**Habitual Identity and Transformative Experience in Merleau-Ponty**

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Once an activity becomes habitual, we can execute it with more certainty and less attention. Once we get used to a particular environment or accustomed to an object, we so to say incorporate them and rely on them in our daily routines. Habits introduce stability and feeling of certainty into our lives. They even become part of who we are, of our identity.[[1]](#footnote-1) The first part of my paper deals with the question: how far can our individual identity be described as a habitual one? When coining the term “habitual identity”, recent literature often takes recourse to Merleau-Ponty (T. Fuchs 2016, I. M. Young 1980, M. Wehrle 2021, K. Jacobson 2015 and 2009, Casey 1984). In my contribution, I will go back to Merleau-Ponty as well and claim that – as far as personal identity is concerned – habituality indeed does play an essential part, without nevertheless being all there is.

In the second part, I focus on the concept of habit in Merleau-Ponty. Habit is understood by Merleau-Ponty, broadly speaking, as an acquired capacity, both cognitive and motor capacity. As such, it is far from any automatism, routine-like behavior, or merely repetitive function. Habit is a capacity, which helps us to deal with everyday situations, such as to cross the street or handle small talks. Our habitual capacities are flexible, capable to adapt to different places or objects, for instance when I have to ride a different bicycle or car than the one, I am used to. Merleau-Ponty develops and maintains this view even in cases which seem to contradict it. This makes his study of pathological cases – of bodily loss (amputation) or personal loss (the absence or the death of someone close to us) – remarkable. Even though in these catastrophic scenarios habits may turn into rigid and useless routines, this only confirms, according to Merleau-Ponty, the essentially flexible character of habits. Our habitual capacities give us a reliable support, they guarantee the continuity and intelligibility of what we experience and the give us feeling of certainty in our behavior. Why should habitual identity be seen as a limited one, as a concept which leaves important areas of our existence unnoticed?

1. Each of us has a typical, recognizable “style,” as Merleau-Ponty calls it (Merleau-Ponty, 2008, 83-86; 2012, 342). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)