

Article

The Gap of Presence: Challenges in Describing Perceptual Phenomena

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Abstract: This paper reconstructs Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project in terms of a phenomenology of sensible transcendence. According to this framework, (i) any given data are correlative to a subjective apprehension, (ii) but they cannot be fully captured by this same experience. Therefore, subjective apprehension must remain open to a type of absence or radical indeterminacy. This notion of transcendence must be grounded in bodily experience, and the challenge is to develop a notion of *logos* that can account for its sensible donation. We describe that the critical apparatus mobilized to achieve this goal, primarily through the notions of "field of presence" and "presentation", restores a logic of consciousness in these analyses that focus on the body.

Keywords: Merleau-Ponty; Husserl; field of presence; transcendence; perception

1. Introduction

When Merleau-Ponty defended his "primacy of perception" at the Société Française de Philosophie, asserting an indissoluble relationship between bodily subjectivity and the sensitive world, he provoked a series of controversies among his interlocutors. Emile Bréhier's objection is emblematic, as he finds the description of lived experience in its immediacy to be either impossible for philosophy or possible only outside its realm, in literature for example. According to Bréhier, "M. Merleau-Ponty changes, inverts the ordinary meaning of what we call philosophy" [1] (p. 73)¹, since the philosophical attitude is precisely opposed to "ordinary perception [perception vulgaire]", and reflection can only arise by distancing oneself from it. It is up to the philosopher to remain silent or to change the subject of his reflections: "In order not to be contradictory, your doctrine must remain unformulated, only lived" [1] (p. 77).

Merleau-Ponty agrees that life is not immediately philosophical, nor can it be. Life is not like philosophy, and just living does not mean philosophizing. However, his response seems complacent because he does not intend it to be the beginning or conclusion of his thesis. By arguing that the themes and propositions of our knowledge, even the most abstract ones, are based on lived structures of perception, his goal is not to reduce theory to life but to expand the territory of life to make it more philosophical and less "vulgar" than Bréhier intended. We could add that this involves endowing life with meaning and *logos* rather than being naive or meaningless. This is the Merleau-Pontian theme of the "enlargement of reason" which runs through all of his readings of the history of thought and phenomenology itself [1,2] (p. 109; pp. 150, 154). For Merleau-Ponty, "to seek to express immediate experience is not a betrayal of reason but, on the contrary, to work toward its enlargement" [1] (p. 77). Bréhier's reply is as quick as it is brutal: in the end, this means "to betray the immediate experience" [1] (p. 77). By risking the possibility of making philosophy non-philosophical, Merleau-Ponty would fall into the opposite prejudice of removing from life all its content and richness that are alien to theorization. When the philosopher believes that he magnifies philosophy instead of betraying it, it is life that he betrays after all.



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This controversy reveals the challenge that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, as well as all theories of perception, face: how can perceptual life be elevated to the status of discourse and become expressed? To what extent does this perceptual life lead to a possible philosophy? The answer to these questions mobilizes his entire early corpus of writings, from *The Structure of Behavior* to the texts collected in *Sense and Non-Sense* and the Sorbonne lectures. Undoubtedly, the most comprehensive elaboration in this trajectory is found in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The problem can be formulated as follows: is it because there is (or simply *il y a*) a "presence" of life to us, of the world to perception, of others to me, that this lived, unreflective, and immediate presence can be clarified philosophically and even obliges us to think about it. Therefore, cutting reflection off from its irreflective soil would mean severing philosophy from its roots in the existence that motivates it. Of course, discovering and describing this "presence" is not an easy task. Everything depends on making it relevant and concrete to us, which requires us to understand the minimum distance that separates expression from the expressed, so as not to presuppose or smuggle anything into this very presence that we see, pure and simple, directly. As Merleau-Ponty wrote, "nothing is more difficult than to know precisely what we see" [3] (p. 71). However, nothing is more urgent than this if we want to know what philosophy is, what it deals with, and how it does it.

2. Meaning and Perception

How can we proceed? This would only be possible if we can establish and defend the existence of *logos*, which is a relation of meaning, in the most basic acts of everyday life and perception. Therefore, it would make sense to perceive, rather than think, to comprehend, rather than judge, to witness, rather than act, and to inhabit, rather than contemplate from above, in what the author calls a *pensée de survol*. If phenomenology aims to describe and thematize experiences endowed with meaning in every sphere of our lives, even before the acts of reflection, it is because, for this philosophy, primary consciousness is not representation (the *Ver-gegenwartigung*) but the presentation (*Gegenwartigung*) of an original sense, a sense in its self-donation, before being made representative in the mode of "as if" (*als ob*), which already changes it in its relative modalities—be it in attention, imagination, reflection, predicative language, etc. At least this is what Merleau-Ponty seems to bring out when he approaches phenomenological discourse and writes about "operative intentionality" (*fungierende Intentionalität*) as that which makes the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life, which appears in our desires, our evaluations, our landscape, more clearly than in objective knowledge, and furnishes the text which our knowledge tries to translate into exact language. Our relationship to the world, as it is untiringly pronounced within us, is nothing that could be any further clarified by analysis; philosophy can only place it once more before our eyes and offer it for our verification [3] (p. xiii).

For Merleau-Ponty, this operative or noematic intentionality is an organization of the "thing itself" as it is presented to the apprehensive consciousness in perception. It is an intentionality that is performed in the perceptual field itself, which he thinks is delineated by Husserl's phenomenology of passive syntheses, as well as the elaboration it suffers in Gurwitsch and Gestalt theory². [4] So, this kind of intentionality develops certain lines of continuation and divergence present in the things themselves, in the surrounding environment (*Umwelt*), and in what he calls the perceived world. It makes the "antepredicative unity of the world and our life" because a pre-formed or "immediate" meaning, as supposed in the discussion with Bréhier, cannot contain predicates or pre-established categories. It is not a work already done by the consciousness or by the "act intentionality", that which precisely needs to be relocated at a later level, "when our knowledge" predicates the brute material of perception and provides it with "an exact language translation".

Also, that is why, before being considered an intentionality *sui generis* (noematic or operative), this kind of relationship was already discovered in scientific works about Gestalt and behavior (called *Umweltintentionalität*) as a fact imposed on the scientist or psychol-

ogist, as an “outside spectator” [5] (p. 175), but now it is unfolded with “philosophical” meaning³ [6]. Reason and facts are never completely separated in this phenomenology of experience. As the author said in the Sorbonne lectures, “psychology is always an implicit, beginning philosophy,” and at the same time, “philosophy has never finished its contact with facts” [4] (p. 14), and here again, we can see this prodigy of perceptual *logos* present in different areas of knowledge. Nonetheless, philosophy is only built when it seeks to apprehend the immanent meaning of these facts so that they are not just “facts”, in a psychological, literary, and even “vulgar” sense, as Émile Bréhier was still allowed to glimpse, but as inalienable or even “transcendental” facts that definitively clarify the relationship between subjectivity and the world.

The laws of our thought and our evident truths are certainly facts, but they are not detachable from us, they are implied in any conception that we could form of being and the possible. It is not a question of confining ourselves to phenomena, of enclosing consciousness in its own states, while retaining the possibility of another being beyond apparent being, nor of treating our thought as one fact among many others, but of defining being as that which appears, and consciousness as a universal fact [3] (p. 455).

But why does Merleau-Ponty think it is a philosophical gain when perception and motility became the original intentionality [3] (p. 160)? The attachment of the body and environment as both sides or developments of the unique operative intentionality enables phenomenology to describe the world and “being as that which appears” (so not as something alien to subjectivity), as well as consciousness “as a universal fact” (so not an exclusive or ideal realm of meaning). The main gain here amounts to the unveiling of a new notion of transcendence in this phenomenological approach. Through motility and perception, precisely, the *corps propre* as a perceptive subject gathers the sparse meaning already motivated by passive syntheses in the environment. Therefore, the world is not only the correlate of the acts or powers of a so-called bodily consciousness, but the source of this meaning and, therefore, a positive transcendence to its apprehensions by the bodily subject.

Thus, (i) there is a subjective opening to the sense of the world, and (ii) this opening is not coordinated or reabsorbed by a conscience. The subjective opening is crucial. By it, we can think of experience in the strong sense, as an experience that one lives (an *Erlebnis*). That is why, from Merleau-Ponty’s standpoint, phenomenology is a philosophy capable of understanding these lived experiences without moving toward the idealist position of a transcendental constitution of the meaning of these experiences. Here, we can watch both a conservation and a reform of phenomenology. Consequently, the contingency of the world is also crucial, and its “mystery” is guaranteed because to some extent it will always remain “strange” to us. “Ontological contingency, the contingency of the world itself”, writes the author, is “what once and for all establishes our idea of the truth” [3] (p. 456).

Therefore, (i) subjective opening and (ii) worldly transcendence are the two sides of the same coin. The world is always correlated to a perceptual experience or to someone’s perceptual life. Through this perceptual opening, it does not need to be determined in its sense by the very subjectivity it opens itself to, so that “a world which [...] is never but an ‘unfinished work’ [...] does not require, and even excludes, a constituting subject.” [3] (p. 465). The concatenation of profiles co-responsible for the awareness of things is motivated or pre-delineated by the world itself, and we can argue that there is some kind of en-formation (*mise en forme*) of, already described by Gestalt Psychology. But this en-formation is not a ruse of the transcendental consciousness, which passively predicts what it can actively unfold. On the contrary, consciousness must be taken in other terms. As a bodily, worldly, and sensible one. Therefore, the intentionalization of lived forms (*gestalten*) coexists here with a gestaltization of intentionality. The first endows them with a philosophical meaning capable of being described (they are “conscious”), and the second changes the meaning that they could have from the traditional standpoint (this consciousness is “corporal”). This dual-impact relationship is crucial. Only then can one speak of perceptive *logos* that the body accompanies and comprehends, without

stopping or anticipating it in its development. “Familiarity” and “strangeness” coexist in an insurmountable paradox here, once the very notion of meaning was remade.

But is this what really happens?

3. Perception and Time

Certainly, this does not exempt us from describing how this paradox is possible and how it is apprehended in each of our perceptual experiences. Contrary to Bréhier’s intervention before the *Société Française de Philosophie*, when he says that philosophy is the very “critical inventory of our lives” and that since Plato it needs to “get away” from the “insufficiencies of this lived perception” [1] (p. 73), Merleau-Ponty views vicissitudes of perception not as an obstacle but as an opportunity for reflection. However, the challenge is how to present a paradox as a condition, rather than a limit, of philosophy. How can we delve into these contradictions without becoming lost in them and without compromising the consistency of a philosophical discourse? The answer has already been anticipated: this is only possible if *logos* is present amidst these lived experiences. It is important to grasp that this *logos* of perception can only be achieved through temporality.

It is essential to acknowledge how temporality functions as the *logos* or the transcendental element in this philosophy, as it manages to reconcile consciousness and the world, identity and difference, the same and the Other, without conflating them. Temporality renders the paradox “philosophical”. However, to comprehend how temporality accomplishes this, we must examine the phenomenologically unfolded concept of time and grasp how it enables us, even compels us, to consider things as a “presence” and the perceptual *logos* as a process of “presentation”. This conceptual and descriptive framework rescues perception from being confined to a pre-philosophical realm, where it may be interpreted merely as belonging to literature or psychological curiosities, and instead leads us towards the salutary notion of “presence”.

Presence gives a name to this paradoxical coexistence of being and consciousness. It is a paradox because the former is always correlated to the latter, but the latter never fully exhausts the meaning of the former in perceptual apprehension. Presence brings about the phenomenalization of the world, making it a correlate of lived experience, while simultaneously protecting it from being absorbed by any of the developments within its phenomenality. It is worth recalling that the conjunction of “Being-for-Itself” and “Being-in-the-World” names and crowns the last part of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. This part describes how the absence of a pure subject, who could possess a complete awareness of their actions and representations, coexists with a world that is not reduced to a pure object or meaning. Nevertheless, it remains necessary to explore how the supposed poles of the corporeal subject and the sensible world are considered from the perspective of presence.

According to Merleau-Ponty, presence is a “unique structure” that allows us to understand the “subject” and “object” as its “abstract moments” [3] (p. 492). This structure is heuristically presupposed and contained in all descriptions made by Merleau-Ponty, establishing the kinship between the body and the world, which share the same fabric and intentional unfolding. (1) The author considers the phenomenal field as a field of presence, at the beginning of the book, where it is stated that “the presence and absence of external objects are only variations within a field of primordial presence, of a perceptual domain over which my body has power” [3] (p. 108). (2) The descriptions of the body also highlight how “perceptual experiences hang together, motivate and implicate each other; the perception of the world is simply an expansion of my field of presence and it does not transcend its essential structures” [3] (p. 351). (3) The analysis of space and time further exemplifies this concept, as “perception provides me with a ‘field of presence’ in the broad sense, which extends in two dimensions: the here-there dimension and the past-present-future dimension” [3] (p. 307). Therefore, the world, perceived as a whole, is considered from this “field of presence”, where its horizons contract and expand without ever surpassing it. (4) This relation of presentation and de-presentation, through which the field of presence expands and contracts, also helps us understand subjectivity and its

relationship with otherness, since Merleau-Ponty raises the question of “how the presence to myself (*Urpräsenz*) which defines me and conditions every alien presence is at the same time de-presentation (*Entgegenwärtigung*) and throws me outside myself” [3] (p. 417). (5) Lastly, the more general dimensions of one’s own life are considered as poles of this structure: “Correspondingly, the generality and the individuality of the subject, qualified and pure subjectivity, the anonymity of the One and the anonymity of consciousness are not two conceptions of the subject between which philosophy has to choose, but two moments of a unique structure which is the concrete subject” [3] (p. 514).

This omnipresence of presence, so to speak, reveals its true meaning in the final part of the text when it is equated with the temporal present. Temporality bestows upon presence its nature, and Merleau-Ponty describes subjectivity as a form of presence in the transitive sense of presentation (along with de-presentation), being present to X, *être à* [3] (p. 485). Simultaneously, this movement renders things and the world a kind of “presence” in the intransitive sense. Hence, the same notion satisfies the two requirements of *logos* that can be truly perceptive, as it provides both the meaning of appearing things and the principle underlying this relationship of meaning. Consequently, it serves as the foundation for general phenomenalization. It is because “nothing exists and that everything is ‘temporalized’” [3] (p. 383) that things and the subjectivity that apprehends them manifest as temporal moments. Merleau-Ponty can therefore conclude that the “analysis of time first confirmed this new notion of meaning and understanding” [3] (p. 492). As a result, phenomenology ceases to be solely concerned with the transcendental constitution of meaning. Instead, it situates itself amid the bodily existence of the Being-in-the-World. Only in this context does phenomenology become a true phenomenology of perception.

This temporal logic immerses us in the ebb and flow of presence and absence. Consequently, the demand for a *logos* that adequately addresses the paradox of perception and satisfies the need for a philosophical discourse that touches upon life can only be fulfilled through the temporalization of meaning. This temporalization enables the reconciliation between subject and world, being and non-being, without negating their differences. It is equivalent to rendering beings present or presented, since “time and meaning are but one thing” [3] (p. 487). The inquiry into unreflective presence demands an exploration of time because, after describing the various nuances and ambiguities of the body and the world, which are neither purely psychological nor physiological entities, one must philosophically comprehend all the previously described phenomena. Merleau-Ponty remains within the domain of experience and the phenomenological approach but calls for a “phenomenology of phenomenology” [3] (p. 419), seeking to uncover the lived origin of the experience itself and unfold its original aspects, such as subjectivity, time, and freedom. By engaging in this second-degree reflection [3] (p. 77), which Husserl referred to as “genetic phenomenology”, one encounters time as a “field of presence”, carrying significant implications.

First, it is necessary to understand how every sense has temporal dynamics, consisting of the present, past, and future. This gives every experience a certain temporal thickness. This temporal dimension presents itself as a field of presence, an inseparable blend of passage and permanence. To contemplate presence means considering the present as the original place of this perpetual blending, perpetually manifesting itself in the present moment and in the “now”. The present “enjoys a privilege because it is the zone in which being and consciousness coincide” [3] (p. 485), since “in the present and in perception, my being and my consciousness are at one” [3] (p. 485). Presence is thus temporal presence or a present presence, with its horizons of the past in retention and the future in protention, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, following Husserl. It is precisely due to its temporal significance that it can unify all the moments of perceptual life without dissolving them. Therefore, all the “presences” mentioned above (body, space, time, others, myself, etc.) can be attributed to temporal presence (as the present in the field of presence). Motor intentionality can establish the relationship between the body and the world due to its “temporal thickness” [3] (p. 456) and because the spatial synthesis of the world and things

is clarified by the temporal synthesis. Thus, “the second makes it possible to understand the first” [3] (p. 307).

Thus, that so-called new notion of sensible transcendence that accompanied the reformulation of subjectivity itself, as incarnate, acknowledges descriptive levels. It is through time that these levels are best elucidated:

The solution of all problems of transcendence is in the thickness of the pre-objective present, in which we find our corporeity, our sociality, and the pre-existence of the world, that is, the starting point of ‘explanations’, in their legitimate—and at the same time the basis of our freedom. [3] (p. 495)

It seems that the field of presence and its transitive aspect, as presentation, can give the measure of the various transcendences of perceptual life.

...the absolute flow takes shape beneath its own gaze as “a consciousness”, or as man, or an incarnate subject, because it is a field of presence—presence to itself, to others and to the world—and because this presence throws it into the natural and cultural world from which it understands itself. [3] (p. 515)

A curious return to canonical phenomenology occurs here because motor intentionality, or simply motility, is contemplated following the operative intentionality of time. Merleau-Ponty states that “we found beneath the intentionality of acts, or thetic intentionality, another kind which is the condition of the former’s possibility: namely an operative intentionality already at work before any positing or any judgment”. He also adds, “a ‘Logos of the aesthetic world’, an ‘art hidden in the depths of the human soul’, one which, like any art, is known only in its results” [3] (pp. 490–491). However, this renders the unpretentious concept of “presence” a notion that can and should be evaluated for its conceptual relevance, along with the phenomenological framework it implies. Thus, it is necessary to take a detour to capture the true meaning of time as the genesis of perception.

4. Time and Presence

Husserlian phenomenology is revisited in its purported “existential” form by Merleau-Ponty [3] (p. 317; footnote 1) to describe how this intentional logic of presence is anticipated within the phenomenological canon. Merleau-Ponty lauds the unveiling of a passive genesis of meaning as an alternative to its complete constitution and absorption by the subjective pole of apprehension: “Such is the paradox of what might be named, with Husserl, the ‘passive synthesis’ of time—a term which is clearly not a solution, but an index to design a problem” [3] (p. 479). This expression appears in the lectures *On the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time*. Husserl refers to it as “*genesis spontanea*” in the first appendix when contemplating the reason behind the existence of impressional consciousness and the experience of time in the “now”. He suggests that this initial impression “is not produced” and should not have its origin as something “produced”, as all production stems from it: “*Genesis spontanea*, it is protoproduction [*Urzeugung*]” [7,8] (p. 106; p. 100). It may seem truisitic, given that “consciousness is nothing without impression”, and it is unnecessary to inquire about one without the other. Thus, if consciousness is within the present moment, its meaning is that it is “already there” in the passive sense of presentation, from which the idea of production in the active sense can be derived through the founded acts of presentification or representation. Consequently, protoproduction is passive production, passive genesis, and a spontaneity that cannot be eliminated.

The problem of perception involves taking the initial step towards time and its passive syntheses. As mentioned, the difficulty arises from the fact that perception carries a sense originating from the world but must be contained within subjective apprehension. This “paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception” [1] (p. 49) motivates Merleau-Ponty’s first works and reappears in the primacy’s defense. According to the author, “the almost organic relation of the perceiving subject and the world involves, in principle, the contradiction of immanence and transcendence” [1] (p. 42). The dilemma is philosophically elucidated by temporality because time has the ruse of bringing the sense of the world (its

transcendence) towards the perceptive apprehension by the body (immanence). We can speak of time as the “measure of being”: of what is (its transcendence) and of what is not (in one’s perspective). Thus, the paradox of immanence and transcendence is resolved, and the present becomes the place where this passive genesis, once considered nonsense, finds meaning. “At the level of being it will never be intelligible that the subject should be both *naturans* and *naturatus*, infinite and finite” since it would be contradictory to think that being equals to non-being. However, “if we rediscover time beneath the subject, and if we report the paradox of time to those of the body, the world, the thing, and others, we will understand that beyond these there is nothing to understand” [3] (p. 419). In short, time offers consistency to the perceived world in general but also threatens it in each of its particular unfoldings. This is not a privative limit, a lack of being, or an inferior existence, but the very modality through which all things come into being and become conscious.

Instead of being a “measure of being”, the field of presence is considered by Husserl as a “form” that constitutes the original modality of donation. Since the manuscripts were written between 1905 and 1917 (on passive genesis), and somewhat before transcendental phenomenology, this understanding of time implies the ideal of the constitution of meaning. Conceiving meaning as presence and deriving it from the present fulfills the requirement of scientificity that phenomenology has always sought. The *genesis spontanea* outlined in the lectures on time is transformed and clarified within the genetic phenomenology of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and of *Experience and Judgment*, as operative and living intentionality. “By principle, everything that affects us as a background is already present to conscience in an ‘objective apprehension’, in the mode of anticipation” [9] (§ 9, p. 43) which occurs as an empty intention but is already predetermined in the field of presence. As pointed out by Burke [10], the term *Präsenzfeld* is absent from the early manuscripts on time. In *Experience and Judgment*, we finally encounter it, and throughout the 1920s it is referred to as a “living present”, an expression also adopted and repeated by Merleau-Ponty. In the lectures on time, Husserl mentions an “original temporal field” [7,8] (p. 32; p. 31) that is terminologically and conceptually linked to the field later described as a *Präsenzfeld* [9] (§ 42, pp. 216–217; cf. § 81, p. 389). What matters here is that these passages describe the perceptual anticipation that occurs in temporal terms. On the one hand, it is time that renders perception an operation that is never completed or fulfilled, but on the other hand, it is also time that launches it toward possible determination or completion. Thus, the perceptual field is a temporal field, a “field ‘of objects’ that, as such, are perceived as ‘units of possible experience’ or, what is the same, as possible substrates of knowledge activities” [9] (§ 9, p. 43). This implies that the possibility of further exploring objects is intentionally prepared in the perceptual field. It is already prepared in the passivity of consciousness and cannot be entirely eliminated without the loss of intentionality itself or without exceeding the scope of the phenomenal field, venturing beyond phenomenology.

What affects us from this background that is always pre-given to passivity is not something totally empty, any data (we have no exact word for it) that would be meaningless, an absolutely unknown data. What affects us is known in advance, at least as long as it exists, in general, as something endowed with determinations; it is given to consciousness in the empty form of determinability. [9] (§ 9, pp. 43–44)

Even though it is necessary to consciously trace the lines of the field in act-intentionalities to acquire knowledge about a particular ontic region or to determine an object, the possibility of determination is already inherent in non-positional intentions. These intentions are situated in time, and “every individual intuited in the unity of an intuition is given in a temporal perspective, which is the form of donation of everything that is present (*Präsent*) amid the same presence (*Präsenz*)” [9] (p. 196).

Merleau-Ponty has these texts in mind. However, it is important to remember that they were written to ensure the accomplishment of the already launched task of the transcendental constitution and complete determination of meaning. Even with *Krisis* and its well-known transcendental step, we can observe that it is already the *logos* of phenom-

enality (as presence) that anticipates the possibility of this transcendental constitution. Nevertheless, the “existential” readings of Husserl strive at all costs to prevent this step and to remain in the *Lebenswelt* as a perpetually indeterminate field. However, if the conceptual consequence is as natural as it is necessary, it appears that the idealist turn of the “second reduction” must already be anticipated by the same logic through which the first reduction to the *Lebenswelt* is conceived. The perceptual Thing, as an unreflected presence, is given as a distance between its profile and itself or its sameness, a distance that intentionality is capable of surpassing in principle. This allows for the transition from the phenomenological intuitionism of the subjective-relative perception to the “great task of a pure theory of the essence of the life-world” [11] (§ 36, p. 141) that characterizes transcendental phenomenology. Of course, this task must encompass all the co-data, horizons, absences, and margins of presence corresponding to the different modes of intentionality. However, presence as a temporal mode of being at a distance from itself determines the meaning of what appears (“being”, whose correlate is “essence”) and the *Lebenswelt* (as the totality of space-time “onta”). Thus, “this is the synthetic totality in which we now discover, for the first time, that and how the world, as correlate of a discoverable universe of synthetically connected accomplishments, acquires its meaning of being [*Seinssinn*] and its validity of being [*Seinsgeltung*] in the totality of its ontic [*ontischen*] structures” [11] (§ 38, p. 145; modified translation).

This is Husserl’s response to the question of the “sense of being” of the *Lebenswelt*, which Merleau-Ponty considers to be the perceived world. It is not surprising that the answer is given almost with the universal a priori of correlation [11] (§§ 41–47) when phenomenology establishes itself as transcendental philosophy. It is simply a matter of recognizing how the notion of presence guarantees this and, perhaps, even serves as another name for transcendental subjectivity itself. The *logos* of presence/cing defines phenomenality as an infinite series or as a distance between the conscious thing and its integral adequacy that can be bridged in principle. What is at stake here is that this establishes a correlation between all meaning and such subjectivity. Husserl argues for “the absolute correlation between beings of every sort and every meaning, on the one hand, and absolute subjectivity, as constituting meaning and validity of being [*Sinn und Seinsgeltung*] in this broadest manner, on the other hand” [11] (§ 41, pp. 151–152; modified translation).

By following the order of the argument, it is possible to see that the entire philosophy of Merleau-Ponty in the 1940s also encompasses these elements from canonical phenomenology. It defends the “primacy of perception” as the inseparable connection between subjectivity and the world, albeit reworked as a perceptual correlation between the movement and the bodily posture that is always intertwined with a perceived world. This body can never exhaust the meaning of the world’s transcendence since it neither produces it nor contemplates it entirely. The notion of “presence” as a “field of presence” serves to both verify this a priori of correlation in canonical phenomenology and reformulate it in perceptual terms in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology⁴ [10].

The same applies to temporality, as intentional modalities that do not constitute “acts” in themselves, such as retention (primary memory) and protention, bring them closer to perception, offering the thing in its embodied presence—in “flesh and blood” (in its *Leibhaftigkeit*). Thus, while “perception, in this case, is the act that places something before our eyes as the thing itself, the act that originally constitutes the object [...] its opposite is re-presentation [*Vergegenwärtigung, Re-Präsentation*], understood as the act that does not place an object itself before our eyes but just re-presents it; that places it before our eyes in image” [7,8] (p. 43; § 17, p. 41). On the other hand, this leads to considering secondary types of temporal relationship (secondary memory of recollection and explicit expectation) as analogous to imagination, as they offer the thing “as if” (*als ob* or, in the text, *gleichsam*): “recollection, like phantasy, merely offers us re-presentation; recollection is as it were the same consciousness as the act aimed at the now and the act aimed at the past, the acts that create time—as it were the same, but nonetheless modified” [7,8] (p. 43; § 17, pp. 41–42). This identification between time, presence, and perception is crucial

to Merleau-Ponty's early philosophical investigations. In Husserl's lectures, retention as "primary consciousness of the past" was initially distant from perception [7] (§ 12)⁵ because perception is "the act that originally constitutes the now" [7] (§ 17, p. 43). However, when retention is considered a constitutive part of the original field of consciousness, as an original experience, a more fundamental kinship with perception is found. Both inhabit the originary zone and "if we call perception the act in which all 'origin' lies, the act that constitutes originally, then primary memory is perception" [7] (§ 17, p. 43). Just as well as perception "sees" the present in flesh and blood, retention also "sees" directly the past. Both retention and perception belong to the primary awareness of presentation, rather than representation. Thus, the question arises as to whether the primary phenomenological distinction lies between presence and representation rather than between present and the past or future. This is noted by great readers like Pedro Alves:

The donation of the world, since it is primarily shaped in the presentative acts, is only fully realized, therefore, in the connection that closely links *Gegenwärtigung* and *Vergegenwärtigung*. As a result, presentification is not a supplementary and inessential element, a mere present amputated from its primary impressive force or that decaying sense, in the famous Hobbesian characterization. [...] Because there is not in Husserl a privilege of strict perception, but of the game between presentation and presentification, the "primacy of perception" thesis can now show itself in its ultimate and most fundamental meaning. [12] (p. 45)

This reading is evident in Merleau-Ponty's most significant phenomenological period, where he seeks to theorize the relationship between expressed acts of thought and the discovery of passive syntheses operating in time and perception, highlighting the inseparable link between activity and passivity. According to Merleau-Ponty, perception extends beyond the "now" and encompasses the unitary complex of the "field of presence". This perspective considers the original modalities of the present, the past–present (retention), and the present-to-come (protention) as modes of donation that differ from their intentional modifications in attention, recollection, or deliberate anticipation.

In this original presentation, "to appear", experiences "need to be borne into being by a primary consciousness, which here is my inner perception of recollection or imagination" [3] (p. 485; my emphasis). This equates consciousness in presence with perceptive consciousness, where imagination, the past, and the future are perceived rather than represented. Moreover, this perception is fundamentally temporal, as a presentation: "Nevertheless my act of representation, unlike the experiences represented, is actually present to me; the former is perceived, the latter are merely represented" [3] (p. 485; my emphasis). Hence, the sense of presence becomes the primary modality of consciousness, as "to be now [*être à présent*] is to be from always and for ever" [3] (p. 483). This is why the present is regarded as the locus of subjectivity in perception.

5. Presence as a Gap

Perception is then understood as presentation in this model of phenomenology. This affiliation is acknowledged. Reading the text is enough to find it. But now one needs to seek the consequences of this primacy of perception as a primacy of presence, as well as the phenomenology of presence that derives from it.

A classic and very insightful comment on this issue is that of Gérard Granel, who states that "the idea of phenomenology consists in the elaboration of the sense of being as presentation, and in the elevation of consciousness to Being" [13] (p. 136). Once again, the primary donation of sense in phenomenology cannot be representative but presentative. This is the trump card of phenomenology, which aims to apprehend "*the étant-présent* in its *être-présent* as an *étant-présenté*, whose being is *présentation*" [13] (p. 136; my emphasis). It is important to fully grasp the consequences of such truisms because if the status of things—as the "things themselves"—depends on this crucial presence, it is because their "sameness" (*Selbstheit*) involves its donation, as self-donation (*Selbstgebung*). Thus, "to

be” and “to be given” are the same. Nothing is more natural for a phenomenology of perception that does not seek to separate being from its perceptual apprehension.

That the table is given and that it is itself given are not precisely two facts, but “one and the same thing”, and this situation defines the essence of intuition. The thing in intuition is a present-being [*étant-présent*] that is itself present in everything that presents it, for example, the table in all the color-qualities that have no autonomy concerning the table itself. Because they are not something that, presenting immediately to themselves, would represent the table or announce it, in short, refer to it in some way; but, precisely, what always and immediately presents the table and only presents itself as its color. [13] (p. 144)

We believe that the discovery of being as presentation and the restriction of sense to this interplay of presence and absence leads to the consideration of all the transcendence (of things, of others, myself, or the world) alongside this characteristic of sameness (*Selbstheit*). It only makes sense to think of a “profile” if it is precisely a profile “of” something. That is, of something that remains at least the same, or of something as the “same” thing. So that this circumscription of perceptual life to a field of presence leads one to consider *logos* as a movement of presentation⁶. We stand at the heart of phenomenology as a study of permanence in variation, motivated by its motto *Zu den Sachen selbst*.

Granel’s step is clever yet redundant. It has to be. He emphasizes that the presence of a thing is inherently tied (present) to everything that this thing reveals, as its being. Therefore, its meaning must be limited to its donation. Perhaps these analyses can be further expanded, as the ruse of presence lies precisely in reconciling transcendence and immanence. It makes the mentioned paradox intelligible since presence is not static or punctual, but rather a kind of “interval” or “gap”. Of course, it is an inexhaustible interval that cannot be traversed in actual perception. Nevertheless, this gap, which is part of the donation of everything in the field of presence, does not need to be crossed. The presumption or attempt to cross it turns each perceptual experience into ostensive data regarding its complete adequacy within this very field. Therefore, the constitutive interval of presence pre-determines its traversal, and it is also implicated in Merleau-Ponty’s thought when he revisits the analysis of temporality and the field of presence, even though he seeks to draw different conclusions from those they originally pointed out.

When phenomenology describes the constant tension and the presumed agreement between profile and thing, this philosophy aims to reunite two inextricable aspects of every sense: its transcendent character, which leads to different, alien, and unknown developments, and its immanent character, concerning subjective apprehension. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty wants to remove any intransigent element in this immanent side of apprehension because this would cause the perceived terms to have a pre-established form. Thinking of perception as a noematic intentionality marks this attempt to disable the “noetic” moment of intentional experience—precisely what would give a specific form of consciousness (*morphé*) to the perceived data and would organize the non-intentional sensory contents (*hyleen*) by giving them meaning (in the so-called *Sinngebung*).

There must be, corresponding to this outline [*ébauche*] of being which appears through the concordant aspects of my own and intersubjective experience, an experience of which I presume the possible completion through indefinite horizons—from the sole fact that my phenomena solidify into a thing and display in their progress a certain constant style—there must be, corresponding to this open unity of the world, an open and indefinite unity of subjectivity. [3] (p. 465; my emphasis)

According to Merleau-Ponty, the pursuit of the “perfect fullness” [*plénitude insurpassable*] [3] (p. 373) of reality lies within the perceptive agency, but only to the extent that perception is understood as this noematic intentionality. The notion of perceptual constancy, described in Gestalt terms, is then philosophically understood in noematic terms. The permanence of the thing alongside its perceptual variations is ensured by the empty nucleus

toward which they converge. Therefore, to comprehend the meaning of an experience, it is necessary to live it, as the perceptive consciousness is deeply intertwined with the world and can only apprehend it by standing before its presence. Simultaneously, the relationship between each of our experiences is what liberates them from the constraints of empiricism, as they all constitute experiences of the “same” world. Let us consider these two points, both of which became apparent when Merleau-Ponty confronts the challenging issue of multiple experiences of space, such as in the context of “myth”.

It must be acknowledged that in the experience of a myth and of the perceptual environment that it evokes (referred to as the “mythical space”), the primitive consciousness lives embodied in it, without distance, that it is effectively “mythical consciousness”: “it is not borne away by each of its pulsations, otherwise it would not be conscious of anything at all. It does not stand back from its *noemata*” [3] (p. 338). While consciousness is engaged in perceiving, the author immediately adds that it cannot be entirely conflated with what is perceived, as it would become an object rather than a subject. There must exist a minimum distance between consciousness and the apprehended object, which allows the series of profiles to form a noematic thread or chain revolving around the same thing: “on the other hand, if it passed away with each one of them [the *noemata*], and if it did not sketch the movement of objectification, it would not crystallize itself in myths” [3] (p. 338). Therefore, engagement is only a half-truth, causing the body to lose itself in its partial perceptual environments. This half-truth is counterbalanced by the minimum distance of consciousness regarding the perceived. Such a distance allows not only the departure from the myth (to engage in reasoning) but also to think that there is a relationship between each of these lived experiences or perceptual semi-worlds. The correlation between sleep and awakening further reinforces this argument: “Without the waking state, dreams would be no more than instantaneous modulations, and so would not even exist for us” [3] (p. 339).

Perceptual consciousness has a foot inside what it perceives and a foot outside, and this makes its presumptive and inchoative movement of objectification. Each perception strives to attain objectivity, even if it is never fully realized. However, there are consequences to this process, as it necessitates an examination of how the notion of perceptive *logos* upholds the traditional concepts of constitution and rationality, which are already entrenched in canonical phenomenology. The transcendental constitution can only be partially achieved within each unfolding of perception as an incomplete objectification, preventing it from being conceived as an *eidos* or an ideal form. Nonetheless, the potential for the constitution remains possible in its base, as a shared (and unreached) goal that each perception pursues in its quest for objectification.

This minimum distance of consciousness regarding the noematic chain also reappears in the chapter on subjectivity as the pre-reflexive contact with oneself. It is the tacit cogito, which is less a coincidence of the subject with himself than being “not concealed from itself” [3] (p. 342). Consequently, the contact with oneself remains alongside a certain distance that the author believes to be the transcendence of the world itself since “consciousness is distanced [*éloignée*] from being, and from its own being, and at the same time united with them, by the thickness of the world” [3] (p. 344). A radical transcendence, we must say, that assures a positive indeterminacy in everything we see.

There is a tradition of reading Merleau-Ponty on the disservices that the tacit cogito would render to the theoretical approach of perception. All the drawbacks would be to some extent related to it, contributing to making Merleau-Ponty intellectualist [14] (p. 34), idealist [15], subjectivist [16], and even platonic [17] (p. 313)—the cogito, therefore, would be fatally incompatible with the body. For instance, Peillon asserts that, after all the description of the non-thetic intentionality of perception, Merleau-Ponty provides the *corps propre* with a cogito and turns it into a “constituent body”:

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the overcoming of the subject-object dualism is internalized in the subject, and the transcendence of the world is reduced to a first immanence. [...] The only difference that still exists between this body-subject and the constitutive consciousness of transcendental immanentism [...] is that

this body lives in ignorance of its power and that the world remains a mystery to it, while consciousness has a full acknowledge of itself and possesses the “law of construction” of the world. [16] (pp. 165–166)

We believe that the distance between consciousness and the world imposed by the cogito is already a consequence of the prior bias of considering meaning as presence and *logos* as presentation. Thus, the consideration of the given as a type of “presence” leads to this distance of consciousness and the tacit cogito, which must be understood first.

Therefore, this minimum immanence of self-consciousness and the minimum permanence of things (themselves) could compromise the perceptual transcendence, assumed to be one of the greatest theoretical gains of this work. That is why reading it from the perspective of temporality compels Merleau-Ponty to introduce an element of “opacity” in the center of consciousness and in the nucleus of things. This opacity would make its meaning not only indeterminate but, above all, a mundane and sensible meaning that is not constituted by consciousness.

6. Transcendence and Opacity

Opacity serves a high purpose because, after adopting the donation model based on the field of presence, the only way to think that the world is the source of meaning is to think that there is an opacity or a blind spot (a *punctum caecum*) in the center of this same presence—even though it had been (triply) endorsed (in the thing as *noema*, in the pré-reflexive cogito, and in the present as the core of time). This is precisely what the author does at different moments. Here is an exemplary passage: “We now understand why things, which owe their meaning to the world, are not meanings presented to the intelligence, but opaque structures, and why their ultimate significance remains confused” [3] (p. 384; my emphasis). This passage marks the source of meaning and seeks to derive it from a constitutive opacity of what is apprehended. Then, there are two very important inferences here: opacity would be what makes (i) the subject a body and (ii) the transcendence a property of the world itself.

Nonetheless, if we closely examine each of the operators used in this phenomenological transposition, we can see that it is, to some extent, impossible. The three figures of the center (in the perceived, in consciousness, and in temporal genesis) are the same ones that propel perception in search of complete adequacy within the field of presence. However, their inadequacy becomes a presumptive adequacy, an in-adequacy, as the interplay between presence and absence is somewhat sanctioned by a presence of a greater degree, which is the constitutive interval of complete determination. As a result, Merleau-Ponty can only prevent determination in a negative or restrictive manner, as in-determined, openness, and inadequate against (and from) determination, closeness, and adequacy. Transcendence is threaded within its presence, making it difficult to consider it as radical or as originating from the world itself. Therefore, when the author tries to uphold what he has written since the beginning of his work—namely that “we must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon” [3] (p. 12)—by deriving such indeterminacy from a constitutive “opacity” of perceptual consciousness, he appears to be aware of the consequences of adopting this *logos* of presence. The “opaque” factor thus becomes the element with which he strives, at all costs, to delimit this very presence that can only be total.

Therefore, it is important to recognize the close and sometimes synonymous relationship between “transcendence” and “opacity”. The lack of transparency of the perceived would lead to the transcendence of perception in general, in a movement where one appears as inversely proportional to the other. According to Merleau-Ponty, “a consequent transcendental idealism rids the world of its opacity and its transcendence” [3] (p. vi), and a constitutive subject who explicitly knows what he perceives would imply “that the thing loses its transcendence and opacity” [3] (p. 380). While things are described as “opaque structures” and there is an “opacity of sense experience [*sentir*]” [3] (pp. 384; 376), we see that the cogito “dominates and maintains the opacity of perception” [3] (p. 53). This attests that the opacity of what is present or donates itself as presence is tied to Merleau-Ponty’s

interpretation of its transcendence as a property of the world and of being. Moreover, as a sensible transcendence that is indeterminate in its meaning. This passage on the “perceptual synthesis” also reveals how opacity serves as a strategic factor in transitioning from (i) presence as a subjective apprehension to (ii) transcendence as property of the world.

Being supported by the prelogical unity of the bodily schema, the perceptual synthesis no more holds the secret of the object than it does that of the *corps propre*, and this is why the perceived object always presents itself as transcendent, and why the synthesis seems to be effected on the object itself, in the world, and not at that metaphysical point which the thinking subject is. . . [3] (p. 269)

There is a logical consequence in this quote that has been explored and reiterated throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception* and deserves careful reading. First, “the perceptual synthesis no more holds the secret of the object”, introducing opacity into the perceived present. Second, “this is why the perceived object always presents itself as transcendent”, deriving transcendence from this present opacity. Third, “the synthesis seems to be effected on the object itself, in the world, and not at that metaphysical point which the thinking subject is”, leading to a conclusion that qualifies transcendence as a property of the world itself and that obliterates the logic of presence through which this very conclusion is conceived and achieved. This explicit transposition implicitly preserves and conserves a logic that is not only foreign but even inhospitable to it. Qualifying the transcendence of sense as a property of the world emphasizes this world as a phenomenizing potency, a position that will continue to be unfolded in Merleau-Ponty’s final writings with the notion of the “flesh of the world”⁷ [18].

7. Conclusions

Maintaining the logic of presence to understand the perceptual development and its apprehension by the body implies a conceptual difficulty not only in *the Phenomenology of Perception* but also in all phenomenology that seeks to approach the sensitive and corporal dimensions of our experience. When it tries to describe the body, there is a risk of talking about a diminished consciousness endowed with opacity or passivity, but not with a true “absence” or “difference” (two fundamental attributes of transcendence) that could and should make the body an intentional pole. The rooting of consciousness in the body should be seen as just a metaphor for the fact that consciousness is its body and, moreover, is sensible. Truth be told, to be—and not to have—a body is to have the experience of true absence, being part of the world and at the same time being phenomenologically coextensive with it. As *pars totalis*, the body would never exhaust the transcendence apprehended by it. That is why the issue of body and sensitivity is so difficult for phenomenology, and why it is central to all of Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions, as it holds a mystery that touches upon the very problem of philosophical *logos*. Until his final unpublished writings, one can read that there is a kind of “truth” that can only be embodied and that consists of being different from itself, of not being capable of being present to itself, a mystery that only the body can retain. Obviously, this is not a case of deprivation or empirical lack of presence. Instead, it is the openness to that kind of transcendence that the author sought since the beginning of his writings: “*la vérité du corps, c’est le charnel, c’est la transcendance*” [19] (p. 180).

Long before explicitly adopting this ontological task, it is in the transition between Merleau-Ponty’s early phenomenological writings and those on language and history in the 1950s that we can observe a farewell to the notion of presence as a truly necessary conceptual operator. Particularly, in 1951, the “field of presence” appears more as an homage to Husserl rather than an endorsement of the doctrine of the “living present” as central to perception and subjectivity. In this same lecture, “On The Phenomenology of Language”, Merleau-Ponty also references the contributions of Structural Linguistics to a new theory of meaning. Furthermore, in his courses between 1952 and 1953, he undertook the task of a “re-definition of consciousness and meaning”, disentangling himself from certain “classic concepts” previously adopted, such as “perception”, “consciousness”, and

“synthesis” [20] (pp. 45–46), as it becomes necessary to understand “consciousness as *écart*” [20] (p. 173). Let us examine this briefly to conclude.

In these years, Merleau-Ponty’s thought increasingly moves towards a diacritical and differential conception of meaning that applies not only to language but also to perception. As a result, the entire doctrine of intentionality is reformulated⁸ [21]. Just as signs are organized diacritically to give rise to signification, the so-called sensory *hyleen* organize themselves diacritically to give rise to perception. While this may not change the superficial aspects of his philosophy, it does alter what is essential: the notion of *logos*. The diacritical organization eliminates the need for a central element that was repeatedly invoked when understanding the thing through the noema, subjectivity through the tacit cogito, and the donation of meaning through the living present.

This reformulation occurs in two steps, concerning *percipi* and *percipere*, which together give rise to a new understanding of their relationship. On one hand, “the sensory fields are this, diacritical systems given with values of employment, characteristic equivalences” [20] (p. 111). On the other hand, it is necessary to apprehend “the body schema as a diacritical system” [20] (p. 174). Thus, the “comparison of the body schema and language” becomes possible through the adoption of a differential, non-presential dynamic of sense. Just as “language does not express meanings, but differences of meanings”, “in the same way the body \neq [differentiates] perceived things” [20] (p. 143) and “it is the same thing to have a body as capable of expressive gesticulation or action and having a phonematic system with the capacity to build signs” [20] (p. 204). Therefore, the phenomenology outlined here does not aim to return to the “thing itself” (*chose même*) or to consider the world as “unique” or “the same”. Instead, it focuses on the process of differentiation that underlies every relation of meaning, whether perceptual or linguistic, natural or cultural, even in that fundamental difference that exists between the body and the world.

Seeking to uncover a phenomenalizing potential within the world, while maintaining its subjective apprehension, requires first grounding consciousness in the body (a task already achieved in the author’s initial phase), as well as grounding the body within the world. This involves increasingly anchoring intentionality within the perceptual field. However, in pursuing this path, the author must address how this world, as it becomes phenomenally constituted, is subjectively perceived. Specifically, how the body’s differentiation from the world is essential to the experience “of” the world, in the dual sense of the genitive, as emphasized by R. Barbaras. Differentiation renders both their unity and divergence intelligible, whereby the body’s perceptions, gestures, and speech are seen as deviant values (termed as *écart*) relative to the system or diacritical level (*niveau*) of the world.

Now, there is still a requirement to make sense of this logic. This process of differentiation can only be considered primary if the phenomenal field itself lacks a referential structure. An example is sufficient to make this explicit and guide our interpretation. Without the concept of presence to explain the sense of perception, both the “same” world and the “presumed” perceptual environment become possibilities of language, from now on responsible for the referential aim or designation. Merleau-Ponty states: “To pass to the idea of space, an expression is needed that does not work in principle as a given teleology, that founds itself” [20] (p. 88). Thus, the teleological presumption exists as a potential unfolding of intentionality in general, rather than being its actual realization, as previously conceived in the logics of presence. This perspective differs significantly from what was stated in 1945: “I never live entirely in anthropological spaces, but am always rooted in a natural and non-human space” [3] (p. 339), since even the unity of this lived and perceived space can only be understood as a product of language. “Natural expression does not go beyond” [20] (p. 87), and whenever we comprehend an environment as “the” space we are already situated within the language and in a “cultural space” [20] (p. 87). It is not by chance that it is precisely here that Merleau-Ponty takes the initial step of considering the nucleus of pre-reflective consciousness (previously conceived as a tacit cogito) as a product of language. This becomes explicit in his later manuscripts and reverberates throughout a

whole tradition of Merleau-Ponty's readers⁹. However, this shift in his thought had already taken place well before the explicit project of an ontology.

We believe that this step marks the author's departure from the phenomenology of presence that was previously adopted, towards a new phenomenology of difference and a new understanding of universality as "lateral universality" [20] (p. 87). It becomes evident that when phenomenology seeks to describe the body and sensibility positively, it must confront true "absence" or "difference". This is because the transcendence it aims for cannot be a mere variation of the old transcendence-in-immanence, where consciousness constitutes the body rather than the other way around. Notably, disruptive interpretations by philosophers such as Lévinas and Derrida have taken phenomenology in the first direction, namely, of a radical "absence" understood as alterity. Nonetheless, one might question whether it is not "difference" that allows theoretical advancement without completely breaking away from the phenomenological framework. In this sense, the true departure from the logic of presence would not lead to an extra-phenomenal absence, but rather to a pre-presential difference.

As Pedro Alves said regarding Husserl, perhaps the secret of his analysis consists in understanding well what lies between presence and representation, in the intentional and crucial change between one and the other. Similarly, we can ask, regarding Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology that he has bequeathed to us, if it is not necessary to take a step back. This would allow us to apprehend and describe what lies between difference and presence, or between a pre-referential intention (even a non-referential one) and the famous "return to the things themselves". By situating the *logos* of phenomena a step back, we can still maintain the phenomenological paradigm, but with a shift from a phenomenology of presence to a phenomenology of difference.

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Notes

¹ I translate all Merleau-Ponty's texts from the original French edition.

² "In reality, what Husserl was looking for to 'ballast' his eidetic intuition and to distinguish it definitively from verbal concepts, was (unbeknown to him), a notion of the kind that the Gestalt theorists suggested. It is a notion of order and meaning that is not generated by applying the mind's activity to some material external to it, a notion of spontaneous organization beyond the activity-passivity distinction of which the visible configuration of experience is emblematic" [4] (p. 414).

³ About the reciprocal influences of phenomenology and psychology, especially in the development of an intentionality appropriate to the body (and not to consciousness), see the paper on Merleau-Ponty and Buytendijk [6] (p. 96). It comes from the latter a notion of "motor intention" [*Bewegungsentwurf*] that allows Merleau-Ponty to understand the behavior imperatively correlated with the environment that corresponds to it.

⁴ It is worth mentioning the reconstruction of this notion by Burke, as well as his deserved criticism. "The *Präsenzfeld* as he has presented it in *Phenomenology of Perception* is still too much polarized by the here-there distinction in which primacy is given to the subject, the absolute here, the absolute present, as though 'thereness' is reduced to the fact that I perceive, that the world is there because I perceive it rather than my perceiving it being based on the fact that it is there" [10] (p. 58).

⁵ "[...] the tone primarily remembered in intuition is something fundamentally and essentially different from the perceived tone; and correlatively, primary memory (retention) of the tone is something different from sensation of the tone" [7,8] (p. 34; §12, p. 32).

- ⁶ Presence is more a “verb” than a “name” [10] (p. 38). Furthermore, Burke points out that the Merleau-Pontian use of the *Präsenzfeld* is as indiscriminate (concerning Husserl’s writings) as it is fundamental to his own theory of perception. The “field of presence” is a broad notion with noematic and noetic moments. The second moment makes the presence coextensive to everything present in it and produced by the act of conscience that apprehends it. “Consciousness is the originator and the presence of the world is the originated. Consciousness as the act of time-creation, is the act of presence creation; the presence of the world is the noematic dimension of time, the explicit and determinate form of the noetic acts of the self-generative *Präsenzfeld*” [10] (p. 49). In our view, this coextensive condition establishes all data of presence within the field as capable of being completely determined in its sense. If it is not the case in an actual experience, since in perception it is always necessary to be situated in regard to the object, yet the “sense” of what is apprehended, its inadequate correlate, must be considered from a complete adequacy. Consequently, the rooting of consciousness in the field of presence is not what hinders the transcendental constitution of sense, but precisely what makes it widely possible, that is, in its active and passive layers of donation. “Even if the presence of the world can be grasped only according to its relation of ‘presence to’ a subject, this does not mean that this relation is the main ontological element of that presence but rather its explicit and determinate form at the epistemic level” [10] (p. 53).
- ⁷ It is possible to notice how the notion of flesh realizes the intentional unity between visions of the world in space and time, while also allowing for the transcendence of other visions beyond my own. “Each landscape of my life, because it is not a wandering troop of sensations or a system of ephemeral judgments, but a segment of the durable flesh of the world, as long as it is visible, is pregnant with many other visions besides my own; and the visible that I see, of which I speak, even if it is not Mount Hymettus [*L’hymette*] or the plane trees of Delphi, is numerically the same that Plato and Aristotle saw and spoke of” [18] (p. 162). However, this unity will be treated differently when considering the intentional model still adopted in his early writings. This has been underlined by a significant part of the critical fortune of Merleau-Ponty’s readers. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that when flesh is understood as *differentiation*, it phenomenally being in a specific manner. We advance this necessity and the heuristic value of such an interpretation in our conclusions.
- ⁸ The paper “Why don’t things have to be the same?” [21] (pp. 147 ss) deals specifically with the reform of the notion of profile (*Abschattung*), showing how the passage between the dyad *éskisse-chose même* to another between *écart-niveau* situates Merleau-Ponty’s in the edge of a phenomenological perspectivism.
- ⁹ In passages such as the following: “To have the idea of ‘thinking’ (in the sense of the ‘thought of seeing and of feeling’), to make the ‘reduction’, to return to immanence and to the consciousness of . . . it is necessary to have words. It is by the combination of words [. . .] that I do the transcendental attitude, that I *constitute* the constitutive consciousness”. The sequence makes it clear that the whole question of subjectivity becomes related to that of reference (not just the self-reference of reflection, the *spoken cogito*, but the pre-reflexive reference of the self-presence, or the tacit *cogito*) and that language is responsible for that referentiality involved on presence, be it on presence to oneself (subjectivity) or on the presence of things (as noemata, or “things themselves”): “The words do not refer to positive significations and finally to the flux of the *Erlebnisse* as *Selbstgegeben*” [18] (pp. 222–223; note of January, 1959).

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