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# The Problem of Habitual Body and Memory in Hegel and Merleau-Ponty

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## Abstract

In this paper, I shall focus on the relation between habitual body and memory in Hegel's *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Both Hegel and Merleau-Ponty defend a view of the self that is centred on the role of habituality as embodied activity situated in a context. However, both philosophers avoid committing to what Edward Casey has defined habitual body memory, i.e., an active immanence of the past in the body that informs present bodily actions in an efficacious, orienting and regular manner. I shall explore the reasons why neither Hegel nor Merleau-Ponty develops an explicit account of habitual body memory. This will shed light not only on Hegel's account of lived experience, but also on Hegel and Merleau-Ponty's common concern with the habitual body.

## Introduction

'All the great philosophical ideas of the past century—the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, phenomenology, German existentialism, and psychoanalysis had their beginnings in Hegel' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 63). Merleau-Ponty was particularly fascinated by Hegel's philosophy to the point that he states, in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, that phenomenology can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking, and that Hegel, among many others, had already mastered it (*PhP*: XXI/II).[1] As is well known, Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Hegel was primarily mediated by Kojève's 1933–39 lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology,* as well as by Hyppolite's writings.[2] Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty's most significant references to Hegel's works primarily concern Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Like most philosophers of the twentieth century influenced by Hyppolite, Merleau-Ponty was convinced that there was a significant opposition between the young and the late Hegel, the latter being the philosopher 'who treated history as the visible development of a logical system' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 64). Yet he also acknowledged that Hegel 'started the attempt to explore the irrational and

integrate it into an expanded reason which remains the task of our century' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 63).

Scholars like De Waehlens (1967), Geraets (1971), Cooper (1975), Carbone (2004), Vanzago (2001) and Storey (2009) have long since pointed out the influence of Hegel's philosophy on Merleau-Ponty. Apart from Cooper, who focused on *The Structure of Behaviour*, the overall tendency is to highlight a Hegelian tendency in Merleau-Ponty's later dialectics and to refer to Hegel's *Phenomenology* as Merleau-Ponty's primary Hegelian source. In my view, however, the *Phenomenology of Perception* offers another path to understanding a significant conceptual affinity between Hegel and Merleau-Ponty with regard to the role of habituality.

More specifically, I shall argue that Hegel and Merleau-Ponty share two fundamental theses: (1) they both conceive of habituality as an embodied activity that is situated in a context, and (2) they do not identify habitual body with body memory. By body memory, I refer to the working definition introduced by Edward Casey (1987: 146–80), who speaks of 'body memory', not of 'memory of the body', in order to highlight the difference between having an experience in and through the body and representing an experience as object of awareness:

> Body memory alludes to memory that is intrinsic to the body, to its own ways of remembering: how we remember in and by and through the body. Memory of the body refers to those manifold manners whereby we remember the body as the accusative object of our awareness, whether in reminiscence or recognition, in reminding or recollection, or in still other ways. The difference is manifest in the noticeable discrepancy between recollecting our body as in a given situation—representing ourselves as engaged bodily in that situation—and being in the situation itself again and feeling it through our body. (Casey 1987: 147)

According to Casey, body memory represents a distinct but fundamental type of memory, which forms a tacit and pre-reflective dimension of experience. In such memory, the past is embodied in action and informs our bodily activities as a habitude. Thanks to our body memory, we regularly perform bodily actions without resorting to any conscious representation, for example when driving, walking or writing. While no recollection of past learning is required, an 'effective history' is established within the lived body as integral to its organs and body parts. In this sense, one should talk of habitual body memory, in order to capture the tendency of habituality to re-enact the past in the present. This means that the body, in accomplishing specific practices, actualises past experiences, including learned instructions, rather than recollecting them *in abstracto*. Thus, body memory is essential to establish the linkage between prior and present



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experience. At the same time, body memory admits freedom of variation in that it establishes a base of self-acquaintance and ease upon which more complicated activities can freely arise. From this point of view, body memory is responsible for those dispositions that give a regular, efficacious and orienting character to our habitual practices.

Since the re-enactment of the past is a central feature of body memory, Casey notices that, while Bergson is the first philosopher that has devoted attention to the notion of habitual body, he nonetheless took a part of it (habit) for the whole (habitual body memory). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty, who was inspired by Bergson and has doubtless provided one of the richest accounts of habitual body, failed to underline the importance of body *memory* as such (Casey 2013). With regard to this, Casey points out that, for Merleau-Ponty, the habitual body is primarily projected into the future. The only way in which the body incorporates the past is by carrying it forward into the future of eventual accomplishments (Casey 2013: 208). Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty did not conceive of habitual body and memory as a unified dimension, because he did not develop an account of embodied remembering.[3] This is evident—as I shall argue in §3—from Merleau-Ponty's analyses of the phantom limb and of Schneider's affliction.

In a similar fashion, Hegel is another philosopher who has certainly devoted the greatest attention to the role of habit and habitual body without developing an explicit account of habitual body memory. For Hegel, habituality represents the system of bodily responses that underlies our practical orientation in the world. Importantly, Hegel's account of habituality underpins his account of embodied experience, which is based on the reactivation of past experiences and practices. Like Merleau-Ponty, Hegel conceives of habituality as the dimension that establishes self-acquaintance, thereby providing the basis for further possibilities of action. However, habituality does not coincide with a form of bodily remembering. Hegel distinguishes between habit and memory in that the former involves bodily behaviours that respond to solicitations of the external world, while the latter concerns the theoretic sphere of meaning. Although both habit and memory are based on a mechanism (Magrì 2016), they are not identified with a single capacity of the body.

In the following, I wish to explore the reasons why either Hegel or Merleau-Ponty do not develop an explicit account of habitual body memory. This will shed light not only on Hegel's account of lived experience, but also on Hegel's and Merleau-Ponty's common concern with embodied activity. In fact, both Hegel's and Merleau-Ponty argue that habituality offers important clues for understanding the experience of the lived body without invoking the Kantian distinction between sensibility and understanding. At the same time, this line of thought motivates Hegel's and Merleau-Ponty's tendency to privilege habitual



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body over body memory. In their view, in order for a subject to actualise her capacities as an embodied self a nexus between the self and her situation has to obtain. However, such a nexus cannot be based on body memory, since the latter would encapsulate the self in her own experiences without providing any further connection between the self and the world. Thus, I shall argue that the primacy of habituality in Hegel and Merleau-Ponty depends on the spontaneous character of bodily experience in connection with the horizon of the experience. In other words, they stress the capacity of the habitual body to undertake movement and practices by drawing on one's own dispositions as a result of being inserted in a given situation. Yet this also entails a fundamental revision of the creative capacity of the self to picture future actions. In fact, for both Hegel and Merleau-Ponty, creativity is not much an imaginative power that is independent from given constraints and executed in a radical free way, but rather it is a process inserted in the given world, which is gradually expanded and enriched.

My paper is divided into three parts: first I consider the significance of habit and memory in Hegel and Merleau-Ponty respectively. Then I focus on the reasons why both Hegel and Merleau-Ponty do not endorse a theory of habitual body memory.

## I. Habitual body and memory in Hegel's *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*

Hegel's account of habitual body and memory is fully developed in the sections on subjective spirit that form the first part of the Philosophy of Spirit, which latter is the third book of the *Encyclopaedia*. Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit illustrates the genesis of self-conscious and self-knowing spirit as a multi-layered living process, articulated in the forms of soul (Anthropology), consciousness (Phenomenology) and intelligence (Psychology). While habit is explored in the Anthropology, memory is investigated in the Psychology. However, this is not supposed to establish any dualism, for 'a lower and more abstract determination of the mind reveals the presence in it, even empirically, of a higher phase' (*PhM*: §380, 8/17). According to Hegel, subjective capacities apply in different levels and forms: while certain living organisms may lack both consciousness and intelligence, there cannot be any rational being that lacks bodily experiences and bodily self-awareness (Winfield 2015). At the same time, the analysis of subjective faculties indicates that there cannot be any sharp distinction between anthropological and psychological capacities, for it is their dialectical unification that determines the genesis of knowing spirit. In light of this, Hegel identifies the sphere of soul as the primary and originary condition of all living beings both logically and ontologically.



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From this point of view, it is significant that the treatment of habit falls within the soul rather than in consciousness or intelligence. Hegel's obvious reason for this is that habit is pre-reflective and developed unconsciously; hence its proper place is the Anthropology. However, Hegel also conceives of memory in the Psychology as a form of habitual mechanism that engenders more developed capacities, such as thinking (Magrì 2016). Thus, the peculiarity of habit in the Anthropology concerns the unity of soul and body that the investigation of habit brings to light. Moreover, since the relation between soul and body remains the underlying basis of subjective spirit, the very treatment of Anthropology represents the permanent background of the entire *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (Nuzzo 2013: 2). In the following, I wish to discuss Hegel's account of habitual body in order to bring to light Hegel's view of the lived body.

According to Hegel, spiritual development presupposes the experience of the lived body (*Leib*). While the physical body (*Körper*) stands for the general individual figure, which is characterised by contingent physiognomic and pathognomic features (*PhM*: §411R), the lived body (*Leib*) comes into play when Hegel describes how the soul inhabits her own body. With regard to this, habit allows an articulated theory of embodied experience. To begin with, thanks to habit, the soul develops a bodily form of self-acquaintance that is specifically different from self-consciousness. In fact, the former does not have a distinct object, but it is rather based on the self-reference acquired by the soul in the course of habitual behaviours. Hegel proceeds by identifying different forms of habituation: hardening against external sensations, indifference to satisfaction and dexterity (*PhM*: §410R). Each type of habituation entails a distinct training of the soul which unconsciously develops the capacity to master its sensations.[4] More specifically, while hardening and indifference to satisfaction refer to the general capacity of the soul to resist impulses and external stimuli, dexterity coincides with what is today called absorbed coping or skilful coping,[5] i.e., the capacity to deal with the environment successfully thanks to motor and bodily skills.

Dexterity is also relevant because it shows in what sense embodiment provides the soul with a firm and permanent form of self-reference. By developing a skill, the soul is not only empowered, but also makes experience of her bodiliness as 'particular possibility […] for a determinate purpose' (*PhM*: §410R, 132/186). Hegel refers to walking and writing, i.e., both activities that entail learning single practices and then forgetting how they have been memorised by the body in the course of their performances. In this sense, habit is not a set of mindless repetitions, but rather it coincides with the capacity of the soul to govern the body from within, in such a way that 'as soon as the representation (e.g. a sequence of musical notes) is in me, the physical body too, unresistingly and fluently, has expressed it correctly' (*PhM*: §410R, 132/186). In a way that resonates strikingly with Merleau-Ponty's example of the key-bank



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spaces of the typewriter incorporated by the typist's fingers (*PhP*: 169/167), Hegel points out that learning how to play an instrument is a process that transforms the representation of a rule into a bodily skill. On Hegel's account, the kind of self-reference that is obtained in habituality underpins a teleological process in which the embodied soul is attuned to her possibilities of development, because the soul possesses herself without knowing it. From this point of view, habit implies a possibility or an outward projection that is based on the acquisition of practices and activities that are situated in specific contexts.

At the same time, Hegel stresses that the deeper connection (*Verbindung*) obtaining between the soul and its body makes the body the middle term between the self and the world (*PhM*: §410A). This means that, by means of habit, the soul moves in a distinct *Leibraum*, i.e., the soul inhabits her space as a dimension filled with different potential opportunities for action and movement. It follows that habitual activities are not passive in the ordinary sense of the word. Even though the soul is not self-conscious, she is nonetheless aware of herself in and through the body as well as projected into those possibilities for action that habit enables. For this reason, Hegel stresses that, through habit, the soul possesses [*in Besitz*] her own content (*PhM*: §410) and acquires her being-together-with-one's-own-self (*Beisichselbersein*), which implicitly recalls the Latin origin of the word habit, which is *habere* (to have). For Hegel (as for Merleau-Ponty), to have a body means to have a world, i.e., to inhabit a horizon that is open to variations and possibilities.[6]

From this point of view, habituality is not just an operation of the body among many others, but rather 'habit is a form that embraces all kinds and stages of mind's activity. […] *Thinking*, too, though wholly free, and active in the pure element of itself, requires habit and familiarity […]. Only through habit do I *exist* for myself as thinking' (*PhM*: §410A, 132/186). According to Hegel, habit is responsible for man's standing upright as well as for the internalisation of religious and ethical norms. In this sense, habituality enables the self to undertake a wide range of actions as well as to memorize certain behaviours in one's own praxis. We regularly perform the same task and, in doing so, we acquire a style, e.g., an individual character, while we are unaware of the coincidence between the rule we actively posit and our passive attitude in performing it. For this reason, Hegel's extensive remarks on bodily expressivity in §411 suggest that, thanks to habit, the soul is capable of imprinting her own stamp to the body. This distinguishes humans from animals in that human subjects train themselves to acquire certain features that mark their external behaviours (e.g., a certain way of laughing or nodding). In this sense, long before the genesis of knowledge and practical will, Hegel outlines a form of pre-reflexive voluntary activity that is acquired though habituality. Since this capacity lacks any form of conscious



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choice and deliberation, which for Hegel are essential for freedom, habituality as such would hardly ground any form of practical freedom.[7] Yet habituality underpins an aptitude that is essential for undertaking movement and action. For Hegel, habitual body primarily identifies the set of dispositions by means of which the soul projects herself into the world, thereby making experience of those possibilities that are open to her.

Apparently, Hegel's account of habitual body does not completely rule out remembering. Indeed, Hegel's overall proposal appears richer when one looks at the relation between habit and memory. In the Anthropology, Hegel notices that 'when developed, and at work in the mind as such [*im Geistigen*], habit is *recollection* (*Erinnerung*) and *memory* (*Gedächtnis*)' (*PhM*: §410R, 133/187). In this perspective, habit is quite similar to memory, since 'habit is the mechanism of self-feeling, as memory is the mechanism of intelligence' (*PhM*: §410R, 131/184). At the same time, he points out that memory belongs to a higher level, for it is very close to thinking (*PhM*: §464). To make things more complicated, Hegel holds that the frequent repetition underlying the acquisition of any habits corresponds to a form of recollection:

> But since the individual activities of man acquire by repeated practice the character of *habit*, the form of something received into *recollection*, into the *universality* of the mental interior, the soul brings into its expressions a universal mode of acting [*Weise des Tuns*] to be handed on to others too, a rule. (*PhM*: §410A, 136/191).

Unlike memory, recollection appears throughout the entire development of the subjective spirit.[8] In the case of habit, it seems that the self possesses its own way of remembering those rules that are embedded in practices and skills. Nonetheless, such remembering is not so much an attribute of the body as a form of acting (*Weise des Tuns*). Indeed, the reference to recollection does not support a theory of body memory, but rather it suggests that, in following a rule habitually, the soul is not blind. For Hegel, the soul enjoys a specific form of bodily freedom in that, by means of habit, she liberates herself from the contingency of the situation at stake in the accomplishment of certain tasks. For example, when we learn to write, we are no longer constrained by certain features of words and letters, because we have already appropriated our own style, in virtue of which our writing proceeds smoothly and freely. Hegel's point is that habituality frees us from accidental features that are inherent in the execution of determined practices as long as the self is established as principle of action. This is what Hegel calls being at home with oneself, which is nothing but self-acquaintance, i.e., the state in which the soul possesses herself as principle of self-determination within a given situation, without yet knowing herself as



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distinct object. From this point of view, Hegel's mention of recollection in relation to habituality, far from introducing a theory of body memory, highlights the dynamic character of self-acquaintance acquired by the soul through habitual behaviour.

In my view, Hegel fails to provide a theory of habitual body memory because of two fundamental reasons. On the one hand, the goal of his Philosophy of Subjective Spirit is to unfold the forms in and through which individual beings develop spiritual capacities, thereby achieving freedom of self-determination at both theoretical and practical levels. In this sense, Hegel's aim is to describe the unfolding of the concept of spirit throughout its different stages of realisation, including self-acquaintance, self-consciousness, and knowledge. Because of his commitment to the concept of self-determination, Hegel does not need a theory of body memory, for his account of habitual body suffices to explain how the self is both embodied and active without yet knowing itself. In this sense, Hegel's aim is to bring to light the specific form of embodied freedom that the soul enjoys in virtue of her bodily constitution.

On the other hand, Hegel's failure to acknowledge body memory can be found in his appraisal of memory as theoretic capacity. On Hegel's account, memory cannot be identified with a bodily disposition, although it certainly presupposes the experience of the lived body. More specifically, memory represents the power of intelligence that supplies receptivity with linguistic and cognitive validity. In this sense, memory is not a faculty of storing and remembering past events, but rather the activity that enables the transformation of the content of experience into meaningful words. Hegel distinguishes three stages of mnemonic activity: (a) name-retaining memory, (b) reproductive memory and (c) mechanical memory (Magrì 2016). In the Psychology, Hegel describes memory at length as the power that retains the meaning of names without the aid of representation. In this sense, the function of memory is complementary and yet opposite to that of imagination.[9] While the latter provides intelligence with an individualised content, i.e., with images and signs (such as cockades, flags and gravestones), memory is responsible for the transformations of signs into words. This is accomplished in different stages (a, b, c) that account for the gradual liberation of intelligence from the external constraints exercised by intuitions and images.

At its highest stage, mechanical memory represents a form of habituality that enables thinking. While mechanical memory is not identical to thinking, nonetheless it is not 'a separable faculty of mind, nor a distinct stage in the growth of a thinker, but a form of activity that can be isolated within, but not separated from, the complex activities of a thinking being' (deVries 1988: 163). What Hegel arguably suggests is that, by routinely recollecting words as meanings, we get used to them to the point that we forget *how* we originally



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learned to connect meaningful series of words. The 'senseless words' are the series of words employed by spirit immediately, without depending on imagination. Thinking arises once we have internalised the rules to connect words in a way that guarantees communication without depending on the conscious recollection of the rules of a particular language.[10] This form of verbal memory enables the activity of thinking, for it provides the basis for generalisation and abstraction.

Yet the distinctive feature of mechanical memory is that intelligence follows a route, thereby routinely connecting names and signification. One could say that memory seems to incorporate habit, but the reverse does not apply. Indeed, while we can learn how to imitate sounds and gestures skilfully, i.e., without understanding the meaning of those gestures and sounds, we cannot understand any language by imitating sounds. Thanks to memory, intelligence possesses herself in a way that is irreducible to sheer habituality. More precisely, memory objectifies the content of thought so that intelligence achieves, by means of language, not just self-acquaintance—as in habit—but rather self-intuition (*PhM*: §463R). This allows intelligence to have thoughts, i.e., to distinguish herself from the content of her theoretic activity as well as to finally determine it in a free way (*PhM*: §468). In light of this, Hegel does not arguably provide an account of body memory in that his conception of memory is not based on the re-enactment of past experiences, but rather on the objectification of the content of experience.

However, a significant shortcoming of this proposal is a potential loss of creativity on the part of subjective spirit. Not by chance, Hegel's appraisal of imagination reflects a major concern with language and memory. Hegel's primary interest in imagination is that of tracing the possibility of language. While it is true that we need imagination in order to think (Bates 2004), it is also true that, for Hegel, we think in names and not in images (Ferrarin 2006). Importantly, Hegel does not conceive of imagination in terms of projective linkage between past and future events. For Hegel, imagination does not serve the purpose of picturing possibilities for action, for these are rather enabled by the lived experience of the body. In this sense, it may be said that, for Hegel, creativity cannot be understood independently from the process of subjective self-determination.

## II. Habitual body and memory in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*

Like Hegel, Merleau-Ponty argues that experience cannot be reduced to the representations construed by consciousness, and that existence is primarily a way



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of inhabiting the world. Yet, unlike Hegel, Merleau-Ponty does not employ a dialectical method to explore the experience of the body.[11] Thus, Merleau-Ponty's view of embodiment is not based on the Hegelian process of self-appropriation. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's view of consciousness shares significant similarities with Hegel's Anthropology, but it does not correspond to what Hegel calls consciousness. As I have shown, for Hegel, the kind of self-acquaintance developed by the soul in the Anthropology does not equate to having consciousness of a distinct object. Hegel considers consciousness the specific topic of investigation of the Phenomenology, which explores the different ways in which the self becomes aware of oneself and others within the shared horizon of life. However, it is only in the Psychology, with intelligence, that the self is capable of objectifying its own thoughts and to know them as its own content. While Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is not construed on the opposition between consciousness and its other—as Hegel's—it is nonetheless worth noting, as others have pointed out,[12] that Hegel's notion of the soul shares several important traits of Merleau-Ponty's account of habitual body. In the following, I will restrict my analysis to Merleau-Ponty's theory of habit in the *PhP* in order to articulate Merleau-Ponty's conceptual affinity with Hegel's account of habituality.

The distinctive feature of Merleau-Ponty's *PhP* lies in the primacy of the lived body, which is viewed as the 'fabric into which all objects are woven, […] and the general instrument of my comprehension' (*PhP*: 273/276). On Merleau-Ponty's account, the primacy of the lived body indicates that there is no absolute divide between thought and perception, for the lived body is the milieu in which all expressive phenomena are originally constituted. In other words, Merleau-Ponty argues that the body itself is the condition of possibility for our understanding of the world, including spatiotemporal situatedness and acquisitions of the cultural world. For this reason, throughout the *PhP*, Merleau-Ponty contrasts the intellectualist and empirical points of view in order to demonstrate that the most fundamental experience of the world has been overlooked by theorists in both the Cartesian and Lockean traditions. At stake is the fact that 'the body is the general medium for having a world' (*PhP*: 171/169), and this comes into existence along with the constitution of the body-schema.

The concept of body-schema identifies the sensorimotor awareness of one's own body that regulates posture and movements. More precisely, the body-schema is a system of sensorimotor abilities, activities and habits that function without the necessity of perceptual monitoring (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008: 146). With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty emphasises that the body-schema refers to a more fundamental relation between the horizon of experience and habituality. According to the PhP, as long as we have a body, space and time are not intellectual forms, but rather indeterminate horizons that include other points of view (*PhP*: 162/164). The word 'here' applied to my body does not refer to a



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position in relation to external coordinates, but rather it identifies the specific inherence of my body in space. Habit is precisely the 'rearrangement and renewal of the corporeal schema [*schéma corporel*]' (*PhP*: 166/164), for it enables the self to learn something anew and to adapt to a new situation.[13] As Gallagher has extensively shown, Merleau-Ponty's notion of body-schema should not be confused with body image, for in the latter the body is experienced as an owned body, while the former is a pre-reflective and non-objectifying body-awareness (Gallagher 1986; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008: 144–45).

In this sense, on Merleau-Ponty's account, we can make sense of certain episodes where I find myself going into a certain room (or taking a certain road outdoors) when I meant to go elsewhere. In these cases, habit and memory supplant attentional awareness, thereby transforming spaces into familiar domains that are filled with multiple intentional threads. However, it is difficult to say whether such episodes account for a theory of body memory, since Merleau-Ponty insists on the sedimentation of habitual movements and gestures that open up a world of situated thoughts and meanings. In one of his lectures given at the Sorbonne between 1949 and 1952 (a few years after the publication of the *PhP*), Merleau-Ponty defines habit as 'an existential operation' (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 452), arguing that habitual activities cannot be reduced either to mechanism, or to an absolute consciousness. What Merleau-Ponty suggests is that habituality does not involve either construction or association, but rather directing the body-schema to the perceived and imaginary world. In other words, he stresses the fact that habituality opens up possibilities for action rather than occasion for bodily remembrance. With regard to this, it is important to notice that the body-schema is rearranged in habits, and habit acquisition is relatively in one's own power. I may have the habit to wake up every day at 7.30 am. I then slowly adjust myself to wake up earlier, at, say, 7.00 am. None of this would be possible had I not more or less consciously adapted myself to a change.

From this point of view, Merleau-Ponty's account of habituality is very close to that of Hegel. Habituality, for both Hegel and Merleau-Ponty, means that we participate in chains of experiences that ground the sense of being oneself in terms of spontaneous bodily activity. Like Hegel, Merleau-Ponty argues that habituality is a primordial form of bodily inherence in a certain *Leibraum*. Habituality is responsible for the apprehension of movements and activities that require the internalisation of a rule, such as writing or playing an instrument. In doing so, habituation does not involve any form of representation. The subject who learns to type might not know the exact position of each letter on the typewriter, yet he senses the blank spaces between each letter because his fingers have memorised the positions on the typewriter. The 'harmony' established between his fingers and his intentions is such that the subject 'incorporates [*intègre*] the key-bank space into his bodily space' (*PhP*: 169/167). It is not that I



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have the representations of letter and words before learning to type, because 'when I run my eyes over the text set before me, there do not occur perceptions which stir up representations, but patterns are formed as I look, and these are endowed with a typical or familiar physiognomy' (*PhP*: 168–69/167).

In this sense, habituality is responsible for the aura of familiarity that surrounds places and that gives to our movements a distinct efficaciousness. We type more quickly on the keyboard of a familiar laptop and we may feel uncomfortable in finding a different computer on our desk. This is due to the fact that familiar objects that we have come to know by means of habitual actions acquire a distinct physiognomy or *Gestalt*. For example, the other laptop that I find on my desk has an intact keyboard and it does not have the dent on right side that I accidentally caused a few years ago. I do not need to observe the laptop to realise that it is not my own, since by running my fingers over the keyboard I sense a smoothness, pressure and resistance different from that to which I have become accustomed. Thus, physiognomy, for Merleau-Ponty, is not simply a perceptual whole, for it discloses motivational nexuses obtaining between the body-schema and the environmental world.

However, while for Hegel habit differs from memory and is crucially distinguished from linguistic and productive forms of expression, Merleau-Ponty is less explicit about the distinction between habit and memory. For Merleau-Ponty, memory is an effort to reopen time on the basis of the implications contained in the present. In this sense, memory constantly shapes our experience of the world, for it coincides with the sedimentation of the past horizon. Accordingly, memory is not to be intended as a static accumulation, but rather as an attitude that is incorporated by the subject and is capable of being reactivated in the appropriate circumstances. It can be said that memory coheres together with the body-schema, thereby establishing self-reference and self-identity. With regard to this, Merleau-Ponty takes issue with Bergson arguing that sedimentation cannot be opposed to spontaneity.

According to Bergson, memory par excellence differs from habit in that the former is a representation that can be embraced in an intuition of the mind, while the latter implies action. Bergson's example is that of the learned lesson via successive repetitions:

> I study a lesson, and in order to learn it by heart I read it a first time, accentuating every line; I then repeat it a certain number of times. At each repetition, there is a progress; the words are more and more linked together and at last make a continuous whole. When that moment comes, it is said that I know my lesson by heart that is imprinted on my memory. I consider now how the lesson has been learned, and picture to myself the



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> successive phases of the process. Each successive reading then recurs to me with its own individuality; I can see it again with the circumstances which attended it then and still form its setting. […] Again it will be said that these images are recollections, that they are imprinted on my memory. The same words, then, are used in both cases. Do they mean the same thing? (Bergson 1991: 79–80).

Bergson's idea is that, in learning a lesson a number of times, a habit is stored up in a mechanism that is set in motion as a whole. As Casey has noticed (2013), this view partially anticipates a theory of body memory. However, for Bergson, the recollection of each successive reading is imprinted in the mind and nothing can be added to it. In this sense, pure memory 'is perfect from the outset' (Bergson 1991: 83). While Bergson holds that pure recollections develop into memory-images that are capable of inserting themselves into the motor diagram, memory-images can be recalled, not re-lived.

In Merleau-Ponty's eyes, Bergson is not able to overcome the dualism between habit and memory. He divides the subject into a duality constituted by an anonymous motility on the one hand, and a pure, abstract memory on the other. As such, Bergson sees 'the origin of habit in an act of understanding which organizes the elements only to withdraw subsequently' (*PhP*: 167/165).[14] On Bergson's account, body memory is similar to a sensory motor mechanism that is activated by motor impulses. Yet Merleau-Ponty's critique of Bergson centres on the power of habit, without providing any explicit account of body memory. Merleau-Ponty insists that habituality represents 'an aptitude to respond to a certain type of situation by a certain kind of solution' (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 196), highlighting the possibilities for action made available by habit.

This is also confirmed by Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the phantom limb. The patient that is beset by the loss of one of her limbs is not presented with the recollections of the amputated limb, but rather feels the loss of the possibilities projected by her body. It is her existential attitude that undergoes a crucial modification, not the synthesis of her representations. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty goes as far as to compare the loss of the limb with that of a friend (*PhP*: 93ff./96). In Merleau-Ponty's view, the phantom limb is not a representation, but an ambivalent presence brought about by the body-schema on the basis of motor intentionality. For this reason, he does not ascribe the phantom limb to an alteration of body memory, for the explanation of the phantom limb in terms of body memory would not be able to account for the contraction of those possibilies of action and movement underpinned by the body-schema.

Similarly, in the case of Shneider, Merleau-Ponty stresses that Schneider's affliction is mostly a motor disorder affecting Schneider's habitual projection in



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the world. Schneider's case is usually associated with a form of agnosia in that the patient manifested a disturbed ability to point out locations of the body on request, even though he had not difficulties with habitual movements, such as grasping.[15] For Merleau-Ponty, Schneider's case is a further proof that bodily space is not a space that is conceived or represented, but rather inhabited by the body. If my hand executes a complicated movement in the air, I do not need to calculate its position in space by adding and subtracting respectively the movements in each direction, for the body-schema regulates and maintains a standard of measure. Without invoking any absolute consciousness, the body-schema supplies our sense of being oriented in space and time. It is precisely this function that was affected in the case of Scheider.

It follows that, for Merleau-Ponty, the role of memory is not that of recollecting or representing the past, but rather of reopening it (*PhP*: 99/101). On Merleau-Ponty's account, memory is a function of the habitual body that carries forward into the future bodily potential accomplishments. This because the habitual body underpins an aptitude that is neither mechanical nor intellectual, for what is acquired by habit is not a series of movements, but a possibility 'to invent a valuable solution to a situation' (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 196).

However, a significant issue may arise in relation to both Hegel and Merleau-Ponty's account of habitual body. If habituality enables motor action and self-acquaintance, how is it possible that we can project in new forms of actions that are not part of our past horizon? How do we gain orientation in new circumstances, provided that we do not draw on the linkages between past and future constituted in imagination? As I shall explain in my conclusions, the answer to this question must be found in Hegel's and Merleau-Ponty's original appraisal of habitual body.

## III. Concluding remarks

By challenging Bergson's dualism, Merleau-Ponty aims to give to the habitual body a deeper foundation that is supplied by the general medium of the body-schema. As a result, the constitution of the past, the hectic present and the projected future are inter-dependent terms that are conjointly active in the experience of the lived body. However, the relevance assigned to habituality produces, in turn, a paradox that has been highlighted by Casey (2013), according to whom, on the one hand, habit is a major clue to the nature of the lived body, while, on the other hand, habit is derivative from it and dependent upon it. For Casey (Casey 2013: 204ff.), the paradox can be avoided by considering habit as being both primary and secondary in relation to the



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body: habit is secondary to the body in so far as it represents a particularisation of the body's generalising and sedimenting powers. Yet habit is also primary in that it forms a permanent background of all my actions and thoughts, standing in communication with other expressive phenomena (like speech). In other words, different layers of habits articulate the existence of the body.

The primary and secondary relation of habit to the body reflects the Hegelian distinction between Anthropology and Psychology, and subsequently between habit and memory. For Hegel, while habit involves the sphere of bodiliness, memory refers to the capacity of intelligence to generate meaning drawing on a more sophisticated form of habituality. Likewise, for Merleau-Ponty, habit implies a multiple layering of capacities that include expressivity and meaning. In this sense, habits are 'plastic' and do not simply require repetition and automatism, but attention and motivation, for they enable the projection of the self into the cultural world. In this sense, according to Romdenh-Romluc (2013), Merleau-Ponty's conception of habitual behaviour can be explained as 'centring oneself in one's activity', i.e., as being attuned to those possibilities of action that are relevant to completing a task. This can also be understood in light of Hegel's model, since habituality underpins a teleological movement that manifests the disposition of the self to actualise herself in the world in and through the body.

In turn, this leads us to question the role of creativity that is prefigured in such account of habitual body.[16] In fact, it can be noticed that neither Hegel nor Merleau-Ponty developed a theory of habitual memory that emphasises the imaginative capacity of picturing the future. One way to justify this is to identify the form of freedom allowed by habituality. More than reopening the past, the body is projected into the future in order to carry out its potential accomplishments. For this reason, habitual body is characterised by depth (Casey 2013), for the body reaches into its sedimented layers of experience in order to fulfil its potentialities. As a result, the lived present can never be an object of contemplation, but it is rather a field of possibilities for action that the body seeks to actualise spontaneously. Thanks to such dialectic between sedimentation and activity, the lived body enjoys a spontaneous form of freedom in that it transforms external constraints into occasions for growth and self-development. In this sense, for both Hegel and Merleau-Ponty the primacy of habituality serves the purpose of defending the spontaneity of the lived body, whose immediate freedom is not yet practical, but it can be viewed as the condition of more developed forms of agency.

With regard to this, it is important to notice that such emphasis on the habitual body outlines a form of bodily awareness (Merleau-Ponty) or self-acquaintance (Hegel) that is essential for agency. In order for the body to



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actualise its potentialities, the body must be first attuned to the available possibilities of action. In this sense, habitual body's actions require a form of attentiveness that differs significantly from reflective awareness. This is supposed to contrast to the common belief according to which attention would hinder the realisation of embodied skilful coping (as noted by Montero 2010). Suppose that you wish to train for an athletic competition. In this case, constant exercise and daily running are essential for your training. While conscious thought is not necessary for accomplishing a good performance, attention and volition are. The runner's drive to improve makes her attuned to the realisation of her goals. The intentional arch that underpins one's own desire to train as an athlete outlines a teleological structure in which the goal is not achieved once and for all, that is to say once the training is accomplished, but projects the body even further towards the expression of its potentiality. In other words, habituality, far from being a mere motor response, indicates that a volitional and attentive form of awareness is necessary for the accomplishment of one's goals. From the point of view of both Hegel and Merleau-Ponty, such a capacity is not captured by either sheer attention or body memory. In fact, both attention and body memory require a deeper constraint to make the body spontaneously attuned to a practical possibility. The nexus established by the habitual body between its existence and the environment functions as necessary link between the body and the world. Thus, what Hegel and Merleau-Ponty suggest is that free agency presupposes a deeper motivation to possess one's own existence at the most primordial level. Such *desideratum* can be fulfilled by a theory of habitual body rather than body memory.

As a way of conclusion, let me summarise the crucial points of convergence between Hegel and Merleau-Ponty. I have argued that, for both Hegel and Merleau-Ponty, the lived body cannot be reduced to either motility or to automatic incorporation of gestures and behaviour. In their views, habit is not a denaturalised way of being, but rather a form in which subjectivity can be at home with one's own body. To this end, they both argue that to be embodied entails to exist and to inhabit a space that is shaped by one's own projection and style. I have also shown that neither Merleau-Ponty nor Hegel developed a unified theory of habitual body memory due to their concern with the spontaneity of the lived body. This means that habituality enables a distinct form of freedom by internalising the agent's motivation to act according to her own purpose.

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## Notes

[1] I wish to thank Timothy Mooney, Dermot Moran and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments and critical remarks on an early draft.
Abbreviations used: *PhM* = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, rev. M. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)/ *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* 1830. *Dritter Teil. Die Philosophie des Geistes* in *Werke in 20 Bänden* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970) [I will indicate Hegel's Remarks R, and Additions A]; *PhP* = Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002)/ *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

[2] On the reception of Hegel's philosophy in twentieth-century French philosophy, see Russon (2010) and Stone (forthcoming).

[3] Fuchs (2012) argues that Bergson and Merleau-Ponty developed a theory of 'implicit memory', which appears in various types, including procedural memory, which corresponds to Merleau-Ponty's account of habitual body.

[4] With respect to the relation between sensations and habit, Hegel's account is clearly reminiscent of the Aristotelian distinction between first and second actualities (*De Anima* II 5, 417 a 21): a first actuality is developed out of a natural potentiality and when we exercise it, it becomes a second actuality. Yet Hegel establishes a point of departure from Aristotle, as he assumes that acquired habits liberate us from natural necessity in so far as they train the soul to move and possess the body. See also Ferrarin 2001: 283ff., and Forman 2010. The notion of habit in Hegel has been object of several studies in recent years, most notably with regard to the problem of naturalism. With regard to this, there have been different responses and analyses. See, for example, Forman 2010, Pinkard 2012, Lumsden 2013, Testa 2013, Levine 2015 and Peters 2016. In this paper, I do not endorse any specific interpretation of naturalism, since my objective is rather to shed light on an aspect that is often unnoticed in contemporary discussions on naturalism, i.e., the lived experience of the body that, for Hegel, marks the sphere of habituality.

[5] As is well known, the concept of skilful coping has become prominent in recent years thanks to the Dreyfus and McDowell debate (for a *summa* of such debate, see Schear 2013).

[6] Not by chance, in the long Addition to §408, Hegel describes at length different forms of derangement that are due to disorders of self-feeling, i.e., to a lack or modification of self-reference, which is stabilised and regulated through habituality.

[7] For Hegel, the genesis of the will is closely connected with that of thinking in the Psychology (*PhM*: §468). Importantly, the unity of thinking and will is a precondition of moral action. For this reason, I find highly problematic contemporary accounts of social naturalism that emphasise habituality in relation to ethical life without acknowledging that habituality as such would hardly justify, in Hegel's view, the individual commitment to social norms. A further appraisal of this issue can be found in Lumsden 2013.

[8] For an appraisal of the role of recollection in Hegel's philosophy, see the essays edited by Ricci and Sanguinetti (2013).



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[9] According to Hegel (*PhM*: §§455–58), there are different forms of imagination (reproductive, symbolic and semiotic). While reproductive imagination accounts for the universality of representations, the other two forms of imagination are necessary to transform representations into available and intuitive contents for intelligence, i.e., by producing symbols and signs. For a detailed account of the role of imagination in Hegel, see deVries (1988, ch. IX), and Bates (2004), who stresses the communicative function of imagining as a middle term between representing and the intellect in the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit. For a discussion of the role of imagination in relation to thinking and pure thought see Ferrarin (2001: 287–308; 2006).

[10] This, however, does not entail that thinking is entirely linguistic or strictly dependent on language. See Ferrarin 2006.

[11] However, Merleau-Ponty also remarks that intellectualism is the antithesis to empiricism, and that the dialectic of the organism is not foreign to history (*PhP*: 101/103ff.). I am very thankful to Timothy Mooney for pointing out this passage to me.

[12] See, for example, Pinkard 2012: 26. With regard to Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology*, it is also worth remembering Russon's pioneering interpretation inspired by Merleau-Ponty (Russon 2004).

[13] In the Sorbonne lectures (1949–52), Merleau-Ponty emphasises the connection between habit, body schema and *innere Sprachform*, stating that the acquisition of habit is the recognising of a certain style, which differs depending on how we speak or write, how we address ourselves or others. Merleau-Ponty refers to Humboldt's *Sprachsphilosphie*, according to which language stems from an inner form that is responsible for meaning generation. Cf. Merleau-Ponty 2010: 49.

[14] It is noteworthy that Merleau-Ponty refers not only to Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, but also, though not explicitly, to Bergson's essay on Félix Ravaisson, the French philosopher whose doctoral dissertation *Of Habit* was first published in France in 1838. In 1904 Bergson replaced Ravaisson at the Académie des Sciences morales et politiques and delivered a lecture on Ravaisson's life and work. There, Bergson defines habit as 'the fossilized residue of a spiritual activity', a definition that was quoted by Merleau-Ponty. Actually, Bergson's reading of Ravaisson was misleading, for Ravaisson did not consider habit as a 'fossilized residue', but rather argued that habit is a disposition, implying the capacity to change and to transform voluntary movements into instincts. In this sense, habit highlights the fact that freedom goes back to nature. Although Merleau-Ponty did not mention Ravaisson's philosophy in the *PhP*, his concern is very close to that of Ravaisson: habit is not simply the acquisition of a new skill habit is not simply the acquisition of a new skill, but rather it represents a principle of action. For this reason, I do not agree with M. Sinclair, in his otherwise brilliant article, when he claims that the traditional strong sense of habit, held by Ravaisson, would be lost in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. See Sinclair 2011.

[15] On the case of Scheider see: Jensen 2009, Mooney 2011 and Romdenh-Romluc 2013.

[16] A similar issue is at stake in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the case of Schneider. See Mooney 2011.



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