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The Problem of Nature in the Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty

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THE PROBLEM OF NATURE

IN THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MERLEAU-PONTY

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ABSTRACT

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In my dissertation, I show that Merleau-Ponty's idea of nature yields a double meaning: nature as ensemble of genetic and productive processes that are attainable in experience (phenomenal nature) and nature as that which enables this experience (transcendental nature). My thesis is that the two meanings of nature, when taken together, offer a guide to Merleau-Ponty's final philosophical formulations about "flesh" and the "visible" and the "invisible." The aim of the dissertation is to trace the salient conceptual and methodological complications entailed by this conception. I argue that the bivalence of the problem of nature in Merleau-Ponty receives a methodological clarification and proves coherent if we pay attention to the way Merleau-Ponty understands the thrust of radicalization in play in Husserl's later work in phenomenology, especially regarding his expansion of the notion of intentionality.

DEDICATION

To Ron Bruzina.

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The successful completion of this dissertation has been made possible by many friends and colleagues, to whom I would like to express my gratitude. I would like to thank Dr. Lanei Rodemeyer for her focused suggestions and comments through a material and a style of composition that was not always easy to read. I also would like to thank Dr. Fred Evans for his continuous readiness to engage in several insightful conversations about my topic. Their contribution has dramatically increased the final overall quality of the dissertation while also never limiting my freedom in developing the argument I was pursuing. I am thankful for Dr. Anthony Steinbock, who accepted without hesitations to be part of my dissertation committee and thus made this project possible. My heartfelt thank you goes also to the many librarians and administrative assistant at Duquesne University for their continuous help during the dissertation process.

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I would like to thank my parents and my sisters, who have always supported in many ways my choice to pursue the study of philosophy at home and away from home.

A most special thank you goes to Dr. Ron Bruzina, who introduced my thoughts to Merleau-Ponty and to an entirely different dimension in philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Edmund Husserl in *Husserliana* (Den Haag/Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff/Kluwer Academic Publishers/Springer):

Hua IV: *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution,* ed. Marly Biemel. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1952.

Hua VI: *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie,* ed. Walter Biemel. 2d edition. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1962.

Hua XVII: *Formale und transzendentale Logik*, *Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft,* ed. Paul Janssen. 1974; English translation by Dorion Cairns, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1969.

Other Works by Edmund Husserl in *Non-Husserliana Editions*:

EU: *Erfahrung und Urteil*. Academia. Verlagsbuchandlung, Prag. 1939

Works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

HLP: "Husserl aux limites de la phénoménologie," in *Merleau-Ponty. Notes de cours sur L'origine de la géométrie de Husserl suivi de Recherches sur la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty*. Paris, Puf, 1998.

IP: *L'institution La passivité*. Paris, Belin, 2003.

MSME: *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression. Cours au Collège de France. Notes, 1953*. Genève, MetisPresses, 2011.

NC: *Notes de cours 1959-1961*. Paris, Gallimard, 1996.

OE: *L'Œil et l'esprit*. Paris, Gallimard, 1964.

PhP: *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris, Gallimard, 1945.

PD: *Parcours Deux 1951-1961*. Lagrasse, Verdier, 2001.

PM : *La prose du monde*. Paris, Gallimard, 1969.

PP: *Le primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques*. Lagrasse, Verdier, 2014.

RC: *Résumé du cours*. *Collège de France 1952-1960.* Paris, Gallimard, 1968.

S: *Signes*. Paris, Gallimard, 1960.

SC: *La structure du comportement*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1942.

VI: *Le visible et l'invisible*. Paris, Gallimard, 1964.

Works by Eugen Fink:

VI. CM/1: *VI. Cartesianische Meditation, Teil 1 Die Idee einer transzendentalen Methodenlehre,* ed. Hans Ebeling, Jann Holl, and Guy van Krerckhoven. Dordrecht, Boston, London, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988. English transaltion by Ronald Bruzina, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation. The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*. Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995.

VI. CM//2: *VI. Cartesianische Meditation, Teil 2: Ergänzungsband,* ed. Guy van Kerckhoven. Husserliana Dokumente II/2. Dordrecht, Boston, London, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988.

ND: *Nähe und Distanz*. Freiburg/München, Verlag Karl Alber, 19

INTRODUCTION

The *lógos* of the soul is deep and we cannot see its boundaries, Heraclitus tells us.[1] Placed at the beginning of philosophical thought, these words link the soul to the idea of infinity. They imply at the same time that our self-examination is vowed to be an infinite task. The core preoccupation of phenomenology echoes Heraclitus' fragment. Phenomenology's preoccupation with radical self-examination discovers a field of infinite research, the field of subjectivity or of consciousness, but reveals also another sense of why the task of self-examination imposes itself as infinite or without limits. The will to self-examination encounters necessarily the positive or interested orientation of our life. It is this object-oriented, theme-oriented life that motivates the task of the philosopher. This interest does not only affect our everyday way to deal with things and others but it extends to the scientific and theoretical investigations that we carry out towards our reality. The task to examine our natural interested orientation in the world, and more specifically our scientific interest, defines the Platonic dialectic. Phenomenology understands itself as reviving the Platonic ideal of science as a science that radically turns towards its presuppositions in order to ground and justify them. Again we run into the two senses of infinite research and self-examination: the will to examine the self may open unto a dimension of ideas demanding restless articulation, explication, and clarification; but the same research is motivated by the question of interest characterizing our natural and theoretical life and would not have any sense without this basic presupposition.

The works of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are paradigmatic for this preoccupation with the question of interest and also exhibit the double sense of self-examination

[1] See the fragment DK 22 B 45 in the edition of *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* edited by H. Diels and W. Kranz. My reference is to the Reclam edition curated by J. Mansfeld: Mansfeld 1986, 273.

as opening unto an infinite dimension of research and as continued research motivated by an unmovable presupposition. The first document of the phenomenological movement, Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901), inaugurated what seemed to many to be an entirely new way of reflecting on questions concerning meaning, truth, and knowledge. Husserl's *Korrelationsforschung* appeared in fact to have burst all at once the dogmatism of an immanent consciousness filled with "representations" and that of an external reality which had to be "ascertained" in order to be known. On the contrary, consciousness is *intentional*, which means that we are always with the matter itself (we might say "bei den Sachen") and not simply enclosed in ourselves. Thus Husserl was attacking the traditional theory of knowledge at its roots. The theoretical constructions that vowed to make the relationship between consciousness and world intelligible would therefore give way to a renewed focus on the living link of subject to world. The theme of the intentionality of consciousness is meant to bring full clarification to the movement towards the external world that defines our being human. With the principle of intentionality, Husserl's program vowed to maintain contact with the "things themselves," now interpreted as "phenomena" through the application of the *epoché*, the "bracketing" of all presumption about the things' existence, in order solely to describe the way in which things come to take on sense before us.[2] In summary, phenomenology begins with an intentional analysis of objects – of their sense *as* objects *for* a subject – in order to lay open the conditions of objectivity in general outside every stance of dogmatic objectivism.

[2] The pivotal role of the *epoché* in Husserl's conception of the phenomenal character of reality can be clearly seen if it is contrasted with Franz Brentano's conception of the phenomenal world understood in terms of an "intentional inexistence" that has the effect of "redoubling" reality. See Lindén, 2011-2012, 341-342. See also Landgrebe 1939, whose first section focuses on the difference between Brentano's and Husserl's notion of intentionality. Brentano's notion of "intentional inexistence," however, must be situated within the ambiguous way in which already Scholastic philosophy distinguished between "intentional" and "objective" reality. This distinction was then inherited by Descartes and passed down to modern philosophy.

Husserl's notion of intentionality appeared to some as reasserting a renewed form of transcendental philosophy on the Kantian or neo-Kantian model. In the notion of intentionality there lies however an even more fundamental sense. According to this sense, not only the positive stance of the naturalism of the natural sciences but also a certain idea of subjective consciousness appears as an expression of dogmatism. Positive science lives nonproblematically within the enactement of experience and knowledge and in holding the self-givenness and self-manifestation of beings in knowing apprehension (intuition, thought, experiment) as the unquestioned source of its judgments. In the "positivity" of ontic knowledge, the objectivity of beings in general, the in-itselfness evidenced in experience (the "empirical reality" of beings) remains a presupposed and not questioned, that is, essentially not comprehended, state of affair. Subjective idealism, on the other hand, lives nonproblematically within the assumption that a reflective take on oneself renders the "I" of experience present in a speculative facing of oneself, as if of another object in a mirror.[3] It is this assumption that allows for the possibility to elaborate the idea of a subjectivity as the necessary condition conveying unity to experience. Phenomenology, on its part, draws inspiration from the conceptual framework of Kantianism, i.e. from the tradition of transcendentalism. The fundamental intuition of Kant is that the truth in the things and in the world that we can understand is of a different order than that of reality itself. Husserl interprets this insight differently than through the idea of our experience of the world as woven in the concepts of an intellectual "I think" and that make up the structure of all that can be experienced and known.[4] The positive significance of the transcendental deduction of the categories in Kant lies precisely in providing a logic of the physical world. The *Critique of Pure Reason* provides the logic of any nature whatsoever.[5] The

[3] See Bruzina 2004, 512n105, 581-582.
[4] PP 45.
[5] See Heidegger 2006, § 3, 10-11, and also VI.CM/1, §1, 9-10. A closer analysis of Kant's *transcendenal logic*, however, should show that, by starting from the *epistomological results of modern science* rather than from our

intention at the core of Husserl's program is that of a description of the concrete relations of experience – those of space and time in perception, and of their modifications in memory, in imagination, in ideality, etc. – as they are lived and not as they are conceived. The aim of phenomenology as a renewed attempt to exhibit the true conditions of objectivity is therefore not that of thinking the things and the world from a standpoint that is before the experience of the things and the world, from which one would putatively assist at their genesis, and therefore define their conditions a priori in a speculative deduction. Rather the aim of phenomenology is that of producing a *logos* of the world-*phenomenon* (Fink) as it emerges in the living process of experience. Phenomenology aims at making manifest a *logos* in its nascent state.[6] This purpose however entails fundamental and urgent implications for the phenomenological way of proceeding, especially as regards the question of the place of the *logos* aimed at and attained by phenomenology within the order of phenomenological findings.

Husserl is said to have raised a renewed interrogative consciousness for the philosophical sense of the "empirical" as well as to have made available the necessary means in order to achieve its understanding (Heidegger). In a way then the phenomenological project can be understood as the clarification of the proper sense of the empirical. It is clear that the empirical that is at stake here takes on a meaning that is no longer reducible to that of "sensible experience" of traditional empiricism nor to the, ultimately metaphysical, assumption of modern physicalism about the existence of a nature in itself.[7] If the possibility of reaching an adequate understanding of

belongingness to a nature, the contribution of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is limited to the elaboration of an *a priori logic* for the kind of nature known by the natural sciences, i.e. as a theory of the *mathematico-geometric projection of spatio-temporality as the antecedent a priori opening upon nature.*

[6] Cf. similar formulations in this direction by Merleau-Ponty in SC 223; PhP xvi; PP 56.

[7] Geraets 1971, 143. Van Fraassen claims that his empiricism should be understood as a stance "in Husserl's sense of an orientation or attitude towards the world." This stance consists in the "conviction that a given range of phenomena should be modelled in a given formalism must always itself be empirically, rather than logically, motivated." See Ladyman and Ross 2007, 99, 235.

objectivity depends on a proper elaboration of the meaning of the empirical, and if the notion of the empirical in Husserl has the basic meaning of phenomenal, then the advancement of the analysis into the things themselves coincides with the clarification of the things as "appearances" or as things "of experience." Phenomenology begins as a reflection upon our experience. Such reflection takes on the form of what Husserl often calls a *Selbstbesinnung* – a meditative self-consideration – and a great deal in understanding the intentions and aims of the phenomenological project consists in reaching an adequate grasping of what a turning towards oneself actually implies. The problem of "apperception," as Kant writes, is a fundamental problem for every theory.[8] Already Aristotle, however, told us that the self-knowledge of the one engaging in experience and knowledge ranks among the finest kinds of knowledge. Aristotle was speaking of the domain of psychology. The high position held by psychology in the order of the sciences consists in his contribution to advancing our understanding of truth in general and of nature in particular. This contribution, however, is achieved precisely, it seems, by advancing the understanding of the one doing the knowing, i.e. by advancing our own *self*-understanding. If Husserl's critique of "psychologism" in the *Logical Investigations* represents his first introduction into phenomenological research, in other works he also resorts to psychology as "way" into his phenomenological philosophy.[9] Phenomenology's "psychological subjectivism," to be understood as *Besinnung*, fits therefore already into a certain tradition in philosophy that takes the phenomenality of the real as a starting point for the elucidation of human experiencing in the world. On the other hand, however, the radicalization of self-understanding in phenomenology takes on the form of a demand for a total clarification of consciousness, so that phenomenology can be said

[8] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 68.
[9] See for instance Husserl's psychological analysis of perception in *Ideas I* (Section II), highlighted by Merleau-Ponty in PP 17. See also the course on *Phenomenological Psychology* from the Summer Semester of 1925, and Section 2 of part III in Husserl's *Crisis of the European Sciences*.

to continue and, more importantly, even to bring to completion the whole endeavor of modern philosophy.[10]

The clarification of the question therefore of *how there can be an in itself for us*, how there is "objectivity" in general[11] takes on the form in phenomenology of a sophisticated account of the relations between subject and object that gathers motives from different philosophical traditions. In particular, Husserl's phenomenology is characterized by a radicalized interpretation of the modern idea of a subjective consciousness. The last interpretive remarks have been made to the effect of fleshing out the guiding question of this study. My question is whether the legacy instituted by Husserl's phenomenological investigations develops a conception of conditions of possibility that separates itself from the long modern tradition of *Bewusstseinsphilosophie* or "mentalist philosophy." In particular, my question is whether the project of seizing the structural condition of subjectivity integrates the problem of natural being into the noetic grasp of reality and into the status of the human subject. The question is especially cogent in light of the intellectual tendencies of Husserl's phenomenology, due to the at least apparent "internalist" psychological schema with which Husserl begins his phenomenological studies (the centering of the analysis around the epistemic relation of the subject to an object).

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[10] In the closing lines of his "Preface" to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty claims that phenomenology, under the point of view of its "will to seize upon the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state" counfounds itself with the effort itself of modern thought. See PhP xvi. In *Phénoménologie, sémantique et ontologie*, Jocelyn Benoist, with reference to Franz Brentano's rendering of the Aristotelian theory of truth, claims that in Aristotle's conception of the grasping of simple things through simple acts, such as in the case of perception, we find the foundation of the phenomenological legacy that goes from Brentano through Husserl to Heidegger and that, as a result, the "modern period" of phenomenology is established upon the "ancient period" initiated by Aristotle's philosophy. If phenomenology brings to completion the inner telos of modern philosophy, if phenomenology itself is established upon the ancient (Aristotelian) endeavor of studying the *self* in order to understand the *world*, then the accomplishment of modern philosophy in phenomenology is the accomplishment of the ancient philosophical project of clarifying truth and nature. . It should be added that this project exhibits also a clear legacy between the ancient and modern concept of Logos as limited capacity that however can always transcend itself. This Logos, as Paolo Zellini says, appears to be very different than the dominating and controlling Logos interpreted by modern deconstructionist philosophies. See Chiurazzi 2017, 107, who refers to Zellini's *Numero e logos* (Milano: Adelphi, 1980), 135-136.

[11] PhP 86, 386, 417.

In order to approach the question at the center of this study, I draw especially on the work of Merleau-Ponty. I do this because the French philosopher more than anyone else took up this direction of work.[12] Merleau-Ponty's descriptive analysis of the experientially lived meaning in play in pre-reflective perceptual human behavior works out in detail a conception of conditions of possibility that integrates the natural aspects of living being, thereby counteracting all too dualist distinctions between the purely physical and the mental.[13] I argue that by recasting psychological and biological concepts, Merleau-Ponty surmounts both the Cartesian and physicalistic tendencies of modern natural science as regards the concept of nature, thereby also offering a redefinition of the place and emergence of the human being within nature. Thus Merleau-Ponty's study of the natural ultimately contributes also to the clarification of the sense of the "empirical" upon which the physical sciences base the validity of their claims. This is not to say, however, that Merleau-Ponty, or for that matters anybody else, has the ambition to advise or correct scientific practice. The claim is rather that philosophy's own approach towards the study of the experience of reality can and must raise interdisciplinary challenges. In the context of the present study, the focus on nature, as the reality that is confronted "outside" of our human artificial productions, aims at shedding light upon a being that has become vague for most of us, as Merleau-Ponty writes, as a remote being somewhere outside our cities and life with other people.[14] The reproach to "mentalist" or "physicalist" tendencies in the sciences that emerges from such analyses of nature exhibits therefore certain aspects of every appearance and experience of reality that the sciences may integrate not so much in their way to *deal* with their objects, but rather in their way to

[12] For this direction of interpretation, see Bruzina 2004, 572n164.
[13] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's summative statement in the *Avant-propos* to his *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Pour qu'autrui ne soit pas un vain mot, il faut que jamais mon existence ne se réduise à la conscience que j'ai d'exister, qu'elle enveloppe aussi la conscience qu'on peut en avoir et donc mon incarnation dans une nature et la possibilité au moins d'une situation historique. Le cogito doit me découvrir en situation …" (PhP vii).
[14] PhP 47-48.

understand them, just as philosophy itself integrates scientific findings into its own procedures in order to have something to reflect upon.

By presenting Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reading of innovative discoveries in modern physiology, the psychology of the *Gestalt*, and developmental biology, I show how he overcomes the traditional dichotomy of mind/spirit and matter/nature or the trichotomy of God, human being, and nature. By discerning a line of linkage that begins with *La structure du comportement* (1942) and continues through *Phénomènologie de la perception* (1945) on to the lecture courses on *La nature* (1956/57, 1957/58, 1959/60), and the writings surrounding that set of lectures, I show how Merleau-Ponty takes up Husserl's ultimate project of working out the fundamental level of experiential sense-genesis as fundamental to conceptual thought.[15] In the course of this exposition, my aim is to exhibit Merleau-Ponty's overall program in terms of an analysis that integrates the elements of human experiential materiality into the self-awareness of the living human, but only if the "material" in question is understood in the way in which Merleau-Ponty reinterprets the latest findings in biology as well as novel advances in psychology and neurology. The direction of analysis here is to break down the dichotomizing conceptions of the "nature" around and confronting us and of "nature" within and animating us as separable from the operation of knowledge and thought. It is due to this separation that nature and materiality remain in a definite sense extrinsic to the concrete living of a reflecting human in a residue of Cartesian distinction between substance as extension and substance as thought.

[15] Cf. PhP 20, and Merleau-Ponty's reference to Husserl's *Formale und transzendentale Logik*.

CHAPTER 1

NATURA SUB SPECIE STRUCTURAE

§ 1. The Disinterested and the Interested Onlooker

If you are investigating what nature is, and your scientific and philosophical activity belongs itself to natural reality, then this implies that the natural reality to which you belong exceeds your specific description and explanation. This simple observation introduces us to the program of *The Structure of Behavior*. In this work, Merleau-Ponty pursues a study of nature that takes into account the belonging of the (human) subjects to the reality they experience. The last programmatic lines of the work, which take issue with the project of a critical philosophy on Kant's model, testify of the wide scope of the inquiry: "it would be necessary to define transcendental philosophy anew in such a way as to integrate with it the very phenomenon of the real."[1] This program is to be achieved by revising the transcendental starting point. This is clear from the opening lines of the book, which advance the task to investigate the relations between consciousness and nature by starting "from below." By this, Merleau-Ponty means to indicate the non-transcendental starting point of the analysis. He specifies that the study has to begin "by an analysis of the notion of behavior."[2] The aim of the study of behavior is to integrate nature or the phenomenon of the real in the dimension of consciousness.

By beginning the analysis "from below" Merleau-Ponty is following a precise strategy that intends to carefully avoid the shortcuts of pure reflection.[3] Reflection reveals to us that the

[1] SC 241.
[2] SC 2.
[3] SC 138.

seamless character of experience is linked to the presence of a subject. The objects of experience vary but the experiencing person remains identical through this variation. Starting with reflection has the advantage to skip, in one stroke, as it were, the main difficulty raised by the empiricist stance of naturalism. The difficulty lies in conceiving the *relatedness* giving unitary articulation to the manifold and discrete moments of experience. This is a basic problem of those positions that maintain a rigorously empiricist stance. Without an adequate clarification of the integrated character of experience, it is the sense itself of the *empirical* upon which empiricism and naturalism base the validity of their claims that remains fundamentally unclarified. The confidence in the purely philosophical vantage point of reflective analysis, however, surreptitiously assumes a definition of consciousness as pure consciousness at the beginning of the analysis, whereas the meaning of consciousness and its interactions with nature is precisely what is in need to be established by the analysis.[4] Merleau-Ponty's counterstrategy, which draws from different approaches, as Théodore Geraets has shown, consists in rather beginning from non-transcendental thought, that is, from the positive thought of the sciences. *The Structure of Behavior* begins as a study of behavior. Behavior is taken up as occurrence in the outside world. The path followed is therefore that of a careful delimitation of the analysis "to denominating the relations of the milieu and the organism as science itself defines them as they should be denominated," that is, still assuming the perspective of a "disinterested spectator."[5] The project of rethinking the relations of consciousness and nature begins with an account of consciousness as seen *from the outside*.[6] However, and this is crucial for the overall aim of the project, the notion of behavior, he explains,

[4] Merleau-Ponty defines "classical thought" as the thought for which the rationality of the world is a granted fact: "Si l'on appelle classique une pensée pour laquelle la rationnalité du monde va de soi…" S 243.
[5] SC 174-175.
[6] See Merleau-Ponty's own summative statements about the project of *The Structure of Behavior* in PhP 249n1; PP 54; PD 13.

has the methodological advantage to be "neutral with respect to the classical distinctions of the 'mental' [*psychique*] and the 'physiological' [*physiologique*]."[7] The profound intuition of the notion of behavior consists therefore also in liberating natural phenomena, especially those pertaining to living nature, from the constraints of scientistic assumptions. The notion of behavior enables a thinking of the living being as in constant "exchange" (*débat*) with a physical and a social world.[8] This exchange is what Merleau-Ponty designates with the notion of "existence."[9] The notion of behavior eschews the conception of consciousness in terms of a "plastic matter" that would receive its shape from an "outside," i.e., from the action of sociological or physiological causes.[10] As a result, in the course of the study Merleau-Ponty proposes to refer to the notion of "structure" in order to describe the exchange of consciousness and nature.

These programmatic statements introduce an account of the new discoveries in physiology and in the psychology of the *Gestalt*. In this connection, Merleau-Ponty exhibits the relevance of the spatial distribution of the stimuli, of their rhythm and of their intensity, thus, in a word, of the so-called "qualitative properties" or properties of "form."[11] In the *Structure of Behavior*, the notion of form allows us to rethink the relations between consciousness and nature in light of the findings (*faits connus*) made available by the new research in physiology and psychology both as regards "reflex behavior" (Chapter 1) and the "higher forms of behavior" (Chapter 2). The notion of form calls into question the naturalistic impasse of scientific knowledge in general and especially the physicalist conception of consciousness in psychology. The idea of form, to put it briefly, is intended to suspend the assumption that givens in the field of perception are the appearance of

[7] SC 1-2.
[8] The notion of "exchange" is derived by Merleau-Ponty from Goldstein who speaks of *Auseinandersetzung*, i.e. "dealing with" but also "contention," "dispute" or "confrontation" between the organism and the environmental world (*Umwelt*). See Noble 2008, 58.
[9] SC 3.
[10] SC 183-184.
[11] SC 10.

causal processes in natural substances in order to enable a description of perceptual givens as they happen in their own terms. As regards sensing experience, Merleau-Ponty illustrates how the contemporary research in physiology undermines the classical theory of reflex and its idea of sensation in terms of a point-by-point process. According to this theory, to each stimulus there corresponds one and only one reaction.[12] The critical examination of the theory of reflex in modern physiology sheds light upon the following aspects: a) having shown that "the fate of an excitation is determined by its relation to the whole of the organic state and to the simultaneous or preceding excitations,"[13] b) then "it is impossible to say 'which started first' in the exchange of stimuli and responses;"[14] c) therefore, the exchange of the organism and the world is no longer to be explicated in terms of linear causality but, as Merleau-Ponty concludes, as a "circular causality," thus constituting an integrated whole.

The study of behavior, against Pavlov's attempt to explain behavior in terms of the theory of reflexes and therefore to place behavior on the order of the physical, sheds light on its constitutive dynamic as something that cannot in principle be understood in terms of the all-ruling mechanism of physical causality (Chapter 1). The notion of behavior, therefore, problematizes the conception of the surrounding reality of the organism as sheer physical matter. Rather, reality is that which "matters" to the animal and to which the animal responds in a meaningful way, a reality that Merleau-Ponty defines as "structural."[15] In this reality, stimuli intervene according to what they mean within a certain arrangement and the reactions of the animal are shaped according to the configuration that the organism itself gives to the stimuli. To put it in Merleau-Ponty's words, the reactions of the organism, which make up its behavior, are "gestures gifted with an internal

[12] SC 6-7.
[13] SC 13.
[14] SC 11.
[15] SC 139.

unity […] a kinetic melody gifted with a meaning."[16] The same point is powerfully expressed by Merleau-Ponty at the end of Chapter 2, "The world, inasmuch as it harbors living beings, ceases to be a material plenum consisting of juxtaposed parts; it opens up at the place where behavior appears."[17] At the same time, behavior opens up within the "material plenum" of the world and cannot be understood as detached from it. "Behavior is not a thing," Merleau-Ponty concludes, "but neither is it an idea. It is not the envelope of a pure consciousness and, as the witness of behavior, I am not a pure consciousness. It is precisely this which we wanted to say in stating that behavior is a form."[18]

After the first two chapters, the study of the relations of consciousness and nature from the perspective of a disinterested spectator exhibits such relations as "dialectical."[19] A "dialectical tension" subsists between the organism and its environment (*Umwelt*).[20] In this relation, both sides, the organism and the surrounding environment, are globally invested, i.e. they participate in the relationship as "totalities," "fields" or "forms." This global investment is what Merleau-Ponty in the course of Chapter 2 begins to call a "structure."[21] The introduction of the notion of structure achieves in particular two things: 1) it undermines the idea of reality as composed by regionally separated kinds – physical, living, and mental things – and, closely connected with this, 2) it undermines the idea of causal transmissions among individual realities. The joint critique of substantialism and causality, as the tenets of classical realism and physicalism, yields an anti-reductionistic account of the relationship between the fields of the physical, the living, and the

[16] SC 140.
[17] SC 136. The insertion is mine.
[18] SC 138.
[19] SC 161.
[20] SC 171.
[21] Rudolf Bernet notes the fact that this sudden change in terminology from "form" to "structure" is not a random choice but rather indicates a new orientation in the investigation whereby Merleau-Ponty begins to submit the results of the preliminary descriptions inspired by the psychology of the "form" to a systematic philosophical interpretation. Bernet 2008, 37.

psychic (Chapter 2, Section 3).[22] At the end of Chapter 3, the critique of the relation of efficient causality between nature, life, and mind articulates a comprehensive conception of reality in which, Merleau-Ponty writes, each order "should be conceived as a recovery and a new structuring of the antecedent."[23]

The application of the notion of structure, however, does not only function as a category of integration and differentiation among orders of reality. This notion also introduces us into the problems raised by descriptions that are carried out assuming the perspective of a disinterested observer. These issues are addressed in the fourth and last chapter of Merleau-Ponty's first important work. With the introduction of the term "structure," a shift takes place from the clear-cut perspective of a disinterested observer in the third person to a more ambiguous standpoint in which the third person perspective can no longer claim absolute autonomy with respect to the first person involvement of the observer in the phenomena observed. This shift takes place in the course of Chapter 2 in connection with the discussion of the cerebral localization of mental functions. In this context, the functioning of the brain is relegated to the observation of an external point of view while it is always only "I" who lives through perceptual and mental experiences. The same shift and complication in the comprehension of the phenomena under consideration can be observed in the discussion of the vital structures at the junction where the appearance of a rudimentary consciousness in animals begins to be demarcated.[24]

The negative import of the notion of structure therefore consists in the critique of the physicalism reigning in the accounts of modern physiology and psychology. Merleau-Ponty holds

[22] For a summative exposition of Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the three orders of the physical, the vital and the mental as *Gestalten* or "structures" as well as of their mutual relationship, see e.g. Bernet 2008, 37-41; Toadvine 2009, 25-37.
[23] SC 199.
[24] For this observation, see Bernet 2008, 35, 42.

that the psychologists of the *Gestalt* were also ultimately led to conceive the structural aspect of reality as embedded "*in* a nature taken in itself."[25] The critique of naturalism and of causal thinking did not affect the realism of *Gestalt* theory, especially with regard to self-critical considerations of method and the theory of knowledge.[26] As a result, the deep implications of structural formations in nature remained to be explicated. In sum, the psychologists of the *Gestalt* vastly explored one salient aspect pertaining to structure, i.e. the aspect of totality defining animate but also inanimate reality and their relations. The other salient aspect of ideality, the aspect which refers back to a consciousness for whom the structure exists, was rather left undisclosed. The last part of *The Structure of Behavior* latches explicitly on this second aspect. However, as I mentioned above, the duplicity pertaining to the form, as both objective and phenomenal, is something that Merleau-Ponty works out in the course of the whole study. The definition of form as structure is meant precisely to capture and clarify this double aspect.

As a result, a new kind of intellection than that of the disinterested spectator imposes itself when dealing especially with living or mental structures.[27] The life of an organism is directed towards the meaningful objects of its environment in a specific living situation. The organism is essentially intentional in its behavior. This life culminates in the behavior of the human being whose intentional capacity extends beyond its living situation. The reality of the living and of the human is not primarily "physical" in the sense in which this word is understood by the physical sciences, i.e. as a reality that is deprived of all attributes of value and action. Merleau-Ponty rather shows that the reality of the living is a reality endowed with practical and not just theoretical meaning. He claims that "form is not a physical reality, but an object of perception," or a

[25] *Dans une nature prise en soi*. SC 151.
[26] On this point, I refer the reader to two crucial footnotes in SC 179-180 and again in PhP 62.
[27] SC 168.

"perceived whole."[28] In other words, any form, even that of a physical system or of a historical institution, "constitutes, alters and reorganizes itself before us like a spectacle."[29] The spectacle of reality is *for* someone. Merleau-Ponty expresses this fundamental relation of reality to the subject, exhibited by the study of vital and mental behaviors, by defining form as an "ideal" unity or as a "signification." Yet – this is the summative result of the research from the psychology of perception – this "consciousness" is not found as a pure disinterested spectator but rather it is a consciousness in relation with the world, in communication and constant exchange with it. If the disinterested observer is found not at the point of departure of experience but at some point of its unfolding and development, then consciousness "in its nascent state" cannot be completely separated from the world. Rather consciousness is discovered at any given moment as attached to the world and invested by the same orders of reality that it singles out in its theoretical behavior.[30]

The tension in play in the way reflection proceeds between a third and a first person perspective also determines the ambiguity in establishing a clear division in levels between physical, vital, and mental realities. On the one hand, consciousness appears as structurally integrated with the lower material and vital orders. On the other hand, the study of behavior, by introducing the reality of meaning into the plenum of the world, discovers a consciousness that gathers the different material, vital and mental events under one idea. This discovery introduces us to a consciousness of significations. Merleau-Ponty thus concludes his analyses of the three orders of matter, life, and consciousness by establishing that "…the 'physical,' the 'vital' and the 'mental' do not represent three powers of being, but three dialectics […] each of them had to be conceived as a retaking and a 'new' structuration of the preceding one. From this comes the double

[28] *Un ensemble perçu*. SC 155.
[29] SC 241.
[30] SC 156.

aspect of the analysis which both liberated the higher from the lower and founded the former on the latter." Yet, Merleau-Ponty adds, "It is this double relation which remains obscure…"[31]

§ 2. Naturizing and Naturized Consciousness

Merleau-Ponty outlined the descriptive aspect of form by means of a critique of conceptions of causality thanks to recent discoveries in physiology and psychology. He also developed the implications of psychological findings for a renewed definition of consciousness. Renaud Barbaras argues that the form represents Merleau-Ponty's version of a "reduction."[32] This is, to be sure, a peculiar version of the reduction because the field of consciousness that it leads to is reached by way of a study of behavior that breaks the separation of the disinterested and of the interested onlooker with respect to the phenomena observed. Merleau-Ponty's version of the reduction does not only critically targets the naturalistic tendencies of the psychology of the form, but, by way of the positive findings made available by the idea of form, he also eschews the idea of a shift of attitude towards a transcendental idealism. These two moments go hand in hand in the notion of structure. Merleau-Ponty finds this double orientation of structure in a pivotal quote, which he draws from Fink's doctoral thesis *Vergegenwärtigung und Bild* (1930), according to which "Without leaving the natural attitude one could show how the problems of totality (*Ganzheitsprobleme*) of the natural world, pursued to their root, end up instigating the passage to the transcendental attitude."[33] If the analysis of the first three chapters of *The Structure of Behavior* operate a sort of reduction, this reduction gives access to what Merleau-Ponty calls a *perceptual*

[31] SC 199.
[32] Barbaras 2001.
[33] SC 222.

consciousness. In the fourth and last chapter of the work, it is Merleau-Ponty's intent to show the fundamental problem facing the study of perceptual consciousness – the problem that makes the double relation of the lower orders of reality with the higher orders of consciousness still "obscure."

The study of behavior was described as an analysis that intended to start "from below." As I noted above, the motivation behind this purpose is methodological. Merleau-Ponty intends to proceed *diairetically*, as it were, or by division. This procedure consists in setting a starting point of the analysis that does not uncritically assume the classical distinctions of reality in certain higher genera. Assuming the separation of genera seems to imply the presupposition of a conception of knowledge that is dependent on the point of view of the disinterested observer. If we assume reality to be a totality separated in regions, then the task of knowledge coincides with the determination of a universal gathering the multiplicity of regions under itself. Rather, Merleau-Ponty stresses, the task is to proceed by way of "pure *description*."[34] This descriptive strategy has the advantage of delimiting the focus of analysis to the single situation of the person doing the description. Contextualized in this way, the three orders of reality appear as "inseparable terms bound together in the living unity of an experience."[35] Thus, this strategy is designed to locate a reality that precedes the separation of inorganic, organic, and mental nature as "three orders of events which are external to each other."[36] The body and the intentions of the *ego*, which find in bodily movements and gestures their realization, nature and soul, are revealed thereby as belonging together.[37] The descriptive aspect of the structure of behavior leads us to understand the phenomenon of behavior as "a whole significative for a consciousness which considers it," as a

[34] SC 205.
[35] Ibid.
[36] SC 205. See also SC 204.
[37] Merleau-Ponty writes that the three orders are "sectors of a unique field." SC 204.

"meaning."[38] Yet, the same descriptions aim at making manifest in the unfolding of behavior "the *view of a consciousness* under our eyes, to show a mind which *comes into the world*."[39] The analysis of behavior as an analysis starting from below discovers a fundamental duplicity running through the orders of reality. All distinctions established in pure description are distinctions operated by and for a consciousness. The notion of consciousness is thus determined as the "form of all forms." In the terminology of Husserl, this form can be designated as a universal *a priori* correlate.[40] At this point, however, precisely when the passage to the transcendental point of view is discovered, the problematic double aspect of the analysis announced above receives a clear statement. Merleau-Ponty frames the issue as that of "the relation between consciousness as universal milieu and consciousness enrooted in the subordinated dialectics."[41] In the relations between the "three dialectics"[42] of the physical, the living, and the mental orders, the latter seems to claim a priority as the truth of the other two or, in Merleau-Ponty's words, "the human order of consciousness does not appear as a third order superimposed on the two others, but as their condition of possibility and their foundation."[43] At the same time, the human order is not indifferent to the presence of the organic-vegetative level, then "consciousness is not only and not always consciousness of truth."[44] Rather, the analysis of the previous chapters also exhibited consciousness as integrated with a certain "inertia" and "resistance," an "imposition," an "inherence" to an organism, a "passivity," a "bond" with a body.[45]

[38] SC 241.
[39] SC 225.
[40] Cf. Hua VI, § 48.
[41] SC 199.
[42] SC 199, 218.
[43] SC 218.
[44] SC 237. See also SC 220.
[45] SC 237, 226; SC 239; SC 225; SC 233; SC 234.

By setting his starting point "from below," Merleau-Ponty has safeguarded the result of his analysis about the relations of consciousness and nature. The discovery of an irreducible experience in the first person, and therefore of the intentionality of consciousness, does not automatically posit the whole of reality within the immanence of subjectivity. In this manner, Merleau-Ponty arrives in his first important work at a clear statement of the transcendental problematic. *The Structure of Behavior* carries out the passage from the natural to the transcendental considerations as a result of the interpretation of the findings from the new research in psychology and physiology. Yet, the "transcendental" sphere is not framed in terms of mental effectuations in a pure mind/spirit substance. At the end of *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty arrives at the formulation of the paradox that is posed to a radically transformed transcendental philosophy: "The natural 'thing,' the organism, the behavior of others and my own behavior exist only by their meaning; but this meaning which springs forth in them is not yet a Kantian object; the intentional life which constitutes them is not yet a representation; and the 'comprehension' which gives access to them is not yet an intellection."[46] In other words, Merleau-Ponty circumscribes a fundamental ambiguity of the result of his study on behavior: consciousness is defined as "universal life," "milieu of the universe," "tissue of ideal significations," "co-extensive with the world," "pure consciousness," i.e. ultimately as source of a "naturizing knowledge."[47] Over against this "consciousness in general,"[48] the descriptions of behavior exhibit a consciousness as "individual," as "flux of individual events," as "part of the world," i.e. as "naturized consciousness."[49] In a summative way, to put it in Merleau-Ponty's own words,

[46] SC 241.
[47] SC 215, 232, 241.
[48] SC 228.
[49] SC 228, 232, 241, 216.

"[consciousness] seems to include two aspects: on the one hand it is milieu of the universe, presupposed by every affirmation of a world; on the other hand it is conditioned by it."[50]

Such antinomy intrinsic to the notion of consciousness in its relation to nature is discovered as a result of the study of behavior as "form." This study has led to the exhibition of what Merleau-Ponty calls "perceptual consciousness."[51] The result of *The Structure of Behavior* is a contribution towards the resolution of the alternative between the realist and idealist versions of the metaphysics of nature. Merleau-Ponty relocates the source of this alternative in the dual aspect of perceptual experience: "The perceived is grasped in an indivisible manner as 'in-itself' [*en soi*], that is, as gifted with an interior which I will never have finished exploring; and as 'for-me' [*pour moi*], that is, as given 'in person' through its momentary aspects."[52] Thus, as Merleau-Ponty outlines in the last pages of his work, "it is perceptual knowledge which must be interrogated in order to find in it a definitive clarification."[53] It is the knowledge of perceptual consciousness or the consciousness for which there is a reality as *Gestalt*, i.e. as *phenomenal reality*, that must still be interrogated.

The Structure of Behavior showed the unsustainability of an idea of existence as dependent on a compositionally structured hierarchy of realities. This insight led us back to the idea of consciousness as basic connective element of the various orders of reality. The defense of non-reducible intentional patterns, however, raises the problem of dualism if intentional patterns are taken to be altogether liberated from the physical or vital orders of reality. The disintegration into an inchoate manifold that constantly threatens every physicalism, at least in its most positivistic versions, is shown to run parallel to the fully contained absoluteness of consciousness. The

[50] SC 216.
[51] SC 227. Perceptual consciousness is defined as "consciousness of reality" (SC 202), which finds its its correlate in the "perceived world" (SC 156) as "phenomenon of the real" (SC 241).
[52] SC 201.
[53] SC 227.

preliminary formulations about the possibility of the unity of experience, of the possibility of a "synthesis" of experience operated by a transcendental subjectivity, need to be reformulated in order to include the findings of the psychology of perception.

§ 3. Phenomenology between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty

In this chapter, my aim was to follow the way in which Merleau-Ponty sets out his meditation on nature. The study of behavior raises the notions of form and structure to the defining features of natural phenomena. Merleau-Ponty discovers that the structural mode of existence of natural forms refers to the notion of subjective consciousness. This notion is however profoundly recast, which has important consequences also for the way the totality of nature is to be reappraised and understood. Merleau-Ponty's starting point "from below" is set in clear contrast with an analysis that is conducted on the level of transcendental research. He begins in fact with "positive" investigations, that is, investigations that are directed towards the objective data of science. Yet, thanks to the experimental findings of the physiology and psychology of perception, Merleau-Ponty's approach to nature becomes phenomenological in a sense that is not purely Husserlian, if with this we assume a certain orthodox understanding of phenomenology.

Against all facile critiques of modern detractors of the positivism of science and of its technique, Merleau-Ponty maintains the idea of a truth of naturalism, thereby siding with Husserl's admiration for the proceedings of the sciences. Husserl not only devotes much of his philosophical efforts to renewing the task of a foundation of the idea of science, but has a special admiration for the most characteristic theoretical science, i.e. mathematics. One only has to look at the role that mathematics plays in Husserl's theory of logic, especially in light of his definition of logic as the

theory of science. For Husserl, the intention is clearly that of radicalizing the meditation on the genuine task of science by placing the investigation on a plane that is no longer affected by the blinders of the sciences' objective or technical focus.[54] In short, the reflective attitude of the philosopher must intervene in order to complement the objective attitude of the scientist. Turning now to Merleau-Ponty, we find an analogue yet also different direction of thought. *On the one hand*, Merleau-Ponty's claim of a truth of naturalism is framed by the critique of the naturalistic focus of the sciences. More fundamentally, like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty directs his critical efforts towards the objective focus of the sciences, which he traces ultimately to the scientific presupposition of determinate being. Moreover, both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty believe that any radical inquiry into objective science, its methods, and results implies an itinerary leading up to its own overcoming as *techné* into philosophical considerations that are carried out on a level other than that of the pure positive interest of the scientist. *On the other hand*, however, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty differ considerably in their understanding of the ultimate status of these philosophical considerations. For Husserl, the task of bringing the thematic focus of the sciences to fundamental self-clarification is in principle always possible in terms of a transcendental reflection that surpasses every presupposition of the natural attitude. For Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, the positivity attaching to the natural attitude of the sciences receives a more pivotal meaning for the self-clarification of scientific endeavors. To put it in the most concise way possible, the *a priori* of reflection loses its value in Merleau-Ponty's hands through the experimental results of contemporary biology, physics, and of the *gestaltic* phenomenology that was taking shape in the experimental investigations of the psychology of the form. These results point for him to the radical *mundane* character of all experience as presupposing the existence of

[54] Notably see on this point the *Introduction* to Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic*.

the world. This presupposition, however, implies that the level of intentional analysis carried out in the transcendental order of reflection can no longer be considered to constitute the presuppositionless ground Husserl is trying to establish. The presupposition of the world receives a more problematic status than that presented in Husserl's earlier versions of phenomenology. Since the presupposition of the world defines for Husserl the correlate of the natural attitude, this problematic aspect is especially salient for the understanding of the role and status of the natural attitude in phenomenology.

In light of this situation, regarding the question about how to understand Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Fabrice Colonna speaks of a "phenomenological misunderstanding" consisting in the tendency of much literature to read Merleau-Ponty through the phenomenology inherited from Husserl.[55] It is not my intention to enter into a detailed confrontation with Colonna's claim. The following chapters will offer clues to rectify and integrate Colonna's position. Here let me only note that Colonna offers a patient and enlightening commentary of the central role that experimental psychology, and in particular *Gestalt*-psychology, play in the overall development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Colonna provides selected evidence for what he takes to be a distortion of the phenomenological reduction in Merleau-Ponty. This distortion should make unclear the designation of Merleau-Ponty's strategy as "phenomenological."[56] Moreover, the central idea of an operative intentionality in Merleau-Ponty would prove to be inspired by the investigations of the psychology of the form rather than having its more direct source in Husserl's work.[57] Colonna's assessment may be adequate if we refer to a certain Husserlian orthodoxy, which, however, is doubtful Husserl has ever practiced himself. In this, Husserl's rigor should not

[55] See the section with the title "Le malentendu phénoménologique" in Colonna 2014, 68-75. Cf. also Colonna 2014, 87, 99-100, 114-115, 195, 242.
[56] Colonna 2014, 72.
[57] Colonna 2014, 73.

be confounded with a form of orthodoxy, which is characteristic not of Husserl's actual work but, if you will, of some ramifications of Husserlian scholarship. If the main point in this debate remains Husserl's fixation on a dimension of subjective immanence,[58] Colonna himself discerns lucidly the Husserlian inputs in the development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and speaks of an ambiguity with regard to Merleau-Ponty's reception of Husserlian themes.[59]

Finally, Colonna clearly recognizes Merleau-Ponty's insight into the convergence between psychology and phenomenology.[60] This is of course a central theme of Husserlian phenomenology, which I cannot take up here.[61] Rather I would like to suggest that the convergence that Merleau-Ponty sees between psychology (but also biology) and phenomenology, together with the questions relative to the relationship between ontological and transcendental approaches, are continuously spurred by developments in play in Husserl's own investigations.

In the following chapters, my task is to achieve an understanding of the basic aspects relative to Merleau-Ponty's return to a truth of naturalism. In Chapters 2 and 3, I will approach my objective by fleshing out some paradigmatic moments of Husserlian research that are in play in Merleau-Ponty's thought. First, I will turn to Husserl's notion of operative intentionality. Colonna

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[58] Colonna 2014, 115.

[59] Colonna points to Husserl's notion of a "formal ontology" and of the "anything-whatever" (141-142, 149), the notion of *lekton* (146), to the notion of *Lebenswelt* (150-153), Husserl's treatment of language and of intersubjectivity (337-339), the notion of the infinite (379), the notion of time (389-392, 413-415), and the idea of the singularity of the world (431-433).

[60] Colonna 2014, 72.

[61] Husserl's philosophical work from the *Logical Investigations* onward can be characterized, not solely but for an essential part, as "anti-psychologistic" (Bachelard 1968). Yet, as we know, the situation is not that simple. Husserl's early psychologism, in *Philosophie der Arithmetik* (1890), finds an anti-psychologistic reaction, in the *Prolegomena* (1900), which, however, is also devoted to recasting the nature and scope of psychology as a science. The second volume of the *Logische Untersuchungen* (1901) takes up a subjective focus on the mental processes in which logical formations originate as objects. In the *Logische Untersuchungen*, Husserl defines this phenomenological task as a "descriptive psychology." The subjective focus that Husserl is after, however, is not in the psychological origin, as empirical, but in the epistemo-critical origin of the themes of logic. Husserl himself makes this distinction in a report from 1903, while also operating a self-critical assessment about the definition of phenomenology as descriptive pscyhology. The second edition of *Logische Untersuchungen* (1913) removes this definition altogether. And yet, in various texts, Husserl will keep presenting descriptive psychology as a starting point or way into phenomenology. On this latter point, cf. Bachelard 1968, 117.

stresses the marginality of this notion in the context of Husserlian phenomenology and rather ascribes the Merleau-Pontian inspiration for this notion to the experimental research of *Gestalt*-psychology.[62] I reverse this claim in two steps: first, operative intentionality is a notion that is often referred to in Merleau-Ponty's scholarship but whose phenomenological grounding is equally often poorly appreciated and understood. I ascribe this state of affairs to the little attention that the literature has so far directed towards the actual argument and context where this notion is introduced by Husserl. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I look into the way in which this notion concretely emerges in Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Second, I turn to the way in which operative intentionality is manifest in Merleau-Ponty's argument in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Operative intentionality radicalizes the articulation of *gestaltic* themes, especially the ideas of body schema, the figure-ground structure of experience, and the notion of level (*niveau*). This radicalization allows Merleau-Ponty to discover a notion of Space that is already foreshadowed in Husserl's studies of the lived-body and space in *Ideen II*. These studies, together with the thematization of operative intentionality, shed light upon Merleau-Ponty's clear shifting of the limitation of the account of reality as dependent on the present of consciousness to the temporal present of the world. In Chapter 3, I refer to another Husserlian notion that is summative of Merleau-Ponty's return to naturalism: the notion of earth. Chapter 3 offers some brief remarks on the notions of sedimentation, which bears meaning on Merleau-Ponty's reception of the notions of natural attitude and of the life-world. The chapter concludes with a brief historical survey on the notion of apperception. The survey intends to shed light on notable historical antecedents to Merleau-Ponty's way to integrate natural features of experience in his definition of subjectivity. Chapters 2 and 3, therefore, issue into a conception of phenomenology that both rectifies and

[62] Colonna 2014, 73.

complements Colonna's judgment about the "phenomenology" of Merleau-Ponty while at the same time concretely clarifying the role played by some Husserlian sources in Merleau-Ponty's approach to nature and consciousness. This preparatory work allows me to take up Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the concept of nature in his lecture courses at the Collège de France. Chapter 4 and 5 elaborate on some salient moments of this treatment, in particular focusing on physical and animal nature. The chapters also begin to outline Merleau-Ponty's philosophical proposal emerging from the studies on nature. Finally, Chapter 6 offers a schematic map of the place and role of the studies on nature in the final project of *The Visible and the Invisible*. The role of the positive sciences and of Husserlian phenomenology receives further attention in connection to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the essence. The notion of essence is important because it delineates the starting point for philosophy and a theory of truth and reason. This starting point coincides with the idea of an institution of nature that Merleau-Ponty begins to articulate in the "Nature" lectures but that his final project left unachieved. The final idea of a psychoanalysis of nature is supposed to indicate the way in which this institution can be pursued.

CHAPTER 2

PATHWAY TO NATURE:

OPERATIVE INTENTIONALITY FROM HUSSERL TO MERLEAU-PONTY

§ 1. Introduction

The task to interrogate perceptual knowledge is what the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) explicitly tries to do. In this study, I aim at showing that the various steps of this interrogation, from the *Phenomenology of Perception* onward, represent an attempt to outline a solution to the transcendental problematic formulated in *The Structure of Behavior*. Merleau-Ponty, however, already has a clear idea of what needs to be done in order to *begin* the clarification of this problem when he writes that "the descriptive aspect of nascent perception [*la perception commençante*] requires a recasting [*refonte*] of the notion of consciousness."[63] I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's recasting of the notion of consciousness enables a transformative understanding of the element of constitution within phenomenological analyses.

By way of anticipation, two aspects need to be clearly stressed in connection with the notion of form that makes its appearance in *The Structure of Behavior*. These aspects already set in motion a recasting of the notion of consciousness. First, the notion of *structure*. According to the very definition elaborated by Ehrenfels in his *On Gestalt Qualities* (1890), this notion expresses the relation among certain elements whose nexus or cohesion results in a whole of peculiar character. This aspect points to a notion of the intentionality of consciousness in terms of an intentionality of "field," of "situation," or "horizon." Second, the aspect of *pregivenness*. This

[63] SC 183.

aspect captures the antecedence of the field in regard to any activity of consciousness. Consciousness finds a field of action as already there and in so doing it discovers itself as firmly rooted in this field. In what follows, I show that Merleau-Ponty's recasting of the notion of consciousness pivots around these two main moments. What emerges from this recasting is the way in which *sense* becomes a fundamental way of being which is at the same time a "going on" of a unique kind, akin more to the dynamics of biological *life* than the "mental" work of reflective thematization, of act-intentional *thought*. The centrality of biological life must be here understood in the way in which Merleau-Ponty reinterprets the findings of modern physiology and of the psychology of the form. It is the thematic deepening of the unique way in which human life and being are a dynamic of going-on, that is, as human nature in the natural experiential world, which represents Merleau-Ponty's constant frame of reference for the clarification of the problem presented in *The Structure of Behavior*.

§ 1.a. How Merleau-Ponty Came to Phenomenology: The Notion of "Operative Intentionality"

In his first two important works, Merleau-Ponty lays the groundwork that allows him to reconceive the contrast between the regions of nature and spirit. In this connection, it is fitting to remind us that, for Merleau-Ponty, Western ontologies can be interpreted as variations on the diplopia affecting Cartesian philosophy.[64] By "diplopia," Merleau-Ponty means the mutual reference and exclusion of a conception of reality as objective and phenomenal.

[64] "Diplopia" is a medical term that literally means "seeing double" (Gr. διπλοῦς "double" and root ὀπ- "to see"). As Merleau-Ponty references in his *Résumés de cours* (RC 127), the expression stems from Maurice Blondel who speaks of an "ontological diplopia" (1935). See N 179. The same idea can be found however already in Alfred North

As we move around in our world, the reality that we encounter in our experience exhibits a certain degree of regularity. When something stands out in our awareness, it immediately shows a typicality or an orientation towards stability. Even before science intervenes with tools and methods designed to formalize reality and render it accessible to a community of researchers, our perception and locomotory functions have already produced points of reference that work as stable orienting signposts for our experience and action. The origin of the conceptual aspect of experience can be therefore located already on the level of perceptual and locomotive behavior. The unity of the object of our desire, e.g. food, remains the stable content of our desiring behavior that aims at a source of nourishment. This is the identical ("objective") core of a varying experience, and the phenomenological idea of an intentional act draws its foundational motive from this idea. From these remarks the connection and mutual reference of the stable and varying moments of our experience emerges clearly. The one cannot be thought without the other. The change of perspective defining the flow of experience (its "phenomenality") contributes to the way in which the object appears to us as object. The object remains the constant *desideratum* of the movement of experience.

When Merleau-Ponty speaks of a "diplopia" of philosophy, he means to give a summative statement about the difficulty encountered by philosophy to account for both of these aspects as belonging to the same experience. In the summary for the second lecture course on the concept of nature (1957-1958), Merleau-Ponty puts this twofold conception of reality under the titles of a positive and a negative philosophy: the former is centered around the permanence of the object and the latter is centered around the variation of appearances.[65] What is more, he seems to be fully

Whitehead who speaks of a "bifurcation of nature" in his *Concept of Nature* (1920). The "bifurcation" refers to the idea of a separation between objects and the way we perceive them.

[65] RC 126-127.

aware of the fact that such diplopia cannot hope to be resolved in either direction. Rather it is a matter of gaining "total possession" of it, as he writes, "like the regard takes possession of monocular images to turn them into one single seeing."[66] This formulation is programmatic and the nature of this program has been clearly underway since the *Phenomenology of Perception*. In the final claims of the preface to this work, Merleau-Ponty points to phenomenology as a philosophy confounding itself with the movement of modern philosophy. Phenomenology, therefore, itself a variant of the Cartesian diplopia, is all the same presented by Merleau-Ponty from early on as the way to accomplish the diplopic movement animating modern philosophy. More fundamentally, if the consequences of its intentions are drawn beyond a preliminary stage of presentation, I hope to show that phenomenology needs to be understood as the way to take possession of what Etienne Bimbenet calls the "constitutive diplopia of human existence."[67]

Phenomenology, we hear from the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, is defined by a double aspect: first, it is a philosophy of essences, i.e. a philosophy that endeavors to understand and define the essence of perception, consciousness, etc.; secondly, however, it is a philosophy of existence, whereby these essences are placed back into existence. The eidetic orientation of Husserl's phenomenology maintains a descriptive orientation, i.e. an orientation that remains anchored in experience by means of its method, the eidetic variation. Husserl speaks of "ideation," which implies that the "ideality" already present in the object of perception, i.e. the unity of the object, is not extracted from a completely determined world whose structures are already in place and working. The presumption of such a world needs to be extracted by way of example and therefore it needs to move through what is factual in order to arrive at a rigorous detailing of the nature of what is ideal, i.e. of the unity of the thing. The essences fixed by ideation

[66] RC 127; cf. also PhP, 266, 269-270, 380; VI 186.
[67] Bimbenet 2008, 93.

are not already given, but need to be extracted from the factuality of experience. It is this descriptive orientation that allows Husserl to discover and then articulate in detailed analyses the intentional aspect pertaining to all experience. The changing of perspective in experience becomes in Husserl paradigmatic for delineating an adequate illustration of the functionings of intentionality. It is not my intention to engage in an extended analysis of the ways in which Husserl understands intentionality, which, as Heidegger reminds us, is not the title for a solution, but rather the title of a problem. Instead I will just briefly sketch the sense that intentionality assumes in Husserl's preliminary phenomenological analyses. This sketch should only work as a critical point of reference for the kind of post-preliminary way in which Husserl begins to frame his analyses in the studies following *Ideas I* and that shall play an important role in Merleau-Ponty's own way to proceed descriptively in the study of perception.

If it is true that, as Fink remarks, the actual thing of sensible perception is the "prototype" of the phenomenological "thing itself," then this clarifies that, in its preliminary version, the procedure of the eidetic variation shows us the inadequacy of each experiential perspective, e.g. the fact that an object can present itself to experiencing consciousness only in perspectival profiles or *Abschattungen*.[68] This inadequacy seems to imply the possibility that such perception could, at least ideally, become adequate as summing up in itself all possible views on the object. Etienne Bimbenet asks, "Don't we find behind such negative formulation a way to define the perspectival profiling of perception with respect to a grasp that would be ideally objective, a grasp that would survey space and would be free of all point of view?"[69] To be sure, the negative formulation about the inadequacy of each and every perspective on the object must be understood in the context of Husserl's relativization of the concept of evidence as involving degrees of adequacy, which must

[68] See ND 143. Cf. Colonna 2014, 240-241.
[69] Bimbenet 2008, 88n3.

also recast the notion of apodictic evidence.[70] As I will show shortly, this is a point that has far implications. However it may be with these differences, Bimbenet's question intends to point to the fact that the interest in the constitution of things encountered in the world leads, by way of the inadequacy of the givenness in person of the object, to the positing of an *absolute region of consciousness* from which my perspective is, so to speak, carved out. The mutual and rigorous dependency in play in Husserl's analyses between the act of intention (the *noesis*) and its content (the *noema*) speaks the deep truth of the correlative nature of experience discovered by the phenomenological reduction. Yet, in preliminary stages, Husserl subordinates the correlation to the structure of a constituting activity of the acts of consciousness, that is, to their sense-bestowing activity. If under the title of the "phenomenological reduction" we understand a reduction to the sphere of immanence, then the phenomenological way of proceeding must appear as an analysis of the structures of experience according to the modes of givenness of an object to a reflecting consciousness. Reflective analysis is thereby vowed to detect and fix its objects as immanent objects of a consciousness, whereby the moments of the object coexist in front of reflective thought and therefore find their ultimate unity and full sense only in the present *of* consciousness.[71]

This way of proceeding, however, sets the field of investigation under a twofold constraint. First, the investigation is limited to the analysis of "constitution of objects" (*Gegenstandskonstitution*). Furthermore, the investigation is limited to an even narrower "presentialistic" analysis. It is phenomenology's pivotal achievement to frame its analysis in terms of an intentional method, which transforms all questions of being in questions of correlation. In

[70] The negative formulation pivoting around the idea of adequate givenness of the object of external perception stems from the fact that, as Husserl writes in the *Cartesian Meditations*, "no imaginable synthesis of this kind is completed as an adequate evidence: any such synthesis must always involve unfulfilled, expectant and accompanying meanings." (Hua I, 96). Cf. Bachelard 1968, 103-106.
[71] See PhP 474.

this manner, phenomenology achieves a liberation from the dogmatic fixation on objects by interpreting them as constituted unities in relation to subjective manifolds. The subject-objet relation, however, works as limiting feature in the analysis when the transitive relation of experience characterizing the correlation is not interpreted as a particular *epistemological* feature, but rather as representative for the understanding of the totality of living consciousness. In this case, the intentional act of the egoic subject is established as the determining moment of the whole transcendental process of constitution. Correspondingly, that which emerges from such process must appear in terms of an object. It is such conception of "transcendental subjectivity" that makes up the basic conceptual framework of preliminary versions of Husserl's eidetic.[72] The latter aims in its intentions at a clarification of the whole of reality through a reflective method proceeding by means of a series of intuitions of essence (*Wesensanschauung*). Such clarification issues therefore into what has the aspiration to be an *apriori* science of reason.[73] However, this science of phenomenology, that aspires to reach the utmost radicality of understanding, is guided in its preliminary formulations by a specific sense of essence yielded from an *epistemological* interpretation adhering to the paradigmatic epistemic structure of the subject-object relation.

In this chapter, I show that the shift from a phenomenology of act-intentionality to a phenomenology of "non-act" or "operative" intentionality in the *Phenomenology of Perception* should be read in the light of Husserl's programmatic critique of experience from *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. The chapter shows in particular that in the *Phenomenology of Perception*

[72] The determination of sense in terms of the seizing of the essence in reflection, if the direction of epistemic accessibility is privileged as paradigmatic for the whole of consciousness, must issue issue into the conception according to which the principle of unity of experience – its "sense" – is *bestowed* by what appears to be the mental activity of a subjective consciousness. It could even be argued that it is the implicit validity of an "absolute region of consciousness" (*Ideas I*) that grounds the idea that the unity and sense of experience can be ultimately exhibited in terms of a manifold of modes of identification (even if the latter certainly assume in Husserl a different signification than the immutable structures of a "pure reason").
[73] VI. CM/2, 238.

Merleau-Ponty makes explicit Husserl's recasting of the notion of intentionality as entailing a shift from a philosophy of reflection to a philosophy of temporalizing constitution. The chapter concludes with a demonstration of this claim by following Merleau-Ponty's meditation on the notion of "spatial level" as "form" of experience in a sense that is representative of his reformulation of the modern notion of the transcendental in philosophy.

§ 1.b. Cartesian "Realism"

In a famous appendix to the *Crisis*, Husserl writes that the dream of an apodictically rigorous science is over. In the first, of several references to Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929) in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty sums up one of the basic points resulting from Husserl's critique of logic by pointing to the fact that Husserl says here that there is no apodictic evidence.[74] This claim needs to be situated in the context of the reworking of the concept of apodicticity that Husserl carries out in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. In a move that will be repeated in the *Crisis*, Husserl gives Descartes a special place in the history of philosophy. Descartes represents a watershed in the history of thinking because of the results yielded by his attempt to realize the idea of the grounding of science through a radical criticism of experience as "what gives [the sciences] beforehand the factual existence of the world."[75] For this reason, Descartes needs to be located, according to Husserl, in that stage of the modern age in which the idea of a science fully capable of accounting for its proceedings and achievements by reference to ultimative normative principles was still very much alive.[76] But there are two elements

[74] PhP xi.
[75] Hua XVII, § 93, 234-238/227-231. References to Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929) indicate the Husserliana volume followed by the page number, and the page number of the English translation.
[76] Hua XVII, 6-7/2

in Descartes' description of the *ego*, of "that I, understood as the ultimately constitutive subjectivity" existing "*for myself with apodictic necessity*,"[77] which make his attempt inadequate in spite of the epochal character of his criticism for the development of transcendental philosophy. First of all, Descartes' focus on the idea of deception with regard to the things of sensible or "external" experience caused him to lose sight of the genuine *evidence* in play in experience as "*an original giving of something-itself* [*eine originale Selbstgebung*]."[78] What is more, however, is that the actual historical impact of Descartes' discovery of transcendental subjectivity consists in a "most faithful" and "ineradicable *error*" resulting in what has up until now been an irreconcilable bifurcation of realist and idealist philosophies.[79] According to Husserl, the *ego cogito* is identified by Descartes with the essence of the human psyche (*mens sive animus*), which, however, is itself a *part* of the world (it is *substantia*).[80] This error prompts Husserl to speak of a "realism" of Descartes. Descartes' realism posits a first real indubitable being from which all the remaining beings, as a whole, are derived deductively by using logical procedures. The problem with this approach arises, however, if we think that the validity of the logical principles thus applied is thereby unquestionably presupposed while they are precisely what should have been clarified by an actual return to experience.[81] In other words, Descartes, according to Husserl's interpretation, commits an error that can be considered the common thread of modern philosophy, both on the realist and on the idealist side. Both sides presuppose the *ego* as the basis of all cognition but then conflate the transcendental dimension, which is discovered with the *ego cogito*,

[77] Hua XVII, 258/251.
[78] Hua XVII, 288/282.
[79] "Sogleich dieser *Cartesianische* Anfang mit der großen, aber nur in Halbheit durchbrochenen Entdeckung der transzendentalen Subjektivität ist durch die verhängnisvollste und bis heute unausrottbar gebliebene *Verirrung* getrübt..." Hua XVII, 235/227.
[80] Hua XVII, 235-36/227-28. Cf. also few lines down, "The *decisive point in this confusion* [...] is the *confounding of the ego with the reality of the I as a human psyche*." Hua XVII, 238/231.
[81] This, in sum, is the point made by Husserl in § 93.b. "Missing of the transcendental sense of the Cartesian reduction to the ego."

with worldly aspects (the *ego* as *human psyche*), thereby failing to take hold of the order of the transcendental that was just discovered. When the transcendental consciousness is confounded with that aspect of our human psyche that properly makes us human, with the same aspect that we encounter and acknowledge in others, then we have circumscribed the proper theme of psychology. A philosophy that posits this theme as the basis of its cognitions would turn into a philosophy of immanence.[82]

As a result of the Cartesian criticism of experience just outlined, the idea of apodictic evidence undergoes a fundamental restriction very difficult to undo when it is conceived as a "feeling of evidence" springing forth out of the generally confused context of subjective life.[83] This idea of evidence leaves unquestioned how what is thus perceived distinctly and clearly takes up the sense of objective transcendence which is beyond all doubt. The so-called "feeling of evidence" is rather itself non-evident until a clarification has been carried out of the complex layering of the "multiplicities of consciousness" (*Bewusstseinsmannigfaltigkeiten*) bringing about such "feeling."[84] In other words, an *intentional analysis* is needed that sheds light upon the "syntheses of transition" (*synthetische Übergänge*) out of which the sense of a clear and distinct evidence comes about as having an identity surpassing any subjective way in which an object endowed with such sense can be seized upon.[85] It is implied in this expansion of the notion of evidence that the kind of evidence belonging to an *ideal* object and that belonging to a *real* object may turn out to present analogous but also quite different structures or syntheses.[86] However, such

[82] *Immanenzphilosophie*. See Fink, "Was will die Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls?," in Fink 1966, 174-175.
[83] Hua XVII, 165/157.
[84] Hua XVII, 172/163.
[85] It is worth noting that Merleau-Ponty will emphasize the role of the "syntheses of transition" all along the *Phenomenology of Perception*. See in particular the chapter on "Space" and on "The Thing and the Natural World." The expression occurs in PhP 39, 307, 380, 480, 484.
[86] On this, see Hua XVII, §§ 58, "The evidence of ideal objects analogous to that of individual objects." The main point of difference between an "ideal" and a "real" object is said to pertain to the *individuated* character of the latter,

an analysis is precisely what Descartes did not offer with the result that the proper evidence of external or sensible objects remained undisclosed as well as any further research about the principles founding the validity of logical principles.

§ 1.c. Operative Intentionality

In the context of Husserl's criticism of Descartes, the expansion of the notion of evidence is pivotal because it allows him to recast the notion of intentionality into what he calls in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* a "functioning" or "operative intentionality" (*fungierende Intentionalität*).[87] It is ultimately as operative intentionality that evidence must be understood. A critique of evidence must exhibit the horizons that are implied in the experience of a being putatively had in evidence. Therefore the critique points to a kind of intentionality that Husserl calls "*horizon-intentionality*." Husserl writes, "These horizons, then, are 'presuppositions' which, as intentional implicates included in the constituting intentionality, continually determine the objective sense of the immediate experiential surroundings," from which he concludes that such "presuppositions" have not the character of premises or of "idealizing" presuppositions of logic.[88] Instead, as chapter 4 of part II of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* attempts to show, they have the character of "experiential" presuppositions. "Experience," Husserl continues, "is the consciousness of being with the matters themselves [*bei den Sachen selbst zu sein*]."[89] This *being-with* or *being-in* is so primordial that no deception, "the non-being of what is experienced," can abolish "the universal

i.e. the fact that a real object is always determinable in terms of a relation to time and space, which ideal objects seem to lack. See also Hua XVII, 166-67/158.

[87] Hua XVII, 165/157.

[88] Hua XVII, 207-08/199-200. Cf. Merleau-Ponty's reference to Husserl's notion of horizon in VI 195.

[89] Hua XVII, 239/232.

presumption of normal harmony […] a universe of being at all times remains for me beyond all doubt: a universe of being that I miss, and can miss, only occasionally and in details."[90] As a correlate to a "universe of being" there emerges a "universal experiential basis […] *as a harmonious unity of possible experience*."[91] The notion of operative intentionality is meant to describe precisely this most fundamental correlation as the correlation of a *living* intentionality (*lebendige Intentionalität*), which, Husserl says, "as functioning (*fungierende*) in this living way, it may be non-thematic, undisclosed, and thus beyond my ken."[92] What should be noticed in this connection is also that the inquiry into this "evidence of experience" must necessarily proceed in stages, so that even the first discovery of it, thanks to the phenomenological reduction,[93] especially in its most preliminary phases, does not rule out the possibility of a further change or even abolition of the phenomenological truths first established.[94]

It is the main import of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* to indicate that an adequate concept of evidence can only be found in connection with a deepened understanding of

[90] Hua XVII, 242/235. Cf. the following passage expressing the same point, "Evidence of experience is therefore always presupposed by the process […] Even an ostensibly apodictic evidence can become disclosed as deception and, in that event, presupposes a similar evidence by which it is 'shattered.'" Hua XVII, 164/156

[91] Hua XVII, 226/218.

[92] Hua XVII, 242/235. Translation modified. Here is the whole important passage, "Die lebendige Intentionalität trägt mich, zeichnet vor, bestimmt mich praktisch in meinem ganzen Verhalten, auch in meinem natürlich denkenden, ob Sein oder Schein ergebenden, mag sie auch als lebendig fungierende unthematisch, unenthüllt und somit meinem Wissen entzogen sein."

[93] An account of the basic meaning of the phenomenological reduction in its main moments is given by Husserl in *Ideas I*, Part 2, Section 1, chs. 3 and 4.

[94] This is just the sense of Fink's characterization of phenomenological analysis as *provisional* (*vorläufig*). In *Vergegenwärtigung und Bild*, Fink writes, "Die phänomenlogische Analyse ist vorläufig. Damit meinen wir die Bezogenheit des phänomenologischen Apriori auf seine Entwurfsituation, die jeweils innegehaltene reduktive Stufe. Wesensmöglichkeiten haben selbst Grenzen ihrer Relevanz, haben eine bestimmte 'Tragweite.' Z. B. apodiktisch einsichtige Möglichkeiten, so wie wir sie in der egologischen Explikation aussprechen können, mögen etwa eine Umwandlung oder gar Aufhebung erfahren durch den Übergang in die transzendentale Problematik der Intersubjektivität." See Fink 1966, 16. Husserl stresses the *provisionalness* (*Vorläufigkeit*) of the investigations into "origins" in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Hua XVII, 277/270-71. The same idea of "provisionalness" is already expressed by Husserl in the *Logical Investigations*. Husserl defines the specificity of his phenomenological investigations into the subjective grounds of pure logic in contrast to the linear or systematic way of proceeding of any scientific discipline. Phenomenological investigations, rather, proceed in zigzags (Hua XIX, 22). Cf. Bachelard 1968, 80-81.

intentionality as "operative" in the sense outlined above. Finally, in order to express this always already accomplished experience that gets continuously done beneath any thematic focus, Husserl chooses the word "teleology." Intentionality, he writes, is a "teleological function" that characterizes the whole life of consciousness.[95] This is a peculiar sort of teleology, however, due to the fact that the "*telos*" at stake in this teleology has always already been attained. This is a delicate point, a point that is echoed in many ways also in Merleau-Ponty's notion of "perceptual faith." Merleau-Ponty's perceptual faith indicates the awareness that any starting point for consciousness is preceded by a field from which consciousness itself emerges, a field that is pregiven and therefore already in play and "attained" by consciousness whenever it begins to direct itself towards any object. However, at the same time, this faith does not refer to an already determinate and preformed being. The faith is in a being that is in a continuous state of forming in ways that are not and in principle cannot be foretold in advance.[96] Husserl rather states that consciousness begins its life with an orientation towards "reason." Now we know that the "*telos*" meant here is the "universe of being," the totality of "things themselves" as the realized and undisplaceable *universal presumption of normal harmony in the course of the harmonious unity of possible experience*, i.e. Husserl's concept of operative intentionality. Consciousness has already "attained" being, but the point here is to stress that consciousness does this in a way that cannot be reduced to any particular way in which consciousness can attain or have beings. Husserl expresses this point by saying that consciousness' orientation (*Angelegtsein*) towards reason is a permanent tendency (*durchgehende Tendenz*).[97] But the teleology that refers to a reason beyond all particular coherences or ruptures of experience is not yet a reference to a reason that is already determinate.

[95] Hua XVII, p. 251/245. See also pp. 168-69/160, 269/262-63.
[96] On this point about Merleau-Ponty's "perceptual faith," see Morris 2018, 202-203, 205-209.
[97] Hua XVII, 169/160.

What I just described is that "teleology" referred to by Merleau-Ponty in the last sentence of *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, "which is written and thought about in quotation marks – that jointing and framing of Being which is being realized through man."[98] The great achievement and constant *desideratum* of phenomenology however is not to let this teleology rest on itself, but precisely to set one's sight on it and its constantly achieved movement. This is why it would be appropriate to describe Husserl's phenomenology in its attempt to confront the teleology of consciousness in terms of an "archeology."[99] All experience, not only pre-scientific but also theoretical and scientific experience, includes in itself a "*sedimented history*" that needs to be uncovered if an adequate understanding of the notion of evidence is to be achieved.[100] The thrust toward the "origin," the "fundamental" or the "genesis" is finally also described by Husserl in a juridical way of speaking. Husserl describes the fundamental form of evidence that a criticism of experience is led to uncover as the "creative *primordial institution of rightness*, of truth as correctness" (*schöpferische* Urstiftung des Rechtes*, der Wahrheit als Richtigkeit*).[101] He writes:

> *[T]ranscendence lies in the proper essence of the experience itself*. What it signifies can be learned only by interrogating experience; just as what a legal property-right signifies and what demonstrates it at any time (incidentally, a matter that itself belongs within our province) can be found out only by going back and examining the "primal instituting" [*Urstiftung*] of that right […] *Experience is the primal instituting* [*Urstiftung*] *of the being-for-us of objects as having their objective sense*.[102]

[98] S 228. Translation modified.
[99] Fink 1966, 199.
[100] *Sedimentierte Geschichte*, see Hua XVII, § 97, 252/245.
[101] Hua XVII, 167/159. He also uses the expression *Urstiftende Intentionalität*, see Hua XVII, 227/219.
[102] Hua XVII, 172-73/164.

"Operative intentionality" has been described as *horizonal*, as *living*, as *teleological*, as *historical*, as *primordially institutive*. Husserl's critique and expansion of the notion of evidence takes on thereby the character of an analysis that we could designate with Merleau-Ponty's words as radically starting "from below." This way of speaking is also justified in the way Husserl criticizes the Cartesian positions as being theories "from on high," i.e. theories that assume some putative absolutely existent being functioning as the starting point of their cognitions but operating with presuppositions that are left unquestioned.[103] After accomplishing the reduction to the ego and thereby opening up "*a new sort of possibility of cognition and being*,"[104] Descartes elaborates a "theory from on high," the main traits of which have been sketched above with reference to Husserl's criticism of Descartes' "realism."

As we have seen in connection with Husserl's deepening of the theory of evidence, it is his description of evidence as functioning intentionality that allows Merleau-Ponty to claim that for Husserl, in effect, there is no apodictic evidence. To sum up, there is no apodictic evidence if with this expression one understands an apodicticity that claims to be *absolutely* free from all deception in the sense of eidetic science or of internal experience. Therefore, neither the *a priori* sciences (e.g. logic, mathematics) nor the reduction to inner self-experience (Descartes' egology), whose insights claimed to achieve "ostensibly apodictic evidence," can claim the title of first philosophy. Husserl's analysis of evidence in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* operates a pivotal shifting from the idea of ultimately apodictic, therefore *grounding* evidence, to an idea of "apodicticity" that is the result of a most radical recasting of the idea of being as the idea resulting from a phenomenological explication of experience. Neither the evidence given in the cognitive mode of a priori science nor, alternatively, the evidence given in the "internal perception" of the human

[103] Hua XVII, 286/280. See also 169/161, 251/244.
[104] Hua XVII, 238/230.

psyche as long as it perceives itself – the latter being the Cartesian approach[105] – emerge as radical enough to work as a starting point of philosophy. Phenomenological explication operates a fundamental relativizing of inner-worldly being with respect to its evidence and thereby opens up the possibility to conceive of a "being" whose explication alone would exhibit true apodicticity and evidence, i.e. a truly "absolute" being.

§ 1.d. Brief Methodic Reflection on the "Idea of Being" in Phenomenology

A question should be raised at this point: if the notion of apodictic evidence cannot find its last resort in any knowledge appearing as being secured over against any possibility of deception and doubt, then in which sense can one still speak of "apodictic" evidence and, in particular, with respect to *which* being? In his set of revisions of Husserl's Meditation I (1931), Eugen Fink addresses poignantly the issue at stake here when he asks, "In which unquestioned sense of 'being' is generally understood the term 'existence' [*Existenz*] in the expression 'apodictic existence' [*apodiktische Existenz*]; what is the all-embracing horizon within which the question about an apodictically evident being moves from the start?"[106] These questions only have the purpose to exacerbate the radically new sense of "evidence" in that which Husserl describes as "evidence of experience" above. No "real" nor any "ideal" being can in principle claim a priority in cognition as having the sense of *absolute* apodictic evidence. The experience of any real or ideal object

[105] The references to VI. CM/1 indicate the pagination of the original German edition followed by the pagination of the English translation. See on the apodicticity of a priori sciences, Fink, VI.CM/1, 167/150; VI. CM/2, 112-113. See on the apodicticity of "immanent" or "internal perception," Husserl, Hua XVII, 165-66/157; Fink, VI.CM/2, 113. In both cases, however, "apodicticity" is shown to have a world-bound character. A good summative account of this argument can be found in Fink, VI.CM/2, 148-158.

[106] "In welchem unfraglichen Sinn von 'Sein' ist gemeinhin 'Existenz' im Ausdruck 'apodiktische Evidenz' verstanden; welches ist der umspannende Horizont, innerhalb dessen sich die Frage nach einem apodiktisch evidenten Seienden von vornherein bewegt?" VI. CM/2, 111. My translation.

presupposes further dimensions that need to be disclosed in order for the theory of cognition and science to claim to be really presuppositionless and to have arrived at that "absolute" principle of knowledge grounding rigorously every other knowledge and beyond which there is nothing else to understand.

Thus, there is a dimension, a situation, a field – what can be designated in an anticipatory way as the *world*, a title however that must remain in this anticipatory indication necessarily within a fundamental indeterminacy – that needs to be discovered in its fullness as an all-embracing horizon, a horizon that in all the attempts to achieve an absolute foundation of cognition and science on the basis of evidence has never been called into question.[107] This means however that the most fundamental of all presuppositions, that of the *pregivenness of the world*, has also never really been approached and, least of all, understood. It is phenomenological analysis that for the first time raises the universal horizon of the world to a problem, thereby also opening up for the first time the possibility of an understanding of this phenomenon.[108] Phenomenological analysis can accomplish a task that has always remained latent in all those philosophies that aimed at a radicalism of cognition because of its breakthrough into the *transcendental problematic* by means of the phenomenological reduction.[109] The latter is to be carried out towards *all* conceivable "externality," not only that of the *worldly* object but also that of the *human* subject. However, the

[107] "Der überhaupt nie als solcher abgehobene und eigens zum Problem gemachte Universalhorizont aller Seinsfrage ist die dem natürlichen Menschen mit natürlichem Recht also geltende Welt." VI.CM/2, 111.
[108] "Mit dem Ingangbringen der phänomenologischen Analyse aber fällt der Universalhorizont der 'Welt'" Fink 1966, 9.
[109] Cf. Husserl's statement at the end of his discussion of "The subjective grounding of logic as a problem belonging to transcendental philosophy," when he writes that "having been led from knowledge and science to logic as a theory of science, and led onward from the actual grounding of logic to a theory of logical or scientific reason, we now face the *all-embracing problem of trascendental philosophy* – of transcendental philosophy in its only pure and radical form, that of a *transcendental phenomenology*." Hua XVII, 238/231.

idea of being is not given up as such. In the *VI. Cartesian Meditation*, Fink makes this point very clear when he discusses the idea of an "explicit reduction of the Idea of being."[110] He writes,

> But we will not get free of bondship to the Idea of being by simply *abandoning* the concept of being. For we would thereby lose the last possibility of making verifiable explications and assertions in regard to transcendental subjectivity. We would fall into the danger of an incurable 'mysticism.' Only by *reducing the Idea of being itself* and forming a new transcendental concept of being will we escape from captivation [*Befangenheit*] in the natural Idea of being.[111]

Phenomenologizing experience does not abandon the concept of being, but rather it makes "the natural Idea of being" (*die natürliche Seinsidee*) thematic. What is meant by this, we now know, is that phenomenologizing experience turns the totality of the *world* into its theme. The experience that phenomenology enables opens up at the same time the comprehension of the world as the pregiven situation from which all pre-thematic as well as all thematizing experience must begin. Proceding in this way, phenomenology arrives eventually at an understanding of the coming about of this pregiven situation itself, whose clarification is the task of a theory of *world-constitution*. In all this, however, we are not identifying *any* being when we identify the natural idea of being with the universal assumption of the pregivenness of the world. The natural idea of being is not reducible to any individual (Descartes' *ego*) or even regional (material ontologies) or formal (logic, *mathesis universalis*) sort of being (i.e. "being" as ultimately understood in the mundane-objective sense). Rather phenomenologizing experience takes as its theme the world and its constitution, which, we hear from Fink, "is not 'in itself' existent but also not nonexistent."[112] Again, Fink

[110] VI. CM/1, 82/73.
[111] VI. CM/1, 83-84/74-75.
[112] VI. CM/1, 82/73.

poignantly gives the fundamental reason that justifies this way of speaking when he says that "If everything existent – according to the transcendental insight of phenomenology – is nothing other than a constitutive *having-come-to-be* [*Gewordenheit*], then the *coming-to-be* [*Werden*] *of the existent in constitution* is itself not already existent."[113]

§ 1.e. The Prejudice of the World

In a methodically rigorous phenomenological way of proceeding one must thus reach that *new sort of possibility of cognition and being* that Descartes failed to take hold of once he made a first breakthrough into it by way of his reduction to the experience of the *ego*. This critical appraisal modifies the sense of the reduction as suspension of the existence of the world and rather yields a solidification of the natural idea of being, that is, of the presupposition of the being of the world. This presupposition however is nothing else than what Husserl describes as the universal thesis of the natural attitude.[114] In other words, Husserl's later works, especially those produced from the late 20s into the 30s, no longer disclose the natural attitude as what needs to be given up in order to gain access to an "absolute" dimension of cognition; instead, the natural attitude becomes more and more the "absolute" situation *from which* all cognition begins and to which all cognition returns.[115] It is this fundamental realization that Fink describes with the expression "captivation in the world" (*Weltbefangenheit*) or that Merleau-Ponty defines as the "prejudice of the world"

[113] VI. CM/1, 82/73. It is worthwhile mentioning the marginal note (n. 239) that is added by Husserl to the passage just quoted. Husserl writes, "Obviously too, however, not a coming-to-be in the sense of a wordly coming-to-be, of a mode of what exists as a [process of] happening – but again an analogue to it."
[114] See Husserl, *Ideas I*, § 30. Cf. also Fink's "Vergegenwärtigung und Bild," in Fink 1966, 12.
[115] Luft points out that the notion of natural attitude in Husserl undergoes a shift between an early text such as *Ideas I* and the later writings. Initially, the natural attitude represents a transitional stage towards transcendental philosophy. Later, however, the natural attitude receives a genuine "right" of standing, which, Luft adds, must be understood in order to give an adequate account of late themes such as the "life-world" and the theory of "enworlding" (*Verweltlichung*). See Luft 2002, 72n84.

(*préjugé du monde*).[116] This expression as used by Merleau-Ponty has been generally taken as signifying the belief in the world as "objective" according to the thematic focus of the sciences. This reading is indeed justified to the extent that, for his analysis of perception, Merleau-Ponty draws from the critique of psychologistic atomism coming from *Gestalt*-psychology, which he in turn also critiques for overlooking a much more pernicious prejudice, i.e. that of "determinate being."[117] However, Merleau-Ponty's notion of a prejudice of the world is articulated in the *Phenomenology of Perception* in a way that retraces Husserl's criticism of evidence and experience in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. This is very clear right at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, right after the passage in which Merleau-Ponty refers back to Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic*,

> The world is not that which I think but that which I live. I am open to the world, I unquestionably communicate with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible. I can never fully justify the permanent thesis of my life that "There is a world," or rather, "There is *the* world." This facticity of the world is what establishes the *Weltlichkeit der Welt* [worldliness of the world], what makes it such that the world is the world, just as the facticity of the *cogito* is not an imperfection in it, but rather what assures of my existence.[118]

The pre-judice of the world, "that constant thesis of my life," however, is not a thematic "thesis" at all. This "pre-judice" (*pré-jugé*) does not have the character of a "judgment." Quite the opposite is the case. The world-prejudice antecedes all thematic focus and can be appropriately described

[116] For the expression *Weltbefangenheit*, see Fink, "Was will die Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls?," in Fink 1966, 159. For the expression *préjugé du monde*, see Merleau-Ponty, PhP 11, 62, 296, 316. Cf. on this point Bruzina 2002, 194.
[117] PhP 62n1. See Barbaras 2001 and Moinat 2012, 106.
[118] PhP xi-xii. Translation modified.

as a "forgetting."[119] What is the sense of this "forgetting"? Right at the outset it seems clear that this forgetting can in no way be interpreted psychologically. If, as "pre-judice," it is not a logical "thesis," the forgetting at stake here can be even less a psychological event, even in the sense of a fully developed phenomenological psychology. If this were the case, an analysis of memory would show that a forgotten event can be made, at least in principle, remembered and become part of the wakeful awareness I can have of my past. A forgotten event is still an event within a world. Yet, as it emerges in Merleau-Ponty's own analysis, a purely psychological analysis, on the model of the one carried out in the first three chapters of the introduction of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, would already point to aspects of the experience of the past that would demand the passage to a different kind of analysis. This analysis, which is more adequately defined as transcendental, must exhibit findings that would function as ultimately explanatory also with respect to the findings of a phenomenological psychology. I already indicated above that in an early reference to Fink in *Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty points out that without leaving the regard directed to "the problems of totality [*Ganzheitsprobleme*] of the natural world," i.e. the regard of the natural attitude, one is led to the transcendental attitude.[120] The forgetting of a single event or of entire stretches of my past is embedded in a much more radical *forgetting* of the world that sustains all "natural" memory and forgetting. Merleau-Ponty repeats this connection between the psychological and the transcendental point of view in the pivotal fourth chapter of the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Perception*. In the third section of this chapter, with the title "Phenomenal Field and Transcendental Philosophy," he indicates that psychological reflection,

[119] *Vergessen*. Cf. Fink's "Vergegenwärtigung und Bild," in Fink 1966, 12, 23. Experience, Husserl says in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, is "*pre-predicative evidence*" (Hua XVII, 217/209) and logic, he continues, "*needs a theory of experience*" (Hua XVII, 219/211). In light of these remarks, it becomes clear why Fink characterizes the very essence of experience as being "forgetful." This aspect however should only make the problem of forgetfulness more pronounced. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty states what this problem is: "The problem of forgetting: lies essentially in the fact that it is discontinuous." (VI 248).
[120] SC 222n2. Cf. also S 207-208.

once begun, gets carried away by its own momentum.[121] The studies of *Gestalt*-psychology, in other words, serve Merleau-Ponty as propaedeutic to point to a dimension of thought that is not limited to "a circulation of self-contained psychical states"[122] nor ultimately to the "thematization of psychological immanence."[123]

Let me just note in passing that the theme of forgetting as well as the problematic raised by it will gain in visibility in Merleau-Ponty's subsequent work. In particular, this theme becomes prominent to rethink anew the problematic of transcendental constitution, as the essay on *The Philosopher and His Shadow* shows.[124] In short, the idea of forgetting recasts the sequential conception of founding and founded layers of constitution.[125] In this connection, it is particularly significant that Husserl's concept of the (life)world carries out this same recasting function in the way it no longer appears as foundation of sense, but rather as what is responsible for anything, founding or founded, to come to determinate appearance.[126] Yet, the theme of forgetfulness is already clearly foreshadowed in the *Phenomenology of Perception* by the notion of a prejudice of the world and by the integration of the notion of sedimentation into the movement of constitution of the world.[127]

It is as this irretrievable ("transcendental") forgetfulness of the world that Merleau-Ponty's notion of prejudice of the world should thus be understood and with it his notion of the operative that he received both from Husserl and Fink. In fact, it should emerge from the present survey on

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[121] PhP 73.
[122] PhP 74.
[123] VI 74.
[124] S 217-219. With reference to Husserl's *Ideas II*, Merleau-Ponty speaks in this text of *Selbstvergessenheit* ("self-forgetfulness").
[125] See also Richir 2008, 170-172.
[126] See Steinbock 1996, 94, 103.
[127] See PhP 151-152, 249. In the "Cogito" chapter, Merleau-Ponty refers to Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic* when discussing the idea of a "sedimented history." (PhP 453). If every *cogito* is always already entangled in a history, the body and its sensible nature is also defined as an "implicit or sedimented science." (PhP 275).

the notion of operative intentionality as introduced by Husserl in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* that this notion represents the pivotal presupposition for understanding the setting and development of Merleau-Ponty's analysis in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, both as regards the study of human embodiement, which is the thematic focus of this work, and ultimately with regard to the analysis of time, which represents the final framing of the whole analysis.

§ 1.f. Operative Intentionality as Temporalizing

With respect to human experiencing within the world, i.e. the theme that Merleau-Ponty is constantly trying to bring to adequate conceptual articulation, one needs to realize that the condition for the very presentation or givenness of an object, on the one side, and for the subject's retention of an object in constancy and identity, on the other, is precisely the horizonal structure of time, the temporality into which the life of the subject is integrated. What I hope it emerges from the present and the following considerations is that Husserl's notion of operative intentionality in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* represents the pivotal presupposition for understanding the setting and development of Merleau-Ponty's analysis in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, which, on different levels – that of the body proper, that of the relation with others, that of cultural life and language – attempts to give a detailed account of the basic communion of the constitutive substrata of *primordial situatedness* and *living consciousness*. The analysis of time now not only confirms the results already established by the study of perception and of the perceived world but also completes the latter by thematizing the idea of the central function of the temporal present pertaining to the world.[128] The unitary structure of this presence exhibits the

[128] PhP 490.

subject and object as two abstract moments.[129] The structure of the pre-objective present confronts us with the ultimate question of understanding how the "presence to myself (*Urpräsenz*), which defines me and conditions all presence of what is other than myself, can be at the same time de-presentification (*Entgegenwärtigung*) and projects myself outside myself."[130] Merleau-Ponty refers to the *Crisis of the European Sciences* when speaking of "primordial presence" and "de-presentifying." Yet the latter is an early word that Eugen Fink used in his dissertation with the title *Vergegewärtigung und Bild* and the occurrence of this same word in the *Crisis* may be an interpolation resulting from Fink's reworking of this text.[131] What is relevant for us to notice in the present context, however, is that this expression gives us the final clue to interpret the notion of "prejudice of the world" in the terms of a fundamental *forgetfulness* or of a "de-presentification" attaching to every primordial present, thereby providing the pivotal clue for the interpretation of operative intentionality as ultimately temporalizing. These brief conclusive remarks regarding the nature of operative intentionality, even if only in outline, are meant to at least indicate the full scope of an analysis of operative intentionality and point in the direction in which we should understand the claim that all problems of transcendence find their solution only with the analysis of time,[132] beyond which, Merleau-Ponty also adds, there is nothing else to understand[133] or, we may rather say, starting from which everything else begins to be understood.

[129] PhP 492.
[130] PhP 417.
[131] Hua VI, 189. "Die Selbstzeitigung sozusagen durch Ent-Gegenwärtigung (durch Wiedererinnerung) hat ihre Analogie in meiner Ent-Fremdung (Einfühlung als eine Ent-Gegenwärtigung höherer Stufe – die meiner Urpräsenz in eine bloß vergegenwärtigte Urpräsenz)."
[132] PhP 495.
[133] PhP 419.

§ 2. The Project of the Phenomenology of Perception as Enquiry into Operative Intentionality

The preceding remarks had the purpose of indicating broadly the direction taken by the evolution of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. The considerations about the general direction in which Husserl's project of transcendental phenomenology is to be followed also aimed at clarifying the kind of treatment of transcendental philosophy that Merleau-Ponty took up, made explicit and continued. In what follows, I would like to present some demonstrative elements for the way in which the program of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* plays out concretely in the project of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. In the present section, I draw a summative connection between Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and Husserl's turn to the idea of operative intentionality. There follows a discussion of the notion of spatial level. This discussion aims at illustrating in a more focused way the scope of operative intentionality in Merleau-Ponty's own work. A final section draws a connection between the notion of operative intentionality and Merleau-Ponty's conception of "natural sign."

If Kant's fundamental intuition that the unity constituting the essence of the concept is the primordially synthetic unity of apperception – the unity of the "I think," the consciousness of oneself – then Husserl's transcendental logic can be read as the project to investigate further into this fundamental intuition. Husserl's investigation into the grounds of logic leads to the distinction between the intentionality of acts, the only kind of intentionality recognized by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and an operative intentionality, which characterizes the natural and ante-predicative unity of the world and of our life.[134] In this distinction is summarized the whole sense

[134] PhP xiii.

of Husserl's transcendental turn that fell upon Merleau-Ponty and others to make manifest in its implications and scope. The *Phenomenology of Perception* is a prime example that aims at bringing to appropriate conceptual articulation this new sense of intentionality, of the relation broached by *Formal and Transcendental Logic* between the ego who experiences and knows and the object.

Merleau-Ponty formulates his project in the *Phenomenology of Perception* as that of "radically rethinking consciousness beyond the framework of representation," that is, as "a being into the thing [*être à la chose*] by means of the body."[135] This project thus presents itself as developing the task of investigating the various aspects pertaining to the perceptual consciousness discovered in *The Structure of Behavior*. In the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the project thus begins by exhibiting the uncritical objective attitude of regard, as the prejudice common to both empiricism and intellectualism, by way of a critique of the classical prejudices implied in the modern notions of "sensation," "association," "projection of memories," and "attention."[136] The analyses taking up pathological cases, such as that of the "phantom limb" and of the patient Schneider in the first part of the work (with the title *Le corps*) serves the purpose of showing the fundamental role of corporeal engagement in the world of the perceiver by highlighting a dissociation between the objective and the affective aspects of a situation.[137] In this way, however, the analysis of pathological cases aims at making manifest what is actually in play

[135] "La conscience est l'être à la chose par l'intermédiaire du corps." (PhP 161). Cf. VI 51 where the same claim is made in connection with the notion of "perceptual faith." Cf. also Merleau-Ponty's note in *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, where Merleau-Ponty stresses Husserl's reformulation of "constitution" and "intentional analytic" in terms of "constitution through the low, through 'inferior levels,' of time, of the body, etc." Merleau-Ponty 2002, 50.

[136] See Geraets 1971, 150.

[137] In the cases of patients affected by phantom-limb, we observe that their felt experience is dissociated from their knowledge of the situation. In the case of patient Schneider, we observe the opposite dissociation. With Schneider, the knowledge of a situation is intact, but the sense- or felt-value of the situation is lost.

in the normal exercise of bodily functions.[138] In the second part of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, on the "perceived world" (*Le monde perçu*), it becomes clear that the analysis of pathologies plays in this work a propaedeutic function for exhibiting the establishment of a "spatial level," which Merleau-Ponty also calls more generally "anchorage" or "milieu."[139] It is this "level" or "milieu" that is disrupted with the emergence of pathologies. Furthermore, in the chapter on "Space," the study of oriented space, depth, and motion, issuing into a treatment of the so-called anthropological spaces (spatiality of the night, of sleep, of morality, of the myth, of sexuality), needs to be read in line with the study of pathologies as the analysis of those phenomena which break our fixation with objective being in order to reveal the integrative sources of objective space. In sum, in this work Merleau-Ponty investigates the structure of "representational" acts (*vorstelligmachende Akte*), in Husserlian vocabulary, in the light of the structure of non-objective or not yet objective being. In so doing, Merleau-Ponty is following explicitly the line of investigation opened up by Husserl in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and its recasting of the notion of act-intentionality towards a form of non-act-intentionality. This recasting issues into a conception that I will call of the "natural sign." This conception, as I will elaborate shortly, aims at giving full conceptual articulation to the sense of the "operative" discovered by Husserl.

In the next section, I shall offer a short digression that functions as a transition to the following considerations of this chapter and also as a brief clarification of the historical background in connection to which both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty elaborated their work.

[138] See Waldenfels 2000, 12, 328 *et passim*.
[139] *Niveau spatial*, PhP 287ff.; *ancrage*, PhP 180, 288ff., 323ff., 379, *et passim*; the word *milieu* is to be found all along the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

§ 2.a. The Discovery of Contingency and Transcendental Philosophy: Descartes and Kant

The limited focus of the first volume of the *Logical Investigations* on the necessary truths (*vérités de raison*) and on the formations with which logic is concerned is already expanded in the second volume with a critical study of correlative subjective processes. Here the problem of "ideal being" is approached in terms of an intentional analysis of its givenness. Husserl speaks of a "lived experience of truth." The problem of a foundation of logic is centered in Husserl's first major work around the idea of sense-bestowing acts. These "acts" of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* are certainly not to be understood as a sheer intellectual activity. Husserl's semiological theory expounded in the *First Investigation* is not limited to the predicative experience of judging acts, but rather extends to a prepredicative sphere.[140] However, the first grasping (*Auffassung*) of sensible givens, the grasping of the lived sensible material (*das erlebte Empfindungsmaterial*, *die erlebte Empfindungskomplexion*) still is in need of a meaning-bestowing act in order that the thing might appear as such, i.e. as this alien intention. In the technical vocabulary of the *Logical Investigations*, this means that seizing upon the content of an intention turns the thing into a meaningful indication or "expression" (*Ausdruck*).[141] As I elaborated above, Husserl did not stop at this first tentative phenomenological-constitutive approach to the problem of ideal objectivities. He revised his earlier analysis in the context of an explicit transcendental philosophy. This work of revision had a double effect: first, it confirmed the anti-psychologistic orientation of subjective

[140] Steinbock 1995, 74.

[141] For a detailed account of Husserl's "intellectualism," which relies especially on the preliminary expressions of Husserl's phenomenology (*Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*), see Lévinas 1963, in particular 91-100, but also 141, 174, 184, 192, 203, 219-223. The main aspect of Husserl's early intellectualism can be condensed in the distinction that he draws in § 15 of the *Logical Investigations* between "intentional lived-experience" and "non-intentional lived-experience." A lived-experience, such as a perception, is intentional because it "means" something, it is directed towards something and it is therefore ready to be articulated in a predicative form. Non-intentional lived-experiences are such precisely because no act has yet "qualified" the "matter" of experience, i.e. the latter has not yet taken up objective form. These are the experiences of diffused joy or pain that have no specific objective correlative.

investigations (what Husserl calls in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* the "*transcendental* criticism of cognition"[142]) ; second, at the same time, this revision also recast the notion of the "transcendental" with respect to the way in which this notion had been developed by the modern tradition. This progression of Husserlian philosophy is summarized by the critique of evidence and experience in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. The meticulous analysis of concrete phenomena backing up this critique finds its methodological justification and motivation within a theory of rationality and truth. The progressive integration of contingent truths (*vérités de fait*) within transcendental logic expresses the insight that these truths – that of perception, of the lived body, of the lifeworld – are not "events" or "things" among things, but what can be called functions or operations by which events and things *come to be* for us in the first place.

Transcendental philosophy represents a pivotal advancement with respect to the metaphysics of substance in that it moves beyond the investigation of the "common reason" of things, i.e. that which is common to a group of things or their *ousía*, in order to inquire into the genesis of *ousía* itself. The purpose of transcendental philosophy is that of exhibiting what holds the unity of "substance" and of "substances" together. Transcendentalism introduces for the first time a fundamental contingency in the theory of reason by introducing a variable at the core of the real that cannot itself be represented like any "real thing" that falls under our experience. This variable, that of subjectivity, introduces thereby a fundamental contingency at the heart of reality, i.e. the contingency of experience. Transcendental philosophy, we could say, investigates the *synousía* (Fink), i.e. the unity of substance and subject. Kant calls the "unconditional necessity" that our reason is led to envision as the ultimate support or ground of all things the "true abyss of

[142] Hua XVII, 179/171.

the human reason." Kant posited this unconditional factor beyond being. In this way, however, our experience resumes in itself the vertiginous character of a contingent event.[143]

The history of transcendental philosophy shows the difficult work of arriving at a proper understanding of this contingency without reducing it in one stroke into the product of an absolute reason, divine (Descartes) or human (Kant). Cartesian philosophy discovers a being (the *sum*) that must be presupposed by any *cogito*. Descartes' insight is that the experience of any object, as long as it goes on, is not separable from an operative element, which is thus posited as something that must exist, in this case, my own *ego*. The idea of certainty that functions as main driving motive in Descartes' strategy does not only point to Descartes' project of a foundation of the sciences, but it also bears the much deeper sense of discovering a dimension that is not of the same order of the *cogitata* but that rather works as their condition of possibility. The *ego sum* is inferred as the result of an argument that never encounters such a thing as the *ego* but only a certain activity of the *cogito*. The *sum* is what needs to be presupposed by every such activity. One could paraphrase a later formulation by Kant by saying that the *ego sum* must accompany all my *cogitata*. It is not accidental that Descartes' doubt should lead us to limit our judgments to the realm of the *cogito*, that is, of thought, as the first and only field where a truth can be found. This aspect fits neatly into his overall distinction between the natural light of the intellect and the natural inclination that pertains to the senses and in general to the bodily aspect of our experience. This is not without consequences for the understanding of the *sum* and for the sense of apodicticity attached to it. Husserl has shown precisely the limitations of such approach in his critique of Descartes' "realism."

[143] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's reading of the significance of Kant's transcendentalism as a form of calling into question the idea of an infinite "naturazing" being in N 59-60.

If Descartes' discovery of the *ego sum* has the effect of reinterpreting the Aristotelian soul as pure consciousness, this discovery represents both an advancement and a regression with respect to the understanding of the subjective processes involved in experience. The advancement consists in the fact that the *sum* points to a more radical dimension of experience as condition of the latter but that it never appears itself in experience. The regression, on the other hand, consists in the interpretation of the *sum* in the light of the model of self-conscious reflective thought.

The transcendentalism of Kant's philosophy is the explicit development of the motive of a pure consciousness. At the same time, Kant aims at overcoming the Cartesian ambiguity of consciousness both as consciousness of objects and as self-consciousness. This ambiguity is overcome by Kant's differentiation between an empirical and a transcendental apperception.[144] Kant's effort consisted in determining the conditions of possibility of the truths of mathematics and physics, which is to say, of constant factors in variation (the physical law across the experiments) and in repetition (the mathematical theorem as reproduced in different places and at different times). These truths are therefore "idealizations." This is also the reason why Merleau-Ponty can claim that the only kind of intentionality acknowledged by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is that of act-intentionality. The transcendental relation broached by Kant is therefore in need of a further integration and development. The process of "purification" of the notion of subjectivity leads in Kant to the formulation of a transcendental subject. This discovery, however, runs the risk of misinterpreting the transcendental relation thus established between subject and reality.

[144] For the last summative statements about the evolution of Descartes' and Kant's idea of a subjective consciousness in the direction of a *purification* of the subject, I refer the reader to Lindén 2017. For the distinction between consciousness of objects and self-consciousness, see Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 411-412.

In brief, the pivotal move of Husserl's phenomenology is to undo the process of purification of the disturbing natural and historical aspects pertaining to human existence by purifying transcendental philosophy of the subject of idealizations. The proper understanding of the contingency that enters the focus of philosophy with transcendental philosophy depends therefore on the proper conception of subjectivity and of the subjective processes involved in experience. The notion of the transcendental subject undergoes a radical transformation in phenomenology from the subject of an absolute reason to the subject of a relational reason, that is, the subject of a reason that accounts for the contingency of reality without squaring it immediately under a common denominator.[145] It is precisely the development in this conception that took Husserl from his beginnings, characterized by a form of absolutism and the "logicistic" philosophy of the *Logical Investigations*, to the later conceptions with their focus on life and history. The conception of the "natural sign" expresses the thesis that only transcendental philosophy brings to full legitimation the contingency of existence and therefore, ultimately, that only a transcendentalism rightly understood can ultimately account for the concepts of nature, history and life. Thus I present the refashioning of transcendentalism by means of the notion of the "natural sign" as the crucial moment in Merleau-Ponty's early philosophy that will lead him to the later studies on nature, history, language at the Collège de France and to his mature recasting of transcendental philosophy into an ontology.

[145] See Chiurazzi 2017, 70.

§ 2.b. The Embodied Subject: *Phenomenology of Perception I*

Let us therefore return to the *Phenomenology of Perception* in order to look more closely at some pivotal moments of its argument. In this survey, I will point to some paradigmatic analyses as evidence for the underlying strategy that Merleau-Ponty is following in this book. The combination of the first two parts of the *Phenomenology of Perception* on "The Body" and on "The Perceived World" aims at investigating the plausibility and the implications of the notion of perceptual consciousness, i.e. of a consciousness that is not immediately one with itself but whose unity (as transcendental) is revealed only in man's concrete engagement in a world. The *Phenomenology of Perception* hinges on a systematic attempt to clarify the deep connection – that Merleau-Ponty sometimes also calls a "communication" or "communion" – between a body subject and the world, as the division of the work shows: the theme of Part 1 is "The Body" and the theme of Part 2 is "The Perceived World." To put it briefly, this clarification aims at modifying the classical conceptual framework according to which the subject-object correlation is the condition without which nothing would exist for anyone.[146] The lived body plays here a fundamental role in exhibiting the features defining the coming about of the milieu of experience. In this work, phenomena of perception are studied from a point of view internal to behavior, that is, in relation to the perceptual experience of the human body as the site of a perception that can be exhibited in its on-going endogenous process. The analysis of the basic ties of the living body to its world thereby pivots more specifically around the aesthetic central-sphere and on the tactile and kinesthetic capacities of bodily being.

[146] PhP 253.

Allow me to briefly highlight the role of a key concept in the context of perceptual experience. This is the concept of "body schema" which is significantly discussed in the hinge section between Part 1 and Part 2 of *Phenomenology of Perception*. The important role of this concept, Merleau-Ponty will comment in a later text, lies in the fact that it "takes seriously the union of the soul and of the body."[147] But this is also the reason why this concept results in being ontologically peculiar in the light of our usual assumptions about the relation between subjects and objects. If the aim of the project outlined by the *Phenomenology of Perception* is to rethink consciousness beyond the framework of representation, the notion of the "body schema" is entrusted with the task to make manifest a consciousness as a being in the proximity of things by means of the lived-body.[148] The "body schema" performs this task by shedding light upon the basic union of the perceiving subject with the subject of movement, whereby it is the movement of the bodily organs that enables the action of the stimuli. If for Descartes it is not the eye that sees, but the soul, Merleau-Ponty claims that it is not the soul that sees either, if by soul one understands a perception without bodily attachments. Contrary to Descartes, for whom perception becomes a judgment, the body schema expresses rather a "pre-logical unity."[149] Merleau-Ponty describes the building up of the notion of body schema from a theory of association through a theory of "Gestalt" and finally to the body schema as description of our being in the world.[150] In this progression, it is the theory of representation that undergoes critique, whether inflected in physiological or psychological terms. Both physiology and psychology fabricate the unity of the body schema with the particular contents of experience that are connected by its activity. Physiology and psychology (even that of the *Gestalt*) have in common a conception of our relation with the world as

[147] N 287.
[148] PhP 173.
[149] PhP 269.
[150] PhP 114-117.

representation and ultimately as an objective reality (reality in-itself). The body schema is rather a dynamic unity (spatio-temporal, intersensorial, sensorial-motoric) that undergoes a process of formation into a specific style of functioning according to the tasks of the organism and that therefore remains open to the acquisition of new and different styles and in general to a process of enrichment of determinations and reorganization.

This is too big of a topic to survey in detail, but let me point to the core idea of Merleau-Ponty's argument, which essentially states that the synthesis of the object rests on the synthesis of one's own body.[151] The synthesis of one's own body, however, is tied to a fundamental motor function, which is what the idea of the "body schema" or "body image" intends to capture. Barbaras writes that the "schema" is not just a system of sensations "indicating a spatial aspect," (for instance, this body here and now as if it were a point on a system of coordinates) but rather is "a manner of directing oneself towards the thing."[152] But for the same reason, the body schema describes a more fundamental dynamic that points beyond the body as purely self-contained power of an insulated subject to its anteceding exchange with a world. Merleau-Ponty also expresses this point when he defines the logic of the body schema as a logic of "interrogation and reply," that is, a logic that is characterized by not being completely determined in advance.[153]

Note what has happened here on a conceptual and methodological level: if we kept considering the body, which is the site of perception, as some ready-made and already available power once and for all, then the behaviorist interpretation of sensation would impose itself almost automatically. But, as Merleau-Ponty writes, the "theory of the body schema is implicitly a theory of perception." The theory of the body schema makes perception itself something not already given

[151] PhP 237.
[152] Barbaras 1998, 230.
[153] N 281.

in advance, as a transparent power, that presupposes the idea of the body as a simple instrument of knowledge. Rather, perception emerges from this study as a dynamic operation that does not proceed by following an already pre-established path. I think David Morris finds a simple but profound way to express this when he writes that phenomena of perception "appear as oriented by and against paths *not* taken, and this *not* is itself revisable and tentative, not specified once and for all or apart from what is happening, and also not specified in some pure consciousness or negation that stands outside the field of sense."[154]

Later Merleau-Ponty will say that "perception reveals to us an ontology."[155] Yet this ontology gets already concretely foreshadowed by the analysis centered around the behavior of a "body-here." The ontology that perception reveals is made more evident in the passage from the study of embodied experience, through its characteristic modes of expression (motion, sexuality, language), to the study of the anteceding appurtenance of the embodied subject to a world. Merleau-Ponty articulates his argumentation in *Phenomenology of Perception* by often finding in Kant both a resource of inspiration and a critical reference. But this was precisely how Merleau-Ponty set out his philosophical problematic in the last lines of *Structure of Behavior*. The disclosure of the role of the "body-here" in the world finds a forebearer in Husserl's treatment in *Ideas II*. In particular, Husserl delimits his account of the experience of space from that of Kant. I will briefly pause on Husserl's analysis of kinesthesis and space in *Ideas II* because it works neatly in combination with the kind of argument that Merleau-Ponty is developing in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. This reference helps us better discern the line of thought Merleau-Ponty is

[154] Morris 2018, 125.
[155] N 64.

following, but it also sheds light on crucial background to Merleau-Ponty's overall project. The following section works as a bridge towards the conclusive part of the chapter.[156]

§ 2.c. Note on Husserl's *Ideas II:* The Regressive Undoing of Self-Forgetfulness

§ 2.c.i. Body Oddity

In *Ideas II* we read that "The same Body [*Leib*] which serves me as means for all my perception obstructs me in the perception of it itself and is a remarkably [*merkwürdig*] imperfectly constituted thing."[157] Let us briefly take a more precise look at this remarkable imperfection. On the one hand, the phenomenological task of clarifying experience and knowledge discovers in the phenomenon of the body a primordial component of all experience.[158] This component must thus enter all explanation of any experiential state of affairs.[159] On the other hand, however, the body is "obstacle" to itself by the very aspect that defines it as body, i.e. its self-referentiality. This is why, Fink says echoing here Husserl, there is a certain oddity (*Merkwürdigkeit*) essentially attaching to the phenomenology of the body.[160] Following Merleau-Ponty's later references to Husserl's *Ideas II*, the odd aspect pertaining to the lived body boils down to the basic fact that the body "senses" (*es empfindet*).[161] This is the fact by which the body is said to be never completely constituted or

[156] The remarks on Husserl's analysis of *Ideas II* receive here considerable compression, but hopefully not at the expense of clarity. The following remarks are by no means exhaustive and cannot (as any other commentary also cannot) substitute for the first-hand reading of this extraordinary material. Finally. references to Merleau-Ponty's first course at the Collège de France on *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, especially with respect to his analysis of lived space, will help integrate and clarify his argument about space in *Phenomenology*.
[157] Hua IV, 159. See PhP 108, 465.
[158] See Hua IV, §§ 18, 32. "Bodiliness" (*Leiblichkeit*), Husserl says, is *Urbestand*. See also Hua IV, 66.
[159] *Urverhalt* says Fink 1966, 95.
[160] VI. CM/2, 53.
[161] S 210. Merleau-Ponty refers to Hua IV, 145. The present analysis offers a more unitary account of the central issue of *Ideas II* with respect to Husserl's later productions than the good study by Frédéric Moinat about the problem of

to be imperfectly constituted. Thus, the remarkable imperfection represented by the phenomenon of the lived body can be summarized in the fact that the body can never be solely an object, but rather takes on the role of that by which there are objects.[162]

This constitutive role of the sensing body comes to the fore in Husserl's analysis of its "kinesthetic" or motor function. Every appearance of a thing is correlative to perceptual circumstances, more specifically to kinesthetic circumstances, such as directing and moving my eyes in seeing, moving my arms, hands, and fingers in touching, bringing my ear closer in order to hear better, etc. Kinesthetic circumstances and sensible appearances stand in a relation of "if-then": if I turn my head in thus and such a way, then this object comes into view, and so on.[163] Husserl sheds light thereby on the crucial aspect of motor function in perception. The so-called "kinestheses" are constitutive of the identity of the manifold appearances of a thing and ultimately of objective space.[164] The "practical kinaesthetic horizon," in Husserl's account, works as "motivating" the qualitative or sensory aspects of a thing as "motivated," which are stated to be the actual "exhibiting" (*präsentierende*) sensations.[165] The latter exhibit the qualitative aspects of

naturalism in biology in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty would lead us to think. Moinat divides Husserl's understanding of the problematic of the living being and of biology into various progressive stages such as the theory of sensation of *Ideas II*, the theory of functions of *Husserliana* XXIX, and the theory of passive synthesis and of the affections of *Husserliana* IX and XVII. In this, my reading follows Merleau-Ponty's own lead. First of all, in the "Nature" lectures he claims that there is no way to bring the texts of *Ideas II* to a final coherent account. This conclusion results however for him into a productive possibility of interpretation, as the section on Husserl in these lectures and the late essay on *The Philosopher and His Shadow* clearly show. These texts raise the aspect of "sensing" to the central issue in Husserl's constitutive studies (such as in *Ideas II*). Husserl's ontology of localized sensations is expanded dramatically in the *Phenomenology of Perception* into the articulation of the material sense integrativeness that is characteristic of the behavior of animal and human nature in the natural world and as anticipating the notion of "flesh" as the universal intercorporeity of living bodies and non-living things. On this latter point, cf. also Bernet 1993, 66.

[162] PhP 108, "[le corps] est ce par quoi il y a des objets." The body is also defined as "general medium" (PhP 171). The peculiar character of a medium, such as water or air, lies in the fact that it never just appears like any object to which the medium grants access, but at the same time the medium can also never just be factored out of our experience of objects.

[163] Hua IV, 57-58; Hua VI, 164; Hua IX, 390. Cf. Behnke 1996, 143-145.

[164] Hua IV, 22, 56, 310 et passim.. See Drummond 1979, 28-29. For the sake of precision and in way of anticipation it should be said that for Husserl however "objectivity" proper is still in need of the presence of "other animals."

[165] Hua IV, § 18.A., 57-58. See also 65-66, 128, 146. On this point see Barbaras 1998, 228. My account of Husserl's phenomenology of the body develops here a critical reading of that of Barbaras.

an object while the former express the fact that any qualitative aspect is spatially determined. The kinestheses operate, as it were, a spatialization of the sensible givens,[166] which have the lived-body as their zero-point of orientation.[167] The body's capacity to freely move by remaining a center of appearances can always, and has always already, set the system of appearances in motion.[168] Simultaneously, being a center restricts so to speak "the manifold of appearance of the Body […] in a definite way," thereby establishing a normal system of unfolding appearances, resulting in a norm or a level that will function as framework of reference for all subsequent experience.[169] Husserl speaks of a normal functioning of the aesthetic body – he uses the expression "orthoaesthetic" body[170] – whose performance has its *terminus*, on the side of the things experienced, in an "optimum."[171] The "optimal" aspect of a thing or the whole intersensorial thing enables a sameness to appear and with it the unity and individuality yielding objectivity.[172] Husserl thus defines the unity of objectivity in the terms of a concordance of intentionality as resulting from the integrative functioning of the whole kinesthetic situation of the lived-body, which includes the kinestheses of my finger together with that of my hand, of my arm, and eventually of my whole body.[173] In other words, the identical aspect or the identical thing is the result of the synesthetic and synergetic functioning of a normal lived-body.[174]

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[166] Barbaras 1998, 228, 68.
[167] Hua IV, 56, 158-159, 202-203; Hua XI, 298.
[168] Hua IV, 158.
[169] Hua IV, 159.
[170] Hua IV, 66.
[171] Hua IV, 59-60, 67, 69, 75.
[172] Yet see the qualification of this form of objectivity above in fn. 179. The crucial aspect of intersubjectivity is still missing from this preliminary account of the genesis of objective space.
[173] See Steinbock 1995, 142, 295. Steinbock refers to Ms. D 131 I, 241a.
[174] Merleau-Ponty uses the word "synergy" (*synergie*) in PhP 269, 304, 377. See also Steinbock 1995, 142-143 and the reference to Ms. D 13 II, 42a. As it should already emerge from the present outline on the sense constitution and genesis of space as centered around the functioning of the lived-body, the notion of "normality," and its correlative notion of "abnormality," have no immediate bearing upon specific concerns regarding physically disabled bodies or bodies that are subject to discrimination, exclusion, even violence from the standpoint of "normal" bodies. With the notion of "normality"/"abnormality," Husserl is attempting to describe a dimension of normativity that is in play in the experience of any kind of specific body. In this sense, according to Husserl's descriptions, even a disabled body

Once a concordance of being is given on these grounds (the grounds of "sensuous relativity"), which Husserl defines as "that which contains all grounds of right," then is also established the right, he concludes, "for positing being and consequently for the possibility and necessity of positing the goal of logico-mathematical determination."[175] We can begin to fathom from the outline of this analysis the pivotal scope that embodied experience will assume in Husserl's studies, especially if one of the leading concerns of Husserl's philosophy is that of offering a genealogy of logic.[176]

Husserl's analysis rehabilitates the role of the senses by exhibiting descriptively the order of experience of an "operative body" (*fungierender Leib*).[177] The sensory-motor functioning of the body enables the obtainment of certain objective properties that can be detached from the living situation by way of distancing, differentiating and de-contextualizing. The order of knowledge, however, must remain tied to the sensible order of form-building and structuring with all its contingencies, ambiguities and non-definiteness. This means that the methods of formalization of experience, which certainly are valuable to overcome the ambiguity and relativity of everyday experience – which for Husserl is mostly an experience relying on secondary qualities[178] –, must

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or a body that is socially emarginated must develop some degree of normativity if they are to experience anything. A too hasty critique against the idea of a "normal" body is already assuming a specific idea of norm in its analysis while Husserl's analysis of the lived-body is trying to achieve an understanding of how a norm gets established in the first place starting from the way in which a living body whatsoever behaves. Finally, it needs to be stressed that for Husserl, the idea of norm or normality cannot be defined on its own terms – it is not a self-referential or self-enclosed notion – but it wants to capture a dynamic that is in constant striving to find a balance and that therefore cannot be detached in principle from the active interplay of "abnormal" states. Husserl's analysis of normality relies heavily on examples such as those of hands with blisters, injured soldiers, substances altering habitual experience, etc. For a systematic account of the connection between "normality" and "abnormality," see Steinbock 1995, Part 2, Section 3 ("A Genetic Phenomenology of Normality and Abnormality") and the expansion of this theory into a generative dimension in Section 4, especially Subsection 11 ("Toward Intersubjective Normality and Abnormality").

[175] *[D]as allen Rechtsgrund Enthaltende*, Hua IV, 76. It is worth noting Husserl's using the language of jurisprudence when he speaks of "right" or what founds a certain "right" – i.e. the *Rechtsgrund*. This language, I pointed out above, will return on the treatment of experience in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. This usage is etymologically related to the definition of the body as "orthoaesthetic," whereby the Greek *orthon* means "what is right" and implying normative force as in the case of the rules of grammar or *orto*graphy. See on this point Waldenfels 2000, 55, 98.

[176] Cf. Waldenfels 2000, 62.

[177] Hua VI, 109; Hua XIV, 57.

[178] Hua IV, 76-77, 88.

be limited in their pretension to truncate being through a universal mathematization of nature.[179] Eventually also the mathematician or the physicist operates within a framework of practical motivations and interests that have at their basis the functioning of the whole "kinesthetic situation" of the lived-body.[180] In particular, the sensible dimension is evident in the investigation of nature in that the scientist or the whole community of rational subjects must be able to exchange the results and findings of their investigations. But in order for this exchange to be accomplished, sensible bodies need to be admitted as transcendental factors for the experience of physicalistic nature to be possible. Even more radically, as it was stressed above with respect to Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the animal and human order of reality, the study of physicalistic nature and of the nervous system according to the point of view of physicalistic science cannot get around the fact that the subject doing the investigation experiences the body proper as what opens a field of experience to be investigated in the first place.[181]

§ 2.c.ii. Husserl on the Intuition of Space

The sensing nature of the body, now integrated with the analysis of the role of kinesthesis, is the key to submitting the form of space – as "the form of all possible things"[182] – to explicit analysis. The analysis of the body exhibits the presuppositions of the ontology of material nature especially with respect to the eidetic science of pure spatiality, that is, geometry. In other words, Husserl's theory of kinesthesis opens up an approach to the problem of the totality of space through the analysis of the concrete modalities pertaining to the double "peculiar appurtenance" of the *ego* to

[179] See Husserl Hua VI, 52, quoted in Steinbock 1995, 86.
[180] Steinbock 1995, 150, 142; Zahavi 1994, 76.
[181] Cf. Moinat 2012, 27n23, 37.
[182] Hua IV, 83.

1) the "psycho-bodily" unit and to 2) a "somatic corporality."[183] In this connection, the role of the "stuff of sensation" (*Empfindungsmaterial*) for Husserl did not stop at the stage of preliminary formulation in the *Logical Investigations*. With the study of the body there arises a different sense of saying that the *hyle* "is not 'over and against' the Ego in the same manner as the constituted external world and its appearances."[184] The apprehension of intentional contents as the condition for any form of presence of the object – for any "spatial presence"[185] – no longer works here like a form operating upon some raw material, i.e. the sensations, which must in this case be presupposed as being a neutral kind of material, at least if we look at a classic text on sensations such as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and its theory of affections.[186] The theory of the kinesthesis teaches us rather that the sensations are themselves *spatializing*. The study of perception as primordially tied to movement begins thereby to shed light on a dimension of discernment other than that of visual being and of Euclidean three-dimensional space. This is the dimension of a "space of orientation"[187] as a "qualified" (*qualifiziert*) form and as differentiated in the various dimensions of orientation (right-left, above-below, front-back).[188]

What emerges from these descriptions is the exhibition of the intentional implications of the naturalistic perspective of natural science. In particular, Husserl's descriptions shed light upon both the naively conceived absoluteness of natural things and upon the objective spatial form attaching to them. Husserl's phenomenology of the body exhibits the relativities by means of

[183] In Hua IV, 215, Husserl speaks of "peculiar appurtenance to the ego" (*besondere Ichzugehörigkeit*) in relation to the "psycho-bodily unit" (*leib-seelische Einheit*) and to "somatic corporality" (*somatische Leiblichkeit*).
[184] Hua IV, 215.
[185] Hua IV, 205.
[186] Cf. N 134.
[187] Hua IV, 83.
[188] For the reference to a "space of orientation," see Hua IV, 83. For the reference to "qualified" aspect of oriented space, see Hua IV, 30-32, 76-77, 84, 88; *Die Welt der lebendingen Gegenwart*, 335.

which physicalistic material nature can be experienced.[189] His analysis of corporeality therefore appears as the regressive undoing of a self-forgetfulness.[190] Husserl's regressive analysis exhibits two main stages of this process of rememoration: 1) the recognition of the role of the experiencing subject-Body[191]; 2) the recognition that the corporeal subject is in a relation of empathy to other corporeal subjects.[192] The latter stage is especially important for the clarification of the experience of space because it corresponds to the lifting of the self-forgetfulness regarding one's own relation with other subjects that allows Husserl to claim to have found the solution to the problem of the "form of intuition" and of "spatial intuition."[193]

The problem goes back to Kant's *Critique of pure reason*. In § 26, when discussing more in detail the very first kind of synthesis applied to a sensible manifold, synthesis that Kant calls the "synthesis of the apprehension," he also remarks that the "form of intuition" (space and time) provides only the manifold of intuition while the "formal intuition" provides the "unity of representation" (B 160) as what *gives* space and time as intuitions for the first time. The "unity of representation" is said to come before the "concept," but also to presuppose a synthesis that does not belong to the "senses." Kant says that the synthesis of apprehension is given *with* the form of intuition, but not *in* it. As it turns out, this synthesis is operated by the power of imagination, introduced in § 24, and that Kant places on the side of the understanding. In other words, in the synthesis of apprehension Kant recognizes a non-conceptual use of the understanding that he analyzes more closely in the "Analytic of Principles" when discussing the doctrine of the schematism.[194] Husserl, for his part, says that the form of intuition "is not a matter of the senses,

[189] "What we are seeking does not lie in the *consequences* of theoretical, mediate thinking but in its *beginnings*; we are looking for its most original presuppositions." Hua IV, 90-91/96.
[190] Hua IV, 218.
[191] Hua IV, 55.
[192] Hua IV, 80-81.
[193] Hua IV, 83.
[194] Cf on this point Carbone 1998, 166n1.

although in another respect it is."[195] For him the spatial intuition is not given *with* the form of intuition. The latter is rather said to be a higher and founded kind of intuition. The primary intuitive space is oriented space, which, as it is clear from the above, is sensuously given. In this special fact, that oriented space is sensuously given, that there is with our perception at once a "here"-"there" relation, a relation of the "here" *to* a "there," this apparently trivial assessment points to the wealth and complexity of the very sense of perception and, as we hear from Husserl, of "*experience* in general," i.e. "that things come to presence there which are to be determined in themselves and distinguished from all other things."[196]

We can begin to fathom from these remarks how far the implications of the analysis of the sensing body must lead us, implications that Merleau-Ponty raised to a basic philosophical task to explore in their fullness. The centrality of the sensing body for the intuition of space plays a pivotal role for the apprehension of *the* world of nature.[197] The phenomenon of the body reveals in fact a dimension that cannot ultimately be harmonized with the "ontology of *blosse Sachen*."[198] This is the material world of physicalistic nature that the first part of *Ideas II* brings to conceptual articulation. The space of orientation is "sensuously given" but not yet "space itself."[199] Oriented space functions as the basis to account for objective space, which is not sensuous but still "intuited on a higher level" thanks to the possibility of changing location and of empathy with other subjects.[200] This whole system of experience is the system of relativities that needs to be integrated into our account of space in order to make sense of the irrelative, i.e. ultimately of the pure and exact ideal space of geometry.

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[195] Hua IV, 83.
[196] Hua IV, 82.
[197] Hua IV, 86.
[198] S 206.
[199] Hua IV, 83.
[200] Ibid.

The analysis of what Husserl calls the "primary and originary sense" of transcendence pertaining to the sheer materiality of nature, as a sense that is primary with respect to the dimension of praxis and value, is revealed as dependent with regard to its origins and scope on an analysis of the kinesthetic central system of aisthesis. The study of subjectivity carried out in the second part of *Ideas II* and especially that of embodied subjectivity, however, even if carried out with the purpose of a "full clarification of the sense and structure of physical nature,"[201] already introduces aspects that belong to the personal subject.[202] The important implication here is that the further clarification of the "sensing" aspect of the body must expand the dimension of the "primary and originary sense" of transcendence pertaining to the primacy of the sheer materiality of nature by introducing us to a much more fundamental sense of "transcendence." In *Ideas II*, Husserl shows that this more fundamental form of transcendence can be achieved by lifting the self-forgetfulness of one's own sensing body through the two main stages that I mentioned above.[203]

§ 2.d. The Notion of Spatial Level: *Phenomenology of Perception II*

Now that I have specified that for Husserl the whole sensory-motor structure defining the body's behavior is responsible for the establishment of a primary space of orientation, let us return to the

[201] Hua IV, 90.
[202] Hua IV, 143.
[203] Husserl's phenomenology of the body advances his *epoché* with respect to the subject. By finding at the heart of the subject the very structure of the world, it advances the laying open of the world as the true dimension of constituting activity. The analysis of bodiliness in *Ideas II* appears therefore to be in strong opposition to the approach taken in the *Logical Investigations*, where Husserl identifies "the phenomenological reduced ego" with the pure psychic ego as separated from its *Ichleib* (LU V, § 4) and conceived as "disconnected" from all empirical-real existence (ibid. § 3). In a seeming paradoxical way, Husserl's opposition in *Ideen II* to the identification of the "pure ego" and the psychic ego, even taken as "pure," led him to a more accurate account of bodiliness than the still too psychologistic position of the *Logical Investigations*.

main theme of this chapter, i.e. the way in which Merleau-Ponty puts to use the notion of operative intentionality in the development of the argument of the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

The idea of a space of orientation is generalized by Merleau-Ponty in terms of the idea of a "spatial level," or also of an "anchorage" or "milieu." The discussion of Husserl's notion of oriented space sheds light on Merleau-Ponty's notion of a spatial level. A reflection on the sense of the notion of level makes explicit the implications of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of spatial experience as a "structural phenomenon."[204] Merleau-Ponty describes the spatial level as "a certain possession of the world by my body."[205] The body adopts a level of perception and action where it can function optimally.[206] He writes, "my body has its purchase on the world when my perception offers me a spectacle as varied and as clearly articulated as possible and when my motor intentions, as they play out, receive from the world the responses they were expecting."[207] As a result, perception as encounter with objects is a more "abstract" function[208] in relation to the establishment of a "perceptual ground" (*sol perceptif*)[209] as structural condition of this function. Thus, Merleau-Ponty writes that every single perception "implies a more secret act by which we elaborate our milieu."[210] As a result, he describes every perception of objects in terms of "a tension that gravitates around a norm."[211] This tension is what he will later define, under the influence of

[204] PhP 325.
[205] PhP 289; also S 86.
[206] PhP 290, 348, 367; MSME 53, 73.
[207] PhP 289-290.
[208] PhP 326.
[209] PhP 290.
[210] PhP 326.
[211] PhP 349. Earlier in the text, Merleau-Ponty however expressed this idea more resolutely by claiming that phenomena of perception, as phenomena of "form," are themselves "the birth of a norm" (*la naissance d'un norme*) and are not realized according to a norm. See PhP 75. In the lectures on "Nature," Merleau-Ponty uses a similar expression in order to define the organism when he writes: "An organism, this is a fluctuation around norms," N 239.

his studies on the structuralism of Saussure, as "diacritical," as an *écart*, i.e. a "gap" or "hollow" with respect to a "norm."[212]

The spatial level that is raised to a norm of perception and action is not yet objective space. The spatial milieu is not already a determinate measurable dimension. The relations between the factors of orientation, distance, and variation of appearance are not subject to an invariable relation and a constant (computational) law ruling their mutual relationship, which, finally, can be conceived and put into a formula.[213] Merleau-Ponty counters this position by reminding us that the objectivity and stability of space and of reality are precisely what needs to be clarified and therefore cannot be presupposed. That objectivity is given over to consciousness as a goal to be attained is here the problem.[214] The spatial level is not a fixed system that is simply there, it is not an "objective system of the world," but rather it consists in the articulation of a field. The level of spatial experience that results from this process is variable.[215] The idea that the milieu is not something ready-made or resulting from a performance accomplished once and for all is an idea already developed by authors such as Uexküll, Buytendijk, Plessner, and Goldstein. These authors elaborate the idea of an "intentionality of the milieu" (*Umweltintentionalität*).[216] Already in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty recasts the physicalist conception of nature as universe of objective events subject to determinate laws – to which the living organism is itself subject – into the conception of nature as source of relevant stimuli detected by inferior or instinctive behaviors of the organism. The organism, so to speak, distills its living milieu within the physical world, so much so that "the excitation is itself already a reply."[217] The organism is the place both of an

[212] Cf. MSME 57-58, 73 *et passim*. Cf. on this point also Carbone 2004, 10.
[213] PhP 347, 349.
[214] PhP 340.
[215] PhP 355-356, 359.
[216] PhP 269. The German term stems from Buytendijk and Plessner (*Die Deutung des mimischen Ausdrucks*, 1925). Merleau-Ponty uses this expression also in his lectures at the Collège de France, MSME 58.
[217] SC 31; cf. SC 11.

actuality (in its preexisting organization) and of a virtuality (in the projection of its organization into a future situation).[218] The milieu is correlatively also subject to a permanent process of becoming. It is in connection with these investigations that in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty develops the idea of "motor intentionality" as a primordial form of intentionality.[219] We have seen above how the body schema is meant to capture this idea. The concordance of the aesthetic "I can" expresses the fact that in perception a lived-body is always an agent and not merely an object.[220] In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty expresses this point also by speaking of a "practognosia" or the idea of a practical knowledge as enabling of experience.[221] This idea sheds light on the constitution of spatial orientation and adaptation to a spatial surrounding environment of the living body that integrates the sense for what is important for the organism in a specific situation. In other words, there is a sense of familiarity that a biological organism already has with what happens in the world by the very fact that it exists within a certain behavior or way of responding to a surrounding reality.[222] This primordially inhabited space is "pre-objective" space, thus not just adaptation to perceptual givens in objective space.[223] Primordial space is rather the result of a "pre-adaptation" of the organism, or an "*a priori* of the organism."[224] Indeed, as we hear from the *Phenomenology of Perception*, "What matters for the orientation of the spectacle is not my body as it is de facto, as a thing in objective space, but my body as a system of possible actions, as a virtual body whose phenomenal 'location' is defined by

[218] SC 79, 157.
[219] For a later summative reference to the idea of motor intentionality, see S 211, RC 17.
[220] PhP 351.
[221] PhP 164.
[222] Barbaras 1998, 230-231; Lindén 2011-2012, 126.
[223] MSME 82, 140.
[224] SC 134; MSME 140.

its task and its situation. My body is located where it has something to do," or to put it in other words, where it has "a possible habitation."[225]

This point can be neatly clarified with reference to the phenomenon of the phantom-limb. The German physician Herbert Plügge asked his patients affected with phantom-limb syndrome to approach a wall to the point that their arm stump would almost touch it. Then he asked whether their phantom-limb "hit" the wall or "penetrated" it. The patients, however, answered that their experience was something quite different.[226] The question, in fact, asks for what the patients *know* is happening with their arm stump. They know however that no arm is there and that there is no way in which the non-existing arm could "hit," let alone "penetrate" the wall. This way of proceeding is not in the condition to understand how someone without an arm can still have the vivid experience of grasping something with their hand or of bending the fingers. The phantom arm is not there in the same way in which an actual arm could be there. But an actual arm is also not there as a purely physical arm. The phantom-limb is there where it has something *to do* and so does primarily an actual, living arm.[227] The patients affected by a phantom-limb did not say that their arm was at the wall or even in the wall when asked to put their arm stump in its proximity. However their arm is at the cup or piece of cloth they are reaching for, that is, it is there where there is a certain practical task to be accomplished. In such patients, the previous spatial level with its coordinates or, to use Merleau-Ponty's words, with its points of anchorage, is still functioning as the norm of perception and action. The subject affected by phantom-limb has not yet effected the transition into the new situation in which the stimuli to move the hand or to bend the fingers

[225] PhP 289; cf. PhP 118-119, 162, 164, 359; MSME 58, 73. In this connection I would like to point the reader also to David Morris' account of what he calls, based on Edward Casey's work, the "power of *place.*" Morris illustrates the idea of what I call here "spatial level" by an insightful reference to the case of immune systems. He writes, "We have to think of organisms and immune systems as engendering sense by first of all dividing up place in ways that are oriented by organisms as bounding themselves, not spaces given in advance." Morris 2018, 172.
[226] The case study is reported by Waldenfels 2000, 27.
[227] On Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the phantom-limb, see PhP 90-105.

will be substituted for stimuli requiring a different kind of movement. Merleau-Ponty speaks in this case of a "scholastic of existence,"[228] which indicates the fact that certain actions are simply repeated without any further integration in relation to the demands of new situations. The adoption of a milieu and the development of habitual behavior can also turn into an obstacle to action when the disruption of the "essential coexistence" (*Wesenskoexistenz*) of organism and milieu is not followed by a new process of adaptation, to be here understood as the "adoptation" of a new milieu.[229]

§ 2.e. The Kantian Notion of a Level of all Levels and the General Level of Experience

These general remarks already sketch a median dimension between consciousness and nature, between organism and world, according to the recast notion of intentionality as operative. At the same time, these remarks open us to further dimensions of analysis that show us the full scope of the analysis of experience. The natural way in which the organism exposes itself to what is other than itself already shapes what is other than itself into something familiar, a milieu, i.e. an *Umwelt*. The milieu is not an objective landscape, but is subject to change, as Werthemeier's experiments show.[230] There results a fundamental relativity of space, which is not purely arbitrary. Every spatial milieu depends on the system of orientation preceding it.[231] The transition occurs when certain new "points of anchorage" are promoted to the status of dimensions and norms.[232] The points of

[228] PhP 99. See Waldenfels 2000, 29.
[229] Merleau-Ponty speaks of a "mouvement of fixation" as a "prospective activity," PhP 267-268, 276-277, *et passim*. Merleau-Ponty uses the term "fixation" in a technical sense with respect to the regard on one object out of the two ocular images. In the chapter on "Space," however, he expands this use to what he calls the fixation of the subject in a milieu and in the world. See, e.g., PhP 325, 328. The expression *Wesenskoexistenz* appears in PhP 360; cf. also SC 239.
[230] PhP 323; MSME 73.
[231] MSME 79.
[232] MSME 58.

anchorage, we hear from Merleau-Ponty's lectures, "represent a certain *gap from the norm*, gap that tends to impose itself as a norm. Promoting the gaps to norms means to stop seeing them as figures in order to see them as dimensions."[233] With the establishing of a dimension or level of perception and action, however, there is the advent of a point of reference that from now on functions absolutely.[234] An important conclusion imposes itself at this point. If a spatial level is always preceded by another spatial level and presupposes the latter, then space is always already constituted and spatiality is always already acquired by every explicit experience of space and of spatial things.[235] This conclusion, however, raises the further question concerning a first level or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, the question of a "level of all levels."[236]

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that space is not to be found in the *contents* of experience. The experiments of Stratton show this with respect to sensual contents as the experiments of Werthemeier do with respect to the sensing body.[237] Both (body and sensible contents) are not spatial in themselves, but receive their orientation from "the general level of experience."[238] There remains the hypothesis to interpret the general level of experience in terms of a *form* of experience. In his lectures at the Collège de France, when rehearsing the conception of lived space from the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty makes his critical target more specific by referring to "the Kantian idea of a level of all levels."[239] In the same lectures, he advances a critical analysis of Kantian space that closely resembles that of Husserl in *Ideas II*. In his critique of formalist accounts of space in the preparatory notes for the lectures at

[233] MSME 73.
[234] PhP 324; MSME 73.
[235] PhP 291; PhP 293.
[236] PhP 293.
[237] The British psychologist G. M. Stratton carried out experiments on spatial orientation by using corrective glasses which inverted images upside down. These experiments were conducted few years before those of M. Werthemeier. Merleau-Ponty comments on these experiments in PhP 282-287.
[238] PhP 288.
[239] MSME 83.

the Collège de France, Merleau-Ponty says that "The theory of the formal [intuition] leads the form of the intuition ('the way in which we are affected') to be a production of the understanding."[240] The core of Merleau-Ponty's critique can be summarized as follows: Kant rightly begins with the idea of space as intuitive (intuition is faculty of relations, Kant maintains), yet the relational totality of space is ultimately led back to a production of the understanding. His point is that the relational character of space, as form of intuition, remains insufficiently determined if we turn space into a system of relations equivalent in all directions: this is virtual space, a "pure object placed in front of a pure mind," it is "homogeneous" or "ubiquitous space."[241] In the Dialectic, however, as Merleau-Ponty also remarks, Kant conceives the world as an open and indefinite unity in which I am situated.[242] In the chapter on the "Antinomies," Kant in fact claims that starting from experience one cannot think the beginning or the end of the world.[243] If the Transcendental Analytic aims at establishing a level of all levels, in the effort to determine the conditions of possibility of mathematics and physics, the Transcendental Dialectic clearly sees the impossibility of arriving at an ultimate or unbounded level from the standpoint of experience.

If space is not a sum but a totality, a system, as Kant has shown,[244] space is also not at once a totality or a system solely for the understanding: "Above/below, right/left are certainly a system, not a sum, but a system that is not for the understanding, i.e. a system that is not immediately identical with respect to variable contents."[245] In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes, "In particular the idea of a unique space and that of a unique time, resting on that of a sum of being, which Kant has rightly critiqued in the Transcendental Dialectic, needs to be

[240] MSME 75.
[241] MSME 72, 83.
[242] PhP 351.
[243] See Waldenfels 2000, 125.
[244] PhP 255; MSME 72.
[245] MSME 72.

bracketed and produce its genealogy starting from our effective experience."[246] The general level of experience, as a result, cannot be a pure form or a pure a priori. In the continuation of the passage just quoted, Merleau-Ponty turns therefore to the phenomenological conception of the experience of space.[247]

§ 2.f. The Phenomenological Conception of "Natural Sign"

What needs to be highlighted in conclusion is the way in which the general level of experience as it is interpreted in the *Phenomenology of Perception* converges with Husserl's basic notion of experience as laid out programmatically in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. In the course of the treatment of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty offers an interpretation of the development of Husserl's thought as divided into three main stages: the "eidetic" or "logicist" stage, the stage of *Ideas*, and the "existentialist" stage.[248] He holds that the main shift from the traditional understanding of intentionality still in play in the first two stages towards the recast notion of operative intentionality of the last period is marked by Husserl's overcoming of the Kantianism of some of his texts.[249] At the end of the second part, Merleau-Ponty makes explicit the "new phenomenological conception of reflection" that is in charge of producing the genealogy of the unity of space (and of time) by "starting from our effective experience."[250] The new conception of reflection consists in establishing the description of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) as the point of departure of reflection. Merleau-Ponty lucidly recognizes that the treatment of the

[246] PhP 255.
[247] PhP 255.
[248] See Geraets 1971, 157.
[249] PhP 320.
[250] PhP 255.

lifeworld in Husserl's late philosophy coincides with the increased awareness of the problematic represented by the shift from the unthematic (natural) dimension of experience to the thematic (phenomenological) dimension of reflection. This realization is not without consequences for the determination of the general level of experience that phenomenology purports to bring to full elucidation.

One of Merleau-Ponty's main thematic *leitmotivs* is the critique of "analytic thought" as the thought that interrupts the unity of transition from one moment to the other in experience and then seeks in the mind the guarantee of a unity which experience had already achieved. Its perspective is one from the outside, i.e. it coincides with the perspective of the disinterested observer.[251] The main point of Merleau-Ponty's criticism of a certain notion of analysis, which he repeats over and over again, is that an analytic procedure can only find in the object – perceptual, spatial, linguistic, etc. – what it has already put into it.[252] This expression can be found in the preface to the second edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant writes that all we cognize a priori about things is what we ourselves put into them.[253] This reference clarifies Merleau-Ponty's stance towards idealism. We read in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that "it is the proper character of idealism to admit that all signification is centrifugal, that it is an act of signification or of *Sinn-gebung*, and that there is no natural sign."[254] By natural sign, Merleau-Ponty means a sign that returns to us more than what we have put into it.[255] Thus, the natural sign expresses the

[251] S 86.
[252] PhP 501, S 97; cf. also S 83, 206, 211, 214; PM 10, 24, 164.
[253] B xiii. Cf. also B 130, where Kant claims that consciousness can only analyze what it has previously synthesized. See PhP 148n2.
[254] PhP 490.
[255] The expression "natural sign" is found in PhP 490 and 419n1. Cf. also Merleau-Ponty 1997, 21. The definition of this sign as that which returns to us more than what we have put into it is in S 118; cf. also PM 193.

conception of a "centripetal" sign.[256] The conception of a natural or centripetal sign is meant to express "this pregnancy of signification in the signs that we might well define the world."[257]

In conclusion, phenomenology rediscovers beneath the Kantian idea of a level of all levels the true universal milieu which Merleau-Ponty here calls "world." The latter corresponds to a general level of experience or of intentionality that Husserl and then Merleau-Ponty define as operative. The conception pivoting around the notion of natural sign discovers "beneath the intentionality of act or thetic intentionality, and as its condition of possibility, an operative intentionality that is already at work before all thesis and all judgment, a 'Logos of the aesthetic world,' an 'art hidden in the depths of the human soul,' and that, like every art, can be known only in its results."[258] The idea of operative intentionality, which is put to work in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, allows us to determine space as a structural phenomenon and exhibits the full scope of the notion of "level,"

> The primordial level is on the horizon of all our perceptions, but it is a horizon which, as a matter of principle, can never be attained and thematized in an explicit perception. Each of the consecutive levels in which we live appears when we anchor ourselves in the respective 'milieu' which is proposing itself to us. For its part, this milieu is spatially defined only in relation to a previously given level. Thus the series of our experiences, all the way back to our first experience, transmits an already acquired spatiality. In turn, our first perception

[256] PhP 501. The term "centripetal" can actually be found already in Husserl, significantly in relation to the account of the "I" as subject endowed with the capacity to assume certain attitudes, to do or not do something. In § 60 of *Ideen II*, Husserl writes, "In Beziehung auf meine zentripetalen Ichakte habe ich das Bewusstsein des *Ich kann*" (Hua IV, 257). Moreover, it is important to note that by elaborating a conception of the "natural sign" Husserl and Merleau-Ponty can be linked to a very old tradition for which nature appeared as a great book that needed to be deciphered. The Renaissance still spoke of a *signatura rerum*, of a "sign" or more literally a "trace" or "signature of things." The ninth book of Paracelsus' treatise on nature carries the title *De signatura rerum naturalium*, as Giorgio Agamben remarks at the beginning of his book with the title *Signatura rerum* (2008). On this point, cf. also Waldenfels 2000, 210-212.
[257] PhP 490.
[258] PhP 490.

> was able to be spatial only by referring to an orientation that preceded it. Hence, that first perception must have already found us at work in a world.[259]

Husserl's descriptions of the relationship between nature and spirit, his analysis of the role of bodiliness in *Ideas II*, and his final descriptions of the lifeworld had to issue into a more radical understanding of the antecedency of sentient experience to concept-guided reflective thought. The notion of operative intentionality is meant to capture this antecedency status of the "natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life," as we hear from the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* and as it is exhibited in this work with reference to the basic structural moments pertaining to the general level of experience such as space, material sensuousness or nature, the other, and temporality. If this is true, however, then Merleau-Ponty's passages in the *Phenomenology of Perception* should be read as the making manifest of the program of a critique of experience that Husserl introduced in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. This program had massive implications with respect to the determination of the point of departure of phenomenological analyses and their way of proceeding, even if Husserl might have not always completely fathomed their scope and adjusted the vocabulary to suit them. It had to fall upon *other* phenomenologists such as Eugen Fink and Merleau-Ponty himself, as the present chapter attempted to show, to render explicit and develop the implications of this program.

[259] PhP 293.

CHAPTER 3

ORDERS OF EXPERIENCE:

WORLD-HORIZON AND THE APPERCEPTION

§ 1. Introduction

Formal and Transcendental Logic carries out a dramatic expansion of the notion of the logical judgment. The reflective examination on the intentional aimings in the experience of evidence (as experience determining the sense and scope of logic) has exhibited the "formal universality" of experience as preceding the categorial activities of judging.[1] The critical question about the dependency of Husserl's thought on the thematic determinations of language is a complex matter in light of Husserl's astonishing claim that the experience of nature is "under" the activity of judgment and yet "in" it.[2] The systematic movement of return to experience operated by *Formal and Transcendental Logic* is carried out under the clear recognition that in the explication of experience, the experiential must appear in relation to the categorial: "The two sets of problems are interwoven in the task of clearing up the lowest level of judging [*Urteilsstufe*], correlatively the lowest level of categorialia, those that still bear their experiential source immediately within them."[3] The genetic phenomenological analysis of Part II of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*

[1] Hua XVII, 219/212.

[2] "Die Natur als Urteilsgestalt, im besonderen als naturwissenschaftliche Erkenntnisgestalt wird natürlich unter sich haben die Natur als Erfahrungsgestalt, als Einheit wirklicher und möglicher Erfahrung, eigener und mit derjenigen der Anderen vergemeinschafteter; aber das *Unter-sich ist zugleich ein In-sich*." Hua XVII, 123/118. Cf. Bachelard 1968, 73, 132-133. Jacques Garelli raises the critique that the ambiguity is never lifted in Husserl's thought between the syntactic logical categories and the syntaxic grammatical categories, the latter implicitly determining the former. As a result, the logical categories remain enclosed in the sphere of predication. See the reference to Garelli's *Introduction au logos du monde esthétique* (Paris, Beauchesne, 2000), in Colonna 2014, 242-243. However, this point of critique seems to be unproblematic since the study of logical formations is for Husserl explicitly a study moving in the sphere of predication.

[3] Hua XVII, 230/223

intends to retrieve and clarify this dimension of experience in terms of an analysis of constitution. Constitutional investigations are investigations that properly give the ontic sense to any object of experience: "such an affair as an object…draws the ontic sense peculiar to it…originally from the mental processes of experience alone…Experience is the primal instituting of the being-for-us of objects."[4] In light of this task, the achievement of Part I can be understood as having shown the full breadth of the idea of the *mathesis universalis* motivating the endeavors of modern science. The analysis of experience of Part II, however, reveals at the same time that an understanding of nature, limited to the domain of formal logic, must remain necessarily within the boundaries of the ontology of a world constructed mathematically.[5] The demand to shift into a domain of experience beyond the properly logical sphere stems from a consequent meditation on formal logic itself, as Husserl has shown. This return to experience leads Husserl to formulate the idea of an intentionality of experience, which he designates as "operative," and, in other texts, to the thematization of the idea of the life-world. The insight into this dimension of experience finds in § 51 of the *Crisis* an explicit recognition in the task of an "ontology of the life-world." Life-world ontology aims at shedding light upon the foundations of the ideal being of judgments that makes possible genuine science. This progression of analysis, however, remains rigorously framed by a transcendental project, which deems ontology insufficient for its purposes of ultimate clarification.[6] In effect, as Steinbock has pointed out, Husserl distinguishes the project of an ontology of the life world and that of a transcendental analysis of the life world.[7]

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[4] Hua XVII, 172-73/164.

[5] See on this point, Hua VI, 178: "Die neuzeitliche Philosophie in ihren objektiven Wissenschaften ist, darüber dürfen wir nie hinwegsehen, geleitet von einem konstruktiven Begriff einer an sich wahren Welt, einer mindestens insichtlich der Natur in mathematischer Form substruierten. Ihr Begriff einer apriorischen Wissenschaft, schließlich einer universalen Mathematik (Logik, Logistik), kann daher nicht die Dignität einer wirklichen Evidenz, d.i. einer aus einer direkten Selbstgebung (erfahrenden Anschauung) geschöpften Wesenseinsicht haben, die sie gern für sich in Anspruch nehmen möchte."

[6] See Benoist 2008, 52. Cf. Colonna 2014, 152.

[7] Steinbock 1996, 93.

In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss some salient aspects of the conception of nature emerging from these radicalizing deliberations about experience, especially in relation to the cognition of nature as paradigmatic for scientific cognition. In particular, I will take up Husserl's manuscript from 1934 on the "Spatiality of Nature," famous for his thesis about the reversal (*Umsturz*) of the Copernican doctrine and the claim that the earth does not move. We know how carefully Merleau-Ponty read this text because he derives from it the idea of infinity as an "openness" (*Offenheit*) or "horizonality" (*Horizonthaftigkeit*) to be distinguished from the infinity attached to the idea of world yielded by the "sciences of the infinity of nature."[8] Merleau-Ponty returns to the *Umsturz*-text several times in his last years: he comments on the earth in his course on passivity from 1954-1955, and again in his first course on "Nature" from 1956-57, in his article on Husserl entitled "The Philosopher and His Shadow" from 1959, and in several working notes from *The Visible and the Invisible*. Finally, he also offers a commentary of the *Umsturz*-text in 1960 in the context of his lecture course on "Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology."[9]

In this section, I will show that the establishment of the primacy of the world of life with respect to the world of science is linked to a reconsideration of the full import and signification of the natural attitude in phenomenology. Clues for this reconsideration can be gathered from Husserl's analysis of the earth. The notion of the earth changes the sense of actuality pertaining to

[8] Husserl 1940, 320. Cf. 307 and HLP, 90-91. Cf. also Steinbock 1996 who refers in this connection to Merleau-Ponty's reflections on these lines of *Umsturz* in VI 223, 230, 305.

[9] There are two other references to Husserl's notion of earth in Merleau-Ponty's work that are worth mentioning. The first is in *Phenomenology of Perception* (PhP 491) in connection with the definition of the term "sense" (*sens*) in the chapter on time. Significantly, the other reference to Husserl's *Umsturz* in *Phenomenology* is in the critical section on the phenomenal and transcendental field at the end of the Introduction where Merleau-Ponty gives a definition of the world by paraphrasing Husserl's formulations in *Umsturz*. The second reference to the earth is in a working note of *The Visible and the Invisible* again in connection with the definition of philosophy as seizing upon the "nexus" of transcendental history and geology (VI 312). Further implicit but clear references to *Umsturz* are in VI 220, 223, 281-282, 290.

the notion of world, thereby prompting a modal theory of the world. This theory, correspondingly, motivates Merleau-Ponty to detect an ontology of *openness* in Husserl's analysis of the earth.

The direction of this interpretation gives a somewhat different spin to Anthony Steinbock's analysis of "earth" and "world horizon." In his *Home and Beyond* (1995), in his article "Reflections on Earth and World: Merleau-Ponty's Project of Transcendental History and Transcendental Geology" (1996), and in the more recent work on *Limit-Phenomena and Phenomenology in Husserl* (2017), Steinbock offers a parallel reading of the two notions of earth and world horizon. According to Steinbock, in sum, these notions capture the main transcendental senses of the life-world beyond the various ontological senses that can be discerned in Husserl's treatment of this notion. Steinbock argues that these transcendental senses frame also Merleau-Ponty's idea of a transcendental aesthetics of space and time. Steinbock bases his argument especially on a working note of *The Visible and the Invisible* where Merleau-Ponty puts forth the notions of transcendental geology, pivoting around the concept of the earth, and of transcendental history, pivoting around the concept of world horizon.

I do not present the following considerations as a critique of Steinbock's clear and insightful analysis. In my reading, however, the world horizon encompasses the *whole* dimension of the aesthetic and not just its historical/temporal side. The earth, on the other hand, is the phenomenon whose study allows us to liberate the aesthetic from the framework of a transcendental philosophy. The latter posits the present actuality of consciousness as the standpoint to which all reality is to be submitted. Rather, I claim that the performance of the notion of the earth enables the conception of a true modalization of experience and, correlatively, of the actuality of the world. Merleau-Ponty calls this conception an ontology of openness.

§ 1.a. Husserl and the Notion of Earth

The Copernican view of the world poses a basic problem: the view of the "infinite Copernican horizons" is not actually given within the demonstrative possibilities of "normal experiential confirmation" and "demonstrative showing."[10] Husserl makes here an important methodological distinction between the sense of "indication" (*Anweisung*) and that of "exhibition" or "demonstration" (*Ausweisung*).[11] He writes, "demonstration, I say, has its subjective departure-point and ultimate anchorage in the Ego who does the demonstrating."

Let me make more explicit Husserl's critical target. The consideration of the world as infinite nature, in the sense of the *Weltall* of *Ideas II*, i.e. the world of Copernican idealization, implies a specific concept of objective being that requires explication. The underlying presupposition here is that the spontaneous intuition of the world is too specific and subjective. There results the necessity to suppress this subjective intuition if we are to achieve the distance (a view from nowhere) warranting the objectivity of knowledge. For the Copernican astronomer, space is added upon space without there ever being an end to this process of addition. At the same time, the same astronomer presupposes that if only it were possible to observe the totality of space, then the latter would appear as a massive reality completely formed and determined, i.e. as pure actuality. The contradiction of this view lies in the fact that it admits the idea of an actual perception of the infinite. But this idea turns the infinite into a complete whole without rest, thereby getting rid of the very notion of infinite. Husserl shows that positive science operates a naturalistic objectivation of the world as infinite homogenous universe. In a text contemporaneous to *Umsturz*, Husserl adds that the phenomenological critique of the world as infinite nature aims at showing

[10] Husserl 1940, 319-320.
[11] Husserl 1940, 311.

"the essential unintelligibility of the world as nature," thereby leading to a "Radical alteration of the concept, a being (*[to] on*)."[12] In *Umsturz*, Husserl writes,

> The modern apperception of the world as world of infinite Copernican horizons has not become for us a world-apperception confirmed by virtue of a world view actually accomplished. ("Apperception" of the world, any apperception whatever, is acceptive consciousness with the sense of being, World, inclusive of levels of constitution.) Apperceptive transfer has taken place such that it remains but a reference [*Anweisung*] for a confirmative intuition rather than actually being constructed at the end as demonstration [*Ausweisung*].[13]

The considerations about a space of orientation in *Ideen II* are resumed and expanded in *Umsturz* in a way that resembles closely Merleau-Ponty's idea of spatial level that I discussed in Chapter 2. The original situation for any demonstration is the field of perception of an embodied subject whose perceptive activity finds a correlate in the oriented space unfolding around the subject's "central body."[14] Husserl proceeds to a more in-depth analysis of the exchange between the living body and its milieu, which in *Ideen II* was recognized as foundational for the objectification of space as a "system of places" (*Ortssystem*).[15] In his analysis, Husserl finds that any intuition of a space of orientation and the determination of a "system of places" as "a system of possible terminations of motions of bodies" must be relative to some "resting" earth-ground. The determination of the reach of play of different groups of experienced objects is exhibited as resting on an implicit foundation: the earth. Without entering into the complex progression of Husserl's

[12] VI CM/1, 197. The modal theory of the world finds its fundamental presupposition in the idea of a modalization of "being" as the main effect operated by the *epoché*, which consists not in denying being nor in the supposition of non-being but of making explicit the consideration of being as "holding good" (*Geltung*). This means that the *epoché* leads to a reconsideration of being from the perspective of its relation to the subject. Bachelard 1968, 155n8, 162.
[13] Husserl 1940, 311.
[14] Husserl 1940, 311.
[15] In his introduction to the English translation of *Umsturz*, Fred Kersten highlights this point when he says that Husserl's way of proceeding in this text reveals "an 'intuition of space' more fundamental constitutively than that correlated with the coperceived rest and motion of the percipient animate organism." Kersten 1981, 218.

analysis, the basic idea is that my sensing-kinesthetic lived-body, whether itself moving or at rest while transported by a moving vehicle or, still, whether moving or resting on an entirely different planet, remains relative to the earth in at least three interrelated respects: first, as a perceptual lived-body I would keep disclosing perceived things through perspectives, i.e. by encountering these things through my sense organs from specific and limited points of view; second, as an intercorporeal (or intersubjective) lived-body I would exhibit material species-specific traits that open my point of view to that of other beings like me; third, as temporal and historical lived-body I or we would not only experience the coherent and shared convergent variation of actual, past and possible perspectives, but we would also behave and communicate according to inherited or typical practices and handle tools according to culturally and communally instituted traditions, etc.[16]

If we were to summarize in a brief point what the notion of earth discovers, then it could be said that this notion rehabilitates the idea of a point of view of experience and rejects correlatively all those conceptions maintaining the possibility of a view from nowhere. These conceptions, those of "We Copernicans, we Moderns," are based on the formalization of the Copernican doctrine into the idea of an objective infinite universe conceived as inanimate external-extended nature. This formalization issues from the Cartesian assumption of a true objective knowledge that must however raise the problem of accounting for our finite experience. In the most eminent cases, the attempts to solve the problem of the relationship between the finite and the infinite in our experience resort to solutions that ground the world in a total perspective (God) making the individual experience ontologically dispensable.[17] But this fact is telling with respect to the idea of a view from nowhere: in order to conceive this view one really needs to be able to

[16] Cf. Compton 1989, 136-137; Steinbock 1996, 102-103.
[17] See e.g. Lindén 1997, 20. Lindén mentions Spinoza, Leibniz and Berkeley. Cf. also Merleau-Ponty who, in relation to the modern notion of the infinite, refers to Leibniz and Spinoza, VI 223.

conceive a view from everywhere or a "God's Eye View."[18] It is this universal view, the view of a *kosmotheoros* as Merleau-Ponty would say, that the notion of earth calls into question by rehabilitating a fundamental aspect of belonging to an experience that is aesthetic-material and historical, i.e. that is from somewhere and that for this very reason, finally, grants us access to a world. This aesthetic-historical dimension of experience sheds light upon the "perverted" character of an exclusivist version of the Copernican view. Husserl demonstrates that the latter is properly speaking inconceivable (he calls it an "absurdity").

§ 1.b. The Modalization of the World and the Natural Attitude

According to Merleau-Ponty, the central insight of the analysis of the earth is the determination of physical reality as resting on carnal being (*une réalité physique reposant sur du charnel*).[19] This finding, however, raises the question about the precise nature of the carnal being thus discovered. In Husserlian vocabulary, the world given to intuition holds a foundational role of primacy with respect to the world of science or of theory in general. In its modern variations, positive science remains oblivious of the problem of an intuition of the world altogether. The discovery of the earth as the "Being-that-is-stem" (*Être-souche*), "ground-stem" or *Stammboden*,[20] recovers the idea of an irremovable starting point of all experience, which, as a result, carries with itself always an "earthy" sense (*irdisch*).[21] But if this is so, then there arises the challenge of making specific the sense of "the primacy of our incarnated coexistence on the earth"[22] with respect to the objectively

[18] Hilary Putnam, "Two Philosophical Perspectives," in *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[19] N 111.
[20] Husserl 1940, 317; HLP, 87.
[21] Husserl 1940, 318, 324. HLP, 87-88.
[22] HLP, 90.

actual nature of Copernican science. Husserl indeed speaks of the "unity of an 'intuition of the world'" (*Einheit einer "Weltanschauung"*) as fundamental framework of reference for any "world-possibility" (*Weltmöglichkeit*).[23] Elaborating on this claim, Merleau-Ponty says in the lectures on nature that "All possibility is variation of our reality, it is *possibility of* effective *reality* (*Möglichkeit an Wirklichkeit*)."[24] The problem is that of how to understand this actuality if it is no longer the actuality maintained by the idea of the Copernican infinite universe. Husserl admits that this is "the great problem of the structure of a possible intuition of the world."[25]

As Husserl unveils in his genetic analysis of judgment in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and elsewhere, every judgment whatsoever has ultimately relation to the world.[26] Moreover, Husserl holds that the sciences, both empirical and apriori, relate to the essential form of a world. It is this fundamental presupposition that grounds their ideal of objectivity, that is, the belief in an absolute true being to be known "in itself."[27] Here I can only offer a brief summary of this vast topic. A phenomenological investigation discovers that every judgment ultimately refers to a certain horizon of experience of objects. The horizon can refer to the inner horizon of an individual object, which consists in the manifold articulation of its appearances. The horizon can also refer to the outer horizon, in which case we are referring to the relational character that every experience of an individual object exhibits with that of other objects that are not under the immediate focus of our attention.[28] This horizonality of experience is the constant basis of any activity of knowledge

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[23] Husserl 1940, 310.
[24] N 227-228. There is a "universality of our world," Merleau-Ponty writes, not with respect to any wordly content, but rather according to "its ontological structure which envelops every possible and which every possible leads back to." (VI 282)
[25] VI CM/1, 207. *Das große Problem der Struktur einer Möglichen Welt-Anschauung*. For a more systematic treatment of the idea of world-horizon, I refer the reader to the Appendix XII to the first volume of the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* with the title "Consciousness of the horizon of the world and its structures. Attempt at a full systematic treatment."
[26] Hua XVII, 212/204.
[27] "Wesensform einer Welt überhaupt" (Hua XVII, 231/224). For the idea of objective knowing pertaining to the science, cf. EU 44.
[28] Cf. Bachelard 1968, 140-141.

producing the idealities of science, their idea in the being-in-itself of the world and in the possibility of a truth-in-itself. The world offered to our pre-scientific and pre-predicative experience, which Husserl also calls the life-world, is therefore traversed by actualities and potentialities. Husserl holds that every actual experience has a dimension of potentialities, which, in principle, can be submitted to investigation, assumed we carry out the proper turn of reflective regard. But this also means that the world of experience in all its actualities and potentialities can in principle be submitted to reflective regard. The Second Meditation identifies this task as that of laying open "the infinite field of transcendental experience."[29]

The analysis of the earth, however, raises a further and difficult problem in the determination of the world of pre-scientific experience. As "stem" of all ontic sense, since it is stem of all possible experience, the earth is not itself a being and cannot receive its specific sense from any intrawordly experience. In the "Nature" lectures, Merleau-Ponty clearly states this ontological difference: "But we must not apply to the Earth the intrawordly relations that we apply within the Earth."[30] Two remarks follow from this claim. First, if the earth is "ground of experience" and "root of our history,"[31] then this notion carries import for the status of the natural attitude as our beginning situation. The natural attitude, if read in light of our attachment to the earth, takes on the sense of "earthy" stem of all experience. In the light of the analysis of the earth, the natural attitude is inappropriately called an "attitude," since it can never be given up and unearth itself completely. As a result, the natural attitude takes on transcendental value with respect to the totality of our experience. This conclusion, and this is our second remark, raises specific questions regarding the sense of a transcendental analysis of the lifeworld. The ambiguity is clear

[29] Hua I, 66ff. See also Bachelard 1968, xxxi, 160.
[30] N 110.
[31] N 111.

when Husserl claims that the difficulties raised by the primacy of the lifeworld against the reified world of (classical) physics are clarified as "necessities of all bestowal of sense [*Sinngebung*] for being and world."[32] However, one could raise the question whether the analysis of the earth points to a sense of being and world other than that provided by intentional objectivity.[33] This problem has to do with the difficulty of conceiving a synthesis or unity of the manifold of appearances returning every appearance to the representation of an objective world since the latter is precisely what needs to be clarified. If, as Merleau-Ponty remarks in the lectures on nature, "According to Husserl every possible pertaining to the world must be founded on an intuition of the world,"[34] then, however, Merleau-Ponty continues, the world is a "pure given [*donnée pure*] that cannot be derived, not even by means of reflection, from what is necessary or from what is possible."[35]

What does this conclusion tell us about the problem raised above, namely that regarding the possibility of a transcendental retrieval of ontological findings? What is the sense of the "transcendental" in the transcendental analysis of the lifeworld? For Merleau-Ponty, the study of the earth yields an "enveloping ontology" with respect to what he calls a "thought of infinity."[36] If, according to Geraets, Merleau-Ponty's thought advances towards a "new transcendental philosophy," the question that Merleau-Ponty keeps asking Husserl is whether the analysis of the lifeworld leaves intact our instruments of analysis.[37] In other words, Merleau-Ponty's insight is to

[32] Husserl 1940, 324. "Aber mag man in unseren Versuchen die unglaublichste philosophische Hybris finden – wir weichen in unserer Konsequenz der Aufklärung der Notwendigkeiten aller Sinngebung für Seiendes und für Welt nicht zurück." This is in sum the idea expressed by the "Methodical Self-Consideration" in Hua IV, 179-180. Merleau-Ponty points to this move in S 223n4. Husserl refers to the *apodiktisches Ego* in Husserl 1940, 323. Cf. Steinbock 1995, 120 and again Steinbock 1996, 104.

[33] The question is raised explicitly by Merleau-Ponty in a working note from February 1959 (VI 226). Merleau-Ponty refers to Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, Hua I, § 48. See in particular Hua I, 135: "Wie kann für mich wirklich Seiendes, und als das nicht nur irgendwie Vermeintes, sondern in mir sich einstimmig Bewährendes, anderes sein als sozusagen Schnittpunkt meiner konstitutiven Synthesis?"

[34] N 123.

[35] N 123.

[36] HLP, 83.

[37] Merleau-Ponty raises this pivotal question in his commentaries to Husserl's philosophy, for instance in *Le philosophe et son ombre* (S 208), but also already in *Phénoménologie du langage* (1951).

raise the question whether an analysis of the lifeworld that understands itself as having transcendental import does not have to admit an ontologically derivative character with respect to *any* consciousness of signification. If this is the case, then the universal ontology of openness inaugurated with the studies of the lived-body and of the earth would have to be considered as encompassing or integrating also the transcendental analysis of the lifeworld.

In his lecture course on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty describes a stronger opposition between the ontology of openness sketched by *Umsturz* and the philosophy of constitution to which Husserl repeatedly turns.[38] In *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, he however offers a more charitable reading of Husserl's move when he says that the loyalty to the "evidences of constitution" must be understood in relation to the dramatic expansion of the transcendental field from the field of idealizations to that of the totality of experience.[39] In Merleau-Ponty's own words, "If the 'back-referrals' of constitutive analysis are not to prevail over against the principle of a philosophy of consciousness, the reason is that the latter has expanded or transformed itself to the extent to be capable of everything, even of that which contests it."[40] Here Merleau-Ponty reads Husserl's move as the radicalization of the ideal of a "wise world" submitted to the ways of consciousness, a move described as "absurd" (*insensé*), but that yields the discovery of "those beings beneath our idealizations and our objectifying activities, which nourish the latter in secret and which can hardly be identified with noemas."[41] For Merleau-Ponty these texts – those encompassing *Ideas II* up to *Umsturz* – are not susceptible to a coherent explication, even though he claims that in *Umsturz* the

[38] See HLP, 91.
[39] S 223.
[40] S 224.
[41] S 227.

role of the lifeworld is clearly that of being the source of all idealizations.[42] In this context, "constituting subjectivity" represents also only an eminent case of such idealization.[43]

§ 2. The Theory of Integration and the Notion of "Apperception"

In *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, Merleau-Ponty points to the "peculiar relationship" between the deep and the higher levels of constitution that Husserl already formulated in terms of a relation of self-forgetfulness in *Ideas II* and in terms of the theory of sedimentation in *Experience and Judgment*.[44] As Jacques Garelli points out, Merleau-Ponty clearly sees that "the lifeworld, *Lebenswelt*, is itself traversed by the sedimentation of sense and that it never presents itself in a totally brute form or as totally purified, but rather always as exposed to a cultural information, which, for the most part, ignores itself."[45] In Husserl's theory of sedimentation, this process of inclusion or integration of what is higher into a unitary composition with what is lower is described through the notion of *Einströmen* or "flowing into."[46] This notion is so fundamental that Merleau-Ponty takes it up in his discussion of the relation between the *cogito* and *time* in the last part of *Phenomenology of Perception*. He refers to this notion when claiming that our purest reflections appear to us retrospectively in time and that there is a "flowing" of the reflections "into" the

[42] Merleau-Ponty speaks in this connection of the "double postulate" of Husserlian phenomenology. In the first lecture course on "Nature," Merleau-Ponty begins his treatment of Husserl's philosophy by pointing to Husserl's concern about the idea of Nature within reflexive philosophy in general and transcendental idealism in particular. At the end of his interpretation, Merleau-Ponty confirms the presence of a tension in Husserl's phenomenology between a philosophy of Nature and the framework of transcendental idealism. See N 102, 112. Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl is functional to his intention to redefine the very idea of transcendental philosophy. This intention is clearly present in Merleau-Ponty's thinking from the beginning. In SC he already calls for a redefinition of transcendental philosophy in order to integrate in it the phenomenon of the real. See SC 241.
[43] HLP, 92.
[44] S 218. Cf. also Garelli 1998, 100. The relationship between a foundation (*fond*) and higher levels (*supérieur*) represents Merleau-Ponty's framework for interpreting the philosophy of Husserl. See N 104.
[45] Garelli 1998, 102.
[46] On the notion of *Einströmen* in Husserl, see Steinbock 1995, 92; Steinbock 2017, 44.

(temporal) flux in the process of reflecting upon the flux.[47] The cogito, as the *Phenomenology of Perception* has it, in virtue of this insurmountable "temporal thickness" (*épaisseur temporel*),[48] emerges as deeply transformed with respect to the cogito of the tradition of the philosophies of reflection. Later in the "Nature" lectures Merleau-Ponty will similarly claim that "Spirit should not be considered as an impartial observer in front of nature: '[The process of] Becoming aware takes part to the process of nature.'"[49] There are two main moments that I would like to stress in connection with the theory of sedimentation.

First, the phenomenological task of a return to the subject cannot be that of a return to a pure subjectivity in full and transparent possession of itself yielding apodictic evidence. This possession is in fact already dispersed by the intervention of an always new present in the temporal flux.[50] In a working note pivoting around the notion of "Einströmen" from February 1959, Merleau-Ponty welcomes Husserl's notion of a "field of presence" (*Präsenzfeld*), but he also critically notes that this field in Husserl is "without thickness" and it is understood as "immanent consciousness." For Merleau-Ponty, the field of presence is rather "transcendent consciousness."[51] If time depends on *someone* who is in it, this someone never coincides with the new present that must remain imminent and therefore always transcendent.[52] Yet the return to the subject does not always appear in Husserl as the return to an apodictic Ego or to a constituting subjectivity as absolute consciousness "without thickness." Sometimes it is the return to a "covered-up

[47] PhP 488.
[48] PhP 456.
[49] N 159.
[50] "J'ai bien, grâce au temps, un emboîtement et une reprise des expériences antérieures dans les expériences ultérieures, mais nulle part une possession absolue de moi par moi, puisque le creux de l'avenir se remplit toujours d'un nouveau présent." (PhP 278).
[51] VI 227.
[52] See VI 238.

subjectivity."[53] Garelli stresses that, with the introduction of the aspect of sedimentation, the return to subjectivity emerges as the exhibition of a concealed intentionality.[54] This insight yields a recast notion of consciousness that is in the making in Merleau-Ponty's thought from the beginning.[55]

The second important point is that the theory of sedimentation reframes the contrast between the lifeworld and the world of scientific and logico-eidetic activity.[56] The result of *Umsturz* can be formulated as the discovery of the primacy of our incarnated coexistence on the earth with respect to any form of idealization.[57] But the theory of sedimentation excludes the possibility to consider the earth as some sort of "pure" world of life – actually a contradictory notion – since, in the pure coincidence of life with itself, all knowledge and thereby all life would be lost, which, finally, would lead to the tenets of a metaphysical positivism in the style, for instance, of Bergson.[58] In *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, Merleau-Ponty refers to Husserl's theory of sedimentation as a theory that literally "turns upside down" the relation between the constituted and the constituting to the extent that the order of the pre-objective and that of the objective can be said to be in a relation of "double" or "reciprocal grounding."[59] In sum, the rejection of the objectivism of nature as correlative to the subjectivism of transcendental consciousness leads to the formulation of a theory of integration of nature and spirit that Merleau-

[53] *Verhüllte Subjektivität*. EU 47. Quoted in Garelli 1998, 103. The *Cartesian Meditations* also speak of an "implicit intentionality" (Hua I, 118).
[54] Garelli 1998, 103.
[55] In this connection, note for instance the passages from *The Structure of Behavior* regarding the adult consciousness and its tumultuous historical becoming that the adult tends to forget in favor of the lucidity of a momentary act of reflection. SC 222, 224-225. Cf. Moinat's comment on the idea of a "genesis of consciousness" in Moinat 2012, 131, 140. See also the passages from the *Phenomenology of Perception* affirming that the "coincidence of myself with myself" is only intentional or presumptive and never real. PhP 397. Cf. Worms 1998, 204.
[56] See Steinbock 1995, 89-90 and Steinbock 2017, 44.
[57] HLP, 90.
[58] Cf. PhP 397, "Nous ne coupons la conscience d'elle-même, ce qui interdirait tout progrès du savoir au delà de l'opinion originaire, et en particulier la reconnaissance philosophique de l'opinion originaire comme fondement de tout le savoir."
[59] "*Fundierung* à double sens," S 218.

Ponty summarizes in his late philosophy with the notion of *chiasm*.[60] In *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, it is rather with reference to Husserl's conception of a "two-way-grounding" relation that Merleau-Ponty articulates his conception of a return to the pre-objective order of experience. In the commentary to *Umsturz*, Merleau-Ponty makes clear that Husserl's treatment poses an ontological problem that he summarizes by highlighting two main moments: first, the simultaneity of earth, incarnated bodies, and simple corporeality on the level of pre-objective relations; second, the reversibility of the "pre-objective" relations and of the "objective" relations (what Husserl in *Umsturz* calls "homogeneities" or "co-constituting equivalences").[61] The insight into the sedimentation of meaning is the insight into a simultaneity attaching to the whole universe of our experience, that of *Leiber*, that of *Körper* and of their co-presence in the same world, to the extent that "the point of springing forth [*ressort*] of constitution can no more be found in its beginning than in its termination."[62]

If thereby the lines between the transcendences found in experience and the transcendental order (to whose clarification all transcendence must ultimately be submitted), start to blur, then Husserl's questioning appears all the more pertinent when he asks, "Thus our concept of the lifeworld begins to totter. And is this not also the case with our concept of intuition, with our concept of evidence?"[63] This question has the potential to lead us into a morass of difficulties that would be hard to disentangle. Yet Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes that the problem of sedimentation (and, connected with it, that of reactivation) is a "fundamental problem."[64] The

[60] Cf. Moinat 2012, 140.
[61] *Homogeneisierungen*, *mitkonstituierende Gleichstellungen*. Husserl 1940, 323.
[62] S 218. This idea is the basis for the notion of reversibility of things, which is developed from the famous analysis of the touching-touched hand from Husserl's *Ideas II*. Merleau-Ponty goes back to this analysis in *Signs*, *Nature*, and *The Visible and the Invisible*. Cf. already in N 233 where Merleau-Ponty reads Uexküll's notion of *Umwelt*. This notion makes unclear where behavior beings and where spirit ends.
[63] Hua XXIX, 214. Quoted in Steinbock 2017, 44; already in Steinbock 1995, 92.
[64] VI 312.

search for a native or pre-thetic view of the world cannot be the search for a primary nature since in our primary way to encounter the world we are already applying various degrees of cultural information and interpretation. If we take science as the most pervasive cultural feature informing our way to look at the world, then we could say that the pre-scientific is definitely not before the scientific or the meta-scientific, but, so to speak, always already within them. In any case, this situation tells us that no description of the lifeworld is ever going to be pure. At the same time, however, this is also an indication that the description of the structural features of our pre-scientific experience or the reflection upon our culturally informed scientific experience may reveal elements that we would have to ascribe to our understanding of a "lifeworld." Thus, it becomes clear why the idea of a primordial sedimentation of meaning in our experience makes a *certain* concept of the lifeworld totter and with it a *certain* notion of intuition and evidence. Both the point of view of human constructions and the point of view of the lifeworld as nature are abstract.[65] A philosophy of the lifeworld does not discover "an inert mass at the bottom of our consciousness"[66] that our constructions would modify and form.

In a certain sense, this philosophy discovers a primordial understanding ("pre-understanding") of the kind thematized by the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics. This is again a complex story, but let me simply note that the hermeneutic pre-understanding stresses the constitutive role of the conceptual dimension of experience. This dimension is that of a general connectivity that gives order and thus operates differentiations within experience. Because of this structuring role, which hermeneutic philosophy tends to contrast with the punctual and atomic aspect of the aesthetic or sensible dimension of experience, pre-reflective experience takes on intellectual features. Heidegger, for instance, begins his analysis of *Dasein* with a "drastic remedy"

[65] VI 227-228.
[66] PhP 151.

by which the "categorial" is brutally set aside from the "existential."[67] The way I intuit "facts" in experience is enabled by a pre-understanding whose nature is inherently historical. This is why the way I relate to the world can for Heidegger be indicated only formally and it requires a "hermeneutics of facticity," that is, an interrogation of the very fact of interrogating as historical in nature and, according to Heidegger, also inherently degenerative. Heidegger can indeed be said to place the essences back into existence (to use Merleau-Ponty's own phrase), but the essence *of* existence is conceived by him as radically separated from all wordly "factual" being. Now, as Merleau-Ponty makes clear at the onset of *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, facticity cannot be indifferent to the facts if philosophy does not want to revert into yet another sophisticated formalism. On the other hand, however, the reflection on the facts does not point for him to an *eidos* as the "invariant" *without which* facts can neither *be* nor *be thought*. I will return to this point later. Consider, however, that Merleau-Ponty reads the real contribution of Husserl's eidetic method as the effort to seize an invariant more fundamental than that of the essence.[68] For Merleau-Ponty, this is the invariant of the openness of experience itself, that is, the transcendence of experience together with its manifold pre-objective and objective implications. This natural situation remains the starting point of any activity of variation. Yet, in Merleau-Ponty, the determination of *enabling* elements (world, history, language) structuring this natural situation softens the separation of the dimensions ("existentials") structuring the concrete situation ("facticity") of existence from the dimensions ("categories") structuring the natural-mundane reality with which one deals for the most part. We assist therefore to a radical transformation of the notions of "category" and "facticity" in Merleau-Ponty's thought, a transformation that

[67] Richir 1993, 42.
[68] See on this point for example the account of the relation of "experience" and "essence" in a phenomenological perspective offered in Barbaras 1991, 117.

denounces their opposition in the direction of an integration of fact and essence. The eidetic orientation of Husserl's phenomenology remains therefore a constant point of reference for Merleau-Ponty's way to approach the analysis of experience. Husserl's descriptive orientation in fact remains anchored in the factual dimension of experience by way of its method, the eidetic variation.[69] As the later elaborations in *The Visible and the Invisible* show, this method is however for Merleau-Ponty a solution as much as it discloses a genuine problem. The problem lies in the fact that the sedimented constitutive processes are not being properly awakened if one adheres to either the correlative act-intentional/object-structural schema (Husserl) or the immediate distinction of philosophy and the sciences, of "fundamental" and "regional" ontologies (Heidegger). As it emerges more clearly in *The Visible and the Invisible*, the theory of sedimentation becomes in the hands of Merleau-Ponty a theory of existentials, in Heidegger's sense, but without the "drastic" separation with respect of the mundane dimension of experience. Merleau-Ponty's way, since at least the *Phenomenology of Perception*, is that of investigating the possibility of what could be described, seemingly in paradoxical terms, as an understanding *without concept*.[70] I shall conclude the present section by pointing to the fact that the questions raised by this complicated cluster of ideas can be situated historically in the context of the debate around the concept of apperception.

[69] Lindén 2011-2012, 342.

[70] Carbone discusses Merleau-Ponty's recurring locution, "without concept" (*sans concept*), and ties it with Merleau-Ponty's reception of Proust's notion of "sensible ideas," of which he seems to detect an antecedent in the Kantian theory of imagination and his theory of aesthetic judgment in the *Critique of Judgment*. Carbone focuses in particular on Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas. See Carbone 1998, 163-191.

§ 3. Historical Note on the Notion of Apperception

The purpose of this "Note" is to articulate further the distinctions that have been introduced so far by leading them back to the context of a debate in the history of philosophy. This is the debate around the notion of *apperception*. By contextualizing the previous remarks within this debate, I point to a thematic convergence between Merleau-Ponty's project to recast the notion of consciousness by a recovery of the notion of operative intentionality and the concerns internal to French philosophical psychology of the 18th and of the 19th century around the notion of apperception.[71]

Miles Burnyeat, in his *Theaetetus of Plato*, describes Plato's introduction of the soul in this dialogue, as mediative capacity connecting the isolated sensations, as the "first certain affirmation in the history of philosophy of the difficult but indubitable idea of the unity of consciousness."[72] This discovery resonates in Descartes' idea that it is not the eye that sees, but the soul. This is a tradition, Merleau-Ponty remarks in his "Nature" lectures, that from Augustine to Bergson defines, on the one hand, matter by the features of instantaneousness and presence and, on the other hand, memory and the past by reference to the spirit.[73] This lineage finds perhaps its most eminent expression in the Kantian idea of a pure consciousness, which, as self-consciousness, is vowed to function as condition of possibility for the unity of experience. While in Descartes the relationship between consciousness of the object and self-consciousness remains essentially ambiguous, for Kant there is rather a sharp distinction between the consciousness of oneself and the consciousness of objects. The separation between self-consciousness and the consciousness of objects in Kant is

[71] For a specific treatment of the notion of apperception in connection with psychology and psychoanalysis, see Lindén 2017.
[72] Chiurazzi observes that Natorp had already presented this view. See Chiurazzi 2017, 38n30.
[73] N 161.

not meant to express a conflict as apperception in fact functions as condition of perception.[74] "The 'I think,' which must be able to accompany all my representations," as condition of possibility of representations, is not itself a representation. As Gaetano Chiurazzi points out, "In the system of experience, or of representation, the I think appears rather as a void, as something that is omitted, and can only be omitted. It is a kind of 'blind spot' of experience, whose objective correlate is the Idea as *focus imaginarius* of the totality of experience."[75] Even if Kant points out that apperception as empirically determined shows a certain dependency on the external objects,[76] apperception is determined as transcendental apperception or as a self-awareness that defies any interruption (unlike empirical apperception). In spite of some residual tensions in his thought, it is clear that for Kant the idea of a transcendental apperception is meant to avoid all psychological admixtures with respect to the composition of our experiences into a unity.

The notion of apperception as a self-awareness difficult to understand but certainly distinct from perception as directedness towards objects was not introduced first by Kant, but by Leibniz. In the *Principles Concerning Nature and Grace*, Leibniz writes, "It is good to make the distinction between *Perception*, i.e. the internal state of the Monad representing external things, and the *Apperception*, i.e. the *Consciousness* or the reflective knowledge of this internal state, which is not given to all Souls, and not given to the same Soul all the time."[77] In light of this claim, it becomes clear that the Leibnizian distinction between apperception and perception differs from the Kantian.

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[74] Lindén 2017, 56n2.
[75] Chiurazzi 2017, 115.
[76] The point of the "Refutation of Idealism," for instance, is that of stressing the role of external empirical intuitions for self-cognition (*Selbsterkenntnis*). For Kant the possibility of inner experience is possible only on the basis of external experience (B 279). In the lectures on the "Union of Soul and Body in Malebranche, Biran, and Bergson," Merleau-Ponty writes, "if I analyze, like Kant does, consciousness at work [*à l'œuvre*] (in the *Refutation of Idealism*, for instance), I have to establish a close relation between 'self-consciousness' and 'consciousness of things.'" (Merleau-Ponty 1997, 55).
[77] *Principes de la nature et de la grâce 4*, quoted in Lindén 2017, 57.

Then for Leibniz apperception is only occasional.[78] A perception can become *apperceptible* with an increase (in its intensity or intensive magnitude). But there is more. Even when we are aware of our perceptions, Leibniz claims that these are made of a certain number of "small perceptions of which we do not have apperception."[79] Leibniz, in other words, excludes the possibility that we can always have explicit awareness of all our thoughts, which implies, he continues, "that there must be at last some thought that comes to pass without us seizing upon it."[80]

The ideas of "small perceptions" and of "blind cognition" (*cognitio caeca*) should be consigned to what Léon Brunschvicg, whom Merleau-Ponty quotes, describes as the incomparable profound regard that the philosophers of the 17th century directed towards the *unconscious.*"[81] Chiurazzi also follows this direction of interpretation, referring to studies showing that the expression *cognitio caeca* is the Latin translation of the French *pensée sourde*.[82] Chiurazzi tells us that this expression designates in the more heterodox Cartesian tradition (he names Nicole and Lamy) "those marginal thoughts, imperceptible, 'covered up,' or also those 'inclinations' that determine our behaviors without being completely conscious."[83] Jan-Ivar Lindén agrees with this interpretation when he considers the "small perceptions" as "closely related to appetites, drives" and thereby suggesting an influence from the Aristotelian tradition with its theory of *aisthesis* and *orexis*.[84] The Aristotelian tradition, with respect to the notion of soul among other things, is however precisely the tradition from which Descartes' discovery of the *cogito* and its further elaboration into the notion of the Kantian "I think" were taking leave.[85] Therefore it would be

[78] See Lindén 2017, 57.
[79] *Nuovi saggi sull'intelletto umano*, *Book II*, *Ch. 9*, quoted in Chiurazzi 2017, 116.
[80] Ibid. See Chiurazzi 2017, 116, who however has a different take on this point than our present interpretation.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Chiurazzi 2017, 117.
[83] Chiurazzi 2017, 117-118.
[84] Lindén 2017, 57.
[85] See Lindén 2017, 56-57.

incorrect to assimilate Leibniz' claim that in our cognitive activity there is some thought that must come to pass without our thinking about it to the idea of a pure self-consciousness in Kantian style. As Lindén remarks, Leibniz' view is not the Kantian, which, Lindén concludes, must not necessarily mean that Leibniz lacks a differentiation that Kant later offered.[86] At the same time, though, this remark must not make us overlook the implications of Kant's idea of a transcendental apperception, even if this idea needs to be reconsidered in light of the rehabilitation of an ontological concept of experience emerging from the Leibnizian notion of apperception.

§ 3.a. Maine de Biran's Theory of the Fact of Consciousness

At this junction there emerges a significant figure in the debate about apperception that I have outlined so far. In the notes taken by students during the course of 1947-48 on *L'union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson*, Merleau-Ponty turns towards some predecessors that in various ways anticipate his own theory of perception. For the purposes of the present discussion on apperception, I will only discuss Maine de Biran's theory of the "primitive fact."[87] This theory issues into the "ontological rehabilitation of the sensible" that Merleau-Ponty mentions in the *Philosopher and His Shadow*, and consists in the exhibition of what he also calls the "infrastructure" behind the immediate sensible data of consciousness which is revealed by the use of our own body.[88]

The relevance of Biran can be condensed into a summative point by paying attention to the double direction of his research: first, he rebukes the philosophers of the *cogito* for maintaining an

[86] Lindén 2017, 57.
[87] Merleau-Ponty dedicates three lectures on Biran in the context of his course offered in 1947-48 as part of the program in preparation of the *agrégation* (viz. lectures eight, nine, and ten).
[88] N 159.

abstract attitude towards the variations in our organic states and their effect on our affective life. In response to this attitude, he formulates a theory of the so called "primitive *fact*" of intimate sense or of consciousness, *le fait primitif du sens intime*, discovered at the beginning of 1804. Second, he detects a fundamental confusion in those naïve sensualist approaches that attempt to explain the generation of ideas and of human faculties and passions starting from simple sensations. This critique is directed in particular towards the so called *idéologues*.[89] Sensualist philosophers in eighteenth century France considered sensation the most primitive "fact." For Biran, however, sensation cannot be a primitive fact in this sense because any fact, even the most simple, in order to be experienced, requires a modification of the state of the experiencing subject. In other words, there must be a differentiation or discontinuity between sensing and sensing that I am sensing. This discontinuity is introduced by the "I" that doubles sensation with a self that is aware of sensing. If we eliminate the subject, then there cannot be any unity but only a confused manifold. It is not accidental that Kant defined Hume's notion of the self as a "motley I." Contrary to Kant, however, Biran did not fall back upon a transcendental apperception, which must be able to accompany all my representations. Biran therefore does not differentiates between an empirical and a transcendental apperception. Instead, by paying heed to the natural progression of animal life, Biran intends to trace a psycho-physiological representation of the birth of consciousness and the world of ideas. At the beginning of the eighth lecture, Merleau-Ponty points out Biran's recasting of the notion of evidence. Biran takes as point of departure the dimension of corporeality and that of the motricity of the body over against mathematical evidence or the evidence of reason.[90] He calls this form of bodily evidence "psychological" or "metaphysical." In this recasting

[89] A good summative study of Biran's work and life is Gouhier 1970.
[90] Merleau-Ponty 1997, 51.

of the notion of evidence, Biran does not aim at dismissing consciousness as much as he rather aims at redefining its notion.[91]

Consciousness in general and ideality in particular are conceived as a result of a fundamental activity that defines the subject of sensation and perception. The perception of thought, he writes, is quite different than that of the hand, yet the former refers to the latter and presupposes it "comme une copie reconnue pour telle, se réfère à l'original: c'est cette copie, ainsi conçue, que j'appelle *idée*."[92] Ideas stem from concrete perception, but what is more is that both perceptions and ideas are grounded on an activity that Biran defines in connection with the phenomenon of the effort (*effort*). Without entering into the intricacies relative to Biran's notion of the "impression of effort,"[93] let me just say that by making effort the basis for a definition of consciousness, Biran conceives self-consciousness as primordially bound to the consciousness of the object.[94] We can speak of a subject-pole and a resistance-pole: "I am" as subject or consciousness is simultaneous for Biran with "I act on my body," which he later expresses with the formula *volo, ergo sum*. The animate, moving body is entrusted with a feeling of its own moving. Without this motility that we feel as being ours, the whole manifold of experience would lack organizing sense, that is, as Morris puts it, "the sense that an 'I' is the nexus of this organizing sense."[95] In accord with the philosophies of the *cogito* and against sensualism, Biran conceives the

[91] Merleau-Ponty 1997, 64.
[92] Biran 1987, 150.
[93] D. Janicaud points out that in Biran's thought the notion of the *impression d'effort* is the source of "insurmountable difficulties."
[94] In connection with the particular experience of volitional effort, as for instance in the case of the movement of our limbs, Merleau-Ponty responds to Brunschvicg's critical attitude towards Biran's theory of the consciousness of the effort. Brunschvicg's neo-Kantian conceptual framework stresses the distinction between consciousness and what is of consciousness, the givenness of consciousness to itself and the givenness to consciousness of what is other than itself. Biran, on his part, places the "antithesis" of consciousness and object as primordial. If the problem lies in the difficulty to prioritize the thinking or conscious subject over against the motor subject, Biran's solution is that of identifying motricity with consciousness. See Merleau-Ponty 1997, 53.
[95] Morris 2018, 137.

subject as a primitive fact. Against the philosophies of the *cogito* and welcoming the demands of sensualist philosophers, however, the subject is for Biran so intimately related to the body that the latter is no longer completely an object and it participates in subjectivity. Yet, this implies that the feeling of one's own existence that defines consciousness is inseparable from the feeling of the existence of a world as constant pole of resistance of consciousness' life. For Biran, each perception makes immediately evident to me that there is a world, and all the sophisms of idealism must remain ineffective in front of this evidence.[96] Following Merleau-Ponty, Biran's "fact" of consciousness is "that which is seized upon in a reflection at its birthing state, at the moment in which the reflecting and the reflected upon are in the process of singling themselves apart from each other."[97] The facticity of consciousness entails what Biran calls a "primordial duplicity" or a "primitive relation" that cannot be reduced to either of its elements. In his course, Merleau-Ponty even speaks in this connection of "an apperception that does not apperceive itself."[98]

The relevance of this discussion of apperception and of the reference to Biran becomes clear in light of Brunschvicg's critical designation of Biran's transfer of evidence onto the bodily dimension of experience as a "non-philosophy."[99] Merleau-Ponty is quick in seizing upon this critical expression and turning it into a positive designation. The expression is significantly found in the essay on *The Philosopher and His Shadow* in the context of the interpretive exegesis of the essential movement of Husserl's phenomenology as philosophy in constant confrontation with non-philosophy. Far from being a form of naïve empiricism, Biran's theory of the fact of

[96] "…tous les sophismes de l'idéaliste ne sauraient ébranler cétte conviction." Biran 1987, 137.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Merleau-Ponty 1997, 75. In the course on passivity, Merleau-Ponty writes, "Il y a un savoir de soi qui n'est pas connaissance de soi." (IP 160).
[99] Merleau-Ponty 1997, 49.

consciousness is rather an anticipation of phenomenology as a philosophy that is indifferent to the distinction of the interior and of the exterior.[100]

The interest in this historical context lies in the fact that the debate around the notion of apperception anticipates the questions related to the problem of transcendental constitution, questions that the notion of sedimentation specifically raises in the context internal to phenomenology. The Kantian concept of transcendental apperception not only was preceded by revealing hesitations in the thought of Descartes and Leibniz, but it was also paralleled by developments stemming from a post-Cartesian tradition in France that was concerned with the genesis and composition of consciousness. This tradition worked with a notion of the empirical that was influenced especially by Locke's empiricism. As I showed, particularly important is Biran's attempt to develop a conception of the subject of experience without separating the idea of a transcendental subject from that of the empirical subject. According to Biran, the absolute autonomy of the "I" endowed with a power of absolute initiative with respect to the manifold content of experience must remain unintelligible if one does not account for the perceptual and historical subject that we are. Yet, Biran does not admit a system of causes producing a consciousness. The debate anticipates issues in phenomenology about the relationship between the transcendental and the empirical, active constitution and passive synthesis. This debate becomes particularly acute when phenomena of genesis, sedimentation, and reactivation are raised to prominence.

Merleau-Ponty remarks that there are both psychological and physiological hesitations regarding the new conception of the *cogito* in Biran, which are due also in part to Biran's closeness

[100] Merleau-Ponty 1997, 59.

to the movement of the ideologists.[101] However, Biran's philosophy raises the problem of a *cogito* that Merleau-Ponty describes in terms of an "operative or actual thought,"[102] of a "prepersonal apperception" or of "an apperception that does not apperceive itself."[103] The question of apperception is tied with the problems of consciousness (and of the unconscious), sensation, perception and reflection. For Biran, the living unity common to all these aspects determines a dimension that Biran identifies with that of animality.

The previous remarks offer an outline allowing to shed better light upon the peculiar character of Merleau-Ponty's return to naturalism as a return often described in terms of an ambiguity. This ambiguity cannot be a disqualifying trait with regard to the rigor of Merleau-Ponty's investigations pivoting around the natural world. The ambiguity of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature can be productively read in line with the traditional debate around the notion of apperception. In particular, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy needs to be read in light of the specific efforts to think Nature and the Cogito together outside of the context of a transcendental philosophy in Kantian style. In this, Merleau-Ponty's work on nature is similar to that of Bergson, of Ravaisson, and, as I have broadly outlined above, of Biran. Colonna has clearly argued that much of the ambiguities of Merleau-Ponty's thought receive crucial clarifications if, to this tradition of French authors, we add the contribution of *Gestalt* theory as providing much of the conceptual infrastructure that Merleau-Ponty relies on everywhere in his work. The theory of the

[101] Merleau-Ponty assigns Biran to the tradition of the so-called the "idealogists" (*les idéologistes*). Thanks also to the translation of John Locke's works in France, empiricism imposed itself in 18th century France and it motivated the emergence of sensualist positions (e.g. Condillac). The movement of the ideologists dealt with the question about the origin of ideas. Maine de Biran opposed radical sensualist postitions that conceived all idea as originating from sense impressions. However, Merleau-Ponty sees in Biran's closeness to the ideologists one reason for his still objectivist conception of corporeal experience. See Merleau-Ponty 1997, 70. For the presence of empiricism in France in the 18th century, see Lindén 2017, 58. The term *idéologistes* turned into that of *idéologues*, with derogatory undertones, by the mediation of Napoleon who did not have much sympathy for them.
[102] Merleau-Ponty 1997, 66.
[103] Merleau-Ponty 1997, 75.

Gestalt is compatible with the French psychology of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in that it combines a naturalistic and a phenomenological approach.[104]

The previous considerations about structure, operative intentionality, the spatial level, the earth, sedimentation, and apperception make available some defining features of Merleau-Ponty's return to naturalism. This discussion not only enables us to begin to approach more directly Merleau-Ponty's treatment of nature in the lectures at the Collège de France, but it also allows us to address more systematically the questions about the relation between transcendental and empirical approaches, the recasting of this relation within the development of phenomenology, and the significance of this recasting for the starting point of phenomenology in the context of these lectures.

[104] Colonna 2014, 93-94.

CHAPTER 4

MUNDUS SENSIBILIS:

STRUCTURE, PASSAGE OF NATURE, MOVEMENT

§ 1. Introduction

The first course on "Nature" from 1956-57 lays out a programmatical objective: the study of nature must function as an "introduction to the definition of being."[1] Nature is "mirror of being" and shall function as the basis to develop an indirect ontology.[2] In his first course, Merleau-Ponty describes nature as a "brute being."[3] The course is divided into two parts. In the first part, Merleau-Ponty presents a line of interpretation that detects in the history of Western ontology a form of "diplopia," which we have already encountered above. The course begins by raising the question about natural production. After a brief remark on the Aristotelian and Stoic approaches, Merleau-Ponty focuses on Descartes as the central figure for subsequent interpretations of nature. These subsequent interpretations are divided into two groups: 1) Kant and neo-Kantianism; 2) the "romantic" conceptions of nature of Schelling, Bergson, and, significantly included in this group, Husserl.[4] The second part of the course continues to detect the presence of Cartesian motives in the interpretation of nature of modern science. It is however with the interpretation of the newer physics that Merleau-Ponty begins to outline more substantial elements of his conception of nature. I will now turn to a more detailed survey on Merleau-Ponty's reading of the contemporary contributions of science to the idea of nature.

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[1] RC 125.
[2] See Carbone 1998, 165.
[3] RC 116. Cf. Carbone 1998, 166-167.
[4] See Carbone 1998, 164. *Diploplie ontologique*, N 179.

§ 1.a. Ontic Structural Realism

The second part of the course on the scientific concept of nature exhibits some interesting considerations that find confirmation in more recent literature in the philosophy of science. Especially one recent contribution by Ladyman and Ross shows important common traits with Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of nature in the new physics. A comparative commentary serves therefore the purpose of clarifying Merleau-Ponty's ontological proposal in the "Nature" lectures as well as that of integrating and confirming some aspects of this proposal by looking at a recent assessment by leading philosophers of science.

The interest of this particular contribution lies in two main elements: first, the anti-reductionism to which Ladyman and Ross commit philosophy in the light of recent scientific discoveries and debates in physics; second, the naturalism that Ladyman and Ross expressly understand as a form of scientism. The commonality with Merleau-Ponty's project is clear. Since *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty has attempted to show the untenability of reductionist theories while defending the idea of a truth of naturalism. In the "Nature" lectures, Merleau-Ponty claims that the philosophy of quantum physics is more realist than classical realism and more subjectivist than transcendental idealism.[5] This claim becomes clear if read in light of the consideration that the objectivism of realism is only the other face of the same objectivism of transcendental philosophy. Contemporary physics is realist because it does not find the truth of its objects in a transcendental dimension subject to a universal "I think." At the same time it is subjectivist because it is no longer concerned with an object as such. Rather contemporary science "calls into question its own object as well as its relation to the object."[6] There is therefore what we

[5] N 134-135.
[6] N 120.

could call a transcendental trait of contemporary science that however coexists with its naturalism. The hyper-realism and the hyper-transcendentalism of physics is what motivates Merleau-Ponty's interest in its findings.

Ladyman and Ross develop a metaphysical view that they contrast with a widespread approach common to many contemporary philosophers, even those who explicitly practice a naturalist philosophy. This position draws inspiration from what the authors define as obsolete features of classical physics or common sense representations of reality.[7] These features consist roughly in the idea that the world is made of little things in a relation of efficient causation.[8] Ladyman and Ross group the different views that are shaped by these features under the title of neo-scholastic metaphysics.[9] Ladyman and Ross thus develop their proposal by contrasting it with the two main tenets of neo-scholastic metaphysics, that is, 1) the doctrine of causation, and 2) the doctrine of composition.[10] Causal relations and compositional relations define reality for classical physics and for the neo-scholastic metaphysics that relies on it. These same features are highlighted by Merleau-Ponty in his account of the assumptions of classical physics. Causalism and an analytic-compositional conception of being are at the basis of classical scientific thought.[11] What Merleau-Ponty adds is the connection of both of these aspects to the "diplopic" aspect of Cartesian ontology. On the one hand, the causalism reflects a conception of the totality of nature as seen from the standpoint of a *kosmos théoros*[12] and it is therefore a "theological claim."[13] On the other

[7] Ladyman and Ross 2007, 19.
[8] Ibid. 4-5.
[9] Ibid. 8ff. It is interesting to note a similar use of the term "metaphysics" with regard to physics in the work of the biologist Jakob von Uexküll. In the *Theory of Meaning* (1940), he writes that "today's physics would be the purest metaphysics after theology." Uexküll 2010, 159.
[10] Ibid. 21.
[11] N 124.
[12] N 141.
[13] N 124.

hand, the analytic conception of being expresses the Cartesian idea of the decomposition of the complex into the simple.[14] This view corresponds to a corpuscular view of reality.

Ladyman's and Ross' critical account of neo-scholastic metaphysics (i.e. what they take to be a scientifically disconnected metaphysics) is based on their naturalism, which refuses a logical foundation and rather espouses a form of pragmatist (non-positivist) form of verificationism that approves only of those claims that find experimental confirmation in the best theories of science and primarily in the best theories of physics.[15] This form of verificationism is presented programmatically as a scientistic stance that eschews any theory of meaning (that of the logical positivists).[16] Ladyman and Ross' verificationism thus brings us back to the reach of our observation or, to put it in the terms of the authors in question, to the standpoint in our region of spacetime "or in regions of spacetime to which we or our instruments could in principle go." "In principle," it is important to note, does not refer here to a specific limitation of the observers that could be overcome practically. Rather it refers to certain boundaries beyond which we are no longer allowed to make claims on pain of entering the domain of "pointless speculation."[17]

At the same time, this restriction need not entail that all our claims are limited to what we actually experience. Ladyman and Ross believe that this is certainly not the case with scientific theories. They give two main reasons for this claim, one epistemic-theoretical, the other pragmatic-methodological. First, scientific theories do not just describe what is observable and actual, but they give us information also about what is counterfactual or possible. In this sense, scientific theories describe the modal structure of reality, i.e. relationships among phenomena "that pertain

[14] N 124.
[15] Ladyman and Ross 2007, 29. They also frame this discussion in terms of the distinction between a purely formal or "Platonist" and a verificationist conception of reality. See ibid. 234-235, 288 *et passim*.
[16] Ladyman and Ross describe the theory of meaning as a theory "according to which the meaning of particular terms (other than logical constants) is either given in experience directly, or consists in the way in which those terms relate to what is given in experience directly." Ladymann and Ross 2007, 112.
[17] Ibid. 29, 235, 237. The poster philosopher for a verificationist stance is identified in Hume, ibid. 64.

to necessity, possibility, potentiality, and probability."[18] Second, but closely linked to the first point, scientists are not interested in what just happens actually in front of their eyes. They are much more interested in the framework of conditions structuring what actually happens. Therefore their methods are designed so as to maneuver these conditions and study the range of possible outcomes.[19] The empirical adequacy sought after by the sciences does not reduce to the ostensive character of the actual.[20] Ladyman and Ross' "ontic structural realism" is equivalent to a metaphysics of modality.[21]

§ 1.b. Syntactic and Semantic Views

In their treatment, these authors take pains to make clear that their view of structural realism is not embedded "in the syntactic view of theories that adopts first-order quantificational logic as the appropriate form for the representation of physical theories."[22] The syntactic view is a view based on the ontology of objects that consists in assuming the identification of being with quantification.[23] To the syntactic view of theories as axiomatic systems or collections of propositions, they oppose a semantic approach to scientific theories as "families of models."[24] Put in these terms, the semantic approach strongly highlights the idea of similarity instead of relying

[18] Ibid. 111, 154.
[19] Ibid. 110.
[20] "Empirical adequacy is not achieved by a list of all the actual phenomena," ibid. This claim should remind us of what Husserl's said in the opening of the *Crisis*, "Bloße Tatsachenwissenschaften machen bloße Tatsachenmenschen," Hua VI, 4. The first volume of the *Logical Investigations* is entirely devoted to demonstrating the right standing of ideality in knowledge over against its empirical reduction to facts. Karl Popper's critique of verificationism also holds that simple empirical factuality is not a necessary criterion for the truth of a theory insofar as principles must be admitted in our theories that are not empirically verifiable. See Chiurazzi 2017, 178.
[21] Ladyman and Ross 2007, 107-111.
[22] Ibid. 128.
[23] See Chiurazzi 2017, 94 and also 171-173.
[24] Ladyman and Ross 2007, 116.

on the logical relation between sentences. The latter syntactic approach presupposes a standard correspondence theory of truth that consists in interpreting the relationship between more or less well defined theoretical terms and the world in terms of an *adaequatio*.[25] This theory of truth depends on the kind of verificationism defended by logical positivists and logical empiricists and that was associated with a special theory of perceptual belief based on uninterpreted sense-data and theories about linguistic entities.[26] To sum up, "The syntactic view demands quantification over a domain of individuals, whether theoretical and observable objects in a physicalist version, or sense-data in a phenomenalist version."[27] The semantic approach, on the other hand, differentiates the domain of truth by introducing a dimension that is not identical with the order of individuals, even if individual terms may or even turn out to have to appear in the formulation of the theories. The semantic approach expresses therefore the idea of a continuity in the scientific investigation that is not based on quantification over individuals, which can only be discreet and discontinuous, but rather on what Wittgenstein would call "family resemblances" as what pertains to individuals but that is of a different order than the individuals themselves.[28] When scientists talk about the world, what is really describing reality are not the single terms or concepts, but a certain structure that becomes delineated and maintains itself in the change of the particular terms and concepts. "The semantic view encourages us to think about the relation between theories and the world in terms of mathematical and formal structures."[29] The structure therefore works as an invariant across different representations. As Ladyman and Ross point out, the fundamental idea

[25] See ibid. 111-115.
[26] See Ladyman and Ross 2007, 28, 33, 63, 132.
[27] Ibid. 118.
[28] Cf. for a similar line of argument Chiurazzi 2017, 28, 110, 129, 131 *et passim*. In this respect, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* and his conception of proposition as "image of a state of affairs" is paradigmatic among correspondence theories of truth and in stark opposition to the later conception of truth based on the notion of "family resemblance."
[29] Ladyman and Ross 2007, 118.

here is that in mathematics the invariant is what comes to define objectivity.[30] A mathematical object, for instance an equilateral triangle, can be understood as a set of transformations that leave the object invariant.[31]

§ 1.c. Invariance between Physics and Phenomenology

The similarity with Husserl's method of eidetic variation seems almost too obvious for those familiar with the phenomenological tradition. Interestingly enough, Ladyman and Ross point to the fact that Hermann Weyl, to whose work in relativity theory they refer as examplary for the application of the mathematical idea of invariant to physical systems, was indeed deeply influenced by Husserl's phenomenology and the latter's understanding of objectivity in terms of invariance.[32] The key aspect of the idea of invariance however is that it turns the attention from the idea of a domain of individual objects as actually self-subsisting entities to the discernment within the domain of being of an operative dimension other than that of objects. In mathematics this is the dimension of the operative rules of transformation that define, for example, a geometrical figure. This operative aspect should also clarify, in retrospective regard, the core meaning of Husserl's proceeding in terms of eidetic variation. This is a proceeding that from the beginning abandoned the exclusive view of reality as partitioned into things and turned its focus rather to its relational character. It is this relational and operative aspect that should be emphasized in the Husserlian idea of the search for the invariant in the variations of appearances. Ladyman and Ross

[30] Ibid. 145-146.
[31] Examples of transformations for a geometrical figure are rotations and reflections, as in the case of placing an imaginary mirror in the middle of the figure so as to find its half reproduced along the line of reflection and thereby the whole invariant figure again. Mathematical group theory is the discipline that studies systematically these symmetries and invariants.
[32] Ibid. 145n29. Our authors refer for this claim to Ryckman's account of the history of relativity theory. Cf. also Bachelard 1968, 174-175.

on their part are interested in stressing the ontological importance of the mathematical notion of invariance for modern physics and especially for the representation of phenomena by quantum theory. They refer to Ernst Cassirer for whom "the possibility of talking of 'objects' in a context is the possibility of individuating invariants."[33] Essentially the view they purport to defend is that of a scientifically motivated metaphysics. Yet contemporary physics does not speak of "things" but it identifies entities through their relations. Quoting Cassirer again, "The individual electron no longer has any substantiality in the sense that it *per se est et per se concipitur*; it 'exists' only in its relation to the field, as 'singular location' in it."[34] Ladyman and Ross argue against a "standard" notion of structure that they understand as set-theoretic or logical and that roughly consists in the idea that relations or structures are only possible as supervening upon related individual objects and their properties.[35] They argue that this notion is undermined by our best physical theories and that therefore it should be rejected in favor of an ontology that is rather informed by physics' actual findings. This ontology should no longer be an ontology of objects but of structures or of relations to be taken as ontologically basic.[36] In their own words,

> Ontic Structural Realism (OSR) is the view that the world has an objective modal structure that is ontologically fundamental, in the sense of not supervening on the intrinsic properties of a set of individuals.

[33] Ladyman and Ross 2007, 147.
[34] Ibid. 140. Cassirer, like Weyl, seems to have thus been concerned with the project of replacing an individual-based ontology with one informed by 20th century physics. Ibid. 132.
[35] Ibid. 148, 151, 153-154, 174-175, 186, 229 *et passim*. Ladyman and Ross point out that the difficulty for the contemporary analytic philosopher to accept the consequences of their structural claims lies in the fact that the latter has been mostly schooled "in modern logic and set theory, which retains the classical framework of individual objects represented by variables subject to predication or membership respectively." Ibid. 155. The aim of these authors could thereby be summarized as inverting the metaphysical relation between background (individuals) and foreground (relations) against which modern science arose and at the same time as finding a justification that would motivate the scientific focus on "individuals" and "forces" over the course of the centuries. See ibid. 246
[36] Ibid. 130.

> According to OSR, even the identity and individuality of objects depends on the relational structure of the world. Hence, a first approximation to our metaphysics is: "There are no things. Structure is all there is."[37]

These theoretical structures describe the modal structures of reality and its relationships of necessity, possibility, potentiality, and probability. What is really entailed in the meaning of scientific theories is thus the reference to "stable modal relations among the phenomena."[38] If contemporary and cutting-edge physics admittedly may have little to say in terms informing strong positive metaphysical or ontological commitments, however, it has more to say negatively by way of denying the idea of a world "as spatio-temporal manifold with classical particles interacting locally."[39] Ladyman and Ross note however that to philosophers such as Quine, the state of science in the 1950s and 1960s still seemed to motivate forms of ontological reductionism and atomism consisting in the "Democritean faith" about the idea of an ultimate quantification over physical or elemental particles.[40] Yet in the 50s Merleau-Ponty turned to the philosophical meaning of quantum mechanics precisely because since the beginning of the twentieth century science has seemed to stop dealing with objects in the classical sense.[41] In the light of the degree of abstractness reached by physical theories Merleau-Ponty however asks the pertinent question about the possibility to speak sensibly about the findings of physicists from a non-technical perspective. His idea is that it is possible to do so by tackling the ways in which science tries to understand the nature that its mathematical and formal structures capture in order to "make sense" of it.[42] This is a striking claim if we compare it with Ladyman and Ross' overall project to articulate a naturalistic

[37] Ibid. 130.
[38] Ibid. 106.
[39] Ibid. 174.
[40] Ibid. 234, 207.
[41] N 122.
[42] N 125.

metaphysics that takes into account the latest discoveries in physics. Their whole project could be interpreted as being the attempt to "make sense" of a new kind of formalism emerging in modern physics. It is therefore on this level that we should look for clues that may inform our concept of nature.

§ 1.d. Physics Deformalized

For Ladyman and Ross, as we have seen, the formalism of modern physics consists in the mathematical and formal description of modal structures of reality. It may sound contradictory to claim therefore, as I would like to do, that the formalism of contemporary physics, with its increasingly abstract character, would carry out a *deformalization* of physics.[43] This claim however is justified if we consider with Ladyman and Ross that the "abstract" findings of physics impose a renewed awareness regarding the "great mistake" of transposing the object-oriented categories that we use to formulate our theories into the content described by the theories.[44] This mistake is avoided if instead of relying on a mode of theory based on the model of formal logic as mode of theorizing upon a domain of individuals we shift our focus to a mode of theory that holds that formalization ultimately hinges upon "physical possibilities for measurement."[45] This aspect is clearly recognized by Merleau-Ponty, who states that "classical thought wants only to take into account positive determinations, to compose them into a unique reality. Now wave mechanics states the impossibility of composing them into a preformed and completely accessible reality."[46]

[43] For the claim about the abstract character of science cf. Chiurazzi 2017, 102 and Ladyman and Ross 2007, 160.
[44] Cf. Ladyman and Ross 2007, 252.
[45] Ladyman and Ross 2007, 236.
[46] N 128.

It is interesting that Merleau-Ponty refers to the problems raised by Zeno's paradoxes as analogous to the problems raised by quantum mechanics. The dichotomous way of proceeding of Zeno's arguments shows the impossibility to account for motion or space by way of a composition of parts. Every step of division that locates a part forces us to turn to the middle term of two extremes now considered itself as an extreme requiring a further middle term and so on indefinitely. In their negative result, however, Zeno's arguments have a positive import in that they force us to consider motion or space differently than in terms of composition. In other words, Zeno's paradoxes challenge the Parmenidean monolithic idea of a being that is and cannot not be and force us to conceive a being that admits of non-being.[47] The same could be said of quantum mechanics. The introduction of probabilistic indeterminism and the idea of entangled states into physics call into question the idea that reality is ultimately made up of self-subsisting entities defined by being identical with themselves.[48] The logic of quantum mechanics is not just a logic of A (being) and ~A (non-being) but a logic that also admits of the passage from ~A to A.[49] But this is equivalent to say that besides claims about what is and what is not, we must admit formulations such as those about a being that can also not be or about a non-being that is not nothing. The result we need to draw, Merleau-Ponty writes, is that "existing things are not individual realities, but generic realities."[50]

[47] "Mais le paradoxe de Zénon était aussi l'occasion de raffiner nos conceptions de l'Etre." N 145.
[48] "No entity without identity" is Quine's motto in "Existence and Quantification" (1969). Quoted by Chiurazzi 2017, 144. Probability, Merleau-Ponty remarks, "enters the texture of the real, and statistics gains acceptance with respect to an individual reality that is generic." N 127. Ladyman and Ross significantly stress the same point when they say that "Arguably, what is really novel about the conceptual structure of QM [quantum mechanics] is that it seems to make use of probabilities irreducibly and not (merely) epistemically." Ladyman and Ross 2007, 187.
[49] "D'où la création d'une logique non plus à deux mais à trois valeurs. A la lettre, il y a création et annihilation des corpuscules dans l'acte d'observation. Mais aux états de non-existence et d'existence s'ajoute 'l'état zéro exprimant la possibilité du passage à l'existence.'" N 128. In this passage Merleau-Ponty quotes Paulette Destouches-Février's *La Structure de théories physiques* (1951).
[50] N 128.

§ 1.f. Observation and Objectivation

The logic operating in the field of quantum mechanics imposes therefore the conception of different criteria of truth than classical logic. The crucial aspect introduced by this new logic is the relation to the subject, which is closely connected with the eminent role that the measuring apparatus assumes in quantum physics. "The reason of this effort towards a new logic is due to the new relation between the thing observed and measure."[51] This new relation needs to be clarified. In the system "object-measuring apparatus-observer" the observer is not just a contingent element that could in principle be reduced with better knowledge of the observer's limitations or with the production of more sophisticated measuring tools.[52] The act of the one doing the measuring does not make manifest an individual object, but rather produces an objectivity by way of the integrated system "system observed-measuring apparatus-observer." Merleau-Ponty refers to Edmond Bauer and Fritz London who speak in this connection of a "maximum of the 'object.'"[53]

Until now Merleau-Ponty's reading of the novel epistemological and ontological aspects introduced by discoveries in quantum mechanics finds full confirmation in what has been established by the work of Ladyman and Ross. There is a further aspect that Merleau-Ponty introduces in his argument in connection with Bauer and London to which I now turn. Bauer and London illustrate the relation of the observer to the system observed in quantum mechanics by exhibiting a sort of transcendental relation at work in the process of observation. Consider the function ψ (x, y, z), where x is the object proper, y is the measuring apparatus and z is the observer. As we just saw, this function represents the notion of object in quantum mechanics. The observer

[51] N 129.
[52] Cf. N 128-129.
[53] N 129-130.

z, however, can always operate a reflective turn towards herself and thereby separate herself from the function ψ (x, y, z). This separation, as Bauer and London note, would have to result into a *new objectivity*. "The act of observation is an act of objectivation."[54] Bauer and London's argument is similar in form to that given by J. W. R. Dedekind in order to demonstrate the existence of a real (non-mathematical) infinite.[55] This proof is based on the idea of biunivocal correspondence between a set *s* and one of its own parts *s'* defined as image of *s*. An example of such relationship is that between natural numbers and even numbers. Bauer and London create precisely such "mirroring" relation by highlighting the possibility for *z* to separate herself from the function ψ (x, y, z) through reflection. In this way the new resulting function is z [ψ (x', y', z')], in which there can be found a biunivocal correspondence between a set *z* and one of its elements *z'*. Merleau-Ponty, however, adds an important qualification to Bauer and London's exemplification of what is admittedly a transcendental relation. The role of self-awareness set in play in the process of observation does not turn the objectivity resulting from the act of observing and measuring into an objectivity for a pure subject. The thinking that is here in play remains a thought annexed to an apparatus.[56] This means that the "coefficient of facticity" introduced by the new physics, if it leads us away from the idea of a pure determinism, also does not lead us to the idea of a pure indeterminism. The failure of a purely deterministic worldview in the light of the findings of the new physics, Merleau-Ponty remarks, makes determinism improbable.[57] On the basis of the same findings and of their coefficient of facticity, however, indeterminism is not established as the only necessary outcome of observation, so that reality would dissolve into another form of objectivism: an objectivism of images or representations instead of the objectivism of a nature in itself. By

[54] N 133.
[55] Chiurazzi illustrates this demonstration in his (2017), 114-115.
[56] N 131.
[57] N 132.

establishing the relationship to the subject as factor defining objectivity, quantum mechanics opposes scientific realism, but also nominalistic idealism and idealism in the Kantian sense. It speaks of reality, but of a reality that shows itself modally in relation to my point of observation.

Quantum mechanics therefore raises the problem of reflection and of the subject of reflection. At the same time quantum mechanics also raises the problem of perception and of the object of perception. Merleau-Ponty feels compelled to say that "the problem posed by physics approaches the problem of perception." Both the new physics and the studies of perception (especially those carried out by the psychology of the form) reveal a structural conception of being and truth.[58] This structuralism represents for Merleau-Ponty the point of contact between the contemporary theories of physics and the philosophy of perception insofar as both outline a non-objectivistic view of being and beings. To put it in a nutshell, both raise the problem of how to think together the *transcendental* and the *ontic*. In modern physics the prioritization of the concept of "order" over that of "measure" represents the point of contact with transcendentalism.[59] In the modern psychology of perception, Albert Michotte's experiments, for instance, aim at revealing a dimension of the perception of causality that is more complex than the experience of "objects" and their "collisions." Michotte's experiments reveal a transcendental or "global" order that is required by the focused perception on singular objects. The psychology of perception, like physics, appear to Merleau-Ponty as making available a world of experience preceding the world covered up by the idealizations of science, that is, the world at a stage preceding the explication of nature, perception, objectivity, and ideality itself, by culture.[60] "It is required to distinguish perception as isolating attitude, such as the attitude taught by the professor of drawing, which demands me to

[58] N 135-136.
[59] This is Massimo Ferrari in *Il neocriticismo* (1977), quoted by Chiurazzi 2017, 159n39.
[60] N 137.

give to each thing a countable magnitude, and perception as natural attitude, with respect to which such operation is impossible."[61] At the same time, however, this transcendental aspect both in physics and in perception remains problematic. The conditioning factor of general experience establishing a field for particular experiences remains in both cases linked to an experiential instance as ontic. The perceiving activity is "global," it opens a dimension where there can be something to be perceived. Yet, the perceiving activity does not simply hold the world in front of itself, but it is itself "in" the world. As a psychophysical being, the perceiving subject is a part of the global dimension that it opens up.[62]

§ 2. Note on A. N. Whitehead

Unlike Quine, in the first decades of the twentieth century another author from the Anglo-American tradition had already outlined a philosophy of nature and then a metaphysics in accord with the new direction of the contemporary discoveries of physics. This author is Alfred North Whitehead. Merleau-Ponty's first "Nature" course concludes with a commentary on Whitehead's philosophy of nature. His aim is achieving a formulation of the new conception of nature emerging from the recasting of the classical notions of time, space and causality operated by the new physics. Contemporary physics denies the primacy of self-subsistent individuals as fundamental components of reality and rather motivates a structural or relational conception of reality. This explains Merleau-Ponty's interest in the work of Whitehead. Merleau-Ponty finds a new picture of the natural world in the relationism put forth by Whitehead.[63] The reference to Whitehead is

[61] N 137.
[62] We recognize in this difficulty the whole problematic of transcendental psychologism. See Hua XVII, § 62.
[63] "[U]ne nouvelle vision de la Nature," N 152. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty's investigation of nature begins with his first book on *The Structure of Behavior*. This project can be regarded as the preliminary culmination of a research

therefore important for two reasons. First, it allows us to locate a philosophical elaboration of the idea of the primacy of relations over substances that is put forth by physics. Second, this relational ontology raises the question about the status of subjectivity in the context of the naturalist position of Ladyman and Ross.[64] In this short section, my only aim is to outline briefly some salient aspects of Whitehead's thought as it is found in Merleau-Ponty's commentary and to introduce us to the question of animality addressed in the next chapter.[65]

As it emerges from the lectures on "Nature," Merleau-Ponty merits Whitehead for having outlined a perspective that deformalizes nature from the classical Laplaceian view of nature as totality of facts in place at a certain instant that would be nomologically sufficient in order to predict the whole future of the world.[66] This view can stand if the facts of nature are framed by the Newtonian concepts of spatial points, temporal instants, and bits of matter.[67] These concepts and the Laplacian view allow us to think of each physical entity as occupying an unequivocal position in space and time. This is the idea of "simple location" (*emplacement unique*).[68] It is this idea, according to Merleau-Ponty, that Whitehead calls into question. The idea of a punctual spatio-temporal existence is an abstraction. This abstraction, however, is taken to be the actual nature that

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project on *The Nature of Perception* written in 1933. In this early text Merleau-Ponty could already take notice of some of Whitehead's basic ideas by the intermediacy of Jean Wahl, whose works Merleau-Ponty adds in the bibliography of SC. If Merleau-Ponty is aware of Whitehead's philosophy since the beginning of his work, it seems however that it is only in the mid-1950s that he carried out a direct study of his texts at the occasion of his "Nature" lectures. See on these points, Robert 2011, 12-13, 25 and Vanzago 2017, 45 and n3.

[64] Cf. Vanzago 2017, 65-68.

[65] For a more detailed account of the confrontation of Merleau-Ponty with Whitehead's thought, I refer the reader to Robert 2011, Hamrick/Van der Veken, 2011, and Vanzago 2017, in particular 57-68. The remarks in this section are mostly drawn on these accounts of Whitehead's philosophy.

[66] N 123-124. The idea of an infinite intelligence put forth by Laplace can already be found in Kant, so that the Laplacean and the Kantian views express the same idea of causality of nature, in which also all human actions are inserted: "so sind alle Handlungen des Menschen in der Erscheinung aus seinem empirischen Charakter und den mitwirkenden anderen Ursachen nach der Ordnung der Natur bestimmt, *und wenn wir alle Erscheinungen seiner Willkür bis auf den Grund erforschen könnten, so würde es keine einzige menschliche Handlung geben, die wir nicht mit Gewißheit vorhersagen und aus ihren vorhegenden Bedingungen als notwendig erkennen könnten*." B577-578 (my emphasis).

[67] For Whitehead these are the three basic concepts of the classical picture of the physical world. See Vanzago 2017, 60, who refers to Whitehead's paper *On Mathematical Concepts of the Material World* (1905).

[68] N 154.

we experience. Whitehead calls this move the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness."[69] The fallacy consists in positing the spatial points and temporal instants, which are abstractions, as real instead of considering them as the placeholders for our descriptions of nature.[70] The fallacy emerges clearly if we look at the main consequence pertaining to the idea of simple location of physical events. This is the reduction of time to a punctual instant, to a "flash-point" at which, Whitehead writes, nature would be fully real even if no nature existed at any other instant.[71] This conception implies a static interpretation of nature, which must do away with the productive and generative aspect that Whitehead claims to be so evident in the physical world.[72] This static view must therefore do away with generation and with nature itself. In the light of the aporetic consequences of this fallacy, Whitehead intends to recover an understanding of motion and change in our concept of nature. This means overcoming the serial conception of nature in terms of a completely given actuality at each instant, which in Whitehead comes down to a critique of the idea of simple location.[73] If this idea consists ultimately in a "rationalizing actualization of the profound dynamic of the real,"[74] the rediscovery of movement and change in the physical world must revise the status of the atomization of reality operated by the idea of simple location. This work of revision does not aim at eliminating the validity of the atomic consideration of reality, but rather it purports to recast its significance for our understanding of the real. Understanding nature starting from atomic elements would be equivalent to "putting the cart before the horse."[75] On the contrary, the actual atomic entities in space and time make up the superficial part of the real while the latter is

[69] Whitehead discusses this fallacy in *Science and the Modern World* (1925) and in *Process and Reality* (1929), but the thought is already anticipated in *Concept of Nature* (1920). See Robert 2011, 100-107 and Vanzago 2017, 61n46.
[70] Cf. N 158.
[71] N 154.
[72] Cf. Whitehead's reference to Newton's *scholium* in Robert 2011, 101-102.
[73] "Ce à quoi Whitehead nous invite, c'est à concevoir, entre l'espace et le temps, des rapports non sériels (*serial*)." N 155.
[74] Chiurazzi 2017, 251. Chiurazzi refers to Whitehead's *Process and Reality* in the passage from which I am quoting.
[75] N 154.

essentially becoming and potentiality.[76] It is the new physics however that motivates not a static but a processual view of nature.[77] Accordingly, Whitehead substitutes the idea of overlapping relations for the idea of simple location.[78] For Merleau-Ponty this shift implies a deformalization of the notion of substance, which in Whitehead corresponds to a dynamization of substance.

In order to make this shift more intelligible, I can refer the reader to the contrast between the Cartesian geometric-mechanical conception of the world, as based on the conservation principle of the quantity of motion, and the Leibnizian conception of the physical world as based on the principle of conservation of the energy.[79] The idea that in an enclosed system it is motion that remains constant issues into a purely mathematical interpretation of motion as change of position. For Leibniz (and for Huygens before him), however, it is not motion but the energy that is conserved. This shift makes a dynamic or physical interpretation of motion possible by significantly reintroducing the notion of "substantial form" stemming from Aristotle. Moreover, it can be claimed that the discovery of analytic geometry is the real contribution of Descartes to mathematics.[80] This discovery introduces the notion of order into the understanding of the physical world. Physical reality is conceived as framed by a system of coordinates. This system of coordinates frames the points of reference on a plane and the coordinates can be translated anywhere on the plane. This conception of order, however, represents an abstraction from the fundamental vectoriality present in nature and consisting essentially in the fact that the spatio-

[76] Chiurazzi claims that Whitehead's inversion of priority between the actual and the potential represents a "radical inversion" of Parmenidean philosophy, "ciò che è costante, identificabile, oggettuale, attuale, numerabile, costituisce la parte superficiale, emergente o 'apparente' del reale, che in se stesso è continua trasformazione e divenire, virtualità non attuale, ma non per questo non reale." Chiurazzi 2017, 251.
[77] N 155, 159, 162-163.
[78] N 157.
[79] On this distinction, see Chiurazzi 2017, 166-168.
[80] Chiurazzi 2017, 154.

temporal placement of a thing is affected by the situation of things in other times and other places.[81] The Leibnizian notion of *vis viva*, on the contrary, captures this vectoriality operating in nature. Thus, on the one hand, the dynamization of nature implies a certain "ontological confusion"[82] and Whitehead speaks in this regard of a nature with "ragged edges."[83] On the other hand, however, this indeterminacy is precisely what makes it possible for us to conceive the connectivity among natural events. The passage of nature, as Whitehead calls it, is that which connects (*ce qui relie*).[84]

The rehabilitation of motion and change in our understanding of nature, that is, the interpretation of nature as passage, rehabilitates a notion of temporal duration that enables an account of the generative or productive aspect of nature. Implied in the notion of generation is the coming about of a certain unity. We saw that the fallacy of misplaced concreteness leads ultimately to the aporetic idea of a static nature. Whether as nature at one single instant or at multiple instants – as *Nature-flash* or as *éclair ponctuel continué*[85] – this idea would eventually make a concept of nature impossible by making impossible any concept of the coexistence of unity and duality. To say that nature is passage, that is, that nature is inherently temporal, reintroduces instead the idea of the synthesis of a manifold that is not just one but that also does not fall into an irretrievable multiplicity. As we have seen, this indeterminacy is precisely what defines the dynamism of nature and thus its material and not just formal character.

[81] N 155. Vanzago also seizes upon this point,, cf. Vanzago 2017, 210-211 and it is clearly stated by J. Beaufret when he wrote in his lectures on the philosophy in France in the 18th century, "Leibniz accusait déjà Descartes de matérialisme car la physique de Descartes est, disait-il, trop géométrique et méconnaî ce qu'il y a de proprement physique dans son objet, à savoir la force…" in Beaufret 1984, 55-56.
[82] N 153.
[83] N 154: "the edges of nature are always ragged" (*les bords de la nature sont toujours en guenilles*). Few pages later Merleau-Ponty says that the passage of nature does not have "narrow edges" (*bords étroits*), N 163.
[84] N 159.
[85] N 161.

As a result, this conclusion must affect our concept of matter, which no longer appears as delimited to an instantaneous present. Rather, matter also has a past.[86] Merleau-Ponty stresses the idea that the notion of time has been traditionally associated with the subject or the mind.[87] The temporalization of the material character of nature breaks this traditional association. This is only possible however if the concept of matter is de-substantialized so that it no longer designates the aspect of complete positivity and actuality of nature but rather the dynamic aspect of nature itself.[88] The unity of nature, as material, is thus not a substantial, but a dynamic unity, it is the unity defining entities subject to motion and change, that is, entities that are essentially temporal. This is no longer the nature of an unlimited intelligence, that of Laplace, but the nature in which we actually live and that we actually experience. It is possible to go so far as to claim that matter in the traditional sense of indeterminate "stuff" is only a derivative concept and does not represent the foundation of life. This inanimate "matter" rather emerges only when the organism is at odds with what is external to the point that it becomes meaningless to its living activity.[89] Only then matter can be said to be "just stuff." This nature characterized by movement and materiality certainly poses a challenge to reason. This is the challenge that emerges with any attempt to seize upon a reality subject to movement and transformation, that is, a reality that is *living* and not static.[90]

As it should be clear from the previous remarks, the conception of nature that emerges from a reading of Whitehead's work motivates a reconsideration of the distinctions between inorganic and organic nature. The stone is itself subject to the dynamism of nature and thus to time. Hegel

[86] N 161.
[87] N 161.
[88] Cf. N 157.
[89] "À cet égard, la matière n'est pas aucun fondement de la vie, mais au contraire ce qui apparaît au vivant quand il est impossible pour lui de voir *un sens de l'importance* dans ce qui apparaît." Lindén 2011, 95. Reinke demanded the recognition of a physics that he called "diaphysics" as a science dealing with the directing forces of inorganic matter. See the reference to Reinke and his "diaphysics" in Uexküll 1973, 293.
[90] Cf. Chiurazzi 2017, 195-196.

saw this clearly when he spoke of an overcoming of the limit of the acidic base into a basic-base in oxidation. The stone is also materially subject to the dynamic interactions of the world such as atmospheric factors etc. that lead it to turn into something other than itself and, to put it in Hegel's words, to overcome its limit. The stone has in itself a disposition to change and to relate with the external world. The difference between inorganic and organic nature then consists in the fact that the former endures the relations in a passive way. The interactions with the external world happen without the possibility of a real mediation on the part of inorganic matter. On the other hand, organic nature actively assimilates the external world and as long as the organism is functioning it does not let itself be absorbed and destroyed by the external substance. The life of spirit performs this activity of metabolization of the real to its full extent, at least in Hegel's perspective. What needs to be retained from this analysis is that there is an organic logic of nature that encompasses everything. The stone also is subject to the logic of the living. In this connection it is significant that, in *Process and Reality*, Whitehead refers to Plato's *Timaeus*, a text about cosmology, as the prodrome of the evolutionary theory of the organism. In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead refers to the Platonic concept of the *χωρα* as "the idea that there is something formless, yet receptive of each form, which is not given unless in relation to each form but can be reduced to none of them."[91] This is the nature that hosts all bodies in itself and that has the capacity to take on different shapes (*Tim.* 50c2), but that never appears as such in any of them.[92] The notion of *chōra* expresses the connective character that emerges in Whitehead's conception of nature. In his account of the notion of *chōra*, Chiurazzi stresses the fact that by withdrawing from the impression of the forms, the

[91] See Vanzago 2017, 68.
[92] Chiurazzi calls this aspect of "withdrawal" or "self-emptying" relative to the *chóra* "kenotic." He refers the term *chóra* to the preposition *chorís* ("without," "outside of") as well as to other expressions such as *chēros* ("widowhood"), *chātos* ("lack," "privation"), *choreīn* (to withdraw, to retreat), and also to *chorismós* ("separation," "distancing"). See Chiurazzi 2017, 223.

chōra creates a void or a discontinuity, which corresponds to the origin of the singularity of individual things. At the same time, however, the *chōra* remains the element where all the forms are impressed, thereby functioning as the source of their mutual, and living, relations. The Platonic concept of *chōra* expresses thus the conception of a fundamentally dynamic reality. The *chōra* is the principle of the dynamism that appears in nature, that is, of its fundamental temporal aspect. This aspect pertains to all natural manifestations.

The idea of a nature in itself, of the *bloße Natur* (Kant), but also the particular manifestations of organic nature, are interpreted by Whitehead in terms of "concrescences" of the passage of nature.[93] The latter remains an "operative" or "obscure principle"[94] that is neither an object nor a subject but that as "global" reality encompasses human beings, animal cells or stones as its "modes." Whitehead's concept of nature as passage and concrescence appears thus as an anti-substantialist and ultimately as an anti-Parmenidean[95] concept just like the Platonic *chōra*. The entities that are formed in it can have a definite essence and therefore *ousía* or "concrescence."[96] Yet nature is not itself this *ousía*.

Merleau-Ponty indicates that the anti-substantialist view of nature corresponds in Whitehead to a recovery of the sense that nature has for perception or, in Whitehead's terminology, for our "sense-awareness," over against a discursive understanding of nature.[97] In other words, according to this reading, the "admixture" (*mélange*) of the concrescences or, in more traditional terms, of the substances, that has nature as its principle, finds in perception the eminent place of

[93] N 162-165.
[94] N 162. Whitehead speaks of nature in terms of an "operative presence." See N 163.
[95] Vanzago 2017, 183.
[96] Cf. Chiurazzi 2017, 87 and Robert 2011, 102-103.
[97] Merleau-Ponty translates the expression "sense-awareness" with *révélation sensible* (N 157) or *éveil sensible* (N 158).

its manifestation.[98] Merleau-Ponty writes that "The critique of unique emplacement makes us understand the ontological value of perception."[99] To be sure, the discursive understanding of nature is completely legitimate in itself, Merleau-Ponty is careful to stress,[100] but it must be carried out with awareness in order not to commit the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. The substantialisation or parceling out of reality, that is, its formalization, should not cover up the overlapping ruling its course, that is, its material character. In *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, this is also called the error of "disimplication."[101] A consideration of the material aspect of nature discovers the subject contemplating nature as participating in this play of relations by way of its incarnated form, which Merleau-Ponty describes rather in terms of a dialectic of proximity and distance.[102]

§ 3. Natural *Dynamis* between Physics and Perception

The new physics outlines a notion of interconnectivity of nature that finds a philosophical development in Whitehead's metaphysics. Merleau-Ponty is receptive of this development, as the lecture courses show. For Merleau-Ponty, "[p]hysics destroys certain prejudices of philosophical and non-philosophical thought without, for all that, being a philosophy."[103] The experiences of physics point to a world anterior to the world of theory, which he calls the perceived world. Thus, we return to the idea of a perceptual consciousness from *The Structure of Behavior* and to the breadth of its reach, which the *Phenomenology of Perception* investigated. In the *Nature* lectures,

[98] *Nous ne pouvons comprendre la nature de l'Etre qu'en nous référant à notre "éveil sensible" (self-awareness), à la perception à l'état naissant.* N 158.
[99] N 159.
[100] N 154, 157.
[101] MSME 78.
[102] N 160.
[103] N 138.

the experiences of physics, as well as those of biology and psychology, motivate more resolutely the claim that "Being cannot be defined outside of perceived being."[104] As I showed in Chapter 3, this way of approaching the pure experience preceding the idealizations of science and culture is coupled with the realization that the natural attitude is not an attitude, that therefore the problem of the intuition of the world of pure experience cannot be solved by a purely transcendental analysis that would put the natural attitude out of play, and, as a result, that the problem of the world cannot be detached from the problem of being. This is the basic line of argument that allows Merleau-Ponty to establish the essential link between Being and what he calls the perceived world. Merleau-Ponty, however, says also that this does not mean that everything should be reduced to perception.[105] The proximity that Merleau-Ponty recognizes between the new findings of physics and the problems of perception is not intended to reduce the investigations of physical nature to a regional problem of perception. If the embodied subjectivity is the pivot around which the ontological shift is carried out, this subjectivity, as embodied, is already a field, and it is already in the world. Several times in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the lived body is said to be the "vehicle of the being-in-the-world."[106] The lived body is not the new name for a condition which lets something else be (i.e. as constituting instance); the lived body emerges rather as a way to access the constitutive factors of experience which let the lived body and everything else be. The proceeding followed by Merleau-Ponty is proof of this. The notion of a field of presence and the role of movement as constitutive of perception have a clear methodological scope for the delineation of the temporal and spatial dimensions of the world.[107] The field of presence, centered

[104] N 247. This is said in the context of animal behavior. Cf. N 144 for a parallel claim in the context of physics.
[105] N 138.
[106] PhP 97, 161, 264. Cf. also the following statement: "C'est en communiquant avec le monde que nous communiquons indubitablement avec nous-mêmes. Nous tenons le temps tout entier et nous sommes présent à nous-mêmes parce que nous sommes présent au monde." PhP 485.
[107] Cf. Serban 2017, 144; Colonna 2008, 144.

around a living body, is explicitly said to renew the conception of time.[108] The notion of body schema is the basis for the elaboration of a topological space, which, Merleau-Ponty writes, would have to be taken as the model of being.[109] Merleau-Ponty writes that "the installation in a space by the corporeal schema, and the founding of a time in the embryology of behavior – all this turns around the problem of an existence that is not a *thought* of existing."[110] In this connection, the later working notes repeatedly speak of a *Weltlichkeit* of the *Geist*, i.e. of a worldy rooting of the mind.[111]

Merleau-Ponty's reading of the physical findings has shown that the natural world can no longer be primarily determined as a domain of individual beings. The objects of physics, in spite of their increased formal determination, resemble all of a sudden the objects of perception as *Gestalt*-psychology determines them: i.e. as "configurations" or "structures." The definiteness that atomistic psychology attributes to the data of sensation and that is supposed to be responsible for the perception of definite objects is an abstraction from the field of natural perception, which delivers rather "ambiguous beings."[112] Physics rediscovers this ambiguity in the objects it studies, which is the ambiguity affecting precisely the dimensions defining the physical world: space and time. This ambiguity consists in the impossibility of determining univocally the spatial and temporal features of physical objects. In *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty could already write that "[i]t sometimes happens that physics, in its increasing fidelity to the concrete spectacle

[108] IP 35.
[109] VI 264. Cf. the following claims from *L'Œil et l'esprit*, "Elle [la vision] seule nous apprend que des êtres différents, 'extérieurs,' étrangers l'un à l'autre, sont pourtant absolument *ensemble,* la 'simultanéité.'" (OE 84); "il [le 'quale visuel'] est la concrétion d'une universelle visibilité, d'un unique Espace qui sépare et qui réunit, qui soutient toute cohésion (et même celle du passé et de l'avenir, puisqu'elle ne serait pas s'ils n'étaient parties au même Espace). Chaque quelque chose visuel, tout individu qu'il est, fonctionne aussi comme dimension, parce qu'il se donne comme résultat d'une déhiscence de l'Être." (OE 84-85).
[110] VI 246.
[111] VI 226, 228, 233 *et passim*.
[112] N 137.

of the world, is led to borrow its images, not from the poorly integrated wholes which furnished classical science with its models and in which one could attribute absolute properties to separable individuals, but from the dynamic unities, fields of force and strong structures which the world of perception also offers."[113] The ambiguity of the objects of perception shares with the ambiguity of the objects of physics the aspect of a *dynamis*, to use an old term, so that both physics and the study of perception shed new light upon the ancient idea of nature as the domain of becoming. Thus, already the investigation of the physical world exhibits elements of natural production and generativity that are made manifest in living nature. Quantum physics introduces us into the idea of a space for something to truly happen and, as a result, as Whitehead's philosophy attests, the new physics reintroduces us to the idea of a passage of nature. The dynamic essence of nature rehabilitates the central role of movement for the determination of the natural world. In the constitution of the animate and inanimate world and at different levels of complexity, we seem to find the same dynamic of totalization, completion, and integration or, in the words of *Gestalt* psychologist Gaetano Kanisza, "of 'filling in the gaps' – that is, of making present that which is absent,"[114] which characterizes the appearance of movement. Let us therefore, in the conclusion of this chapter, turn to the phenomenon of movement. In order to do so, I will refer to the study of movement that Merleau-Ponty carries out in his first course at the Collège de France on the topic of "The Sensible World and the World of Expression." The following section will achieve two objectives: first, it will make more explicit the way in which Merleau-Ponty inquires into the various aspects of natural dynamism – materiality, permanence, causality, organic production etc. As a result, the following considerations will also illustrate more concretely the meaning of

[113] SC 156/144.
[114] "Two Ways of Going beyond the Information Given" in *Organization in Vision: Essays on Gestalt Perception* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 6, quoted in Smith 1988, 31.

speaking of a "natural sign." Second, the remarks on movement will also build the transition to the next chapter dealing with animal nature, where we find the perception of a movement involving manifestly productiveness and generativity.

§ 4. The Praxis of Nature, or What the Things Do

The phenomenon of movement clarifies the sense of "openness" of the world – a recurring expression in Merleau-Ponty's last writings – in terms of a spatial and temporal openness. If Merleau-Ponty is interested in the ontological elements that the new physics and the study of perception can contribute to our understanding of reality, then, however, we see now that this contribution operates in the context of a renaturalization of the question of being by means of the reference to the sensible dimensions of the world.[115] The lecture course on "The Sensible World" from 1953 is divided into three parts dealing with 1) the phenomenon of lived-space, 2) the perception of movement, and 3) the notion of the body schema. In all this, we are told that the study of lived-space functions as a propaedeutic in order to arrive at an intuition of movement.[116] The theory of the body schema discovers the constitution of an oriented space that is primarily traversed by actional vectors determined by what the lived-body has *to do*. This leads Merleau-Ponty to understand the schema in terms of the ground of a *praxis*. Now the study of the perception of movement discovers that such *praxis* is inextricably tied to a certain behavior or life of things within the world, that is, tied to what things themselves *do* or to what I designate as a certain *praxis* of nature. More generally, the picture of the sensible world that emerges from the analysis of movement provides concrete clues allowing for an integration of Husserl's transcendental

[115] In this direction moves also Colonna in his (2014), 354-355.
[116] MSME 89.

aesthetic. The scope of the following remarks, however, is and must remain very modest in the light of the dramatic implications involved in the task of a reformulation of Husserl's own transcendental aesthetics. My reflections are simply limited to pointing to the hypothesis that the problem of a radically transformed transcendental philosophy needs to be reverted from the problem regarding conditions of possibility ("that without which") into what seems to be the real main problem, namely the problem of individuation, the problem of spatial and temporal determination within the world not just in terms of formal conditions, but also as enabling features ("that by means of which") wherein individuated beings come about, in essential form and full concreteness.

A decisive clarification of the implications stemming from the new findings in physics – but, as we will see shortly, also from biology – comes for Merleau-Ponty from the tradition of the psychology of perception. Especially in relation to the phenomenon of movement, the reference to the studies of the authors belonging to this tradition establishes for Merleau-Ponty the demonstrative grounding for the philosophical claims regarding the notion of "overlapping" (*empiètement*, *enjambement*), as notion defining the totality of phenomenal reality. The lecture course on the "Sensible World" approaches the phenomenon of movement in a systematic way by looking at cases of what *Gestalt* psychologists call "modal" and "amodal" perception of movement. In the case of modal perception, as exemplified in Werthemeier's work on the stroboscopic effect, we observe that the dynamic of "filling in" characteristic of movement has a counterpart in the stimuli.[117] Amodal perception, such as Albert Michotte's tunnel effect, is equally

[117] Kanisza 1979, 6. Paracchini 2008, 215n17. The effect of stroboscopic movement can be simply caused by the successive activation and deactivation of two sources of light in a dark environment. The two lights are placed in close vicinity to each other and activated at different speeds. Depending on the speed at which the lights are turned on and off, the observer can *see* a stroboscopic movement, that is, the impression that a shining object moves from a point A (turning on of one source of light) to point B (turning on of the other source of light placed nearby). The stroboscopic effect appears when the interval between the deactivation of the first source of light and the activation of the second one is approximately between 10 and 250 ms.

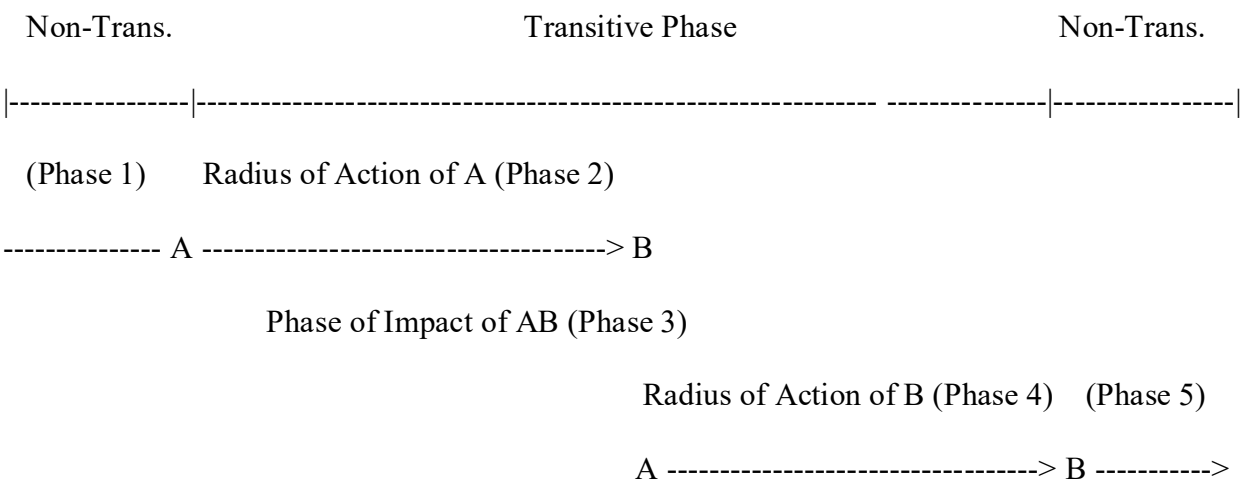
perception involving the presence of something absent, but without any correspondent in the sensible givens. An example of amodal completion process is that according to which the backside of an object is present to us without us actually seeing it. Another example, which bears essential significance for the constitution of the whole phenomenal world, is the amodal perception of the background of a perceived object. The figure-ground structure of experience is a case of amodal perception.[118] In light of the pivotal role that amodal perception plays in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and because of his recurrent reference, in the last working notes, to the work of Michotte, I shall briefly turn my focus to Merleau-Ponty's treatment of Michotte's examination of the perception of mechanic causality in his lecture course on the sensible world.

Michotte's experimental findings concerning the perception of mechanic movement prove especially insightful because of their implications for developing an adequate understanding of the dynamic of spatio-temporal phenomena and, correlatively, for advancing our understanding of the structuration of the sensible world in general. The apparent simplicity of Michotte's experimental setting should not deceive the reader about the profound questions that he is trying to address: is there a perception of causality, and how does it appear? How can we have experience of permanence and identity in objects while also perceiving changes in their properties? These are the central questions leading the investigations of Hume or Descartes into our experience of the natural world. Merleau-Ponty, however, finds in experimental psychology a new starting point to tackle the ontological implications that questions of permanence and change have for our understanding of natural reality. The reference to the authors of the psychology of perception is so pervasive in Merleau-Ponty's thinking that, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, he claims that "the

[118] Kanisza 1979, 6.

modern theory of perception is a phenomenology (Michotte) that unveils brute being, the 'vertical' world."[119] I now turn to Michotte's experiments on perceived movement.

The experimental studies conducted by Michotte have established that the "launching effect" we experience when two objects enter in contact with each other *does not* extend over the course of the whole movement of the two objects but is delimited by a "radius of action" or different "transitive periods" assigning causal action to one object over the other. In other words, Michotte showed that in the configuration of objects A and B there is a moment when object A, at a certain distance from object B, and moving at a certain speed, *enters* its "radius of action," that is, that period when the observer has the impression that object A will cause the movement of object B. When A *enters* the "transitive phase" of causal action it becomes the *impacting* (*choquant*) object. From now on, object A is phenomenally related to object B as the *impacted* (*choqué*) object, which takes up the role of an object moving in a movement that is *not* its own (what Michotte calls "phenomenal split" or "scission"). It is possible to give a rough outline of Michotte's experience on the launching effect, in this table:



[119] VI 254.

With this simple experiment, and by varying the direction, speed, or duration of contact between the objects involved, Michotte and his collaborators were able to establish that the reach of causal activity (the "radius of action") depends on the speed of the movement and on the temporal distance of the objects from their impacting phase.[120] These experiments, together with those on phenomenal permanence,[121] demonstrate that a perception of causality is in fact possible (against Hume), but also, and more importantly, they point to a renewed and more precise determination of the permanence and change defining the sensible world. Finally, these experiments provide the phenomenal data that ground the scientific categories of substance and causality, which, as a result, receive a phenomenal grounding and legitimation.

The experimental findings concerning the "launching effect" present us therefore with a case in which it is a certain organization of the things themselves that structure our perception of an event in terms of the imminence of something about to happen, that is, in terms of a futural event, in a way that is independent of protentional dynamics.[122] Merleau-Ponty comments on this point: "Already in the launching effect something analogous happens: the movement of the impacting body appears as a 'preparation' of the impact. Element of imminence. The movement of the impacting body is not 'for itself,' nor that of the impacted body […] Thus, retroaction of the end of the process upon the beginning ('preparation') entanglement of the beginning upon what follows. Entanglement of the change of place upon the figural aspects and reciprocally: movement,

[120] See on this point, Paracchini 2008, 220-221. Paracchini refers to further research by Michotte's collaborator Mariano Yéla who established that another crucial factor was to be introduced in order to understand the global perceptual event resulting in the impression of causality. The beginning of the "transitive phase" of A (A *as* impacting) and the end of the "transitive phase" of B (B *as* impacted) in fact was shown to depend on a *temporal* constant that is independent of the speed of the objects. A certain temporal *duration* relative to the moment of impact is responsible for the determination of the impression of causal action between two objects.
[121] For a reference to Michotte's studies of permanence, see Colonna 2014, 167-169.
[122] Paracchini 2008, 223.

i.e. becoming of a figure."[123] In other words, the experimental results regarding the "radius of action" offer the phenomenal evidence for the claim that a certain behavior of the things themselves – the "preparation" of an "imminence," "retroaction," the reciprocal "encroachment" of these moments – plays a pivotal role in bringing about a sense of the future and therefore a sense of the general "encroachment" of time. If it is quite superfluous to oppose the view that we operate certain anticipations on the basis of a continuous experience of the just-now in its relation to the now, however, this view must be integrated with the evidence of the facts that show, to put it in Paracchini's words, that it is "sensible reality itself that *imposes* 'in advance' its own givens in the course of the events."[124] The full sense of the future, i.e. of productivity and genuine generation, is inseparable from the configuration of the sensible givens themselves, something that Merleau-Ponty sometimes expresses by saying that they are "pregnant." The identity of a certain appearance over time is not the result of a subjective ensouling. The unreflected that enters reflection is already animated by a structure of its own, by an organization that is "endogenous."[125]

I shall conclude this chapter with a brief coda. In this chapter, we started to look closer at Merleau-Ponty's ontological proposal stemming from his lectures on nature. The first section especially focused on Merleau-Ponty's reading of the findings in contemporary physics. This reading issues into the preliminary formulation of a philosophy of structure. This philosophy shows important convergences with the discussions and claims in a recent contribution by the leading philosophers of science James Ladyman and Don Ross. These philosophers have advanced a position known as "ontic structural realism." This position maintains the primacy of relations

[123] "Déjà dans l'effet lanchement quelque chose d'analogue: le movement du corps choquant apparaît comme '*préparation'* du choc. Élément d'*imminence*. Le movement du choquant n'est pas 'pour son compte,' ni celui du choqué […] Donc *retroaction* de la fin du processus sur le début. ('*préparation'*) *empiétement* du début sur la suite. *Empiétement* du changement de lieu sur les caractères figuraux et réciproquement: movement devenir d'une figure." MSME 106.
[124] Paracchini 2008, 224.
[125] MSME, 97, 102, 107.

over that of substances or individuals. The discussion of this position is helpful to introduce us to the recast conception of nature that Merleau-Ponty sees emerging from the new physics. Merleau-Ponty dedicates part of his first course on nature to Whitehead who had already attempted to develop a metaphysics on the basis of the new scientific discoveries in physics. A brief discussion of Merleau-Ponty's reading Whitehead's work integrated the insights into a structural conception of nature. Following Whitehead's clues, the new physics carries out a kind of Copernican revolution that has philosophical implications for our understanding of the relations between organic and inorganic nature. The main implication is that the notion of life in nature is restored. In the final section, I show Merleau-Ponty's analysis of movement in his first lecture course at the Collège de France as laying the philosophical presuppositions for an account of nature as firmly rooted in living dynamics. I present Merleau-Ponty's analysis of movement in the lecture course on *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression* as elaborating a transcendental aesthetics integrating that of Husserl. This position consists essentially in problematizing the idea of an existence in space and time that is not "thinking" of existence, as Merleau-Ponty writes in his later working notes.[126] Before turning to the problems raised by the worldly rooting of the mind, which will occupy us in the last chapter, in the next chapter I begin to address the problem of a rooting of the mind by addressing the phenomenon of animal nature. This is also Merleau-Ponty's focus in his second lecture course on nature.

[126] See VI 246.

CHAPTER 5

NATURE AND LOGOS

§ 1. Introduction: Animal Nature

In the last chapter we saw that the philosophical meaning of the new physics consists in "putting in doubt the idea that every object has an individual existence."[1] The aim of this chapter is to advance and deepen this insight by looking at Merleau-Ponty's study of animality in the second course on nature.[2] In particular, this chapter will focus on the contribution of Jakob von Uexküll's biological theory of animal life. Uexküll's theory plays an important role in the intellectual history of the twentieth century, but emerges also as pivotal specifically in Merleau-Ponty's treatment of nature. The combination of findings from physical and biological theories in the first two courses on nature introduces us to the philosophical proposal that Merleau-Ponty begins to articulate in the third course on nature and in the contemporaneous draft of *The Visible and the Invisible*. This proposal pivots around the two moments of the *institution* and of a *psychoanalysis* of nature. The treatment of animal nature will therefore complete the preparatory work required to approach adequately the role of the problem of nature in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. We will see that Merleau-Ponty's analysis reads the experiences of material and living nature as having a deformalizing effect towards the actualism characterizing both causalistic and finalistic concepts of nature. This deformalization results in the elaboration of the notion of an invisible element in

[1] N 128.
[2] "Animality, the Human Body, Transition to Culture" (1957-58).

natural being. This elaboration consolidates the conception of an "intentionality within being," which is Merleau-Ponty's definition of operative intentionality in *The Visible and the Invisible*.[3]

Merleau-Ponty's study of animality in the lectures on "Nature" emerges as a study that opposes the way in which the relations between the human and the animal have been articulated by the philosophical anthropology of the tradition. Following a strategy that pays careful attention to the actual findings in the sciences, Merleau-Ponty develops his analysis by looking at a multitude of concrete examples from studies on the animal world. In Merleau-Ponty, this analysis broadens the scope of the phenomenological investigation by taking into account the intentionality of animals, as it emerges in Uexküll's theory of animal experience. The ontological question of animality is crucial, especially because it addresses the fundamental relations between experience and reality. Without having to share Uexküll's idea of a quasi-musical composition of the universe, Merleau-Ponty's study of animality develops rather the idea of nature as *feuillet* or "leaf" of being. This reading has important consequences for understanding the emergence of the human being in nature. The definition of nature as a "folio leaf" of being aims at exhibiting the human being as a face or fold within nature. In this theory, the tendency to posit humanity as the appearance of an interiority in the midst of or over against an exteriority is critiqued and recast. Merleau-Ponty quotes Teilhard de Chardin, who writes that "The human being has come silently."[4] This reference offers a sense of the conception of humanity that Merleau-Ponty develops in these lectures. This conception intends to rethink the idea of a rupture introduced by consciousness in being. This rupture has the effect to lead us to a yet renewed version of the "ontological diplopia" that, as we know, Merleau-Ponty traces back to Descartes and ultimately to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

[3] VI 297-298.
[4] *L'homme est entré sans bruit.* N 334, 339.

Rather, Merleau-Ponty wants to elaborate a "binocular philosophy"[5] that can think the appearance of the human being with consciousness otherwise than as a function of the objective body or as a form of absolute spirit "parading" in front of itself.[6] This new understanding of human consciousness, however, can only be achieved by a philosophy that blurs (*brouiller*) the separation between phenomenal and objective being.[7]

Let me clearly state right at the outset the kind of implications raised by the study of animal life and of life in general. The living being, as being characterized by a beginning (birth) and by the unfolding of a becoming (development), raises ontological concerns that have repercussions for the modern understanding of the relations of nature, human being, and God.[8] Merleau-Ponty speaks of a Judeo-Christian postulate of modern thought. The Judeo-Christian heritage of modern philosophy is the expression of an "abstract philosophy that describes Being as emerging from Nothing."[9] On the contrary, the phenomenon of the living sheds light on the fundamental fact of an "anteceding being" (*être antécédent*).[10] Modern biology states that *omnis cellula e cellula*, i.e. everything that has an order stems from something that is endowed with order.[11] There follows an immediate consequence for our understanding of the relations of nature, human being, and God,

[5] N 180.
[6] Merleau-Ponty critiques the (Hegelian) idea of consciousness as "redoubling" (*redoublement*, N 180 or *reduplication*, N 333) of being, whereby "consciousness witnesses its own manifestation in the exterior, this kind of 'parade' with return to itself." (N 337) The same claim is made earlier in the course on nature where Merleau-Ponty wants to renounce to the idea of the human being as "parade of the asbolute in front of itself." (N 180) and to the idea of a "pure exterior" doubled (*doublé*) by a "pure interior" (N 304). Merleau-Ponty speaks of "doubling" of reality also in N 206, 208. For consciousness as function of the objective body, see VI 253.
[7] N 349.
[8] Colonna refers to Jean Wahl, who highlights the two moments of the "pre-reflexive" and of "becoming" as the two themes characterizing the contemporary process of renewal of metaphysics. See Colonna 2014, 51.
[9] N 180. By the words of the devil, Valéry's poem *Ébauche d'un serpent* indicates this postulate very clearly, as well as its consequences, i.e. the unintelligibility of the process of creation itself. The devil wants us to believe that in the idea of God himself there is implied the idea of the "temptation of the Nothing." See Beaufret 1984, 22. These lines of Valéry's poem capture nicely the modern understanding of the relations between nature, human being, and God. In a provocative way of speaking, if measured according to the idea of Valéry's poem, modern philosophy would appear here as a devilish philosophy.
[10] N 180.
[11] Uexküll 1973, 5.

of the relations between nature and spirit or, more formally, of the object and the subject. The idea of a manifestation of the world that proceeds from God down to the human in order to issue into nature is deeply transformed. "Naturalism, humanism, theism: these three terms have lost all clear signification in our culture, all these conceptions keep transitioning into one another."[12] Yet, Merleau-Ponty detects elements exhibiting the mutual relationship between nature, the human being, and God, not only in our culture, but already in the tradition. Christianity, Merleau-Ponty writes, reveals an "ontological mystery" in the idea of a God whose last words are, "Why have you forsaken me?"[13] Note also that in the inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Merleau-Ponty claimed that a God who has made Himself into a man, can no longer be thought without this passage through humanity. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty traces the wavering of Cartesian philosophy between an ontology of the object and an ontology of the existent being to the project of reducing the concepts of nature, God, and the human being under the sole denominator of being.[14] Descartes' philosophy is for this reason "unstable" because it is "undermined by the reference to a nothing that it never stops negating, but that it also does not stop thinking, as if there was a being of the nothing [*un être du néant*]."[15] Thus, as I will show shortly, what is at stake in the lectures on animality is, first, the determination of the order in which a certain being is already in play and working between the animal and the environment (the *Gestalt* is such being) and, second, the determination of the precise meaning of this relationship as "dialectical."[16]

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[12] N 181. A paradigmatic case in modern culture of this continuous transitioning could be found in the work of Felix Ravaisson.

[13] N 180. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty links Leibniz's *Theodicy* to the project of Christian theology of integrating the conception of a necessary Being with the unmotivated emergence of "brute Being." This project, following Merleau-Ponty, issues into a conception that makes "brute Being" dependent on the necessary Being, thereby forsaking the idea of a "hidden God" (*Deus absconditus*) in favor of that of God as what is real in the highest sense (*ens realissimus*). See VI 264.

[14] N 176.

[15] N 172.

[16] Merleau-Ponty highlights the two aspects of the *Gestalt* and of "dialectic" relationship as the two moments defining modern biology at the beginning of his lecture on animality. See N 187-188.

These are in outline the wide-ranging implications opened by the study of living nature. Merleau-Ponty finds the clues to determine more precisely the idea of "antecedent being" in the studies carried out by G. E. Coghill and A. Gesell about embryological development.[17] These studies, like that about the development of the motor functions of the *axolotl* salamander by Coghill in 1929, challenge the theory of the living as machine.[18] The new developmental biology stresses the potential and temporal features of the organism in interaction with its environment beyond its actual functioning.[19] In other words, the organism carries with itself a productivity and a generativity that is captured by the notion of behavior as thrusting movement that engenders the anatomical development that, in turn, enables further behavioral activities.[20] The anatomical determinations are therefore inseparable from and rather fully integrated with the animal motoric behavior. As in the case of physical objects, the difficulty in adequately articulating this situation lies in a form of fallacy of misplaced concreteness (Whitehead): the functional-physiological explanation works for us who have already observed what certain anatomical features will do once developed, yet the same explanation is alone insufficient if we limit the focus on what the animal is actually doing right now as it develops these anatomical features.[21] Coghill's study, therefore, sheds light upon a totality, that of the adapted organism, which does not appear in the actual anatomical parts taken at a single moment in time, but which is anticipated, as it were in outline, in the total behavior of the animal at a certain point of its embryological development. Thus, a

[17] N 188-200.
[18] N 201.
[19] N 193. See also N 191: "Le développement embryiologique réalise progressivement des parties individuelles (anatomiquement et fonctionnellement), en même temps que la conduite d'ensemble envahit la péripherie du corps."
[20] For some exemplary expositions of this process with regard to Coghill's study, see Mazis 2000, 235 and Morris 2018, 212-216.
[21] "If we read in the first movement the act of swimming, we fall in the retrospective illusion that makes us project what is yet to come into the past, or to double the sensible world with an intellectual world without first understanding." (N 203)

fundamental reference to the future is here in play. The living organism exhibits "the imminence of what is going to follow in that which has already begun."[22]

We recognize in this claim a reading similar to that offered in the studies on movement in the first lecture series on the sensible world. As a matter of fact, Merleau-Ponty himself draws this connection at the end of his analyses of Coghill and Gesell on animal development. The reference to the perception of movement in the "Nature" lectures returns to Michotte's analysis already mentioned in the "Sensible World" lectures. The observable appearances of developmental change and objectual movement exhibit both the imminence of a future.[23] The dynamic of morphology exhibits structural moments such as anticipation, orientation, spiral development, intertwining, asymmetry, fluctuation of equilibrium and disequilibrium, and tendency towards an optimal state.[24] The same general structural moments pertain now also to the dynamic of perceived movement. I already highlighted Merleau-Ponty's description of Michotte's analysis of the launching effect: we observe preparation, imminence, retroaction or feedback, intertwining, and the presence of a radius of action. In the nature lectures, Merleau-Ponty can state lucidly that:

> [m]ovement perceived in its nascent state is always a movement that goes somewhere […] is a movement that goes from its point of arrival to its point of departure. This is not only an already made trajectory, not

[22] N 205. Merleau-Ponty speaks with reference to Coghill's study of a "référence à l'avenir" of the embryo in N 193.
[23] Morris describes developmental change as "tension interior to the organism's 'level' as configuring a developmental field." (Morris 2018, 212). Mazis similarly points out that the auto-regulating transformations enveloping the animal and its environment are "processes moving by fluctuations through moments of equilibrium and disequilibrium […] there are levels of organization of the environment and organism […] an unfolding field in which there is this folding back of one into the other." (Mazis 2000, 235). Both Morris and Mazis point out the same result of these sections. For Morris, organismic totality and perceived movement "are not to be understood as translation along an already determinate trajectory." (Morris 2018, 212). Mazis writes similarly that both the organism and the phenomena of the percetual field "get us to see [that] there is no need for an underlying ground for either animality or world, if we can envision a more global relation among multiple factors, in which there is not a juxtaposition of being and non-being, but rather the presence of a given lack that gives rise to emergences that provide an evolving, self-regulating sense of structure or form (N 206-210)." (Mazis 2000, 236).
[24] These are the seven principles of "dynamic morphology" given by Gesell and reproduced by Merleau-Ponty in N 198-199.

> even a trajectory that will be, but a trajectory that is going to follow. It is the grasp of the imminence of what is going to follow in what has already begun. Imminence is the character of the structure of perceived movement. The totality grasped is not beyond space and time; it is perceived as the enjambing of what crosses space and time.[25]

We thus discover that the living organism, analogously to perceived movement, exhibits a totality that is not a "totality by summation" (i.e. as purely actual), but that is neither a "transcendent" totality (i.e. as purely ideal), since it is tied to specific spatio-temporal and material conditions.[26] Rather, in the context of the new biology, Merleau-Ponty speaks of "a totality [that] is no longer describable in physiological terms; it appears as emergent."[27] The problem of life thus raises the question of how to understand the coming about of totality as its defining feature.[28] For Gesell the status of the living form or totality is the "fundamental enigma of science."[29] Merleau-Ponty echoes Gesell's concern when he claims that the question of how to understand such a totality "is the philosophical question that raise Coghill's experiments. This question is at the center of this course on nature and perhaps at the center of all philosophy."[30] The solution to this question will find its final statement, Merleau-Ponty says, only at the end of the course.

In this chapter, I will approach the solution that Merleau-Ponty formulates in his second course on nature. In order to do so, I will mainly focus on Uexküll's theoretical biology and his notion of *Umwelt*. The reference to Uexküll's descriptions takes up an important place in Merleau-Ponty's second course on nature. Furthermore, Uexküll is one of the most philosophically inclined

[25] N 205.
[26] N 204.
[27] N 194.
[28] "La forme ou la totalité, voilà donc le caractère du vivant." N 200.
[29] N 200.
[30] "Comment dès lors, comprendre cette relation de la totalité aux parties, quel statut faut-il donner à la totalité? Telle est la question philosophique que posent les experiences de Coghill, question qui est au centre de ce cours sur l'idée de Nature et peut-être de toute philosophie." N 194.

authors among modern biologists. This is true if we consider especially two aspects pertaining to his work. First, Uexküll's theory of *Umwelt* avoids either a reductive materialism of random and mechanical interactions or any sort of vitalism, in which determinate goals are embedded within nature. This aspect aligns with Merleau-Ponty's strategy in the lectures on animality and it also brings Uexküll's theory close to the conceptions pivoting around the notion of *Gestalt*, which is characterized by eschewing the classical dichotomy of materialism versus vitalism.[31] Second, Uexküll situates his project explicitly in reference to transcendental philosophy, which he however expands in two directions that clearly introduce the notion of behavior in modern biology and that are of equally crucial significance for Merleau-Ponty's own project: i.e. sensorial experience and intersubjective life (interanimality). Finally, it should be noted that not only Merleau-Ponty, but other influential philosophers of the twentieth-century have repeatedly been inspired by Uexküll's approach to biology.[32]

§ 2.a. Behavior and Consciousness

In *Theoretical Biology* (1920), Uexküll observed that the idea of considering a machine to be like a living being would encounter general dissent whereas the idea of comparing living beings to machines has certainly many supporters.[33] The critical target of Uexküll is the machine theory about living organisms. This theory puts forth a form of mechanicism that posits a ready-made

[31] See N 187.
[32] Buchanan (2008) offers a good account of this history by focusing in particular on the influence exerted by Uexküll on the work of Heidegger, Cassirer, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze and Guattari. Carbone points out that Merleau-Ponty's new ontological proposal is presented "in an especially enlightening way" through the analysis of Uexküll's theories (2004). Hamrick/van der Veken (2011) consider Uexküll to exert an important influence on Merleau-Ponty's views of life and nature. Other authors have stressed the relevance of Uexküll for deepening the idea of the intentional act in phenomenology by his theory of animal experience (Lindén 2011) or for achieving an understanding of the notion of "form-of-life" (Agamben 2014).
[33] Uexküll 1973, 145.

structure involving the local co-functioning of certain isolated elements right at the germinal state of the living being.[34] It goes without saying that this theory rejects any form of vitalism. Merleau-Ponty sees a form of bad faith operating in the modern interest for machines. In fact, he notes, this interest hides a fascination for the resemblance that machines have with living beings. This interest owes much to the fascination for the appearance of living reality that machines may exhibit. Merleau-Ponty remarks that in the seventeenth century there was a parallel interest for automatons and for the study of perspectivism. In both cases, however, the interest was spurred by the appearance of a living dynamism that both automatons and perspective representation caused in the observer.[35] Moreover, if Kant says in his anthropology that animals are like things (*Sachen*) that can be actioned and handled at one's own discretion (*mit denen man nach Belieben schalten und walten kann*), Malebranche's claim is revelatory when he says that he would have not hit a stone as he hit his dog, the reason being that the stone did not suffer.[36] The reference to Uexküll's observation is therefore interesting for our purposes because Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of cybernetics (the science of machines) counters precisely the tendencies of machine theorists and the bad faith of the moderns with respect to their interest in machines. He posits that the study of machines exhibits features pertaining to living organisms by highlighting especially the ideas of information and communication in machine theory. The self-regulatory, responsive, and feedback driven behavior we observe even in quite rudimentary machines exhibits dynamics that may

[34] This is in fact the definition of the "dogma" of evolution theorists given by Uexküll, "Immer wieder versuchten die Evolutionisten, das Dogma von einem im Keime von Anfang an vorhandenen unsichtbaren Gefüge festzuhalten, indem sie Erbschaftspartikelchen voraussetzten, die in irgendeiner Weise miteinander räumlich verbunden sein sollten." Uexküll 1973, 218-219. This dogma is still very much present in our times. Richard Dawkins defines the individual organism of a mammal in terms of a "survival machine" in *The Selfish Gene* (1989).
[35] N 219.
[36] N 219.

provide models helpful for thematizing the processes of feedback and integration of information in living organisms. In other words, cybernetics has much relevance for biology.[37]

The most damaging consequence of the machine theory of living beings is that, by making animals into pure objects, this theory implies a suppression of the *subject* – although, as we already know from Merleau-Ponty's remarks, the subject does not really disappear but is only displaced and interpreted as *Kosmostheorós* separated from the universe of pure things.[38] The consequence of the machine theory of the living is however fatal for biology. This theory eliminates the idea of non-human perception and it interprets the world perceived by humans as a fictitious domain of secondary qualities. As a result, the machine theory reduces the whole biological enterprise to a physico-chemical investigation.[39] Yet, the living being, Merleau-Ponty remarks, is never simply identical to a distribution of facts that could be formalized by fixing combinatorial possibilities that are valid once and for all.[40] By holding this position, however, the machine theory empties biology as a science of all autonomy.[41] Many of the considerations of Uexküll's *Theoretical Biology* are meant to be a response to this theory.

To this effect, it is remarkable that Uexküll presents his project of rehabilitation of the autonomous status of biology as explicitly a Kantian enterprise. He summarizes this enterprise in the claim that "all reality is subjective appearance [*Alle Wirklichkeit ist subjective Erscheinung*]."[42]

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[37] "La cybernétique tend à devenir une théorie du vivant et du langage." N 212. This approach to cybernetics is not as strange as it may sound at first. The philosopher of biology Daniel J. Nicholson, for instance, argues for a theoretical use of the machine concept of the organism. See Morris 2018, 69, 133, 142.
[38] N 141, 181. See also VI 32.
[39] For Uexküll the putative elimination of the "content signs" (*Inhaltszeichen*) of perception has the only purpose to bring the whole of reality to a common denominator which alone allows the "calculating manipulability" (*rechnerische Durcharbeitung*) of reality. See Uexküll 1973, 126-127. In relation to Descartes, who maintains the idea of the animal and of the human body as machines, E. A. Burtt similarly remarks that Descartes' criterion to establish an element of certainty in our experience is oriented towards "mathematical handling," in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (New York: Anchor Books 1954), 117.
[40] N 217.
[41] Uexküll 1973, 7. Cf. also Buchanan 2008, 14-16.
[42] Uexküll 1973, 9.

This Kantian approach, however, undergoes an important expansion in Uexküll's hands. Uexküll himself informs us about the two respects in which Kant's Copernican revolution needs to be advanced. He writes that "The task of biology consists in expanding in two directions the results of Kant's investigations: (1) by considering the part played by our body, and especially by our sense-organs and central nervous system, and (2) by studying the relations of other subjects (the animals) to objects."[43] Yet this expansion is not without consequences for the Kantian transcendental project that aims at determining the conditioning factors of human experience and the knowledge of reality. The two aspects in which the Kantian project needs to be further developed, according to Uexküll, bear significant weight for our understanding of the subjectivity involved in experience. The sensing aspect of the subject's own body targets precisely that aspect that in the tradition of Western philosophy has often been associated with the animal dimension of human existence.[44] Correlatively, the notion of reality as subjective appearance is recast in light of our experience of animals and of *their* way to direct themselves towards objects. It is in this context of expansion of Kant's investigations that Uexküll's well-known idea of *Umwelt* is developed. The theory of animal experience that this notion is meant to capture reveals an ontological dimension that, even if explicitly located within the framework of a Kantian approach, has precisely the effect of changing the implicit anthropological presuppositions under which Kant's project is carried out. In other words, Kant's *Critic of Pure Reason* is here integrated with the project of a *Theoretical Biology*, which must deepen the transcendental presupposition that knowledge can only be human knowledge.[45]

[43] Uexküll 1973, 9-10.
[44] Buchanan 2008, 3.
[45] See on this points and for a parallel line of interpretation, Lindén 2011, 96-97.

In Uexküll's work, the notion of *Umwelt* is entrusted with the task of further specifying the transcendental idea of conditioning subjective factors in the context of a theory of animal experience. In this connection it is worth noticing that Uexküll explicitly claims that "there are as many worlds as there are subjects."[46] Instead of leading us right into a helpless form of relativism, however, this claim, along with the notion of *Umwelt* that buttresses it, introduces us to the most interesting and profound aspect of Uexküll's ideas, i.e. the relational character of the world of appearance and of living nature in general. This aspect of relation, which is found to be in play whenever we encounter a living organism, is not reached through an inner intuition of one's own activity or through introspection. Uexküll eschews a certain kind of psychology that is too at ease in implanting human meanings in the world of animals, thereby foreclosing the possibility to gain an understanding both of the specific nature of living organisms other than human beings and also of the animal nature of human beings themselves. There may very well be aspects of animal life that we do not and cannot know. Yet, it would be an illegitimate assumption to consider *any* subjective content of animal experience as in principle inaccessible to us or, even worse, as not existing. The extension of the reality of lived experience to the animal domain seems justified by the fact that we do experience the various animal modes of relating to the world – and to us – as we do experience the various human ways of addressing the world and ourselves. But the negation of subjective contents of experience in animals often follows the negation of subjective contents of experience in other humans. Descartes is an example of this twofold conclusion.[47] Instead,

[46] "Demgegenüber behauptet der Biologe, dass es ebensoviel Welten gibt als Subjekte vorhanden sind." Uexküll 1973, 95

[47] Cf. Fink in ND 214.

Uexküll's strategy is to focus on the expressions of the animals that can be perceived by an observer and from there to draw conclusions about the organization of the animal.[48]

There are two interrelated implications in this way of proceeding that Merleau-Ponty latches onto right at the beginning of his reading of Uexküll's work. The first is that Uexküll's idea of biology as "doctrine of the organization" (*die Lehre von der Organisation*) does not start from a prejudged notion of a consciousness filled with representations. Rather, this doctrine assigns any definition of consciousness to the empirical study of the *behavior* of the animal. Especially in light of his early work on behavior, where Uexküll is never directly quoted,[49] it is significant to stress that Merleau-Ponty designates Uexküll in the "Nature" lectures as anticipating the notion of behavior.[50] Second, it is only the focus on the outer expressions of the animal or on its behavior that can validate any claim about the organization of animal experience and therefore also of consciousness as *one possibility* of such organization. This is a crucial point, also and especially in relation to the task of defining human consciousness. The behavior of the animal circumscribes an *Umwelt*: the latter is "bound to a certain dwelling-world," Uexküll writes at the beginning of his *Theory of Meaning*.[51] The *Umwelt*, Merleau-Ponty echoes in the lecture, is a "surrounding of behavior" (*entourage du comportement*). That is, *Umwelt* is "the aspect of the world in itself that the animal addresses, that exists for the behavior of an animal, but not necessarily for its

[48] "Die Biologie hat sich nur mit den für den Beobachter wahrnehmbaren Äußerungen der Tiere zu befassen und aus ihnen auf die Organisation zu schliessen." Uexküll 1973, 215

[49] In SC, Merleau-Ponty quotes Uexküll indirectly through an article by F. Buytendijk, "Les Différences essentielles des fonctions psychique chez l'homme et les animaux," *Cahiers de philosophie de la nature* 4 (1930), 131. Merleau-Ponty's quote occurs in SC 172, where he takes up the descriptive idea of the melody: "the unfurling of an *Umwelt* is a melody, a melody that is singing itself." See Buchanan 2008, 122-130, 133 and Carbone 2004, 64n8.

[50] N 220. Adolf Portmann points out that Uexküll is not the founder of *Verhaltensforschung*. Portmann however adds that Uexküll's research exerted an important influence on those authors in Germany who in the 1930s developed this direction of work. Behavioral research is the result of the convergence of manifold sources. Uexküll's own work emerges from this research environment and contributes significantly to it. See Portmann's "Introduction" to Uexküll 1956, 11-13.

[51] Uexküll 2010, 139.

consciousness."[52] Animal behavior therefore precedes consciousness and the latter emerges rather as a form established as a result of a particular behavior, a quite peculiar one at that: "This behavioral activity oriented toward an *Umwelt* begins well before the invention of consciousness…Consciousness must appear as an institution, as a type of behavior."[53] As a result, the philosophy of consciousness must ultimately appear inadequate to elucidate the possibility of a "structural ontology" or an "ontology of relations."[54] Only a study of behavior can elucidate the possibility of this ontology and thereby also eschew the dangers of relativism.

Thus, by starting with the study of the animal's behavior, the Kantian starting point regarding knowledge can finally be recast in a context that accounts for the multifarious manifestations of life. These considerations shed light upon the actual scope of Uexküll's expansion of the Kantian approach with respect to the subject of experience. Consider the conclusion that Uexküll draws from the biological analysis carried out in the first three chapters of his *Theoretical Biology*. The morphological study of the animal (such as the study of the spatial distribution of its sense organs), exhibits a regularity that we recognize in our own incarnated human form. The interesting claim in this conclusion is not that the analogous regularity in the morphology and behavior of another living being works as a premise for us to draw conclusions about its status as a subject. Rather the salient point is that the regularities of behavior in the animal are an indication of the fact that the appearance of our surrounding world cannot be limited to conditioning factors relative to our human subjectivity alone. In the following I reproduce the whole important passage,

[52] N 220.
[53] N 220.
[54] N 299. See also Buchanan 2008, 36.

> When we recognize the regularity that we come upon in the forms of our own attention (and that is the determining factor for the world of appearance of our own subject) not only in the formation of our own body but also in the formation of the body of alien subjects, about whose forms of attention we do not know anything, then this is an indication that the form-giving activity [*Formgebung*] of the perceptual cues is not only conditioned by our subject, but rather it is an intersubjective activity. Thereby we are here on the way to intuit the workings of a nature pointing to a unity which is above even our own apperception, in which we usually discern the last instance of unity.[55]

If a world of non-human perception is integrated in the unity of *our own* perceived world, then there arises the question about the kind of relations that are in play in this inter-animal world. The next section will address this question by taking a closer look at Uexküll's theoretical biology and his notion of *Umwelt*. The reference to Uexküll allows Merleau-Ponty to begin to articulate and generalize the ontological aspects emerging from the study of embryological and morphological development in the animal organism. In particular, Uexküll's theory of *Umwelt* does two things. First, it makes explicit the role and stratification of expressive meaning right into the animal world. Second, it enables a dramatic expansion of the integrated circuit of organism and environment into the new ontological proposal Merleau-Ponty is after. According to this proposal, humans are no longer placed on a separate level of being than the rest of nature, but, by way of their lived body, integrally part of the circuit defining living nature. The following considerations about Uexküll's theory will thus introduce us to Merleau-Ponty's idea of an ontological mutation taking place in post-Cartesian philosophy, a mutation that the concept of nature helps bringing to light.[56]

[55] Uexküll 1973, 107. The question about a form of unity of experience that is above our human apperception should not be confused with the question about whether an alien form of apperception, such as that of animals, can become manifest in our world of appearance in the shape of an objective factor of nature. The latter question, Uexküll writes, was addressed by Hans Driesch and answered positively. See Uexküll 1973, 155.
[56] N 265.

§ 2.b. The Artisan Scheme of Ontology and the Notion of *Umwelt*

The studies of embryological and morphological development presented at the beginning of the second course on nature describe the animal organism as a general form of integrated behavior with the innumerable variations of a dynamically structured surrounding world. This integrated behavior is for Uexküll the "inexplicable something" (*etwas Unerklärbares*) that makes the study of the living both so difficult and at the same time so attractive.[57] Uexküll advances the idea of a "conformity with plan" (*Planmäßigkeit*) inhering in living nature.[58] This is the object that biology is entrusted to study. The idea of a "conformity with plan" captures "the marvelous fact […] that in the outside world certain features are available in limited number for which the animal, if it wants to flourish, must develop certain counter-features in its bodily structure that must fit together with the features of the outer world like joints (*Fugen*) and pivots (*Zapfen*)."[59] The adequate understanding of living nature depends on clarifying this marvelous fact. The main difficulty on the way to achieve this clarification, however, remains the artificialism of the classical concepts that have been traditionally applied to the explanation of living phenomena.

In *Theoretical Biology*, Uexküll distinguishes living organisms from machines by saying that the former are characterized by a "centrifugal" while the latter by a "centripetal" mode of existence. He writes that morphology shows us that the triggering of living processes "cannot stem

[57] Uexküll 1973, 134.
[58] Uexküll 1973, 292ff. This term is pivotal in Uexküll's philosophical biology. By "philosophical biology" I mean a conception of life that is grounded in empirical givens but that also lays open on this basis the fundamental features defining both life and the study of life. The idea of a philosophical biology is made explicit by Uexküll himself when he writes that "Biology wants only to point to factors that are present in the subject beyond sensorily given phenomenality and which should serve to clarify the interrelations of the world of the senses." Uexküll 2010, 159.
[59] Uexküll 1973, 320. Compare also what Uexküll writes few lines down: "We have to put up with this fact: on the one hand, the features of the outer world, which do not exert any orienting influence and, on the other hand, the living germ cell, which does not have any organs that would be able to communicate the knowledge of these features. Bur certainly we observe how the germ cell with full resolution produces certain counter-features that are integrated into a group of certain features of the outside world. We can leave this problem aside as unsolvable…" Ibid. 321.

from an agent factor located spatially outside the material because the construction of the living being is accomplished centrifugally and not centripetally as in the case of things."[60] This claim condenses in a nutshell the critical target of Uexküll's theory. Let me call this target the "artisan scheme of ontology."[61] Uexküll delimits his idea of "conformity with plan" against the mechanistic theories of stimulus-response as well as the vitalistic theory of animal behavior as governed by an entelechy or end-goal exerting attraction upon the activity of the animal. In spite of its opposition to the modern machine theory of living beings, also a traditional version of teleology must still understand the organism in terms of a machine when it conceives the process of formation as the agency of outer forces upon a certain material. Thus, the conception of a machine governed by an entelechy does not change the ontological status of the machine into that of a living thing.[62] Merleau-Ponty sees this point clearly when he writes that "teleology understood as the conforming of the event to a concept shares the same fate as mechanism – these are both concepts of *artificialism*." Then he concludes, "[n]atural production has to be understood in some other way."[63]

The artisan scheme, which goes back to Aristotle, is based on the idea of a material (*hylé*) that is indeterminate but that can take up different forms. This scheme emerges as an especially powerful interpretive tool due to our tendency to have a formative behavior with respect to things. For Aristotle, as we know, the artisan scheme had an explicative purpose according to his method of making more accessible *for us* what is most difficult to understand *in itself*. Yet, if this hermeneutic feature is screened off, then we encounter again a case of misplaced concreteness by reducing what is most difficult for us to understand to the way in which we usually speak about it. In this case, the teleological approach would not differ essentially from a mechanistic approach

[60] Uexküll 1973, 232. See also Uexküll 2010, 156.
[61] Lindén 2011, 102n14.
[62] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's reference to the work of E. S. Russell in N 238.
[63] RC 117.

and this is precisely the core of Uexküll's critique. As a result, the formation of structure in plants and animals, understood as a centrifugal activity, is not accounted for. The *telos* in organic nature is not to be placed outside the organism but it receives an orientation from within while always remaining rooted to specific local conditions, as pathological cases due to cutting or grafting show.[64] Uexküll writes, "No effect can come from the *Umwelt*, that is, from the inorganic medium, which would prompt the germ cell to take a determinate direction during its formation process. We cannot assume a direct exchange of influence between the germ cell and the *Umwelt* as it is presupposed by the theory of goal-pursuing."[65] To be sure, this is not to say that the *Umwelt* does not play a role in the development of the organism, quite the contrary. This critique points rather to a more precise appreciation of the notion of *Umwelt* and of the global behavior of the animal towards it.

By claiming that the developing organism is not in a direct exchange with the *Umwelt*, Uexküll's point is that organism and *Umwelt* rather grow together. In contrast to the conceptions that place an image or representation in the consciousness of the animal, or that take the animal as a material substance, or, again, in contrast to the idea of a goal exerting a force of attraction on the animal, Uexküll writes, "The plans that rule living beings are rather active and operative."[66] The way in which the organism produces and comes to have a cohesive relation to its environments, as

[64] A flatworm is able to regenerate the terminal parts of its body when cut. When the planarian worm is cut in the middle, however, it can develop two heads upon one tail. See Uexküll 1973, 315-316. The grafting of a piece of epidermis from a tadpole into the germ cell of a triton at the place where the triton will develop a mouth results in a triton with the soft dental structure of a frog rather than with the triton's own hard dental structure. Uexküll 2010, 152-153, 193. Cf. N 237-238.

[65] See Uexküll 1973, 318-319. "Von der Umwelt, namentlich dem anorganischen Medium, kann aber gar keine Wirkung ausgehen, die den Keim veranlassen würde, einen bestimmten Weg während seiner Ausbildung einzuschlagen. Eine direkte Wechselwirkung, wie sie die Lehre von der Zielstrebigkeit voraussetzt, kann zwischen Keim und Umwelt nicht angenommen werden."

[66] Uexküll 1973, 301.

if with joints and pivots, is essentially *active*.[67] Uexküll conceives this activity, as well as the natural orientation and production involved in it, not as a fact of the animal nor as a fact of the *Umwelt*, but as the activity binding both the animal and the *Umwelt*, so that "the one could not exist without the other."[68] This means that the organism is essentially relational. As long as it exists, the organism is never a completely self-contained entity nor it can ever achieve identity with some atomic actuality. Animal embryogenesis, morphology, and behavior show that something is at work in the life of the animal that never matches the pure actuality of a certain situation.

Uexküll expresses this fundamental insight by means of the notion of "functional cycle" (*Funktionskreis*). Reduced to basic formal terms, the functional cycle describes "the connection of subject to object."[69] Uexküll uses the image of a pincer movement in which two moments link the animal to its surrounding world: with one arm of the pincer, the animal is related to the environment by "perception marks"; with the other arm, the animal comports itself towards these perceptual features in the way specific to its kind by way of "effect marks."[70] As a result, the *Umwelt* encompasses the articulation of objective factors (stimulus-like factors) and of subjective factors (states of organism) in one single physiological-perceptual total process.

[67] Morris (2018) sketches a brief critique of teleosemantics, a position that aims at establishing some positive phenomena so as to match this phenomena with a current function of the organism. Teleosemantics could thus be considered an inverted version of Baer's theory of *Zielstrebigkeit*. Teleosemantics posits the condition that the organism needs to satisfy not as a target remotely guiding its development, but as a retroactive factor determining the process of natural selection (the living organism lives because it develops a certain appropriate function that matches a certain natural factor). Morris however stresses a point that Uexküll makes very clear everywhere in his work, namely that the organism is itself "a selective and orienting *agency* over and above criteria of survival." See Morris 2018, 253n18, 71-72. What Morris adds, by looking at Merleau-Ponty, is the negative aspect that is implied by the living agency in order to be an *agency* and that has to do ultimately with the temporality affecting the living. I return to this point in the conclusion of the chapter.

[68] "Eines wird ohne das andere nicht bestehen können." Uexküll 1973, 96.

[69] Uexküll 2010, 49.

[70] Uexküll 2010, 49.

Uexküll's descriptive scheme allows us to discern the elements that in the life of an animal work as unifying factors, i.e. the factors which make up the *Umwelt* of the animal. Uexküll's speaks of "primal images" or "archetypes" (*Urbild*).[71] Depending on the animal under consideration, we will find a diversified scale of *Umwelten* with more or less unified character. Thus, for instance, the jellyfish exhibits a non-unified responsive behavior while the ameba shows too much responsivity and integration with its environment. Higher animals, on the other hand, show a much clearer integration of perceptual and actional functions with respect to their environment.[72] Moreover, at the level of higher animals, instincts and outer appearance outline a complex reference system that more clearly than the mechanical behavior of some lower animals exhibits the orientation of animal life towards meaning formation, symbolic exchange, and interpretation.[73]

Instead of reducing the interpretation of the animal world to its more mechanical forms, which give rise to the impression of a one-to-one correspondence between the animal and the environment, Uexküll's ethological philosophy discovers that the behavior of the animal is not framed by the constraints of a ready-made physico-chemical universe. The relation of the living organism with its surrounding world is insufficiently understood in terms of a fixed concatenation of events. The relation to an *Umwelt* is rather the relation to certain carriers of meaning, such as the odor function in the tick, but also the categorial function in the human. These carriers of meaning define the specific modes of belongingness of the animals to reality. This result allows us to indicate the real philosophical contribution stemming from Uexküll's biology: his conception liberates the living being from any instrumental consideration, that is, from any identification of the project to understand living beings with the necessity to achieve an explanatory account in

[71] See Uexküll 2010, 159, 167.
[72] N 221-227. For a clear summative account of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Uexküll's study of lower and higher animals, cf. Mazis 2000, 237-238.
[73] "L'*Umwelt* est de moins en moins orienté vers un but et, de plus en plus, interprétation de symboles." (N 231).

terms of causes and effects. At the same time, even if not pursued explicitly by Uexküll himself, this insight has the implicit effect of challenging the identification of reason with an instrumental faculty.[74]

§ 2.c. Uexküll's Copernican Revolution

There are two main implications of the conception of living nature according to the notion of "conformity to plan" that I would like to highlight. First, this conception can be read as a reply to the contradictory tendencies of the Cartesian dream of the animal-machine. According to this idea, the animal as machine is the result of a process of assemblage that is purely due to chance. In this conception there lies the idea of an integral mathematization of reality, which presupposes in turn the idea of the possibility of gaining a perfect insight into the workings of nature as a whole. The latter idea, moreover, is based on the assumption of an "Archimedean" point as absolute perspective outside of nature. Ultimately these assumptions are linked to the modern conception regarding the possibility of interfering and controlling the events of nature, which is only possible if there is rigorous knowledge of the causes of natural phenomena. This conception can be considered as a particularly paroxysmal version of the artisan scheme of ontology, whereby the formative character of our relationship with the world takes on a specific utilitarian spin. As we can see, the theory of the animal-machine does not reject the teleological worldview, but represents

[74] Hamrick and van der Veken show that Schelling was already aware of this point when they say that "On [Schelling's] view, eighteenth-century thinkers mistakenly identified understanding with explanation and Reason with intellect, such that Nature was transformed into a detached Object for investigation and manipulation. In other words, the reduction of understanding to explanation and Reason to intellect lay at the origin of the ontology of the object." Hamrick/van der Veken 2011, 131-132. According to these authors, Bergson assigns mechanism and finalism to a "conceptual thinking that functions by means of instrumental rationality – forming and testing plans and fitting means to ends." Hamrick/van der Veken 2011, 153-154. See also the section "Instrumentalité et raison" in Lindén 2011, 92-95.

a rather refined improvement on this worldview by raising a specific human behavior towards reality to ontological eminence for the definition of the whole of reality.

A second implication has to do with the relational aspect of the "conformity to plan" anticipated above and that here begins to be substantiated. If, on the one hand, Uexküll claims that the belief in the existence of one and only one world is an illusion,[75] on the other hand, he highlights the fact that, "like the spider's threads," each subject spins out "its relations to certain qualities of things and weaves them into a solid web, which carries its existence."[76] At the end of his *Theoretical Biology*, Uexküll draws the conclusion of his theory of the *Umwelt*, one that was already implied in his adherence to the Kantian idea of the subjective character of all experience. If there are as many *Umwelten* as there are subjects, then there is no longer a distinction to be made between the "world" (*Welt*) and the *Umwelt*. The world in the objective sense can only be "a rarefied cast of the *Umwelt*."[77] The identification of the world with the animal's *Umwelt* has the effect of doing away with the distinction between the notion of a world in itself as distinct from the *Umwelt* for each animal subject. Yet there is a further conclusion that imposes itself at this point and that is crucial for the kind of answer that Merleau-Ponty is after in his studies of nature: by giving up the notion of the objective world altogether, each subject also can no longer be simply thought as a part of the (objective) world.[78] This result is important because it liberates the study of living nature from the part-whole dichotomy. Only then, to put it with Uexküll, the task of "forming the universe out of the *Umwelten*" can begin anew.[79] It is precisely Uexküll's idea of the

[75] Uexküll 2010, 54.
[76] Uexküll 2010, 53. Cf. also N 230-231. It would be interesting to follow the history of the analogy of the spider web, which is also to be found in the work of Francis Bacon. Bacon compares the act of the spirit returning upon itself to the work of the spider weaving its web. The result of this work is delicate and fine but useless, according to Bacon. Uexküll's image of the spider web thus could be read also against this background as rehabilitating the fundamental Cartesian idea of a return to the subject and thus to the new contribution of the philosophies of reflection.
[77] Uexküll 1973, 338.
[78] Buchanan also stresses this all-important point in Buchanan 2008, 128.
[79] Uexküll 1973, 339.

intertwining of *Umwelten* (*enveloppement des Umwelten*) that Merleau-Ponty indicates as being the more interesting aspect of Uexküll's theory. The rejection of the idea of an all-encompassing objective world and the identity of the world of the animal with its *Umwelt* makes possible a glimpse into the coordinated network of relations among the various *Umwelten*. This network must remain hidden so long as the idea of one objective world is maintained.

§ 3. The Ontology of the *Umwelt*

These remarks allow us now to turn to the ontological implications that Merleau-Ponty draws from Uexküll's studies. The animal is not a punctual existence manifest in pure actuality.[80] Correlatively, the reference to the *Umwelt* is the reference to something "inactual."[81] Living nature is not a world of things or substances, but a world of transitions. When Merleau-Ponty writes that "It is necessary to put in the organism a principle that is *negative* or *absence*,"[82] then it becomes clear that we are dealing with the sort of preparatory work required to support the later linguistic and conceptual formulations about the invisible and the visible. Merleau-Ponty chooses the same wording applied to the animal as with Michotte's experiments about perceived movement: "each moment of [the animal's] history is empty of what will follow [*ce qui va suivre*]."[83] It is in this

[80] N 239. Cf. other similar formulations scattered throughout the nature lectures: the animal is "a pure wake that is related to no boat." (N 231); the organism is "a fluctuation around norms" (N 239); "The body is not intelligible in the actual" (N 344).
[81] N 251, 252, 255. In these pages, Merleau-Ponty is dealing with K. Lorenz's treatment of animal instinct. Instinct also becomes a factor indicating a symbolizing behavior rather than a form of mechanical response to a triggering object that is present in actuality. In spite of his diverging views, Lorenz repeatedly acknowledged his debt with the work of Uexküll as precursor of the science of ethology.
[82] N 207. In the first course on "Nature," Merleau-Ponty had already anticipated this point by simply stating that "in biology abscence has a meaning," N 96. The idea of "presence of an absence" is already found in the lectures on passivity (1954-55). Cf. also Buchanan 2008, 138; Morris 2018, 13-14, 18. This idea, however, which is also pivotal in that it defines the nature of temporality, needs to be read in light of the influence exerted by the psychology of the form on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. The idea of the presence of an abscence is in fact eminently contained in the figure-ground structure of experience and in the types of amodal perception.
[83] N 207.

context that Merleau-Ponty also introduces the term *écart* ("gap," "hollow," "divergence," "disparity"), which already appeared in previous elaborations and whose meaning needs to be understood in the context of Merleau-Ponty's meditations on the notion of level.[84] We also read that "Seizing life in things means to seize in the things as such a lack [*un manque*]."[85] But this lack "is not lack of this or that."[86]

These formulations return to us the core ontological import of Uexküll's biological studies. At the end of his philosophical interpretation, Merleau-Ponty writes:

> Living being is not a form; it is formed directly without the theme having to become an image [beforehand]. Morphogenesis is neither a work of a copyist nor a force that goes [on its own]. The ideal is a guide indissociable from the activity. The reality of the organisms supposes a non-Parmenidean Being, a form that eschews the dilemma of being and nonbeing.[87]

The kind of contribution that the study of nature must achieve is perhaps nowhere clearer than in these lines: this contribution consists in producing a new understanding of Being itself. At the beginning of the third and last course on "Nature," Merleau-Ponty states explicitly that "the ontology of Nature" is "the way toward ontology."[88] Parmenidean being is presented as the

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[84] N 208, 270, 272. The expression *écart* can cover several expressions in English such as the ones already indicated, but also "interval," "difference," "deviation," "deflection" (VI 166/124) "separation" (VI 250/197) "Disparity" is used most recently by David Morris in Morris (2018), but it is already found in Buchanan 2008, 148. Carbone (2004) uses more often "divergence" (VI 179/135). As Ronald Bruzina pointed out in a seminar, *écart* is also a technical expression in the world of ballet dance where it indicates the movement of the "split" (*grand écart*). Merleau-Ponty uses the term *écart* in his studies of language and in particular with reference to Saussure's analysis of language. In this context, "écart" captures the "diacritical" structure of language that Saussure made thematic. Cf. N 195. Earlier uses of the expression *écart* appear in the first course at the Collège de France on *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression* (1953). See e.g. MSME 50, 58.
[85] N 209.
[86] N 207.
[87] N 239. Translation modified. Cf. a passage from previous lectures where Merleau-Ponty expresses a similar idea: "The idea as field does not contain what will be developed in it, and yet, the idea gets a teleology underway." IP 98. The passage is quoted in Morris 2018, 19, 25.
[88] N 265.

paradigm of positive being. The kind of being that biology is after makes manifest a non-Parmenidean being in that a lack or privation appears to be constitutive of every particular orientation of life in nature.[89] Physical phenomena, perceptual appearances, and now life exhibit a being that is rather "interrogative" or, otherwise put, the organism is the seat of an "operative non-being."[90]

The difficulty here is to guard us against turning this indeterminacy of life into another determinacy and into another positivism. Thus, from Merleau-Ponty's working notes from the third course on nature it is possible to gather the following argumentative strategy of these pages: the ontology of the in-itself aims at exhibiting *a Being* (*un Etre*) as positive principle explaining the determination of all particular beings, i.e. it is really search for a being (*un Etant*);[91] the development of science calls into question the idea of a Being-object (*Etre-objet*) of nature by exhibiting a negativity in nature;[92] there arises the question of how to understand the presence of a negativity that is also endowed with efficacity;[93] the negation of the idea of the nothing opens up the possibility of this understanding over against the ontology of the in-itself or the thought that thinks according to what is positive and for which the nothing is another positive term.[94] Thus Merleau-Ponty's formula to designate the indeterminacy is "something" (*quelque chose*) that he also expresses as "that which is not nothing" (*ce qui n'est pas rien*).[95] This way of speaking leads us back to Merleau-Ponty's general critique of modern philosophy and its idea of nothingness. In his strategy, the negation of the concept of nothing has the effect of rehabilitating the idea of a

[89] Lindén stresses this point in Lindén 2011, 92.
[90] "Ce n'est pas un être positif mais un être interrogatif qui définit la vie." "La rupture d'équilibre appraît comme un non-être opérant, qui empêche l'organisme de rester dans la phase antérieure." N 207 for both passages.
[91] N 266, 262.
[92] N 275.
[93] N 301, 208.
[94] N 301-302, 266-267, 298-299.
[95] N 302, 267, 275. Bergson also points to the problem of starting with the priority of non-being in order to define being. See also Hamrick/Van der Veken 2011, 146n46.

negativity *in* being.[96] What this concretely means however is that the negation of the nothing allows for the conception of "a being of the order of the *Logos*," that is, of relation, as opposed to a being of the "pure thing."[97] In this manner, however, the idea of "anteceding being" and ultimately of continuity as condition for the experience of living and historical reality is reestablished:

> This means that ontologies concern the leaves [*feuillets*] of one sole Being in which we already are at the moment we speak, and which can be globally defined as what is not nothing [*ce qui n'est pas rien*] – Nature, life, man, and so *Ineinander*.[98]

Yet, as we have seen, the possibility of this account depends on the modalization of the monolithic idea of Parmenidean being.

§ 4. The Logos of the Sensible World and Interanimality

Thus, what is the solution that Merleau-Ponty had announced to the problem of the relation of whole and parts, and that he anticipated was going to be offered at the end of this course on nature? Uexküll's descriptions have definitely confirmed the exclusion of the idea of a positive principle or idea as separate from what happens in living reality.[99] Totality, as the organism shows, is not transcendent nor only immanent with respect to the single events or facts composing the organism.[100] Living events have made the idea of totality ambiguous, as the following formulation

[96] N 305.
[97] N 209.
[98] N 283.
[99] N 188, 200, 203.
[100] N 201, 204, 206.

brings to our attention: with respect to the organisms or life in general "totality is everywhere and nowhere."[101] But this negative result holds the positive and preliminary ontological point Merleau-Ponty is making in these final pages of his 1957-58 course on nature. This point consolidates around the weakening of the sense of an actual or ready-made totality, however we decide to fancy it, in order to lay open a further and deeper sense of totality in terms of openness or possibility. Merleau-Ponty notes that there is no "pre-possession" (*Vorhabe*) of totality in terms of our own idea of totality.[102] This claim implies however a resolute recasting of the idea of the human being as the animal endowed with "logos." The implications of Uexküll's intuition of a nature "pointing to a unity which is above even our own apperception" as "last instance of unity" become now clearly delineated.[103] Against the Cartesian view of the human body and of animals as processes regulated by mechanical causality, but also in contradistinction to the Aristotelian essentialism that takes the human as an animality with reason as its characteristic feature, Merleau-Ponty intends to recover the view of the *logos* as something that is not in any way added to the animal.[104] With the abandonment of mechanism and finalism, however, it is really the idea of the *homo faber* that is hereby overcome: "This abandonment of causality and finality is an overcoming of the *Homo faber* and encompassing Being, grasped from within, and not surveyed, fabricated."[105]

The conceptual dimension, which traditionally is entrusted to account for the unity of experience, is no longer relegated to the understanding and therefore to a traditional philosophy of consciousness, which relocates the human in a dimension where it does not have any relation to life.[106] By relocating the subject firmly in the animal, Uexküll thus finds at the same time the

[101] N 240. In the working notes to the third lecture course on nature, we read that life is "ambiguity of the parts and of the whole." N 302.
[102] N 311.
[103] Uexküll 1973, 107.
[104] N 270, 276-277.
[105] N 276.
[106] N 339.

animal in the subject.[107] The radical separation of sensation and concept can no longer be maintained and the role of the concept in experience undergoes a substantial recasting. The regulative function attributed by Kant to the spontaneous subjective application of the concepts (pure categories) is transposed by Uexküll to the elementary level of the active behavior of the organism. The regulative role of the concept lies here in the system of intentional references orienting the self-locomotory behavior of the animal. The constant change pertaining to the living, due to its essential motility, pivots around certain moments that acquire special enduring meaning in the life of the animal and without which there would be no structuration of experience and thus no experience at all.

The more immediate contribution of the study of animal behavior consists in making available a series of concrete examples that realign the human with the rest of living nature. These examples carry out a reversal of the radical separation between the sensible and the conceptual or the body and the soul. They show in fact the production of meaning formations on a level preceding that of the pure concept as dimension taken not to require any bodily or natural attachments. The study of the human lived-body acquires in this context its full ontological scope. It is the concrete study of the human body and its *logos* that shall exhibit the relevant differences with the animal, such as the emergence of language, both in speech and writing, and of the cultural world. The renewed consideration of animal behavior and of the behavior of the human body teaches us therefore "not only the union of our soul with our body, but [also] the lateral union of humanity

[107] Merleau-Ponty speaks of an "animality in the subject" (*une animalité dans le sujet*) in N 219.

and of animality."[108] Humanity is "another corporeity"[109] or, we could also say in a slightly rephrased form, another animality. In sum, the "Nature" lectures aim at seizing the *logos* of the *zōon lógon échon* at a point that precedes the ideal of the *animal rationale*.

The partial merging of the human and of the animal must change the meaning of the *logos* as the defining and exclusive feature attributed until now exclusively to the human. This *logos* can no longer be identified primarily with the reason of the *animal rationale* of the tradition, even less with a Cartesian *cogito* or with the modern scientific intersubjective community and its systematic epistemological disqualification of the subjective factors that do not fit its scientific paradigm about what counts and what does not count as objective.[110] The notion of *logos* rather undergoes now a dramatic generalization and relativization beyond all projective self-interpretation of the theorizing subject. Understood in this way, the human "logos" becomes only another face or fold within nature and its *logos*.[111] The title of the third course on "Nature and Logos" becomes now fully intelligible. In this section I have made explicit the main aspects implied in the conjunction of this title. This work of explicitation allows us now to better understand Merleau-Ponty's own reading of the course title when he says, "*Nature and Logos*. There is a Logos of the natural world,

[108] N 339. In the third "Nature" lectures, Merleau-Ponty writes: "It is not the eye that sees, but it is not the soul either. It is rather the body as open totality" or as "body of the spirit." *Totalité ouverte* (N 280) and *corps de l'esprit* (N 284). As regards this latter expression, see also N 288, RC 177 and VI 287. In N 188 Merleau-Ponty uses also the variant expression *corps du comportement* and in N 284 the expression *corps d'une vie*. These formulations capture the fact that the soul is not something added from outside to the body, the latter being therefore identified with the animal side of the human. This point is expressed in various but similar formulations: in the introductory remarks about Coghill's and Gesell's studies in behavioral biology, Merleau-Ponty says that "l'esprit est non ce qui descend dans le corps afin de l'organiser, mais ce qui en émerge." (N 188). In the same connection now with reference to Gesell, he writes, "Le comportement 'ne descend pas' dans l'organisme 'comme une visitation d'en haut. Il émerge plutôt des bas niveaux.' Le supérieur est autre chose que l'inférieur, mais ne vient pas d'une source extérieure à l'organisme lui-même." (N 200). In relation to humanity, the topic of the third course on nature, we hear that what is human is not to be understood as "imposition d'un pour soi à un corps en soi." (N 270). In the first formulation of a theory of flesh right in the first "sketch" of the third course on nature, Merleau-Ponty writes that "*theory of flesh*, of the body as *Empfindbarkeit* and of the things as entangled in it. This has nothing to do with a *consciousness* that *would descend* into a body-object." (N 271). This seemed to be the inevitable conclusion for a philosophy of substances, in whatever version we make take it.

[109] N 269.

[110] Cf. Lindén's "Intersubjectivité et expérience" in Lindén 2011, 87-88.

[111] "L'humain serait donc une sorte de face intérieur de la nature." Lindén 2011, 86.

[of the] aesthetic [world], on which the Logos of language rests."[112] The study of animality has the merit to let us discern this dimension of operative logos in nature. Merleau-Ponty thus defines "animality" as "the *Logos* of the sensible world: an incarnated sense."[113] On a conceptual level, this definition introduces us to a dimension that will be addressed in its properly philosophical meaning as the *invisible*. The study of animality only radicalizes this zone of indeterminacy by placing it at the very bottom of any experience whatsoever and thereby assigning to it the role of a condition of possibility of all experience in general. We read,

> Animality and human being are given only together, within a whole of Being that would have been visible ahead of time in the first animal had there been someone to read it. Now this *visible and invisible* Being, the sensible, our *Ineinander* in the sensible, with the animals, are permanent attestations, even though visible being is not the whole of Being, because it [Being] already has its other invisible side.[114]

There are several points that I would like to make explicit in connection with this passage:

First, it is now clear that the attestation of a visible and invisible Being in the experiences of biology breaks the unquestioned presupposition of a putative absolutely finished and objective world.

Second, the breaking of this presupposition does not open upon the absolute dimension of a consciousness – on the model of Husserl's *epoche* with the bracketing of the existence of the actual world –, but rather opens us to a dimension of interanimal co-existence.[115] This is indicated by the term "*Ineinander*." In the summary of the nature course, Merleau-Ponty defines this

[112] N 274.
[113] *Sens incorporé* (N 219).
[114] N 338.
[115] Merleau-Ponty speaks of "interanimality" in N 227, 247.

Husserlian term as "inherence" of the perceiving lived-bodily self with the world and the others.[116] This finding makes explicit the main ontological implication of Merleau-Ponty's study of animality: all experience belongs essentially to a reality that exceeds the specifically conditioned subjective features by which experience opens upon reality.[117] In other words, the dimension of co-existence that emerges from the crossing and interlacing of *Umwelten* identifies an interanimal (or intercorporeal) reality that cannot be defined with reference to any of the particular animal modes to belong to each specific *Umwelt*. This interanimal reality must therefore remain indeterminate in principle. Yet this indetermination is not nothing! A way to understand the dimension of interanimality as *logos* of the natural world is indicated by Merleau-Ponty when he describes the *Umwelt* as present to the animal like a "theme" or as a "variable thematism."[118] In the last pages of the second lecture course on nature, he draws an analogy that is worth being noticed, especially in light of his late project of a psychoanalysis of nature. The *Umwelt* is defined as "a theme that haunts consciousness" and the orientation of animal behavior is compared to the orientation of our oneiric consciousness.[119] Oneiric consciousness orients itself "towards certain poles that are never seen as such, but that are nonetheless cause of all the elements of the dream."[120]

[116] RC 152. See N 269n1, 278.
[117] Lindén has argued in favor of the role of a universal animal community in shaping our empirical reality and has stressed the distinction between a "universal of the soul" (*l'universel de l'âme*) and the "universal of the mind" (*l'universel de l'esprit*). Lindén claims that "The empirical worlds of animals are not like stuff that we can shape according to our own will, but rather that which gives in virtue of its empirical and universal validity an ontological entourage to our will to determine the world. The totality of experiences of all living beings make manifest an ontological dimension that holds good for everyone, but that has this universal validity under the sign of a constitutive indetermination." Lindén 2011, 89-90. As a result, in his argument for an "ensouled universal" (*animé universel*) or a "universal holding good" (*valable universel*), Lindén concludes that "Belongingness means precisely that the dimension *to which* one belongs exceeds the character *by which* one belongs [to it]." Lindén 2011, 94. Renaud Barbaras, commenting on Merleau-Ponty's double critique of naturalism and essentialism in *The Visible and the Invisible*, writes in the same vein, "*That which* is addressed [*visé*] by the question exceeds absolutely *that which* the answer discovers as the object of what is addressed." Barbaras 1989, 29.
[118] N 233, 239.
[119] N 233.
[120] N 233. See also N 251, 252, 255.

The notion of oneiric consciousness stresses the sense of virtuality allowing for variations in the life of the animal against the idea of a rigid concatenation of mechanistic actions.

Finally, the character of indeterminacy (or of the invisible) is implied in our claim that there are various ways for animals *to exist*, that humanity represents for us a particularly accessible way, and that therefore the definition of existence that emerges from this dimension of co-existence is not univocal. Over against modern approaches to nature, interanimality can be defined as a feeling of (co-)existence to which each animal or whole species reply in their specific way. Through the confrontation with animal life we find a path towards the elaboration of a fundamental form of intentionality that is neither restricted to our human teleological sense (culture) nor, in even more restricted terms, to a very specific human teleological sense (the cultural world of scientific objectivity).

As I illustrated above, Merleau-Ponty finds the means to develop this line of inquiry in Uexküll's theory of *Umwelt*. The incipit of the first three "sketches" in the preparatory notes for the third "Nature" course makes clear that Uexküll's theory represents the starting point for articulating an esthesiology or a theory of flesh.[121] Esthesiology becomes here the title for a theory that takes seriously the union of the soul and the body and that therefore opposes those positions that conceive thinking, the soul, or consciousness, as imposed from above.[122] Let us therefore turn to Merleau-Ponty's last formulations that shall complete our treatment of the sense and scope of Merleau-Ponty's meditations around the concept of nature. The final section of this chapter briefly

[121] Unlike the first two courses on "Nature," which are composed by the notes taken by several auditors, the third and final set of notes making up the lecture course on nature is Merleau-Ponty's own hand. This third gourp of notes is divided into eight "sketches" (*Ébauches*). These sketches are composed as repeated variations on central themes of the course. The first three sketches begin with the same reference to the theory of *Umwelt*.

[122] "Esthésiologie: l'union de l'âme et du corps prise au sérieux." (N 287). "Ne pas penser l'esthésiologie comme descente d'une pensée dans un corps." (N 284).

takes up the definition of nature as "leaf of Being." The next chapter will approach the idea of an institution of nature.

§ 5. Nature as Leaf of Being

Merleau-Ponty speaks in various ways of organic life as the establishment of a dimension or as enveloping phenomenon or as structure, all terms that can be summarized under the heading of the "invisible." We should pay heed to the wording here. At the beginning of his third course on nature, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The organism is not a sum of instantaneous and punctual microscopic events; it is an enveloping phenomenon, with the macroscopic style of an ensemble in movement. In between the microscopic facts, global reality is delineated like a watermark [*en filigrane*]."[123] The second course on nature has stressed this point already: "In a certain sense," he writes, "there is only a manifold and this totality that emerges is not a totality in potentiality but the instauration of a certain dimension."[124] Organisms are "events framed by a structure that would not be realized in another order, but that has relations with these events."[125] At the end of the course, we are told that the animal being is not a "potentiality of being [*puissance d'être*]."[126] The animal is not a potentiality *of* being, that is, of something that already is and only needs to unfold according to a positive principle (materialistic or vitalistic).[127] In a formulation anticipating the elaborations of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty rather defines life as "a power to invent the visible

[123] N 268.
[124] N 208. Merleau-Ponty even says that the living operates only with physico-chemical elements and that an organism is, in a certain sense, nothing but physicochemistry. Both claims are found, respectively, in N 232 and N 267.
[125] N 239.
[126] N 248, N 272.
[127] Both positions are inadequate to account for living processes: assemblages of natural processes for mechanism and the same assemblages infused with external and pre-established end for finalism. Hamrick/van der Veken 2011, 153.

[*puissance d'inventer du visible*]."[128] The study of animality and of the relations defining animal life works as a propaedeutic to approach this power at work. The study reveals an identity between the life of the animal and its body, its spatial surrounding, and other animals.[129] This identity however is conceived not in terms of the identity between substances, which remains ultimately problematic to produce. Animal life exhibits an inherent relation to otherness that calls into question the idea of a monolithic totality without negativity and its correlate idea of space as *partes extra partes*. Monism and pluralism are ultimately kindred in their conception of being as one or many. According to both positions, being is plenitude equally spread in all its parts.[130]

These formulations have the purpose to make fully explicit the ultimate implication of the fact that we can only really see the physico-chemical facts or the separate living events but we cannot see the appearance of life itself or the emergence of consciousness itself.[131] This finding in turn outlines the very definition of being as a "watermark," "in filigree."[132] In the context of the third course on nature, this terminology fits with the imagery introducing us into the ontological reading Merleau-Ponty intends to offer. He defines nature as "leaf" of being (*La Nature comme feuillet de l'Etre*).[133] This definition does several things in combination with the idea of being as "watermark."

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[128] N 248.
[129] N 227. See also VI 309.
[130] N 304.
[131] "[…] we had only a bit of a protoplasmatic jelly, and we then have an embryo, by transformation which, always too early or too late, we were never witness to in our investment in a biological field." (N 268). "Where does the human with consciousness truly appear? We do not see him any more than we see the moment when consciousness appears in ontogenesis." (N 334). See the reference to "physicochemistry" or to what Merleau-Ponty calls the order of causality or of the events in the second course on nature, N 232, 235, 238, 239, 243. The task of a rehabilitation of the sensible for Merleau-Ponty cannot be separated from the study of empirical facts. His whole work is one impressive attestation of this claim. For Merleau-Ponty, in any case, "It is starting from the visible that we can understand the invisible. [It is] starting from the sensible that we can understand Being, its latency, and its manifesting itself." (N 335). The sensible world is not the same as the factual world of science, but the factual world of science works for Merleau-Ponty as an essential starting point to arrive at a rehabilitation of the sensible.
[132] N 268-269.
[133] In different wordings, this formulation is found in N 265, 266, 269, 275, 283.

First, the definition of nature as "leaf" of being is introduced as part of a tripartite series of problems that include the human being and God. In this way, Merleau-Ponty connects his ontological formulation to the historical surveys of the previous courses on nature. There he concluded that naturalism, humanism and theism were conceptions that keep transitioning into one another in modern culture. After the study of animality, Merleau-Ponty can offer the reason for this blurring of metaphysical distinctions. The reason is that in fact these distinctions presuppose a continuity that needs to be uncovered. This is the dimension of a pre-being (*Vor-Sein*) that is the *nexus* or *vinculum* between nature, the human, and God, and that represents the unifying theme of philosophy.[134] It helps to note that Merleau-Ponty also defines nature as a "fold" (*pli*).[135] The relations between physicochemistry, plant and animal life, and human spirit are presented in terms of foldings of the same material. This aspect relative to the folding clarifies in an important way the characterization of nature as a part revealing the whole, "as leaf or layer of total Being."[136] It has already been remarked that Merleau-Ponty's use of the term "leaf" refers also to full paper sheets used for the production of booklets by way of folding.[137] In this technique, what is called the folio leaf does never get cut but only folded. Contrary to the monist and pluralist interpretations of being as one or as many, Merleau-Ponty's imagery intends to capture the continuity of the real beyond the one without falling into the absolute disintegration of a manifold. As we have seen, this conception is based on the overcoming of the idea of a monolithic Parmenidean being. If read in this light, the theory of flesh that systematizes these results cannot be read as a monism.[138]

[134] N 265.
[135] N 269. The word "pli" is applied to life in N 208.
[136] N 265. In N 266, nature is said to be "part of this complex, what reveals the whole."
[137] See Vallier's comment in his translation of the nature lectures in Merleau-Ponty 2003, 305n7.
[138] This is Barbaras' critique in Barbaras (2008). See Hamrick/van der Veken 2011, 181-190, for an analysis of this critique and a possible Merleau-Pontian response.

Second, the connection to the terminology of printers is clear in the image of the "watermark." The watermark is something that is there and that is not visible although it can become somewhat visible. A piece of paper carrying a watermark presents features that are not reducible to its visible constituents. This image integrates neatly that of the folio leaf. Merleau-Ponty is suggesting that life and consciousness need to be understood in these terms. Life and consciousness are what emerges in between the reality that can be encountered in experience even if they can never be experienced as anything that is encountered within experience: "*In between* [*Entre*] the microscopic facts, global reality is delineated like a watermark, never graspable for objectivizing-particular thinking, never eliminable or reducible to the microscopic."[139] From perception to nature and life, as a note of *The Visible and the Invisible* states, we are dealing with a "dimensionality" and, Merleau-Ponty crucially adds, "Being is dimensionality itself."[140] The idea of a watermark has therefore at this point quite a wide scope for framing the relation of meaning from the microscopic level of the sensing relation going on in the organ of sense to the macroscopic level of the relations between animal species with one another and on an historical scale. The point here is that these relations are barely detectable but they are there and can be discerned.[141] Note however that what is here discerned can only be discerned through what can be actually seen and only *as* the barely detectable, i.e., as maintaining its feature of invisibility. Merleau-Ponty begins in the nature lectures to designate this invisible that is not absolute invisibility, but also never to be taken in terms of any visible thing, as an "inner framework" (*membrure*).[142]

[139] N 268.
[140] "Chaque champ est une dimensionnalité, et l'Être est *la* dimensionnalité même." (VI 280).
[141] "La vie n'est pas une sorte de quasi-interiorité, ce n'est qu'un pli, la réalité d'un passage, comme dirait Whitehead, inobservable de près mais qui assurément se fait, et qui est une réalité." (N 208).
[142] N 152, 159, 269, 282, 287.

A final methodological and terminological consideration shall conclude this first outline of the ontological implications Merleau-Ponty lays open at the end of his "Nature" lectures. In his later investigations Merleau-Ponty has confirmed and radicalized the idea that the facts of science, in particular of psychology and biology, introduce us to an understanding of Being.[143] This idea continues the way of proceeding that found its first application in *The Structure of Behavior*. There Merleau-Ponty referenced Fink's insight regarding the "problems of totality" arising in empirical investigations and leading us, by themselves, to assume a transcendental attitude. In an early passage from Merleau-Ponty's first important contribution, he suggests that the facts of biology exhibit a "signification," a "rhythm" and "attitudes."[144] Biological understanding is reached by detecting these aspects showing through the facts made manifest by the existence of the animal. The studies on animal nature that Merleau-Ponty surveys and interprets continue and deepen this insight by drawing more resolutely its ontological implications. Yet the psychology of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is also already an ontology.[145] There results a notion of the real as a total or global being. This "molar being" or "reality of mass" must complement the scientific tendency to focus exclusively on "parceling," "corpuscular" or "molecular being."[146] The ontological conclusions sketched out above are the indication of the reach of this integration. But making explicit the implications of scientific findings works also as a concrete demonstration of the fact that a passage from empirical considerations to the more properly philosophical ones is in fact possible. If this passage is possible, then this works as an indication of a deeper state of affairs

[143] "Cette référence à la psychologie peut avoir une double signification: ou bien la psychologie est beaucoup plus que la physiologie, elle nous fait entrer dans l'Etre, ou bien les travaux de Gesell et de Coghill ne reflètent que la psychologie de l'homme s'efforçant de penser le devenir embryonnaire." (N 206).
[144] SC 171. This theme of *signification* or, much better, *sens*, is fundamental for the understanding of Merleau-Ponty's overall project as Morris (2018) has shown in detail.
[145] VI 230.
[146] These expressions are to be found in N 209, 269. The term "molar" is an outdated term used in chemistry in order to designate a chemical composit that does not exist in the form of a molecule but in that of a crystal.

concerning the difference between the empirical and the transcendental or the ontic and the ontological. This difference is namely not absolute. This is an important point showing the underlying linkage between the first two chapters of *The Structure of Behavior* and the later lectures at the Collège de France. The difference of this early account from the lectures on nature is that here Merleau-Ponty is working with a clear insight into the notion of pregivenness (operative intentionality), worked out explicitly in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. This notion allows him to place his discussion of living nature already beyond the alternative between the opposed but simultaneous tendencies toward a nature in-itself (objective nature) and a nature for-ourselves (subjective nature). In other words, Merleau-Ponty has already overcome the anthropological problem that attaches to any explication of sense in nature and that has the effect of encapsulating the subject in a situation that is as if given or pre-conceived in a fixed manner for all time (whether as part of an objective nature or as ideal subject of constitution or as psychological subject of representations).

CHAPTER 6

THE INSTITUTION OF NATURE

§ 1. Introduction: Ontology and Phenomenology

The study of nature advances concretely a theory of the continuity of the real against the theories of spatio-temporal atomism. The main assumption of the latter is that things are individually separated according to exclusive contours. This assumption makes it impossible to account for the fundamental continuous processes defining our experience, such as organic life, history, consciousness, and time. In the previous chapters, I showed how Merleau-Ponty develops his account of the Gestalt character of action from his first two works on behavior and perception in a series of investigations into the concept of nature. These investigations issue into a theory of modal or non-Parmenidean being, i.e. "this Being interiorly woven with negation."[1] This move, which draws ontological value from our experiences of perception, space, movement, and nature, may appear abrupt, unjustified, or simply naïve. Merleau-Ponty addresses lucidly the justification of the ontological function of experience right at the beginning of *The Visible and the Invisible*. I will turn to this aspect of method in the next sections of this chapter.

Note, however, that Merleau-Ponty's program in the 50s, i.e. during his appointment at the Collège de France, was to proceed to an explicit ontological utilization of his studies on the psychology of perception. Merleau-Ponty begins his first lecture course from 1953 by stating clearly that for him there is no difference between ontology and phenomenology.[2] In this first

[1] N 275.
[2] MSME 46.

course, movement is said to be "revealing of being."[3] The profusion of interpretations of studies from psychology, biology, and physics was now to be accompanied by a clear development of their ontological implications. A note composed in the context of the lecture course on passivity (1954-1955) raises the "problem of a phenomenological ontology."[4] This is a problem because, Merleau-Ponty continues, phenomenological ontology is not well understood.[5] As it emerges from the course, the phenomena of passivity, such as sleep, the unconscious, and memory, function as orienting phenomena that lead to this phenomenological ontology. The phenomena of passivity achieve this by introducing us to the notion of "field,"[6] which is a notion that Merleau-Ponty situates in the context of a lexical configuration including terms such as "level," "dimension," "horizon," "ground," "*écart*," "something" (*quelque chose*, *Etwas*). The notion of field opposes the idea of a punctual "I think" empty of contents. The course running parallel to that of passivity, entitled "Institution in Personal and Public History," clarifies even better the vast programmatic intent that this lexical configuration outlines. The course summary, in fact, begins with the following claim: "the concept of institution may help us to find a solution to certain difficulties in the philosophy of consciousness."[7] In light of the programmatic context that I am here presenting, we can infer that the notion of institution, together with that of passivity, is entrusted with the task of producing an ontology that would no longer be subordinated to any version of a philosophy of consciousness, including the phenomenological version of a philosophy of transcendental constitution. Finally, the lectures on nature held between 1956 and 1960 make clear that the theme of nature stands out by two main attributes: first, Merleau-Ponty writes, the *concept* of nature is

[3] MSME 100.
[4] IP 176.
[5] IP 178.
[6] IP 182-183.
[7] RC 59.

the privileged expression of ontology, and its evolution works as a propaedeutic towards ontology; second, the *experience* of nature shall also outline another ontology.[8] If we turn to the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*, then Merleau-Ponty pushes the ontological project back to the analyses in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and introduces the new project explicitly as an ontological interrogation.[9] As a matter of fact, the whole analysis "must be entirely carried out within the perspective of ontology."[10]

Merleau-Ponty is well aware of the problems raised by this perspective. If it is true that "no form of being can be posited without reference to subjectivity," then the question imposes itself: how can the determination of ontological truths be harmonized with a philosophy that reduces everything to transcendental immanence?[11] In the same series of working notes, Merleau-Ponty specifies that the ontology emerging from the particular analyses of nature, the human body, and language, must also provide the notions enabling a recasting of our conception of transcendental subjectivity.[12] Allow me to add some precision on this point.

First, for Merleau-Ponty, the exploration of the subjective theme is truly the exploration of a field (in this following Husserl's investigations of the *Bewusstseinsfeld*). It is clear however from the beginning that Merleau-Ponty intends to investigate this field not by following the methodological criteria of a standard eidetic phenomenology. The centering of the latter around reflexive analysis is rather shifted towards the rehabilitation of the straightforward interest of the

[8] N 265-266.
[9] VI 219, 230, 237. In a working note of *The Visible and the Invisible* from February 1959, Merleau-Ponty famously states in reference to the *Phenomenology of Perception* that "what one might consider to be 'psychology' (*Phenomenology of Perception*) is in fact ontology." (VI 230). The question, then, as Merleau-Ponty realizes in another note from the same month, remains that of bringing the results of the *Phenomenology of Perception* to "ontological explicitation." (VI 237).
[10] VI 222.
[11] In VI 220, Merleau-Ponty writes that "nulle forme d'être ne peut être posée sans référence à la subjectivité." He then makes the problem of philosophy as transcendental idealism explicit in a note describing the way to proceed in the first part of *The Visible and the Invisible* (VI 222).
[12] N 221.

experimental method, in particular that of the psychology of perception.[13] The situation is not so simple as Merleau-Ponty also claims from early on that Husserl's phenomenology has provided the theory for the methodic reflections of the psychology of the form.[14] In this sense, the reflexive analysis of phenomenology acquires a further and deeper meaning: Husserl designates it as a transcendental investigation. These investigations are identified by their "critical" character. The two senses of reflection (introspective reflection on the conscious egological life and methodological reflection upon the preliminarily straightforward phenomenological seeing) can only abstractly be detached in Husserl's own analyses. This is the reason why Husserl describes his way of proceeding in terms of a proceeding by "zig-zag."[15]

This first point now leads us to a second one. Then in Husserl we find a third sense of reflection that is added to the previous two. This further sense of reflection intends to take the methodological, critical, or transcendental reflection to its maximum of radicality as the critique of the critique of the transcendental sphere itself. Now this project of final self-critique is lucidly taken up by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* when he also calls for a definition of understanding and reflection that would be "more radical than objective thought."[16] He then continues: "To phenomenology understood as a direct description, a phenomenology of phenomenology must be added."[17] There is a *higher* naïveté of phenomenology that Husserl also

[13] This point has especially been highlighted by Barbaras 2001, Paracchini 2008, and Colonna 2014. For more literature on the importance of experimental studies and especially of *Gestalt* psychology in Merleau-Ponty, see Colonna 2014, 80n30.
[14] PhP 62n.
[15] On the two senses of reflection and their intertwining in Husserl's way of proceeding as "zig-zag," see Luft 2002, 7. Husserl explicitly describes his investigations as procedding by a "zig-zag" in the *Logical Investigations*. Luft's description, however, applies clearly to the writings composed after the transcendental turn. See the brief but clear description of this method in Bachelard 1968, 80, who refers to FTL: "The investigation in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* does indeed zigzag, as can be see in the numerous recurring advances: a cycle of investigations leads to *results* which enable us to *advance* in the understanding of logic. But, while proceeding in this way, one acquires new results, which lead, in turn, to a more profound analysis than that which was previously completed. Possessed of these new means of analysis, one is to *go back over* the preceding results, which were only provisional."
[16] PhP 419.
[17] PhP 419.

recognized and led him to the project of a self-critique or of a phenomenology of phenomenology.[18]

I cannot even begin to look into the pivotal question of phenomenological methodology and systematic, but the points just outlined should help us clarifying Merleau-Ponty's own proposal. In the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty refers again clearly to the cardinal question of self-critique:

> the definition of philosophy would involve an elucidation of philosophical expression itself (therefore a becoming conscious of the procedure used in what precedes 'naïvely,' as though philosophy confined itself to reflecting what is) as the science of pre-science, as the expression of what is before expression *and sustains it from behind* – Take as theme here the difficulty: if philosophy wishes to be absolute, it contains itself.[19]

Merleau-Ponty's last philosophical proposal is advanced in terms of an ontology. Even without yet having a full understanding of the sense and scope of this proposal, the previous remarks allow us to claim that Merleau-Ponty's ontology is backed up by the self-critical work required to make philosophy *absolute*, that is, philosophy as having hold of itself, as containing itself.

In this chapter, I show more in detail how Merleau-Ponty articulates this result. The place of the concept of nature in Merleau-Ponty's project will be clarified and its philosophical scope clearly circumscribed. In a nutshell, what emerges from this survey is the way Merleau-Ponty frames the solution to the problem of natural totality. The chapter is divided into the following steps: 1) First, I locate the place of the concept of nature in the context of *The Visible and the*

[18] See Luft 2002, 16 and in particular the footnote n. 19 on this page. Luft points out that the theme of a phenomenology of phenomenology appears not to be an exclusively Finkian theme, but that it emerges in Husserl's thought before his collaboration with Fink. Luft refers to Hua XXXIV, 176.
[19] VI 221.

Invisible. I show that the meditation on nature serves Merleau-Ponty to make explicit the ontological perspective he is painstakingly outlining starting from a position that wants to remain "phenomenological." The idea of *perceptual faith* is the introductory formulation of this perspective, which is elaborated in contrast to the starting point of Cartesian philosophy. 2) Second, I show that Merleau-Ponty justifies this ontological dimension of experience in his reading of the notion of *essence* in *The Visible and the Invisible*. This reading draws inspiration from Husserl's idea of eidetic variation. Following Merleau-Ponty's reading, Husserl's understanding of essence can be divided in three phases, which make explicit the notion of essence already implicit in scientific cognition. Merleau-Ponty's reading of essence concludes with the ontological statement of the character of mediation attaching to all being. This idea finds its articulation in the notion of the flesh. 3) Third, the idea of perceptual faith and the interpretation of essence shed light upon the ideas of an *institution of nature* and of a *psychoanalysis of nature*. These latter notions are a full recognition of the problem posed by the organicist conception of nature as totality. Thus, they also point in outline to its solution.

§ 2. The Experience of Nature in *The Visible and the Invisible*

§ 2.a. From Cartesian Doubt to Perceptual Faith

The final sketches of a plan for *The Visible and the Invisible* show that the work ought to be divided into two parts. The first part is entitled "The Visible and Nature." This title substitutes in the last two plans that of "Being and World," which rather appears in the first four plans. The second part

was to be entitled either "The Word and the Invisible" or "The Invisible and the *logos*."[20] The first working note also indicates that the main title of the work itself shifted from "The Origin of Truth" to *The Visible and the Invisible*. These few editorial indications are telling of the scope of the work. The motives of nature and the *logos*, of the visible and the invisible, shall lead us into a theory of being, world, and truth. In the final plans, the first part on "The Visible and Nature" is divided in four chapters: introductory and methodological reflections had to go under the heading of "Philosophical Interrogation," followed by two chapters respectively on "The Visible" and on "Nature" or "The World of Silence." The final chapter of the first part had to deal with ontology. It is not possible to determine with certainty the place that the study of nature was to take in the final version of the project. It is clear, however, both from these indications of a plan and from the working notes for the third course on nature (January-May 1960) that the treatment of nature was to provide the basic elements for a new ontology to be put in relation with classical and modern ontology.[21] This ontology – variably designated as "of nature," "of the visible," of "'wild' being"[22] – clearly had to provide the bridge towards the treatment of the *logos*. The hinge function of the concept of nature towards the treatment of the *logos* emerges concretely in the last part of the second course on nature, which locates an activity of symbolism and communication in the instinctual and sexual behaviors of the animal.[23] The eight "Sketches" of the third course articulate this question in much more detail, in particular in connection with a renewed consideration of the

[20] See the indications of a plan for the work of *The Visible and the Invisible* in Claude Lefort's *Avertissement* (VI 9-12).
[21] See N 265, 275 and VI 11, 185, 222.
[22] The designation "ontology of nature" appears in N 265. Merleau-Ponty speaks of an "ontology of the visible" in the chapter on "L'entrelacs – Le chiasme" in VI 185. The relevant references to the "ontology of wild being" are in VI 11, 219, and 222.
[23] See Merleau-Ponty's last indication for a plan of the work in Lefort's "Editorial Note." The outline of this last plan was presumably redacted in November or December 1960. Merleau-Ponty's own last indication in VI 328 dates March 1961.

human body, which combines the insights gathered from the study of Schilder's notion of the body schema and of Uexküll's notion of *Umwelt*.

Merleau-Ponty clearly recognizes and reiterates the character of circularity of the research. He begins the analysis with an ontological outline,[24] even if he is aware that only the particular analyses (of nature, the human body, language) can deliver a concrete understanding of the being he is after. Yet, it is the ontological outline that shall provide the justification for the ontological function of the experiences surveyed in the particular analyses.

This circular aspect becomes evident in Merleau-Ponty's conception of the reduction. The idea of the reduction in phenomenology is linked to the determination of an absolute point of departure for philosophy, according to the principle of presuppositionlessness. It is well-known that for Husserl this determination is not tied to a unique mode of proceeding and that he pursued a variety of ways to introduce us into phenomenology's absolute starting point. Whatever way we follow, Merleau-Ponty is clear that the starting point of philosophy cannot be identified with an act of suspension of the existence of the world. The consequence of this suspension is the establishment of a being, the *mens sive anima*, as indubitable. This being, however, is itself part of the world, which contradicts the initial world-bracketing stance.[25] In Chapter 2, I already showed how Husserl departed from this Cartesian motive in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Merleau-Ponty picks up from the idea of a "sufficient reduction," which leads beyond the transcendental immanence and reveals the true transcendental as "worldliness" (*Weltlichkeit*).[26] However, as we have seen, for him the particular analyses and positive descriptions of the sciences

[24] VI 240, 251
[25] Merleau-Ponty presents this argument in VI 225.
[26] VI 226.

have the capacity to lead us to philosophical considerations.[27] The particular analyses operate thus for Merleau-Ponty also a form of reduction, which, he writes, discloses "little by little – and more and more – the 'wild' or 'vertical' world."[28]

The ontological outline, which goes under the title "Philosophical Interrogation," turns against Pyrrhonian arguments and shows that the issue of establishing a starting point for philosophy is not a problem of reality (the skeptical problem whether there is a world or whether our experience of it is true or false). The question is not *if* the world exists, but *how* it exists.[29] The study of nature, which was to follow, intended thus to begin and advance our insight into the sense of being of the world (*le sens de l'être du monde*) after the prejudices of skepticism and logicism have been finally detected and weakened in their extreme and self-destructive demands to reason.[30]

Since Merleau-Ponty's proceeding exhibits a circularity, allow me to shed more light upon the character of this circularity. I will do this by connecting Merleau-Ponty's argument in the ontological outline of *The Visible and the Invisible* with the considerations advanced in the "Nature" lectures. As we have seen, the main implication drawn from the study of nature is the one concerning the question about being and nothing.[31] This is the question defining modern thought, which can be summarized by the Leibnizian search for a principle of sufficient reason when he asks, "why is there something rather than nothing?" In a certain modern declination of

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[27] Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty, there is a true "proximity" or "parallelism" between positive science, and in particular psychology, and phenomenology. See PhP 63.

[28] VI 230-231.

[29] Barbaras 1989, 28. "Il faut donc passer de la question *an sit* à la question *quid sit*, de la question du fait à celle du sens: non pas se demander *si* le monde est, mais *comment* est ce monde qui est."

[30] VI 21. Merleau-Ponty points out that the Pyrrhonian argument presupposes the idea of a Being in-itself while calling it into question in its critique of our experience of reality. Skeptical arguments have an ontological prejudice, that is, they must maintain this idea of a Being in-itself in order to raise their doubts about experience and knowledge. In this, as Husserl alludes in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, skeptical relativism shares the same assumption of logical absolutism, i.e., the assumption of a being and a truth "in itself." In his discussion of *hyperdialectic* Merleau-Ponty clarifies that this "dialectic without synthesis that we are talking about is not however skepticism, the vulgar relativism, or the domain of the ineffable." (VI 129).

[31] This view is confirmed by an unpublished note where Merleau-Ponty suggests that the opposition of being and nothing resumes all the oppositions of metaphysics. I.B.N., VI, f. 54 (in Colonna 2014, 250).

this question that was inaugurated by Descartes' doubt, the question presupposes a definition of being as framed by a double negation: that which is is that which cannot not be. But this implicit understanding of being has far-reaching consequences for our definition of experience, reality, and knowledge. Descartes' doubt is the prime paradigm for the search of a being understood as double negation. The methodic doubt follows precisely this understanding in discerning what is from what is not. In this light, the methodic doubt no longer shows a purely presuppositionless stance. The doubt rather presupposes a specific definition of being as that which resists the hypothesis of inexistence. In other words, what is positive for it is what is identical to a negation of a negation.[32] The work of discerning and extracting being and truth has therefore already decided the fate of a whole series of experiences that are in one stroke placed on the side of what is not, i.e. the illusory and the phantasms of imagination. The progressive stride of the Cartesian doubt does not change anything to the hypothesis of inexistence. Finally, as I indicated in the previous chapter, the search for a certitude that resists all doubt – at the cost of casting out of experience most of what precisely counts for us as experience – is kindred with the tendency to identify the reality that we encounter in experience with the reality upon which we can operate.[33]

The experiences of physical and living nature surveyed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 have raised the demand to conceive of a form of negativity in being. The idea of a negative-in-being, however, runs directly against the idea of a positivity of being that is at once identical with a double negation. The immediate implication of this non-Cartesian perspective, which needs to be explored

[32] See VI 62, 75.

[33] With reference to Einstein's disqualification of the "psychological" experience of simultaneity regarding intersubjective perceptions, Merleau-Ponty writes that this position presupposes "that what is is not *that upon which we have an openness*, but only *that upon which we can operate*." (VI 35). The philosophies of reflection equally reduce "in advance our contact with Being to the discursive operations with which we defend ourselves against illusion." (VI 62). What is significant is that someone like Einstein would openly admit the contrast of the "wildly speculative" character of his science due to this understanding that equates Being with the operations of science. The philosophies of reflection, we may add, tend to cover up this same contrast emerging in their theories rather than openly acknowledging it.

more closely, is that the potentially disturbing experiences of deluded sensation, dreaming, hallucinating, can no longer be simply cast out of being and placed on the side of nothing. A further consequence is therefore that the separation between reality and appearance needs to be reconsidered. Therefore, the dimension of a negativity in being opens us to a level of experience where the antinomy of being and nothing works as a true antinomy, that is, as Kant taught us, as a relationship between two terms whose reconciliation can only be found on a level that is *other* than that on which they appear to be antinomic. The significance and novelty of Merleau-Ponty's thought is decided precisely on the meaning of this "other" order.[34]

The opening of *The Visible and the Invisible* designates this other order as *perceptual faith*. In the context of perception understood in the narrow sense (the perception attached to my sense organs), this faith consists in our natural certitude to be dealing with the same things, that is, with things that generally maintain a permanence in the flux of experience.[35] This is a certitude that is not based on any deliberate effort of justification and that for this reason is a faith.[36] The experience of a piece of iron that turns red or of a dilating balloon illustrate intuitively what Merleau-Ponty calls the "antinomies of perceptual faith."[37] The question is the basic one to understand how a thing can remain identical for us while we perceive changes in its properties.[38] In more general terms, the antinomy of perception lies in the fact that perceptual beings appear as preceding the act of perception while not being conceivable outside of this act: "Being is anterior to perception, and

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[34] VI 49 f.

[35] It is "the permanence of the perceived and of perception" (VI 60) that motivates the "very naive postulate" of Cartesian "spirituality," Merleau-Ponty remarks in VI 59. The expression "perceptual faith" appears in the *Phenomenology of Perception* in connection with the experience of depth as "nothing but a moment of the perceptual faith in one sole thing." (PhP 303).

[36] The introductory lines of *The Visible and the Invisible* specify that "faith" is understood here "not in the sense of decision but in that of what is before all position" (VI 17).

[37] VI 50.

[38] Albert Michotte addressed this question in his studies on phenomenal permanence: "A propos de la permanence phénoménale. Faits et théories" (1950) in *Causalité, permanence et réalité phénoménales* (Louvain/Paris, Publications universitaires/Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1962). See Colonna 2014, 168-169.

this primordial Being is conceivable only in relation to perception."[39] The conceptual difficulty is that appearance seems to absorb being entirely. However, reducing being to appearance would only yield another conception of being as "full" being. Rather, what needs to be understood is that perceived being is "the center of indetermination that introduces the possible into full (*plein*) Being."[40] Merleau-Ponty often recurs to the analysis of experiences such as hallucination or illusion to illustrate that the antinomy in perception between reality and appearance must be understood in terms of the modal character of experience in general.

The concept of modalization of experience is a typical Husserlian one, and one that is fundamental for phenomenology in several respects. The concept of modality is implicitly present on the most basic level of phenomenological analysis, i.e. that of the a priori intentional *cogito cogitatum* correlation, which is the correlation between performances of the experiencing *ego* and the contents of experience.[41] More precisely, the modal character of experience emerges when this formal intentional scheme is integrated with fundamental phenomenological concepts such as *meaning* and *interest*. Every experience orients itself towards an object *as* this object endowed with such and such qualitative features. This *as*-structure attaching to the object is correlative to a certain interested behavior on the part of the subject. The correlation meaning-interest is traversed by different degrees of success, if you will: walking in a museum I may have some special interest for the beauty of the works surrounding me, yet not all works will respond to my interest in the same exact way. I may encounter some works that forfeit my interest instead of fulfilling it: some will be indifferent to my interest, others may even be ugly, etc. In one word, some objects will not

[39] N 83.
[40] N 84. This claim and the one preceding it are made in the context of Merleau-Ponty's discussion of "The Romantic Conception of Nature."
[41] Husserl designates the idea of a universal a priori correlation between consciousness and being as his most fundamental discovery in Hua VI 169n.

satisfy the condition that my interest places on them, in this case the requirement of beauty. This is index of the fact that my experience does not unfold on a flat plane where certain given objects are simply registered in the experience of the subject. Experience is essentially structured in terms of meaningful points of reference that admit of different degrees of responsiveness.[42]

It could be argued that Husserl takes over a certain Cartesian way to interpret the modal character of experience when he considers the scientific attitude of verification as the ideal mode establishing the true and ultimate sense that any being can assume for us.[43] The straightforward orientation towards the fulfillment of interest in the non-scientific attitude is raised to a higher level of awareness in scientific doing, where confirmed or verified certainty substitutes the straightforward, more natural certainty. But confirmed certainty is precisely the certainty that withstands all doubt.[44] What is interesting, however, and more relevant for the way Merleau-Ponty utilizes the idea of modality, is the way the modal structure of experience articulates the intentional life of the natural attitude as encompassing the broadest sense of experience. In this case, the modality of experience refers to the fundamental horizonal structure allowing for a potentiality or progression of references. The meaning-interest scheme of experience is not isolated. This implies that it is embedded in a referential framework that allows for degrees of differentiation, articulation, and restructuration. Everything in our experience is found at the intersection of intentional implications. Suzanne Bachelard writes: "the systematic explication of the horizon reintroduces a sort of absolute – the absolute of the ever-more in place of the dogmatic absolute of

[42] The expression "flat being" is found in *The Visible and the Invisible* in various different wordings. See in particular VI 97, 135, 152, 165, 169, 179, 182, 290, 296, 306, 313.
[43] Luft points out that the attitude of science sets the "absolute" standard of optimality in experience towards which every other (natural) striving for optimality must appear as "relative." Luft 2002, 44.
[44] Cf. Bachelard 1968, 70.

the in-itself."[45] By the notion of horizon, it is possible to reintegrate in experience those experiences that do not respond to our current interest.

In the context of *The Visible and the Invisible*, perceptual faith is therefore assimilated to "the inaugural opening to the world" as the structuring of a continuity that encompasses both reality and mere appearance.[46] Merleau-Ponty defines the world as the place of compossibility of incompossibles. He writes:

> [W]e understand by world not only the sum of things that falls or could fall under our regard, but the place of their compossibility, the invariable style which they follow, which connects our perspectives, [which] allows the transition from the one to the other and which gives us the feeling [*sentiment*] – whether it is a question of describing a landscape or of agreeing about an invisible truth – of being two witnesses who are able of looking over the same true object or, at the very least, of exchanging our situations with respect to it, in the same way in which we can exchange our stationing points in the visible world [understood] in the strict sense.[47]

The world designates the unity of the infinitudes of relative reason in one sole *omnitudo realitatis*:

> The destruction of beliefs, the symbolic murder of the others and of the world, the split between vision and the visible, between thought and being do not, as they claim, establish us in the negative; when one has subtracted all that, one installs oneself in what remains, in sensations, opinions. And what remains is not nothing, nor of another sort than what has been struck off: what remains are mutilated fragments of the vague *omnitudo realitatis* against which the doubt was plied, and they regenerate it under other names—appearance, dream, Psyche, representation.[48]

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[45] Bachelard 1968, 214.
[46] VI 49. Cf. also VI 57.
[47] VI 29-30.
[48] VI 143. Perceptual faith names the struggle initiated with Plato's philosophy for the integration of the infinite relativities of experience in a unitary conception of the real. This struggle had to teeter between assigning the

At the end of the section on the natural world in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty claims that the hallucinatory thing and the perceived thing both belong to an experience that is more primordial than deliberate cognition, experience that he designates as "primordial faith" or "primordial opinion."[49] The point common to the analyses of perception, hallucination, illusion is that they all attempt to reverse the notion of the real as that which resists a deliberate doubt, as that which intellectual operations or acts of discrimination could establish once and for all and for which, as we have indicated above, the real is defined as what cannot not exist.[50] As a result, the notion of perceptual faith captures a sense of being that is not filtered through the move of Descartes' doubt.

The problem for Merleau-Ponty is now to show that beginning from a point other than the Cartesian beginning pivoting around the *an sit* question still demands an adequate clarification of the meaning and scope of the *quid sit* question. The approaches analyzed are those that start with the reality as it is experienced without first setting this reality against the backdrop of a deliberate doubt. These approaches are the philosophy of reflection, dialectic philosophy, and the philosophies of intuition. Merleau-Ponty characterizes the guiding concepts of these approaches,

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relativities to the domain of the unbounded and therefore deeming them as philosophically irrelevant in the search of the *archai* or the *eide* as paradigmatic forms of reality *or* integrating the idea of the infinite itself as pivotal for a definition of the real – as in the definition of Being as *dynamis*. Cf. Lindén 1997, 18, 22, for the first tendency; cf. Chiurazzi 2017 for the second tendency. For a contextualization of the concept of *omnitudo realitatis* as a Kantian theme, see Colonna 2014, 358-372. A concurrent line of argument can be found in Fink's *Alles und Nichts* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), which Merleau-Ponty may have known thanks to Jean Wahl's review of this work, "Totalité et Néant," *Révue de métaphysique et de morale*, n. 3/1960, pp. 347-355. According to Fink, Descartes has subjected all things to the methodic doubt but not the dimension in which they are found. Fink therefore suggests that Descartes has "emptied" the world but may have conserved the world as empty and indeterminate field of those things that are most certain. Fink 1959, 194.

[49] The title of this section states the thesis that "Both the hallucinated thing and the perceived thing stem from a function that lies deeper than knowledge. The 'originary opinion'." This section is significantly placed between the treatment of "The Thing and the Natural World" and "Others and the Human World."

[50] Both in PhP 394 and in VI 62-63, Merleau-Ponty carries out a critique of "criteriological thought," that is to say, the thought that operates a deliberate critique of the confused ideas of sensible experience or of the prejudices of inherited knowledge. The paradigm of this criteriological thought is Descartes.

i.e. reflection, negation, and intuition, as pointing to an inchoate experience that offers us simultaneously both subject and object, being and nothing, essence and existence.[51]

In the following section, I will follow in particular Merleau-Ponty's conception of essence. The determination of essence not only function as a guiding theme in Merleau-Ponty's argument, but it also offers an implicit justification for the circular style of research that he is practicing. The theory pivoting around the unity of essence and fact provides the methodological underpinning for extracting ontological claims from the experimental findings of the sciences. Finally, the conception of essence that Merleau-Ponty develops in *The Visible and the Invisible* clarifies the claim that the starting point of every reflection, and eminently of philosophical reflection, is the lifeworld. In Husserl's notion of the lifeworld, Merleau-Ponty discovers an original sense of essence, which at the same time seems to point beyond a phenomenological methodology taken in the strict sense.

§ 2.b. Discovering Essence between Husserl and Positive Science

Merleau-Ponty interprets Husserl's eidetic variation as a way to approach and outline his own notion of experience. There results a threefold articulation of essence, which I will schematically present below. In the chapter on "Reflection and Interrogation," Merleau-Ponty makes the point that eidetic variation stabilizes our experience allowing us to reach an insight into its dynamics. This reflective process of stabilization, however, finds its first enabling ground in the aspects of permanence exhibited by unreflected experience.[52] Moreover, the conceptual work of fixation of

[51] VI 172.

[52] "Le fonctionnement réflexif […] ne maintient pendant ce temps la permanence du perçu et celle de la perception sous le regard de l'esprit que parce que mon inspection mentale et mes attitudes d'esprit prolongent le 'je peux' de mon exploration sensorielle et corporelle." (VI 60); "Je n'ai pu […] prendre le chemin de la réflexion, que parce que

experience remains subject to the course of experience itself and holds good only so long as experience does not contradict it.[53] In the chapter on "Interrogation and Intuition," Merleau-Ponty draws the further implications of this proceeding. His critical reading of the *Wesensschau* is meant to show that Husserl's rejection of absolute knowledge and absolute relativism is implicitly anticipated in his conception of eidetic intuition.

§ 2.b.i. Essence I

Husserl formulated the notion of eidetic intuition at a time when he strictly opposed essence and fact (the critique of the *metabasis eis allo genos* in the *Prolegomena*). Taken at its face value, the "essence"-"fact" distinction, in Merleau-Ponty's reading, would ultimately eliminate the actual contribution of non-objectifying acts from the fabric of experience. The recognition of non-objectifying acts "would be purely and simply the overthrow of consciousness, irrationalism." Non-objectifying acts would thereby lose their ontological function.[54] As I have shown in Chapter 2, the critique of the notion of evidence in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* represents a pivotal moment of revision of experience and therefore of the very task and scope of eidetic variation as the method allowing us to achieve an understanding of experience.[55]

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d'abord j'étais hors de moi, dans le monde, auprè de autres, et c'est à chaque moment que cette expérience vient nourrir ma réflexion." (VI 74).

[53] "Réflechir […] c'est dégager des choses, des perceptions, du monde et de la perception du monde, en les soumettant à une variation systématique, des noyaux intelligibles qui lui résistent, cheminer de l'un à l'autre d'une manière que l'expérience ne dément pas…" (VI 70).

[54] VI 292.

[55] It is worth noticing that the composition of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* is contemporaneous with the final stages of preparation of the Britannica-article that Husserl started in collaboration with Martin Heidegger only in order to eventually dismiss Heidegger's contributions, already perceived as being heterodox with respect to his own phenomenological program. If this dramatic episode marks the beginning of the rupture of Husserl's collaboration with Heidegger, at the same time, the work of revisions of Husserl's program, which was already under way in the 20s and which culminated in the summative statement of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, finds in its results much in common with Heidegger's direction of thought in phenomenology. The fact that Merleau-Ponty would refer repeatedly to concepts such as "ontological difference," "transcendence," and "verbal *Wesen*" for a clarification of the

For Merleau-Ponty, the notion of the intuition of essence must remain an inextricable problem if we still presuppose the bifurcation of the "flat multiplicity" of spatio-temporal individuals and a dimension of pure significations, posited as "other" than that of individuals.[56] The inextricable problem traces back to the ambiguity of the notions of intuition and of essence. If intuition is implicitly attributed to a pure spectator or a *kosmotheoros*, as Merleau-Ponty often designates it, then the notion of essence must identify a second, Platonic, positivity.[57] The radical separation between essence and fact is therefore based on the insight that no unity can emerge from the array of singular facts alone.[58] Another instance is needed to make the unity of the manifold possible. A certain tradition in philosophy has constantly tried to conceive this unifying factor as *soul* and *consciousness*, often determining this unifying factor as imposing a unity on the manifold. The problem here lies in the fact that the full sense of the manifold of experience gets lost and only a narrow version of the manifold is retained.

§ 2.b.ii. Essence II

The idea of eidetic variation, however, represents already a reply to this inextricable problem in the context of the phenomenological program. This idea determines the essence not as the positive object of an intuition but as the invariant of a variation.[59] In this case, the essence is not taken as

relation between essence and fact, shows indirectly – that is, by the intermediacy of Merleau-Ponty's work – a convergence of thought between Husserl and Heidegger that is deeper than more obvious points of discordance.

[56] VI 151-152.

[57] In this respect, the naturalism of natural science and the idealism of the reflective philosophy of the essences complement each other. The ontology of the *blosse Sachen* corresponds to the ontology of the *kosmotheoros* and vice versa. Cf. VI 32 and VI 252 for exemplary passages stating this correspondence.

[58] See Barbaras 1989, 30.

[59] See Barbaras 1989, 29.

separate from the fact, since it is the work of variation on the facts that yields the objectivity of the essence.

For Merleau-Ponty this work of variation is already found in the concrete proceedings of science. As a matter of fact, *The Visible and the Invisible* begins with a preamble that deals with science.[60] Merleau-Ponty makes here a familiar point, namely that the scientific knowledge of our reality remains anchored in the perceived world and it is made possible by it.[61] It is again the psychology of the form that represents for Merleau-Ponty a breakthrough moment in the history of science. In sum, as already *The Structure of Behavior* made clear, this psychology shows that the objectivism of physicalistic or psychologistic science cannot be legitimately assumed to be the exclusive stance on the world.[62] If we disregard the ideological self-interpretations of science and instead pay attention to its concrete way of proceeding, then the scientific access to objectivity exhibits a proximity to Husserl's eidetic variation rather than to any hypostatized views of induction or essentialism.[63] Science raises the *quid sit* question in its methodic self-reflections. The essences that it establishes (the essence of nature, life, history, language) are maintained "under the jurisdiction of the facts."[64] In its proceedings and findings, science exhibits that facticity and ideality are undivided. Scientific thought already applies a form of eidetic variation in the determination of its objects.[65] But the recognition of this way of proceeding in science, which exhibits a concrete instance of the interrelation of fact and essence, only functions as a preliminary indication of the kind of task that is given over to philosophy to carry out, namely that of interrogating the presuppositions around this interrelation. The precise nature of the relationship

[60] VI 31-48.
[61] For a paradigmatic way to express this point, see e.g. IP 35: "Je peux apprendre à mieux connaître [l]'entourage par la science, mais ce sera toujours remaniement du monde perçu, emploi de ses structures."
[62] VI 38.
[63] See VI 155-156.
[64] VI 146.
[65] Cf. VI 156 where Merleau-Ponty speaks of psychology, ethnology and sociology.

between fact and essence is left unquestioned by science.[66] Thus, for Merleau-Ponty the implicit recognition of the unity of fact and essence in science would issue into a form of scientism if it does not proceed to clarify this unity itself. Merleau-Ponty suggests that this "scientistic" stage is also that of Husserl's eidetic variation when the latter understands the task of philosophy as that of expressing in essential invariants the totality of experience.[67] Be as it may, the essence as the result of a deliberate variation of experience is literally an in-variant. The variation extracts, as it were, the stable hinges of experience, its universal contours.[68] The work of variation is work of exchange, comparison, correction that yields what is not incompatible with the unfolding of experience. Merleau-Ponty writes, "There is therefore for me something inessential, and there is a zone, a hollow, where what is not inessential, not impossible, assembles."[69] As a result, however, the essence, as in-variant, must emerge as a negative being.[70]

§ 2.b.iii. Essence III

Yet, there is a moment underlying this conception of eidetic variation, which leads us to the full articulation of its philosophical implications. The work of exchange, comparison, reciprocal clarification and correction among facts implicitly recognizes that there is a starting point from which essences are not yet attained but from which they can be accessed. Eidetic variation is ideation, it is an activity that needs to unfold in order to attain its object. Time has here obviously

[66] VI 146.
[67] See VI 70.
[68] VI 70.
[69] VI 150.
[70] "L'essence émerge de cette épreuve, - elle n'est donc pas un être positif. Elle est un in-variant." (VI 149).

a fundamental role.[71] But we also thereby recognize that the variation involves a contact between the essences and our own experience. At this point of convergence with experience, the negative determination of the essence as in-variant undergoes further deepening. Here we recognize the true philosophical scope of the method of science as moving freely between the domain of facts and that of essences and, as a consequence, of Husserl's impressive insight into this way of proceeding for the development of his phenomenological program. The idea of eidetic variation maintains rigorously the distinction between the activity of articulating experience through significations or essential features *and* the fact of experience itself, from which this activity begins and is continuously carried.[72] The explicitation of this distinction in phenomenology enables to expand the "partial and abstract contact" that scientific cognition establishes with being and to enter the true domain of philosophy, that is, the domain of the "total contact of someone who, living in the world and in Being, means to see his life fully, particularly his life of knowledge, and who, an inhabitant of the world, tries to think himself in the world, to think the world in himself, to unravel their jumbled essences, and to form finally the signification 'Being.'"[73] Once the discrepancy of lived experience and eidetic determinations is established, every eidetic determination knows itself as firmly rooted in existence. If this is true, however, then the problem of essence doubles again. Taken from one end, it becomes the problem of unreflected being as "brute" or "wild" being, which must issue into a new definition of the essence.[74] Taken from the other end, the problem of essence becomes the problem of "teleology" or the problem of how an incarnate subject can have the idea

[71] "Toute idéation, parce que c'est une idéation, se fait dans un espace d'existence, sous la garantie de ma durée qui doit revenir en elle-même pour y retrouver la même idée que je pensais il y a un instant et passer dans les autres pour la rejoindre aussi en eux." (VI 150).
[72] Merleau-Ponty critiques Sartre's philosophy of negativity for not drawing the radical implications of this difference (VI 120) and praises Husserl for accepting this difference (VI 71). In *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, Merleau-Ponty claims that for Husserl the transcendental reduction is inevitably an eidetic reduction: "[T]oute réduction transcendantale est inévitablement eidétique" (S 226).
[73] VI 146.
[74] VI 71.

of science and of objectivity.[75] Schematically, this redoubling of the problem of essence corresponds in Merleau-Ponty's project to the problem of the relationship of Nature and Logos or of the visible and the invisible.

The analysis of essence leads us to the starting point of philosophy. In a working note, he writes: "The eidetic variation, therefore, does not make me pass to an order of separated essences, to a logical possible, the invariant that it gives me is a structural invariant, a Being in intrastructure which in the last analysis has *its Erfüillung* only in the *Weltthesis* of this world."[76] The signification "Being," which the eidetic variation reveals, is this "Being in intrastructure." This is the factor concretely working as connective of all experience. The most fundamental meaning of essence lies therefore in bringing to expression this connective factor. But this meaning can be made explicit and therefore fulfill the philosophical task only in the constant return to the "thesis of the world" as the true invariant grounding all variations of experience. By means of Husserl's vocabulary, Merleau-Ponty states that the world is the place where all meaning-intention finds its fulfillment. This means, however, that no intention can in principle fall outside the world. The pre-givenness of the world as starting point of philosophy is therefore understood as being truly operative. The world is the constant thesis of my life.[77] As a result, in this "thesis," we recuperate not only every reflective attempt to turn towards certain regions of the world or towards the world itself, but also every feigned behavior (imagination) or failed experience of integration (illusions, hallucinations, etc.).

The activity of eidetic variation exhibits a sense of nothingness that does not require to be established over against a being that, for its part, resists negation (Descartes), and that is not pure

[75] Cf. IP 165, 174.
[76] VI 282.
[77] PhP xii.

negativity over against a being of pure positivity (Sartre).[78] Eidetic variation, properly understood, reveals a negativity inherent to the appearance of being itself. There is no appearance that imposes itself as pure being nor any appearance can turn out to be a pure nothingness. Rather there is "a field of appearances, each of which, taken separately, will perhaps subsequently break up or be crossed out (this is the part of nothingness), but of which I only know that it will be replaced by another which will be the truth of the first, because there is a world, because there is something."[79] At every moment, experience testifies to this fundamental evidence: "there is being, there is a world, there is *something*; in the strong sense in which the Greek speaks of *τὸ λέγειν*, there is cohesion, there is meaning."[80]

§ 2.c. The Ontological Capacity of Experience

In dealing with the problem of the essence, Merleau-Ponty is drawing the radical consequences of the ontological function of experience promoted both by Husserlian phenomenology and by the new discoveries in the sciences. Philosophy is "the recapture of the brute or wild being."[81] But this recapture finds a crucial resource in non-philosophy, that is, in science. As regards Merleau-Ponty, it is the psychology of the form that carries a paradigmatic anti-idealistic ontological function. Commenting on Husserl's appendix on biology from the *Crisis*, he writes: "From there, revision of the relationship philosophy-non transcendental thought. Psychology is philosophy. Biology is philosophy. Philosophy is already in [a] recognition of lateral participation of life and of psychism

[78] VI 121.
[79] VI 121. The same point, with explicit reference to Husserl, is made at the end of the section on "Interrogation and Intuition" (VI 170). See also VI 173, 184.

[80] VI 121.
[81] "La philosophie comme reconquête de l'être brut ou sauvage," (VI 139).

with me."[82] In an unpublished note, Merleau-Ponty even proposes to speak of a philosophy of nature instead of a philosophy of being: "we say philosophy of Nature and not philosophy of being because it is a question of accounting for our experience of being, – and in particular for scientific experience."[83] This approach, as it emerges from the analysis of essence, is also in play in the way Merleau-Ponty reads Husserl's *Wesensschau*. In this section, I will make more explicit the result of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of essence in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

The eidetic variation, in the second sense outlined above, reveals the individual thing as the focal point (point of variation) of a generic and ideal universality (in-variant). According to this theory, reality appears to be framed in terms of the oppositions of 1) the one-many, 2) the possible-actual, and 3) the exemplar-species.[84] Merleau-Ponty, however, has purported to extract the unstated implications ("unthought") of Husserl's analysis of essence, which he no longer understands as separate from existence nor as coincident with it. The outline about perceptual faith and the theory of essence points to an invariant dimension, which is not an *eidos*, but rather coincides with the facticity of the thesis of the world. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of essence returns to us the original sense of Husserl's conception of the natural attitude.[85] In *Ideas I*, Husserl describes the thesis of the natural attitude as follows:

> Alle Bezweiflung und Verwerfung von Gegebenheiten der natürlichen Welt ändert nichts an der *Generalthesis der natürlichen Einstellung*. "Die" Welt ist als Wirklichkeit immer da, sie ist höchstens hier oder dort "anders" als ich vermeinte, das oder jenes ist *aus ihr* unter den Titeln "Schein," "Hallucination" u. dgl. sozusagen herauszustreichen, aus ihr, die – im Sinner der Generalthesis – immer daseiende Welt ist.[86]

[82] NC 85.
[83] I.B.N., VI, f. 106 (in Colonna 2014, 136).
[84] See Fink in ND 222-223.
[85] Cf. Luft 2002, 73, 78 *et passim* for a systematic reconstruction of the theory of the natural attitude.
[86] Hua III/1, 61.

Merleau-Ponty carries out a relocation of the notion of essence into the horizon of the natural attitude and into the singularity of the lifeworld as its correlate.[87] As a result, we may infer, the sense of ontology as the theory of essences (of the a priori, according to Husserl) would have to undergo a recasting and point to a redefinition of ontology and of its scope.[88] At least, this is the direction that Merleau-Ponty follows. The dimension of the natural world of life cannot be ultimately framed in terms of the methodical distinction between essence and existence and this distinction remains derivative with respect to this most fundamental layer of analysis.

The insight into the natural dimension of experience implies that any single appearance, any being or fact, cannot ultimately be posited as belonging absolutely to another order than the order entailing the structural or essential features of reality (the species). Every fact is rather an integral part of the order of permanence and dimensionality of the lifeworld. Yet, the recognition of this connection between fact and essence works now as the presupposition for a deeper qualification of the essence itself: in its unity with the order of facts, the essence is already facticity. The essence is the opening and organization of a process of confirmation, breaking up or crossing out of facts.[89]

In one of the last working notes from December 1960, Merleau-Ponty thematizes explicitly the relationship of essence and of the existence by referring to the idea of an *ontological capacity* of experience: this is the "capacity to take a being as representative of Being." This capacity exhibits a general characteristic of every being to become an "emblem of Being." More profoundly, however, this capacity exhibits "the openness to Being in an Entity, which, henceforth,

[87] Luft points out this correlation in his systematic theory of the natural attitude. See Luft 2002, 54-55.
[88] Fink points out that ontology for Husserl remains the title for the eidetic theory of higher order objects or of the "a priori." ND 156. He also claims that nowhere in Husserl there is an ontological determination of the processes involved in constitution. ND 152.
[89] VI 148, 184.

takes place *through this Entity*."[90] In these formulations, Merleau-Ponty intends to articulate the characteristic feature of wild being as not flat or mono-dimensional. The new conception of essence consists in the idea of a capacity of "de-regionalization" belonging in principle to every regional fact.[91] This de-regionalizing aspect not only enables a conception of the essence that overcomes its separation with the facts, but also allows to expand or "de-regionalize" the notion of essence itself. Therefore, the essence would no longer simply coincide with some structural component of experience or, correlatively, of the experienced object (the distinction in intuitional or categorial objects, formal and material essences, the determination of regional ontologies, etc.). The notion of essence coincides now with the idea of a horizon of sense in general and ultimately with the phenomenon of the world.[92]

The ontological import of the studies of perception, of the sensible and natural world, of expression and language emerge now clearly.[93] Merleau-Ponty writes, "we have with our body, our senses, our look, our power to understand speech and to speak, *measurants (mesurants)* for Being, dimensions to which we can refer it, but not a relation of adequation or of immanence."[94] Thus, the essence becomes the name for the transcendence of the world itself, which is neither "subjective" (as representation) nor "objective" (as reality in-itself) but the Being that works as connective for all beings, both subjects and objects. If this is so, however, then we discover a Being that cannot be primarily determined in purely positive terms. The introductory chapters of *The Visible and the Invisible* point to an ontology that takes the farthest stance towards those forms of

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[90] VI 323.
[91] "Tout *that* comporte un *what* parce que le *that* n'est pas rien, donc est *etwas*, donc *west*" (VI 256).
[92] On this topic, cf. the essay by Agata Zielinski, "La notion de 'transcendance' dans *Le visible et l'invisible*: de l'indétermination au désir," in de Saint-Aubert 2008, 215-253. Zielinski stresses the importance of the perception through adumbrations and of the structure of horizon for Merleau-Ponty's notion of transcendence. At the end of the section on *Interrogation and Intuition*, Merleau-Ponty establishes a parallel between what he calls the "operative world" and the "operative essence." See VI 158.
[93] See VI 138 for perception. See VI 267 for the sensible and natural world. See VI 139, 166-168 for language.
[94] VI 140.

artificialism and positivism that fabricate the world or Being with the innerwordly and the ontic. Being is the totality that can never be resolved in terms of any of the innerworldy totalities as sum, organic life, etc. To do so would ultimately abolish the ontological difference. At the same time, however, and this is crucial, our placement in Being and in the world is definitive. This means that we cannot have any other point of view other than an intraontic or innerwordly point of view. This situation represents a conundrum for the understanding: on the one hand, the understanding is led to posit an ontological order as separate from the ontic order; on the other hand, it must also know itself as necessarily intraontic.

§ 3. Merleau-Ponty between Phenomenology and Metaphysics: The Institution of Nature

In this final section, I will highlight a final articulation of this conundrum in the idea of an "institution of nature." I will approach this point by looking closer at Merleau-Ponty's reception of Fink's critical reading of the method of intentional analysis. Highlighting the notions of institution of nature will at the same time allow us to achieve what I take to be a remarkable approach to the problem of nature in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty intends to present his version of the institution of nature in contrast to Descartes'. The idea of an institution of nature occurs in Descartes' Sixth Meditation. In his last meditation, Descartes discusses the problem of the substantial union of the soul and the body. This discussion is carried out in connection to the assessment of the existence of material things. The meditation rehabilitates the existence of material things by justifying the veracity of the natural inclination to believe in the existence of external things. Descartes thereby reintegrates this natural inclination, which plays a crucial part

in our life, with our faculty of natural light, which is guaranteed by the existence of God. This expedient of the proof of God, as Husserl calls it, must provide the reason why we can, and ultimately should, trust the impression of corporeal affections.[95] Yet, this rehabilitation of the existence of material things yields a particular conception of the relationship between the soul and the body. This relationship cannot be thought in itself, Descartes contends elsewhere.[96] But even if we cannot grasp the union of body and soul through our natural light, this union is certainly lived, that is, we experience it in our natural inclination to believe in the existence of material things, including our own body. Yet, the proofs of the existence of God function as premises to establish the truth of this inclination. According to this conception, an "institution of nature," Descartes writes, "compels the soul to function according to the apparatus of the body and also the body to furnish ready-made thoughts to the soul."[97]

In the "Nature" lectures and again in the drafted part of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty critically targets the conception that presupposes an *ens originarium* for the explication of the union of body and soul. Because it rests on this presupposition, the union of body and soul rests on "the absolute opacity of an institution that reconnects by the efficacity of decision two orders each of which would suffice to itself."[98] Thus, the institution of the natural union of body and soul is ultimately a divine institution. Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, purports to take seriously Descartes' claim that the union of body and soul cannot be grasped by our pure

[95] *[D]ie Nothilfe des Gottesbeweises* (Hua VI, 422).
[96] Descartes' letter to Princess Elizabeth from June 28, 1643.
[97] This is the relevant passage from Descartes' *Meditations*: "when I feel pain in my foot, my knowledge of physics teaches me that this sensation is communicated by means of nerves dispersed through the foot, which, being extended like cords from there to the brain, when they are contracted in the foot, at the same time contract the inmost portions of the brain which is their extremity and place of origin, and then excite a certain movement which nature has established [*qui institutus est a natura*] in order to cause the mind to be affected by a sensation of pain represented as existing in the foot." Descartes 1911, 196-197.
[98] VI 286

understanding.[99] But he also refuses to make the meaning of natural experience dependent on an *ens originarium*. He intends thereby to articulate the institution of nature on the level of the natural union of body and soul, which he understands as an order that gives "at one stroke what a divine science would make us understand."[100]

In *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty begun his inquiry about the relationship between nature and consciousness by starting "from below," that is from a more neutral notion, so to speak, than the pure psychological or physiological ones. The notion of behavior served this purpose. The question about the nature-consciousness or the body-soul relationship is taken up again in *The Visible and the Invisible*. In a similar fashion, but with a more explicit metaphysical concern, Merleau-Ponty defines his starting point to approach this question by refusing the point of view of God. As I showed in Chapter 4 and 5, the difficulty to abandon the divine point of view – that of a *kosmothéoros* – is linked for Merleau-Ponty to the difficulty to think being and nothing as closely interrelated.[101] The ontological outline in the drafted portion of *The Visible and the Invisible* makes this point manifest in critically targeting reflection, negation, and intuition according to their unresolved positivistic and negativistic tendencies: "Like the negativism of the doubt, the positivism of the essences says secretly the contrary of what it says openly."[102] If the negativism of Descartes' doubt harbors the positivism of a *res cogitans*, the positivism of the essences harbors the negativism of a pure consciousness.[103] In Merleau-Ponty's strategy, Sartre's philosophy emerges as the epitome of this *ventriloquial thought* as "that which always affirms or denies in the hypothesis what it denies or affirms in the thesis, that which as high-altitude thinking

[99] He makes this point in *Eye and Mind*, OE 55.
[100] VI 222.
[101] Merleau-Ponty's long fine-grained critique of Sartre's philosophy boils down to Sartre's failure, in spite of his intentions, to think a "nothing sunk in being." VI 118, 122.
[102] VI 160.
[103] VI 160.

belies the inherence of being in nothingness and of nothingness in being."[104] The experiences of nature, as seen in Chapter 4 and 5, give voice to a dimension where being and nothing pass into one another.[105] By the same token, however, Merleau-Ponty suggests, the way to understand their interrelation presupposes the refusal of any high-altitude thinking, i.e. of a point of view from nowhere, which must always assume either a positivistic form (substantialism) or a negativistic form (transcendental idealism). The possibility to clarify what Descartes describes in terms of an institution of nature without assuming the point of view of God depends on clearly opposing the idea of a being that can only be *ex nihilo*.

How does Merleau-Ponty characterize this situation of indivision of being and nothing that defines our natural situation but that raises insurmountable difficulties when we try to grasp it? In order to sketch out an answer to this question, I will look for clues in the last characterization of nature that we find in *The Visible and the Invisible*. In the working note with the title "Nature" from November 1960, Merleau-Ponty considers the meaning of nature in the sense of what is primordial. He suggests that the most primordial (*Urtümlich*, *Ursprünglich*) might be older than everything, but not like a thing is older than another thing. In fact, what is older than everything is here claimed to be, with a reference to Hegel, "of the first day."[106] The working note continues, "It is a question of finding in the present, the flesh of the world (and not in the past) an 'ever new' and 'always the same.'"[107]

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[104] VI 104.
[105] Merleau-Ponty speaks of *passer* of being and nothing into one another in VI 96 and of *totalité confuse* in VI 91. In this argument, the same point about the interrelation of being and nothing comes to expression in a variety of different formulations such as *épaisseur*, *profondeur*, *pluralité des plans*, *arrière-mondes* (VI 97). These expressions are typical of Merleau-Ponty's positive attempt to capture the dimension of negativity that he is after and that can be summarized with the idea of an "interworld" (*intermonde*), expression that appears several times over the course of *The Visible and the Invisible* (VI 73, 90, 116) and most importantly there where the concept of "flesh of the world" is introduced (VI 116).
[106] VI 320. See also VI 264.
[107] VI 320.

This claim can be understood in light of another working note, written few months earlier, which connects thematically with the question of the primordiality of nature. In the working note entitled "'Indestructible' past, and intentional analytic – and ontology" (April 1960), he speaks of an "architectonic past," of a past belonging "to a mythical time, to the time before time, to the prior life [*à la vie antérieure*]."[108] Jargon aside, the question remains for Merleau-Ponty to clarify the way in which the inactuality of the past remains effective in the actuality of the present and is therefore simultaneous with it. In the course of this same working note, Merleau-Ponty considers the viability of Husserl's intentional analysis for adequately treating the problem of the architectonic or mythical past of nature. The question namely is whether the way of proceeding in terms of an intentional analytic is able to seize upon the (architectonic) simultaneity of the past and of the present. The paradigmatic case study is Husserl's analysis of retention. Merleau-Ponty points out a tension in the analysis of retention.

On the one hand, the method of intentional analysis continues to maintain the idea of an absolute point of view: "a place of absolute contemplation *from which* the intentional explicitation is made, and which could embrace present, past, and even openness toward the future – It is the order of the 'consciousness' of significations, and in this order there is no past-present 'simultaneity,' there is the evidence of their divergence."[109] The analysis of retention intends to account for the peculiar presence of a temporal moment that is now in the past. It does this by assessing the presence of the present and the present of the past through a process of progressive adumbration resulting in Husserl's famous diagram representing the elapsed time-phases through the lenses of the flow of a present now. The past was itself a present and is now still present,

[108] VI 296.
[109] VI 297.

although adumbrated by the present now, etc.[110] As Merleau-Ponty already points out in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the analysis of the various temporal phases of impression, retention, protention, and their modalities of succession and coexistence, leads us back to the temporal form of experience as not itself temporal. As a result, the analysis of time discovers the task to investigate the field that is opened by this web of temporal interrelations.[111] Advancing the analysis of time in this direction, however, requires taking up on a deeper level the clarification of how the timeless absolute presence of transcendental subjectivity relates to the temporal flow it constitutes.[112] The presence of an absence that the analysis of retention accounts for raises the necessity of clarifying this same dynamic on a deeper level.[113] Merleau-Ponty, however, thinks that the intemporality of absolute subjectivity (the positing of an absolute point of contemplation) must make unintelligible the temporal operation that it is supposed to realize (the past-present "simultaneity"). Colonna, for instance, points out the difficulties encountered by a transcendental approach to this question, which have in particular to do with the problem of how to conceive the relationship between the timelessness and immortality of the transcendental *ego* and the temporality of the mundane and mortal *ego*.[114]

On the other hand, these sketchy remarks lead us to the alternative take Merleau-Ponty has on the analysis of retention. He writes:

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[110] Hua X, … in Colonna 2014, 389.
[111] Fink calls it a *Gespinst zeithafter Sinnbezüge* in ND 221.
[112] See PhP 483. Merleau-Ponty refers to Husserl's *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*. Cf. Colonna 2008, 141.
[113] "Il faut une présence du passé qui soit abscence, il faut qu'il soit una certaine abscence." IP 252.
[114] See Colonna 2008, 144. Colonna quotes from Hua XI, 377-378: "Die Gegenwart ist notwendig erfüllte Gegenwart. Wenn auch der gerade 'währende' einheitliche Gegenstand oder Vorgang aufhören kann, so kann der Prozeß des 'Währens' selbst nicht aufhören. Das Währen ist 'unsterblich.' Hört der Ton auf, so ist dafür eben ein anderes da als währende Gegenwart […] Das Fortleben und das Ich, das fortlebt, ist unsterblich - notabene das reine transzendentale Ich, nicht das empirische Welt-Ich, das sehr wohl sterben kann."

> [T]he *Ablaufsphänomen* that Husserl describes and thematizes […] contains the "simultaneity," the *passage,* the *nunc stans,* the Proustian corporeity as guardian of the past, the immersion in a Being in transcendence not reduced to the "perspectives" of the "consciousness" – it contains an intentional reference which is not only from the past to the factual, empirical present, but also and inversely from the factual present to a dimensional present or *Welt* or Being, where the past is "simultaneous" with the present in the narrow sense. This *reciprocal* intentional reference marks the limit of the intentional analytic: the point where it becomes a philosophy of transcendence.[115]

There where the method of intentional analysis interrogates the most fundamental layer of the life of consciousness, i.e. the life of temporality, we discover a dimension that escapes intentional analysis and that, Merleau-Ponty writes, is "meta-intentional."[116] He is here following clues stemming from Fink who in an essay from 1959 offers some poignant reflections about Husserl's late philosophy.[117] Fink highlights three main motives that appear to be especially prominent in Husserl's then still mostly unpublished manuscripts. These motifs are, first, the interpretation of time, second, the treatment of the intuition of essence (*Wesensschau*), and, third, the analysis of intersubjectivity. In light of these guiding themes of Husserl's late philosophy, Fink intends to show the presence of speculative elements in Husserl's thought. These elements, however, are not just implicitly at work in Husserl's lengthy analyses, they are also what Husserl lucidly obtains by following the rigor of his own analytical work:

> Time grounds in a time-formative [*zeit-schöpferisch*] present, which is not in time; the division of all beings (*essentia – existentia*) grounds in a primordial unity [*Ur-Einheit*], which is neither "factical" nor "possible,"

[115] VI 297. Colonna sees in this passage the influence of Bergson on Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl. See Colonna 2002, 216. Merleau-Ponty refers to Bergson in relation to his conception of time in the working note with the title "Nature" (VI 320).
[116] VI 297.
[117] E. Fink, "Die Spätphilosophie Husserls in der Freiburger Zeit," in *Nähe und Distanz* in ND 205-227.

> neither one nor manifold, neither exemplary nor a species; the plurality of subjects grounds in a depth of life before any self-adherent individuation [*selbsthafte Individuation*]. Husserl repeatedly circles around these three conceptual motives […] Husserl wants to think back into the formless ground from which the configurations emerge, he wants to seize the *apeiron*, the unlimited – yet, not in a mystical sinking into the night, in which – according to Hegel's mocking word – "all cows are black"; he wants to seize upon it as the primordial source [*Ur-Sprung*], as the fissure [*Riss*] that tears apart the living ground, as the negativity in the most primitive Being, that is, he wants to grasp time in its emergence from the intemporal-eternal, the fabric of the world [*Weltgefüge*] in its being fabricated [*Fügung*], and the selves, the subjects, in the selfing [*Selbstung*] of absolute Being.[118]

This passage has a profound programmatic scope not only for the way Merleau-Ponty reads Husserl, but also for the development of Merleau-Ponty's own thought. In connection with the three themes of time, the essence, and the *alter ego*, Husserl formulates theses that point to the limits of the method of intentional analysis.[119]

At this point, we can turn to the "Nature" working note, where Merleau-Ponty states for us the new point of view of the analysis of time: "The sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction, realize from within a passage from one into the other." Merleau-Ponty thus names the simultaneity of past and present (but we could add the future as well), which he sees being exhibited in the order of the sensible and of nature, with the expressions "existential eternity. The indestructible, the barbaric Principle."[120] These are the titles that are now entrusted with the recasting of the idea of the *ens originarium* or of a first cause. The intemporal character of time,

[118] ND 224.
[119] ND 222-223. Sebastian Luft writes in connection to the movement of self-overcoming in Husserl's phenomenology: "Husserl hätte wohl selbst nicht zugegeben, dass er jemals die Grenzen phänomenologischer Methode willentlich überschritten hätte, aber seine eigenen Denkanstrengungen, die ihn zuletzt in die Nähe spekulativer Philosophie führen, belehren nicht zuletzt ihn selbst eines Besseren." Luft 2002, 17.
[120] VI 321.

i.e. the character pertaining to its indestructible or eternal passage, is not placed on the side of a transcendental consciousness but it is explicitly attributed to nature. In the summary of the first course on nature, when commenting on Lucien Herr's statement that "Nature is of the first day," Merleau-Ponty defines nature as the "implication of the immemorial in the present, the appeal from the past to the most recent present."[121] Merleau-Ponty, however, raises doubts about the possibility to arrive at an adequate determination of this natural implication by the method of intentional analysis. Intentional analysis is said to ultimately yield a phenomenological *positivism*.[122] What becomes clear to Merleau-Ponty, thus, is that a thinking of nature, of the *physis*, cannot be achieved in this way. He insists on the necessity to take again operative intentionality as starting point of the analysis: "It is necessary to take up again and develop the *fungierende or latent* intentionality which is the intentionality within being [*intentionnalité intérieure à l'être*]." He continues by claiming that the project of developing operative intentionality as intentionality within being "is not compatible with 'phenomenology,' that is, with an ontology that obliges whatever is not nothing to *present* itself to the *consciousness* across *Abschattungen* and as deriving from an originating donation which is an *act,* i.e. one *Erlebnis* among others."[123]

We observe in this line of argument the clear attempt to take hold of the negative *in* being exhibited by the experiences of nature. The idea of an institution of nature raises the issue of understanding how something can both be *ever new* and at the same time *always the same*. The question of nature is closely linked to that of temporality. Colonna captures this link of nature and

[121] RC 94-95
[122] Merleau-Ponty speaks of a "*positivist* endeavor" in relation to the method of intentional analytic in VI 285. This working note is from January 1960. It should be noted that in October 1959 Merleau-Ponty intervened in the discussion on "Langage et inconscient" at the Sixth Bonneval Symposium on the topic of the unconscious. On this occasion, as reported by Pontalis, Merleau-Ponty stresses already that an understanding of the unconscious cannot be reached by way of an intentional analytic "that would positively distinguish and describe a series of operations or acts of consciousness," in Merleau-Ponty 1966, 143.
[123] VI 297-298.

time in a summative and clear way: "Time and Nature pass into one another, they exchange their philosophical function within a unique conceptual operator, namely that of a development [*croissance*], of a letting be [*faire advenir*], of an event, of the differential deployment of Being."[124] This reading finds evidence in the way Merleau-Ponty brings the notion of the unconscious (which Freud describes as "indestructible") into the orbit of the definition of nature. Merleau-Ponty defines the Freudian unconscious as "fecundity of the event," thus indicating a semantic kinship between the unconscious, and nature, with the notion of institution.[125] As a result, the institution of nature expresses the idea of a natural event, which is not only and not primarily a limiting feature of experience, but rather an enabling feature, which lets something be seen and which is productive of meaning.[126]

The notion of institution that Merleau-Ponty delineates implies a reappraisal of the actual scope of the natural world of life. The reach of this natural world is expanded to the point that the possibility itself of getting out of it results impossible. This is also the reason why Merleau-Ponty must ultimately find himself at odds with Husserl's intentional analysis. The argument is this: if the natural world of life is established as invariant starting point of philosophy, then the natural attitude, as its correlate, cannot be left; then, also, the project of phenomenology as transcendental philosophy is impossible because the reduction cannot do its job, it cannot be performed fully, and

[124] Colonna 2002, 227. This link between time and nature is very clear in the following passage from the late lecture courses: "the visible that we see, of which we speak, is the same visible of which Plato and Aristotle spoke, the same visible that they saw, the same numerically: behind each landscape of my sight, even if it is not l'Hymettus, l'Ilisos or the plane trees of Delphi, because it is a landscape, not a flock of ephemerous sensations nor of judgments, of stray and vagrant spiritual acts, but a segment of the *durable flesh of the world*, are hidden the landscapes of all the human beings that have been, of all those who will be, of all those who would have been or could be, undivided between them and me like the object that I hold between my right hand and my left hand." NC 374-375. My translation and emphasis.
[125] IP 222n.
[126] See on this whole point the treatment of "symbolism" in IP 200f.

a true genuine transcendental domain cannot be delimited, or, if there is anything like a transcendental domain, it would be inaccessible.[127]

The institution of nature is Merleau-Ponty's programmatic title drawing the ontological demands implied by the notion of operative intentionality. This argument also sheds light on the way in which Merleau-Ponty's late formulations about the flesh and the chiasm should be approached. Notions such as simultaneity, but also depth, articulate Merleau-Ponty's idea of the chiasm, that is, the idea that "every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken, the hold is held, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of."[128] The institution of nature is the institution of an order that is not "in the past" as opposed to our "present." In this case, it would not encompass or overtake us. The past of nature is "of the first day," it is fully in our present but not as an adumbrated phase of consciousness. The institution of nature is *Urstiftung* or "primordial institution," which encompasses the present, the past, and the future taken as lived-experiences of consciousness.[129] Nature as institution, or better, as primordial institution, is in our living present, but it must remain inaccessible to any immediate or intuitive grasp.[130]

[127] Cf. Luft 2002, 83.
[128] VI 319. The same idea is made explicit also in VI 177-178, 183, 247, 327.
[129] VI 275.
[130] With special reference to the theme of temporality, Colonna points out Klaus Held's argument in *Lebendige Gegenwart* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), who highlights the difficulties for phenomenological experience to seize upon the anonimity of the ultimate living present.

CONCLUSION

In *The Structure of Behavior*, the question of nature, and of its relationship with consciousness, emerges as the question of how to understand natural forms and totalities (Chapter 1). The psychological notion of a level of experience provides Merleau-Ponty with the conceptual framework to account for our experience of nature. Nature is the general title for the spatio-temporal level of experience. Yet, it is the effort to make explicit the implications of intentionality as operative that allows Merleau-Ponty to dramatically deepen the investigation of natural totality in the direction of an ontology (Chapter 2 and 3). Natural reality, space and time, are a level that is subject to modifications and modalizations and that is always preceded by another level, etc. The experiences of nature presented in Chapters 4 and 5 continue and deepen the study of natural totalities. The ontological intention of these analyses, however, is only half understood if the shift Merleau-Ponty operates towards ontology is not carefully followed. The notion of operative intentionality opens us to the true level of all levels, which is pregiven once and for all: this is the level of the world, which Merleau-Ponty identifies with being itself.[131] In this Merleau-Ponty follows a development that was already under way in the work of Husserl, especially in the late 20s and into the 30s as he turned more and more toward the problems of method and of system in phenomenology. This development can be summarized by few extraordinary lines from Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. In the last pages of this book, Husserl sums up his criticism of logic by targeting in a parallel way both skeptical relativism and logical absolutism. Husserl argues against the fatal misconception in philosophy and science of presupposing "an absolute norm for

[131] NC 113.

objective being and truth."[132] The "very restricted teleological sense" of the sciences and much philosophy fails to seize upon

> the infinitudes of life and its cognition, the infinitudes of relative and, only in its relativity, rational being, with its relative truths. But to rush ahead and philosophize from on high about such matters is fundamentally wrong; it creates a wrong skeptical relativism and a no less wrong logical absolutism, mutual bugbears that knock each other down and come to life again like the figures in a Punch and Judy show.[133]

Merleau-Ponty's interest in nature, in animality, and their relationship with humanity can be read in the context laid out by these lines. The study of nature and life carries out concretely the core idea expressed by Husserl's passage in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, which is that of revealing "all those relativities in which being and validity are involved," of making manifest "the *truth* […] not as falsely absolutized," but rather "as within its *horizons*," and, therefore, of shedding light upon a "living intentionality."[134] Failing to discern these relativities in play in the emergence of the ideal of objective being and truth leads to fatal consequences for the whole enterprise of science. What Merleau-Ponty is after is precisely those "infinitudes of life and its cognition,"

> What we are looking for, on the contrary, is a true unfolding [*explicitation*] of Being, that is, not the exhibition of a Being, even infinite, in which the articulation of beings one after another comes about in a manner that is in principle incomprehensible to us, but rather the unveiling [*dévoilement*] of Being as that which they (beings) model or cut out [*modélisent ou découpent*], that which places them together on the side of what is not nothing.[135]

[132] Hua XVII, 284/278. Husserl attributes this "beschränkter teleologischer Sinn" to the absolutizing of the regulative ideal and methods of the "exact" sciences for our definition of experience and knowledge.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Hua XVII, 285/279.
[135] N 266.

The import of the study of nature and animal life is therefore no less that of producing a different conception of being and truth as generative. This however only if nature is rediscovered in its original sense as going back to the Greek verb φυω- and the Latin *nascor*, as Merleau-Ponty wrote in the very first lines of his first course on "Nature." Nature is that from which something else is generated, and therefore it is a principle of continuity without having to be an absolute principle, whether as absolute truth or as substantial foundation. As a result, to conclude, nature, life, and also interanimality (nature as experienced) become the latest formulations of operative intentionality in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty.

But also, the rehabilitation and concern with metaphysical themes in Merleau-Ponty's thought, which Fabrice Colonna has brilliantly exposed, remains incomplete if we do not take into account that the emergence of metaphysical and even speculative motives originated within Husserlian phenomenology itself. In Merleau-Ponty's project of a philosophy of nature, operative intentionality is the technical placeholder of this development from within phenomenology. The experimental character of the psychology of perception and the reflective approach of Husserl's phenomenology thus, in Merleau-Ponty's hands, seem less contradictory than some passages in Colonna would suggest. If we follow Fink, whose argument underlies and integrates Merleau-Ponty's own understanding of phenomenology from the beginning, then we should conclude that the proposal of an institution of nature (Chapter 6) does not want to be a replacement *toto coelo* of Husserl's method. In his essay on Husserl's late philosophy, Fink argues that the difference between intentional analysis and speculation is not a mere methodological one: "In the meditating thinking of the fissuring differences [*reissende Unterschiede*] that Being [*Sein*] and being

[*Seiendes*] undergo, the thinker experiences also their primordial unity."[136] This thinking meditation decides also the fate of Merleau-Ponty's own philosophy.[137]

[136] ND 156.

[137] The proximity of Fink and Merleau-Ponty is attested in Merleau-Ponty's own words. In a letter to Fink, he writes that "today as in the past, I am very close to your preoccupations and your meditation, even if the approach and the mode of expression are different." The excerpt of Merleau-Ponty's letter is quoted in Bruzina 2002.

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