

## Phenomenology of Movement

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Nothing is the same

So we keep moving

We keep moving

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 “animal of perceptions and movements”<sup>3</sup>, the vision is the question and the movement is the answer.

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 (1953), must therefore be understood as movement, and the movement as “*révélateur de l'être*”. The sense appears through the expressive gesture of the body. 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.

The contrast between immediacy and mediation might then 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 immediacy and mediation. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 167: “I am that animal of perceptions and movements called a body”.

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 becomes evident 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 same applies for the perception of the body of others:

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 in my own body, this alienation of others through me and of me through the others that makes possible the perception of others<sup>4</sup>.

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. When it comes to the perception of others, then, 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

<sup>4</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Parcours 1935-1951*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 1997, p. 178: “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”.

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.

### 1. *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 situated<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), London and New York, Taylor and Francis, 2013, p. 172-177. 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;

Already in 1945 Merleau-Ponty understood existence as movement. The “movement of transcendence” 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 “act of taking up” that makes possible the transition from immediacy to mediation, from matter to immaterial, from body to sense, and that allows me to transfer myself into the world and into others and them in me, become understandable.

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

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transcription by Franck Robert, *Phénoménologie et ontologie. Merleau-Ponty lecteur de 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”. *Ibid.* p. 531.

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*”. 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 unfolds itself. Thus in its core resides also intentionality: the “bodily space” is the space in which “the object can *appear* as the goal of our action”. “If my body 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”<sup>6</sup>. 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 thematizes either one. Movement is in fact described as something that belongs to the body and not as the essence of

<sup>6</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 105, 102, 103.

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. Movement inhabits 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 anything other than movement.

In his analysis, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between two types of movement: the “concrete movement” and the “abstract movement”. This abstract or virtual movement designates our “orientation towards the possible”, as 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”<sup>7</sup>. Compared to the concrete movement, the abstract movement is an *invisible movement*.

The same opposition that was expressed in the example of the condition of disease of the body proper, namely the opposition between immediacy and mediation, is renewed in the gap between concrete and abstract movement and therefore between lived and virtual space. 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

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 114.

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, repeatedly recalled by Jan Patočka<sup>8</sup>, 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 stand out, the zone of non-being *in front of which* precise beings [...] can appear”<sup>9</sup>, if phenomenology is understood as the “study of the apparition of being to consciousness”, but even this reflection will be developed only by Patočka himself. 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 originally 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 existence<sup>10</sup>.

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 existence<sup>11</sup>.

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 but in his analyses reduces movement to its carnal dimension. By reducing movement to its physical

<sup>8</sup> J. Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, Chicago, Open Court, 1997, p. 26, 47.

<sup>9</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 139.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 91.

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 movement, it belongs to the body in motion. And my eye is a bodily eye. Only by thinking together the movement of the body toward the world and the movement of the world toward the look of this same body, do we avoid the risk of relegating the body in the place it occupies, thus compromising its phenomenalizing 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 toward 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 *phenomenalizing 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<sup>12</sup>.*

## **2. *The Courses at the Sorbonne (1949-1952) and the First Course at the Collège de France (1953)***

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 350.



As in *Phenomenology of Perception*, in his first course at the Sorbonne, *Psychologie et Pédagogie de l'enfant* (1949-1952), Merleau-Ponty calls “movement of transcendence” the act of the body that makes sense of the world. The actor’s body’s power to signify is revealed, then, as 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”<sup>13</sup>. This “movement of transcendence” characterizes human life: “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”<sup>14</sup>. 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 degraded. *Of all this analysis, we shall underline that the perception of others is the perception of a freedom which appears through via a situation*<sup>15</sup>.

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. This act of taking up, this act of the human dialectic *par excellence*, is nothing but the transformation of contingency into

<sup>13</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Psychologie et pédagogie de l'enfant. Cours de Sorbonne 1949-1952*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2001, 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”.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 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”.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 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*”.

meaning. In short, the movement that defines human life, the “movement of existence”, is the “movement of transcendence”.

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 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 works. Already 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.

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 being in the divergence, *être dans l'écart*.

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: “that unity is the one of a praxis”<sup>16</sup>. In other words, the unity of the body is experienced as praxis, and praxis is nothing but movement. Yet 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: “problem: relation of this praxis with knowledge”<sup>17</sup>.

The relationship between the body and the world must be described as a movement, as a dynamics. Consciousness must therefore be thought as the “unity of a project”, a project that

<sup>16</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression. Cours au Collège de France. Notes, 1953*, Genève, MetisPresses, 2011, p. 138: “cette unité est celle d'une praxis”.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 158: “problème: rapport de cette praxis avec connaissance”.

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, 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 world<sup>18</sup>. Briefly, 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 will later develop in this direction the reflections of Merleau-Ponty. Yet, in the course of 1953, he already recognizes 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.

One should then consider – what Merleau-Ponty could not do, except in the last working notes and in the “Preface” to *Signs* – the relationship between the body and the world 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.

Nevertheless, 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 clear how, eventually, 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.

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

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88-92.

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 world<sup>19</sup>.

### 3. *Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Last Working Notes (1958-1961), Jan Patočka, Renaud Barbaras*

In the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible* this movement from the inside to the outside and vice versa is the meaning of the term “dehiscence” in which Merleau-Ponty indicates the true sense of the “flesh”. The flesh is not the unity of the world, of me and the other, rather it is “dehiscence” and therefore lack of coincidence, not only between me, the world and others, but also within myself, for a sort of internal excess, the *échappement* of *Phenomenology of Perception*.

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 phenomenalizing movement; it follows that the subject is no longer conceived as motor intentionality, but as transcendence. According to Barbaras,

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 monde<sup>20</sup>.

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

<sup>19</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 66-67. Extract from “Indirect Languages and the Voices of Silence” (1952).

<sup>20</sup> R. Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène: sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, Grenoble, Millon, 1991, p. 58.

intentionality: it is a “subject of free volition”<sup>21</sup>. 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 has therefore 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”<sup>22</sup>. The current perception refers to the horizon of the possible: “this infinite distance, this absolute proximity”<sup>23</sup>, notes Merleau-Ponty. The body is here. The space is the world. The body is a tension directed to the outside, to the world.

But more often than not the idea of fusion or of coincidence serves as a substitute for these indications, which would call for a theory of the philosophical view or vision as a maximum of true proximity to a Being in dehiscence.... We should have to return to this idea of proximity through distance, of intuition as auscultation or palpation in depth, of a view which is a view of self, a torsion of self upon self, and which calls “coincidence” in question<sup>24</sup>.

*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<sup>25</sup>.

As Husserl himself points out, the drive for self-preservation (which characterizes life) is simultaneously the “drive for worldliness,” in the sense in which the “fulfillment” of “the driven intentionality of monads” is “directed towards the world”. Desire is fundamentally the desire for the world<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, Second Book*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, First Book*, The Hague, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983.

<sup>23</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 128.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de travail inédites, de 1958-1960*, [341] (10), p. 586-587.

<sup>26</sup> R. Barbaras, *Desire and Distance*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 113-114. E. Husserl “Manuscrit C16/40a et 36a, translated by A. Montavont. These references are taken from her thesis [...] *De la passivité chez Husserl* Paris: PUF, 1999”. (*Ibid.* p. 162).

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. In the same way, the subject “ is a certain lack of...”<sup>27</sup>. We are this lack, this gap, this movement by which proximity and distance become synonyms, and 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 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, as stated by Patočka: “mouvement originaire que nous sommes – mouvement vers le monde, puis, à travers le monde, de retour à nous-mêmes”<sup>28</sup>. And the way of this inroad, the way subject and the world meet, is through desire<sup>29</sup>. The world always presents itself as *something else*, so that human existence, as Barbaras points out, is entirely enclosed in the movement that unfolds in the empty space – or more precisely in the gap (*écart*) – between desire and distance. But as the space of desire is the distance, movement never finds rest, or, as claimed by Hobbes, “when a thing is in motion, it will eternally be in motion”<sup>30</sup>. 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<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 201.

<sup>28</sup> J. Patočka, *Papiers phénoménologiques*, Grenoble, Millon, 1995, p. 69.

<sup>29</sup> R. Barbaras, *Le tournant de l'expérience: recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty*, Paris, Vrin, 1998, p. 262-263: “le propre du désir est qu’il se trouve intensifié dans la mesure même où il est satisfait”; “le désir est absence de ce qui ne peut être présent [...]. Le désir est la figure concrète de l’absence, le lieu du monde où le monde se figure en son absence constitutive. Le désir est dès lors ce qui, au sein du monde, en permet la phénoménalisation [...]. Nous pourrions dire ici qu’il n’y a de monde que pour un être capable de désir et que, inversement, un tel être est nécessairement un être du monde car ce qui est visé dans ce désir est le tout du monde dont il fait partie”.

<sup>30</sup> Th. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London, Penguin, 1985, p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 229. Extract from “Man and Adversity” (1951).

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 writes “I am a body that rises up toward the world”<sup>32</sup>. The body rises up toward the world as *infinetisation* of desire. Or, as Patočka claims, human existence is “l’ouverture, l’infinetisation à travers la finitude”<sup>33</sup>.

Or, cela signifie que chaque *rêve* humain est réalisable. Mais *toutes* les réalisations humaines sont des réalisations de rêves. Les rêves sont le premier pas, la première illustration intuitive d’une intention originellement vide, d’une possibilité qui s’annonce sous les espèces d’un pur désir<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 78.

<sup>33</sup> J. Patočka, *Papiers phénoménologiques*, p. 113.

<sup>34</sup> J. Patočka, *Liberté et sacrifice. Ecrits politiques*, Grenoble, Millon, 1990, p. 228. Extract from “Les fondements spirituels de la vie contemporaine” (1969).

