

Introduction: The Arts and Sciences of the Situated Body

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This special issue of *Janus Head* explores a number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary dimensions of the theme, the situated body. The body, of course, is always situated in so far as it is a living and experiencing body. Being situated in this sense is different from simply being located someplace in the way a non-living, non-experiencing object is located. That the body is always situated involves certain kinds of physical and social interactions, and it means that experience is always both physically and socially situated. The interesting question is not only how this works (what precisely it means to be situated), but whether and how the answer to that question changes from one situation to another. It seems reasonable to say that the body is situated differently in different situations, and that this difference may not be simply a difference in the situational content but a difference in how the body processes being situated precisely because the circumstances are so different. To put it differently, we might say, the question is not just about differences in situations, but differences in situatedness. Is it possible that the body is X-situated (in terms of its situatedness) in the task of solving a mathematical problem, but is Y-situated when it is engaged in dancing with another person? And if, as seems obvious, there are significant physiological and experiential differences involved in being in these different situations, are some of these differences due to being X-situated, for example, rather than Y-situated?

This collection of essays gathers together investigations of the situated body that address such variations in what it means to be situated. These investigations cross theory and practice, expression and performance and interweave disciplines and practices such as philosophical anthropology, cognitive science, phenomenology, architecture and painting, and artistic performances like dance and music. They describe the body as an experiencing enactive agent embedded in various pragmatic and social circumstances, the body as rigidly circumscribed in art and science, and the body as extended into its environment through the high technology that is more and more defining our experiences and our relationships. Here are the conclusions and open questions that we can discern from these papers.

Just as the body, which Merleau-Ponty calls “the possibility of situations,” is, in some degree, disruptive to the pure thinking of traditional philosophers from Plato through Descartes, and even for some contemporary philosophers of mind, so too does the very concept of *situation* challenge both science and philosophy. It involves a critique of objective thought, a rejection of the strict distinction between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, and an opening up of both phenomenology and philosophy of mind to an aesthetics (Watson) where, again, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, “music is as eloquent as speech” and may better allow us to “sing the world” (1962, 391; 187).

At the same time, the fact that cognitive scientists have recently rediscovered embodied and situated cognition, raises the question of whether art and science can provide complementary accounts; whether a serious consideration of situatedness, a consideration that itself is situated and shaped by the instruments, tools, media, and technologies that allow us to do science and to perform art, may allow an explication of all of the various forms of experience, including creative performance and aesthetic experience (Brink).

The body itself can be made a situation; it can be made a laboratory for experimentation, not only in science and medicine, but also in art, performance, and even architecture (DePreester, Karoblis, Keane, Kozin). Quite in contrast to the traditional philosopher’s rather tidy view which involves pushing the body to one side, or viewing it as a machine, the body can certainly be “in your face,” off-balance, messy, leaky, broken, abused, neglected, as well as enjoyed or ecstatic. All such bodily states can be presented in artistic performances and productions, and at least one question is whether philosophers can learn from such things, whether what such performed and produced situations show about the body can be brought into a cohesive account of how the diversity of practices and phenomena fit together in a way that does not lead to simply another one-dimensional metaphysical conception of subjectivity (Rawnsley).

Bodily states are not static; the body moves. Bodily movement situates us in a variety of ways. If, as Pascal (1966) says, “Our nature lies in movement,” this is reinforced by recent advances in the neurosciences in regard to perception, intentional action, and understanding the behavior of others. But movement is not simply locomotive and instrumental and intersubjective; our movement is not just for getting around, getting things done, or communicative purposes. Movement and accompanying proprioception

make us what we are insofar as they help to constitute a phenomenologically pre-reflective self that is neither substantive nor purely socially constructed (LeGrand). Furthermore, movement is often for pleasure or to avoid pain; it has an affective dimension (Cole and Montero). Not only do we like to move, both phenomenology and neuroscience tell us that we like to watch movement. The affect that comes with movement and the observation of movement can be very different for different forms of movement, in sport and after sport, in dancing and keeping time to music, in sexual rhythms and in the stillness of meditation.

In all kinds of movement humans extend themselves into the non-biological, in more than one ontological direction: they are bodies but not simply biological insofar as they enter into cultural and spiritual experiences; they are bodies and at the same time other than biological as they incorporate technology and enter into a “non-human” or cyborgian dimension (Selinger and Engström, Clark). Although it is not clear where the limits are for such cultural, spiritual or cybernetic possibilities for transcending purely physical limitations, it does seem clear that such transcendence is possible only because we *remain* embodied and situated (Harle). And whether or not our ability to conceive of ourselves on cultural, spiritual, or cybernetic models involves nothing more than creative metaphors, we need to consider further the moral and political issues that this kind of self-understanding brings with it.

References

- Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962. *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
 Pascal, B. (1966). *Pensees*. London: Penguin Edition.

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