


AN ABSENCE THAT COUNTS IN THE WORLD: MERLEAU-PONTY'S LATER PHILOSOPHY OF TIME IN LIGHT OF BERNET'S "EINLEITUNG"¹

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volume, Rudolf Bernet convincingly argues for an alternative order and grouping of Husserl's early texts on time — texts originally published as "Supplementary Texts" (Part B) in the critical edition of Husserl's *Time Lectures in Husserliana X: Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*.³ Most significantly, Bernet situates these texts within the context of the development of Husserl's phenomenology and brings to light not only their philosophical import but also their limitations and blind spots. By means of Bernet's re-reading and reconstruction, Husserl's early analyses of time come to reveal tendencies and directions of thought that are otherwise obscured by the organization of the *Time Lectures* themselves. As is now well known, the "Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time" (originally published in 1928 and republished as Part A of the critical edition in 1966) were edited by Edith Stein and nominally by Martin Heidegger and juxtapose texts from different periods of Husserl's thought on time between 1893 and 1917;⁴ this collage effectively masks the philosophical and terminological shifts within Husserl's phenomenology of time-consciousness. What is masked is precisely that "unthought-of element" of Husserl's analyses that Maurice Merleau-Ponty was to find so productive; this is Husserl's constant self-questioning and rethinking of earlier positions, the divergence and revision that reveal his thought as a process in the making.⁵ In taking up and re-ordering the "Supplementary Texts" from *Husserliana X*, Bernet's "Einleitung" makes visible the stakes implicit in the movement of Husserl's thought on time, both in the continuities upon which it insists and in the transformations it enacts. The "Einleitung" reveals reiterations but also differences within Husserl's own thinking of time; it exposes the articulations, hesitations and sometimes even the worries that make the concepts central to Husserl's phenomenology of time-consciousness — concepts of retention, primal impression and absolute consciousness — what they have become for us.

As Bernet notes, Husserl's time-analyses have been a generative, albeit contested, ground for later French phenomenologists for whom the critique of these analyses has constituted an indispensable point of departure in their own thinking of time ("Einleitung," lxiii). Maurice Merleau-Ponty is a curious case

in this regard. Though Merleau-Ponty presents his account of temporality in the *Phenomenology of Perception* as one that follows closely from Husserl's Time Lectures, the temporality which he elaborates throughout that text is one that is characterized as much by "dehiscence"⁶ as by "envelopment" (PhP 140/164) and interlocking ("*emboîtement*") (PhP 240/278). This double reading of retentional intentionality, as the temporal movement both of disintegration (PhP 419/479) and of return and presence to self (PhP 427/488), paradoxically demonstrates Merleau-Ponty's closeness to Husserl. For the author of the *Phenomenology* the Husserlian framework is one that remains *too close*. Merleau-Ponty thinks within this framework, drawing out its implicit yet undeveloped possibilities, but I would claim that Merleau-Ponty does not scrutinize the framework itself. His reading in the *Phenomenology* is at once faithful to, while diverging from, Husserl, yet unlike his approach in later texts such as "The Philosopher and His Shadow" this divergence is not itself marked out or questioned (Signs 177/223); there is no uneasiness with respect to Husserl's texts here.⁷ That distance Merleau-Ponty only achieves in his later works and once his reading of Husserl comes to be mediated by other thinkers (notably Heidegger and Bergson). Most importantly, Merleau-Ponty's relation to Husserl can be understood to mediate his relation to his own thought, with all the vexations and reversals that this implies: Husserl constitutes not only a privileged point of departure for Merleau-Ponty's philosophy (whether on the lived body or on time) but also a means for self-questioning and self-critique.⁸ Thus as Merleau-Ponty distances himself from his own early work — specifically from the philosophy of consciousness and subjectivity and the metaphysics of presence that he comes to discern as having framed the *Phenomenology* (VI 183/237, 200/253) — this self-critique passes progressively through a critical re-reading of Husserl.⁹

The import of this way of reading Husserl for Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of time is double. It means not only that Husserl's phenomenology continues to inform Merleau-Ponty's thinking on time, despite his explicit critique of the Time Lectures in the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*. Although such continuing influence can be attributed to the shift in Merleau-Ponty's focus from the Time Lectures to "The Origin of Geometry"¹⁰ — to which Merleau-Ponty's later courses and writings are clearly more favourable — I believe that Merleau-Ponty's relation to the Time Lectures is a more complex one than such an interpretation allows. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty's later critique of the Time Lectures is accompanied by a working-through and re-conception of Husserlian notions. The central concepts of Husserl's time-analyses are not discarded out of hand. Whether it be the "encasement" or "envelopment" of retentional intentionality or the potential unconsciousness of "ultimate" consciousness, these concepts shift and are reconfigured (sometimes in radical and almost unrecognizable ways) within the later ontology of time that is the *flesh*.

It is in this vein that Merleau-Ponty's appeal, in "The Philosopher and His Shadow," to the fecundity of Husserl's "unthought" can be reread (though the Time Lectures are not Merleau-Ponty's focus in that text).¹¹ Not only would this "unthought" stem from the iterative and self-questioning movement of Husserl's time-analyses, but also from the structures of temporality that Husserl sought to bring to phenomenological description, even when he could not find adequate formulas to fix them (here Husserl's reflections on the nameability and temporality of the "flow" of absolute consciousness come to mind (PITC 75, 371)). Indeed, to invoke a common theme in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl, it is the "failure" to give a complete account and the need to resume the analysis that are the positive lessons of Husserlian phenomenology. In other words, the inability to grasp time-consciousness in an act of intellectual possession demonstrates the excess of its becoming, a transcendence that cannot be held "as between forceps" (VI 128/170). But it is because Husserl's time-analyses bring together divergent tendencies that they can become the locus for this Merleau-Pontian insight: on the one hand, we find in Bernet's words the "dream of the omnipresence of the entire life of my consciousness on call and at my disposal at any moment" ("Einleitung", xlii) — the metaphysics of presence presupposed in Husserl's insistence on the absolute self-presence of the consciousness of the "now" and in his disquiet with respect to forgetting — and, on the other hand, there is a phenomenological attention to time, an attempt to think it from within, that belies this dream.¹² Though Husserl himself did not work through this tension, Merleau-Ponty can be seen to take it up in his articulation of time as "dehiscence" in the *Phenomenology* and in his attempt to name time without fixing it in *The Visible and the Invisible*. Time is, in the latter text, "vortex" (VI 244/298), transcendence without subject or object, and "absence [that] counts in the world" (VI 228/281).

In what follows, I examine Merleau-Ponty's later critique and reworking of Husserl's time-analyses through the lens of concepts, limitations and concerns brought to light by Bernet's reading of these time-analyses in the "Einleitung". My argument draws primarily on the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, but it is also informed by Merleau-Ponty's lecture courses on *Institution* and *Passivity* (1954-55).¹³ Three elements of Bernet's reading of Husserl frame my argument: (i) the metaphysics of presence, the "dream of the omnipresence of ... consciousness" presupposed in Husserl's analyses ("Einleitung", xlii); (ii) retention as non-linear "encasement [*Verschachtelung*]," as the splintering or spiralling of time that implies a certain structural circularity, or in Merleau-Ponty's terms "simultaneity" ("Einleitung", li); and (iii) the problem of forgetting demonstrated at once by Husserl's "positivistic horror of the past as the locus of an absolute and fundamental absence" ("Einleitung", xlii) and by his reflection on, and

rejection of, the possible unconsciousness of ultimate consciousness (“Einleitung”, lvi and PITC 382). Since Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy of time takes its point of departure — as both critique and reconceptualization — from Husserl’s time-analyses, it will be important to follow the trajectory of these Husserlian concepts within Merleau-Ponty’s later ontology of the *flesh*. My question is: what becomes of the present, retention and forgetting in the later works? The tentative answer passes through the logic of institution as the “retrograde movement of the true” and through unconsciousness as (dis)articulation of the perceptual field, as Merleau-Ponty attempts to detach Husserlian notions from the philosophy of consciousness and “rehabilitate” them within an ontology of time.¹⁴

I. Merleau-Ponty’s Critique of Husserl Early Time-Analyses

The explicit critique of Husserl’s early time-analyses takes place in the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*. At the centre of this critique we find Husserl’s time diagram: “Husserl’s diagram is dependent on the convention that one can represent the series of nows by points on a line.” (VI 195/248, W.N. May 20, 1959) This same diagram of time was appropriated in a positive sense by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, reproduced with a slightly different skew in order to emphasize the sinking into the past of each now-point and the “thickness” of retention that at once separates and connects the present to the past (PhP 417/476-7). In that text, Merleau-Ponty overlooked the rectilinear (PITC 99) and one-dimensional nature (PITC 380) of the diagram in favor of the non-linear complication introduced into the diagram by retention — what Bernet has called “splintering” (“Einleitung,” li) and Merleau-Ponty “dehiscence” (PhP 419/480). Though continuing to recognize the positive import of retentive intentionality for the understanding of temporality, Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* no longer finds this intentionality sufficient to save Husserl’s time diagram. This is because Merleau-Ponty has become concerned with a deeper problem than linearity. Though his critique is aimed at the “linear conception of time” presented in Husserl’s diagram, as Bernet rightly notes (“Einleitung,” lxiii), it is also more than this. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty’s critique of the spatialization of time does not follow Bergson’s account in *Time and Free Will* (VI 195/248). For Merleau-Ponty, the error does not lie in representing time in terms of space, rather it is both spatiality and temporality that must be reconceived (and his ultimate descriptions of the *flesh* emphasize its “spatializing-temporalizing” structure (VI 244/297)). The problem, in a word, is not merely that of the line but of the point (whether spatially or temporally conceived).

In the working notes, Merleau-Ponty describes “Husserl’s diagram as a positivist projection of the vortex of temporal differentiation.” (VI 231/ 284,

W.N. January 1960) It is the positivity of the present, the now-point of Husserl's diagram, that is at issue here. And it is from this representation of the now-point as self-presence that both the punctuality and abstractness of the present and the seriality of time emerge as intertwining problems for Merleau-Ponty.¹⁵ At stake here is the metaphysics of presence that undergirds Husserl's time-analyses. In "Is the Present Ever Present?", Bernet notes the importance for Husserl of maintaining that "the now is, for itself and absolutely, present *now*."¹⁶ The self-givenness of the now-point, its immediate perceptual presence for a primal impressional consciousness, is a metaphysical conviction that is reiterated in Husserl's time-analyses, even when it is belied by his phenomenological descriptions. For Merleau-Ponty, this is more than a question of privileging the present (though it is also that); it is a misconstrual of the nature of the present, the consequences of which freeze the passage and flow of time. The assumption of full self-presence makes the present into a self-contained and sufficient moment, a source-point that coincides with itself.¹⁷ Such a point persists in itself, but has no internal reason for passing. By attributing absolute presence to the present, it becomes inconceivable that this present can itself pass. It can only become past by means of an *external* pressure, another present that competes with it and that pushes it out of existence — or, more precisely, out of the grasp of the consciousness of the "now." Thus Merleau-Ponty asks of Husserl: "Is it the new present, in its individuality, that pushes the preceding one into the past, and that *fills* a part of the future?" (VI 190/244) Merleau-Ponty notes that "the upsurge of time would be incomprehensible as the *creation* of a supplement of time that would push the whole preceding series back into the past. That passivity is not conceivable" (VI 184/237). Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty, this was precisely what Husserl's appeal to the auto-constitution of the flow of absolute consciousness attempted, yet failed, to avoid (184/237). Ultimately, this picture would make of the present "a segment of time with defined contours that would come and set itself in place" (VI 184/238); it would be "a field defined by the objective diaphragm" (VI 196/249), where the present content were wholly positive and fully given to consciousness and the past an "occultation" or negation of this content (194/248).¹⁸ Time would then be defined as a series of punctual *Abschattungen*, a succession of self-contained moments that push each other out of presence.¹⁹

Significantly, this picture misses the passage of the present, since the implication of the past in the present — their internal interdependence — is elided. The relation of past and present remains one of externality. It is such an aporia that defines Husserl's treatment of the relationship between primal impression and retention for Bernet: "the two are separated in an original form of 'externality' in which each pole presupposes the other, yet neither can be derived from the other." ("Einleitung," lv) It is for this reason, I believe, that

Merleau-Ponty no longer finds the addition of retentional intentionality to be sufficient to mitigate the punctuality and seriality of the Husserlian diagram. Unless the past is recognized as internally necessary to the definition of the present, and retention co-conditional for the consciousness of the primal impression, the import of retention is lost. For Merleau-Ponty, retentional intentionality should be understood to restructure the flow; Husserl's time-analyses can only recognize its supplementation and "splintering" at points. By founding time-consciousness in the self-presence of a source-point — the primal impressional consciousness or consciousness of the "now" — Husserl relegates retention to the role of an "appendage or relic, a 'comet's tail'" ("Einleitung", lv).²⁰ The implications of retention are not thought through.

Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl's time diagram carries the reflection on the "now-point" farther. His argument is not only that the knife-edged present, or now-point, cannot be said to exist since it constitutes an idealized abstraction (as Derrida will later argue). His argument is that Husserl has underestimated the import not only of retention but also of the now-point itself. For Merleau-Ponty, a point is more than merely a "point." I find three senses in which this can be understood from the working notes. First, a point is already a relief or *Gestalt*. He notes that "it is the Cartesian idealization applied to the mind as to the things (Husserl) that has persuaded us that we were a flux of individual *Erlebnisse*, whereas we are a field of Being. Even in the present, the landscape is a configuration." (VI 240/293) This is not only because there are no isolated points or figures in the perceptual field, but also because to be seen as a "point" is to deploy the differences within the perceptual field so that a certain figure becomes prominent while others remain implicit. The point relies for its visibility upon systems of diacritical difference — not only upon other points but also lines, colours and depth. Second, the now-point is already passage. The present is always elsewhere (or else-when) than where I look. It is unlocalizable as a fixed point, "ungraspable from close-up, in the forceps of attention" (VI 195/249); "one knows that it is not there, that it was just there, one never coincides with it" (VI 184/238). Though it may seem that this understanding of the now-point would motivate Merleau-Ponty to conceive it as a disintegrating or evanescent presence, his conception of the present in fact proceeds in the opposite direction, expanding it to a cycle "with indecisive contours" (VI 184/238), as we shall see in section two. Third, a spatio-temporal point is an event that, as it passes, opens up a future for other points. Since Merleau-Ponty does not subscribe to a formal understanding of the now-point, taken apart from its "content," the now-point must already be understood to inscribe a style or way of being. In other words, a point is already a direction or dimension, "a centre of forces".²¹ The point does not persist in itself, but is difference within a spatio-temporal field and the transformation of that field.

What the working notes offer, by means of these three senses of the point, is a reconceptualization of the now-point. I would thus claim that Merleau-Ponty's critique of Husserl's early time-analyses not only uncovers the ideal of self-presence upon which the edifice of time-consciousness is constructed (the "dream of the omnipresence of ... consciousness" to which Bernet points ("Einleitung", xlii)), but also seeks to provide an alternative. In abandoning the dream of self-presence, the Husserlian now-point is not evacuated, but reinscribed as transcendence. Significantly, the now-point is no longer defined as presence to an actually-existing mode of consciousness (or to a subject, as in the *Phenomenology of Perception*). Rather, the now-point is at the cusp of a transcendence that surpasses the subject, and that cannot be encompassed by consciousness. It belongs to the ontological movement, the temporalization, of the *flesh*.

In response to this Merleau-Pontian critique, it may be objected that Husserl's time-analyses rely precisely on the distinction between now-point and primal impressional consciousness that Merleau-Ponty appears to elide. Though now-points are organized according to a succession in immanent time, and hence can appear to trace a linear path, Husserl came to realize that the structure of time-constituting consciousness could not be likewise described as a "succession." (PITC 333) Rather, in the last group of the time-analyses (Bernet's group four, texts from September 1909 to end of 1911), absolute consciousness is characterized as a "being-all-at-once" of two sorts, which make possible the experiences of succession and of simultaneity. (PITC 77-78, 374) Though this "being-all-at-once" cannot be properly called "simultaneity" any more than "succession" (PITC 375-6), since such terms can only be used to speak of immanent time within Husserl's schema, Husserl nevertheless appears to be trying to describe a structural coexistence of impressional and retentional consciousness in the actuality phase of consciousness. This structural coexistence is not static but "makes up the moving moment of the actuality of consciousness" that is the "flow" of absolute consciousness (PITC 378).

Appealing to the primal impressional consciousness does not, however, mitigate Merleau-Ponty's critique. The "philosophy of consciousness" is the locus of repeated and generalized criticism in the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible* — not only as it is presupposed in Husserl's time-analyses and other texts but also as it works to frame many of the analyses of the *Phenomenology of Perception*.²² The reconceptualization of the present, to which I have pointed, works to recuperate the insights of the time-analyses by shifting the account of temporality away from this philosophy of consciousness. This shift of attention is not therefore a misreading on Merleau-Ponty's part, but an effort at philosophical rehabilitation. In order to see this, it is necessary to turn briefly to the critique of the philosophy of consciousness as it has to do with time. In a particularly rich working note,

Merleau-Ponty observes that “[t]he intentional analytic tacitly assumes a place of absolute contemplation *from which* the intentional explicitation is made, and which could embrace present, past, and even openness towards the future.” (VI 243/297, W.N. April 1960) The problem is precisely that the “being-all-at-once” of time, what Merleau-Ponty calls the “past-present ‘simultaneity’” (VI 243/297), is contained within the immanence of consciousness. In this schema, whatever is, or was, must present itself to a consciousness that grasps it in full self-presence (primal impression) or as an absence that derives from a former presence (retention). To rehabilitate primal impression and retention it is necessary to think them not as acts of consciousness — even if non-objectivating, as in the case of Husserl’s notion of horizontal retentional intentionality [*Längsintentionalität*] — but to think them as “intentionality without acts” (VI 238/292), or more precisely as “intentionality within being.”²³ This intentionality is not a property of a consciousness to which the now-point must become present, but “the thread that binds” the now-point to its own past and future (VI 173/227). It is the temporal becoming or transcendence of the now-point itself, a transcendence that cannot be fully encompassed in any consciousness.²⁴

The aim of Merleau-Ponty’s critique is, then, to think the past and the present without reducing them to the “consciousness of the past” and the “consciousness of the present.” At the centre of the critique is Husserl’s constitutive analysis which traces the being of the past and of the present back to time-constituting consciousness. This constituting consciousness Merleau-Ponty elsewhere describes as “the philosopher’s professional impostor” (Signs 180/227); instead of disclosing the secret structure of time, this consciousness is an “artefact” that the presumptive teleology of philosophical reflection projects back onto the flow (180/227). In contrast, Merleau-Ponty maintains that “it is indeed the past that adheres to the present and not the *consciousness* of the past that adheres to the *consciousness* of the present: the ‘vertical’ past contains in itself the exigency to have been perceived, far from the consciousness of having perceived bearing that of the past.” (VI 244/297) There is a *weight* to the past, and to the present that passes, that make a difference in time and whose reverberations can be felt, even when the present involves unconsciousness and the past remains forgotten; in other words, they are “absences” that count in the world. The “simultaneity” or adherence of the past to the present is a structure that Husserl’s intentional analysis failed to grasp, a structure that was implicit within his description of the “flow” as Merleau-Ponty reads it.²⁵ I believe that Bernet points to this concentric structure when he describes the way “each new retention ripples through the whole of time-consciousness like a stone cast into the water.” (“Einleitung”, li) It is this simultaneity that Merleau-Ponty tries to think through in his later philosophy of time — insisting that it is neither fusion without differentiation (a position he

attributes to Bergson), nor the juxtaposition of external moments (Husserl). Not unlike Husserl's hesitations in naming the "flow" of absolute consciousness, Merleau-Ponty searches for images and concepts through which the internal implication of past and present, and hence the simultaneity that structures time, can be glimpsed. Though it is unclear that any of these concepts can be taken as final (or that such completion is even possible), I will examine two such schemas below: Merleau-Ponty's appeal to Bergson's "retrograde movement of the true" (section two) and, in a move surprisingly reminiscent of the *Phenomenology*, to the *Gestalt* of the perceptual field (section three).

Merleau-Ponty's critique of the philosophy of consciousness as framework for thinking time stems not only from the paucity of its representation of past and present, but also from its inability to do justice to the structure of time as past-present "simultaneity." My reading of Merleau-Ponty is hence informed by two concerns overlooked by the philosophy of consciousness, lacunae that Bernet discerns in Husserl's account of the past in the time-analyses ("Einleitung", xlii). On the one hand, there is the "circularity" of time that can be seen in the historical becoming of the past, its power to take on new meaning after the fact and to thus reconfigure, and be reconfigured by, the present (section two). And, on the other hand, there is the problem of forgetting, not only as the insinuation of discontinuity and absence into what could have been an "omnipresent" intentional life, but as a structural absence that makes perception possible for Merleau-Ponty (section three).

II. Retention, the Present and the "Retrograde Movement of the True"

Merleau-Ponty's lecture course on *Institution* (1954-55) opens with a re-reading of Husserlian primal impression that will be accompanied by a radical rethinking of retention. Merleau-Ponty observes Husserl's hesitation between, on the one hand, conceiving the primal impression according to the schema of apprehension-apprehension content²⁶ and, on the other hand, understanding it as *Urempfindung* "where I am surpassed, [because I feel the] thickness of the sensible, of the present, the thing itself."²⁷ The present is a surpassing not only in the sense in which it is something new, and hence not immediately perceived as a recognizable object, but also, as we learn later in the lecture course, in the sense in which it is an event that only comes to have its meaning post-factually. Since the present does not have its meaning in itself, retentional intentionality cannot be a matter of simply holding onto the former present and conserving its meaning as it was without loss. Rather, in both the *Institution* Lectures and *The Visible and the Invisible*, retention is rethought by Merleau-Ponty in a way that allows for the openness of the present and the historical becoming of the past.

In this vein, Merleau-Ponty appeals to Bergson's conception of the "retrograde movement of the true" from *La pensée et le mouvant* (cf. IP 91-

94; VI 189/243; VI 240/294).²⁸ For Bergson, this is the anachronistic process by which an event appears to have pre-existed its emergence, or a judgment its dated formulation. An event or judgment is thus taken to be *possible* — in a form that was fully defined and worked-out — prior to its actualization.²⁹ This movement involves the retrospective projection onto the past of that which happens in the present. In other words, the past is reconfigured and redefined according to the present; it is seen as already containing the *possibility* of the current present, as having been its nascent equivalent. For Bergson, this retrospective movement is a mirage or illusion that makes us believe that the truth pre-dates its emergence, that it is the discovery of an eternal essence.³⁰ This at once misunderstands the difference in kind between past and present, taking the past as a modality of the present, and elides the unpredictable novelty of duration that cannot be captured within the mirrored schema of the possible and the real.

But Merleau-Ponty finds in the “retrograde movement of the true” precisely the logic of historicity and truth that Bergson thought lacking. It is the “automatic” rippling back of the present,³¹ the reverberation by which “a now presents itself as pre-existing itself” (IP 94), that Merleau-Ponty appropriates from Bergson and, I believe, uses to rethink retention. Bergson does, after all, sometimes speak as if this projection were not merely an error of the intellect, but a movement that was produced by the very passage of the present: “By the simple fact of realizing itself, reality projects its shadow behind itself onto the indefinitely remote past.”³² For Merleau-Ponty, then, “there is really retrograde movement of the true (and not only retroactive effect of the *discovery* of the true).” (IP 91) This is to say that the meaning of the present is not given to a constituting consciousness; rather, the present institutes itself by means of its temporal propagation, its transcendence (IP 37). This propagation is, for Merleau-Ponty, the true meaning of the auto-constitution of time that Husserl theorized.³³ On this model, retentive encasement would not be a matter of holding onto and conserving, albeit in the mode of presentification, the series of former presents as they sink continually into the past (“Einleitung,” 1-li). The past is not the same but absent; rather the past is transformed, takes on new sense, through its intentional relation to the new present.

More precisely, it should be noted that this temporal propagation has a double directionality, giving time a “circular” or cyclical structure in Merleau-Ponty’s later thought. In this context, Merleau-Ponty uses Bergson’s “retrograde movement of the true” to articulate the logic of “institution,” a term that translates his version of the Husserlian notion of *Stiftung* (IP 91-94).³⁴ The circularity of time is encapsulated in a note to the *Institution* lectures: the present, Merleau-Ponty says, “has to become what it is [*a à devenir ce qu’il est*]” (IP 36, marginal note). *On the one hand*, the passing of the present, its institution, means the “opening of a field” (IP 38) To be precise,

it is by becoming past that the present installs a field or dimension according to which a certain future is opened up. The promise of the primal impression, and of *le sentir* generally, is to “become ‘level’ or dimension” (VI 239/292); to use Husserlian terms, the retention of a former primal impression protends a certain future. Merleau-Ponty notes:

Thus institution [means] [the] laying down in an experience [...] of dimensions (in the general Cartesian sense: system of reference), in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will have a meaning and will form a *sequel*, a history. The meaning is deposited [...] But not as an object in the cloakroom, as mere remainder or survival, as residue: [it is there] as to be continued, to be completed without this sequel being determined. (IP 38)

Thus the past present — the event become field or dimension which Merleau-Ponty also calls the “dimensional present” (VI 244/297) — outlines a future of sense (Signs 72/91). Though this future is made possible by the past, it is neither causally determined by it, nor a mere realization of it. Possibility, for Merleau-Ponty, is not a retrospective copy of the real; it is the fecundity and power (*puissance*) of polymorphous Being to give rise to ever new dimensions of sense — systems of diacritical difference — according to which it can be seen, though not wholly given (VI 252/306). The forward movement of institution is hence at once openness to a future, but also the circumscription of that future according to the field that the former present has instituted. Openness to the future inscribes a structural blind spot or limitation that derives from the very contingency and facticity of the former present that has made it possible. Thus, though “any entity can be *accentuated* as an emblem of Being” (VI 270/323, commenting on Freud), it is nevertheless the case that openness to Being henceforth takes place *through* this entity. The forward movement of institution outlines a form of continuity that is not an illusion for Merleau-Ponty; the future is undetermined, but neither arbitrary nor unmotivated.

On the other hand, there is the backward movement of institution, the “retrograde movement of the true.” Here, new events opened up by the former present are projected back onto that present, giving it its sense. It is in this way that the present *becomes* what it is. The meaning of the former present was not given in itself, but is the effect of the retrospective reverberations (or ripples) of the future, now present, that it has made possible. Importantly, this meaning is always mediated through other events (though not necessarily ordered in a stepwise mediation), so that this meaning is neither closed nor complete. In this sense, historical becoming is inscribed within the being of the past for Merleau-Ponty. Not only does the present have its meaning in passing, but as past it is constantly rewritten. Indeed, we may say that the present has its meaning only in the mode of the “*will have been*” [*va avoir été*] (VI 189/243). It is the very dimensionality and polymorphism of the *flesh*, which Merleau-Ponty’s account assumes, that dictates this non-closure and re-inscription of

the past. Since no dimension can be considered exhaustive, and since the diacriticality of dimensions implies their constant self-differentiation (a diachrony that reorganizes their synchrony), the institution of a dimension, as well as its constant shift, will mean that the past is reconfigured so that it reveals another historical sense. Though this historical meaning often appears as an elaboration of what the past *was*, it sometimes reveals an alternative sense of the past, “inassimilable” to prior dimensions (IP 250). It would be an error to understand this reconfiguration as a reconstruction of the past; the meaning that the past comes to have is not a retrospective illusion but neither is it explicitly contained in the past in itself (IP 251). Rather, this is the historical coming to expression of the multi-vocal and “overdetermined” events of the past itself (VI 240-241/294).

The forward and backward temporal movements of institution, that make the present what it is, do not coincide or come to rest there. This is not only because the sense of the present is always elsewhere, as past dimensionality and future possibility; it is also that the circle — through which the present-become-past opens a future and the future-become-present reconfigures the past — is not closed. Neither past nor future can be exhaustively given, but what is more troubling here for the Husserlian theory of time-consciousness is that the present is not immediately or fully given. The present not only *passes*, it *becomes*. The self-presence of the present is mediated by means of both retentive intentionality and the protentions that retention calls for.³⁵ Re-reading the Husserlian concept of retention, Merleau-Ponty notes that “the absolute present which I am is as if it were not” (VI 191/244). Yet the present is not nothing for Merleau-Ponty. Although the model of institution implies “the influence of the ‘contents’ on time which passes” (VI 184/238) — so that the present cannot be attributed a homogeneous and constant form and is far from being an “objective diaphragm” (VI 196/249) — it is through the very circularity of time that the present can be understood. The present is variable and situated; only as past for a future does the present become something. Hence the present is “a cycle defined by a central and dominant region and with indecisive contours — a swelling [*gonflement*] or bulb [*ampoule*] of time.” (VI 184/238) In this context, it may be accurate to speak of time as spiralling, as Bernet suggests in the “Einleitung” (li). Indeed, in the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty uses the image of a “vortex” [*tourbillon*] (VI 244/298) to describe the spatializing-temporalizing structure of the *flesh*, but he also speaks, in another context, of a “stroboscopic spiral” (VI 264/317). That the “spiral” is stroboscopic is not without significance for the notion of the present; for the present is then “like the point of [the spiral] which is *who knows where*” (264/317), which cannot be located if we search to fix it, but which is revealed in passing as having already transcended us.

This rethinking of the present is central to Merleau-Ponty's later ontology of time. But what does it mean for the Husserlian notion of retention? Merleau-Ponty's reworking of retention as "retrograde movement of the true" takes seriously Husserl's occasional admissions in the time-analyses that the primal impression requires retention in order to come to presence itself and that the constitution of the "now" needs the consciousness of the past — directions in Husserl's time-analyses to which Bernet has pointed in his work.³⁶ But Merleau-Ponty's reworking of retention ultimately also breaks with a central element of Husserl's account of retention. What is at stake is the Husserlian investment in retention as the guarantee for the omnipresent continuity and memorial repeatability of the life of consciousness, and in "memory as the most faithful reproduction possible of a past perception" ("Einleitung," xlii). I believe that Merleau-Ponty breaks with this picture in two ways. First, in taking the "retrograde movement of the true" to be the very movement of the temporality of events and not a mere retrospective illusion, Merleau-Ponty conceives of retentional intentionality as the propagation of sense. Retention does not conserve the past, modified as the absence of a former presence, but opens up the past to historical transformation and to the expression of "a sense it did not yet have in original-present experience" ("Einleitung," xlii). This belies the Husserlian dream of a past fully accessible and recuperable by means of the continuous encasement of retentional intentionality. The past is not simply pushed back in retention yet held onto as the same past; the ripples of retentional encasement must be understood as reconfigurations according to which hitherto invisible dimensions of the past come to the surface.

Second, in Merleau-Ponty's account, the opening of the future that the retention of a passing present makes possible is not simply a confirmation of the continuity of intentional life but a transformation of that life. This speaks to a limitation of Husserl's theory of memory that Bernet examines in *La vie du sujet*. Bernet notes that his conviction of the continuity and coherence of the life of consciousness leads Husserl to conceive the future as the confirmation of this continuity, without recognizing the necessity for deformation and loss. This means not only that forgetting is accidental, but also that it can be reconquered in acts of recollection. It is this ideal repeatability of the past — its accessibility as it was for a former primal impressional consciousness — that retention protends on Husserl's account. The future for which retention calls is, then, a future that is made up of acts of recollection in which what has been retained is reproduced and felt to coincide with the present that it was.³⁷ It is this dream of the immediate givenness to consciousness of the present as it is — and of its subsequent and continuous accessibility through retention — that makes forgetting a difficulty for Husserl's time-analyses, as Merleau-Ponty comes to realize in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

III. The Problem of Forgetting

In the working note where he discusses Husserl's time diagram (see section one), Merleau-Ponty broaches the problem of forgetting in Husserl's Time Lectures: "The problem of forgetting: lies essentially in the fact that it is discontinuous." (VI 194-5/248, W.N. May 20, 1959) As Merleau-Ponty is well aware, Husserl's early time-analyses can only account for forgetting in terms of the shrinking of the temporal horizon, the fading-away of remote retentions as they become more and more distant from the actual phase of consciousness (PITC 361-2). Forgetting, then, is an ordered phenomenon. More so, it is a contingent loss that is recuperable, for it is always in principle possible to recover these remote retentions in a present act of recollection (though the accuracy of a recollection may sometimes be in doubt). Merleau-Ponty's own attempt to deal with forgetting in the *Phenomenology of Perception* remains close to this Husserlian account. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty understands oblivion as the limit of the retentional chain (PhP 423/483-4); on the other hand, he attempts to supplement the Husserlian framework with an account of forgetting that assimilates it to an intentional act, performed in bad faith, by which memory continues to be possessed but is held at a distance (PhP 162/189).

By the time of the lecture course on *Passivity* (cotemporaneous with that on *Institution*, 1954-55), Merleau-Ponty realizes that the problem of forgetting is badly posed if it is understood as an accidental inability to remember, or a loss that can be overcome (IP 256). Such an approach deals with forgetting by evacuating what is most difficult, or unsettling, about it. It betrays, as Bernet notes of Husserl, "a positivistic horror of the past as the locus of an absolute and fundamental absence, of an inexorable withdrawal and an irreplaceable loss" ("Einleitung", xlii).³⁸ Merleau-Ponty's insight, in this regard, is to see forgetting not as a problem to be solved, but as a necessary and original structure of time (IP 256-7). It is in this vein that Merleau-Ponty's response to Husserl in the working note cited above can be understood: "But it is not so: there are retentions that are not forgotten, even very remote ones. There are fragments 'perceived' just now, that disappear (have they been perceived? And what exactly is the relation between the perceived and the *imperceived*?)" (VI 194f/248) This points the direction in which Merleau-Ponty seeks to think forgetting; for to take forgetting as originary means, for Merleau-Ponty, to understand its role within perception. The consequence is that forgetting is no longer understood as a loss but as a negativity that is generative of the perceptual field (VI 228/281) — as an originary absence, imperception or blind spot within the present (VI 247/300).³⁹

This approach to forgetting that understands it as an unconsciousness which would reside within the present, or actual phase of consciousness, is not wholly alien to Husserl's time-analyses. Such unconsciousness is the fate of

the “ultimate consciousness” of which Husserl dreams in the final text included in *Husserliana X* (“Einleitung”, lvi, PITS no. 54). There Husserl speculates that “an ultimate consciousness that controls all consciousness in the flow” (PITS 382) might allow the flow to be grasped in its entirety (rather than only as past), so that constituting and constituted could finally coincide (381). But if an infinite regress is to be avoided, then such a consciousness cannot become the object of attention of another consciousness; it is hence ultimate and constituting, but also unconscious (on Husserl’s terms). Though this thought-experiment seems to take place principally as an afterthought in the time-analyses, and although Husserl finally rejects the possibility of such an “‘unconscious’ consciousness” (PITS 382), this line of thinking is one that Merleau-Ponty takes up, and radically reworks, in his later philosophy. Specifically, it is by bringing unconsciousness into the heart of perception that Merleau-Ponty is able to think the “simultaneity” of past and present, which he criticized Husserl for neglecting.

For Merleau-Ponty, then, forgetting “is to be sought in vision itself: memory will be understood only by means of it.” (VI 194/247, W.N. May 20, 1959) What Merleau-Ponty proposes is not simply a schematization of time on the model of perception. The reductiveness of such an approach was already evident in Husserl’s hesitations with respect to the application of the apprehension-apprehension content schema in the context of time-consciousness — as Bernet has clearly shown (“Einleitung”, xlvi, PITS 322-3) and as Merleau-Ponty realizes in the *Phenomenology* (PhP 152n/178n).⁴⁰ In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty’s aim is not only to understand temporality by means of perception, but also to rethink perception according to the structuring role that forgetting plays in visibility. It is by means of this double revision that Merleau-Ponty’s later ontology of the visible is also an ontology of time.

The crucial move is to no longer take forgetting as belonging to the interiority of the subject, and hence as posing a problem for a philosophy of consciousness that aims at omnipresence. Forgetting is, rather, understood to belong to the structure of the *flesh*. The equation of temporality with subjectivity that was dominant in the *Phenomenology of Perception* is hence revealed to be a subjectivism that misconstrues time; to say, in the *Phenomenology*’s confident phrase, that “we are it” is to reduce past and present to their representations for a subject (PhP 430/492). But temporality is not a transcendence that belongs to a subject. It is rather the transcendence, or surpassing, of the subject by a spatializing-temporalizing *flesh* to which that subject belongs. It is hence more accurate to say that we are *of* time, than that we are time (to use an oft recurring expression of the later work). More specifically, since the *flesh* is thought first and foremost through visibility, forgetting becomes for Merleau-Ponty a function of that contact between body

and world, that folding upon itself of visible *flesh*, which is perception. It is therefore within the perceptual field that forgetting is to be located.

Merleau-Ponty notes that “the unconscious is to be sought not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our ‘consciousness,’ but in front of us, as articulations of our field.” (VI 180/234) More precisely, I find implicit in Merleau-Ponty’s later work three ways in which the perceptual field involves a structural unconscious or invisible, a form of originary forgetting. First, the unconscious is the level or dimension according to which one perceives; “[f]or one perceives only figures upon levels — And one perceives them only in relation to the level, which therefore is unperceived.” (VI 189/243) It is in this sense that consciousness is “ignorance of itself, imperception” (VI 213/267), for it forgets the level or dimension that makes it see. Indeed, it must forget this level, not see it, in order to see *according to it*.⁴¹ This is a forgetting of the past that coexists with perception and makes it possible (it corresponds to the former present become dimension or level, described in section two). The forgetting of the past stems, in this sense, from my “inherence” in it (VI 227/281). Here, consciousness is understood to require the differentiation of the *Gestalt* structure,⁴² while the unconscious is this differentiation itself; the unconscious is *between* figure and ground (VI 189/243). More precisely, the unconscious past is the instituted system of diacritical difference according to which the very separation of figure and ground comes to be defined. It is in this way that past and present are “simultaneous” for Merleau-Ponty (VI 267/321), and that retention can be understood as the “inner framework [*membreure*]” (VI 215/269) or depth of the perceptual field (VI 219/273).

This points, however, to a second sense of forgetting, a sense that leaves its mark on the working note cited at the beginning of this section. There Merleau-Ponty says: “understand perception as differentiation, forgetting as undifferentiation” (VI 197/250, W.N. May 20, 1959). Although this undifferentiation seems, at first, to simply be the result of a lack of separation, specifically that of figure-ground — and hence a fusion that destroys the past — the reading of the past in section two suggests another interpretation. The “undifferentiation” of the past would not be lack of difference, but the multiplication of differences that connect laterally and non-oppositionally, without selection. The past would be a polymorphous, multi-vocal and over-determined matrix, a “mixed life” that can suggest divergent futures (IP 269). Thus the first sense of forgetting, by means of which a former present is instituted as the dimension according to which I perceive, relies on another forgetting. The instituted or “dimensional” past, which is refracted back through the process of actualization it has motivated, remains a circumscribed past (one that circumscribes a corresponding future, as we have seen in section two). There is in this “retrograde movement,” by which the dimensional past is formed, a foreclosure of other dimensions or systems of difference

suggested within the past itself but unperceived in the absolute sense. There would be, in this regard, an originally forgotten past that exceeds any given version of the instituted past and that is more than what is given or operative in the present.

Although Merleau-Ponty shies away from such “absolute invisibility” or “pure transcendence” in *The Visible and the Invisible*, mentioning it only rarely (VI 229/282, 254/308), Derrida has pointed to its trace in that text.⁴³ Such an absence that is felt but that cannot be indexed through perception, even in its retrospective and prospective play, may require an account that goes beyond perception. This would point, to use Merleau-Ponty’s terms, to a “simultaneity” that is also an asymmetry or irreversibility — to what he evocatively calls “the time before time” (VI 243/296). In this second sense, forgetting would be the very inaccessibility, difference or transcendence of the past, that which makes it past and which means that there is no possibility of coinciding with it in recollection (IP 258). Here, the past transcends me not only because of my inherence in it — because it is “too close” — but because this inherence means that my access to the past is always mediated through one of its dimensions, a dimension that dictates its own invisibility. This second sense of forgetting is hence also a double forgetfulness: it is not only a forgetting of the dimension through which I perceive, but also a forgetting of the self-erasure that its function as dimension dictates and thus of the partiality of this dimension itself. This, in turn, implies a third structural blind spot of perception that contributes to the discontinuity of forgetting (and to the structure of time as “stroboscopic spiral”). For, though every new present forms a “coherent deformation” with respect to an already established level, or dimensional past (VI 262/315), so some presents are “inassimilable” to the instituted dimension (IP 250). Such a present is hence not only “divergence with respect to a norm of meaning, *difference*” (IP 41), but registers as nonsense with respect to that norm — as the “disarticulation” of the previous order (VI 197/250). It is in this additional sense that a new present may involve an initial, structural blindness of consciousness (VI 225/278).

There is, finally, a risk in Merleau-Ponty’s project of rethinking perception and time by means of one another. For it means that invisibility often takes on the role of a proxy for forgetting, without the relation between different forms of forgetting, or that between perception and memory, being sufficiently addressed in the text. Though Merleau-Ponty makes clear that the “invisible” of which he speaks is not of one sole kind, that invisibility is heterogeneous and points to a multiplicity of structures (VI 257/310-11), by conceiving forgetting according to the dimensionality of the sensible and the *Gestalt* structure of the perceptual field, its “pure transcendence” may be missed. This echoes a critique that Bernet levels against Husserl’s earlier time-analyses, but that he finds mitigated in the final texts when retention is no longer thought

according to the model of perception (“Einleitung”, xlix-l). It is difficult to know whether the unfinished text of *The Visible and the Invisible* is moving in the direction of an “invisibility” that can be thought beyond the analogy to sensible being. The visible, in Merleau-Ponty’s thought, continues to provide the measure according to which all other phenomena or structures of the *flesh* are understood; there is here a “dictatorship of the visible,” one could say (IP 209). That a non-reductive “mixed or hybrid life” — to use a term from Bernet’s recent work — would be possible within Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the *flesh* is hinted at by Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis that “invisibility” is heterogeneous, that a unified ground cannot be recovered, and by the attempt in the final pages of the manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible* to think *flesh* “beyond the circle of the visible” (VI 144/189).⁴⁴ What such a “*métissage*”⁴⁵ would mean for an ontology of time that seeks to take seriously the simultaneity of the past with the present, but also its inaccessibility and forgetting, I have tried to give a glimpse of in this text.

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References

1. In the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks of “[a] certain relation between the visible and the invisible, where the invisible is not only non-visible ... but where its absence counts in the world ... where the lacuna that marks its place is one of the points of passage of the ‘world’.” This expression encapsulates the way time, and more specifically pastness and forgetting, are understood in Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy. Cf. *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. C. Lefort, trans. A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 228; *Le visible et l’invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, établi par C. Lefort (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964), 281. Henceforth cited as VI with English then French pagination.
2. Rudolf Bernet, “Einleitung” to Edmund Husserl, *Texte zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*, hrsg. von Rudolf Bernet (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1985). Translated in this volume by Elizabeth A. Behnke as “Husserl’s Early Time-Analyses in Historical Context.” Henceforth cited as “Einleitung” with reference to the original German pagination.
3. Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*, Hua X, hrsg. von Rudolf Boehm (Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1966); *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991). Cited as PITC with German pagination.
4. See John Barnett Brough’s “Translator’s Introduction” in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, xi-xvii.
5. In speaking of “the unthought [*l’impensé*],” Merleau-Ponty notes that “the works and thought of a philosopher are ... made of certain articulations between things said.” Cf. “The Philosopher and His Shadow” in *Signs*, trans. R. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 160; *Signes* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1960), 202. Henceforth cited as *Signes*. Merleau-Ponty is, of course, drawing on Heidegger here.
6. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 419; *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris:

- Éditions Gallimard, 1945), 480. Henceforth cited as PhP with English then French pagination.
7. Though I agree with Bernet that “tout en se glissant dans le mouvement de la pensée de Husserl, [Merleau-Ponty] y creuse un écart dont l’apport critique est assurément très riche;” I do not think that this critical import is actualized till the later works. Cf. Rudolf Bernet, *La vie du sujet: Recherches sur l’interprétation de Husserl dans la phénoménologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 164.
 8. In comparison, Merleau-Ponty’s relation to Henri Bergson in the *Phenomenology* is the relation to an other who is consistently misrecognized. (For this argument, see my essay “The Temporality of Life: Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and the Immemorial Past”, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XLV, Summer 2007, pp. 177-206.)
 9. I am indebted here to Renaud Barbaras’s insight that “it is by way of Husserl that Merleau-Ponty grasps his own thought.” Cf. *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 219.
 10. Edmund Husserl, “The Origin of Geometry” in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 353-378.
 11. In light of the publications that have taken place in the intervening years—both the critical edition of Husserl’s Time Lectures in 1966 and Bernet’s “Einleitung” to the republication of the “Supplementary Texts” in 1985—the “unthought” that we find in Husserl will not coincide with that which Merleau-Ponty discerned in the 1928 version of the Time Lectures. This was inevitable since, in addition, our philosophical concerns have a historicity and individuality that differ from his. Caution is hence called for, but I would also claim that this is a generative difference. In light of the tendencies in the Time Lectures that have become visible by means of the intervening publications, the threads of Merleau-Ponty’s reading of the Time Lectures can be disentangled in more nuanced ways.
 12. Bernet demonstrates this tension in “Is the Present Ever Present?” *Research in Phenomenology*, 12 (1982): 85-112. This is also, of course, a productive tension for Jacques Derrida’s reading of Husserl in *La voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967).
 13. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L’Institution, La Passivité, Notes de cours au Collège de France, 1954-1955* (Paris: Éditions Belin, 2003).
 14. To paraphrase Merleau-Ponty’s reference to “an ontological rehabilitation of the sensible” in “The Philosopher and His Shadow” (*Signs* 167/210). Merleau-Ponty’s sense of “ontology” derives here from Heidegger rather than Husserl. For the distinction between the Husserlian and Heideggerian senses of “ontology,” see Bernet, “Einleitung,” lxi-lxii.
 15. For more on Merleau-Ponty’s critique of punctuality in Husserl, see Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, 221-226. For Merleau-Ponty’s critique of serial time, see Mauro Carbone, *The Thinking of the Sensible: Merleau-Ponty’s A-Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 5-13.
 16. Bernet, “Is the Present Ever Present?”, 106.
 17. In his critique of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty notes: “the present itself is not an absolute coincidence without transcendence; even the *Urerlebnis* involves not total coincidence, but partial coincidence, because it has horizons and would not be without them.” (VI 195/249)
 18. Merleau-Ponty adds: “Study exactly the *Erfüllung* of the present: the danger of this metaphor: it makes me think that there is a *certain void* that has *its own* dimensions and that is filled by a defined quantity of the present.” (VI 195-6/249)

19. Merleau-Ponty calls this “serial time” in the working notes (VI 168/222).
20. Merleau-Ponty notes that “Husserl’s error is to have described the [retentional] interlocking starting from a *Präsensfeld* considered as without thickness, as immanent consciousness.” (VI 173/227)
21. In this vein, Merleau-Ponty says: “Understand that the *Gestalt* is already transcendence: it makes me understand that a line is a vector, that a point is a centre of forces.” (VI 195/248)
22. Merleau-Ponty’s critique of his early work is well-known: “Results of Ph.P.—Necessity of bringing them to ontological explication ... The problems that remain after this first description: they are due to the fact that in part I retained the philosophy of ‘consciousness.’” (VI 183/237) This is instantiated by the identification of temporality with subjectivity in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (PhP 422/483). As John Sallis has shown, the guiding problem of the *Phenomenology* is that of subjectivity. (“Time, Subjectivity, and the *Phenomenology of Perception*.” *The Modern Schoolman*, XLVIII, May 1971, 343-357).
23. Of course, Husserl notes that retention is not an act (PITC 118), but Merleau-Ponty’s point here seems to be that it is finally assimilated to the logic of acts (accompanying and forming a constitutive part of acts). He says: “The whole Husserlian analysis is blocked by the framework of acts which imposes upon it the philosophy of *consciousness*. It is necessary to take up again and develop the *fungierende* or *latent* intentionality which is the intentionality within being.” (VI 244/297-8)
24. In *La vie du sujet*, Bernet speaks of an “intentionality without subject or object” but concludes that a Husserlian framework can accommodate an intentionality without object, yet not without subject (326). The question for me is whether such an intentionality can be found in Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy.
25. Merleau-Ponty notes that “the *Ablaufphänomen* that Husserl describes and thematizes contains in itself something quite different: it contains the ‘simultaneity,’ the *passage*, ... the immersion in a Being in transcendence not reduced to the ‘perspectives’ of the ‘consciousness.’” (VI 243/297)
26. In the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty already favorably noted Husserl’s abandonment of the apprehension-apprehension content schema in the Time Lectures (PhP 152n/178n), but did not take this to also call for a deconstruction of the philosophy of consciousness.
27. Merleau-Ponty, *L’Institution, La Passivité*, 34. Henceforth cited as IP, English translations are my own. As Bernet notes, the emphasis on the link of sensibility and time in Husserl shows the closeness between the early Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. I would claim that this continues in Merleau-Ponty’s later works. Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, “Intentionality and Sensation” (1965) in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, trans. Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998).
28. Henri Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1938), 13-16.
29. *Ibid.*, 13-14.
30. *Ibid.*, 14-15.
31. Bergson speaks of “un mouvement rétrograde qu’exécuterait automatiquement dans le temps la vérité une fois posée.” (*Ibid.*, 15)
32. *Ibid.*, 15; my translation.
33. For institution as autoconstitution of sense, see Carbone, *The Thinking of the Sensible*, 6.
34. From “The Origin of Geometry.” Merleau-Ponty discusses this text in much greater detail in his later lecture course, *Notes de cours sur L’origine de la géométrie de*

- Husserl, texte établi par Franck Robert (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998); *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology, Including Texts by Edmund Husserl*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002).
35. Such prospective and retrospective movement can also be found to characterize the temporality of perception in the chapter on “*Le sentir*” in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. See my essay “‘A Past Which Has Never Been Present’: Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty’s Theory of the Prepersonal”, *Research in Phenomenology*, 38 (2008): 41-71.
 36. See “Einleitung,” lv, and “Is the Present Ever Present?”, 104. See also PITC 280.
 37. Bernet, *La vie du sujet*, 248-9. See also PITC 302-303.
 38. See also Bernet, *La vie du sujet*, 245, 248.
 39. On originary forgetting, see Bernhard Waldenfels, “Time Lag: Motifs for a Phenomenology of the Experience of Time,” *Research in Phenomenology*, 30 (2000), 115.
 40. More generally, one also finds hesitations in the time-analyses with respect to the analogy between spatial thing and temporal thing and with respect to the assimilation of time-consciousness to spatial perception, even though Husserl often relies on such analogies for his argument (see PITC 304-5).
 41. For more on Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “dimension,” see Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, 174-181.
 42. For Merleau-Ponty, “[t]o be conscious=to have a figure on a ground—one cannot go back any further.” (VI 191/245)
 43. See Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires d’aveugle: L’autoportrait et autres ruines* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990), 56-7.
 44. Bernet speaks of “une vie mélangée ou métissée” as follows: “C’est dire non seulement que cette vie consciente s’accomplit simultanément à différents niveaux, mais aussi qu’elle fait cohabiter en son sein des formes différentes d’intentionnalité dans un même élan vital. Son unité est donc toujours une unité composée, c’est-à-dire une unité qui rassemble des différences qui s’entrelacent sans jamais se fondre en une trame uniforme.” See *Conscience et existence: Perspectives phénoménologiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), 18.
 45. *Ibid.*, 17.