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MERLEAU-PONTY ON THE BODY

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Abstract
The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty claims that there are two distinct ways in which we can understand the place of an object when we are visually apprehending it. The first involves an intentional relation to the object that is essentially cognitive or can serve as the input to cognitive processes; the second irreducibly involves a bodily set or preparation to deal with the object. Because of its essential bodily component, Merleau-Ponty calls this second kind of understanding 'motor intentional'. In this paper I consider some phenomenological, conceptual, and cognitive neuro-scientific results that help to elucidate and defend the distinction between intentional and motor intentional activity. I go on to argue that motor intentional activity has a logical structure that is essentially distinct from that of the more canonical kinds of intentional states. In particular, the characteristic logical distinction between the content and the attitude of an intentional state does not carry over to the motor intentional case.

1. Introduction

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, first published in 1945, Merleau-Ponty describes a patient named Schneider, whose visual pathology stems from a traumatic injury to the brain incurred during trench warfare in the First World War. Schneider's case of morbid motility, according to Merleau-Ponty, 'clearly shows the fundamental relations between the body and space'.[1] The following somewhat lengthy passage occurs near the beginning of Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Schneider:

> In the . . . patient . . . one notices a dissociation of the act of pointing from reactions of taking or grasping: the same subject who is unable to point to order to a part of his body, quickly moves his hand to the point where a mosquito is stinging him. . . . [A]sked to point to some part of his body, his nose for example, [he] can only manage to do so if he is allowed to take

[1] *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 103.

> hold of it. If the patient is set the task of interrupting the movement before its completion . . . the action becomes impossible. It must therefore be concluded that 'grasping' . . . is different from 'pointing'. From the outset the grasping movement is magically at its completion; it can begin only by anticipating its end, since to disallow taking hold is sufficient to inhibit the action. And it has to be admitted that [even in the case of a normal subject] a point on my body can be present to me as one to be taken hold of without being given in this anticipated grasp as a point to be indicated. But how is this possible? If I know where my nose is when it is a question of holding it, how can I not know where it is when it is a matter of pointing to it?

'It is probably because', Merleau-Ponty concludes, 'knowledge of where something is can be understood in a number of ways'.[2]

The general point of Merleau-Ponty's discussion is that the understanding of space that informs my skillful, unreflective bodily activity – activity such as unreflectively grasping the doorknob in order to go through the door, or skillfully typing at the keyboard – is not the same as, nor can it be explained in terms of, the understanding of space that informs my reflective, cognitive or intellectual acts – acts such as pointing at the doorknob in order to identify it. As Merleau-Ponty says, in skillful, unreflective bodily activity

> my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task. And indeed its spatiality is not . . . *a spatiality of position*, but a *spatiality of situation*.[3]

To give a name to intentional activities that essentially involve our bodily, situational understanding of space and spatial features, Merleau-Ponty coins the phrase 'motor intentionality'. Grasping is the canonical motor-intentional activity.

As recently as 1992, perceptual psychologists were loathe to distinguish between the kind of spatial information available to the visual system for visuo-motor activities such as grasping and the kind available for perceptual judgements about location implicit in acts of pointing. In a forward thinking paper of the day one psychologist writes:

[2] *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 103–4.
[3] *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 100.

> We often do not differentiate between grasping and pointing when we generalize about how vision is used when generating limb movements. It is possible, that how individuals use vision may vary as a function of whether they are generating pointing or grasping movements, and that some principles of how vision is used during reaching and pointing is (sic) not generalizable to grasping.[4]

This was a maverick view in 1992. Since that time, however, the important work of neuroscientists A. David Milner and Melvyn Goodale has opened the way for acceptance of this basic Merleau-Pontian distinction – the distinction between essentially bodily understandings of space and spatial features, on the one hand, and essentially cognitive or reflective understandings of these on the other. Much of Milner and Goodale's work comes from an analysis of D.F., a patient who suffered carbon monoxide poisoning that resulted in a visual pathology strikingly similar to Schneider's. Milner and Goodale describe her situation as follows:

> D.F.'s ability to recognize or discriminate between even simple geometric forms is grossly impaired. . . . [Her] pattern of visual deficits [however] ... is largely restricted to deficits in form perception. D.F. . . . recovered, within weeks, the ability to reach out and grasp everyday objects with remarkable accuracy. We have discovered recently that she is very good at catching a ball or even a short wooden stick thrown towards her. . . . She negotiates obstacles in her path with ease . . . . These various skills suggest that although D.F. is poor at perceptual report of object qualities such as size and orientation, she is much better at using those same qualities to guide her actions.[5]

In particular, Milner and Goodale report, D.F. is capable of responding differentially to spatial features of an object like its size, shape, and orientation even in cases in which she is incapable of visually identifying those very features. One test of this involved the identification of the orientation of a slot. Quoting again from Milner and Goodale:

> [We] used a vertically mounted disc in which a [rectangular]

[4] Carnahan, Heather, 'Eye, head and hand coordination during manual aiming', in Proteau, L. and Elliott, D. (eds.), *Advances in Psychology 85: Vision and Motor Control*, Elsevier Science Publishers B.V., 1992, p. 188.

[5] *The Visual Brain in Action*, pp. 126–128.

> slot . . . was cut: on different test trials, the slot was randomly set at 0, 45, 90, or 135°. We found that D.F.'s attempts to make a perceptual report of the orientation of the slot showed little relationship to its actual orientation, and this was true whether her reports were made verbally or by manually setting a comparison slot. [Further examination revealed a large variety of other reporting methods for which her performance was equally bad.] Remarkably, however, when she was asked to insert her hand or a hand-held card into the slot from a starting position an arm's length away, she showed no particular difficulty, moving her hand (or the card) towards the slot in the correct orientation and inserting it quite accurately. Video recordings showed that her hand began to rotate in the appropriate direction as soon as it left the start position. [One is reminded here, by the way, of Merleau-Ponty's claim that 'from the outset the grasping action is magically at its completion'.] In short, although she could not report the orientation of the slot, she could 'post' her hand or a card into it without difficulty.[6]

Milner and Goodale go on to suggest a neurophysiological basis for the dissociation between pointing and grasping. They claim that there are two different streams of visual information flow in the brain, one of which is geared to perceptual judgement, the other of which is geared directly to action. D.F.'s case is one of the principle pieces of evidence that there is not one common understanding of orientation on the basis of which both judgement and action occur, but rather two different ways of understanding spatial qualities like orientation. Indeed, D.F.'s understanding of the orientation of the slot, unlike the more familiar cognitive understanding, is essentially in terms of her bodily capacities and dispositions to act with respect to it. In the terminology of Merleau-Ponty, she has a motor intentional understanding of orientation. In this paper I would like to explore some of the distinctive features of motor intentional activity, and in particular to say something about its logical form.

2. The motor intentional understanding of location

Perhaps a good way to begin to explore the features of motor intentional activity is by comparing them to the features of more

[6] *The Visual Brain in Action*, p. 128.

cognitive, report oriented modes of understanding an object. The comparison is especially interesting when it comes to the understanding one has of the spatial features of the object like location, size, shape, orientation, and so on. Keeping in line with the discussion so far, I will take grasping an object to be a paradigmatic motor intentional activity, and pointing at an object to be an essentially cognitive, report oriented task. The spatial feature of the object that I will focus on here is its location. Our question, then, will be, What understanding of the location of an object is inherent in the grasping activities directed toward it, and how is this understanding different, if it is, from the understanding of the location of an object on which the pointing act depends? In this section I will argue that, on at least one account of the understanding of location required for pointing acts, that understanding is neither necessary nor sufficient for the success of grasping activity. If correct, this claim would be for location what Milner and Goodale's analysis suggests about orientation. It would be, in other words, the denial that there is a common understanding of the location of an object in virtue of which both judgements about it and actions toward it occur.

I will think of the pointing act on the model of demonstrative identification. Now, there is a genuine philosophical question about what it is in virtue of which a pointing act picks out or refers to or identifies its object. One widely held view, however, attributable in the first instance to Evans as I understand him, is that the actual location of the object is that in virtue of which the demonstrative pointing act identifies it.[7] By the actual location I mean the location of the object as it is referred to in what is sometimes called an objective cognitive map. The actual location of the object, on this view, is a spatial feature of it that distinguishes the object identified from all other objects in the universe. I will use this general account of pointing, and the spatial features of the object on which its demonstrative identification depends, for the sake of comparison.

In motor intentional activity there is likewise a kind of motor intentional identification of the object – a way of being directed toward it that is in some way dependent upon an understanding of, or at any rate a bodily sensitivity to, its spatial features. This is true at least in the sense that objects of different sizes, shapes, orientations, and locations require different kinds of grasping

[7] See Evans, *Varieties of Reference*.

activities. In the sense of motor intentional identification with which I'll be concerned, successful completion of the relevant motor intentional activity is at least sufficient for motor intentional identification. On this view, then, we can say that D.F. is capable of motor intentionally identifying the orientation of the slot – she has so to speak, a bodily understanding of that orientation – despite the fact that she does not, in a more traditional sense, know what the orientation is. The bodily understanding of a spatial feature of an object is manifest in the subject's capacity to act differentially with respect to that feature.

Whatever this bodily understanding of the object amounts to, however, I believe it is not an understanding of its actual location. Knowledge of the actual location of the object, I claim, is neither necessary nor sufficient for the success of the motor intentional activity directed toward it. I will begin with the denial that knowledge of the actual location of an object is necessary for its motor intentional identification.

For starters, I think there may be an issue of fineness of grain. Suppose that I'm sitting at the breakfast table in the morning and I want to take a sip from my coffee mug, which is at actual location π on the breakfast table. Unreflectively I reach out to grab the mug and, as it happens, I am successful in doing so and in drinking from it. The grasping activity has succeeded in identifying its object motor intentionally. Now the question arises, could the very same activity have succeeded in identifying its object if the mug were in a different actual location? The answer must depend on how we individuate motor intentional activities, and I don't intend to give a general answer to that question here. Surely on some natural criterion we can say that if the actual location were sufficiently different – if the mug were in the middle of Detroit, for example, or maybe even if it were just in the other room – then some different grasping activity would be required. But what if the mug were in an actual location that was different by only a tiny amount – a millimetre, for instance. Suppose that I also succeed in grabbing the mug and drinking from it in this situation. Well, if we make the difference in actual location small enough then on any natural criterion of individuation the activity must be the same. After all, points in actual space are indefinitely small, whereas points in behavioural space must not be. If they were, then motor intentional activity would depend upon factors that are in principle unavailable in any way to the performer of the activity, and this seems to undermine the very notion of a

bodily sensitivity to the object on the basis of which the activity is performed. So this seems to indicate that an understanding of the very particular actual location of the object is not necessary for the success of motor intentional activity directed toward it.

Perhaps it will be objected, however, that this isn't the kind of knowledge we had in mind when we said that knowledge of the actual location is required for pointing. After all, actual locations of this very particular sort are perceptually indiscriminable in every way, so perhaps knowledge of them is not required for pointing either. One way to proceed at this point, then, is to ask whether the locations with which we identify objects when pointing at them are more finely grained than the locations with which we identify objects when acting with respect to them. I suspect there is a sense in which something like this is true, but I confess that the terrain here is muddy, and that I don't have any good way of drying it up. I will admit, however, that it almost seems to me as though focussing on fineness of grain gets us off on the wrong foot anyway. The real issue is probably not how finely understood the location of the object is, but whether there's anything like a location we understand at all in grasping an object, as opposed to a located object understood as a unitary thing. I'll say a bit more about this in the next section.

For the time being, however, rather than pursue the issue of fineness of grain, I will simply point out that there is another important factor in distinguishing pointing from grasping, one which Evans himself was keen to emphasize. Namely, that the demonstrative pointing act, unlike the grasping activity, cannot succeed unless it is based on knowledge of the object that distinguishes it from every other object in the universe. This is a criterion that is sometimes called 'Russell's Principle', and it is central to both Strawson's and Evans's views on demonstrative identification. But the only way knowledge of the actual location of an object can live up to this demand is if it is knowledge of the object's place in the universe at large, not just knowledge of the object's place with respect to the perceiver. It must be, in Evans's terminology, knowledge of the object's objective location, not just knowledge of its egocentric location. Since only egocentric knowledge is required for grasping, here is a definitive sense in which the understanding of location necessary for pointing is not an understanding that is necessary for the success of motor intentional activity.

I should mention, parenthetically, that this observation leads

Evans to develop a view about behavioural or egocentric understandings of space that distinguishes them from objective understandings of space. It's not often noticed, however, that Evans's whole discussion of behavioural space is not only similar to the view about grasping that Merleau-Ponty develops, it is actually motivated by Merleau-Ponty's work. This is clear from the fact that Evans introduces the topic with a long passage from a paper by Charles Taylor in which Taylor is explicitly presenting Merleau-Ponty's view. So it's not surprising that, in a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's account of the body, Evans's views are lurking around.

We have seen, then, that knowledge of the actual location of an object is not necessary for the success of motor intentional activities directed toward it. But knowledge of the actual location is not sufficient for motor intentional identification either. To see this we need only consider parallel situations in which the object is in the same actual location but the success conditions for the motor intentional activity directed toward that object are different. For instance, consider two situations in which my coffee mug is located at actual position π on the breakfast table. In the first of these situations the mug is perched innocently on top of the table, while in the second it is super-glued to the surface. Assuming that in both cases I am grasping the mug in order to drink coffee from it, then it is clear that the conditions for the success of the motor intentional activity in the first case (e.g., that I grasp it normally and drink from it) are different from those in the second case (e.g., that I first pry it off the table top with a crow bar and then grasp it normally and drink from it). Thus, although a normal grasping action is enough properly to identify the mug in the first case (motor intentionally), it is not enough properly to identify it in the second. We could make a similar point by substituting a different object altogether for my coffee mug – a red rubber ball, for instance. Even if it is at the same actual location, a very different kind of grasping activity may be required to grasp the ball successfully than was required to grasp the mug. It seems, then, that motor intentional activities succeed at least partly in virtue of facts about the object toward which they are directed. Because actual locations contain no information about the object that occupies them, knowledge of the actual location alone is insufficient for motor intentional identification.

3. Motor intentionality is an essentially bodily relation to an object

We saw that motor intentional activities succeed at least partly in virtue of facts about the object toward which they are directed. Of course I will change my way of grasping a thing if it's in a substantially different actual location – I'll reach over there instead of over here. But I'll also change my way of grasping it, for instance, if it's a different thing in the same location. What are the differences? I'll form my grip differently, I'll scale my hand opening differently, I may even prepare my entire body differently if the object is perceived to be, for instance, very heavy instead of very light. The upshot is that in identifying an object motor intentionally I typically prepare myself to deal with the entire object, not just with some independently specifiable spatial feature of it, like for instance its actual location. This fact, I believe, is built into the very way we use the terms pointing and grasping, so let me begin by saying something about this.

By contrast first consider the case of pointing. When I point at a table in the corner of the room, I succeed in pointing at the corner of the room whether the table is there or not. If a thief has just ransacked my house I can successfully communicate to the police officer that 'There', (pointing to the corner of the room) 'is where my table used to be'. It is clear when I do this that I am pointing to the same actual location I would have been pointing to had the thief left the table untouched. Since the table is gone, of course, I fail to point at it, but since I am still pointing at the actual location it occupied, it must be the case that this actual location is specifiable independently of the object.

On the other hand, consider grasping. When I grab for my coffee mug in the morning I direct my activity toward it, not simply toward some independent location that it occupies. If I am hallucinating the existence of the mug we do not say that I grasped the location but failed to grasp the object – the grasping activity has failed altogether. The most I can do is grasp at the (actual) location, but if there's no object there, it won't be a genuine grasping act. Genuine grasping, it seems, is directed not just toward a location, but toward a located object.

The perceived existence of the object is so important to the grasping act that without it the action is measurably distinct. This is clear from another interesting empirical result, this one

reported by Goodale, Jakobson, and Keillor.[8] These authors have shown that there are measurable qualitative differences between natural grasping movements directed toward an actual object and 'pantomimed' movements directed toward a remembered object. When an actual object is present to be grasped, the subjects typically scale their hand opening for object size and form their grip to correspond to the shape of the object. In pantomimed actions, on the other hand, when there is no object present, although the subjects continue to scale their hand opening, their grip formation differs significantly from that seen in normal target directed actions. It seems that the actual perceived presence of a thing, and not just some independent representation of it (like a memory), is necessary for the motor intentional activity directed toward it. This is why Merleau-Ponty insists that motor intentional activity is directed toward the object itself in all its particularity. As he says,

> In the action of the hand which is raised towards an object is contained a reference to the object, not as an object represented, but as that *highly specific thing* towards which we project ourselves, near which we are, in anticipation, and which we haunt.[9]

This is not merely the kind of direct realism that is sometimes found in the philosophical literature nowadays. That's because it's not just the rejection of representational intermediaries; it is also an embrace of the positive notion of a whole bodily understanding of the object.

It is important to emphasize again, therefore, that the understanding of the entire object that I have when I am grasping it is not an understanding I can have independent of my bodily activity with respect to it. My bodily activity with respect to the object just is my way of understanding it. We saw this already in the case of D.F. – the understanding of the orientation of the slot that she has in posting a card through it is not an understanding she can have independent of the posting activity. In particular hers is not the kind of understanding of orientation that she can report in any way other than by actually posting the card through the oriented slot. But this kind of bodily understanding of the world

[8] Goodale, Jakobson, Keillor, 'Differences in the visual control of pantomimed and natural grasping movements.', *Neuropsychologia*, Oct., 1994, v. 32 (n. 10), pp. 1159–1178.

[9] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 138, italics in the original.

is familiar to normal subjects as well. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of a typist's bodily understanding of the keyboard:

> To know how to type is not, then, to know the place of each letter among the keys, nor even to have acquired a conditioned reflex for each one, which is set in motion by the letter as it comes before our eye. If [bodily skill] is neither a form of knowledge nor an involuntary action, what then is it? It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort.[10]

That there is a peculiarly bodily type of understanding of objects is the central point of Merleau-Ponty's category of motor intentionality: motor intentional activity is a way of being directed toward objects that essentially involves a motor or behavioural component. As Merleau-Ponty says in introducing the phrase:

> . . . we are brought to the recognition of something between [reflex] movement as a third person process and thought as a representation of movement – something which is an anticipation of, or arrival at, the objective and is ensured by the body itself as a motor power, a 'motor project' (*Bewegungsentwurf*), a 'motor intentionality' . . .[11]

In motor intentional activity, in other words, there is not an independent way we have of understanding the object on the basis of which we act differentially with respect to it. Rather our bodily activity is itself a kind of understanding of the object. This is surely an odd kind of understanding of the world, and I don't claim to have clarified it much beyond insisting that it is essentially bodily. But in the next, and final, section I will try to show that if we take this idea seriously, then the logical form of motor intentional activity is very different from that of more traditional cognitive or reflective intentional states. Although this still won't tell us what motor intentional identification is, it will give a pretty good idea of how strange a thing it must be.

4. The logical form of motor intentional activity

The claim I'm interested in is this: that the logical form of motor

[10] *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 144.
[11] *ibid.*, p. 110.

intentional activity is different from the logical form of cognitive or reflective intentional states, states such as believing that John is in the bedroom, hoping that the sun will shine, or intending to buy the flowers. In particular, the difference is that it is impossible to distinguish the content of motor intentional activity from the attitude directed toward that content. The content/attitude distinction is perhaps the most basic logical distinction one can make in the characterization of cognitive or reflective intentional states. The claim that motor intentional activity fails to admit such a distinction, therefore, if correct, will serve to distinguish motor intentionality from reflective intentionality in a relatively formal and complete way.

One standard way to characterize a belief state is in terms of a proposition consisting of concepts possessed by the subject enjoying the belief. If Sally believes that the slot is oriented at 45°, for instance, then we may say that Sally possesses the concepts [slot] and [oriented at 45°]. At a minimum this means that she is capable of entertaining at least some other thoughts involving these concepts – thoughts about slots that are not oriented at 45°, for instance, and thoughts about things other than slots that are so oriented. The proposition consisting of the concepts [slot] and [oriented at 45°] is a representation of the way the world is toward which Sally has the attitude of belief.

But what is the content – the representation of the way the world is – that is at play in D.F.'s motor intentional activity? It is clear that it is not a representation that contains the concept [oriented at 45°]. In the first place, it is unlikely that D.F. even possesses such a concept. She is systematically incapable of reporting that things are oriented at 45° when they are, and this seems at least a pretty good first-order guide to whether she possesses the concept or not. It is possible, I suppose, that she possesses the concept by deference – the way some of us may possess the concept [arthritis] by deferring to experts in our community, despite the fact that we systematically misapply the term ourselves. But even if she does possess the concept by deference, she is certainly not making use of somebody else's knowledge when she posts the card through the oriented slot. So it is clear that she is not in any way using the concept [oriented at 45°] in performing the motor intentional activity of posting the card through the slot that is, as a matter of fact, oriented at 45°. If there is a representational content that characterizes her understanding of the orientation of the slot, then, it must not be one containing the concept [oriented at 45°].

The problem is that there seems to be no concept that D.F. possesses in virtue of which she is capable of performing the posting activity. It's not merely that she can't count to 45, for instance, and for that reason fails to possess the concept [oriented at 45°], but she possesses some other extensionally equivalent concept. No, she also can't draw the slope of the slot on a piece of paper or even rotate her hand into the correct orientation without at the same time moving it toward the slot. She seems, in other words, not to be able to represent the orientation of the slot at all except by means of posting the card through it. This is another way of putting the claim that motor intentional activities constitute essentially bodily understandings of their objects.

But still, why can't we think of this activity itself as a way of understanding the orientation of the slot toward which she can have the attitude of belief? Why can't she say, in other words, 'I believe the slot is oriented *this* way [said while posting the card through the slot]'? Well, she can say this, I think, and I understand from Goodale that she's learned to make use of this technique. Indeed, he says it's made experiments very tricky recently. The problem is, if you ask her to report the orientation of the slot, she'll begin to move her hand toward the slot as if she were going to push it through, and then at the last moment she'll stop, saying '*This* is the orientation it's in' [rigidly holding her hand in its final position]. Now it's true, in this instance, that she has a representation of orientation that she can report. She has a representational content, in other words, toward which she can have the attitude of belief. But the question is whether this is the representation of the orientation of the slot that constituted the understanding she had of it when she was posting the card through the slot. I suspect it's not.

The difference, I think, is that when she stops the posting action, the thought she has then seems to be about whatever orientation her hand happens to be in. I strongly suspect, for instance, that if you changed the orientation of the slot after she'd stopped moving her hand, and didn't let her begin the posting activity again, she would continue to say that the orientation of the slot is whatever orientation her hand ended up in. What is revealed in the posting activity, however, is the actual orientation of the slot – it's that orientation itself that the activity is sensitive to. So even if she can have an attitude toward the activity that manifests an understanding of the orientation, this is not the same as having an attitude toward the understanding of the orientation that the activity manifests.

The situation is a bit like the one that Frege describes with respect to the concept horse. For Frege, any attempt to refer to the concept horse *as a concept* will necessarily fail, since referring to it at all turns it into an object. So too, it seems, any attempt to characterize as an independently specifiable representation the understanding of orientation that D.F. manifests in her posting activity will necessarily turn it into a different kind of understanding than the kind it was at the time of the performance. The understanding of orientation that the activity manifests, in other words, seems not to be the kind of thing toward which we can have an attitude at all.

Supposing this is true for D.F., we might wonder whether it is true for ourselves as well. I suspect it is. Consider the understanding of the doorknob that you have when you unreflectively reach out to open the door. Is this understanding itself the kind of understanding toward which you can have an attitude? Or is it rather the case that in order to reflect upon the understanding manifest in the activity at all we necessarily change it into something different from what it was at the time the activity was being performed? It is more difficult to know in our case, since unlike D.F. we do possess concepts like orientation, size, shape, location, and so on, and it's tempting to re-construct the understanding manifest in our activity in terms of these. But is it in virtue of this kind of conceptual understanding of the object that we perform our unreflective, skillful activities? If Milner and Goodale are right in hypothesizing that there is an independent stream of visual information that is directly tied to action, then perhaps this kind of motor intentional understanding even for normal subjects is a kind that we cannot reflectively access as such. We may be able to reflect on the activity itself of course – I sometimes seem to be able to remember, for instance, reaching out to grasp the doorknob, even if I wasn't aware of doing it when I actually performed the activity. But again, this seems to be reflecting on the activity, not on the understanding of the doorknob that's manifest in it. So there seems to be good evidence for thinking that motor intentional activity is like this even for normal subjects, that it essentially discloses the world to us, in other words, but cannot be captured in the process of doing so. This coheres with Schneider's report of his own experience, which is a kind of pure motor intentionality, for he says,

> I experience the movements as being a result of the situation, of the sequence of events themselves; myself and my movements are, so to speak, merely a link in the whole process and I am scarcely aware of any voluntary initiative. . . . It all happens independently of me.[12]

Because motor-intentional activity is called forth by the situation in this way, and is therefore to some degree independent of the autonomous will of the subject, it does not have at its heart the kind of autonomous representational content that a subject could have an attitude toward. I suspect that this is the point that Merleau-Ponty was trying to make in this final passage with which I'll end. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> [I]f I can, with my left hand, feel my right hand as it touches an object, the right hand as an object is not the right hand as it touches: the first is a system of bones, muscles and flesh brought down at a point of space, the second shoots through space like a rocket to reveal the external object in its place. In so far as it sees or touches the world, my body can therefore be neither seen nor touched. What prevents its ever being an object [like any other], ever being 'completely constituted', is that it is that by which there are objects [for us]. [But] it is neither tangible nor visible in so far as it is that which sees and touches. . . . [Therefore] the body [must] no longer [be] conceived [strictly] as an object of the world, but as our means of communication with it, to the world not longer conceived as a collection of determinate objects, but as the horizon latent in all our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought.[13]

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[12] *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 105.
[13] P*henomenology of Perception*, p. 92.

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