

Derrick DE KERCKHOVE & Cristina MIRANDA DE ALMEIDA (dir.), *The Point of Being*, New Castle Upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, 349p.

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Translated by Derrick de Kerckhove

Published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in August 2014, under the editorship of Derrick de Kerckhove and Cristina Miranda de Almeida, *The Point of Being* invited nine researchers to highlight and to test certain aspects of the concept of Point of Being. Mentioned briefly in his book *The Skin of Culture: investigating the new electronic reality*, published by Somerville House, in 1995) (*Les nerfs de la culture : être humain à l'heure des machines à penser*, published by Les Presses de l'Université Laval, in 1998), the concept here is the subject of a substantial development and a deep transdisciplinary review. The concept of point of being is intended to offer an alternative to the concept of the point of view, which is not sufficient to account for the new reality in the digital age.

Indeed, the concept or metaphor of the "point of being" is a paradigm shift from the "point of view" that, since the Renaissance, has dominated the thinking process through writing, printing and representation, especially in the case of *trompe l'oeil*. For de Kerckhove the transition from a perception based on the point of view to another based on the point of being, at least in their overlapping or interpenetration, is directly connected to the impact of electricity, electronics and digital technology on sensitivity, but so far was not sufficiently researched. Through electronics, digital evolution not only enables to connect media, people and things, but also has the effect of reorganizing sensoriality in its entirety, in a way that the sense of touch plays a leading role. Overall, the review focuses on "how current digital processes of production, reproduction and distribution of information affect our perception of time, space, matter, senses and identity" (p.2). Basically, *The Point of Being* explores the following research question: "which are the psychophysiological dimensions of the ways people experience their presence in the world and the world's presence in them?" (p.1). As a prism, this book includes a considerable amount of interdisciplinary references that illuminate the psychophysiological dimensions of the point of being through topics as diverse as the interval, electricity, the sense of touch, proprioception, augmented tactility or homeopathic change.

In the first chapter, de Kerckhove makes a rigorous exercise of disciplinary definition of the concept 'the point of being', drawing from philosophy, mesology, therapy (Gestalt and touch theory), neurophysiology, cognitive science, and literature. Firstly, an inevitable question: is it really a point? Then, is it related to being as a noun, a verb or a present participle (in the case of English "being")? Relatively speaking, is it better regarded as a concept or metaphor? Finally, what about the subject / object cleavage? For de Kerckhove the point of being is at the same time a point, as for example when one feels an acute pain in the body or an emotion localized in the chest, and a milieu, to the extent that it operates in a field without border or boundary. It would occupy a "middle position between thought, feeling and space" (p. 12) that mesology, a study of milieu introduced by geographer Augustin Berque, can illuminate. As Michel Serres specifies in relation to the human body, "while it is bounded by the skin, it can be felt not as a limit but as a portal to experience the world" (p. 13). The result is a continual exchange of energy between the various media constituent of the environment. Therefore, because the point itself is not really identifiable, the expression "the point of being" takes on a metaphorical sense. With closed eyes, we better understand how tactility, proprioception and kinaesthesia play a more important role than when they are subordinated to the dominant vision. It is necessary to understand touch in its extension to the entire surface of the body: "tactile cognition is based not only on contact pressure but also on the interval of space between people and things"(p. 14). The power of touch lies, among others factors, in its confirmation that what we touch is not of the order of a hypothesis, but rather something other than oneself. The author uses the term sensory transduction to signify the circuit between self and non-self: "The body is the incarnation (and the interface) of being" (p. 17).

These defining features result in a significant re-evaluation of the dimensions of being and culture. By comparing more closely the point of being and the point of view based on the example of navigating a small sailing boat, the reader becomes aware of all the sensory-perceptual and cognitive implications of the point of being: "Displacing the point of perception from sight to the whole being makes it easier to see that the Point of Being corresponds to the sense we feel about ourselves, our sense of place, time and state"(pp. 22-23). In the wake of these findings, the author discusses the sub-themes that the point of view polarizes in an exclusive mode whereas the point of being refocuses them in a more inclusive way. The exclusive mode of vision is manifested by the separation of subject and object which causes the polarization of cognition and singling the brain as the seat of cognition and consciousness. The centrality of the point of view in creative, scientific and social processes also promotes a reductive and dependent attitude, which is reflected even in the institutionalization of religions. De Kerckhove shows that the point of being, not so the point of

view, favors the reunification of usually dichotomous components and a more inclusive way of thinking. Being perceived as an individual, ethical and existential posture, and extended into collective social responsibility, "the Point of Being will eventually have to complement the point of view in guiding individual choices"(p. 55). These foundations serve as pivot to questions regarding the interval and environment, historical and spiritual dimensions that will be developed in the chapters by guest researchers. These issues are presented more specifically in different fields such as architecture, philosophy and choreography, Korean notions of culture and body, or a connective heart (via an electromagnetic empathetic heart touch) and a spirituality inspired by quantum physics (open to uncertainty and complexity, chaos and fuzzy truths).

Chapters 2 to 9 are extensions of the central theme and test the concept of the point of being in different areas of research or innovative creation. Firstly, Rosane Araujo, Gaetano Mirabella and Isabelle Choinière focus their analysis on the notion of interval through architecture, philosophy and choreography. In Chapter 2, Rosane Araujo develops her thinking by proposing a neologism, *orbanism*, a contraction of urbanism and *orbis* (latin for *world*). There is no doubt for this researcher that the city is a concept dependent on personal experience. Therefore, her declination of personal, urban and global dimensions and their interpenetration in orbanism are important contributions to the conceptual construction of the point of being. For his part, Gaetano Mirabella, in Chapter 3, deepens the interval as a "space that feels". The body becomes a scene, the "body-scene"; sensation merges with thinking, thinking sensation; and space that feels corresponds to externity, the amalgam of the conscious space. His innovative philosophical contribution to the development of the point of being allows to refocus the role of the subject in relation to a "re-sensorialised" space, where matter is networked and connected to the Internet. In Chapter 4, devoted to research-creation methodology and the notions it convenes, Isabelle Choinière describes the interval related to the sensoriality deployed by the collective sound body. She proposes to consider the interval as an interface between body movement and its relationship with technology. To do this, she anchors her argument in her research-creation, entitled *Meat Paradox*, in which a reversal of the dichotomous analytical tradition takes shape favoring a posture of interconnection and integration. After being immersed in the interval of different environments, the reader is led into the sub-theme related to the environment.

Three other researchers: A. Jung Huh, Semi Ryu and Loretta Secchi, lean on the proprioceptive experience of the medium. The first two interpret aspects of Korean culture, while the latter presents her work in the Museo Tattile Anteros (Anteros Touch Museum) of Bologna. In Chapter 5,

A. Huh Jung emphasizes the concept of "between" from the perspective of the Korean traditional culture and its aesthetic manifestations (architecture, houses and gardens). This concept allows to examine the relationship between subject and object, between being and the world, and to go beyond dualistic fragmentary thought. Through practical cases, this proposal of integration takes shape in various aspects of daily life. For her part, in Chapter 6, Semi Ryu reports the meta-sensory experience and its new modalities shaped and suggested by interactive technology. Her review of the transition from virtual/ potential into the actual in the "active" space illuminates the conception of the point of being. She develops various emotional states and explores the intervals of the body in relation to another kind of tactile sensory modality that she calls "sensing without sensing". Finally, in Chapter 7, Loretta Secchi develops the properties of tactile and inner vision related to sensing a work of art. From complete or partial blindness conditions, interpretative methodologies of the Museo Tattile Anteros are the basis for the comparison between the cognitive perceptual experience generated by retinal vision and the haptic perceptual experience of the tactile inner vision. The reading of a work of art by means of its relief reproduction provides a useful educational tool that promotes the integration of sensory and intellectual experiences. Thus the Korean cultural and museum contributions related to sensory environments are followed by an exploration of both historical and spiritual dimensions.

For the last two chapters, Cristina Miranda de Almeida and Maria Luisa Malerba widen the subject. The first promotes a return to ontology centered on the heart which was replaced by a consciousness, cognition and perception centered in the head, while the second offers a reflection on the relationship between quantum theory, chaos theory and spirituality. In Chapter 8, the co-director of the book, Cristina Miranda de Almeida, develops substantial text that allows to locate the point of being at the level of the heart, the connective heart. Ultimately, the refocusing that she proposes allows us to consider the heart as an interface that allows to overcome opposite polar dualities in relation to matter, space-time and self. This contribution allows to better understand the contemporary sensibility that emerges from the intertwining of physical, digital and social processes. Finally in Chapter 9, Maria Luisa Malerba shares a reflection that revisits the source key of scientific changes that have modulated the transition towards the post-Galilean period. She inscribed the analysis of the interval at the intersection of religion, culture and technology with a focus on the chaos theory and quantum physics. In doing so, she suggests a possible framework for the emergence of a spirituality, a citizenship and a personal attitude inspired by the "quantum" (at the micro scale of matter and its sub-atomic particles) that, according to her, would correspond more to the present moment.

Given the innovative aspect of the concept of the point of being, the thoroughness evident in its rigorous definition and critical examination, the richness of its activation through philosophical reflection and in areas at the cutting edge of research and creation, this book is essential, not only for the academic university audience, notably in the study and practice of the arts, aesthetics, media arts or communication sciences, sociology, cultural anthropology and semiotics of the body, but also for readers interested in a general manner in the current paradigm shift in relation to perception. It offers a unique sum of reflections on the transition from a culture oriented by the point of view into a digital culture inflected by the point of being. Despite the complexity of scientific concepts convened and the apparent paradox to connect areas long considered unrelated, *The Point of Being* is one of the most accessible and useful works to tame the issue of sensory and cognitive experience and in full digital and connective transformation.

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