

PHENOMENOLOGY OF EMBODIMENT

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Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. Translated by Richard A. Rand. Fordham University Press, 2008.

With *Corpus* Jean-Luc Nancy proposes a fundamental reconfiguration of the body, a reconfiguration that displaces both metaphysical dualism and phenomenological interiority—a writing not *on* the body, but *a* body itself. *Corpus* refuses any systematic exposition, proceeding instead through fragments that enact perfectly the very thing they describe, that is, the interruption of discourse by the irreducible plurality of bodies, as pluralism is in fact one of Nancy's main concerns throughout his entire oeuvre. But such a stylistic decision is not ornamental, rather it is highly constitutive, responding to what Nancy names the “revolt of bodies” against totalizing language. The body emerges not as an object of knowledge but as that which exceeds and fractures discursivity while remaining entirely within it. Central to the text is the thesis that embodiment is fundamentally a matter of exteriority and therefore the body is not a container of an interior self but the very exposition of existence as being-outside-itself. The philosopher reinterprets here the Cartesian problem of the union and communion of body and mind by shifting attention from substance to relation. As such, for Nancy, existence unfolds as a passage through exteriority, where the self is always already displaced beyond itself. In this sense, embodiment names neither a substrate nor a lived unity but a spacing, more so, an extension without origin, in which sense itself takes place. It is worth stating that Nancy's engagement with psychoanalysis also reinforces this displacement, in that the Freudian proposition that the psyche is extended, yet unaware of its extension, becomes decisive, thus the psyche is nothing other than the body in its withdrawal from self-presence. One can also state that this entails a critique of all hermeneutics that treat the body as bearer of signification. In fact, against such approaches, Nancy insists on the body as a site of *asignificance*, where sense is not interpreted but exposed in its material dispersion. Therefore, one can deduct from here the phenomenological importance of *Corpus* and say that it lies in its transformation of embodiment into a problem of touch, weight, and contact—the body is defined as self-sensing exposure, a structure in which sensing is inseparable from being affected and displaced. It is of significance to circle back to the idea that, in good continental fashion, *Corpus* also serves as

a meta-text—itself a body, itself a measure of contact—with Nancy writing: “Bodies, for good or ill, are touching each other upon this page, or more precisely, the page itself is a touching (of my hand while it writes, and your hands while they hold the book) [...] the infinitesimal dust of a contact.” Embodiment becomes thus the condition for a non-subjective phenomenology, where experience is neither interior consciousness nor intentional relation but the circulation of touches at the limits of bodies, since, after all, for the philosopher, existence is fundamentally co-existence. In this manner, Nancy reorients phenomenology toward a thinking of the body as plural, as fragmented, as irreducibly relational, opening a decisive path beyond both subject-centered and representational accounts of lived experience.

Jensen, Rasmus Thybo, and Dermot Moran, eds. *The Phenomenology of Embodied Subjectivity*. Springer, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01616-0>

The Phenomenology of Embodied Subjectivity brings together a series of essays that collectively articulate the enduring philosophical force of phenomenology when directed toward the problem of embodiment. Instead of dealing with the body as a mere biological substrate or an external object of cognition, the contributions insist on the body as the very condition of possibility for experience, agency, and meaning. Across its thematic divisions, such as habitual action, perceptual life-world constitution, pathological embodiment, and intersubjectivity, the collection shows how classical phenomenological resources remain fruitful for contemporary debates in cognitive science, psychiatry, or medical anthropology. A significant philosophical concern that emerges from this collection of essays is the critique of mind–body dualism, especially through sustained engagement with figures such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The essays repeatedly return to the idea that subjectivity is not housed in a detached intellect but is instead lived through embodied situatedness, that embodiment is not only an essential structure, but that it also “involves being affected, stimulated, and involved in practices by and with the world.” This is particularly evident in analyses of habitual action where agency is described not as reflective deliberation but as pre-reflective bodily attunement to affordances in the environment, reconfiguring freedom as an immanent openness structured by embodied capacities and worldly contexts. From the standpoint of the phenomenology of embodiment, the volume is especially compelling in its treatment of pathological cases such as but not limited to chronic pain, anorexia, and melancholia, cases in which the lived body is disclosed in conditions of disruption. Here embodiment is shown not as a stable background, but as a fragile and dynamic synthesis

through which the world itself is disclosed and liminal experiences contribute themselves to one's experience of being in the world. Such line of thinking resonates strongly with Merleau-Ponty's account of corporeal intentionality, insofar as bodily disturbance reveals the normally tacit structures of perception and affect. Equally significant is the book's emphasis on intercorporeality, in that subjectivity is not isolated but formed through embodied relations with others, mediated by gesture, language, and shared lifeworld structures, and embodiment becomes the site where individuality and relationality intersect, challenging any reduction of the self to either interior consciousness or external behavior. Overall, it can be said that the collection proposes a non-reductive phenomenology of embodiment, one in which lived bodily experience is both epistemologically foundational and existentially constitutive, while also showing that subjectivity is neither purely mental nor merely physical, but rather that it is an ongoing embodied enactment of sense within a shared world.

**Simonsen, Kirsten, and Lasse Koefoed. *Geographies of Embodiment: Critical Phenomenology and the World of Strangers*. SAGE, 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529702125>**

Kirsten Simonsen and Lasse Koefoed's *Geographies of Embodiment: Critical Phenomenology and the World of Strangers* develops a reflection on embodiment that can be placed at the intersection of critical phenomenology and human geography, as the book situates itself explicitly within debates on humanism and post-humanism, and it uses the concept of embodiment to rethink how subjectivity is spatially and politically constituted in everyday life. Across its chapters, it brings phenomenological philosophy into dialogue with empirical case studies of urban, national, and transnational encounters, thus grounding abstract questions of subjectivity in situated social practices. A significant philosophical effort of the text is its reconfiguration of the body not as a fixed biological entity but as a spatially and temporally situated process through which the world is lived and made meaningful, embodiment is thereby understood as fundamentally relational, in that bodies are always already entangled in *encounters* with others, with institutions, and with urban materialities. To this effect, the book extends phenomenological insights, particularly those associated with the lived body, into the domain of social and political geography, showing thus how embodiment is shaped by power relations, by difference, and by exclusion. A particularly significant contribution lies in its analysis of encounter as a constitutive structure of embodied life, with encounters being more than merely accidental meetings between pre-formed subjects; rather, encounters are generative events in which subjectivities are formed, contested, and differentiated. From this

perspective, urban space appears as a dense field of embodied negotiations, where proximity and distance, visibility and invisibility, are continually produced through everyday practices, and one can think here also of works such as those of Gaston Bachelard or Juhani Pallasmaa. But the book's phenomenological orientation becomes especially driven when it addresses alterity and the concept of the stranger. As such, embodiment is revealed as a site where ethical and political questions converge, questions such as how bodies are oriented toward others, how they are recognized or misrecognized, or how spatial arrangements condition the possibility of hospitality or exclusion. These kinds of analyses resonate strongly with a broader phenomenological tradition in which intersubjectivity is not secondary but foundational. Ultimately, and what readers no matter the background should retain from this work, *Geographies of Embodiment* advances a critical phenomenology of spatial life in which embodiment is neither private nor purely biological, a phenomenology in which embodiment is an open-ended and worldly process through which social worlds are continuously enacted, thereby deepening phenomenological accounts of lived experience by embedding them within the material and political textures of geography, while also offering a compelling account of how subjectivity is always already a spatial and relational achievement.

Jansen, Julia. "Imagination, Embodiment and Situatedness: Using Husserl to Dispel (Some) Notions of 'Off-Line Thinking.'" In *The Phenomenology of Embodied Subjectivity*, edited by Rasmus Thybo Jensen and Dermot Moran, 63–79. Springer, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01616-0_11

With this chapter, Julia Jansen brings forth a phenomenologically grounded critique of the widespread assumption that imagination is a form of "off-line" cognition, detached from perception, action, and environmental embeddedness, an assumption that is prominent in certain strands of cognitive science, though one does not necessarily need to possess a high knowledge of cognitive science to engage with its thesis. Against this model, the chapter argues that imagination is not an inner, quasi-isolated mental faculty, but an activity structurally continuous with embodied and situated experience, and the target of Jansen's analysis is a conception of imagination as involving internal representations that function independently of ongoing bodily engagement with the world. This view, often associated with representationalist accounts of mind, presupposes a sharp division between perception, as world-directed and embodied, and imagination, as internally generated and disengaged. Jansen put together resources from Edmund Husserl to challenge this division at its roots, as Husserl's analyses of phantasy and image-consciousness, the author suggests, do not support a clean separation

between on-line and off-line modes of cognition, but instead what they do is reveal a more complex interplay of presence, absence, and modification within experience. A key move in the chapter consists in reinterpreting imagination as a modification of perceptual intentionality rather than its negation in what can be briefly summarized as follows: imagining does not suspend the structures of embodiment and world-relation; it reconfigures them; more so because, or since even in imaginative acts, consciousness remains oriented toward a horizon of possible experience, structured by bodily capacities and prior engagements. In this regard, imagination is neither self-contained nor purely interior but remains anchored in the subject's situatedness, drawing upon sedimented habits, motor possibilities, and environmental contexts. This position aligns with broader developments in theories of situated and embodied cognition that exist at the intersection of phenomenology and cognitive science, theories which reject the idea that mental processes can be understood independently of the organism's interaction with its surroundings. As Jansen notes, these approaches emphasize that cognition depends on the system's embeddedness in an environment and cannot be reduced to internal symbol manipulation. The author's contribution thereby lies in showing that these insights are already anticipated within phenomenology, provided Husserl's analyses are read without the distortions introduced by representationalist interpretations. For the phenomenology of embodiment, the importance of the chapter is twofold, in that, firstly, it extends the scope of embodiment beyond perception and action to include imagination itself, thus resisting any residual tendency to treat imaginative life as disembodied, and secondly, it clarifies how bodily situatedness informs even those experiences that seem to transcend immediate reality. As such, imagination is revealed as a mode of engagement with possibilities that remains rooted in the lived body and its world. One could argue that by dissolving the opposition between on-line and off-line cognition, Jansen repositions imagination within the continuous field of embodied experience in a much-needed manner, with the result being a more integrated account of subjectivity, one in which even the most seemingly detached acts of consciousness retain their grounding in the structures of bodily life and situated existence.

Kim, Hye Young. "We as Home: Phenomenological Reflections on Embodiment, Presubjectivity, and the Husserlian Homeworld." *Continental Philosophy Review* 59 (2026): 57–79. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-025-09714-1>

This article develops a phenomenologically oriented inquiry into subjectivity, with particular attention to the ways in which lived experience is structured through affectivity, embodiment,

and the pre-reflective constitution of sense. Although framed within contemporary debates in phenomenology, the text can be read as an attempt to refine the conditions under which subjectivity is disclosed, especially against reductions that either intellectualize experience or dissolve it into purely naturalistic explanation, which is why even though it tackles a known concern, it is important for the manner in which it guides the discussion. At its conceptual core, the article defends a robust account of embodied subjectivity, that is, the subject is not understood as a detached cognitive pole but as an already situated, affectively charged, and world-involving existence. Which means that embodiment is not an empirical attribute added to consciousness, but the very medium through which any world can appear as meaningful at all. In this sense, the article continues a trajectory familiar from post-Husserlian phenomenology, in which intentionality is inseparable from bodily being-in-the-world and from the tacit structures of lived orientation. Also, it is worth mentioning that a key philosophical contribution of the piece lies in its emphasis on pre-reflective life, with experience being shown as structured prior to thematic cognition, through affective tonalities, habitual bodily dispositions, and an implicit openness to the world. This level of experience is not reducible to conceptual articulation, yet it is not irrational; it constitutes the very ground from which reflective thought emerges. In this respect, the article reinforces a non-dualistic understanding of subjectivity in which cognition, affect, and corporeality form an inseparable dynamic unity, with the discussion being particularly compelling, especially in contemporary phenomenology that deals with dynamic world structures, because of how it reframes subjectivity as essentially relational and world-immersed. The body is not merely the locus of perception, but the site of responsive attunement, where meaning is enacted through situated engagement with a shared world. But the concept of *shared world* is fundamentally different today than it was at the beginning of phenomenology. Also, this undermines any strict opposition between interiority and exteriority, suggesting instead a continuum of embodied sense-making. Ultimately, the article proposes a form of phenomenological reflection in which subjectivity is understood as an ongoing process of embodied disclosure. Rather than positing a fixed essence of the subject, it describes a dynamic field in which meaning, world, and body are co-constituted, and in doing so, it contributes to contemporary phenomenological efforts to rethink experience as fundamentally incarnate, relational, and temporally enacted, beyond the manner in which these concepts were already defined by classical phenomenology.

**Zhang, Junguo. “Patočka’s Phenomenology of the Natural World: From Husserl to Heidegger and Beyond.” *Studies in East European Thought* (2025).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-025-09741-x>**

The essay proposes a reconstructive engagement with Jan Patočka’s phenomenological project, situating it within a critical trajectory that moves from Husserl’s transcendental philosophy to Heidegger’s existential analytic, while also attempting to indicate how Patočka reconfigures these inheritances in a distinctively original way. The central thematic axis of the paper is the notion of the natural world, understood not as a merely objective domain of entities, but as the concrete field of human existence in which meaning, embodiment, and world-disclosure are co-constituted. From the standpoint of the phenomenology of embodiment, the most philosophically significant contribution of the discussion lies in its insistence that embodiment is not a secondary empirical feature of subjectivity, but rather its fundamental structural condition, and also as it draws attention to the work of Jan Patočka in a more engaging manner. Human existence is described here as being rooted in embodied situatedness, where moods, affective attunements, and practical engagements disclose the world in a pre-theoretical manner, an emphasis that resonates with a post-Husserlian critique of transcendental subjectivity insofar as consciousness is no longer treated as a self-sufficient ground, but as always already embedded in the worldly dynamics of life. At the same time, it bears stating that the text underscores Patočka’s critical distance from Heidegger’s tendency toward existential negativity by emphasizing the productive tension between freedom and necessity within embodied life. Embodiment here is not simply finitude or thrownness; embodiment is a dynamic site where transcendence emerges from within concrete worldly involvement. The natural world thus becomes the horizon in which human beings oscillate between limitation and self-transcendence, it is no longer a static background against which subjectivity unfolds. Philosophically, such an approach deepens phenomenology’s account of embodiment by refusing both reductionist naturalism and pure transcendental idealism. Instead, what it does is articulate embodiment as the mediating condition through which *worldhood* itself becomes intelligible, thereby highlighting how lived corporeality is inseparable from temporality, affectivity, and practical orientation. Overall, the paper presents Patočka’s contribution as a mediating gesture within phenomenology, and a gesture that preserves the descriptive richness of lived experience while rethinking the ontological status of the subject as fundamentally embodied and world-immersed.

Costello, Matthew C., and Kevin A. Aho. “The Paradoxical Nature of Older Adult Embodiment.” *Topoi* 44, no. 4 (2025): 1145–1157. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-025-10175-7>

While not thoroughly phenomenological at first sight, Matthew Costello and Kevin Aho’s study examines how advanced age reshapes embodied cognition by tracing the interaction between sensory, motor, and cognitive systems within action–perception dynamics, a discussion that is not only often lacking from theories of embodied cognition, but one that is much needed in order to better understand lived experience. The authors begin from an embodiment framework in which coherent behavior depends on the integrated functioning of perceptual, motor, and also cognitive subsystems, and they situate aging within this framework by drawing on experimental research indicating that these systems undergo differential decline that leads to a functional reconfiguration of embodied processing rather than a uniform reduction of capacity. In such a reconfiguration, older adults exhibit a characteristic pattern involving reduced weighting of body-action system inputs alongside increased reliance on visual processing and higher-order cognitive mechanisms. This particular shift is described as a compensatory adjustment in which diminished bodily and motor contributions are offset by heightened dependence on externally oriented and cognitive resources. Building on this account, the authors identify two paradoxical structures that emerge in older adult embodiment, structures fundamental for the understanding of lived experience in advanced age. The first concerns the increasing explicit awareness of the body that coincides with a diminished integration of bodily processes within embodied action, while the second concerns the tendency for external environmental structures to become more prominent as reference points in action and perception despite reduced bodily access to the world. These paradoxes articulate tensions between bodily presence and functional integration, as well as between environmental reliance and diminished physical engagement, with the authors proposing that they can be clarified through a combined approach that integrates empirical findings from cognitive neuroscience with phenomenological analysis of lived experience. On this basis, they introduce the notion of an embodiment equilibrium in older adulthood, understood as a dynamic balance between neural reweighting and experiential structures of bodily being-in-the-world. The account aims to articulate aging not as a simple decline but as a systematic transformation in the organization of embodied cognition, which is of significance not only for how we understand this stage of life, but more so, for how we conceptualize and integrate it within the phenomenological field. Also, this work is relevant for phenomenology of embodiment as it brings phenomenological

description of lived bodily experience into direct dialogue with empirical accounts of action–perception reconfiguration in aging.

Henry, Michel. *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*. Translated by Karl Hefty. Northwestern University Press, 2015.

In *Incarnation*, Michel Henry elaborates a realignment of phenomenology by grounding the question of embodiment not in exterior perception or worldly appearance, but in the immanence of affective self-experience. Against the dominant orientation of phenomenology toward intentionality and manifestation, Henry argues that the most originary mode of appearing is not the appearing of objects in the world, but the self-revelation of life to itself. This self-revelation is immediate, non-intentional, but also irreducible to any form of exterior visibility, with the concept of *flesh* designating this domain of absolute immanence, in that flesh is not to be understood as the physical body as extended in space, nor the lived body as structured through perception and action, but as the invisible, affective dimension in which life experiences itself from within. To feel pain, effort, or joy is not to perceive an object, proposes Henry, it is to undergo a mode of self-affection in which the distinction between subject and object collapses, and this pathos of life constitutes the fundamental mode of givenness, preceding any relation to the world. Henry's analysis proceeds through a sustained critique of phenomenology theories that privilege exteriority, most notably that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. While acknowledging the importance of the lived body in structuring perception, Henry claims that such accounts remain bound to the horizon of visibility and transcendence. By contrast, the philosopher seeks to uncover a dimension of experience that is entirely internal, a dimension where appearing is not a relation to something other, but the pure fact of self-experiencing. The body, insofar as it is flesh, does not stand before the world—the body is immersed in itself. And it needs stating that this distinction leads to a dual characterization of embodiment. On the one hand, there is the objective body, accessible to perception and science, and the lived body, engaged in action and worldly disclosure. On the other hand, there is the flesh, which cannot be objectified or externalized, with the latter not an additional layer but the very condition for any experience whatsoever. Without the self-affection of flesh, no perception, movement, or thought could occur. Embodiment is thereby rooted in an invisible interiority that sustains all forms of exterior relation. For the phenomenology of embodiment, the importance of Henry's work lies in the manner in which it displaces the emphasis on perception toward affectivity, in the manner in which it challenges the assumption that the body

is primarily a means of access to the world, proposing instead that the most fundamental dimension of embodiment is the way in which life is given to itself. Henry's shift redefines what is at stake in the phenomenological inquiry, that is, rather than describing how the world appears to a subject, the task now becomes to elucidate how subjectivity itself is constituted through self-experience, with Henry's account thereby introducing a tension within phenomenological approaches to the body. Where other thinkers emphasize openness, intentionality, and relationality, Henry insists on immanence, on passivity, on interiority. Yet this is a tension that is itself philosophically productive, in that it insists embodiment cannot be exhausted by its worldly functions, and through this insistence, Henry's *Incarnation* compels a reconsideration of the limits of phenomenological description and secures a place for affective life at the very foundation of experience.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences." In *The Primacy of Perception And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*. Edited by James M. Edie. Translated by William Cobb. Northwestern University Press, 1964.

In "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences," which can be seen as a distillation of his major work, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty formulates a concise yet programmatic statement of his broader philosophical project: the re-grounding of truth, objectivity, and rationality in the lived immediacy of perceptual experience. Against both empiricist reductions of perception to atomistic sensations and intellectualist accounts that subordinate it to conceptual synthesis, he argues that perception already possesses an intrinsic organization and meaning, that it is not a passive reception of data nor an interpretive act imposed by a detached subject, but an operative, bodily engagement with a world that is always already there. Central to Merleau-Ponty's essay is the claim that the perceived world constitutes the always presupposed foundation of all higher-order cognition. Perception is thus described as a *nascent logos*, a pre-reflective field in which sense, truth, and value first emerge. This formulation displaces the classical hierarchy that privileges intellectual clarity over sensory ambiguity in that what appears as ambiguity or contradiction in perception, its intertwining of presence and absence, immanence and transcendence, is not a deficiency to be overcome but the very *condition* of access to being. In other words, perception gives objects not as fully determinate entities but as horizons open to further exploration, structured through the body's motor capacities and situated perspective. This emphasis on the body as the locus of perceptual synthesis marks a decisive contribution to the phenomenology of embodiment;

the perceiving subject is not a disembodied consciousness but an incarnate agent whose bodily schema organizes space, action, and meaning. The body is not merely in the world; it is the means through which a world is disclosed. In this sense, embodiment is not an empirical add-on to cognition but its transcendental condition, and one is familiar with these critics from the very opening of *The Phenomenology of Perception*. The short essay thus provides one of the foundational articulations of a philosophy in which subjectivity is inseparable from its corporeal and worldly situation. Equally significant is the extension of this thesis beyond perception narrowly construed, in that Merleau-Ponty maintains intellectual thought, scientific knowledge, and intersubjective communication remain rooted in perceptual life, and even the most abstract truths retain a temporal and historical dimension, dependent on the evolving horizon of experience. And it is such a continuity that prevents any strict division between perception and reason, while preserving their differences in degree and articulation. Within the broader trajectory of French phenomenology, this account of embodiment establishes a line of inquiry that later thinkers will radicalize in distinct directions. For instance, the attention to the body as site of sense and exposure resonates with Jean-Luc Nancy's reflections on corporeal being-in-common, while Michel Henry's emphasis on affective self-revelation can be read as an internalization of the primacy Merleau-Ponty grants to lived experience. In each case, the body is no longer an object among others but the originary dimension in which meaning occurs. Therefore, the essay's importance lies less in offering a closed doctrine than in opening a field of research, in that by situating perception at the origin of philosophical reflection, Merleau-Ponty has redefined the task of phenomenology as the excavation of that pre-reflective ground from which all forms of knowledge arise.

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Duquesne University Press, 1969.

Totality and Infinity unfolds as a critique of the reduction of alterity to totality and an elaboration of a relation that preserves separation while making meaning possible, while situating itself against an ontology in which beings are comprehended within a unifying horizon, arguing that such comprehension neutralizes exteriority. In its place, it develops a relation to the Other that cannot be contained within knowledge, since it exceeds representation and resists integration into the Same. Lévinas begins the exposition from the constitution of interiority through enjoyment, labor, and dwelling, while the subject is described as living from elements, sustaining itself through nourishment and habitation, and prior to reflection or

thematization. This interiority is not a self-enclosed one, rather, it is one that is conditioned by an exteriority that remains forever irreducible. The encounter with the face marks a break within the economy of enjoyment, introducing a demand that does not arise from the subject's initiative; the face is presented as expression rather than object, and its presence institutes a relation in which the self is called into question, and language is articulated as discourse, a relation that maintains distance while enabling address, with truth being grounded in this structure as a movement that proceeds from separation. The ethical relation is asymmetrical, since responsibility does not follow from reciprocity but is imposed by the Other's presence. Within this framework, embodiment appears through sensibility, need, and exposure to elements; the body is implicated in enjoyment and dependence, it is situated in a material relation that precedes cognitive acts. This particular configuration introduces a dimension in which subjectivity is inseparable from vulnerability and receptivity, marking a displacement of accounts that privilege autonomy or synthesis, while indicating a register of embodiment articulated through nourishment, habitation, and exposure. It is significant to note that Levinas's inclusion within the phenomenology of embodiment discussion is justified insofar as his account of sensibility and vulnerability reorients embodiment toward exposure to the Other, showing how embodied subjectivity is constituted through affective openness rather than self-contained perception or cognition.

Gallagher, Shaun. *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

In *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Shaun Gallagher proposes a sustained argument for the constitutive role of embodiment in the formation of cognition, challenging models that treat the mind as fundamentally disembodied or computational, with the text proceeding through a dialogue between phenomenology and empirical research, while also seeking to demonstrate that bodily structures and capacities are not peripheral supports for mental life but integral to its organization. A central distinction guiding the analysis of this particular work is that between the body schema and the body image, in that the body schema refers to a system of pre-reflective, sensorimotor capacities that regulate posture, movement, and spatial orientation without requiring conscious awareness, and it operates as a practical, operative background that structures interaction with the environment, while the body image, in contrast, encompasses perceptual, conceptual, and affective attitudes toward one's own body, attitudes that include explicit representations and beliefs. Gallagher's argument hinges thus on the claim that these two dimensions, though evidently distinct, are not only interrelated, but that they

jointly shape both action and self-consciousness. Through detailed consideration of pathological cases, such as disorders of proprioception, neglect, and motor control, the book shows how liminal experiences, disruptions in bodily processes lead to corresponding alterations in perception, agency, and cognition. But Gallagher does not treat these cases as anomalies external to normal functioning, instead, the author views them as revelatory of the structures that ordinarily remain tacit. Therefore, the breakdown of bodily integration exposes the extent to which even abstract cognitive tasks depend upon the integrity of embodied systems. Within the phenomenological tradition, Gallagher's position extends insights associated with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, particularly the emphasis on the lived body as the locus of perceptual intentionality, however, the contribution and importance of the text lies more in its systematic incorporation of empirical findings into phenomenological analysis. Rather than subordinating one domain to the other, what Gallagher proposes is to treat phenomenology and cognitive science as mutually informative, with each being capable of refining the other's claims about embodiment, and the implications for the phenomenology of embodiment are substantial with such an approach. By articulating the body schema as a non-representational, operative structure, the book provides a conceptual framework for understanding how bodily processes can be both non-conscious and constitutive of experience. Embodiment is thereby not reducible to what is explicitly felt or perceived; embodiment includes a layer of organization that precedes and conditions conscious awareness. At the same time, the analysis of the body image shows that reflective and interpretive dimensions of bodily experience remain essential for understanding *selfhood*, with the overall effect being that of displacing any residual dualism between mind and body, but, and this is significant to note, without collapsing one into the other. Cognition thus emerges as an activity distributed across neural, bodily, and environmental processes, with the body serving as a central organizing dimension. In this respect, the work contributes to a broader reconfiguration of philosophical psychology, one in which embodiment is neither an empirical detail nor a phenomenological supplement, but a foundational condition for the possibility of mind.

Heinämaa, Sara. *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

In *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*, Sara Heinämaa advances a rigorous reinterpretation of sexual difference within the framework of classical phenomenology. The author does not treat sexual difference as a biological given or

as a socially constructed identity, seeking instead to articulate it as a fundamental structure of lived experience. The guiding ambition is to recover the descriptive resources of phenomenology, particularly those of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in order to clarify the experiential meaning of sexed embodiment, while also offering a careful reinterpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's analyses. A central thesis of the book is that sexual difference should not be understood as an attribute added to an otherwise neutral subject. Against both naturalistic and constructivist accounts, Heinämaa argues that sexual difference is a modality of embodiment that permeates perception, movement, and intersubjective relations, that it is neither reducible to anatomical features nor exhaustively determined by cultural norms. Instead, it is constituted in the style or manner in which the body inhabits the world, a style that is at once expressive and relational, and Heinämaa's engagement with Husserl emphasizes the resources of genetic and generative phenomenology, particularly the analysis of how meaning is sedimented through habitual experience. Sexual difference, in this light, emerges through the temporal development of bodily capacities and orientations, rather than as a fixed essence. From Merleau-Ponty, the author draws on the notion of the lived body as a pre-reflective unity of perception and action, but extending it to account for differentiated modes of bodily comportment. Sexual difference thus becomes intelligible as a variation within the general structure of embodiment, rather than as a deviation from a neutral norm. The author's interpretation of Beauvoir is also especially significant, as Heinämaa resists readings that construe Beauvoir's account in *The Second Sex* as a straightforward thesis of social construction and instead reconstructs Beauvoir's position as a phenomenological analysis of how sexual difference is lived and articulated through concrete situations. The famous claim that one is not born but becomes a woman is thus understood here not as a denial of embodiment, but as an account of the *dynamic* formation of bodily subjectivity within a field of possibilities and constraints. For the phenomenology of embodiment, the significance of this work lies in its systematic integration of sexual difference into the core structures of lived experience, challenging any residual tendency to treat the body as implicitly neutral or universal, and demonstrating instead that embodiment is always already differentiated. At the same time, it avoids reducing this difference to fixed identities, emphasizing its fluid, temporal, and relational character. By situating sexual difference within the fundamental operations of perception, motility, and intersubjectivity, Heinämaa expands the scope of phenomenology itself, with embodiment no longer being conceived as a homogeneous condition shared identically by all subjects, but as a field of differentiated styles of existence, each with its own modes of disclosure and constraint, the result being a more nuanced account of the lived body,

an account that foregrounds difference without abandoning the phenomenological commitment to describing experience as it is given.

Barbaras, Renaud. *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*. Indiana University Press, 2004.

In *The Being of the Phenomenon*, Renaud Barbaras returns to the ontological implications of appearing itself, with the guiding problem being not merely how phenomena are given to consciousness, but going in depth, to what it means for something to appear at all. As such, the book shifts the center of phenomenological inquiry from structures of subjectivity to the being proper to manifestation, the being understood as an irreducible dimension of reality. Barbaras begins from a critical engagement with the legacy of Edmund Husserl, whose transcendental reduction secures the primacy of intentional consciousness but, in doing so, risks subordinating the appearing of the world to constituting acts. Barbaras does not reject this framework outright, seeking instead to radicalize it by insisting that appearing cannot be grounded solely in the activity of a subject. The phenomenon, *in appearing*, exceeds any act that would aim to constitute it. Appearing must therefore be understood as an ontological event, one that implicates both subject and world within a more originary field. Further, this reorientation is developed through a sustained dialogue with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose analyses of perception already point beyond the subject-object dichotomy, making the author's choice perhaps the most obvious one. Yet Barbaras extends these insights by arguing that perception is rooted in a more fundamental structure of belonging, that the perceiver is not simply situated in the world but participates in a movement of manifestation that precedes and exceeds it, that the subject emerges as a moment within this movement rather than as its ground. A key concept organizing this account is that of desire. Barbaras characterizes the subject as essentially desiring, not in a psychological sense but as an ontological openness to what appears. Desire names a constitutive distance; it names a non-coincidence with oneself that propels the subject toward the world. This distance is not a deficiency to be overcome but the very condition of relation: because the subject is not self-sufficient, it is exposed to and dependent upon the appearing of what is other. The text is reminiscent here of the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, who theorizes desire as *self-end*, writing, "desire knows that it has its end in itself." For both, desire is not a psychological need but a fundamental ontological movement. The world, in turn, is not a collection of objects but a field of manifestation that responds to and sustains this movement. Within the phenomenology of embodiment, this position carries significant consequences, as

the body can no longer be understood merely as the site of perceptual synthesis or as an instrument of intentionality; the body is the concrete expression of this ontological desire, the place where the subject's openness to the world is enacted. Embodiment thus takes on a dynamic and relational character, that is, the body is not simply given but continuously constituted in and through its exposure to what appears. This deepens earlier phenomenological accounts by situating the lived body within a broader ontology of manifestation rather than treating it as a foundational but ultimately self-contained structure. By articulating a field in which subject and world co-emerge through a shared movement of manifestation, Barbaras provides a framework that redefines embodiment as fundamentally ecstatic and relational. Ultimately, the body is revealed not as a stable entity, but as a happening, the site where the being of the phenomenon is not merely received but participated in.

Leder, Drew. *The Absent Body*. University of Chicago Press, 1990.

In *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder proposes a phenomenological account of embodiment that proceeds not by reaffirming the body's constant presence, but by analyzing the ways in which it recedes, withdraws, and becomes tacit within experience. The central thesis is that the body, far from being continuously given as an object or even as an explicit field of awareness, typically functions through modes of absence. This absence is not a negation of embodiment but its ordinary condition—the body operates as a background structure that enables perception and action while eluding thematic attention, with Leder distinguishing several modalities through which the body disappears. In states of skilled activity, habitual movement, and perceptual engagement, the body is not apprehended as an object among others but is absorbed into the task at hand; it becomes an operative medium rather than a thematic focus. This disappearance is by any means not epistemic ignorance but rather a structural feature of embodied intentionality, in that attention is directed outward, and the body recedes into a functional anonymity. The phenomenological significance of such a claim lies in its revision of classical accounts that privilege bodily presence; here, absence is the one shown to be constitutive of agency. This background withdrawal is complemented by what Leder terms *dys-appearance*, a mode in which the body returns to awareness through disruption, most notably in liminal experiences such as those of pain, illness, or dysfunction. In such cases, the body is no longer transparent but obtrusive, it becomes fragmented, and resistant, and what had functioned as an unnoticed horizon becomes an object of concern, often in a localized and alienating way. The lived body thereby oscillates between disappearance and *dys-appearance*,

neither of which can be reduced to simple presence. This oscillation that Leder proposes reveals the body as a dynamic field rather than a stable entity. A further dimension of the analysis concerns the internal recessiveness of bodily processes, with visceral functions, organic rhythms, and the interiority of the flesh remain largely inaccessible to direct perception. The body is not only absent in its outward functioning but also withdrawn in its inward depth. This structural opacity complicates any attempt to render embodiment fully transparent to consciousness and underscores the limits of phenomenological self-access. The importance of this work for the phenomenology of embodiment is substantial, more so for contemporary phenomenology, and perhaps it is a work that is yet to be properly engaged with. By shifting emphasis from presence to absence, Leder extends and revises insights associated with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose analyses foreground the body as the site of perception and action, with Leder retaining this foundational role but demonstrating that such functioning depends precisely on the body's capacity to withdraw from explicit awareness. Embodiment is here neither pure immediacy nor constant self-givenness, but a structured interplay of visibility and invisibility. As such, the book establishes a crucial corrective within phenomenological discourse: the lived body is not simply what is most present to us, but often what is most tacit, most recessed, and most elusive. Its philosophical contribution lies in articulating absence as a positive, constitutive dimension of embodied existence.

Dahl, Espen. *Incarnation, Pain, Theology: A Phenomenology of the Body*. Northwestern University Press. 2024.

In *Incarnation, Pain, Theology*, Espen Dahl undertakes a phenomenological investigation of embodiment through the guiding concept of incarnation, understood both as a general structure of human existence and as a specifically Christian claim. The work proceeds by situating itself within the tradition of phenomenology while reopening its central problems through engagement with theological motifs and the phenomenon of pain. The analysis begins from the classical distinction between lived body and objective body, while arguing that this dyad remains insufficient for capturing the full density of embodiment. By introducing the notion of *flesh and blood*, the book seeks to account for a dimension in which materiality and lived experience are inseparable, thereby addressing the persistent difficulty of explaining how the body is both experienced from within and situated in the world. This proposal is developed through critical engagement with Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Henry, whose respective emphases on constitution, perception, and immanent life are shown to leave unresolved the

material and passive dimensions of embodiment. A decisive shift occurs in the privileging of passivity over activity. Against a dominant orientation toward the body as *I can*, the analysis foregrounds breakdown, incapacity, and receptivity as constitutive of embodiment. Pain becomes exemplary in this regard, revealing the body as a site of inner tension, where expression presses toward language while remaining exposed to failure of recognition. In this framework, pain is not a mere physiological accident but an existential rupture that shatters the self's transparency, forcing a confrontation with the raw, irreducible passivity of being *flesh and blood*. The communicative fragility of pain discloses the unstable relation between separateness and intersubjective acknowledgment, thereby complicating assumptions about shared meaning. The theological dimension does not function as a doctrinal supplement but as a heuristic that intensifies phenomenological description. The idea of incarnation reopens the question of embodiment by displacing rigid oppositions between interior and exterior, matter and meaning, and by insisting on the irreducibility of flesh as lived materiality. In this way, the work contributes to the phenomenology of embodiment by extending its scope toward passivity, materiality, and suffering, while preserving the ambiguity that characterizes embodied existence.