Phenomenology of death: subjectivity and nature in Husserl's genetic phenomenology

Vecino, M.C.

Chapter 7: The body

In this chapter, I turn directly to the topic of embodiment, which is an underlying issue in every major point of contention in this research. Our understanding of what constituting subjectivity is and how it relates to human nature, which later reflects on our understanding of death, relies heavily on the way we conceive embodiment. Its central role can explain why I have in turn considered Husserl's notion of the primal I (which is disembodied) and then that of the monad, in which the body remains subordinated and secondary regarding the noetic side of the correlation, as the most fundamental figure of subjectivity. After considering these two, the notion of person has proven to be more fitting to account for the complexity of the subject as a whole, but without a proper account of the body, it can easily fall back into a one-sided description.

7.1 Introduction

As it may have transpired from the previous sections, embodiment is a key issue when thinking about limit-cases and the relationship between transcendental and empirical subjectivity. In the section on the paradox of human subjectivity, we saw that the subject is embodied insofar as she objectifies herself through self-apperception as a psychophysical being, which resulted in there being always a distance between constituting subjectivity and her body. In the transcendental-empirical divide, embodiment belonged in the realm of the empirical. However, as Husserl refines his theory of constitution, embodiment turns out to be a crucial *condition* for constitution. This takes us to the paradoxical idea that the subject would need to be a body in order to constitute herself as embodied. How would this work? I will now turn to the specifics of Husserl's reflection on embodiment.

In our previous chapter I have looked into the notion of person as the embodied subject that acts within a life-world, and considered the reading that suggests it might be the true concretion of transcendental subjectivity, possibly allowing us to bridge the gap between transcendental and empirical subjectivity. However, following Hanne Jacobs (2014) and Steven Crowell's (2012) readings, we saw it would still be possible to think of the person as constituting without committing to

the thesis that it is at the same time an object in the world. This would entail distinguishing the person from the psychophysical being, which Husserl seemingly tended to conflate, and so separating embodiment from nature. Yet, this does not seem entirely possible for Husserl. On the contrary, He characterized the body as a type of bridge between nature and spirit, or nature and culture (Hua/Mat 4, 186), or a turning point (*Umschlagspunkt*) between causal and conditional orders (Hua 4, 161). In the reading I am proposing here against Crowell's, the person is fundamentally embodied, and this characterization of the body as a middle point between these two realms and as essentially ambiguous, go hand in hand.

Starting from the ambiguity manifested in the phenomenological reflection on embodiment, whose cornerstone is the phenomenon of double sensation, I claim that neither a purely subjective nor a purely objective experience of embodiment is possible, but rather, the being of the body calls for a rethinking of this dualist understanding of subjectivity. Through an analysis of bodily normativity and of the relationship between the body and temporality, I also claim that embodiment is present in the most basic levels of constitution, both as subjective and objectively lived.

The consequences of this reading go as far as questioning the methodological validity of the first-personal and the third-personal approaches to consciousness. Regarding death, the possibility to think of it in terms of a *normal* event in the life-world is opened. So far, we knew that the person, for Husserl, died; and that there was a kind of transference from the experience or knowledge of the death of others to one's own, that resulted in my own awareness of my finitude. The notion of normality now provides a way to consider how mortality is apprehended and embodied, even before any thematic awareness of death takes place. Once the body as object is taken as transcendentally relevant, a criterion for telling apart death from sleep in a phenomenologically sound way is also provided.

7.2 Leib and Körper

The most famous contribution of Husserlian phenomenology to the question of embodiment is the distinction between two ways of considering a body that Husserl

ascribes to the two ways of referring to a body in German: *Leib*, usually translated as lived body, and *Körper*, the physical or material body. This distinction relates in a way to the distinctions we have been dealing with so far between the transcendental and the empirical subject, and between my first-person experience of myself as a subject and a third-person experience of myself as an object. My body as lived body can be thought of as the way I experience my body in the first person. While if I consider myself as an object in the world I can see my body as a thing in nature alongside every other thing. However, these distinctions between different senses of the body can prove to be a bit more complicated than the prior ones since, while *Körper* is reserved for the consideration of my body (or any body) as a mere physical thing in space, throughout *Ideas 2*, Husserl speaks of *Leib* to account for animated organisms in nature as well as my own body as it is experienced "from within", and so sometimes a third term seems to be needed to address a division within the division. Besides the body as material thing, he distinguishes:

> *1. the aesthesiological Body. As sensing, it is dependent on the material Body; but here we once more have to distinguish from the physicalistic Body the material Body as appearance and as part of the personal surrounding world.*
>
> *2. the Body for the will, the freely moving Body. It is something identical, even in relation to the various possible movements the freely active spirit performs with it. There thus results a stratum of reality that is its own*. (Hua 4, 284; Husserl 1989, 297)

Husserl uses the term *Leib* every time "body" appears in this passage, so evidently this category exceeds the body as subjectively experienced, which seems to fit better with only "the freely moving body". As the aesthesiological body is distinguished from the material body, there would be a three-fold characterization of the body, or a two-fold characterization in which a middle point of interaction is identified, which mimics the classification of the world itself. Husserl also uses the term *Leibkörper* throughout *Ideas 2,* the *Cartesian Meditations*, and other writings, possibly to stress the entanglement of the two experiences of embodiment, although by no means in a systematic and rigorous way.

Regarding the relation of the body with the whole of the world, immediately after the previously quoted passage Husserl states: "*Thus we have two poles: physical nature and spirit and, in between them, Body and soul. As a consequence, Body and soul are "nature in the second sense" properly speaking only according to the side turned toward physical nature*." (Hua 4 285; Husserl 1989, 298). Here the body seems to be a kind of third region that lies in between nature and spirit, as a combination of the two. This type of characterization is also present in the 1919 lectures on nature and spirit where he refers to the body as the point of connection between nature and spirit (Hua/Mat 4, 186)[69]. So we would have two poles in the world and the body in between them as something that resists being circumscribed to either region; we also already know that the person is a spiritual being that at the same time depends–to some extent—on a natural basis; and now we see inside the body itself the presence of these two poles along with a middle point that is neither one nor the other. The analysis of the body appears to be at the heart of this somewhat heterodox way of describing subjectivity, that is, as a middle point, a mixture, or a third kind between two poles. If we go back to the paradox of subjectivity, we find that these two poles could only be alternatively present, such that self-awareness as constituting subject excluded self-awareness as constituted object and vice-versa. These analyses of the body seem to stray away from that duality and instead bring forth a third region where human experience proper happens. As Elizabeth Behnke warns us:

> *What Husserl's research shows, in other words, is that the Body does not fit neatly into a dualistic ontology where everything must be assigned to either one or the other of two mutually exclusive categories such as 'mind' or 'matter', 'spirit' or 'nature*'. (Behnke, 151)

In a manuscript from 1921, Husserl reflects on this particularity: "

> *My body is given to me on the one hand as a physical thing (real-causal spatial thing) and on the other as a body. We have physical experience (perception) of it, but we also*

[69] For an in depth research on this idea, see Rabanaque, Luis, "The body as noematic bridge between nature and culture" in Vandevelde & Luft (eds), *Epistemology, Archaeology, Ethics. Current investigations of Husserl's corpus*, Continuum, 2010

have somatological perception of it. Regarding the latter, the main problem is: What is the meaning-structure of this perception (…) (Hua 14, 56)[70]

The question that this chapter opens up can be formulated as follows: If the body as a *freely moving body* is experienced in the first person, and the body as *material* body is experienced in the third person, what type of perspective would be fitting for this 'middle point', if it is in fact a separate category?

7.3 The ambiguity of the lived body

If it is possible to pose the previous question it is because reflection on embodiment shows it is difficult to abstract what is given subjectively in the experience of my body from its constitution as an objective reality. Rather, experience of embodiment is given in a spectrum in which these two forms are ideal poles that could never be fully reached: "*There is neither a pure existence of body-as-subject nor of body-as-object. The former would amount to a disembodied and purely feeling state of the mind, while the latter would be the corpse as the completely corporified and deanimated body.*" (Breyer 2017, 739).[71]

The phenomenological evidence of this difficulty can be located in the phenomenon of double sensation, by which a perceiving body perceives itself, both from the inside as from the outside. In *Ideas 2*, Husserl gives the famous example of one hand touching the other to illustrate this phenomenon: while the touching hand experiences certain sensations that disclose properties of the touched hand (as they would of any touched object) thus constituting the touched hand as a

[70] Mein Leib ist mir einerseits als physische Ding (real-kausales Raumding) gegeben und andererseits als Leib. Wir haben von ihm physische Erfahrung (Wahrnehmung), wir haben aber auch von ihm somatologische Wahrnehmung. Hinsichtlich der letzteren ist es das Hauptproblem: Welches ist die Sinnesstruktur dieser Wahrnehmung (…)

[71] A potential counter-example of an experience where my body is given in these separate modes is an out-of-body experience. According to Michela Summa (2014) in these types of experiences I perceive my own body as an object, while *being* my body as subject. This is because, in order to see my own body from the outside, I need to remain oriented spatially as the 'phantom body' that is floating above my objective body; and so I would still have the subjective experience of my body as zero-point of orientation. I would argue that the body I look at from above is not in fact my own body as objective, but a body that I imagine looking like me. In fact, it would be impossible to experience my own body truly as an exterior object, since that would entail the possibility of experiencing all its sides, including those that are by principle inaccessible to me.

physical thing, and the touched hand is at the receiving end of internal sensings – it feels the pressure, the localization of the touching, etc.– both can turn into the other while merely focusing on one type of sensations or the other. According to Husserl, this shows that:

> *the body is originally constituted in a double way: first, it is a physical thing,* matter*; it has its extension, in which are included its real properties, its colour, smoothness, hardness, warmth, and whatever other material qualities of that kind there are. Secondly, I find on it, and I sense "on" it and "in" it: warmth on the back of the hand, coldness in the feet, sensations of touch in the fingertips*. (Hua 4, 145; Husserl 1989, 153).

Moreover, in the case of me touching my own body, the localization of sensations that is felt from the inside is constituted in conjunction with the constitution of the place in which the body as a thing is touched from the outside (Bernet 2013, 49).

Not just in the case of a direct perception of one's own body, but in every perception, the body is co-perceived, although in an imperfect way (Hua 5, 124). My own body is at the limit of every perception, or, as Husserl says, it is the *zero-point* of orientation [Nullpunkt der Orientierung], in the sense that it is always "here" and thus works as the centre of the field of perception in relation to which everything else is organized spatially. While being an object itself, it holds a privileged place, it is a "*subjective object*" (Hua 5, 124) and this contributes to its ambiguous constitution:

> *Among all things, my body is the closest to me, the closest to perception, the closest to my feeling and will. And so I, the functioning ego, am in a special way united with him in front of all other objects in the surrounding world. It is, in its own and different ways, the centre, the centred object, functioning in the middle, and becomes, even when being itself an object (opposite to me), the centre of function for all other objects (…)* (Hua 14, 59)[72]

[72] Mein Leib ist mir unter allen Dingen das Nächste, das Nächste der Wahrnehmung, das Nächste meinem Gefühl und Willen. Und so bin ich, das fungierende Ich, vor allen andern umweltlichen Objekten mit ihm in besonderer Weise einig. Er ist, in eigener Weise und verschiedener,

The body is the centre of orientation for every perception and every action, and it holds in this sense a fundamental role regarding our practical involvement in the life-world. It is also an expressive unity, and Husserl considers this expressiveness as an indication of the unity of body and spirit (Hua 4, 241), and a way of understanding and being understood by other people (Hua 4, 196). Bodily sensations of pleasure and pain are also at the basis of value judgments, and this could all amount to a certain experience of nature through our lived body in the spiritual world (Dzwiza 2019).

7.4 The body and the first person

In the previous chapter, I presented Crowell's reading of Husserl's naturalistic assumption. According to Crowell, Husserl mistakenly identified the person with the human being and this prevented him from considering the person as the true constituting subject, that in Crowell's reading was self-constituting through *praxis* in a much more Heideggerian fashion (a subject that constitutes through her dealings with a world that she is already involved with). Crowell argues that, even when embodied, the person's body is not constituted (Crowell 2014, 41) and so the person is not to be identified with the human being. With this in mind, he distinguishes two senses of *Leib* that he claims Husserl conflates, and advocates to keep only one within the realm of the transcendental:

> *On the one hand,* Leib *is that which incorporates, as it were, the person's ability to try—its skills and habitualities; its 'I can'—which opens up the practically normative space of apperception necessary for the constitution of meaning. Let us call this 'lived body: On the other hand,* Leib *is the 'animate organism the body that belongs to constituted nature as part of the pre-given world. Let us call this 'living body'. Recognizing this ambiguity has implications for our understanding of consciousness, for while it is still possible to conceive consciousness as a distinct stratum of the* living *body-for instance, one can distinguish between the living body and the corpse by appeal to the presence or absence of consciousness as psyche-it is no longer possible to distinguish between*

Mittelpunkt, in der Mitte stehendes Objekt, fungierend habe ich es in der Mitte und Wird es, obschon selbst schon Objekt (mir gegenüber), zum Funktionszentrum für alle andern Objekte (…)

*constituting consciousness (*Vermögens-ich*) and the* lived *body. (Crowell 2012, 42)*

The reason why Crowell considers the identification of constituting subjectivity with the human being mistaken or even dangerous is that it would mean constituting subjectivity (meaning-giving consciousness) could be studied as an object of the natural sciences. Indeed, the whole point of Husserlian phenomenology was to go against the naturalization of meaning and stress the first-personal givenness of consciousness to avoid scientific reductionism; and in this sense Crowell is right to be concerned. In fact, this stance is arguably most faithful to Husserl's own thought, whose commitment to the first personal perspective and transcendental idealism run deeper than anything else. In a manuscript from 1908 he describes the body as "*a certain system of real and possible sensations*" [ein gewisses System wirklicher und möglicher Empfindungen] (Hua 13, 5) and dismisses on this ground the idea of a dependency of consciousness on the body. In a way, everything that was said about Husserl's view of death so far shows precisely this: that the body should not be thought of as a condition of possibility for consciousness. However, as I will propose, challenging the sharp division between first-personal and third-personal givenness of the body does not necessarily entail their conflation.

Crowell's argument relies heavily on the possibility of such sharp distinction between subjectively lived and objectively lived embodiment. In other articles he complements this view by arguing that everything that can be presented as 'natural' in myself is merely something that is *constituted as* natural *by* myself and thus cannot be considered proof of my own involvement with a general nature conceived as shared with other living beings (Crowell 2014). This presupposes that the "myself" that constitutes can be distinctively identified outside this natural involvement. For Husserl, this would be problematic since embodiment is entangled with nature to the point that one cannot be considered without the other:

Now one could ask what it is like if I keep my body and all the rest of nature disappears, or if I keep a nature and my body disappears. But there it would have to be shown that nature is only possible in unity with a body too, and that a body is hardly conceivable

without a more extensive nature (Hua 14, 98)[73].

At the same time, Husserl denies that causal explanations can account for bodily consciousness, and so he faces the problem of explaining "*the relations of the irreal, of an event in the subjective sphere, with something real, the Body: then mediately the relations with an external real thing which is in a real, hence causal, connection with the Body.*" (Hua 4, 65; Husserl 1989, 70). In order for the body to be considered as "*a "turning point" where the causal relations are transformed into conditional relations between the external world and the Bodily-psychic subject*" (Hua 4, 161; Husserl 1989, 169), it must be reconsidered in light of its fundamental ambiguity.

Regarding limit-cases, one of the consequences of this classic Husserlian approach to embodiment is that it is not able to provide us with a criterion for telling death and sleep apart. Indeed, from a purely first-personal perspective, all forms of unconsciousness are the same. Taking inspiration from the Merleau-Pontian account of temporality via Didier Franck's *Chair et corps* and the notion of the flesh [*la chair*] as the passive locus of time-constitution, Matthieu Mavridis (1997) claims that it is bodily activity that allows us to tell apart sleep from death, which from the Husserlian perspective get conflated. In an article on the subject, he states that it is simply the difference between the living body of the sleeping person and the cadaver that marks the distinction between the potentiality of an ego (in the case of sleep), and its absolute end. It is because a sleeping subject breathes and moves that it differs from a dead one, and this is so from the point of view of the conditions for empathy and not from a naturalistic discourse. This means that there is a passive recognition of another functioning subject that differs when we face a sleeping person or a dead body, where the former shows up as embodying a subject, and the latter as mere materiality (Mavridis 1997, 209-10). In order to be able to make this distinction in phenomenological analysis, we would need to admit as valid certain statements about the first person that stem from third-personal

[73] Nun könnte man noch fragen, wie ist es, wenn ich meinen Leib behalte, und die ganze übrige Natur verschwindet, oder, wenn ich eine Natur behalte und mein Leib verschwindet. Doch da wäre zu zeigen, dass eine Natur nur möglich ist in eins mit einem Leib, für den sie erfahrenden, und dass ein Leib für sich ohne weiterreichende Natur wohl schwerlich noch denkbar ist.

observation. This would be possible if, unlike in Husserl, the passive level of temporalization is embodied and thus presents the ambiguous character of the body: "*The architectonic ambiguity of the flesh, neither pure noema nor pure noesis*" (Mavridis 1997, 209). This would allow for the intersubjective solution to be entirely effective, since it gives validity to something like an identification of a "primal ego" "from the outside". In relation to sleep we can find one of the rare passages where Husserl seems to grant the organic body a constituting character:

> *I wake up someone sleeping. I give him a bodily shake. I call aloud to him, and so on. The body [is] the index for psycho-physical stimuli [Reize]. It is the index for a lawfulness of the binding of hyletic prominences to the organic embodiment in its natural objective being—indeed, the lawfulness that makes possible the immanent temporal order, the grouping of hyletic data [and, hence] worldly apperception*. (Hua/Mat 8, 102)[74]

This shows to what extent limit cases subvert the normal standards that Husserl holds true, and cry for a serious consideration of the role of the body that stresses its ambiguity. Notably, it is an indication of the theoretical limitations that come with maintaining a canonical Husserlian perspective on certain key topics. Does this mean that, at this point, we must definitely depart from Husserl? Perhaps the way Merleau-Ponty did? I argue that this is not necessary. Although we need to reject some of Husserl's moves, this should not amount to breaking away from the two basic Husserlian principles of intuitive givenness and first-personal evidence.

7.5 The body of norms

The double character of the body ties up with Husserl's inquiries into genetic phenomenology and habit formation through repeated experiences. The idea that every experience gets sedimented and contributes to shaping anticipations and to

[74] Den Schlafenden wecke ich, ich schüttle ihn etwa leiblich, ich rufe ihn laut etc.; der Leib, Index für psychophysische Reize, Index für eine Gesetzmäßigkeit der Bindung seiner hyletischen Abhebungen an die organische Leiblichkeit in ihrem naturalen objektiven Sein; und zwar eine solche Gesetzmäßigkeit, daß die immanent-zeitliche Ordnung, Gruppierung der hyletischen Daten mundane Apperzeption ermöglicht. *Present translation by James Mensch in "Birth, death and sleep. Limit problems and the paradox of phenomenology" (Forthcoming)*

form a certain style of experience and of the world remains abstract until we focus on the actual procedures which allow for such a thing to happen. Perceptive habits are formed on the level of the passive body; experiences that are repeated allow us to develop skills and abilities that shape the way we see the world. What Husserl calls the '*I-can*' (Hua 4, 257; Husserl 1989, 266) is the set of abilities that are experienced as available to the embodied subject at any given time and that form the background of every possible experience. These skills don't only refer to complex abilities like playing the piano or dancing *ballet* but go all the way down to how we talk, walk and see things. Husserl's studies on the notions of normality and normativity show that even in the most basic level there are underlying norms that orient experience towards a certain notion of optimality (Hua 4, 59; Husserl 1989, 64). In the case of visual perception, for example, certain lighting conditions are considered optimal for obtaining a clear view of an object. The clearest and fullest perception of the object represents the *optimum*[75]. Normality in perception is a combination of this optimality and of concordance, which is the coherence of a particular experience of an object with other experiences of the same object and with the rest of experience in general. It then works as an organizing principle that presents us with a coherent, well-adjusted experience of the world, and so it is already a normative concept. As far as optimality goes, the criterion for determining what is optimal is given by an intersubjective ruling. Husserl talks about a familiar world (*Heimwelt*) to refer to the social environment we are accustomed to, and a strange world (*Fremde Welt*) to refer to foreign communities and their own intersubjective norms (Hua 15, 214). Our familiar world provides the criteria for a normal experience, but the rules that are effective in it need to be internalized and operate "from within". As Joona Taipale (2012) points out this creates a tension between the primordial and the intersubjective levels of normality, which Husserl would settle in favour of "solitary normality".

This means that, even if intersubjectivity is the source of the type of normativity that governs our personal experience, it is necessary that we internalize those rules

[75] „Das Optimum ist das Erscheinende in der besten Akkomodation, die den Charakter eines Näherbringens hat'' Ms. D 13 I, 81ª, quoted by Taipale, 2012, 52

ourselves in order for them to be effective. The key here is, once again, the meaning of "ourselves". And so while phenomenology can provide the analyses of how cultural norms are literally incorporated all the way through to the most basic levels of experience, it remains a point of contention whether this means the individual loses its privileged position. On the basis of Husserl's general discussions about normality in later manuscripts, Maren Wehrle shows that "*Individual perceptions and actions are embedded within experiential horizons that go far beyond current perception; they are motivated and have to be in accordance with broader cultural and historical horizons."* (Wehrle 2015, 136). Our bodily habits are a reflection of our community and familiar environment not only because we form them partly by mirroring those around us, but also because we inherit a natural and cultural past that manifests itself in them. A possible way of accounting for this reading–one that is not explicit in Husserl's work—is to turn to the instinctive intersubjective bonds that Husserl finds operating both at the level of the infant Ego and of the adult passive Ego, in his generative phenomenology. These are responsible for the transmission of tradition, and provide us with sedimented senses that do not stem from habitualities formed during our lifetime (Hua 15, 609).

In the context of his reflection on normality, Husserl suggests another account of death as an abnormality or as the limit of bodily normality: "*an anomaly that destroys the biophysical individual, biophysical death, in which the body ceases to be truly a body and to appresent a psychic life at all*." [eine Anomalie, die das biophysische Individuum zerstört, den biophysischen Tod, in dem der Leib aufhört wirklich Leib zu sein und überhaupt ein Seelenleben zu appräsentieren.] (Hua 14, 69). As Andrea Staiti puts it, however, death is a "*normal anomaly*" (Staiti 2014, 278) in the sense that, even if not an everyday event, it is to be expected eventually, and there are typical ways in which we deal with it when it affects people close to us. I would argue, moreover, that it is not an anomaly at all, but in fact we become aware of death as a part of the normality of life, under some specific cultural characteristics. Let's recall that in the genetic approach to limits, Husserl considered death to be unconceivable for the transcendental subject. However, the discussion of normality allows us to see that, considered from the point of view of a transcendental person that is involved in a life-world, death acquires its rightful

place in any horizon of experience, even if it is a “horizon of potential abnormalities” (Ciocan 2017, 178).

We have seen in the chapter on death that Husserl deals with some of these issues in his generative writings, but even though he recognizes the presence of senses that are inherited through tradition, he redirects all intersubjective formations to my primordial constitution of others. That means that even when he points back to the activity of a transcendental community, this community rests on the shoulders of the primal I; and so, as Taipale pointed out, the primordial level of normality precedes the intersubjective one. What the bodily dimension of normativity can bring to this scene is a more concrete understanding of the subject in her involvement with the world and others, one that defies the possibility of separating these two levels of normality. If it is true that for Husserl “*I myself [am] the primal norm constitutionally for all human beings*” (Hua 1, 154; Husserl 1960, 126); when the description of myself as constituting subject is made to include embodiment in the sense discussed above (namely as already including social norms in it), separating the two orders can only mean performing an abstraction on the concrete unity of the embodied subject. Moreover, the ambiguity of the body shows that there is a fundamental alterity within myself, that makes it harder to speak of a sphere of ownness where the Other would be constituted: “As soon as we adopt the standpoint of the body and proceed from a bodily self which is “not master in its own house”, the Other arises as co-original with myself and to some extent as earlier than myself”. (Waldenfels 2007, 81).

7.6 Merleau-Ponty’s phantom limb

A lot of what has been said about the body so far echoes some of Merleau-Ponty’s most important contributions to post-Husserlian phenomenology, and indeed in many ways Merleau-Ponty’s reading and reinterpretation of Husserl aligns with the results of this research. In *Phénoménologie de la perception*, embodiment is considered from the point of view of the ontological ambiguity that, as I suggest here, Husserl already pointed at but did not fully explore, possibly

because it would have meant rethinking some fundamental principles of his own method. What Merleau-Ponty deals with under the title of "being-in-the-world" is the type of bodily being that cannot be defined in terms of either first- or third-personal perspectives:

> *Because it is a pre-objective perspective, being in the world can be distinguished from every third-person process, from every modality of the* res extensa*, as well as from every* cogitatio*, from every first person form of knowledge–and this is why "being in the world" will be able to establish the junction of the "psychical" and the 'physiological.'* (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 82)

In order to illustrate this junction, Merleau-Ponty focuses on the phenomenon of the phantom limb, that is, on the experience of a part of my body that is neither present nor absent, and on the difficulty that this kind of phenomenon creates for both psychological and physiological explanations. The phantom limb shows, on the one hand, that having a body means being engaged with the world and certain objects in a particular sense that relates to my own practical field. The loss of a limb in my body as material object does not immediately reconfigure my practical field and so I find myself still attempting to accomplish the same tasks as before and not being able to. This shows that the experience of my body goes beyond what a naturalistic view would portray. On the other hand, there is what Merleau-Ponty calls "*regions of silence*" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 84) in the totality of my body, which is a way of expressing the impersonal character under which I experience it. The resistance that my own body opposes my active initiatives, the passive processes to which I owe my subsistence and that work incessantly in the background of my bodily experience, are for Merleau-Ponty marks of my body's belonging to a natural world, or a world that is broader than the spiritual one:

> *A margin of almost impersonal existence thus appears around our personal existence, which, so to speak, is taken for granted, and to which I entrust the care of keeping me alive. Around the human world that each of us has fashioned, there appears a general world to which we must first belong in order to be able to enclose ourselves within a particular milieu of a love or an ambition.* (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 86)

The phenomenon of the phantom limb presents some similarities with the case

of death, insofar as the latter can be thought of in terms of an absence felt in our bodily presence. When Husserl speaks of the analogical constitution of our own death, he refers to phenomena that are of an eminently bodily nature like sickness, aging, and sleep. It is in the experience of the weakening of my body's strength and my own sense of agency over it that I can get an approximate feeling of what dying would be like, as an experience that I can and will go through as an embodied being in the world. Moreover, even when this type of analogical constitution is not given in my sphere of ownness, the analogical constitution through others in the life-world is already present, and as we have seen, this intersubjective implication is achieved through the–bodily—incorporation of social norms, which include death as a special case. This bodily dimension of the experience of my own death cannot be reduced to either a third-personal ascription of a possible event in my body seen as a material *Körper*, nor is it exactly a first-personal experience of death, since this would be impossible.

7.7 The body and time

If we follow Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, we also find that the impersonal existence he attributes to the body is understood in terms of an "anonymous" character and it is intimately entangled with the structure of time. In this sense it holds a strong resemblance to Husserl's notion of the primal Ego in that they both refer to the spontaneous yet passive accomplishments of temporality that serve as the basis for the constitution of objects *in* time. But if we think of the primal Ego as what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the anonymous layer of the habitual body, what we would have is a pre-personal consciousness that is nevertheless embodied. The spontaneously lived body is the bearer of the subject's history and intersubjective involvement, and it functions by passively expressing all these sedimented senses: "*The domain of our body includes all that really has to do with me without being done by me*." (Waldenfels 2007, 75). So it is pre-personal in the sense that there is no thematic awareness of the self in its spontaneity, but in an important sense it is not, since it includes the person's world. As Sara Heinämaa understands it: "*Thus understood, perception is "prepersonal," not in the sense of*

being an egoless stream or a collective accomplishment of several simultaneous subjects but in the sense of having a history and a 'prehistory,' as Merleau-Ponty states." (Heinämaa 2015, 125). Because the habitual body expresses previously acquired senses and dispositions, when we turn to it reflectively we discover our past, and so the objective dimension of embodiment becomes a key to understanding our temporality: "*Thus, to summarize, the ambiguity of being-in-the-world is expressed by the ambiguity of our body, and this latter is understood through the ambiguity of time*." (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 87)

Along the same line, Maren Wehrle argues that, at its most basic level, time-constitution is already bodily. She takes the notion of *operative intentionality* from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty understood as a "*general intentional directedness or embodied action and engagement"* (Wehrle 2020, 506), and of *implicit time* (Fuchs 2006) to describe what elsewhere in this dissertation we have discussed under the notion of absolute time-flow, namely, the most basic level of self-awareness that is a condition of possibility for our experience of temporal objects. Embodiment and time are entangled in such a way that "*temporal constitution concretely takes place in the lived body's actual performance of movements*" and "*The lived body is thereby the concrete realization of lived time*." (Wehrle 2020, 506/508

In our discussion in chapter 5, we found that Husserl's genetic inquiries on time-constitution led to an *absolute fact* that could not be further explained. The presupposition of a primal I was introduced as a theoretical device to account for this absolute fact of experience. According to Ronald Bruzina, the fact that primal temporalization requires an impressional element to which the primal I turns in order to retain it–thus originating the flow of time—, meant that Husserl's theory required a certain "naturalism" (Bruzina 2010, 118). Indeed, if primal impression is given to our bodily senses, we would have to say that the stream of time is dependent on the body.

In a similar line, Wehrle argues that this absolutely functioning intentionality must be bodily

because, firstly, every time consciousness relies on impressions, and thus affection and

> *sensual receptivity that presupposes a body with localized sensations. Secondly, all object perception presupposes a moving body with kinaesthethic skills, that is, the fact that perception is dependent on potential movement and action (…)* (Wehrle 2020, 505).

We can now say that these two arguments can be tied together in virtue of the inseparability of the subjective and the objective aspect of the body, which can be translated in terms of our necessary belonging to an objective world while being constituting subjects of the world. The inseparability of these two orders of self-experience is what prevents us from adopting two types of solutions I will consider in the following section: one is Crowell's proposal to consider the lived body as a purely subjective experience. This position represents a strong defence of the transcendental principle that cannot, however, accommodate its ambiguous character. As a counterpoint I will analyse Merleau-Ponty's stance, which, I will argue, commits the opposite excess.

7.8 Beyond first and third person

What these reflections on time and embodiment show is that, while I can only be an object in the world if I am already a subject that constitutes herself as such, the opposite is true as well: I can only be a subject for the world if I am first a body that is susceptible of sensory affection. Furthermore, since "pure" subjectivity is only ever given retrospectively, it can only be grasped as a non-object once it becomes objectified. This is what Husserl referred to as the paradox of the living present, and what it shows is the intimate relation and the interdependency of the anonymous functioning subject and the objective person. When thinking about subjectivity as a primal Ego that is not embodied, Husserl's problem was to then try to connect this pre-personal dimension with the personal, embodied subject in the world. The link between these two, not being given from the start, remained mysterious; whereas if we consider that the pre-personal arises at once with the person we can think of the unity of this lived body, already subjective and objective in itself, to not be something else that would help bridge the subjective and the objective—that is to say not a substance or a basis where two things come together—but the unity itself, the concrete whole of subjectivity.

In Husserl's view, the first person had to be disembodied because the body, in its ambiguity, was already infested by a dimension of objectivity. The body is from the start susceptible of being considered in third-personal terms, and thus it could not belong in the primordial sphere. But because embodiment is so fundamental for constitution, it is also problematic to consider it merely as a constituted achievement of the subject. Crowell's proposal of an embodied transcendental subject, which is neither objective nor natural, aimed at reconciling the purity of the first person with the fundamentality of embodiment, but it accentuated the gap between mental and physical states.

Methodologically, questioning the purity of the first-personal standpoint does not immediately lead to a third-personal approach such as the one of the natural sciences, but it is a gateway to possibly understanding why the same kind of being can be thought of through both perspectives. As Rudolf Bernet states: "*It is because the* Leib *that feels itself touched simultaneously appears from the outside as* Leibkörper *that the latter can also be a* Körper *that is subject to physical and neurophysiological laws*." (Bernet 2013, 53). The ambiguous status of the body calls for a different or broader perspective on the subject. In the experience of double sensation lies the stepping stone for elaborating on such a mixed perspective without forfeiting intuitive givenness, since it presents us with an intimate experience of the foreign and vice versa. It can thus be said to provide us with an intuitive presentation of the entanglement of first and third-personal perspectives. This type of experience might not give us grounds to completely abandon the first personal perspective, although it does challenge its purity. At this point, and insofar as our intuitive experience is giving us reason to doubt the integrity of the first personal perspective, these two principles of Husserlian methodology that I have been trying to maintain appear to be at odds with each other. However, a balance may be achieved. While the experience of embodiment might undermine the stability of the first-personal perspective, it is necessary to remind ourselves once again that intuitive evidence is not given in a void, but in first-personal experience. Neither one of these principles should be placed above the other, but complement each other in phenomenological work.

What I have tried to show so far is that, while concrete experience cannot be analysed in third-personal terms, it also exceeds first-personal givenness, at least in the way it is thematized by Husserl–that is, as ultimately leading back to the primal Ego. The type of practical, enworlded, embodied *praxis* that the person carries out in the life-world requires a broader idea of the givenness of experience. Husserl tried to achieve this by broadening the scope of the transcendental, by including within the transcendental sphere things like norms, instincts, impulses, emotions, etc. to the point of committing to a sort of "hyper-transcendentalism" (Montavont 1999, 282). But even in the context of generative inquiries, intersubjective accomplishments always necessarily lead back to an individual stream of consciousness.

We can summarize our findings regarding embodiment as follows:

a) Experience of my own embodiment is given as neither purely subjective nor purely objective, but as preceding this polar opposition.

b) embodiment is not given in a secondary way as a part of the process of self-objectification that a previously disembodied consciousness performs on herself; but is a necessary condition for any constituting activity. The body is already present at the most basic levels of experience.

c) the ambiguity that characterizes bodily consciousness, when applied to the subject at the most basic level of constitution, challenges the first-personal perspective not only on embodiment but as a whole. Not only does experience in the first-person allow for an objectification of ourselves; but an objective, third-personal stance about oneself is also necessary in order to have a first-personal, lived experience of oneself.