and the desire to be governed by values such as truth and beauty.

Phenomenology has much to say about the manner in which pain is experienced, its nearness or distance from the ego, and so on. Embodiment, moreover, cannot be understood unless its relation to the concepts of normality and optimality are understood. The lived embodied self constitutes certain situations as normal (e.g., able-bodiedness, possession of all functioning senses, range of motility, etc.) and also degrees of optimality (looking at objects in the upright posture, under clear daylight, with both eyes, and so on).

Furthermore, embodiment raises broader issues about human experience in imagination, fantasy, and dreams. Hence, Sartre asserts: “The body is the psychic object *par excellence*—*the only psychic object*” (1995, 347). There is the intricate problem of the “body schema” (*le schéma corporel*), a concept that was originally proposed by the Austrian psychiatrist Paul Ferdinand Schilder (1923 and 1950) and taken up by Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962, see also Gallagher 1995), the body as it is fantasized in erotic fantasy, the body in dreams, the imaginary body (Gatens 1996), the body as it is experienced in illness (Carel 2013) or in conditions such as anorexia nervosa (Legrand 2013). Even in dreams our seeing is embodied. There is no completely disembodied experience because in dreams there is still a sense of the “here.” I can dream that I am flying and soaring over the landscape, but I am seeing it from my own point of view and that point of view is bodily situated. Furthermore, as Merleau-Ponty says, I weave dreams around things. One could devote a whole chapter to phenomenology’s extraordinarily rich discussions of the erotic body as found in Sartre, Levinas, and others.

Illness, Carel argues, creates a gap between the biological body and the lived body. Long-term illness presents itself phenomenologically as a disruption of the lived body’s connection with the world and has to be integrated into one’s living a good life. Anorexia is typically described in individualistic terms, but may be better understood if its intersubjective nature is highlighted. It is, Legrand suggests, a form of communication with others, a form of self-manifestation. The areas of exploration of embodiment are expanding rapidly. New issues are raised by the possibilities of radical body modifications, gender reassignments, and enhancements of the body enabled by advances in biotechnology, such that there is even talk of the “posthuman” condition (Bostrom 2003, Hayles 1999).

Husserl’s phenomenology of intentional consciousness—like that of Merleau-Ponty—begins with the world of perception. Perception is an embodied act *par excellence*, and the nature of the revealed world of perception is intimately and necessarily correlated with the experience. Furthermore, perception founds other higher intuitive acts, e.g., categorical intuitions, and even judgments and chains of reasoning. The body is always present in all conscious experiences, but in unique ways. It is not the case therefore that the phenomenology of cognitive states can be reduced to accompanying sensory experiences. There is a genuine experience of surprise,

astonishment, intense understanding, insight, the “eureka” moment. All of these deserve phenomenological attention in themselves.

There are certain bodily functionings, seeings, touchings, movements of limbs and organs that reveal the world of objects, colors, feels, touches, smells, and so on. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

All tactile perception, while opening itself to an objective “property,” includes a bodily component; the tactile localization of an object, for example, assigns to it its place in relation to the cardinal points of the body image. This property which, at first sight, draws an absolute distinction between touch and vision, in fact makes it possible to draw them together. (1962, 315)

Furthermore, and this will become important in the phenomenological account of perception, there is always a *gap* between the sensed content and the more dominant perception of the thing (in the natural attitude). This “excess” (*Überschuss*) or *plus ultra* of perception is provided by the apprehension. In so far as these contents are apprehended so as to present the object, Husserl calls them “displaying” or “presentational contents” (*darstellende Inhalte*), see for instance *Thing and Space* (1998, § 15), see also *Ideas I* (2014, § 36). Thus, in seeing a white paper, the presentational sensation of white is a “bearer” of intentionality, of an interpretation, but not in itself consciousness of an object. Husserl recognizes a difference between *presenting* and *presented* sensations. The former sensations motivate our attribution of certain sensory features to a body. When I touch a smooth and cold surface, I have certain sensations in my fingers, but I attend through these sensations to the properties of smoothness and coolness of the surface. It takes a reflective turn of regard to notice the sensations in my fingers. The sensations are double-sided. They present themselves as belonging to the fingers, but also as “presenting” (*darstellen*) properties of the object. The body has a series of sensings (*Empfindnisse*, see Al-Saji 2000 and 2010)—its seeings, touchings, and movings—that themselves disclose features of the surrounding world. Certain sensations are routinely attributed to external things, while others are located in us in a certain way. But this is different in the different senses—vision, for instance, is more “distal” than touch. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty claims that touch brings body and world literally into contact with one another in specific places, unlike the experience of sight, which gives me the sense that I am “everywhere and nowhere”:

Tactile experience, on the other hand, adheres to the surface of the body; we cannot unfold it before us and it never quite becomes an object. Correspondingly, as the subject of touch, I cannot flatter myself that I am everywhere and nowhere; I cannot forget in this case that it is through my body that I go to the world. (1945, 365/ 1962, 316)

All our experiencing—and indeed the whole sensory world that surrounds us—is coordinated in complex ways with my own bodily movements. Merleau-Ponty claims that human action presupposes a “global bodily knowledge” (*un savoir global du corps*) that systematically unifies the different dimensions of the body (1945, 363/1962, 314). He writes: “Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronizes with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning” (1945, 248/1962, 214). The room feels warm because we are sensitive to heat. Moreover, I may become aware that the *room* feels cold or I may be aware that *my body* feels cold in the room. There are feelings (like my sense of where parts of my body are) that seem to be constituted internally, so to speak, while others definitely come marked with transcendence. A person suffering from tinnitus may hear the irritating ringing noise as “inside her head” and can separate it from persistent ringing noises that appear to be transcendent. The lived body is thus always in a complex relationship with itself through proprioception and is also in intercorporeal relations with others (human and animal).

In fact, with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the discussion concerning the self-constitution of one’s own body begins much deeper down in consciousness. Both phenomenologists are fascinated by the kind of “interwovenness” (Husserl’s *Verflechtung*, Merleau-Ponty’s *l’interlacs*) that belongs to the senses—how touch tracks vision and vice versa, how what is *seen* is in principle *touchable*; there are shared qualities in both touch and vision, e.g., the *smoothness* that I touch can also be seen by the eye. I see from the handle on the cup that it can be picked up. I can even see so-called “dispositional” properties—that the cup is fragile, the glass brittle. Furthermore, I integrate these properties seamlessly into a single experience of the object. Merleau-Ponty writes that “the brittleness, hardness, transparency and crystal ring of a glass all translate a single manner of being” (1945, 368/1962, 319). Merleau-Ponty speaks of a “synaesthesia” that, for him, is not an unusual condition but rather belongs essentially to our sensuous embodiment. There is, he writes, an “inscription of touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible—and the converse” (1964, 186/1968, 143). I can *see* that a rock will make a comfortable seat. My hand grasps a good holding point when climbing. It is these deep “affordances” in nature that are correlated to the body’s experiential movements.

In his 1907 lectures on *Thing and Space* (1998), Husserl is first interested in how sight unfolds in terms of the movements of the eyes, their combination, the manner in which near and far is constituted just within the visual field. He moves to consider the field of touch. Husserl argues that there is an essential and irrevocable priority of touch in the constitution of the lived body. The situation of the so-called “double sensation,” a phenomenon already discussed by nineteenth-century German psychologists, is one that for Husserl reveals the extraordinary manner in which the body is in the world and constitutes itself through its own touch sensations. The double

sensation refers to the fact that, in touch, I can feel myself touching and, more or less at the same time, I can feel the surface touched. In the case in which I touch myself, one finger or hand touching another, then there is an unusual circuit of touching and touched. Husserl discusses it also at some length in *Ideas II*. Merleau-Ponty takes up this double sensation in his *The Visible and Invisible* and makes it central to his analysis of flesh. Flesh, for him, is essentially characterized by reversibility. For Merleau-Ponty, there is a circle or circuit of touching and touched, and, similarly, although this is not as immediately intuitable, there is a circle of seeing and the visible (1964, 185–86/1968, 143). Merleau-Ponty writes:

When one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon that of the other because the operation is reversible at will, because they both belong (as we say) to one sole space of consciousness, because one sole man touches one sole thing through both hands. (1964, 183/1968, 141)

Merleau-Ponty claims that the unity of the experience of both hands is akin to the unity of both eyes. Moreover, what unifies my body is also that which opens my body to the experience of others' bodies. Two human subjects' bodies touch each other in a handshake, and this reversibility is already prefigured in the single subject. The world is therefore an "intercorporeal being"; my body "couples" with the "flesh of the world" (*la chair du monde*) (1964, 187/1968, 144). Merleau-Ponty finds this embodiment and reversibility in other areas, especially in the coupling of vocalization and being heard. I can hear my own voice; I can listen to myself speaking. He takes reversibility to be indicative of human being-in-the-world. This reversibility, furthermore, has within it a certain distantiation. I can never completely *coincide* with my self in the act of self-touching, rather I have a presence to myself that at the same time indicates the absence of self (*une presence à Soi qui est absence de soi*). Thus the self-constitution of the body includes absences and gaps. As Edith Stein points out, I cannot see the back of my body (without a mirror).

Husserl, Scheler, Edith Stein, and others have a layered conception of the body. The body appears differently at different levels of our experiences. The body is a seat of sensations including proprioceptive sensations, pains, pleasures, itches, or scratches. In *Ideas II* § 54 (Hua IV/1952), Husserl speaks of the body as a "bearer of fields of sense" (*als Träger der Sinnesfelder*), and he talks about the "stratum of sensation" (*die Empfindungsschicht*) as including both "sensuous pleasure" (*sinnliche Lust*) and "sensuous pain" (*sinnliche Schmerz*) (1952/1989, 212). For Husserl, these "lower" strata do not belong to the ego, properly speaking:

Just as the body in general is over and against the ego, so is everything "not-I" [„*Nicht-Ich*“] which makes it an object, and only in the mode

of “over and against” does it appertain to the ego, precisely as existing object of the ego’s experiences. (1952, 212/1989, 223)

Husserl here appears to be making pleasure and pain of a sensory kind a sensory stratum or “content” that belongs to the “not-I” rather than to the ego itself. They have the character of “belonging to the ego” (*in dieser Weise ich-zugehörig*) rather than being properly “egoic” (*ichlich*). In contrast, *acts* of the ego, such as judgments and valuations, for Husserl do not appear as foreign to the ego, but are grasped as essentially belonging to it. They are not “alien to the ego” but are operations and “states” of the ego itself (*sie sind nicht ichfremd, sondern selbst ichlich, sie sind Betätigungen (Akte), Zustände des Ich selbst*). In other words, acts and operations of the ego—even in reflection—do not appear as *objects* of the ego but as integral “parts” of its essence. Husserl thinks that this experience of the “not-I” so deep in my experience is the foundation for my experience of other kinds of alterity, including the alterity of the other subject, which is experienced in what psychologists at that time called *Einfühlung* or empathy. I experience otherness even in my own body. For Husserl, when I bang my hand against something, then I encounter my hand as a physical object, perhaps even as an obstacle (when my hand falls asleep) and not as belonging to me as *Leib* (Hua IV/1952, 317). I cannot escape experiencing myself as a vulnerable body in the world in this regard. For Husserl:

Acts are subjective in quite a different sense than my body is. (*Aber die Akte sind in ganz anderem Sinn subjektiv als mein Leib*). (Hua IV/1952, 317/1989, 329)

Sensations are *mine* in a different sense than my acts are. Feelings of pleasure, warmth, pain, etc., pervade the body. As Husserl elaborates, feelings of free movement (Husserl’s “I can’s”) are felt as egoic in a sense different from the kinaesthetic sensations that underlie them. This difference between what I have and what I am speaks to a central intuited difference. (Gabriel Marcel tried to capture these different senses in which we have our body in his “phenomenology of having” in *Being and Having* (1935/1949), which itself is based, as Marcel acknowledges, on the phenomenological analyses of Günther Stern, a former student of Husserl; see Stern 1928). Some experiences have the character of nearness to me and others are more at a distance. The self is entirely permeated by emotions, but even these can be at different *depth*. As Edith Stein writes:

Anger over the loss of a piece of jewellery comes from a more superficial level or does not penetrate as deeply as losing the same object as the souvenir of a loved one. Furthermore, pain over the loss of this person would be even deeper. (1917, 113/1989, 101)

The body also feels the pull of various tendencies and drives. There is just an idiosyncratic attraction towards a particular color, sound, texture, taste. We experience the “stimulus” (*Reiz*) or allure of experiences, but we also experience a certain attraction or “pull” (*Zug*). Husserl writes in *Ideas II* (Hua IV):

The primal intellective [*Das Urintellektive*] also does not arise “psychically” [*seelisch*] from association, but from a ray emanating out of the ego; it is not something foreign to the ego [*ichfremd*], but is precisely absolute. On the other hand, the ego presupposes sensibility as affection, as stimulus [*Reiz*], first of all primal sensibility [*Ursinnlichkeit*], and then the secondary. The ego always has possessions. Primal sensibility [*Ursinnlichkeit*] is its primal possession [*Urhabe*]. (1952, 335/1989, 346)

Husserl in particular notices how this individuality is very deeply seated in the embodied person. A baby will laugh and try to imitate a particular sound or will ignore another. Alongside these idiosyncratic tendencies are more anonymous drives—hunger, thirst, the desire for sex, for rest, for excitement. These drives can become controlling, as in the case of addictions. Similarly some of these negative drives can develop into phobias. For Husserl, all these experienced drives, cravings, aversions, etc. can be brought to awareness. They achieve a certain prominence in our experience and cannot be ignored. But at that point, the ego (as Husserl calls it) can take a stance towards a drive. A person can allow herself to yield to a drive or establish a habit of resisting the drive or at least valuing it negatively (e.g., I know I should not smoke, I have a craving to smoke, I give in to the craving but I evaluate this negatively). Husserl writes in *Ideas II* (Hua IV), §59:

Habits are necessarily formed, just as much with regard to originally instinctive behavior . . . as with regard to free behavior. To yield to a drive establishes the drive to yield: habitually. Likewise, to let oneself be determined by a value-motive and to resist a drive establishes a tendency (a “drive”) to let oneself be determined once again by such a value-motive . . . and to resist these drives. (1952, 255/1989, 267; translation altered)

Drives and instincts, for Husserl and for Stein, shape our embodied comportment and our habits, but they also penetrate consciousness and they can be altered by active position-takings of the ego.

Following Husserl and Scheler, Stein maintains that sensations in themselves are not closely involving the ego. She writes:

Sensations (*Empfindungen*) result in nothing for the experienced “I” [*für das erlebte Ich*]. The pressure, warmth, or attraction to light that

I sense are nothing in which I experience myself, in no way issue from my “I.” On the contrary, if they are made into an object, they “announce” [*bekunden*] “sensitivity” [*Empfindlichkeit*] to me as a persistent psychic attribute [*als beharrlich seelische Eigenschaft*]. (1917, 111/1989, 100)

Earlier in *On the Problem of Empathy*, Chapter Two, Stein writes:

The sensation of pressure or pain or cold is just as absolutely given as the experience of judging, willing, perceiving, etc. Yet, in contrast with these acts, sensation is peculiarly characterized. It does not issue from the pure “I” as they do, and it never takes on the form of the “*cogito*” in which the “I” turns towards an object. Since sensation is always spatially localized “somewhere” at a distance from the “I” (perhaps very near to it but never in it), I can never find the “I” in it by reflection. (1917, 46/1989, 42)

According to Stein, sensations such as pleasure and pain are, as she puts it, “on the surface of my ‘I’ [*an der Oberfläche meines Ich*]” (1917, 111/1989, 100). Stein distinguishes in the ego superficial and deeper layers, areas of nearness and distance.

Closer to the ego are the emotions and moods. According to Edith Stein, every feeling has a certain mood component “that causes the feeling to spread throughout the ‘I’ from the feeling’s place of origin and fill it up” (1917, 116/1989, 104). A slight resentment can fester and grow and ultimately consume me completely. Emotions can be episodes in conscious life or they can be ways in which other experiences display themselves. There is not only “depth” and expanse (“width”), and “reach” in relation to emotions and feelings, but there is also duration. Emotions and feelings develop, evolve, change over time. Stein believes that the length of time a feeling remains in me is subject to motivational, not natural, laws. In other words, they are explicable under the overall laws of *motivation*. The feeling of anger has its appropriate time. If one remains angry too long, one loses control of one’s anger and it becomes an obsession or a wound in the psyche. Interestingly, Stein acknowledges that every individual person has a “core” and a quota of “psychic strength.” She suggests this tentatively:

Perhaps one could show that every individual has a total measure of psychic strength determining intensity, which intensity may claim every single experience. So the rational duration of a feeling may exceed an individual’s “psychic strength.” (1917, 117/1989, 105)

Our very tentative discussions here have sought to emphasize the centrality of the body in all conscious experiences and also the depth and breadth of the thematic of embodiment—which moves from the body in everyday experience through the imagined, fetishized, or dream body to the experiences of

the body in relations with other bodies in what Merleau-Ponty calls “intercorporeality.” He introduces this concept in his late work *The Visible and the Invisible*:

If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own. And if I was able to understand how this wave arises within me, how the visible which is yonder is simultaneously my landscape, I can understand a fortiori that elsewhere it also closes over upon itself and that there are other landscapes besides my own. If it lets itself be captivated by one of its fragments, the principle of captivation is established, the field open for other Narcissus, for an “intercorporeity.” (1964/1968, 140–1)

Intercorporeality has many different forms and, indeed, Merleau-Ponty himself also speaks of “interanimality” (1968, 172). In *The Visible and the Invisible*, he sees intercorporeality as belonging to “pre-objective being” (*l'être préobjectif: l'intercorporéité*). The concept of intercorporeality is also explored in psychology. The developmental psychologist Colin Trevarthan has proposed the concept of “primary intersubjectivity” to capture the intercorporeal interaction taking place already in the womb when mother and baby are in symbiotic communication—the mother hums to the child, the child in the womb has been observed to move or wriggle in time to the music. The child in the womb responds already to the mother’s voice, to external sounds, to music, and so on. There is the mother’s intercorporeal experience of the child kicking in the womb, or just the sense of another subject being present, who is listening, who is aware. In early pregnancy, the child is first aware through touch and can be observed (in ultrasound) reaching and touching itself. By 25 or 26 weeks, the child is moving in the womb and responding to sounds. The baby will gradually show a particular adaption to the rhythm of the mother’s language.

But it is important to understand that the rich field of embodiment and intercorporeality explored by phenomenology cannot simply be imported into naturalized science. The Husserlian and Merleau-Pontyan phenomenological projects remain resolutely transcendental, although with different emphases. Even Merleau-Ponty does not want to reduce the human to animal embodiment in a world understood naturalistically, but rather to show the interplay between the corporeal and the sense-constituting transcendental domain. He writes:

But a sufficient reduction leads beyond the alleged transcendental “immanence,” it leads to the absolute spirit understood as *Weltlichkeit*,

to *Geist* as *Ineinander* of the spontaneities, itself founded on the aesthe-
siological *Ineinander* and on the sphere of life as sphere of *Einfühlung*
and intercorporeity—The notion of species = notion of interanimality.
The intertwining of biology or psychology and philosophy = *Selbstheit*
of the world. (1968, 172)

The phenomenology of embodiment reveals—as we saw at the outset—the
two-sidedness of the embodied subject as in the world and for the world.

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