

that T-P considers as an archetype of
relation to the world in all its varied
In the chapter "The Entertwining -
Daniela Vallega-Neu describes the flesh of
body as "the coiling over of the vis
the seeing body, of the tangible up
standing body ..." (VI 191 [146]) The
the body is experienced when in per
the perceiver finds himself emerging
coiling on himself) from the perception
of things in their sensible qualities
calls this coming-to-himself of the
movement of temporalizing and
thus, the flesh of the body names
ontological dimension of the body
emerges in and out of the entwining
things, and subsequently the body
a determinate dimension of being
being perceived.

The
Bodily Dimension
in Thinking

The flesh of the world, as T-P con
a working note of 1860 ("Flesh of t
Flesh of the body - Being"), also has
temporal, and dynamic determin
As this note suggests, in its tempo

The Bodily Dimension in Thinking

SUNY series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy

Denis J. Schmidt, editor

The Bodily Dimension
in Thinking



Daniela Vallega-Neu

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For Alejandro

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*Für den Schaffenden gilt immer noch, was für Dante galt:
Der Körper . . . ist für ihn die Seele.
(Rilke über Rodin's Zeichnungen)*

For the one who creates still holds what was true for Dante:
The body . . . is for him the soul.
(Rilke on Rodin's drawings)



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Preface



During my studies in Freiburg I found myself saying to a friend that if there is one thing I could say about truth this was that it hits its target (“Wahrheit trifft”). What I had in mind when I was saying this was not a concept or an idea of truth but a certain corporeal experience that goes along with thinking when an event or thought exhibits a certain creative and transformative power. Of course, this corporeal experience is not always the same, but it marks a site for thought that I have been seeking and enjoying since my first early and tentative attempts in the field of philosophy. What does not pass through that site remains for me on a philosophical level unintelligible and uninteresting. This experience of a corporeal site of thinking is what guides the explorations of this book.

The project for this book arose during my last year in Freiburg (1995) and since then I have worked on it in many places (Freiburg and Jena in Germany, Travedona and Città di Castello in Italy, State College and Turlock in the United States). I first presented this project for the application to a post-doctoral fellowship from the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD) in order to work with Charles Scott and John Sallis at Penn State University and was granted this fellowship for the academic year 1997–1998. I thank Charles Scott and John Sallis, whose work since then has been a precious source of inspiration for me, for their continuous support and comments on my work. I presented some of the chapters of this book at conferences in various places (University of Jena, *Collegium Phaenomenologicum* in Città di Castello, Heidegger Conference of America, Western Phenomenology Conference) and I am grateful for the feedback I received from various colleagues and friends on these occasions. Susan Schoenbohm helped me especially with

the initial chapters of the book, and I also thank Omar Rivera for reading the whole manuscript and for making editorial corrections and thoughtful comments that helped me strengthen many ideas. Further I am grateful to James Risser and to Linda Neu for their continuous support. In particular, I thank Alejandro A. Vallega who was always there for me as an engaging interlocutor, thoughtful reader, and supporting companion.

Travedona, August 14, 2004

Introduction



Since its Greek beginnings, Western philosophy has been characterized in its most proper activity as thinking reflecting on itself, and this self-reflection has been characterized as a move away from the body. It appears that body and thinking acquire their proper determinations in their distinction and opposition. Certainly, the philosophers of our tradition are well aware that this move away from the body is not a real separation, since all reflection we perform as living beings inevitably remains tied to the body, but nevertheless many from them still conceive thinking as an activity that is radically different from the body and its life. More recently, following Nietzsche, many attempts have been made to articulate the activity of thinking not in distinction or opposition to the body but as itself “bodily.” But even Nietzsche contended that the moment we think the body, this body becomes an object of thought that is never able to adequately represent the lived body prior to its categorization in thought. Since traditional determinations of the body arise precisely in their distinction to thinking and concepts of thought, the question arises whether this move away from the body is an inevitable consequence of reflexive thought, and whether it is at all possible to think the body reflexively without objectifying it. My claim is that this is possible, but in order to do this we may have to abandon certain preconceptions of what the body is and of how thinking occurs. One way to question and undermine the traditional mind-body dualism is to discover and articulate how thinking itself is a bodily event. When attempting to explore the bodily aspect of thought, as it is revealed to us in reflexive thought, we first need to question what we mean here by “body.” Thus, one main question of this book is: *How are we to think the “body” that we find at play in our own thought?*

This question already implies a certain access to whatever is designated here as “body.” The body in question is not taken as a posited thing, as an object of scientific inquiry at which I can look from a distance. Rather it is found or discovered

in a reflective experience. Such reflective experience must not necessarily be of philosophical nature. Different forms of reflective experiences of the body are for instance required in the performing arts (dancing, acting) and in various forms of meditation. Similarly to how a dancer as she dances remains conscious of the movements of her body in such a way that this body is not objectified, in philosophical inquiries thinking may remain alert to the bodily movements that are at play *as* this thinking occurs. The difficulty here is to find a form of reflection as well as a language that do not simply objectify the occurrences that they address.

To question reflexively the body through which or in which our thoughts take shape implies that the body in question is not already there for thought but first comes to be for thought in thought—that is, performatively. In attuned and attentive awareness of what we may come to call “bodily” movements in thinking, body emerges as an occurrence and dimension that characterizes and shapes the very thought in which it emerges. This implies that the emerging of the body does not resolve in a full presence of a body-thing that becomes an object of thought. Rather, body emerges opaquely in its coming to pass as a temporal dimension that carries innumerable concrete and singular articulations of thought. Thus, what allows us to thematize the bodily dimension in thought is the attention to the emergence of thought as a bodily event. This addresses a second main question of this book that concerns the arising of thought and that complements the previous question: *How do we come to think the “body” that we find at play in our own thought?*

When we attempt to stay alert to the bodily aspects or qualities that we experience in the emergence of our thoughts we do not find a “body-object” that is already there. At first, what we may experience are movements, desires, resistances, directionalities, shapes, and images; occurrences that Descartes attributes to what he calls the thinking substance precisely in opposition to the body conceived as an extended substance. This may raise the question whether we can properly speak of a “body” when we attempt to describe the sensations, desires, resistances, and movements at play in the enactment of thought. Is a body not by definition a thing, an object of thought, and like every object of thought the result of a complicated process we call thinking? Have we not been trained too well by our tradition to understand bodies in opposition to conscious thought as this mute impenetrable mass of organs, tissues, bones, and skin? Would we not be misled by continuing to speak of body when referring to this sensible dimension of thought? “Why not speak of ‘physicality,’ or ‘sensibility,’ or ‘flesh?’” a friend once asked me. I have thought about this question since and about why I am not ready to abandon this word, “body,” all together.

I am aware that when I look reflexively for the body that I find at play in the enactment of thought, strictly speaking, I do not find a thing. What I find

are occurrences, motions, densities, which in fact leads me to speak not of “the body” in thought but rather of the “bodily dimension” in thought or the way in which thought “occurs bodily.” In some instances I may also speak of the physicality of thought, or of its sensibility, or, with Merleau-Ponty, of its flesh. I believe that the advantage of staying with word forms related to “body” is that, in doing so, we may have a sense of a temporal and spatial concreteness and singularity that I do not find in the same way in the word “physicality.” Further, the word physicality, to my ear, carries more scientific connotations and with these a sense of objectivity that would hinder my explorations of bodily being and thinking. Had I written this book in German, I would have used the term “*Leib*,”¹ which in phenomenology has come to designate the lived body, and not the term “*Körper*,” which designates any body-object in a larger sense; that is, living and inanimate “bodies” that we perceive in outer perception and that as such become objects of scientific inquiry. In speaking of the body, I am concerned with the lived body (*Leib*) that we *are* and that reveals itself in a strange intimacy, as we remain alert to its motions in thinking.

This does not mean that I simply question the body subjectively and not objectively. Such a reading would not only be an oversimplification but it would also be misleading. As I will show, the exploration of the bodily quality of thinking leads to a “desubjectivation” of thought with respect to the Western tradition, in that it points to the physical interweaving of thinking and other bodies and physical events. Once we focus on how bodies play in thought we can no longer understand thinking simply as the activity of a subject, nor can we understand thinking as an activity that is somehow opposed to a world and objects it thinks. The bodily dimension in thought points to how thinking is *of* the world, said with Merleau-Ponty’s words, it points to how thinking shares the flesh of the world, and to how its texture is woven into histories that reach farther than our “subjectivity” and our conscious memories.² This is why I prefer not to speak of the bodily dimension *of* thought, which would suggest that the bodily dimension in question belongs primarily to thinking. In opposition to this, I believe that thinking belongs to this bodily dimension that reaches beyond what we may come to name as “ourselves” and that shapes the very ways in which we come to understand ourselves. The following of the trace of the body in our thought reveals the strangers we are to ourselves, but may also lead to a new understanding of how we come to be who we are in relation to the world we live in.

This book is composed of a series of studies of philosophical texts, in which I explore how Plato, Nietzsche, Scheler, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Foucault think of bodies, and how in the way they think of bodies possibilities are opened to conceive bodies beyond what these philosophers explicitly think. When reading these philosophers I look for both, how they think bodies and how a bodily

dimension is at play in their thinking; that is, I look for how determinations of a “body” or “bodies” arise in their thought, and how the enactment of their thought is itself “bodily.” This requires that, in reading their texts, the reader stay attuned and alert to the movements and articulations of their thoughts by sharing a strange intimacy with the texts as these unfold in the reading. It is in this attentiveness to *how* the thoughts of the philosophers take shape in their texts that I find determinations of bodily events that may not find explicit articulation in these texts. This reading does not lead to one uniform way of understanding bodies and the bodily dimension in thought. Rather, the presented readings proliferate the ways we understand bodies at the same time that we come to see how bodies take place in articulations of differences that shape the way we are and the way we think. Thus the exploration of the bodily dimension in thinking opens the way to an understanding of bodies not simply as things in space and in time but rather as dimensions through which and in which space and time find articulations always anew in quite singular ways. Ultimately this leads to the possibility of an ontology of bodily being for which this book may present a series of preliminary studies.

The first part of this book explores body and thinking at the limit of metaphysics. The second part explores two phenomenological accounts of the body. The third part explores different ways to think bodies beyond subjectivity. The three parts mark a trajectory from the limits of classical metaphysics to those of phenomenology, and from these to those of an ontology of bodily being. More specifically, the first part discusses the limits of the history of Platonism, with the arising and collapsing of a mind-body dualism in Plato and Nietzsche. The second part explores the bodily dimension in thinking in two phenomenological approaches that, in different ways, lie at the limit of a Husserlian phenomenology: Scheler’s phenomenology broaches classical ontology, whereas Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology broaches a postclassical ontology of the flesh. The third part explores the bodily dimension in thinking at the limits of articulations of the singularities of bodies beyond subjectivity: Heidegger opens possibilities to think the singularities of bodies by breaking through subjectivity from within traditional Western philosophy, whereas Foucault breaks through subjectivity at the limit of philosophy through historical analyses of practices and institutions. In each of the philosophers discussed in the three parts we will find different ways of articulating bodies, as well as quite singular forms of bodily thinking.

In a reading of Plato’s *Timaeus* (part 1, chapter 1) I will trace the differing between thinking and body that sets an essential stage for the history of metaphysics and the determinations of body and thinking that follows it. The discussion questions how the distinction between a realm of the intelli-

ble and of the sensible comes to be in and for thinking and traces this distinction back to *legein*, a term I understand to indicate a bodily activity of differencing and gathering that at its source withdraws from conceptualization. The second chapter comprises a reading of Nietzsche and shows how in his work the difference between body and thinking within metaphysics reaches its limit and how Nietzsche “twists free” from Platonism. In this chapter I argue that Nietzsche remains largely imprisoned in a post-Kantian epistemology that seals the realm of consciousness off from the possibility of conceiving anything outside of consciousness. To speak of body and thereby reveal the truth of the body is impossible for Nietzsche, since, when I think of body, the body is already an object of consciousness and thus never reveals what it could truly be “in itself” prior to becoming an object of thought. However, I will also argue that Nietzsche does break through this “prison” of consciousness and opens a bodily dimension of thought in the *performativity* of his thought; that is, in exposing performatively how thought happens “bodily.”

The second part of this book considers how, after the post-Kantian closure of consciousness on itself, phenomenology reopens possibilities to rethink and articulate the body and the bodily dimension in thought. In chapter 3, after considering in a brief introduction phenomenology’s possibilities for thinking bodies, I look at the more traditional position of Max Scheler, who maintains explicitly a distinction between spirit (*Geist*) and what he calls the “vital sphere” (*Vitalsphäre*), a position that in many ways points back to Plato. The chapter shows how Scheler avoids a simple objectification of the body when he conceives it as an “analyzer” that determines whether and how one perceives something. I will also argue that his late thought of the “powerlessness of the spirit” not only leads to an overcoming of the dualism between mind and body, but that it also puts into question the separate principles Scheler claims for life and spirit. Yet, even if Scheler thinks the mutual penetration of life and spirit, for him the issue of this mutual penetration is the enlivening of spirit and not the return of thinking to its bodily origins. The latter is the project of Merleau-Ponty’s thought, which I consider in chapter 4. In this chapter I focus primarily on Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* as well as on his last working notes. I begin my reading of Merleau-Ponty with a problematization of his attempt to articulate “brute being” (*être brut*) in the light of traditional reflexive thought. In this context I further develop the idea of a kind of reflection I call “awareness,” which, instead of already objectifying the occurrences that come to our awareness, goes along with them. Then I follow Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh from the archetype of reflection in the relation between body and things to an articulation of thought as recoiling flesh, and finally to an exploration of the gap at the center of the chiasm between flesh of the body and flesh