Dasein and possibilities:

Dasein might be defined as the living entity that can disclose possibilities *as* possibilities. When we do this, we rely on but surpass Merleau-Ponty’s *habit-body*. When we’re “living” our body just as a habit-body, we’re on “autopilot,” i.e., moving through a fixed set of somewhat flexible, situationally-appropriate relations between

1. perceiving something

and

1. “interpreting” what we perceive as *meaning* “Do this!” And we *do* it, without making a choice to do it.

There are three basic ways in which Dasein can surpass the habit-body – while still relying on it – to disclose possibilities *as* possibilities:

1. Making, or *projecting*, a plan. This involves moving from

a pre-possession, or fore-having (= the disclosure, or understanding of one’s practical skills and habits *plus* one’s goal, or end in view),

to

a preview, or fore-sight (= one’s *projected* plan of action). This proceeds through the process of deliberation:

1. I desire some goal, end-in-view, or ‘for-the-sake-of-whom’.
2. I take an “overview” of my disclosed, or understood skills and habits.
3. I make a plan of temporally-ordered steps that, if carried out, will serve as means that will allow me to reach my desired goal, or end-in-view.
4. It’s only when we project a plan and begin to carry it out that we truly make *choices*. When we don’t have a pre-view of a plan, we’re merely employing our habit-body: “going through the motions” without awareness that there might be other options.
5. Projecting such a plan involves Merleau-Ponty’s *projective body*, in which one *virtually* places oneself (as habit-body) into a possible but non-actual situation. (For example, a skier anticipates how he or she will move his or her body at various places along the race course; or someone practices answering questions they anticipate might come up in a job interview.)
6. Since what’s virtually situated in a possible but non-actual situation is one’s (current) habit-body, someone can “live” their projective body only if they have a *habit-body.*
7. When we *project* our possibilities explicitly in a plan, we’re still operating completely within our current practical *world* (i.e., the complex web of your practical possibilities for dealing with intraworldly entities) and our current communal horizon of *the ‘one’* (i.e., the complex web of norms governing communal roles and relationships).
8. A second way in which possibilities can be disclosed to us *as* possibilities occurs when one perceives one’s horizons of possibilities as *limited*. Whereas when we make a plan (as described above), we remain in our current, given practical world and the given communal ‘one’, perceiving one’s current world and current communal norms that make up the ‘one’ allows us to *alter* (usually by way of expanding) the current “horizon” of our practical world or our current communal horizon of the ‘one’. This can happen in two ways:
9. Someone resolves to learn a new skill; this presupposes that one’s *world* (of practical possibilities) has been disclosed as *limited*. Resolving to learn a new skill happens roughly as follows:
10. We have a goal, end, or ‘for-the-sake-of-whom’ that we wish to achieve, but see that we lack a skill necessary to achieve it.
11. We *project* a plan, or practical project, whose goal is to acquire this skill. This proceeds in the same general way as making a plan (as described above), but usually by doing specific kinds of things:

(i) observing people who have mastered the skill,

(ii) getting instruction from such a person, or

(iii) practicing it on one’s own.

Generally, we employ (i), (ii), and (iii) when we learn a particularly complex skill, like speaking a new language or playing a musical instrument.

1. Resolving to learn a new skill involves Merleau-Ponty’s *free body*: one in which we place our projective body in a possible but non-actual *world*. Generally, it gradually dawns us that we would be free “for” more possibilities – i.e., able to achieve more possibilities – if we acquired the skill in question, thus motivating us to attempt to expand the current horizon of our world.
2. To sum up: *the* ***free body*** *can work, by way of the* ***projective body****, to alter the* ***habit-body****.* This is because one way for the body to be freer is to make a plan (hence employing its projective body to place itself virtual in possible but non-actual situations), where the goal of this plan is to develop new skills (of the habit-body).
3. Someone resolves to work for social change. This happens roughly as follows:
4. We take some communal goal, or end, that we *already* have; such an end is included in our *current* communal horizon of the ‘one’. (For example, we have a democratic or religious view of social justice, but see that there are cases in our society where individuals or groups aren’t treated in a socially just way, e.g., discrimination, massive wealth disparity, etc.)
5. We then see that the complex web of social roles and relationships that makes up our current communal horizon doesn’t allow for achieving end (1).
6. We then project a plan whose goal, or end, is designed to achieve end (1). As with (II-A), this involves projecting a plan of action. Resolving to work for social change generally involves engaging in specific kinds of projects, such as *organizing* groups of *other* individuals to work together to achieve this change.
7. Like resolving to acquire a new skill, working for social change involves Merleau-Ponty’s *free body*: in this case, one in which we place our projective body in a possible but non-actual *community*. Generally, it gradually dawns us that we or others could be *freer* if we occupied such a society whose social roles, relationships, and norms differ from our current ones. Concerted attempts to change society don’t generally come “from out of the blue,” but rather emerge as “Gestalt shifts” in our perception of our relationships to other people. For example, low-wage workers shift from seeing other low-wage workers as their *competitors*, to seeing them as possible *collaborators* who could put together their *shared* economic interests to work *together* for social change.
8. Anxiety: in this rare mood, *every* possibility that one encounters is encountered as a *mere* possibility.
9. When this happens, every practical “meaning” shows up as just something one *could* do, but not as something *to-be*-done. No entity that we perceive “beckons,” or “solicits,” us to do one thing rather than another. No activity, that is, is “fixed”; everything appears “up for grabs.”
10. Since in anxiety we don’t focus on any particular practical, worldly meaning, intraworldly entities lose their meaningfulness.
11. Thus in anxiety, we experience *meaningless*: we feel “not at home,” or “out of place”; our familiar surroundings suddenly appear unfamiliar.
12. We could call this kind of embodiment the *anxious* body.
13. Unlike (I) or (II), in anxiety we don’t actually make a choice. Nevertheless, in anxiety we’re faced with the possibility of making a *radical* choice as to who to strive to become. Such a potential choice is *radical* because it’s not done in order to or for the sake of any possibility currently encountered as fixed.