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Essays in Honor of Lester Embree

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DERMOT MORAN
"HUSSERL AND MERLEAU-PONTY ON EMBODIED EXPERIENCE"
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Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on Embodied Experience

Dermot Moran

Ich habe meinen Körper, ich bin mein Leib, Helmuth Plessner

I am my body. Gabriel Marcel (quoted in Phenomenology of Perception, p. 174 n. 1; 203 n. 1)

I am my body. (Je suis donc mon corps.) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie de la perception (1945, p. 198; 231; see also p. 150; 175)

In this paper I want to re-examine Husserl's foundational discussion of embodiment and reassess its influence on Merleau-Ponty.*

1 In the Shadow of Husserl

Since the foundation of phenomenology with Franz Brentano, the careful and patient analysis of perception has been at the very heart of its method and concerns. Although he rarely made it explicitly thematic, Husserl regularly discussed perceptual experience in his major publications from *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901) to *Experience and Judgment* (1938). (An exception to this lack of thematization, however, is his 1907 *Thing and Space* (*Ding und Raum*)† lectures, where he may be said to have explicitly inaugurated the "phenomenology of perception," where he employs

*(An earlier ersion of this paper was presented to the "100 Years of Merleau-Ponty Centenary Conference" held at the University of Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria, 14–16 March 2008. I would like to thank Ivan Kolev for his comments.)

†E. Husserl, *Ding und Raum*, hrsg. Ulrich Claesges, *Husserliana* Bd. XVI (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1973; trans. Richard Rojcewicz as *Things and Space. Lectures of 1907* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997). Herafter "DR" followed by the pagination in English, then in German.

D. Moran (✉)
School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland
e-mail: dermot.moran@ucd.ie

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that exact phrase. More recently his *Wahrnehmung und Aufmerksamkeit* lectures (up to 1912) have been published which also discuss perception in detail.[1])

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as he constantly acknowledged (see, for instance, his extended recognition of his debt in "The Philosopher and His Shadow" in *Signs*,[2] while at the same time emphasizing that all commemoration is also a kind of betrayal), was hugely influenced by Edmund Husserl's account of embodied perceptual experience (not only as he discovered it in the typescripts of *Ideas II* and *Crisis*, but from his extraordinarily attentive readings of Husserl's published writings). Merleau-Ponty's interpretative reading of Husserl remains remarkably consistent across his writings from *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945)[3] to *Signs* (1960). While Merleau-Ponty claimed to be "pushing Husserl further than he wished to go," he never ceased to express a huge loyalty to the mission of phenomenology and to philosophy as itself phenomenology. He has been accused of being overly insistent on his continuity with Husserl, when in fact he was breaking new ground. But I think this is mistaken and that Merleau-Ponty is actually a supremely subtle and perceptive reader of Husserl; and indeed was quick to grasp the fuller implications of Husserl's works, which we, thanks to the Husserliana publications, can now appreciate in more detail. Of course, when writing the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty has access not only to Husserl's draft manuscripts as supplied to him by Van Breda through the war years, as well as personal contact with Eugen Fink, but also access to very reliable texts expounding Husserl's conception of experience, namely Edith Stein's *On the Problem of Empathy* (Halle, 1917)[4] as well as her Habilitation on the "Contributions to the Philosophical Foundation of Psychology and of the Human Sciences" published in the *Jahrbuch* (1922, cited in Merleau-Ponty's bibliography in the *Phenomenology of Perception*).[5] Stein is clear (as is *Ideas II*) that the sensory fields of experience are "alien to the ego" (*Ichfremd*) as opposed to more "*ichlich*" or "egoic" states such as enjoyment.[6] In *On the Problem of Empathy* she gives a very careful articulation of Husserl's views on perception, as can be found in the later published *Ideas II*, with elaborate discussion of the incompletely constituted character of the lived body as well as its function as the *Nullpunkt* of perception. Merleau-Ponty always portrays the mature Husserl as someone who acknowledged that phenomenological reflection had to be harnessed to *history* and *facticity*, and who faced the paradoxes implicit in that conception, and indeed his own phenomenology of perception follows Husserl *à la lettre* in this regard.

Given the widespread view that Merleau-Ponty departs fundamentally from his mentor Husserl, it is important to try to form a more accurate picture of the nature of Husserl's influence on him, and the manner in which Merleau-Ponty in turn transformed and interpreted what he had received from the master he never personally knew.[7]

It is often maintained (by philosophers such as Hubert Dreyfus) that Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of embodied perception offer a significant advance beyond Husserl's ground-breaking but relatively tentative and unfinished explorations of this area (especially in his *Ideas II*).[8] According to this reading, Husserl is misleadingly characterized as a "methodologically solipsistic" representational, Cartesian philosopher of consciousness, who did think tangentially about embodiment and corporeality (*Leiblichkeit* which all animate beings, even ghosts, have – not *Körperlichkeit* which all material, spatial bodies have), but who is not usually credited with being a genuine philosopher of embodied action (Dreyfus' "skillful absorbed coping") or of what Merleau-Ponty calls the "incarnate subject" (*le sujet incarné*, PP, p. 154; 180). Even a sympathetic phenomenologist such as M. C. Dillon while acknowledging that Merleau-Ponty was in his middle period (i.e. 1945–1959) uncritical of Husserl, goes on to speak of Husserl's concept of the *Lebenswelt* as having a "latent solipsism" and as being conceived idealistically as a "constituted cultural horizon".[9] This view of Husserl can be challenged, but moreover, it was never the view of Husserl held by Merleau-Ponty.

Overall, there are indeed striking similarities between Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of the role of the "I-body" (*Ichleib*) in all perceiving, the body as the *Nullpunkt* of orientation, the inextricable intertwining (*Verflechtung*) of the senses in actual perception, the presence/absence composition of perception, whereby the object appears in a "profile" (*Abschattung*) with other absent profiles co-intended, and the "horizonal" character of perceptual experience, as A. D. Smith has pointed out in a recent study.[10] In this respect, apart from a difference in the descriptive language, Merleau-Ponty's account of perception is much the same as

[1] See E. Husserl, *Wahrnehmung und Aufmerksamkeit. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1893–1912)*, Husserliana vol. XXXVIII (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004).

[2] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), trans. R. McCleary, *Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern U.P., 1964).

[3] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), trans. C. Smith as *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962). Henceforth "PP" followed by page number of English translation; then, pagination of French edition.

[4] Edith Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (Halle: Buchdruckerie des Waisenhauses, 1917, reprinted Muenchen: Verlagsgesellschaft Gerhard Kaffke, 1980), trans. Waltraut Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964; 3rd ed., Reprinted Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1989).

[5] This treatise has been translated as E. Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, ed. Marianne Sawicki, trans. Mary Catherine Baseheart and Marianne Sawicki, *Collected Works of Edith Stein* Vol. 7 (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2000).

[6] Stein, op. cit., p. 17.

[7] A. D. Smith, "The Flesh of Perception: Merleau-Ponty and Husserl," in T. Baldwin, ed. *Reading Merleau-Ponty on Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1–22, also seeks to assess Husserl's relation to Merleau-Ponty, but Smith interprets Merleau-Ponty as classifying Husserl with the "intellectualists" whereas I do not.

[8] See, for instance, Hubert Dreyfus, "Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Husserl"s (and Searle's) Concept of Intentionality", *Rereading Merleau-Ponty: Essays Beyond the Continental-Analytic Divide*, eds. Lawrence Hass and Dorothea Olkowski (New York, NY: Humanity Books, 2000); and idem, "Intelligence without representation – Merleau-Ponty's critique of mental representation", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, Vol 1, No. 4, Special Issue: Hubert Dreyfus and the Problem of Representation, Anne Jaap Jacobson, Ed. (Kluwer Academic Publishers: 2002); and idem, "Merleau-Ponty and recent Cognitive Science", *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Taylor Carman and Mark Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[9] See M. C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 2nd Edition (Evanston: Northwestern U.P., 1988), p. 87.

[10] A. D. Smith, 'The Flesh of Perception: Merleau-Ponty and Husserl,' in T. Baldwin, ed. *Reading Merleau-Ponty on Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1–22.

Husserl's. Husserl is the primary source of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the incarnate subject,[11] and of the phenomenological principle that subject and object are correlated a priori in an inseparable way, such that they are, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "two abstract "moments" of a unique structure which is *presence*" (PP, p. 430; 492).

Husserl is also, for Merleau-Ponty, his ideal philosopher since, as perpetual beginner, he refuses to take for granted what others believe they know (PP, p. xiv; ix); in this sense Husserl challenges typical traditional philosophical and scientific accounts of perception. But Merleau-Ponty also finds in the writings of the mature Husserl (from *Ideas I* onwards, and not just in the *Crisis*) a more ambiguous philosophy, for whom, the reduction and the reflective turn can never do away with the complexity and darkness of the pre-reflective world of experience. In fact, I want to suggest, as Merleau-Ponty is the first to acknowledge, Husserl's thoughts about the subject incarnated in its perceptual world are very close to Merleau-Ponty's own views.

Merleau-Ponty usually presents this Husserl as the unpublished author struggling with radical originality as opposed to the "official" Husserl of publications such as *Ideas I*. He speaks of the "unthought" in Husserl (*impensé de Husserl*, "The Philosopher and His Shadow", *Signs*, p. 160; 202). Husserl's reflection is the uncovering of what is "unreflected" (*un irréfléchi*, *Signs*, p. 161; 204), and already given as that which provokes, enables and sustains the reflection itself. Merleau-Ponty links this emphasis on lived existence to a kind of Heideggerian/Sartrian emphasis on the anonymity of the subject's "ecstasis" or "*ek-stase*" (PP, p. 430; 491) towards the world: "It is this *ek-stase* of experience which causes all perception to be perception of something" (PP, p. 70; 85).[12] However, with regards to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty presents him primarily as Husserl's student, who developed Husserl's account of the *Lebenswelt*. Thus in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty writes:

> ...the whole of *Sein und Zeit* springs from an indication given by Husserl and amounts to no more than an explicit account of the "*natürlicher Weltbegriff*" or the "*Lebenswelt*" 'which Husserl, towards the end of his life, identified as the central theme of phenomenology.... (PP vii; i)

In other words, Merleau-Ponty here presents Heidegger's *Being and Time* in much the same way as Husserl himself did, namely, as a developed account of the natural mode of human being-in-the-world; "anthropology" in Husserl's sense. Merleau-Ponty does indeed understand human existence, as Heidegger does, primarily as transcendence towards the world, but here he is precisely following Sartre's reading of Husserl, and indeed Husserl's own remarks on intentional transcendence.

For Merleau-Ponty, while Husserl is the philosopher seeking "universal constitution", at the same time he came to recognise that all reflection must ultimately be captive to actual experience:

> Reflection is no longer the return to a pre-empirical subject (*retour à un sujet préempirique*) which holds the keys to the world (*des clefs du monde*); it no longer circumambulates its present object and possesses its constitutive parts. Reflection must become aware of its object in a contact or frequenting (*un contact ou une fréquentation*) which at the outset exceeds its power of comprehension. ... Reflection is no longer the passage to a different order (*le passage à un autre ordre*) which reabsorbs the order of present things; it is first and foremost a more acute awareness of the way in which we are rooted in them. ("The Philosopher and Sociology", *Signs*, pp. 104–5; 131)

Note that this term "pre-empirical" is frequent in Husserl.

With regard to the rejection of the "Cartesian" conception of universal constitution, is certainly true that Merleau-Ponty frequently rejects the idea of an disengaged intellectual consciousness constituting the world through some kind of intellectual synthesis and of intentionality as a "thought" or the product of an "I am" (see PP, p. 233; 269). Opposing the (Neo-Kantian?) interpretation of intentionality as a voluntary, primarily cognitive act, Merleau-Ponty emphases instead Husserl's "functioning intentionality" (*fungierende Intentionalität*) as "that which produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life" (PP xviii; xiii). Our bodily intentions already lead us into a world constituted for us before we conceptually encounter it in cognition:

> I am not a constituting thought (*une pensée constituante*), and my "I think" is not an "I am", unless by thought I can equal the world's concrete richness (*la richesse concrète du monde*), and re-absorb facticity into it. (PP, p. 376n.1; 430–1n.1)

With regard to the context of this latter quote, Merleau-Ponty has been talking about Husserl (via Descartes who is the explicit target) and is criticising the view that, while the object of perception is doubtful, the actual act of perceiving it is not. Merleau-Ponty rejects this kind of apodicticity attaching to "inner" perceiving. He argues that if there really is a constituting power of subjectivity, it cannot end in the mere essential structure of things but must yield the actual concrete world itself. For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is "transcendence through and through" (PP 376/431); what I am conscious of in seeing, is the "actual effecting of vision" (*l'effectuation même de la vision*, *PP* 376/431–2). Vision "is an action" and "sight is achieved and fulfils itself in the thing seen" (PP, p. 377; 432).

2 Challenging "Intellectualism" and the Pure Mind

There is in Husserl, for Merleau-Ponty, recognition of the ultimate impossibility of the transcendental attitude breaking with the natural attitude and becoming pure mind.

[11] See, for instance, Donn Welton, "Soft Smooth Hands: Husserl's Phenomenology of the Lived-Body", in Donn Welton ed. *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 38–56.

[12] Heidegger interprets intentionality in terms of the *ekstasis* of Dasein in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* as well as in *Being and Time*, see Dermot Moran, "Heidegger's Critique of Husserl's and Brentano's Accounts of Intentionality," *Inquiry* Vol. 43 No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 39–65; reprinted in *Phenomenology. Critical Concepts in Philosophy*, Ed. Dermot Moran and Lester E. Embree. (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), Vol. 1, pp. 157–183.

> We are involved in the world (*Nous sommes pris dans le monde*) and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world. (PP 5; 11)

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's Husserl is not a pure essentialist who ignores existence in terms of infinite possibilities but someone who puts the essences back into existence:

> Husserl's thought is as much attracted by the haecceity of Nature as by the vortex (*le tourbillon*) of absolute consciousness. ("The Philosopher and His Shadow", *Signs*, p. 165; 209)

Merleau-Ponty portrays the early Husserl (of the *Logical Investigations*) as someone committed to eidetic intuition that goes beyond the factual, "passing to the infinity of possibles" (*Signs*, p. 105; 106), but, even by the time of *Ideas I*, Husserl had recognised that "eidetic intuition has always been a "confirmation," and phenomenology an "experience ... and he generally rejected the possibility of a "mathematics of phenomena" or a "geometry of what is lived" (*Signs*, p. 105; 132). The real Husserl is someone who acknowledged the impossibility of shaking off the *Lebenswelt* (*le monde vécu*).

> The world ... is no longer the visible unfolding of constituting thought ... but the native abode of all rationality. (PP, p. 430; 492)

Furthermore, although Merleau-Ponty putatively differed from Husserl on the status and role of the transcendental ego, this is far from clear, given how approvingly Merleau-Ponty quotes Husserl's *Ideas II* on the nature of absolute subjectivity in "The Philosopher and His Shadow," which we shall return to below.

In fact, I believe that it can be demonstrated textually that many of Merleau-Ponty's criticisms of the interpretation of the Cartesian *cogito*, the transparency of constituting consciousness to itself, and of the status of the transcendental ego, are not in fact criticisms directed at Husserl himself, but are more generally criticisms of Neo-Cartesian and Neo-Kantian idealist thinkers such as Léon Brunschvicg (1869–1944) in particular, professor at the Sorbonne and the Ecole Normale.

3 The Thesis of the Primacy of Perception

Merleau-Ponty's work is a sustained effort to rehabilitate the world of perception with its inextricable correlation with the perceiving subject. He himself speaks of an "ontological rehabilitation of the sensible" ("Philosopher and His Shadow," *Signs*, p. 167). For him, both world and subject have been distorted both by science and by traditional philosophy. The danger, as Merleau-Ponty says, at the outset in *Phenomenology of Perception* is that we think we know (as the legacy of encrusted philosophy and a more general "intellectualism") what experience affords, we postulate certain theoretical constructs as the actual objects of perception and further we then "transpose these objects into consciousness" (PP, p. 5; 11):

> We think we know perfectly well what "seeing", "hearing", "feeling", are, because perception has long provided us with objects which are coloured and emit sounds. When we try to analyse it, we transpose (*nous transportons*) those objects into consciousness. (PP, p. 5; 11)

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty writes that "to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break (*il faut rompre*) with our familiar acceptance of it", but he goes on to conclude that "from this break we can learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world" (*le jaillissement immotivé du monde*, PP xiv; viii).

Husserl, too, speaks of the need both to overcome and to account for the "taken-for-grantedness" or "obviousness" (*Selbstverständlichkeit*) of our naively experienced world. This is the whole meaning of the transcendental attitude (see Prague lectures, XXIX 119):

> The transcendental philosopher sees with astonishment that this whole objectivity with all the sciences of it is a huge problem. The radical problem is already the obviousness (*Selbstverständlichkeit*), in which this world is constantly and which this world is. (XXIX 119)

Phenomenology rightfully insists on the a priori correlation between subject and object. In his later notes, Merleau-Ponty claimed that the *Phenomenology of Perception* failed because he was starting from a consciousness/object distinction,[13] but it is clear that even there he is articulating an overcoming of this divide in terms of a unified field of experience. As Dillon himself comments:

> "Consciousness" in the *Phenomenology* [*of Perception*] is a term seeking its own dissolution. It is an illuminating impediment to the development of Merleau-Ponty's ontology.[14]

Merleau-Ponty does not just want to emphasise the peculiar character of embodied perceiving. He also wants to emphasise that the so-called "objective world" to which perception gives access is also less fixed and more ambiguous that we normally suppose:

> Perception is thus paradoxical. The perceived thing itself is paradoxical; it exists only in so far as someone can perceive it. I cannot even for an instant imagine an object in itself. (*Primacy of Perception*, p. 16)

Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty are committed to the transcendental idealist claim that the objective world is what it is due to its correlation with subjectivity and there is no world outside of that correlation. As Merleau-Ponty constantly tries to articulate, the body is both in the world as object and also that which mediates world to the experiencing subject:

> My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven (*la texture commune de tous les objects*), and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my "comprehension" (*l'instrument general de ma 'compréhension'*). (PP, p. 235; 272)

As M. C. Dillon has pointed out, Merleau-Ponty is also committed to the foundationalist thesis of the primacy of perception as foundation for all claims to truth and

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[13] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, texte établi par Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 200, trans. A. Lingis, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern U.P., 1968), p. 253. Henceforth "VI" and page no. of English translation; followed by page number of French edition.

[14] M. C. Dillon, op. cit., p. 102.

validity.[15] According to Merleau-Ponty, the familiar, taken-for-granted perceptual world is actually "to a great extent unknown territory,"[16] ignored by traditional philosophy (Merleau-Ponty cites Descartes' wax example, better known by intellection than by sensing), yet rehabilitated by modern art (e.g. Cézanne) and by modern philosophy (phenomenology). In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he insists that all knowing, including intellection, indeed all consciousness, ultimately depends upon, elaborates on, what is uncovered in perception. Merleau-Ponty insists:

> all knowledge takes place within the horizons opened up by perception. (PP, p. 207; French 240)

and again

> All consciousness is, in some measure, perceptual consciousness. (PP, p. 395; 452);
>
> The perceived world is the always-presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence. (*Primacy of Perception*, p. 13)

And, elsewhere:

> all conciousness is perceptual even the consciousness of ourselves. ("The Primacy of Perception," in *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 13)

Merleau-Ponty's main theme is the concrete richness of pre-reflective, pre-theoretical, embodied conscious experience of the world through perception. This perceptual life provides the ambiguous basis for subsequent rational thought and indeed conscious "egoic" selfhood in the full sense. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, as indeed for Husserl, the "self" which perceives is, not the I which decides and reasons, but rather another self that has, in his words, "already sided with the world" (*qui a déjà pris parti pour le monde*, PP, p. 216; 250), a "modality of a general existence, one already destined (*vouée à un monde*) for a physical world, that runs through me (*fuse à travers moi*) without my being the cause of it" (ibid.). Elsewhere, in *Phenomenology of Perception* he says:

> My personal existence must be the resumption of a prepersonal tradition. There is, therefore, another subject beneath me, for whom a world exists before I am here, and who marks out my place in it. This captive or natural spirit is my body ... the system of anonymous "functions" which draw every particular focus into a general project. (PP, 254; 293–4)

According to Merleau-Ponty, "the body is a natural self" (*un moi naturel*, PP, p. 206; 239). In general, Merleau-Ponty, under the influence of Heidegger and Sartre, takes the name "existence" for the general state of the embodied human connection to the world, for which he also used the term "being-in-the-world" (*être au monde*).

[15] See M. C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 2nd Edition (Evanston: Northwestern U.P., 1988), p. 51.

[16] M. Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. Oliver Davis (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 39.

> The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from the world which it projects itself. The subject is a being-in-the-world and the world remains "subjective" since its texture and articulations are indicated by the subject's movement of transcendence. (PP, p. 430; 491–2)

But the nature of the perceiving body's existence is "ambiguous" (PP, p. 198; 231) and I have no way of knowing it except through "living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. I am my body...." (PP, p. 198; 231)

Merleau-Ponty way of exploring this ambiguous, incarnate, lived perceptual existence is through transcendental phenomenology, but, in exploring this relation of transcendence in immanence (as Husserl calls it), he seeks explicitly to repudiate the more Cartesian, Kantian and generally "intellectualist" aspects of Husserlian thought. One cannot simply think oneself into the constitution of this embodied existence. Merleau-Ponty is a constant critic of the idea of a transcendental subjectivity that is given to itself in full transparency. Rather: "We constitute constituting consciousness by dint of rare and difficult efforts" (Merleau-Ponty, "Philosopher and his Shadow," *Signs*, p. 180; 227).

For him, modern psychology sees the object as a system of properties presenting to the various senses and united by an intellectual synthesis.[17] Yet, for Merleau-Ponty, the unity of the object will remain a mystery in this approach. Merleau-Ponty insists that what is experienced is always what he calls a "structure" or a "system" which is already meaningful and significant. This "structure" or "system" already has a kind of validity and living significance of its own. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty always speaks of a kind of unified, dynamic, vital significance running between ourselves and our world.

4 The Intertwining and Intercommunication of the Senses in Constituting the Perceived World

Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty believe that empiricist atomism concerning the senses has shortchanged experience. Genuine perception requires the whole body and cannot be achieved by isolated sense organs acting alone:

> Sensory experience [i.e. individual experiencing through one sense only such as sight] is unstable, and alien to natural perception, which we achieve with our whole body all at once, and which opens on a world of interacting senses. (PP, p. 225; 260–1)

As is well known, one of Merleau-Ponty's first moves is to reject the individual, atomistic "sense datum" or "quale" as the specific object of sensuous perceivings. In *De anima* Book II Aristotle discusses sight, touch, taste and so on, and distinguishes between proper sensibles (colour, sound) and common sensibles (motion,

[17] Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, op. cit., p. 59.

figure, etc.) which can be grasped by more than one sense. Aristotle's legacy, with his restrictive account of just what the senses can see – something adopted by the Cartesians and by empiricists such as Berkeley – was directly challenged by phenomenology, both by Husserl and subsequently Merleau-Ponty. Whereas, for instance, Aristotle maintained that sight only apprehended "colour" in a relatively strict sense, the phenomenological tradition, including Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, insists that we see the actual *texture* of a coloured surface and its intermeshing with other sensory modalities. Thus I can see that the carpet is "woolly red," to invoke Merleau-Ponty's own example:

> Finally this red would not be the same if it were not the woolly red of the carpet. (*Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 4–5; 10)

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty claims we can *hear* not just sounds but also the *brittleness* of the glass as it breaks. We *see* the difference between a wheel bearing weight and one not doing so (PP, p. 52; 64). We do not see a pure *quale* but rather our vision is already inhabited by significance, "a vital value" (*une valeur vitale*, PP, p. 52; 64), whereby the property is related to our "incarnate subject" (*sujet incarné*, PP, p. 52; 64). Thus the child, burnt by the flame, *sees* the candle's light as threatening.

Colours as experienced, for Merleau-Ponty, do not have "a certain indescribable state or *quale*" rather they present themselves "with a motor physiognomy, and are enveloped in living significance" (*d'une signification vitale*, PP. p. 209; 243). He goes on:

> The motor significance of colours is comprehensible only if they cease to be closed states or indescribable qualities presented to an observing and thinking subject, and if they impinge within me upon a certain general setting (*montage*) through which I come to terms (*je suis adapté au monde*) with the world; if, moreover, they suggest to me a new manner of evaluating, and yet if motility ceases to be the mere consciousness of my movements from place to place in the present and immediate future, and becomes the function which constantly lays down my standards of size and the varying scope of my being in the world (*mon être au monde*). Blue is that which prompts me (*sollicite de moi*) to look in a certain way, that which allows my gaze to run over it in a certain manner. (PP, p. 210; 243)

It is not enough to discover that green is a restful colour and red is disturbing: "we must rediscover how to live these colours as our body does, that is, peace or violence in concrete form" (PP, p. 211; 245).

Merleau-Ponty then goes on to make a powerful analogy between the *sensing* and the *sensible*. It is like that between sleeper and sleep. The person intending to sleep lies down and puts the body in a position that invites sleep and falls into a rhythm of breathing which is eventually taken over by the breathing of sleep:

> *I* am breathing deeply and slowly in order to summon sleep (*pour appeler le sommeil*), and suddenly it were as if my mouth were connected to some great lung outside myself which alternately calls forth and forces back my breath. (PP, pp. 211–12; 245)

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's discussions of sleep and dreaming are quite remarkable in that he claims that the world pervades our consciousness even in sleep.

For Merleau-Ponty, the natural sciences and traditional philosophy have both collaborated in isolating the senses from each other, whereas we have to see them

as interwoven in a synaesthetic way. *Synaesthesia* (which he discusses in relation to people who have taken mescalin (PP, p. 228; 263), where the sound of a flute takes on a bluish-green colour) is taken by Merleau-Ponty not to be an abnormal condition, but rather to be quite normal and indeed an integral element in everyday experience:

> Synaesthetic perception is the rule (*La perception synesthétique est la régle*) and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience (*déplace l'expérience*), so that we have unlearned (*désappris*) how to see, here and generally speaking, feel, in order to deduce (*déduire*), from our bodily organisation and the world as the physicist sees it, what we are to see, hear and feel. (PP, p. 229; 265)

Merleau-Ponty goes on to claim that each colour "is nothing but the inner structure of the thing overtly revealed" (*n'est que la structure intérieure de la chose manifestée au dehors*, PP, p. 229; 265). The senses are interwoven and "intercommunicate" (invoking another phenomenologist Schapp, *Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, 1910):

> The senses intercommunicate (*communiquent entre eux*) by opening onto the structure of the thing (*la structure de la chose*). One sees the hardness and brittleness of glass, and when with a tinkling sound, it breaks, this sound is conveyed by the visible glass. One sees the springiness of the steel, the ductibility of redhot steel, the hardness of a plane blade, the softness of shavings. ... The form of a fold of linen or cotton shows us the resilience of dryness of the fibre, the coldness or warmth of the material ...In the same way I hear the hardness and unevenness of cobbles in the rattle of a carriage, and we speak appropriately of a "soft", "dull" or "sharp" sound. (PP, pp. 229–30; 265)

Merleau-Ponty constantly emphasises this intertwining:

> The sensing (*le sentant*) and the sensible (*le sensible*) do not stand in relation to each other as two mutually external terms, and sensation is not an invasion of the sentient by the sensible. It is my gaze (*mon regard*) that subtends (*sous-tend*) colour, and the movement of my hand which subtends the object's form, or rather my gaze pairs off with colour, and my hand with hardness and softness, and in this exchange between the subject of sensation and the sensible it cannot be held that the one acts while the other suffers the action, or that one confers significance on the other. Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronises with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning (*une sollicitation vague*). (PP, p. 214; trans modified; 247–8)

Husserl too speaks of this "intertwining" for instance of the the constitution of the physical object with the constitution of the ego-body (*Ichleib*) in his *Thing and Space* lectures of 1907 (DR § 47, p. 137; XVI 162), where he also, incidentally, discusses the case of one hand touching the other, and the manner in which sensations of touching can be reversed into sensations of being touched.

For Merleau-Ponty, the traditional debate as to whether sight or touch affords the experience of space is mistaken. Each sense conveys spatiality in its own unique way. In a wonderful passage, Merleau-Ponty takes about the way each sense "makes space" (*faire l'espace*, PP, p. 221; 256):

> When in the concert hall, I open my eyes, visible space seems to me cramped compared to that other space through which, a moment ago, the music was being unfolded, and even if I keep my eyes open while the music is being played, I have the impression that the music is not really contained within this circumscribed and unimpressive space. (PP, p. 222; 256)

A blind person whose sight is restored finds the whole world different, not just through the addition of a new sensory modality but because the entire "structure of the whole" (PP, p. 224; 259) has altered.

Interestingly, Husserl makes similar claims about the interlocked nature of our perceptual experience and the living whole into which it seamlessly runs.

5 Husserl's ABC of Consciousness

Husserl is seeking what occasionally calls "the ABC of consciousness". Husserl wants to uncover the basic forms of our conscious life in terms of their essential features and necessary structural interconnections, how it all hangs together (as John Searle puts it). It is not, therefore, just a matter of the enumeration or "uncovering" (*Enthüllung*) of the layers of our intentional life, Husserl also wants to examine their interlocking interconnection into the single, unified framework (*Lebenszusammenhang*) which enables not just the unity and identity of a single consciousness but also participation in the shared, communalized, universal rational life, our *Erkenntnisleben*. Husserl, like Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, is a holist. Intentional life is an interconnected *whole*, the structure which binds the elements together (attitudes, beliefs, modifications, sedimentations, alterations of attitude, etc) has to be understood as a coherent, integrated "complex" (*Zusammenhang*) which gives us the harmony of a continuously existing world. Husserl often speaks of the different layers or "strata" involved in an act of consciousness. He also points out that (in perception) these strata do not sit on top of one another but "interpenetrate or intersaturate" each other (*sie durchdringen sich oder durchtränken sich*, DR, p. 62; 75).

In keeping with his close attention to what is given in experience, Husserl, like Merleau-Ponty, is both an admirer of empiricism and its critic. For Husserl, empiricism genuinely represented "a radicalism of philosophical practice,"[18] setting itself against all idols of metaphysical superstition. In that sense, Husserl says in *Ideas I*, empiricism "springs from the most praiseworthy motives," but it carries a conceptual and unexamined baggage.[19] As a committed, even radical, empiricist, Husserl too begins his account of cognition with direct, immediate perceptual experience, which for him, as subsequently Merleau-Ponty, forms the basis of all consciousness. The bedrock mental act is perception, therefore any study of knowledge and consciousness must begin with perception, although it clearly does not stop there, going on to study judgements and other forms of position-taking (*Stellungnahme*).

For Husserl, perception offers a paradigm of a kind of consciousness where intention finds fulfilment, where the activity of perceiving receives immediate and constant confirmation and collaboration, and hence is a paradigm of the evidence, the "primordial form" (*Urmodus*) of intuitiveness (APS 110; Hua XI 68; see also *Crisis* § 28, p. 105; Hua VI 107). In *Ideas I* § 39 Husserl writes:

[18] E. Husserl, *Ideas I*, § 19, p. 35; Hua III/I 35.

[19] *Ideas I*, § 19, p. 35; Hua III/1 34.

> I shall look for the ultimate source which feeds the general positing of the world effected by me in the natural attitude, the source which therefore makes it possible that I consciously find a factually existing world of physical things confronting me and that I ascribe to myself a body in that world ... Obviously this ultimate source is sensuous experience. For our purposes, however, it will be sufficient if we consider sensuous perception ... a primal experience from which all other experiencing acts derive a major part of their grounding force. (*Ideas I* § 39, pp. 82–3; Hua III/1 70)

Merleau-Ponty emphasises the importance of this *Urdoxa* of perception and of the natural attitude in his important essay on Husserl,[‡] "The Philosopher and His Shadow" (in *Signs*, pp. 163–4; 207–208), when he argues that the natural attitude gives rise to the phenomenological attitude and yet somehow still encompasses it: "the natural attitude ... seesaws in phenomenology" (*Signs*, p. 164; 207).

According to Husserl, in his 1924 lecture to the Kant Gesellschaft[20], it is perceptual consciousness that gives us our first sense of objectivity, physicality and the experience of "world":

> [Perception] is what originally makes us conscious of the realities existing for us and "the" world as actually existing. To cancel out all such perception, actual and possible, means, for our total life of consciousness, to cancel out the world as objective sense and as reality accepted by us; it means to remove from all thought about the world (in every signification of this word) the original basis of sense and legitimacy. ("Kant and the Idea of Transcendental Philosophy", p. 26; *Erste Philosophie* Hua VII 251)

Perception of transcendent objects gives us the *sense* of an abiding world, of a world that is our disposal in so far as we can revisit and re-perform earlier perceptions, and so have an abiding knowledge, as he stresses in his *Analyses of Passive Synthesis* lectures:

> The fact that a re-perception, a renewed perception of the same thing, is possible for transcendence characterizes the fundamental trait of transcendent perception, alone through which an abiding world is there for us, a reality than can be pregiven for us and can be freely at our disposal. (APS § 3, p. 47; Hua XI 10)

> Intellectualism and empiricism do not give us any account of the human experience of the world; they tell us what God might think about it. (PP, p. 255; 296)

At the same time, Husserl was a relentless critic of extreme empiricism "as absurd a theory of knowledge as extreme scepticism" (LU *Prol.* § 26 Appendix, I, p. 59; Hua XVIII 94). Husserl's overall complaint against empiricism was that it misunderstood and incorrectly "theorized" the very nature of the "given" on which it depended. Empiricists start from "unclarified preconceived opinions."[21]

[‡] Edmund Husserl, *Analysen zur passive Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungen-und Forschungsmanuskripten (1918–1926)*, hrsg. M. Fleischer, *Husserliana*, Band XI (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988); trans. Anthony Steinbock as *Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001). Hereafter: APS.

[20] Husserl, Edmund. "Kant and the Idea of Transcendental Philosophy." Trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl. *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 5 Fall 1974, pp. 9–56.

[21] Husserl, *Ideas I*, § 20, p. 38; Hua III/I 38.

Husserl appears not to have *intellectualism* in his sights in the same manner as Merleau-Ponty does. But both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty reject the *naturalistic* and *objectivist* notion of a "ready made world" (to use Putnam's phrase) which is already there prior to its encounter with consciousness. As Husserl writes:

> The conception we are fighting against acts, obviously, as if objectivity, Being of every sort, were something in itself without relation to consciousness, as if consciousness only accidentally approached the object, operated on it, and undertook these and those alterations, precisely in the mode of an operation in the natural sense. In the background lies hidden the presumed obviousness: things are in themselves prior to all thought, and now comes the Ego-subject, a new thing, which works on and produces something, ... (DR, p. 33; XVI 39)

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty insists that the "things of the world are not simply neutral *objects* which stand before us for our contemplation".[22]

6 Husserl on Our Affective Life

One should not think of Husserl as someone who concentrated only on logical acts or epistemic acts. He was also capable of writing insightfully about the complexity of our emotional and affective life. For instance, Husserl discusses the example of a *grudge*. My deeply felt grudge against someone can be reawakened; but it can thereafter become either a "reawakened grudge" or a *new* grudge based on the same old motivations. In *Ideas II*, Husserl writes about the attitude involved in grudging:

> At different times I do have different experiences of the grudge ... yet it is only the grudge coming again to givenness; it is a lasting grudge (or a lasting conviction). The judgement of determinate content as lived experience lasts a while (immanent duration) and then is irretrievably gone. A new lived experience of the same content can subsequently emerge – but not the same lived experience. It may emerge in such a way, however, that it is only the former conviction returning again, the former conviction that had been carried out earlier and is now again being carried out, but it is the one lasting conviction, the one I call mine. (*Ideas II*, p. 120: Hua IV 113)

But Husserl distinguishes this kind of identity from that of the mathematical judgement.

> If I acquire anew an old conviction, while executing the appropriate judgement, then the acquired conviction (a lasting acquisition) "remains" with me as long as I can assume it "again", can bring it again to givenness for me in a new execution. I may also abandon the conviction, now rejecting the reasons for it, etc. Then again I can turn back to the "same" conviction, but in truth the conviction had not been the same throughout. (*Ideas II*, p. 121; IV 114)

Merleau-Ponty is not in agreement with Husserl on this last point. He takes the essential and intrinsic temporality of our conscious experience to be such that we can really never revisit the same conviction and genuinely affirm it is the *same*.

[22] Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, op. cit, p. 63.

7 Husserl on Perception

Let us go over what Husserl himself has to say about perception. For him, as for Merleau-Ponty, perception is the basic form of conscious experience, characterised by certainty and acceptance (perceptual certainty) such that every normal perception is a consciousness of validity. It is an experience of something present, self-given, there. The object has the character of "*selbst-da*" and is given "in one blow" (*in einem Schlage*), while at the same time it presents itself in profiles. The object as such is actually the Kantian Idea of the unity of these infinite profiles; it is a combination of presence and absence.

As Husserl says in *Thing and Space* (p. 105):

> The essence of perception implies, indeed, that the thing stands there in the mode of givenness in the flesh and as determined in such and such a way, thus with a sense which refers to possibilities of fulfilment whereby the thing would come step by step to full givenness. (*DR*, p. 105; 125–6)

In *Ding und Raum* Husserl gives his most detailed analysis of the essence of the perception of spatial objects. Here and elsewhere he points to the essential "inadequacy" (*Inadäquatheit*, EP VIII 44) and to "a radical incompleteness (*eine radicale Unvollständigkeit*, DR XVI 51) of perception. We have the sense of a "more" attaching to the object. In later writings Husserl speaks of a *plus ultra* given in the empty horizon (APS, p. 48; Hua XI 11). Husserl prefers to speak of it as an excess, an overflowing. There is an "excess" which is a permanent structural feature of external perception. The perception of its essence always promises more than it actually supplies:

> External perception is a constant pretension to accomplish something that, by its very nature, it is not in a position to accomplish. Thus, it harbors an essential contradiction, as it were. (APS 38; Hua XI 3).

This is the transcendence involved in perception.

Husserl tries to describe the manner in which the absent sides of a physical object are co-presented in a perception as a kind of empty intending or an apperception. It is not however either an imaginative filling or a kind of inferential reasoning or a representing. Merleau-Ponty makes a very similar claim in his *Primacy of Perception* address

> If we consider an object which we perceive but one of whose sides we do not see, or if we consider objects which are not within our visual field at this moment – i.e., what is happening behind our back or what is happening in America or at the South Pole – how should we describe the existence of these absent objects or the nonvisible parts of present objects? Should we say, as psychologists have often done, that I *represent* to myself the sides of this lamp which are not seen? If I say these sides are representations, I imply that they are not grasped as actually existing; because what is represented is not here before us, I do not actually perceive it. It is only a possible. But since the unseen sides of this lamp are not imaginary, but only hidden from view (to see them it suffices to move the lamp a little bit), I cannot say that they are representations.

> Should I say that the unseen sides are somehow anticipated by me, as perceptions which would be produced necessarily if I moved, given the structure of the object? If, for example, I look at a cube, knowing the structure of the cube as it is defined in geometry, I can anticipate the perceptions which this cube will give me while I move around it. Under this hypothesis I would know the unseen side as the necessary consequence of a certain law of the development of my perception. But if I turn to perception itself, I cannot interpret it in this way because this analysis can be formulated as follows: It is *true* that the lamp has a back, that the cube has another side. But this formula, "It is true," does not correspond to what is given to me in perception. Perception does not give me truths like geometry but presences. I grasp the unseen side as present, and I do not affirm that the back of the lamp exists in the same sense that I say the solution of a problem exists. The hidden side is present in its own way. It is in my vicinity. Thus I should not say that the unseen sides of objects are simply possible perceptions, nor that they are the necessary conclusions of a kind of analysis or geometrical reasoning. It is not through an intellectual synthesis which would freely posit the total object that I am led from what is given to what is not actually given; that I am given, together with the visible sides of the object, the nonvisible sides as well. It is, rather, a kind of practical synthesis: I can touch the lamp, and not only the side turned toward me but also the other side; I have only to extend my hand to hold it. (*Primacy of Perception*, pp. 13–14)

Merleau-Ponty speaks of a practical synthesis where Husserl would more properly speak of passive synthesis. It is passive and practical in the sense that there is no ego involvement. Merleau-Ponty's answer would be exactly the same as Husserl's. Perception is a *sui generis* experience; it does not have conceptual content in and of itself. Merleau-Ponty concludes:

> In other words, the synthesis which constitutes the unity of the perceived objects and which gives meaning to the perceptual data is not an intellectual synthesis. Let us say with Husserl that it is a "synthesis of transition" [*synthèse de transition*] – I anticipate the unseen side of the lamp because I can touch it – or a "horizonal synthesis" [*synthèse d'horizon*] – the unseen side is given to me as "visible from another standpoint," at once given but only immanently. What prohibits me from treating my perception as an intellectual act is that an intellectual act would grasp the object either as possible or as necessary. But in perception it is "real"; it is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which is it given exhaustively. It is not accidental for the object to be given to me in a "deformed" way, from the point of view [*place*] which I occupy. That is the price of its being "real." The perceptual synthesis thus must be accomplished by the subject, which can both delimit certain perspectival aspects in the object, the only ones actually given, and at the same time go beyond them. This subject, which takes a point of view, is my body as the field of perception and action [*pratique*] – in so far as my gestures have a certain reach and circumscribe as my domain the whole group of objects familiar to me. Perception is here understood as a reference to a whole which can be grasped, in principle, only through certain of its parts or aspects. The perceived thing is not an ideal unity in the possession of the intellect, like a geometrical notion, for example; it is rather a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another according to a given style, which defines the object in question. (*Primacy of Perception*, p. 15)

In my view, Merleau-Ponty's summary presentation of his position in this address, "The Primacy of Perception," represents excellent but – I emphasise – still entirely faithful, Husserlian exegesis. Perhaps we see Merleau-Ponty's emphasis when he says (as Alva Noë[23] does some 60 years later) that the subject which does the synthesising in perception is not my intellect making mediate inferences but rather "my body as the field of perception and action." As Alva Noë says: "Perception isn't something that happens inside us," he says. "It's something we do." Noë says:

> Perceiving isn't representing, or even presenting; it is *enacting* perceptual content – that is to say, making contact with the world through skillful exercise.

Merleau-Ponty himself similarly speaks of perception as an action. But Husserl too emphasises constantly the actional element in perceiving. Both Merleau-Ponty and Husserl tried, for instance, to correlate certain kinds of chains of movement of the eyes, head, neck, muscles, and so on, to certain revealed chains of profiles of the object in question. When I look at a particular spot on ceiling, I know I can trace a line with my eyes from that spot to one further to the left. That experience is not just felt to be a certain "I can" or physical possibility in me (my ability to move my eyes or tilt my head) but I experience this evolving sensory panorama precisely as an intrinsic feature of the object seen.

I do not see the unseen parts of the table. I see the table and recognise (perceptively) that there are further profiles to be gained, further fillings to be filled in, but these profiles, for Husserl, have to be given *intuitively and not through inference or reasoning.* As Alva Noë writes (without reference to Husserl and phenomenology, but merely as a fact about perception):

> Presence in absence, or amodal perception, is ... a hallmark of *normal, veridical* perception. When you look at the apple, you have a sense of its presence as a voluminous whole, even though you only actually see its facing side. (Alva Noë, "Real Presence")

To say that we see an object from one side is not to deny that we actually see the object itself. Husserl makes this clear in *Ideas I* § 138. Despite the inadequacy of each one-sided perception, what "properly" appears cannot be separated from the perception of the thing as a whole. The side that properly appears is really a non-self-sufficient part of the whole that is the "sense" of the perception (*Ideas I*, p. 331; Hua III/1 286–7). In terms of his analysis of the essence of perception, Husserl maintains that what we think of as peculiarities particular to us are actually eidetic insights that belong to the Idea of a physical thing as such. A material thing unveils itself in endless spatial profiles. Even God can only grasp a physical thing in profiles (*Ideas I* § 149, p. 362; Hua III/1 315). Similarly a material thing also reveals itself in perception in a series of temporal moments. Not even God can alter this eidetic truth (DR XVI 65). Unrolling in spatial and temporal profiles pertain to the essence of a material thing (DR XVI 66).

Husserl lays stress on the harmonious nature of such progressive fulfilments. Certain prefigurations get filled in intuitively while new expectations are opened up.

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[23] Alva Noë, *Perception in Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

> Proper to every appearing thing of each perceptual phase is a new empty horizon, a new system of determinate indeterminacy, a new system of progressing tendencies with corresponding possibilities of entering into determinately ordered systems of possible appearances, of possible ways that the aspects can run their course. (APS, p. 43; Hua XI 6)

8 Normality

Husserl, like Merleau-Ponty, puts considerable emphasis on the role of normality in our experience, for example, seeing things in daylight is the *normal* perceptual state:

> At the same time, certain conditions prove to be the "normal" ones: seeing in sunlight, on a clear day, without the influence of other bodies which might affect the color-appearance. The "optimum" which is thereby attained then counts as the *color itself* .... (*Ideas II* § 18b, p. 64; Hua IV 59)

A particular colour presents itself as belonging to the thing itself, even though the aspects of this colour are constantly changing. "A privilege attaches to clear daylight" (*Ideas II*, p. 65; 59). Similarity seeing in air (as opposed to through water) is also considered part of the normality (*Ideas II* § 18b) or seeing through transparent glass. Similarly we can have abnormal contact. Touching something with my tongue. Touching something with a blister on my finger (abnormal change in the organ) *Ideas II* p. 66; 61. If I ingest santonin[24] the whole world seems to change, altering colour. (*Ideas II*, p. 67; 62). Merleau-Ponty often uses examples which alter the flow or the expectation of change the outcome (e.g. mescalin). Alva Noë does the same when he reports patients recovering from cataract operation who see the changing profiles of a ball rolling.

When I see the corner of the table, do I actually perceive it as rectangular or as presenting to me as an acute angle. When I see the top of the cup, does I apprehend it as round or as elliptical? In one sense I have to say the question is misplaced since round/elliptical, right-angle/acute are not categorisations that belong immanently to the human perceptual process as experienced. I don't really apprehend geometric shapes (*qua* geometrical) at all. I encounter various forms of spatial depth. In another sense I see/apprehend it *as round* and my careful adjustment of my gaze and with a will to see it otherwise (as if I were a sketch artist about to render the angle of the table perspectivally in a drawing) I can see it as elliptical. So it is really presenting to me as "*round-looking-but also capable of looking-elliptical-from-this-perspective once I attend to it.*" Now it is clear that such content can be learned and one can learn to discriminate it more acutely. We can be taught to be more discriminating, to identify different texture of fabric to distinguish between the letter "I" and "l" or "v" and

[24] A colorless crystalline compound, $C_{15}H_{18}O_3$, obtained from a species of wormwood, especially santonica, and used as an anthelmintic (i.e., to kill intestinal worms).

"u", to distinguish (if not to name) different aspects and locations of a taste (fore and after, etc.). Tasting and touching are both actions, activities. We taste by rolling something around the mouth; we feel smoothness only by moving our fingers over it.

Some senses such as sight are distal and require taking up an optimal distance from the object. Husserl here even raises the question as to why we cannot lie our eye along the thing and see it from zero distance (*DR*, p. 109; XVI 131).

9 The Natural Attitude and the Transcendental Attitude

Let me now finally turn to an area where Husserl and Merleau-Ponty are supposed to fundamentally disagree. Husserl often speaks of the need for philosophy to adopt the transcendental attitude of the "disengaged", "non-participating spectator" (*unbeteiligter Zuschauer*, Hua XXXIV 9), or "disinterested spectator" (*uninterestierter Zuschauer*, XXXIV 11). At the same time, Husserl emphasises that all attitudes, including the philosophical attitude, have to take cognisance of embodied life in the life-world as the ground for all being and validity. There seems to be an impasse. Husserl wants the universal *epochē* to break free from the hold of the natural attitude in order to make visible constituting subjectivity, but at the same time one can never break free from the all-encompassing life-world, from finitude and facticity.

Husserl explicitly develops this tension as a paradox in the *Crisis*. Human beings are both subjects *in* the world and subjects *for* the world. In some of his unpublished manuscripts, Husserl went further and claimed that transcendental subjectivity requires an insertion not only into transcendental *intersubjectivity* (something Merleau-Ponty recognises and explicitly emphasises) but also into embodied subjectivity. Indeed, for Husserl, transcendental idealism requires that the world of real being be known not just by an actual (as opposed to possible) subject as such, but by an *embodied* subjectivity (*eine leibliche Subjektivität*, XXXVI 132).

How does Merleau-Ponty react to this? First of all, Merleau-Ponty agrees with Husserl's criticism of the manner the natural attitude can become distorted into the naturalistic, objectivistic attitude. Against this, Merleau-Ponty remains a committed *transcendental* philosopher, but he rejects the view that transcendental philosophy commits him to accept an all-constituting intellectual mind which is a transcendental subject. In this context in the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception* he criticises the way Husserl has been understood or has presented his own thought:

> For a long time, and even in recent texts, the reduction is presented [by Husserl] as the return to a transcendental consciousness before which the world is spread out and completely transparent, quickened through and through by a series of apperceptions which it is the philosopher's task to reconstitute on the basis of their outcome. (PP xi; v)

Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen, always portrays the transcendental ego of traditional idealist philosophy as a detached intellectual ego which merely contemplates the world or constitutes it solely out of thought. For Merleau-Ponty, it is a consequence of idealism that it sees all constitution as *Sinnbegung* (PP, p. 428; 490) whereby all meaning flows out from itself "centrifugally" (*toute signification est centrifuge*, PP, p. 428;

490). But this is a perversion of the true meaning of the transcendental turn for Merleau-Ponty. As he explains earlier in *Phenomenology of Perception*:

> A philosophy becomes transcendental, that is to say radical, not by taking its place in absolute consciousness (*en s'installant dans la conscience absolue*) without mentioning the measures which led it there, but by considering itself as a problem; not by postulating a knowledge rendered totally explicit, but by recognizing as the fundamental philosophical problem this *presumption* (*présomption*) on reason's part. (PP, p. 63, trans. modified; 76)

Here Merleau-Ponty correctly sees transcendental philosophy, rather as Husserl does, not as a set of doctrines, but as a radically self-critical approach that questions its own right to proceed as it does. Transcendental viewing, *theoria*, grows out of critical reflection on "naturalness" of the human condition, according to Husserl in his *Crisis*:

> Part of transcendental philosophy's own meaning was that it arose out of reflections on conscious subjectivity through which the world, the scientific as well as the everyday intuitive world, comes to be known or achieves its being-validity for us. (*Crisis* § 57, p. 201; VI 205)

The break with the natural attitude has to be accomplished but it also has to be justified. Or as Merleau-Ponty says there is need through a higher order reflection to transform the "phenomenal field into a transcendental field" (PP, p. 63; 77).

In contrast to the disembodied intellect, Merleau-Ponty's own notion of the transcendental subject is that of a situated and embodied source of meaning that unrolls temporally:

> What for us is primary (*originaire*) consciousness is not a transcendental Ego freely positing before itself a multiplicity in itself, and constituting it throughout from start to finish, it is an *I* which dominates diversity only *with the help* of time. (PP, p. 276 n.1; 320)

Elsewhere he says that the transcendental ego cannot be understood as something apart from time but rather subjectivity must be identified with temporality (PP, p. 425; 487). The empirical subject does not trail in the wake of the transcendental subject, Merleau-Ponty says (PP, p. 426; 488). Rather the subject awakens in time and finds time running through it from start to finish.

But is that really different from Husserl's account of transcendental subjectivity? Merleau-Ponty himself seems to think not, especially in his "The Philosopher and His Shadow" text where he quotes Husserl as saying: "*there is no constituting of a mind for a mind but of a man for a man*" (*Signs*, p. 169; 213). He goes on to say a little later in the same essay:

> Re-read, if you doubt it, the extraordinary pages [in *Ideas II*, p. 90; Hua IV 85] in which Husserl implies that even if we meant to posit absolute or true being as the correlative of an absolute mind, such an absolute being would not merit its name unless it had some relationship to what we men call being. We and absolute mind would have to recognize each other, as two men "can only through understanding each other recognize that the things one of them sees and those the other sees are the *same*." (*Signs*, p. 171; 216)

In the passage in question, Husserl is asking whether an absolute spirit (such as the traditional God) can be said to see the same things as we do. If we see sensory qualities and God sees other intellectually-accessible properties of the thing, then we cannot be said to see the same thing. Husserl goes on to say:

> Obviously, the absolute spirit would also have to have a body for there to be mutual understanding, and thus the dependency on sense organs would have to be there as well. (*Ideas II*, p. 90; IV 85)

This passage is not directly about the transcendental ego, but is in fact, a critique of the notion of an absolute viewpoint on objective nature. Husserl maintains that nature is intersubjectively constituted by beings with bodies and even if new spirits are introduced into this nexus "they must do so by means of their bodies" (*Ideas II*, p. 91; IV 86).

Husserl himself does speak of the need to understand the transcendental ego not as a detached self but rather has to recognise that it is the same as the self I enjoy as a "man among men" (Hua XXIX 117–18). There is only one single self, not two. Similarly, Husserl maintains, Kant never grasped the transcendental problem of intersubjectivity (XXIX 118) and never penetrated through to genuine transcendental subjectivity (*Crisis* § 57, p. 199; VI 202). It is always necessary to posit both empirical and transcendental subjectivity and to recognise also their identity:

> I myself, as transcendental ego, constitute the world, and at the same time, as soul, I am a human ego in the world. (*Crisis* § 57, p. 202; VI 205)

There is a fundamental *paradox* of the "identity and equally of the essential difference" between psychological and transcendental subjectivity (XXIX 118). This is a major theme in Husserl's writings, especially in the *Crisis* § 57. The answer for husserl is that I cannot have generated the world out of myself, and hence I have to make "consciousness of intersubjectivity" a "transcendental problem" (*Crisis* § 57, p. 202; VI 206)

In saying much the same thing about transcendental intersubjectivity, Merleau-Ponty has very insightfully diagnosed the more complex Husserl beneath the caricature of the Cartesian solipsistic philosopher. As Merleau-Ponty acknowledges:

> By moving to the pre-theoretical, pre-thetic or pre-objective order, Husserl has upset the relationships (*a boulversé les rapports*) between the constituted and the constituting. Being in itself, being for an absolute mind, from now on draws its truth from a "layer" where there is neither absolute mind nor the immanence of intentional objects in that mind, but only incarnate minds (*des esprits incarnés*), which through their bodies "belong ... to the same world" (Hua IV 82). (*Signs*, p. 172; 217–18).

Husserl's most complex thought on the manner in which transcendental subjectivity requires mundanization in finite embodied subjects is now more clearly known to us as a result of publications from the *Nachlass* including the intersubjectivity volumes[25] and the volume on transcendental idealism.[26] But it was very early, and on the basis of much slimmer resources, already identified in its main elements and in its tensions, ambiguities and paradoxes by Merleau-Ponty. In his case, contrary, to what he asserts, commemoration is not also betrayal.

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[25] E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass*, 3 vols, Hua XIII, XIV and XV, hrsg. I. Kern (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973).

[26] E. Husserl, *Transzendentaler Idealismus. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908–1921)*. Hrsg. Robin Rollinger & Rochus Sowa. Hua XXXVI (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003).