

CONCLUSION

In the last five chapters I have been attempting to resurrect a phenomenological ontology of the body, through difference. I have sought, that is, to show that the body allows thinking to escape from the trap of dualism. By thinking the body as different, philosophy no longer needs to privilege either an objective or a subjective mode of thinking.

I have argued that the early attempts by Kant and Heidegger provide the resources for other philosophers to develop the method by which the body can be allocated a central role in ontology. It is through a phenomenology which questions the privilege ascribed to the universal (questioning, that is, the transcendental a priori) that the embodied subject is revealed as the motile agency that articulates the world in its historical unfolding. In the language of the third chapter, this agency is 'workless'; that is, the subject does not dominate its world (its spaces, language, buildings and so on), nor is it dominated by them. It is rather through a 'middle-voiced' interplay that the world and the embodied subject express each other, as history.

In this way, the embodied subject is seen to act on the basis of a cultural and historical horizon of difference. This horizon is not immemorial or

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prescriptive of a certain form of authenticity. Such constructions of the horizon are derivative upon a more primordial corporeality - that of the culture and the history being transformed by agents of the present. The present is therefore the site of transmission and transformation of the conditionings and patternings of a cultural given. The cultural given or *habitus* is re-worked according to the different demands of the present.

Through my readings of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, I have argued that this 'communication more ancient than thought' that takes place between the body and its world is inherently *political*. The politics of difference begins with the embodied subject, situated within a cultural horizon. This cultural horizon is the simulacrum of the Kantian transcendental horizon. Like the Critical model, it operates as a given, as the condition of possibility for accessing and living within a world. Unlike the transcendental apriori however, this horizon is not universal and does not forever recede. Rather, the horizon is gathered up within each embodied action, and the possibilities of transformation of a particular world are opened up. In this sense, freedom, as I began to argue in the fourth chapter, becomes the freedom to be a *historical being*.

It is not granted that historical agency within the present of a cultural horizon facing its future can always express itself within the terms of that

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present. There will always be conservative and reactive forces which construct the cultural and historical given as 'pure' and 'originary'. Ideologies of an 'uncorrupted before' promote the desire to repeat the past without difference, to transmit but not to transform.

In relation to this, perhaps the most significant ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty is that he does not spell out the difference between active and reactive modes of motility. It is as if Merleau-Ponty romanticises the body's capacity to incorporate difference by addressing the needs of the present. For Merleau-Ponty, transformation of the cultural given itself operates as a given. But the absence of a distinction here ends up as a form of phenomenological flattery. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty is left unable to address all the forms of conditioning which the institutions of modernity and post-modernity have imposed upon the body.¹

Moreover, the freedom of a 'corporeal schema', of celebrating the simple motile agency of bodily being, can be constricted and paralysed by the other. Through the work of Frantz Fanon and James Baldwin in the final chapter, I began to articulate a serious challenge to the idea that Merleau-Ponty's flesh ontology brings us justice in the form of an always already

¹ It is this lacuna in Merleau-Ponty's thinking that Nick Crossley addresses by inserting the work of

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given intercorporeity. In order to acknowledge the difficulties of difference, I read into Fanon an *idealisation* of the flesh ontology. That is, I contended that for Fanon, the union through difference of the flesh ontology *cannot be considered as given*. The fact that as embodied subjects we are all chiasmically entwined to our own worlds of difference entails that the flesh, as the Ideal of the universal, must be struggled and fought for. To consider the flesh as somehow vaguely already given is therefore a dangerous move. Within the terms of this move it would be correct to describe phenomenology as a conservatism.

It has been my principal aim in this thesis to argue that phenomenology does not necessarily fall back into such a conservatism. On the contrary, it is only through a phenomenological methodology that difference can be thought, ontologically and therefore philosophically. Phenomenology, read through its development from Heidegger through to Merleau-Ponty, at last allows philosophy out of the current impasses of poststructuralist obsessions with the sign. The body, as spacing and temporising its world, dances with difference in the moment. Again I return to the words of Michel Serres,

Michel Foucault in his book, "The Politics of Subjectivity".

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All come to dance in order to read without speaking, to understand without language. They are all, nowadays, so exhausted, so saturated, so hagridden with discourse, language, writing. In the end fugitive meaning passes through there, taciturn. (Serres, 1995:40)

It is time to return to 'the body', through a phenomenological ontology. The body marks out its being-in-the-world. Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty fall into the trap of considering this engagement with the world to be within the terms of a reconstituted monism of being. Both tended to assume that there is only one world, and that 'world history' is World History. It is possible to read Heidegger's entire oeuvre as a shift from grounding such a World History in the subject to its displacement in language and, finally, a mysterious Event of being. Only in the Merleau-Ponty however is it possible to discern tensions beneath the surface of the text - tensions of difference. Against the prevailing reading of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as opening up to thought the lived experience of the motile body and yet closing itself off to the thought of difference, I have discerned a political ontology that works 'against the grain.'

If philosophy does not engage with difference in the world, then it will become less and less relevant to the multiple voices that demand expression

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in theory today. Philosophy will become an anachronism, the worst form of being ‘untimely.’ No-one will continue to believe in and cherish the universalisms and the proffered certainties of language, truth and logic. Nor will they accept a grand historicism that disables and paralyses the possibilities of grounding human agency in a world open to transformation. And finally, nor will people continue to be seduced by the simulacra of difference, operating in a textuality which absorbs all transcendence within its own terms. Philosophy must speak difference, or it will be drowned out by voices of the contemporary.

For instance, by not engaging with issues around race, philosophy falls increasingly into the trap of being necessarily racist. For being blind to the difference of race is the least overt (but most powerful) form of racism at work in society. The fact of race and racism in the West alerts us, at a theoretical level, to the fundamental difference embodiment can make to identity. As Fanon so painfully exposes, in “The Fact of Blackness”, racism, beginning with apparently the most innocent of gestures (from the child on the train) has the capacity to destroy the capacity to *be* in the world.

And so, as I acknowledged early on, I have to be alert and vigilant to my own positioning as a white male westerner. I write and exist in the world with a given set of privileges (and disadvantages), which allow for a specific

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set of insights and blindspots to be made available to me. It is only on the basis of my bodily being in the world that my 'knowledge' takes on the form it does. Again, from a philosophical point of view, all epistemic claims are grounded within a corporeal horizon of difference. Epistemology cannot be privileged over a phenomenological ontology without falling into the trap of not being able to ground difference. I choose my subject, but I cannot choose my audience. In this case, I cannot speak for difference, but I can attempt to allow difference to be spoken.

The body. Difference. Phenomenology. As these themes get taken up and developed in the thinking to come, I end with the vulnerable struggle of the dancer as a figure for the efforts required to place embodied difference at the centre of philosophy today.

The dancer is the sole hero, he remains when the others have gone, when music withdraws from the space. He is the sole hero, for he is helpless. His body is helpless, his gestures and the sign that he attempts are not aided. Dance is without recourse. It is alone, and it is first. (Serres, 1995:46)