

Petr Kouba
Margins of Phenomenology

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Introduction

To begin with, it would be fitting to explain the perhaps overly ambitious title of this book. Exploring the margins of phenomenology is a task for an entire lifetime and one certainly cannot pretend to do so in a single book – this is all the more true in that as this is not a systematic work but a collection of studies that reflect, from various perspectives, upon a set of phenomenological issues and confront them with positions beyond the framework of phenomenology. A common thread running through the studies is their contemplation of the differences between phenomenology and post-phenomenology, which transcends phenomenological tradition by means of non-phenomenological approaches. Phenomenological themes like worldhood, life, individuality, temporality, corporality, emotionality, disease, suffering and our relationships with others are considered from both phenomenological and post-phenomenological stances. Thus, although processed in a phenomenologically transparent manner, the phenomenological field of investigation is regarded, as it were, from the outside. At the same time, however, it appears that phenomenological thought is compelled toward the outside by the force of its own rectitude, as is evident in the key moments of the works of the likes of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Lévinas and Maldiney.

Take, for example, the phenomenon of suffering: Can suffering even be a phenomenon in the phenomenological sense? What is its intentional structure? Is suffering a matter of the structure of an individual existence, or does it rather show itself to be a moment in which the unity of an individual human existence falls apart? Does suffering bring an individual existence back toward itself when it tears it from its absorption in the world, or is it rather an excess that throws an individual existence beyond itself? How is an individual existence related to the suffering that overwhelms it and rends it asunder? However we might answer such questions, it is clear that conclusions regarding the particular character of suffering cast a specific light on the issues of health, disease and ultimately the finitude of human existence.

However, it is not only a question of human existence, for suffering is what connects humans with animals. From the standpoint of suffering, the difference between humans and animals is obscured – or rather it is no longer a matter of strict ontological distinction and becomes “only” a question of the extent to which this or that organism is capable of suffering. At any rate,

the anthropocentric view on the reality of life ends here. And thus we find ourselves outside the framework of modern phenomenology, which has been so mindful of the experiential disclosure of its phenomena.

By contrast, the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, which represents the outside of phenomenology most plentifully in this book, broaches and explores the possibilities of non-anthropocentric thought when describing the processes of individuation in which individuality is not presupposed as a fundamental structure of experience but on the contrary, is shown in its precarious nature as something that breaks apart and is reconstituted within the framework of vital upheavals. The finitude of individual existence conceived this way is immediately projected into an understanding of the fundamental structures of emotionality and corporality as well. In addition, it is true here that individuality never stands alone, but is fundamentally bound up in a network of “intersubjective“ relationships. Individuality and collectivity are interconnected to the degree that the desocialisation of experience necessarily leads to the breaking apart of the structure of individual experience. This brings us back to the experiential structure of suffering. Nonetheless, we must not forget that for Deleuze and Guattari the disintegrating influence of suffering is compensated for by ecstatic experiences of joy and intensity that tear everyday existence out of its vital equilibrium.

As regards the relationship between phenomenology and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, however, we must set matters straight. If we consider the entirety of Deleuze’s work and his collaborations with Guattari, it is clear that phenomenology figures most often as a target for ironic comments. Although the influence of Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty is beyond doubt, phenomenological thought is here most often present only implicitly. That is perhaps why there is so little secondary literature on the relationship between Deleuze’s philosophy and phenomenology. Neither is this book meant to be an exhaustive treatise on the complicated and equivocal relationship between Deleuze and phenomenology. This is evident in the very fact that out of the entire corpus of Deleuze’s works, we consider here mainly texts written in collaboration with Guattari. Those interested in the relationship between Deleuze and phenomenology would be advised to explore Alain Beaulieu’s *Gilles Deleuze et la phénoménologie*, which deals with this issue more thoroughly.¹

¹ Alain Beaulieu, *Gilles Deleuze et la phénoménologie* (Paris: Sils Maria éditions, 2004).

Corporality and Thought on the Boundary of Individual Being

Corporality and thought in themselves represent two complicated philosophical problems. Even greater difficulties arise, however, if we investigate both of them at the same time in order to shed light on the relationship between them. What, then, is the relationship between corporality and thought? Are they two phenomenal fields bound by ties of mutual correlations, or is their bond between them even tighter than that? Could we imagine it being so tight that we would be forced to posit a factual fusion of the two spheres? And if so, what would we gain by abolishing or at least calling into doubt the boundary between the spheres of corporality and thought?

In order to answer these questions, we would like to appeal to two philosophical schemes in which corporality plays a central role. The first is Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological-existential discussion of human existence as outlined in *Phénoménologie de la perception*. The second is Deleuze and Guattari's "schizoanalysis", in which one may see an attempt to overcome certain existential principles, foremost among them the supposed individual character of human existence, a supposition that finds its way into the phenomenological view of human corporality. For the post-existential analysis, corporality ceases to be a fundamental moment in the self-realisation of an individual existence and becomes a domain of pre-individual events. At the same time, such a descent to a pre-individual dimension of life breaks new ground for thinking anew the relationship between corporality and thought. Our task will be to examine how Deleuze and Guattari overcome Merleau-Ponty's conception of corporality and attempt to show what consequences their revision of the phenomenological view of corporality entail for understanding the relationship between corporality and thought.

A Historical Aside

Before we come to the confrontation between the existential and the post-existential views on corporality and thought, however, it would be fitting to delve briefly into the history of philosophy in order to better understand the

basic difficulties awaiting any philosophical considerations aiming to illuminate how they are related. Two thinkers may be taken as representing all the rest, for they determined the manner in which the Western philosophical tradition has conceived of the relationship between corporality and thought.

The first thinker we shall discuss is Aristotle, who dealt with corporality and thought in *De Anima*. According to Aristotle, that corporality is related in some way to mental processes is evident in the fact that mental states such as emotions are always accompanied by physical changes: “It seems that all the affections of soul involve a body – passion, gentleness, fear, pity, courage, joy, loving, and hating; in all these there is a concurrent affection of the body”.¹ Because the body somehow takes part in these states, it cannot be separated in any simple way from the soul. As Aristotle says, “there seems to be no case in which the soul can act or be acted upon without involving the body; e.g., anger, courage, appetite, and sensation generally”.² It is mental states like anger, confidence or desire that make plain the essential interdependence between body and soul. However, one might ask whether anger, confidence or desire can be considered states at all. If we take into account the dynamic connection between body and soul as well as the driving role motives play in inducing human behaviour, then perhaps we should speak of “movements” instead of “states”. For example, according to Aristotle, anger “should be defined as a certain mode of movement of such and such a body (or part or faculty of a body) by this or that cause and for this or that end”.³ Anger is a bodily movement related with the stimuli that call it forth and the goals it aims to fulfil. The same is true of all other emotional movements; bodily movements reveal themselves in connection with their stimuli and motives. However, if we consider the dynamic coupling comprising stimuli, motives and their bodily correlates which, taken together, make up an emotional movement, it seems that the human soul loses its specificity, that it merges with the human body and its practical relationships with the stimuli that call on our attention and the goals we pursue.

The extent to which the soul is separable from the body is the main problem Aristotle deals with in *De Anima*, where the soul is understood as the actualisation of a particular body. That does not mean that the soul itself

¹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, in *Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 4 (403a).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

must have a bodily – that is, material – nature. Instead, the soul is the form of the body. In the context of his discussion of the relationship between the soul and the body, Aristotle uses the terms matter and form (*HÝLÉ* and *MORPHÉ*), combined with the terms potentiality and actuality (*DYNAMIS* and *ENERGEÍA*). If matter is a principle of transformation and the potential to acquire new purposes, whereas form represents the principle of actuality and the definiteness of a given being, then a body must be matter that acquires form and definiteness by means of a soul. Soul is therefore form as well as “an actuality of the first kind of a natural body”.⁴ The soul is the general principle of life and the basic principle of motion in the living body. However, this only makes the question whether the soul is separable from the body even more pressing.

For Aristotle, the answer is that although emotional movements of the soul and sense impressions may be inseparable from the body, in addition to them, the soul also has a purely rational capability. The most defining capability of the human soul – that which in the end constitutes it – is the ability to think abstractly – that is, the ability to think not only of individual things, but of generalities. And it is this rational part of the human soul that is – by contrast with the ability to perceive through the senses – in principle inseparable from the body. Although the rational part of the human soul depends on what the senses provide it with, it need not always be passive; it can become active as well. What is known as active reason, which is the actual basis of the reasoning soul, is not dependent on the senses or the sensorial capacity and therefore not dependent on the body. As Aristotle claims, “Thought in this sense of it is inseparable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity”.⁵

The second philosopher we shall discuss is Descartes. He too in his own way developed a conception of thought as something that in a certain mode is not passive, finding the basic source of the autonomy and sovereignty of reason in the certainty of the *cogito, ergo sum*. Although he splits human existence into mind, whose essence consists in pure thought, and body, which like all physical objects is characterised by extension, Descartes also wonders how we are to understand the psychosomatic whole of human existence. The methodical separation of human existence into *res cogitans* and *res extensa* does not prevent him from realising that understanding the

⁴ Ibid. p. 21 (412b).

⁵ Ibid. p. 135 (430a).

fundamental character of human existence is an issue involving first and foremost the connection between mind and body. Regarding this connection, Descartes notes in *Discours de la Méthode* that it is not enough that mind “be lodged in the human body like a helmsman in his ship, except perhaps to move its limbs, but that it must be more closely joined and united with the body in order to have, besides this power of movement, feelings and appetites like ours and so constitute a real man”.⁶ Thus, even though mind is radically different from body, which Descartes thinks of as a mechanical automaton, he does not neglect phenomena like feelings and desires, which cannot be reduced to the sphere of *res cogitans* or to that of *res extensa*, either. This is true particularly of emotions, which Descartes lists among the “passions” in *Pasions de l’âme*. However, since the term “passion” might appear to suggest a certain passivity, perhaps a better term might be “affect”. Affect involves a particular movement, one which does not require the active use of our reason. Because emotions influence our will – that is, they tell us what to do without requiring us to think explicitly and at the same time prepare our body for what we are to do – they are the type of movements which set human existence as a whole in motion. As Descartes puts it, “the principal effect of all the human passions is that they move and dispose the soul to want the things for which they prepare the body. Thus the feeling of fear moves the soul to want to flee, that of courage to want to fight, and similarly with the others”.⁷ The passions are part of the original *union* between mind and body (Descartes uses the term “connection” in his letters to Elizabeth of Bohemia) and as such may only be properly understood on the basis of the psychosomatic whole. For Descartes too the emotions are evidence of the factual inseparability of mind and body. Emotions show that it is the *union* of mind and body that leads to an understanding of human existence in its practical relationship to the world. Nevertheless, because the methodical splitting of human existence into *res extensa* and *res cogitans* prevents the full clarification of the linkages and interactions between body and mind, Descartes must himself acknowledge in the end that he is unable to shed light on the problem of the mind-body connec-

⁶ René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. I*, eds. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 141.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 343.

tion and must content himself with an intuitive understanding of it.⁸ Intuitively – that is, based on everyday experience and day-to-day conversations – we understand that we are a union of mind and body. In other words, “Everyone feels that he is a single person with both body and thought so related by nature that the thought can move the body and feel the things which happen to it.”⁹

The Phenomenological Conception of Corporeality

If we are not to content ourselves with this intuitive understanding and abandon a philosophical mode of thought, we must overcome Cartesian mind-body dualism. One way to avoid *res cogitans* – *res extensa* dualism with regard to human existence is offered by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, in which human existence is not understood as a unity of two radically incommensurable spheres, but as an inseparable unity of individual being. Of course, this has consequences with regard to the issue of human corporeality. In *Phénoménologie de la perception*, the body is not conceived as a physical object compelled to function in accordance with mechanical laws. Instead of resorting to a mechanical reductionism that interprets the body as a complicated machine, the body is understood on the basis of individual corporeal experience. “I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world,” says Merleau-Ponty.¹⁰ The body is a moment in motion of being in the world; having a body means being involved in a definite environment, identifying with particular projects and continuously engaging with them.¹¹ The body is the performer of communication with the world; it is the bearer of the cognitive process which is human existence.

If human existence is not a machine that can be broken down into its parts but the locus of an individual’s relationship with the world, then this

⁸ René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. III*, eds. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 226–9.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 228.

¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 90. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962; rev. 1981), p. 75.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 97. *Ibid.* p. 82.

circumstance must be reflected in its spatial organisation. In this connection, Merleau-Ponty speaks of a “body schema” (*schéma corporel*), which is more than simply a collection of separate organs. “[M]y whole body for me is not an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. I am in undivided possession of it and I know where each of my limbs is through a *body image* in which all are included,” writes Merleau-Ponty.¹² The concept of the body schema must be properly understood, however: it is not only the result of bodily experience, or an image we construct of our own body. Neither is the sensory-motor unit of the body to be understood in the sense given to it by *Gestalt-psychologie* – that is, as an awareness of one’s posture, of how one holds one’s body. It is not enough to declare that our own body is a form and as such represents “a phenomenon in which the totality takes precedence over the parts.”¹³ Instead, the body should be understood as the expression of our situatedness in the world, which is never static, but essentially dynamic. Our own body is part of our dynamic scheme of the world – our practical intentions, tasks and projects.

When Merleau-Ponty describes the dynamic scheme by which human existence relates itself to the world, he uses the metaphor of a *wave*. An individual existence is like a wave that rushes forth, coiling into itself, returning to itself in order to hurtle forth once again. In *Phénoménologie de la perception*, existence is conceived as an unfolding. Only in the context of this dynamic unfolding can we adequately understand the body schema, according to Merleau-Ponty. Once again, the human body is not a machine that can be broken down into its component parts; it is given in its totality in the body schema, which operates within the dynamic framework of an individual existence. This body schema is not identical with an objective movement or the representation of such a movement in thought, but has its own coherence consisting in a motoric intentionality that gives bodily movements their assurance and coordination. It is this intentionality which guarantees the functional unity of the senses, motility, sensibility and intelligence.

If we were to be precise, we would have to say that an individual body schema is not given, but happens within the framework of an intentional relationship with the world. A body schema is, to be precise, a dynamic synthesis of all the bodily functions available to an individual. The movement in

¹² Ibid. p. 114. Ibid. p. 98.

¹³ Ibid. p. 116. Ibid. p. 100.

question is not simply a movement in the narrow sense, but smell, touch, sight or hearing as well. In the body schema all of these bodily functions are coordinated and brought into mutual accord with the intentions and tasks arrayed before a concrete individual. The body schema synthesises the bodily functions and, along with them, an inexhaustible abundance of potential experience.

Even though the body schema is a synthesis of bodily functions, it does not always find itself in perfect equilibrium. On the contrary, the body schema is quite often subject to disequilibrium with which individuals must come to terms. This is the case, for example, when we learn something new, like a new skill, and thereby enrich our individual body schema. To see this process in the proper light, it is not enough to understand it as the manipulation of a physical object that is coordinated in accordance with the instructions of a subject; it must be seen as a disruption in the stable functioning of the body schema and a search for new, enriched syntheses charged with significance. Merleau-Ponty writes that the body

is not an object for an "I think," it is a grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium. Sometimes a new cluster of meanings is formed; our former movements are integrated into a fresh motor entity, the first visual data into a fresh sensory entity, our natural powers suddenly come together in a richer meaning, which hitherto has been merely foreshadowed in our perceptual or practical field, and which has made itself felt in our experience by no more than a certain lack, and which by its coming suddenly reshuffles the elements of our equilibrium and fulfils our blind expectation.¹⁴

The body understood as a synthesis of bodily functions constituted within the framework of an intentional relationship with the world thus constantly oscillates between states of equilibrium and disequilibrium. Nonetheless, the body schema rarely attains a state of perfect equilibrium and when it does, it is generally only for a short time. Because bodily existence is subject to changes in the environment, unforeseeable upheavals and disruptive moments that must be dealt with, it most often entails a certain proportion of disequilibrium that brings with it uncertainty and unease. In addition to moments when we must adapt to changing conditions, we are exposed to bodily disequilibrium when we transcend our factual situation by seeking and discovering new possibilities for action. Abandoning a bodily equilib-

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 179. Ibid. p. 153.

rium and transitioning to disequilibrium is an indispensable prerequisite for being able to go beyond the horizon of a given situation and exposing ourselves to new possibilities. Generally, therefore, we may note that bodily disequilibrium make it possible for us not to cling to what is given, to transcend the boundaries of what is given and to discover ourselves in new contexts.

In other words, the ability to transcend the conditioned decentralisation, transfiguration and reorganisation of the body schema is what permits us to escape from any particular situation toward new one. This possibility of *escape* (*échappement*) is a fundamental expression of the freedom that characterises human existence as such. “All that we are,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “we are on the basis of a *de facto* situation which we appropriate to ourselves and which we ceaselessly transform by a sort of *escape* which is never an unconditional freedom.”¹⁵ Although we constantly transcend what is given at any moment and escape in varying degrees from our *de facto* situations, we can never attain absolute freedom, for every escape brings us into a new situation in which we are limited in some way. Freedom does not mean absolute unrestraint and indeterminacy and is nonetheless not just an empty word. This is true not only in the domain of love and sexuality – which Merleau-Ponty speaks of in connection with escape from a *de facto* situation – but in a whole range of other activities, such as learning, playing, improvising or experimenting. None of these activities would be possible without the self-transcendence and self-realisation that becomes possible through the destabilisation and subsequent reconsolidation of the body schema.

Nevertheless, bodily disequilibrium and the concomitant destabilisation of the body schema not only make possible a liberating escape from a *de facto* situation, but also entail the essential risk of absolute collapse. In addition to laying down the conditions for any liberation, bodily equilibria are the ultimate basis for the possibility of pathological disintegration. This is best seen in the schizophrenic disintegration of the comprehensive structure of experience. Because the body schema maintains not only the cohesion of particular organs, but also the coordination of bodily functions – among which the sensorial functions have a privileged position – schizophrenic hallucinations may be described as a disruption in the synergy of the bodily functions that provide an individual with an orderly, homogeneous experien-

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 199. Ibid. pp. 170–1.

tial field in whose framework objects retain clearly delineated forms, stable proportions and persistent identities. If objects are displaced within experience taken as a whole, if they stop being themselves and become filled with indistinct menaces, if perspectives suddenly break up and distances become inexplicably transformed, “this is because one’s own body has ceased to be a knowing body, and has ceased to draw together all objects in its one grip”.¹⁶

The disintegration of the body schema does not, however, represent the limit of phenomenological description. The breakdown of the sensory unity provided to experience by objects with coherent proportions and persistent identities is ultimately based on the collapse of the temporal synthesis in which the past and the future are combined.¹⁷ The collapse of the synthesis of bodily functions manifests itself on a temporal plane as a collapse of the transition-synthesis (*synthèse de transition*), which is the foundation of time and, along with it, human existence. The transition-synthesis is the foundation of human existence in that it launches itself from each situation into new ones and, in this transcending existence, maintains its intentional structure. Thus the breakdown of the temporal synthesis leads not only to the disintegration of the body schema, but also to the collapse of the intentional structure of experience. Although this collapse may manifest itself on the level of the intentionality of acts involving a thetic consciousness of a definite object, it takes place primarily on the level of operative intentionality, which constitutes the very basis of conscious existence. Merleau-Ponty writes that

the life of consciousness – cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life – is subtended by an “intentional arc” which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects. It is this intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility. And it is this which “goes limp” in illness.¹⁸

This citation makes it clear how profound the effect of the schizophrenic disintegration of experience on a human existence can be. It also makes it clear that the possibility of collapse looming over the temporal synthesis, the body schema and the intentional structure of existence is brought home not

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 327. Ibid. pp. 282–3.

¹⁷ Cf. Ibid. Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 158. Ibid. p. 136.

only by schizophrenia, but by any illness – whether psychological or somatic – that threatens human existence. In addition to any clinically determinable causes – or perhaps against the background of such causes – we will find that the ontological cause of pathological disorders consists in a temporally conditioned disruption of the intentional structure of consciousness and a parallel disturbance in the body schema. Although such generalised upheavals rarely occur in pure form and usually remain hidden underneath defensive reactions, auto-regulatory mechanisms and adaptive processes that are meant to establish, at least temporarily, a functional stability, one may recognise in them the source of the threat of illness, madness and death.

Moreover, the vulnerability, instability and the finitude of human existence is highlighted by the fact that the disintegration of the body schema, the breakdown of the temporal synthesis and the collapse of the intentional structure of consciousness, are not compatible with an individual existence. The integrity of an individual existence is inseparably bound up with the operation of the temporal synthesis in which both the functional body schema and the intentional unity of consciousness are maintained. That is why the disruption of the transition-synthesis that is the foundation of the body schema and constitutes our intentional relationship with the world necessarily leads to the collapse of the individual structure of human existence, which is most clearly evident in schizophrenia. However, there are other extreme or terminal states of human existence – if we think of them as such – that show how the collapse of the transition-synthesis leads to the depersonalisation of human existence and the disintegration of its individual structure. We may assume that any instance of bodily disequilibrium and the concomitant undermining of the individual's intentional relationship with the world always transcends to some extent all individual structures of human existence. The body schema may suffer a slightly destabilising disequilibrium or its operative intentionality might collapse irrevocably; in both cases we may discern a process of depersonalisation that an individual existence must resist.

Despite his primary orientation toward the individual structure of human existence, Merleau-Ponty is aware that human existence also comprises a certain degree of depersonalisation. It is this tacitly occurring depersonalisation that makes us fragile and vulnerable. We become aware of the contingency and finitude of our own being not only when we fall ill or get wounded, but also during moments of malaise, vertigo and confusion, when

we stand on the verge of a pre-personal abyss that opens up before us.¹⁹ The pre-personal abyss discussed in *Phénoménologie de la perception* contains within it the anonymous sediments of experience that the individual does not constitute alone, but receives from others or draws from the bottomless resources of nature.²⁰ Because human experience does not start from nothing but draws on the anonymous heritage handed down by nature or mediated by others, “there is always some degree of depersonalisation at the heart of consciousness”.²¹ We do not create words ourselves, but learn them first from others, only then imprinting a single meaning onto them, after the fact; we get our senses, which prepare us for sensory perception, in the same manner. This anticipatory preparedness persists as a certain anonymous remnant in our perception – a remnant which, like our birth or our death, is never completely ours. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, neither the moment of birth nor the moment of death are the type of thing an individual can experience in an intentional manner (interestingly, the issue of prenatal life is not considered), because if we were able to experience them as present to us, that would mean we would exist before ourselves and would be outliving ourselves, too.²² Individuals can perceive themselves only in the sense that they have “already been born” and “are still alive”, whereas “their” birth and “their” death constitute pre-personal horizons of their being. Likewise, we plunge into anonymity and emerge from it when we perceive with our senses, without ever managing to gain complete control over the impersonal periphery of our individual being. However, acknowledging the pre-personal element of experience does not change the fact that sensory perception, through which individual existence comes into contact with spheres that transcend its own contexts, becomes unified and synthesised around the structure of the “I can”, which is true for the phenomenon of the human body as well. The body schema, despite the disequilibrium it is continuously exposed to, is in principle “always mine.” As a synergic system whose functions are coordinated in a single realised existence, the body, as we read in *Phénoménologie de la perception*, is “a natural self”.²³

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 294. Ibid. p. 254.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 159. Ibid. p. 137.

²¹ Ibid. Ibid.

²² Ibid. p. 249. Ibid. p. 215.

²³ Ibid. p. 239. Ibid. p. 206.

In connection with our analysis of human corporality, however, we might ask whether it is really necessary to understand bodily disequilibrium as simply the extreme limit of an individual's intentional reach or whether it might not be interpreted more thoroughly and radically. If we agree with Merleau-Ponty's claim that I cannot think my own death and "I [...] live in an atmosphere of death in general, and there is a kind of essence of death always on the horizon of my thinking" which conceals within itself the constant threat of the body schema's disintegration, might we not understand this mortal disintegration in and of itself, based on what takes place in its framework?²⁴ However, that would require considering it not from the perspective of an individual existence, but from that of the depersonalisation that takes place in the context of bodily disequilibrium. The anonymity of pre-personal or post-personal life would then not appear only as an outside delimiting an individual existence without ceasing to coexist with it, but as something that reveals an individual existence in its own light by letting it through and engulfing it once again. If an individual existence rises like a wave from the impersonal element and then recedes back into it, one might say that it is the individual's unfolding. But can we really think this way about the body and its situatedness between bodily equilibrium and disequilibrium? And if so, how then are we to understand the process of escape that removes us from our factual situation through the disintegration of the bodily synthesis, thereby opening up new possibilities?

The Post-Existential Conception of Corporality

The answers to these questions may be found in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. By contrast with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis, which (despite all the references to the anonymous sphere of being) always adheres to the structure of the individual's existence and therefore might be labelled "existential", their analysis – which they term schizoanalysis – may be considered as post-existential. For Deleuze and Guattari begin where Merleau-Ponty leaves off: they deal not with individual experience and its structure, but the collapse of individual being and its intentional relationship to the world. Post-existential analysis begins at a place that for existential analysis constitutes a limit to what may be described.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 418. Ibid. p. 364.