

## 1. The Cognitive mind

Phenomenological consciousness is, according to Husserl, essentially but not comprehensively intentional. Nevertheless, even if intentional experiences do not exist (for example the sensations), a consciousness not provided with an openness to the world, that does not direct towards objects, events, and so on, cannot define itself authentically as a consciousness.

The notion of intentional consciousness can be easily assimilated to the one that a contemporary philosopher of mind would call a cognitive and functional mind. There are three characteristics that distinguish consciousness as intentional. The first characteristic is the distinction between immanent or reflexive intentionality and transcendental intentionality. In Husserlian phenomenology, whose method consists of the overcoming or the suspension of the natural attitude through the phenomenological reduction, the reflection is the main instrument that allows the passage from the naturalistic object to the priority dimension of the subjectivity (noetic side). And it is still the reflection that allows phenomenology to extend its analytical field from the experiences to the intended object, to the object-in-the-how of its determinations and of its ways of givenness (noematic side).

Husserlian phenomenology assumes the operating of the reflective-philosophical attitude as not problematic and undisturbed, taking for granted that consciousness has always the possibility to exert a sort of doubling or almost of duplication of itself: as consciousness that lives its own stream of experience, hence primary, and as consciousness that reflects on those experiences as object of phenomenological viewing, hence secondary. The second characteristic is the necessary dependence of the object intended from the determined point of view. Consciousness, as far as it is intentional, is not, as Nagel would have said, a “vision from no place”, a “naked” perception of the object, but a perspective cut on things. It’s not possible to perceive, to imagine, to judge, to feel a feeling towards something unless specifying the determinations, which means embracing in an essential way a point of view. The third characteristic is the independence of the intentional consciousness from the existence of the object towards which it is addressed. We can, as we know, imagine entities that do not exist (the golden mountain, the source of youth), but also perceive objects that do not exist, as it happens during the hallucinations.

Putting intentionality at the centre of the phenomenological description, as Husserl does, means to identify the root of the consciousness in its representational activity. “Every act is a representation or is founded on a representation”, is considered by Husserl, and before him by Brentano, as an unavoidable principle of the philosophical and phenomenological analysis. Consciousness is not truly consciousness if it hasn’t the strength to direct itself towards something “else” with respect to itself, a strength that is supplied by its very internal structure, by its noetic framework. Something very similar to what nowadays we would call the function of the mental, its role in the cognitive economy and in the relationship with the word .

## 2. The Qualitative Mind

Husserl’s answer to the question if all the states of consciousness are intentional is, in contrast with Brentano, negative. Many experiences are intentional, but many others are not. Perception, imagination, emotions, such as fear, are intentional without any doubt; but sensation of pain, anxiousness, depression, angst, panic are not intentional states. If I say “I am afraid” it is obvious that someone would ask me: “of what?”; but if I say: “I feel depression” or “I have a panic attack”, the question seems not so obvious anymore. They would say that in these cases, as a matter of fact, it is what is not in that openness to the world that characterizes consciousness in its intentional function. Consciousness is in a way close in its own feeling.

The existence of non intentional experiences allows us to isolate a further dimension of the subjectivity: that is the feeling, an element that seems to be – at least on the analytical view – distinct from the intentional structure of experience. The intentional and representational function does not fill completely the notion of consciousness. There is in fact, soul and propulsive centre of every consciousness, a non

intentional sensorial, impressive, material, passive dimension, that suggests a conscious feature, profoundly different from the active, explicit, transparent, schematic, functional, in one word a representational feature. The result is that the sensual and qualitative element is spread if not put in a shape; amorphous and formless if not collocated within a structure; as Kant says, blind if with no concept.

Husserl does not make any exception with respect to this trend and recognises in the insightful content the necessary presence of the material element (*hyle*), essential if aimed to the fulfilment of an empty intention and nevertheless actually non separable from the intentional shape.

It's this latter one that, shaping and animating the sensorial content evidently not shaken on its own, supplies to the act its intentional direction, hence giving it a determination that is of its own. The sense becomes hence strictly interlaced with the representational power of consciousness, with its ability to present something.

Consciousness, for Husserl, renders the object present and by doing so, gives to the world its own order and sense, allowing that passage from the chaos to the cosmos that characterizes the phenomenological vision. The material aspect of subjectivity corresponds to what for the contemporary philosopher of the mind is the qualitative mind or authentic consciousness. Not the mental or the psychological function, hence, but the qualitative dimension of subjectivity. That dimension which, according to a lot of philosophers of the mind, is the true *hard problem* of the discipline, the enigma, the mystery, the apparently irreducible element respect to the scientific image of the world. From a qualitative point of view, the subjectivity is characterized not so much by what it means, but by what it feels.

Material phenomenology offers a dramatic limitation of the absolute priority of the intentionality, a priority that as a matter of fact would lead to a necessary resizing of the sensual, impressive and affective element. On the other hand, the material aspect of subjectivity also resizes the strength of the reflexive and reductive attitude. In fact the latter can focus only on the *noesi* intended as an intentional ad functional structure of the act. It does not reflect itself just on the sensations, that oppose themselves for their own nature, to any distances, to each possibility of "face to face". The object of reductive reflection is only the sensitive data, the *noematic* data. But the latter is not the sensation, though the result of its animation, interpretation, projection in the world; not the sensual element but its objectification. What can be made the object of reduction is hence, eventually, the only *noetic* structure, the functional frame of the act, not the material content.

There are two consequences that emerge from what has been said. The first regards the impossibility to make the material content the object of an autonomous reflection and, as consequence, the impossibility to make the object of knowledge a qualitative data without its being shaped and interpreted by an intentional structure. The second consequence concerns the necessary introduction of the embodiment aiming to take account of the two elements that characterized the same immanence. The first is that the material or hyletic dimension of knowledge necessarily supposes the existence of a body that feels. The lack of transparency of consciousness is given by its inevitable conjunction with embodiment. The second is that the same functional structure presupposes the existence of a body that, through the movement, allows the synthesis of the appearances constituting objects.

They are conditions that also necessarily presuppose an a priori link also concretely founded on the specificity of the content of the involved elements. In other terms, it would seem that to take account both of the consciousness, in its relationships between material content and functional content, and of the relationship between consciousness and body, the material a priori is the philosophical relevant point.

### 3. The Living Body

The psychic dimension is, according to Husserl, legally connected with embodiment and the result of this essential and necessary connection is the living consciousness and the embodied consciousness. The notion of *Leib* widens the pure immanence of the "stream, with no beginning or end, of 'lived experiences'"<sup>1</sup>, to its diffusion in the body with respect to which that stream results necessary connected.

---

<sup>1</sup> E. Husserl, Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, Second Book, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1989, p. 98.

The notion of living body embraces nevertheless two elements: the matter and the body extension. Each of them interlaces a different relationship with the immanence of the stream of consciousness. To be objectively experienced, consciousness has to result in the living factor of an objectively living body, even if not a priori and necessarily of a material living body. In other terms, only between a flux of experiences and a body extension is there a relationship not empirical but a priori.

On the one hand, hence, the result of the union between stream and *Leib* (intended as a material body) is the empirical subjectivity, with its psychical states, its personal characteristic, its behavioural dispositions and so on. On the other hand, the result of the union between stream and *Leib* (intended as body extension) is not the empirical subjectivity, but the living body in general. So, according to Husserl, the mind-body problem is in reality a double problem, articulated, at least at first sight, in two different problems: a) the naturalistic problem of the relationship between consciousness and material body; b) the phenomenological problem of the relationship between consciousness and body intended as living body. It is, hence, the notion of body that constitutes the focus between the phenomenal or qualitative dimension and the cognitive or intentional dimension of the mental.

The living body is in fact, in its turn, an heterogeneous entity. On one hand, because it acts an essentially kinesthetic role, the body is a disembodied body scheme, with functional and constitutional tasks. On the other hand, because it expresses its own feeling nature, it is living consciousness, the organism immerses itself in a perceptive world, essentially passive and receptive. Also for the phenomenology, however, once we take distance from the naturalistic view expressed by the relationship between empirical consciousness and material body, two problems arise. The first is to clarify both the material body and the living body (or living and embodied consciousness). The second problem is to clarify the relationship between the living body and the body scheme (or kinesthetic body). This implies identifying also within the same phenomenology, even in a different configuration, a problem relative to the qualitative states.

#### 4. Mind, body and material a priori

The essential link that exists between the stream of experiences and the body extension in Husserl's phenomenology seems to be read as a case of the material a priori thoroughly analogue to the essential link between colour and extension. Affirmations such as "a colour cannot exist without a certain extension", or "there's no timber without duration" involve modalities of connection between nonindependent contents, modalities that are founded on the essential specificity of the parts that compose the whole. The disjoint moments of the phenomenon do not give themselves, hence, if not in connection with other moments (and just for this they cannot be represented separately); differently from contents that, even if not in fact, can be in principle separated from what surrounds them. In this sense, it seems admissible to support that integration between the moments or non independent parts satisfies a necessary material law: the essential impossibility to represent a colour without extension is an impossibility philosophically different from the actual and empirical impossibility that I have to represent, for example, the visual data without the background from which that data assumes emphasis.

The relevant notion is, in this case, to be "effectively content": its diffusion in a extension (logical material link) is actually contained in the colour, whereas its being linked to a determined background (empirical link) is not effectively contained in a determined colour surface. In the former, it is about inner differences that fuse themselves on the pure essences of the thing. It is about, hence, modalities of a priori connections in the sense that they fuse themselves on the essential specificity, on the nature of the parts that compose a whole.

The foundation relationship between moments or non independent parts composes that material logic that gets the name of material a priori. Now, the logic that is involved when we talk about the relationship between mind and body in Husserl's phenomenology would seem to be just this.

The form is, however, in every situation a qualified one. Qualities are what fills, they extend over the surface and through the corporeality of the form. Qualifications, however, extend from the things into empty space: *rays of light*, *radiations of heat*, etc. That means that thingly qualities condition qualities and qualitative changes in other things and indeed do so in such a way that the effect is a constant function of the situation: to every change of situation there corresponds a change of effect. In virtue of

such a subordination to spatial relations which may be determined with exactitude, even the sense qualities become amenable to exact determination.<sup>2</sup>

Equally a stream of consciousness without materiality is legally possible: it is a proof, according to Husserl, of the logical possibility of ghosts, without materiality and nevertheless with body scheme.

If thereby the a priori (although entirely empty) possibility of the actual ghosts is granted, then the immediate consequence is that a psychic subject without a material Body is indeed thinkable, i.e., as a ghost instead of a natural animal being, but in no way without a Body of some kind.<sup>3</sup>

But a stream of consciousness without a body scheme is legally impossible. The psychical stream, to be objectified, has to cover (or spread in) an own body. The essential link is not, hence, for Husserl, between psychical and physical, between mind and material body, but between psychical and body scheme. From the point of view of being given, or of being objectifiable, the psychic layer can not be disembodied, that is it cannot be separated from its body extension. The expression “can not” is not empirical but a priori. A stream that does not “spread” in a body extension is a countersense exactly as a colour that does not spread on a surface. The psychical is given, hence, in its essential connection with the corporeality (and in its empirical connection with the materiality) and the result of this inseparable link is the living body.

It is in connection with what is material that the psychic is given to us. Among material things there are certain ones, or from an eidetic standpoint there are certain ones a priori possible, which are soulless, “merely” material. On the other hand, there also are certain ones which have the rank of “Bodies” and as such display a connection with a new stratum of being, the psychic stratum, as it is called here. What is included under this heading? What experience first discloses to us here a stream, with no beginning or end, of “lived experiences” “of which manifold types are well known to us from inner perception, “introspection”, in which each of us grasps his “own” lived experiences in their originality.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the actual experience of a merely material thing, not animated by the psychical, confirms, for Husserl, the priority of a pure I, immaterial and disembodied. A pure I caught properly through a reflective conversion of look; a pure I that does not generate and does not over go but “enters and goes out of scene”; a pure I that does not hide in its own secret and interior richness, it is absolutely simple; it is absolutely in light. A pure I that is not living consciousness, feeling consciousness, body as taker of localised sensations; but, we could say centre of functions, an intentional structure adequate and transparent towards itself.

In this sense, it is admissible to talk about the privilege of the psychical, exactly as it is admissible to talk about the privilege of the colour of the timber respect to its surface, the latter being a sort of substrate in which the various *plena* (visual, audio, sound) spread themselves.

## 5. Which body in phenomenology?

I’m going to try to summarize what has been said. There is a kind of priority of the psychic, but not the possibility to segregate the psychic layer from body layer. With respect to its being objective, the psychic must be inextricably (in the sense of the a priori legality) tied to the body. To see some sort of unbreakable link between mind and body does not endorse a similar indissolubility between psychic and material.

The empirical impossibility of a stream of consciousness without a material body should not be confused with an a priori impossibility. This last one exists only between a stream of consciousness and body extension. The object of pure phenomenology is the connection between mind and extension,

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 101

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 98.

not the connection between mind and matter. That connection that gives rise to the living body or, which is the same, to the embodied mind.

The application of the concept of the material a priori to the mind-body problem in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl allows us to distinguish analytically both the points in question (cognitive mind, qualitative mind, matter, extension) and the relationships (empirical and a priori) that exist between those elements. The application of the concept of material a priori to the mind-body relationship shows, on the other hand, also the limit of its conception, in reference to the emerging concept of embodiment.

At a closer look, the mind-body problem in Husserl has four subordinated problems: a) the problem of the relationship between cognitive (or intentional) mind and material body b) the problem of the relationship between cognitive (or intentional) mind and living body as body scheme, c) the problem of the relationship between cognitive (or intentional) mind and the feeling body (qualitative mind), d) finally, the problem of the relationship between material body and qualitative mind. Now, Husserl's phenomenology seems to account mainly if not exclusively, for the functional and structural aspects of both the mental and the corporeal: on the one hand intentionality as basic structure of the mental, on the other the kinaesthetic body as the basic structure of the body.

The main, *hard problems* in the phenomenological perspective are, hence, two:

1. *the mind-body problem* : the problem of the relationship between the material part of the concept of body and the two-side concept of mind; 2. *the mind-mind problem*: the problem of the relationship between the intentional mind and the illeitic, qualitative mind; between the essential (formal) part and the not-essential (material) part of consciousness. The link between the body scheme (not material body) and the qualitative mind is analogue to the link that subsists between the colour and the extension or space (*material a priori*). But the *hard problem* here is that the body scheme is not sufficient to explain the whole concept of body. The *hard problem* concerns the notion of matter, the notion of material body. And the material body is an essential condition to feeling something, to have an intuition of something. Then, the central problem is the role of the natural, material, concrete notion of the body. The problem is not about the essence of the human being but about the nature of the human being.

This role is completely removed by Husserl and this fact marks the difference between the naturalistic approach and the phenomenological approach. The problem is that without an *integrated* concept of body it is possible to resolve neither the mind-body problem nor the mind -mind problem. For the last resolution it is necessary a paradigm change, in the sense used by Kuhn. This change reintroduces a material concept of body in the phenomenological perspective.

## 6. The Flesh of the Body

The central point, in the Merleau Ponty's phenomenological approach, is the crucial notion of the *flesh* in place of the notion of body. In phenomenology, the concept of body is strictly connected with the notion of extension, and then, ultimately, with an a priori link. On the contrary, the concept of flesh includes the crucial presence of transcendence in the stream of consciousness. This marks exactly the difference between Husserl's phenomenology and Merleau Ponty's approach.

In philosophy of mind there are two main problems within naturalistic perspective. First, there is the problem of explaining the phenomenological content of the consciousness. Second, there is the problem of explaining representational or intentional content. Between the two, only the first problem is considered *the hard problem* of the Philosophy of mind. We have seen the existence of the hard problem inside Husserl's phenomenology, a problem inherited from Descartes. The problem concerns the central notion of feeling and its relation with body. Both in Descartes and Husserl there is a clear distinction between intellectual cogitationes and sensitive cogitationes; between thinking and sensing; between intentional content (comprehensive of the body and its movements around the objects) and illeitic content, the *what it feels like* problem that Nagel speaks about.

A philosophical account of *what it feels like* needs a new concept of the body, a more material concept than the phenomenological one. We can find this concept in the notion of flesh proposed by Merleau Ponty and in the change of paradigm that this notion presupposes. The mind is inherently embodied. This crucial thesis, that is one of the major discoveries of the cognitive science, characterizes Merleau Ponty's

thought. The crucial point here is that the new phenomenological notion of body is largely natural, material, concrete. As Lakoff and Johnson said:

Reason is not disembodied, but arises from the nature of our bodies and bodily experience. This is not just the innocuous and obvious claim that we need a body to reason; rather, it is the striking claim that the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment. (...)

In summary, reason is not, in any way, a transcendent feature of the universe or of disembodied mind. Instead, it is shaped crucially by the peculiarities of our human bodies, by the remarkable details of the neural structure of our brains, and by the specific of our everyday functioning in the world. (...)

The phenomenological person, who through phenomenological introspection alone can discover everything there is to know about the mind and the nature of experience is a fiction.<sup>5</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's epistemology sets a considerable limit on some conceptual tools employed in Husserl's phenomenology, such as those expressed by the notions of intentionality, constitution, reflection, transcendental, and gives stability to others such as those represented by the notions of passivity, genesis, motivation, sedimentation, noticeably extending their meaning. In many respects, concepts with a critical role in Husserl's phenomenological epistemology find in Merleau-Ponty a deeply different orientation.

As Husserl's phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty's epistemological project is radically anti-reductionist and deeply anti-naturalistic.

Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naïve and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself around me and begins to exist for me. To return to the things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learned beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.<sup>6</sup>

However, in contrast with Husserlian phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty's antireductionist attitude and anti-naturalism don't involve the suspension, or the bracketing, of the natural stance. In a different way, the anti-naturalism professed by Merleau-Ponty has the aim to recover and preserve the natural stance, as well as a space for the pre-categorical thought, within which the consciousness, by its nature and genesis, inhabits.

In other words, for Merleau-Ponty, in contrast with Husserl, the naturalization and the natural stance don't follow the same way. The naturalization implies a process of conversion, that is, the translation of something derivative and secondary (for example the phenomenal and qualitative world) into something considered epistemologically basic and grounded (for example the world described by the physics). Instead, the natural stance reveals the necessity of an immersion in the broad context of nature, a process required if we want to give a full and authentic account of these "things" that phenomenology aims to describe from a morphological point of view.

The exclusion of the natural stance involves a description of the things very similar to that provided by a map, which is to a particular region what geography is to a landscape. Accordingly, the segregation of the natural dimension, in addition to the rebuttal of a natural attitude, risks draining the content of the experienced thing, showing the image of a disembodied object, deprived of its flesh, that is a mere functional element with no depth.

In philosophy of mind, the rebuttal of the naturalistic stance, as well as the assumption of a natural attitude involve a departure from the supposition that the physical states, e.g. the neuronal states, are primary and irreducible elements. At the same time this involves a departure from a kind of *anti-reductionism* which, on the contrary, considers the states of consciousness as primary and irreducible, that is, as free elements independent from any natural position. It is interesting to observe that anti-reductionism, as stated by Husserl, implies the assumption of a reductive stance. Definitely, in certain respects, the concept of

---

<sup>5</sup> G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh. The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*, New York, Basic Books, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology of perception*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. IX.

phenomenological reduction has a meaning contrasting the concept of reduction used in philosophy of mind. Phenomenological reduction requires giving up, or at least taking distance from, the natural stance (the scientific and object-oriented attitude) emphasized by reductionism in philosophy of mind.

However, as paradoxical as it may sound, phenomenological reduction and reduction in philosophy of mind share a critical aspect that justifies, at least in part, their homonymy: both of them affirm the necessity of a radical departure from the *natural stance* (in the case of phenomenology) and from the *manifest image* (in the case of philosophy of mind). Starting from this shared necessity, phenomenological approach and reductionism in philosophy of mind turn into two antithetical paths: the former establishes the priority of conscious experience and considers the physical states – the neuronal states included – secondary and derivative; while the latter establishes the priority of the physical states and considers the states of consciousness as derivative and according to some of its defenders not existing and illusory, therefore eliminable.

Assuming this point of view, the absence in Merleau-Ponty's works of a process of reduction – also of the phenomenological one – is perfectly clear. To endorse a philosophical project characterized by a radical anti-naturalism is not to deny the natural character of the consciousness. In this basic methodological distinction a critical change of paradigm can be summed up noticing that on the one hand the exigency of Husserl's phenomenology was that of disentangling the subject from the *world*, and that on the other hand Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is concerned to completely immerge the subject in the world, restoring the natural bilateralism between thought and the environment that an original phenomenological description should always preserve.

The reflective subject of the Husserlian phenomenology, that is, the subject conceived as the condition of possibility, rather than the bearer, of an actual experience is the result of an analytic reconstruction and not of an original phenomenological description. In contrast with this paradigm, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology there is no absolute priority for an impenetrable and objective reality, as well as there is no absolute priority for the idea of a subject conceived as a constitutive power, that is, as an invulnerable inwardness that can be reached through a backward walk.

Merleau-Ponty transforms the correlative analysis, typical of the Husserlian phenomenology within which the structure of consciousness is the basic element, in a bilateral analysis according to which both the subjective and the objective poles require a foundational priority. Accordingly, he extends the methodological approach from a perspective that privileges the external frame of the experience, to a perspective that fills that frame with an actual content.

In this view, the constitutive structure, or the reflective component, is progressively placed side by side with the domain of the unreflecting; the transparency of representation with the opacity of the feeling; the expressible character of the structured datum shows the relevance of the dumb, tacit, unexpressed and inexpressible nature that the experience inexorably brings with itself. This is a powerful change of perspective that makes it possible to transform puzzles in philosophy of mind (as in the case of the "question" of *qualia*), into "genuine" problems. On the other hand, as noticed by Kuhn, the conversion of a puzzle into a problem becomes possible only when a change in the theoretical and conceptual background happens, a change that opens the door to a different definition of the problem and not to other solutions of the same puzzle.

This conceptual change is evident in the way Merleau-Ponty faces the problem of sensation as opposed to the puzzle of *qualia*. As it is well known, because of their subjective nature (intrinsic, private, and hardly reducible to a third person perspective) and their essentially qualitative character (direct, immediate, and so ineffable), *qualia* are considered in philosophy of mind the only and genuine *hard problem*. But Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology adds another trait, maybe the most important, to those standard features usually ascribed to *qualia*. Qualia are essentially and not accidentally associated to the subject's embodied dimension, that is, to the possession of a lived body contrasting with the mere possession of a physical body (as in Descartes' philosophy). The introduction of the body establishes the role of the natural subject, that is, the role of the embodied, situated subject relative to which both the notions of reduction in philosophy of mind and phenomenological reduction appear to be inadequate.

On the other hand, the introduction of the body determines an epistemological shifting from the above mentioned puzzle of *qualia* to the problem of sensation.

There are two ways of being mistaken about quality: one is to make it into an element of consciousness, when in fact it is an object for consciousness, to treat it as an incommunicable impression, whereas it always has a meaning; the other is to think that this meaning and this object, at the level of quality, are fully developed and determinate.<sup>7</sup>

According to Merleau-Ponty, it is necessary to reconsider the question of sensitivity as a genuine problem: this is not a question concerning the possession of inert qualities or contents defined by well marked boundaries. Contrasting the identification of the notion of sensation with that of *qualia* assumed as a reply to external stimuli, the sensitivity is not something determined, instantaneous and detailed, but it is vague, ambiguous and indeterminate. On the other hand, for Merleau-Ponty, it is not correct to consider the domain of sensitivity as intrinsically formless and structureless except when a theoretical and meaningful system intervenes to check the rush and chaotic sphere of sensorial stimuli.

This is the idea of a great part of post neo-empiricist epistemology, according to which, to be accessible the datum should be interpreted and embedded in a circle of hypotheses and background theories. On the contrary, according to the idea proposed by Merleau-Ponty, the sensible datum is not tied to a theoretical and conceptual apparatus, but shows on its own a proper structure, even if flowing and ambiguous.

The sensible and perceptive field – that the qualities inhabit – far from representing the immediate result of an external stimulus, or a mere reply to an external situation, depends on specific variables such as for example the biological sense of the situation. This makes the sensible experience a critical process analogous to that of procreation, or that of breathing and growth. The things are for Merleau-Ponty *flesh* and not mere *bodies*, they are not a mere extensions or bodily surfaces covered by specific qualities. Accordingly, the sensations are not a mere reception of qualities but represent a vital inherence, they don't offer inert qualities but active and dynamic properties characterized by a proper value related to their functional role in preserving our life.

The pure quale would be given to us only if the world were a spectacle and one's own body a mechanism with which some impartial mind made itself acquainted. Sense experience, on the other hand, invests the quality with vital value, grasping it first in its meaning for us, for that heavy mass which is our body, whence it comes about that it always involves a reference to the body.<sup>8</sup>

The identification between *qualia* and sensitivity derives from a process of alienation suffered by the concept of body that inevitably leads to the leveling off of both the notion of consciousness and the notion of experiential thing. By contrast with this view, the embodied thought becomes the result of a circular conception of experience and knowledge. This is a conception within which the experience assumes an insight that neither the Husserlian notion of *plena*, nor the notion of *qualia* in philosophy of mind, are able to show. In the first case because the former notion is too close to an extensional idea of the qualitative element. In the second, because the latter notion is too close to the empirical notion of sensible datum and to a physiologic and mechanistic interpretation of sensation.

The idea of sensation assumed as a filling quality and the sensation assumed as the phenomenal and qualitative reply to an external stimulus, contribute to levelling out the domain of experience, draining and atrophying its own sense, that is, the idea of sensitivity as a living rhythm. A sensitivity that, in order to be understood, cannot be divorced from the analysis of the notions of body and embodiment, together with the awareness of the radical change of paradigm introduced by them.

#### References

- E. Husserl, Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, Second Book, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1989.
- G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh. The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought, New York, Basic Books, 1999.
- M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of perception, London, Routledge, 2002.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 8.