

Body Talk, Body Taunt – Corporeal Dialogue within a Community of Philosophical Inquiry

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ABSTRACT: This essay explores Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh as it applies within the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI), the pedagogical method developed by philosopher Matthew Lipman to foster young people's multidimensional thinking—critical, creative and caring—through collaborative dialogue. Using a phenomenological framework, the essay aims to extend Merleau-Ponty's conception of chiasmatic relations between self and other by appealing to the account of intersubjective dialogue presented in the work of phenomenologist and CPI scholar David Kennedy. The guiding question focuses on hostility expressed corporeally in dialogue: How might the phenomenological experience of individual inquirers within a CPI be affected by the hostile interventions of body language? The essay introduces the notion of body taunting as the combined “vocabulary” of flesh—gestural, postural, physiognomic, kinetic expression—with which inquirers both deliberately and inadvertently provoke, dismiss, intimidate or alienate one another as they attempt to co-construct meaning. Building on what Kennedy calls “the lived experience of preverbal dialogue” (Kennedy 2010, p. 45), the essay argues that body taunting poses a threat to the CPI's emerging intersubjectivity by changing the chiasmatic relations between inquirers, making boundaries between self and other seem more pronounced, notably in moments when disagreement is communicated nonverbally in antagonistic ways that betray or contradict voiced arguments.

Philosophizing with others on questions of deep existential significance can be a transformative experience on both intellectual and corporeal levels. Yet within the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI), the pedagogical method developed by educational philosopher Matthew Lipman as part of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) program, the focus tends to be on the power of conceptual exchanges rather than embodied thinking. To foster multidimensional thought—or equal parts critical, creative and caring thinking—a CPI engages its members in collaborative dialogue on the issues that matter to them most, emphasizing the development of strong mental habits and reasonableness. However, as CPI scholar and practitioner David Kennedy observes, this process is not solely intellectual: “Thought moves us,” he writes. “Even before we open our mouths we are making meaning together” (Kennedy 2010, p. 207/193). Co-inquirers in a CPI share the fulfillment and frustration of shared philosophical reflection not only through the content of their talk but also through their dialoguing bodies.

This essay will explore the embodied dimension of the CPI experience, particularly as it involves hostility expressed corporeally in dialogue. Using a phenomenological framework, I will aim to extend Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception of chiasmatic relations between self and other by appealing to the account of intersubjective dialogue presented in Kennedy's theoretical work. How might the phenomenological experience of individual inquirers within a CPI be affected by the hostile interventions of body language? I will introduce my notion of body taunting as the combined "vocabulary" of flesh—gestural, postural, physiognomic, kinetic expression—with which inquirers both deliberately and inadvertently provoke, dismiss, intimidate or alienate one another as they attempt to co-construct meaning. Building on what Kennedy calls "the lived experience of preverbal dialogue" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 45), I will argue that body taunting poses a threat to the CPI's emerging intersubjectivity by changing the chiasmatic relations between inquirers, making boundaries between self and other seem more pronounced, notably in moments when disagreement is communicated nonverbally in antagonistic ways that betray or contradict voiced arguments. Though not altogether undesirable, body taunting requires conceptual attention since it highlights a neglected dimension of the CPI experience—namely corporeal expression—that greatly affects its pedagogical effectiveness, notably its efforts toward multidimensional thinking and shared knowledge construction. I will begin by exploring the dialoguing body in a CPI from a phenomenological perspective, drawing on both Merleau-Ponty and Kennedy's interpretations; then propose the concept of body taunting as a threat to the self-other chiasm in a CPI, and finally emphasize the need for bodily self-correction that moves a CPI's inquirers from taunt to tact.¹

I. THE DIALOGING BODY—A CPI FROM PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A CPI designates a dialogical space where a group of people are joined by a philosophical question they find intriguing and worthy of conceptual exploration, and that they try to resolve or better understand through structured conversation with the help of a trained philosophical facilitator. Adapting the pragmatist ideas of Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey, Lipman envisioned the CPI method as a collaborative thinking practice with the potential to instil in its members a spirit of self-correction characterized by open-mindedness, epistemological modesty, acceptance of fallibility, comfort with uncertainty, resistance to bias, and mutual support—a multilayered metacognitive disposition aiming toward enhanced awareness of thought processes (Lipman 2003, p. 218). Yet although the work involved is intellectual in character, a CPI is also a powerful corporeal experience. Sitting in a circle, visible to one another and in close proximity, inquirers encounter each other's lived experiences and resulting philosophical positions through their dialoguing bodies—beyond the content of their talk, they connect with each other's tone of voice, facial expressions, gestural style, and overall bodily energy. This embodied thinking reflects a sensory, intercorporeal quality of the CPI method that would be lost or at least greatly compromised if the inquiry were attempted in a teleconference or online virtual space. And yet, the CPI scholarly literature focuses almost exclusively on the vocal outputs of this form of philosophical inquiry, with little regard for the role bodies play.²

In a strong CPI, however, the dialoguing body can take on a very specific, heightened state of attentiveness that greatly affects the ideas being voiced. When inquirers feel safe with one another, their bodies can quieten, allowing for a contemplative mood that is conscientiously at ease without being fully relaxed. Their corporeal role in the dialogue alternates between that of the speaking body and of the listening body, using the gestural signs already built into the CPI method to indicate when they want to talk and how to nominate the next interlocutor.³ In deference to the difficult intellectual task at hand, the dialoguing body in a CPI is careful not to distract others with unnecessary physical movement while also revealing excitement about conversational themes, quandaries and epiphanies through bodily motions—sitting upright, shifting weight, leaning forwards, nodding, gesticulating with hands and bouncing with feet, or a host of these actions in tandem. The combined pressure and delight of collective inquiry is felt in the dialoguing bodies trying hard to give one another the attention needed for quality mental exchanges, while their nonverbal movements politely ask—or at times impatiently demand—“but what do you mean exactly?” This intercorporeal experience highlights the affective and aesthetic components of the CPI method—the particular atmosphere that is formed when people attempt to co-construct meaning, experiencing moments of convergence while maintaining their distinct individuality.

Phenomenologically, this corporeal dimension of the CPI recalls Merleau-Ponty’s notion of chiasmatic relations between the self and others. In his posthumous work *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty uses the notion of flesh to capture the chiasmatic aspect of the self’s experience of the world and of other subjects—the constant intertwining or crisscrossing that occurs between sensing and being sensed, perceiving and being perceived.⁴ In his various writings, he notes how, “my body and the other person’s are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 215) and yet there is always a necessary *écart* (or gap) between them—the self and other cannot be conflated completely since “in order that there be communication, there must be a sharp distinction between the one who communicates and the one with whom he communicates” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 148).⁵ In his essay “The Child’s Relation with Others,” Merleau-Ponty argues that this chiasm is gradually understood in childhood, as humans evolve from a “me which is unaware of itself and lives as easily in others as it does in itself” to an awareness of the “objectification of one’s own body and the constitution of the other in his difference” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 149). This evolution is made possible in part through a grasping and emulation of the body movement of others—an intersubjective process Merleau-Ponty calls “postural impregnation,” borrowing from developmental psychologist Henri Wallon. As phenomenologist Katherine Morris writes:

The child finds himself surrounded by the bodies of others who sit and walk in particular ways, who gesture and gesticulate, who dance, and who utilize various objects. To learn how to walk, to gesture and to dance it to learn how these others do these things...There is a kind of ‘postural impregnation’ of my own body by the conducts I witness...In virtue of this layer of shared existence, I am always already ‘situated in an intersubjective world’ (Morris, 2012, pp. 110/117).

The self-other chiasm further extends to dialogue: despite a perpetual degree of divergence between views, “there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are woven into a single fabric...Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1958, pp. 354/413).

Applied to a CPI, the chiasmatic relations between self and other accentuate the potential for dialogue to enable an intersubject—which David Kennedy defines in his collection of essays *Philosophical Dialogue with Children: Essays on Theory and Practice* as an “emergent whole that includes the other and that is always building and being built” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 81). He describes dialogue as “a space of interrogation that is characterized by self-othering, or experiencing self as an other. In dialogue, we enter into the experience of lived difference—we no longer operate from the position of the bounded, thematizing subject” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 42). For Kennedy, this is especially true in a CPI since its philosophical explorations address and destabilize its members’ fundamental assumptions about identity, knowledge and ethics, facilitating a meeting between different world-views: What is a self? What does it mean to know something? How can we achieve the good life? The intertwining of self and other is further evident in the very aim of CPI dialogue, which is for inquirers to think both for themselves and with others, achieving autonomous thinking as a result of collective meaning-making. This involves inquirers accepting what Kennedy calls the “radical incommensurability of individual perspectives”—the fact that in spite of similarities our personal vantage points are distinctly our own—while also remaining open to being changed by encounters with the other and their viewpoints (Kennedy, 2010, p. 105). In this space of shared knowledge construction, inquirers become co-creators of themselves and of others, in a constant negotiation to define their subjectivity as a “diverse unity” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 138). According to Kennedy, the dialogical self in a CPI is thus “a chiasmic self: it no longer knows exactly where the boundaries of self and other begin and leave off. It is a post-Cartesian, a post-rational self” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 27), one that represents “the new impossibility of thinking the self apart from...an interlocutor that it both is and is not” (Kennedy, 2006, p. 116).

The chiasmatic relations between self and other in a CPI are experienced not only intellectually through dialogical exchanges but also corporeally as inquirers share a common physical space with their dialoguing bodies. Describing the CPI in part as a “community of gestures,” Kennedy underlines the power of preverbal dialogue, which comprises the myriad exchanges that occur through body language before inquirers even begin to speak. Referencing what Merleau-Ponty called our “total language”—our gestures, posture, gaze, kinesic style, etc.—Kennedy remarks that when we enter a CPI, what takes place is not only an exchange of ideas but a “dialogue of body images” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 194). As a result, a community of inquirers that grows close over time begins to apprehend the idiosyncratic body talk of its members: what was once unforeseeable or unfamiliar becomes endearing in its predictability—a sign of increasing intimacy—and reflects a recognition of each inquirer’s particular contribution to the group. The community gets to know each other not only intellectually but corporeally—a powerful aspect of the CPI experience that has not received the conceptual attention it deserves.

II. BODY TAUNTING—A THREAT TO THE SELF-OTHER CHIASM?

While powerful, however, the experience of dialoguing bodies in a CPI is not always a harmonious one, and can include hostility expressed not only verbally but also corporeally. Though the issue of aggressive speech has been tackled from multiple vantage points in CPI scholarship,⁶ the question of bodily hostility remains largely unaddressed: How might the phenomenological experience of individual inquirers within a CPI be affected by the hostile interventions of body language? To capture one type of hostility expressed corporeally, I propose the concept of body taunting, which I define as the combined “vocabulary” of flesh—gestural, postural, physiognomic, kinetic expression—with which inquirers both deliberately and inadvertently provoke, dismiss, intimidate or alienate one another as they attempt to co-construct meaning. In everyday vernacular, taunting is understood as a kind of provocative exhibition of contempt. According to the New Oxford Dictionary, it is usually “a remark made in order to anger, wound, or provoke someone,” and comes from the French phrase “tant pour tant,” loosely translated as “tit for tat” (Oxford, 2014, www.oxforddictionaries.com). It can be defined as a rejoinder in response to a comment deemed valueless or unworthy of consideration, perhaps as an indirect way of gaining the upper hand and subduing the person being taunted. A taunt can also be gestural, varying from inane acts like sticking one’s tongue out to coarser motions like giving someone the finger. But the concept of body taunting I am proposing points to hostile corporeal interventions that are less conspicuous though possibly as impactful.

In a CPI, lived experience is under a kind of nuancing microscope: inquirers critically examine aspects of life to pinpoint the subtleties that often get overlooked, enabling them to problematize their epistemological, ethical, metaphysical, aesthetic, logical and political assumptions, and determine how the presumed definitions, criteria and categories with which they assess the world may be refined to help them better understand and engage with their everyday realities. This nuancing examination process affects not only the ways in which inquirers converse with each other—the effort towards clear, precise yet also illustrative language as well as sound, thorough and summative argumentation—but also the subtle manners with which their bodies interact as the dialogue progresses. Body taunting is a term to describe what takes places when disagreement is communicated nonverbally in antagonistic ways that betray or contradict voiced arguments. I argue that body taunting poses a threat to the CPI’s emerging intersubjectivity by changing the chiasmatic relations between inquirers, making boundaries between self and other seem more pronounced.⁷ Though not necessarily altogether undesirable (as I will later argue), body taunting can affect the inquiry process and the community’s dynamic, and thus requires analysis.

Body taunting can be palpable but hard to pinpoint—it is difficult to describe out of context because it embeds itself in the dialogical reasoning particular to a CPI session. Some obvious non-contextual examples include seemingly sincere verbal statements (“That’s very interesting!” or “I see your point!”) that are contradicted by a shrug, eye roll or curled lip; or assurances of receptivity (“I’m open to that approach...”) coupled with closed, withdrawn body positioning. Another instance could be feigned humility (“I’m not sure if what I’m about to say is important...” or “Please correct me if

I'm mistaken...") accompanied by imposing, condescending posturing. In these cases, there is an attempt to keep up appearances verbally without the body's commitment. To my mind, the more interesting cases of body taunting happen through a certain cluster of CPI "gathering" moves intended to keep the group on track and promote building between ideas. Modelled by the facilitator at first, in a strong CPI these moves eventually get taken up by the inquirers, though sometimes in an antagonistic fashion that seems to counter their purpose.⁸ The move to summarize, for instance, is designed to remind inquirers of the key points made so far to ensure earlier ideas are not forgotten, to maintain consistency and continuity in the argument, and to slow down and possibly reorient the inquiry before it gets derailed. A body taunter may offer a summary that is helpful in terms of content, but sabotaged by oppositional body language of irritability and arrogance that suggests the inquiry is inadequate, nonsensical, and not up to par. With the move to clarify, a body taunter may achieve through verbal statements the goal of ensuring the group's understanding and relevant, useful connections, but through body language express a pedantic, dogmatic attitude that implies a sense of superiority and elitism. Finally, with the move to restate and interpret, a body taunter may succeed in identifying unacknowledged assumptions in the group's thinking and explaining the implications of previous contributions, all the while using a slow, overbearing tone and patronizing gesticulations that insinuate disdain for the inquiry's direction. Whether intended or not, the rudeness happens at the level of body talk rather than in verbal exchanges.

In these cases, the taunting element—what is provocative, dismissive, intimidating or alienating—is the incongruity between verbal and body language, and the added layer of disingenuousness. The dialoguing body is communicating something different than what has been voiced, resulting in mixed signals that estrange inquirers from one another. This incongruity complicates the interpretation effort that inquirers already undertake to try to address their given philosophical question. Indeed, the CPI method is already very hermeneutically demanding: the process of expressing, understanding and building on different ideas with others constitutes intensive interpretive labour under the best of circumstances. Referring again to Merleau-Ponty, when the "total language" seems internally inconsistent or contradictory, inquirers may be left in hesitation, wondering what to decode—speech? gestures? tone? Either accidentally or deliberately, body taunting may cause a meaning reversal: as Kennedy observes with regard to body talk, "gesture can gloss the linguistic even to the point of making words mean exactly the opposite of their usual meaning" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 198). The target of the taunt—whether another inquirer, members of the group, or the inquiry process itself—is somehow belittled or ridiculed. This politicizes the interpretive work of the CPI by establishing a hierarchy between taunter and taunted, underlining power struggles that might have been loosening with the group's evolution towards an ethos of intersubjectivity.

Two important potential losses may ensue from such body taunting. First, through hostility to other inquirers or the group, body taunting may hinder the self-othering process described above and accentuate the boundaries between self and other that were beginning to seem less noticeable, thus threatening the self-other chiasm. When body taunted, inquirers may sense the aggressive, antagonistic energy of their taunter to the degree that it silences their speech but also affects their

body—they cower, recoil, sweat, shake, feel faint and stutter. Their willingness or ability to talk may decrease, resulting in missing perspectives and an imbalance of contributions, which in turn damages the community's dynamic. Second, through hostility to the inquiry itself, body taunting may disrupt the sense of continuity and flow so sought after in a CPI atmosphere. In "The Aesthetic Dimension of the Community of Inquiry," Ann Sharp, co-founder the P4C program alongside Lipman, argues that two different modes of time—*chronos* and *kairos*—are at work in a CPI: the former reflects the ticking of the clock, the need to time manage the actual duration allotted for dialogue, while the latter fosters a kind of timing transcendence, where inquirers "become so involved in [their] activity that [they] actually forget the passing of minutes, and...live, at least temporarily, in a timeless realm" (Sharp, 1997, p. 70). Body taunting may directly affect *kairos* time through a corporeal expression of impatience that screams "I have no time for this!" and jerks the group back into *chronos* time. As Sharp reflects, "in the experience of *kairos* we not only have to forget about the passing minutes, but in a real sense, we have to forget ourself...To be preoccupied with the self, however...is to move from the timeless back to the time-bound" (Sharp, 1997, p. 70). On this account, body taunting can be seen as affecting the self-other chiasm by inhibiting the achieved levels of aesthetic experience that contribute to the transformative feeling of a consonance of minds among community members.

Given these potential losses to a CPI, what motivates body taunting in the first place? What might this specific type of corporeal hostility reflect? Though the drives to body taunt may be multifaceted, four particular motivations seem reasonable to consider, and may exist alone or in combination. First, body taunting could be perceived as evidence of epistemological bias—a way of communicating the privileging of certain forms of knowledge at the expense of others. For instance, an inquirer who happens to be well-versed in certain intellectual traditions attached to a concept in the inquiry question may not be willing to entertain other approaches, opting to validate preferred ideological structures while communicating indifference or obstinacy through a body language that asserts "My mind is made up." Second, body taunting could reveal discomfort with uncertainty—a way of resisting the emergent, unsettled, contestable truth environment of the CPI method. In a CPI, philosophical positions are deemed to be open to revision as long as there is life experience to inform and nuance them: as Sharp notes, "We cannot engage in such creative transformation...if we remain wedded to the idea that there is one absolute truth, and only our world view contains it" (Sharp, 1997, p. 73). Yet if everything is open to question, an inquirer who feels uprooted or unsettled by the process may express their aversion through bodily rigidity, while still seeming flexible in conversation. Third, body taunting could betray a kind of intolerance—a way of conveying fear or insecurity when facing alternative perspectives or having personal prejudices challenged. This possibility is likely heightened in very socially diverse CPI groups since, as Kennedy writes, "The more knowledge-perspectives I am exposed to—whether of gender, class, sexuality, self-understanding, religious belief, aesthetic value and so on—the more alternative versions of truth I encounter" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 137). An inquirer may know better than to voice bigotry but not manage to hide its corporeal manifestation, especially in cases where the unfolding argument defies personal preferences or beliefs. Fourth, body taunting could be a sign of egoism—a way of reinstating self-interest, individual expertise and claims to rightness.⁹ Since a CPI environment strives to decentre the ego and cultivate "a form of subjectivity appropriate for a democracy...which prioritizes the skills of dialogue and negotiation" (Kennedy, 2013, p. 75), an inquirer who objects to the goal

of distributed power and knowhow among the community may attempt to assert themselves corporeally as the leader, the elite, the specialist, without the decency to verbally query or disagree with other members. With all four motivations, body taunting risks adversely affecting the community's co-construction of meaning by demarcating the self and other, and thus influencing the chiasmatic relations between inquirers. Worse still, body taunts may be contagious among dialoguing bodies, resulting in greater estrangement between inquirers, and a more sharply felt self-other boundary. Accordingly, the potential for multidimensional thought achieved intersubjectively may also be impeded: some perspectives or people may no longer be taken seriously (lack of caring thinking); there may be reluctance to engage with and evaluate unfamiliar views and arguments (lack of critical thinking); and inquirers may not perceive the need to look for missing perspectives, test possibilities and envision the implications of ideas (creative thinking).

While these motivations toward corporeal hostility may seem reasonable, a significant challenge with body taunting remains: its very identification. How can inquirers be certain it is happening? Can particular body talk be considered as taunting by some and inoffensive by others? Problematically, inquirers may assume a bodily antagonism that is not present or intended, or misconstrue gestural language due to unfamiliarity or oversensitivity. If an inquirer is stiff in her body, her rigidity may be interpreted as a lack of receptivity instead of a mere corporeal mannerism that the community will learn to read as it gets better acquainted. Similarly, an inquirer who is very sensitive about a particular moral or societal issue may read body taunting into another's nonverbal communication until she learns more about his reasoning and gestural style. Moreover, while inquirers cannot assume that everyone will read or interpret one another's body talk in the same way, they also cannot surmise that an alleged body taunter will be aware of their dialoguing body's effects on the group if not told directly what they are (or at least appear to be) doing. For instance, an inquirer with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who cannot read nonverbal cues may be unable to attend to other members' "total language," focusing only on the content of speech at the expense of body vocabulary, and thus remaining blind to body taunting in themselves and others. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Morris suggests that people with ASD may not be lacking a theory of mind—which is one prevailing opinion—but instead a bodily understanding of others, making it difficult to perceive body talk in co-inquirers if the "exchange meaning was grounded in their bodies, not their intellects" (Morris, 2012, p. 115).¹⁰ In light of such problems with body taunt identification, members of a CPI must become aware of their presuppositions regarding body language "vocabulary" in the same way that they recognize assumptions in their conceptual frameworks. They must be clear about how they define gestures and words alike, or else risk "body talking" past each other and sensing disagreement or tension where none exists, which can ultimately threaten the self-other chiasm.

III. BODILY SELF-CORRECTION—FROM TAUNT TO TACT

In order to foster this corporeal awareness, body taunting should become another target of the self-corrective disposition cultivated in a CPI. As mentioned, Lipman envisioned the CPI method as a collaborative thinking practice—a dialogical approach to philosophizing centred on

metacognitive self-correction: “thinking inquiring into itself for the purpose of transforming itself into better thinking” (Lipman, 1988, p. 41). Yet his mission to “liberate students from unquestioning, uncritical mental habits” can be extended to unquestioning, uncritical bodily habits since these also affect the self-discipline and self-regulation so needed for successful CPI dialogues. Like correcting bad posture, regulating body taunting habits might require a very diligent, almost artificial focus at first, and involve some overcorrection and awkward manoeuvring until more congruous body talk becomes possible.¹¹ Still, this effort towards a global sense of self-correction that includes mental and bodily habits is an important endeavour—one that reveals a neglected dimension of the CPI experience with potentially broad repercussions on its pedagogical effectiveness.

Pedagogically, the issue of body taunting can easily be raised in the post-dialogue assessment phase of a CPI, during which inquirers evaluate their inquiry session and overall community progress based on question prompts from the facilitator, such as: “Did we make progress with our question?” and “Did we share control of the dialogue?” Here, the facilitator’s role is analogous to an x-ray, helping to reveal issues and processes beneath the inquiry’s surface so the inquirers have a chance to mull them over after the fast-paced, multifaceted dialoguing phase (Kennedy, 2013, p. 149). Though usually focused on appraising multidimensional thinking, the assessment phase can also make explicit certain problems arising within the group’s particular dynamic, such as issues with power, participation and communication styles. Accordingly, it would be very easy for a facilitator who suspects body taunting or other types of corporeal hostility to raise questions about bodily interventions that amount to gauging, “Were our dialoguing bodies interacting constructively?” During this assessment stage, the group can discuss and decide together what body vocabulary they find distracting or offensive, whether the bodily hostility they witness seems inadvertent or deliberate, and whether the body taunts warrant serious strategic consideration or only acknowledgement. This process must be particular to a CPI on the basis of need, since not all groups will necessarily respond to perceived body taunts in the same way—it is hard to gauge the afterlife of taunts given some groups might not notice or mind them, others might recognize and grow from them, and still others might disintegrate completely as a result of them. However, if body taunting is experienced by even a minority of inquirers, no matter how seemingly exaggerated or unreasonable the reaction, the community should consider its potential effects given their responsibility to one another within their CPI. This sense of accountability becomes all the more pressing when cultural differences within the group complicate their interpretive work, requiring collaborative clarifications and definitions of body vocabulary—what the group agrees is or is not appropriate for their exchanges. Since awareness of body taunting might not be enough to eradicate it, what should matter is the effort towards constructive body talk. The CPI method should strive for nuance not only in speech but in “total language,” with the inquiry cared for both intellectually and corporeally.

Of course, this self-corrective disposition is not easy to maintain continuously. As Kennedy writes, self-correction requires “a certain courage, abandon, and ability to endure,” notably when dialoguing bodies are being unreasonable, unclear, verbose, meandering, bigoted, and the like (Kennedy, 2013, p. 200).¹² Inquirers may genuinely believe that they could have made better use of

the dialogue time, so in a sense have to accept what Kennedy calls “the little death of [their] own potential contribution” (Kennedy, 2013, p. 217), and resist getting the last word with their bodies. If body taunting has affected the community’s solidarity, a self-corrective disposition may be even harder to maintain, since inquirers might feel they are the only ones trying, and sense the boundaries between themselves and others becoming increasingly pronounced. Here, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of sympathy is helpful to understanding the dynamic of dialoguing bodies:

Sympathy does not presuppose a genuine distinction between self-consciousness and consciousness of the other, but rather the absence of a distinction between the self and the other. It is the simple fact that I live in the facial expressions of the other, as I feel him living in mine (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 174).

Phenomenologist Maurice Hamington further argues that awareness of Merleau-Ponty’s self-other chiasm helps to enable care: “Corporeal knowledge creates the potential of sympathetic perception that makes care possible,” he writes. “The common denominator capable of overcoming physical and social distance is our embodiment...Through the intermingling of the flesh I have a glimmer of what the stranger experiences” (Weiss, 2008, pp. 213/215).

A genuine commitment to cultivating self-correction can therefore help nurture particular intellectual and moral virtues, from perseverance and reasonableness to empathy and humility. If body taunting becomes another target of a CPI’s self-corrective disposition, then an additional virtue to promote would be what I call bodily tact. In their article “Tact and Atmosphere in the Pedagogic Relationship,” Hannu Juuso and Timo Laine offer an insightful take on tact as “a certain moral intuitiveness” and “reactive sensitivity” that enables people to perceive the contextually significant features of a situation and the individuals involved (including gestural cues), and “be sensitive but at the same time strong, as tact may require straightforwardness, determination and...experience of the other’s vulnerability” (Juuso, 2004, pp. 6-9). Extended to dialoguing bodies, tact would require an effort towards congruity between verbal and body language so that inquirers can focus on the interpretive work of deciphering and making meaning out of the content of contributions, with minimal mixed signals to distract them from that already exacting task. It is important to note that disagreement and tensions are welcome as the aim is not an aloofly neutral or emotionless bodily presence, but rather a body vocabulary that is in harmony with voiced arguments to prevent unnecessary provocation, dismissiveness, intimidation or alienation caused by perceived contradictions between words and gestures. As such, bodily tact would enhance the chiasmatic relations between self and other, and help to highlight Merleau-Ponty’s notion of sympathy when disagreement and tensions do arise in the community as a result of conflicting world-views. A tactful dialoguing body would strive to maintain the authentic interest necessary for engagement in self-othering, especially in challenging moments, addressing communication issues directly rather than through oblique body taunts.

At the same time, the virtue of bodily tact might also involve the recognition of body taunting's possibly constructive effects, like the following two instances. First, body taunting could be perceived as a prompt for a necessary crisis in a CPI. As Kennedy notes, a rupture is often necessary to "break the false sense of harmony" in a group and have inquirers confront each other's differences and limitations (Kennedy, 2010, p. 203). A body taunter could represent a version of the "rogues" or "loose cannons" that Kennedy contends might help move the community into more authentic, honest interactions (Kennedy, 2010, p. 197). Since misunderstandings in a CPI are unavoidable given the difficult philosophical (and often ethical) content of dialogues, body taunting might bring about the crisis needed to raise the group's accountability to each other and to the inquiry process, and acknowledge their epistemological biases, discomfort with uncertainty, intolerance or egoistic inclinations. Second, body taunting could offer a potential form of resistance for inquirers who feel subjugated or ostracized during CPI dialogues. A domineering inquirer who is negatively affecting the group's dialogical progress or potential for intersubjectivity might elicit an individual or collective response of body taunting from co-inquirers attempting to make his problematic behaviour explicit. Inquirers who feel estranged might read each other's body vocabulary as evidence that they are not alone, and gain the confidence necessary to confront their antagonist. In turn, this might help the body taunter recognize and reconstruct his body image: as Kennedy writes, "in my own gestural accommodation to it, [I] am affording you a new understanding of your own gesture" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 194). And so, though body taunting may often be detrimental, it is not altogether undesirable since it can illuminate strains and frictions in a CPI that might otherwise be ignored.

Moreover, an emphasis on bodily self-correction and the virtue of bodily tact also sheds light on wider implications for participation in philosophy as a collaborative thinking practice. For marginalized dialoguing bodies, the academic discipline of philosophy may produce hostile experiences since its intellectual traditions and theories have been largely male-dominated, ageist and heteronormative in character. Awareness of body taunting as a possible threat to intersubjectivity and the self-other chiasm may illuminate philosophical perspectives that have been historically excluded, including those of children, women and queer communities. Of course, it may be the case that collective philosophical dialogue includes a legitimate favoring of power struggles and hostility: as CPI practitioners Gilbert Burgh and Mor Yorshansky have argued, domination and even coercion might represent "honest and engaged involvement by students in a painful process of social reconstruction" (Burgh and Yorshansky, 2011, p. 447). Yet if the CPI method strives for truly communal meaning-making, it must advocate for those who are in danger of subjugation or ostracizing because of their vulnerable societal positions, or else risk alienating them even further from philosophical practice. For instance, Kennedy describes children as "voices from the margin" and "privileged strangers" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 41), whose philosophical perspectives have been predominantly neglected because of an adultist stance that denies their intellectual and moral agency. Yet as he remarks, this prejudice against their philosophizing capacities denies the ways in which children, by their very malleable, nascent nature, represent "the possibility for the emergence of new forms of subjectivity in the world" (Kennedy, 2013, p. 67). As Merleau-Ponty notes, "We must conceive of the child not as an absolute other, nor as the same as us, but as a polymorph"—a being that can take many forms by virtue of its transitional state (Kennedy, 2010, p. 62). Philosophizing with children should therefore also include appreciation for the self-other chiasm

and the possibility of intersubjectivity, and thus avoid corporeal hostility such as body taunting that may alienate young voices from genuine philosophical engagement. Similarly, the inclusion and representation of gender and queer issues in collaborative thinking practices may lead to a “pedagogy of discomfort” that CPI theorist and openly queer scholar Maughn Gregory deems crucial for meaningful value inquiry: “The self-correction that is possible through such inquiry requires us to be vulnerable, not only to the painful possibility of coming to see one’s former judgments as misguided or immoral, but to distressing bouts of moral disequilibrium” (Gregory, 2004, pp. 62-63).¹³ And so, by accentuating the corporeal interplay between inquirers—or the dialogue of body images—a focus on bodily self-correction can give insight into participation and representation issues in philosophical practices like the CPI method, challenging the discipline’s male-dominated, heteronormative and ageist character, and further encouraging a move from taunting to tact.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have focused on the embodied dimension of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry experience, and specifically on the type of corporeal hostility I have called body taunting. I have used this label to help make explicit the palpable but overlooked incongruity that arises when disagreement is communicated nonverbally in antagonistic ways that betray or contradict voiced arguments. Drawing on the phenomenological accounts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Kennedy, I have argued that body taunting poses a threat to the CPI’s emerging intersubjectivity by changing the chiasmatic relations between inquirers as they attempt to co-construct meaning, making boundaries between self and other seem more pronounced through a corporeal hostility that is provocative, dismissive, intimidating or alienating. Though perhaps necessary at times to address issues of accountability among inquirers, body taunting highlights the need for the CPI method’s self-corrective spirit to strive for nuance and clarity not only in speech but in “total language”—gestural, postural, physiognomic, kinetic expression—to ensure the inquiry and its dialoguing bodies are cared for both intellectually and corporeally. To foster the self-othering process that lends collective philosophizing its transformative power, a CPI’s members must ensure they establish their own definitions and uses for the various body “vocabularies” that complement their verbal exchanges, just as they would with the concepts they use in their philosophical positions. This corporeal awareness can be perceived as a kind of bodily tact that reflects Merleau-Ponty’s sense of sympathy and the chiasmic self that Kennedy endorses. As Sharp has noted, in an aesthetically strong CPI, “reading faces [and overall bodily energy] becomes as important as attending to words” (Sharp, 1997, pp. 72-73). Collaborative philosophical practices must take into account the role of dialoguing bodies if they are to achieve inclusiveness of participants and perspectives.

ENDNOTES

1. Since its inception in the 1970s, the Philosophy for Children (P4C) program has grown into an international movement endorsed by UNESCO, and come to designate not only philosophy for young people but also for communities more generally. As such, this essay will not focus on children specifically but on people of any age engaged in a CPI practice. The essay is theoretical in character and the examples it presents do not result from empirical research—they are fictionalized instances included for illustrative purposes to help concretize the concepts proposed.
2. There are notable exceptions in the CPI literature such as the work of P4C co-founder Ann Sharp who argues that “the aesthetic dimension permeates every aspect of communal inquiry,” where aesthetic includes both intellectual and bodily responses (Sharp, 1997, p. 76).
3. The specific gestures may vary from one CPI to another but usually involve raising hands to indicate a desire to speak, making eye contact with other inquirers to gauge who wants to build on the given position, and pointing to the next interlocutor when finished speaking.
4. For Merleau-Ponty, the flesh is different from skin: “The flesh is not matter...it is not fact or sum of facts ‘material’ or ‘spiritual’...the flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 139). Henceforth in this essay, the particular dimension of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh that concerns intersubjectivity will be referred to as the self-other chiasm or as the chiasmatic relations between self and other.
5. As Douglas Low explains in *Merleau-Ponty’s Last Vision*, “this chiasm cannot be complete. There cannot be total fusion, for then the experiencer and the experienced would conflate, would become one, thereby making experience impossible. There must be an experience that puts us in contact with the world outside and yet separates us from it, keeps us at a distance from it” (Low, 2000, p. 25).
6. Of direct relevance to this essay, Kennedy describes aggression that occurs within what he calls the “Community of Interest” (Kennedy, 2010, pp. 204-205), and also with respect to power in his articles “Power, Manipulation and Control in a Community of Inquiry” (2003) and “The Psychodynamics of the Community of Inquiry and Educational Reform” (2000).
7. It is noteworthy that in this author’s experience as a CPI facilitator and philosophical practitioner, body taunting has been more of an issue with adults and teens than with children. According to Merleau-Ponty’s argument in “The Child’s Relation with Others,” this may in part be because children are in the process of recognizing themselves as distinct from others and can therefore more

easily be receptive to competing considerations and perspectives, decreasing the motivation to body taunt (Toadvine and Leonard Lowlier, eds., 2007, pp. 143-184).

8. For a glossary of relevant moves and elements in the CPI method, see Sasseville's *Penser ensemble à l'école* (2012).
9. To be clear, egoism here refers to the prioritization of the Cartesian self, thought to be capable of pure, atomistic, disembodied existence (Descartes, 1988, pp. 59-103), not to psychoanalytic theories like those of Sigmund Freud.
10. Morris refers specifically to the childhood experiences of ASD activist Temple Grandin, who developed a "library of mental videotapes" to help her make sense of other children's behaviours in different contexts but could still not viscerally understand their gestural exchanges, believing them to be somehow magical or telepathic since they escaped her corporeal grasp (Morris, 2012, p. 114).
11. As Morris writes in relation to Merleau-Ponty, "It is by virtue of the body's capacity to acquire habits that the past has a weight, and the weight of the past, we might say, both enables us to go forward and holds us back, it creates both momentum and inertia. On the one hand, without the capacity to acquire habits, we could not learn from experience, we could not acquire the skills and competences which enable us to do things that we could not do before. On the other, habits can be difficult to change, so that if I have learned to play tennis a bit inefficiently, correcting my bad postural habits is difficult" (Morris, 2012, p. 69).
12. For Kennedy, true self-correction in a CPI includes asking oneself tough questions, notably: "What am I really after? What am I willing to give up in order to get it? How am I a part of this group? How am I using it?" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 208).
13. Gregory's observation about the vulnerability needed for CPI self-correction is reconcilable with many feminist accounts. For instance, in her seminal phenomenology article "Throwing Like A Girl," Iris Young notes how women might experience their embodiment differently which affects their sense of self-efficacy. The girl "develops a bodily timidity which increases with age. In assuming herself as a girl, she takes herself up as fragile" (Young, 1980, p. 153). Applied to a CPI, this could mean that female inquirers might be more hesitant in their body language and more easily affected by body taunting, notably if they have incarnated their performance of "girlness" to a high degree. Though it is beyond the scope of this essay, an interesting supplement could include considering issues of performativity as they relate to gendered body vocabulary used in a CPI. As Judith Butler writes in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," though women individuate their performance of gender, their performative acts still reflect societal norms: "As a corporeal field of cultural play, gender is a basically innovative affair, although it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations" (Butler, 1988, p. 531).

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