

BODY, SPACE AND SIGN

Svend Erik Larsen

The paper discusses how space is constituted through the presence of the human body. In this context it is argued that the simultaneous foundation of human space and the human body is a semiotic process. A special emphasis is given to the user of indexical signs as the basic device with which the body locates itself in relation to material objects, including other bodies, in such a way that a subjective space of perceptual, psychological and social character is created. With support from phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty), from cognitive and perceptual psychology (Piaget, Gibson) as well as from semiotics (Peirce, Bühler) this issue is explained in detail. Its manifestation and cultural and historical changes are analysed in a drama by Holberg and a poem by Rimbaud.



From the mouths of babes ...

Most Danish parents have tried playing this finger game with their children: "Dance, Thumbkin, Dance." The song is a combination of words and gestures. One starts with a clenched fist in front of the body, and, preferably, several people who can see each other. There is a verse for each finger starting with the thumb, naming the names of each finger: "Thumbkin, thumbkin, where are you?" at the same time as the little fist moves in time to the music.

The song continues: "Here I am, here I am ! Hello, hello, hello," and out of the fist, which has been moving in time to the music, pops the finger which is being sung about. At the end of the song all the fingers have been mentioned, and they are all stretched out in the last verse of the song.

As long as it is only the thumb which is in action, it is easy for the adults to play the game. This is true at least for me who is all fingers and thumbs as we say. This thought might strike you while the children are playing, and you are left out of their game. One is only an observer watching the children as they laugh to you, and rather more to each other. Until they reach the middle

Γράμμα / Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism 2 (1994)

© 1994 by Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

finger, and some of them burst out laughing as they glance at the adult and sing "Up yours finger." So I become part of their game simply because I am there. I am still part of their game with the last two fingers, because it is quite difficult to stretch out "Ringman" and "Littleman" for both children and adults alike. Everyone is relieved when the song ends as it began, with something we can all do, because it is just as easy to stick out all your fingers as we do now, as it is to stick out your thumb as we did in the beginning.

What is it that actually happens, apart from the fact that the roles of adult and child are no longer so clear-cut? A relationship between body and space is established, and without this relationship there is no meaning or social life.

Each participant orients him- or herself toward a *possible surrounding space* with the question "where is?" This is in *dialogue* form, partly because there are several people present and partly because a question is being asked. But the dialogue is first and foremost controlled by the body — the "you" here is a finger, part of my body, which becomes an entirety through the song, becoming a hand. Through the *symbolic structure of language* the movement between part of the body and the body as a whole is played out, so that an "I" is put into place. The body becomes a subjective body, which can say "Here I am." Whilst the singer is at first an *I* asking after each finger in turn, the singer himself becomes a *you* each time one of the fingers answers: "Here I am." The body is localized in a room as a subjective body via a symbolic structure which ensures that the body is present in an *intersubjective space*. Here the subjective body can be seen and recognised.

But a space like this will already have been pervaded with *meaning*, a meaning which is reiterated by the child who, through the tacitly understood laughter with the adult when we reach the "up yours" finger, projects himself into the already structured reality in front of him/her and by the adult who relives and revives the childish battle with the motor nerves, as "Ringman" and "Littleman" stick out rather clumsily. The experience which is relived here is that there is neither subjectivity nor meaning unless the body is anchored somewhere. This anchorage inevitably becomes meaning, despite conscious intention, because the anchoring takes place through signs and symbols, in this case verbally and through gesture. The body is not a place, but the body as meaning *takes* place — and cannot avoid doing so.

From the mouths of babes and sucklings, we can learn that truth which says that body and space are mutually dependent and function within this mutuality through sign and symbol systems. "In vino veritas" — truth comes out in wine; so from drunken people we can learn something about what happens when this mutuality breaks down. In the comedy *Jeppe of the Hill* by the founding father of Danish Theatre Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) we can see how.

Jeppe is a poor peasant who is daily drunk or beaten up by his wife Nille and her terrible switch called Master Eric — or both. One day the baron from

the local manor house wants to play a trick on him. Drunk, he is placed in the baron's bed where he wakes up to the splendour of the noble house, not quite sure if he is alive or dead and maybe in Paradise. Drunk again, he is brought back to the village to Nille and Master Eric and is the victim of a pretended execution, staged by the baron and his men. Finally, he becomes sure that he is alive, helped by Nille's tough words and blows and by the words of one of the baron's men, disguised as a judge.

When Jeppe, probably suffering from a terrible hangover, wakes up in the baron's bed, he has to ask, in the same way as children ask about Thumbkin: "Where is my wife, where are my children, where is my house, and where is Jeppe?" (Holberg 16), and he reaches the alarming conclusion that the body he sees and feels, "is not me" (16). He has no recourse but to use his thumb, together with his index finger: Jeppe pinches himself to see if he is awake or dreaming. It works: "Yes, I feel it; I'm awake" (16). Via the body the subject has become anchored in the space where it belongs, where it takes place.

The system of symbols, and thus the intersubjective guarantee that the relationship between body and space isn't just free fantasy, is something that Jeppe can thumb his nose at: "I'm awake, sure enough; no one could argue that," he says triumphantly. But the doubt starts to spread immediately afterwards: "... because if I weren't awake, I couldn't. ... But how can I be awake, now that I come to think it over?" (17) The system of symbols never falls into place, and so the relationship between body and space falls apart: "... I'm not asleep, I'm not awake, I'm not dead, I'm not alive, I'm not crazy, I'm not sane, I am Jeppe of the Hill, I'm not Jeppe of the Hill, I'm poor, I'm rich, I'm a miserable peasant, I'm an emperor. O — o — o — ! Help! Help! Help!" (18) The others have to come and make the decision for him.

Servants, lackeys and maids rush in and fill him with words. Now the system of symbols becomes so powerful that the bodily realities have difficulty in making any impression, even though Master Eric certainly hits him hard enough. Once again, fingers are used when Jeppe checks to see if the dung-heap really is a dung-heap: "I thought when I woke up again I should find my fingers covered with golden rings, but, saving your presence, they're covered with something very different ... I thought that when I woke up I should reach out and grasp a glass of pork-wine, but instead, to speak modestly, I get a handful of dung" (33). Even though Nille can knock some sense into him on the dung heap, she can't knock him out of Paradise: "Jeppe: 'As true as I'm an honest man called Jeppe of the Hill, as sure as that is true, I have been in paradise and have seen things that it will stun you to hear of' (*Nille beats him again and drags him into the house by the hair*)" (35).

Nille's words have never had any real validity, so she can't convince Jeppe, not even when Jeppe is hanging from the gallows and is dead, because

he has been declared dead loudly and clearly by the high court set up by the baron as part of the trick they play upon Jeppe. But Master Eric revives the body once again: "Jeppe: '... You shall soon find out that I am not afraid of Master Eric any more, for now I can't feel a beating' (*Nille runs home for Master Eric, comes back again, and beats him as he hangs*). Jeppe: 'Ow, ow, ow! Stop it, Nille, stop! You'll kill me all over again. Ow! ow! ow!' " (43) But this body can't be anchored in a space where it can function until the court sentences him back to the land of the living with words and symbols: "Come, take our word for it, and thank us for so graciously sentencing you back to life again," the fake judge says (44). Jeppe's trip through bodily experience, spatial halls of mirrors and turbulent systems of symbols finally ends when he "*Shakes himself loose and runs away*" (48) to another space, another body, another language which doesn't exist, outside the space where bodies can only express the language of power.

The philosopher in the center

Is there anywhere then that we can place the philosopher? The children have taught us the one extreme, where the unity of body and space achieve a common symbolic anchorage. The desperate drunk has shown us the chasm which opens at our feet when our anchorage fails us and space and body and language point each in their own direction. We can attempt to place the philosopher in the center where the consequences of the extremes can be formulated together.

Many people have tried. One of them is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For him, space is always bound to body. "Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the positing of things becomes possible. This means that instead of imagining it as a sort of ether in which all things float, or conceiving it abstractly as a characteristic that they have in common, we must think of it as the universal power enabling them to be connected" (Merleau-Ponty 1970: 243).

These connections point to the role of the body for Merleau-Ponty. When things are not placed in an absolute space, i.e. are oriented in relation to an absolute zero or center, as in Euclid, Newton, Descartes or Kant, then they are oriented in relation to the body from which the mutual relations are perceived, and which position themselves according to these relations. Things are understood as "the double horizon of outer space and corporeal space" (1970: 117). Via the body, things are not merely given a *position* as isolated objects, but are placed in a *situation* (1970: 116).

But when the body is the point of organisation for the perception of things it becomes divorced from things. Therefore it is connected to a consciousness.

Phenomenology gives consciousness two dimensions: on the one hand an orientation towards the world which is human and creates meaning using the body as a starting point, and, on the other — and at the same time — a

mental appropriation of the body. That consciousness is at all connected to the body in this way is not such a bad thing, especially if one thinks about how much energy philosophy has used in the course of time trying to break it away from there. As we saw above, children at any rate, have never been fooled by it. Because of the bodily connection there is no way around a psychoanalytical concept about the bodily based desires which result in body images and phantasms in surrealistic profusion. Otherwise, the conscious remains an abstract concept.

At the same time, the world around us, toward which consciousness as a bodily bound activity is directed, must not be seen as having been created or positioned by consciousness alone. Merleau-Ponty fights valiantly against any form of idealism:

In every perception ... it is the material itself which assumes significance and form. ... Human life "understands" not only a certain definite environment, but an infinite number of possible environments, and it understands itself because it is thrown into a natural world. ... The perceived world is not only my world, but the one in which I see the behaviour of other people take shape, for their behaviour equally aims at this world, which is the counterpart not only of my consciousness, but of any consciousness which I can possibly encounter.

(1970: 324, 327, 338)

Consciousness is directed at the world, not just because consciousness as pure consciousness is made this way or shows sublime freedom. It is directed towards that which is larger than, or different from itself. The surrounding world is thus not just a logical prerequisite for thought, as is assumed with the phenomenological concept of the intentional object. It is the real limit for the horizon of my consciousness, a real limit that is connected to this consciousness precisely because it is a corporeally connected consciousness. If we forget this, there will always be a Nille with her Master Eric.

Even though Merleau-Ponty is apparently better at finding words about this intentional object, he searches unceasingly for an expression and an understanding of this real "other," which our bodies continually remind us of, and which keeps us spellbound. The intentional orientation of consciousness towards the surrounding world is a necessary openness towards this world in its diversity.

It is here that Merleau-Ponty's work on *aesthetics and sign* comes in. Aesthetics is our meeting as corporeal subjects with this "other," and signs are the means by which we anchor the corporeal subject and position it in this "otherness." Painting in particular fascinates Merleau-Ponty as an area of aesthetics, because of its connection to sight. Briefly he puts it as follows in his essay "Eye and Mind": "to see [voir] is to *have [avoir] at a distance*" (1964: 166). In more depth he says:

The painter "takes his body with him," says Valéry. Indeed we cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist

changes the world into paintings. To understand these transsubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body — not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement ...

Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the "I can." Each of the two maps is complete. The visible world and the world of my motor projects are each total parts of the same Being.

The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing ... It is not a self through transparence, like thought, which only thinks its object by assimilating it, by constituting it, by transforming it into thought. It is a self through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of the one who sees in that which he sees ...

(1964: 162)

Using sight the body is placed in a world among things, and in this way the body can become a self-conscious and subjective body. This occurs without the difference between "I" and things disappearing. On the contrary, this difference creates the possibility for meaning, a meaning which is linked to the body's ability to move, find its place, in the visible world. It is in this situation that painting gives an exemplary idiom :

The eye sees the world, sees what inadequacies keep the world from being a painting, sees what keeps a painting from being itself, sees — on the palette — the colors awaited by the painting, and sees, once it is done, the painting that answers to all these inadequacies just as it sees the paintings of others as other answers to other inadequacies.

(1964: 165)

In painting, sight gives a bodily absorption of the world — it is painted with the hand and the body — and the meeting with the picture is a sensory experience of the visible incompatibility between body and thing. Yet body and thing function in the same place.

To the children playing the finger song, Merleau-Ponty would probably say when they let one of the fingers dance to "Here I am, here I am!," that in reality they are singing: "Look, here I am, look, here I am!," because they are sticking the finger out so that everybody can see it. Towards the psychologists Merleau-Ponty is a little more gruff:

Vision alone makes us learn that beings that are different, "exterior," to one another, are yet absolutely *together*, are "simultaneity;" this is a mystery psychologists handle the way a child handles explosives.

(1964: 187)

Even though Merleau-Ponty may find psychologists a little slick and somewhat irresponsible, they in turn might find him rather too mystical. Why

— they might ask — is it the body, the eye, the visual experience that is given so much emphasis? Is it not so that the body and things, although different, are of equal importance? What about taking a look at this world of things?

Psychologists on the sideline

This is precisely what the American perception psychologist James Gibson has done. He makes no reference to Merleau-Ponty, but — as far as I can tell — uses the same starting point, although he is more interested in how we might understand things rather than the subject of eye, body and consciousness.

He presupposes mutuality between the surrounding world and living creatures — as bodies that can see and move, limiting the surrounding world in relation to the purely physical surroundings, which — quite naturally — make some conditions for the extent of sight and movement. This mutuality can be seen in the concrete way in which we experience things as being embedded in each other — they are not just there, side by side, they are nested in open hierarchies (Gibson 8f).

Even if the physical world, for an abstract metric reflection, forms a straight line from the smallest atoms and to the farthest galaxies, the straight line will always bend when passing the area where body and world are mutually dependent. That is the visible world. It is that which makes the conditions for how the rest should be understood, since atoms and galaxies have to be visualised in the visible world (models, pictures, mathematical formulae etc.) to be able to get into the metric system at all. Time and distance are perceived through this world's meters and minutes. This visible world is called the *ecological environment* — there where one "is a perceiver of the environment and a behavior in the environment" (8). Merleau-Ponty says — albeit in a different key:

We understand then why we see the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being which is indeed more than their being perceived — and why at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body; it is that this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it. It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity, it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.

(1968: 135)

Gibson continues by considering how things look in the ecological environment, there where the distance between the seeing, moving body and things becomes communication. This happens without any fuss or petty investigation of phenomenology's concept of thing: we do not observe things — spatially defined bodies — and we cannot use the concept of thing as a

fundamental concept for an understanding of the ecological environment, the visible or — as Gibson says — the terrestrial world around us.

What we are dealing with is a composition of *medium*, *substances* and *surfaces*. A *medium* — like air or water — is the aspect of the environment where continuous movement is possible for living creatures, and through which they receive sensory impressions, so that sight, for example, has no sharp limitations. Everything that hinders continuous movement or the homogenous spread of sensory impulses is *substance*, which in turn gives discontinuous moments in the environment. Medium and substance can be different in different environments, but the existence of both phenomena is indisputable.

The edge opening for a transition between substances or between substance and medium (e.g. a horizontal line) is a *surface*. Surfaces are what meet the body and the eye. It is in relation to them that sight and movement unfold. "A *potentially visible surface* is one that could be looked at from some place in the medium where an animal *might* be" (Gibson 23). Our environment is made up therefore, of the surfaces we can put together to make substances which we move around in, in relation to a medium, so that "the continuous act of perceiving involves the co-perceiving of the self," Gibson says, sounding almost exactly like Merleau-Ponty (240).

In order that this can happen, the surfaces have to appeal to us in relation to what we can see and move in proportion to. In other words, they have to give a possible direction to our sight and movement. Gibson uses a home-made word to describe this, proving that it is not just Frenchmen and Germans who can do this. He calls it the "affordances" of the environment (127). This means that all surfaces possess a "layout" (22), a blueprint making repeated observations and actions possible — the map of what "I can do" is what we have just read in Merleau-Ponty. Since the starting point is the visible environment seen from one place, its primary pattern is bound to the orientation of sight and thus the light, as that which teaches us the difference between medium, substance and surface.

In an environment of surfaces there will always be an "ambient optic array" (Gibson 51), i.e., light that structures the surface in relation to an observation point, a contextual light for the observer you might say. It is this light that makes it possible for the "affordances" of the environment to function (Gibson 143). To see and to see in a direction are just as incontrovertibly bound together as seeing and experiencing oneself as a seeing being.

Now, the eye and the body are constantly changing direction. Gibson's basic task is a showdown with the laboratory experiment where sight is fixed. We always see in a continuous movement. But the "affordances" don't change. Gibson maintains unequivocally that they are the characteristics that the thing — i.e. the surface, possess, seen in relation to an observer, but they

are not subjective qualities of experience (137). We are indisputably in a real world, but we orient ourselves in it as real by way of surface perceptions in relation to an observing body, not in relation to "objective" time or space categories like those of physics (cf. 8).

Therefore, a body in movement must not just be seen as a thing which moves in a space, but as a body which orientates itself in relation to different "affordances." In other words it is a body that *chooses*. The affordances of the faucet are constant — but I can stay by them or move, i.e. change direction, orient myself differently, and I can use them or leave them alone.

And now the semiotician bursts on the scene saying "Here I am!" To choose means that one has to be capable of inferring something from the "affordances" of environment and thus recognise them as *real* or *valid*. At the same time, one has to be able to *point out* — foreman, foreman (index finger) where are you? — elements in such a way as to be able to make a specification of the world around us. So, it must be possible to *define* a universe or an environment which the subject belongs to, a universe that is common for the subject and the "affordances" — a place where one can say: "Here I am!" Another way of putting it is that we are parts of a sign process or a *semiosis* — and it points beyond Gibson's "affordances."

The ever-present semiotician

The fundamental mechanism in the conclusion which gives the pulse in the semiotic process, is the link between the visible surfaces and the unseen volumes. This link creates our environment as things. We see the façade of a house, but perceive it as a house (cf. Schütz 1955 on Husserl's appresentation). We see a body surface — and that includes our own — but perceive an entire body. And without the perception of the whole body we do not perceive the visible in such a way as to be able to make links or semiotic inferences (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1968: 137). These must be located in order to function, namely in "the inauguration of the where and the when, the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word: facticity, what makes the fact be a fact" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 140). Or: "We grasp external space through our bodily situation. A 'corporeal or postural schema' gives us at every moment a global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, of our hold on them" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 5).

"Affordances" have, therefore, a clear limitation: they only indicate phenomena that are directed towards us, so that we can conclude the existence and special character of the "objects" that have occasioned them, and thus orient our actions according to these "objects," regardless of whether or not we can see them. We do not react to the smoke, but to the fire we have concluded must exist. We do not react to the tap but to the water that is the reason for the installation. In other words, we are dealing with a kind of *indexical sign*.

But whereas this type of indices makes up the entire basis for Gibson's basic concept, they only make up half of what the semiotician calls indexical signs. Up till now we have only looked at indices that make it possible for us to read the map of the environment as real and valid. But we also have indices that place us on the map. That is the locating that Merleau-Ponty talks about, and it is what places us in relation to phenomena which are specified as being important.

These two types of indices — from the surface to the eye, so that we see things, and from the finger to the thing — weave us together with the environment in a process of signs. Charles Peirce talks about reactive indices or *reagents* (the smoke in relation to the fire) and designating indices or *designations* (the finger that points, the "look there" of language, pronouns etc.) (Peirce VIII, 368, note 23; cf. Goudge 1965).

Both kinds of indices must necessarily work together: the reagents state the validity or reality of a thing, its ontological status, whilst the others are totally indifferent to it. The designations simply locate a subject in relation to a "something," which then is incorporated in a sign system where it can be specified and become meaningful as something in particular. This the reagents cannot do. But whether the "something" is dream, real, fictive etc., is totally unimportant, just as long as it is possible to define a common universe for the subject, the indexical sign and the "something" concerning which we draw our conclusions (cf. Larsen 1991).

Merleau-Ponty seems to have noticed this ambiguity: It is by letting ourselves be influenced by visible indices that we have the world "at a distance" (1964: 166) — here we have the reagents — but for Merleau-Ponty it is also in the gesture of pointing — here come the designations — that we have the world "at a distance" (1960: 83). We presuppose and re-create this distance, when we produce meaning.

But as the designations don't really care whether they point at fiction or reality we have to vary them a little like Karl Bühler (Bühler 79), so that we can see precisely why we can say more than the Lord's prayer, using our semiotic talents. They make it possible for us to choose which common universe we delimit for subject, sign and thing.

First Bühler introduces the *deixis ad oculos* (e.g. a pointing finger), with which relations between material units in the same universe can be picked out; then the *anaphora* (e.g. pronouns or time markers) which show the relations between instances within the same already delimited universe of sign or symbol ("as shown *earlier* I *believe* [i.e. *now*] that..."); finally, the *deixis am Phantasma* are what Bühler calls those elements which show the relations between instances in different delimited space which already have meaning invested in them (i.e. between memory and presence; between fiction and reality: "I [i.e. I who am talking to you right now] walked on the water yesterday [i.e. in my dream]." And the whole lot can be mixed

together: "at this point in the text [*ad oculos*] the narrator believes [present is a *deiksis am Phantasma* and marks the simultaneity between reality and fiction] as above [anaphora], that ..."

Bühler maintains that these types are arranged in a hierarchy, so that a *deiksis ad oculos*, and thus a material universe, is always present. This is where Peirce's reagents work. They are not an expression for banal materialism, but a manifestation of the fact that meaning is always created via a body which is localised. The consequence of this hierarchy is that if the reagents disappear from one system of signs they will always become part of another which supplements the first (i.e. verbal language as supported by gestural language). Or, if the object being talked about is not anchored materially (it may be a fantasy, imagined, made up etc.), then the materiality of the system of signs or the sign producer's own materiality will come to the forefront, i.e. rhyme and rhythm in poetry, corporeal fascination in aesthetic reception, children's songs about the right place for the thumb. In other words, designations are always anchored in a universe with ontological specification, even though they cannot specify it themselves.

But with Bühler one can go one step further and point out that it is a peculiarity of highly developed sign systems, first and foremost the verbal language, that one has *deiksis am Phantasma* which can make references between different universes. With sign systems like this one can delimit a common universe for sign, object and subject, even though these instances may belong each to their own universe when looked upon from another point of view.

It is this operation we set into motion when we read fiction: we delimit indexical elements which make it possible for us to use the experience from our everyday lives in a fictive universe and thus make the interpretation valid in the social universe in general. Without limitation, via designations, of the common universe in which the subject is localised, the interpretation becomes meaningless; but without the anchoring of this common universe in a material universe in which reagents function, however limited this might be, the interpretation is invalid.

It is this double indexicality, with the body as the center of rotation, that Merleau-Ponty sees as having been accentuated so well in painting. But when one sees the placement of the body in space giving meaning as a semiotic process, as here, painting has no privileges, although it may have some special characteristics.

The poet in the wings

Merleau-Ponty would probably have nodded in approval at this claim, because it is not the individual media or sign systems that interest him, but "the unique activity of explicitness and meaning creation, which is our very nature" (1960: 290). It is in actual fact a process which is important —

painting's transition between the visible and the invisible, there where the painter "asked the visible and created visibility" (1960: 79), or literature's transition between words and silence, there where meaning, a particular intention is "definitely not to be found in the words: it is found between them, in the hollows of space, time and meanings that the words delimit, just as a film's movement occurs between the immoveable pictures which succeed each other" (1960: 95).

But if it is this kind of process and the transition between different fields, that art emphasises, then the indexical locations are broken up and tend to be unstable. And so was the philosopher in the middle. In that position one can decide the conditions for locations, but here one can also get caught when these conditions are destabilized in continually changing processes. And is art anything but experiments with how subjects are located in our world of experience pervaded by sign and meaning?

A poet may be able to install an all-inclusive system of localising which is beyond experience. It becomes more religion than poetry. Or include a series of changing localising systems, like William Faulkner's narrators. Or try to avoid making the indices explicit in any way, just letting the chaos of things appear in endless catalogues. Or do many other things. But there is one thing that a poet cannot do: escape from the double structure of reagents and designations. Just look at Arthur Rimbaud in *Illuminations* (Rimbaud 195, with my alterations in brackets, SEL):

Grey crystal skies. A strange pattern of bridges, [these] straight, [those] arched, others going down [or] [forming] oblique angles to the first, and these shapes repeating themselves in other lighted circuits of the canal, but all of them so long and light that the banks, heavy with domes, are lowered and shrunken. Some of these bridges are still covered with hovels. Others support masts, signals, thin parapets. Minor chords cross one another and diminish, [tones] come up from the [slopes]. [One] can see a red jacket and perhaps other costumes and [some] musical instruments. [Is it] popular tunes, bits of castle concerts, remnants of public hymns? The water is grey and blue, as wide as an arm of the sea. — A white ray, falling from the top of the sky, blots out this comedy.

In this scenery it is not the *reagents* that dominate. The sky is grey, but where does the greyness come from, what does it bring with it, what connections does it create? We have to go right down to the water's edge before these types of indices appear: the sequence "so long and light that ..." marks the fact that the low situation and reduction of the banks is an index of the specific character of the bridge. And yet. The insertion about the heavy domes shows us vaguely that they might also contribute to this indexical effect. Finally, it is obvious that the banks only look as if they lie low and small. So we also face a series of indexical signs of a particular vantage point for an observer.

The next reagents turn up a little later: the music is the index for various musical instruments, dressed up players and for indefinable musical contexts.

But these indices are weakened by a "perhaps" and a question mark.

When the reagents that state which world we can count on as being real and valid are weak, it is because the fundamental statements of this world's temporal and spatial character are missing, just as we lack a body that sees and acts in it being rendered visible. Causal statements that show us that the concrete sensory experience occurs in the same universe, are lacking. There are no clear statements of time to organise things consecutively in the same universe: the few finite verbs are connected to static situations. There is no explicit and coherent body subject moving around and giving the environment coherent and common human dimensions.

And yet we know all too well that we are not in a universe void of people, not just because we can identify details, but because the many designations create a relation from an observing subject to things, even though an *I* has never been mentioned. There is a subjective instance that evaluates ("strange"), that points ("these ... those"), which senses at a distance (only the distant senses sight and hearing are involved, and these with some uncertainty), which compares ("as wide as"), which sees a surface from a point (that the banks lie low and are reduced in size is because of perspective displacement, like the obliquity).

Reagents state that there is an environment which functions, but only the designations give it a symbolic order, and this order is organised in relation to a sensing subject that is created through the game of the indices, so to speak, or, more correctly, a subject that is in the process of being created, because the word *I* is never mentioned, but a subject is on its way. The few finite verbs underline first and foremost, therefore, a now in movement.

The predominance of designations places the ontological status of this environment in doubt, because this status they cannot decide — is it material, is it free fantasy, is it fiction, is it dream? We do not know. The only thing we know for sure is that a subject is installed — and if the attempt to establish a subject can be seen as the meaning of the poem, it is more implied by the word construction than designated by the words (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 103) and precisely, therefore, the position of the subject is maintained as a process in the poem.

The indices can thus show that the poem balances between explicit and implicit, between real and constructed, a delicate balance that doesn't show things that are real, but points at things that become reality.

But if balancing is of central importance, it is no good saying: aha, so we are just talking about a subjective reality, or maintain that the poem is primarily a piece of metapoetry referring to itself. Because then we would suppose a universe which is just as well-defined as the material reality although different from it. Nevertheless, these aspects are included in the poem, too. The designations actually create a subjective reality, as in so much modernist poetry. The metapoetic reflection is obviously present in the

reference to the environment as a visible, formal pattern in the lines of the bridges, in the sound impressions that are taken to be music, and in the self-referential closing of the whole scene mirroring itself, where the grey sky in the beginning corresponds to the grey surface of the water at the end.

More important is the fact that it is all destroyed at the end. The only active finite verb is "blots out" and the destruction comes — without clear intent from the sender ("falling from the top of the sky") — from a sharp and precise element in the environment, "a white ray." The subject has already left the earlier position which was barely made explicit, and can now point from a new place from where the earlier scenery can be surveyed as a whole from the outside and called "this comedy." Now the whole process can continue by letting a new subjective position emerge and be broken off.

By analysing the indices it is possible to focus on the fundamental drama in a lot of modern literature — not the recognition of things or people, but the continued attempts to find a place that turns the things into a valid environment by saying "Here we are!"

Here we are!

Do you think they will be able to find the way to the bridge despite the crooked angles, all those with the mixed realities that they must conquer and make their own — the children, Jeppe, the artists, Merleau-Ponty, Gibson, Bühler, Rimbaud and all the other good souls? There is some doubt as to whether they will ever agree on where the realities are. For which system of signs should be used to give them collective validity? Should they decide to use Nille's method and reach for Master Eric or shake their fists at each other, I hope that someone will shake their clenched fists in time to the music and hum and then sing: "Thumbkin, thumbkin, where are you?" and end by singing: "All my body, all my body, where are you? — here I am, here I am!"

Odense University

Works Cited

- Bühler, Karl. *Sprachtheorie*. 1934. Stuttgart: Fischer, 1965.
- Gibson, James J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.
- Gouge, Thomas A. "Peirce's Index." *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society* 1 (1965): 52-70.
- Holberg, Ludvig. *Jeppe of the Hill. Comedies by Holberg*. 1723. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1914. 1-51.
- Larsen, Svend Erik. "Urban Indices." *Semiotica* 86 (1991): 289-304.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Signes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

- . *The Primacy of Perception*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1964.
- . *The Visible and the Invisible*. 1964. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968.
- . *Phenomenology of Perception*. 1945. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. *Collected Papers I-VIII*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1931-1958.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Rimbaud's Illuminations*. Ed. Wallace Fowlie. London: Harvill Press, 1953.
- Schütz, Alfred. "Symbol, Reality and Society." Eds. Lyman Bryson, et. al. *Symbol and Reality*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1965. 135-203.



Το άρθρο διερευνά πως ο χώρος αποκτά υπόσταση από την παρουσία του ανθρώπινου σώματος. Στη συγκεκριμένη περίπτωση προτείνεται ότι η ταυτόχρονη θεμελίωση του ανθρώπινου χώρου και του ανθρώπινου σώματος είναι μια σημειωτική διαδικασία. Ιδιαίτερη έμφαση δίνεται στο χρήστη ενδεικτικών σημείων ως το βασικό τέχνασμα μέσω του οποίου το σώμα τοποθετεί τον εαυτό του σε σχέση με τα υλικά αντικείμενα, συμπεριλαμβανομένων και άλλων σωμάτων, με τέτοιο τρόπο ώστε να δημιουργείται υποκειμενικός χώρος προσληπτικού, ψυχολογικού και κοινωνικού χαρακτήρα. Με επιχειρήματα από τη γνωστική και αντιληπτική ψυχολογία (Piaget, Gibson) καθώς και από τη σημειωτική (Pierce, Bühler), αυτή η θέση επεξηγείται λεπτομερώς. Η έκφρασή του και οι πολιτισμικές και ιστορικές της μεταλλαγές αναλύονται μέσα σ' ένα θεατρικό έργο του Holberg και ένα ποίημα του Rimbaud.