THE PHILOSOPHY OF BODY: INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND TEMPORALITY

Dalia Marija Stančienė
Klaipėda University, Lithuania

The body is our general medium for having a world.
(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 169)

Abstract
On the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of body, the article analyses the intersubjective life-world and the time experienced by a body. The consciousness and duality of a body are revealed: a body simultaneously experiences the other and itself. The article discusses a unity of a physical body and an incarnate consciousness, which reveals itself in certain lifelike situation at each point in time, a sensual perception of which each time provides new knowledge and further opens up the world. The article shows that Merleau-Ponty brought a revolution of sensual perception in philosophy. He revealed that sensual perception consisted of various processes of consciousness associated with memory, imagination, feelings and other areas. It is assumed that the reason of the origin of time is the interaction of a subject with things. Analysis of time is a possibility to access to a concrete structure of subjectivity that represents a subject. Time has a transitional nature of movement through the difference between the past and the future in the present.

KEY WORDS: philosophy of body, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, lifeworld, intersubjectivity, temporality.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15181/atee.v1i0.1321

Introduction

The theme of the body is being examined by various scientific disciplines, such as architecture, geometry, geology, medicine, etc., and it is also popular in various arts, such as photography, sculpture, performance art, dance, etc. Natural science investigates physical characteristics of the body: mass, size, speed and other parameters. In terms of medicine, the issue of a human body and its contact with the environment is relevant.

Philosophy became interested in the body in ancient times and a wide range of interpretations were offered in each historical period. In ancient times the body was perceived as an object with a tangible form, and the idea of the body was treated as part of the immaterial world. Such a dualistic concept was applied to the analysis of a human phenomenon that consists of body and soul.

Psychology distinguishes between the human ego (the set of internal experiences) and the body that belongs to the outside world. Phenomenology analyses the relationship between I and the other or one’s own and a stranger. Thus the body of a human being is perceived in various ways since scientists, doctors, anthropologists, artists and representatives of other professions show interest in it.

In the New Age a dualistic concept of a human being was established by a French philosopher, mathematician and physicist René Descartes (1596-1650) who set a framework for modern subjectivism. He distinguished between two kinds of substances: tangible (corporeal) and intangible (thinking). The substances are described pursuant to the main character of each, which were identified by Descartes as: “extension in length, breadth, and depth, constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought the nature of thinking substance.” (Descartes, 1901, p. 321). According to Descartes, these two substances are in a human being.

Describing himself as a thing that thinks “I am a substance also, although I conceive that I am a thing that thinks and not one that is extended” (Descartes, 1911, p. 16, [Med. III]), Descartes proposes a substantial unity of body and soul of a human being while perceiving himself as “a being composed of mind and body” (Descartes, 1911, p. 29. [Med. VII]). A substantial unity of body and soul of a human being does not mean that the body and soul of a human being are the same, because, according to Descartes, his soul, which is the basis of himself, “is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it” (Descartes, 1911, p. 27. [Med. VI]). Thus thinking, which, according to Descartes, is the essence of the soul, establishes the priority of the entity in the cognitive process and gives it precedence over the body.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) also expressed his views on the subject. In 1938, he presented a cycle of lectures The Age of the World Picture to the society of Freiburg and evaluated Descartes’ approach arguing that “With the interpretation of man as subiectum, Descartes created the metaphysical presupposition for future anthropology of every kind and tendency” (Heidegger, 2002, p. 75).
A slightly different interpretation of the issue of body and soul was suggested by Vasily Sesemann (1884-1963), a philosopher who moved to Lithuania in 1923 and took a position as professor at the University of Lithuania in Kaunas (since 1940 in Vilnius University). In 1933, in the article “Time, Culture, and Body”, he wrote that “the spirit subordinates the body overpowering it by the body itself, and only with the discipline of the body can it control its own potencies” (Sesemann, 1997, p. 602). As Lithuanian philosopher Dalius Jonkus (born in 1965) points out, “He [V. Sesemann – D. M. S] perceived the cultivation of the body as an integral part of a philosophical practice.” (Jonkus, 2015, p. 39).

There are different opinions concerning Descartes’ anthropology. The dualistic approach of Descartes provoked criticism from Martin Buber (1878-1965), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and others. Lithuanian philosopher Arūnas Sverdiolas (born in 1949) notes that “Merleau-Ponty tries to overcome the paradoxical Descartes’ dualism in every way and demonstrate that consciousness is a spirit that is independent of the body and is not offhandedly housed in the body, and the one which is essentially incarnated is incarnate and corporeal consciousness.” (Sverdiolas, 2005, p. 9).

The article focuses on Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body, because he opened up completely new areas of the existence of the body.

**The object of research:** expression of the philosophy of body.

**The purpose of the research:** to reveal insights of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body and open new areas of the existence of the body.

**The methods of the research:** comparative analysis of philosophical literature, interpretation and phenomenological reflection.

**A human body in a lifeworld**

Merleau-Ponty investigates a human body from the phenomenological perspective, i.e., the body is in a lifeworld: “The body’s animation is not the assemblage or juxtaposition of its parts. Nor is it a question of a mind or spirit coming down from somewhere else into an automaton; this would still suppose that the body itself is without an inside and without a “self”. There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place – when the spark is lit between sensing and sensible, lighting the fire that will not stop burning until some accident of the body will undo what no accident would have sufficed to do...” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 163-164). From the point of view of Merleau-Ponty, a living body belongs to the world and is a certain source of it.

Having noted the works on a lifeworld by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Merleau-Ponty concludes that the existence, i.e., the way of presence of being in the world, is determined not by consciousness, but by human “corps propre”. “Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 159-160). In this case being is treated as a specific, live and corporeal consciousness or, in other words, incarnate and not thinking consciousness. By means of phenomenology Merleau-Ponty demonstrates the incarnation of consciousness, i.e., reveals the consciousness of the body.

He defines the essence of consciousness as the existence of Ego, and the world as something the life of Ego is based on and not as something that is being thought of the world. The world is not exhaustive, therefore Ego does not have it at its disposal, but communicates with it. According to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that “consciousness itself as a project of the world, meant for a world which it neither embraces nor possesses, but towards which it is perpetually directed—and the world as this pre-objective individual whose imperious unity decrees what knowledge shall take as its goal” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. xx).

Thus a living body, a unity of a physical body and an incarnate consciousness, reveals itself in certain lifelike situation at each point in time, a sensual perception of which each time provides new knowledge and further opens up the world. However, according to Merleau-Ponty, being part of the world and wanting to perceive it, we have to suspend ourselves, weaken the intentional threads so that the world would unfold to us as strange and paradoxical.

According to Lithuanian ethnologist Giedrė Šmitienė (born in 1973), Merleau-Ponty brought a revolution of sensual perception in philosophy and revealed that “sensual perception is affected by an incarnate consciousness or conscious body and that sensual perception is a synthesis inseparable from memory, imagination and many other processes of consciousness” (Šmitienė, 2014, p. 18). Relating sensual perception with the investigation of the world, Merleau-Ponty argues that “Looking for the world’s essence is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse; it
is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xvii). Unique world for every normal human being is “antepredicatively self-evident” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 149).

**Intersubjective relationship**

According to Merleau-Ponty, a living body allows one to get to know the intersubjective relationship: “my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 412). In this way, a living body is an instrument of communication that helps us not only to know the nature and bodies, but also to get the opportunity to meet and interact with others.

A human being is a body which is involved in the relationship with other bodies and as a result of these relationships a human being can make use of his body and become aware of not only natural, but also social environment as “a permanent field or dimension of existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 412).

A connection with the social world, according to Merleau-Ponty, is closer than any express perception or any judgement, just as with the natural world. Merleau-Ponty suggests looking at the social world form the perspective of existence, since “we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 412).

In a primordial way a living body masters sociability that exists before any cognition and only then performs the act of communication and discovers the world around it. Merleau-Ponty maintains that my body is a “meaningful core which behaves like a general function, and which nevertheless exists, and is susceptible to disease. In it we learn to know that union of essence and existence which we shall find again in perception generally.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 170). In this way, a traditional separation of a subject and an object is abandoned by acknowledging that the intersubjective relationship unfolds in the environment of various realities in which separate things of the world disappear, as a human being and the world are the members of one body: “it is the same world that contains our bodies and our minds, provided that we understand by world not only the sum of things that fall or could fall under our eyes, but also the locus of their compossibility” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 13).

Regarding the human communication and its process, Merleau-Ponty discerns the ability of people to articulate the world. For example, when listening to music we feel certain experiences associated with music, i.e., the thing itself gives us a way into the world of the other. Such a contact with the other includes the relationship both with oneself and the world and covers a wide range of experience: time, imagination, space, the other, feelings, patterns of behaviour, etc.

Communication with the world is continuously ongoing, because the world is alive and the things within it constantly reveal themselves with a new desire of existence by including a thinking Ego into the event of life. Merleau-Ponty notes that this relationship obviously reveals itself in the painting works. Analysing the painting works of Cézanne, he emphasized that as regards the painter, “the world no longer stands before him through representation; rather, it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible. Ultimately the painting relates to nothing at all among experienced things unless it is first of all “autofigurative”. It is a spectacle of something only by being a “spectacle of nothing”, by breaking the “skin of things” to show how the things become things, how the world becomes world.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 312).

In the art of painting the representation of things through the play of forms transforms a common understanding of the thing by giving it a deep sense and signifies the surrounding environment in a new way. Merleau-Ponty’s vision of artwork was a way “for being absent from myself, for being present at the fission of Being from the inside – the fission at whose termination, and not before, I come back to myself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 317). Artwork as well as things of the nature exist in the visible, disclose a primordial expression of the reality and teach us how to see the true and deep beauty of the universe.

Nature admiration presupposes not only the articulation of the world, but also actions in conjunction with the other, during which a human body experiences itself and the other in a primordial way. By way of example, Merleau-Ponty points to his and the other’s admiration in a green meadow: “Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognize in my green his green.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 142). In this case, as Merleau-Ponty points out, there is no problem of alter ego, since the seeing of greenness anonymously includes both observers, and its spreader, which is here and now, radiates greenness all the time. In this way, a non-corporeal being of the greenness is experienced.
Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that in this case, together with the visible and the tangible we face up “a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 143). Thus the intersubjective relationship includes the action of touch. While touching not only the data are being received, but also the duality of the body is experienced: the body becomes something that experiences things and something that is being experienced. Merleau-Ponty describes such a body that generates the exchange of information between something that is being experienced and something that experiences things as a dynamic and transitive body intentionally directed towards the other.

Lithuanian phenomenologist Dalius Jonkus (born in 1965) points out that Merleau-Ponty does not put visuality and tactility against each other and reveals that “visuality, albeit indirectly, is localised in corporeality and experienced as an inter-corporeal relation” (Jonkus, 2009, p. 210). Such a concept of a dual body of Merleau-Ponty reveals polycentricity of the world.

**Body and time**

In the polycentric field thanks to consciousness a body unfolds in time that measures our being. According to Merleau-Ponty, time makes sense to us “because we are at the past, present and future. It is literally the tenor [sens] of our life, and, like the world, is accessible only to the person who has his place within it, and who follows its direction” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 500). Time helps to understand the presence of an object and a subject, as two abstract modi, in the integral structure called presence. Merleau-Ponty argues that a perception of being in the time dimension allows one to get to know the relationship between a subject and the world, because it develops through time-subject and time-object. Analysis of time is a possibility to access to a concrete structure of subjectivity that represents a subject.

Merleau-Ponty discovers an intimate relation between subjectivity and time: “To analyse time is not to follow out the consequences of a pre-established conception of subjectivity, it is to gain access, through time, to its concrete structure. If we succeed in understanding the subject, it will not be in its pure form, but by seeking it at the intersection of its dimensions. We need, therefore, to consider time itself, and it is by following through its internal dialectic that we shall be led to revise our idea of the subject.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 477).

As a sequence of events, time presents an environment that a subject can understand only by taking a certain position in it, which makes this environment tangible to him. Being the core of time, the world exists thanks to the sole motion of time, which combines and separates the actually presented and the present. Consciousness, which is to bring clarity, on the contrary, becomes a carrier of ambiguity. In this way, according to Merleau-Ponty, nothing exists outside time, but “temporality is not some half-hearted existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 387). A thing and the world only exist at a level in which subjects experience them.

An object and the world are mysterious to us and are no longer a part of an objective thinking due to ambiguities, i.e., invisible sides of a thing or their inaccessible internal parts as well as the present of a thing that emerged from the past and already has a vision of the future. Merleau-Ponty argues that the ideal of an objective thinking is based upon and ruined by temporality, thus, according to him, “the world itself lives outside me, just as absent landscapes live on beyond my visual field, and as my past was formerly lived on the earlier side of my present.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 389).

According to Merleau-Ponty, time originates due to the subject’s interaction with things. The very things contain the future and the past as if of eternal state of pre-existence and survival. The future and the past existing in the present of the world are considered to be a surplus, since for being to be time-based, it lacks non-existence. An objective world is full of everything, therefore there is no place for time: “Past and future withdraw of their own accord from being and move over into subjectivity in search, not of some real support, but, on the contrary, of a possibility of not-being which accords with their nature.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 479).

If future prospects were withdrawn from an objective world and the latter was perceived as being inside oneself, we would have only “now”. However, Merleau-Ponty notes that these “now” would not be able to form a sequence as they do not belong to anything and do not have any features of temporality. Thus, it is wrong to define time as a sequence of “now”. Time is a datum of consciousness, i.e., consciousness constitutes time and becomes independent from “now”.

Indeed constituted time is not time, but its final registration and the result of its movement that “objective thinking always presupposes yet never manages to fasten on to” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.
482). Such a time as if becomes spatial in nature, because its individual moments exist even before thinking and belong to the present, since “consciousness is contemporary with all times” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 482).

This is a static and unchanging space for a particular subject, therefore, Merleau-Ponty argues that there should be another time, i.e., real time that goes on in its own way. It is important for us to see the birth of this time and conceive its expression not as the object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being. It is in daily activities of a person that time expresses itself with a day that is about to end in the horizon of an evening and an approaching night. The past, as if a day that is about to end, regenerates itself with the time lived out and is opened up when we return to the past moments which were then closed to the future of this day. This indicates that time is measured by means of a personal life, attesting to “a future sliding into the present and on into the past” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 483).

In this way time is perceived intentionally. The past, the present and the future overlap with each other and are experienced in the present, which is not identical to itself. We can perceive the present from a certain distance, i.e., through the difference between the past and the future as well as through a corporeal transcendence of the motion. The solution to transcendental problems lies “in the thickness of the pre-objective present, in which we find our bodily being, our social being, and the pre-existence of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 503).

Conclusions

While communicating with itself and the other, a human body unfolds in space and time experiencing the real world and its history. Phenomenology of body developed by Merleau-Ponty reveals a body that perceives things and analyses and interprets situations. Merleau-Ponty calls such actions the incarnation of consciousness and becoming of body a conscious subject. A body is the way of presence of a human being.

From the point of view of Merleau-Ponty, a living body belongs to the world and is a certain source of it. A body experiences and is being experienced in conjunction with the world and, therefore, it is a correlate of the world. Communication with the world is continuously ongoing, because the world is alive and the things within it constantly reveal themselves with a new desire of existence by including a conscious subject into the event of life and an encounter with the other. During the encounter with the other, the fields of perception of both participants overlap, and this field becomes polycentric. Thus the unity of the world is developed by taking over each other’s experience.

Time plays an important role in phenomenology of body. Merleau-Ponty attributes time to the network of intentionalities. Intentionality is a directiveness of consciousness towards an object, in other words, its states or experiences. Each experience, as an intentional act, is time-based and has a transitional nature of movement through the difference between the past and the future in the present.

References

KŪNO FILOSOFIJA: INTERSUBJEKTYVUMAS IR LAIKIŠKUMAS

Dalia Marija Stančienė

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje, remiantis Merleau-Ponty kūno filosofija, analizuojamas intersubjektyvus gyvenamasis pasaulis ir kūno išgyvenamas laikas. Filosofija kūno susidomėjo antikoje ir visais istoriniais periodais yra siūlomos įvairios interpretacijos. Psychologijoje išskiriama žmogaus ego (vidinių patirčių visuma) ir kūnas, priklausantis išoriniam pasauliui. Fenomenologai analizuoją Aš ir Kita arba savo ir svetimo santykį.


Pasak G. Šmitienės, Merleau-Ponty įvykdė juslinio suvokimo perversmą filosofijoje, atskleisdamas kad jusliniame suvokime veikia įkūnyta sąmonė arba sąmoningas kūnas, kad juslinis suvokimas – tai sintezės, neatsérimo nuo atminties, vaizduotės ir daugybės kitų sąmonės procesų.

Gyvenamasis kūnas yra bendravimo instrumentas, kurio pagalba ne tik pažįstame gamtą ir kūnus, bet taip pat įgyjame galimybę susitikti ir bendrauti su kitais. Žmogus yra kūnas, kuris įtraukiamas į santykius su kitais kūnais ir šių santykių dėka žmogus įvaldo kūną ir pažįsta ne tik gamtą, bet ir socialinę aplinką. Atsisakęs tradicinės subjekto ir objekto perspektyvos, Merleau-Ponty teigia, kad intersubjektyvus santykiai skleidžia objektų realijų susipynusioje terpėje, kuriuose dingsta tik pažįstama dalykai, kadangi žmogus ir pasaulis yra vieno kūno nariai.

Tirdamas žmonių komunikaciją, Merleau-Ponty jos vykstme įžvelgė žmonių gebėjimą artikuliuoti pasaulį. Komunikacija su pasauliu vyksta nemūškstamai, nes pasaulis yra gyvas, kuriame esantys daiktai nuolat atskleidžia, kaip jie egzistuoja ir egzistuojant, atskleidžiantys pasaulį. Intersubjektyvus santykiai yra vieno kūno nariai, kurie maždaug artikuliuojama kūno kūninėje terpėje, o tų santykių dėka įvaldo kūną ir pasaulį.

Paseka: G. Šmitienės, Merleau-Ponty įvykdė juslinio suvokimo perversmą filosofijoje, atskleisdamas kad jusliniam suvokimui veikia įkūnyta sąmonė arba sąmoningas kūnas, kad juslinis suvokimas – tai sintezės, neatsérimo nuo atminties, vaizduotės ir daugybės kitų sąmonės procesų.

Gyvenamasis kūnas yra bendravimo instrumentas, kurio pagalba ne tik pažįstame gamtą ir kūnus, bet taip pat įgyjame galimybę susitikti ir bendrauti su kitais. Žmogus yra kūnas, kuris įtraukiamas į santykius su kitais kūnais ir šių santykių dėka žmogus įvaldo kūną ir pažįsta ne tik gamtą, bet ir socialinę aplinką. Atsisakęs tradicinės subjekto ir objekto perspektyvos, Merleau-Ponty teigia, kad intersubjektyvus santykiai skleidžia objektų realijų susipynusioje terpėje, kuriuose dingsta tik pažįstama dalykai, kadangi žmogus ir pasaulis yra vieno kūno nariai.

Tirdamas žmonių komunikaciją, Merleau-Ponty jos vykstme įžvelgė žmonių gebėjimą artikuliuoti pasaulį. Komunikacija su pasauliu vyksta nemūškstamai, nes pasaulis yra gyvas, kuriame esantys daiktai nuolat atskleidžia, kaip jie egzistuoja ir egzistuojant, atskleidžiantys pasaulį. Intersubjektyvus santykiai yra vieno kūno nariai, kurie maždaug artikuliuojama kūno kūninėje terpėje, o tų santykių dėka įvaldo kūną ir pasaulį.

Paseka: G. Šmitienės, Merleau-Ponty įvykdė juslinio suvokimo perversmą filosofijoje, atskleisdamas kad jusliniam suvokimui veikia įkūnyta sąmonė arba sąmoningas kūnas, kad juslinis suvokimas – tai sintezės, neatsérimo nuo atminties, vaizduotės ir daugybės kitų sąmonės procesų.

Gyvenamasis kūnas yra bendravimo instrumentas, kurio pagalba ne tik pažįstame gamtą ir kūnus, bet taip pat įgyjame galimybę susitikti ir bendrauti su kitais. Žmogus yra kūnas, kuris įtraukiamas į santykius su kitais kūnais ir šių santykių dėka žmogus įvaldo kūną ir pažįsta ne tik gamtą, bet ir socialinę aplinką. Atsisakęs tradicinės subjekto ir objekto perspektyvos, Merleau-Ponty teigia, kad intersubjektyvūs santykiai skleidžia objektų realijų susipynusioje terpėje, kuriuose dingsta tik pažįstama dalykai, kadangi žmogus ir pasaulis yra vieno kūno nariai.

Tirdamas žmonių komunikaciją, Merleau-Ponty jos vykstme įžvelgė žmonių gebėjimą artikuliuoti pasaulį. Komunikacija su pasauliu vyksta nemūškstamai, nes pasaulis yra gyvas, kuriame esantys daiktai nuolat atskleidžia, kaip jie egzistuoja ir egzistuojant, atskleidžiantys pasaulį. Intersubjektyvus santykiai yra vieno kūno nariai, kurie maždaug artikuliuojama kūno kūninėje terpėje, o tų santykių dėka įvaldo kūną ir pasaulį.

Paseka: G. Šmitienės, Merleau-Ponty įvykdė juslinio suvokimo perversmą filosofijoje, atskleisdamas kad jusliniam suvokimui veikia įkūnyta sąmonė arba sąmoningas kūnas, kad juslinis suvokimas – tai sintezės, neatsérimo nuo atminties, vaizduotės ir daugybės kitų sąmonės procesų.