



MY OWN BODY AS A FORM OF OTHERNESS IN PAUL RICOEUR'S PHILOSOPHY

doi: 10.2478/v10038-012-0007-4

MIROŚLAW ŻAROWSKI

University of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland

ABSTRACT

The philosophical rehabilitation of the body and corporeality, as undertaken by Paul Ricoeur, may be inscribed as a critique of the model of modern subjectivity as prefigured in the Cartesian *Cogito* of self-consciousness, self-awareness and substantial identity. This dominating paradigm of thinking cannot be preserved any longer in the face of Nietzsche and Freud, as well as of contemporary linguistics. This model reduced corporeality as a residuum of what is other than I to a handy object of scientific and technological exploration. Whereas, according to Ricoeur, otherness is not something that only accidentally happens to *ego*. It is not an unessential element and a negative aspect of a subject's and person's identity. Becoming oneself and understanding oneself take place in the medium of the Other. Otherness is for the identity of human ego something internal and originary, reaching us in a sphere of what is truly our own. The hermeneutics of being oneself, rejecting an appearance and the temptation of direct cognition, consists in the analysis of three figures of Otherness, which seem to be consecutively: my own body, the Other and Conscience.

Under the influence of the Husserlian distinction of “my own body” and “a body among other bodies”, as well as the Heideggerian existentials describing “being-in-the-world”, Ricoeur postulates, in a way similarly to Marcel and Merleau-Ponty, a reinterpretation of traditional understanding of both subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the very cognitive act of doing so. Its pre-reflexive foundation was uncovered by existential hermeneutics. The phenomena of being a body and having it appear to be problematic to the utmost, thus opening access to originary relationships between a man and the world as a correlation of bodily intentionality.

Key words: Paul Ricoeur, hermeneutics, phenomenology, body, subject, understanding

Wounded Cogito (*Cogito blessé*)

Begun by Descartes, the modern model of recognition, of self-awareness, self-knowledge and individual identity grounded in an act of indirect reflection, has been criticized and deconstructed by philosophy over the last two centuries. Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), a French philosopher who joined both the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions of his time named this a “wounded cogito” (*Cogito blessé*); wounded because under the influence of criticism one is obliged to revise his own ontological and epistemological claims.

The discovery of unconsciousness, according to Ricoeur, questioned the thought of subjectivity as totally transparent and accessible to itself. The discovery of intersubjectivity overstrained the idea of an immanent, self-sufficient and entirely autonomous self (*ego*). The constitutive role of tradition and pre-understanding, as raised by hermeneutics in their interpretation, including the interpretation of oneself, has struck Cartesian belief with the possibility of achieving an absolute, devoid of any prejudice, origin of knowledge. The discovery of a figurative and not transparent character of language has taken away the certainty of indirect reflection as a discursive event. As Ricoeur writes: “This obliteration of the sign as a thing is never complete, however” [1, p. 41].

This inner experience turned out to be no more less than the outer-mediated one, which through the form of articulation and language, in where a self-realizing subject understands what he is not. If corporeality has not become a synonym of experiencing oneself, it has surely become its unavoidable element, a kind of borderline case, opening a new horizon, at first in front of the French disciples of Husserl as well as the careful readers of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*: G. Marcel, J.-P. Sartre, M. Henry, M. Merleau-Ponty, and J.-L. Marion.

It is necessary to be aware that the crisis of modern subjectivity was initiated by discoveries, which at the beginning of 19th and 20th centuries, first helped to emancipate the humanities, and then gave them the impetus to go forward in their multidirectional development. A model of Cartesian subjectivity, as a philosophical project created to ground the mathematical philosophy of nature, proved to be too narrow and incomplete according to Paul Ricoeur. It could not cover the complex and problematic character of human experience and the nature of the world. The Cartesian model had an impact on conceiving the body and corporeality, reducing it to the function of being a correlation of a thinking ego, to having only a quantitative characteristics as a handy object of scientific and technical exploration. Thus it constituted a continuation of long standing thought, beginning in the Plato tra-

dition of metaphysics, which considered corporeality as a specific *residuum* of what is secondary, accidental, nonessential and negative.

Among the symbols that “allow one to ponder”, Ricoeur also finds one deposited in the Orphic myth on the exiled soul and about the body as a foreign, unknown and hostile place, being literally the covering of “two opposite vectors of human existence” [2, p. 272]. In the assumed vision of Plato, where a body is a prison in which “a soul becomes a trivial criminal” [2, p. 268] and the “punishing function of a body” is the means of penance and of catharsis, which appear to be a “degrading sanction”, a place of corruption and a secondary origin of evil. As Ricoeur writes: “[...] the scheme of exile, amplified by the scheme of repetition, has the tendency to transform a body into a symbol of misfortune of existence” [2, p. 271]. In the background of the radical dualism of both soul and body there is an opposition of identity and of otherness: “[...] a man is according to himself *the same* as his soul and *the other* than his body” [2, p. 264]. The Orphic myth tells us the story about the wandering of a soul which through consecutive incarnation redeems its guilt, but the real subject of that narration and its significant understatement is, according to Ricoeur, the “misfortune of existence”, the return of the body into a place, at the same time, of punishment and of guilt, the struggle of the body with its own transparency, otherness and strangeness, retaining the deepest truths about human existence. It is a dramatic process of becoming oneself through experience and even through exposure to otherness. Philosophical tradition has tried to exorcise that truth and to cover it by the concept of pure subjectivity, which should be critically reconsidered once again.

Man is never what he considers himself to be. Paul Ricoeur accepted the arguments of the “masters of suspicion”, especially those of Nietzsche and Freud, and completed them with his own understanding of the hermeneutical tradition and from the discoveries of contemporary linguistics. He does not announce, as Derrida, Lyotard or Foucault, “the death of man” or “the death of a subject”. He seems not to consider a subject as a redundant category in an epistemological search. It is true that “I”, as a principle of inner unity, affirmed by both modern philosophy and by a commonsensical approach of “egology”, which stands for both the transcendental “ego” as well as the empirical “ego”, appears to be a mystic and pragmatic illusion. However, the illusion is irremovable, one that we cannot escape from. It seems to be certain that a human being will speak about himself using the first person singular, whereas other people are treated by him as his other “ego”. That is why Ricoeur writes about a *Cogito wounded, broken, humiliated*, especially through Nietzsche, and he does not expound, for example, on the annihilated ego [3, p. X]. He postulates on narrative identity as opposed to its substantial identity. That

means that instead of being the same, one tries to be, in a narrative way, “oneself”. The “Ego” appears to be a game which is played by man with himself. With himself, but really, with whom?

The Cartesian Ego, *res cogitans*, as a thinking subject, is only a heuristic abbreviation, a figure constructed for reasons of criticism. Ricoeur also writes on the different *cogitoes*: the Socratic, Platonic, Kantian and Husserlian, each time meaning that it is something inherent at the basis of the epistemological act, lasting in time as “the same” despite the plurality and variety of representations it holds due to the substantial status ascribed to it. *Cogito* is a thinking being, but a thinking being that metaphysics describes as the original form of being and, at the minimum, its most perfect representation. It is exactly this thing which Ricoeur opposes through the use of identity, which he expresses as being an *ipse* type, “Being oneself” (*Ipséité, Selbst*), a “narrative” identity that cannot be reduced to the simple feature of having an identical character. Categories such as promise, obligation or testimony all constitute “being oneself”. Reflection is indeed to some extent a return to oneself, but as it has nothing of what indirect intuition has, it becomes mediation, becoming only a long and indirect way. The identity of the self (*ego*) is a task. It is a response to the presence of the other and one’s own incomplete transparency of one’s own being in the world. There is no other subject’s identity besides the one to be recognized when somebody promises and then keeps that promise, being throughout this time the same person [4, p. 48–49]. Being oneself, as fidelity to oneself, is the credibility of one who accepts obligation, thus possessing a dialogical and ethical character and refers to the certainty which does not possess the character of representation. It comes close to the Heideggerian existentials which found the sort of being-in-the-world: “being decided” (*Entschlossenheit*) and “permanence of oneself” (*Selbst-ständigkeit*), as well as the “responsibility taken for another” by Emmanuel Lévinas. Ricoeur also frequently and in a vast extent refers to the Aristotelian conception of ethical activity, presented in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as through his concept of *fronesis* – practical wisdom and prudence which join the striving for “good life” with moral duty. It is conceived as a capability of regenerating each moment anew in a concrete situation while pondering on the subjective conditions and consequences of activity.

Towards the hermeneutics of existence

The attempt to elaborate a theory capable of justifying the techniques of exegesis and the interpretation of cultural texts is not the exclusive aim of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. Since our language speaks about man as the effect of one’s work, this aim consists of understanding the sense of human existence. Between her-

meritology as methodology (Schleiermacher, Dilthey) and hermeneutics as ontology (Heidegger) [5, p. 8], Ricoeur tries to recover what for the rationalist tradition was a baseless claim, what was superstition or nonsense, and which in the light of circular, or even elliptical, hermeneutical experience appears to be but a silent challenge. Understanding is not a constitution of meaning, thanks to which a subject consolidates its power over an object, but rather a kind of existence in which its capability to be open is tested. The subject is to be open to an object's revealing attestation. The goal of interpreting something is not just in understanding something, but rather understanding oneself in the face of something, let us add, never fully realized.

An objective moment has, through Ricoeur's hermeneutics perspective, a secondary character when compared with "participation", "belonging" and "including", as a primary form of a objective-subjective relationship, being nothing more than an existential situation. The ontological premises of understanding, the discovery of which Ricoeur is indebted to Heidegger, as well as the notion of "self-understanding", as the process open to Otherness, conceived analogously to Heidegger's "projecting" (*Entwerfen*), motivated Ricoeur to accept a thesis about the primacy of existence over reflection. Hermeneutics, confronted with the task of understanding what is understanding, appears to be a kind of search for the pre-reflexive meaning of reality [6, p. 3]. However, this ontology is rather peculiar: trying not so much to conceive being, but rather an effort of being, or even an effort of coming close to being through the regaining and wasting of that which/whom one is, through the process of appropriating and expropriating oneself, in which "ego, *ego cogito*, is to be grasped in the mirror of the testimonies of your own life" [7, p. 39].

Ricoeur's view that all cognition is preceded by pre-understanding allows for a critical understanding of the conception of "pure consciousness", elaborated on the basis of Husserl's phenomenology. Consciousness always runs to something else than itself; the notion of intentionality, opposite of Husserl, Ricoeur ties to the notion of otherness (*altérité*). Intentionality signifies the directing of consciousness towards a meaning before that meaning becomes a part of it as well as before the moment consciousness becomes an instance of measuring itself. The identity of a subject is not given directly, "[...] the meaning of consciousness lies beyond itself" [8, p. 112].

Existential hermeneutics, grasping "being oneself (yourself)" as a project, creates a distance between Ricoeur's language and Husserl's phenomenology with its directness, lack of assumptions and its immanence. Instead of an analysis of pure consciousness, Ricoeur's program prefers "a roundabout way", where the dialectics of analysis and of reflection, the interpretation of interpretation in a hermeneutic circle, create a situ-

ation where a subject not only initiates the process of understanding. An object of interpretation is problematic from its own nature of being, even and perhaps especially when it appears to be its subject, where any interpretation is then neither unquestionable nor ultimate. The gift of speaking and of understanding consists in not having the last word. Language is rooted in what is accidental, distracted and ambiguous, any attempts at its idealization or formalization tend to falsify it. That which changes the course of human existence is, in the same way as existence itself, unimportant. A correlation of this unessentiality is its inconclusive character. Understanding is a way through which a subject comes back to itself by means of vanishing, falling away and becoming alienated. As we can read: "The shortest way that leads from me to me is the thought of the other" [9, p. 195–196]. The lack of obviousness, the lack of transparency of human existence, equips existence with a characteristic feature of ethical nature. Thus existential hermeneutics is also ethics, "[...] its aim is to grasp *ego* in its effort to exist and in its desire to be [10, p. 46]"

Otherness does not come from outside, it is not something that happens only accidentally to a subject such as *ego* (*Soi*). Otherness is also a heterogenic element in the face of an identity of a subject and a person, an element that may be removed beyond reflexive synthesis, it can be overcome and made neutral. Otherness is something inner, original and constitutive for human identity. It reaches us in a dimension of something which belongs to what is our own in the strongest sense. *Soi-même comme un autre – Oneself as Another* – is the title of one of the most important books by Paul Ricoeur. There we can read that: "[...] the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought without the other" [1, p. 3]. What is the place of the body in this philosophical turn? It seems that the hermeneutics of *Ego*, *Ego* open to Otherness or rather, one should say, open by means of Otherness, consists at first in hermeneutical-phenomenological analysis of three basic figures – the "figures of Otherness", of which "my own body" is the first one.

My own body – between being and possessing

It is for Ricoeur a peculiar paradox that we owe the creation of the problem of "my own body" to Edmund Husserl and not to Heidegger. When striving to elaborate on "an ontology of my own body" we must follow Husserl's "the most promising sketch of ontology" [1, p. 322]. If we follow Husserl's *Cartesian meditation* [11, p. 135–154], in the context of the question how to get to know the other man as "an analogue of myself", we would then choose to put aside everything that is given to us as not ours, as foreign, from all the senses "present to everybody", which means both from the

objective world as from the world of culture, and “concrete totality”, where the experience of my own body will still remain irremovable. In this perspective the world is given to us in a different way. In the medium of a body as a sphere of what is our own to the utmost (*Eigenheitssphäre*), this is the difference between “me” and “not-me”, between a subject and an object. In this earlier than intersubjective phase my own body and the world that forms a correlation to it are not yet an effect of creating the sense of intentional consciousness. All that is left is My own body, embodied as Ego, the worldly Ego. “I can” (*je peux*) is a formula expressing the fact that, despite radical intimacy and belonging, it should still be assimilated only as my own.

That, which for Husserl was only an episode of research, attempting to cross a bridge between the data of pure consciousness and the world of living experience (*Lebenswelt*), was an attempt that ultimately did not end successfully, which for his followers became a critical moment and a turning point [12, p. 97–106].

It formed the proper discovery of what in a phenomenological perspective is irreducible, at being a correlation of a pre-predicative, pre-objective, pre-discursive phase of cognition. As Ricoeur notices: “In a sharp-edged dialectic between *praxis* and *páthos* one’s own body becomes an emblematic title of a vast inquiry” [1, p. 320]. According to Ricoeur, besides the simple *Jemeinigkeit* of my own body, it exposes the whole sphere of inner passivity that is of otherness. At the same time it is the very body that constitutes the centre of attracting that otherness.

For Gabriel Marcel, “my own body” was already a particular case of what we have and what we, at the same time, are, opening a field of thought on the nature of possessing and being. As we can read: “Embodiment – a central datum of metaphysics. Embodiment, a situation of a being who finds himself to be connected to a body. Datum not transparent to itself: an opposition to *cogito*. I can say about that body neither that it is me, nor that it is not, nor an object to me. Immediately we find ourselves beyond the opposition of a subject and an object” [13, p. 9]. What connects me with my body is a model and pre-figuration of possession of which the body is “the most secret, the most deepest shelter” [13, p. 140], and at the same time I am my body, although I am not identical with my body. That much can be said of Marcel, to whom “Ricoeur owes a theme of his philosophy” [5, p. 11].

The phenomenon of “my own body” also becomes a point of departure of Merleau-Ponty’s analyses, where he says: “Thus it is an object that never leaves me. Is it in such case still an object?” [14, p. 109]. Not at all. Its presence is not a factual necessity but a “metaphysical one”. It is a condition of everything else that I meet. And because of that, it becomes something, in a sense, absent to me. The duality of experiencing my own body, namely that it is at the same time perceived and per-

ceiving, is accompanied by its ontic double meaning: being something nearest to us and transcending over the limits of my own identity. Each time it is something more and something less than an object. Closer to us than us ourselves, and at the same time never given to us directly and, as such, transcending the sphere of what we are able to authorize.

The problem of my own body is possible when we accept the phenomenological research perspective while at the same time, realize the advanced revision it has taken on. Not only things are given to me but also the experience of them. Besides, as Merleau-Ponty writes: “The world is not what I think it is, but what I experience as the world” [14, p. 14]. To the Cartesian *Ego cogito* – “I think” – juxtaposes Merleau-Ponty’s “I perceive”, to pure thinking – perception. It is its analysis that allows one to reveal, as the French philosopher claims, the pre-predicative, pre-discursive phase of cognition. The body endows the character of “dwelling” to being in time and space. As an extension of my own body as a perceiving subject, things lose their objective character, their status as something represented, whereas the thinking I loses its substantial identity: “When I come back to myself, escaping the dogmatism of common sense or dogmatism of science, I discover not the focus of inner truth but a subject exposed into the world” [14, p. 8–9].

Perception, similarly to Ricoeurian pre-understanding, does not constitute an object of cognition, but is an intention of our being, its existence, “the modality of pre-objective view”. Merleau-Ponty writes, “A body is a vehicle of my being in the world. To have a body means for a living creature to be related to a certain environment, to be identified with one’s projects and constantly be involved with them” [14, p. 100]. The phenomenal body testifies to the fact of the pre-objective view of the world. Through my own body do I enter into the most intimate relations with the world, but always as an already “embodied subject” (*le sujet incarné*), not so much imprisoned in the body as rather being together with the body transgressing oneself in an ecstatic, expressive way.

Thus, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, similar to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, seems to be an attempt at recovering the body, emancipating it from the dictation of an idea, a form and a thinking soul. But it is also an attempt at describing the world according to the body; a description of the world as the correlation of bodily, motor intentionality. The individualized, concrete, involved in the world, entangled with a subject, perception of Merleau-Ponty or the Ricoeurian subject of acting and experiencing are located between consciousness and things, as irreducible neither to it nor to them. What is this idea of subjectivity, tied to the world and open to it? At first nothing more than the experience of our corporeality. Corporeality, as a principle of experience, generally means that there is corporeal “know-

ledge” about the world, that a being is always grasped by us through a previous physically determined perspective. The perspectival character is an expression of “I can” and at the same time an order of power and possessing. As V. Descombes comments: “Immersed in existence a subject is pervaded by the inner difference, which Merleau-Ponty names consecutively: disagreement with oneself, not-possessing oneself, and the lack of transparency” [15, p. 84]. That which is connected, especially in the rationalistic tradition, with the phenomenon of appearance, i.e. a lack, similitude, incompleteness and dissonance, is the only resonance in which a body is reworked as a subject of perception, according to Merleau-Ponty, and as a subject of self-recognition according to Ricoeur’s concept.

The phenomenology of perception, which Ricoeur engages in a fruitful controversy [16, p. 25–31], as a return to the experienced world, is an attempt to describe the discourse of what precedes every discourse, that what is “mute” and “silent”, which nonetheless seems to be an original source of the experience. Every discourse assumes that original character, but neither of them can rule over it, neither possess it, neither can they express it in a thematic way. It was explained that “the whole world of science is to build on the experienced world. If we want to reflect on science in rigorous way, to evaluate precisely its sense and extent, we have to arouse first the experience of the world of which science seems to be a sort of secondary expression” [14, p. 6]. This original sense, which belongs to “existential mimicry rather than conceptual statement” [14, p. 203], may be merely approximated, and a way to its explication is, by Merleau-Ponty, determined in advance as infinite. As Ricoeur comments in his *Semio-logical challenge: the problem of a subject*, “[...] consciousness with its acquired skills and verbal tools remains always a debtor of instructive spontaneity of my body” [9, p. 257–258]. In a traditional discourse, the body as a thing, as an object, as virtually a supplement, is not allowed to speak. But it is the same with the body, as an uncovered subject of sense, it also is “mute” and “silent”. How should one present something that is neither represented nor representing? How is discourse of a body possible, if a body is “neither signifying nor signified” [17, p. 24]?

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception is perhaps the most significant attempt at the philosophical restitution of corporeality. Paul Ricoeur shares neither its scope nor the radicalness of its scale. However, he does, unquestionably, similarly interpret Husserl’s distinction between *Leib* (my own, alive body) and *Körper* (a body among other bodies), considering the very distinction (*le corps* – objective body, *la chair* – alive body) as the announcement of the “ontology of my own body”, which he wants to develop in a shape of his own existential hermeneutics. He writes: “[...] possessing bodies is precisely what persons do, or rather

what they actually are” [1, p. 33]. The discovery of my own body as a limit case should induce us to reinterpret the traditional understanding of both subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the very act of cognition, that also opens a new perspective about the relationship between identity and existence, which, after Heidegger, is thought as an understanding reference to itself, realised at first in a medium of the inauthentic forms of inner-worldly being [1, p. 327]. Although the Heideggerian analytics of *Dasein* seems to abort a body about a body, Ricoeur notices significant reference to it in the concept of “Project-being thrown” [1, p. 327].

That act of possessing the body is something that we do and that we are, so is it therefore an act of possession at all? At least we can ask such a question, that is what the grammar of a natural language offers to us. The analysis of the phenomenon of the human body uncovers its universal character, ambiguous and vague, as belonging to the world. A body, a combination of what is particular and anonymous, located in a place so far predestined to the thinking conscious of itself, seems to be the essence of discourse, a reservoir of both a narrative and reflexive character. We never leave our own body, we neither completely possess it nor are we identical to it, and as Ricoeur writes, it is adequate to the “polisemic nature” of the sphere of human activity that never constitutes nor creates the whole. That is why it demands using a language that is not possessive. “Only a discourse other than itself [...] is suited to the meta-category of otherness” [1, p. 356].

Being me as the process of signifying and preserving myself

My own body, something that Heidegger did not elaborate on as one of the existentials, seems to co-sound with *Geworfenheit* and facticity, and expresses, according to Ricoeur, an alien character of being in the world as a paradox of human existence. It is a condition of a human belonging to the world: activity creates the happening of the world and at the same time signifies, in a self-referential way, its originator: “One’s own body is the very place – in the strong sense of the term – of this belonging, thanks to which the self can place its mark on those events that are actions” [1, p. 319]. But this stigma can only be marked by the one who carries and bears it, who himself is marked by it, who is given first to its arbitrariness as sensing it. Who is something that remains in a question of “who?”, even when there is a lack of answer. Who transgresses the limits of one’s finitude, but before he has to experience them. That is why, it is exactly here, Ricoeur claims, “[...] in this strange and extraordinary relation to my body, and through it to the world, one should seek the essence of experience of finitude” [18, p. 304].

“Being oneself”, as that identity postulated by Ri-

coeur, is not a primary fact, as much as a subject of understanding is not a condition of understanding or a reason, but rather, an effect. Man does not possess, at least in the common sense, his body, as he similarly does not possess, in a cognitive dimension, direct access to himself. The objective understanding of oneself, as problematic to the utmost degree as it is, is a response to the objectivity of self-understanding as a dialectical combination of what is universal and of what is particular. Self-understanding has to slide neither into solipsism, nor into naive realism, although it has support neither from the inside nor from outside. And it is exactly in “[...] this pre-linguistic relation between my flesh localized by the self and a world accessible or inaccessible to the «I can» that a semantics of action should be built” [1, p. 325].

As mentioned above, the “semantics of action” is an answer to that which is impossible to be held due to the “pre-linguistic” discourse of a body. Its “building” is there to stabilize the dialogic character of sense, within the space of a linguistic practice that is condemned to only offer exchange. The practice mentioned here is practice in the precise sense of a word, that is why Ricoeur especially prefers those interpretations of language which tie language to an action, that all linguistic statements are performances, that the difference between the descriptive and performative character of statements is, to some extent, apparent (J. Austin, J. Searle) [9, p. 229–231]. The concept of speaking as the act of performing something finds its completion in the concept of action as speaking, acting is a gesture, it is articulation and expression, it tells about itself and about its creator whose personal unity appears to be “a narrative unity of life” (A. MacIntyre, Ch. Taylor). All these, as Ricoeur writes, active syntheses are built over the primary passive syntheses, which is a carrier of the subject and body.

To “be oneself”, one should be able, as Ricoeur writes, “to signify oneself”. Signifying oneself is mediated in the potency of action. It does not just consist in being a signatory to acts previously authorised and constituted by an acting subject, which through its potency is able to act and express itself by means of a body. The very act of acting is understood by Ricoeur not as an unhindered expression of a subject, but as an indication of being in the world. In this entanglement, as found in the world, which precedes every activity, there is no activity without sensing, no activity without passivity, no trespassing borders without experiencing the resistance that they exert. No form of activity, whether from speaking to perception, from traveling to producing something, is free from sensing otherness; it never is entirely liberated from it. But it is due to that action, according to Ricoeur, which possesses a reflective and self-reflexive character.

“Mutual interrelation between activity and suffering”, as the deepest form of sensing (*páthos*), was dis-

covered, according to Ricoeur, by Maine de Biran, a French philosopher of the 19th century. He analysed different degrees and layers of the passivity of the body and “[...] is therefore the first philosopher to have introduced one’s own body into the region of non-representative certainty” [1, p. 321]. Both effort and resistance, similar to a dancing body, creates indivisible unity. Also touch, whose object becomes a part of the scheme of corporeality, is at the same time the nearest to what is internal and to what is outside, it offers the greatest certainty of the existence of “not-me”, pointing to the fact that a body is a mediator between the internal character of a subject and the external nature of the world; thus it becomes a primary witness to its mutual, original belonging to each other [12, p. 106].

Being somebody in contrast to being something can be neither found nor identified. Rather, it is a state of character – the primary “I can”, in which the “I” can hardly be heard, does not signify a subject-substratum, acquiring a form, as Ricoeur expresses it, of “preserving oneself”. It is exactly this concept of “preserving oneself” that is a measure of the subjective duration of time and not the constant recurrence of type and character. Being somebody consists in the capability of preserving what we are only becoming. Action is the very process of becoming, as well as its first interpretation. Corporeality is a reflexive moment of activity. At first, thanks to it, lies the operation of a certain feature in activity, a readiness to being recognised by somebody as his own.

According to Paul Ricoeur – a body – my own, but not possessed, owned, but not transferable, is a mediator between the ego and the world, between internal and external experience. Nevertheless, it is apparent that a body is “[...] the only object that I rule over directly and in agreement with my will” [11, p. 141]. The embodied ego is a subject, where its distance towards an object becomes annihilated, where annihilated is understood in the sense that it becomes internalized. The experience of my own body is an experience of passivity. The fact that, by means of a body, I have the power over anything, and it makes room for something more elementary and primary: to the acts of sensing, submitting and being exposed. My own body, as a *residuum* of what is my own, appears as a carrier of Otherness, as something that I do not possess, do not choose, do not establish. It reveals its double meaning: on one hand it exerts resistance, on the other it is a means of overcoming. The intentionality of the body corresponds to a world that is not a represented world. The “I can” that is thrown into this world does not derive from “I want”, but, on the contrary, it forms (constitutes) its condition. Somebody who remains himself, who reveals himself in activity, but who remains within the everlasting question of “who”?

Thus, my own body would be a certain function, as Merleau-Ponty once said: a “pendulum movement

of existence” [14, p. 106], or as Marcel wrote: a “[...] border sphere between being and possessing” [13, p. 70], which evokes the relative, temporal, unsteady relation between a subject and the world.

Their synthesis is, according to Ricoeur, the competent structure of affective intentionality, which lead the reader to two other figures of Otherness: the experience of the Other as well as Conscience. All of these figures, all the forms of Otherness, reveal the way of self-understanding, a way back to oneself as a dialectic of possessing as well as losing of property. The unity of subjective life aspires to authenticity, it may be even be the truth when confronted with the Other. It testifies to otherness and is testified by otherness. The way of being of the *ipse* type “[...] remains in a permanent effort of transcending oneself, opening oneself to otherness – without possibility of reaching it and without possibility of remaining oneself, of satisfaction, stabilization, of balance and rest” [4, p. 225].

The way of understanding does not so much solve the problem, but rather makes its solutions more problematic, where an order “[...] may be only the abstract phase of self-understanding by oneself; an order in itself is a thought external to itself” [19, p. 171]. While expressing ourselves, we produce a kind of difference between us and ourselves and we strive for the verisimilitude of being somebody, a verisimilitude which is perhaps the deepest form of truth of existence. As we continue reading, the “[...] consideration of truth, one would like to begin from paen to unity: truth does not deny itself, whereas there is a multitude of lies; truth brings people together, whereas a lie separates them. It is impossible, however to begin like that: unity before it becomes a source of satisfaction, appears to be a perverse temptation” [18, p. 57].

Paul Ricoeur’s thoughts on the body, developed within the context of understanding the problem of subjective identity, contains a proposal more radical than just something as banal as once again writing about the historical controversy between idealism and materialism, between sensualism and rationalism. What is important is it is not just an appreciation of the body and corporeality as being more important than human nature that was conceived throughout the course of European thought. The problem remains not in the fact that man has also a body, but in the fact that it cannot be possessed. What is more, the idea of non-possessing should be, in a sense a paternal model for thinking about identity and non-identity of a concrete human cognitive subject of this world. Another me, whom I meet in myself and outside myself, is “always” Other than me.

It is not accidental that the rhetoric of corporeality, in comparing something to a body or pointing to a body of something, has in contemporary humanities a rather negative tone. It may be said that there is something that defies understanding, and even though it does

escape us, it requires us to consider it, to agree with its inconclusiveness of epistemic conceptions. The body remains as a figure of Otherness, and our living and discursive practices, in relation to the body, is a measure of openness to Otherness, Strangeness and Difference in all of its social and cultural manifestations. This openness is, at the same time, an openness of our own body. Ricoeur writes that “[...] instead of having the feature of confinement characteristic of an oyster shell, about which Plato speaks or, even more, instead of the Orphic Tomb, it is an openness. What is more, it is openness of many different kinds: openness of a need, a need of the world I miss, openness of the very suffering, by which I am left at the mercy of the outside world, vulnerable to its threats, open as the uncovered flank, openness of perception, due to which something other reaches me” [18, p. 305]. This *topos* of the body validates and exposes our aspirations as unreliable in keeping another human being and the world around us in relationships that are only instrumental.

References

1. Ricoeur P., *Oneself as Another*. Transl. K. Blamey. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992.
2. Ricoeur P., *Symbolism of Evil* [in Polish]. Transl. S. Ochab, S. Cichowicz. PAX, Warszawa 1986.
3. Kowalska M., Introduction. Dialectic of being oneself. In: Ricoeur P., *Oneself as Another* [in Polish]. Transl. B. Chełstowski. PWN, Warszawa 2005, VII–XXXVII.
4. Lubowicka G., Conscience as affirmation. An idea of subjectivity in Paul Ricoeur’s philosophy [in Polish]. UW, Wrocław 2000.
5. Rosner K., Paul Ricoeur – philosophical sources of his hermeneutics. In: Ricoeur P., *Language, text, interpretation. Collection of works* [in Polish]. Transl. P. Graff, K. Rosner. PIW, Warszawa 1989.
6. Ricoeur P., *Faillible Man*. Transl. Ch. Kербley. Henry Regnery, Chicago 1965.
7. Cichowicz S., Paul Ricoeur’s codes of existence. In: Cichowicz S., *Towards concrete reflection. Four historical examples* [in Polish]. Słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2002.
8. Ricoeur P., *Hermeneutics and human sciences*. Transl. J.B. Thompson. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981.
9. Ricoeur P., *Existence and hermeneutics* [in Polish]. PAX, Warszawa 1985.
10. Ricoeur P., *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. Transl. D. Savage. Yale University Press, New Haven 1970.
11. Husserl E., *Cartesian meditations* [in Polish]. Transl. A. Wajs. PWN, Warszawa 1982.
12. Sweeney R., The body as expression of life. *Annalecta Husserliana*, 1996, 48, 97–106.
13. Marcel G., *To be and to have* [in Polish]. Transl. P. Lubicz. PAX, Warszawa 1986.
14. Merleau-Ponty M., *Phenomenology of perception* [in Polish]. Transl. M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński. Fundacja Aletheia, Warszawa 2001.
15. Descombes V., *The same and the other* [in Polish]. Transl.

- B. Banasiak, K. Matuszewski. Fundacja Aletheia, Warszawa 1997.
16. Ricoeur P., Merleau-Ponty. Beyond Husserl and Heidegger (1989). In: Flynn B., Froman W.J., Vallier R. (eds.), Merleau-Ponty and the possibilities of philosophy. Transforming the tradition. State University of New York Press, Albany 2009, 25–31.
 17. Nancy J.-L., Corpus [in Polish]. Transl. M. Kwietniewska. Słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2002.
 18. Ricoeur P., According to hope [in Polish]. PAX, Warszawa 1991.
 19. Ricoeur P., Language, text, interpretation. Collection of works [in Polish]. Transl. P. Graff, K. Rosner. PIW, Warszawa 1989.

Paper received by the Editors: September 3, 2010

Paper accepted for publication: June 9, 2011

Correspondence address

Mirosław Żarowski
Instytut Filozofii
Uniwersytet Wrocławski
ul. Koszarowa 3
51-149 Wrocław, Poland
e-mail: Zarovius@interia.pl