From the Embodied Self to the Embodied Person. On the Constitution of One's Own Personal Expressive Style

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will focus on the process of constitution of oneself as an embodied being and, more precisely, on the specific way in which one can experience oneself not just as an embodied *self*, but rather as the actual embodied *person* he/she is. I will start by describing the most basic way in which our embodied self is constituted, that is as a felt-feeling body and as the zero-point of orientation of all our sensations and perceptions. Then, I will show how our body can be constituted for us also as an instrument for action, leading to the experience of what Husserl called "I-can" (Husserl 1952, 159-160). I will argue that, even though in this latter form of body awareness we can experience some traits of our own personality, a further dimension of our embodied life – that is, the *expressive* one – allows us to have a more defined experience of the specific embodied *persons* we are. I will describe what "person" specifically means in my framework and, on this basis, I will show how the expressive dimension of our body can account for my experience of myself not just as an embodied *self*, but as the embodied *person* I am.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary philosophical debate on the nature of mind and subjectivity, great attention has been devoted to how one's body shapes and defines not just one's perceptual and cognitive abilities but also the experience of oneself and one's relations to others (Gallagher 2005, Clark 2008, Zahavi 2014). Several studies, for instance, have shown that many of the perceptual and cognitive tasks we are involved in in our everyday life are not accomplished in virtue of the centralized and amodal functioning of a disembodied mind. Rather, they are executed thanks to continuous interactions between the entire organism and the

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world (O'Regan and Noë 2001, Colombetti 2014, Wilson 2002). These studies have also contributed to re-thinking the self as an *embodied* self and to highlighting how the experience we can have of ourselves is highly mediated by the experience of our own body. On these bases, one of the underlined aspects is that we do not generally experience ourselves as *disincarnate minds*, but on the contrary as *embodied beings*. Stemming from the phenomenological tradition (Husserl 1952, Merleau-Ponty 1945, Stein 1917), in particular, several authors have tried to describe the main features of one's experience of his/her body and to elucidate the process of constitution of oneself as an embodied being, embedded in a world of practical meanings and possibilities for actions (Zahavi 2002, Gallagher 2017, Heinamaa 2011). In this paper, I would like to explore precisely this topic, focusing however on the specific way in which we can experience ourselves not just as embodied *selves*, but also as the actual embodied *persons* we are.[1]

In line with authors such as Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 199-204), in fact, I maintain that the experience of ourselves is multilayered and multifaceted. I can experience myself in a minimal sense, just as the distinctive dimension of the first-person-perspective givenness of all my experiences (Zahavi and Kriegel 2016). However, I can also experience myself in a more structured and complex way, as capable of many different actions, as the author of some of these actions, as the subject of such and such affective states, and also as the unique *person* I am as different from all others.

In this paper, I would like to explore the way in which our body contributes to such a constitution of ourselves. In particular, I will argue that the dimension of our embodied life that is the most suitable for our own unique personality to emerge is the one I call "expressive".[2] I will characterize this expressive dimension specifically as the *stylistic mark* of our personal embodied life and I will show how the expressive dimension may be the best way in which each of us can experience himself/herself as the specific embodied *person* he/she is.

In this way, a peculiar feature of our experience of ourselves will emerge: the fact that we constitute ourselves as persons not just through complex narrative practices in which we construct and understand our own stories, but also in a more pre-reflective way, through the specific embodied style of our acts and our experience of them. This aspect will allow us not to reduce the persons

[1] I will clarify the specific phenomenological notion of "person" I endorse in paragraph 4.

[2] This is not tantamount to saying that I will maintain that we, as persons, are reducible to our (expressive) bodies. I will make it clear and further explain this point in paragraph 4.

we are to what we can tell and narrate about ourselves: not all aspects of ourselves as persons should necessarily be captured in our narratives in order for our own personality to be constituted.

Aiming at elucidating better the constitution of ourselves as embodied persons, in this paper I will start by describing the most basic way in which our embodied self is constituted and how we can experience it. At this level, our body will be described as a felt-feeling body and as the zero-point of orientation of all our sensations and perceptions. Then, I will show how our body can be constituted for us also as an instrument for action, leading to the experience of what Husserl called "I-can" (Husserl 1952, 159-160). I will argue that, even though in this latter form of body awareness we can experience some traits of our own personality, a further dimension of our embodied life allows us to have a more defined experience of the specific embodied persons we are. As already mentioned, I will present this dimension as the "expressive" one. I will describe what "person" specifically means in my framework and, on this basis, I will show how the expressive dimension of our body – understood as the *stylistic mark* of our embodied life – can account for my experience of myself not just as an embodied *self*, but as the embodied *person* I am.

2. Bodily Self-Awareness and the Zero-Point of Orientation[3]

As is widely known, one of the crucial aspects that many phenomenologists have underlined (Husserl 1952, Merleau-Ponty 1945, Scheler 1916, Stein 1917) is that our body is not merely an object for us. Indeed, primarily, our experience of our own body is not comparable to the one we have of other objects, nor to the way sciences such as anatomy, biology or physiology can inspect our body. These latter attitudes deal with our body as a thing – that is as a mere *physical* body (*Körper*). Treating the body as an object in this way means also inspecting it primarily by means of outer perception and examination, as it is usually done with all other spatio-temporal things. However, a closer examination of my experience of my body shows that such an experience cannot be completely grasped by outer perception and that the outer perception of my body differs significantly from that of other objects. Stein (1917), for instance, notes that, if it were given solely in acts of outer perception, our own body would appear as the strangest object. It would be a material thing whose appearances would

[3] I dealt with the issues presented in this paragraph also in Forlè (2013).

exhibit weird gaps. It would constantly withhold some of its parts, such as its back, showing us possible courses of perception to make such hidden profiles present, but then hiding them inevitably to us. Moreover, other objects of outer perception can be given to me in a variety of different appearances; they can be also approached or withdrawn, so that, in the latter case, they may vanish from my sight. My own body, on the contrary, can be given to me in a narrower set of appearances and, more interestingly, if we keep our eyes open, it can never completely vanish from our sight: it is always there, with a tangible nearness that no other object has (Stein 1917, 38-39).

This last aspect introduces a crucial feature of my experience of my body: as Stein herself continues, also if we shut our eyes and stretch out our arms so that no limb can touch any other, we cannot really get rid of our body (Stein 1917, 39). My body is always there, it belongs to me and I discover that I can feel it *proprioceptively*, even when I have no outer perception of it. I have a sense of my body as my own living body (*Leib*), which I cannot have of any other object or foreign body. In this sense, I have a specific first-person perspective on my own body.

Such an experience allows me to perceive my body not actually as something that *I have*, but as something that *I am* (Zahavi 2002, 19). Indeed, I can not only feel my body as belonging to me, but I can also have sensations through my body (Husserl 1952, 151-169): such sensations can become *my own* sensations – so that I can experience that *I* am having such sensations - exactly because my living body, through which they are acquired, is experienced as what *I* am (at least partly). This is already a reason why we can tell that, by means of the experience of the felt-feeling body, we can experience ourselves as *embodied selves*. Interestingly, moreover, a phenomenologist such as Scheler underlines that I live my body as the unifying dimension of my bodily experiences not because the experience of my body results as the dimension that all my bodily experiences have in common. On the contrary, experiencing my living body as a unified whole is the condition of possibility for all my sensations and perceptions to be perceived as linked together by being *mine* (Scheler 1916, 781-783).

Importantly, our proprioceptive body-awareness is not usually a reflective one, but it is more a tacit sense of our body, which accompanies our sensations, perceptions, feelings and actions. As Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 137) notice, for instance, we have a tacit sense of our posture and state (e.g. whether we are sitting or standing, whether our muscles are relaxed or contracted, etc.) as well

also of the space we are in (e.g. whether it is overcrowded or not). Such a proprioceptive awareness of our body, moreover, is not a kind of object-consciousness. If it were so, in fact, it would be a perspectival awareness of the body that would need a perspectival point of view from which such an awareness originates. On the contrary, I am – as an embodied subject – the zero point of orientation in relation to which every object of perception is given. If my body were given to me as any other object in perception, a second embodied subject would be needed as the perspectival point of view of such a perception of the body, leading in this way to an infinite regress (Gallagher 2005, 137). On the contrary, our living body is given to us pre-reflectively and un-thematically, not as an object of perception but rather as the subject we are.

This last point allows us to highlight another specific feature of our living body. As embodied subjects, we are the perspectival point of view to which all our sensations and perceptions are oriented. In Husserlian terms, our living body is the bearer of the *zero point of orientation* of our sensations and perceptions (Husserl 1952, 165). Indeed, in perception, objects are never given in their totality, but always through a certain *profile* (Husserl 1952, 165-167). Every perspectival appearance, Husserl points out, presupposes not only something that appears, but also something that it appears *for*; the latter has to be the point from which that particular perspective is originated or, in Husserlian words, the point of view that motivates – that is, that gives reasons for – the appearance of that certain profile of the object instead of another. Husserl recognizes that the bearer of this privileged point of view is, precisely, our body.

Indeed, everything in the world has a particular orientation in relation to our body and the way we can experience the place of things in the surrounding space reveals this relationship. I can perceive something as near or far *from me*, this book as being on *my right* and this cup of coffee on *my left*, that door as being in *front of me* and the piano *behind me*. Things can be changed in orientation (e.g. my book can be moved behind me, my piano on my left) but they will continue to be oriented in relation *to me*, that is, more specifically, to the living-body-occupying-a-position-in-space that I (partly) am.

It is crucial to underline here that, in order for me to experience the objects I perceive as oriented towards me, I do not just need to *have* a body that acts as a zero point of orientation. I also need to *experience* my body as such. I need to be able to experience my body, its position and its relation to the surrounding world. Indeed, in order to perceive the book on my right, I need to experience

the book but also *myself* – at least pre-reflectively – as an embodied being in a specific spatial relation to my book.

This description of the structure of outer perception highlights how we experience our own living body not just as the felt *locus* of bodily sensations but also as the point of reference and the subject of perception. In perception, we experience ourselves not as disincarnate minds but specifically as embodied selves occupying a region of space and being in spatio-temporal relations with other objects. This aspect appears even more clearly if we look at the fact that, in perception, we also constitute ourselves not as static points of view, but specifically as *embodied subjects capable of movement*. Indeed, I can perceptually recognize, for instance, the case in which an object is showing me different profiles because it is moving this way or that in relation to me, from the case in which it is showing the same profiles because *I* am moving in a certain way around it. This is possible also because I have a *sense of movement* (i.e. in Husserlian terms, *kinaesthetic sensations*) that lets me experience whether I am still in front of the object or whether I am turning around it (Husserl 1973, 147-149). Thanks (at least partly) to kinaesthetic sensations, I can also recognize the *same* object in the *manifold* of its appearances, while I am moving around it. Indeed, I can see the profiles of the object as different manifestations of the *same* object because I know that the appearance of different profiles is motivated by my movement, not by the appearance of various different objects (Husserl 1973, 131-173). These examples clearly show how, through perception, we can specifically experience ourselves as *embodied selves in movement*.

The characterization provided so far makes it clear that the experience of ourselves as embodied selves is primordial: having a unitary sense of one's own living body, for instance, is the condition of possibility for the basic experience of all our sensations as *ours*. Moreover, experiencing oneself as embodied and as occupying a specific portion of space in relation to other things is the condition of possibility of one of our primordial acts, that is perception.

However, can the embodied self we have just described account for the experience of ourselves as the specific embodied *persons* we are? It seems it cannot. Being aware of my bodily states and experiencing my living body as the zero point of orientation of all my bodily experiences does not seem to provide me with an experience of the specific person I am, of my beliefs and decisions, of the values I believe in, of my own personality. It seems to me that I am much more than an embodied unifying centre of sensations, feelings and perceptions.

In what follows, I will specify what I mean in my account by "experiencing oneself as the person he/she is". However, even the sketchy hints I have mentioned here seem to show that, although constituting the necessary and primordial basis of experiencing oneself, the experience of the living body described here does not seem to be able to account for many crucial aspects of the person one is.

3. "I-do" and "I-can": the Body as an Instrument for Action

One of the distinctive features of our own living body is the fact that the latter can be experienced as "an *organ of the will*, the *one and only Object* which, for the will of my pure Ego, is *moveable immediately and spontaneously*" (Husserl 1952, 159). Husserl notices that my living body can be experienced by me not just as capable of movements but specifically as capable of *free and spontaneous* movements, as well as of purposeful actions. In fact, unlike other objects, which can only be moved, my living body is capable of active and voluntary movements and actions, not just of passive ones. When I move freely, I experience my movements not as something that *happens* to me, but as something that *I do.* Thanks to this ability, the living body is experienced as the "organ of the will", that is, as an instrument for the subject to act freely in the world. This experience leads the subject to live him/herself as an "I do" and an "I can" (Husserl 1952, 159): the embodied subject experiences that he/she moves and acts freely and also experiences what he/she is able to do in the world through his/her living body. This experience is not based on a scientific knowledge about one's own body and its physiological or physical potentialities. On the contrary, it is a pre-reflective and primordial experience of the living body that is structured through lived movements and actions themselves (Husserl 1952, 272-273).

In the contemporary debate, such an experience is also known as *sense of agency* (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 158-162). The latter is usually defined as the experience that I am the author of the acts that I accomplish. This is not something that we usually focus on reflectively: rather, as in the case of our proprioceptive body-awareness, most of the time our sense of agency is tacit and pre-reflective. Indeed, in accomplishing our acts, we are directed generally

towards the world and towards our aims: our sense of agency accompanies our free and voluntary acts remaining in the background of our attentional focus.[4]

Obviously, however, the fact that I have a sense of agency and that I can experience my living body as the instrument of my "I do" and my "I can" does not mean that I live this experience in all my movements and actions. Sometimes, my body can be lived as partly similar to other objects in the world, which are always *passively* moved and not capable of free and spontaneous movements. Indeed, I can live the experience of being passively moved, as in the case in which, for instance, someone drags me on a chair in the room. In this case, I experience my body as being passively moved: I am not the author of my movements, even though I can experience those movements as movements of my body, as movements that *are happening* to me. The sense of agency is absent in cases such as this, even though the *sense of ownership* is preserved: what is preserved, namely, is the experience that, even though they are not originated by me, such movements still pertain to my body.

It is also worth noticing that, since I can live my living body as the instrument of my "I do" and of my "I can", the world itself – as the correlate of my free movements and actions – acquires a variety of practical meanings. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty (1945, 142) for instance maintains that motility is already a source that provides meanings to the world, so that "consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that', but of 'I can'" (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 137).[5]

The idea is that the body, as capable of different movements and actions in the world, helps to re-define the world as a set of *manipulanda* – that is, a set of things that can, or even have to, be manipulated. In this sense, objects appear as *poles of actions* for the engaged embodied subject (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 105-106).

According to Merleau-Ponty, such practical meanings are the objective correlates of a *motor* intentionality that allows the subject to practically and pre-reflectively know *how* to work with them. This kind of knowledge is profoundly

[4] This does not mean, of course, that we cannot also focus attentively on our being the authors of our actions and being explicitly conscious of it. This is what happens in cases of *attribution* of agency, in which the subject is reflectively focused and aware and she/he can tell that she/he is the author of the action (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 160-161).

[5] This does not mean, of course, that Merleau-Ponty's notion of "I can" is the same as Husserl's one. My aim here is merely to highlight how the contribution of Merleau-Ponty is also crucial for the phenomenological definition of the practical and embodied dimension of subjectivity.

different from that derived from a *representative* form of intentionality, which instead allows the subject to know *that* things are such and such and *that* they can be manipulated in one way or another. In other terms, the body and the motor experiences it allows, give the subject a practical knowledge of the world that is highly different and often separable from the representative knowledge he/she can have about it. For example, as Merleau-Ponty says, it is possible to know how to type on a keyboard without being able to say where the letters that make the words are on the keyboard itself (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 144). Knowing how to type is not knowing abstractly the place of each letter among the keys, but it is "knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when body effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort" (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 144).

This is knowledge for an embodied subject, not for a detached subject of representations. Learning to type, therefore, means acquiring a habit that surely implies the grasping of meanings, but specifically the *motor* grasping of *motor* meanings (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 143). In Merleau-Ponty's own words,

> Our bodily experience of movement [...] provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a 'praktognosia', which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function' (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 140-141).

The experience of the living body as an instrument for action is also shaped by the external technical (and technological) tools that one can learn to use. The blind man's cane, for instance, ceases to be an object for its user: on the contrary, it starts to be lived as a part of the blind man's living body itself (Merleau Ponty 1945, 143). Indeed, manipulating the cane, the blind man does not perceive the stick for itself, but, *through* it, he perceives the objects and the space around him. The point of the cane becomes an "area of sensitivity" (Merleau Ponty 1945, 143) through which the world is perceived: the cane extends the area of touch, providing a parallel to sight. In this kind of experience, the stick is not reflectively focused on as an object, but rather it is tacitly and pre-reflectively present as the living body itself. Moreover, when a tool starts to be experienced as a part of the living body, space too starts to be lived in relation to the new potentialities (or obstacles) the tool gives. Indeed, as some experimental studies have also shown, the way our brain maps peri-personal space as opposed to extra-personal space is shaped by the instruments we can use. Being able to use a cane to touch far regions of space leads our brain to re-map such regions not

as "far" but as "near" (Berti and Frassinetti 2000, Iriki et al. 1996). Furthermore, this re-definition of space through instruments seems to be pre-reflective too. As Merleau-Ponty notices, in fact, if I am in the habit of driving a car, I do not need to calculate and compare the width of the car to that of the opening I need to pass through. On the contrary, I can immediately *see* if the opening is large enough to let my car enter it (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 143).

The experience of myself as a subject who acts in the world and is capable of certain movements and actions contributes to the experience of myself as an *embodied self.* This kind of experience is founded on the experience of my living body as the center of all my sensations and perceptions but is not reducible to it: indeed, the former is not just the experience of my body as the bearer of my bodily experiences but also as the subject of my spontaneous and free movements.

It should also be acknowledged that the experience of my "I cans" provides me with a more defined experience of myself. This is so, obviously, because the set of "I cans" that I experience are not those that anyone can live. Indeed, whereas some of my action potentialities are very basic and similar to those of many other human beings (e.g. stretching arms and legs, walking, grasping objects), several other potentialities are much more distinctive of my personal skills and abilities (e.g. skiing, playing the piano, climbing mountains). However, more interestingly, the latter set of bodily potentialities also provides me with a more defined experience of myself because it can tell me something about my habits, my specific abilities and, likely, about my preferences and my lifestyle. Experiencing myself as capable of playing the piano instead of playing volleyball lets me experience some aspects of my personality and my own way of life. In this way, I experience *myself* as more than just *any* embodied self. Something similar also happens in the case of others. As Husserl specifies, for instance, at least in some actions of the other I can get an idea of what kind of person the other is. If I see a man grasping a glass of water, I can understand that he is doing so because he is thirsty and wants to drink. This action does not tell me anything about the personal traits of that man. But if I see that, before drinking, he suddenly lowers the glass since he has noticed a poor thirsty and hungry child in front of him, this action *can* tell me something about the personality of that man (Husserl 1952, 282). In a similar way, the experience of what I do and what I can do tells me something about who I am, and about my personality. This also binds somehow the free eidetic variation of my "I cans". Husserl notices, for instance, that on the one hand I can imagine that I could kill a man, since for instance I am able to

make those specific movements that constitute the action of killing a man. However, on the other hand, I cannot really imagine that *I* could kill a man, since I am not that kind of *person*. I have, for instance, certain values that prevent me from acting in that way. In this sense, the type of person I am prevents me from killing a man and, in this case, defines one of my "I cannot" (Husserl 1952, 277-278).

These insights allow us to argue that in my actions and action potentialities I already experience some of my personal traits. In this way, I start experiencing myself as an embodied *person*, rather than just an embodied self. My thesis, however, is that there is a further layer of the embodied experience of myself that allows me to have a more complete and defined experience of my personality and, therefore, of me as a specific embodied person. As mentioned in the introduction, this is the dimension of my *embodied expressive life*.

4. The Embodied Expressive Life: Experiencing Myself as an Embodied Person

One crucial aspect of our embodied nature is the ability we have of *expressing* ourselves through our body. By means of our body, we can express our emotions and feelings, as well as our attitudes and, as I will argue for in what follows, some of our personality traits.[6]

First, our bodily expressions are the way in which many of our affective states 'unload' themselves (Stein 1917, 48-49): joy can be unloaded in an exulting behavior and a smiling face, shame in blushing and lowered eyes, fear or terror in staring eyes, clenched fists and a trembling body, and so on. Some bodily expressions seem to be so structurally and functionally significant for the affective states they express that the latter can be significantly altered if the former are not in place (Krueger and Overgaard 2012, 250-254). Let us think,

[6] As I will show, such *personality* traits cannot be conveyed just because of the ability that we, as lived bodies, have of expressing emotions and feelings – indeed, it can be argued that higher mammals are also capable of manifesting complex emotions, even though we generally do not refer to them as persons. Rather, I will argue that those personality traits are conveyed thanks to the ability that our lived body has of expressing a specific *style of behaving*, meant as a unifying quality of one's bodily comportment, which appears as connecting in a motivated and coherent way the different expressions and the various actions of a person. I would like to thank an anonymous referee whose comments gave me the opportunity to make this point more explicit.

for instance, of the way an affective state of frustration can develop and change depending on whether it unloads in a liberating bodily comportment or not.[7]

Such a connection between affective states and their bodily expressions has led some authors to conceive the latter not just as something external to the former, as if affective states were just a kind of internal mental state that can also *cause* something else, i.e. behavioral expressions. On the contrary, in an embodied cognition framework, bodily expressions are argued to be actual *constitutive parts* of the same affective states they express (Krueger 2018, Overgaard 2012, Forlè 2019).

However, it is worth underlining that our living body does not simply express emotions and feelings, but also our specific and personal way of living them. Through my living body, I am able to express not just a feeling of shame, for instance, but the specific way in which *I* express shame. In my expression of shame, a personal *stylistic mark* can emerge: as the embodied person I am, in fact, I have a specific way of expressing this feeling and my bodily behavior seems to be able to convey that specific trait. Several cases in our everyday life show that this is the case, as in those situations in which, in the acts, movements and expressions of the other, we are able to grasp not an impersonal and unspecified way of acting, but the specific expressive style of that person. Moreover, a person can be recognized as the *same* in different situations thanks also to such a general style of behavior that pervades his/her actions as a unifying trait. In this respect, for instance, Cusinato (2018) identifies three different levels of constitution of one's own way of expressivity. The most basic one is the impersonal level of expressions as a *minimal common vocabulary*, which seems to be shared by all human beings, independently of the culture or society they live in. The expressions of basic emotions identified by Ekman (1999), for instance, can account for this basic level: emotions such as fear, disgust or joy seem to be universally conveyed by specific facial expressions, which constitute the basic general schemes on which each culture or society shapes its own forms of expressivity. The second level is actually the one defined by societies and cultures: each of them has its specific forms of expressivity of emotions and feelings – so that, for instance, the way a Japanese smiles to express happiness is different from the way a German does it, even though there are some basic traits that the two have in common. Stemming from the social standards of expressivity of this second level, each individual constitutes his/her own personal way of

[7] On a similar point, see Scheler (1923, 251).

expressing his/her affective states. At this level, the personal stylistic mark of each one emerges, so that, even between two homozygous siblings who have grown up in the same family, we can recognize two different personal styles of expression (Cusinato 2018, 126-128).

In this theoretical framework, when talking about the expressive dimension of one's own living body, I do not mean just one's ability to express feelings and emotions, but also the ability to express them in a way that allows an individual *personality* to emerge. One's personal expressive style, therefore, is that which allows, not just some affective states to be expressed but, through them, more general attitudes and personal traits of the individual to be conveyed.

Actions themselves are not simply accomplished or not, but they can be performed in a more *calm* or *anxious* way, in a more *friendly* or *hostile*, *gentle* or *harsh* manner. By means of these features, we can grasp some traits of the personality of an individual. Moreover, by the specific way in which each individual *enacts* such expressive traits and by the way in which the latter are structured *gestaltically* in the behavioral style of each one, we can even grasp the specific expressive mark of that person as opposed to, or as different from, that of another. I can recognize my friend Sarah in her personal style of behaviour, not just on the basis of *what* she does, but also based on *how* she does what she does – that is, based both on the expressive traits of her actions and on the personal and individualized way in which she enacts those expressive traits. The expressive dimension of one's body (the *how* of his/her acting) connotes in a specific way what he/she does (the *what* of his/her acting) and contributes to the emergence of more fine-grained and individualized traits of personality. Indeed, even though, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, our actions and action potentialities already display some aspects of the persons we are, the specific (expressive) way in which we perform these actions characterizes them better and allows the emergence, therefore, of a more defined personal style. Enlarging Husserl's previous example, seeing a man who suddenly lowers the glass of water he was about to drink in order to give it to a poor thirsty and hungry child he has just noticed in front of him can give us some hints about that man's personality. However, seeing whether he is doing that with hesitancy, with an attention-seeking behavior, or with compassion can let us grasp even more about him. Furthermore, if I happen to notice a particular stylistic trait in the expressive way in which that man accomplishes that action, I may recognize not just a man with such and such personality traits, but specifically my friend Paul, as different from my colleague John or my brother Al.

On this background, my thesis is that experiencing such an expressive dimension of my own living body is also the most suitable way of experiencing *myself* as the *embodied person I am*. Indeed, as we said, first, expressivity is the way in which several of our personality traits can emerge; second, specific expressive traits define better those personality aspects that are already conveyed by my actions. Therefore, the expressive living body seems to be the dimension of our embodied nature in which the specificity of ourselves as ourselves – and as different from any other – can emerge.

This is crucial not just for us to recognize other embodied beings as different individualized embodied *persons*, but also for us to recognize *ourselves* as the embodied persons we are. Experiencing proprioceptively the expressive traits of my living body, I can structure my own personal identity and I can recognize – or sometimes even not recognize – myself as a person in the way I express myself. I can recognize who I am, for instance, in the gentle and kind way in which I treat another, or in that particular clumsy behavior I have in situations I am not used to. Likewise, I may not recognize myself in that unpleasant attitude I once took towards a friend, or in that irritable behavior at home.

Obviously, this does not mean that the person I am is completely disclosed in my expressive behavior, nor that I am so completely transparent to myself that the way I experience my personality traits is epistemologically more reliable than the way in which others can perceive me. On the contrary, I can learn a lot about myself and my expressive living body from what others tell me about my behavior. In this sense, I can always learn something new about myself. Rather, the idea I want to defend is that, among the different layers of the experience of our living body, the expressive one is that in which we can best experience ourselves as the embodied specific persons we are. This is so, even though not every aspect of our personality is conveyed – for ourselves and for others – through bodily expressivity.

Importantly moreover, as we already mentioned, in my framework the expressive dimension of the living body is able to convey specifically the *stylistic mark* of our personal embodied life. Indeed, it is not just the case that through the living body we can express something about what our attitudes are in one or another situation. More interestingly, it is also the case that through the living body we can convey our specific *style* too. The idea is that a personal style of expression and behaviour emerges when a *coherent* and *reasonable* sequence of actions and expressions emerges. A personal style is perceived

(proprioceptively or by means of outer perception) when a sort of *unifying quality of behaving* is perceived as connecting in a motivated and coherent way the different expressions and the various actions of a person. The personal style of each person, therefore, appears to be something that emerges in time through the unfolding of the expressive behavior itself. Rather than being something *prior* to actions and expressions, the personal behavioral style is constituted, on the contrary, as an emergent quality of actions and expressions themselves.

Now, my thesis is that this stylistic mark, which emerges in the expressive dimension of the living body, is what specifically allows an individual to experience him/herself as the person he/she is. This could be so because, in my account, a person is actually defined as the specific "style of his/her experiences" (Guccinelli 2013, XCV) or, in other terms, as a motivated connection of *acts* that lets an individuality emerge (Scheler 1916, De Monticelli 2009). Let us clarify this point.

Against a phenomenological background, I maintain that a person is not just endowed with some psychological *functions*, but rather that he/she can exercise such functions in his/her *acts*. For instance, if "seeing" is a function, "looking at something" is an act. Indeed, as De Monticelli (2009) for instance specifies, in looking at something I exercise an ability of mine (i.e. seeing) to focus my attention on something in my visual field. Something strikes me, it somehow "requires" my attention and I look at it. This basic kind of act already requires a *subject* who performs them: "looking at" is not something that passively happens to me, but something *I* do and that also shows what kind of visual things strike me and draw my attention. Indeed, it is likely, for instance, that, being confronted with the same visual things, you and I will be struck by different details and we will look at the same visual scene in different ways, focusing on different aspects. Even if we are endowed (arguably) with the same psychological function (e.g. sight), it is likely that we will focus our attention variously and we will perceive different aspects of the same scene. In this sense, in our act of *looking at,* a personal trait is already present and is able to emerge (De Monticelli 2009, 218).

Similarly, our emotions and feelings are the affective acts in which we respond to those valences of the world that strike us: I may be terribly *scared* by a snake, you may be *amused* by the way it moves on the ground, our friend Paul can look at it with a *deep scientific interest*. We are not just reacting impersonally to something: rather, each of us responds differently to it, and our way of responding is already distinctive of each of us, of our preferences, our

interests, our evaluations. This does not necessarily mean that there is no objective reality, but just that different aspects of the same things can strike each individual person differently. In our *responses* to the world, our personal style of being already starts to be constituted. In this sense, we can describe our acts exactly as those lived experiences of ours in which we *take a position* towards the different aspects of reality (Husserl 1952, Scheler 1916). As mentioned, these position-takings are not something that happen to us, but something that requires a subject to make them.

Obviously, my acts are not just basic ones such as perceptions and emotions. I can perform, for instance, another kind of act when I take a position on one of my acts – e.g. when I indulge in my fear of snakes or when I try to suppress it. In this way, I can modify the way in which a basic act such as an emotion *motivates* other acts of mine (De Monticelli 2009, 198-199): if I indulge my fear, the latter may motivate me to run away, whereas if I manage to suppress it, it will probably lose that motivational power.

Another crucial class of acts is obviously the one in which we take positions freely and consciously about how to act and what to do in the world. According to De Monticelli, these types of acts are actual *commitments* we make on our future behavior, both with respect to ourselves (*decisions*) and with respect to others (*promises*) (De Monticelli 2009, 200-201). These acts are those in which my ability to take a position about others, the world, and myself emerges in the clearest and highest way: I can *endorse* my compassion to poor people so that I can be motivated to help them and therefore *decide* (i.e. take a position on how to act) to make a donation.

Our everyday life is characterized by many different acts that are related to one another by *motivational* connections. As we have just seen in the examples provided above, indeed, some acts can motivate others, i.e. they can *give reasons* for other acts. In such a motivational connection of different kinds of acts, I constitute myself as that specific subject who is the author of these position-takings. The idea, however, is not that I am something existing *before and independently* from the acts I make. On the contrary, as Scheler specifies, I come to constitute myself as the individual I am exactly *in* the acts I make: in the positions I take, as well as in the motivations I endorse, my personal identity starts to be shaped as an individuality that will be always different from that of all others (Scheler 1916, 747-751). In fact, as De Monticelli stresses, my acts are not events that happen to me and *cause* other acts to happen, as if the latter were mere *effects*, which are always the same, *ceteris paribus*, if the causes are the

same. On the contrary, first, my acts are position-takings that already show my own personal responses to the world; second, several acts of mine are often motives for other acts to be made and *I* can choose to endorse them and be motivated by them or not. As the subject of these acts, *I* am involved in them as the *specific individual* I am: another individual, indeed, may not be motivated by his/her acts in the same way as I am (De Monticelli 2009, 219-220).

In this sense, therefore, my personal identity is shaped in my acts as an *individuality*. Moreover, as already mentioned, it is not something that pre-exists my acts, nor something that should be stable and invariant notwithstanding the variety of the acts I make. Rather, my personal identity is exactly what continuously emerges as shaped in my acts and as a kind of "qualitative orientation" (Scheler 1916, 751) of these acts. In this sense, we can say that a person is the "style of his/her experiences" (Guccinelli 2013, XCV): a person emerges in his/her own individual, qualitative, and stylistic way of orienting and directing his/her position-takings, i.e. his/her acts. A person emerges in the specific motivated connection of acts that he/she performs: being motivated in a precise and specific way depending on the position-takings made, such a connection of acts displays a *stylistic mark* that is specific for each different person. This stylistic mark is what unifies all the acts of a person, and which allows one to recognize that individual as the person he/she is.[8]

It should be easy to see now why, in this framework, the expressive dimension of the living body we have described can be said to be the most suitable for experiencing oneself as an embodied *person*.

As we previously said, our living body is not just able to express one affective state or another, but it is also able to convey some more specific traits about how *I* live and express that affective state. In this way, it is able to express some traits of my personality and to convey a specific *style* of behaviour that emerges as a unifying *qualitative feature* of my expressions and actions. Such a style emerges when a *coherent* and *reasonable* sequence of actions and expressions emerges, that is when the latter are perceived as *motivating* and *being motivated* by other actions and expressions in a very specific and individualized way.

This description of the style of behavior allows us to notice how it can be conceived as the bodily counterpart of the whole person understood as the style

[8] On Scheler's phenomenology and specifically on his notion of person, see Amori (2010), Cusinato (2007, Ed.), Zahavi (2010), Vendrell Ferran (2008).

of his/her experiences. A person emerges in the motivated connections of acts he/she performs. Since we are embodied persons (i.e. persons endowed with a living body), several acts of ours are performed through our living body and are often *expressed* by it. Therefore, the way our acts *motivate* each other is also expressed in our living body and becomes visible to others. The fact that I have endorsed my fear of snakes so that it motivates me to scream loudly and run away as fast as I can shows a motivational connection of acts that is expressed through my living body, my actions and my expressions. My living body, therefore, is able to express the personal style of motivational connections emerging from my acts. Obviously, not every act – nor motivated connection of acts – is bodily expressed: this is the reason why not every aspect of the persons we are is shown through the body. The person is not completely displayed in his/her living body: however, some personal stylistic traits are, since the living (expressive) body can show, partly, that personal stylistic mark that each person has. In this framework, therefore, the persons we are do not emerge just in complex narrative practices in which we construct and understand our own stories about ourselves, but also in a more pre-reflective way, through the specific embodied style of our acts and our experience of them.

In this sense, experiencing one's own living body in its expressive dimension is a crucial way for one to experience his/her own style of behavior. Moreover, by experiencing such a style, one can also partly experience the person he/she is, since, as I have argued, the behavioral style of each one can be considered as the bodily counterpart of that specific, individualized style of experiences that each person can be said to be.

This is the reason why, in conclusion, I claim that the dimension of our embodied life that is the most suitable for us to experience the embodied persons we are is the expressive one. Even though I can already experience some traits of my personality in my actions and action potentialities, it is only in the expressive dimension that this experience emerges in its highest and clearest way. Indeed, as we have seen, our living expressive body is able to convey – to us and to others – that specific stylistic mark that emerges not just in *what* we do, but also in *how* we do what we do. This specific unifying *qualitative feature* connotes our actions and is able to express the specific *style of experiences* that, as argued, constitutes the specific and individualized *persons* that we are.

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