

Papers III: SPATIALITY AND MOTILITY

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„Le promeneur dans le jardin”: a phenomenological description of spatial experience

One of the issues tackled by phenomenology, beginning with Husserl's, is that of the perception of spatial objects, and the role of one's own body (“Leib”, “corps propre”) in constituting that perception. Husserl's theory of the lived-body and the body's motility in perceiving the life-world was further developed by Merleau-Ponty who considered the body as a body-subject, always-already-in-the-world, source of a pre-conscious practical knowledge. The body, through its actions, is directed-toward-the-world: it is thus the motility (the ability for movement) of the body-subject, the „I can” that forms the primordial consciousness-toward, the primordial intentionality. Similar thoughts had been already developed earlier by thinkers such as Erwin Straus. He analysed the different modes of being-in-the-world, such as the spatio-temporal modes of „here” and „there”, whose structures are defined by the bodily projects opened to the body-subject by the „I can”.

In the present paper, I will look at „designed space” such as a garden, not as a backdrop for our perception of spatial objects, but as a spatial object of its own kind, whose experience can be described following the phenomenological framework outlined above. Through the changes or continuity in specific sensory experiences that occur as we move through space, combined with distant views and memory of what we have already seen, we experience the garden as a succession of units combined into structured wholes. The garden invites motion through its spatial form, by offering the possibility for heightened experiences of ‘here’ – views, objects, spaces seen on axis - and ‘there’ – views and objects in a distance, that we feel we can reach. But more subtly, the garden can accompany the transition from the fulfillment of being ‘here’ to the desire of going ‘there’ and enrich through such transitions our motion itself.

The present paper seeks thus to explore how the composed space of a garden – here specifically the garden of Versailles – makes use of these primordial modes of relating-to-the-world, structured by the bodily intentionality available to human motility, to allow the visitor to build through time a differentiated and meaningful aesthetic experience of the space of the garden.

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The way we move - expressivity and interaction

The way we move – expressivity and interaction The paper investigates the relation between expressions and interpersonal understanding. How do we share expressive space and what is it that we share? If we consider expressions as action readiness, then, the paper claims, we must be moving in a field of shared signs of possible interaction. In three steps the paper argues that expressivity is inherent to embodiment (1), which makes interpersonal interaction dependent on expressivity (2), since, otherwise action would not be understandable and interaction would be impossible (3). The idea is to underline human expressivity as an anthropological key to intersubjectivity. Expressions are not only natural and non-communicating, as when we yawn, and they are not solely cultural phenomena either, as when we put the hand in front of the mouth while yawning. On a structural level expressivity points to the way our movements connect us in patterns of intelligibility.

When we are asked, how we are aware of our bodies and what, then, we are aware of, our answers, according to Raymond W. Gibbs Jr., point towards the interplay between experiences of worldly engagement, corporality and interpersonal meaning: all of these aspects are pointed at, when we use the notion of embodiment. Following Gibbs the body as experienced engagement, is experienced in its vitality and in its activity; as experienced corporality the body appears as object and as instrument, and as interpersonal meaning the body is experienced as appearance and as an expression of self. What this means, is not only that the notion of the embodiment is important in a variety of fields because of its subjective, interpersonally shared, cultural, physical and mental aspects, but also that the way we experience our bodies holds a certain key to the investigation of all these fields.

The paper investigates the relation between expressions and interpersonal understanding in the attempt to get hold of what part expressions play when we interact and understand each other. Two questions will be guiding the paper: how do we share expressive space and what is it that we share? The first question we will consider by investigating the expressive body and the second by looking role of the other expressive bodies.

If we grant that expressions are states of action readiness, as Nico Fridja claims, we will be led to a notion of expressive space. If further we find it that the body is characterized as a double bound self relation, where we are aware of both biologically having and culturally being a body, expressivity is already inherent to embodiment, in the sense that the self relation is the reason why we are expressive, as the German philosopher Helmuth Plessner held it. There is a non-conceivability for us to our own bodies and an unawareness of its all time

presence as Bernhard Waldenfels describes it, and these insights hold a key to our understanding of expressivity. The way we depend on the expressivity of others, when we understand each other is crucial to answering the second question: What we share in expressive space is a not yet verbal field of interpersonal meaning, and without this field prior to any language, we could not understand actions.

At the end of the paper I will spell out the relation between the “I move” and the “I express” of embodiment as a concluding remark to the former two questions, whereby I will distinguish a watered down conception of movement as being globally expressive from a fundamental understanding of expressive subjectivity, which is realized and carried out as a relation.

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Choreographing Resistances: Kinaesthetic Intelligence and Bodily Knowledge as Political Tools in Activist Work

Bodies have been used as a powerful political tool in activist work. They have been used as instruments or objects in campaigns where bodies are placed in the front of bulldozers, chained to trees, and marched down the main streets of the cities. These demonstrations and performances are called here as resisting choreographies and choreographing resistances (Foster 2003). They can be spontaneous gestures or carefully organized media campaigns. Resisting choreographies can be directed for or against various things: human rights, world peace, nuclear power, trade unions, foxhunting, G8, or global warming.

By introducing a few of resisting choreographies during the last two decades, I reflect on the power of gestures. Why was a single gesture deadly for a male clerk in the 1989 Chinese student movement? Why does group crawling on the main street in Helsinki arouse a lot of emotions in passers-by in 2007? Media and IT play a central role in organizing these events, for instance, in Greenpeace’s carefully designed shrewd choreographies.

The resistance, reflexivity and reflectivity of gestures are leitmotifs in this paper. Instead of focusing on the body’s physical force or symbolic meanings in these demonstrations (Sharp 1973), I reflect on the body’s fragility and vulnerability. Drawing on the phenomenology of the body (Sheets-Johnstone 1999; Gallagher 2005), theories of choreography, performing studies and political science, I suggest that social choreographers have kinaesthetic intelligence and bodily knowledge of reigning over public spaces by gestures and movements during these events. Resisting choreographies are essentially dialectic usually

dangerous to its performers because of their stunning, amusing, irritating or infuriating acts.

The paper suggests contrary to Lakoff and Johnson (1999) that morality does not easily emerge from and addresses itself to our embodied experience. It requires public events in which performers interrogate the embodied limits of the morality of the society by receiving spontaneous responds of spectators and authorities. The paper also wants to show that the core element of kinesthetic intelligence (Gardner 1983) is not only control of one's bodily motion, but a sense of kinaesthetic fields (Husserl 1973) in which we are involved.