

Papers II: MOTION AND SURROUNDINGS

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On movement and stillness

My point of departure in this paper is Henri Bergson's essay *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, where he opposes the living as that which is constantly changing to the mechanical as that which fails to adapt or that which keeps repeating itself. The living body is then something like perfect liveness or pliability, constantly moving and adapting to its surroundings, and moreover: the living seems to be that which is constantly on the alert, always prepared to take one way rather than the other. In contrast to this, the mechanical within the living is that which lags behind, that which falls out of the movement, or simply that which does not fit. The comic is precisely the revelation of this mechanical component within the living, a disruption in the otherwise beautifully moving body: suddenly someone trips and falls on his behind, and the body reveals itself in all its clumsiness. Bergson thus opposes the principle of life - vitality - to that which is weight and resistance, something which nevertheless seems to be a part of the living body. How can one explain that the living comes to life only in the body, in short, that all living creatures are bodily? Is this material body only the other side of life, something which life must pass through? Or is this body part of life itself?

My paper then moves on to Sartre's description of desire and flesh in the third part of *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre opposes the active and the passive body in a way very similar to Bergson; for example he describes his view of a person walking from behind: what he sees is not only the active movement that the legs are making but also certain "involuntary waddlings of the rump". The rump is then "like an isolated cushion which is carried by the legs and the balancing of which is a pure obedience to the laws of weight." In Sartre's description, human being is characterized as that which is constantly on the move, trying to become something else or someone else. Movement gives human being her justification: in the movement nothing "falls behind" but everything is oriented towards the goal that you want to achieve, and everything that you are, is justified because of this goal. How then, should one treat the waddling rump? Is it to be thought of as a pure thing, having nothing to do with movement and life?

Finally I will find in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy a possibility to think life, not as movement per se, but as the play between these two principles - movement and stillness, awareness and oblivion, lightness and weight. According to Merleau-Ponty, the immobile is not to be thought of as foreign to movement, but to that

which stays still. In the same way I argue that movement might in fact be made possible through a coming to terms with that which is not moving.

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Perception and self-movement

Perception and self-movement What is the relation between the self-movement and perception? Self-movement is no doubt important in an instrumental manner; perception is a means to action and action a means to perception. In the present paper I will argue for a much stronger relation, when I explore the question from the perspective of how perception places us in proper contact with mind-independent objects and properties belonging to such. The idea that will be defended is that self-movement is a necessary and constitutive condition for a subject having a conception of objectivity and thus for perceiving objects and properties as existing unperceived.

This claim will be developed through a critical discussion of G. Strawson's thought-experiment with so-called Weather Watchers; "creatures who are constitutively incapable of behaviour or any motion whatsoever" (Mental Reality, OUP, 1994: 251). The argument I will present will be based on the idea that inert perceivers like Weather Watchers are incapable of having proper spatial concepts, as it will be argued that to possess such concepts one must either be an active embodied and self-moving subject or spatial concepts must be wholly innate. The latter position will be briefly discussed and denied, and to establish the first it will be argued that inert perceivers will lack an egocentric space where spatial concepts find their meaning, and moreover, that the alternative of having spatial concepts only linked to an allocentric space is incoherent, as the very idea of an allocentric frame of reference only can be meaningful in relation to an egocentric frame of reference.

Exploring the possibility of imaginable subjects like inert perceivers will in turn help us to discuss a series of important questions on the relation between self-movement and perception, of which I will end by briefly discussing if one in working on questions like this must take into account contingent facts about human or human-like perception with the sense-modalities such creatures have, or if one can operate on the abstract level of imaginable creatures.

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The kinaesthesia of exile and home: an example from canadian immigrant literature

This paper is the first in a new project on movement and immigration literature. It builds on and expands my doctoral dissertation “The Constitution of Movement in Rudy Wiebe’s fiction: A Phenomenological Study of Three Mennonite Novels” (Ph. D diss., Stockholm University, 2006).

My doctoral thesis investigated movement as a phenomenon of constituting directedness in the Canadian writer Rudy Wiebe’s work, with a particular focus on movements of migration, violence and regeneration, but also on narrative movement and focalization. The novels studied—*Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), *The Blue Mountains of China* (1970), and *Sweeter Than All the World* (2001)—display a peculiarly kinetic-kinaesthetic focus in their vocabulary choice and narrative structure, which is also strengthened by the historical backdrop of the Mennonite people, as described in the novels. The Mennonite movement originates in the Anabaptist branch of the Protestant Reformation. This religious movement, born in the religious experience of regeneration, was soon doubled into being also a physical movement of migration, exile and persecution, that over the following centuries took the group from Central Europe to Poland, Russia and China, North and South America.

One part of the thesis initiates an examination of the complex sense of home expressed in the novels. There is a homesickness that comes to expression in the novels, which grows interesting with the strongly religious and reclusive Mennonites, since it concerns both the geographical places left during centuries of migration and exile, and the theological place, i.e. the eschatological home—the true and only home, which is always “over there,” with God. Both these longings come out in the singing of *Heimatleeda*, the songs of home. *Heimatleeda* as a phenomenon will be further investigated in this paper. Since the songs and the continual wandering/exile of the Mennonites’ coincide, there is a sense where for these people wandering is home as movement and movement as home. In an eschatological sense, even the kinetics of moving away in exile has the kinaesthetic quality of home.

In the paper, as in the thesis, I will continue to explore these phenomena using the phenomenological insights of both Edmund Husserl and Maxine Sheets Johnstone. Husserl’s conceptualization of phenomenological directedness (e.g. in *Time and Space*) and Sheets Johnstone’s development of that into the concept of kinaesthesia (*The Primacy of Movement*) will be of particular importance for the discussion.