

Philosophy of Body: Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida, and Lacan—A Phenomenological Overview

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ABSTRACT

With Husserl, we now know that the *Leib* is an inseparable “unity” of the “physical and the aesthesiological” that can only be sundered in the abstract, a “psycho-physical property” (Husserl, 1989, 152-163). The *Leib* and its character of sensibility are conditionally dependent on circumstances. The *Leib* is not only a *Nullpunkt* (a point in reference to which every position and every extension are delineated), but also a system of organs. It is a unity of the “material” and the “psychic,” and a concrete whole (Husserl, 1989, 36). It is a unit composed of materiality and immateriality. The *Leib* or the lived-body is “not just a body but precisely an animate organism” (Husserl, 1999, 97). It is a “psychophysical whole” (Husserl, 1999, 98).

Husserlian phenomenology (Husserl, 1937, 16, § 62) was inspirational because it obliged phenomenologists to make a thorough description of the intentional character of human experience as a prerequisite to any theoretical constructions; constructions that all too frequently only blurred instead of shedding light on *die Sachen selbst* (the things themselves).

Merleau-Ponty had an unwavering dedication to the Husserlian phenomenological description, seeing in it a safeguard against an abstract theorizing that is devoid of any relationship to facts on the ground. However, even as Merleau-Ponty was passionate about the Husserlian phenomenological project, he was saddened by the details of that program. He was as passionate about the unattainableness of a full-length reduction as he was about (Husserl’s emphasis on) the need for a thorough phenomenological description.

Our embodied account of being human notes with interest Lacan’s recognition of the phenomenological relevance of the body in the constitution of human subjectivity; his recognition of the role of the cultural in the formation of the body image/notion; his appreciation of the place of man’s relationship with his body in any theory of the self; his acknowledgement of the place of the Other in our knowledge of ourselves; his recognition of the place of self-movement in our self-knowledge (See Lacan, 1988a, 168-171; 1988b, 166-167, 169-170; Lacan, 1953, 12-13). Our embodied account also observes with admiration that the constituting ego of Lacan’s phenomenology of the imaginary is “itself constituted by the perceived unity of others and objects” (Bonner, 1999, 237-238). For, the perceptual gestalt that the constituting ego perceives is, as Lacan puts it, “certainly more constituent than constituted” (Lacan, 1949/1977, 2).

Heidegger, Derrida, and other deconstructivist thinkers agree that traditional metaphysics unduly accentuates the aspiration for a direct access to meaning. As Heidegger indicates, it aspires to a meaning that is directly present to us now as well as to meaning that is eternally present to us, as with the undying laws of science. This leads it to a metaphysic that claims that meaning is immediately and fully present to us rather than that some elements of meaning are absent in our grasp of meaning. Metaphysical reflections, from Plato up to Descartes and to Husserl, follow this thought trajectory (Derrida, 1998, 236). Derrida shows how what is taking place now and what is in the conscious mind at the moment no longer exhaust the sphere of what is important. Happenings leave their traces behind. Two species of trace belong here. The

first are the memories we recall. The second are the behavioural patterns that keep recurring when situations akin to the original incident present themselves. Hence traces of earlier experiences influence present moments. Our study will understand Derrida's and Heidegger's invaluable insights as a legitimization of multiple narratives and pluralist metaphysics. These insights have indeed a couple of helpful implications for contemporary scholarship. They reopen the epistemological and metaphysical spaces for the genuine exploration of the depth of human incarnation and reason. Psychotherapists, for instance, now recognize that what the mind dreams up, what the hand writes down, what the memory recalls, and what the mind reflects on, all can be relevant to therapeutic sessions.

Keywords: metaphysical reflections, phenomenological description, psychophysical whole, intertwining, lived-body, phenomenal body, Leib, kinaesthetic sensations, perceptual gestalt, self-constituting presence

EDMUND HUSSERL

Phenomenologists attempt to understand the relationship between the characterization of the body by the natural sciences and the description of the body by phenomenology. The former (the body by the natural sciences) is the objective body and the latter (the body by phenomenology) is the phenomenal body. Husserl's two terms for the body, Körper (Physical body) and Leib (lived-body) fit into this differentiation (Husserl, 1989, 35-36). Körper designates the objective body, while Leib describes the phenomenal body. The lived-body is a confluence of that which is not extended and that which is spatially localized that which is "not extended yet ordered into space" (Welton, 1999, 42). The lived-body (Leib) is at once extended and not extended, because the fundamental "correlation between material things and bodily experiences" is a relationship between the physical (extended) and the psychological (non-extended) (Welton, 1999, 44). Thus the Leib is that which is, in the words of Husserl, "psycho-physical," it is a "psycho-physical ... intertwining" between the "lived-body" and the physical body (Husserl, 1989, 71).

Thus, though Husserl is a philosopher of consciousness rather than a philosopher of body, his theory of body offers us the presence, sense, and import that the perceptual world affords the conscious subject. He not only shows how the materiality and reality of perceived things call for their being "situated spatially," but he also demonstrates how there is the "space of perceived things" only because the body is a "centre of motility and of action." Thus it is the very materiality and reality of experienced and perceived things that characterizes Körper as Leib (Welton, 1999, 44).

Hence, Husserl puts back the experienced body/thing into its Umwelt. He establishes that reality, which he identifies with materiality, "lies in its relation" to conditions/situations/contexts/events and in the way we correspondingly grasp this relation (Husserl, 1989, 44). He demonstrates that perceived things (and the Leib) are materially present to us as "relational presence." The experienced thing, the lived-body, conditionally depends on other things and on environmental dimensions; this dependence on relations is an essential aspect of its incarnation.

Again, our perceiving and moving Leib lends flesh to perceived things. If perceived things were not "perceptually situated," they would have no relation to one another; and if they had no orientation to our perceiving and moving body, they would not be perceptually situated. In Husserl, this Leib that is constitutive of the flesh and space of perceived things is at once the centre by virtue of which things become situated and also the lived-body of "kinaesthetic sensations" (Husserl, 1989, 63). That is to say the Leib is also the lived-body of the voluntary movements of advancing towards and retreating, of grabbing and fighting off, of holding out

against and stepping into (Welton, 1999, 43). Thus, the Leib is not only spatial, but also orients things and is (itself) as well oriented.

Welton shows, however, that it is not enough to discover Körper as Leib. The Leib must be placed within the context of nature. A descriptive attitude that views the Leib as “manifest phenomena and not as self-constituting presence,” treats its themes as mere objects and does not treat the Leib as part of nature. Husserl replaces this unnatural attitude with a phenomenological attitude that treats the Leib as Leib. This natural attitude treats the Leib as part of nature.

Welton breaks up Husserl’s description of the “self-presencing” of the Leib into three interlacing moments (Welton, 1999, 43). Husserl discovers that the touching process is reflexive; in touching an object the lived-body becomes aware of being touched by the object. Moving the hand over (tactilely exploring) the table I get “tactile sensations of smoothness and coldness ... I experience ... sensings” (Husserl, 1989, 153). Hence touch perception inaugurates a new form of experience. It establishes *Empfindnisse* (sensings), an *Erlebnis* (a lived experience) that is not an *Erfahrung* (experience-of). Tactility inaugurates an *Empfindung* (a sensory event) that is not a *Wahrnehmung* (perception). It establishes a discovery of oneself that is not a discovery of a thing. *Empfindnisse* are the particular sensings or sensory events that make the Leib accessible to itself as lived, while they are (in the very act of) being rendered to the world. They emerge at the interface between “tactile sensation and kinaesthetic sensation;” they spring up at that critical point where the flesh of the Leib encounters the flesh of things (Welton, 1999, 45). The sensings that the Leib experiences in exploring objects make it visible and present to itself. In the act of touching the Leib senses itself and becomes aware of itself as the one doing the tactile exploration. It becomes aware of itself as a non-object that is touching an object. Welton calls this “reflexive sensing.”

This reflexive sensing, however, is replaced by another (second) moment or experience where the touching Leib senses itself as being touched. For in tactile exploration the Leib not only experiences (*erlebt*) things, but it also comes to be experienced (that is, experiences itself) as one of the things being experienced. Yet this experience is reversible, because the hand that is being touched can again become the hand that is touching. Thus, the lived-body is given and presented to itself as Leib in this “self-referentiality” that hardly refers to anything. The lived-body’s “reflexive but preconscious” *Empfindnisse* that we find in the initial moment now become enhanced in the second moment and develop into the lived-body’s “reflective and conscious” sensing of itself. Here the experiencer becomes conscious of his experiencing, and is able to experience his experiencing as inconspicuous (Welton, 1999, 47).

The description of the Leib takes on a decisively advanced turn in the third moment where the touching hand is also recognized as the moving hand. In tactile exploration, the hand or Leib experiences two types of sensations, namely, the “indicating sensations of movement and the representing tactile sensations.” So, “if I include these sensations ... it becomes lived-body, it senses” (Husserl, 1989, 152-153). Welton shows that this third dimension integrates the initial two moments. To recognize that the lived-body reflexively senses itself, as we discover in the initial moment, is to acknowledge that the lived-body moves itself in the perception that is in progress. In the tactile exploration of an object, “we move” nearer to it, “pick it up,” turning it around in our hands (Welton, 1999, 47). The tactile qualities of coldness and smoothness that we discover therefrom develop in connection with the movements of the hand and of the Leib. When the Leib touches itself, as in the second moment, its self-touching is a function of its self-movement. The sensing Leib is aware of itself as self-sensing because the moving Leib is aware of itself as self-moving. The Leib is, thus, “present to itself” not only as a nexus of self-sensing but also as a system of self-movements (See Welton, 1999, 48).

Husserl insists that the Leib is one with the Körper; both form a unit because the Leib is an organ and a system of organs. The Leib is an inseparable “unity” of the “physical and the

aesthesiological” that can only be sundered in the abstract. Touch perception affords us a direct and immediate awareness of the Leib. This *Empfindsamkeit* (sensibility, sensitiveness, receptivity) of the Leib that we have is a lived experience (*Erlebnis*) that is a function of conditional circumstances and events. This “conditional” character of the lived-body’s *Empfindsamkeit* shows that it is a “psycho-physical property” (Husserl, 1989, 152-163). Thus, the Leib and its character of sensibility are conditionally dependent on circumstances.

Husserl had earlier on characterized the Leib as a *Nullpunkt*, a point in reference to which every position and every extension are delineated, but which is devoid of the extension that characterizes the things it perceives. Given that the Leib is receptive, because it senses (*empfindet*) and is conditional, it is no longer only a *Nullpunkt* but also a system of organs. In this way Husserl characterizes the Leib as a unity of the “material” and the “psychic,” and as a concrete whole (Husserl, 1989, 36). Thus, the Leib is a unit composed of materiality and immateriality.

Hence, though Husserl is not a philosopher of the body and could not have extensively treated the body as flesh, his theory of Leib makes a case for the embodied character of the human being. The Leib or the lived-body is “not just a body but precisely an animate organism” (Husserl, 1999, 97). It is a “psychophysical whole” (Husserl, 1999, 98).

MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND DERRIDA, ON DECONSTRUCTING THE METAPHYSICS OF PRESENCE

In his *Of Grammatology* (1967,) Derrida defends writing against a thought system with a long history of preferring what is said to what is written. The true idea appears to the conscious mind immediately one conceives of it. The conscious mind can instantaneously voice out this true idea (*logos*,) turning it into speech, and verbally representing it. This feature of immediacy that the spoken word has, in contradistinction to the time-lag in writing, makes it the most genuine way to represent *logos*. Derrida never argues that what is written can be as present, that is to say, as near to the instant, as speech can be. Instead, he argues and works against the notion of presence, inserting it a wider context of spatiality and temporality, and deflating it from the inside. For as he argues, the “movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside” (Derrida, 1967, 24).

Reflective thought identifies the phenomenon of ‘Being’ with being present. This is the case with early Greek philosophy and, perhaps, with successive generations of western philosophers. Being is either being present at a certain here and now or being that which we can encounter in our everydayness (Cf. Heidegger, 1959, 61). Aristotle defines time as the “number of movement in respect of before and after” (Aristotle, *Physics*, Book IV, part 11). This definition privileges that which is present now, that is to say, it favours the present time. Thus we lose sight of other dimensions of time (the past and future) as we consider the presence of the so-called present moment.

Platonic and Aristotelian thoughts, as divergent as they may be, agree on the notion of ‘Being’ or existence as remaining or continuing across time and space. Being or existence is a continuous “now,” of a sort. Here, whether in the past, in the present, or in the future, “to be” is to be continuously present as a certain continuous moment (Cf. Heidegger, 1962, 38-40). This classical notion of ‘Being’ conceives of time as something we encounter the way we encounter objects (Heidegger, 1982, 306).

Be that as it may, this notion of ‘Being’ as being present to us at some temporal moment is merely one possible way of conceiving of being. It is a way of interpreting Being that identifies *logos* with the objects we encounter in our day-to-day existence, which present themselves to us in some continuous moment. In this way the timeless *logos* takes on time and place (Heidegger, 1982, 308). The Aristotelian notion of time as that which is present to us now, Heidegger protests, makes us conceive of things only in relation to the present moment

(Heidegger, 1962, § 6, p. 26). He maintains that time is, instead, a confluence of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Heidegger shows how what we call “a priori propositions” are only temporal ones and how our ontological propositions merely reflect the disclosing of the existence of that which is in some temporal and cultural setting. He opines that our recognising Being, when and if at all it does happen, follows from what is the case in our environment. Reflective thought receives its insight from the way that-which-exists manifests itself in our day-to-day encounter with it. The philosopher only articulates this disclosing of the existence of that-which-is in his temporal and cultural setting (Heidegger, 1982a, 324). Descartes, most likely, received his insight of turning the important features of things into numbers from a modern monetary system that was progressively displacing the mediaeval barter culture. Nihilism was already a historical fact in the 19th century Europe long before Nietzsche gave it a philosophical articulation (Heidegger, 1982b, 4). This shows how that-which-is and the philosophical enterprise belong together. The existence of that-which-is reveals itself in our steadily shifting manner of encountering the world around us and in our tacit conception of who we are. Reflective thinking makes this dynamism explicit.

Heidegger rejects the idea of human existence as a presence that is continuous. He denies that the human being can live in an uninterrupted, unbroken, present time. The presence of that-which-is to us cannot be taken to mean an immediate presence (Heidegger, 1972, 13 & 16). Human existence, he insists, is instead durational. The human being is inserted in time; one is inserted in a period of time with time-based horizons that span through a ‘before’ and an ‘after.’ One comes into being within a certain spatio-temporal horizon; exits being in a certain spatio-temporal frame. These spatio-temporal frames and horizons impact on our living in the current durational interval. As Heidegger seems to insist the present reality is but a confluence of past, present, and future realities.

As with man’s life, an idea takes on a life of its own. An idea is incapable of a timeless presence, though. An idea develops from earlier ones and from our memorial stocks. An idea that so develops, mixes up with other ones, matures, and develops into or provides an inspiration for other ones. As with the human life, an idea is historical and runs a certain course. What we call the present, Heidegger would seem to imply, is but a faint footprint of a temporal duration that goes from a ‘before’ to an ‘after’ (a ‘not-yet’) (Heidegger, 1962, § 6, 26). Jacques Derrida takes this line of thought from Heidegger.

Heidegger shows how that-which-is can be present to us; it retains the past when it denies it and preserves the future when it withholds it (Heidegger, 1977, 128–29). With Heidegger we begin to realise how the notion of the existence of that-which-is as an immediate presence to us of ‘Being’ turns out to be only a historical and cultural development. He lets us see how we cannot expect this to be the case at all times and in all places (Heidegger, 1968, 17-18).

Moreover, Heidegger does not accept the view of interiority as a measure for the true and the real. He does not assent to the traditional view that that which is at all times true can be unmediatedly present to the human mind. He contends that the human being cannot be except in the context of being in the world. The human being, whose mode of being is being in the world, cannot transcend the incarnate, the spatial, and the material. The true, as does the human being, is in the world of space and time. To lay bare the true obliges the human being to move around in, relate with, engage with, examine, and scrutinize the physical world. Exploring the true and knowing the true, in the world, are all under the limitations of space and time. So, metaphysics cannot but have the character of its space and time. A metaphysics that does not acknowledge this will be presumptuous. This is what the metaphysics that we today refer to as the metaphysics of presence seems to be.

Derrida borrows from Heidegger this critique of traditional metaphysics. He regrets that the metaphysical emphasis on immediateness, transparency, and presence has the

impoverishing consequence of loss of consciousness of contingency and complexity. This, Derrida seems to say, corners metaphysics into exclusionary reflection, and robs it of an inclusive habit of thought. Derrida also regrets that metaphysics of presence institutionalises hierarchical structures that unduly subordinate one thing to the other. The subordination of the binaries to one another is done in such a way that some are unduly privileged while others are unjustifiably disadvantaged. The disproportionate and unjustifiable subordination becomes clear in a process of deconstruction (Derrida, 1982, 195).

Truth has its spatio-temporal horizons. This implies the possibility of changing over time. It also involves sensitivity to some spatial contexts. So in addition to its features of surviving change and time, it also unfolds amidst the variances of its spatio-temporal horizons. Consequently, it cannot be the case that the true is at all times present in our minds. Instead of proceeding from the human interior, propositional thought flows from some exteriority. Often there are discrepancies between the idea and that which is said, and between what is said and what is heard. The result is a mix-up of bygone moments that leave their traces on our minds. This we call memory. In this way, memorial knowledge becomes exterior to propositional thought. Again, linguistic components leave their traces on the human mind, such that the spoken word derives from the gap between when the linguistic skill is acquired and when it is utilised.

Heidegger does not place the claim that the true idea is directly present to the mind over the gap that exists between memorial knowledge and abstract thought, and between the acquisition of linguistic skills and their use. What the conscious mind is directly aware of no longer has primacy over what we can get from our memorial stocks or through introspection. With Heidegger what we say and hear no longer has primacy over what we write and read. Derrida agrees with Heidegger on this point.

Heidegger shows how the privileging and the prioritising of that which wholly manifests itself to us goes with the forgetfulness of the very conditions that make it possible for that-which-is to be present to us in the first place. Following Heidegger, Derrida argues that traditional metaphysics loses sight of what prevents that-which-is from appearing to us.

With Heidegger, Derrida and other deconstructivist thinkers agree that traditional metaphysics unduly accentuates the aspiration for a direct access to meaning. As Heidegger indicates, it aspires to a meaning that is directly present to us now as well as to meaning that is eternally present to us, as with the undying laws of science. This leads it to a metaphysic that claims that meaning is immediately and fully present to us rather than that some elements of meaning are absent in our grasp of meaning. Metaphysical reflections, from Plato up to Descartes and to Husserl, follow this thought trajectory (Derrida, 1998, 236).

This claim of the immediate presence of meaning to us and the ontological structure that sustains it begin to disintegrate in the face of new insights in phenomenology. Thanks to Heidegger and the deconstructivist philosophers, we now know that futuristic reflection (our projections for the future), becoming aware of our finite existence, and the way we receive or reject the traditions of our time, all affect our understanding of present realities.

Again, Derrida shows that our claim that reality immediately presents itself to us in its integrity is each time only met halfway by the memorial traces of prior experiences that prevent us from experiencing the immediate presence of what-is. (Derrida, 1973, 68). Husserl has no justifiable reason to posit and “privilege” the actual and immediate presence to us of that-which-is (Derrida, 1973, 62-63). Husserl’s notion of temporality is flawed because attempts at stabilising and steadying meaning fail as things continue to take on new meanings (Derrida, 1973, 104). For the same reason too the idea of an identity that has the necessary stable features remains problematic. This type of experience will continue to elude our temporal existence, because of its futuristic dimension.

Heidegger's *Being and Time* shows how the ontological bias of classical metaphysics for the notion of Being as that which is immediately and wholly present to us rests on our originary encounter with the world as the place of entities we are familiar with and of objects that are available for our manipulation. Building on the Heideggerian insights, deconstructivist thought, especially in Derrida, begins to deconstruct this ontological claim. Derrida's deconstructivist methodology presupposes that prevailing thought systems contain the elements necessary for an interventionist deconstruction in their "neglected" foundation pillars (Derrida, 1989, 72). Every metaphysic has its non-metaphysical dimension; and the literary work of any given scholar contains what it aims at avoiding (Derrida, 1989, 73).

Taking off from phenomenology and drawing inspiration from Husserl, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Saussure, Levinas, and Freud, Derrida increasingly distances himself from structuralism, phenomenology, existentialism, metaphysics, and other philosophical methods and movements of his predecessors. His deconstructive philosophy aims at uncovering the inadequacy of western philosophy by analysing particular texts. Its aim is the exposition and the subsequent subversion of the combatitive, exclusionary, and oppositional binaries at the heart of western thought, such as speech/writing and presence/absence. Derrida exposes prevailing narratives, dislocates them from within, and unmasks the unhelpful dualistic hierarchical structures they conceal (Derrida, 1982, 195).

Derrida's discontent with metaphysics, surprisingly, spills over to phenomenology. First, he suspects that the emphasis of phenomenology on the purity and immediateness of human experience will make it remain an illusory transcendentalism. Second, he fears phenomenology will become a lost opportunity and another failed metaphysics (Derrida, 1973, 75).

However, Derrida neither places the reflective over the spontaneous nor does he place what we write over what we say. Instead, he invites us to recognise the multidimensional character of symbolic reasoning, in particular, and of human thought, in general. Again, Derrida's rejection of the metaphysical emphasis on immediacy, purity, and presence that has the impoverishing consequence of loss of consciousness of contingency and complexity is of the essence to us. This, as he seems to say, corners metaphysics into an impoverishing exclusionary reflection, and robs it of an enriching inclusive habit of thought (Derrida, 1982, 195).

Our study will understand Derrida's and Heidegger's invaluable insights as a legitimization of multiple narratives and pluralist metaphysics. These insights have indeed a couple of helpful implications for contemporary scholarship. They reopen the epistemological and metaphysical spaces for the genuine exploration of the depth of human incarnation and reason. Psychotherapists, for instance, now recognize that what the mind dreams up, what the hand writes down, what the memory recalls, and what the mind reflects on, all can be relevant to therapeutic sessions.

So it is that what is taking place now and what is in the conscious mind at the moment no longer exhaust the sphere of what is important. Happenings leave their traces behind. Two species of trace belong here. The first are the memories we recall. The second are the behavioural patterns that keep recurring when situations akin to the original incident present themselves. Hence traces of earlier experiences influence present moments.

In Freudian psychology, trace represents the continuing influence of earlier experiences. The recurrent behavioural patterns may continue even as the conscious mind no longer has the memories of the original incident. Freudian psychoanalysis attempts at retrieving these memories with the original incidents that trigger them. It does this for two reasons. First it looks forward to identifying and illuminating the root of the recurrent pattern of behaviour. Second, it wishes to halt its automaticity.

Derrida's deconstructive philosophy, therefore, helps us see how the past not only influences the present but also leaves traces that will influence the future. Psychotherapy no

longer needs to focus entirely on the existing moment of the interaction between the psychotherapist and the psychotherapeutic patient.

JACQUES LACAN

Lacan proposes a genetic theory of the ego, a psycho analysis that “treats the relationship of the subject to his own body,” given his identification with an image. He discusses the psycho-analytic implication of body-image. He notes the “extraordinary effect” that the “symbolic expression” of the body image has when it creates “muscular paralysis” (Lacan, 1953, 12). He notes how remarkable it is that an “imaginary anatomy” should produce such an “astonishing somatic compliance” as its “outward sign.” He also notes that the “imaginary anatomy” in question hinges on the “bodily functions” a certain culture recognises. So the imaginary anatomy differs from one culture to the other (Lacan, 1953, 12).

Lacan interprets the phenomenon of the phantom limb, where a certain pain that “local irritation” cannot explain anymore endures, as the “existential relation of a man with his body-image” (Lacan, 1953, 13).

Lacan studies the behaviour of a child before a mirror and notes that it is meaning laden. Lacan observes how, although the neonate lacks “sensory and motor coordination,” yet as soon as she is able to open her eyes, she shows remarkable fascination at the sight of a human face. He notes also that this neonate shows in unmistakable ways that he picks out the mother from everyone else around (Lacan, 1953, 15).

Again, Lacan observes that between six and eighteen months of age, the attitude of the neonate in front of the mirror teaches us of the fundamental relationship of the human being to his image (Lacan, 1988, 168). Through the “mediation of the image of the other” the neonate jubilating takes on a “mastery” which he is yet to acquire. In this way, Lacan observes, the human “subject” shows himself entirely capable of assuming this mastery within himself (Lacan, 1988, 168-171).

Lacan shows how the human subject assumes the image of the form of the other person. As a human subject, one has a “surface” situated within one that establishes a connection between the external and the internal by means of which one knows oneself, comes to be conversant with oneself as body. Lacan recognizes that one knows oneself “as body,” in contrast to the animal. This he does even as he has no reason to know himself, given that he is inside his body (Lacan, 1988, 168-171).

Lacan contends that this process of gaining awareness of oneself “as body” takes place within the “movement of exchange with the other” (Lacan, 1988, 168-171).

One’s image of one’s body, with its imaginary mediation, is the “principle of every unity” that one perceives in objects. If one perceives from without an object that has its own identity, these object places one in a state of tension because one perceives oneself as an “unsatisfied desire.” Lacan points out that the “reflection of the subject, its mirror image, is always found somewhere in every perceptual picture.” This, he argues, is what gives every perception its quality, its unique feature (Lacan, 1988, 168-171).

Charles Bonner articulates the phenomenological relevance of the body in the constitution of human subjectivity in the “imaginary and symbolic orders” of Jacques Lacan. Bonner observes that Lacan advances Freud’s proposal that “the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego” (Freud, 1923, 26). He shows how Lacan (1953, 1949/1977) builds on the insight that already at six months of age; the infant has a visual perception superior enough to its motor coordination that it is able to show its fascination, seeing its image in a mirror (Bonner, 1999, 235).

When the infant identifies with the specular image, it lays/establishes the groundwork for the creation of the ego and for later identifications. This stopping/pausing awhile, “stagnation,” endows the ego and its objects with the important qualities of “permanence, identity, and

substantiality” (Lacan, 1949/1977, 17). Thus the ego has an intentional relationship to the perceptual unities it constitutes. But most importantly, the unity of the conscious ego depends on the “perceived unity of the perceptual field” (Bonner, 1999, 237).

Hence the constituting ego of Lacan’s phenomenology of the imaginary is “itself constituted by the perceived unity of others and objects” (Bonner, 1999, 237-238). For Lacan, this perceptual gestalt is “certainly more constituent than constituted” (Lacan, 1949/1977, 2). This dependence of the conscious ego on others and objects, potentially reduces the ego to non-being. Given that “consciousness is always consciousness of the other,” it is the other’s reflected image that makes the ego the ego; otherwise the ego would be nothing (Samuels, 1993, 73-74). Lacan’s infant creates an opening for the alienating effect of this potential nothingness when it identifies with the mirror image.

Our embodied account of being human will note with interest Lacan’s recognition of the phenomenological relevance of the body in the constitution of human subjectivity; his recognition of the role of the cultural in the formation of the body image/notion; his recognition of the place of man’s relationship with his body in any theory of the self ; his recognition of the place of the other in our knowledge of ourselves; his recognition of the place of self-movement in our self-knowledge (See Lacan, 1988a, 168-171; 1988b, 166-167, 169-170; Lacan, 1953, 12-13). Our embodied account also observes with admiration that the constituting ego of Lacan’s phenomenology of the imaginary is “itself constituted by the perceived unity of others and objects” (Bonner, 1999, 237-238). For, the self-constituting presence, that the constituting ego perceives is, as Lacan puts it, “certainly more constituent than constituted” (Lacan, 1949/1977, 2).

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