

The free body
Notes on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of movement

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It is precisely through movement that the subject inscribes himself into the world and becomes visible to others. The subject is a movement directed to the outside, that is to say, the subject is desire. The desire is the "tension" towards the "extrême dehors" (Edmund Husserl) that we call the world. In all of his works Maurice Merleau-Ponty reaffirms, without thematizing it, a conception of life as movement, and of body as action and desire: man is "un certain manque de...". In other words, it is the distance between myself and the absent that drives me to move, to annul the distance through motion. Thus life is nothing but the unfinished act of moving into space and thereby creating space – the space in which we, as desire and movement, encounter both others and the world. As the action is the way one appears to another, every relationship is based on appearing. In short, life is the movement that leads us towards the world and coincides with our desire to make it appear.

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But I, I always pondered only Nature,
and as I moved, by ship, or coach, or horse,
in all the world I saw but one true 'thing',
although it was disguised in many ways;
one single truth, but yet the base of all
the many, that we falsely say are 'something':
such fleeting things as sleep has, or by mirrors
I can reduplicate at will; mere ghosts,
offspring of human brains, beyond which nothing,
within which nothing, ever is but motion¹.

The body is first of all a means of expression. Though often we use language to express ourselves, so, more often than we think, the expression is realized through the body before reaching the word: we communicate and express ourselves mostly through gestures and with the body in general. As Merleau-Ponty claims in his first dissertation, *The Structure of Behavior* (1938; 1942), eyes and face, hands gestures and body movements already declare openly our state of mind, are figurations of our behavior. The free act of expression of the body, he writes in the first course at the Collège de France (1952-1953), must therefore be understood as movement, and the movement as "*révélateur de l'être*". Moving itself, the body reveals who we are, it exposes to others the image that we have of ourselves, while this same image, escaping from our eyes, escaping, so to speak, from our hands, by a sort of metamorphosis becomes possession of others.

The body has its own language, it is the expression of what we think, of what we desire, of what we are. The bodily equilibrium, the harmony of the parts, is nothing but a mutual correspondence between thought and movement, between desire and action. For a subject so conceived, beginning from Husserl, as a "subject of free volition", that is indistinguishable from his own body and that therefore Merleau-Ponty defines as

¹ Th. Hobbes, *Vita Carmine Expressa* (1673), in William Molesworth (ed.), *Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis Opera Philosophica quae Latine Scripsit Omnia*, London, 1839, vol. 1, pp. lxxxv-xcix: "Seu rate, seu curru, sive ferebar equo./ Et mihi visa quidem est toto res unica mundo/ Vera, licet multis falsificata modis:/ Unica vera quidem, sed quae sit basis earum/ Rerum, quas falso dicimus esse aliquid;/ Qualia somnus habet fugitiva, et qualia vitris/ Arbitrio possum multiplicare meo;/ Phantasiae, nostri soboles cerebri, nihil extra;/ Partibus internis nil nisi motus inest". Translation from the Latin by Karl Maurer.

“animal of perceptions and movements”², the vision is the question and the movement is the answer. The body is perception and act of expression, but passivity and activity, perception and expression, are given only through motion, they are nothing but motion.

Hence, in the notes of his first course at the Collège de France, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, Merleau-Ponty can affirm that movement is already expression, that movement and expression are synonyms. In the same way, the meaning of the term “body schema” – that he uses in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) as much as in his last writings, up to *The Visible and the Invisible* and the unpublished notes (1958-1961) – indicates the action regulated by the widening of our motor schemas, by their unity. Mastering our body, moving ourselves, we explore the milieu that surrounds us, the outside; but by exploring the world, simultaneously we explore ourselves, our inside. To move means to throw the inside to the outside: what Merleau-Ponty tries to express by writing that the “flesh” must be understood as “dehiscence”, seepage of the inside to the outside and finally returning to itself.

If, to start, we locate a first and a last thought on movement in the whole work of Merleau-Ponty, we can note the precocity of the first (“Être et Avoir”, 1936) and the firm clarity of the second (“Preface” to *Signs*, 1960):

a phenomenological method binds the subject to the Being, by defining it as a tension or intention directed to an end³.

Man exists only in movement. Similarly the world and the Being hold together only in movement; it is only in this way that all things can be together. Philosophy is a reminding of this Being⁴.

I will trace here a brief reflection on the works of Merleau-Ponty in which the theme of movement assumes a central position, from 1938 up to the last working notes. In particular I will focus on *The Structure of Behavior* (1938), on the two chapters of *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), respectively centred on sexuality and motricity, on the first course at the Collège de France entitled *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression* (1953), that actually is entirely devoted to the theme of movement, and finally to the last working notes, published and unpublished, of *The Visible and the Invisible* (1958-1961). It is necessary to underline, however, that apart from the 1953 course, there is no systematic treatment of the theme of movement in Merleau-Ponty's reflections: it always appears, but in a marginal way. Hence it is opportune to clarify that, except for some brief passages, Merleau-Ponty never reached a proper formulation of a phenomenology of movement. Thus, in the last working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*, he seems to formulate what we could define as a dynamics of the flesh. The centre of this research is therefore the absence of a phenomenology of movement that actually has not been elaborated by Merleau-Ponty, but of which he has furnished the essential elements and the guidelines for formulating such a phenomenology. Before going into the reading of the relevant texts, it is necessary to clarify the limits, that is, what in them has stopped a proper formulation of a phenomenology of movement:

- *The Structure of Behavior* (1938) and the Sorbonne courses *Psychologie et pédagogie de l'enfant* (1949-1952): despite the fact that the theme of movement is central in both works, only the motor dimension of movement is considered (the analyses of psychology, neurology and ethology studies related to primates and early childhood behavior, and to agnosia cases find there ample space);

- *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945): as Merleau-Ponty himself will write in one of his working notes⁵, in this text he maintains the distinction body/consciousness: the movement is therefore understood only as physical movement, bodily movement, or as intentional movement, movement of the consciousness (it must be recognized nevertheless that Merleau-Ponty is the first to use the expression “movement of existence”,

² “I am that animal of perceptions and movements called a body”. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 167.

³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Parcours 1935-1951*, Verdier, Lagrasse, 1997, p. 39: “une méthode phénoménologique relie le sujet à l'être, en le définissant comme une tension ou intention orientée vers un terme”.

⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 22.

⁵ “The problems posed in *Ph.P.* are insoluble because I start there from the “consciousness”-“object” distinction –”. M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968, p. 200.

which will later become fundamental for Jan Patočka); this body/consciousness dichotomy is almost unknowingly overcome only in the final part of the chapter “The Body in its Sexual Being”;

- *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression* (1952-1953) and the other courses at the Collège de France: the problematic concept of “consciousness” is replaced by the term “expression”, though, even if movement is the principal theme of this first course at the Collège de France, the reflection concerns above all the perception of movement; a libidinal conception of the body and of the subject as “desire” emerge nonetheless in the last courses on the concept of *Nature* (1956-1960);

- The published and unpublished working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible* (1958-1961): if world and subject are “flesh”, it remains impossible to understand how the subject can make the world appear. The contemporary (1960) “Preface” to *Signs* and the last notes, particularly the ones related to the concept of “dehiscence”, are the only which testify to a conception of the subject and the world as movement.

1. *The Structure of Behavior* (1938) and *Psychologie et Pédagogie de l'Enfant* (1949-1952)

“A wave is not an individual except for the man who regards it and sees it advancing towards him”⁶.

If our body was not always positioned to have a point of view on the world, what we would actually see would be the sea, the whole sea that rhythmically moves itself. The link between our body and the surrounding space – that Merleau-Ponty, following the studies of the Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll and of the German neurologist Kurt Goldstein, designates with the German term *Umwelt* – is therefore irreducible. Such a link is lived by us as a circle of passivity and activity: if it is true that the external environment influences and induces the movements of our bodies, so the action that they in turn exercise on the world is undeniable. Merleau-Ponty concludes then that we could read behavior as an effect of the surrounding environment as much as we could see in the latter the result of the influences exercised by the movements of the organism and, in general, by human and animal behavior. Space for us is always a practicable or “covered space”. Our movements, that from the inside we live as actions, are always in a certain way also “motor reactions”.

Thus, animals and men react to space in an adapted manner even in the absence of adequate actual or recent stimuli. ‘This space is bound up with the animal’s own body as a part of its flesh. When the animal moves itself in this space to which it is adapted, a melody of spatial characteristics is unfolded in a continuous manner and is played in the different sensory domains’. Science must conceive of a physiological representation for this ‘intention of movement’ which is ‘first given as a nucleus from which the totality of the movement is subsequently differentiated’⁷.

The concept of “melody” will return in the courses of the Collège de France (1956-1960) devoted to the theme of *Nature*, particularly in the part related to Uexküll (“The *Umwelt* of the superior animals”): the relation between the animal and its own *Umwelt* is a melodic relation, in the sense in which the beginning and the end of a melody implicate each other. The *Umwelt* is an open field, a vital field of relationships and in the animal that lives inside of it, no less that in the human being, a melody is always already present, not as an idea or a finality, and not even as a means, but as a “theme that inhabits the consciousness”. It is just for this that the theory of stimulus and that of reflex – that is, the idea that the action of the organism is mere reaction and that the perception is only a reflex of the external reality – have to be both abandoned, as must also be abandoned not only the distinction between the inside and the outside, but also the as much rigid alternative between chaos and determinism, inside of which philosophy often tried to situate human beings (this subject will assume a central position in a chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception* that I will analyse later). The dissolution of the distinctions between the inside and the outside, between the body and the world, redefines the relation among the parts of the organism, among the animals, and eventually between the body

⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior* (1942), Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 2011, p. 8.

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 30 (F. Buytendijk, *Versucher über die Steuerung der Bewegungen*, p. 94; P. Schilder, *Das Körperschema*, p. 65).

and the spirit, movement and thought. For the analysis of movement, in fact, this means that, in the practicable space, distance is defined only by its relation with a general direction, or by the sense conferred to the motor actions. Hence, by returning to the example of the melody, Merleau-Ponty can write that “the activity of the organism would be literally comparable to a kinetic melody since any change in the end of the melody qualitatively modifies its beginning and the physiognomy of the whole”⁸. This is relevant, therefore, for the relationship among inside and outside, as much as for the interior by itself, the human body, which must not be conceived anymore as a mere aggregate of parts, but instead as a melodic unity of schemas and functions: every note calls to itself the preceding one and the following one. Furthermore, this is significant especially for the relation between perception and movement, conceived the one as passivity, the other as activity, and so previously thought as separate:

thus the receptive motor part of the nervous system must cease to be conceived as independent apparatuses, the structure of which would be established before they enter into relationship. [...] The facts suggest, on the contrary, that the sensorium and motorium function as parts of a single organ⁹.

The Structure of Behavior derives its title from a section of the second chapter entitled “The Structures of Behavior”. This section is almost entirely occupied by the descriptions and the analyses of experiments on chimpanzees, performed, among others, by the gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler. Köhler had observed and studied the behavior of primates put in complex situations, noticing how the global situation was much more important when compared to the apparent central role of the object considered as the focus of the experiments. A particularly pertinent example is the one of the box containing food placed at such a height that the chimpanzee was forced to put more boxes one on top of another with the purpose of arriving at the food. Köhler noted that the animal was not skilled in the construction and that the buildings were always unstable and shaky. What was noteworthy, and that Merleau-Ponty underlines several times, was the way in which the movements of the chimpanzee compensated the instability of the structure, so that, in most cases, it was able to climb up to the top and to take the food. In fact, we can see the same mechanism also in the daily life of human beings: we can consider, for instance, the case of a bicycle that tends to pull to the right; the owner that lent the bicycle to a friend, would be aware of the imbalance only thanks his friend, that is, through the body of the other. As a matter of fact, the body of the owner, over time has adapted to the imbalance of the bike: his body has put in place, without his being aware of it, mechanisms of adaptation to compensate for the imbalance of the bike for which the act of riding appeared natural and the owner felt quite balanced. The same happens in a runner that we see, during a marathon, running askew. His flaw is not due to anything other than a mechanism of compensation, or rather to a system of small compensations that go to balance tensions due to previous injuries and old habits. If the runner did not bend his body, he would almost certainly perceive a pain that would prevent him from completing the agile motions. Thus transferring the example of the bicycle to the body, one will hear a physiotherapist say that our body, in order to avoid the condition of ache or disease, has compensated the defects developed because of an accident or due to a sedentary lifestyle and bad posture, with the result of nearly achieving a total lack of pain and then, all of a sudden, its unexpected appearance: the natural mechanisms of compensation of the body are no longer sufficient. Returning to the example of the chimpanzee, it happens at times that the animal doesn't succeed, with its body, to compensate for the instability of the construction, which collapses under its weight. Likewise it is possible that the body compensates for a long time the instability due to an accident, without the ache becoming perceptible in any way, even if to an external look, as in the case of the marathon runner, a certain imbalance would result. When the disorder manifests itself, it will be necessary to restore the balance through a process of adaptation, this time knowingly, so that the disorder fits into our body schema and, so to speak, is accepted by it, and entails conscious changes of our basic motor schemas. As stated by

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 107.

⁹ *Ivi*, p. 36.

the free-diver Loïc Leferme, one should “try to understand that the adaptation has to be made infinitely”¹⁰. This way, our motor schema will not suffer unintentional alterations anymore, but will give rise to a novel system of compensation, a new style of behavior: in fact, “the body is a system of motor powers that crisscross in order to produce a behavior”¹¹.

With regards to the experiment with the chimpanzee building a construction with boxes, Köhler noticed that the animal considered the construction stable only when the boxes were completely motionless (as far as the construction appeared evidently unstable to his eyes). However, if only one of the boxes oscillated, the chimpanzee restarted building the construction right from the start. We deduce, therefore, that the state of equilibrium coincides, for the animal, with the absence of movement.

While using the construction, even if it was unstable, the chimpanzee could mount on top, as mentioned above, because every movement of the construction was “admirably compensated” by the movements of the animal’s body; in other words the constant displacement of the center of gravity, implemented by means of the movements of the body, allowed the animal to have the construction obey its movement. Köhler concluded that the chimps realize constructions through a “struggle against the oscillation”¹². We deduce, therefore, that the relationship of the animal with means and ends, with the surrounding space, the objects and the final aim, is entirely regulated by movement: by its annulment, or its compensation.

The same applies not only for actions and movements, but also for perception and in particular for the understanding of the possible functions of objects. In short: if another chimpanzee was sitting on a box, the animal was not able to make instrumental use of it, because it appeared to its eyes as a seat (a “box-as-seat”). When the box (visually) lost this function it returned to a “box-as-instrument”, usable for different purposes. This means that, unlike humans, the animal is not free to change at will its own point of view; put differently, it means that objects assume, in turn, different functions, according to the use that is visually given, that is, the current use and not the possible one: “the object appears clothed with a ‘vector’, invested with a ‘functional value’, which depends on the effective composition of the field”.

To confirm this, Merleau-Ponty considers another of the experiments carried out by Köhler: if an apple was placed in a box and the animal was put in front of the closed side of the box, so that it was not possible to reach the apple directly, it was impossible for the animal to accomplish indirect movements (for instance, move the box in order for the apple to drop); but if the apple was thrown out the window the animal was able to reach it without difficulty by moving its body.

Thus it is clear that executing a detour and arranging that one be made at the goal constitute two different and unequally difficult tasks for the animal organism. The spatial relations [...] are accessible to animal behavior only [...] when their pattern consists in a movement of the organism toward the goal; the goal is the fixed point, the organism the mobile point, and they cannot exchange their functions¹³.

The distinction between direct and indirect movement, or concrete and abstract, will be clarified in *Phenomenology of Perception*; but already here Merleau-Ponty finds in human behavior, especially in the conditions of agnosia and fatigue, two cases that might elucidate the distinction between lived space and virtual space (a distinction that seems to be absent in animals, as what is lacking is the ability to accomplish indirect movements, as well as the ability to visualize virtual spaces): for each of us, in fact, taking a complicated route is easier than verbalizing the directions, and if we must illustrate it to someone, we resort to the use of a “motor mimic”, meaning we first need to act out through gestures before explaining, which in a condition of fatigue is normally difficult. The same recourse to “motor attitudes” takes place in the patient of Gelb and Goldstein:

¹⁰ L. Leferme in *Aux limites du corps: les chemins de la profondeur*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xTHmZor1m4>: “essayer de comprendre que l’adaptation, elle se fait à l’infini”.

¹¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Nature. Courses notes from the Collège de France*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2003, p. 148.

¹² M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, p. 116 (W. Köhler, *L’Intelligence des singes supérieurs*, p. 142-143).

¹³ *Ivi*, p. 117.

it is not sufficient to say that we appeal to ‘kinesthetic data’ in order to make up for the faltering ‘visual data’. One would have to know precisely why they are faltering. Moreover, the motor attitudes are not *substituted* for the visual data. As a matter of fact, the gestures of orientation have a meaning in this case only in relation to some visual representation of the route which we form for ourselves. What the motor attitude contributes is not the content, but rather the power of organizing the visual spectacle, of tracing the relations which we need between the points of represented space. The alleged recourse to tactile data is in reality a recourse to lived space, in opposition to the virtual space in which our indications were situated at first. [...] The difficulty of a pure description of the itinerary is of the same order as that of reading a map or of orienting oneself on a plan; and it is known that a plan is practically unusable precisely in certain cases of agnosia. The purely visual sketch demands that we represent the itinerary for ourselves from a bird’s-eye view, from a point of view which has never been ours when we traversed it; it demands that we be capable of transcribing a kinetic melody into a visual diagram, of establishing relations of reciprocal correspondence between them. In the same manner, arranging that a detour to an object *be made* is to trace by our very gesture the symbol of the movement which we would have to make if we were in its place¹⁴.

The contrast between movement and representation emerges in this paragraph, however in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological writings it has not been fully thematized (it occurs more often in his political texts). Here, movement and perception are synonymous, and the intervention of one is necessary to the existence of the other. As in the case of the ocean we perceive the wave just as a single entity, so we are spectators of glimpses, and are thus incapable of seeing the world as a whole. And in order for the wave to appear to us as the rise of the sea, and in order for the private glimpse to approach the horizon, there is nothing more useless than a nautical chart or a map. In short the body is too far from any type of representation to find the coordinates inside of it.

Motor and visual relations that create the mapping of the body’s action in the world and of the world on the body are immediate relations. The nature of the relationship between the body and the world is identifiable in immediacy, while representation is synonymous with mediation. The chimpanzee lacks precisely the ability of mediation. The animal has no difficulties moving, or acting immediately; but it does not act in a mediated way. Evidently, the displacement of an object is a mediated action, as is the case of construction with boxes; both actions are aimed at attaining the apple, but the point here is that the means and the end, the goal and actions accomplished to reach it, can be connected only by the use of mediation, a skill that precisely is missing in the animal: “the animal cannot put itself in the place of the movable thing and see itself as the goal. It cannot vary the points of view, just as it cannot recognize something in different perspectives as the same *thing*”. It cannot, in short, accomplish indirect movements nor make use of representation; put differently, it cannot do what distinguishes humans from animals: “trace by our very gesture the symbol of the movement”. For the chimpanzee, the moving body cannot take the place of the goal, which instead is fixed. This becomes possible for man only through the change and the interchangeability of points of view, their adaptation to the situation, so that the object that was the goal becomes a moving body while my body stops moving and recognises itself as a goal-object.

As a matter of fact, we do come up against the privilege of the body proper [...]. What is really lacking in the animal is the symbolic behavior which it would have to possess in order to find an invariant in the external object, [...] comparable to the immediately given invariant of the body proper and in order to treat, reciprocally, its own body as an object among objects. In the same manner the monkey, which knows how to balance itself so well [...] by appropriate movements, does not succeed in balancing its constructions¹⁵.

The immediacy that characterizes our relationship with the body and its surrounding space derives – for us as for the chimpanzee – from motion, from the fact that our bodies are moving bodies, immediately exposed to the world and directed toward the world. The animal that knows how to stay balanced, that, by means of movement, knows always how to bring back stability to its body and how to control its position, will not need to build stable constructions, because its body tells it, tacitly, that it will compensate with its own balance the instability of the construction, as well as man does, quite unconsciously, for example, with

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 117-118.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 118.

his bike. The chimp will have to ensure immobility of the construction and not its stability, even at the risk of falling (in the same way, the man *knows* his bike goes straight until he lends it to his friend). Moreover, what is essential for the animal is that the construction assist in reaching the goal; so that the goal, in its concreteness, remains the immobile point to which the concrete movement of the body proper – the moving body – is finalized: “*corps mobile, clé du monde*”, Merleau-Ponty will write in 1953.

The act of making the apple fall from the box in order to eventually obtain it, as an abstract movement, is quite impossible for the animal. Merleau-Ponty concludes, therefore, that the observed situations have in common the fact of being “manifestations of a behavior adapted to the immediate and not to the virtual” and that in the chimpanzee the “vision is imperfect only because it is the sense modality of the virtual”.

At a time when a chimp gets up from the “box-as-seat”, the other chimpanzee will not see in it nothing more than an object “clothed” by the “seat vector”. What it then does, is move it here and there, quite by chance, and all of a sudden a fortuitous movement will suggest the possibility to transform the “box-as-seat” into something else: “this is because the chance movement has transposed the problem from virtual space, where it ought to be resolved by possible operations, into actual space, where it begins to be effectively resolved”¹⁶. To access the virtual, and in order for the box to stop being a “box-as-seat” or a “box-as-instrument” (that is to say an object) and become a *thing*, one must then move to identify the “sense of the virtual” no longer with vision, but with the link motion-vision. Furthermore, instead of saying that everyone hides something, one should say, as claimed by David Lynch, that it is the world that always hides something and that every human being is, from the moment in which his vision encompasses the world, a kind of investigator. Every human eye that investigates the world looks for a total visibility and the act of moving coincides precisely with the attempt to encompass at every point in time increasingly wider portions of the world, so that, sooner or later and once and for all, the world will cease to be a horizon and will instead become immediately and entirely visible. This desire will never be fulfilled, it will remain a longing, and not because of an organic defect of our eyes or an intrinsic inadequacy of perception, but rather because where everything is visible there is no space for vision.

In fact, we cannot entirely see our body either: a complete vision is available only for the eyes of the other, or for the mirror (and not even that is absolutely true: it should happen, as it does for example in some of Jean Renoir’s films or Dali’s paintings, that the view of the “front” given by the mirror, is completed by a view of the “back” offered by the camera or by the eye of the painter: in short, one should make simultaneously visible *the vision and its double*). Now, even though the body is never visible in its entirety, it always works as a single system, as a whole in which the various parts cooperate in maintaining balance: as a “melody”. Each gesture, even the simplest, is the result of a series of movements, resulting in turn from a superior elaboration effected by the brain. Yet each movement is carried out spontaneously, without our being aware of all the mechanisms that are set in motion. Such mechanisms are defined precisely as *motor schema*. The automatism of the action of the chimpanzee that produces balance in its own body, is indeed an automatism, the unaware realization of basic motor schemas. To simplify, then, it would be correct to say that the origin of the impulse that prompts the movement is found in the brain (to be precise, in the motor cortex), but that doesn’t alter the fact that an exploration of the surrounding space achieved through the variation of orientations and positions, matches the acquisition of a greater variety of motor skills. From all this we can eventually conclude that an extension of the basic motor schemas corresponds to an opening of new expressive horizons.

It is a fact that our opening to the world is constituted and made possible by a motor system that predispose-us-to and allows us to adapt our daily and contingent, pragmatic relationship with the world¹⁷.

A virtual space is opened there where the body becomes bearer of an intentionality:

¹⁶ *Ivi*, p. 119-120.

¹⁷ V. Gallese, *Corpo non mente. Le neuroscienze cognitive e la genesi di soggettività ed intersoggettività*, « Educazione Sentimentale », 20: 8-24, 2013, p. 10-11: “Resta il fatto che la nostra apertura al mondo è costituita, resa possibile da un sistema motorio che ci predispose-a e consente di adattare la quotidiana e contingente relazione pragmatica col mondo”.

to imagine is to tend towards the real object in order to make it appear here. [...] So the imagination turns out to be essentially an *affective and motor* phenomenon. [...] We aim at the object by *movements, motor intentionalities*, without needing to represent it. [...] The entire problem of imagination will depend on the degree of precision given to the notions of affective and motor *intentionality*. Our relationship with the imaginary is not a relationship of knowledge, but a relationship of existence¹⁸.

In the courses *Psychologie et pédagogie de l'enfant* held at the Sorbonne between 1949 and 1952, the movement-intentionality link, to which Merleau-Ponty had already devoted an extensive analysis in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is developed: a subject conceived primarily as intentionality expresses itself through movement. The movement, writes Merleau-Ponty, is in regards to the intention what the three visible sides of the cube are for the cube. In other words, the movement is manifestation.

But already in *The Structure of Behavior* the principles had been established:

- in order to perceive, it is necessary that the thing does not show me all its sides at the same time: it is necessary that only some of the sides are intended;

- the fact that I do not see my body is just a particular case of the perspectivism of perception.

As the thing transcends its visible aspects, so the body transcends the visible aspects of the thing by intending it: the body reduces the distance by movement and through movement transcends even itself. If Merleau-Ponty had further developed this “movement of transcendence” in these early years, he would have grasped it as what unites things, the body and the world. As we know, the “flesh” will have this role in his later writings, while we have to wait for Jan Patočka for the first proper formulation of this theory. However, it is important to point out that since 1938 these issues were not at all alien to Merleau-Ponty and indeed the elements necessary to sketch a phenomenology of movement were already fully present. In his first dissertation, in fact, he writes that it is necessary, in order to perceive, that some sides of the cube are present, others are only intended. Moving on from this starting point offered by Merleau-Ponty, we could say that the perception-intentionality link implies and presupposes another one: even movement and desire are closely related, to the point that it could be argued that if the essential characteristic of perception is its possible expansion, constantly desired in every actual perception, this expansion can only occur through movement and that, on the other hand, any expansion achieved through movement is induced by desire, the desire to reach the world and to join the other. Moreover, one should highlight again the ambiguity of the body proper: part of the world, my body is the only fragment that I cannot inspect entirely. Every perception is limited, nevertheless the thing is there in front of me, motionless, and I can inspect it and see all its sides by moving my body. Yet this possibility is denied to me in the case of that peculiar thing that is my body: the vehicle of my being in the world, the hidden intermediary between me and things, is the only area of the world that I will never see. It is important to understand how the inability to see the whole world, compensated by the possibility of revealing wider fragments through movement, is due to the impossibility of seeing my entire body (my eyes, head and shoulders), an impossibility that, unlike any other, remains as such. My eyes are the only place in the world that is invisible to me. Yet none of us cares to see our own eyes or head, whereas we long to encompass the totality of the world. It is perhaps sufficient to know that someone else can see them for us, hence all our efforts are now aimed at the rapprochement of this “other”. In the courses at the Sorbonne, Merleau-Ponty can therefore write that in the moment in which I glimpse the intention that has put in motion the action of the other, I do not only understand it, but I also take it up,

I animate it and transport myself to him. Husserl said that the perception of others is a ‘coupling phenomenon’. The word is hardly a metaphor. [...] It is this transfer of my intentions in others’ bodies, and of others’ intentions

¹⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Psychologie et pédagogie de l'enfant. Cours de Sorbonne 1949-1952*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2001, p. 226-227: “imaginer c’est tendre vers l’objet réel afin de le faire apparaître ici. [C’est] la ‘présence dans l’absence’. [...] Ainsi l’imagination se révèle être un phénomène essentiellement *affectif et moteur*. [...] L’on vise l’objet par des *mouvements, des intentionnalités motrices*, sans avoir besoin de le représenter. [...] Tout le problème de l’imagination dépendra du degré de précision donné aux notions d’*intentionnalité* affective et motrice. Notre rapport avec l’imaginaire n’est pas un rapport de connaissance, mais un rapport d’existence”.

in my own body, this alienation of others through me and of me through the others that makes possible the perception of others¹⁹.

The discovery of *mirror neurons* and recent research in the neurosciences²⁰ have prompted many to rethink the relationship between perception and movement, as well as the way we see the action of others: motor acts of others arise from a “visible” intention, hence are immediately understandable. The activation of the “same neural mirroring mechanisms” – i.e. the fact that mirror neurons are activated both during the execution of an action as during the perception of it – confirms the existence of a “motor equivalence between what has been acted and what is perceived [...]”. To perceive an action – and to understand its meaning – is equivalent to simulating it internally²¹. In other words, the discovery of mirror neurons might provide scientific evidence for the interchangeability of the points of view I mentioned before, namely the possibility for each of us to take the perspective and the point of view of the other: I can see what the other sees, feel what he feels, make the move that the other is making without actively moving my body nor rationally representing his movement. All this is the basis of empathy, which must be understood as an emotive bodily imitation:

recent findings in cognitive neuroscience revealed the existence of a neural mechanism, the mirror neuron mechanism (MNM), matching action perception on action execution. It has been proposed that this mechanism could account for direct understanding of action and intention both in humans and nonhuman primates²².

The embodied simulation (ES)

provides a new empirically based notion of intersubjectivity, viewed first and foremost as intercorporeality. In relation to touch, by means of ES we do not just ‘see’ a sensation experienced by someone else and then understand it through an inference by analogy. By means of ES we can map others’ sensations by re-using our own motor [...] representations. ES provides an original and unitary account of basic aspects of intersubjectivity, demonstrating how deeply our making sense of others’ living and acting bodies is rooted in the power of re-using our own motor [...] resources²³.

The discovery of mirror neurons has therefore provided an explanation of imitation and of our faculty of sharing others intentions; moreover, intentionality highlights the contrast between movement and representation, i.e. between immediacy and mediation:

¹⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Parcours 1935-1951*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 1997, p. 178: “je l’anime et me transporte en lui. Husserl disait que la perception d’autrui est comme un ‘phénomène d’accouplement’. Le mot est à peine une métaphore. [...] C’est ce transfert de mes intentions dans le corps d’autrui, et des intentions d’autrui dans mon propre corps, cette aliénation d’autrui par moi et de moi par autrui qui rend possible la perception d’autrui”.

²⁰ The University of Parma Research Group coordinated by Giacomo Rizzolatti and composed by Vittorio Gallese, Luciano Fadiga, Leonardo Fogassi, while studying the macaque premotor cortex during the '80 and the '90, discovered that the neurons that were thought to be activated only for motor functions, were also activated while the monkey was observing other's movements. In 1995 they also showed the existence of mirror neurons in men. The activation in the observer's brain of the same nervous circuits activated during the execution has been defined *embodied simulation* (ES). “Neurons in premotor area F5 are known to code goal-related motor acts, like hand and mouth grasping. Surprisingly, many of these neurons (called, mirror neurons) were found to be activated not only when the monkey performed a particular object-related action, but also when the monkey observed someone else performing the same action. [...] In accordance with these findings in monkeys, a similar mirror mechanism mapping action perception on motor representations of the observer's brain was revealed in humans by many studies through different methodologies, including fMRI, PET, MEG, EEG, TMS (Rizzolatti et al. 1996; see for reviews Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2010; Rizzolatti and Craighero 2004; Gallese and Sinigaglia 2011)”. V. Gallese, S. Ebisch, *Embodied Simulation and Touch: the Sense of Touch in Social Cognition*, 2013, p. 274.

²¹ V. Gallese, *Corpo vivo, simulazione incarnata e intersoggettività*, in M. Cappuccio (a cura di), *Neurofenomenologia. Le scienze della mente e la sfida dell'esperienza cosciente*, Milano, Mondadori, 2006, pp. 304-305: “equivalenza motoria tra ciò che è agito e ciò che viene percepito [...]. Percepire un'azione – e comprenderne il significato – equivale a simularla internamente”.

²² V. Gallese, M. Rochat, *The Evolution of Motor Cognition. Its Role in the Development of Social Cognition and Implications for Autism Spectrum Disorder*, in *Evolutionary, Neural and Philosophical Approaches*, 2013, p. 20.

²³ V. Gallese, S. Ebisch, *Embodied Simulation and Touch*, p. 269. In the notes of the first course at the Collège de France, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression* (1953), Merleau-Ponty wrote: “figure et fond et expérience d'autrui. Le monde d'autrui serait sur fond toujours supposé par les figures du mien. Non pas un vécu opaque, un tissu de sensations à jamais privées, couronné par une identité idéale, mais un prélèvement sur... le monde intersubjectif, un pli de mon monde”. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression. Cours au Collège de France. Notes, 1953*, Genève, MetisPresses, 2011, p. 210.

these results suggest that even humans do not need to explicitly represent intentions as such when understanding them in others. Action motor intentions are embedded within the intrinsic intentionality of action – that is, its intrinsic relatedness to an end state, a motor goal. Most of the time we do not explicitly ascribe intentions to others, we simply detect them. When witnessing others' behaviors, their motor intentional content can be directly grasped without the need to represent it [...]. We qualify such abilities as *motor cognition*²⁴.

These researches confirmed Merleau-Ponty's intuition (1938) that the motor system and the perceptual system are a single system. In short, the motor system and the perceptual system work as a whole for the purpose of understanding of others, so that intentionality is already a movement: we grasp it, we grasp its meaning, and we reproduce it within us, we simulate it. Long before these discoveries, in the notes of the courses at the Sorbonne, Merleau-Ponty had guessed that the problem of intersubjectivity could be solved only by means of research on intentionality and the motor system, or rather on the intention-movement relation. In fact, the intention that gives rise to others' movements appears through their own movements, that is to say the intention becomes visible, as if at the same time we observe the movement through which the intention unfolds, we would lived it in our own body, we would simulate it internally.

The problem of imitation also remained insoluble as long as we put it in classic terms; as spectator of a movement, I become capable of making it myself; to do what I saw I would need a double knowledge which I do not have: that of the muscular contractions of the model and how *I* may realize this series of movements [...]. Everything happens as if the intentions and motor realizations of the other were in a sort of intentional encroachment relation, as if my body and that of others formed a system [...]. What I learn to consider as the body of others is a possibility of movements for me²⁵.

The power to signify of an actor's body, for instance, is the completion of a power that we all possess and which derives from the original relation between the body schema and the perceived world, between intentionality and imagination. The foundation of the phenomenon by which the actor is able to lead us right into the drama, to express with his body the gestures of any other body and to haul with a single movement all the imaginary right on the stage thus making it present lies “in the intentionality that binds our body to the world [...]. We despise even more the comedian because we believed that he was a god, maybe because of the movement of transcendence which represents the expressive significance of the body”²⁶. In the “movement of transcendence” human existence is entirely summarized. “If to live is to invent, it is to invent from certain data. [...] When we consider expression in life, it would be necessary to say that the expressive creation is still subjected to take others into account”²⁷. In life the other can no longer afford to play a role, and neither can I elude the responsibility involved by intersubjective relationships. The “factual situation” in which we are both placed draws at once the space and the limits of our freedom. Freedom always appears through a situation and only on this borderline is it possible to attend the “manifestation of the other”:

the other can appear to me such as he really is but is also given to me as hidden. The other is only as appearing-through: he appears as alive sense without being conserved or degrading. *Of all this analysis, we shall underline that the perception of others is the perception of a freedom which appears through via a situation*²⁸.

²⁴ V. Gallese, M. Rochat, *The Evolution of Motor Cognition*, p. 26.

²⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Psychologie et pédagogie de l'enfant*, cit., p. 562: “Le problème de l'imitation, lui aussi, est resté insoluble tant qu'on l'a posé dans les termes classiques; spectateur d'un mouvement, je deviens capable de l'effectuer à mon tour; pour faire ce que j'ai vu il me faudrait une double connaissance qui me manque: celle de contractions musculaires du modèle et comment, moi, je puis réaliser cette série de mouvements [...]. Tout se passe comme si les intentions et réalisations motrices de l'autre se trouvaient dans une sorte de rapport d'empiètement intentionnel, comme si mon corps et celui d'autrui formaient un système [...]. Ce que j'apprends à considérer comme corps d'autrui est une possibilité de mouvements pour moi”.

²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 563: “dans l'intentionnalité qui relie notre corps au monde [...]. L'on méprise d'autant plus le comédien que l'on avait cru qu'il était un dieu, peut-être à cause du mouvement de transcendance que représente la signification expressive du corps”.

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 565: “si vivre c'est inventer, c'est inventer à partir de certaines données. [...] Quand il s'agit de l'expression dans la vie, il faudrait dire que la création expressive est encore assujettie à tenir compte d'autrui”.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 567: “Autrui peut m'apparaître tel qu'il est réellement mais il m'est donné aussi en tant que caché. Autrui ne fait que transparaître: il apparaît comme sens vivant, sans qui se conserve ou qui se dégrade. *De toute cette analyse, nous soulignerons que la perception d'autrui est la perception d'une liberté qui transparaît à travers une situation*”.

Movement arises from vision: by watching others I understand their intentions and I move. However, without moving I could not access any landscape, as it would be impossible to express myself. The body is a means of expression, and movement is the source of meaning; as he already did in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty calls “movement of transcendence” the act of the body that makes sense of the world. The sense appears through the expressive gesture of the body. The problem of perception and understanding others dissolves in the moment in which we discover in the body not only a “tension” towards the world – the intentionality – but also an activity – the motricity – which, by being inserted in the world, makes sense of the world, and by being placed in a factual situation, affirms its freedom. This activity defines me as much as the other, the life of the individual as much as the existence of the community, as Merleau-Ponty says in 1951 during the conference “Man and Adversity”:

mind and man never *are*; they appear through the movement by which the body becomes gesture, language an *oeuvre*, and coexistence truth²⁹.

Human nature seems to be characterized by the possibility, or rather by an authentic capacity to transcend the factual situation in which it is situated. To open virtual spaces in the heart of actual space, to create horizons of possibility where there was only a factual situation: this is the movement of existence, a movement of transition from the concrete to the abstract, from immediacy to mediation. The movement of existence is precisely a movement of “opening to the world”, to a world conceived as an horizon of possibilities, never given – or only half given, as Merleau-Ponty wrote in the pages dedicated to Machiavelli³⁰ – but opened, in the world texture, by the human act, by what Merleau-Ponty calls the “act of taking up” (*acte de reprise*). This act of taking up, this act of the human dialectic par excellence, is nothing but the transformation of contingency into meaning. In short, the movement that defines human life, the *movement of existence*, is the *movement of transcendence*.

The contrast between mediation and immediacy might now appear as the most peculiar of the mysteries of our body. In fact, our body lies exactly in the middle, at the point of convergence between mediation and immediacy. One would say that, as we live with our body, we are our body, the experience we make of it is straightforward: between me and my body there does not exist any mediation. Yet, the body is the vehicle through which I inhabit the world. In this sense, even if I am not aware of it, the body plays a mediating function, the bodily mediation. The body is conceived by Merleau-Ponty as mediator of the world. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, when it comes to the body, Merleau-Ponty does not examine in depth this mediation function (he does it though on the level of consciousness and experience of the world). So that, this enigma of the body proper is resolved, in some way, in the opposition between contingency and necessity described later in *Phenomenology of Perception*. However, in *The Structure of Behavior*, the role of mediation of the body is analysed in the specific condition of disease. According to Merleau-Ponty, the perception of the mediation function of our body remains latent till we get sick. This affirmation is indeed problematic: if, on the one hand, the idea that illness manifests the role of mediation of our body is unassailable, on the other hand one must avoid the danger of a return to the division already noted by Husserl between the perceived body (*Leib*) and the real body (*Körper*) – i.e. the scientific conception of a body that is a mere aggregate of parts, a body that exists only anatomically, so that if one part does not work anymore, there is no world anymore. In fact, affirming that only a condition of disease can present us with the evidence of the function of mediation between us and the world carried out by our body, might seem equivalent to reviving the division between body and soul, to restore, in place of a rediscovered contact with the world, the primacy of many distinct causal mechanisms of organic and physical order on a body conceived as *Leib*. In short, as Merleau-Ponty writes, rediscovering the nature of mediation that characterizes our body does not mean to reduce it to a coloured glass through which we perceive the world and that changes our perception. The soul needs a body to express itself. And the body is a means of expression.

²⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 240. I've substituted “show” with “appear” for the verb “*transparaître*”.

³⁰ *Ivi*, p. 211-223.

Neither fragment of matter nor intermediary between the spirit and the world, our body resides permanently in the ambiguity of being both and neither of these, because, in fact, it is “the bearer of a dialectic”. The body is a dialectical movement, a movement of transition from the material to the spiritual, a passage of one into another (in *The Visible and the Invisible* this movement from the inside to the outside and vice versa will be the meaning of the term “dehiscence” in which Merleau-Ponty indicates the true sense of the “flesh”). Again in 1951, in a text recently published as “Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty”, he comes back to this *movement of transcendence* – or this *metamorphosis* of the actual into the possible, of contingency into sense – already described in the conclusion of the chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception* “The Body in its Sexual Being” I analyse below:

it seems to us [...] that the characteristic operation of the mind is in the movement by which we take up [*reprenons*] our physical existence and employ it to symbolize instead of only coexisting [...]. The actual space [...] in men is superimposed by a virtual space.

Our researches thus will eventually have to lead us to think about this *transcendental man*, or this 'natural light' common to all, which appears through the movement of history. [...] The moment, of which we have constant experience, in which an existence returns to itself, takes up itself and expresses its own sense³¹.

2. *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945)

In human existence, then, there is a principle of indetermination, and this indetermination does not merely exist for us, it does not result from some imperfection of our knowledge [...]. Existence is indeterminate in itself because of its fundamental structure: insofar as existence is the very operation by which something that had no sense takes on sense, by which something that only had a sexual sense adopts a more general signification, by which chance is transformed into reason, or in other words insofar as existence is the taking up of a *de facto* situation. “Transcendence” is the name we shall give to this movement by which existence takes up for itself and transforms a *de facto* situation. Existence, precisely because it is transcendence, never definitely leaves anything behind, for then the tension that defines it would disappear. [...] Existence has no fortuitous attributes and no content that does not contribute to giving in its form, it does not admit any pure facts in themselves, because it is the movement by which facts are taken up. One might respond that the organization of our body is contingent [...]. It is impossible to distinguish in the total being of man a bodily organization that one could treat as contingent fact and other predicates that necessarily belong to him. Everything is necessary in man, and, for example, it is not through a simple coincidence that the reasonable being is also the one who stands upright or who has opposable thumbs – the same manner of existing is expressed in both of these cases. And everything is also contingent in man in the sense that this human way of existing is not guaranteed to each human child through some essence acquired at birth, in the sense that it must be continuously renewed in him through the accidents of the objective body. [...] Human existence will lead us to revisit our usual notion of necessity and contingency, because human existence is the change of contingency into necessity through the act of taking up [*acte de reprise*]. All that we are, we are on the basis of a factual situation that we make our own and that we ceaselessly transform through a sort of *escape* [*échappement*] that is never an unconditioned freedom. [...] In this voluntary taking up, in this passage from objective to subjective, it is impossible to say where the forces of history end or where ours begin, and strictly speaking the question is meaningless, since history only exists for a subject who lives through it and a subject only exists as historically situated³².

³¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Parcours deux 1951-1961*, Verdier, Lagrasse, 2000, p. 42, 47-48: “Il nous semble [...] que l’opération caractéristique de l’esprit est dans le mouvement par lequel nous reprenons notre existence corporelle et l’employons à symboliser au lieu de coexister seulement [...]. À l’espace actuel [...] se superpose chez l’homme un ‘espace virtuel’”; “Nos recherches doivent donc nous conduire finalement à réfléchir sur cet *homme transcendantal*, ou cette ‘lumière naturelle’ commune à tous, qui transparaît à travers le mouvement de l’histoire. [...] Le moment, dont nous avons la constante expérience, où une existence se retourne sur elle-même, se ressaisit et exprime son propre sens”.

³² M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), London and New York, Taylor and Francis, 2013, p. 172-177: “L’existence humaine nous obligera à réviser notre notion usuelle de la nécessité et de la contingence, parce qu’elle est le changement de la contingence en nécessité par l’acte de reprise. Tout ce que nous sommes, nous le sommes sur la base d’une situation de fait que nous faisons nôtre et que nous transformons sans cesse par une sorte d’*échappement* qui n’est jamais une liberté inconditionnée” (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 199).

In one of the unpublished working notes, dated November 1960 and entitled *Ontology and History*, Merleau-Ponty wrote again: “ce que j’essaie de dire en ontologie (que la connaissance, l’homme ne sont pas tant création et surgissement que remaniement, échappement, dans le prolongement du *logos* sensible) comporte application à l’Histoire”. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de travail inédites, de 1958-1960*, [292] (11a), p. 574; transcription by Franck Robert, *Phénoménologie et ontologie. Merleau-Ponty lecteur de*

Already in 1945 Merleau-Ponty understood existence as movement. The “movement of taking up” unites those that philosophy has long regarded as irreconcilable opposites: *raison* and *déraison*, body and spirit, visible and invisible, contingency and sense. And it could reunite them precisely because it is a movement. Only by conceiving the subject as movement, the “escape” and the “chiasm” that make possible the transition from matter to immaterial, from body to sense, and that allow me to transfer myself into the world and into others and them in me, become understandable and human existence itself becomes describable.

The perceiver gives meaning to the world. It would be misleading to ask how he can be both the beginning of the world and a part of the world, because in this question lies the paradox of perception, the enigma of vision. The opacity of perception must be accepted and maintained, because the world is opaque. If empiricism claims to reach an absolute objectivity and intellectualism claims to achieve an absolute subjectivity, then an authentic philosophical reflection will reject the conclusions of both, i.e. the idea that I am nothing but a thing among things, as much as the idea of an absolute consciousness that already knows every object. If science conceives the body as an “exteriority without interiority” and intellectualism reduces the subject to an “interiority without exteriority”, a spectator who flies over the world without ever inhabiting it, phenomenology returns the subject to his world, imbedding him in a body and places him in a situation, by denying him the privilege of a global and absolute view. The Cartesian paradigm of a thought separated from the body, inhabitant of infinite transparent spaces, and of a body accidentally inhabited by a consciousness, mere weight, must be overcome. Just as with Kant's transcendental consciousness, in fact, the Cartesian cogito cannot account for perception of the world, nor for our comprehension of others because, as it is not situated, as it does not have a body, it is not a subject, but an abstract I in front of a world entirely unfolded. Unlike the perspective applied in the Renaissance, which did not give the sensation of volume but reduced depth to a single plane, the vision of a bodily subject, a carnal cogito, is dimensional. The subject inhabits necessarily a single point of view, from which a perspective arises; while he is looking, he does not see the objects placed between his body and the object of his gaze, yet they not only exist, but it is from their thickness that the vision is born. Distance and my perception of distance, in fact, arise from these secondary objects; they make manifest the horizontal connection of sensitive data. In short, the fact that we are bodily subjects gives us a world and is the constitutive paradox of existence. When thought and extension cease to be distinct, we discover a subject opened to the world, placed in it, an inhabitant of space, which is both body and spirit and that discovers his body as attached to things and discovers in things human characters, as if they were his mirror. Without losing the distance, because without any distance there would not be any visibility, we find ourselves in a relationship with these things. The relationship between us and things is ambiguous, since it is a relationship of a carnal being with a carnal world.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty takes up the analysis of the link between movement and vision: the movements of the body proper have a perceptual meaning and form with external phenomena a system of continuous references and correspondences. Motility, spatiality and corporeality are shades of a single gesture: the movement of the body arises from the space and thereby creates space. In particular, it is the “body schema”, later referred to as “postural schema” that makes clear the union among body proper, spatiality and motility. It gives us the schema of our positions as an “undivided possession” of the parts of our body and of all the movements it may perform. In other words, it provides us with a “global sketch of the body”, or rather a “global awareness” of our posture in the world, and finally recognizes this posture as a *dynamic*: “this term means that my body appears to me as a posture toward a certain task, actual or possible. And in fact my body's spatiality is not [...] a *spatiality of position* but a *spatiality of situation*”. “If my body

Husserl et Heidegger, thèse de doctorat, Annexes 4, Université de Nice, 2002. In the transcription presentation, Robert wrote: “la transcription présente est celle du volume VIII. 2 des manuscrits de Merleau-Ponty microfilmés à la Bibliothèque Nationale de France, volume qui regroupe l'essentiel des notes de travail de 1958-1960 non publiées par Claude Lefort à la suite du *Le Visible et l'Invisible*. Ma transcription de ce volume était presque achevée lorsque j'ai pu consulter la transcription de nombre de ces notes par Renaud Barbaras. [...] La plupart des passages transcrits par Renaud Barbaras se trouvent maintenant, avec la nouvelle pagination microfilmée de la BnF, dans le volume VIII. 2, quelques uns dans le volume VIII. 1, un dans le volume VII”. *Ivi*, p. 531.

can ultimately be a 'form', and if there can be, in front of it, privileged figures against indifferent backgrounds, this is insofar as my body is polarized by its tasks, insofar as it *exists towards* them"³³.

Through the concept of body schema Merleau-Ponty outlines a sort of first "movement of existence". Space, far from being reduced to extension, is understood as the place in which movement can unfold itself. Thus in its core resides also intentionality: the "body space" is the space in which "the object can *appear* as the goal of our action"³⁴.

In the chapter on motricity, Merleau-Ponty states repeatedly the wish to undertake an analysis of movement and he makes use of italics when using the term "appear", but never really thematises either one. Movement is in fact described as something that belongs to the body and not as the essence of bodily existence. Furthermore, he writes that, in order to understand its relationship with space, one should consider "the body in movement", as if movement was an attribute of the body and not its way of being in the world. The movement inhabits the space, it is not yet the essence of existence; at the centre of the latter there is only the body proper, even if it is already clear that there must be an element of conjunction between the body and the world, and that it cannot be nothing other than movement. Merleau-Ponty eventually distinguishes between two types of movement, the "concrete movement" and the "abstract movement". This abstract or virtual movement designates our "orientation towards the possible", because it enlarges the sphere of the actual by opening up the space of the possible, of the inactual: "within the busy world in which concrete movement unfolds, abstract movement hollows out a zone of reflection and subjectivity; it superimposes a virtual or human space over physical space"³⁵. Compared to the concrete movement, the abstract movement is an *invisible movement*.

The same opposition that was expressed in the example of the map, namely the opposition between lived space and virtual space, is renewed in the gap between concrete and abstract movement. The abstract movement is made possible by what Merleau-Ponty calls "function of projection", by which I create in front of me a free space in which what did not exist may exist, in which everything can come to presence, that is *appear*. This "power of projection" is our power to give meaning to the world, our power to make it appear, to lead it to presence: it is the "movement of transcendence".

To be *situated* in the world does not mean just being *in* the world, which is proper of objects, but to *inhabit* the world. To say that our body inhabits space, then, is equivalent to saying that we are no longer tied and imprisoned in the place and time we occupy, but that through them and through the "intentional threads" we are connected to all other possible landscapes and horizons that surround us and which are not – yet – here. Similarly, I can perceive the other because the other appears to me as a consciousness that is an "inhabitant of its movements". Consciousness is no longer synonymous with knowledge, but with "motor intentionality"; and the body, as movement both concrete and abstract, as intention of movement, is also motor intentionality. I perceive my body as a power, writes Merleau-Ponty, but then he does not say that my body is an "I can", but that consciousness is an "I can" (and no longer an "I think that"). In other words, he argues that consciousness is in the body, that it is the body as an "I can", that I am thought in the same manner in which I am a body. In short, for Merleau-Ponty the subject is movement in the sense that it is constantly projected into tasks, purposes, intentions, desires. What is lacking, however, in this identification of the body as an "I can" – which lasts at least until 1958 (*The Nature*) – is an existential dimension of movement. To say that I am the "sensation of a power", that I am in the world through my body as a whole of my motor possibilities, that I have a world as I have a body that is constantly projected towards goals, risks reducing movement to a merely corporeal region, and not yet acknowledging its existential dimension. More interesting is the description of the body as "the darkness of the theatre required for the clarity of the performance, the foundation of sleep or the vague reserve of power against which the gesture and its goal

³³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 102-103.

³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 105.

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 114.

stand out, the zone of non-being *in front of which* precise beings [...] can appear”³⁶, if phenomenology is understood as the “study of the apparition of being to consciousness”, but even this reflection will be developed only by Jan Patočka. Furthermore, it seems that when it comes to apparition, Merleau-Ponty is forced to leave the body and return to a pure consciousness, the only one that is able to be “opening to the world” without losing the power to make it appear. But how does consciousness inhabit its body? Why is it that in order to exist I need to be a consciousness *and* a body, to see (in the sense of bringing the world to presence) *and* to move? The solution perhaps lies in what Merleau-Ponty calls “movement of existence”:

these clarifications allow us to understand motricity unequivocally as original intentionality. Consciousness is originarily not an ‘I think that’, but rather an ‘I can’. [...] Vision and movement are specific ways of relating to objects and, if a single function is expressed throughout all of these experiences, then it is the movement of existence³⁷.

The union of the soul and the body is not established through an arbitrary decree that unites two mutually exclusive terms, one a subject and the other an object [...]. It is accomplished at each moment in the movement of existence³⁸.

Existence is vision *and* movement, there being between them no supremacy nor any order of appearance. Merleau-Ponty claims that existence is nothing but movement and in his analyses reduces movement to its carnal dimension. By reducing movement in this fashion to its physical dimension or to movement as perceived, he passes over the existential aspect of human life as movement. I watch and I move, but I do not see myself, nor see my movements. As with depth, movement cannot be an object of perception: movement is invisible. We never see the movement, and indeed, when we look for movement in space, writes Merleau-Ponty, in reality we are looking for the paradox of a trace of time in space. Yet the gaze emerges from the movement, it belongs to the body in motion. And my eye is a bodily eye. Only by thinking together the movement of the body towards the world and the movement of the world towards the look of this same body, do we avoid the risk of relegating the body in the place it occupies, thus compromising its phenomenizing power. Merleau-Ponty, however, attributes this power to consciousness, precisely because consciousness is not of the world; and he cannot get rid of the body/consciousness dualism without making them coincide. But if consciousness is nothing else than body, motor intentionality, “I can”, how can it make the world appear? Consciousness must be thought in the immediacy of existence, out of the space of representations, closely linked to perception and apparition; moreover it has to be conceived as a movement of distancing from itself, of leakage and entering, of escaping and going inside. “Escape” and “dehiscence” are the names, respectively used in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1958-1961), of this movement towards the world to make sense of the world, to bring out the expression from the carnal texture, the “flesh”. It is therefore necessary to renounce the category of consciousness or, rather, to abandon the notion of static consciousness, because if we say that consciousness and body coincide, we throw the subject out of the world, but if we reduce consciousness to the body, we leave unresolved the mystery of the *phenomenizing movement*.

*I have the world as an unfinished individual through my body as a power of this world; I have the position of objects through the position of my body, or inversely I have the position of my body through the position of objects, not through a logical implication, [...] but rather through a real implication, and because my body is a movement toward the world, and because the world is my body’s point of support*³⁹.

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 103.

³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 139. “Mouvoir son corps c’est viser à travers lui les choses, c’est le laisser répondre à leur sollicitation qui s’exerce sur lui sans aucune représentation”. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 161.

³⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 91.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 350.

3. *Le Monde Sensible et le Monde de l'Expression (1953) and the Other Courses at the Collège de France*

Here, the spirit of the world is in ourselves, as soon as we know how to *move ourselves* and *look*. These simple acts already enclose the secret of expressive action. As the artist makes his style radiate into the very fibers of the material he is working on, I move my body without even knowing which muscles and nerve paths should intervene, nor where I must look for the instruments of that action. I want to go over there, and here I am, without having entered into the inhuman secret of the bodily mechanism [...]. We must therefore recognise that what is designated by the terms “glance”, “hand”, and in general “body” is a system of systems devoted to the inspection of a world and capable of leaping over distances, piercing the perceptual future, and outlining hollows and reliefs, distances and deviations – a meaning – in the inconceivable flatness of being [...]. Already in its pointing gestures the body not only flows over into a world whose schema it bears in itself but possesses this world at a distance rather than being possessed by it. So much the more does the gesture of expression, which undertakes through expression to delineate what it intends and make it appear “outside”, retrieve the world⁴⁰.

In the course *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression* Merleau-Ponty overcomes his phenomenology of body (or phenomenology of perception) and starts to sketch a phenomenology of movement. As he already did in the courses at the Sorbonne (1949-1952), he states that the perceiving subject is primarily a “*sujet moteur*” and a “*puissance motrice*”. The body is not a piece of matter, a thing among things, because it is inhabited by a “*visée*” and because it makes the world appear. The intentionality is therefore to be understood primarily as motricity: the ego is its own motion, the subject is motricity.

The problem of *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, however, is that, even if movement is the central theme of the entire course, instead of conceiving the subject as a movement, Merleau-Ponty focuses mainly on the perception of motion (and depth). However, once he recognized the “joint possession of movement”, he admits that it cannot belong either to a body conceived as a thing, nor to a consciousness that inhabits the world from the outside, from above. The consciousness must therefore be thought as the “unity of a project”, a project that is clearly conceived as dynamic, as a “project that embodies itself”. With this definition, Merleau-Ponty takes up the concept of body schema already developed in *Phenomenology of Perception*, to insert it in an even more dynamic horizon (“le corps est schéma parce qu’il est puissance motrice, [...] moyen d’action”⁴¹), in which body and consciousness are no longer separated, but meet in the movement by which the motives (*motifs*) and the aim (*visée*) radiate into space, become its extension and determine at once both the body and the space itself. But most importantly, they give meaning to the world⁴². Now, if on the one hand, viewing the world as an extension of my body and the body as an extension of the world (a conception that will be at the centre of *The Visible and the Invisible*) means to assume a unity between them, and if on the other hand, consciousness can be thought only if placed within this union – that is not a coincidence – Merleau-Ponty would be forced to return to a static conception of consciousness, precisely the one he is trying to overcome. Indeed, in order for the movement to be, there must be an “*entre*”, a “mediator” between me looking at the world and the world that moves; this mediator is my body, because it also moves, and because from its inside I can feel the unity of its movement as an extension of the world in me and of me in the world. In order for space to be, in order for me to be “here”, I need to inhabit space, and not to be in space as a thing, but to inhabit it with my body, my *body in motion*. Briefly, I inhabit the space with my body because my body moves. This implies that place becomes synonymous with the situation and that there is no other space but the world. This space, this world, is the primordial place and every theory of motion is nothing but a reflection upon this primordial spatiality. In other words, existence begins, as for Patočka, with the movement of anchoring or rooting (Merleau-Ponty uses the term “*ancrage*”). Once we are anchored to the ground, another movement starts: it is the movement of orientation (“*orientation*”). Motricity is what gives us a place, but every place presupposes a *body that sees* it. Movement and vision institute our existence in the world, as much as our power to make it appear: “cette capacité motrice est la lumière de la perception”⁴³.

⁴⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 66-67. Extract from “Indirect Languages and the Voices of Silence” (1952).

⁴¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, p. 131.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 88-92.

⁴³ *Ivi*, p. 125.

Even the subject of seeing is not the “I think that”, but the body. The eye is a bodily eye and it is just thanks to the fact that I am anchored to a perspective, to a particular place in the world, that I can make the world appear. And though I cannot – currently – see but glimpses, every time I open my eyes to the world, instead of seeing only what is physically present in front of me, I encompass the world as horizon. To say that the world is a horizon, then, means to acknowledge the impossibility of there being a limit of my vision. There is a relationship between the body and the world, an accord by which the one calls the other. This accord is movement, “parce que le rapport corps-monde qui fait qu’un mouvement signifie un déroulement du spectacle et inversement le spectacle un spectateur [...] est [...] un rapport que nous existons”. The subject is thinkable only as a “mobile subject”, but Merleau-Ponty notes appropriately that “ceci n’explique pas l’apparition”⁴⁴. It explains only the interplay between the body and the world that emerges from the movement of anchoring in the primordial space and notably by the movement of orientation. In fact, as far as the course is entirely devoted to the theme of movement, the theme of apparition appears only marginally. This primordial space that is originally perceived, is reconfirmed not as the place of an embodied subject, but of a consciousness that sees. One wonders then where that consciousness resides: it is as if the subject remains split in two, one part being the body that inhabits the world, the flesh wrapped in the flesh of the world, and the other being the eye, that is the phenomenizing activity that makes the world appear. Yet, the subject’s phenomenizing activity places him in some way out of this world. The assertion according to which it is equivalent to say that we are aware because we are mobile and that we are mobile because we are aware, implies, as Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes, that consciousness is conceived as that which resides within mobility and vice versa, that, in short, there is a reciprocal relationship of container-contained. Hence, is the movement in consciousness or is it consciousness that inhabits the movement? We are again faced with an opposition: on the one hand a situated movement and on the other a *non motor* consciousness that is forced to become a body, to become the same with movement, in order to live in the world. In this framework, consciousness is synonymous with knowledge, expression, while the movement is understood as nothing but a mere displacement of place, which means that it cannot define existence by itself, but it remains only a face. To get out of this impasse one should admit that the act of expression already inhabits the body as the “bearer of an indefinite number of symbolic systems”, or better as the bearer of an indefinite number of motor schemas. The inexhaustible richness of the possible horizons I can access – or shape – through motion can be affirmed, in fact, only by recognizing the inexhaustible richness of the possible movements of my body, from which the first inevitably derives. In other words, the only possible way to maintain the unity between consciousness and motricity vision and movement, would be to conceive existence itself as movement, but only Jan Patočka later develops in this direction the reflections of Merleau-Ponty. Yet, in the course of 1953, he already recognizes that only through movement can we shape our existence and make sense of the world, that is to say, make it appear: “mouvement = expression. [...] D’où capacité expressive indéfinie du mouvement. Expression définie ici comme apparition d’une existence”. Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to state that there is a coincidence of consciousness (which now he calls “expression”) and movement: “mouvement comme expression [...] mouvement comme révélateur de l’être”⁴⁵.

The perception of the unity of the body schema, of the joint possession of the indefinite number of motor and symbolic schemas, is proper to a subject involved in a project, engaged in the world, and which is projected in the one act of giving meaning to the world: “cette unité est celle d’une praxis”. In other words, the unity of the body is experienced as praxis, and praxis is nothing but movement. But “le mouvement est toujours avant ou après le moment où je le saisis”⁴⁶. This means not only that human vision always takes place, so to speak, outside of movement and in immobility, but also that in the very act of perceiving my

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 79.

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, pp. 183, 173.

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 138, 89.

movement, or rather in the act of perceiving myself as movement, I always escape myself (the “échappement” of *Phenomenology of perception*).

“Il y a là un certain dualisme, incontestable. Mais ce dualisme ne signifie pas deux substances. Il signifie [...] un certain *écart*, par rapport à niveau où âme et corps se recouvrent”; “L’intérieur totalité de l’extérieur, – mais totalité ouverte”⁴⁷. In Merleau-Ponty’s reflections at the time of this course, as he himself concedes, there remains a certain dualism (*moi/mon corps*), but the main theme of the gap or divergence (*écart*) – which will become central in *The Visible and the Invisible* – does not find a place. Therefore, the notions of action and *praxis* (Merleau-Ponty preferred the latter because it also includes “motivations”), which could have wholly defined subjectivity, remain unclear, and Merleau-Ponty is forced to concede shortly after, “problème: rapport de cette praxis avec connaissance”. Thus, he falls back into the dualism he is trying to overcome, only sometimes seeing the solution in movement:

c’est la même chose d’être mobile au sens humain et conscient. Anticipation du supérieur dans l’inférieur, mais reprise et changement de sens de l’inférieur dans le supérieur. Mobilité au sens où elle appartient à notre corps est déjà expression, mais aussi émergence dans cette mobilité d’une dialectique de l’expression qui la transforme. Schéma corporel et ouverture à un monde par motricité. Mais aussi relation avec autrui, langage, pensée. Donc au moins ébaucher cette dialectique mouvement – geste – langage, où mouvement devient expression⁴⁸.

This passage clearly takes up the one in *Phenomenology of Perception*, which concludes the chapter on sexuality and that I discussed above. However, we still do not see a simple “is” replacing the “belongs to”, so that the sense, or rather the task of making sense of the world, seems to be identified with movement, but then the gap (now called “dialectic”) reappears, and the fact that this gap is not thematized but remains unexpressed (“at least sketch”) prevents movement and sense from becoming synonyms. Yet they are understood as such: “mouvement et sens indissociables, synonymes”⁴⁹. “Donc ici mouvement = révélation de l’être, résultat de sa configuration interne, et clairement autre chose que changement de lieu”⁵⁰. Whether this is a reflection on a subject conceived as movement, or a study of the perception of movement by the subject, this sentence can only mean that being is movement and that the movement of the subject is what allows him to have a world as much as the ability of understanding and making sense of it. The relationship between my body and the world must be described as a movement, as a dynamics. One should then consider – what Merleau-Ponty could not do, except in the last working notes and in the “Preface” to *Signs* – this relationship as dynamic, as a “*dynamique moi-monde*” (Merleau-Ponty himself names it in this way), and then thematize it; one should say that the body is a “corps mobile, clé du monde”, that “il est dynamique” – as he does, – but also explain what this dynamics is; that is, one should come to think a *dynamics of the flesh* together with a *dynamics of manifestation*, but only the last works of Renaud Barbaras go in this direction.

The body is movement and “le mouvement révèle l’être”⁵¹. Cinema, invented as a means to capture movement, is now defined by Merleau-Ponty as “l’expression universelle par le mouvement”. The unity of the sensible world, the chiasm that founds our relationship with the world and with others, can only be grasped by editing. Precisely because it is a movement, the condensation into a single point of view of all the possible perspectives and of all the actual and potential movements, editing shows also what is not visible. Through the eyelid match, the present refers to the absent and indicates it on the screen, there where it is not and it cannot not be: “regard vers...”⁵².

It is possible that with these reflections on cinema, in 1953, the ontology of the flesh, of the visibility of the invisible, began to take shape. “L’unité différenciée” of the visible and the invisible, in fact, can only rest

⁴⁷ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de travail inédites, de 1958-1960*, [154] (26b) e [155] (28b), p. 536.

⁴⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l’expression*, p. 158.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, p. 114. And also: “Mouvement et sens indiscernables” (*Ivi*, p. 173).

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 102.

⁵¹ *Ivi*, p. 88, 82, 129, 106. And again: “les images apparaissent d’emblée à corps mobile qui est clé du monde” (*Ivi*, p. 86). And also: “le mouvement comme révélateur de l’être” (*Ivi*, p. 100).

⁵² *Ivi*, p. 126, 169.

on movement. Editing, precisely because it is a movement, makes visible the subject's interrogation of the world. The body schema also is nothing more than an editing, that is, a movement. Similarly, the key concept of the last working notes, the concept of dehiscence, is a synonym of movement.

The subject and the object, myself and the other, can never be defined positively, because they show themselves only through the movement of escaping out and penetrating into things, in the movement of relation and conflict, in short, by interacting and co-instituting themselves. Similarly, the field in which this movement takes place – the world – is never given once and for all: it is the place of the *institution*⁵³ precisely because it is a frontier place in which we live and in which, by slipping away from ourselves we become others by achieving the other, to eventually come back to ourselves. The world is the place of the alternation subject-object. The man who is exposed to the contingency of the world and of his own body, who lives the coincidence of activity and passivity, gives rise to an activity that transforms the world. Sense is thus instituted, or better yet it is the sense itself that traces its own path, its own future. The sense is a living movement that institutes a certain kind of existence. It emerges from a dynamic configuration of openings and processes. The sense merges into movement through which it is instituted, in other words, the foundation *is* the process. And for institution to take place and achieve its deployment there needs to be an intersubjective field.

The body as the power of *Einfühlung* is already desire, libido, projection-introjection, identification. The esthesiological structure of the human body is thus a libidinal structure, the perception [is] a mode of desire. [...] The body would pass in the world and the world in the body. Feeling or pleasure, because the body is mobile, that is, the power to be elsewhere, are the [means of the] unveiling of *something*. An organ of the mobile senses (the eye, the hand) is already a language because it is an interrogation (movement) and a response⁵⁴.

Before being defined as desire, the subject is described by Merleau-Ponty as a movement that is directed toward the world in order to make it appear: the movement is a question and perception is the answer. But “my movement is rather the reduction of a divergence, and the I which is the proprietor of the movement is that toward which this divergence points”. So the subject is conceived as a divergence or gap in respect of space and motricity, and motricity unfolds itself in a world conceived as an open field. The world is in fact the scene of two theatres or two spaces: the space of the possible, and that of the actual. In the same way, between me and myself there is no coincidence, but a divergence, since I am the movement of escaping (*échappement*) and returning to itself, of “projection-introjection”⁵⁵, of expansion and contraction, which eventually will be named desire. The starting point of the entire reflection of Merleau-Ponty is the outside, or rather the gap that separates us from the outside, from the world as well as from the other. Things are in this divergence, our relationship with things and the world can be described only as *être dans l'écart*.

Hence it is evident that Merleau-Ponty exceeds the characterisation of the phenomenon of movement as a mere mirror of vision, that without which the vision would not even be in principle possible. Moreover, it is now clear how, in 1960, he understood that the problem of the flesh – or better, of the exchange between a carnal being with a carnal world, of a subject who is a subject-object thing that can be seen and subject who sees – can only be solved on the basis of movement, by identifying with motion the essence of the seeing and visible body. Movement is the link between the body and the world, the only way for our flesh to reach the flesh of the world, now that the perception has been revealed as “a mode of desire”.

Nous nous plaçons, comme l'homme naturel, en nous *et* dans les choses, en nous *et* en autrui, au point où, par une sorte de *chiasma*, nous devenons les autres et nous devenons monde. La philosophie [...] se tient, comme l'homme naturel, au point où se fait le passage du soi dans le monde et dans l'autre, à la croisée des avenues. [...] Je ne suis pas finaliste parce qu'il y a déhiscence, et non production positive, – à travers finalité du corps, – d'un homme dont notre perception et notre pensée prolongeraient l'organisation téléologique. L'homme n'est pas la *fin* du corps, ni le corps organisé la *fin* des composants: mais plutôt le subordonné chaque fois bascule

⁵³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution/La passivité. Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954-1955)*, Belin, 2003, p. 23-41.

⁵⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, p. 210-211.

⁵⁵ *Ivi*, p. 217-218.

dans le vide d'une nouvelle dimension ouverte. [...] Il n'y a pas d'autre sens que charnel, figure et fond – Sens = leur déboîtement, leur gravitation (ce que j'appelais l'« échappement » dans *PhP*)⁵⁶.

4. *The Published and Unpublished Working Notes (1958-1961)*

The “flesh” is not the unity of the world, of me and the other, rather it is “dehiscence”, meaning escape from itself, tension toward the outside, spontaneous opening to the encounter and therefore lack of coincidence, not only between me, the world and others, but also within myself, for a sort of internal excess, *échappement*. The divergence (*écart*) yielded by this escape or excess is the place of the flesh, i.e. of both the subject and the world, precisely because they always escape this coincidence: “ceci n'est pas *coïncidence*, mais *déhiscence* qui se sait telle”⁵⁷.

In botany, dehiscence means a phenomenon of a spontaneous opening for the discharge of the internal contents to the outside. Here dehiscence means the emergence of the body from the horizon without trespassing, a movement of opening and escaping. For this reason, in the last working notes, Merleau-Ponty prefers to describe the relationship between human beings and the world with the term “dehiscence”, stating that the flesh is not to be thought of as a unity. In fact, if we remain firm to the fact that my body and the world are one extension of the other, it remains to be understood how the world might appear, how I can make it appear, that is to say, how I can be both body and vision, a force that penetrates the flesh of the world as much as a vision that makes the world appear. The answer is that I am a part of it. But how can my belonging to the world be transformed into a phenomenizing activity? The answer is through movement. In a working note dated January 1960, Merleau-Ponty develops this insight:

Primauté absolue du mouvement [...] comme instabilité instituée par l'organisme lui-même, comme *fluctuation organisée par lui*, et donc, par la même, dominée. Ma mobilité est le moyen de compenser la mobilité des choses, et donc de la comprendre et de la survoler. C'est par principe que toute perception est mouvement. Et l'unité du monde, l'unité du percevant sont cette unité vivante de déplacements compensés [...]. La fixité du point fixé et la mobilité de ce qui est en deçà et au-delà ne sont pas des phénomènes partiels, locaux [...]: c'est une seule transcendance, une seule série graduée d'écarts – La structure du champ visuel, avec ses proches, ses lointains, son horizon, est indispensable pour qu'il y ait *transcendance*⁵⁸.

If in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty had insisted on the intentional nature of movement, in *The Visible and the Invisible* his interest moves to the link between motricity and belonging: the dimension of the belonging is now understood as synonymous with the phenomenizing movement; it follows that the subject is no longer conceived as motor intentionality, but as transcendence.

L'expérience d'autrui ne peut être resaisie en sa vérité que dans une perspective ontologique. Il s'agit en effet de penser un sujet qui n'accède à lui-même qu'en se faisant autre à lui-même, [...] une appartenance du monde au sujet qui soit tout autant appartenance du sujet au monde⁵⁹.

L'analyse de la motricité permet donc de mettre en évidence un sens neuf de la phénoménalité: dans la mesure où le mouvement émane d'un soi, il faut admettre une perception qui lui est propre, quelque chose comme un paraître moteur. Cette conclusion est déjà présente dans la *Phénoménologie de la perception*⁶⁰.

Merleau-Ponty develops in these working notes some of Husserl's insights: in *Ideen II*, in fact, the movement was already understood as the medium through which we can access the vision of totality, a

⁵⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p. 312-313.

⁵⁷ *Ivi*, p. 314.

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, p. 284.

⁵⁹ R. Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène: sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, Grenoble, Millon, 1991, p. 58.

⁶⁰ R. Barbaras, *Le tournant de l'expérience: recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty*, Paris, Vrin, 1998, p. 230. And also: “Le sujet est à l'origine de l'espace plutôt qu'il n'en fait partie [...]. Parce qu'il se meut dans un monde qui lui doit sa phénoménalité, le sujet charnel contient cela même qui le contient: il passe dans le monde qu'il conduit au paraître, il se meut dans l'espace même qu'il constitue par sa marche. [...] C'est le sujet moteur qui, en se portant vers le monde, le fait paraître. Le mouvement du sujet au sein du monde est tout autant dévoilement du monde par le sujet” (*Ivi*, p. 232). *Paraître moteur* is the first name of the *mouvement phénoménalisant*: R. Barbaras, *La vie lacunaire*, Paris, Vrin, 2011; R. Barbaras, *Dynamique de la manifestation*, Paris, Vrin, 2013.

totality in succession. If the body is my point of view on the world, the “zero-point of orientation”, and if a simultaneous view of all sides of the object is not possible, it is also true that from this *here* I move into space, I turn around, I move forward and go back, I push myself out into the surrounding space and I create a space. The creation of the space is possible only starting from the distance between me and the world; within this distance, within this depth, the space unfolds itself as the possibility for my body to move and have a world. In addition to the *zero-point of orientation*, the body is also referred to as the place of intentionality: it is a “subject of free volition”⁶¹. My unilateral point of view – my body *here and now* – is exceeded through intentionality. In this sense, Husserl can say “we start from what comes *before* every point of view”. The body itself, as a movement, as a potentiality or possibility of movement, as “I can”, reveals itself as a halo of actuality. In other words, the limitations (of the vision) drags us into infinity (intentionality – inactuality – transcendence). Through movement, the subject makes the world appear by making himself visible to others and the world. But the world does not end here. “It extends without limit”, it is “crossed” and “surrounded” by “horizons of indeterminacy”. The “rays of the look” widen “*in infinitum*” the circle of the present, drawing beyond its borders the wider circumference of the possible. Movement therefore has to be understood as an infinite possibility of expansion, because if it is true that the perception must remain incomplete, it is equally true that the incompleteness requires expansion. The infinite, the indeterminate, writes Husserl, “is necessarily present”⁶². The current perception refers to the horizon of the possible. The body is here. The space is the world. The body is a tension directed to the outside, to the world.

If in the study of perception the starting point of both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty is the lack of visibility, the imminent but never realized visibility of the sides of the cube that I do not currently see; if precisely this invisibility that dwells in the heart of the visible exposes my belonging to the world, or rather the thickness, the depth that we have in common; in short, if the world and the body are made of the same texture – the flesh – and I can become aware of this similarity by recognising the correlation between the invisibility of the sides of the cube (the hidden sides of the thing), and the invisibility of my body (my eyes, my head, my back), then the phenomenology of perception is already a phenomenology of movement, as the starting point lies in my ability to move (around the cube) in order for my eyes to unveil the other sides of the cube and, in a world always already intersubjective, in the ability of the other to move (around my body) to reveal that it is visible too. Between seeing and visibility there is in fact reversibility, “*réversibilité qui est vérité ultime*”⁶³. But even if reversibility is the texture of the fabric of the world – the flesh – even if reversibility finds the relationship of mutual belonging between the body and the world, it remains unfulfilled. Reversibility allows the meeting but at the same time prevents the coincidence, otherwise the visible as such would vanish. Similarly, my encounter with the other cannot be based on our coincidence: “*et aussi conception des autres et de moi non comme coïncidences, mais au contraire comme vies déjà commencées, itinéraires*”⁶⁴.

The difference that I feel between my hands touching each other, this thin fracture between my seeing body and my visible body, is overcome by the perception of the unity of my body which is given to me by the other, by the mirror, or by the gaze of the forest upon me: that is how I become visible to myself. Thanks to the unrealized reversibility I possess myself even without seeing myself and I possess the world as an invisible horizon: “*l’homme comme ingrédient du monde, morceau de monde qui se replie sur lui-même*”⁶⁵. This first upheaval implies a second one: to reveal the world, human beings turn the world inside out “*et, à ce titre, il n’est pas dans le monde*”⁶⁶.

To solve the mystery of embodiment and to avoid a mutual exclusiveness between the belonging to the world and the power to make it appear, it would suffice to bring together the two “leaves” that compose the

⁶¹ E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, Second Book*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002.

⁶² E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, First Book*, The Hague, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983.

⁶³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p. 201.

⁶⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de travail inédites*, [148] (72b), p. 534.

⁶⁵ *Ivi*, [232] (12), p. 557.

⁶⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p. 178-179.

body – the seeing inside and the visible outside – in the movement, instead of thinking human beings and the world united in the flesh. Indeed, even if at least theoretically they remain separate by the depth, in the flesh there is place only for unity, so that one wonders how a meeting can take place. Merleau-Ponty himself wonders where the confines between the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world have to be placed. In attempting to answer this question, he comes back to the dualism (the body as “un être à deux feuillets”) that he is trying to overcome. Only in the last working notes does he find a possible solution:

Partir de ceci: il n’y a pas identité ni non-identité, ou non-coïncidence, il y a dedans et dehors tournant l’un autour de l’autre⁶⁷.

Novembre 1960. Voyant-visible. Corps partie du monde = visible (idéisme). Corps point de vue sur le monde = voyant (réalisme). Les deux = le voyant-visible. Principe pour comprendre: *partir de ce chiasme* comme du fait premier: la chair du monde comme un des feuillets de ma chair (le feuillet = visible), son feuillet ‘public’, le ‘sujet’ fait partie du visible. [...] Donc à penser l’un par l’autre. En arrivant à la *vision*, il n’y a pas ‘progrès de l’esprit’. Il y a meilleure intégration de deux feuillets: ce que je vois n’est *pas dans mon corps*, ce que je touche y est *davantage*. Dialectique: visible-voyant-voyant-visible (= en soi pour soi)⁶⁸.

The “movement of existence” is nothing else than our “opening to the world”, as Merleau-Ponty wrote. The subject can be described only as a movement, as a dynamics that exceeds and overcomes itself, the only one that can respond to the appearing of the world, because the world also exceeds itself and because all that is visible and the slope of that which is not actual – the invisible – is dragged into the present apparition. In short, because the world is a “horizon”.

Le problème que j’étudie ds *Visible et Invisible* est le même que celui de la dialectique et du marxisme. [...] Tout dépend de la possibilité de concevoir une intuition qui ne soit pas coïncidence avec l’être, mais vraiment ouverture, qui donne un *sens*⁶⁹.

By moving, I distance myself to look out on the world, and by inhabiting the world I come back to myself: the movement of moving away and coming back to ourselves is a single movement. The “virtual centre” of this movement, the location where it originates before unfolding as a change of place, is intentionality. Intentionality is the site of an invisible movement which then flows into a visible one. Movement of transcendence and desire are the names of this *invisible movement*.

The body is not an object, i.e. its existence is not exhausted by its bodily dimension, since it is matter constantly exposed to unreality. The paradox of our body, this *free body* or subject of free volition, is to transcend the bodily dimension as such. In short, movement is what shows that limitations don’t belong to the body.

Chair. L’explication par le génital, ou **même** par le sexuel, ne termine pas les problèmes: car les états de plaisir renvoient au désir, et le désir n’est pas prévision ou recherche d’un état de plaisir, il est intentionnalité. [...] Le ‘génital’ et même le ‘sexuel’ sont tout puisqu’ils sont *la chair* (c’est-à-dire non pas un ‘phénomène’ ou un ‘corps phénoménal’, mais un *être à 2 faces*, qui est ce qu’il est et aussi ce qu’il n’est pas et à être, une ouverture, une ‘lumière’)⁷⁰.

Movement refers to a dimension that it exceeds precisely by being its realization. This dimension is desire. By unfolding, movement makes the world appear. But if the world is nothing else than its own apparition, then it is nothing real. And in the same way, a human is a “sujet d’une *praxis*. [...] Il est un certain manque de...”⁷¹. We are this lack, this gap, this movement by which proximity and distance become synonyms, but because of a sort of internal excess, excess internal to the movement, we are always beyond ourselves. Only a subject who always exceeds himself can reach what exceeds every apparition, that is, the world. To the apparition of the world, in fact, a body that is only matter cannot answer, nor can a body

⁶⁷ *Ivi*, p. 316.

⁶⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de travail inédites*, [359] (527), p. 592.

⁶⁹ *Ivi*, [266] (54a?), p. 567.

⁷⁰ *Ivi*, [341] (10), p. 586-587.

⁷¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p. 252.

inhabited by a consciousness and its intentions. Only a body that is motion, a body that like the world always exceeds itself, that is always before or beyond itself, that crosses itself, turns inside out on itself and discovers behind itself, as its *other side*, the world, without ever being able to grasp it; only a body that is a tension directed to the outside, because inside it houses a lack, an absence, a gap, can make the world appear. If the world is a horizon, the presence of an absence, the subject who makes it appear will have to be recognized as an inroad in the depth of the world. And the way of this inroad, the way subject and the world meet, is through desire⁷². In short, life is the movement that leads us towards the world and coincides with our desire to make it appear.

“The body is enigmatic: a part of the world certainly, but offered in a bizarre way, as its dwelling, to an absolute desire to draw near the other person and meet him in his body too, animated and animating, the natural face of mind”⁷³. Precisely because we are desire, we come out of ourselves to meet the body of others and to move forward towards the world in search of that totality that is constantly promised yet never given, that surrounds our eyes as much as it is surrounded, that is as infinite as we are finite. The body – our embodiment – is *finitisation du désir*; yet Merleau-Ponty wrote “I am a body that rises up toward the world”⁷⁴.

The body rises up toward the world as *infinitisation du désir*: if, every time I look, the perception renews the gap between my desire, my aspiration to totality, and the limits of my vision, the finitude of my existence, every time the movement tries to reduce this gap, to annul the distance, but, since this gap is original and irreducible, as it is the ground of our very existence, and since the space of desire is the distance, the movement never finds rest. The desire is *infinitisation*, life is “l’ouverture, l’infinitisation à travers la finitude”⁷⁵. This desire remains a longing or as Hobbes had already claimed “Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire, nor without Feare, no more than without Sense”⁷⁶.

⁷² “Autrement dit, s’il est vrai que voir c’est voir toujours plus qu’on ne voit, que la chose perçue est présentation d’un invisible, alors celui pour qui il y a quelque chose, l’être-à-l’horizon, doit *exister sur le mode de son propre excès*, doit être l’unité delui-même et de son autre, bref n’être lui-même que sur le mode de la non coïncidence avec lui-même. Un tel être ne peut être conçu que comme *mouvement*. Le mouvement est en effet cela qui existe comme son propre excès ou sa propre négation; il n’est ce qu’il est qu’en étant toujours hors de soi. [...] Il s’excède lui-même [...] parce qu’aucun déplacement ne le termine, parce que chaque fase se donne comme actualisation d’une puissance qui la dépasse”. R. Barbaras, *Le tournant de l’expérience*, cit., p. 260.

⁷³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 229. Extract from “Man and Adversity” (1951).

⁷⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 78.

⁷⁵ J. Patočka, *Papiers phénoménologiques*, Grenoble, Millon, 1995, p. 113.

⁷⁶ Th. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London, Penguin, 1985, p. 130.