



# The hegemony of the practical in embodied cognitive science and the question of bodily vulnerability

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## Abstract

When perception is made the subject of philosophy, it is primarily understood as pre-theoretical sensual knowledge, and the question of its truth content becomes the focus of attention. In contrast, approaches that fall within the philosophy of embodiment quite rightly point out that perception is bodily anchored and closely linked to interests in action. The primacy of knowledge is therefore substituted by a primacy of praxis. This article aims to point out the blind spots that such a hegemony of the practical entails. In a phenomenological way, it is to be shown that beside the aspect of instrumentality, perceptive situations are also experienced as pleasant or unpleasant as such. This points to the importance of the pathical character of perception. However, it is not a call to enthrone the primacy of affect instead of the primacy of practice. The paper concludes with a thought on the philosophy of pedagogy and education. Proceeding from that perceptive position, it is argued that film in particular offers a chance to apply the phenomenology of pathical perception to the field of intersubjectivity.

**Keywords** Perception · Praxis · Affect · Corporeality · Subjectivity

## 1 Introduction

When perception is made the subject of philosophy, then it is primarily considered as sensual knowledge. It is then asked to what extent sensory perception provides reliable information about the world and represents a valid basis for true statements. Thereby, we lose sight of how perception is experienced as a sensory affect, i.e., as a pleasant or unpleasant influence of the object of perception on the subject of perception. In contrast to the privileged perceptive position of a distanced and impartial subject, a phenomenology of pathical perception thus seeks to do justice to the very fact that the things of

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perception – especially those outside my own body – are experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, comfortable, delicious, disgusting, painful, too cold or too hot. Now it could be expected of an approach such as the embodied cognitive science to do justice to the full range of this pathical dimension of perception. In the following, I would like to pursue this question and argue that, contrary to that expectation, the character of perception as an affect is largely lost sight of within embodiment theories because perception is usually examined in its context of action. Furthermore, those that investigate the interaction between affectivity and perception undoubtedly fill an important gap left open by the hegemony of the practical. However, the affective dimension of perception is not the same as its pathical dimension. No doubt that my mood influences the way I perceive, but what the pathical dimension of perception means in this study for instance comes to the fore when I feel the wind or the sun on my skin, when I taste the strawberry in my mouth or when I experience how the things I perceive scratch, bump, or cut me. From the perspective of the philosophy of perception, the affective can be understood rather as a psychic experience of perception that can, of course, also have physical effects. In contrast, the pathical is not a psychological but a physical experience of perception, which can of course also have psychical effects. Embodiment theories do have the tools to investigate this topic phenomenologically, but in order to do that it would be necessary to first of all expose the subject area in its autonomy and in doing so, to contradict both the hegemony of the practical and the confusion with the affective.<sup>1</sup>

The so-called *embodied cognitive science* is a contemporary movement in cognitive science that tries to conceive mental acts – e.g., perceiving, thinking, remembering, etc. – as *embodied, enactive and situative*, and therefore of the subject as a *complete agent*. Following their basic idea of embodiment, these theories want to completely do justice to the subject's corporeality.<sup>2</sup> This orientation towards corporeality is by no means taken for granted within cognitive science. Thus we can for instance observe a paradigmatic change from cognition to the activity of an embodied mind in this relatively young discipline. In what follows, this article takes a look at two authors from that sphere who at a first glance come closest to this study's question. These two principal witnesses with affiliation to the philosophical school of phenomenology are Evan Thompson, who calls his concept of an embodied mind *neuropsychology*, and Shaun Gallagher, who elaborates how the body organizes the field of perception according to practical relevances. Arguably, the paradigm of cognition as embodied activity is explicitly proclaimed for the first time in *The Embodied Mind* (Varela/Thompson/Rosch 1991/2016). More recently, Thompson's much-noticed *Mind in Life* (2007) ties in with it.

<sup>1</sup> See for research on the affective on the basis of the embodiment, e.g., Colombetti 2014, 2017; Maiese 2014; Slaby 2008.

<sup>2</sup> However, the common label of *embodiment* suggests a consensus that does not exist within that movement in this way: “[W]e have to admit that there is no equivalent consensus yet in embodied cognitive science” (Ziemke/Zlatek/Frank 2007:5). “Embodied cognitive science is still a relatively young approach to the study of mind and language. Critics of the approach might argue that it has so far failed to produce a coherent theoretical framework that integrates and unifies different approaches and disciplines. However, one could also argue that it was in fact the premature convergence of traditional cognitive science on functionalist/computationalist and representationalist/symbolic theories of mind that for a long time disconnected cognitive science from many of its historical roots which are now being rediscovered” (Ibid.:10).

That change of paradigm within cognitive science can be boiled down to the following: cognition is embodied activity. *Embodied* means here: “[C]ognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities” (Varela/Thompson/Rosch 1991/2016:173). As a consequence, particular capabilities of the subject can no longer be studied individually from each other. As such, sensory and motoric processes are “fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition” (Ibid.). Insofar “perception consists in perceptually guided action” (Ibid.), it follows that “to be conscious of X is to put all one’s skilful sensorimotor and attentional resources onto X, such that one is aware not simply of X but also of the opportunities for further action of thinking that X affords” (Thompson 2007:262). Within neurophenomenology, there is a consensus that the notion of perception as sensual cognition is a reduction that does not do justice to the actual perceptual situation. Perceptions are not isolable processes of an indifferent spectator, but situated in a context of corporeal action: “[P]erceptual experiences are active manifestations of a kind of skillful knowledge and are defined in terms of potential for action” (Ibid.:259).

Neither is the perception a causal effect of the object – Varela, Thompson and Rosch call the realist position “hen position” – nor is it a constitutive achievement of the subject – this idealistic notion is called “egg position” (Varela/Thompson/Rosch 1991/2016:172). As the priority of both the object and the subject is denied, it is not possible to say, for example, whether the ultra-reflection of the world is first or the vision sensitive to ultra-reflection. Varela, Thompson and Rosch seek a middle way, according to which neither the subject precedes the object, nor the object precedes the subject, but both develop from a reciprocal relationship. For the perception of color this means: The hen position is wrong because colors are not physical properties but belong to the world of perception; the egg position is wrong because this world of perception is not subjectivistic but culturally determined. The subject and object of perception must be thought of as equipurmordial:

Contrary to the objectivist view, color categories are experiential; contrary to the subjectivist view, color categories belong to our shared biological and cultural world. Thus color as a study case enables us to appreciate the obvious point that chicken and egg, world and perceiver, specify each other. (Varela/Thompson/Rosch 1991/2016:172)

Within neurophenomenology, the redefinition of the concept of cognition at this point leads to the replacement of the juxtaposition of stimulus and reaction by a dialogue between organism and milieu as two poles of an indissoluble relationship (see Thompson 2007:70). We can speak of such a dialogue insofar as, for example, sucrose has value as food in a milieu which the organism itself brings into existence (see Varela/Thompson/Rosch 1991/2016:158). The key is the underlying body-world relationship from which both subject and object develop: “[O]rganism and environment enfold into each other and unfold from one another in the fundamental circularity that is life itself” (Ibid.:217).

However, taking a closer look at the middle way postulated by Varela, Thompson and Rosch, doubts arise as to whether this approach can be interpreted as innovative or as a way out of aporias from a philosophical standpoint, too: Neither the realism of the hen position nor the subjectivism of the egg position enjoy great popularity today,

let alone that every philosopher feels compelled to choose between these camps. It seems as if the positions claimed to be dominant are merely two cardboard characters, serving the purpose of emphasizing one's own position. On closer inspection, however, this middle way does not turn out to be a great pioneering achievement: Far from being a new discovery, it is rather the beaten path that most philosophical theories nowadays follow. The presented middle way means taking the side of culturalism as opposed to objectivism on the one hand and subjectivism on the other. The objectivism of the hen position is hardly ever seriously advocated anymore. Varela, Thompson and Rosch believe that they can escape the subjectivism reproach towards the egg position by pointing out that the cognitive system does not construct the world according to *cognitive* but rather according to *cultural* categories. Construction does however still take place; therefore, it seems rather obvious that, in the end, this middle way is but a variety of constructivism just like the idealistic egg position. As long as we are talking about construction, it is always about an activity that the subject performs on the object: The subject constructs, forms, organizes, gives meaning, etc. However, if the relationship between the perceiving and the perceived is understood in this way, then what a phenomenology of pathical perception is interested in – namely, what happens to the subject by the object – disappears from view right at the outset. Here, then, it is no longer about an active but rather about a passive subject, affected by the influence of an object on its own body.

## 2 The hegemony of the practical

As long as the perceiving instance is simply exchanged by a practical one, the pattern – as was shown in the example of Varela, Thompson and Rosch – remains the same: Relevance, meaning or value of a perception is achieved through the influence of a corporeal subject on the object. The constitutive instance is simply no longer the perceiving mind but rather the acting body; however, constitution still takes place. A meaning as an affect, on the other hand, would be a meaning that *befalls*, that can be understood inversely as an influence *on* the subject. Obviously, that meaning would also not be objective in a metaphysical sense because it exists only in dependence on a bodily disposition: vulnerability, sensitivity to pain. I experience the heat of the fire and the sharpness of the broken glass because I am a vulnerable being. Corresponding with Thompson's basic insight, such a sensation is indeed located on a middle path insofar as it is neither constituted by the subject nor approaches the subject in complete subject-independence from the world. Rather, it is based on the fundamental and indissoluble relationship between body and world. Here, then, it is indicated in what way the body must be understood in order to do justice, for example, to the phenomenon of perceptual affect.

It cannot be denied that the corporeality of the perceptual subject is taken seriously in embodied cognitive science. Unlike in *dualistic* approaches, it is assumed that the mind only ever exists embodied and that due to its essential determination by its physical bodily form, it cannot become the object of a theory independently of its embodiment. Thus there is no 'pure' mind, only a mind that has *always already* been formed by its respective body. In contrast to the *reductionist* views of identity theory or eliminative materialism, on the other hand, it must be noted that *embodied* does not

mean that the spirit is identical with the body or that it is a negligible quantity for understanding bodily actions.

A concept is required that is capable of elucidating the relationship between body, mind and world beyond functionalist and computationalist, dualistic and materialistic models and their respective reductions. Programmatically, Gallagher explains at the beginning of *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (2005):

It is my aim in this book [...] to develop a conceptual framework that will avoid both the overly reductionistic approaches that explain everything in terms of bottom-up neuronal mechanics, and the inflationistic approaches that explain everything in terms of Cartesian, top-down cognitive states. (Gallagher 2005:2)

Consciousness and intelligence develop as the human body acts on its environment according to certain interests of action and life (see Noë 2009: xiii). Perception is hereby regarded as the result of sensomotoric coordination, whereby it is assumed that the perceiving subject firstly has a body and secondly pursues certain action interests. As perception from this point of view is always linked to a certain action context, it must therefore be considered in connection with an acting body.

At the same time, the one-sided focus on action causes *embodiment* to be often used synonymously with *enactivism*. For embodiment theorists place the emphasis almost exclusively on *actions*, while the *affects* of such an embodied mind are almost never considered. This marginalizes the fact that, conversely, the world also has an effect on the human body and that what happens to me, the embodied mind, is experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, painful, lustful, disgusting, etc., whereby the question naturally arises in what way and to which extent consciousness is also formed by precisely such pathical bodily experiences. From the perspective of a phenomenology of pathical perception, it can be argued that the basic idea of *embodiment* should be taken even more seriously than this branch of research itself has done so far.<sup>3</sup> As intuitively plausible as the idea that the mind is formed by the body acting in the world is, it cannot be denied that this also happens because the body experiences the effects of the world on itself.

Ultimately the conclusion suggests that not only perception, but rather the entire mind-brain-body-environment nexus can only be adequately understood if not only the *praxis* and the *acting* body, but also the *pathos* and the *suffering* body are taken into account. Just as the experience of perception not only includes that what is perceived appears in relation to my action interests but also that I experience it as pleasant or unpleasant, so too consciousness is not only always intertwined with an *acting* body, but also – possibly even a lot more so – with a *suffering* body. The embodiment theorists mentioned above, however, are mostly oriented towards forms of motoric movement and action and prove to be insensitive to pathical embodiments. In this way the letter falls short of the spirit: the theories developed fall short of the aspiration that lies in the basic insight of *embodiment*.

<sup>3</sup> For details on a phenomenology of pathical perception, see Bonnemann 2016.

### 3 Action and suffering relevances

If we consistently take the basic insight of the embodiment theories serious and provided that it can be shown that an embodied perception is not only practical but also pathical, then Hubert L. Dreyfus' famous criticism of AI research could be augmented by a further aspect: The result of Dreyfus' research is anything but spectacular if all it says is that the received data is homogeneous for the computer because for it, the situation of perception is not structured in advance through action interests (see Dreyfus 1972). However, the data is mainly homogeneous to the computer because it does not experience the data as pleasant or unpleasant, because it does not cause it pain and neither does it please nor frighten it. The human subject differs from the passive computer not only because of its *praxis*, but also because it experiences even its *passivity*. It is debatable whether a computer, because of its programming, does not in some way pre-structure the received data according to a purposive orientation, but the idea that it enjoys or is disgusted by data surely is absurd.

From this point of view, the organization of a field of perception is not only based on action relevances, but – as one could say analogously – also on *suffering relevances*. A *complete agent* is more than a mechanical receiving device for perceptions; firstly because perceptions are ordered according to action relevances, but secondly also because these perceptions have a valuable meaning to agents that is closely related to their bodily experience. The interaction between body and environment is reciprocal – not only in the sense that my bodily action can be successful or unsuccessful and thus has to be modified according to the reactions of the environment. Rather, it is also reciprocal in the sense that the environment in turn influences me and that I experience this influence.

However, by leaving the structuring of the field of perception exclusively to the action interests and completely overlooking the pathical dimension of perception, Dreyfus performs not an *intellectualistic* but an *instrumentalistic* reduction of the notion of perception. In view of this reduction, the objection is justified: Joy or suffering is not only based on the experience of having successfully or unsuccessfully pursued my goals of action in the world. One enjoys the perceived not only because it proves to be an obedient means to one's own ends, but because it is itself pleasant in its appearance and thus an end. Not only certain facts – an end is achieved or not, an object behaves as desired or not – but certain objects and certain qualities in these objects are pleasant or unpleasant.

We enjoy the brightness of sunshine, the taste of vanilla ice cream or the color of the sea, and we suffer from the cold of the wind or the sting of the bee. The fire is too hot regardless of the particular goal I am pursuing. Therefore, there can be no question of fire being one of the objects of perception that, as Dreyfus writes, “gets its *whole* meaning from its pragmatic context” (Ibid.:173, emphasis added), because in the most diverse contexts of use, fire retains the meaning that it is *too hot* and can therefore cause me pain and serious injury. This meaning is indeed relative to the perceiving subject, but only to its vulnerability and not to its goals of action.

Here it becomes clear that the *practical* meaning of a thing depends on my action interests and therefore on the context of usage in which it is placed: the rock is an obstacle if I want to drive down the road by car; however, it is a helpful means when I climb it to admire the landscape. The *pathical* meaning of a thing, on the other hand, such as the being-too-hot

of the fire or the delightful taste of a delicacy, is completely independent of my action interests but dependent on the fact that I am a bodily being that can be hurt by fire.

According to the explanations given so far, there are good reasons to assume that the field of perception is organized not only practically but also pathically. It will turn out that the affects of the embodied perceptual subject are not taken into account by Gallagher either. However, his book is paving the way in that his notion of the body schema provides the appropriate theoretical framework for adequately conceptualizing the affective character of perception.

#### 4 Gallagher's instrumentalistic reduction of the body-world interaction

With regard to the question of the affective character of perception, of all the representatives of embodiment theory, Gallagher's body concept is the most fruitful. This is due to the productive distinction between two dimensions of corporeal embodiment that are often mixed up – body schema and body image – around which Gallagher's thinking has been revolving for many years and which are systematically developed and discussed in *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (2005). The exemplary experiments and case descriptions quoted show, however, that Gallagher also ascribes little importance to the pathos of perception, for he too places the emphasis on body movements and actions through which the embodied mind acts upon the environment in order to change it. The central question of his book – “how bodily movement and the motor system influence cognitive performance – how the body shapes the mind” (Gallagher 2005:9) – shows he too is concerned only with the *acting* body.

If in the following Gallagher's juxtaposition of *body schema* and *body image* is used to explain the pathical, this means reading *How the Body Shapes the Mind* against its intention. For while Gallagher tends to place pathical experience on the side of the body image, it is argued here that it is also a fundamental component of the body schema. While his examples show that indeed the body schema also displays pathical traits, conceptually, the pathos only appears as that by means of which my own body becomes an object for me, i.e., as the source of my body image. On the one hand, Gallagher's conception of the body is to be enhanced here; on the other, it is used to further spell out pathical perception.

Gallagher draws on phenomenological, experimental and developmental psychology and not least neurobiological research of the late 1990s, letting it flow into the central thesis of his book: “[T]he body, through its motor abilities, its actual movements, and its posture, informs and shapes cognition” (Ibid.:8). Current research results show that I am confronted with a stable world of perception only because my body unconsciously performs motoric stabilizations (e.g., microsaccades of the eyes, posture adjustments) in order to compensate its own swaying as well as the movements of objects. According to Gallagher, this lays the foundations for the central thesis of a bodily formation of consciousness intentionality. This thesis is supposed to be further supported by developmental psychological and neurobiological studies showing that a wide range of motor activities in childhood promote the development of perceptive and cognitive abilities, or that visual perceptions automatically trigger certain movement programs that are anchored in neuronal circuits.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The examples mentioned are selected here as representative of Gallagher's overview. See Gallagher 2005:8 f., which is also where all research literature references can be found.

Gallagher attributes all these examples – in view of the range of the chosen research areas, the results of which are reduced to a single denominator in no time, this seems at least somewhat daring – to achievements of what he calls, with and at the same time in clear distinction to Paul Schilder, a body schema (see Schilder 1923). Two different aspects of corporeality that are often confused with one another in substance are terminologically distinguished by Gallagher by the conceptual pair of body schema and body image.<sup>5</sup>

Gallagher understands the body schema as “a system of processes that constantly regulate posture and movement: sensory-motor processes that function without reflective awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring” (Gallagher 2007:273). While the body schema is the answer to the question of “how the body shapes the perceptual field”, the body image refers to my own body as the object of my consciousness and answers the question “about the appearance of the body in the perceptual field” (Gallagher 2005:18). Gallagher understands the body image as “a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one’s own body” (Ibid.:24).<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the body image, the body schema itself is not an object of perception but the origin of intentional, prenoetic achievements (see Gallagher 2007:274), through which interaction with the world – e.g., perception – becomes possible (see Gallagher 2005:26).<sup>7</sup> The body image *needs* not appear, but it *can* of course appear at any time.

According to Gallagher’s conception, the body is thus located on both sides of the intentional relationship. As the *subject* of intentionality, it functions as

<sup>5</sup> Gallagher also detects that mix-up in the case of Schilder, the father of the body schema concept. The visual moments of my body image are part of the body schema for Schilder, for Gallagher however they are part of the body image (see Gallagher 2005:17–20).

<sup>6</sup> Focussing my attention on my body does not necessarily mean my whole body (see Ibid.:9). Apart from that, Gallagher explains that the body image is always influenced by social and cultural factors, too (Ibid.:30): “For example, I may be emotionally dissatisfied with the way my body looks because it does not match up to the cultural idea of beauty or strength” (Ibid.:40).

<sup>7</sup> The body schema structures that form consciousness intentionality “happen *before we know it*. They do not normally enter into the phenomenal content of experience in an explicit way, and are often inaccessible to reflective consciousness. I use the term *prenoetic* to signify these hidden aspects” (Gallagher 2005:2). According to Gallagher’s views there is an innate body schema, as he claims there is hardly any other plausible explanation for the imitative behavior of newborns. Cf. the critical considerations by Jung 2009:292 f.



body schema; as the *object* of intentionality, it is given as body image.<sup>8</sup> However, my bodily interaction with the world does not itself require a body image; the body schema that organizes perception and action is thus not dependent on the body itself being given as an object of consciousness. Gallagher's argumentation is at this point distinctly phenomenological:

If I reach for a glass of water with the intention of drinking from it, my hand shapes itself in a precise way for picking up the glass, and it does this completely outside my awareness. But the shape that it takes on is in complete conformity with my intention [...]. When I walk across the room to greet someone or jump to catch a ball in the context of a game, my actions may be explicitly willed, and governed by my perception of objects or persons in the environment. My attention and even my complete awareness in such cases, however, are centered on the other person or the ball, and not on the precise accomplishment of locomotion. (Gallagher 2007:275)<sup>9</sup>

According to Gallagher, I have awareness of the glass or the ball or the person opposite me, but not of my body and its movements with which I reach for the glass, catch the ball or reach out my hand to greet another person.

But under what circumstances do I gain a body image, i.e., how does my body itself become the object of my consciousness? Gallagher answers this question with a list of the circumstances under which such a turn of view from the objects of the field of perception to my own body takes place:

<sup>8</sup> Gallagher's conceptual pair is a reaction to an ambivalence of speaking of the body. As Jung explains, on the one hand, it can mean that which is given to the actor in their self-perception and is thus intentionally available. On the other hand it can mean that which shapes this self-perception and the intentional possibilities of the actor without itself becoming perceptible as qualitative experience and motor activity (Jung 2009:294). He adds that according to Gallagher's reasoning, phenomenology of consciousness and neuroscience – which deals with the subpersonal –, are equally structurally blind to the prenoetic effects of the interaction between organism and environment. The former insofar as it is committed to the philosophy of consciousness' ideal of cognitive self-transparency, the latter insofar as it searches for direct "Neural Correlates of Consciousness" (Ibid.:300). Jung's understanding of phenomenology, however, is restricted to phenomenology of consciousness. He does not seem to take seriously those attempts within phenomenology to relativize the orientation towards consciousness, such as those by Merleau-Ponty or Heidegger: After all, unlike the body [*Körper*], the living body [*Leib*] is not only not a thing, it is also not simply the way I consciously experience my own body but rather also the mediation of the entire world of perception. This dimension within phenomenology completely slips Jung's attention. An *intentio obliqua* discovers in Merleau-Ponty what is hidden from the *intentio recta*, even without scientific methods. For this reason Gallagher understands his own thinking as phenomenology, which remains incomprehensible if one shares Jung's narrow understanding of phenomenology: "I will adopt the following limited position: a phenomenology that understands intentionality as a form of being-in-the-world, and recognizes the importance of embodied action for shaping perception, offers an interpretational framework different from purely functional or syntactic interpretations of the empirical data" (Gallagher 2007:272).

<sup>9</sup> The analogy with Sartre strikes the eye: "The body as a sensible center of reference is that *beyond* which I am in so far as I am immediately present to the glass or to the table or to the distant tree which I perceive" (Sartre 1984:429).

Such circumstances include voluntary reflection (as in medical examination, vain self-inspection, or even philosophical introspection). Many studies indicate that in addition to deliberate reflection of one's own body, the body manifests itself in consciousness in certain 'limit-situations', for example in fatigue, sexual excitement, experience of pain or pleasure, sickness, certain pathologies, stress-situations, or physical challenges as in athletics or exercise. (Gallagher 2005:28)

Taking a look at this list of examples, it is obvious that in the cases of “fatigue, sexual excitement, experience of pain or pleasure”, the body image occurs through direct physical contact with the objects of perception. In contrast, in the cases of “voluntary reflection”, the body image imposes itself less experientially but is rather evoked and judged on the basis of past experiences. The birth of the body image originally happens more out of comfort and discomfort than out of reflection, or rather, from this point of view, it is suffering that produces reflection. Reflection, the observation of oneself, already presupposes the experience of suffering which teaches me that there is someone who can be observed reflexively.

Thus, Gallagher's central thesis is: “[P]renoetic performances of the body schema influence intentionality” (Ibid.:146). If constitutive acts of consciousness, like for example perceptions, are to be understood as “prenoetic functioning of body schemas” (Ibid.:141), then perception theory cannot ignore the embodiment of the perceiving subject. If one is inspired by Gallagher, the question ‘What is perception?’ is to be transformed into the more precise question ‘In what way is the perceiving subject *embodied?*’. That is due to the insight that the phenomenal content of a subject's perception depends on whether it can fly, swim, climb, bite, grasp, etc. Finally, that can be linked to the question: ‘What action interests does the embodied perceiving subject have?’ (‘Is it sated or hungry, does it want to mate?’).

For instance, the human shape – the upright walk, the exemption of the hand from locomotion, etc. – also determines the specific perception: “The establishment of human shape, then, is not neutral with respect to how we perceive the world or how we act in it” (Ibid.:148). As Gallagher points out, my perception is that of an embodied subject for the very reason that it depends on my physical location: “To see, for example, is not only to *see something*, as Husserl's principle of intentionality would indicate, but also to *see from somewhere*, that is, under conditions defined by the position and postural situation of the perceiving body” (Ibid.: 140).

## 5 The inadequacy of a purely practical body schema

Taking stock: Besides corporeality, Gallagher almost exclusively asserts the action-relatedness of the body-world relationship. The body schema organizes my perceptual world, and it does so according to action interests, therefore under strictly pragmatic aspects:

Perceiving subjects move through a space that is already pragmatically organized by the construction, the very shape, of the body. [...] Where must an object be located within my perceptual field to afford an optimal perception? It depends on

the sense modality with which I perceive, and on the purpose of my perception.  
(Ibid.)

The insistence on the pragmatic character of the interaction between body and world allows Gallagher to demonstrate the irreducibility of prenoetic achievements to neuro-physiological processes: “The body *actively organizes* its sense experience and its movement in relation to pragmatic concerns. In this regard, prenoetic operations of the body schema are not reducible to physiological function, even if physiological events are necessary conditions for such operations” (Ibid.:142).

From a phenomenological perspective, Charles Taylor has emphasized with all desirable clarity that our perception is 1. the first opening to the world and the unbreakable background of all other activities, and 2. essentially that of a physical agent engaged with the world. Thus, for Taylor, foreground/background, left/right and up/down are already orientations characterizing the field of perception as that of a bodily actor. The dimension up/down has meaning for me as a corporeal actor carrying out activities in a field of gravity. I must hold myself upright in order to act, or at least balance my position with the force of attraction. In other words, the field is dimensioned up and down because it is the field of an actor of that particular kind, because it is a field of possible action. Thus, according to Taylor, we must turn our attention to the construction of the field of perception to see that the Cartesian or empirical view amounts to a reduction. We then see that things are directed upwards or downwards; that around me there is a sphere of touchable objects; that behind it, a zone of easily accessible objects is building up; that zones further away are hardly accessible, and so on; and that the conditions of accessibility change with the actor’s physical condition, depending on whether they are sick or healthy, etc. (Taylor 1986: 197–199).

To return to the hegemony of the practical within the theory of embodiment: Those prenoetic performances of the body schema are of a pragmatic nature, and pathical aspects – the pleasantness or unpleasantness of what is perceived – play no significant role in Gallagher’s definition of the human relationship to the world.<sup>10</sup> Although it certainly cannot be denied – for which Taylor apparently has more of a feeling<sup>11</sup> – that it is not only my momentary participation in a ball game that shapes my perception, but also my body’s sensitivity to pain.

Gallagher himself makes a casual remark, however, that suggests that pleasant or unpleasant experiences should be understood as variants of the prenoetic intentionality of the body schema:

[W]hen the experiencing subject eventually becomes aware that she is too cold or too hot, the intentional meaning of that feeling will have already been conditioned

<sup>10</sup> Even where perceptual qualities are clearly taken into account that are not simply hindering but painful, Gallagher adheres to the primacy of perception: “The fact that I may feel the object as hot rather than as smooth, for example, will not only depend on the objective temperature of the object, but on my purposes” (Gallagher 2005:142). From this point of view, pleasure and pain are shortened to the results of action intentionalities. The fact that both are originally affects, i.e., experiences that happen to me, is not taken into account.

<sup>11</sup> See Taylor 1986: 199, where he explains that it is not only me as an corporeal actor that acts upon things, but that things also act upon me. My field is structured not just by zones of accessibility but also by zones of danger and safety. Obviously, these dimensions are intertwined. A cliff limits not just a zone of accessibility but also one of safety because acting and suffering are interlocked.

by the body's prenoetic performance, and will have already affected perception. Similar performances of the body can be described in cases involving stress, pain, hunger, fatigue, lability, and so forth. (Gallagher 2005:149; see also Ibid.:151)

Although Gallagher speaks of a pathical perception, he does not draw any consequences for his conception of the body from it: For him, the body that forms the mind is still only an acting and not a suffering body. The interaction between body and world remains one-sided, with the body intervening in the world without anything from the world happening to it. The example of the heat of the fire, which can hurt and injure me regardless of my current action interests, shows that pathical experiences cannot be reduced to pragmatic conceptions. For this reason, the idea of a purely pragmatic organization of the field of perception remains reductionist in view of the phenomenal contents of what is perceived. Thus, an instrumentalistic reduction of the concept of perception as well as of the body can be observed.

When Gallagher explains that pain is something through which I gain a body image, the body seems to be pathical, but only as a body image and not as a body schema. In so far as the body is constituting and forms perception, it is practical; in contrast, in so far as it is pathical, it is constituted, i.e., itself something perceived. Since pathos is thus only brought into play as a quality of the body image and not as an aspect of the body-world interaction, Gallagher's line of argument creates an impression which he possibly did not intend at all, namely that there is also only one single object in pathical experience, namely my own body. Pathical experience is then only an experience that is directed towards the body image. In Gallagher's depiction, my own body comes to my consciousness through pleasure and suffering – and thus they belong to the body image and not to the body schema. From this it follows logically that for Gallagher only my own body, but by no means the objects of my perception experienced by me bodily, exhibits pathical qualities. Thus the realm of pathic experience shrinks to a subjective state in which there is only one object: my own body.

Drawing on Michel Henry's phenomenology for a comparison with Gallagher, it is striking that the French philosopher, although he takes a completely different path, ultimately tears pathos and world apart in a similar way to Gallagher. The everyday experience that my body is worldly because it hurts when a thing hits me, becomes a mystery in Henry's work. What he can describe is the pathos as a pure self-reference in which I experience pleasant or unpleasant states of my body. What he struggles with, on the other hand, is to describe what I would like to characterize as *prereflexive pathical perception*: It is prereflexive – i.e., not yet self-referential – because I experience pleasant and unpleasant qualities of perception while my own body is not yet the object of intentional consciousness. It is the things themselves that I see, hear, feel, smell or taste that are pleasant or unpleasant. In contrast to this, on the level of *reflexive pathical perception*, I finally become phenomenally aware of my own body to which these things happen. Thus, reflexive pathical perception stands exactly between a prereflexive pathical perception, which does intend bodily but does not yet intend the body, and a mere own-bodily sensation, which is not given any extracorporeal object at all. In the following, these considerations will be illustrated using a model case of pathical perception, namely disgust.

The disgusting exists in the world because the disposition to disgust – as can be said with Gallagher – is part of the body schema. But on the primary level of perception, the

disgusting is an objective quality of my perceptual world. On the level of the body schema, disgust is the perception of disgusting objects; on the secondary and reflexive level of the body image, however, disgust is the experience of my own bodily states and reactions. More precisely: We find an object disgusting before we make our gag reflex, nausea, goose bumps and the cold sweat on our forehead the object of our consciousness. So the disgust is initially centrifugally directed at something in the world before, centripetally, my body image becomes its object. Thus, when I am conscious of my disgust, I am already turning away from the disgusting object and towards my disgusted body, i.e., I have a body image formed of the being-disgusted. The disgusting object recedes into the background in light of the agonizing nausea that is now in the center of my attention as a quality of an appearing body image. Here, disgust is therefore no longer the quality of an object of perception but a state of my body, the 'flesh' of my body image, so to speak. Against this background, it is obvious that a certain degree of suffering – or pleasure – is necessary for such a reflexive return to happen.

These descriptions show in what ways Gallagher's body schema conception can be expanded when it becomes clear that the organization of the field of perception does not only follow pragmatic aspects: Insofar as the body schema precedes the body image and pathical qualities on the prereflexive level do not yet flow into the constitution of a body image, qualities such as *enjoyable*, *disgusting*, *pleasant* or *unpleasant* are not yet originally experienced as inner bodily states but as objective qualities of the world of perception. Just as action interests first appear as a layer of the world of perception before they are reflected as subjective decisions, so affects form a layer of the world of perception before they are reflected as bodily states or as sensations. In this sense, my prereflexive eye pain is an affect that – centrifugally, i.e., in object-orientation – gives the sunlight the pathical meaning *too bright* before this eye pain itself reflexively – centripetally, i.e., as a quality of a body image – becomes the object of consciousness. In short, pathical perception is exteroceptive before it becomes interoceptive.

If however the approach starts too high, a subjective distortion occurs, i.e., the phenomena are not recorded until the reflexive level, which is then considered as their original mode of appearance. The pleasant is then not a quality of the perceived but a subjective state of the perceiver. As a result, what I perceive is no longer the end in which my perception loses itself, but a means to bring forth certain qualities in the perceiver: When I look at a sunset, I do so not because it is beautiful, but because it arouses certain feelings in me; I fall in love with a person not because that person is lovable, but because I want to enjoy the state of being in love. If the reflexive perception is placed at the beginning, the result is a relationship to the world that is as egocentric as it is instrumentalistic. In this way, reflection shifts the pleasant from the realm of the objective to the realm of the subjective, whereby the phenomena become mere means of evoking own-bodily states. From this point of view, it is puzzling why certain objects of perception should be able to trigger such feelings of pleasantness and unpleasantness at all, if they themselves are supposed to be completely neutral.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Although not for the realm of the pathical, Colombetti argues quite similarly that affects are not something purely internal (see Colombetti 2017).

## 6 Educational-philosophical perspectives of a phenomenology of pathical perception

Finally, I would like to reflect on perspectives of philosophy of pedagogy and education resulting from applying the phenomenology of pathical perception to the field of intersubjectivity, focusing primarily on the bodily expression of another human being. For it is precisely this bodily expression in face-to-face interaction that provides me with information about the way in which my counterpart is affected by the present situation.

In conclusion, I would like to bring forward the argument that film provides a unique educational potential because it promotes a sensitization to bodily expression like no other medium. The idea that bodily expression as it appears in film initiates an educational process is already implicit in *The Visible Man or the Culture of Film* (1924) by Béla Balázs, a film theory pioneer. As can be argued with Balázs, we think and feel more differentiated and nuanced not only with growing linguistic expression, but also when we expand our possibilities of bodily expressiveness. That shows what film, unlike literature, can do: While literature according to general consensus deepens the understanding of linguistic expression, film can sensitize the viewer to bodily expression.

A film example might be helpful at this point in order to make clear what the uniqueness of the bodily expression in film compared to any other medium is: In Tom Ford's *A Single Man* (2009), the viewer watches a man who is told in a phone call that his life partner has died in a car accident. The camera slowly approaches his initially very calm and composed face – a face that seems to be used to keeping feelings and secrets to itself. While the man calmly and politely asks objective and judicious questions, he increasingly grasps the full extent of the catastrophe. In this sad film scene, we perceive the expressive movement of a face as a progressive process in which the pain digs deeper and deeper into the man's initially so serene face. There is a lot of talking in the first half of this scene, but it is by no means the words that provide insight into the pain. Paying attention to words alone, we might even believe that the message does not throw the man off track that much. Unlike in a novel, it is not words that tell us about his feelings, and neither could a painting or a photograph portray that expressive movement in a comparable way. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the art of acting reaches a remarkable level especially when sadness is not just played but rather when a sadness becomes tangible that should actually remain hidden but unintentionally surfaces here and there.

Because the actor's play heightens the viewer's awareness for what words do not say and to the contrary perhaps even want to hide, it can be said that film reception promotes the development of a sensitivity that is identified more precisely as *tact*. From this angle, *tact* should be understood as the ability to perceive nuances of expression in which it becomes clear how my counterpart feels even without them speaking frankly about their state of mind. What this assessment refers to is the involuntary bodily expression, i.e., the facial expression, gestures and posture of another person. Consequently, I behave tactfully when I follow my sense of whether the other person wants me to bring up that mood or is afraid of losing face because of it. It might be appropriate to acknowledge their sadness but to not let them notice it.

In order to be able to act tactfully at all, however, first of all an understanding of the bodily expression of people and the atmosphere of situations is necessary – and there is much to suggest that films can make a significant contribution to that: The reception of films leads to a better understanding of the non-linguistic expression of people and situations, which should rightly be considered an essential condition for tactful social interaction. This is by no means true for all films, of course, and by no means true only for fictional films, but especially also for documentary films such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985).

In a multicultural world, tact seems almost indispensable because there is no relying on a uniform life and behavioral style. Yet just as little as the sense of humor such a sense of tact is developed through moral-philosophical discussions or the learning of social conventions. For linguistic expression, more can be expected from literature, and for bodily expression, more from film. A further development of the phenomenology of pathical perception towards a phenomenology of pathical perception of others would reveal the whole spectrum of the social relevance of tact.

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