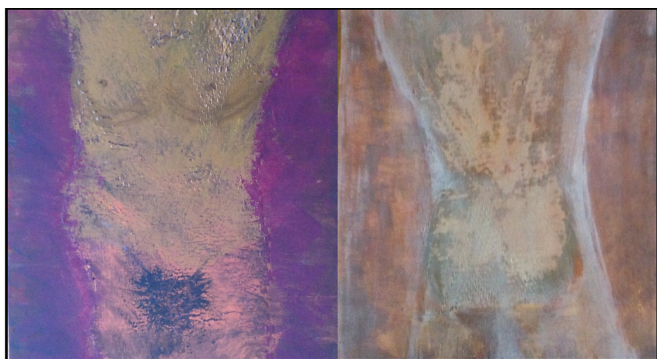


Liminal Beings: A Sketch

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Other –painting by Barbara Hielscher-Witte

"Nothing human is altogether incorporeal."

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

From where do we speak about and access the *other*? "In some traditions, the problem of inter-subjectivity has been identified with the problem of other minds. The only mind I have direct access to is my own"(Zahavi 2005, 148). Furthermore, the thinking mind places us in perspectivity across to the other and the context around. From this position, the other seems to be foreign territory. Attempts to get closer to the being of the other often have the effect of incorporation, in which the being different is deconstructed as alien and thus domesticated

and put in opposition to us. The mind as such is invisible and needs expression to concretize. From here then it often sounds as if the experiencing of the other could be easily liquefied in words and thus directly converted into meaning. But what a shared human situation has to say is genuinely open, complex, inter-subjectively and culturally co-created and only approachable as an approximation of translation into language, from one way of experience to another, and in that not without residue and incompleteness.

The leap from the lived experience to language is mediated by concepts, which are “fingers pointing to the moon, but not the moon.”¹ One of the helping concepts to access the encounter of the other from a different position than that of him being across from us is the phenomenal lived body in the life-world. This shift in thinking is subtle yet radical. From the basis of the embeddedness of the lived body in the life-world, every shared situation brings forth a new process of differentiation, a process of shaping of me and not-me, rather than an opposition of me and the other, which the mind tends to produce.

The “life-world” (Lebenswelt) is the world of our immediately lived experience as we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it. It is what is present to us in our everyday tasks and enjoyments—reality as it engages us, before being analyzed by our theories and our science...Easily overlooked, this primordial world is always already there when we begin to reflect or philosophize. It is not a private, but a collective, dimension—the common field of our lives and the other lives with which ours are intertwined—and yet it is profoundly ambiguous and indeterminate, since our experience of this field is always relative to our situation within it (Abraham 1996, 40).

Through the lived body, our corporeality appears as a prototype of the in-between. Thus existing bodily, we are neither mere extensions nor mere consciousness, neither only internal

1 Chinese saying

nor only external, neither only past nor only future, neither only individual nor only collective, neither only natural nor only historical, neither only objective-thingly nor only subjectively. From here, the situation in which we talk, work, play, argue with and encounter each other is not a reflective category, but an existential one: we are always already situated by our lived body before we turn to our situation in explicit thematization. Intersubjectivity then is more than what is planned by the individual, because what happens between people is itself structure-forming and unpredictable. In working, playing, speaking, living together, intersubjectivity thus functions as continuously newly articulated dimension of relation and community.

From the perspective of the lived body, we are simultaneously seeing and seen, perceiving and perceived. In this primordial sphere the other is equiprimordial. On this level of being-in-the-world, a sensual formation of relation is established, which connects and precedes the encounter of the other as another distinguished from me. In sensing, the experience of *me* contains as well dimensions of otherness. In its development, this dimension of bodily relatedness is at the beginning, from which the consciousness of one's own body and one's own self gradually forms and arises. The body is experienced as body-in-connection-with-others, the experience of self a precipitation of interactive experiences. Through my body, above all reflection, I've always been socialized; bodily I am related to others. Before I express my conscious intentions, I have already adjusted myself physically to the others.

It is never our objective body that we move, but always our phenomenal body, and this in a way that is by no means mysterious since it was our body as an asset ... that carried itself towards the tangible objects and perceived them (Merleau-Ponty 1966, 40).

From the phenomenological perspective we are already embedded in the world through the lived body. What the heart is within the human body, is—metaphorically speaking—the lived body for the human being in the world: a poly-sensual, both intercorporeal and world-relation

constituting living means. Intersubjectivity emerges from the lived body as intercorporeality and returns back to it in reciprocal coupling, thus creating the liminal space of in-between. In the corporeality of the lived body, which is as such unavailable and hidden to the conscious and intentional mind, we are not transparent to ourselves, yet in existential vulnerability exposed to the other and at his mercy. In the fragility of this intercorporeal inter-subjectivity, the experiences of one's ownness and otherness of the other are co-present. Herein, neither being bodily nor being different are freely available. They both emerge inter-dependently in the moments of expression.

If there is a constant reference to one's own lived body throughout the lived experience, albeit implicitly, then this reference forms a structural part of the phenomenal field of perception that is likely to affect all other processes of perception, including the encounter of the other. Expressive gestures then reveal aspects of this being-in-the-world immediately in bodily gestures and mediated and materialized in other modalities of expression.

In expressive artifacts and in creative acts, aspects of these human-world relationships materialize and thus first become available to conscious perception and reflection. The process of expression mediates in such a way, that it simultaneously separates, reveals, shapes and connects; expression becomes simultaneously impression as it offers and concretizes in a tangible way the "other" to us, which originates from our hidden lived body, from the relational space between us and from the context around us. From this perspective, the own, the foreignness of the other and the common we are both in are given at the same time and constitute the multiple dimensions of a situation, which invites us to differentiate them further. What materializes in expressive events becomes thus new knowledge about me, not-me, us and our being-in-the-world as embedded in it.

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