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Abstract

Turning to the moment when phenomenology (Maurice Merleau-Ponty) meets process philosophy (Alfred North Whitehead), this article turns around three questions: (a) How does movement produce a body? (b) What kind of subject is introduced in the thought of Merleau-Ponty and how does this subject engage with or interfere with the activity here considered as ‘body’? (c) What happens when phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) meets process philosophy (Alfred North Whitehead)? and builds around three propositions (a) There is never a body as such: what we know are edgings and contourings, forces and intensities: a body is its movement (b) Movement is not to be reduced to displacement (c) A philosophy of the body never begins with the body: it *bodies*.

Keywords

body, movement, phenomenology, process philosophy, subject

Three questions, three propositions

This article turns around three questions:

- (a) How does movement produce a body?
- (b) What kind of subject is introduced in the thought of Merleau-Ponty and how does this subject engage with or interfere with the activity here considered as ‘body’?

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- (c) What happens when phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) meets process philosophy (Alfred North Whitehead)?

And it builds around three propositions:

- (a) There is never a body as such: what we know are edgings and contourings, forces and intensities: a body is its movement.
 (b) Movement is not to be reduced to displacement.
 (c) A philosophy of the body never begins with the body: it *bodies*.

In his late writings (at a time when he should still have had decades to develop his thought), Merleau-Ponty turns to Alfred North Whitehead. Over a period of a few years, he teaches Whitehead's work on nature and begins to explore how the concepts of process philosophy (a mode of thought that begins with process, and never with a 'subject' of a process, and which does not privilege the human but works instead from a perspective that decries what Whitehead calls the 'bifurcation of nature')¹ might provide insight into his phenomenological approach.²

Merleau-Ponty's turn to Whitehead puts into question many of the central postulates of phenomenology, most glaring of which is perhaps the relationship between consciousness and experience. This leads Merleau-Ponty to admit, in the notes that accompany *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968: 200), that what he calls the 'consciousness-object' distinction at the heart of his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1981b) has led him astray. The rethinking of experience brought forth from working with Whiteheadian concepts also challenges other key phenomenological starting points found in Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre – that there is a perceiving subject, for instance, that the feltness of the world edges into experience through the human, who remains central to the world's appearance, and that sensation is equal to experience.

For Whitehead, experience is a worlding that produces 'subjective forms' but is never pre-supposed by them. Consciousness is but the 'acme' of perception (and experience does not depend on it). Sensation is a secondary (albeit always intertwined and co-composing) phase of perception – or what he calls 'prehension' – which always begins not with a sensing subject, but with the force of a relational attunement (causal efficacy) based on the in-act of a singular set of

conditions from which, for some forms of life, a second phase, which he calls 'presentational immediacy', emerges (the experience of quality as it expresses itself in a field of sensation). Relation and sensation are co-composing in experience, participatory in the direct experience of a world in-forming. The subject does not precede this experience, it is in-formed by it.

In Whitehead there is never the primacy of the human for experience: perception is in the world and not of or for the world. Merleau-Ponty's turn to Whitehead arguably brings phenomenology to its limit, a limit that is more than human, and begins, in fascinating and hesitant moments of lucidity and contradiction (a few of which are explored below), to ask where phenomenology might go were it to abscond from some of its most central postulates. What would happen to phenomenology were it to really delve into process philosophy?

The force of process philosophy lies in its ability to create a field for experience that does not begin and end with the human subject. There is no subject 'of' experience, no consciousness outside of the event in its unfolding. Readers of Deleuze and Guattari will recognize these postulates, and Whitehead clearly plays a role here as well. For Whitehead, there is always a complex intertwining between *what is absolutely what it has become or is becoming* (an actual occasion) and *what is in the realm of potential* and can express itself, like Bergson's and Deleuze's virtual, only in its effects, in its contribution to the in-act of experience.

Movement, as Bergson has shown with his work on duration and time (where the experience of time as such is always a subtraction from a virtual duration, a subtraction that forever alters the tenor of the durational field it was culled from), is key to understanding the complex relationship between the actual and the virtual. There are always two co-composing streams of movement, one of them virtual but contributory, one of them actualized. Jose Gil (n.d.) calls the contributory – or durational – movement 'total movement'. Total movement is the field of movement-moving, the virtual force of movement as it traverses and insinuates itself into all actual displacements, into all form-takings and ecologies of life-living.³

A body never pre-exists its movement. Total movement courses through all incipient form-takings (the edging into itself of 'object', the shading into itself of 'figure'). What actualizes as this or that

displacement, this or that form, is but a brief instantiation of what that movement has become. Choreographers such as William Forsythe know this well: Forsythe speaks not of hitting a form ('do this figure') but of dancing the very force of movement-moving ('find the movement in the figure, and move with it'). He asks his dancers to *body*, not to 'represent' a body. From noun to verb, what movement does is make apparent that nothing is quite what it seems.

Beyond Me and Mine

That nothing is quite what it seems suggests a kind of wonder. A wonder not of a subject (not 'my' wonder) but a wondering *in movement* (a wonder that moves the me I am becoming).

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone writes:

To say that in improvising, I am in the process of creating the dance itself out of the possibilities which are mine at any moment of the dance, is to say that I am exploring the world in movement; that is, at the same time that I am moving, I am taking into account the world as it exists for me here and now. As one might wonder about the world in words, I am wondering the world directly, in movement; I am actively exploring its possibilities and what I perceive in the course of that wondering or exploration is enfolded in the very process of moving. (1981: 403)

In Sheets-Johnstone's account, the desire to parse out the 'me' and 'mine' of movement can still be heard despite the fact that she is trying to articulate a quality of moving that exceeds the planned 'taking-form' of a displacement externally prescribed, that she is seeking to conceptualize a 'without-me-ness' of a moving that 'wonders the world directly'. This me, my, mine is a habit, a turn of phrase that gives in to the linguistic progression, that, in so many languages, gives order to the sentence by making the subject the instigator of all action. If there is movement, it must be 'mine'. And yet, in this citation (a citation that is part of a work, we might add, that is, at the time it is written, still enmeshed within a Merleau-Pontyan phenomenological perspective that Sheets-Johnstone has since largely left behind), there is a strange turn to an elision of the very 'I' that frames it. The 'I' of 'I am wondering the world directly, in movement' is eclipsing itself into the directness of the encounter: in the wonder of improvisation, the 'I' is effectively left behind. It still stands, of course, in the

writing: 'I am actively exploring its possibilities and what I perceive in the course of that wondering or exploration is enfolded in the very process of moving', but less as a concept than as a place-holder. Sheets-Johnstone here has an insight that has not yet made its way into a reworking of a semantic structure, it seems to me. In the wondering, it is not 'I' but movement that is becoming the subject.

If this is the case, the force of the proposition reads differently: it is not 'I' who is in the process of creating a dance, but the dance itself that is in the process of creating 'me', a me that in its bodying will wonder the world directly. The *I* is in movement, active in a worlding, a taking-account of the world, co-composing with movement's inflexions, attuning to its tendencies to form. The wonder is of the event's capacity to create a bodying that is in excess of its-*self*, altering the very field of what 'I' might be.

This kind of wonder-ful movement-event is rarely ascertained as such – it is too quickly subsumed into the nextness of movement-moving. But even without the felt experience of wonder, wondering the world directly happens all the time, even in the most banal of everyday movements.

There is an infinite number of tendencies-to-form that populate any given movement-event. These tendencies-to-form are steeped in habit. Though in continuous modulation, they tend to tune movement to its attainment – this or that destination, this or that figure, this or that axis.

To tune movement to a destination, a figure, an axis of form, backgrounds the direct feltness of wonder that occurs in the eclipsing of the *I*. The key to exploring movement potential is not to deny these instances of return-to-form or goal orientedness but to become aware that all movings ultimately exceed what seems to be so firmly at movement's centre: me. Movement courses through the me that is in formation: experience, perception, feeling – all of these are movements, and each of them contributes, in an infinity of ways, to what 'I' will become in any given occasion.

Movement moves, and in the moving, in the actualization of experience, inclinations occur. But these inclinations are not yet bodies, not yet forms – they are inflexions, directional forces through which a certain knot of tendencies begin to tie themselves together. This knot is the bodying. It is not 'I' except in the sense of Individuation. It is what 'I' will have become in the absolute timeliness of this

singular iteration. In the individuating, in what Whitehead calls the concrescence of the actual occasion, what has individuated *is* absolutely what it is. But only fleetingly, coursed through as it is by the forces of its subsequent becomings. What emerges as form is therefore never a general subject, it is *the subject of the event*. Superject, as Whitehead would say.

And so we have two competing tendencies. On the one hand, in the experience of movement-moving's unmooring of the 'I', we have the ingression of total movement. Movement trembles with potential. On the other hand, we have a subtraction from potential eventness that reduces movement to this or that actual occasion. From immanence to the in-act: every event trembles with the pull of these limit-phases of experience. And in the act, what makes itself known, when it can be felt as such, is the trembling, the wonder of the absence of the pre-determining 'I' in the unfolding of the event, a wonder that cannot but ask: *where am I* in this turbulence of movement?

'Where am I?' touches on the ungraspable quality of movement-moving, reminding us that movement is always in the infinity of a crossroads between a *where* and a *how*, and never a *who*. Not me, not here, not there, *where*, in the middling of experience in-forming. Not 'who' but 'how' – not who the subject is but how it comes to experience (as event, as bodying). 'Where am I?' – an ontogenetic field of experience in the making.

In the ontogenetic field of experience, there is not yet a category of self, of body, of external perceiver. To wonder the world directly is to have touched, momentarily, the unmooring 'where' of movement-moving. 'Where am I?' – in the middle of an ecology of relations, dancing the dance that dances me. 'Where am I?' – flooded with remnants of technique, with signposts of form and expectation, moved by a movement that exceeds me.⁴ 'Where am I?' – transported by the force of movement-moving, carried by tendencies in the moving toward a reorientation of the field of expectation. Where? Dancing at the limit of what a body can do.

Wondering the world directly, in movement, is to participate in an enfolding that challenges the centrality of the I. It is not 'I' as self-enclosed subject who is creating movement, but movement itself that is in the process of recalibrating an 'I' that will eventually emerge, unmoored. Not '*I am wondering*' but '*Where does this movement wonder me?*' A body is never in advance of its moving.

Total Movement

Wonder is the limit-concept of this process of recalibration, the opportunity, in movement, to experience the more-than of movement's possibility: its infinite potential. To wonder the world directly is to experience being danced in the moving, to feel the composition of movement tuning to a topology of spacetime that affects, that tweaks the emergent bodying affectively. For wonder only surfaces in a field of exploration unmotivated by a pre-existent subject. Wonder as the force of having-been-moved felt in the present-passing, the force that recalibrates every starting point and every equilibrium, a force of exuberant disorientation. In wondering the world directly, the more-than of actual movement – what José Gil calls total movement – is touched, is felt. This more-than – the force of movement's virtual intensity – participates in the moving, opening movement to a quality that exceeds the form-taking of this or that displacement. Here, the movement dances beyond its technique toward what I have called its technicity – the force of its singular potential – the moving always active beyond the stability of its passing iteration. This force of movement-moving has a quality that is ineffable, a quality – an affective tonality in the moving – that touches movement's limit as force of form, shifting the dance to a momentary place of invention. Not the subject inventing, but movement inventing.

Movement invents in the beyond of possibility, if possibility is conceived as that which lies within the realm of the already-knowable or already-thinkable, where variations are always variations on the theme. Movement exceeds the theme, always out of reach of form-as-such. Total movement is how we might conceptualize the beyond of movement's possibility, the realm of its potential. It is the relational field of movement-moving, a virtual plane that makes ingression into this or that actual movement, but is never actualized as such. If we understand phenomenology as defined by Merleau-Ponty as 'a study of the appearance of being to consciousness' total movement can in no way belong to the register of the phenomenological (1981b: 61). It is felt, but cannot be reduced to being. It is sensed, but not within a consciousness-of that belongs to a subject external to the event.

Total movement, when felt at the edges of actual movement, takes the event into the register of wonder. The excitement of the 'wow' of

wonder may seem to bring a subject back to the event – ‘Was that really me!?’ – but this will never have been a phenomenological subject, for being never precedes the event. The subject through which the wonder is felt is always a Whiteheadian superject, the outcome of the ingathering force of the event.

To know a movement ‘as such’ is to have culled the movement from its process. Dancing the limit is unnerving and impossible to sustain – landing is always imminent. And so the experience of wonder is short-lived: form inevitably returns. Yet form is different each time, active as it is in the constellation of its emergence. The ‘thisness’ of the ‘here’ of form is a mirage. For movement has not stopped. What has stopped and taken form is but a subtraction from the total field of movement – a step, a shape, a figure always already on its way to something else. This is not to say that there is another more perfect, more aligned, more complex form somewhere else (hiding on some neutral stratum mistakenly taken to be that of ‘total movement’). This form, now, is all there is, and with the ingression of total movement into its edgings, both total and actual movement have mutated (each a limit of the other). Each coming-to-form is a recalibration of what was always only one field, an occasion in its disequibrated doubling. It is vital to *not* place total movement within a kind of transcendence, as though its plane were finally and always secured. Total movement is a quality of the more-than of movement-moving that accompanies all comings-to-form and that can only be felt in the coming-to-form that is movement’s actual occasion. Each emergent form tweaks the durational field of experience, tunes its total movement toward new ecologies, new potentials. Total movement is not to be had, not to be experienced as such. Its contribution is in the how of movement’s form-taking, and not its ‘what’. Total movement is why no form can ever be reproduced, and why no body can pre-exist the event of its bodying.

This paradox of movement – that there is no ultimate reproducibility, no complete and final form-taking, that we move infinitely but are never really there – is a challenge for thought, especially in light of the fact that it is movement that allows for the very form-takings it infinitely exceeds. This paradox is at the heart of Whitehead’s philosophy, and is its richness. To follow it through, the key is to give up the concept of metric time and consider time in all of the durational complexity Bergson proposes, keeping in mind, always, that any

event subtracted from the infinity of duration has an effect on this infinity, altering its course. This is never about creating two opposing realms, the finite and the infinite, the actual and the virtual, but about trying to make felt what their transversal attunements call forth.

In a late piece of Merleau-Ponty's entitled 'Everywhere and nowhere' (1964), he begins to address a notion similar to total movement. Merleau-Ponty writes:

The extraordinary harmony of external and internal is possible only through the mediation of a *positive infinite* or (since every restriction to a certain kind of infinity would be a seed of negation) an infinite infinite. It is in this positive infinite that the actual existence of things *partes extra partes* and extension as we think of it (which on the contrary is continuous and infinite) communicate or are joined together. If, at the center and so to speak in the kernel of Being, there is an infinite infinite, every partial being directly or indirectly presupposes it, and is in return really or eminently contained in it. (1964: 148–9)⁵

Lawrence Lawlor reads this passage in line with my sense that, in this period, Merleau-Ponty is seeking a vocabulary for experience that will take him out of the vicious circle of subjectivity,⁶ where consciousness continues to be orchestrated by a certain sense of subject-oriented intentionality. In the passage above, a shift seems to be taking place in Merleau-Ponty's thought that would open experience to its infinity without privileging a primordial starting point. The infinite infinite does not begin or end – like total movement, it makes ingression, attuning not to containment but to its excess. Wonder.

The Force of Movement-moving

The force of movement-moving can be felt in the ingression of total movement into the actual. There is in all movement, everyday or virtuoso, a more-than that exceeds its actualization. Gil speaks of this more-than in terms of equilibriums, suggesting that each balance is a multiplicity – there is no single axis of the body, no single point of stasis. What there is instead is what Simondon calls metastability – precarious equilibrium. Every apparent balance is in fact composed not only of an infinite number of micromovements, movements so minute they are largely imperceptible, but also virtual movements – intervals, intensities, forces. Neither can be thought without the other – a micromovement is not simply a smaller movement. It is the vibrational force

within actual movement that agitates within every displacement, within every figure or form. It is what makes movement multiple and complexly active.

Virtual movement is also a vibrational force but it operates within the realm of movement-moving. Virtual movement has a quality of coursing through rather than acting-on. Yet these two limits of the same field of movement – the actual and the virtual – are very hard to distinguish. Take the example of dancer's pose in yoga. Here a complex equilibrium is at stake: torso reaching forward and up, one leg grounded, the other held by a hand such that the extended leg curves toward the forward leaning head. The standing leg twitches with micromovements even when it looks still – thousands of rebalancings are continuously taking place to keep the figure from falling out of itself, seeking a metastability in the stilling (the stopping of the movement is always the falling out of it – the balance must remain in movement to be held). The role of micromovements are clear, but what of virtual movements? Everyone who has ever encountered this pose will admit that thinking is dangerous. What is this 'thinking' that destabilizes if not a virtual force? This virtual force of thinking can work in more than one way. If the thinking is externalized – as in a 'thinking-about' – the tendency will be to fall out of the pose. This will have happened because the micromovements recalibrating the balance and the virtual movements intensifying it will become increasingly out of sync. 'Thinking-about' will lead to a certain stopping of the balancing-in-movement, a taking-movement-outside-itself which will result in the loss of this particular balance. On the other hand, a thinking-with (that will likely feel like a non-thinking) will lead to a merging of the virtual movements and the micromovements such that the balancing will feel as though its work is being done on its own, without me. This is because such a thinking-with is absorbed in the work of the micromoving: it tunes to the micromovements, as though thinking from within. A thinking-about, on the other hand, tends to attend to an 'outside' of the momentary balancing, thereby destabilizing what is already precarious.

Movement moves with movements of thought, with the witness of movement-thinking-itself. Here, thought and movement have become one. This is what Gil means when he writes of '*conscience du corps*' or awareness. Micromovements and virtual movements always co-compose to create the complexity we call balance, where

every equilibrium, every passage or posture is already multiple, metastable, actual and virtual, even when it seems at its most still.

The metastability of equilibrium is how a bodying takes shape, always slightly out of balance, precarious. *This* singular form-taking is but a phase in the wider realm of movement-moving: it is its capacity to dephase that makes it movement. This precarious balancing, this bodying in disequilibrium is also a relational movement. It cannot be thought outside of its implicit co-tuning with the associated milieu – the relational field or interval – of its emergence. Bodyings emerge in the activity of intervals – these thousand tiny balances, these thousand incipient preaccelerations. It is *thought in the moving* that holds these intervals together. Thought as a relational witness of movement-moving, thought as that which activates the complex constellations of the virtual and the actual co-combining in the moving. Relational movement is always a movement of thought, and each movement of thought is the generating of an in-act of movement-moving.

When relational movement is felt, whether on the sidewalk or within a dance performance, what is foregrounded is an affective attunement that exceeds the movers as such. The emergent field of movement-moving in its multiple metastability is momentarily directly perceived. Wondering the world directly. There is here a quality of body-moreness (not bodylessness), a bodying in motion that expresses itself with a quality, perhaps, of effortlessness, effortless because it is not the subject, not the pre-formed body doing the moving, but the relational field itself that moves. The movement-moving is activating an environmentality that resonates with everything in its path. This is what Suzanne Langer (1953) means when she speaks of virtual powers, or dance forces.

José Gil touches on this relational field in his exploration of how a movement in disequilibrium is achieved in the dancing. He writes:

Equilibrium is not mechanical, physical, but ‘virtual.’ It is the virtual body that dances (Suzanne Langer), not the body of flesh and muscle. Or rather: the body of flesh actualizes the virtual in the dancing, it incarnates it and dematerializes it at the same time. (n.d.)⁷

But, as Gil warns, this is not to:

make a separation between two systems, that of the body and that of the spirit. . . . The balance of the dancer is virtual not because it derives

from an action of consciousness on the body, as the effect of a physical cause, but because this action belongs to the presence of the body in the very moment that it manifests. The actualisation of the virtual is an act. (n.d.)

The manifestation, the in-act of movement-moving, is always in excess of the taking-form of this or that displacement. The form is but an afterthought, the physical demonstration of a certain stilling. To actualize the virtual in the dancing is to create an encounter with potential that, while passing through form, never stops there. This encounter with the ‘where’ of form’s disappearance allows something else to appear. This something else is the metastability of movement-moving: the vibratory point where movement’s excess and its deterioration into form are co-composing.

The dancer’s movement has transformed the body into a resonant system . . . such that the infinite has become actual . . . and this, thanks to the effect of infinite amplification obtained in the resonance of all movement in a system of unstable equilibrium. (Gil, n.d.)

A mobile axis emerges between movements that no longer expects or seeks a center. The resonant field of relational movement is itself on the move, creating a multiplicity of balances in the making. The field of dance has opened to the more-than of its physical iteration. There are not two dancers, but two+i, where i stands for interval, individuation and the infinite infinite.

Where Phenomenology goes Wrong

In his late notebooks, Merleau-Ponty writes: ‘The problems posed in the *Phenomenology of Perception* are insoluble because I start there from the “consciousness”–“object” distinction’ (1968: 200).

As mentioned above, it is in his course on nature (1956–8) that Merleau-Ponty most consistently outlines Alfred North Whitehead’s thought. Here, as in the final notebooks for *The Visible and the Invisible*, there is a sense that, had Merleau-Ponty lived, Whitehead might have played a central role in his philosophy, shifting Merleau-Ponty’s work from the focus on primordial lived experience,⁸ to the question of the act in its relation to an infinite infinite.

To recapitulate: akin to total movement, the infinite infinite cannot be known as such, but is felt in its effects as a relational or

contributory force. Total movement is a way of bringing the concept of movement to the plane of immanence to make felt, as in the concept of the infinite infinite, that there is a continual folding into and out of immanence (by subtraction) into actualization. The actual occasion – that which is absolutely what it is, *this* step, *this* form-taking – is never completely divested of this potential of the infinite infinite. Its edgings into form remain attuned to it, always, and this is what makes the act ultimately processual. For while *this* form will always have been *this* form, and every other form-taking will always have been *that* form, the in-act will always have been momentary, and will always already have folded into the immanent field of the nexus of experience, from which new form-takings, new bodyings will emerge.

In a thinking that takes its point of departure from the $2+i$, there cannot be a subject or object pre-formed. Both must be immanent to the unfolding of the act. Merleau-Ponty gestures to this in his course on nature of 1956–7. He writes, '[t]he object is the abbreviated way of marking the fact that there has been a set of relations', suggesting, following Whitehead, that the object is never a thing in-itself (1964: 158, my translation). An object is a constellation of relations. An object shades into itself in-act. If an object is always in-act, it follows that the same would hold for a subject, that both would be emergent *in the event*. This is indeed Whitehead's argument: 'An occasion is a subject in respect to its special activity concerning an object; and anything is an object in respect to its special activity within a subject' (Whitehead, 1967: 176).

Taking Merleau-Ponty at his word is to read into his late writings the necessity to abolish the framework that conflates immanence with transcendence, that relies on a (transcendental) subject for the constitution of experience. But how can one proceed to exceed the bounds of the finite, of the subject–object dichotomy, while holding on to a thought of consciousness as that which precedes experience and constitutes it? How can the in-act become the force of composition when consciousness remains 'intentionality without acts', where 'Being, is the "locus" where the "modes of consciousness" are inscribed as structurings of Being . . . and structurings of Being are modes of consciousness . . . ?' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 158, 292).

In Whitehead's thought, consciousness is backgrounded in lieu of fields of contrast – that, for instance, between appearance and reality,

where appearance is the casting forth or prehension of certain points of emphasis and reality is the wider field of experience, unprehended as such, or, in some cases, ‘negatively prehended’.⁹ The question of the act for Whitehead can never be reduced to the question of consciousness. ‘Consciousness presupposes experience, and not experience consciousness. . . . Thus an actual entity may, or may not be conscious of some part of its experience’ (1978: 53). Consciousness works subtractively ‘as the feeling of negation’ (1978: 161). To have consciousness in the event is to experience a foregrounding of certain attunements and tendencies. Consciousness is never of the whole: ‘conscious perception is . . . the most primitive form of judgment’ (Whitehead, 1978: 162).

José Gil takes a slightly different path from that of Whitehead. In a similar effort to take the subject out of consciousness and move away from a phenomenological ‘consciousness-of’ (a cognitive consciousness), he opts, as mentioned above, for a non-conscious notion of body awareness – a thinking in the moving, which he calls ‘*conscience du corps*’ (consciousness of the body) and translates into English as ‘awareness’. For Gil, complex movement questions such as that of equilibrium necessitate a certain notion of awareness, a *consciousness-with*. Following Steve Paxton, who speaks of a consciousness that travels to the interior of the body, Gil suggests that there is an ‘unconscious consciousness’ that characterizes the experience of movement. He speaks of a ‘body penetrated with consciousness’, referring not to an external consciousness (a form of judgement) but to an infra-consciousness *in* the movement.

Body-consciousness, as Gil defines it, depends on ‘a complete osmosis between consciousness and body’ (n.d.). Such an osmosis cannot be held infinitely: it appears in spurts of intensity, in pain, for instance, or in the magnificent and sometimes terrifying choreography of bicycles moving at rush hour in Amsterdam. In such instances, Gil suggests, there is no longer a sense of a body-object or an external view on the body (a ‘body-image’).¹⁰ This felt awareness *in the moving* provoked by the osmosis of consciousness and body leads instead to an amplification of the relational field of experience through which a co-composing bodying emerges.

In this account, as body and awareness become one, there is a complex imbrication of what Whitehead calls ‘non-sensuous’ perception with actual perception. By using the term ‘non-sensuous’, Whitehead

is gesturing toward the field of experience that exceeds sense-presentation. In a non-sensuous perception, what is perceived emerges not from the sense-presentation of the present environment (as in 'this' touch, or 'this' vision) but through an overlapping of pastnesses into presentings that are already anticipating the immediate future – a direct perception of time out of sync. With non-sensuous perception comes the feeling, in the movement, that the past and present are coagulating into an experience of an already-felt 'in-act'. This is key to Whitehead's process philosophy as it is a mode in which pastness can become contributory to the present in-act, not as the past that was, but as a dimension of the present it will have become. Non-sensuous perception is one of the ways in which the field of immanence (or the nexus of experience) actively contributes to the present-forming. This does not happen at the level of sense-presentation because it occurs before a bodying that could sense. It occurs in the *infra* of bodying that precedes the event's form-taking. Sense-presentation is another phase altogether, a meta-process that already depends on a certain securing of the in-act. It is important to distinguish feeling, sense-presentation and sensation here. Feeling, for Whitehead, always precedes sense-presentation – sense-presentation is of the bodying while feeling is of the potential for bodying (and sensation is their *entre-deux*). Non-sensuous perception is full of feeling.

Every movement in-act is imbued with pastnesses – every step is composed of the millions of steps that preceded it, and yet every step is also uniquely itself. What Gil is gesturing toward with his concept of consciousness-with is this very overlap of pastnesses in the presenting coming to act as this or that thinking-feeling in motion. This thinking-feeling in motion is a consciousness-with of time turning on itself. Here, the *field* of movement becomes conscious of movement potential, and in the consciousness of it, the body composes itself for this or that coming movement – remembering the future, in the moving. 'The body fills awareness with its plasticity and continuity. Thus a certain kind of consciousness is formed . . .' (n.d.). Consciousness is here with-body, not 'of' body, in the relational field of movement-moving (thinking with, in the moving).

Gil's concept of consciousness-with or awareness is not phenomenological. 'How to define it?' Gil asks. 'Well, in a way completely different from phenomenological consciousness. . . . Never has

phenomenology considered the consciousness of the body outside of intentionality' (n.d.). Consciousness in Gil is co-emergent with experience in the thinking-feeling. It is expressive in a register always in excess of the expressed.¹¹ It is force before it is form, microperception, tendency, opportunity, *felt as such*, 'wondering the world directly, in movement'.

This consciousness-with is a kind of porous awareness, open, multiplying, dispersed. It is expressive in the edgings-into-experience of forms.

The consciousness of the dancer disseminates itself in the body, disperses, multiplies in the innumerable internal and external points of contemplation; and, at the same time, partially destroys itself as clear consciousness of an object, letting itself be transported in the current of movement. (n.d.)

Consciousness invades the becoming-body, tunes it, attunes to it, even as the becoming-body invades awareness. Body-worlding.

The Perpetual Moving Present

The movement which I actually create at any moment is not a thing which I do, an action which I take, but a passing moment within a dynamic process, a process which I cannot divide into beginnings and endings. There is an ambiguity about my moving, a dissolution of my movements into my perpetually moving present and a dilation of my perpetually moving present in my movements. (Sheets-Johnstone, 1981: 405)

Note the shift here in Sheets-Johnstone's thinking. Both quotes (the earlier one about wondering the world directly and this one about the dynamic process of moving that exceeds the subject) are from the same piece of writing. In the course of the composition, a writing-strategy has presented itself, and has managed to begin to curb the habit of placing the subject first, of situating the subject as outside the activity of its bodying.

José Gil's concept of awareness or consciousness-with similarly takes us out of the first-person tendency. This is, in large part, what Gil is writing toward. Not 'I' am aware, but *the event of movement* is aware. Movement as dynamic form out of which certain bodying

tendencies take shape. An affective tonality before a form, a velocity, an intensity, an elasticity, before the representation of this jumping/turning/sliding/falling form.

The dynamic form of movement-moving is never perceived as such. What is perceived are the ways in which the attunements resolve. Into *this* intensity of spiralling, into *this* feeling of connection to the mobile ground. Dynamic bodying in motion.

We no longer consider the body as a ‘phenomenon,’ a concrete perception, visible, evolving in objective Cartesian space, but as a body-metaphenomenon, visible and virtual at once, cluster of forces and transformer of space and time, transmitter of signs and trans-semiotic, with an interior at once organic and ready to dissolve in its rise to the surface. (Gil, n.d.)

In the metastability of a bodying dynamic what comes to form is not a phenomenal body but a tending, an attuning, an affecting that moves with the world and is co-constitutive of it. ‘A paradoxical body’ (n.d.).

‘The body’ is paradoxical precisely because it has never existed as such. It comes to form, it breeds figures, but it never ‘is’. Body is always a verb, an activity of bodying, a becoming-active of the paradoxical tendings – the disequilibriums, the multiple balances – that incite it to co-compose, dynamically, relationally, with the world. What we have come to know as ‘body’ is felt, as wonderful paradox, but only in the moving, and what is felt is not its exteriority or its external image but the witness, the in-actness of the event coursing through it. Body is event. Dancing event.

Where Phenomenology meets Process Philosophy

Merleau-Ponty writes:

It is not we who perceive, it is the thing that perceives itself over there, – it is not we who speak, but the truth that speaks at the heart of speech – Becoming nature of man that is the becoming man of nature – The world is a field, and as such always open. (1968: 185)

Perception happens. The same thinker for whom perception seemed allied to an original notion of consciousness suggests that perception fields.¹² This is the tension in Merleau-Ponty’s late work,

that perception seems to oscillate between a notion of prehension – a pulling into emergent eventness of a constellation of tendencies – and a notion of perception as that which is tied to a certain presupposition of subjectivity or situatedness. To move further in a Whiteheadian direction would have meant, as has already been suggested, to give up on ideas of consciousness as Merleau-Ponty defines it, to move beyond ideas of primordiality as regards experience and to ally himself with a less humanist, more ontogenetic theory of perception, one, especially, that does not require a pre-existing perceiving subject or placeholder for the subject. Referring explicitly to the citation above, this would have meant breaking the symmetry of ‘man becoming nature and nature becoming man’, shifting from the humanizing of nature to another model altogether where it is the field of relation that is the subject of the event. There are many entries in Merleau-Ponty’s late notebooks that suggest that such a turn is imminent. Here is one example:

‘the point of view of the object’ and the ‘point of view of the subject’, a common winding (*serpentelement*), being as a winding (what I called ‘modulation of the being in the world’). It is necessary to make understood how that (or any Gestalt) is a perception ‘in the making, in things’. (1968: 194, translation modified)

I see this tendency also in his comments on colour, where colour at times corresponds quite closely to Whitehead’s notion of the eternal object (which, paradoxically, is more infinite infinite than eternal and is definitely not an object), defined as the relational and contributory force in the actual occasion of a certain quality that adds a certain singular yet infinite ‘thisness’ to the event.

The in-act of Whitehead’s philosophy is monadic only to the extent that an actual occasion in its culmination will always be exactly what it has become. Once an occasion reaches its ‘subjective form’ it will never be other than what it is. A word said will always have been said, a flower’s turning toward the sun will always have been that particular turning. But combined with this atomicity comes the notion of eternal objects, which can be thought as haecceities that make ingress into occasions, giving them their relational and qualitative force. An eternal object is ‘pure potential’ that contributes ‘to the definiteness of that actual entity’ (Whitehead, 1978: 23). ‘So far as concerns their functionings as objects, this is the great distinction between an actual entity and an eternal object. The one is stubborn

matter of fact; and the other never loses its “accent” of potentiality’ (Whitehead, 1978: 239).

Merleau-Ponty speaks of ‘the being-rose of the rose, the being-society of the society, the being-history of history’. This, he explains, ‘is not society, the rose seen by a subject, it is not a being for itself of society and of the rose . . . it is the roseness extending itself throughout the rose’ (1968: 174). Merleau-Ponty touches here on a quality of experience which exceeds the object’s phenomenality and refutes the position of the perceiver-subject. The *roseness*, the *societyness* is a quality that courses across the event, exceeding the occasion as circumscribed. The *bodyness* of the body(ing) – just outside the grasp of phenomenology, and yet alive at the edge of thought proposed by the very system it exceeds.

Eternal objects are of the infinite infinite, or total movement. They are the quality through which relation is felt: they are what connects the fields of immanence and actualization. For each movement, there is a movement-quality, as ‘eternal object’, which is immanent to its form-taking. This immanent quality tunes the movement to the singularity of its singular taking form, its *lightness*, its *groundedness*. The more complex the movement’s affective tonality, the more intricate its relational web.

Beyond Consciousness into the Interval

The relational web of movement is activated through the interval, or what Gilbert Simondon calls the associated milieu. The associated milieu is not to be understood as the between of an already-framed set. The associated milieu is the intensive webbing of all comings-to-form. It is intensively between, intensively more-than, and intensively contributory. The associated milieu as interval is the quality of relation that activates the *entre-deux*, for instance, of the step and the ground that gives to the stepping a sense that a third is being created in the moving that is neither specifically of the earth nor of the body, but a kind of earthing in the bodying. It is the force that provokes the individuation of movement-quality. Think again of the sidewalk and see-feel the movement of the crowd. Note that there is more than one velocity, more than one horizontality, more than one verticality. Attune to the complex choreography of the relational movement and note how it is *not* that bodies are cognitively organizing themselves

in a kind of consensual movement, but that in fact intervals are continuously opening up for the moving. These intervals are not created out of the blue: they are created by the complexity of a movement already under way. Movement, in the shape of intervals, creates the potential for a moving-with. It is with these intervals that crowd-movement moves. A hole here, a swerve there, a turning, a tuning, a twisting, an elastic stepping. Not me moving into a hole, but the hole moving the relational movement to which I connect. A dance of intervals for the collective bodying in movement – collective individuation, Simondon might say.

Movement begins in the Interval . . . But the Interval is already there, as a virtual power, in all movements of the body. (Gil, n.d.)

The interval is perpetual more-than equilibrium, infinity of the between, $2+i$. Out of kilter, in becoming. The interval is an active field, a multiplicity of movement potential to which bodyings tune. It is here that the dance of total movement occurs, not simply in the dancer's limbs, her flesh, her muscles. The interval populates her moving such that there is a continuous recalibration of relational movement. It is through this relational movement that bodyings take shape, and here, in the 'where' a body will never quite reach, that movement overtakes the mover. The interval, with-bodying but not of a body pre-formed. Interval: a relational tool for co-composition with infinity.

Multiple equilibriums are active in the relational interval. The interval makes ingress into the movement-event as the dynamism that colours, that tunes the movement this or that way. The interval captures the force of the potential of movement's relay into form (and into form's excess), bringing the bodying into singular balancings.

This balancing in the bodying reminds us that there is no beginning or end to movement. Total movement is always at work in the tunings through which this or that displacement unfolds. A body is a movement out of balance.

Beyond Gestalt

The virtual field of movement is the plane of immanence. Its tension or intensity = 0; but in it are engendered the strongest intensities. In it

thought and the body are dissolved one into the other ('thought' and 'the body' as empirical givens); it is the field of the heterogenesis of danced movement. (Gil, n.d.)

A body is never less than the world that co-composes it. It appears, perhaps, as a kind of Gestalt, but it always exceeds the sum of its parts. A body is always infinitely more than one.

Gestalt is the closest Merleau-Ponty comes to defining the body as a field of relations. 'My body is a Gestalt and it is co-present in every Gestalt' (1968: 207). Yet the question, here as elsewhere, is whether Merleau-Ponty is willing to conceive of experience in itself, with a body(ing) that is not honed or pre-inscribed by a notion of consciousness that requires an a-priori concept of intentionality. Is Gestalt capable, as a concept for the bodying, of creating an absolute difference in the Deleuzian sense, a difference that refutes analogy, resemblance, identity or opposition, 'a heterogeneity between ground and grounded, between condition and conditioned'? (Lawlor, 1998: 16).

The body in movement is never a being-for-itself. It is infinitely more-than even the force of form it can take. Merleau-Ponty seems to sense this: 'Show that since the Gestalt arises from polymorphism, this situates us entirely outside the philosophy of subject and object' (1968: 207). A cognitive consciousness will never be the tool to demonstrate this. The body cannot be cognitively conscious and moving as one – this is why Gil works with the notion of a consciousness-with (a thinking in movement) and not a consciousness-of.

Lawlor writes: 'The challenge of immanence states that there is no two world ontology, that being is said in only one way, that essence does not lie outside of appearance; in short, the challenge of immanence eliminates transcendence: God is dead' (1998: 15). Deleuze's critique of phenomenology is that it cannot think immanence.

Beginning with Descartes, and then with Kant and Husserl, the cogito makes it possible to treat the plane of immanence as a field of consciousness. Immanence is supposed to be immanent to a pure consciousness, to a thinking subject. . . . Transcendence enters as soon as movement of the infinite is stopped. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 46–7)

A strong concept of immanence is necessary to an understanding of total movement. Gil writes: 'the dance gives itself directly, in the very action of dancing, its own plane of immanence. To dance is to

flow in immanence' (n.d.). Immanence here opens the way for a thinking in the bodying that does not return to a consciousness-of, that does not fall into a transcendence.

To flow in immanence, in the dancing, is to oscillate in a continuous between of the finite and the infinite infinite. In a Whiteheadian vocabulary, the plane of immanence might be conceived as the nexus of actual occasions – a virtual field that contributes to experience in the making but can never be known as such. This is also the field of eternal objects – never felt, of course, except as quality in their ingression into the actual. There is no knowledge of the nexus as such: it is not directly experienced, except perhaps in wonder. The nexus is always and only contributory. It is this very potential for contribution that makes actuality so rich and complex.

How does this contributory quality become actual? This is a technical question. Each actual occasion is a limiting of the field of potential. This limiting occurs through an active process of subtraction. Each subtraction is a matter of technique. The in-act of a shading into form of an object is a technique for the seeing (useful for driving). And the in-act of a reshading into force of the very same 'object' is also a technique for seeing (useful for painting). However the subtraction tweaks, it will always have produced a singularity: just this, or just that. A movement that tunes toward a stomping will have grounded in just this way, and it will also have verticalized in just this way, embodying a technique, perhaps, for earthing, for sounding, for falling.

Movement is the vibratory force that creates a relay between planes, between the fields of the virtual and the actual. It is one of the ways in which the immanent can be felt. What is in-act, in movement, always carries the seeds of the virtual – it dances immanence. But it does so not in a phenomenological sense. It does so in the excess of the sensorimotor, in the field of forces, of amodal sensations and affective tonalities that exceed any pre-supposed starting point, be it a subject, an object, a consciousness-of.

Movement transports the actual into the quasi-chaos of its more-than, always exceeding simple location, touching the excess of actualization with a bodying that can never be quite contained.

In fact, the plane of movement constructs immanence by transforming all conscious sense (expressive, representational etc.) into movement that emerges at the surface of bodies; and it changes the unconscious

sense into a virtual movement of communication and osmosis between unconsciousnesses – we should speak here of ‘unconsciousnesses of the body’. (Gil, n.d.)

Unconsciousnesses of the body traverse, move, creating awareness in the bodying that evolves into forces taking form that themselves evolve into balancings in the bodying. Unconsciousnesses not as outside the knowing, or outside the thinking-feeling, but as the affective resonance of the more-than of this or that bodying.

It is no longer possible to clearly distinguish between a body and its movement. The virtual field of movement is everywhere palpable – we wonder at the dance dancing us.

Wonder

Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains. (Whitehead, 1978: 232)

Notes

1. On the bifurcation of nature, Whitehead writes:

What I am essentially protesting against is the bifurcation of nature into two systems of reality, which, in so far as they are real, are real in different senses. One reality would be the entities such as electrons which are the study of speculative physics. This would be the reality which is there for knowledge; although on this theory it is never known. For what is known is the other sort of reality, which is the byplay of the mind. Thus there would be two natures, one is the conjecture and the other is the dream. [This leads to a] bifurcation of nature into two divisions, into the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of awareness. . . . Causal nature is the influence on the mind which is the cause of the effluence of apparent nature from the mind. . . . The bifurcation theory is an attempt to exhibit natural science as an investigation of the cause of the fact of knowledge. . . . The whole notion is partly based on the implicit assumption that the mind can only know that which it has itself produced and retains in some sense within itself, though it requires an exterior reason both as originating and as determining the character of its activity. . . . [I]n considering knowledge we should wipe out all these spatial metaphors, such as ‘within the mind’ and ‘without the mind’ . . . (1920: 30–32)

2. This writing can be accessed both in Merleau-Ponty’s courses on Nature (1956–8; see Merleau-Ponty, 1981a) and in the notes for *The*

Visible and the Invisible (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), which was left uncompleted.

3. For a more detailed account of total movement see Manning, *Always More than One: Individuation's Dance* (2013).
4. In *Always More than One* (Manning, 2013), I explore how technicity outdoes technique, leaving within the movement the remains of a practice rather than its form.
5. It is noteworthy that even here, where Merleau-Ponty touches on the concept of the infinite infinite, there remains a strong resistance to letting go of the idea of a harmony of the external/internal. A true encounter with the infinity of a plane of immanence requires a commitment to heterogeneity that must always exceed any notion of the schism between inside/outside.
6. Lawrence Lawlor writes, quoting Merleau-Ponty:

No matter how hard one tries to reinterpret *The Phenomenology of Perception*, one cannot do away with the fact that subjectivity is at the center: 'Things and instants link up with one another to form a world only across that ambiguous being known as subjectivity.' (Lawlor, 1998: 28, quoting Merleau-Ponty, 1981b: 384/333)

And yet, after quoting the passage mentioned above, Lawlor writes:

A positive infinite, conceived without the seed of negation, is a pure plane of immanence. An infinite infinite expresses itself without end; there is no interruption of its movement. Therefore transcendence cannot enter and limit it, establish another world, an Other, a second meaning of Being. (Lawlor, 1998: 29)

Another reading, by Rudolf Bernet, complexifies the notion of subjectivity throughout Merleau-Ponty's writings:

If *Phenomenology of Perception* reveals a common flesh of the world, things and body, it still tries to understand this within the horizon of bodily subjectivity. This is why the philosophy of nature leads to a naturalization of the perceiving subject that, in its turn, goes hand in hand with a subjectivization of nature. However, this philosophy of nature, surmounting the opposition between nature and subject, and providing a genealogy of the subject, also gives birth to a new conception of the subject as well as of nature. Arising out of things within a common world and affirming its identity through its difference from things, the human subject is at once itself and another, one and manifold, present and absent, visible and invisible. Within the universal intersubjectivity or 'intercorporeity' of the world, the subject is that singularity by which the world is articulated as an open system of diacritical differences. (1993: 67)

The altering of infinity's course occurs always in the contributory realm of the virtual actualizing. There is no 'form' of duration, no 'content' to immanence. Another way to conceive this is to turn to Simondon's (2005) concept of transduction. Every dephasing of individuation, Simondon writes, induces a transduction, and each transduction entails a change in process. It is important to understand this quality of difference beyond the register of a simple cause and effect. What is being altered here is the tenor of a process beyond any pre-constituted idea of outcome.

7. All quotations are my translations from Gil (n.d.).
8. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write:

Phenomenology wanted to renew our concepts by giving us perceptions and affections that would make us give birth to the world, not as babies or hominids but as beings, by right, whose proto-opinions would be the foundations of this world. But we do not fight against perceptual and affective clichés if we do not fight against the machine that produces them. By invoking primordial lived-experience, by turning immanence into an immanence to a subject, phenomenology could not prevent the subject from forming no more than opinions that would already draw the cliché from new perceptions and promised affections. (1994: 149–150)

9. Whitehead speaks of consciousness as the 'acme' of experience, refusing to privilege conscious experience (this is not a humanist philosophy, as is Merleau-Ponty's). On negative prehension, Whitehead writes:

The process through which a feeling passes in constituting itself also records itself in the subjective form of the integral feeling. The negative prehensions have their own subjective forms which they contribute to the process. A feeling bears on itself the scars of its birth; it recollects as a subjective emotion its struggle for existence; it retains the impress of what it might have been, but is not. It is for this reason that what an actual entity has avoided as a datum for feeling may yet be an important part of its equipment. The actual cannot be reduced to mere matter of fact in divorce from the potential. (1978: 226–7)

10. Gil goes on to say that this 'externality' of body perception is itself always filled with holes, even in the most ordinary 'regime of awareness'. In José Gil, *Le Mouvement Total* (unpublished; quotes in the text are my translation from the French; published in Portuguese, *Movimento Total – O Corpo e a Dança*, 2001).
11. In *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Deleuze writes: 'The paradox is that at once "the expressed" does not exist outside of the expression and yet bears no resemblance to it, but is essentially related to what expresses itself as distinct from the expression itself' (1990: 333).

12. The fielding of perception here remains embedded in a subjectivization of nature. This continues to be Merleau-Ponty's tendency, even in the late writings: to trap himself in his own chiasms. See also note 4 and Rudolf Bernet's (1993) comment on nature.

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