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## Intercorporeality in virtuality: the encounter with a phantom other\*

ARIELA BATTÁN HORENSTEIN<sup>1</sup>, MARÍA CLARA GARAVITO<sup>2</sup>, VERONICA COHEN<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Instituto de Humanidades-CONICET-Universidad Nacional de Córdoba

<sup>2</sup> Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

<sup>3</sup> Universidad Nacional de las Artes

arielabattan@gmail.com; mcgaravitog@unal.edu.co; verocohenwil@gmail.com

**Abstract.** We use phenomenology to reflect on the experience of being with others as mediated by screens through videoconferencing platforms, a phenomenon accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic and social isolation measures. We explore two directions to explain the intersubjective experience of a videoconference. One direction introduces a conceptual background based on previous contributions in phenomenology, while the other one is more speculative: we introduce the novel idea of a phantom other. First, we understand this phenomenon either as a correlate of image consciousness or as a paradoxical perception. Then, we introduce the phantom other using ideas offered in phenomenological descriptions in which the phantom limb appears as a quasi-presence. The phantom other is the same flesh and blood body with whom I co-constitute senses of the world. In a videoconference, the other appears as a whole body with which I coordinate, although she appears as a phantom other.

**Keywords:** intercorporeality, phantom limb, quasi-presence, lived body, virtuality.

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The social isolation measures that were imposed by governments across nearly the entire globe due to the COVID-19 pandemic caused a worldwide acceleration of digital literacy and a migration

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of a good part of our social and community life to virtual environments<sup>2</sup>. With unusual speed, elderly people who had never used a cell phone were making video calls, teachers at all levels were giving classes using online platforms, and some of us were taking virtual classes.

As phenomenologists living under such circumstances (i.e.: getting accustomed to using *Google Meet*, *Zoom*, *Skype*, and *WhatsApp* for communicating with family, friends, and students), countless questions and philosophical queries arose. In this context, we began to meet virtually, thereby combining philosophical reflection and lived experience. Taking into consideration the relevant aspects of this phenomenon (virtualization of the meeting space, technological mediation, geographical distance and temporal difference, reconfiguration of affectivity, among others), we searched for phenomenological tools that would allow us to describe and understand this unexpected phenomenon.

The phenomenal field broadened to encompass a series of new phenomena – or, more precisely, old phenomena in new contexts. These include otherness and empathy in virtuality (Ferencz-Flatz [2022]; Osler [2021]), extended cognition, agency through technological devices (Genusas [2022]), screen-mediated perception, mediated intentionality, etc. In short, we sought to apply Merleau-Ponty's thesis of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality to the encounter mediated by screens through videoconferencing platforms.

Our goal was to provide a phenomenological description of the experience of being with others as mediated by digital screens. We aimed to rela-

tivize apocalyptic forecasts which predicted that lack of affectivity would lead to a dehumanized present and a future of solipsistic egos secluded behind screens. As a result of this descriptive process, we arrived at the concept of the “phantom other”. In what follows, we propose to explore this concept by proceeding in two directions. Through a programmatic approach, we consider the relevance of conceptual and descriptive tools provided by phenomenological analysis to account for the phenomenon of the encounter with the other in a virtual situation. In so doing, initially we maintain that the intersubjective relationship mediated by screens seems a sort of a paradoxical perception that avoids any form of reductionism. In this sense, the givenness of my interlocutor in a video call cannot be explained using pairs of opposites such as actual-virtual, being-appearance, or presence-absence. Then, employing a more speculative approach, we focus on the definition of the phantom other as informed by phenomenological descriptions of the phantom limb (Merleau-Ponty [1945]; Morris [2004]; Umbelino [2019]).

#### 1. THE ENCOUNTER IN VIDEOCONFERENCING PLATFORMS: IMAGE CONSCIOUSNESS OR PARADOXICAL PERCEPTION?

Our point of departure is twofold: first, the principle that «all consciousness is consciousness of something», and second, Merleau-Ponty's claim that consciousness is embodied and intentionally projected towards the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, «appearances are always enveloped in me by a certain corporeal attitude» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 356). For this reason, we do not limit our inquiry to the domain of consciousness, but rather start from the fact of embodiment. For example, when someone takes a cube and turns it over in her hand, the object is perceptually given to her as a perspectival object, with physical characteristics, values, etc. because she is an embodied subject. However, when the interaction occurs with human beings in flesh and blood (*leibhaftig*),

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<sup>2</sup> By virtual environments, we refer to a milieu where people interact through technological devices of audiovisual communication and within the framework of the screen. The setting up of a virtual milieu or environment does not pre-exist the meetings *stricto sensu*. The milieu is motivated and generated by the interaction of individuals and their communicational exchange. The engagement with the virtual milieu does not imply a duplication or neutralization of reality. There is no conflict between virtuality and reality, but rather they coexist, and we dwell simultaneously in both milieus.

the subject identifies the other as a consciousness based on their gestures and linguistic expressions. Now, if the other is seen on a screen (a fact that changes the conditions of her appearance), what would be the intentional correlate of this consciousness in this case? In other words, what would be the object toward which consciousness is projected? Is it the computer, the screen, or the image of the other? The myriad of possible objects that are involved in this experience is only one dimension that our analysis can address. An adequate answer to these questions depends on analyzing all the aspects involved in the phenomenon.

We assume that during the interactions through digital platforms, we meet people rather than a computer or a screen. Nevertheless, the other does not appear in the same conditions and circumstances as in a face-to-face meeting.

This phenomenon can be usefully approached by using a phenomenological conceptual framework that is based on Husserl's reflections on image consciousness (see Álvarez Falcón, [2009]; Boyer, [2014]). Let us briefly recall Husserl's distinction between intuitive presentation (perception) and presentification (fantasy) as it appears in *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory* (1980). When facing a photograph or a painting, it is possible to phenomenologically distinguish three strata – or, as Husserl says, three objects: 1) the physical thing or the thing-image (*Bildding*), 2) the representative object or the object-image (*Bild-Objekt*) and 3) the represented object or subject-image (*Bild-Subjekt*) (Husserl [1980]: § 9, 64). Therefore, in the perception of a painting, for example, it is possible to distinguish between the picture, that is, the material object made of wood that can be hung on the wall (physical thing), the (pictorial) image or copy of that which is to be represented (the representative object), and the subject of the picture (the represented object).

The picture (conceived as a material object) and the image belong to different domains. When the image appears, the givenness of the material object is displaced; the object represented is given to consciousness as an image. Nonetheless, although they are in conflict, they are intimate-

ly related. In image consciousness, the distinction between the material object and the image becomes evident, whereas in perception, the intentional object coincides with the object that appears. Consequently, as Álvarez Falcón holds, «In the image we will find a strange unreal, fictitious, virtual support of something that does not appear, because rather than being present, it is represented, presentified» (Álvarez Falcón [2009]: 23-12, translation by the authors).

However, to compare an image with someone appearing on a screen is problematic: not only because there are remarkable differences between a drawing on a sheet of paper and a screen composed of pixels, but also because the other with whom I interact is more than an image on a screen. Looking at the image of my grandmother that appears on a photographic paper – a physical, immobile thing – is not the same experience that I have when I call her on *Zoom*. Something different occurs when I meet her through a videoconference platform. Through it, we share temporality, and I resonate and interact with her movements, facial gestures, and voice.

Even if the screen is the perceived object, the other – i.e., our interlocutor in audiovisual communication – is not reducible to an object-image in Husserlian terms. Strictly speaking, the other is not an image, but appears “in an image” by means of the screen. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that she is given through the pixels, and her appearance does not belong to the same domain as the screen or the image.

The Husserlian thematization of image consciousness can be enlightening, but it is an insufficient tool for addressing our problem. For this reason, we explore the possibility of considering this perception of the other on a screen as a paradoxical perception. The paradoxical perception: (i) oscillates between the visual capture of the object (the screen) and the perception of what appears on it (the interlocutor), (ii) is not reducible to the dichotomies between actual and virtual or presence and absence, and (iii) involves not only consciousnesses and objects but lived bodies, even if they are mediated by screens.

We rely on González-Guardiola's (2019) phenomenology of specular reflection to elucidate these three points. Relying on the Husserlian theory of image consciousness, González-Guardiola describes the ordinary action of looking into a mirror. In this action, both a body in a vertical position and a flat, perpendicularly placed mirror are involved: «the mirror replicates the movements of our body when the body is visually oriented towards it» (González-Guardiola [2019]: 256, translation by the authors). Thus, it is possible to distinguish four components of this experience: (i) the reflecting body that must comply with the conditions of verticality and perpendicularity, (ii) the image reflected on the mirror or reflected body, (iii) the mirror surface, that is, the material thing and (iv) the intentional consciousness that carries out the synthesis of these elements in the experience. González-Guardiola argues that we experience the synchronization of these heterogeneous aspects every morning when we groom ourselves.

For González-Guardiola, the Husserlian scheme of image consciousness does not explain the specular reflection because it is a discordant phenomenon that is difficult to conceive as an image. According to González-Guardiola, Husserl prefers to explain the specular reflection as an illusion-object (*Illusionäre-Objekt*) rather than as an image-object. The illusion-object is seen as the correlate of a perceptual act (instead of an act of image-consciousness). This is, undoubtedly, the most significant contribution to our work: «the specular reflection is constantly perceived as a reflection (illusion-object), which means that it is perceived as cancelled from the surrounding world of real bodies, but at the same time it is among them, it is relative to its background» (González-Guardiola [2019]: 260, translation by the authors).

Considering the specular reflection as an object that dwells among real objects despite its irreality seems more appropriate to characterize the corporeal presence of the other during a videoconference. The idea of specular reflection alludes to the non-present – that is, to what is

not corporeally present here and now, but which depends on the subject's corporeal presence. González-Guardiola adds:

What is intentionally aimed at by both objects (the image and the reflection) supposes absolutely different modalities of 'aiming' in both cases: the image will continue to exist as a spatiotemporal object that exists independently of the positionality and mobility of my body and of any other body, while the existence of the reflection depends on the positionality and mobility of the body (González-Guardiola [2019]: 261, translation by the authors).

To summarize, González-Guardiola's analysis offers us at least three significant elements to understand the phenomenon of intersubjectivity in virtual encounters: first, the comprehension of the particular object through which a specular reflection exists, i.e., as a perceptual non-real object; second, the overcoming of the presence-absence dichotomy; and third, the close link between specular reflection and the body.

Here we finally reach the central assumption that is necessary to understand what is given through the screen: as in specular reflection, the body plays a crucial role in videoconferencing. The orientation of participants' bodies in a video call as well as their gestures, movements and bodily intentionalities shape the entire experience.

The analysis of specular reflection shows that there is a close link between the body and the reflective object (the mirror). The subject's place and position determine the whole perceptual field: for instance, being in an upright position in front of the mirror. In addition, the perceptual field has a privileged visual direction (from the subject to the reflected image and the mirror that reflects her) because the body is a point of orientation. In the context of video calls, we can identify the same components interacting in a more complex manner. During a video call, we interact with another person (or persons) through a screen. Despite the fact that we can see our own image in the screen as in a mirror, the intersubjective experience, the engagement with another person, is more than a reflection or mirroring. However, we



also observe that the directions of attention – far from being reduced to the object seen within the limits of the screen – are multiple and manifold. Consequently, the perceptual directions are: from the subject to the other through the screen and vice versa, from the subject to the screen, from both participants looking at themselves while they look at each other, from the participants to the objects, landscapes or spatial horizons that stand in the background of the interlocutors, etc. The incorporation of a screen within an intersubjective experience increases the phenomenon's complexity. However, that is not only due to the technological device: rather, it is a consequence of the fact that we are, as Merleau-Ponty says in *Signs*, «an animal of perceptions and movements called body» (Merleau-Ponty: [1964]: 204). It is the body that shapes the world, and this implies that «[...] my experience opens onto things and transcends itself in them because it always accomplishes itself within the framework of a certain arrangement with regard to the world that is the definition of my body» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 317).

The arrangement of my body intentionally projected onto the screen contributes to the appearance of the other as a pole, as another “me” to whom I address myself and from whom I expect a response. Just as the action of grooming myself and the movement associated with it “vivifies” the reflected image (so to speak) while synchronizing it with the action of the real body, the movement of my body through meaningful gesticulation solicits the other, asks for a gesture from the other: not as imitation, but as creation –as the expression of an existence.

In the experience of being with others in a virtual situation, we recognize a different modality of attention and bodily intentionality that differs from our posture when engaged in the act of reading or writing in front of a screen. When we read or write, corporeal intentionality brings the object into existence through habits and as an extension of my being in the world. We can lose ourselves in reading or feel as if the ideas that we generate on the screen reside in our fingers. In both cases, however, the direction of attention irremediably

goes from the subject to the object: if we close our eyes or put our hands at rest, the interaction with the computer stops. Moreover, when we meet another, although we make use of the mouse or even the keyboard, these are hidden behind the expressive and communicative intention that takes place in the situation at hand. During the interaction with the other we watch and recognize her as the recipient of our voice, as an interlocutor of our ideas, as a correlate of our affectivity, as a threat to our intimacy, etc. In the intersubjective relationship mediated by screens, movements resemble the gestures of a musician. In this sense, the computer is more like a musical instrument than an object of technological use since it seems to elicit what Merleau-Ponty calls «gestures of consecration» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 147). These are the gestures that the musician performs in front of the instrument and which, far from any automatism, «[...] put forth affective vectors, they discover emotional sources, and they create an expressive space» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 147).

Although the gestures and movements carried out for another in front of a screen have the same anatomical or physiological constitution as those we carry out when writing or reading, they do not bounce off the illuminated surface of the computer, nor do they disappear into it; rather, they seem to extend beyond it to resonate with our own body. Gestures communicate, they express meanings and embody them – which is why video calls were a highly effective palliative during the pandemic (to the point that health professionals used them with patients in intensive care).

## 2. PHANTOM LIMB AND QUASI-PRESENCE

So far, we have referred to the specific characteristics of the intersubjective relationship in the virtual encounter. Through the screen, the other appears not as a simple image, but as an embodied subject, someone who interacts with me. However, this relationship requires further analysis since, although based on a “face-to-face” encounter, the body of the other is given in a peculiar way. For

this analysis, our premise is that intersubjectivity is intercorporeality; consequently, we must specify how the corporeal dimension of the other is given in the virtual encounter. We start with the notion of phantom limb as it is used by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, because we find the idea of a phantom body (or part of a body) to be illuminating for understanding intercorporeality in videoconferencing experiences<sup>3</sup>.

Merleau-Ponty turns to the phenomenon of phantom limb in his critique of the definition of the body as a collection of parts mechanically related to each other. His review of the principles of mechanistic physiology allows him to introduce the idea of a lived body. Instead of experiencing the body as a set of parts, the body is consciously given as a totality in which some sensitive areas are predominant or retained according to the tasks one performs and one's intentional projection towards a world that solicits them. Merleau-Ponty states that «my body is wherever it has something to do» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 260) – which is to say that the body is intentional, thrown into the world: it constitutes the world for itself, and in this it is itself constituted as a constitutive totality. Furthermore, the power both to attach instruments to oneself (with an existential significance through habit) and to mobilize oneself in situa-

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<sup>3</sup> The goal of this article is to conduct a review of the “phantom” in the phenomenon of quasi-presence, as analyzed by Merleau-Ponty. Notably, in light of the significant advancements in neuroscience over the last decades, a vast body of literature, particularly in the work of Vilayanur S. Ramachandran (1996, 1998), has emerged on this topic. Ramachandran's research focuses on the pain patients feel in their amputated limbs and the therapeutic discoveries he has made using a “mirror box”, which enables patients to “observe” their amputated arm. From a contemporary phenomenological perspective, this subject has been approached by several authors, such as Gallagher (2005), Breyer (2012), and Gallagher and Meltzoff (1996). In a previous work (see Battán-Horenstein [2016]), we have explored this approach to the phenomenology of the pain experienced in a phantom limb. However, in this article, we aim to address a distinct issue that is related to the phenomenology of the phantom limb: our perception of the other on the screen as a quasi-presence.

tions – whether they be actual, virtual – resides in this body that is projected towards its tasks:

The body is the vehicle of being in the world and, for a living being, having a body means being united with a definite milieu, merging with certain projects, and being perpetually engaged therein. (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 84).

So, what happens when a member of this organized totality is immobilized or amputated? Does the world mute its solicitation and things cease to be projects or tasks to be carried out for the subject? The answer to these questions leads to Merleau-Ponty's reflection on phantom limb – that is to say, on the limb that refuses to withdraw from the project, to be forgotten or to remain useless. Furthermore, this phenomenon confirms that the body is thrown into the world; or rather, that its existence depends on the solicitations of the world. For Merleau-Ponty, the appearance of a phantom limb makes sense in the field of sedimentations by which the world is given. Because the lived body of an amputee relied upon the amputated limb to project itself intentionally upon the world prior to losing it, it continues to include the amputated limb as a part of itself. Now, what does it mean, phenomenologically speaking, to say that the subject continues to count on that amputated limb? If, as Merleau-Ponty says, the amputated limb appears insofar as the world continues to solicit it, then a name must be found for this modality of presence of the limb that has already been amputated and which now appears as a phantom. What allows Merleau-Ponty to escape from an ontological commitment to the irreducible presence-absence dichotomy is the notion of *quasi-presence*. As Umbelino holds, the phenomenon of phantom limb shows:

the mistake of accepting that there is a difference in nature between “phantom” and “real” [...] and the error of presuming that, in that aporia, the “real” always has primacy over the “phantom”. In this sense, there is an increased relevance of the certainty that the phantom of the absent limb is both the presence (which is not present) of the lost limb, and

the immemorial presence in the body of an unbroken spatial and temporal continuity [...] which is the pre-personal body of habit (Umbelino [2019]: 87 et seq., translation by the authors).

Merleau-Ponty uses the notion of quasi-presence to characterize the type of experience in which we still expect to see a recently deceased friend coming through the door, or when we hear his or her voice. Just like the expectation of a dead friend, the phantom limb enters the field of quasi-presence. This means that, on the one hand, its presence shares the realm of the reality of what it is here and now – that is, of physical objects – while, on the other hand, it is no longer a physical object.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the phenomenon of phantom limb overcomes the dichotomy of the "presence of a representation" and the "absence of a limb". In his reflections, the idea of quasi-presence emerges to the extent that the amputated limb is present, but not in the way that other parts of the body are present. This type of presence occurs in the field of possibilities, which is to say that it stands in direct relation to the meanings of the world in which the body is still in possession of the arm.

What aspect of Merleau-Ponty's notion of quasi-presence helps us to understand what happens in front of a screen? Is it possible to make an analogy between missing our deceased friend or an amputated limb and the intercorporeal relation that occurs in a video conference? In what follows, we will use the notion of phantom limb as a point of reference in order to develop the notion of the "phantom other"; in turn, this will allow us to elucidate intercorporeal experiences mediated by video conferencing platforms.

### 3. THE PHANTOM OTHER

Even in videoconferencing platforms, the intersubjective encounter presupposes lived bodies (*Leib*). In other words, intersubjectivity is not an encounter of pure consciousnesses; rather, all bodies project meaning into the world, even in vir-

tual spaces. As already mentioned, and following Merleau-Ponty, we conceive intersubjectivity as intercorporeality: we experience meaning through the movements, actions, language, and facial gestures of expressive bodies. There is a peculiar and unique style of interacting with the world that is inherent in the perception of the other in flesh and blood (*leibhaftig*). It follows that intersubjective and intercorporeal communication are not based on the givenness of the other as an object, but rather on ways that the other copes with and relates to the world, as well as his or her opening to new and unexpected meaningful experiences. A communal world is the result of encounters among lived bodies; it is the effect of intentional projections and openings of meaning developed by embodied subjects.

Intentional projections and openings of meaning carried out by the lived body that are modulated by one's situation also occur in virtual encounters. The screen does not restrict the lived body and what bodily intentionality constitutes. That is why we are not only spectators of an image projected in front of us; we are in intercorporeal communication with others. Through the platform, intersubjective exchanges have the following characteristics: (i) when the image is perceived, we solicit a body with which it is possible to interact. That means that the other's image has the power to affect my own experiences of the world and he or she can be affected by me. (ii) On the screen, the other's visual and audible<sup>4</sup> appearance is relat-

<sup>4</sup> Sound is an important aspect in "framing" and "off-screen" aspects of virtuality, but it would require a peculiar analysis that exceeds the framework of this paper. In this context, sound is a complex phenomenon. At the same time, it is not possible to completely control off-camera sound, and audio can be cancelled by muting the microphone. By virtual environments, we refer to a milieu where people interact through technological devices of audiovisual communication and within the framework of the screen. The setting up of a virtual milieu or environment does not pre-exist the meetings *stricto sensu*. The milieu is motivated and generated by the interaction of individuals and their communicational exchange. The engagement with the virtual milieu does not imply a duplication or neutralization of reality. Vir-

ed to what is “framed” and what is “off-camera”. In other words, the visual and audible image evokes a whole situation in which the other in front of me is embedded: for instance, a gesture by the other can be related to another person who is invisible to me but is visible to the other<sup>5</sup>.

The other appearing on the screen invites us to attend to the multiple and varied possibilities of corporeal-being-in-the-world. Through virtual interaction, we encounter a situated other who we recognize by his or her peculiar way of dealing with the world – however she is not given in flesh and blood, but according to the mode of a “phantom other”<sup>6</sup>.

We define the phantom other as the phenomenon of the other being given in quasi-presence. In the same way that one’s own body is not experienced as a set of parts but as a unity of consciousness, the other’s body, when viewed through a screen, is not experienced as a visible face or hands, but as someone who expresses intentional projections and ways in which the world appears. Furthermore, in the encounter, we do not find ourselves as mere spectators of a way of presenting the world that is inherent in the expressivity and gesturality of the other’s body; rather, we find ourselves affected by such intentionalities. Here, quasi-presence is the result of the body’s capacity for intentional projection through the screen: the

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tuality does not dispute the field of meaning with reality, but rather they coexist, and we dwell simultaneously in both milieus.

<sup>5</sup> The situation does not necessarily evoke the body in front of me in the image, but a body in this specific situation: although I may never have interacted with some particular students I meet through *Zoom* in person, I have interacted with other students in a university classroom. With those bodies, I have constituted the spatiality and temporality, but also affectivity, of having the experience of teaching a course at a university. Those experiences have sedimented, constituting the horizon of meanings I count on, and allow me to give the name “class” to a particular videoconference.

<sup>6</sup> We have previously elaborated the notion of “phantom other” (see Battán-Horenstein, Garavito, Cohen [2021a] and [2021b]) to help us understand intersubjective encounters in virtuality.

appearance of the other, like that of the phantom limb, is solicited by the situation itself; the videoconference evokes the presence of the other body, a body with which I coordinate, resonate, and engage in experiences of co-constituting senses of the world (Zahavi [2001]). In a way, the other is given as an embodied subject – is in a “present body” – which implies that she is not experienced as absent. However, the presence experienced during virtual encounters is distinct from that of face-to-face interactions, and the analogy of the phantom limb is a useful way to comprehend that virtual experience. A patient recognizes that her phantom limb is not physically present in the same manner as her other limbs but is still perceptibly real; the phantom limb exists in the objective world, as Anabelle Dufrent (2015) has suggested. The phantom limb is ambiguous, as the individual acknowledges a sense of ownership in the body schema, but simultaneously lacks the same level of control over it as she does with her physical body. The limb somehow escapes control: it cannot be moved in the same way as other limbs, and it cannot be healed like a wound on an actual hand.

We observe a similar ambiguity in the encounter with others. While the other person is present, the level of interaction I experience is not equivalent to that of someone sitting beside me, whose expressions are entirely perceivable and located within the same physical space as my own body. Furthermore, I do not possess the same sense of ownership over her body as I do over my own corporeality. Despite these restrictions, being in front of a screen to interact with others introduces experiences of lived space, time, and body. Interaction in a virtual context determines the modality of givenness in which others appear as perceptions.

As we have pointed out, the other who we are interested in interacting with in the context of virtuality is not given as an image but is more of a paradoxical perception. Through intercorporeal affective resonance, the phantom other is what appears in what is moving in front of me. In other words, he or she is reborn as another who we



recognize and in whom an affective stream finds its correlate. But how is it possible for such affective resonance to take place in a virtual exchange? According to Fuchs, affective resonance is a consequence of «the way emotions disclose the affective qualities or affordances of a given situation» (Fuchs [2020]: 77) and consists of «proprioceptive and interoceptive feelings» that are aroused in the perception of other subjects and their emotional states. Through the notion of resonance, we confirm Merleau-Ponty's thesis of a primary and original intercorporeality.

However, we disagree with the way Fuchs understands virtual encounters: for him, resonance seems to require a complete bodily (*leibhaftig*) mediation because intercorporeal resonance would be the consequence of a (synchronous and simultaneous) interaction of subjects through their gestures and expressions. For Fuchs, we experience the rage of another through both the perception of facial gestures and our intercorporeal resonance. And this resonance, which is felt deep inside of us, is limited in online interaction because we cannot access the expressiveness of the whole alien body; in other words, the gesture of rage in the face is only a part of what is an embodied and situated expressiveness. Osler (2021) has questioned this proposal, pointing out that screen-mediated relationships can be as empathic as offline environments. Unlike Fuchs, she points out that empathy occurs in interaction with a lived body rather than a physical body, and the lived body is projected through the screen: «the assumption that empathy only occurs face-to-face rests on an unjustified restriction of expressivity to the physical body» (Osler [2021]: 4). For her, an encounter with the other may be technologically mediated but “still direct”.

We understand intercorporeality through the screen differently: while Osler and Fuchs think about the conditions of the possibility of online empathy, we are more interested in the phenomenon of intercorporeality as a coordination of intentionalities that project and constitute senses of the world. Thus, intercorporeality results in more than empathic experiences. We are inter-

ested in understanding affectivity as a modality of the intentionality of consciousness instead of as a place of understanding the other as a fellow human being – that is why we see bodies as expressions of intentional projections, and thus as ways that the world appears in other bodies.

We hold that intercorporeal affective resonance also arises in virtual contexts despite the impassable limits imposed by the screen. Unlike the case of the face-to-face encounter in which the intersubjective situation is the effect or result of affective resonance, affective resonance in the virtual encounter is a condition of the phantom other. In other words, because there is affective resonance – because there is a bond developed in the habituality of previous encounters – the other can be given in his or her quasi-presence, that is, a presence which is neither properly real (in flesh and blood) nor a mere image, but rather a phantom.

Like Merleau-Ponty's notion of phantom limb, the phantom other is sustained by the habitual body. The phantom other is not a second nature, nor is it an impostor that vicariously replaces a lived body as an avatar. The phantom other is not the product of an intellectual operation, nor is it reducible to an image consciousness: the other appearing on the screen enjoys all his or her subjectivity and his or her bodily constitution despite being given to us without depth, just as a phantom limb is a quasi-presence that contributes to the practical interface that constitutes the consciousness of our own body.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we went in two directions to explain the intersubjective experience of a videoconference. One direction introduced a conceptual background based on previous contributions in phenomenology, while the other one was more speculative: we introduced the novel idea of a phantom other. First, we asked whether this phenomenon should be understood either as a correlate of image consciousness or as a para-

doxical perception. We recognized that a virtual encounter cannot be understood as a correlate of image-consciousness, since interaction through a video conference is not a static representation of the other as absent and imagined, but rather a dynamic phenomenon in which the other is experienced as present. Moreover, the other is not a paradoxical perception (such as, for example, the perception of a body's reflection in a mirror). In a video conference, there is no encounter of a self with its reflection, but of two subjectivities that relate intercorporeally. By attending to the case of specular reflection, we recognized that the appearance of the other through videoconferencing platforms cannot be understood in terms of dualities like actual-virtual, being-appearance, and presence-absence.

The second direction introduced our own approach to what occurs in videoconferencing encounters. We defined the phantom other using ideas offered in phenomenological descriptions of phantom limb in which that limb appeared as a quasi-presence. The phantom other is the same flesh and blood body with whom we coordinate, resonate, and co-constitute senses of the world. A limb appearing as a quasi-presence means that the lived spatiality of one's own body cannot be reduced to a sum of organs but is the result of habitualities through which one gives meaning to the world. If, following Merleau-Ponty, the body is a being-in-the-world, then bodily experiences are linked to forms of appearance of the world. The phantom limb is an example of how the world solicits intentional projections of the body. Quasi-presence occurs when the world solicits a bodily configuration that includes a non-existent body part, such as when it solicits an amputated organ. The phantom other extends the region in which the world solicits those intentionalities: sometimes it solicits intercorporeality. In a videoconference, the other does not appear as having something missing, or as a set of parts, but as a whole body with which we coordinate. However, this does not mean that this other appears in complete presence: being limited by the image, she is configured as a phantom other.

We have questioned two approaches to intersubjectivity mediated by screens: Fuchs and Osler treat intercorporeality solely as the empathic encounter with an alter ego and that is why they miss an important feature of intercorporeality as co-constituted sense-making. In the end, for us, the phantom other shows that affectivity is the key to intercorporeality because it participates in a coordination of bodies through intentional projections towards the world.

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