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THE AFFECTIVE SHAPE
PERCEPTION AND THE ENCOUNTER OF OTHERS

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> La verdadera otredad hecha de delicados contactos, de maravillosos ajustes con el mundo, no podía cumplirse desde un solo término, a la mano tendida debía responder otra mano desde el afuera, desde lo otro.
>
> (J. Cortázar, *Rayuela*)

1) Introduction

The long-lasting debate about empathy in the fields of Philosophy, Cognitive Sciences and Neurosciences has traditionally paid a very limited attention to expressivity, implying that the "problem of other *minds*" needs something more than simple perception. As Dan Zahavi points out, the *invisibility thesis*, which means that the others' mental states are not directly visible to us, is common to the two most widely spread theories in Cognitive Sciences, the *theory theory* (TT) and the *simulation theory* (ST).[1] The first one claims that an empathic ability consists in conscious and inferential judgments about another's mental states. A well-known reference is the Maxi Test, created by Wimmer and Perner (1983), in which children are supposed to make a correct inference on a puppet's mental states, by putting themselves "in its shoes". This test measures the ability to detect a false belief, by using a «representation as a frame of reference to interpret or anticipate the other person's actions».[2]

The ST is rooted in the argument from analogy, because of its reference to one's own feelings in order to understand the other. Among the

[1] D. Zahavi, *Self&Other. Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy and Shame*, Oxford 2014, 173-176.

[2] H. Wimmer, J. Perner, *Beliefs about beliefs: Representation and constraining function of wrong beliefs in young children's understanding of deception*, «Cognition», 13 (1983), 106.

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major theorists, Alvin Goldman supports an explicit simulation theory which combines a simulative process with an inferential development of pretended states, in order to attribute them both to the other person. He admits that this represents «a blend of ST and TT, with emphasis on simulation»,[3] therefore it's not hard, I think, to detect the Cartesian error of splitting the mind and the body, since a conscious simulation is needed to infer a plausible judgment on the other's emotions or thoughts. Instead, as regards an implicit version of the ST, one of the major representatives is Vittorio Gallese. His thesis relies on a reproducing account of the mirror-system, discovered by his research team, by which these neurons are interpreted to fire when someone sees an action because her motor system implicitly *simulates* the action which she observes. Gallese "as if" system can be defined as subpersonal and relational: «although we do not overtly reproduce the observed action, nevertheless our motor system becomes active *as if* we were executing that very same action that we are observing».[4] His hypothesis, moreover, displays a certain confusion between what's phenomenal (concerning the experience, even the pre-reflective one) and what is neural (do neurons really have a first-person perspective?). Given that for him «action observation implies *action simulation*»,[5] the neuroscientist tacitly raises the mirror system to the rank of consciousness, since some cortical areas would then become the subject of a pre-noetic experience of simulation.

As I will prove, rediscovering expressivity is a way to go beyond TT's and ST's impasses. Let me provide a short example to show why I find this concept so crucial for intersubjectivity. Imagine to be attending a seminary. At a certain point, a student lifts up his hand and asks: "I don't really see the purpose of these lessons. Why do we have to attend them? Philosophy won't give us a job!". Now turn your eyes to the professor: he frowns at him, his cheeks become red, his eyes show a dangerous light. Does the student really need an inferential reasoning to realize which kind of emotion he has provoked? Would the student real-

[3] A. Goldman, *Simulating Minds. The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading*, New York, 2006.

[4] V. Gallese, *The "Shared Manifold" Hypothesis. From Mirror Neurons To Empathy*, «Journal of Consciousness Studies», 8/5-7 (2001), 37.

[5] *Ibid*., 36.

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ize the professor is upset only by an explicit judgment or a simulation? I rather think that he neither needs an inferential moment of reflection to perceive what he has provoked (maybe he would instead employ it to reflect on the danger of failing the exam), nor to simulate on himself the possible reaction, that anyway would have no way to be verified unless through perception of the expression, again.

My claim is therefore that only a re-definition of perception, the roots of which I have individuated in Max Scheler, allows a correct phenomenological interpretation of the empathic process. Being perception impulse-based, it loses the neutral character of a passive reception of sensible data from which we should abstract a rational knowledge. Perception is embodied and value-based, and in order to explain how we can have other-knowledge, we need to reexamine the concept of lived-body from a new perspective.

2) Leib *and embodied perception*

To argue that perception is active and embodied, we necessarily have to deal with the mind-body problem, that has been influenced by a certain Cartesian conception for a long time. In the second Meditation on First Philosophy, with the revealing title *The Nature of the Human Mind, and How it is Better Known Than the Body*, the first target of the Cartesian doubt is the sensible datum. This is valid both for the sensible certainty referred to our own «whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the body»[6] — and the perception of other human beings, that Descartes is observing from his window: «I normally say that I see men themselves […]. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment which is in my mind».[7]

Even though much more should be said about the complex philosophy of Descartes, it's easy to detect why dualism places its roots in his

[6] R. Descartes, J. Cottingham, R. Smoothoff, D. Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, Cambridge 1984 [1641], 17.

[7] *Ibid*., 21.

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thought: the deceptiveness of our senses opposed to the certainty of our rational judgment, combined with a self-reflection that should be the only safe way to prove our first-person perspective, creates an *impasse* that splits the mental dimension and the physical one. This can be seen well in the word *corpse*, in the previous quotation: not only the body is regarded as a mere mechanical support for the mind's activities, but there is also no distinction between a lived and a dead body.

This is precisely one of the major conceptual clarifications introduced by Max Scheler in his 1912 text, *Die Idole der Selbsterkenntnis*. The phenomenologist claims that the lived body (*Leib*) is to be distinguished from the physical one (*Körper*), since it represents its own foundation. By using a concept very close to the *pre-reflective consciousness*, Scheler argues that the unity of our living body (*Leibeinheit*) arises as «an immediate, clear content, given as materially identical and as a whole».[8] It goes without saying that we can find here the clear clues of Scheler's opposition to Descartes' dualism. This will become a bitter and open attempt to "shake it off" (*abschütteln*) in *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*.[9] Using the well-known title of Damasio's book, we could say that *Descartes' error* involves for Scheler a dualism that doesn't correspond to our experience. The conception of the body as

[8] «ein unmittelbar anschaulicher, material identischer Gehalt und als Ganzesgegeben» (M. Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik, GW* II, 158).

[9] M. Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, *GW* IX, 56-58. «Für die Neuzeit hat die klassische Theorie des Menschen ihre wirksamste Form gefunden in der Lehre des Descartes, die wir eigentlich erst in jüngster Zeit abzuschütteln im Begriff sind. Dadurch, daß er alle Substanzen in «denkende» oder «ausgedehnte» einteilte und lehrte, daß der Mcnsch allein von allen Wesen aus diesen beiden in Wechselwirkung stehenden Substanzen bestehe, hat Descartes in das abendländische Bewußtsein ein ganzes Heer von Irrtümern schwerster Art über die menschliche Natur eingeführt. [...] Auch das ist grundfalsch an der Descartes'schen Lehre, daß das Psychische nur in „Bewußtsein" bestehe und ausschließlich an die Großhirnrinde gebunden sei. […] Es ist der *ganze Körper*, der heute wieder das physiologische Parallelfeld der seelischen Geschehnisse geworden ist, keineswegs nur das Gehirn. Von einer so äußerlichen Zusammenbindung einer Seelensubstanz mit einer Körpersubstanz, wie sie Descartes annahm, kann gar nicht mehr ernstlich die Rede sein. [...] *Ein und dasselbe* Leben ist es, das in seinem Innesein *psychische*, in seinem Sein für andere *leibliche* Formgestaltung besitzt. [...] Im äußersten Gegensatz zu all diesen Theorien dürfen wir sagen: *Der physiologische und der psychische Lebensproseß sind ontologisch streng identisch* [...]».

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a machine leads to an unnatural division between the animation of a living being and the necessity of a mechanism of affective anthropomorphic projection on the images coming from external nature.[10] Apparently it's a reason-centered perspective, by which we can't discover the truth without a judgment that allows us to split the experience of the lived world from a supposed hidden mechanism. Yet, could we really say, e.g., that animation for animals doesn't exist while they're hunting, just because they don't have our kind of projection? Or that an aggressive animal coming towards us is just a machine in which we project an animation?

Another convincing criticism is about the loss of a psycho-physical unity. Descartes, in his *Passions of the Soul*, claimed that the pineal gland was involved in perception and corporeal movement, and was the soul's location in which *res cogitans* and *res extensa* are connected. Nowadays we know on the contrary that, on a neural level, there's no specific cerebral gland designated to keep the unity between the two layers. Nevertheless, the reductionist view of the brain as a "control room", as the only source of our decisions as Libet's experiments on free will have been interpreted, still represents a subterranean path toward a mind-body split. Reductionist theses have indeed a strong academic success and reveal that dualism is still spread in the brain-mind form, excluding the fundamental role of body, experience and environment. To explain consciousness through neural connections means to consider the human being as a brain in a vat, forgetting that even neural connections themselves are shaped by experience, social contacts and interaction with the environment. American neurologist and Nobel Prize winner Eric Kandel, has investigated how the formation of neural connections is provoked by sensory experience and practice. Two examples are quite convincing: the neural representation of a musician's fingers, much more developed than in a person who has no expertise in playing an instrument and, the second, the significant case of London taxi drivers tested with fMRI, who show a larger hippocampus than other persons of the same age, due to the improved orientation skill they acquire through their job. Memory is correlated to new interconnections that are unique for every human being, since they directly depend

[10] M. Scheler, *Der Formalismus..., GW* II, 158.

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on personal experiences, practice, and attitudes.[11] Even in the study of the brain, it is clear that "consciousness" could not flourish (and maybe not even arise) without embodied interactions with the world and the others.

With such premises, how does the idea of perception change then? One of the great intuitions in Scheler's theories is the impulsive system (*Triebsystem*) pertaining to both animals and men. The contact with our world is accomplished, using today's terminology, in an embodied, enactive and interactive way, since even our physiological function is dynamic and continuously shaped.[12] Scheler's novelty consists in the deeply changed perspective on sensations and perception, which lose their conceptual and exclusively receptive character. Let's suppose we have an orange in front of us. Rationalists and empiricists would agree in considering the sensation as a consequence proportional to the stimulus, meaning that sensations are reduced to receptive and passive processes, by which the orange would have a univocal and active effect on our perception, which would be impressed like a plate.[13] Another suitable example, from *The Phenomenological Mind*, is Buytendijk's description of eyestrain while reading a book. The lines themselves become fatiguing, boring, difficult, because of the pre-noetic influence of tiredness on the reader, who will realize her bodily condition only afterwards.[14] Her *perception* of the content is affected by a very flesh-and-bone value.

Therefore, it must follow that our perception is rarely neutral and aimed at a mere cognitive knowledge. We are immersed in a lived world, we interact with living creatures and non-living objects through movements, gestures, expressions. Briefly, through a lived body that is surely not only guided by rational purposes. According to the above-

[11] E.R. Kandel, *In Search of Memory. The Emergence of a New Science of Mind*, New York 2007.

[12] M. Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, *GW* IX.

[13] Moreover, the cognitivistic "sandwich" model claims that we receive an impression from external stimuli, after which we consciously elaborate it in our mind and, as a third step, emotions and motor responses arise.

[14] F.J.J. Buytendijk, *Prolegomena to an Anthropological Physiology,* Pittsburgh 1974, 62 (quoted in S. Gallagher, D. Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, London - New York 2012, 134).

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mentioned example, we could grasp the orange with the (explicit or pre-noetic) intention to eat it, but would our perception be the same with and without mildew's traces on the fruit? The purpose is not, apparently, to know something about it, but rather to have a concrete interaction with it, and that aspect shapes our sensations *before* and *during* the experience, which means to have an active and impulse-based perception. This is oriented by what Gerald Edelman, in a very Schelerian way, calls *values*. Values are not only to be intended in a moral way, but, first of all, they are basic systems correlated to brain neurotransmitters and guided (at least at a basic level) by evolution and evolutionary strategies, with an effect on the biological level. Regarding the orange, values would have an active role in our perception of the fruit, letting us feel disgust in perceiving the mildew. Value systems are responsible for the release of the appropriate neurotransmitter that affects our perception and therefore our impression, our behavior and our interaction with the world. Conversely, synaptic connections and perceptual categorization, related to value systems and involving significance-givenness for the subject, are also continuously shaped and modified by our experiences. Such value systems, that constrain categorization, are in fact not completely imposed in advance and, shaped by past history and learning, they give a unique and dynamic pattern from which to interpret a certain scene. Again, as for synaptic connections, they are intrinsically individual and depend on experiences, history and learning.[15] Even though Neuroscience allows us a better comprehension of the perceptive processes, reductionism is therefore to be refuted by pointing out the fundamental role of body, experience and interactions in shaping our own neural structure.

[15] Edelman's theory claims a mutual interaction between values, perceptual categorization and experiential selection of neuronal gropus that shapes perception and gives rise to behavior. On a more complex level, the three main higher brain functions (perceptual categorization, memory and learning) present a dynamical, always *in fieri* interconnection that leads to synaptic changes, to continuous modifications in categories through behavior and motor activity and consequently to a memory that results from a continual recategorization. G.M. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire. On the Matter of the Mind*, New York 1992.

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3) Expressivity and social perception

As for the perception of our environment, the perception of others is never neutral. Feelings, emotions and value-judgments are never avoidable, and at the same time we are pre-noetically guided by an attention to certain aspects, such as, I argue, movement and expressivity. The Schelerian concept of expressivity represents a revolutionary point of view in the perception of others.[16]

To sum up, the main theories in Cognitive Sciences, namely the simulationist (ST) and the theory (TT) accounts, present a main problem, that is a self-reference which doesn't allow the exit from one's own monadological sphere. Scheler's theory of expressivity and expressive phenomena represents a suitable way to go beyond this *impasse* toward a real social contact. The German word *Ausdruck* (expression) means literally to "push out" an emotion, implying that, for Scheler, feelings and emotions come to be present in the expression directly. This implies that we do not perceive first a physical body and *then* an emotion. On the contrary, the *Körper* (material body) is an abstraction of the *Leib* (lived body), which is constituted by an enactive *Triebstruktur*. For this reason the subject is perceived and caught as an expressive unity (*Ausdruckseinheit*), inherently embodied, and the first step for intersubjectivity appears to be more immediate and tangible than usually thought. As the philosopher wrote,

> For we certainly believe ourselves to be directly acquainted with another person's joy in his laughter, with his sorrow and pain in his tears, […]. If anyone tells me that this is not "perception" (*Fremd-Wahrnehmung*) […] I would beg him to turn aside from such questionable theories and address himself to the phenomenological facts.[17]

Again, Scheler reminds us of the non-neutral character of our perception. The grasping of an emotion or an intention doesn't usually require an inferential judgment or a simulation. If a person runs against us with aggressive eyes and attitude, do we really need to judge or simulate her intentions? As regards primary intersubjectivity, there is no

[16] Cf. also G. Cusinato, *Periagoge*, Verona 2014, 92-94.

[17] M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, London 1954, 260.

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need for an inner hypothesis or simulation. Therefore, we are able to perceive her intended feeling or to detect her real feeling if she's lying, but this is possible only thanks to expression. Since the other's emotions are perceived directly, this theory avoids a self-reference and allows a real exit from one's own solipsistic sphere, so solving the above-named problems of ST and TT. Moreover, the subject is not a Cartesian duality of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* anymore. Her expressions are not a "soul manifestation" but a unity-manifestation. This doesn't mean, of course, that the other is entirely transparent. Since the subject has a private dimension, that is her *personal* sphere (in the moral sense of the term), her otherness is preserved, but a real communication is possible starting from the basic level. Scheler speaks in fact of the certainty of experiencing both our own and the others' thoughts, emotions, feelings, and the direct aspect of the experience is expressed in the word *Fremdwahrnehmung*, that is neither a judgment nor a simulation, but rather a *perception*. He even claims that the subject of an experience can at first remain unknown, emerging from «an immediate flow of experiences, undifferentiated as between mine and thine». Even though this sentence has been criticized for eliminating the distinction between two persons necessary for the rise of intersubjectivity, it pinpoints, instead, a dynamic way of conceiving the "subjects" as entities whose formation is continuously re-shaped through common experiences.[18]

In such non-neutral perception of other, that I call "expressivity-catching", my claim is that there is a *pre-noetic focus* on expressive behavior. A good evidence of this tendency is the well-known experiment by Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel, in which a short video shows three geometrical figures moving around a closed geometrical space. Experimental subjects show a disposition to interpret the video as a coherent story, with meaningful actions carried out by the three geometrical figures, which acquire various moods and personalities (timid, aggressive, dictatorial,…).[19] This is possible because of the direct ex-

[18] A good interpretation is Zahavi's proposal of distinguishing in those lines a sense of ownership (which would be a pre-noetic necessary character of experience) from a sense of authorship, that would be instead not experienced in this primary intersubjective contact. See D. Zahavi, *Self&Other…*, 132.

[19] F. Heider, M. Simmel, *An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior*, «The American Journal of Psychology», 57 (1944), 243-259.

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perience we have of the dynamic of embodied emotions. We pre-reflectively know that when we see a living subject, animal or man, moving fast towards an another until invading his personal space and the other subject moves backwards in response, it's a case of threat, violence, aggression. Conversely, a hesitant way of moving will be seen as shy or scared. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone writes, there is a mutual intrinsic influence between emotion and movement that doesn't even allow to separate them in experiential time. Emotions literally move us: «There is not an identity but a formal dynamic congruency between the kinetic and the affective. Unified by a congruent dynamics, the modes of experience are simultaneous; they are temporally conjoined».[20] That is to say, using a Schelerian language, that expressivity in body and movement is not split from the emotion expressed: it is present there.

Although the methods of the experiment can be criticized (the questions they pose might influence the experimental subjects to give a "human" interpretation of the figures), the results represent suitable evidence of our tendency to focus on an animated and expressive behavior. In the contact with others, this can be perceivable on the face (Scheler's example of laughter and tears) and in gestures (as in this experiment, or in Scheler's example of a man with joined hands to pray[21]). If our focus was the mere physical aspect of the body (*Körper*), Heider&Simmel's video would only be perceived as an amalgam of geometrical figures to our perception. Moreover, Meltzoff&Moore have pointed out that even babies have a basic intersubjective tendency, being responsive to and imitating facial expressions.[22] It goes without saying that a newborn isn't able to think in inferential terms, but this doesn't mean he's not actively perceiving and interacting with another human being. And this is precisely an intersubjective relation. The focus on facial expressions in these studies shows a tendency to expressivity, emotion- and intention-catching since the very beginning of our lives. A general tendency, but, as we have seen, not of a static nature, since there can be individual variations towards one aspect rather than another, depending on per-

[20] M. Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Morality*, Philadelphia 2008, 205.

[21] M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*…, 260.

[22] A. Meltzoff, M.K. Moore, *Imitation of facial and manual gestures by human neonates*, «Science», 198 (1977), 74-78.

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sonal experiences and interests.

On the other hand, since we are immersed in a social and interactive world, the other shapes us. If it's true that we approach others in a non-neutral way, the same happens when we are perceived. As Thiemo Breyer points out, with an echo from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, a fundamental human dimension is the *social visibility* through which we are constantly exposed to the eyes of other people and at the same time we play the role of observers. Breyer sums up his theory in five main points:

> 1) Humans are visible, thanks to their embodied presence and their upright carriage
>
> 2) Humans are aware of their visibility, with all the consequences on emotions (such as shame) and identity-formation.
>
> 3) Humans live a double-life as seeing-seens, and they are aware of both having a first-person perspective as a subject and of being and object of perception
>
> 4) As regards a higher level of the social relationship, humans are made visible (or invisible), e.g., as an exhibition of attention and care or, on the contrary, as an instrument of domination, "pretending that the other is invisible", or simply being inattentive.
>
> 5) Humans also show and express themselves, through a behavior, a way of dressing, in the attempt to give a certain image or representation of themselves.[23]

First of all, people are in the social dimension with their *Leib*-presence. The term body-image has undergone a heated debate and still finds no agreement among scholars, but it can be useful to show the effects of social interactions that affect the individual from the very basic level. By *body-image* I mean the image (beliefs, concepts, emotions, representations) we continuously create of our body and the reflective relationship we have with it. It can also affect (and be affected by) the pre-noetical aspect (*body-schema*),[24] which allows us to move in the

[23] T. Breyer, *Social Visibility and Perceptual Normativity*, in M. Doyon, T. Breyer (edd.), *Normativity in Perception*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire 2015.

[24] I follow here some suggestions by Paul Schilder, who points out how our body-image can be seen as an intrinsic dynamic process, incessantly re-shaped, destroyed and re-built: see P. Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body*, New York 1950 [1935]. Nevertheless, Schilder keeps within the same concept the pre-noetic and

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world in such and such way and with a certain purpose. It is clear why the construction of our body-image, continuously evolving through new experiences, is affected by the others' eyes and social interactions. Here is an everyday-life example, if people on the street start to stare at us with a glance of disapproval (maybe we have a tomato spot on the shirt or we are dressed in a very unusual way), we will have the tendency to walk in a clumsy, embarrassed way. On the contrary, the affective relationship with our body-image can be improved if we receive repeated admiring or approving gazes. Breyer efficaciously points out that the gaze of others is a powerful tool, since it's never neutral nor received in a neutral way, and can have a significant effect even when it shows inattention, indifference or the aim of excluding a person deliberately.

Moreover, Gallagher underlines how social interactions shape perception, and lead us to see the world in a certain way. A child that perceives an expression of, e.g., disgust, in the other will learn that a certain object is to be avoided and that other people will have the same value-judgment about it. What he learns directly affects the way it perceives that particular object.[25] Can this social learning be also valid for intersubjectivity? By fully accepting the others' value-judgment about a person or a category of people, we will most probably fall prey to prejudice. But if we see social learning under another light, it could help us to learn to see *the empathic process itself* in a new way. As Schutz points out in his criticism, if the expression can be ambiguous about innermost intentions and reasons, it is also true that a certain practice of attention to expressivity can reveal hidden clues that sometimes are precluded even to the person we are observing, and allow a direct contact with the other person from the very basic level. I'd like to remark again that when we underly the importance of bodily-visible emotions it doesn't imply reducing empathy to an infallible other-reading: it goes without saying that the linguistic dimension, together with an identification when the situation is not completely clear, can be helpful in or-

the reflective instances, which are better distinguished and clarified in Gallagher's theory of the distinction body schema/body image. See S. Gallagher, *Body Image and Body Schema: a conceptual clarification*, «Journal of Mind and Behaviour», 7 (1986), 541-554, or S. Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Oxford, 2005.

[25] S. Gallagher, *Seeing Things in the Right Way: How Social Interaction Shapes Perception*, in M. Doyon, T. Breyer (edd.), *Normativity in Perception*..., 121.

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der to understand the other. Sometimes, however, a *reading* is just not necessary, since perception gives us enough insight.

4) Concluding Remarks

The idea of perception that has dominated Philosophy with its neutral and passive character should instead come back down to earth and admit its value-influenced and active aspect. What Scheler theorized about a *Triebstruktur*, is proved to be true not only on the phenomenological level of experience, but also on the biological one. Basic values, emotions, past experiences and acquired patterns affect perception and experience itself, creating an unrepeatable perspective for every human being, that for the phenomenologist give rise to a correlation between the impulsive structure and the lived world, and between the individual's *ordo amoris* and world-openness, two fundamental aspects in the continuous formation of a person.[26] Unlike the idea of a plate impressed by sensations, a medley of rational knowledge, emotions and bodily affections is what shapes our viewpoint on the world and on the encounter of others. There is of course a difference between "emotion" and "affection",[27] but what is starting to be recognized in certain philosophical theories is the need to reconsider the overall dimension of the human being interacting with the world and the others. Some elements proving that an affective revolution is developing towards the elimination of the abstract and artificial character of dualism are the phenomenological proposal or the theory of direct perception, proposed by Gallagher and Zahavi, the problems of we-intentionality and empathy reconsidered under a phenomenological light, that concerns the experience itself and the attention for the embodied dimension of consciousness.

In the Philosophy of the Mind and in Cognitive Sciences, the use of misleading expressions such as "problem of other minds" and

[26] On intersubjectivity as understanding the other's system of values and emotions, or *axiological competence*, cf. R Guccinelli, *Le direzioni del sentire. Intersoggettività e conoscenza interpersonale tra Scheler e Merleau-Ponty*, «Dialeghestai. Rivista telematica di filosofia», anno 11, inserted 5th July, 2009 [http://mondodomani.org/dialegesthai/rgu01.htm#par3].

[27] For a precise characterization in this respect, see R. De Monticelli, *The Sensibility of Reason: Outline of a Phenomenology of Feeling*, this issue.

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"mindreading", shows that the obstacles in understanding the empathic process must be removed by aiming at the very basic roots of it. How can we exit from the solipsistic prison, if not by realizing the direct contact through our *Leiber*? If "minds" are visible in expressions, and emotions cannot be really divided from them, grasping the other without absorbing him is possible and this is precisely the long-time aim of empathy. At the same time, the awareness of the role of social interactions in shaping a dynamic and evolving subject accounts for some subtle nuances and complexities in the intersubjective relationship, starting from the other person's influence on the continuous building of our own body-image.

Abstract

The problem of intersubjectivity, widely and heatedly debated in the different domains of Philosophy, Cognitive Sciences, Neurosciences and Psychology, displays today a diverse panorama of theories that don't always allow to explore the problem of affectivity. What I claim in my paper is that, in order to understand the problem from its roots, a redefinition of perception is necessary. After analyzing Scheler's theories of *Leib* and expressivity as a starting point and finding evidence of their validity in specific neurobiological studies, the concept of perception that emerges loses every possible neutral and mere passive character as we discover it to be *affectively shaped* through values, emotions, personal experiences. Keeping in mind such characteristics, it is possible to understand the experience of others as an embodied, interactive and concrete encounter, that leads us to call into question the main theories of mind in the Cognitive Sciences and reminds us of the role the others play in shaping us.

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