

Future Directions in Feminist Phenomenology
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Hyperdialectic: Methodological Considerations for an Ontological Feminist Phenomenology

ABSTRACT

In an early feminist phenomenological paper Jeffner Allen (*Through the Wild Region*, 1983) interpreted Merleau-Ponty's "hyper-dialectic" or "good dialectic" through the I-other, men-women opposition and criticized Merleau-Ponty for his androcentric, sexist assumptions of a gender neutral body as the foundation for his ontology. Since then phenomenological feminists have stayed away from Merleau-Ponty's concept of the hyperdialectic, even though Allen, at the end of her paper, points out possibilities for a new beginning for the good dialectic in feminist thinking.

This paper examines the shift from dialectic to hyperdialectic in Merleau-Ponty's late work and why this shift became necessary as Merleau-Ponty developed his ontological philosophy. I will argue that from early on Merleau-Ponty had a conflicted and ambivalent relationship with the Hegelian dialectic and its Marxist manifestations, particularly its tendency to assume an abstract, "high-altitude thinking" which did not take into account the ontological entanglement of the embodied mind with the stream of history. The hyperdialectic as a method developed in tandem with Merleau-Ponty's evolving understanding of *Gestalt*, structure, or *forme* and the transformational rules that govern wholes, which he encountered in his work with Gestalt psychology, Levi-Straus' structuralism, and Saussure's linguistics. The method of the hyperdialectic, which Merleau-Ponty developed only in outline, suggests a way for investigating complex systems where changes in individual elements affect the web as a whole – and vice versa. I intend to bring together the diverse hyperdialectical rules that Merleau-Ponty gathered from his structuralist readings, which were filtered through his readings of Husserl and Heidegger (such as figure/ground, pivot/field, whole/difference, immanence/transcendence, being/non-being, etc.).

The hyperdialectic is a method appropriate to an ontological, post-consciousness

phenomenology which acknowledges that the human subject is “neither an outside witness, nor a pure agent” (VI 174) but is deeply implicated in the changes within the socio-historical field. I would like to use these reflections on the hyperdialectical rules as a springboard for opening the question: can Merleau-Ponty’s hyperdialectic be productive for feminist phenomenology?