JYU DISSERTATIONS 251

Hermanni Yli-Tepsa

# The Question of Biological Existence in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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*To my mother Marke and my father Lauri*

# ABSTRACT

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Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908–1961) main philosophical work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, is known for its detailed argument for the claim that perception, the locus of evidence and truth, is embodied. A central part of the argument is the analysis of the anonymous bodily life at the basis of perception. An important but less noted claim endorsed by Merleau-Ponty in his analysis of the infrastructure of perception is that perception rests upon instinctive operations of the perceiver's body.

The thesis uncovers Merleau-Ponty's thinking of the instinctive ground-layer of perceptual experiencing. It takes as the leading clue the term *biological existence* by which Merleau-Ponty refers to the instinctive operations of the body in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The thesis shows that even if the term has a scientific connotation, Merleau-Ponty's purpose is not to argue that a life scientific conception of the body would reveal the ground of perception. Instead, scientific descriptions of the body, notably the ethological characterization of instinctive behavior, will ultimately provide means for delimiting and describing a primitive mode of intentional lived experiencing.

The thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 is an explication of the philosophical context of Merleau-Ponty's early works, *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, and an explication of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the basic tenets of phenomenology. Chapters 2 and 3 sort out Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological interpretation of the scientific studies of behavior, his conception of the organism, and the primitive behaviors of instinct and reflex. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 elaborate a variety of aspects of instinctive experiencing in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. The work explicates and discusses the instinctive mode of temporality, motor intentionality, affectivity and sensibility, and it shows that a coherent line of thought is opened up by the question of biological existence in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Keywords: Merleau-Ponty, perception, instinct

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Yli-Tepsa, Olli Hermanni
Kysymys biologisesta eksistenssistä Merleau-Pontyn teoksessa *Phénoménologie de la Perception*
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Maurice Merleau-Pontyn (1908–1961) pääteos, *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, tunnetaan perusteellisesta argumentistaan, jonka mukaan havaitseminen on paitsi tiedon ja totuuden kannalta olennainen, myös luonteeltaan ruumiillinen kokemisen muoto. Tärkeä osa Merleau-Pontyn argumenttia on havaintokokemuksen pohjarakenteen ja havainnon perustalla olevan anonyymin ruumiinelämän analyysi. Merleau-Ponty-tutkimuksessa on jäänyt vähäisemmälle huomiolle Merleau-Pontyn esittämä anonyymia ruumiinelämää koskeva väite, jonka mukaan havainto rakentuu osin havaitsijan ruumiin vaistonvaraisista toiminnoista.

Väitöskirja selvittää Merleau-Pontyn teorian vaistonvaraisesta kokemuksesta, joka on yksi havaitsemisen perusedellytys. Työn avainkäsite on *biologinen eksistenssi*, jonka avulla Merleau-Ponty *Phénoménologie de la Perception* -teoksessa viittaa ruumiin vaistonvaraisiin toimintoihin. Väitöskirja osoittaa, että käsitteen tieteellisestä konnotaatiosta huolimatta Merleau-Ponty ei argumentoi, että havainnon pohjarakenteen selvityksessä tulisi nojautua viime kädessä biologiatieteen tarjoamiin selityksiin ihmisen ruumiista. Sen sijaan elävien olentojen käyttäytymistieteelliset kuvaukset, erityisesti vaistomaisen käyttäytymisen luonnehdinta, tarjoavat viime kädessä keinon määrittää ja kuvailla primitiivistä intentionaalista elettyä kokemusta.

Väitöskirjassa on seitsemän lukua. Ensimmäinen luku eksplikoi Merleau-Pontyn varhaisteosten, *La Structure du Comportement* ja *Phénoménologie de la Perception* filosofisen kontekstin sekä Merleau-Pontyn käsityksen fenomenologian lähtökohdista. Luvut 2 ja 3 selvittävät Merleau-Pontyn fenomenologisia tulkintoja etologiasta, organismista sekä vaistoista ja reflekseistä. Luvut 4, 5, 6 ja 7 käsittelevät yksityiskohtaisesti vaistonvaraisen kokemisen eri puolia Merleau-Pontyn havainnonfenomenologiassa. Työssä selvitetään, mitä ovat vaistonvarainen ajallisuus, liikeintentionaalisuus, affektiivisuus ja aistimellisuus. Väitöskirja näyttää, että biologisen eksistenssin kysymyksen ympärille muodostuu yhtenäinen ajatuskulku *Phénoménologie de la Perception* -teoksessa.

Avainsanat: Merleau-Ponty, havaitseminen, vaisto

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Fiskars, June 2020
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# SISÄLLYS

# INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908–1961) phenomenological explication of the instinctive basis of perceptual experiencing. The thesis discusses Merleau-Ponty's conception of "biological existence" and its role in the phenomenological theory of perception that Merleau-Ponty formulates in his early works *The Structure of Behavior* (1943) and *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty uses the term biological as an attribute of existence, in order to specify a primitive, pre-personal type of intentional lived experiencing.[1] For example, as Merleau-Ponty famously argues in the chapter "Sensing",[2] perception emerges on the basis of a pre-personal layer of sensibility, an anonymous life of the senses.[3] Insofar as Merleau-Ponty takes up perception as the central theme of his early works, he focuses on a problem which is also at the core of Husserl's phenomenology.[4] Merleau-Ponty holds that perception is the original type of experiencing in which the object is constituted as real,[5] "in person",[6] "itself"[7] or "in flesh and blood".[8] Accordingly, perception is the locus of presence, evidence and truth.[9] In perception a transcendent unity of the object is given within a continuity of varying partial aspects of the object lived

1 PhP, 18/11; 99–100/86–7; 104/90; 142/124; 171/147; 186/162; 221/195; 406/370.
2 PhP, 240–280/214–252.
3 PhP, 250/224.
4 See, for instance, Hua3, §35; §40, 82–83/85; §41. See also Held 2003, 37.
5 PhP, 396–7/358–9.
6 Hua3, §39, 81/83. "Any perceiving consciousness has the peculiarity of being a consciousness of the *own presence 'in person' of an individual Object.*" "In person" is a translation of *Leibhaftig*. In the very beginning of *Ideas I*, Husserl writes: "the <natural> experience that is presentive of something *originarily* is *perception*." Hua3, §1, 11/5–6.
7 PhP, 429/393.
8 PhP, 369/333.
9 See, for instance, Hua3, §43, 90–91/93; §136, 315/327. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty writes: "Yet there is indeed a human act that, in a single stroke, cuts through all possible doubt in order to install itself in the fullness of truth: this act is perception, in the broad sense of knowledge of existences". PhP, 50/42. See also PhP, 452/415–6. "There are truths just as there are perceptions".

through by the perceiver.[10] Perceptual experience provides the basis of the distinction between the physical thing, which is independent of the experiencing subject, and the experience itself. As Husserl writes in *Ideas I*:

> "Precisely [in the transcendence of a perceived physical thing] the most cardinal of [diversities] becomes manifest: the diversity between *consciousness and reality*".[11]

Moreover, the acts and accomplishments of perceptions belong to the experiential sphere of wakefulness and activity. Insofar as the subject of experience is wakeful and attentively notices objects, it becomes possible for the subject to assume a position with respect to the objects and to control its comportment towards the objects. In other words, the field of wakefulness allows for the constitution of an awareness of oneself as an active agent and as a person (and also a similar awareness of others).[12] Finally, each perception involves a horizon of *a world* whose uniqueness encompasses all other possible perceptions, disruptions and breaks of perception and the experiences of other perceiving subjects.[13] Thus, Merleau-Ponty argues that our active, reflective, communal and communicative experiencing life is ultimately grounded on perception. As perceiving beings, we are not yet full-fledged persons or participants of a community, or capable of reflective or analytic thinking. However, Merleau-Ponty thinks that communality and reflection are built on perception, so that if the capacity to perceive is compromised (such as in hallucinating or dreaming), these higher-level phenomena also lose ground.[14] Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty's account, perception is a fragile formation and it can decline, since it is inherently related to non-personal, anonymous matters. The term "biological existence" refers to the *pre-personal life of the body*, and this means the anonymous embodied intentionality that precedes perception and prepares the ground for it.

> In short, in his phenomenology of perception Merleau-Ponty comes up with a question that concerns the ground-layer of perceptual experiencing. The aim of the analysis of

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10 PhP, 82–83/71.

11 Hua3, §42, 88/90. The general theme of Merleau-Ponty's early philosophical project could be seen as schematically expressed in this passage. As it is well known, *The Structure of Behavior* begins by setting the task of understanding "the relations of consciousness and nature". See SC, 1/3.

12 Merleau-Ponty does not formulate an account of agency in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The view that emphasizes the relation of agency to perceptual intentionality can be read out of, for instance, Merleau-Ponty's analyses of motor intentionality (PhP, 114–172/100–183), hallucination (PhP, 385–397/ 349–360) and *cogito* (PhP, 423–468/387–430). Furthermore, a consideration of agency is part of Merleau-Ponty's account of the freedom of a human person. See, for instance, PhP 500–1/462–3.

13 See PhP, 407/370; 491/454. See also Hua4, 205/216: "Hence in a now which, as intersubjective presence, is *identical* for the different subjects […] these subjects cannot have the same 'here' (the same intersubjective spatial presence) nor the same appearances. The index of this phenomenological state of affairs is the impenetrability of the different contemporaneous Bodies as such. […] The appearances two subjects have cannot fuse together into identical appearances as do the optical appearances provided by one's two eyes."

14 See, for instance, PhP, 190–2/166–8; 391/355.

> perception is not only to provide a characterization of perception as an isolated phenomenon, but it also accounts for the perception within a system of phenomena.[15] In other words, the phenomenological theory of perception must also clarify the relation of perception to the phenomena *below* and *above*.[16] As Merleau-Ponty writes, one of his tasks is to reveal the "instinctual infrastructure of perception".[17]

What is the instinctive infrastructure of perception, and what is the biological existence that operates beneath personal existence? As is well known, a central claim of *Phenomenology of Perception* is that the subject of perception is embodied. Merleau-Ponty claims that the human body is not only an instrument of perception, but also the very manner in which we perceive things around us. To use his example, the phrase "we see with our eyes" should be understood as meaning that seeing something is (enacted by) the very movement of the eyes and that the eyes "with" which we see cannot primarily be understood as objects, but must be conceived as the very subjective aspect of perception.[18] Nevertheless, the subjective body is not the sole performer of perceptions. Perception also depends on the pre-personal operations of the body, such as the functioning of sense organs and breathing, which have the phenomenological role of preparing for the emergence of perceptual acts. As Merleau-Ponty writes, the body, "[i]nsofar as it includes 'sense organs' […] ceaselessly sketches out the empty form of the genuine event".[19]

It is important to distinguish two aspects in Merleau-Ponty's treatment of biological existence. *First*, biological existence refers to an instinctive intentional accomplishment that differs from perceptual accomplishments, not in terms of the kind of implicit intentional horizon that the subject of experience possesses, but in terms of a temporal extension of the horizon of experience. Biological existence is an intentionality characterized by a diminished extension of the horizon of experience or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "scope [*l'ampleur*] of our life".[20] Accordingly, a way to phenomenologically approach instinctive experiencing is to vary the extension or the scope of the horizon of experience. *Second*, the attribute "biological" in the term "biological existence" refers to a pre-given intentional schema that emerges spontaneously, i.e. without any external stimulation, from the structure of the body. The bodily infrastructure functions as a pre-given dimension, an implicit intentional schema or a horizon that guides the pre-personal drives. However, the pre-given dimension is intrinsic to the body itself. This is

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15 See PhP, 338/305, for a related claim, according to which perceptual intentionality is in a relation of communication with other basic kinds of intentional lived experiencing: "Mythical or dreamlike consciousness, madness, and perception, despite all their differences, are not self-enclosed; they are not islands of experience without any communication and from which one cannot escape."

16 See, for example, PhP, 65/53, where Merleau-Ponty writes: "We will attempt to reveal the instinctual infrastructure of perception and, simultaneously, the superstructures that are built on it through the exercise of intelligence", and "[w]hen reflection is equally capable of clarifying both its living inherence and its rational intention, it will be assured of having found the center of the phenomenon."

17 PhP, 65/53.

18 PhP, 81/69, 241/216, 246/220.

19 PhP, 193/168.

20 PhP, 95/81.

what Merleau-Ponty means when he describes pre-personal life as "biological" or "natural". The reference is to what belongs to the body itself, that is, what is intrinsic to the body.[21]

The situation becomes more complicated when we take Merleau-Ponty's notion of transcendence into account. Merleau-Ponty suggests throughout *Phenomenology of Perception* that human existence is characterized by transcendence, which means a capacity to stretch out and extend one's reach beyond the actual situation or the urgent condition, and to point beyond pre-determined experiences and experiential environments. However, just like biological existence, *human* existence involves both a certain level of intentional accomplishments and an implicit intentional schema that belongs to the bodily infrastructure. Transcendence is a fundamental phenomenon which is not dependent on our wakeful experiencing or of our activity. Instead, transcendence is due to the very infrastructure of the body.[22] For example, Merleau-Ponty points out that the transcendence characteristic of human existence can be found already in the anonymous associations at the margins of our wakeful life.[23] However, at the same time, Merleau-Ponty holds that the experiences do not reach beyond the actual to the same extent. According to Merleau-Ponty, biological existence is operative at a level that is bound to the actual. Merleau-Ponty opposes biological existence to the human modifications of existence. He writes, for instance: "we just claimed that biological existence gears into human existence and is never indifferent to its particular rhythm".[24] In short, even if transcendence is an inescapable structure of the experiential life of human beings, that is, even if all our experiences have a horizon of transcendence, the full phenomenological account of our experiential life calls for an account of a primitive layer of experience, a "partial" instinctive life that remains operative even at the moments in which our actual capacity to accomplish the intentional acts is diminished. Thus, the attributes "biological" and "human" denote two modifications of existence according to the level of capacities and two corresponding kinds of bodily infrastructure.[25]

In his article from 1993, Rudolf Bernet touches upon the problem of biological existence (even though he uses the term "natural life" instead of "biological existence"). According to Bernet "[t]he inquiry into the status of the human subject can learn much" from Merleau-Ponty's analysis of "natural life" that "owes nothing to the spiritual life of human culture".[26] However, to my knowledge, there are no full-length studies focused on the problems of biological existence and the instinctive infrastructure of experiencing. The themes of anonymity, the pre-personal and the body, which come close to the problem of biological existence, have been central in the research literature on Merleau-Ponty.[27] Other issues

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21 PhP, 399/362–3; 493/455–6.
22 PhP, 197–8/173; 377/341.
23 See, for instance, PhP, 271–3/243–5.
24 PhP, 186/162.
25 Below, I will return to the distinction between biological and human existence.
26 Bernet 1993, 56.
27 For a discussion concerning Merleau-Ponty's theory of the pre-personal, see Dillon 1993; Lawlor 2003 (88–90); Al-Saji 2008. On anonymity, see for example Zahavi 2002, and Heinämaa 2015. Merleau-Ponty has been a prominent figure in discussions concerning the

that pertain to this study and are discussed in the research literature include Merleau-Ponty's relation to the science of biology,[28] Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature,[29] generativity,[30] human/animal difference,[31] childhood[32] and phenomenology of life.[33]

The notion of biological existence is often mentioned but not further developed in texts that deal more generally with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, or texts that clarify central concepts in Merleau-Ponty's written work.[34] Moreover, the concept of instinct in Merleau-Ponty's usage seems to be largely unproblematized. For instance, Stawarska (2014) and Saint Aubert (2004) take up a critique of a classical concept of instinct, when they examine Merleau-Ponty's relation to psychoanalysis.[35] Some authors have given interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's account of repression, which is related to the notion of "biological existence".[36]

My purpose in the work at hand is to reflect on the issue of biological existence in Merleau-Ponty. To be sure, this does not mean that I would thereby ignore the great interpretative work already done. My aim is to provide a more detailed and deeper analysis on instinctive intentionality in Merleau-Ponty's early works, leaning on the already available interpretations. A. D. Smith has recently provided a line of interpretation, which is close to the approach taken here. On the one hand, Smith shows that there is a connection between Husserl's phenomenological reflection on the passive sphere of experience – on the phenomena of association, affection and the instinctive drives – and Merleau-Ponty's notion of the pre-personal[37], while on the other hand, Smith points out the terminological similarity between Husserl's analysis of the instinctive drives in the second book of *Ideas* and Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the pre-personal.[38] Accordingly, I will make use of Husserl's phenomenological analyses in my interpretation.

## Questions and Problems

Merleau-Ponty's characterizations of biological existence leave us with methodological questions that neither he nor his interpreters answer in a satisfactory manner, and there are also conceptual problems that remain to be resolved. These questions and problems can be summarized by two general inquiries: (1) Does

bodily experience, motor intentionality and embodied cognition. See, for instance, Varela & Thompson & Ross 1993; Weiss & Haber 1999; Heinämaa 2012; Marratto 2012; Jensen & Moran (eds.) 2013.

28 See Hansen 2005; Thompson 2007; Buchanan 2008; Moinat 2012; Meacham 2013; Gallagher 2014; Romdenh-Romluc 2018.

29 See Grosz 2008; Toadvine 2009; Wirth & Burke (eds.) 2018.

30 See Beith 2018.

31 See Glendinning 2007; Ruonakoski 2011.

32 See Simms 2008; Welsh 2013.

33 See Barbaras 2005; 2008, 66–85; Dupond 2008, 223–30.

34 See Langer 1989, 33; Hass 2008, 88; Weiss 2014, 132; Toadvine 2014, 31;

35 Stawarska 2014, 65; Saint Aubert 2004, 137, 197.

36 See Morris 2014, 113–4; Dorfman 2015; Smyth 2014, 61–65; Mooney 2017.

37 Smith 2007, 7, 9.

38 Smith 2007, 16.

Merleau-Ponty's account of biological existence meet the methodological demands of his phenomenological approach? (2) And what are the concepts and discoveries that properly belong to his transcendental phenomenological theory of biological existence?

These questions arise because Merleau-Ponty's discussion of biological existence contains arguments and claims that can be interpreted as *scientific* or *ontological* or *metaphysical*, and for this reason their phenomenological significance and connection to phenomenology remain unclear. As I will argue in this thesis, even if Merleau-Ponty borrows terms and draws insights from the physiology and biology of his time in order to develop his understanding of the pre-personal, his concept of biological existence is a part of his phenomenological theory of sense constitution and not an extra-phenomenological resource.

Merleau-Ponty characterizes phenomenology as a particular form of transcendental philosophy, whose point of departure is in the argument that all worldly beings have their ultimate source of sense in their manner of appearance.[39] The phenomenologically conceived transcendental is the world in its relatedness to consciousness. The world of experience or the world-as-experienced is ultimate insofar as it is self-evident for the subject who lives it. The phenomenological study makes the transcendental field of the world of experience available to reflective thematization by putting out of play all validity claims concerning its being, reflects on the experiential accomplishments correlated to different kinds of objects, and accounts systematically for their essential structures. This amounts to saying that phenomenology is a return to phenomena, the experiences in which "things themselves" are self-given.[40] If the transcendental in phenomenology are the phenomena, this means that all possible (and impossible) sense, meaningfulness in the first place, is phenomenal. There is no sense, no meaningful discourse, outwith phenomena.

Why does Merleau-Ponty's account of biological existence seem to exceed phenomenology, or why are the claims concerning it unclear?

The *first*, well-known issue is Merleau-Ponty's use of scientific theories for the purposes of a phenomenological theory. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, when the concrete descriptions of the body and the perceived world are about to begin,[41] he suggests that, in the beginning, these descriptions can be conducted with the psychologist, until "the psychologist's self-critique […] definitely converts the phenomenal field into a transcendental field."[42] In fact, Merleau-Ponty does not only make use of psychology, but also ethology (the biological study of animal behavior) and physiology.[43] No doubt, the two latter branches of science are especially significant in the case of biological existence. The theme of the instinctive life of the human body is also studied in biology, physiology and developmental psychology, as one of their aims is to account for primitive forms of

39 PhP, i/lxx.
40 See, for instance, PhP, 73–4/61–2. See also Hua1, §2.
41 This is situated at the end of the introductory chapter, "Classical Prejudices and the Return to Phenomena".
42 PhP, 77/64–5.
43 See, for instance, PhP, 16–17/10; 105/91.

behavior.[44] In his account of biological existence, Merleau-Ponty makes use of his contemporary scientific conceptions of the organism, instinct and reflex, but does the conversion of the phenomenal field into a transcendental field work out? Rather than successfully describing the proto-perceptual phenomenon of the pre-personal and its place within the system of constitutions, does he simply lean on scientific theories (which might be nowadays outdated or at least radically improved)? How should we conceive of the position of these scientific concepts and insights in his attempt to discover the phenomenological notion of the pre-personal life of the body?

*A second*, related problem concerns the intuitive evidence of biological existence. Phenomenology is supposed to work out its systematic account of sense constitution on the justificatory basis of clarification of phenomena, or on the basis of a faithful description of the objects as they appear in experiences of them. Accordingly, it does not justify its claims by speculation or rational argumentation concerning beings beyond the experiences, but by approaching "as close as necessary" the phenomenon in question, that is, bringing it to intuitive evidence.[45] As Husserl formulates his famous "Principle of All Principles" in the first book of *Ideas*:

> "No conceivable theory can lead us astray. We should realize that each theory could draw its truth only from originary givenness."[46]

Or, as Klaus Held puts it:

> "Philosophy should assert no more and no less than is possible for it on the basis of *originary, given intuition*. Evidence becomes a model for philosophical knowledge."[47]

Now, the problem is that biological existence refers back to a pre-personal mode of experiencing, and pre-personal experiences are lived through at a level of anonymity, such as dreams.[48] When one falls asleep, one loses the grip of the perceptual presence of the objects.[49] We can describe the pre-personal phenomena, such as the sensory experiencing, as a marginal part of our perceptual experience. However, in order to describe proto-perceptual sensibility as an original phe-

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[44] At the time he wrote *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty was acquainted with the theories of developmental psychology of William Stern, Jean Piaget, Henry Wallon, Paul Guillaume and Kurt Koffka. Freud's psychoanalysis, Paul Schilder's study on body schema and Ludwig Binswanger's existential psychoanalysis also influenced Merleau-Ponty's view on the development of psychic life. See PrP, 31–3. See also PhP, 408/371, where Merleau-Ponty shortly deals with Piaget's conception of the child's "pre-rational" experience.

[45] The expression "as close as necessary" is borrowed from Klaus Held. Held 2003, 7.

[46] Hua3, §24.

[47] Held 2003, 10.

[48] Merleau-Ponty's conception of anonymity implies that the anonymity of the sleep does not imply that I could not ascribe it as my sleep, or as not belonging to the continuity of my life. The anonymous experiences are, still, my experiences. See, for instance, PhP, 514/477.

[49] PhP, 190–1/166–7. See also PhP, 514/477, where Merleau-Ponty writes about the anonymity of the sensory experience: "Who perceives this red […]. Certainly not anyone we could name, nor anyone who could be placed among other perceiving subjects."

nomenon, we should be able to return to the experiencing life before any perception was established. But if, as Merleau-Ponty claims, perception is the locus of presence, properly speaking there would be nothing present in the purported proto-perceptual experience. Consequently, it seems to be impossible to directly elucidate pre-personal experiences, which are originally non-wakeful, obscure and non-communicable.[50] At least, there is no direct evidence of the pre-personal life of the body. But if there is no evidence, how do we resolve the problem of pre-personal sense constitution? Does Merleau-Ponty construe a being beyond appearance in order to account for the emergence of perception? Is he obliged to construe a pre-personal consciousness, that is, a pre-personal experiencing that does properly speaking appear to us perceiving persons? If we add here the fact that Merleau-Ponty's theory of the pre-personal makes use of the ethological concept of instinct and the physiological concept of reflex, and thus reverts to 3rd person observations of behavior and not 1st person descriptions of experience, it seems that he does not succeed in getting to the heart of the matter. He simply seems to turn to scientific theory of the body when there is no phenomenological evidence of the infrastructure of perception.[51]

> *Third*, Merleau-Ponty's characterizations of biological existence in terms of a *life (Leben*) and *infrastructure* seem to be problematic.

Occasionally, Merleau-Ponty opposes biological existence to transitive and relational experiences, which suggests that he is seeking a self-enclosed non-intentional consciousness.[52] The problem is that even if the term "biological existence" refers to a life that is within my perception and to a life of my own body, the concept of life does not seem to work adequately because it is supposed to describe the body as a constituting consciousness. The French words "vivre" and "vécu" can be used to translate the German words "leben", "erleben" and "Erlebnis", whereas the common English translation of the word is "experience". Anne Montavont explicates Husserl's conception of *Erlebnis* in the *5th Logical Investigation* by pointing out that "life" (*vie*) means living through experiences, the livedness of experiences.[53] Life in its ultimate phenomenological sense refers to an irreducible self-awareness entailed in experiences.

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50 This problem is addressed by Zahavi in his article "Merleau-Ponty on Husserl: A Reappraisal". See Zahavi 2002, 21–22. Zahavi associates the notion of anonymity – which is a notion that both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty use – with Husserl's phenomenological investigations of the sphere of passive experiencing. In the work at hand, I will follow this interpretation: Merleau-Ponty's problem of biological existence, insofar as it involves a pre-personal and anonymous subjectivity, is one of the issues belonging to the phenomenological problematic of passive experiencing.

51 This formulation resembles Hart's critique of Nam In-Lee's interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology of the instinct. See Hart 1998, 109–10.

52 PhP, 186/162.

53 Montavont 1999, 19–20. The French translation of Husserl's passage is the following: "Ce que le moi ou la conscience vit (*erlebt*) est précisément son vécu (*Erlebnis*). Il n'y a pas de différence entre le contenu vécu (*erlebten*) ou conscient et le vécu (*Erlebnis*) lui-même." (Husserl 1961–2, 362). See also "Translator's introduction" in the 2012 edition of *Phenomenology of Perception*. Landes 2012, xlix.

There are three crucial things here to be noticed. First, life as a primal kind of self-awareness is not an awareness of oneself as an object of experience. Second, life does not refer to another, experienced living being; rather, it is the ultimate self-awareness of experiencing.[54] Finally, as Montavont remarks, the concept *life* as living through experiences (*Erleben*, *Erlebnis*) renders the German verb "to live" (*leben*) transitive: to live is to live something.[55] If biological existence refers to an infrastructure of perceptual experience, the phenomenological task would be to discover the pre-personal lived body or a dimension of bodily experience in which the proto-perceptual world is constituted and which provides the soil of perception. However, it is not clear whether the concept of the pre-personal life of the body, as it is used by Merleau-Ponty, bears a relation to the body as a perceived object. Merleau-Ponty's own use of the German words *Leben* and *Erleben* in *Phenomenology of Perception* seem to suggest that he understands the pre-personal body as a self-enclosed object:

> "This, we will now add, does not prevent 'living' (*leben*) from being a primordial operation from which it becomes possible to 'live' (*erleben*) such and such a world, nor does it keep us from having to eat and breathe prior to perceiving and reaching a relational life".[56]

Here, Merleau-Ponty seems to claim that the primordial operation of living does not have the transitional, relational sense of experiencing, or any self-awareness as "living through" intentional experiences related to the outside. Besides this passage, Merleau-Ponty has also other characterizations of biological existence that suggest the idea of biological existence as self-enclosed life processes of the body bearing no relation to the outside. In particular, he suggests that our "bodily functions" have a cyclical, banal and monotonous rhythm.[57] Does he thereby indicate that what he means by "bodily functions" are life processes that repeat themselves monotonously, like the heartbeat and the rhythm of breathing?[58] But this characterization is part of Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of how one's own body appears to oneself, such as feeling one's heartbeat[59] or listening to the "blood pulsing in [one's] ears".[60] Thus, the description does not seem to concern the body as the subject of experiencing, or the body as a subject-object (for instance as touching-touched), but merely concerns one's own body as an experienced object (felt, heard, seen or touched by oneself). In short, instead of describing the founding layer of embodied subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty seems to be describing certain life-processes or organic processes of one's object-body. But the object-body, within the order of constitutions, cannot serve as the living infrastructure of perception. Instead, the body can have the sense of a specific object

54 Montavont 1999, 19–20.
55 Montavont 1999, 20. Montavont also refers to Levinas, according to whom *Erlebnis* is intentional lived experience: "L'intention est *Erlebnis*". See Levinas 2001, 206.
56 PhP, 186/162.
57 PhP, 100/87, 104/90, 191–2/167, 516/479.
58 PhP, 16/10, 99/86, 104/90, 160/139, 484/447, 516–7/479–80.
59 PhP, 100/87.
60 PhP, 191–2/167.

(recognizable life-processes) only on the condition that we are able to *perceive* our body.

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty accounts for the bodily infrastructure of perception in terms of a ready-made, fixed organization that precedes proper experiencing. He claims that the body is a "system of definite powers".[61] He famously claims that human experience and thought is not thinkable without the specific structure of the human body: "[A] man without hands or without a sexual system is as inconceivable as a man without thought".[62] Human experience and thought is only possible "within a framework of a certain arrangement with regard to the world that is the definition of my body".[63] Furthermore, even if Merleau-Ponty is careful to emphasize that human existence is everywhere permeated by transcendence, freedom and varieties of individual desires and habits, he also claims that "our reflexes express a species *a priori*".[64] In this vein he argues, for instance, that color perception is made possible by an *a priori* arrangement of the body.[65] But again: Aren't hands, legs, feet and the head identifiable structures of the human body only insofar as the body is conceived both as motor powers of perceiving and as objects of perception? Can we conceive of the bodily infrastructure of perception in terms of the perceived body or objective body, if this structure belongs at the level of life on which nothing is yet perceived, if its processes precede perception in the proper sense, and if the pre-personal constitution of sense precedes identification of the body parts as external objects? Does Merleau-Ponty, here too, smuggle the body as object into his description of the purportedly pre-personal infrastructure?

To summarize, Merleau-Ponty does not seem to adequately address the phenomenological question of biological existence because he characterizes biological existence either as life or as infrastructure in terms of the object-body or in terms of the perceived body.

*Fourth*, an additional problem is that if Merleau-Ponty fails to describe biological existence, as a pre-personal phenomenon in its own terms, then also his characterization of its relation to perception falters. Schematically speaking, in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty characterizes the relation of perception to biological existence as having two aspects, *sublimation* and *resistance*. On the one hand, perception is said to be the *sublimation* or *transfiguration* of biological existence.[66] Here we must add that Merleau-Ponty conceives of the twofold relation of sublimation and resistance in terms of a mereological relation between parts and a whole. The act of perception is a summoning or cohesion of the body, which is a complex or multiplicity of fields. The fields of the (pre-personal) body, most importantly the sensory fields, are endowed with new sense when they become *parts* of a new unity, the perceiving-perceived whole. For example, the per-

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61 PhP, 226/199.
62 PhP, 197–8/173.
63 PhP, 350/317.
64 PhP, 104/90.
65 PhP, 38/32, 243/217–8.
66 PhP, 99–100/86–7, 159/138, 226/199, 230/203, 259–60/233. See also PhP, 16/10.

ceived object is given multi-modally, that is, for different senses and for the different sensory fields of the body. The visual givenness of the unified perceptual object is due to the unification of two visual fields. Merleau-Ponty argues that the emergence of the perceptual cohesion can be attested, for example, in the transition from squint vision to unitary vision.[67] When we perceive an object, our eyes and the corresponding sensory fields operate in communion, being component parts of a unitary perceptual intentionality. On the other hand, however, the relation of biological existence to the synthesis of perception is also said to be that of *resistance*.[68] When I perceive the green leaves of the plant in front of me in full daylight, the plant is present fully and clearly, that is, in a perceptually satisfying and optimal manner. However, the greenness of the plant that I see in front of me is originally given in an actual living through a feeling or sensation in which my sensing body blindly communicates with the sensed green by accompanying it "rhythmically", that is, by resonating with it, as Merleau-Ponty puts it.[69] In this regard the perceived object as well as the perceiving self is given partly obscurely and opaquely.[70] It is clear that this specific kind of "obscurity" of sensation does not mean that the object would appear in a poor lightning or as covered by other things. A perceived object can be elucidated by better lightning, by better control and by a higher state of self-awareness. But such scales of experiencing are not at issue here. Instead, the "obscurity" of sensation characterizes all perceptions equally, unclear as well as clear ones, and it belongs to perception even when the conditions are optimal for the grasping of the appearing object. Besides, perception is always given in part as an uncontrollable, self-organizing power that takes place regardless of the perceiver's activities.[71] The perceiving person is aware of her perception as already acted out by an anonymous life of her body, and this happens always when she perceives something. In Merleau-Ponty's account all acts of taking position, controlling or deciding upon objects and the world thus necessarily work on the uncontrolled, passively experienced self-organizing life of one's body related to that which is sensed. For example, one can freely choose to fix one's gaze on objects that appear far away, in which case one has a double image of nearby objects.[72] However, one cannot choose to look at the horizon *and* to see a unitary nearby object.[73] Moreover, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "we cannot prevent ourselves from focusing our eyes".[74] One meaning of the relation of resistance is captured by this idea of an irreducible blindness, opacity and uncontrollability that belongs to all perceptual experience.

Now, if there is no satisfying account of *what* the biological existence that is sublimated in or resists perception is, then the phenomenological analysis of perception remains incomplete. If biological existence is interpreted as life processes

67 PhP, 266/239.
68 PhP, 100/87.
69 PhP, 247/221.
70 PhP, 250/224.
71 PhP, 249/223.
72 See PhP, 266/239.
73 On similar points, see PhP, 501–3/464–5.
74 PhP, 292.

that ultimately belong to the context of nature that is outside the domain of the intentional experience, then the problem of the relation between perceptual experience and the life processes in question appears as a problem of causality or physio-psychic conditionality. Husserl argues in *Ideas II* that the "because-so" relation between experiences can be explicated within the domain of experience itself by concepts of motivation. However, motivation relations are relations in which the relata – the motivated and the motivating – are mutually defined and dependent; they are not relations of causality between worldly things or conditional relations between the realms of the physiological and the psychic.[75] As Husserl writes:

> "[...] the physiological processes in the sense organs, in the nerve cells and in the ganglia, do not motivate me even if they condition, in my consciousness, psychophysically, the appearance of sense data, apprehensions, and psychic lived experiences. […] what is not intentionally included in my lived experiences, even if unattended or implicit, does not motivate me, not even unconsciously."[76]

If Merleau-Ponty's conception of biological existence can be explicated by natural scientific concepts – for example, by physiological, neurological or evolution-theoretical concepts – then his account of the relation between biological existence and perception remains methodologically problematic. How can one conceive of the relation between perception and a pre-perceptual level of life, if this life is conceived in the objectivistic terms of a natural scientific object? The order of foundation (founding-founded) would in this case be false, and the account would fail as a contribution to genetic phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty himself is explicit on this.[77] Perception does not emerge from an object-body, and what it emerges from cannot be captured by natural scientific concepts. Instead, the sense of the body as a scientific object is posterior to and follows perception in the order of founding.[78] The body as a mere scientific object, or as belonging to a nature conceived as an absolute domain of all possible objects, lacks sense. The same seems to hold true for any attempt to conceive the pre-personal bodily life in terms of objective perception and perceived objects.

To conclude, in his early phenomenological project Merleau-Ponty raises the question about the pre-personal ground-layer of perception, but he does not seem to be able to account for this ground in a convincing manner. Even if his aim is to discover the life of the body that underlies perception, which is not life in a context of an objective nature, his account of this primal nature falls short of the goal because it uses concepts borrowed from physiology and biology. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of the pre-personal seems unconvincing, insofar as it interprets the bodily self-experience in terms of an experience of the

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75 See Hua4, §56.
76 Hua4, 231/243.
77 PhP, 33/26. Merleau-Ponty contends that the nature as object of science "is clearly posterior to the experience of cultural objects, or rather, it itself is a cultural object. We will thus also have to rediscover the natural world and its mode of existence, which does not merge with the mode of existence of the scientific object".
78 PhP, 66/54.

object and insofar as it understands the lower-level phenomenon of the pre-personal in terms of a higher-level phenomenon of perception.

Here I would like to mention one possible interpretation. It is possible to contend and argue that the natural scientific descriptions used by Merleau-Ponty in his early account are only *preparatory* in the sense that they prepare ground for his proper phenomenological characterization of the pre-personal. Accordingly, the 3rd person approach of the sciences of behavior might help in the beginning with regards to framing the phenomenon, but ultimately they would only provide a negative characterization, i.e. tell us only what the pre-personal phenomenon is not. The scientific descriptions would not touch the phenomenon of the pre-personal life of the body as such, in that they could be left behind after they have done their work and led us sufficiently close to the phenomenon. However, the point of departure of my interpretation is in the insight that this interpretative approach, which could be named a "privative approach" to the pre-personal, fails. The main problem here is that the distinction between 3rd person observations and the phenomenon is taken for granted and is conceived as a static relation between two realms with no possibility of one influencing the other. In contrast to this I believe that, in Merleau-Ponty's early phenomenological project, scientific studies and the philosophical study of phenomena are in a relation of reciprocal influence, without being mixed up. As I will argue below, this alternative interpretation also provides a fruitful way of understanding Merleau-Ponty's concept of *existence*.

**The Aims and the Tasks of the Thesis**

The problems presented above point out a need to provide an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's theory of biological existence that does not downplay the role of biology, physiology and psychology without falling into a scientific naturalism or remaining within the confines of science that would equally betray Merleau-Ponty's transcendental phenomenological project. The goal of my study is to provide such an interpretation. In the following, I will briefly explicate the main aims and the tasks of the research to be conducted, that is, the research questions and the main arguments defended in the thesis.

So, the *main aim* of the thesis is to show that Merleau-Ponty's theory of biological existence is a central and justified part of his early project of phenomenology.

What does this justification consist of? What are Merleau-Ponty's arguments that must be elucidated in order to meet the challenge of demonstrating that his theory of biological existence, including the influence of the scientific studies of behavior, is both coherent with his phenomenology and a valid part of it?

1. First of all, the question of methodological access to the pre-personal must be addressed. It must be shown that, even if there is no direct evidence of the phenomena of the pre-personal life of the body, there is an indirect way of accessing these phenomena and that this indirect method is justified. Furthermore,

it must be shown that biological, physiological and psychological theories of instinctive intentionality intersect in some respect or to a certain extent with phenomenology, so that they can be taken into consideration and also used by the indirect phenomenological method. In particular, it must be shown that some of the theories of *intentional behavior* provided by these sciences can be used for the purpose of indirectly revealing biological existence as a pre-personal phenomenon. It must be asked, what are Merleau-Ponty's arguments that convince one that sciences of behavior are helpful and also necessary for the phenomenological clarification of biological existence?

2. *Second*, it must be shown that Merleau-Ponty is justified to make use of the scientific theories of instincts and reflexes in order to describe phenomenologically biological existence as a particular kind of intentionality in its subjective and objective aspects. It must thus be asked, how does Merleau-Ponty conceive the manner in which the phenomenologist should treat scientific theories of behavior (and of experience) and the concepts by which these theories account for their object?

3. *Third*, we also need to know, how does Merleau-Ponty elucidate biological existence as *a lower-level intentional accomplishment* and as *infrastructure*. What is a phenomenologically pertinent manner of characterizing biological existence as a pre-personal intentional accomplishment? What is a pertinent phenomenological characterization of the bodily infrastructure, in other words, the pre-given intentional schemata that guide experience at the ground of perception? How are these two sides of biological existence related to each other?

In particular, what does Merleau-Ponty mean by the characterizations of biological existence as *cyclical* and as a *non-relational* "Leben", and what does he mean by his characterization of the bodily infrastructure as an *a priori* organization of the organic parts of the body (e.g. hands, feet, eyes)? Merleau-Ponty claims that if we consider bodily organs in their "living function" and not as parts of the objective body, i.e. the body conceived as an object, then we can discover them in their founding role.[79] What is this living function?

4. *Finally*, it needs to be asked, how does Merleau-Ponty argue the case for his account of the relation of the pre-personal to perception, which he provides in three different manners: (i) in terms of resistance and transfiguration, (ii) in terms of a part-whole relation and (iii) in terms of a relation of an original past to present?

On the whole, by performing these four sub-tasks, the thesis provides an interpretation and explication of Merleau-Ponty's early phenomenological analyses of the pre-personal life of the body (i.e. his early phenomenological project). Generally speaking, the thesis answers the question, what is the function of the

[79] PhP, 197–8/173, 493/455. Merleau-Ponty writes: "It is just essential to me that I have a body as it is essential to the future to be the future of a certain present. And this is true to the extent that scientific thematization and objective thought will not be able to find a single bodily function that is strictly independent of existential structures, and, reciprocally, not a single 'spiritual' act that does not rest upon a bodily infrastructure […] it is not only essential that I have a body, but also that I have this particular body […] If I put my ears, my nails, and my lungs back into my living body, they will no longer appear as contingent details".

analysis of the pre-personal life of the body in Merleau-Ponty's early project of phenomenology?[80]

**The Structure of the Thesis**

An introduction to the subject matter will be provided in Chapter 1. The chapter begins with an explication of the philosophical context of the two major works of Merleau-Ponty's early philosophy, *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty's point of departure in both works is his project of transcendental phenomenology. After clarifying this starting point, I will explicate Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the basic tenets of phenomenology, and then provide a schematic account of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of bodily experience and perception.

*Chapters 2 and 3* provide explications of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological interpretation of the scientific studies of behavior, his conception of the organism, and the primitive forms of behavior characteristic of instincts and reflexes.

Chapter 2 has two tasks. First, it presents Merleau-Ponty's argument for the claim that observations of behavior can indirectly contribute to phenomenological analysis of the experiential life of the observed living being. Insofar as biology, physiology and developmental psychology work on observations of intentional behavior, they intersect with the phenomenological approach. The chapter then focuses its discussion on the particular case of instinctual behavior.

Given that biology studies living beings, physiology studies human body and psychology the human mind, the phenomenological questions that Merleau-Ponty addresses to biology, physiology and psychology are the following: What are the experiential accomplishments that make it possible for something to have the sense of a living being or the sense of a human body or a human mind, taken as objects of scientific study? And what are the experiential accomplishments that enable the *knowledge* and *explanation* of the living being, of the human body and human mind? For what kind of a subject does the scientific explanation of these objects make any sense at all?

However, in Merleau-Ponty's view, the phenomenological analysis of biology, physiology and psychology also contribute to an understanding of transcendental subjectivity. The phenomenologist does not share the aim of providing explanations of objects with the scientist. Despite this difference, however, Merleau-Ponty thinks that scientific theories necessarily contain implicit characterizations of the phenomena, that is, characterizations of the world as experienced, even if these implications are not explicitly expressed in the theories. Sciences of behavior contain implicit accounts of experience. Thus, sciences potentially indicate experiences or bring us close to experiences, insofar as these implicit accounts can be extracted from their theories. Accordingly, these accounts can be used by phenomenology in its inquiries into constitution. Faithful accounts of experience of the world are accounts of how the world, objects and other subjects appear, and as such they provide material for the discoveries of a transcendental

[80] Cf. Heinämaa 2015.

inquiry into sense constitution. To be sure, phenomenology necessarily begins with the methodological procedure of transcendental reduction, the questioning of all the theses concerning the validity of the objects or the world-in-itself. In particular, it requires abstaining from the claim that experiences belong to a mind understood as an entity in objective nature.[81]

More precisely, a study of behavior can contribute to our understanding of experience in two ways: *First*, the observer has *direct* evidence of his or her experience of the observed behavior. Accordingly, one can directly reflect on the experience of the observing scientist and ask, what is the type of experience in which the observed object can be conceived of as a living being. *Second*, studies of behavior can provide *indirect* evidence of the mental and experiential life of living beings, on the basis of the observed behaviors of these beings. Merleau-Ponty contends that physiology presupposes implicit characterizations of behavior, and that this behavior can also be subjected to a psychological study.[82] Thus, it is possible to indirectly reflect on the purported experiential life of the observed living being, beginning with the observed behavior, and ask what kind of experiential life is indicated by the behavior.

With regard to the *first* point, Merleau-Ponty argues that a reflection on the experience of the scientist provides a basis for a critique of the Cartesian and intellectualist neo-Kantian accounts of consciousness that were dominant in his own time. This argument is central in *The Structure of Behavior* in particular. The work consists of lengthy critical discussions on the scientific explanations of physical, animal and human nature, but the ultimate purpose of these discussions is to formulate an argument about the kind of intentionality required for scientific knowledge of nature to be possible at all.[83] Merleau-Ponty's argument is that scientific knowledge necessarily implies a perceptual relation to the world. The specific argument with relation to biological and physiological knowledge is the following:

In Merleau-Ponty's view, ethology plays a central role in life sciences. Biology is first and foremost a study of the bodily structure and the observed behavior of living beings. The explanation of the measured changes in the body of a living being refers back to an intuition of the figure-ground configuration of the body as a whole. The holistic configuration, on the other hand, runs parallel with the meaningful structure of the intentional behavior of the living being. Finally, the meaningful structure of behavior as an object of observation only makes sense to a subject who emphatically follows the behavior. This means that the observer has to be a perceiving subject. Biology as a science would not be possible if the research procedures in biology only consisted of reflective, analytic, judgmental, theoretical and calculating operations. In short, the analysis of sciences of behavior shows that *perception* must be understood as an original kind of experiencing.

The *second* possibility is that a study of observed behavior contributes to a study of phenomenon of the other, insofar as the observed behavior gives the

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81 See subchapter 1.2.2 of this work.
82 PhP, 14/10.
83 See SC, 199/184. See also subchapter 1.1 of this work.

observer an insight into the experience of the observed subject. In this work I will not go more into detail regarding this emphatic relation to the other's experience. However, behavior is significant insofar as it can offer insights into experiences that were otherwise inaccessible.

Merleau-Ponty formulates his conception of instinct in *The Structure of Behavior*, as he deals with the question concerning scientific knowledge of animal behavior. Instinct is a concept that characterizes a particular kind of behavior in animals.[84] As part of the argument above, Merleau-Ponty aims to demonstrate that instincts are intentional and meaningful forms of behavior, even if they may appear mechanical or automatic. Instincts essentially relate to the configurations or patterns of the environment that are meaningful to organisms or animals, and they are adaptive to unique situational changes in a way that makes a purely mechanical explanation impossible.[85] Instinctual behavior has a relatively stable and unchanging character. An instinct does *not* have any pre-determined end.

According to Joseph Keeping's recent argument, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy provides a basis for a new philosophical interpretation of instincts.[86] Keeping claims that Merleau-Ponty formulates the instinct in a way that differs from two "classical" conceptions of instinct, which see it as a drive and as a mechanism. According to the classical drive-theory, drives are quantities of energies or flows of energy which behave like electric charges: they increase and diminish, and are displaced or discharged. Instead, according to the classical mechanism-theory, the instincts are physiologically locatable and have a rigid structure that could be disclosed by a neurophysiological study.[87] Merleau-Ponty does not see instincts as drives or mechanisms in either of the above senses. Instead, he believes that instincts are configurational in the sense that the relative stability of instincts result from the fact that they are determined by *the organization of the body*. The morphological organization of the body gives the instinctual behavior limits of operation and a teleological character *without* pre-determining the *object* or the goal or *telos* of the instinctual behavior beforehand. Characterizations of instinctual behavior also indicate an instinctual form of experiencing, namely, the way the world is given to the subject of the instinct.

In *Chapter 3*, I will explore Merleau-Ponty's conception of the primitive behaviors of the human body, such as the movement of the sense organs and breathing, and the implications that this conception has to his phenomenological analyses. We experience these primitive performances of our body in our body, and we experience these movements as our movements. However, we do not have direct evidence of the agent or the egoic intention to perform such movements, and we cannot characterize the accomplishments that belong to the prepersonal life of our body as we can characterize our active accomplishments. One way to approach instinctive experiencing is to observe primitive behaviors of the

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84 SC, 114–5/104–5.
85 SC, 175/162; PhP, 92–3/80–1; Keeping 2006, 184.
86 Keeping 2006, 172.
87 Sigmund Freud is the typical representant of the drive-theory, while the theory of the instincts as mechanisms is developed for example by the ethologists Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen. I deal with this issue in subchapter 2.3.

human body. We can follow, for instance, the movements of the limbs and the eyes of a sleeping person. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty makes use of his account of instinctive animal behavior when he interprets the primitive behaviors of the human body. Inasmuch as the instinctual behavior of an animal signals the animal's experiential life, the studies of reflexes and instincts might give the phenomenologist leading clues for the study of the phenomenon of our biological existence. As I will argue, according to Merleau-Ponty the physiology of primitive behaviors of humans, especially studies of instincts and reflexes conducted by Kurt Goldstein,[88] inform us about a pre-personal modality of human existence that Merleau-Ponty calls our "biological existence".

*Existence* is a central concept also in *Phenomenology of Perception.* The concept of existence refers to the specific mode of being of animals and humans as being outside themselves and not coinciding with themselves, being essentially related to the world (hence "being in the world").[89] Merleau-Ponty also characterizes existence as intentional but, using terms inherited from Husserl, he claims that it is a question of an "operative" kind of intentionality.[90]

I will explore Merleau-Ponty's account, according to which biological existence differs from what he calls personal existence, insofar as it refers to primitive behaviors that have a relatively stable or rigid pattern, and insofar as they do not exhibit voluntary control or agency of the subject. I will also account for Merleau-Ponty's conception of the irreducible relation between the personal existence and biological existence. Merleau-Ponty characterizes biological existence as an original past that has been integrated into or sublimated in personal existence. However, he also claims that the integration of biological existence into personal existence is not total, and that biological existence resists the person and is repressed by the person. I will concentrate, in particular, on Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the relation of repression.

Chapters 2 and 3 start the characterization of biological existence by beginning with observations of behavior. They end up with characterization of biological existence as instinctive experiencing which operates at a lower capacity-level. Accordingly, instinctive experiencing is characterized by blindness of goals, generality of subjectivity and cyclicality of time. In particular, it turns out that the phenomenological concept of the horizon of experience is crucial in Merleau-Ponty's account of the lower capacity-level. According to Husserl's insight, experience is never strictly limited to that which is immediately given. Instead, consciousness is a center-periphery structure,[91] and if all conscious experiences involve a center of activity, attention or affection, they also involve a surrounding background of that which is potential or possible, yet-to-come or already-past. The evidence of experiencing at a lower capacity-level suggests that the horizon of experience is something that can be modified: the horizon can be diminished or enlarged. In other words, the horizon of possibilities has a "scope". There is

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88 Goldstein formulates his view on the instincts and reflexes in his book *The Organism*. Goldstein 2000.
89 See SC, 136–7/125–6; PhP, viii/lxxvii.
90 PhP, xiii/lxxxii. See page 48.
91 See page 69.

an extension or a scope of that which comes through to us, that is, that which affects the subject and counts for the subject as its possibilities or potentialities. Accordingly, experience at a lower capacity-level is a diminishing of the scope of affection, or the "scope of life". As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "Prior to stimuli and sensible contents, a sort of inner diaphragm must be recognized that, much more than these other ones, determines what our reflexes and our perceptions will be able to aim at in the world, the zone of our possible operations, and the scope of our life".[92]

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 seize on the phenomenon of biological existence in its motor, affective and sensible aspect.

*Chapter 4* clarifies the difference between natural time and the time of habit-acquisition. Habit-acquisition occurs at a level of goal-directed human capacities, which is higher in terms of temporality than the natural time of involuntary life of the body. In an intriguing passage, Merleau-Ponty associates bodily functions with natural time:

> "There is, however, at least a generalized time, and this is even the time intended by the common notion. This time is the perpetual starting over of the series: past, present, future. It is like a disappointment and a repeated failure. This is what we express in saying that time is continuous: the present that it brings to us is never really present, since it is always past when it appears, and the future has there but the appearance of a goal toward which we are moving, since it soon arrives in the present and since we then turn toward another future. This is the time of our bodily functions, which are cyclical like them, and it is the time of nature with which we coexist."[93]

In short, on the basis of the analysis of the pre-personal, developed in the previous chapters, in this chapter I will explicate what Merleau-Ponty means when he speaks about this correspondence between the "bodily functions" and the cyclicality of the pre-personal time at the ground of the temporality of the perceptual present. I will oppose the natural time of pre-personal bodily life to the dynamic time of habit-acquisition. In his account of habit-acquisition, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the role of the subject's lived body. According to Merleau-Ponty all processes of habituation are embodied, inasmuch they involve lived-bodily movement. Habituation can be an acquisition of a new gesture or an incorporation of an object or an instrument. But habit-acquisition is also, to use Merleau-Ponty's terms, a mode of "fundamental power".[94] Habituation exemplifies the way in which experiences and capacities become familiar and are sedimented within the life of an individual, and the way in which new experiences and capacities can be established on the basis of the already acquired sedimented experiences. Thus, habituation is an example of the dynamism of the development of the experiential life of the individual. Accordingly, habituation is an example of the temporal process by which new layers of meaningfulness are built.

I will demonstrate that the contrast between natural time and the dynamic temporality of habit-acquisition can be explicated by concept of the "scope of life",

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92 PhP, 95/81.
93 PhP, 516/479.
94 PhP, 171/148.

that is, by reflecting on the extension of the horizon of experience. In this connection, I will take up Husserl's analysis of the "impressional present", which is part of his analysis of passive experiencing. The characterization of the sphere of the impressional is Husserl's attempt to reflect on the kind of experience which lacks any affective relation to the non-intuitive. It is a question of an experiencing limited to that which is intuitively present. This is what happens in the collapse of experience into a lower capacity level: if the horizon of experience is diminished, it means that the non-intuitive loses the affective force it exerts on the subject. It appears that instinctive intentionality is a modification of intentionality in which it is reduced to the sphere of the "impressional present".

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 I will study instinctive intentionality by separately examining three central and interconnected aspects of experiencing: (i) motor intentionality, (ii) affectivity and (iii) sensing.

In *Chapter 5* I will take up Merleau-Ponty's well-known argument according to which an unthematic and unreflective mode of bodily experiencing is an essential feature of all perceptual experiencing.[95] But Merleau-Ponty also claims that motor intentionality can vary according to the extension of the horizonal awareness of the subject. This he exemplifies with the widely discussed case of Schneider, a world war I patient studied and discussed by Kurt Goldstein.[96] Merleau-Ponty's study of Schneider's pathological motor intentionality thus provides a means to concretely examine how kinesthetic awareness is influenced by the diminishment the scope of affection.

*Chapter 6* turns the focus to instinctive affective intentionality. It clarifies pre-personal, instinctive experiences by showing that such experiences can be understood as specific forms of what Merleau-Ponty calls "atmospheric awareness". Atmospheric experiencing is indeterminate and "blind" in that it does not contain an awareness of any particular object. Nevertheless, it functions selectively and eventually leads to a selection of a particular prominent object. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, the meaningfulness that guides the determination and identification of the object is experienced as *an atmosphere*.[97] There is an intrinsic "meaningfulness" of primal drives delimited by the organization of our body. However, instinctive drives can give rise to a rich variety of particularized affective intentionalities. Or, as Joseph Keeping nicely puts it: a sexual drive, for instance, is not *at first* determined by the object that it encounters, but initially determined by the lived bodily organization of the subject.[98] However, the drive's directedness is initially only vague, and it becomes clearly determined by the encountered objects or focused enjoyments, which happens subsequently. On the basis of the analysis of the affective atmosphere it can be shown that we can experience meaningfulness without precise objects; a meaningfulness that initially guides the experiencing but at the same time leaves experiencing at the mercy of

[95] See, for instance, PhP, 166/143, where Merleau-Ponty quotes Grünbaum: "Taken in its pure state, motricity already possesses the elementary power of sense-giving".
[96] See the beginning of Chapter 5.
[97] PhP, 12/7, 30/23, 140/122, 243–4/218, 249/223.
[98] Keeping 2006, 189–191.

the vicissitudes of the environment. In short, the instinctive experiencing signaled by biological existence can be characterized as an affective intentionality, which is an atmospheric mode of experiencing.

Finally, *Chapter 7* inquires into Merleau-Ponty's conception of the relation between perception and primal sensibility. Merleau-Ponty analyses the relation between perception and pre-personal sensibility as a mereological part-whole relation: perception is a unification of multiple pre-established sensory-motor fields of the body. There is a pre-personal consciousness of the senses and sensory regions, which Merleau-Ponty also calls "natural selves". My suggestion is that this consciousness must be understood as a form of instinctual experiencing. This is a form of experiencing that is not regulated by the intended object as in the case of the perception. Sense fields are initially regulated by the sensory-motor configurations of the body. However, some instinctive drives tend towards the synthesis of perception. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, primal sensing can provide an outline or sketch of perception, before the establishment of the proper perceptual act. The emergence of perception is originally a passive and "blind" phenomenon of association or "affinity".

# 1 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUESTION OF BIOLOGICAL EXISTENCE

## 1.1 Merleau-Ponty's Project of Phenomenology in The Structure of Behavior and Phenomenology of Perception

Let us begin with linking the question of life with the basic task of Husserl's phenomenology, which is to disclose and clarify the sense foundations of the sciences in the experiential accomplishments of subjectivity and in the joint accomplishments of intersubjectivity. This project of studying and criticizing the foundations of sciences is adopted by Merleau-Ponty in his early philosophy. Insofar as I am concerned with the question of life, the task is to focus on life sciences.

Like the other sciences, biology provides objectively valid empirical knowledge and theoretical explanations of life, from "the microscopic to the global scale".[99] As Campbell and Reese et al. write, biology "is an ongoing inquiry about the nature of life".[100] Human biology, then, provides knowledge and explanations of the individual or social behavior of the individuals of the human species, of the organic human body and its different structures and processes, etc., in terms of life scientific methods, concepts and theories, to the extent that this is possible. Now, the question concerning the nature of biological knowledge, and the question concerning its metaphysical or ontological significance are philosophical questions, not empirical ones. Contemporary scientific naturalism holds the metaphysical view according to which scientific knowledge represents the reality of nature that exists independently of human experience and knowledge, and moreover a reality in which this knowledge itself is included. Accordingly, it holds that we are ultimately purely biological beings, in that our experience is excluded as a subjective formation from and only included as a real incident in

[99] Campbell and Reese et al. 2013, 3.
[100] Campbell and Reese et al. 2013, 2.

the reality that is posited and represented by the best biological knowledge at hand.

In contemporary public discussions, informed by modern life sciences, it is not problematic to be committed to a naturalistic view, according to which life is an entity in objective nature. It is this nature that grounds all our experience and cognition, sciences included.[101] The details about what we are as biological beings are updated by the latest biological research, but the fundamental hypothesis stands through all such changes. Thus, it is reasonable to think that there is a biological nature at the ground of our experiential life, and it is reasonable to refer to the best available biological theories when accounting for what kind of beings we are as living bodies. This is the core of scientific naturalism: ultimately, natural scientific explanations will tell us what we are and thus determine our ontological status.

From the point of view of transcendental phenomenology, the problem of scientific naturalism is the hypothesis of a "language of nature", according to which sciences exhaustively explain what belongs to the objective reality that operates under or behind our subjective experiences and beliefs. According to Merleau-Ponty, this hypothetical objective nature is apt to cover and also obscure the sense that reality has for us. Natural behavioral sciences ultimately remove the phenomenon of the rationally acting human being, the being who acts for reasons, by explaining and showing how this phenomenon is causally or functionally conditioned and constituted by factors external to experience.[102] Yet, as Husserl argued, the reduction of rational action to purely external conditions is a self-undermining project, which motivates radical skeptical notions and positions.[103] The reductionistic claim is self-contradictory because it undermines the grounds of its own legitimacy as a truth claim. Rational action is excluded from the realm of the objective nature that is posited by scientific explanations, but the meaningfulness of such explanation itself depends on the possibility and actuality of rational action.[104] According to the biologist version of the naturalist-reductionistic paradigm, in principle human beings, their behavior and constitution can be exhaustively explained by the biological conditions of our bodies, so in the end we *are* nothing but biological organisms.[105] But this claim does not help us understand the approach and relation that the scientists themselves take to reality while studying organisms, constructing theories and making universal truth

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101 According to Ritchie, one common way of defining the "natural" in naturalism is to oppose it to the "supernatural". Accordingly, a naturalistic philosophical attitude is characterized by a denial of objective existence of anything that is not scientifically explicable. In other words, the non-scientific leftover is supernatural. Ritchie 2008, 2.

102 PAR2, 50.

103 See, for instance, Hua2, 21/18.

104 Cf. Hua19 (LU II); Hua4 (IdII); Hua6 (C).

105 See Hua18 (LU I), §52–56, 196-213/123–133. In *Logical Investigations* Husserl criticizes attempts to find a biological basis for cognition and for logic. In short, Husserl contends that even if it is important to study the role that a certain kind of economy of thinking plays in problem solving and in cognition, the theory of the economy of thinking cannot answer the question concerning what makes rationality rational, or what makes knowledge knowledge.

claims of validity.[106] Rather, the legitimacy of life sciences as a rational approach becomes questionable or even impossible.

From the point of view of phenomenology, a philosophical discourse on life, which simply posits life as one specific type of reality, the type in which experiences are included, and does not critically inquire into the conditions of this positing, is highly problematic. The radical phenomenological principle is that there is no being that should not be clarified with regard to its way of givenness in experiences. This amounts to the claim that *all* things must be critically investigated with respect to the way in which they are related to subjective experiential accomplishments. As Rudolf Bernet formulates the idea:

> "Thus, truly *phenomenological* phenomena only appear once I decide to investigate each and every real or possible object in its way of being given to me and other subjects. This is the ultimate meaning of the 'phenomenological reduction', without which it does not make sense to speak of phenomenological phenomena or phenomenology."[107]

Or, as Husserl himself formulates the basic questions of phenomenology:

> "[I]n what way is the being of the world, the world, which is for me and could be for me, grounded in my intending, in my streaming experiencing and otherwise conscious life, and in my *enduring features*?"[108]

As it is well known, Husserl's idea was that a specific methodological procedure of phenomenological reductions makes it possible for us to investigate the process of sense-constitution: transcendental phenomenology begins with bracketing or putting out of play all validity-claims concerning the studied objects, for the purpose of enabling an investigation of the intentional and temporal structures of consciousness in which the senses of the objects are constituted.[109] Merleau-Ponty's well-known formulation for this fundamental methodological procedure is the following: Phenomenological reflection begins with a step back,

> "in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear; it alone is conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical."[110]

Phenomenological reflection requires an abstention from the natural direction at and focus of experience on worldly things and events and the world as a totality of such things and events. The abstention is not a denial or a doubt of the world, but means that we are "putting out of play" its validities, renouncing participation in it or "refusing to be complicit" with the world.[111] The aim of the abstention is not to turn to oneself or to proceed by a study of the inner life of the subject. Its

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106 Cf. Hua6; PAR2, 57–8. Cf. also Heinämaa 2018.
107 Bernet 2015, 4.
108 Hua34, 244, cited in Jacobs, 357 (transl. by Jacobs).
109 Hua4 §32, 60–1. *Crisis*, §44.
110 PhP, viii/lxxvii.
111 See, for instance, Hua1, 59–60/19–21.

task is to make the experiential life of relating to the world visible, and to disclose the conditions of the world's sense.

Husserl's critique of scientific naturalism and his phenomenological project of illuminating the sense-foundations of the sciences plays a central role in Merleau-Ponty's early philosophical project, carried through in his two first publications, *The Structure of Behavior* (1943) and *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). For Merleau-Ponty, the most important works by Husserl are: the second volume of his *Ideas*, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, *Experience and Judgment* and *The Crisis*.[112] As he explains in a later work,[113] his project was motivated from the state by a philosophical problematic that concerns two discordant aspects of human life: On the one hand, scientific studies provide us with knowledge, in the light of which human beings seem conditioned by, dependent on and even reducible to a physical, biological or social nature.[114] Accordingly, a strictly naturalist philosophy could ultimately be purified from all references to subjectivity and consciousness. On the other hand, when we consider and take into account our reflective, introspective and intellectual capacities, human subjectivity appears to be unconditioned, self-sufficient, autonomous, free and absolute. In this latter regard, thinking and consciousness would provide the basis for both philosophical and scientific rationality.[115]

According to Merleau-Ponty, the problematic duality of the two dominant but incompatible philosophical stances – *empiricism* as the philosophy that unconditionally adheres to the sciences, and *intellectualism* as the autonomous philosophy of pure consciousness – has its original framework in the Cartesian division between nature as pure exteriority and thought (*cogito*) as pure interiority. In his introduction to *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty writes that by nature he initially means a nature of real objects, of a pure exteriority, "multiplicity of events external to each other, connected by laws of causality".[116] Consciousness, for its part, refers to an ideal interiority of sense, to intelligible ideal relations.[117] Consequently, while the Cartesian ideal of natural scientific progress is to explain everything as causal-functional relations and networks of relations of external

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112 Merleau-Ponty studied these works under the guidance of Leo van Breda and Eugen Fink in the Husserl archives in Leuven in 1939. Cf. Toadvine 2002; Heinämaa 2013.
113 PAR2, "Titres et travaux. Projet d'enseignement", 9–27.
114 PAR2, 11–12.
115 According to Merleau-Ponty, the distinction between the two incompatible philosophical stances of critical idealism and scientific naturalism has its background in classical Cartesian division between nature as pure exteriority and thought (*Cogito)* as pure interiority. In the beginning of *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty writes that the work is concerned with the relation of consciousness and nature. By nature, he means pure exteriority, "multiplicity of events external to each other, connected by laws of causality" (SC, 3/1; see also Moinat 2012, 92). By contrast, consciousness belongs to the absolute dimension of the ideal interiority of sense and intelligible ideal relations (Moinat 2012, 92). While the Cartesian dichotomy endorses a scientific ideal of explaining everything as causal relations of external objects and events, the philosophy of consciousness considers each and every conceivable being as an ideal unity of signification given for an intelligent reflective consciousness (SC, 4/2). Merleau-Ponty's two works, *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* aim at showing the impertinence of the distinction and at pointing out a more original perceptual relation to the world at its foundation.
116 SC, 1. Moinat 2012, 92.
117 Moinat 2012, 92.

events, the parallel Cartesian ideal of the philosophy of subjectivity[118] considers every conceivable being as an ideal unity of signification present to a purely intelligent and wholly reflective consciousness.[119] *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* aim to demonstrate the impertinence of this duality and disclose an original perceptual relationship that we have to the world at its sense-foundation and that secretly supports both the above described positions, regarding their senses.[120]

Thus, Merleau-Ponty aims at a phenomenological illumination of the common background, or the unifying horizon behind positive knowledge and philosophical reflection. His task is to understand why human being has this double character, and to develop an alternative account and analysis of human life that would not lead to the opposition that exists between empiricism and intellectualism, naturalism and spiritualism.

Merleau-Ponty takes on the phenomenological task of illuminating the foundations of the sciences, and he executes this task by showing how both traditional strategies of philosophy – intellectualism that follows the dictation of consciousness and empiricism that follows the dictation of the sciences – fail in their attempts to demonstrate either the absoluteness of subjectivity or the absoluteness of nature. This leads him to argue for the view that *perception* is the original jointure of consciousness and nature.[121] The early works, *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, both begin with an initial explication of two opposite points of departure, the principle of *consciousness* and that of empirical *knowledge*, and both analyses lead from this false opposition to a philosophical explication of perception as the original juncture that secretly or unnoticeably supports both abstractions. *The Structure of Behavior* adopts the scientific position of "the foreign spectator"[122], considering merely positive scientific knowledge of human beings, and then asks "if [this knowledge] would really reduce human beings to a condition of an object".[123] *Phenomenology of Perception* begins with the statement of the indubitable evidence of consciousness, but then

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118 In *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty refers with this respect to Leon Brunschvicg's philosophy, which stresses on the absoluteness of the intellectual thinking subject. Merleau-Ponty writes: "We are thinking of a philosophy like that of L. Brunschvicg and not of Kantian philosophy, which, particularly in *Critique of judgment*, contains essential indications concerning the problems of which it is a question here" (SC, 248/223).

119 According to Merleau-Ponty this division characterizes the situation of philosophy in his contemporary France (SC, 4/2). He titles the two branches of philosophy "critical thought" and "naturalism".

120 As Juho Hotanen shows in his recent thesis, Merleau-Ponty's reading of Descartes cannot be reduced to a mere one-sided critique of Cartesian duality. The reading is more complicated. A central aspect of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation is his reflection on the two sources of evidence in Descartes, the evidence of the intellect (which teaches the distinction of the mind and body) and the evidence of the lived experience (which teaches their union). See Hotanen 2019, 14.

121 PAR2, 13.

122 PAR2, 13. Merleau-Ponty writes that *The Structure of Behavior* considered the perceiving human beings from the outside, aiming at finding the valuable meaning of the experimental studies that approach human beings from the point of view of the foreign spectator.

123 PAR2, 13.

demonstrates how the acquired and available *knowledge* provided by Gestalt-psychology and Gestalt-theoretically oriented ethology and physiology forces us to critically study the relations that consciousness is supposed to have with its body and its world.

In the work at hand, I will interpret Merleau-Ponty's early philosophical project as a critical reworking of and addition to Husserl's project of transcendental phenomenology. By the term "critical" I mean that while Merleau-Ponty accepts Husserl's descriptive and analytical method, he profoundly questions the ideas of absolute nature (a strictly mind- or consciousness-independent reality of science or metaphysics) and absolute consciousness, which inform much of his contemporary Husserl reception.

I will argue that Merleau-Ponty adopts Husserl's critique of scientific naturalism as outlined in the second volume of *Ideas* and *The Crisis*. In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, he expresses this unambiguously:

> "I am not the result or the intertwining of multiple causalities that determine my body or my 'psyche'; I cannot think of myself as a part of the world, like the simple object of biology, psychology, and sociology; I cannot enclose myself within the universe of science".[124]

And further:

> "[T]he philosopher describes sensations and their substratum as one might describe the fauna of a distant land – without being aware that he himself perceives that he is the perceiving subject and that perception as he lives it belies everything that he says of perception in general. For, seen from the inside, perception owes nothing to what we know in other ways about the world […] about the sense organs as described by biology".[125]

Whereas Husserl's critique of reductionistic philosophical approaches in his early works, *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901) and *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* (1911) focused mainly on naturalistic, psychologistic, anthropologistic and historicistic versions of reductionism (and objectivism), and afforded life-scientific versions of naturalism less attention, Merleau-Ponty takes behavioral sciences and life-sciences as the main target of his phenomenological critique. For this reason, the second volume of Husserl's *Ideas* is crucial to him: this is the work in which Husserl studies the limits of the natural scientific conceptualizations and methods, and draws these limits by the concepts of life, expression and meaning.

Why, then, does Merleau-Ponty devise the concepts of *biological* existence, *natural* life and *bodily infrastructure* in *Phenomenology of Perception*? As I already stated in the introduction above, my aim is to show that he uses these terms to

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[124] PhP, ii/lxxi–ii. To be sure, this does not mean that for Merleau-Ponty the subject would be totally separated from the motivational relations, and, for instance, its embodied condition. Compare the seemingly opposite claim that Merleau-Ponty makes later: "Insofar as I have 'sense organs', a 'body' […] I become the place where a *multitude of 'causalities' intertwine*." (PhP, 86, emphasis mine) However, Merleau-Ponty does not return here to scientific naturalism, but to a phenomenological analysis of existence, which I argue amounts to Husserl's analysis of the personalist attitude in the second book of *Ideas*.

[125] PhP, 240/214.

refer to a specific kind of intentional lived experience (*l'expérience vécue*, *Erlebnis*), and not to life as conceptualized by the objective sciences of nature. It can be argued that Merleau-Ponty's concept of biological existence has its counterpart in Husserl's concept of "nature", which Husserl mentions occasionally in the context of the analysis of persons in the third section of the second volume of *Ideas* (hereafter *Ideas II*). In general, if the context of the constitutive phenomenological analyses of the first and second sections is the scientific nature, the context of the analyses of the third section is the subject related to its environing or surrounding world.[126] However, the shift from the investigation of naturalist attitude to the personalist attitude does not mean that the elementary strata of all experience would be ignored. The relations of the subject to its surrounding world do not merely concern the accomplishments of an active and free person. Passive, "unfree" layers of experience underlie active layers of experiencing, and these passivities must also be taken into consideration. This is evident, for instance, in Husserl's analysis of associative motivations in *Ideas II* and his discussion of affectivity in *Experience and Judgment*.[127] In *Ideas II* Husserl mentions the motivational relations established by the habituation of earlier acts, and the completely "a-rational" powers of pre-intentional experience, such as primal sensibility, sensible feelings, and drives. Husserl claims that all consciousness "is built upon substrata".[128] Finally, as he writes:

> "Running backwards through the strata of the constitution of the thing, we arrive finally at the strata of sensation as the ultimate, primitive, primal objects, no longer constituted by any kind of Ego-activity whatsoever, but, in the most pregnant sense of the term, *pregivennesses* for all of the Ego's operations."[129]

It is this domain of passive experiencing which underlies all egoic acts and surrounds the wakeful ego that Husserl occasionally describes in terms of nature. For instance, in a supplement he claims that the Ego has a "natural side", and the "purely passive" Ego is "mere nature and belongs within the nexus of nature", which is not the "Ego of freedom". The "mere nature" is associated with "the entirety of the 'mechanical I-do', which is exemplified with a sensuous drive.[130] Furthermore, the [active] Ego and nature "stand in contrast", and "every act also has its natural side, namely its underlying basis in nature: what is pregiven as affecting is a formation of nature".[131] Here, obviously, Husserl characterizes the passive sphere of experiencing in terms of "nature". In other words, nature is not meant in the sense of the universe of the natural sciences, insofar as the analysis belongs to the study of persons. "Nature" means here a different kind of being than nature as the ultimate context of physical things.[132]

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126 See Hua4, §50, 185–9/194–9.
127 Hua4, §56 b).
128 Hua4, 214/225.
129 Hua4, 214/225–6.
130 Hua4, Supplement XII, §3, 338–9/349–50.
131 Hua4, 339/350.
132 Cf. Hua6.

If we take into account the fact that Merleau-Ponty did read the second book of the *Ideas* while he prepared the *Phenomenology of Perception*, we can point out the terminological correspondence. Thus, there are good reasons to claim that biological existence, natural life and natural self are concepts whose context is the phenomenological study of the passive sphere of experiencing and, in particular, the sphere of original passivity. However, as we will see, Merleau-Ponty's concept of biological existence is also indirectly motivated by the study of behavior, in particular the description of instinctive behavior.

## 1.2 Methodological Principles of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

To begin with, we have to explicate the basic tenets of the phenomenological method, as Merleau-Ponty understands and characterizes it. I will begin by exploring his account of our experience of worldly objects as the basis of all phenomenological reflection. After this I will provide a short characterization of phenomenological reflection as a faithful attempt to describe experience as it is present to itself or as it presents itself.[133] Finally, I will deal with Merleau-Ponty's view of eidetic inquiries and eidetic variation, and will draw some implications for phenomenological studies of temporal, individual persons.

### 1.2.1 Experiencing Life as it is Present to Itself: On the Possibility of Phenomenological Reflection

Merleau-Ponty distinguishes phenomenology from dogmatic philosophy, in a similar manner as Kant distinguishes his transcendental philosophy from dogmatic thinking. Dogmatic philosophy is preoccupied with certain types of objects and relations between objects.[134] Distinct from this, Kant's transcendental philosophy studies the conditions of possibility of the objects of experience. Analogously, phenomenology redirects its interests: rather than focusing on objects or types of objects, it studies our experiences of objects and their general structures. However, phenomenology is also an inquiry into intentionality and the intentional relations of correlation between intended objects and intending subjects. Finally, as can be seen in the above quoted "Principle of All Principles", Husserl's phenomenology gives a central methodological role to perceptual experiencing. Husserl claims that the *originary givenness* provides the final justificatory ground

[133] The notion of faithfulness to experience is also found in Husserl's characterization of his phenomenological method. See, for instance, Hua3, §90, 207/218, where Husserl writes: "[…] what is decisive consists of absolutely faithful description of what is actually present in phenomenological purity and in keeping at a distance all the interpretations transcending the given."

[134] PhP, 236/210. Merleau-Ponty writes: "Reflective analysis releases us from a first dogmatism, which consists in taking for granted that the object exists in itself or absolutely, without wondering what the object is."

for any study of the sense of objectivity.[135] This statement emphasizes the role of perception in Husserl's phenomenology, insofar as, according to him, perception is the mode of intentionality in which something is "originarily" given, in other words, given "in person" or "itself".[136] Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl here when he argues that *experience of objects* is the "immediate source" and has "final authority" with regard to our knowledge concerning the objects.[137] Furthermore, the primary mode of experience with regard to evidence is perception. As he claims, "[t]here are truths just as there are perceptions".[138]

Instead of proceeding to study the conditions of the possibility of experience in a Kantian manner, however, Merleau-Ponty proposes a return to experiential life. He declares: "The fundamental philosophical act would thus be to return to the lived world beneath the objective world […]."[139] The act of returning to experience should not be taken as a pure intuition illuminating some formal principle. Rather, it must be understood as the task of turning to things as they are experienced, working through their ways of givenness, following their modes of appearing, and describing these in adequate terms. It is a re-turn, a turning back to experience, but also a renewal or awakening of habituated experience by imagination, recollection or actual experiencing for the purpose of examining it, its structures and conditions without any prejudging notions or oppositional concepts.[140]

Thus, our philosophical task is to trace and explicate the modes of givenness of objects – including the givenness of the world, of oneself and others – and not to make inquiries of merely the objects themselves. But is it possible to trace and make our experiencings of things thematic? What is the world of experience to which phenomenological reflection needs to return, according to Merleau-Ponty? How does he conceive the philosophical act of returning?

One can argue on various grounds that experiences of objects cannot, strictly speaking, be captured as such in reflection, and thus made thematic and articulated. According to Merleau-Ponty, a basic motivating factor for the downplaying of the approach that aims at tracing experience of the world is a habit of thinking that he calls the "prejudice of the objective world" [*préjugé du monde objectif*].[141] The prejudice of the objective world, in Merleau-Ponty's discourse, means our general tendency to interpret phenomena in terms of what we know about objects. On the one hand, we are forgetful about the particularity and uniqueness of the ways in which things are given in experiences, and we attempt to interpret things-as-experienced by concepts that properly characterize merely objective relations between objects. On the other hand, we also tend to think that the world of known objects is more complete and more true or real than the field

135 See page 20.
136 See page 14.
137 PhP, 31/24. See also PhP, ix–x/lxxviii–ix.
138 PhP, 452/415.
139 PhP, 69/57.
140 PhP, 75–6/63. "The center of philosophy […] is rather found in the perpetual beginning of reflection, at that point when an individual life begins to reflect upon itself".
141 PhP, 12/7, 71/59. Landes translates the phrase in question as "the unquestioned belief in the objective world".

of experienced things, because objects and their relations can be determined unambiguously and in an exact way, whereas the things-as-experienced seem to be hopelessly ambiguous and indeterminate.[142]

In his early works, Merleau-Ponty argues that the phenomenological return to experiences becomes an impossible task within the conceptual-historical context that is dominated by the Cartesian mind-body dualism, where pure thought is strictly distinguished from purely external objects. In the framework of this Cartesian dichotomy, thinking does not grasp a thing as such, but rather the ideal unity or the concept of the thing. The ideal unity of the thing is an object that can only be thought, not perceived or imagined, similar to the ideal unity of geometrical objects that can only be conceived in purely intellectual thinking.[143] Consequently, lived experience intends ideal significances, but in a confused and impure manner. Accordingly, the main task of philosophy is to bring clarity to experience by distinguishing and separating the ideal unities and essences that can clearly and distinctly be thought from all the objects of confused and obscure thoughts.[144]

Merleau-Ponty argues that all Cartesian philosophy that operates with dichotomies leads to a flawed and inadequate account of sense perception. Namely, this type of philosophy is bound to ask, what remains of the content of sense perception without the ideal unities and ideal concepts that are contributed by intellectual thought, reflection and attention?[145] The only answer possible seems to be that nothing of the content remains since it is assumed that the contents of sense-perception lack internal unity, which means that they are diffuse and blind without the articulation provided by concepts. Moreover, observation of our body demonstrates that the main contents of sense-perception, i.e. sensations, are mere data received and transmitted by bodily sense organs. If our body is just one external object among other objects, strictly isolated, then sensations occur "in our head" and not in our thoughts, and are not only blind and essentially diffused but also incommunicable and thus private. Thus, phenomenality, the what-is-it-like quality that characterizes all experience, as distinct from the semantic content of perception, would have to be conceived at the outset as an impenetrable mental event, as a psychic occurrence, as sense data or as a pure inner impression.[146] The distinction between ideal unities (or meanings) and sense impressions would be applicable even to feelings and emotions. There would be a hidden activity of the intellect operating in or behind meaningfully articulated experiences, taking care of their articulation by organizing immediate impressions of sense data into meaningful units. If such were the case, experience would

142 PhP, 66/54, 76–77/64–5.
143 Merleau-Ponty exemplifies the ideal unity with Descartes' analysis of a piece of wax. See PhP, 41–2/34–5.
144 An illuminating explication of Merleau-Ponty's many-dimensional reading of Descartes' philosophy is offered by Juho Hotanen 2019, cf. Heinämaa 2004; Heinämaa & Kaitaro 2018.
145 Merleau-Ponty ascribes this type of intellectualism, for instance, to Alain (1861–1951). See PhP, 35–6/29–30.
146 PhP, 20/13–14, 43/35.

have no articulable structure apart from semantic contents conceived as intelligible unities of signification. Accordingly, there would be nothing to explicate or understand in the experience apart from these intelligible meanings.[147]

Now, what is Merleau-Ponty's alternative conception of experience that is able to secure the basis of the phenomenological return? Dan Zahavi has distinguished a set of conditions that experiential life must meet in order to provide a point of departure for phenomenology.[148] These conditions can also be used to interpret and assess Merleau-Ponty's view of experience.[149] The world of actual experience that precedes phenomenological reflection, but allows the realization of this reflection, can schematically be characterized as follows: (i) it has meaning, (ii) it is intentionally structured, (iii) it has inner articulation and rationality, and (iv) it involves a form of spontaneous and immediate self-acquaintance.[150] In the following, I will discuss these four features of experience separately and, on that basis, will interpret and assess Merleau-Ponty's conception of phenomenology as a reflection that "follows experience".

*(i) Meaningfulness.* Phenomenology begins with a meaningful, already articulated world of living experience. Experience is also studied through its linguistic articulations. However, phenomenology does not assume that experience is articulated on the basis of language as a system of significations or on the basis of the linguistic meanings, the uses of words or grammatical rules.[151] Merleau-Ponty argues that without the experiential dimension, language as a system of signs and significations would not have any contact with the subject of experience: "all the significations of language are measured against [experience] and it ensures that language means something for us."[152] So, in the context of classical phenomenology, meaningfulness is not merely about the semantic contents or the uses of the words. Merleau-Ponty is strongly committed to the idea that our experience of the world is meaningfully articulated, also and already at the prelinguistic level. The meaningfulness of experience concerns the ways in which experienced things are articulated, but at the same time it also concerns the phenomenal aspect of experience. All objects of experience, from colours to mathematical formulas, have a phenomenal aspect to them, "what is it like to" experience them. This phenomenal aspect or dimension cannot be separated from the

147 PhP, 9–10/3.
148 Zahavi 2005, 79.
149 I have decided to follow Zahavi's articulation of the phenomenological conception of experience with regard to the issue at hand (clarification of the point of departure of phenomenology in experience) in the book *Subjectivity and Selfhood* (Zahavi 2005). Zahavi himself refers to Heidegger's conception of experience in some of Heidegger's early phenomenological writings, such as *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (see Heidegger 1993). On the one hand, Zahavi's account is lucid, detailed and well argued. On the other, in my view, Zahavi's account is particularly useful if one wants to clarify Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology.
150 Zahavi 2005, 79. Zahavi writes: "[…] life-experience is imbued with meaning, is intentionally structured, has an inner articulation and rationality, and, last but not least, it has a spontaneous and immediate self-understanding". In the passage in question Zahavi interprets Heidegger's early hermeneutical enterprise.
151 PhPr, ix/lxxix. Merleau-Ponty writes: "The Vienna Circle, as we know, claims categorially that we can only relate to significations."
152 PhPr, ix/lxxix.

meaningfulness of experience; both features are mutually implicatory. Without phenomenality one would not have any experience. To refer to a classical phenomenological example, a blind person simply does not have the phenomenal consciousness of "what is it like" to experience a visual object, and this implies that they also lack the meanings essential to visibility.[153]

Experience has a pre-thematic meaningfulness, and the task of phenomenology is to make this meaningfulness explicit. The task of returning to experience would be a very different kind of philosophical project, if experience would be conceived as a state, event or relation that would completely lack articulation or resist it.

*(ii) Inner articulation.* Meaningfulness is not arbitrarily projected to experience by the philosopher in the reflective act of making the experience explicit. Instead, the world of living experience has its own inner articulation and rationality. Phenomenological reflection *traces* the articulation of the experience and *describes* it, so that the description is an attempt to faithfully gather the original articulation of the experience and its world.[154] An alternative manner of describing articulation is by referring to synthesis. Intentional lived experience is articulated insofar as it is synthetic unity, which means that it is a whole that consists of parts ordered according to this unity.

Merleau-Ponty often describes experience as having a texture (*texture*), a fabric (*fabrique*) that organizes itself spontaneously: "the real is a tightly woven fabric; it does not wait for our judgments in order to incorporate the most surprising of phenomena, nor to reject the most convincing of our imaginings."[155]

Experience has a spontaneous "logic" that Merleau-Ponty also describes as an "immanent signification".[156] The following passage shows clearly Merleau-Ponty's commitment to the idea of a spontaneous articulation of experiences:

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153 See Hua2, 6/63.

154 However, this does not necessarily imply that the world of the experience would by fully attained by the subject of the experience. It is not that before reflection the subject would have attained the being in itself, which would imply a type of transcendental realism. This kind of concern is presented by Gardner (see Gardner 2017). Gardner provides an interpretation of what Merleau-Ponty means by his concept of "pre-objective", and he criticizes Merleau-Ponty (from a Kantian point of view) of falling into a kind of transcendental illusion, insofar as he gives the pre-objective a transcendental status. Gardner's article gives an interesting and fruitful articulation, which helps to set Merleau-Ponty's conception of the transcendental in relation with Kant's philosophy and with German idealism. However, it seems to me that its price it's a misinterpretation of the meaning of the notion of the pre-objective in *Phenomenology of Perception*. I believe that the pre-objective for Merleau-Ponty cannot be thought as a domain of experience lacking any object whatsoever, even if it lacks the sense of the object in the proper or full sense. The pre-objective is not opposed or defined by negating objectivity. The problems pointed out by Gardner seem to arise from this kind of opposition of alternatives. See, for instance, Gardner 2017, 9–10. Instead, I think that what is in question is a problematization or enlarging of the notion of the objectivity. The value of Gardner's article lies in positing philosophical questions that Merleau-Ponty should answer. This discussion, however, falls outside of the scope of the present work.

155 PhP, v/lxxiv.

156 PhP, 61/50–1.

> "the very notion of the 'immediate' is transformed [if the prejudice of the objective world is questioned]: henceforth it is no longer the impression […] rather, the immediate becomes the sense, the structure, and the spontaneous arrangement of parts.[157]

Merleau-Ponty consistently criticizes the approach that attempts to clarify experiential (psychic) phenomena in terms of isolated structures or formal principles. Phenomenology deals with "structures of living experience", as opposed to structures created by thought, imagination or language.[158] The pre-thematic experience of the world, as already articulated before all phenomenological reflection, is a field or texture, the parts of which are arranged in an immediate, spontaneous way. One feature of this spontaneous organization is the fact that, before thematization, our worldly life is permeated by an irreducible indeterminacy.[159] Indeterminacy and the spontaneity of the articulation of the phenomenal field describe our experience as we live through it in our everyday natural existence:

> "To have the experience of a structure is not to receive it passively in itself: it is to live it, to take it up, to assume it, and to uncover its immanent sense."[160]

*(iii) Intentionality.* The analysis of intentionality has a central place in Husserl's phenomenology, and also in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. Husserl accepted Brentano's idea that consciousness is inherently intentional, but redefined the concept of intentionality and the type of investigation that it requires. Each and every consciousness is a consciousness of something. Non-intentional consciousness, i.e. a completely non-relational awareness, is impossible. Accordingly, every experience is an experience of something, and this something is called "object" (*Gegenstand*) in the technical language of phenomenology.[161]

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the argument for the necessary intentionality of consciousness does not, in itself, make phenomenology specific, since the idea is also central in Kant's philosophy.[162] In "Refutation of idealism" Kant already demonstrated that pure inner intuition of oneself is not possible, and that every cognition of ourselves is mediated by external objects.[163] Kant also argued that cognition of oneself requires a relation to an external object itself – not a mere representation of an object.[164] In this way, Kant aimed to show that idealism – the

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157 PhP, 70/58.
158 PhP, 71/59.
159 PhP, 51–55/43–47.
160 PhP, 299/269.
161 This does not mean that non-intentional consciousness would not be possible at all. Instead, for instance in *Logical Investigations* Husserl points out that some feelings and sensations are non-intentional. Hua 19 [5th Logical Investigation, §15], 406–10/107–11. Thus, according to Husserl, a non-intentional awareness as a component of intentionality is conceivable.
162 PhP, xii/lxxxi.
163 PhP, xii/lxxxi; CPR, B 275–9. On Husserl's critique of Kant's idea of the inner intuition leading to a mythical conception of the transcendental subject, see Hua6[C], §30, 116–8/114–5.
164 CPR, B 275. Kant writes: "I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. All time determination presupposes something *permanent* in perception. But this permanent something cannot be something within me, precisely because my existence can be determined in time only by this permanent something. Thus, the perception of this persistent something is

view according to which our inner experience is indubitable, certain and autonomous, while the being of the outer world can in principle be doubted – fails.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological conception of intentionality differs from the Kantian conception in allowing different modes of intentionality, including conceptual and non-conceptual modes, active and explicit modes, and also passive and latent forms. Thus, intentionality is not limited to voluntary and explicit acts (such as comparing, measuring, counting, classifying) or the identifying and synthetic activity of making judgments.[165] A central claim of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* is that the intentionality of explicit acts is based on a non-thematic intentionality.

Merleau-Ponty describes this mode of intentionality with a term "operative intentionality" that he adopts from Husserl.[166] Clarification of the sense constitution of objects is a study of intentionality, but intentionality refers to different kinds of structures operative on different levels and phases of experiencing. Explicit acts of judgment and decision aside, experiencing also includes relations to things as part of practical activities. In these operative modes of intentionality, objects are given to the subject in a non-thematic and non-thetic manner.[167] The subject of the operative intentionality does not posit objects as present, or as absent some specific way, but the subject is influenced, motivated and "called" by objects. In every case, the phenomenology as a study of intentionality does not reduce objects to a non-worldly inner life. According to Merleau-Ponty,

> "[…] there is no 'inner man', man is in and toward the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself. When I return to myself from the dogmatism of common sense or of science, I do not find a source of intrinsic truth, but rather a subject destined to the world."[168]

Or, as he also puts it, as experiencing beings "we are through and through related to the world".[169]

Thus, insofar as experience is the initial point of departure for phenomenology, this does not mean that phenomenology would start from inner experience, pure inner feelings, immediate data of consciousness,[170] psychic states or purely mental phenomena. Phenomenology is not as much a characterization of the experiencing subjectivity as a description of "the world-experiencing life".[171] Phenomenology is about modes of existence or the different ways of "being in the world".[172]

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possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me".

165 PhP, xii/lxxxi.

166 PhP, xiii/lxxxii. On Husserl's use of the notion "fungierende Intentionalität", see Hua17[FT], §59, 165/157; §94, 242/235.

167 PhP, 61/50.

168 PhP, v/lxxiv.

169 PhP, viii/lxxvii.

170 PhP, 69–70, 57–8.

171 Hua15[I3], 187. See also Zahavi 2003, 74.

172 This is also how Husserl characterized the subjectivity in his late works. Zahavi emphasizes that instead of the subject, Husserl introduced the terms "world-experiencing life",

*(iv) Self-acquaintance.* A further requirement is that experiences bear a self-consciousness (*Selbstbewusstsein*, *conscience de soi)*,[173] or a self-acquaintance (*Vertrautsein*).[174] The subject of experience is somehow aware of the inner articulation of his or her experience, as he or she lives through this experience.[175] Husserl's conception of experience (*Erlebnis*) refers to a self-acquaintance, an essential *livedness* of the intentional experiences. The "livedness" of experiences means the essential feature that experiences are something that are undergone or lived through (*Erlebt*, *vécu*) by someone, and living through (*Erleben*) means to be aware of the experiencing itself.[176] The livedness of the experiences involves a minimal or primal self and the self-relation that differs from all relations to the objects. Accordingly, there is a self-luminosity that belongs to all experiences and which precedes all objectifying self-relations, including those operations of reflection that objectify the experiences and/or the experiencing self.[177]

Merleau-Ponty's discussion is in accord with this Husserlian understanding. Merleau-Ponty claims that experiences are characterized by an elementary self-consciousness, which is not awareness of itself or of the self as an object. He makes the view quite explicit while characterizing consciousness in the following way:

> "Consciousness is neither the thematization of self, nor the ignorance of self, it is *not hidden* from itself, that is, there is nothing in it that is not in some way announced to it, even though it has no need of knowing it explicitly."[178]

Now, as Zahavi has demonstrated in a lucid manner, the basic self-awareness of experience is not in any conflict or tension with the outward-directed intentionality of experience. Experience is both intentional and self-aware, and these two essential features of experience are not reducible or explicable in terms of each other. There is no experience without a relation to an object and, conversely, the

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"lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*) and the "life of world-consciousness" (Hua29, 192, 247). Zahavi 2003, 74.

[173] See PhP, 344/311.

[174] Self-acquaintance is a term used by Zahavi. It is a translation of the term *Vertrautsein* used by Heidegger in the lecture course *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*. See Heidegger 1993, 157.

[175] Zahavi 2005, 15, 80–1. To be sure, the question of self-awareness and of self-consciousness is a subject of debate. Some hold the view that the notions of self-awareness or self-consciousness, or even the concept of consciousness, do not catch the original sense of the primitive experiences. For instance, Al-Saji interprets Merleau-Ponty's pre-personal sensory life as a "polymorphous unconscious" (Al-Saji 2008, 46). As she admits, this interpretation requires that one takes a critical stance to Merleau-Ponty's claim concerning the foundational role of subjectivity as presence ("to the world and to itself", Al-Saji 2008, 47). In this work, I will opt for the characterization of pre-personal experiences in terms of self-awareness, provided that the primitive experiences themselves have right to function as the sources for the description of "self" and "awareness", and as sources for a critique of preconceptions concerning these notions.

[176] Hua3/1[Id1], 251/261. See also Taipale 2014, 21, 181. Anne Montavont points out that the livedness of experiences, which is a basic self-awareness of the experiencing, life in the transitive sense (*Er-lebnis*) is central in the phenomenological conception of life. Montavont 1999, 20.

[177] Zahavi 2005, 61. See also PhP, 487/450.

[178] PhP, 342/310.

object has no sense without being given to someone in experience. However, the givenness of the object to the experiencing subject also entails self-awareness. As Zahavi puts it, "[n]othing can be present *to me* unless I am *self*-aware."[179] The world as experienced includes a spontaneous and immediate *self*-understanding, a "lived self-acquaintance".[180] There is a necessary self-awareness, a familiarity, a self-concern or a self-consciousness involved in all experiencing of things.[181] This self-awareness precedes all reflective and objectifying relations to oneself. We do not become aware of (or acquainted with) ourselves *merely* through a reflection of ourselves, or primarily in this way. We are already self-aware before any reflection and self-objectification begins. As Zahavi argues, it is a basic result of phenomenological analysis that we are acquainted with ourselves exactly when we deal with the world through our accomplishments. Reflective and linguistic appropriations of the self transform the self, but pre-linguistic and pre-reflective self-awareness is not totally lost in this transformation.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the self-awareness *qua* livedness of experiences is essentially linked to the phenomenality of perceptual experiences, that is, to the qualitative phenomenal character that particular sense perceptions have. This is, for instance, the awareness of seeing or feeling while seeing or feeling something. As he writes:

> "The consciousness I have of seeing or of sensing is not the passive registering of a self-enclosed psychical event that would leave me uncertain with regard to the reality of the thing seen or sensed; nor is it the unfolding of a constitutive power that would eminently and eternally contain in itself every possible vision or sensation and that would meet up with the object without having to leave itself; rather, that consciousness I have of seeing is the very realization of vision."[182]

Thus, it is the self-awareness integral to the phenomenal consciousness of experiences of objects that makes phenomenology possible as a transcendental philosophy that returns to experience and works through experiences. As Merleau-Ponty famously writes, "[s]eeking the essence of consciousness will thus not consist in working out the *Wortbedeutung* [the meaning of the word] consciousness and in fleeing from existence to the universe of things-said; rather, it will be rediscovering that *actual presence of myself to myself*, the fact of my consciousness which is what the word and concept "consciousness" ultimately mean."[183]

Finally, we can say, following Zahavi, that intentional lived experiences, insofar as they involve rudimentary self-awareness, have an elementary mineness. Intentional lived experiences "belong to" the experiencing self or subject. Even if experience would contain an irreducible element of passivity, and even if I would not operate as a fully active subject or agent of my experience, all experiencing still has a basic "mineness". This does not imply that every experience would be accompanied by an I-thought, a conception of an I-subject or a conception of a

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[179] Zahavi 1999, 72.
[180] Zahavi 2008, 80.
[181] Zahavi 2005, 80.
[182] PhPr, 431/395.
[183] PhP, x/lxxix. See also Hua19/1[LU], "Einleitung", 6/166.

self, or a reflection on or about a self. Thus understood, subjectivity is a more minimal and less complex structure than personal identity.[184]
In short, phenomenological investigation is an attempt to reflect on the experiential articulation of the lived world.[185] In their reflective thematizations and descriptions, the philosopher does not reduce the experience to any knowledge of objects,[186] nor do they project their own philosophical principles onto an otherwise unarticulated experience. Instead, the description is motivated and guided by experiential life itself.[187] The point of departure for a phenomenological investigation is "factic life-experience itself, with all its concrete articulations and tendencies."[188]

### 1.2.2 Epoché and Reflection

How does Merleau-Ponty characterize the initial methodological operation that is necessary for the opening of the experience for phenomenological reflections? What does he mean by the *return* to phenomena?[189] The term "return" has two central meanings in this context. On the one hand, it implies a phenomenological critique of the natural attitude, a critique which makes a return to an actual experience possible, and which gives this experience to reflection for explication. On the other hand, the return implies a genetic-phenomenological disclosure and study of the layers of pre-acquired experiences that inform the actual experience at hand. I will account for these two aspects of Merleau-Ponty's idea of return. First, I will concentrate on the idea of return as a critique of natural attitude and as the institution of phenomenological reflections, and I will then study the idea of return in the sense of genetic-phenomenological inquiries.

Phenomenological reflection is an act of thematizing, clarifying or making explicit experience as it is. The oft-stated idea is that phenomenology does not alter the experiences that it studies, but merely makes them explicit and illuminates their conditions of possibility. Merleau-Ponty endorses Husserl's well-known principle, "back to the things themselves".[190] In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl's principle of going back to the things themselves refers to the beginning of the phenomenological investigation (of logic in that context) in intuitive

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184 To be sure, Zahavi's account of consciousness as entailing a self has been contested. See, for instance, Krueger 2011. Krueger argues for the claim that minimal consciousness does not involve any self in the sense of "a stable who". However, this comes close to what Zahavi means by the minimal self. Namely, self according to Zahavi is not any experiential content, a *what*, but a *how* of experience. It is a question of subjectivity of experience more than a subject of experience. See Zahavi 2011. The question, whether Merleau-Ponty would endorse an account according to which consciousness entails a minimal self or self/other distinction has been discussed in particular in relation to Merleau-Ponty's view concerning experiences of young infants. See for example Gallagher & Metzoff 1996, Maclaren 2008, Whitney 2012.
185 PhP, 69/57.
186 PhP, 69/57. Merleau-Ponty writes: "[...] in this lived world we will be able to understand the law as much as the limits of the objective world".
187 Zahavi 2005, 80.
188 Zahavi 2005, 81.
189 The title of the introductory part of *Phenomenology of Perception* is: "Introduction: Classical Prejudices and the Return to Phenomena".
190 PhP, ii/lxxi, 470/433; Hua19/1[LU], "Einleitung", 10/168.

givenness of things in experience. Apart from the idea that experience provides the initial point of departure, Husserl's principle also implies that the reflecting philosopher can directly follow the structures and variations of experiences, and account for them. The basic aim is to provide faithful descriptions of experiences instead of using "empty words" or referring to remote or confused intuitions.

The idea that philosophy should clarify experience implies that experience is not initially thematized for itself.[191] Husserl described this initial situation of experience by saying that it is naturally or inherently engaged in the things of the world. If we, as experiencing beings, are naturally engaged in the things of the world – if we live in the world, and are immersed (involved) in our practical projects and projects of taking care of things (environments and others), but also involved in our cognitive and theoretical projects and their accomplishments – then what is left without thematization is the field of our lived experiences. Thus, our initial experience, which Husserl called experience in the "natural attitude" or "natural life", is naïve in that it does not take into account the manner in which the world is given in experiences. This means that the experiential life that is responsible for the constitution of things is left unnoticed.

Merleau-Ponty argues that because perceptual experiences bear an inherent orientation towards the perceived objects in their reality, they lay the ground for its objectification.[192] A perceived unitary thing is given as "complete". It belongs to the structure of perception that the perceived thing appears as a unity within a multiplicity of limited and changing perspectives. The perceived thing appears as inexhaustible and complete with regard to particular spatial and temporal perspectives.[193] Perceptions are experiences that are guided by a specific perceptual optimality.[194] The perceived object has a central role with regard to the optimality of perception: the perception of something appears as more perfect exactly when *the object* is given in a more optimal manner. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty claims that the empirical knowledge, based on the evidence provided by perceptual experiences, naturally moves farther away from its root in perception, as it deals with things and relations between things. Thus, perceptual experience is an "incipient science". Inversely, science "is a perception that has forgotten its origins and believes itself to be complete."[195]

Merleau-Ponty describes the initial operation that makes experience available for phenomenological reflection as a step back from this natural directionality of perception. The thematization of experience thus requires an abstention from the natural engagement of experience with things and the world. The ab-

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191 PhP, 71/59. Merleau-Ponty writes: "[...] phenomena are never absolutely unknown to scientific consciousness […], it is just that scientific consciousness does not "thematize" them, it does not make explicit the horizons of perceptual consciousness [...]."
192 PhP, 453/416, 456/419.
193 PhP, 81/69, 84–5/72–3.
194 In the research literature it has become usual to write of perception in terms of normality and normativity. The normativity of perception is a specific kind of normativity that has to be distinguished from other kinds of normativity: for instance, from the socially usual, conventional, natural or original. See Steinbock 1995, 125.
195 PhP, 66/54.

stention is not a denial or a doubt of the world, but "putting it out of play", renouncing taking part into it or "refusing to be complicit" with the world.[196] The aim of the abstention is to awaken and to make the experiential life tied to the world appear. Merleau-Ponty formulates this initial operation of epoché as follows: phenomenological reflection begins with a step back from the world

> "in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear; it alone is conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical."[197]

The act of phenomenological reflection must now be briefly characterized. Zahavi distinguishes reflection from the attentional modification of experience characteristic of the epoché. This distinction is crucial, since attention might be assimilated with phenomenological reflection on the basis of the fact that neither of these two steps alters the experience. According to Husserl, attention is nothing but a modification of the experience or modification of the activity in which one is already engaged.[198] It could be said to be a more intense form of wakefulness.[199] Attention highlights the experiential relations we are entangled with at the moment.

What distinguishes reflection from attention is that reflection is a new, separate act, and not only a modification of the experience that one already lives through.[200] Reflection is a new act that appears together with the experience that is reflected on. Thus, reflection involves a particular kind of doubling of the subject: the reflecting subject differs from the subject of the reflected experience.[201] In this regard reflection is similar to recollection. When I recall my past experience of driving a bike, two experiences and two acts conflate: my current act of recalling (as I sit in my office drinking coffee) and the recalled past act of riding the bike. Husserl claims that there is a separation between the reflecting act and the reflected act, and a similar fission between the reflecting and the reflected subject. Husserl describes this in terms of a self-fission (*Ichspaltung*).[202] If I now reflect on

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196 Hua3, §32, 65/60–1; Hua6, §44.
197 PhP, viii/lxxvii. My purpose is not to develop any new interpretation of the phenomenological method. For this reason, I will operate with this basic account of the epoché and will not go into examining it in more detail.
198 Zahavi 2005, 90; Hua19, 425/118; Hua3, 75–6/75–6.
199 Zahavi 2005, 88. Zahavi notices that it was Eugen Fink's claim that phenomenological reflection is simply a more intense form of self-awareness. See Fink 1992, 116–7.
200 Zahavi 2005, 90.
201 Hua3, 78/80. See also Hua8, 89, where Husserl writes, with regard to a self-reflection of one's observation of a house: "Sondern in der lebendigen Gegenwart habe ich in Koexistenz das verdoppelte Ich und den verdoppelte Ichaktus; also das Ich , das jetzt kontinuerlich das Haus betrachtet, und das Ich, das den Aktus vollziecht: 'Ich bin desse inne, dass ich kontinuerlich das Haus betrachte,' und der ev. sich ausspricht in der Form: Ich betrachte das Haus. Denn natürlich dieser schlichte Satz ist Aussage des reflektierenden Ich, und das darin ausgesagte Ich ist das reflektiv erfasste."
202 Hua8, 96. In the passage in question Husserl writes: "In der Ichspaltung haben wir ja: furs erste das Ich, das den Aktus der Wahrnehmung vollzieht, oder den der Erinnerung vollzog, un das also am Sein interessiertes Ich ist; und wir haben in eins damit zweitens das darüberstehende Ich der Reflexion […]". See also Zahavi 2005, 90.

my present act of drinking coffee, I entertain both my earlier experience of drinking and my new reflective act that studies this experience.

Merleau-Ponty recognizes the need to conceive reflection as a new act that somehow transforms both the reflected experience and the reflecting subject.[203] He suggests that it is not sufficient to assimilate the subject with one of the positions, either with the I of the reflective attitude or with the I of the pre-reflected experiential life. Instead, one has to see the two positions as related to each other and to clarify how reflection transforms the unreflected:

> "We must not merely settle into a reflective attitude or into an unassailable Cogito, but also reflect upon this reflection, understand the natural situation it is aware of replacing and that thereby belongs to its definition. We must not merely practice philosophy, but also become aware of the transformation that it brings with it in the spectacle of the world and in our existence."[204]

Now, the kind of transformation that reflection brings to the reflected experience is, according to Husserl, an accentuation of the structural features of the reflected experience that were implicit for the subject who unreflectively lived it through. As Zahavi puts it: "A reflection might, at best, simply be accentuating structures already inherent in the lived experience".[205] In this regard, the transformation that phenomenological reflection brings to the reflected experience resembles that of attention, even if reflection also differs from the change of attention characteristic of the epoché. Epoché is the initial step that makes it possible to reflect on the correlation between the experience and its object. Reflection is a distinct act that makes the structure of the reflected experience thematic; it brings to the fore the characteristics of the experiential life that were marginal or in the background.[206]

### 1.2.3 Eidetic Variation

In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty aims at providing a systematic account of perceptual experience. What is the systematic account that phenomenology provides? To begin with, there are different kinds of beings and traditional categorizations of regions of beings; for example, physical things, living beings, persons, artefacts and artworks. This means that we conceive and experience things in different senses or meanings of being. On the basis of a categorization of pre-established manners to articulate meaningful beings – or in Husserl's terms, regional ontologies – phenomenology seeks to disclose correlative structures that combine these different kinds of beings with different types of experiences, the basic manners of givenness of things. Thus, phenomenology seeks to explicate processes of sense constitution in disclosing the correlative experiences in which the meaning of something is established.

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[203] PhP, iv/lxxiii.
[204] PhPr, 75–6/63.
[205] Zahavi 2005, 89. See also Hua1, 77/38–9.
[206] Zahavi 2005, 89–90.

Ultimately, the phenomenological account is a clarification of sense constitution. Its systematic accounts describe the essential structures of our experiences of the world and worldly objects as meaningful. This means that the phenomenologists are not determined to describe particular experiences or the full richness of their contents, but are determined to study the universal structures and general conditions of experiencing in all their possible varieties. Thus, Husserl emphasizes that phenomenology is necessarily a material eidetic science, the subject matter of which is experience. It is not a formal science, such as logic, nor an empirical science, such as psychology, but is comparable to geometry, which is the material eidetic science of space. As in geometry, variations of initial examples produced in free imagination play a crucial role in the phenomenological method.[207] Husserl emphasizes that phenomenology is not an inquiry into empirical regularities found within a limited group of factual experiences. Instead, a phenomenological analysis of sense constitution requires abstaining from the facticity of a factual experience in order to freely conceive of possible variations of the experience in question. Only this method can bring forth insights into essences, into the invariants without which the experience in question would not be conceivable. Accordingly, singular experiences are conceived as exemplary instances of that particular type of experience in its essence. For instance, phenomenological description is not about the perception that I happen to have at the moment, but about the essential structure of whatever perceptual intentionality.[208]

What are the essences and essential relations that phenomenology discloses in experience, according to Merleau-Ponty? In order to answer this, we have to clarify his interpretation of the eidetic analysis.[209] Eidetic analysis is a procedure of variation, of modifying experience in order to disclose its essential correlations. Merleau-Ponty endorses Husserl's idea that eidetic analysis requires an "eidetic reduction". The eidetic reduction consists of abstention from the factuality of a particular experiential accomplishment. The abstraction from the factuality of an experience makes it possible to freely vary the experience in question in imagination. For instance, instead of describing the perception of a table that I happen to have at this moment, we can imagine variable perceptions. What if the table was red instead of brown; what if its size was different, etc. Merleau-Ponty points out that the epoché, insofar as it is a puts validity claims out of play, is also an eidetic reduction. The epoché, which makes the unthematic experience available for reflective thematization, also makes it available for free variability in phantasy:

> "[E]very reduction […] is also necessarily eidetic. In other words, we cannot bring our perception of the world before the philosophical gaze without ceasing to be identical with that thesis about the world […] or without passing over from the *fact* of our existence to the [essence] of our existence."[210]

[207] See Heinämaa & Kaitaro 2018.
[208] See, for instance, Hua3, §3, §70; Hua1, §34, Hua17, §98.
[209] See PAR2, 81–102.
[210] PhP, ix/lxxviii.

However, he claims that this should not lead to dismissing the important contribution that the factual psychological descriptions of experience can make to the phenomenological account of essences. He criticizes the principled distinction between eidetic psychology and empirical psychology, and the conviction about the necessary distribution of work between these two fields. While eidetic psychology varies experience in free imagination, empirical psychology studies factual cases, such as first-person reports of the studied subjects.[211] According to the distinction, eidetic psychology would disclose universal essences, while empirical psychology would merely apply these presupposed essences to empirical data.[212]

Merleau-Ponty claims that eidetic variation bears a significant resemblance to the procedure of induction in empirical psychology. They are both based on particular cases of experience. Specifically, free variation must deal with imagined experiences, and imagined experiences are particular cases as much as the factual experiences at the basis of empirical induction. Conversely, empirical psychology does not only consist of applying already-acquired insights into empirical data. Instead, the particular cases are already meaningful factual experiences that are made thematic in reflecting them. The factual experiences themselves have the power to change our ideas concerning the essential structures.[213] Furthermore, the need to change one's idea concerning the essential structure of experience does not require that one should perform the procedure of free imagination again, but new insights and understandings emerge directly from descriptions of factual experiences. Merleau-Ponty thinks that reflections on factual experiences, first-person reports and observations of behavior are justified cases of eidetic variation as much as freely imagined possible experiences.

According to Merleau-Ponty some of Sartre's and Scheler's theoretical insights can be criticized for giving an unwarranted primacy to free imagination with regard to eidetic analysis of experience.[214] Merleau-Ponty claims that sometimes Sartre and Scheler think that the universal essences and essential relations of experience revealed in free imagination would simply overrule encountered factual experiences. For instance, in his analysis of different forms of life in *Human's Place in the Cosmos*, Scheler contends that he will not deal with the variety of the life-forms "between plants and animals" encountered in empirical studies, but with that which is essential to being a plant and an animal:

> "We are not dealing here with empirical concepts because of the variety of transitional forms between plants and animals of which Aristotle was already aware. The *essential* direction of life which is designated by such words as 'plantlike' and 'vegetative' is a completely outward-directed impulsion."[215]

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211 PAR2, 91.
212 PAR2, 91.
213 In fact, this is also Husserl's view in the first book of *Ideas*. Husserl points out that historical writings, art and poetry provide a fertile ground for freely imagining variations of experience. Hua3, §70, 148/160.
214 PAR2, 98.
215 Scheler 2009, 9.

Here Scheler makes one understand that the "transitional forms" encountered in experience would not simply be any significant instances that would demand reconsidering the essence. Merleau-Ponty argues that phenomenological philosophy should be wary of this kind of "scholasticism".[216] There are no essences of experiencing that should not be tested with the factual instances of experience. There is something wrong if the imagined instances fit well with the essence, but the factual experiences counter it.

Consider, for instance, the experience of a hand. The phenomenological account is not merely about describing the features of a singular experience of something, such as that which is involved in my experience of my hand here and now. Eminently, the eidetic task is to account for not only this particular experience of the hand, but for hand-experience in general. What are the minimal requirements that are needed in order that the hand is given as a hand? We can conceive of wooden hands, immaterial hands, hands made of food or phantom hands. Furthermore, we can conceive a mathematical formulation of the physiology of a hand, or we may try to imagine a hand with no reference to the human body; a hand with no activity of touching, grasping or bodily movement. We can imagine a god's hand, or the hand of a bacterium living beyond humanity. On what condition can we understand something as an experience of a hand?

Merleau-Ponty is critical of Scheler's manner of understanding the eidetic analysis. In Scheler's account, the clarity and strength of an eidetic intuition (*Wesenschau*) that captures a pure ideal essence is valued over the "indeterminacy" of concrete morphological essences.[217] To keep up with our example, the aim would be to attain the ideal, exemplary experience of a hand. The obscure instances of our experiences of hands and the experiential differences between the uses of hands in different situations and with different interests may be disregarded.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the matter that eidetic variation does not disclose an atemporal domain of essences. He refers to Husserl's characterization of phenomenology as an inquiry into essences in *The Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Husserl contends that when one abstracts from the factual experience, and engages in scrutinizing the possible variants of the experience in question in free imagination, an *invariant* – the essence or the eidos common to all the variants – comes to the fore.[218] However, this is a "constituted eidos" that is in correlation with a "constitutional Apriori".[219] The essence here is nothing other than the correlate of the accomplishment of the eidetic intuition, which is relative to the free variation. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "In our experience, the

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[216] PAR2, 98–9.
[217] In *Ideas I* Husserl contends that one should not determine beforehand the criteria for the essence of an experience, such as the criterion of exactitude of the geometer. Thus, for instance, vague and fluid essences might be indispensable in a particular sphere of experience. Husserl writes: "If the aim is to give appropriate conceptual expression to the intuitionally given essential characteristics of intuitionally given physical things, that means precisely that the latter must be taken as they are given." Hua3, §74, 155/166.
[218] Hua17, 255/248.
[219] Hua17, 255/248.

intuition of some particular essence necessarily precedes the essence of intuition".[220]

In addition to imagination, in Merleau-Ponty's analysis, the contribution of emphatic experience of the other's experiences and the other's behavior is crucial. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty highlights the significance of descriptive psychology and ethology for the phenomenological analysis of experience. The other person's descriptions of their experiences, insofar as they differ from ours, motivate us to modify our own experience. Moreover, the observed bodily gestures of the other persons and animals may motivate us to consider completely new types of modifications of experience that outshine the results of our own acts of imagination. Such indirect evidences provide us with previously unimaginable possibilities of experiencing.[221] However, even when such variations are suggested by alien experiences, we must be able to render them imaginable as modifications of our own experiences. Otherwise they would remain totally unconnected to the common field of experiencing. For instance, Merleau-Ponty makes use of the neurologist Kurt Goldstein's extensive analysis of a patient's bodily performances and experiences.[222] Another illuminative example is the experience of a phantom limb discussed by many philosophers. These experiences and phenomena are difficult to devise or imagine, beginning with one's own normal experiences.[223]

Thus, phenomenologically sound descriptions of concrete experiences studied as possible variations of experiencing lie the center of Merleau-Ponty's analysis. The reflecting philosopher returns retrospectively to study a particular experience in order to describe the way in which it is lived by the experiencing subject as an example of the general structures of experiencing. As we saw above, experiences *are not explicit or thematic for the experiencing subject*; *they are not reflected at the moment of experiencing*. The reflecting philosopher can disclose matters that belong indispensably to the structure of the particular experience but are not in its thematic focus. And they also disclose the enabling conditions of experiencing. Thus, the reflecting philosopher can say that the subject *must be somehow aware* of X in order to have that particular experience. For instance, I do not feel the position of my hands on the keyboard when I write a text. Instead, I am explicitly focused on the words and thoughts. However, one can say that I must be marginally or implicitly *aware of* the position of my hands in order to be able to move them correctly on the keyboard. Namely, what would be the experience in which *I was not aware of my hands at all*, for example, if I did not feel where my hands are, if I was not immediately kinesthetically and proprioceptically aware of their locations, or did not feel the keyboard while writing. All such deprivations would contribute to very *different kind of experience* than the experience of writing. Such counter-examples demonstrate that an implicit bodily awareness is part of any experience of writing. But abnormal experiences also

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220 PhP, 453/416.
221 PAR2, 80, 91–3; S, 162–5; PhP, 388–9/352–4.
222 See SC, 71n1. More on Schneider, see chapter 5.2. in this work.
223 See also the above mentioned passage from *Ideas I*, in which Husserl writes of the important role of poetry and literature for philosophy. Husserl mentions that fiction may overcome our own fancy with respect to originality and detailed features. Hua3, §70, 148/160.

disclose some of the necessary components of normal experiences. When my leg goes limp during deep sleep due to a stagnant sleeping position, and when I then wake up and, head to the kitchen and fall down on the floor, I come to realize quite concretely that most of my everyday activities are dependent on the felt givenness of my limbs. Thus understood, it is phenomenologically sound to speak of awareness and experience, even if this was not part of that which was explicitly and thematically present to me in my experience.

Not every description of experience is correct. For instance, consider the Kantian idea that a pure form of space is required to enable the experience of a spatial object. Now, according to Husserl's phenomenological principle, we should not presuppose such a conception if it does not work out as a description of experience itself.[224] However, if we evaluate the idea of pure space as a characterization of experience, we discover that such a form is not among the constituents of the concrete experience. While writing, I must feel the keyboard and be aware of some kind of spatiality, but would I be really *aware of* pure space? "Pure form" might be an object involved in the act of abstract thinking. The task of writing with the keyboard is clearly different from abstract thought, and why should I insert an abstract thought in the performance of writing. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty argues that eyes as physiological organs or as retina are not involved in the experience of seeing something: "[…] I do not mean that my retina […] my eyes as material organs, are operational and make me see the house. With only myself to examine, I know nothing of these things. With this assertion I wish to express a certain manner of reaching the object […]".[225] In short, whatever retrospective descriptions of experience that uncover non-explicit features of awareness are not phenomenologically faithful or sound.

### 1.2.4 Biological Existence Within the System of Constitutions

> "[…] an enormous task is foreshadowed, which is that of transcendental phenomenology as a whole: the task of *carrying out all phenomenological investigations* within the unity of a systematic and all-embracing order by following, as our mobile clue, a system to be found out level by level, the system namely of all objects of possible consciousness […] of carrying out such investigations as *corresponding constitutional investigations*, one based upon another, and all of them interconnected, in a strictly systematic fashion. […] here it is a matter of an infinite *regulative idea*." (Hua1 [CM], §22, 54.)

A phenomenological explication of sense constitution can concern a particular kind of object or a particular kind of experience. For instance, we can explicate the essential features of spatial objects: what distinguishes spatial objects from non-spatial objects, and in what kind of experiencing is an object is constituted as having a spatial extension?[226] One can accomplish the free variation on a specific modification of experiencing: in what respect does perceiving an object differ from remembering the object? Furthermore, the explication can make explicit

[224] To be sure, Kant would not claim that pure space as a condition of possibility of experience would amount to a description of concrete experience itself.
[225] PhP, 81/69.
[226] As we will see below, Husserl argues that the experience of spatial objects is constituted in what he calls "localized sensing".

the composition of the experience or of the object. For instance, a perceived hand is a temporal, spatial, material and real object (insofar it has a typical constant style of behaving in changing circumstances). However, we can conceive of perceived spatial objects that are not material (such as rainbows) or as not real (such as a hallucination). Furthermore, we can conceive of the experience of the temporal unity of the objects by abstracting from the spatiality altogether. In short, by considering the composition of an experienced object, we end up with different layers of experiencing. Thus, a systematic phenomenological analysis that operates by means of the eidetic variation deals with experience as a complex that consists of many components and layers. There are basic structures, lower-level or deep structures, upon which higher-level structures are built. Husserl accounts for the relations between experiences, most importantly in terms of the relation of founding/founded (*Fundierung*)[227] and the relation between the abstract and the concrete, and both these relation types are based on his theory of parts and wholes.[228]

However, a cursory reflection of one's experiential life is sufficient to make it obvious that an explication of isolated experiences or act-object correlations is hardly sufficient to provide a systematic account of consciousness. Three matters come into relief. *First*, that which I experience in the moment does not consist of succeeding isolated intentional lived experiences. I am surrounded by a multiplicity of objects, and I am engaged in multiple simultaneous experiences. While I write and look at the screen, I see a lamp at the margins of my perception. At the same time a memory might pop up in my mind, I feel hungry, I articulate thoughts about what I am writing, etc. Instead of isolated experiences, one has to account for a *field* of experiencing. *Second*, the experiencing is a constant temporal flow. Living through a unity of particular experiences such as grasping a pen is to experience succeeding phases of that experience. Furthermore, when the accomplishment is finished, it is not actual anymore, but recedes into the past, while I engage in another act. However, this does not mean that I would become totally unconscious of the experience in question. Instead, although it is already in the past, it still affects me in one way or another. The phenomenal field is not only a field of simultaneous experiences, but also a field of past experiences and future experiences that I expect or anticipate. *Finally*, the phenomenal field belongs to the unity of my conscious life. The past experiences still affect me, but also, for example, my past acquisitions – that which I have learned – determine that which I am able to do in the moment. The experiences are not isolated insofar as they are experiences that belong to the totality of my life, having a place in my life history.

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[227] John Drummond points out that in Husserl's phenomenology relations of foundation between two experiences mean two things. On the one hand, an act is founded on another act if "it presupposes the other act as necessary". On the other, it means that "an act builds itself upon another act's matter […] so as to form a unity with it". Drummond 2003, 83. The first meaning corresponds to Husserl's notion of foundation that he formulates in the *Logical Investigations*. A part is founded on X means that it is in a necessary connection with the X. In other words, the part could not exist or it would be unthinkable without the X. Hua19/1, §14, 267/25.

[228] See Hua3, §15, 35/29.

Thus, phenomenological explication not only accounts for particular experiences and the systematic order of experiences, it also accounts for the essential characteristics of the temporal flow, temporal development and the temporal order of experiences. Furthermore, it accounts for the way in which experiences are ordered within the life of an individual experiencing being, or a monad.[229] The difference between a constitutive analysis of a singular phenomenon, and the holistic or systematic analysis (in which an analysis of a singular phenomenon means entering into the system at a specific place in it) is explicated in terms of the difference between "static" and "genetic" phenomenology. For example, Klaus Held makes note of the fact that "static phenomenology" cannot account for the systematic whole of phenomena. Instead, it clarifies the manner in which a particular kind of object appears (or is constituted), distinguished from the other constitutions. Instead, genetic phenomenology accounts for the systematic and temporal order of the phenomena within the whole life of an individual experiencing being.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as reflective, descriptive and eidetic analysis of experience. However, the aim is not to describe particular experiences detached from the concrete temporal stream of the life of an individual. Instead, Merleau-Ponty points out that particular experiences are always situated within the flow of experiencing, and the flow of experiencing is a development of an individual perceiving person, having an individual life history. The analysis of experiences within the context of the "concrete subjectivity" of the individual person is what Merleau-Ponty calls "existential analysis".[230] Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty does not study perception as an isolated phenomenon, but within the "genetic phenomenological" system of constitutions. Merleau-Ponty contends that genetic phenomenology locates experiences within a system of an existential totality, which is a specific, temporally developing part-whole configuration of an individual experiencing being.

In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty links genetic phenomenology (*phénoménologie de la génèse*) to an analysis that studies particular acts as non-independent parts of a more comprehensive temporal whole.[231] The "concrete subjectivity" is a whole that has a temporal center of immanent egoic acts, but which also consists of the motivating background of a peculiar sedimented and continually developing, sedimenting (thus changing) history and habituality. Accordingly, the world of experience is articulated into overlapping existential totalities. A phenomenological analysis of a particular constitution could be characterized as an entering into the system.[232]

Merleau-Ponty's existential analysis is holistic. This idea has repercussions in Gestalt-theory, such as in Goldstein's analysis of the human being, but also in

229 See Hua14, 34, 38; APS, 635, 640.
230 PhP, 152–8/132–7.
231 PhP, xiii/lxxxii-iii.
232 On the connection between genetic phenomenology and systematicity, see Held 2003, 52–3.

Husserl's phenomenology of persons developed in *Ideas II*.[233] It stresses the idea that everything that is distinguished in the experiential life of the individual is a dependent part of and must be situated in the context of the experiential life of the individual monadic being.[234] The individual is a whole of intersecting structures. As Merleau-Ponty writes, for instance: "[…] I become the place where a multitude of 'causalities' intertwine."[235] There is a dialectic between the whole and the parts, and the layers of experience must be included in this whole-part structure. There are different levels of these structures, but they are all mutually connected and connected in the whole of the concrete subject. Nevertheless, an individual existence is a developing being that acquires various capacities during its development and has a sedimented history of experiencing that consists of lower-level and higher-level experiences.

Finally, it must be emphasized that refocusing the analysis so that it concerns the individual existence also has implications for the way in which the operation of the philosopher is characterized. Namely, the phenomenological act of reflection has to be understood not just as a possible relation to experience but also as a concrete act of a temporally and spatially situated individual, having a specific life history. Phenomenological reflection and eidetic variation are both actual experiences of individual subjects, not forms of some universal subjectivity. Accordingly, each and every philosophical act of disclosing the necessities of experiences can be questioned by further acts, by other simultaneous and diachronic reflecting subjects. Moreover, the acts of imagining are embodied acts.

Now, as I will argue in this work, biological existence becomes an issue of phenomenological explication in two manners. On one hand, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of "syncretic behavior" indicates a primitive, instinctive experiencing. On the other, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes a lower level of existence, which has a motor, affective and sensible aspect, as a "matter" on the basis of which the synthesis of perception is instituted. My claim is that biological existence can be accounted as an instinctive experiencing.

## 1.3 Tracing the Thematic Field of the Research

In the following subchapter the task is to explicate the central concepts and distinctions that Merleau-Ponty uses in his account of biological existence. As I will argue below, biological existence refers to an instinctive experiencing, which remains bound to the sphere of original passivity. But within the sphere of original passivity, the instinctive experiencing is a modification that can be attained through a reduction to what Husserl calls "the sphere of the impressional present".

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[233] See Hua4 [IdII], Dritter Abschnitt, "Die Konstitution der Geistigen Welt" [Section Three, "The Constitution of the Spiritual World"].
[234] The theoretical basis is in Husserl's and Brentano's theories of parts and wholes or mereologies. Cf. Heinämaa 2009.
[235] PhP, 99/86.

The explication of what is *instinctive* experiencing or instinctive intentionality, and the explication of the impressional present and the link of instinctive experiencing to it, will be the tasks of the later chapters. Here the task is to explicate Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the person and the pre-personal. In my explication I will link this distinction to Husserl's distinction between the active and passive spheres of experience. My claim is that Merleau-Ponty's concept of the pre-personal corresponds to Husserl's conception of the original passivity. Furthermore, perception is a bridging phenomenon between the passivity and activity. Perception enables the active, wakeful sphere of experience, and makes the constitution of the person in the accomplishments of actively taking position possible.

A further task of this subchapter is to provide a rough explication of our bodily self-awareness. According to Merleau-Ponty, the instinctive intentionality has a motor, affective and sensible aspect. Furthermore, it will be argued that the "biological" or the "natural" in biological existence refers back to an infrastructure of the body. Later in this work, in the interpretation of the instincts, I will follow Keeping's argument, according to which instincts are *embodied meanings*. Merleau-Ponty claims that biological existence involves an awareness of one's own body, both in the sense of bodily movement and bodily infrastructure. What is the primary mode of awareness of one's own body as movement, and as an infrastructure? I will make explicit the difference between kinesthetic self-awareness, and the awareness of one's own body as a specific object. The explication will dispel some possible misunderstandings concerning the lived body and the role of the phenomenal body in perceptual experiencing and in biological existence.

### 1.3.1 Perception of a Transcendent Object

What is perception? What are the minimal requirements, the components of genuine acts of perception? To begin with, perceptions are particular kinds of intentional lived experiences that come and go within the temporal flow of our conscious life. Sense perceptions are directed to external, sensible objects. Now I see a red lamp in front of me, now a cat which lies under the lamp. I am perceptually aware of the room that surrounds me and in which I perceive a variety of things. While I focus on a particular thing such as the coffee cup, I still notice the other things in the background, out the corner of my eye, and at the same time I hear the noise of a car outside. Imaginations, phantasies, hallucinations, memories and dreams differ from perceptions in the proper sense. While I see the cat in front of me, I also ponder that which I am writing about: sudden memories can pop up in my mind, and I become silently stimulated by a desire for coffee. This means that I am not solely engaged in perceiving something in my wakeful life. Furthermore, there are moments in which I hardly perceive anything at all, such as when I fall asleep or when I live through an episode of stark emotion.

However, Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, thinks that perception has a central role within our wakeful, personal and communal life. The object of perception is given in its carnal presence, as "in itself". As Husserl writes in *Ideas I*:

> "Any perceiving consciousness has the peculiarity of being a consciousness of the *own presence 'in person' of an individual Object*".[236]

The perceptual intentional modification by which an object is present carnally, in itself, in person or in its own presence, is to be distinguished from the modifications of the givenness of the object in remembering, phantasy, hallucination or dreaming. Perception is the original, non-modified givenness of an object as independent from the perceiver. As Husserl points out, in perception the object is originally present as "over against" consciousness. For this reason, perception is also the original source for the "general positing of the world effected by me in the natural attitude".[237] Besides, in perception the perceiving consciousness appears for itself as inessential. The perceived object appears as the center that guides perception.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the perceived object appears originally as "in person" or "in itself", insofar as in the perceptual synthesis the object is constituted as a transcendent unity. Merleau-Ponty exemplifies the occurrence of the synthesis of perception with the transition from squint vision to a unitary vision. The transition occurs as a focusing and converging of the eyes. When we experience the transition from squint vision to a unitary vision, we experience a merging of images into a unity of an object. In the squint vision the two images appear as attached to us, insofar as they move according to the movement of our eyes. The doubled object appears as attached to the two moving images, and its visual appearance seems to be modifiable by the subject. If we twist our eyes more, the images move farther from each other. Accordingly, the object does not appear as independent from us, and the distance between the object and the subject of perception is not properly established. The two images "wander vaguely *in front of* the things, they have no place in the world", as Merleau-Ponty points out.[238]

When the images merge in one unity they disappear. At the same moment, we are no longer aware, in a similar manner, of a connection between the movements of our eyes and changes in the appearances. Now, we are focused on the object, and the movements bring forth different aspects of the object itself. The object does not appear as attached to the appearing images, but it appears as an independent center. Accordingly, wakefulness is permeated by a dominating background of the world of perception. In wakefulness, objects appear as autonomous from us, which also means that they have a place within a world, as Merleau-Ponty points out. The wakeful world appears as an independent surrounding environment, which does not follow our movements and locations, but is independent of our locations and movements.

According to Merleau-Ponty, transcendence is an essential characteristic of the perceived object. The perceived object appears as a unity that transcends, that is, points beyond its actually experienced aspects. In other words, the perceived object is an inexhaustible unity. Let us explicate the inexhaustibility of the perceived object with Merleau-Ponty's example of the visual perception of a house.

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[236] Hua3[Id1], 81/83.
[237] Hua3[Id1], 80/82.
[238] PhP, 269/242.

When I look at a house, the house appears as a unity within changing sensible aspects. When I walk around the house, I see it from different sides. I see only one visual aspect of the house at a time. However, the perceived house does not originally appear instantaneously. The house appears within a temporal flow in which the perspectives of the house follow each other in a concordant unity. Furthermore, as I walk around the house, I spontaneously anticipate the side of the house that will soon appear, and I retain the just-passed visual impressions of the house. Alternatively, I can stay still, and look at the different parts of the house: the roof, the windows, the door, the footing. Again, the house appears as a unity within these different visual aspects of the house that follow each other harmoniously in a temporal flow.[239]

The appearance of a unity within varying limited aspects requires each phase of the perception, in which one single aspect appears, to be endowed with a reference beyond the actual aspect. If perception lacked this reference to the unseen aspects, the experience of the object would differ drastically.[240] The mere visible front-side would not appear as a house. When I see a house, I perceptually expect a familiar visual appearance of a backside that I do not actually see. While I see the front, the unseen but possible visual appearance of the backside is perceptually there. The unseen sides of the house are not given as empty, dark or unimaginable.

Thus, the aspects of the unity of a perceived object are by necessity limited aspects that bear a reference or radiation beyond. Moreover, the perceived object is by necessity inexhaustible. This means that the perceived object is not reducible to a limited group of aspects. It is given to the perceiver, in one way or another, that the object always points beyond its already-anticipated, expected or familiar characteristics. We can conceive of a limited subject who would be fully engaged in perceiving a particular object with respect to a particular activity. Consider, for instance, the "instinctive" act of grasping an apple and eating it, in which the subject's awareness of the "apple" would be strictly limited within the confines of the act. The apple would be given only as something-to-be-eaten. It would be given for the subject as a centre or pole that guides and unites the phases of the action, but as nothing more. In this case, the apple would be given as an "object" in the meaning of a centre, but limited to its practical context. Instead, the object or the centre of perception is given as something that refers beyond the current or urgent practical context. As Merleau-Ponty writes, the perceived thing is "being shot through from all sides by an infinite number of present scrutinies which intersect in its depths leaving nothing hidden".[241] In other words, the perceived object appears, in one way or another, within an infinite, open horizon.

To be sure, there would be a lot more to say about the transcendence of perceptual experiencing. Now it is sufficient to point out that, according to Merleau-Ponty, perception, which is an intentional relation to the inexhausible unity

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[239] PhP, 81/69.
[240] As we will see below, in Schneider's case, the expand of spontaneous references or motivational associations is diminished.
[241] PhP, 83/71.

of a perceived object, is also an accomplishment of transcendence. Wakeful life is at the same time an accomplishment or actualization of the capacity to point beyond, and it is a condition for our active experiencing. The fact that we are not awake all the time does not mean that we would occasionally lose and then regain the transcendence of the perceived object and the world-horizon. Our anonymous, passive life is also permeated by transcendence. However, the capacity of transcending or pointing-beyond is not always accomplished to the same extent.

### 1.3.2 Perception as the Bridge Between the Passive and the Active Spheres of Experience

What is at stake in the distinction between the person and the pre-personal? The distinction between the person and the pre-personal is central to *Phenomenology of Perception*. My contention is that Merleau-Ponty's conception of the person corresponds to Husserl's notion of the person. According to Husserl, the person is constituted in specific intentional accomplishments and position-taking acts (*Stellungnahme*). However, as I will show, position takings are higher-level acts that are based on an already active ego. Namely, it is only possible to take position on something if one already attentively notices this something. Instead, one can simply notice something without accomplishing any further act of taking a position with respect to it. As Husserl writes: "[a]ll genuine activity is carried out in the scope of attentiveness."[242]

As Hanne Jacobs points out, personhood is something that one learns or achieves within one's life.[243] Personhood, in Husserl's sense, is constituted in the subject's willed comportments toward objects. Simply put, the intentional lived experience of simply seeing a book does not constitute oneself as a person. Instead, the person is only constituted in the way in which one responds to what one sees. To be sure, this can also mean that the subject does nothing. However, only when this doing nothing becomes compared to the other possibilities of taking position, and only if it is conceived as a specific comportment towards what the subject sees, can it be conceived as constituting the person's character. Simply noticing something differs from being an idle or unresponsive person. As Jacobs writes:

> "To become a person consists, phenomenologically speaking, in constituting oneself as a person in and through the positions one takes".[244]

Hart associates position-taking with a voluntary activity. A position-taking can take place insofar as the subject is able to minimally control the act. This correlates with Aristotle's idea of *hexis*, personal character, according to which some-

[242] Hua11, §49.
[243] Jacobs 2010, 349.
[244] Jacobs 2010, 349.

one's personal character is present only in the manner the subject treats the objects around them. Accordingly, the personal character or the "will" can be only constituted within the acts that are controllable:

> "[f]or Aristotle the key consideration for the determination of character is the voluntary act. This is an act which the agent does in the sense it could have been refrained from; it is also an act which is done with knowledge as to both what the act is and what its consequences are. Voluntary acts need not be acts which one desires or likes to do. […] Voluntary acts thus embrace primarily the voluntary dimension of life […] they encompass what the verbs 'doing' and 'acting' generally refer to."[245]

Hart notices that Husserl's conception of position-taking (*Stellungnahme*) is a similar kind of "setting", a position or an attitude towards something.[246] Accordingly, Jacobs characterizes position-taking not as a feature that belongs to all active intentional accomplishments, but as a specific intentional act.

In *Ideas II*, Husserl distinguishes position-taking from the mere attentive noticing of objects. Position-taking amounts to comporting towards objects. Consciousness of an object can mean that the object is simply an object of attention. Husserl points out that attentive noticing is a kind of accomplishment, but not a position-taking.[247] The latter can mean, for instance, evaluating the object's aesthetic or moral value, explicating, comparing, judging, calculating or carrying out a practical task with respect to the object. Deliberations and commitments are, accordingly, position-takings. In the chapter "Sensing", Merleau-Ponty characterizes the anonymity of sense experiences by distinguishing them from personal acts. In the passage in question Merleau-Ponty associates personal acts with acts such as commitment and deliberation. As he writes, a person is a mathematician because they have decided to be one.[248] Accordingly, our projects, such as a plan to climb a rock face,[249] our qualifications and valuations[250] and attitudes towards the world,[251] constitute ourselves as persons. This suggests that our self-awareness of ourselves as persons is constituted in the manner in which we relate to that which is given to us.[252] Here my purpose is not to provide a more detailed analysis of personhood, which would require taking into account the intersubjective and social dimension of the person.[253] In general, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the person, contrasted to anonymity, refers back to the acts of position-taking.

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245 Hart 1992, 52–3.
246 Hart 1992, 53.
247 Hua4[Id2], 278/291. It must also be pointed out that according to Husserl an individual character of the subject of being related to the objects can be manifest both in simple attentiveness and in position-taking.
248 PhP, 249/223.
249 PhP, 501/464.
250 PhP, 503–4/466.
251 PhP, 504/466.
252 Merleau-Ponty examines this relation in particular in the chapter "Freedom", which consists of a critique of Sartre's understanding of freedom. See PhP, 498–520/458–83.
253 Arguably, only the experience of oneself as an I among the other subjects constitutes the authentic sense of personhood. Besides, personhood is centrally related to "taking position" within a social context. Being a person is related to being an authentic member of a social group. Accordingly, the person can be fully understood only by explicating the phenomena of identification and membership within a social group.

How is the sphere of active experiencing delimited, if it does not merely comprise position-taking acts? The idea is that we can only take position with respect to that which we already attentively notice. In order to choose between buying milk or sour milk, one must already be aware of these two objects in a manner that these objects are available for the accomplishment of choosing. According to Husserl the egoic activity in the proper sense begins when the ego turns toward and object. As he writes:

> "The investigation into the active accomplishments of the ego, through which the formations of the genuine *logos* come about, operate in the medium of an attentive turning toward and its derivatives. Turning our attention toward is, as it were, the bridge to activity, or the bridge is the beginning or *mis en scene* of activity […]".[254]

That is to say, the passive experience is delimited by becoming aware of an object in turning towards it, and to investigate the shift from passivity to activity is to investigate the gradual transition from the unnoticed experience to attentive noticing. Passive experiencing remains unnoticed.[255] Accordingly, passive experience does not entail any proper awareness of an object, but rather an awareness of prominent object-like unities. Husserl distinguishes multiple modes of attentiveness, of which some modes are passive. For instance, we can distinguish different levels of vigilance or being affective that is stimulated within the unnoticed experiencing. Thus, there are lower and higher gradations of attentiveness, even in passivity. The lowest form of active experiencing is what Husserl calls receptivity. Receptivity is the ego's "complying with", the pull of an enticing, noticeable object-like unity.[256] Thus, the activity of the ego begins already before the proper attentive turning towards an object. The process of turning toward the object, then, is characterized as a bridge to all activity.[257]

Even if there are modes of passive attentiveness, the active turning towards is characteristic of wakefulness. And, as Husserl (at least in *Ideas I*) and Merleau-Ponty contend, wakeful life is structured on the basis of perception. According to Husserl,

> "[o]ur natural wakeful Ego-life is a continuous actual or non-actual perceiving. Incessantly the world of physical things and, in it, our body, are perceptually there".[258]

The wakeful, active sphere of experiencing is conditioned by perception. It implies that non-perceptual intentional lived experiences such as hallucinations, dreams and the state of dreamless sleep are in themselves non-wakeful, and they do not arouse active attention. Waking up is both the emergence of perception (or the horizon of perception), and the emergence of the sphere of active attentiveness.

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[254] Hua31, 4 [APS, 276].
[255] Husserl distinguishes the experience of unnoticed object-like unities from objects co-noticed objects, that is, objects that are at hand and noticed but that stay in the background, such as the objects perceived at the margins of the visual field. Hua17[FT], 363–4 [APS, 18].
[256] Hua11, 162/210.
[257] Hua17, 4 [APS, 276].
[258] Hua3[Id1], 81/83. (Translation modified)

It must be added that wakeful life, permeated by perception, does not consist of activity throughout. Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty conceives of the sphere of activity in terms of center-periphery structure. According to Merleau-Ponty, one of Husserl's discoveries was that he accounts for the transcendental as a phenomenal *field*.[259] Instead of singular acts, consciousness must be characterized as a field that consists of a center and a surrounding periphery. At the center lies a radiating ray of active attention.[260] At each moment of the temporal flow of waking life, a particular accomplishment is at the center. For instance, now I see the screen in front of me, and I think about preparing food, etc. At another moment this perception and this thought become past, and new perceptions and thought will prevail. Nevertheless, the past perception and though still exert affective force on the subject, and they are still retained. Husserl explicates the affective force of the non-actual in terms of stimulation and radiation. Experiences and objects of experiences can be "located" nearer to the center or farther away from the center of active attention. Accordingly, the intensities of their affective forces vary. Finally, the wakefulness of a subject comes with a varying scope of attentiveness or the expanse of what can come through to the ego, or what can stimulate or affect the ego. We will return to these themes below. In short, wakefulness consists of a thematic center of active attention, and it is surrounded by a background of passive, unnoticed experiencing, which nevertheless influences the center. For instance, as Husserl points out in *Ideas II*: we experience "excitations from the objects constituted in the 'background'" and we allow "them to intensify, to knock at the door of consciousness".[261] There is no activity without passivity, and no active accomplishments without being passively affected and receptive.[262]

The synthesis of perception can be characterized in terms of the scope of radiation. If, in general, perception requires a reference beyond the actual, and also beyond the context of the urgent act, then, it can be described as a widening of the scope of that which comes through to the subject of experience.

### 1.3.3 The Pre-Personal and the Sphere of Original Passivity

If the concept of person refers to the specific acts of taking position, the concept of pre-personal, as I will argue below, refers to the sphere of that which is originally passive. Merleau-Ponty's account of the experiential sphere of the pre-personal is reminiscent of Husserl's analysis of the passive synthesis and the domain of passive experiencing. In *the Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty does not follow Husserl's detailed phenomenological analyses of the peculiarities pertaining to the sphere of passivity. However, arguably passive synthesis is an important and central theme in Merleau-Ponty's early

[259] PhP, 74/62.
[260] See, for instance, Hua4[Id2], §22.
[261] Hua4[Id2], §22, 98–9/105.
[262] Hua4[IdII], 213/225.

works.[263] First of all, Merleau-Ponty shares with Husserl the more general project of a phenomenological investigation into the genetic origin of scientific knowledge, logic, propositional acts, and truth-claims in the sensible and perceptual dimension of experience.[264]

Husserl formulates a set of phenomenological problems concerning the passive synthesis in *Cartesian Mediations*, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and in *Ideas II*. These texts provided important sources for Merleau-Ponty in his phenomenology of perception project.

A phenomenological explication of active thinking life, within which logical truths are constituted, begins with a presupposition that what is perceptually and sensibly given is already meaningful. Active operations, such as counting, classifying and judging are syntheses that constitute peculiar kinds of unities. However, the active operations are layered on formations of sense that are already constituted in sensibility. For instance, these operations presuppose that we are already aware of self-identical objects. The objects are focused on and made thematic, and they are also remembered and modified in imagination as self-same, their typical manner of appearing is expected and new characteristics are attributed to them in new perceptions so that this typical style evolves and changes during the course of perceptions of the same object.[265] Simply put, that which we perceive around us is already meaningfully articulated before we make explicit judgments and carry out other operations of intelligence on them. Or, as Biceaga formulates:

> "Governed by objective regularities, visual and aural impressions appear as always already organized in sensorial patterns charged with meaning."[266]

Husserl believes that the specific syntheses in which these formations of unity are constituted must be accounted for in a phenomenological analysis, since otherwise the phenomenological project would remain incomplete.[267] However, these unifying accomplishments – for instance the synthetic unities of sense constituted in awakenings, associations of rememberings, identifications and expectations – differ from the active cognitive operations. In this regard, as Anthony Steinbock writes, it is a question of "tracing the accomplishments of thinking to their genetic origins in *passive*, pre-cognitive syntheses".[268]

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[263] On Merleau-Ponty's references to passivity and passive synthesis in *Phenomenology of Perception* see, for instance: PhP, 39/33, 50/43, 65/53, 192/167, 216/191, 241/215, 478/441, 488/451.

[264] Victor Biceaga points out that "[d]oubtlessly, Husserl's interest in the idea of passivity is predominantly epistemological" (Biceaga 2010, xii). When Merleau-Ponty characterizes the problem of the body in *Phenomenology of Perception*, he points out that due to the objective thought we have ignored the "pre-predicative knowledge", which should be phenomenologically clarified (PhP, 85/74). "Pre-predicative" is one of Husserl's determinants of the domain of passivity.

[265] Hua11, 6/42.

[266] Biceaga 2010, x.

[267] Hua17, 373 [APS, 32]; Biceaga, xiii.

[268] Steinbock, "Translator's introduction", APS, xxii.

Steinbock mentions that Husserl's notion of passivity is an ambiguous notion and has several contexts of use. *First*, Husserl distinguishes passivity and activity with respect to sense genesis. Sense genesis can have a passive and active mode, where the former means the synthetic articulations of sense-unities which do not result from egoic activity. *Second*, passivity delimits a sphere of experience which does not entail an active ego. *Third*, the sphere of passivity means a *preceding* or *preparatory* sphere of experiencing that is bound to lead towards the activity. Thus, the sphere of passivity is the sphere of pre-theoretical, pre-predicative, pre-linguistic, pre-thematic or pre-reflective experiencing which must be studied in order to fully elucidate the theoretical, predicative, linguistic or reflective accomplishments.[269] *Fourth*, the sphere of passivity is the sphere of the *pre-givenness,* and, *fifth*, the passivity is conceived as the *foundation* of activity.[270]

The phenomenological reflection on the unnoticed experience and the description of its characteristic features can be methodologically problematic. The problem is, simply, that the unnoticed experience, insofar as it does not in itself involve any active participation of the ego, strictly speaking remains unnoticed. But if reflection requires an active ego, it would seem that there is nothing to reflect on in the passive experiences. However, Husserl does not claim that we should be able to directly return to passive experiences and then reflect on them. Instead, the sphere of unnoticed experiencing is attested retroactively.[271] Consider, for instance, when one realizes having constantly heard the hum of a fridge after one is awakened by the perception that the hum has suddenly stopped.[272] It is evident that we have heard the hum, and not that we did not hear anything at all, or that the just-passed unnoticed experience is totally opaque or impossible to reflect on. Accordingly, when we walk a familiar pathway while being wholly engaged in a discussion with a friend, we hardly pay any attention to the pathway itself – in which case we can say that there are moments in which the perceived environment is not noticed by us even at the margins of our attention – the unnoticed environment does not just appear as a meaningless abyss that would arouse a feeling of anxiety in us. In this manner it makes sense to characterize the unnoticed, passive experiencing retroactively or in a backward reference. Moreover, Husserl also makes use of systematic arguments when he studies the phenomena of passivity. For instance, he claims that "nothing prevents us from thinking that what is familiar to us as an interruption of alert consciousness would be extended to infinity", provided that a thoroughly non-wakeful consciousness must contain the possibility of awakening.[273]

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269 Biceaga 2010, xiii, xvi.
270 See Steinbock 2004, 23.
271 See, for instance, Hua4[IdII], §22, 100/106.
272 Thus, the unnoticed experiencing is phenomenologically discovered beginning with the sphere of experience in which the ego is active. As, for instance, Jay Lampert claims, the sphere of passivity has the phenomenological status of origin because the active sphere of consciousness by necessity contains a backward reference to it. See Lambert 1995, 28; Biceaga 2010, xvii.
273 Hua4, §26, 108/115.

Merleau-Ponty was acquainted with Husserl's project of genetic phenomenology and the phenomenological analyses under the rubric of passive constitution. In early works he explicitly refers to passages on passivity in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, *Experience and Judgment*. One of the recurrent claims in *Phenomenology of Perception* is that the unity of temporality and the associative unities of elementary sensibility should not be thought of on the basis of a model of an ego that joins objects or sensory data together actively or on the basis of a model of active operations of intelligence (such as counting, naming and judging). Arguably, the idea of passive synthesis is an essential part of Merleau-Ponty's critique of the "empiricist" notion of association.[274] Merleau-Ponty claims that association conceived as an active operation of linking isolated sensory data, and the "intellectualist" notion of the active ego as the condition of possibility of the linking, presuppose another, deeper notion of association in which the sensible contents are passively unified due to their affinity.[275] Another central idea[276] related to passivity held by Merleau-Ponty is that the elementary passive synthesis of time bears an irreducible ambiguity or two-sidedness. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the temporal synthesis is always also a combination of making distance and tearing away, so that if an all-encompassing or "universal" unification of temporality lies at the bottom of all sense formations, the very same process entails a destruction of unity.[277]

However, Merleau-Ponty's most relevant reference to Husserl's conception of passivity with regard to the issue of the pre-personal is his reference to Husserl's distinction between primary and secondary passivity. In *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty provides a characterization of the body and soul as co-determining notions. The body must be understood as a ground or the material which is unified by a particular sense and the "soul" [*'l'âme*] must be understood as the sense that unifies the disparate elements belonging to the body-ground. In this context he makes a further distinction between two kinds of grounds for sense constitution, the "natural body" and the "cultural body". Merleau-Ponty points out that the distinction corresponds to Husserl's distinction between "originary" and "secondary" passivity.[278] Accordingly, in *Ideas II* Husserl distin-

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274 Biceaga points out that Husserl's notion of passive synthesis implies a critique of "empiricist atomism." (Biceaga 2010, xvi)
275 PhP, 65/53.
276 See Chapter 4.2.
277 PhP, 39/33, 488/451.
278 SC, 227n1/249. In the footnote in question Merleau-Ponty refers to a text in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, in which Husserl outlines the genetic phenomenological analysis concerning the activity of judging and its modifications (Hua17, Appendix II, 314–326/313–29). There Husserl distinguishes original activity from the modification of the activity into a passive form, "secondary sensuousness" (Hua17, 319/320). Secondary sensuousness is further distinguished from a "consciousness of objects that have themselves never yet been *given* in a consciousness." (Hua17, 317/317). Elsewhere in the book Husserl makes use of the term "first Nature". He writes: "My intrinsically first psychophysical Ego […] is [...] a member of an *intrinsically first Nature*, which is not yet Objective Nature […] In the nexus of this first Nature, as holding sway in that body […] which is called my bodily organism […] my psychic Ego makes its appearance, 'animating' it as the unique animated body". (Hua17, 247–

guishes between three kinds of non-wakeful lived experiences: sediments of earlier acts, unities formed associatively from proper thematic acts, and completely passive lived experiences[279] Roughly speaking, secondary passivity refers to the sedimented, latent or dormant acquisitions that refer back to and expand an earlier synthetic activity of the subject.[280]

The ego is related to its earlier acquisitions in a passive manner. Memory and habituation are the phenomena behind secondary passivity.[281] For example, once a motor skill, such as the skill of walking, is originally acquired in the successful, wakeful act of walking, it becomes further constituted in a process of habituation which involves repeating the acts of walking and expanding the movements by walking, for instance, on different terrains. Even if the process of learning to walk is not active throughout, it necessarily involves an active effort of concentration to the movements to be executed and the environment to-be-moved-in. But the process of habituation renders the movement, which in the beginning demands active effort, something that occurs rather passively and with no active effort of paying attention: we successfully walk absentmindedly, taking into account the changes of the terrain etc., while being focused on wholly other things. Thus, habitual movements, originally acquired by an active effort, can be carried out in a mode of passive experiencing, without paying attention to them.

Now, primary passivity is the sphere of passivity which does not involve these formations of sense founded on activity of the ego. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty links the notion of "primary passivity" to the notion of the pre-personal, as he writes that "nature's form of passivity" is "a form of generality" at the bottom of our personal acts. Accordingly, he writes that this kind of passivity must be distinguished from an "ancient custom", thus suggesting that the passivity of the "natural" body also differs from the passively acquired cultural or traditional practices.[282] Merleau-Ponty conceives of the passively experienced intentional schemata that influence the wakeful, active ego in terms of generality and anonymity. For instance, when an intentional lived experience sinks into the past, in this process it becomes emptied of its intuitive givenness, and it becomes more and more general and anonymous. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes two kinds of generalities that correspond to the distinction between the "natural" and the "cultural" body: the anonymous generality of "our habitus" and that of our "'bodily functions'".[283] Thus, we can draw a parallel between Husserl's phenomenological inquiry into the sphere of primary passivity and Merleau-Ponty's framing of the sphere of the pre-personal.

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8/240–1.) In APS Husserl mentions the passivity pertaining to habituality as "secondary sensibility", as he makes a distinction between "three levels of genesis". Hua11, 342/631. See also Steinbock 1995, 41.

279 Hua4[IdII], §56 b, 222–3/234.

280 See Biceaga 2010, xviii.

281 Husserl analyzes re-collection in terms of "reproductive association". See, for instance, Hua11, 120/166.

282 PhP, 171/147.

283 PhP, 160/139.

### 1.3.4 The Phenomenal Body

Husserl claims in *Ideas II* that sense perception would not be possible without an awareness of one's own body. The body, he writes,

> "is […] the *medium of all perception*; it is the *organ of perception* and is *necessarily* involved in all perception."[284]

Merleau-Ponty takes up the central points of Husserl's analysis of the layers of bodily self-awareness in the first part of *Phenomenology of Perception*.[285] All unitary spatial objects appear in the manner of being "there", refer back to a spatial "here". No matter whether the object was imaginary or actually present in flesh: if it appears as having a spatial location, then by necessity we situate ourselves in a particular location, a "here" from which the spatial object appears as a "there".[286] The question that Husserl asks in *Ideas II* is, how is it possible that we are aware of ourselves as having a central location, a "here"?[287] In the following, we will focus on three aspects of bodily self-awareness: kinesthetic sensing, localized sensations and the appearance of one's body as a peculiar object.

Following Husserl's analysis, Merleau-Ponty points out that the movements of one's own body are sensed in a primal manner. There is an essential difference in the manner in which the movement of an external object appears, and in which one's own moving body appears to one while carrying out a movement.[288] A reflection directed towards one's moving body is secondary with regard to the original self-awareness of one's own movement. Originally, movement does not appear thematically. As Merleau-Ponty points out: "[w]hen I transfer my gaze from one object to another, I have no consciousness of my eye as an object".[289]

Kinesthetic sensing can be made evident indirectly as a motivating condition. The eye, for instance, appears as a certain power of movement. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the difference between active and passive movement of the eye makes sense even if the eye would not be given as an object. We sense the difference between passive and active movement of the eye indirectly in the changes in the way the external objects appear. When we press the eye with the finger, and the eye moves passively, it results in the apparent movement of the visual field. When the eye moves actively, the visual field appears as stable.[290]

More generally, the kinesthetic sensations do not themselves present anything, but they accompany that which is sensed and perceived, and motivate the specific manner in which the field of perception appears as ordered. More gen-

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[284] Hua4[IdII], §18 a, 56/61.
[285] The central claims are found in the chapter "The experience of the body". Curiously, Merleau-Ponty suggests that these claims belong to "classical psychology". PhP, 106/92.
[286] PhP, 107–8/95–6, 118–9/104–5.
[287] Husserl takes up the same issue also in *Cartesian Meditation*s. See Hua1 [CM].
[288] PhP, 109–10/96–7.
[289] PhP, 322–3/291.
[290] PhP, 322–3/291.

erally, there is a kinesthetic sensation of the movements and stillness of the different parts of the body, and a sensing of the posture, the configuration of the body. The example of the pushing of the eye can be generalized: if the configuration of body becomes intermingled, so will the phenomenal field. The sensations and feelings of one's own body also have the two aspects of the kinesthetic self-awareness and the awareness of the external. When I feel pain in my head, in this feeling I can distinguish between the felt pain and the bodily self-awareness that motivates the feeling of pain.

No sensing of any kind is conceivable without kinesthetic self-awareness. Instead, in *Ideas II* Husserl conceives of the possibility of purely visual sensing, abstracted from the spheres of other senses, notably the tactile sphere. Husserl characterizes purely visual sensing as a "play of kinesthetic motivations" which could not be apprehended bodily. It is not clear whether, according to Husserl, disembodied visual sensations would be sensings at all. The "kinesthetic motivations" would remain *without* localization (constituted by the touch-sensations that the eye has as it moves in the eye cavity) if one abstracts from tactility altogether. Then they might not deserve the qualification of sensations of movement. The purported "kinesthetic sensations" of the abstracted vision would lack the sensing of any tension, touch or weight related to the movement. For instance, the visual sensing would motivate something visible, but if one would not feel in tactile manner the eye-movements, one could not localize vision to the eyes or have anything in the sense of "movements of eyes". There would be no sense of a "body" nor any difference between the visual appearance of one's own body and the other bodies.[291] Thus, we can arguably say that kinesthetic self-awareness, insofar as it is a question of self-awareness of movement, cannot be thought of as distinct from the sense of touch: kinesthetic self-awareness and tactile sensory awareness are two aspects or dimensions of the same fundamental sensory experience.

Nevertheless, we can conceive of the manner in which a temporal awareness of the order of the kinesthetic sensations could be linked to different kinds of touch sensations. How do we, for example, sense a difference between a rough and a smooth surface? In order to recognize the roughness or the smoothness of a surface, we have to move our hand (for example) on the surface. The felt texture of roughness corresponds with a certain temporally ordered trajectory of the hand. A systematically ordered series of kinesthetic sensations functions as a motivating series for the particular feeling. Simply, we cannot keep the hand still and feel the roughness. Or if we imagine the roughness, it already implies the self-awareness of the ordered movement of the hand. Accordingly, there are typical eye-movements related to the appearance of different visual shapes and visual objects.

Thus, the appearance of a spatially located object would not be possible within the abstracted sphere of the visual. The awareness of a temporal order of visual sensations is not sufficient in order to experience movement. Namely, we must also be aware of the locations of our moving body in order to experience

[291] Hua4[IdII], 150/158.

movement. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty contend that the movement could not be located if one's own body could not appear to one as something sensed. Husserl attributes the sensing of one's own body to the sense of touch and kinesthetic sensations as they function together. The visual sensations can be localized in the eye only insofar as the eye-movements are felt through muscle-sensations of the eyes, and insofar as we can touch our eyes, etc. It is peculiar to the tactile sensations that the touched corporeal surface becomes localized. When a coffee cup touches my hand, I both feel *the cup* with my hand, and I feel the pressure of the cup *in* my hand. There are two alternating aspects, the sensation of the object, and the inner sensation that has a location in one's own body. I feel the difference, when the cup touches my back or my foot, and I feel the difference, if the touching object has a different shape, warmth, pressure, etc. Without further ado, I am aware of the difference when I push my middle finger, my index or my wrist with a pen. The difference is a difference between spatial locations of my body. Accordingly, as I move my hand and feel the roughness of the table, I sense the smoothness of the table, I sense touch-sensations in my hand, and I kinesthetically sense the movement of the hand.[292] Besides, In localized sensings there are two aspects or directions. On the one hand, the sensations felt in the body constitute the appearing sensed quality. But, on the other hand, the sensed object appears as the "cause" of the sensation. The touching part of the body appears as touched by the external object. Finally, the localized sensations also appear as spatial centers. The point where the body is touched is experienced as an "ultimate central here". Accordingly, the visual appearances can refer back to a location of a central "here" only insofar as we feel the eyes in a tactile manner. Only if it appears that the visual sensations touch us, do they become localized.

Now, the double touching is a specific case of touching. When I touch my left hand with my right hand, there appears a reciprocity of sensations, unlike in the case of touching external objects. When I touch my right hand with my left hand, I feel the texture of the right hand *with* my left hand, and I feel sensations of pressure and warmth *in* my left hand. But, without having to perform any additive movements, I can shift to the way in which the right hand touches the left hand, so that I feel the left hand *with* my right hand, and I feel touch sensations *in* my right hand. This experience is also essential for the way in which one's own body appears. If I abstract from the tactile sensations of the right hand, instead of my own hand, it appears that I touch an external object. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty mentions the double sensations as one peculiarity of the experience of one's own body. As he points out, "the two hands are never simultaneously both touched and touching […] the two hands can alternate between the function of 'touching' and 'touched'".[293] He also mentions that the double sensations have to do with the incarnation of one's own body.[294] We can conceive of localized sensations and abstract from double sensations. There would be experiences of sensations with their localized "heres", but without a sense of

[292] See Hua4[IdII], §36.
[293] PhPr, 109/95.
[294] PhPr, 109/95.

belonging to the unity of one's own sensed body. The experience of one's own body would be framed by external objects but it would not be conceived itself as a sensed object. The body would lack an appearance of an inter-sensory unity without the double sensations. Without double sensations, visual sensations could not be directly associated with feelings of the eye-movements and with the other feelings felt with respect to that which is visually sensed. Thus, perception, insofar as it is a perception of an inter-sensory object, requires an appearance of one's body as both sensing and sensed.[295]

Localization of sensings bears a constitutive significance not only for certain kinds of sensations, but also for affects. For instance, if "my foot hurts", I don't mean that my foot would be first present as an "object", the closest object to my experience, and pain would be given as a pure feeling without location. Instead, the pain is immediately localized in the foot. The pain directly indicates its place, and has a peculiar spatial order, a "pain-space".[296] Accordingly, as Husserl points out in *Ideas II*, all kinds of sensuous feelings, such as sensations of pleasure and pain, the sense of well-being or a general malaise, can be distinguished according to their specific localization in one's own body.[297]

According to Merleau-Ponty, perceptual synthesis involves a synergic unity of the body, just like in the above example the perception of a unitary object is due to the convergence of the eyes. Accordingly, the object of perception is an inter-sensory unity. As we will see, in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty gives a primal significance to the inter-sensory, synergic unity of the body. Primitive operations involve the multi-modal coordination of different parts of the body. And the spatial experience of the body is an awareness of its total configuration, which has a centre-periphery structure. Accordingly, when the body is organized according to a synergic unity, it appears as a unity of one central "here". We have seen this also in the case of the emergence of the synergy of the eyes. A unitary perceived object appears at one spatial location, related to the location of the unity of the perceiver. All spatial objects appear only in reference to the experience of one's own body. Here, we have pointed out that the experience of one's own body can be thought of in terms of kinesthetic sensations, localized sensations and the appearance of one's body as sensing and sensed. In neither of these senses is the body experienced as a pure object or as thematized for itself. Instead, in all of them the body appears as a condition of experiencing external objects.

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[295] In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty does not give any central significance to double sensations.
[296] PhP, 110/96.
[297] Hua4[IdII], §39, 152/160.

# 2 ORGANISMS AND INSTINCTS

In this chapter I will focus on Merleau-Ponty's conception of living organisms and instinctive behavior that he presents in the work *The Structure of Behavior*. First, I will present Merleau-Ponty's argument for the claim that an understanding of intentional behavior of living beings is an irreducible part of life scientific explanations. This implies that scientific studies of behavior can contribute to a phenomenological investigation of the experiential life of the studied subject in question, though in an indirect manner. Insofar as biology, physiology and developmental psychology work with observations of intentional behavior, they intersect with the phenomenological approach.

Second, it follows that Merleau-Ponty's analysis of instinctive behavior is significant with respect to his conception of biological existence (which he presents in *Phenomenology of Perception*). Accordingly, the second task of the chapter is to explicate Merleau-Ponty's conception of the instinctive behavior.

What makes *The Structure of Behavior* a phenomenological work, when for the most part it consists of lengthy discussions on scientific explanation of behavior (chapters I–II)[298] and of an interpretation of the role of Gestalt-forms in scientific explanation (chapter III)?[299] How does the analysis of biological life, which is an analysis of a living being – an object experienced from a third person perspective – contribute to the understanding of natural life as a component part of perception as experienced from within by the subject in question.

The ultimate philosophical framework of *The Structure of Behavior* is transcendental phenomenology. This can be attested by Merleau-Ponty's later characterization of his early philosophical project that we have already presented above. The analysis of objects of nature in *The Structure of Behavior* is ultimately related to the question of consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty states in the beginning of the book, the aim is to understand the *relations* between consciousness and (of organic, psychological and social) nature.[300] There are good reasons to argue that the relations must be understood as *intentional correlations* between the

[298] SC, 1–138/3–128.
[299] SC, 139–199/129–224.
[300] SC, 1/3.

experiencing subject and the object experienced. Throughout the book, Merleau-Ponty aims to show that intelligent, cognitive thought *is not sufficient* for making scientific knowledge of beings of nature possible. There could be no scientific knowledge of natural beings if the subject of science was pure intellectual thought. To be sure, to show this requires a critique of the natural beings. If natural beings were pure objects set against each other in external relations, and if they would be explainable by the means of intelligible ideas, then only pure intellectual thinking would be demanded of the scientist. If, however, natural beings were not merely pure things, scientific knowledge could not merely be based on cognitions of intelligible ideas. For example, at the end of the first two chapters of the book Merleau-Ponty concludes that, because the structure of behavior "is not a thing nor a consciousness", it is "opaque for an intelligent cognition".[301] In short, the question: is scientific knowledge adequate to its natural object? underlies Merleau-Ponty's discussions on explanations of nature.[302]

Accordingly, even if Merleau-Ponty does not make explicit the transcendental phenomenological point of departure in *The Structure of Behavior*, this is its implicit presupposition. As Merleau-Ponty contends at the end of the chapter III, the preceding analysis of objects of scientific knowledge has abstracted from the reflective analysis of experience.[303] Given that the presupposed philosophical context of the work is transcendental phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty begins from pre-established scientific conceptions of behaviour of worldly animal and human beings, and proceeds to evaluate their pertinence, the implicit understanding of the phenomena behind them, and the consequences that must be drawn concerning the type of consciousness that can have such phenomena.

Human or animal behavior can be studied at many levels. First, behavior can be studied with regards to what occurs within the animal or human body. The body can be studied with regard to its anatomy, physico-chemical processes or physiological functions. Second, the behavior can be studied as an ethological phenomenon, i.e. as recognizable animal or human performances related to an environment adequate to them. In my work, the focus is on Merleau-Ponty's conception of the bio-scientific aspect of human behavior.

Just as he does with regard to his other (physical, spiritual, sociological) explanations of behavior, Merleau-Ponty claims that the biological explanations of behavior basically deal with dynamic Gestalt-structures.

Biological knowledge would require only operations of "intellectual thinking" if the organism could be conceived in an atomistic, mechanistic or vitalistic manner. Biological theory-formation could downplay the role of perception. But insofar as the explanations require a conception of the organism as a dynamic Gestalt-structure, it cannot be given to an intellectual thought. It must be given as perceived, and is thus correlated with a perceiving subject.

Merleau-Ponty's analysis of biology is a central aspect of his treatment of scientific descriptions and explanations of animal and human behaviour in *The*

[301] SC, 138/127. Translation modified.
[302] SC, 199/184.
[303] SC, 199/184.

*Structure of Behaviour*. When Merleau-Ponty analyses his contemporary biological discourses in *The Structure of Behavior*, he is basically interested of criticizing traditional distinctions between consciousness and object, interiority and exteriority, and ideal sense and pure object, and the corresponding oppositional views of human beings either as a subject of thought or an object of scientific knowledge. In particular, his argument about biology consists of showing that a scientific study of life – that is, biology as a science – would not be possible if the only research procedures in biology consisted of reflective, analytic, judgemental and theoretical operations. In his treatment of biology in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty is interested in the necessary presuppositions of biology which remain implicit in bio-scientific investigations: the conditions without which it is impossible to conceive of the objects of biological descriptions and explanations. In other words, it is a question of the implicit presuppositions that must be taken as valid in order to be able to conduct a study of living beings.[304] It is a question of a relation to living beings that every biologist realizes by the simple fact of carrying out a study of life, regardless of the explicit claims, models and theories about life.[305]

There are two basic models of the living being that are consistent with Cartesian distinction between external nature and inner ideal signification. One aims at explaining the living organism in a purely atomistic way, which merely identifies causal relations of parts external to one another. The other model views the organism as a machine determined by a certain number of functions. The difference lies in the way of conceiving the forces responsible for the organization of the mechanism. Merleau-Ponty points out that contemporary life sciences are dominated by the idea of eliminating all references to purposes, teleology, consciousness or intentionality from biological explanations – an idea that has its origin in early modern philosophies of nature. Living beings are pictured as a "material mass *partes extra partes*", as mechanisms moved by external causal forces.[306] Merleau-Ponty compares the dogmatist state of his contemporary biosciences to the state of the physical sciences, which are characterized by a complete freedom of thought and imagination. All possible models[307] of physical reality seem to have prima facie equal explanatory value, independently of the types of concepts used in the construction of the models.[308]

Merleau-Ponty argues that biology explicated as a scientific project, which is based on the Cartesian distinction between extension and thought and which aims at a mechanical explanation, constantly contradicts its own practices of identifying, describing and even explaining the behavior and constitution of living beings. He focuses his critique on anatomical and physiological studies of the bodily organization of animals and human beings and on the ethological studies

304 Cf. for example SC, 174–5/161–2.
305 SC, 170/157, 171n1/244. See also Moinat 2012, 107.
306 SC, 1/3.
307 SC, 1/3, 26–7/26–7, 153–4/142.
308 SC, 1/3.

concerning their behavioral relations to their environments.[309] According to the ideal of mechanistic explanation, observations and perceptions of the behaviours of living beings play a preparatory, heuristic role in biology, but they should be eliminated in the proper explanation of the bodily organization of the organism.[310] Contrary to this, Merleau-Ponty claims, in line with Kurt Goldstein's organicistic holism that it is not possible to eliminate all references to the analysis of its behavior from the anatomy and the physiology of the bodily organization of a living being. The holistic manner of understanding the living being as an organic figure-ground configuration or gestalt is required by the proper biological explanation. In other words, Merleau-Ponty is opposed to the view, according to which scientific development in biology means its molecularisation, i.e. the process in which more accurate causal explanations replace holistic explanations.[311] He accepts Goldstein's argument that *organism* is a pivotal concept for biological studies that aim to explain the organization of living bodies.[312] This means that organisms are in a strong sense mechanically inexplicable: unlike in the case of machines and mechanisms, in principle there is no determinate causal principle that could explain the organization of the parts of an organism externally. An organic form does not consist of causal relationships, and it is not like a machine constructed or controlled by a determinable function, an external agent or a life-force.

So, according to Merleau-Ponty, organisms are mechanically inexplicable and can be identified, analyzed and explained as unities of signification. Living beings must be studied as intentional subjects, that is, as beings that are organized for purposeful actions in specific environments, adequate for the types of action they can perform.[313] Biological explanations always bear a reference to a perception of an activity, and the perceived activity consists of purposeful movements and behaviors. Only by acknowledging the purposefulness of the behaviour of living animal and human beings is it possible to formulate laws and principles that capture constants in individuals and species. The detected constants necessarily refer to perceptions of what Merleau-Ponty calls "immanent signification" in the activity of the behaving living being. Living beings are constantly perceived as having "immanent signification", or as Merleau-Ponty also says, being melodic unities. Thus, a specific kind of intentionality can be revealed in the study of the form, structure or configuration of living beings.[314]

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309 It could also be said that with regard to biology, Merleau-Ponty is focused on that which happens on the level of the body of an individual organism than that of the molecule or that of the whole ecosystem.

310 SC, 138/127. Merleau-Ponty understands behaviorism as driven by the ideal or maxim of mechanical explanation of the organism: "le behaviorisme peut toujours inventer d'autres modèles mécaniques dont il faudra recommencer la discussion".

311 Cf. Wolfe 2014, 2. Cf. also SC, 48. Merleau-Ponty writes: "The object of biology is to grasp that which makes a living being a living being […] [to account for] an indecomposable structure of behaviour."

312 See also Wolfe 2014.

313 If this is put in terms of *Ideas II*, the ultimate context for the study of life is not "naturalistic" but "personalistic".

314 PAR2, 16.

Merleau-Ponty criticizes the doctrine that can be called "Gestalt-realism", which was proposed, for instance, by Wolfgang Köhler. Rather than postulating Gestalt-forms as realities, Merleau-Ponty poses a transcendental-philosophical question about the sense of organism and aims at disclosing the constituting activities that allow something to have the sense of the organism as "immanent signification". The specific kind of intentionality perceivable in animal and human behavior and presupposed by the bio-sciences implies the task of describing a specific type or kind of consciousness that differs from pure reflective consciousness operating with ideal significations. Organism is a phenomenon[315] that calls for a "philosophical initiative" in its own right. In order to make sense of the practices of the bio-sciences, one needs to ask: what are the conditions of possibility for the phenomenon of organism, which is neither a material object nor an ideal signification? How can there be knowledge of organisms as such? Who and what kind of subject is implicated by the phenomenon of organism? To whom is the organism originally given, if it can be given to anybody?

Merleau-Ponty claims that organisms cannot be given to a purely theoretical and reflective subject exclusively operating for the construction of scientific knowledge. Organism is originally given in perception, in a relation between a subject of perception and a percept. In Merleau-Ponty's own words: organism is given "to a perceptive type of consciousness".[316] The demonstration that the concept of organism is a pivotal concept of biology and the biosciences, then, raises a philosophical question of perception. Effectively Merleau-Ponty argues that as long as we do not explore perception radically, as an autonomous source that demands a reinterpretation of the relation between the subject and the object, we cannot account for the phenomenon of the organism and its constitution.

In the following, I will study more closely Merleau-Ponty's characterizations of the structure of life and the living. Merleau-Ponty criticizes atomistic views of organisms, i.e. the views according to which organisms ultimately consist of anatomical structures. According to Merleau-Ponty, organisms have to be considered holistic structures, in which parts are dependent on the whole and the whole on the parts.[317]

Merleau-Ponty is also critical of the idealistic version of holism, according to which organisms are ideal structures or forms. In the case of such idealistic holism, an explanation of a living being would consist of the explication of an original principle of organization that is responsible for the being or organisms. In Merleau-Ponty's view, in the study of organisms, anatomy and physiology are dependent on specifically biological categories and constants that do not function as determining principles. I end up by explicating Merleau's idea according to

315 PAR2, 16.
316 PAR2, 16.
317 Structure has three uses in *The Structure of Behaviour*. In the first two chapters of the book it functions as a tool for criticizing the concepts of reflex and conditioned reflex. The third chapter provides a finer account of physical, vital and human structures. It interprets structural features of unities such as soap bubbles, electric charges and organisms. Finally, in the last chapter of the book, which formulates the transcendental problem of perceptual experience, structure becomes an attribute for a specific kind of awareness, a consciousness embedded in structures.

which the organism is originally (as given in perception) a dynamic Gestalt or an "immanent signification" in the constant state of becoming.

## 2.1 Organisms as Dynamic Gestalts

In *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty studies critically various models of the living being. In the following, I will go through his critiques of the atomistic and the functional (or computationalist) models of the organism. I then explicate Merleau-Ponty's account of biological knowledge as knowledge of typical structures of behavior, i.e. knowledge of particular sensory-motor couplings with an environment. The basis of the knowledge of structures is in the perceived behavior of the organism. Knowledge of the perceived organism cannot be reduced to knowledge of the structures of behavior, insofar as the organism is always in a state of becoming according to its inner, individual norm.

### 2.1.1 The Critique of the Atomistic Model

In *The Structure of Behaviour*, Merleau-Ponty begins by discussing an atomistic conception of the behaviour of a living being. According to this conception, the behaving organism can be explained as a purely material system: the organism is composed of separate, external parts.[318] According to Frédéric Moinat, the atomistic view assumes or argues that the organism is a mechanism composed of separate parts which exist independently of one another and "affect each other only by disseminated and particular causal relations." In other words, the organism is a result of "the ensemble of causal interactions, where the effect of each interaction is strictly determinable and analysable for itself, independently of the other factors."[319] Merleau-Ponty contends in *The Structure of Behavior* that this is the view that the classical theory of reflexes has of organisms.[320] It could also be said that according to this understanding, an organism is an *aggregate* or *sum* of separate parts. Furthermore, according to this model, both the inside and the outside of an organism is reducible to an objectively spatial structure of its body, the view of the body which becomes emphasized in an anatomical study.[321] In it, all concepts of organism covering the whole of the life of an individual being, and all talk about intentional and purposeful behavior, would merely have a heuristic or instrumental role, and behind all phenomena described by such concepts there would be an ultimate material reality explicable by reference to purely material

[318] SC, 3/4–5, 59/56.
[319] Moinat 2012, 94.
[320] SC, 7/9, 59/56; Moinat 2012, 94.
[321] SC, 5/7.

objects and causal relations between them.[322] As Merleau-Ponty writes, "the explanation furnished assumes that we must construct the whole by assembling the parts".[323]

The classical theory of reflex is, for Merleau-Ponty, a paradigmatic example of an atomistic model of the organism. In his treatment of the topic, Merleau-Ponty refers to and draws from Kurt Goldstein's critique of the theory of reflex. Goldstein gives a lucid definition of this theory as follows:

> "[According to the reflex theory] organism represents a bundle of isolable mechanisms that are constant in structure and that respond, in a constant way, to events in the environment (stimuli). […] the aim of research, according to this conception, is to dissect the behaviour of the organism in order to discover those 'part processes' that can be considered as governed by mechanistic laws and as unambiguous, elementary reactions to definite stimuli. To work out these laws exactly, one exposes the organism to single stimuli, using various means to control conditions so that the reaction, which corresponds to that particular stimulus, may occur in almost complete isolation. Ideally this principle can only be realized by segregating from the whole that part of the organism under investigation."[324]

A basic example of an isolating technique is the study of how a dissected limb (e.g. the dissected leg of a frog) reacts to electric impulses directed at nerve endings. In order to find a lawfully constant causal relation between a certain stimulus and a certain response, one has to be able to observe the stimulus (electric impulse) and reaction (certain tension of muscles in the leg) as factors that can be determined independently of the other parts of the environment and of the organism. The basic claim of the classical reflex-theory is that a lawful causal relation functions in the exact same manner regardless of whether the body member is isolated (the dissected leg of a frog) or the body member is a functioning part of the living whole (the use of the leg in frog's behavior in a certain environment).

In *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the problem of the atomistic model is that it cannot account for all variations of reflex-reactions. The total *behavioural form* of the organism has to be taken into account in order to explain these variations. A closer critical examination of the four components of the reflex relation – i.e. stimulus, place of excitation, reflex circuit, and reaction – reveals the internal incoherence of atomism. The main explanatory paradigm of the classical reflex-theory assumes that a conceptually isolable *stimulus*, located at a determined *place of excitation*, has a constant relation to *a reaction* that is a causal effect of the stimulus mediated by a *reflex circuit*. Merleau-Ponty questions this assumption by showing that actual studies of stimulus-reaction do not confirm it. *First*, in case of a complex stimulus, the same spatial parts of the organism produce different reactions when organized in different *forms*. Merleau-Ponty mentions a study by Sherrington and Miller, according to which the ear of a cat

[322] See for example, Wolfe 2014, 4.
[323] CP, 368.
[324] Goldstein 1995, 69.

responds in five different ways to touching, and these different reactions correspond with differences in the structure of the stimulus.[325] *Second*, it is impossible to determine the location of one sensation anatomically or spatially (an excitation of a spatial point of a body can produce different sensations of locus or position).[326] *Third*, it is not possible to determine and isolate the processes that lead from an excitation to a motor response since, for example, certain chemical and vegetative conditions can "suppress, sometimes even turn around the attended effect of certain stimulus".[327] *Fourth*, the motor response is not sufficiently determined by a particular stimulus, but it also depends on the behavioural state of the body: "the movement to execute depends on the initial [behavioural] positions of the limbs, which is variable".[328] To summarize, Merleau-Ponty, in line with Kurt Goldstein, claims that, factually, there is always too much variation in the bodily organization and in the relation between the living being and the environment for any purely causal anatomical theory be able to cover all observed phenomena. In order to explain the observed variations, the atomist model (built in all anatomical approaches) has to proceed by introducing ever newer auxiliary hypotheses. In other words, the impossibility of atomism is made evident by the growing complexity of explanations in the face of the facts: by the growing number of auxiliary hypotheses that the scientists compose and introduce in order to explain the variations that deviate from their original theories. For example, a two-level model can be established for the explanation of observed irregularities and anomalies in stimulus-response correlations. If the same stimulus causes a different reaction, it is possible to postulate a higher system (e.g. the brain, the neural system or some other center of selection and control) that influences the supposedly regular reflex-processes (lower level automatic, partial processes). This means that a modular explanation of the organism (one that introduces hypothetic controlling modules, centers or mechanisms) is, according to Merleau-Ponty, merely a modification of the atomistic model construed to save the underlying (philosophical) principles of causalism and atomism. However, according to Merleau-Ponty, this way of explaining the bodily organization of the organism proves to be too complex and endlessly provisional (the strategy of introducing additional auxiliary hypotheses is never-ending).[329]

Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, we cannot avoid resorting to a holistic view in the explanation of behavior of a living being. This holds in respect to the *inside* (body), the *outside* (environment), and *the relations to the outside* that characterize the life of such beings. However, for him, it is not only a question of comparing different explanations of organisms. He does not claim that there would be any incontestable counter-proof or a knock-down argument that would once

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[325] SC, 9/11. Merleau-Ponty does not give an exact reference to Sherrington and Miller's study. Instead, he refers to V. F. von Weizsäcker's article on reflexes in *Handbuch der normalen und pathologiscen Physiologie*. He mentions that the facts he presents in the chapter on reflects are "well-known", but that he will repeat these facts in order to demonstrate Goldstein's and Weizsäcker's new interpretation concerning explanation of the organism (SC, 8n1/226).
[326] SC, 14/15.
[327] SC, 16/17.
[328] SC, 28/28.
[329] SC, 15/16; Moinat 2012: 97.

and for all demonstrate the failure of atomistic attempts. Nothing can definitely show that mechanical models supported by auxiliary hypotheses could not in principle explain the organism.[330] After all, there is no evidence of any other kinds of causal relations than the one that is typical of physico-chemical processes.[331] But Merleau-Ponty is determined to critically investigate the relation between the explanations offered and the initial descriptions of the organism to be explained. In general, he believes that explanations should not be taken to refer to some ultimate real being of the organism that is supposed to lie hidden behind the initial appearance of the organism being perceived. Instead, he aims at developing a framework in which explanations remain explicitly dependent on the initial description of the organism, insofar as they presuppose the description in some manner.

Merleau-Ponty accords with Goldstein that the physico-chemical study of life, the physiological study of functions and the analysis of the organism's manifest behavior, are just different aspects of the same total scientific enterprise and operate on the same experiential foundation.[332] A study of isolated reflexes ends up introducing ever more auxiliary hypotheses in order to cover the whole of animal behavior. In this endeavor it does not manage to explain the behavior or the organism but merely emulates, in its own additional operations, the type of open whole that was removed at the beginning, and substitutes a different system for it. The supposed explanation is just "a certain manner of describing or naming the phenomenon".[333] Simply, the whole organism or its behavior is not explained, but is presupposed in atomism.

### 2.1.2 Organisms as Holistic Structures and Open Unities

When the fundamental problems of atomism have been unveiled, it may seem that the organization of the behavior of a living being in its relation to the environment must be holistically explained by a reference to a total structure or form. In this case, it is not the parts that make up the whole, and explanations do not proceed by identifying disseminated causal relations and regulating modular centers. Here, Merleau-Ponty has in mind the theory of part-whole structures developed in Gestalt-psychology from the 1920s onwards, in particular the Gestalt-structure described and modelled by the so-called Berlin School, including Wolfgang Köhler, Max Wertheimer and Kurt Koffka.[334] Following Goldstein's line of

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330 SC, 138/127.
331 SC, 165–6/152–3. However, one could argue against the endlessly provisional theory that it fails to redeem its promise: to put an end to auxiliary hypotheses and to complete the theory. This is, for instance, Husserl's argument in *Crisis*. See Hua6, 38–41/39–42.
332 CP, 365–6.
333 CP, 366.
334 The idea of Gestalt refers back to Franz Brentano's insight, according to which the originality of descriptive psychology can be demonstrated by an analysis of part-whole-structure. According to Brentano a careful study of the composite character of the soul shows that perceiving mind is a whole which cannot have additional parts. A modified soul is not any independent part, but an extension of the non-modified soul. See Heinämaa 2009; Moran 2012, 104–9.

thought, Merleau-Ponty accepts some central aspects of this holistic interpretation of the organization of the living being. However, he rejects the notion that the Gestalt-structure can operate as a formal principle in the explanation of the organism.[335] Actually, such an explanation would again be "mechanistic", insofar as it would reduce organic behavior to a limited number of predetermined functions. Against this, Merleau-Ponty claims that the mechanical explanation of the organization of a living being remains unsatisfactory, even when it is embedded in a holistic framework.

In his own account, Merleau-Ponty refers to Christian von Ehrenfels' two criteria of a Gestalt-structure: the form and the configuration of parts.[336] According to the first criterium, i.e. the criterium of form, a Gestalt is more than the sum of isolated parts. An organization is a Gestalt if its parts cannot have any independent sense apart from the configuration of the whole, so that if the configuration is lost, the parts also disappear.[337] According to the second criterium, a Gestalt is a transposable totality. If all the parts of a Gestalt change, but the specific configuration of the parts, that is, the particular manner in which the parts are related, remains the same, the whole remains the same.[338] As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "[t]he form is a configuration […] in which the value […] of each element is determined by its function in the whole and varies with it".[339]

It is worth noticing that these two criteria are applicable not only to organisms, but also to machines and to some systemic physical phenomena. Köhler applies the Gestalt-principle to explanations of physical nature in general and not just to living nature.[340] Certain physical systems (e.g. droplet, soap bubble, distribution of electricity on the surface of a conductor) can be explained only by reference to the total state of the whole, i.e. by a "holistic law" of the global configuration.[341] These structures can be determined by states of *equilibrium*, i.e. by states of balance with regard to given external conditions.[342] There are physical systems that tend to *maintain* certain equilibria, so that their organization is based on "simple conservation of established order".[343] One example is a soap bubble. The spherical form of the bubble is conserved insofar as an equilibrium is maintained between external and internal forces (pressure of air inside the bubble). The balance is acquired by a modification of the configuration of the parts. If the external conditions change, the parts are spatially reconfigured so that a balance

335 Merleau-Ponty's critique of the theory of physical Gestalts is similar to Goldstein's. See Goldstein 1995, 293–302.
336 SC, 47/45. As far as I know, Merleau-Ponty uses the words Gestalt, structure, form and order synonymously.
337 A similar kind of thinking of the part-whole relation is also found in Kant when he conceives of the "organized beings", that is, artworks, machines and organisms. Kant 1987, §65, 251–55; Ginsborg 2004.
338 SC, 49–50/47.
339 SC, 182/168.
340 Ted Toadvine claims that like some of the Gestalt-theoreticians Merleau-Ponty is committed to a "new interpretation of the reality as a whole". Toadvine 2009, 32. See also Moinat 2010, 101.
341 Moinat 2010, 97.
342 SC, 157/145.
343 SC, 158/146.

is maintained. Thus, in a soap bubble, the value of every part is determined with regard to the structure (the spherical form of the soap) which the system realizes. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, the bubble has an "inner unity".[344] It displays a certain degree of "independence" from external circumstances: it "resists" external influences as it tends to maintain its state of equilibrium. No law can be formulated for each part separately, and no part can effectively be isolated in the study of the whole.[345] The inner coherence of the system in question is manifest in a manner that it makes the explanations of any isolating approach unconvincing, and compels the formulation of a function, which is convenient for all parts at once.[346]

According to early Gestalt-theorists, the holistic character of these physical systems makes them structurally similar to more complex higher-order organic and mental phenomena.[347] Köhler and Wertheimer hoped to bridge the gap between mental and physical phenomena by "paralleling the holistic mental structure with a similar one in physical systems".[348] Thus, there could be a relation of *isomorphism* between mental structures and brain structures. All particular psychological structures could possibly be paralleled with corresponding physiological Gestalts.[349] As Köhler writes: "The principle of isomorphism demands that, in a given case, the organization of experience and the underlying physiological facts have the same structure".[350]

Perhaps the most striking example of a holistic organization of a physiological phenomenon that Merleau-Ponty discusses is the organizational shift that occurs in hemianopsia.[351] Hemianopsia is a trouble in which the visual field is reduced by a half.[352] The shift involves a spatial redistribution and changing of roles of the retinal points.[353] In hemianopsia half of the retina is put out of play, but this does not result in a corresponding loss of the half the visual field. What occurs instead is that the still-functioning half of the retina is re-organized so that the function of focused seeing is restored. The re-organization results in the restoration of the capacity of focusing, but the visual field weakens in that the contours of what is seen appear more blurred than before.[354] Now, if we regard the physiological parts, i.e. singular points of the retina, we can notice that they are capable of re-organizing themselves and to modify their muscular function according to their reorganization. They seem to have a potential to operate in dif-

344 SC, 143/132–3.
345 SC, 148/137–8.
346 SC, 153/141–2.
347 At the same time, as Merleau-Ponty remarks, Gestalt-theorists rejected the romantic conception of absolute unity of nature. SC, 45/43.
348 Goldstein 1995, 294.
349 Goldstein 1995 294; SC, 145/134–5.
350 Köhler 1992, 301. Evan Thompson has claimed that the neurophenomenology developed by Maturana and Varela is based on a similar parallelism: "The principle of isomorphism demands that in a given case the organization of experience and the underlying physiological facts have the same structure." Thompson 2007, 357.
351 SC, 41/40–1.
352 SC, 41–2/40–1.
353 CP, 364.
354 Goldstein 1995, 56–8.

ferent configurations. As Merleau-Ponty writes, referring to Goldstein's explication of the phenomenon: "the functioning of the eyes structures the anatomical conditions so that a minimum of useful functions can be maintained."[355] In order to explain the configurational shift and the corresponding shift in the visual field, one has to revert to the visual *task* of focusing. The visual performance of focusing is a particular form, a relation of certain kinds of parts that can be transposed or transferred to various material bases, insofar as the configuration of parts is maintained. In Merleau-Ponty's analysis, the redistribution of retinal points can be explained only as a conservation of the form of the function of focusing.[356]

However, after having embraced the basic idea of holism central to Gestalt-theories and used it in the problematization of atomism, Merleau-Ponty argues that the behavior of an organism cannot be explained by any collection of predetermined basic forms. There is no formal principle or formula of an organism, even if there may be a formula for the equilibrium of a soap bubble.

Thus, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is not possible to explain the physiological organization of a living being by reference to a determinate principle of equilibrium or harmony. The principle of equilibrium concerns physical structures and also the physiology of organisms to a certain extent. The structural dynamics of physical systems can be mathematically apprehended – it is always possible to capture this dynamism with a mathematical equation.[357] Accordingly, when one of the variables is modified, this produces a modification in every other part in a consistent manner.[358] If a description of one part and a mathematical formulation of the process of change would be given, it would be possible to deduce the whole structure, insofar as the other parts would be predetermined by the principle.[359]

When applied to an organism, this would mean the possibility of explaining the whole of its constitution or behavior by a predetermined unchanging function. The function would remain the same through all altering situations – only the organism's means of realizing it would vary. In this regard the organism

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355 CP, 364.
356 CP, 365.
357 Merleau-Ponty also remarks that such a physical system – inner unity inscribed into a segment of space, resisting external influences by its circular causality – has a specific sense of individuality. The individuality of a physical form is distinct from the individualities of classical (Newtonian) physics: there are no elements with absolute properties, but there is a "molar" or "functional" individual. Moreover, with physical structures a principle of discontinuity is introduced into a physical world. With physical forms are given the (minimal) conditions of development by *leaps* or *crises*, conditions of an *event* or a *history*. A soap bubble persists and resists external influence up to a certain limit, after which a sudden qualitative change follows a redistribution of the forces. (SC, 148/137–8.)
358 Moinat 2010, 98.
359 SC, 142/131–2. To be sure, Merleau-Ponty did not see the possibility that something like a dynamical systems theory could provide a mathematical formulation of an autopoietic organism. Varela gives a mathematical formulation of an entity that aims at producing itself in variable, unpredictable environments. What the organism aims at re-producing is not a specific determined form, but its capacity for self-production. Thus, this formulation is able to provide a formal model of an organism with a dynamic structure. See Moinat 2010, 156–7; Maturana & Varela 1980, 78–82.

would be comparable to a droplet, which tends to maintain its form in altering conditions. As Merleau-Ponty writes,

> "An approximately constant functional result would be obtained by variable 'means' and it would be justified to say that the function allows to understand the organism […] Finally, if it was established that the nervous processes in every situation tend to re-establish certain privileged states of equilibrium, these latter would represent the objective values of an organism".[360]

If organisms could be understood as physical Gestalts, they would be systems the behavior of which is governed by a finite number of principles, and their behavior would be interpreted as an activity of complying with these principles in changing situations. The organism would thus be dependent on the external impulses stemming from the environment in a wholly negative way. Every excitation that came from outside would mean "disorder" for the organism. The response of the organism would *only* consist of changing the disorder to order, of restoring the organism's equilibrium.[361] As Merleau-Ponty writes, such system would aim towards rest and stability.[362]

Goldstein admits that restoration of a determined state of equilibrium is a typical trait of behavior that occurs in certain anomalous situations, such as in the above-mentioned example of hemianopsia.[363] In brain lesions, for instance, the former environment, which was adequate for the behavior of the organism, is lost or considerably weakened, and the task of the organism is to shape its relation to the environment, so that it maintains the most important performances.[364] In this regard, the reorganization of the retinal points in hemianopsia bears some similarity to the redistribution of elements in a drip of water.

However, the analogy is obscured when one compares physical systems to concordant, adequate behaviors of organisms. The difference lies in how a privileged (or preferred) way of carrying out a task is selected by an organism amongst multiple possibilities.[365] An organism can be identified by identifying a typical or normal behavior: preferred ways to accomplish tasks, preferred positions, movements and environmental situations.[366] If the structures of organisms were similar to physical structures, it would be possible to find a determinate and unchanging formula for its preferred behavior, "the only possible solution".[367] Köhler, for example, proposes a principle of economy as a formula: the privileged behavior is that which consumes the least amount of energy.[368] Here,

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360 SC, 38/37–8; Moinat 2010, 98.
361 Goldstein criticizes Freud's idea of death drive on this basis. According to Goldstein, organism strives for an ordered state of *tension* and not to total equilibrium. Goldstein notes a connection between isolation technique and the negative view of the organism's response to the environment as a removal of tension. He claims that the more some part of the organism is isolated, the more its goal is in itself and the more it is seen as removal of tension and negation of the disturbance of the external impulses. (Goldstein 1995, 259.)
362 SC, 157/145.
363 Goldstein 1995, 60, 139–40.
364 Goldstein 1995, 56.
365 SC 158/146; Moinat 2010, 102.
366 Cf. Goldstein 1995, 266.
367 SC, 159/146.
368 SC, 159/146; Moinat 2010, 101–2.

again, Merleau-Ponty brings forth Goldstein's holistic argument, according to which general formulas such as the formula of simplicity, the formula of unity or that of economy cannot help explain organic behavior.[369] One encounters an unending variation and ambiguity in the behavior of a living being, and the explanation by fixed principles becomes impossible.[370] The argument is similar to the critique of atomism: the explanation falls because, in principle, one needs an endless amount of auxiliary hypotheses to take all the exceptional cases into account. Explanations become reasonable only when the *natures* or the *individual styles* of organisms are taken into consideration. The nature, or the inner norm of an organism, according to Goldstein, is a limit-concept that can be approached only by following the temporal development of the life of the individual as far as possible. The life of the individual consists of its purposeful behaviors. First of all, one has to be able to conceptualize or describe the behaviors of the organism. Behaviors are particular, dynamically developing figure-ground configurations that offer the basis for the way in which the parts of the body are organized.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the organisms cannot be explained by a model of a machine. According to Merleau-Ponty, "[a] machine is capable only of operations for which it has been constructed".[371] I will not go deeper into the complex question of what distinguishes machines from living beings. I will just mention here that Merleau-Ponty's point is that the prior construction of a machine somehow pre-determines its possible operations. A physical system or an organism could be accounted for on the basis of the model of a machine, if it was possible to define and predict the actions of the physical system or the organism in different external circumstances on the basis of their inner architecture, no matter how poor or rich the amount of actions the physical or organic machine is capable of executing.

Merleau-Ponty suggests that this is, to a certain extent, possible for physical systems, but not possible for living beings. The preferred behavior of a living being in certain circumstances cannot be predicted from the living being's initial, systemic organization.[372] On the contrary, the perception and observation of the intentional behavior of a living being has an original significance with respect to the explanation of its part-whole organization.

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[369] In *Logical Investigations* Husserl presents a similar kind of argument, as he criticizes Avenarius' idea of a principle of economy of thought, which would provide an explanation of cognition on the basis of biological purposefulness. See Hua18 (LU I), 197/124.
[370] Goldstein 1995, 267. See also Dreyfus 1992; Gallagher 2014, 209.
[371] SC, 96/87.
[372] Authors such as Francesco Varela and Evan Thompson have aimed at filling the explanatory gap that Merleau-Ponty articulates between mathematically formulated natural-scientific accounts of the body and perception of the intentional behavior of the organism. As Thompson writes: "the strategy of working of both sides of the gap is precisely the one pursued by the dynamic sensory-motor approach. On the brain side, neural states are described not at the level of their intrinsic neurophysiological properties or as neural correlates of mental states, but rather in terms of how they participate in dynamic sensory-motor patterns involving the whole active organism." (Thompson 2005, 414; 2007, 15.) See also Hurley and Noë 2003, 132.

### 2.1.3 Explanation of Organisms and Intentional Behavior

So far, I have explored Merleau-Ponty's critique of atomistic and functionalistic attempts to account for the organic structures of the bodies of living beings. The common denominator in the critique is mechanical inexplicability. The issue has how to explain the typical behavior of the organic part of a living being, or how to account for the way in which the measurable properties – for instance, the location, warmth or electric charge – of a hand change with respect to changing circumstances.

Let us compare the behavior of a hand of a living being to the behavior of the mechanical "hand" of a machine, such as an mBot. Mbots are programmable machines designed for children. An mBot has a flexible body which can be equipped with motors, servos, lights, sound emitters and a variety of sensors. The mBot is programmed and controlled by software. Accordingly, the behavior of the machine depends on the programmed code. For instance, the mBot could be programmed to move until it gets close to a physical object, whereupon it would perform a robot-grasping of the object it with its robot-hand. The grasping movement can be explained by the program, which is a complex sequence of orders given to the robot, beginning with what happens when the program is set in motion. In the case of an mBot, the sequence of orders can be seen in the software as an arrangement of blocks of code. In short, the behavior of a part, in this case the robot-hand, of the mBot-machine can be explained in a sufficient manner by referring to the unity of the whole, which is the formula or the total function of the machine, or its sequence of orders.

When the biologist does not only *describe* but begins to *explain* the behavior of an organic part of a living being, for instance, the way in which the measurable properties of a cat's paw change in varying circumstances, do they ignore the apparent intentional behavior of the paw and begin to conceive of the unity of a mechanism, a function or a program which lies behind it? Merleau-Ponty's claim is that this is not possible. The organic unity, which explains the specific properties of the parts of this unity, cannot be thought of as a mechanism abstracted from the perceived intentional behavior of the living being in question. The mechanical explanation is forced to recur to additive auxiliary hypotheses, which makes it at the end too complex.[373] But the problem for Merleau-Ponty does not only lie in the complexity. Merleau-Ponty holds that the mechanical explanation of a living being is insufficient for an essential reason. No matter how complex or intelligent the program, it cannot provide a complete account of the unity of the organism, unlike a machine such as an mBot. According to Merleau-Ponty, the organic unity of the cat's body, which explains the behavior of the cat's paw, always refers back to the cat as a subject of intentional behavior. The living being's bodily configuration at a particular moment of its life is expressive of (that is, variable according to) its intentional behavior. Or consider, for instance, the behavior of a hungry dog. We can distinguish hunger and playfulness in the repertoire of the typical behaviors of a dog. When the dog is hungry, it performs

[373] SC, 15/16.

particular movements, its body has certain postures, etc. In particular, if the configuration of the hungry dog's body is observed more carefully, it appears that certain areas of the body (such as the mouth) are emphasized while some other areas remain at the background. The dog's body consists of multiple parts and partial functions, but it appears that these parts are adjusted or adapted with respect to the configuration specific to the identifiable behavior of hunger in a similar manner, as in the above example of the hemianopsia the parts of the eyes are adjusted to the changed situations. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "the motor reactions, temperature, proportions of calcium and calium are connected by their common belonging to the mode of activity of the organism."[374] Here the very bodily configuration appears to correspond with the observed typical intentional behavior. Accordingly, the life scientist cannot take the step of leaving aside the configurations of the body equal to identifiable behaviors and begin to operate with a mere mechanical explanation, starting with a purported determined function of the mechanism. Instead, Merleau-Ponty claims that the intentional behavior has to have a guiding role for the biological explanations all the way.

In the following, I will explicate what, according to Merleau-Ponty, the unities of intentional behavior are as constants that have a significant role in the formation of knowledge in life sciences. Merleau-Ponty is critical of Köhler's and Wertheimer's attempt to draw a parallel between physical and organic structures, but he does not abandon the idea of Gestalt as a descriptive and explanatory concept in biology. Gestalt-structures, specific figure-ground configurations of the body, are the kind of unities by which the bodies of living beings can be explained. The problem lies in the lack of accurate interpretation of the implications of the Gestalt-structure.[375] Merleau-Ponty suggests that the elementary constants that guide biological explanations are unities of significations. He writes that cores (*noyaux*) of signification form the *a priori* of biological science.[376] Thus, the question is, what does Merleau-Ponty mean by a unity of signification of intentional behavior?

For instance, the measured qualities of a cat's paw differ according to the different total configurations of the cat's body. Merleau-Ponty claims that these configurations correspond to intentional behaviors, such as "sleeping" or "catching a prey". The question is, then, what are "sleeping" and "catching a prey"? How are they understood in the first place, and what are their components, insofar as they are intentional behaviors? First of all, let us point out that according to Merleau-Ponty there is a difference between what it means to be able to correctly explicate what "sleeping" means and to perceptually recognize or identify the sleeping behavior. On the one hand, it is possible to perceptually recognize

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374 SC, 168/155.

375 SC, 142–3/132. Merleau-Ponty points out that Gestalt-theory implies an interpretation of the ontological status of the form, which would abandon a philosophy of substances. However, Gestalt theorists have not gone very far in this endeavour, and they lapse into realist postulates, that is, they propose materialist and spiritualist interpretations of form. (SC, 147/136–7) If form is conceived as a cause or a real thing, then one does not think the consequences of a philosophy of forms radically.

376 SC, 170/157–8.

the sleeping behavior of another living being, even if one would not be able to make this explicit or represent it. On the other hand, to be able to represent what sleeping means is not sufficient to recognize sleeping behavior.[377] In short, according to Merleau-Ponty, an understanding of intentional behavior is originally a perceptual understanding, and not a representative or propositional understanding.

Intentional behavior is originally intelligible in an unthematic manner, which also means that the unities of signification of the behavior are not isolated from the total structure of the behavior in question but, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, they are *immanent* to the structure of the behavior in question.[378] If we take up the above example, it means that when we originally recognize cat's sleeping, we do not make explicit propositions about the markers according to which the behavior is recognized, such as the "cat stays still", "it has curled up into a ball", etc.

Merleau-Ponty compares the unthematic intelligibility of a structure of behavior to the way in which a melody is understood and recognized. Intentional behaviors are like kinetic melodies, temporally ordered structures of movements. *On the one hand*, a melody is a temporal Gestalt, which means that it is a transposable unity. The absolute pitch of the notes of the melody is not essential for it: the same melody can be played from various pitches. But if the specific relation between the notes of the melody changes, or if one of the notes is taken away, the melody changes too. Moreover, one note with one absolute pitch sounds different in different melodies or, for instance, if the same note appears as part of the same melody which is transposed to a different pitch. It is the unity of the melody which determines the appearance of the notes. We can properly hear and recognize a unity of a melody only by listening to it all the way through. The unity is articulated phase by phase, in the course of time. Once we have patiently followed the melody from its beginning to the end, we "know" the melody, and it becomes possible to recognize the melody and repeat it. *On the other hand*, in its original understanding, the unity of the melody is not an object that would be focused for itself. The unity itself is not made thematic. But it also means that if the melody consists of a sequence of phases which are actual one after another, the past phases and the anticipated future phases of the melody are not thematic objects either. At each phase of the melody we hear the actual tone within the continuity of the ordered unity, but without having to thematize the total unity, or without having to thematize the past or the future tones.[379] As Brett Buchanan remarks, the unity of a melody is like "a product of interconnected notes".[380] In a similar manner, kinetic melodies are products of interconnected phases of movement or moving parts of the body.

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[377] We will come back to the difference between perceiving and representing in chapter 5, when we deal with Merleau-Ponty's analysis of motor intentionality.

[378] The concept of immanence has an important role in SC, and Merleau-Ponty uses it always in the same sense. SC, 54/51, 70/65, 125/115, 130/120, 133/122, 140/130, 145/134, 148/137, 165/152, 170/157, 173/160, 174/161, 183/168, 188/174, 191/177, 198/184, 211/196, 237–8/221.

[379] All this is familiar from Husserl's analysis of the temporal unities, which is part of his analysis of time-consciousness. We will return to this theme in chapter 4.2.

[380] Buchanan 2008, 126.

This is also the primary manner in which unities of intentional behaviors are understood. It does not imply that this understanding would not have a dynamic character: the understanding of the intentional behaviors can evolve and change. We will come back to this theme below.

What are the components of the intentional behavior of living beings? Next, I will roughly go through the essential characteristics of intentional behavior. Intentional behavior is a relation to an outside, or as Merleau-Ponty also puts it, it is a "being-in-the-world".[381] It involves a self, a purpose and a means, an object and an environment.

*First*, intentional behavior implies a self or a subject. The subject is both a self, involved in the particular behavior, and a unity of the living being of which this particular behavior is a part. But the self also means sentience. Intentional behavior implies a self or a subject who is aware of what it is like to live through the behavior. It implies a self who lives through a situation adequate to the behavior in question. It is not a question of the self-awareness of the subject who perceives intentional behavior of a living being. Instead, insofar as a body appears as moving intentionally, it implies a sentient self for whom the movement itself, the aim of the movement, the objects and the surrounding environment appear, in one way or another. The perceived behavior is an indication of a psychic life or of "the soul" of the behaving being. There is something it is like for the cat to be sleeping, or for the dog to be hungry.

In *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty does not deal with the question of the experiential or sentient life of a living being indicated by the behavior, but he suggests that when we perceive a living being, we deal with a being that relates to the surrounding world and environment according to its own, "inner norm".[382] The self is also a self in terms of *a center.* The self is a center of activity, and a center of receiving stimuli or being affected by stimuli and responding to stimuli. Here, Merleau-Ponty seems to refer to Kant's distinction between mechanical movement and living movement.[383] In the above case of an mBot, we can say that the robot appears like a center. In the first instance the robot moves forward. Then, as it approaches a small cube, it slows down, stops and grasps the object with its robot-hand. In the case of the mBot, we can reveal the unity of its actions as the program. The sensors measure the distance to the object. When the measured distance is below a certain number, the program advances to the command of slowing down. The "norm" for the "action" is the program, which is controlled from the outside. In this manner, a movement that appeared to us as living and intentional can be retroactively disclosed as mechanical.[384] Instead, in

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381 SC, 136/125.
382 SC, 134/123, 161/148, 167/154.
383 See Kant 1987, §65, 253. Kant distinguishes between motive force and formative force. Machines, permeated by motive force, are only moved by an external force, while the movement of self-organizing beings, which involve formative force, is produced by the being in question. Mechanisms (artefacts) just pass on movement, while organisms produce their movement. Kant follows here a distinction that occurs already in Aristotle's physics (735a3–5).
384 But we have to point out that even if a being is disclosed as a mechanism, the behavior produced by the mechanism appears as intentional.

the case of the living organism, the norm of the intentional behavior remains undisclosed to the perceiver.[385]

*Second*, when we perceive intentional behavior, we are not directed to an inner, psychic life of the intentionally moving self. Behavior necessarily involves an object to which the behavior is directed, and an environment specific to it. Sleeping is a specific kind of behavior in the sense that it appears as a turning away from the external environment. Grasping a ruler, avoiding an obstacle, approaching a place or eating a sandwich are intentional behaviors whose object is more easily graspable. The object of the intentional behavior can be more or less indeterminate. Moreover, behaviors are not necessarily directed towards real, material objects. However, the behaviors are particular only insofar as they have a center of orientation, something towards which the behavior is directed.

*Third*, behavior also involves an affective attunement, a tension, tendency, need or desire towards which the self tends in its accomplishment. Behaviors thus involve a purpose or an aim and a means of approaching the aim. In grasping it is the grasped, in eating the food-to-be-eaten or the focused enjoyment of swallowing.

*Finally*, in intentional behavior, the objects and the aims are not situated within a pure domain of objects. Instead, behavior entails an environment that is adequate to the subject of behavior. In an analysis of intentional behavior, it must be taken into account that the external environment is specific to the behavior in question. Merleau-Ponty writes that the organic equilibrium

> "is obtained, not with respect to real and present conditions, but with respect to conditions which are only virtual and which the system itself brings into existence; when the structure, instead of procuring a release from the forces with which it is penetrated through the pressure of external ones, executes a work beyond its proper limits and constitutes a proper milieu for itself."[386]

In behavior the living being and its environment form a structural unity. As Brett Buchanan writes, "organic relations must be considered by a fundamental relation to a world". The world, here, does not (necessarily) mean an objective world or a geometrical space. Instead, it is the world adequate to the organism: the surrounding environment or the milieu characteristic for the behavior.[387] In the situation of perceiving the behavior of another living being, there are two worlds in question: the world surrounding the other body, as the observer sees it, and the world that corresponds to the behavior and which is the world of the perceived living being. Accordingly, there are as many different surrounding environments as there are different kinds of behavior. Or, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "[t]he world

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[385] In other words, the self of the living being appears as transcendent.
[386] SC, 157/145–6.
[387] SC, 136/125. The idea that the organism is related to a specific environment a basic feature in descriptions of primitive intentionality of living beings. For example, Dennett writes in *Consciousness Explained* that with the occurrence of life a "point of view" is generated, and the world's events are partitioned in favourable, unfavourable and neutral. However, this way of describing is an anthropomorphic view of life, and according to Dennett the very same teleological features can also be explained conditionally: if these X are to survive, certain conditions must be met (Dennett 1991, 173–).

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."[388] For instance, walking involves the environment adequate for walking, or fear is accomplished within a fearsome environment.[389] Also the more general types of behavior and species-specific behaviors have their corresponding environments (the adequate environment of a frog, the environment of the young, etc.). The environment is always a part of the kinetic melody.

The self, object, purpose and means for attaining the purpose, and the environment or the space in which the intentional movement occurs – these characteristics are understood as part of the immanent signification of the kinetic whole of the intentional behavior. Just as the understanding of behavior is originally an unthematic grasping of a temporally expanded kinetic unity, the elements of the unity itself originally appear as inseparable parts of the movement itself. In other words, it is not necessary for the perceiver to represent the elements that make up the unity of behavior, but this holds neither to the behavior itself. The perceived moving being does not necessarily appear to represent or think about its movement, purpose, object, world or the means to attain the movement.[390] Insofar as the intentional behavior appears as a kinetic melody, there is no isolated center of the subject or an end which would have the role of a final cause of the action. "Analysis of ends and means of action is substituted with its immanent sense and interior structure".[391]

**Varieties of Unities**

According to Merleau-Ponty, the biologist operates with a stock consisting of a variety of ensembles of action,[392] such as "walking towards the goal", "to take something", "to eat prey". Now, we have seen that these unities of signification, which delimit different figure-ground configurations of the body, are based on an original understanding of intentional behavior. For instance, there are unities of signification that specify particular states of the organism such as fatigue, hunger or fear.[393] There are also unities of significations that specify general types of behavior such as masculinity or femininity, the typical behavior of the young or old, or a behavior typical to a species.[394] Besides, a style of behavior characteristic to all particular accomplishments of an individual living being is another unity of signification. These unities specify coordinating configurations, which make it possible to identify, classify and to explain organisms and their characteristics.

It still has to be pointed out that Merleau-Ponty does not think that the biological understanding of behaviors would be reduced back to our everyday understanding of behaviors. Instead, he suggests that an incessant development of

388 SC, 137/125.
389 SC, 174/160–1.
390 SC, 188/174.
391 SC, 188/174.
392 SC, 170/157.
393 SC, 171n1/244.
394 Moinat 2010, 104–5.

reconfiguring and refining of this understanding is a crucial part of biology. How does the process of knowledge of behavior advance?

Consider a situation in which one encounters another living being whose behavior appears unfamiliar to us. In this situation we might acknowledge that what we perceive is indeed the intentional behavior of a living being, but we cannot understand or particularize that behavior in question. Another situation would be one in which we have a pre-given understanding of a behavior, which is then challenged and changed. In both cases a new unity of signification becomes intelligible. How does this occur? Merleau-Ponty characterizes the basic operation in biology as the discovery of a melodic unity by following a variety of phenomena, facts and details concerning the object of study. It is not "noting a series of empirical coincidences, not even establishing a list of mechanical correlations". Instead, in the basic operation "the ensemble of the known facts [is connected] by their signification, […] a characteristic rhythm [is discovered] in all of them […]."[395] The primary operation consists of connecting, coordinating, conjoining the details and of finding what is characteristic to them.[396] Merleau-Ponty describes the connecting activity as a creative cognitive procedure, where the principle stems spontaneously from the multiple details.[397] Here, Merleau-Ponty is in accord with Goldstein, who relates it to Goethe's idea of *Schau*, "a procedure that springs continuously from empirical facts and never fails to be grounded in and substantiated by them."[398] According to Goldstein, learning to understand a new behavior of another living being is similar to the manner in which one learns a new skill, such as the skill of riding a bicycle.[399] Both operations require initial, anticipatory exercises. The initial attempts to perform new movements or to understand the new kind of behavior are not aimless, but they still lack coherence, or adequate unity. The adequate performance or understanding, just like the unity of a melody, is found suddenly and without further ado. Goldstein writes:

> "this is a fundamental biological process by virtue of which actualization of organisms is made possible […] the cognitive process of the biologist is subject to practically the same difficulties of procedure as the organism in learning".[400]

If our conceptions of living beings are based on the understanding of the unities of signification of intentional behaviors, it follows that biology cannot be detached from its connection to perception. Instead, we can detach the understanding of the core unity of a machine from its apparent behavior, namely, the core that is found in the sequence of the code of the program.[401]

According to Merleau-Ponty, study of life is first and foremost a study of melodic unities or immanent significations. The unities of behavior have their

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395 SC, 171/158.
396 SC, 170/157.
397 SC, 166/153, 175/162.
398 Goldstein 1995, 307.
399 Goldstein 1995, 307.
400 Goldstein 1995, 308.
401 Nevertheless, it holds true that if one would not understand the behavior of the machine, produced by the code, one would not have any proper understanding of the machine at all.

basis in the actually-perceived behavior of the organism. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "Every organism […] is a melody which sings itself. This is not to say that it knows this melody and attempts to realize it; it is only to say that it is a meaningful whole for a consciousness which knows it, not a thing which rests in itself."[402]

## 2.2 Organisms and Perceptual Intentionality

According to Merleau-Ponty, the foundation of biological knowledge is the perceived living being. Merleau-Ponty thinks that the partial bodily processes of the body of a living being are variable according to the total figure-ground configuration of the whole organism. These holistic configurations refer back to the observation [and perception] of the behavior of the living being. When we observe the organism at a given situation, what we follow is a multi-level behavioral structure. On one hand, we can follow and recognize the particular intentional act of the organism, which is a particular, melodic configuration involving the sensory-motor body coupled with its adequate environment. The recognizable particular pattern of behavior (for instance, the bird feeds its young) can be compared to similar types of behavior in other living beings and, in another instance, of the life of the individual organism in question. On the other hand, beneath particular behaviors, the style of the whole organism, its "nature" or the "inner norm" (the individual bird, acting blindly according to a problem determined by the elements of a given situation, but with no pre-established solution), is intelligible but not determinable. Thus, the organism appears as an individual that cannot be reduced to any particular type of behavior. Finally, this is related to the appearance of the organism as living. The organism appears as living as a sense that is in a state of becoming. Beneath the recognizable patterns of behavior the totality of the organism appears as a "swirl".[403]

The two elements, the particular act of behavior and the unity of the individual living being, give rise to a phenomenological problem of perception that Merleau-Ponty formulates in the end of *The Structure of Behavior*. Actually, there are three different problems: the problem of the structural and symbolic consciousness, the problem of empathy, and the problem of the stratified structure of the individual existence. In the following, I will deal shortly with all these three aspects of the problem of perception.

In general, in *The Structure of Behavior*, the problem of perception arises from a transcendental questioning of the Gestalt-theoretical interpretation of physical, biological and human nature. According to Gestalt-theory, the holistic part-

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[402] SC, 172/159. Translation is modified. On Merleau-Ponty's late consideration of the significance of the melody as a "sensible idea" and its relation to Proust, see Carbone 2004, xv.
[403] SC, 166/153. See also N, 205. In both of the passages in question Merleau-Ponty mentions that the notion of the "swirl" [*tourbillon*] comes from Hegel. However, at least to my knowledge, this concept does not play any prominent role in Hegel's way of conceiving organic life.

whole configurations of Gestalt-structures are necessary for the scientific knowledge in each of the fields of nature. Now, Merleau-Ponty asks, what is the original mode of experience, in which a structural unity of the Gestalt is given? In short, Merleau-Ponty's aim is to show that perception is an original mode of evidence not only in biology, but also in physics and psychology. All knowledge has its basis in perception, be it a perception of a physical thing, a living being or (more specifically) a human being.[404] In all these branches of sciences, Merleau-Ponty ends up with a similar situation. On the one hand, the scientific knowledge operates with *ideal* unities of signification.[405] On the other hand, these ideal forms are rooted in the original evidence of phenomena (physical, living, psychological, sociological, historical). In the original evidence, the signification of the phenomenon is a unity embedded in a temporal structure. In other words, it is a melodic unity in the sense described above. The intelligible ideal form is established in an operation in which a unity of sense is detached from this original structural unity, and placed on an ideal plane. The problem of perception is, according to this line of thought, a problem of *a unity* of two modes of consciousness: an original consciousness aware of a signification embedded in a structure, and a consciousness of an ideal unity of signification. Merleau-Ponty characterizes these modes of awareness as the *lived* and the *known*. We both *live through* structures and understand significations of structures in a primal manner, and *know* them, in that we can isolate *ideal significations* out of the originally lived structures. The two modes have their initial ground in perception. Knowledge of an object is based on its qualities or properties (color, weight, form, size, movement, a form of behavior, etc.). But before knowing, that is, explicitly identifying the qualities, we live through them insofar as we perceptually attain the thing in a particular sense. We perceive "vague essences", we distinguish the style or the type of a thing without being able to determine or define it. We are perceptually acquainted with typical characteristics of physical things, living beings and human beings before we can explicate the differences in an analytic manner.

The qualities belong originally to the structure of the thing perceived in a specific situation and environment. Now, perception originally lives through a structure of the thing in its immanent, non-figurative sense, and detaches the structure from its initial, actual and concrete situation, elevating it on an ideal, figurative level.[406] On this basis, a lived structure can be converted to an ideal signification, and made explicit by logical acts.[407] For example, the perceived rectangular physiognomy of a book, which is an incarnated structure, can be made explicit as the signification "rectangle".[408] The challenge presented at the end of *The Structure of Behavior* is to disclose in detail these two aspects of perception.

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404 SC, 235/218.
405 I will leave here aside Merleau-Ponty's account concerning the role of the ideal unities in physics, psychology, sociology and history.
406 SC, 232/215
407 SC, 232/215.
408 SC, 232/215.

I have not followed Merleau-Ponty's argument in its entirety but focused on the specific part of this total argument, according to which the root of biological knowledge is in the perception of a living being. Merleau-Ponty draws the same conclusion with respect to the other domains of nature: the ideal significations of behavior emerge from the original perception of the immanent signification of the living being. However, a living being is not whatever object of perception. The living being is another living and lived body, like the body of the perceiver. The organism is another individual existence, like the perceiver herself.

The encounter of another living body leads to the phenomenological problem of empathy. Given Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the idea that a structural consciousness founds a consciousness of ideal significations, he highlights the foundational significance of emphatic associations of gestures and movements between two lived bodies. Thus, Merleau-Ponty writes that "as the witness of behavior, I am not a pure consciousness."[409] There is a basic "motor understanding" of the other's bodily expression, which occurs in participative interaction with the other.[410] Merleau-Ponty evokes the capacity of the child to understand the sense of the mother's gestures to demonstrate the basic structural awareness in the perception of the other's expression.[411] Merleau-Ponty remarks that, for the infants, the other's bodily gestures that express menace and melancholy, for instance, have a distinctive signification, even if the children would not be able to conceptualize it, and even if they would not be able to execute these gestures by themselves. The infant does not live in isolation, but in a relation of co-existence,[412] in which their body is in a close associative connection to the mother's or the caregiver's body.[413] This basic sensory-motor coupling with the other's body is not based on the *projection* of one's own sentiments and senses of gestures to the other, but rather precedes it. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is possible to make comparisons and projections of gestures between one's own body and the body of another, only if they are already "understood" in the emphatic motor understanding of the sense of the other's bodily gestures. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty thinks that a primal co-existence,[414] a synergic unity with the other's body, precedes the elaboration of an awareness of oneself as a separate individual, and of the other as another self.[415]

I will not engage more deeply with the phenomenological problem of empathy in Merleau-Ponty. Nevertheless, it must be noticed that the analysis of biological life, and the problem of anthropological difference, implies a comparative perspective on the differences between different types of behaviors of individuals, and a classification of humans and animals. The basis of such comparisons lie in the encounters of the others, in the characterizations of the similarities

409 SC, 138/127. See also SC, 187/173.
410 Moinat 2010, 133–4; SC, 239/222.
411 SC, 169/156–7.
412 SC, 239/222. Merleau-Ponty also uses the terms "syncretic" and "syncretism" when he describes child's experience. See SC, 48n1/230. See also Bornemark 2014, 263–5; Welsh 2013, xiv, 45–72.
413 PhP, 367–8/404–5.
414 SC, 239/222.
415 SC, 48n1/230.

and differences between the other's behavior and one's own, and the familiarity and unfamiliarity of the other's behavior. Insofar as the experiencing subject is basically aware of the bodily gestures that motivate the experiences, the gestures of the other's body are immediately associated to the other's experiences. In *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty deals with the question concerning the difference between animal and human behavior, and he classifies different levels of behavior.

The idea of human existence as a stratified structure that Merleau-Ponty develops in *The Structure of Behavior* is significant with respect to the question of biological existence present in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Namely, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the structure of human behavior, which is stratified according to different levels, prepares us for the idea that perception is structured by a lower-level of biological existence.

In fact, Goldstein's holistic method implies that behavior is a stratified structure. According to it, the physico-chemical processes of the body are permeated by the higher-level living behaviors, in the manner in which the lower-level processes are *configured* by the higher-level structures. In human beings, the living forms then appear as parts within the symbolic plane of behavior. Thus, Merleau-Ponty does not only claim that the dimensions of behavior, physical, vital and human, as three separate orders. He also formulates a conception concerning their ordering. He claims that the superior order is a re-organization of the inferior order, but such that it brings along new qualities. Merleau-Ponty conceives the relation between structures in terms of part-whole relations. For instance, he characterizes the nervous system as the bodily ground of behavior. All forms of behavior are configurations of the nervous system. However, when an act of behavior is established, the distinct functional regions of the body, such as the optical and auditory system, are integrated into a superior figure-ground form of the body.[416] The variation of the value of every partial field of the body is determined by the global form of the nervous system. Mutually, the global form consists of nothing else than the partial functions. Moreover, if one part of the nervous system would be damaged, the function would be profoundly altered. Merleau-Ponty concludes that the parts lose their specificity in the new order, *and* they somehow maintain their independence and specificity insofar as their correct functioning guarantees the maintenance of the higher order. In the integration, that which is integrated gathers a totally new meaning, but the new whole "is nothing outside of" the integrated parts.[417]

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[416] SC, 223–4/206–8.

[417] Probably Merleau-Ponty adopts this view from Goldstein. As Goldstein neatly puts it: "[T]he members that we distinguish neither compose the organism, nor are they antagonistic to it, because the organism is nothing but the members themselves. There is neither a struggle of the members among each other in the organism, nor a struggle of the whole with the members […] Only deterioration or imperfect adaptation of the organism makes members stand out abnormally." (Goldstein 1995, 322–3) See also N, 205.

Merleau-Ponty claims that the relation between inferior and superior order (physical–vital, vital–psychic, psychical–spiritual) has to be conceived as a relation of partial to total.[418] Human organisms do not consist of lower autonomous biological processes juxtaposed to higher psychic capacities, plus a level of spirituality consisting of particular human capacities. Human existence is a configuration of the lower level processes of the body.[419] From the Gestalt-theoretical perspective that Merleau-Ponty adopts, human bodily existence does not appear as a new substance but a new organization, a new form of unity.[420]

Merleau-Ponty describes the manner in which the human body appears for the scientist who aims to understand human behavior from a third-person perspective. It attests that when we observe another human being who, for instance, looks at an apple, we can disclose the stratified structure of their body, configured according to their current activity and situation. However, this is not how they experience their perception from their own point of view as the perceiving subject. Accordingly, the one who observes the body is not aware of their own bodily configuration. The constitutive levels of perception are those that are somehow given within the perception itself. Is the observation of the human body, then, totally irrelevant with regards to phenomenology of perception? At least it gives Merleau-Ponty a leading clue for his manner of characterizing the problem of the biological existence. In the next chapter, we will proceed towards the problematic of biological existence, by examining Merleau-Ponty's analysis of physiology in *Phenomenology of Perception*. But before that, in the following subchapter we will explore Merleau-Ponty's account of the instinctive mode of behavior.

## 2.3 Instinctive Behavior

Here, the task is to explicate Merleau-Ponty's account of the instinctive behavior. We have to make explicit Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the instinct because it will clarify his conception of biological existence. In the following I will lean on J. Keeping's recent article on Merleau-Ponty's theory of the instincts.[421] Keeping's

418 SC, 195/180.
419 See Marratto 2012, 35.
420 SC, 196/181.
421 Keeping 2006. I have chosen to follow Keeping's article in this chapter for two reasons. First, at least to my knowledge, it is one of the rare articles that deal in more detail with Merleau-Ponty's conception of the instinct in Phenomenology of Perception. The second reason is that Keeping is well aware of the history of the concept of the instinct in the 20th century and tries to see the relevance of the concept of instinct for later discussions in the philosophy of biology (notably sociobiology). Merleau-Ponty's conception of the instinct is not much discussed in the secondary literature. In works that present Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, his view concerning the instinctive syncretic behavior is usually mentioned but not analyzed at length (see, for instance, Toadvine 2016 and Welsh 2013). Olkowski (2006) analyzes the relation between instinct and intelligence in Bergson and late Merleau-Ponty. Halá k & Klouda (2018) discuss the role of instincts in Merleau-Ponty in the context of the question of anthropological difference.

aim is to formulate an account of instinctive animal behavior[422] on the basis of Merleau-Ponty's remarks on the issue and with the help of certain key claims. As he remarks in the beginning of the article, the conceptions of instinct have traditionally offered an answer to the question of how it is possible that animals perform sophisticated behaviors which they obviously cannot have learned. A paradigmatic example of an instinct is the nesting behavior of a bird. A bird whose foster-parents belong to a different species will build a nest typical for its own species, which is not like the nest that its foster parents build.[423] The purpose of this thesis is not to focus on the instinctive behaviors of animals. Instead, the purpose is to explicate instinctive behavior, because it helps us understand the unlearned behaviors that emerge spontaneously from the human body, and accordingly it helps us understand Merleau-Ponty's conception of biological existence as a primitive level of experiencing at the foundation of perception. From this viewpoint, three claims concerning the instinct become emphasized. First of all, the instincts are intentional. They are particular kinds of "being in the world", rather than drives or mechanisms. Second, instincts are specified as particular kinds of intentional behavior in terms of capacity level and embeddedness of the intentional schema in the instinctive accomplishment itself. Finally, the instincts are spontaneous and unlearned, but this does not have to mean that they would be innate. Instead, as Keeping emphasizes, Merleau-Ponty's account of instincts suggest that they emerge spontaneously from the morphological structure of the body of a living being. Keeping claims that the instincts are embodied meanings.

### 2.3.1 The Critique of Two Conceptions of the Instinct: Drive and Mechanism

According to Keeping, Merleau-Ponty's theory of the instinct as intentional offers an alternative account to the opposite, classical conceptions of the instincts, either as drives or mechanisms. According to a drive-conception, instincts are ultimately workings of the displacements and various qualitative transformations of quantities of energies. The drive functions like a quantity, like an electric charge or a flow. Drives are thus accounted in terms of increase, diminution, displacement and discharge. These kinds of characterizations are found, for instance, in Freud's theory of the drive.[424] According to Freud, the characterization of the drive as a quantity or flow functions well as a working hypothesis because it helps to explain and co-ordinate "a great variety of psychical states".[425]

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422 Keeping 2006, 173.
423 Keeping 2006, 172.
424 Freud 1962, 60–61.
425 Freud 1962, 61. It must be noticed that a theory of instincts as related to the body organs can also be found in Freud's works, in particular in his theory of "organic repression", which elaborates on the development of human affectivity as bound to the upright position of the human body. In the upright position the sense of smell and olfactory stimuli atrophy for the good of the visual stimuli – and this is significant with respect to the development of sexuality. See, for instance, Geyskens 2001. Geyskens writes, characterizing Freud's account: "the abandonment of the oral and anal sexuality is connected with the loss of smell as a source of sexual excitation […] what was once sexually exciting has become repulsive" (Geyskens 2001, 872). See also, Mooney 2017, 64.

The drive-theory is applied mostly to explain the variety of the affective life of human persons. Instead, the theory of the instinct as a mechanism comes from the 20th century ethologists, such as Lorenz and Tinbergen, who accounted for the varieties of animal behavior. According to the mechanistic account, the instincts are "fairly specific relatively rigid sequence[s] of motor behaviors", and they can be located in "specific neurophysiological mechanisms".[426] The instinctive mechanisms can be physiologically located and their structure can be examined. Instinct-mechanisms, like mechanisms in general, are subject to priming, guiding and switching on and off.[427]

The theory of drives and the ethological theory of neurophysiological mechanisms both purport to explain an unlearned predisposition to behave in a certain way.[428] Keeping does not ignore the critique that has been addressed to these ways of understanding the unlearned, predisposed behaviors. In order to understand the critique and Merleau-Ponty's alternative conception, we have first to look at typical characteristics of the instinctive behavior.

### 2.3.2 The Characteristics of Instinctive Behavior

Keeping refers in his depiction of instinctive behavior to Tinbergen's and Lorentz's accounts. However, basically the same characteristics can also be found in Merleau-Ponty's account of "syncretic behavior" in *The Structure of Behavior*.[429] In the passage in question, Merleau-Ponty classifies animal and human behaviors into three general groups. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the behaviors can be classified to lower and higher levels according to the embeddedness of the structure in the content of the behavior.[430] Accordingly, there is a distinction between behaviors with respect to its level of embeddedness. In other words, even if the behavior would have the same structure or content, it can be modified with respect to the level of embeddedness of the structure. On this basis, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between behaviors at three levels: syncretic, adaptive and symbolic.

Merleau-Ponty points out that the distinction between the three levels of behaviors does not classify the living beings (animals) into three groups. There are no animal species whose behavior would necessarily or always remain at the syncretic level, and no living being whose behavior would necessarily or always remain at the level of the symbolic. However, he claims that, in each of the species, one of the three levels dominates and is characteristic of a general style of the behavior of the species in question.

Merleau-Ponty also points out that instinctive movement is linked to behavior at the first, syncretic level.

There are three typical characteristics of instinctive behavior. First the "sign stimuli" that trigger the instinct are highly specific or "abstract" configurations.

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426 Keeping 2006, 173.
427 For Discussion of Konrald Lorenz's ethological concept of the instinct in 1950's context of philosophy of biology, see Griffiths 2004.
428 Keeping 2006, 173.
429 SC, 113–5/103–5.
430 SC, 113/103.

Second, the instinct is pervaded by a "blindness" or "automatism". The instincts react only to the pre-determined sign-stimulus, and for this reason the instinctive behavior is bound to errors and mistakes. Finally, the instinctive behaviors are characterized by a specific way of being varied: the instincts emerge and fade out according to seasons, periods or cycles. Let us elaborate on these three points.

What does it mean that the sign-stimulus that triggers the instinctive response is "abstract", as Merleau-Ponty puts it?[431] It means that the response is triggered only by a specific, pre-given, and relatively unchanging configuration of the stimuli. The one who inquires the instinctive behavior will find out that the triggering stimulus adequate to the subject of the instinct appears not as a concrete object, but one abstract aspect of the object or environment. The conditions that have to be met are highly specific. For example, the stimulus that triggers an attacking behavior of a spider, that is, the stimulus which the spider "understands" as a "prey to catch", is a specific vibration of the net produced by the movements of the fly. The fly as a prey is not given visually or auditively. Thus, if a fly is placed in the spider's nest, and it does not emit the triggering vibrations, the spider does not treat the fly as a prey. Instead, if a vibration of the net is produced with a tuning fork, the vibration triggers the spider's attack.[432] In addition, the sign-stimulus is not only an isolated, specific object, but a whole specific configuration of the surrounding environment. An ant placed on a blade of grass does not drop to a white paper which has been marked with a black circle, unless a group of certain quite specific requirements are fulfilled. The paper must have a specific size, and the distance to the ground, and the intensity and direction of the light, must have a specific value.

The instinctive behavior responds only to the specific sign-stimulus or a specific configuration of stimuli, and for this reason it typically leads to "errors" or "mistakes". For instance, a situation in which the catch could be caught effortlessly, without the typical attacking behavior, does not elicit a response on the spider's part. Instead, the spider reacts in a situation in which it senses the correct kind of vibration, but there is nothing to catch. As Tinbergen writes:

> "an animal responds 'blindly' to only part of the total environmental situation and neglects other parts, although its sense organs are perfectly able to receive them […] and although they seem to be no less important, to the human observer, than the stimuli to which it does react."[433]

Another, related characterization of instinctive behavior is that the instinct is *imprisoned* to its "natural conditions".[434] The spider is imprisoned to its manner of behaving because it does not learn to distinguish the vibration of the tuning fork and the vibration of the fly, and it does not learn to treat the immobile fly as a catch. In other words, the spider is stick with its stereotypical manner of catching the prey. The situation adequate for the response is pre-given or "prescribed" to the spider. We could also express it by saying that the intentional schema that

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431 See SC, 107/97, 113/105.
432 SC, 107/97.
433 Tinbergen 1951, 27.
434 SC, 114/104.

guides the spider's action remains fixed. Finally, another aspect of the instinct is that the behavior occurs almost automatically. When the adequate stimuli are present, the behavior follows without further ado, without any control of the behavior on the part of the subject of the instinct.

Keeping points out that the instincts emerge and fade out, or their intensity varies according to temporal periods or cycles.[435] The same sign stimulus may motivate a stronger or weaker response depending on the season. These variations in the instincts can be thought to be due to the changing internal conditions of the organism.

Here my purpose is not to give a detailed picture of the critique addressed to the drive-theory and the mechanistic theory of the instinctive behaviors. I will focus on one problem, which is the problem of innateness of the instincts. The notion of instinctive behavior has been criticized because it seems to imply that some behaviors are innate in the sense that they are present at birth. However, this idea is problematic. On one hand, the claim that some behaviors would be genetically determined is a simplistic account of the role of genes in the development of a living being. It is widely acknowledged that the developmental process is due to both the genetic blueprint and the influence of the natal and post-natal environment. If the environment is altered, the organism is altered accordingly.[436]

Another problem is that some unlearned behaviors are not innate for the reason that their emergence depends on some prior skills that the organism has acquired by learning. For instance, all chickadees open seeds with their beaks instinctively, but this behavior requires that the birds have first learned to use the beak.[437] The idea of an innate behavior is problematic from the onto-genetic point of view. Nevertheless, Keeping claims that this does not remove the problem of the instinct, which accounts for the unlearned, spontaneously emerging behaviors.

### 2.3.3 Instincts Are Intentional

Insofar as instincts appear as blind and automatic, it might appear tendentious to explain them as neuro-physiological mechanisms. However, Merleau-Ponty argues that the instincts are intentional behaviors, not mechanisms. Unlike mechanisms, the instincts involve an "understanding" of their objects.

Keeping explicates the mechanical inexplicability of the instinctive behaviors in terms of "configurationality". What does it mean? Let us follow Keeping's example here. An animal that instinctively escapes a flying predator must be able to recognize the sign-stimulus of the "predator" that triggers the escaping behavior. Now, the direction of the flight of the predator is significant with respect to its recognizability. This is because the form of birds of prey is such that their neck is short and the tail is long, as opposed to birds which are not predators, who have a long neck and short tail. The difference between flying predators and non-

435 Keeping 2006, 175.
436 Keeping 2006, 177.
437 Keeping 2006, 177.

predators does not lie in the shape of the bird as such, but in its shape in relation to its direction of movement. The form of the neck typical to birds of prey must be located in the direction of advancing. Now, the direction of the movement appears only with respect to the perceiver, and what counts as sign-stimulus is not the shape in itself, isolated, but the "*distance* and *orientation* of the sign-stimulus with respect to the perceiver."[438] It follows that if, for example, the location or the direction of the movement of the perceiver changes, the perception of the sign-stimulus must be adapted to these alterations. It is a question of a perceptually constant sign: the stimulus behaves in a constant manner in changing circumstances or "configurations". As something which remains constant and thus adjusted with respect to changing configurations, the sign stimuli cannot be explained in terms of mechanistic causality. This is because the amount of possible configurational situations is not limited or pre-determined.

There is a significant difference between the "automatism" and "mechanical inexplicability" of the instinctive behavior. The sign-stimuli can amount to a specific and "abstract" configuration, and still the manner in which the subject of the instinct recognizes the triggering sign is not reducible to a program consisting of a sequence of commands. It is not determined beforehand when and where, in what lighting and in what temperature the fly will move on the spider's net, producing the triggering vibrations. The spider has to be able to recognize the vibration in differing configurations, even if the quality of sensed vibrations does not appear as exactly similar in changing circumstances, just as the shadowed parts of a red book appear different from the non-shadowed.[439] The spider errs as it tries to catch a sound fork, but it does not err in recognizing the vibration even if the location and the direction of the vibration changes. As Keeping puts it, an infinite set of motor mechanisms would be needed in order to "account for the vicissitudes of every possible situation, and even this would not explain how the movements are coordinated with perception."[440]

### 2.3.4 Instincts and Habits

Keeping points out that instincts are like motor habits insofar as they both involve "practical knowledge".[441] For instance, a subject who has acquired a skill of writing with a keyboard can flawlessly and fluently locate the locations of the keys while writing. However, at the same time it is difficult for the subject to recall, to visualize or to thematize the locations. The locations of the keys in the habituated action of writing are "known" only "in and through practice". Moreover, habits, too, involve "triggers". The keyboard is perceived as suitable for writing, and it "calls for" the movements of writing. The keyboard functions as a trigger for unleashing the movements of typing in a similar (though by no means the same) manner as the vibrations trigger the movement of spider's attack. Both

438 Keeping 2006, 178.
439 We will return to this theme in chapter 7.
440 Keeping 2006, 179.
441 The difference and similarity of the instinct and habit is a recurrent theme of this thesis work.

the instinctive action and habitual action could be characterized as "practical knowledge". Both are practical knowledge that remains within the act. It is a question of an understanding that remains within the actual performance in which the act is carried out.

Moreover, habituation is a process by which a new environment that motivates and calls for the movements becomes projected over that which is unfamiliar. Thus, even if we do not perceive an actual keyboard in front of us, we can perform writing movements with an imaginary keyboard, or with a keyboard made of wood. This projection bears a similarity to the blindness of the instinct, and just as the subject of the instinct is imprisoned to the specific schema of behavior, the habituated subject can be, at least momentarily, "imprisoned" to the habit.

Finally, habit and the instinct involve a schema that is dynamic. Again, the situations for carrying out the schema can vary. Accordingly, the required movements are adjusted to the changes of circumstances. For instance, we know how to type with a keyboard that is double the size of a normal one, or with a keyboard whose keys must be pushed harder, or how to type while we are sitting down or standing, while we turn our head, etc. Just like habit, the instinctive behavior "adapts itself to the unique circumstances of each situation in which it is elicited."[442]

There are also significant differences between habit and the instinct. Unlike the habituated subject, the subject of the instinct has an incomplete grasp of the situation. As we have already shown, according to Merleau-Ponty, the subject of the instinct is at a lower capacity level, which is associated to the one-dimensionality or uni-dimensionality of the instinctive behavior. This means that, in the instinctive behavior, the situation is experienced "along only one dimension", as Keeping puts it. The instinctive behavior responds "literally" to a pre-determined complex of stimuli. The subject of the instinct does not grasp beyond the pre-given sign stimulus, in which case the subject of the instinct would be able to deal with other characteristics of the situation. But this is another way of saying that the triggering sign overrides the other information received by the subject. For instance, if the spider would grasp the situation fully, it would not attack anything that vibrates in the net in the particular manner. Thus, the sign stimulus engages the subject of the instinct wholly, to the extent that there is no occasion for any alternative behavior. The characteristics of the instinct are such that:

A. The instinctive subject cannot become called for by anything outside the pre-given intentional schema. There are no other vectors of movement than those highlighted by the possession.

B. The instinctive accomplishment will not be unleashed if the sign does not actually show up. The instinctive behavior will cease if the triggering or motivating configuration disappears.

Keeping formulates the tight connection between the sign and the behavior characteristic of the instinct by writing that the sense of the situation *is nothing*

[442] Keeping 2006, 184.

*other than* the elicited behavior. In other words, there is no possible distance between the situation and the behavior. This amounts to Merleau-Ponty's claim that in the syncretic behavior the (pre-given) structure is embedded in the actual content of experience. Or, to apply Keeping's phrasing in Merleau-Ponty's example, the spider experiences the vibration simply as incitement to attack, and the vibration simply means "something to be attacked". We can attest to a similar kind of simplicity in the awareness of the keyboard while writing. In concordant and harmonious writing, the keys-to-be-pushed incite the finger-movements in a similar, simple manner: within the habitual movement itself there is no occasion for the fingers to investigate other aspects of the keys than that which is pre-determined by the sequence of touches belonging to the kinetic melody.

However, if the instinctive behaviors are subject to a pre-given schema, how can the instinct change, emerge and fade out? One of the problems that Keeping addresses to the drive-theory is that if drive is conceived as a release of a certain quantum of "action-specific potentiality", like a flowing of a fluid from a container until the container is empty, it seems to follow that an instinctive action would continue until the potential or the energy is expended.[443] But the instinctive behavior ends when it becomes satisfied, for instance, when the prey is caught. This action might require more or less energy, but it does not mean that all the energy would be expended. Instead, the actual accomplishment alters the vectors or the configuration of the situation for the subject of the instinct, and it is a question of both altering the inner conditions of the body and the external conditions. For instance, the spider carries out the attacking movement. It is possible that the spider catches the fly, or the fly drops from the net, or the spider recognizes something else as it moves toward the fly. In any case, the situation alters and it might motivate the continuance of the ongoing behavior or unleash some new kind of behavior.

### 2.3.5 The Instinct and Embodied Meaning

If the instinctive behavior cannot be reduced to an underlying neuro-physiological mechanism, it must then be accounted as a kind of primitive intentionality which involves an "understanding" of and a directedness towards its object and the environment. But, as we have seen, it is not a question of a representational knowledge of the object, but rather an unthematic understanding. We will provide a more detailed account of this awareness below, in chapter 5, as we deal with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of motor intentionality. In the following, I will focus on Keeping's argument concerning the constitutive significance of the anatomical and physiological apparatus of the body of the subject of instinct with respect to the particular instinctive behaviors. Instead of innateness, Keeping coins the concept that the unlearned intentional schemata that guide the instincts emerge spontaneously from the structure of the body.

There are two aspects of the embodied meaning. On the one hand, the anatomical and physiological apparatus of the organism constitutes the *perceptual*

[443] Keeping 2006, 176.

*field* or the *Umwelt* of the subject of the instinct. This is the global organization of the field, the order within which the trigger of the instinct can appear. On the other, the particular aspects emphasize different aspects of the field. They are related to specific rhythms or patterns. With respect to both of these aspects, the claim is that, inasmuch as the organism itself determines its *Umwelt*, the instinct *itself* determines what shall be a trigger for it. In other words, the sign stimulus is not meaningful without the structure of the body. As Keeping writes: "the trigger only exists as such because the instinct itself makes it meaningful as a trigger".[444] Merleau-Ponty also makes a similar claim:

> "But it is the organism itself – according to the proper nature of its receptors, the thresholds of its nerve centers and the movement of the organs – which chooses the stimuli in the physical world to which it will be sensitive."[445]

First, Keeping suggests that the "gross morphological characters" of the body determine the repertoire of possible movements and behaviors. We can consider, for instance, the difference between the bird's wing and a leg with respect to the shape and organization of the muscles. To be sure, the wing and the leg delimit different fields of possible movements. They both determine the movements which are possible or preferable, and the movements which are not possible. Thus, if a limb with a particular organization does not determine what the specific movements to be executed with the limb are, it functions selectively with respect to a field of movements, while it excludes other fields of movements (and of postures). Accordingly, we can distinguish, for instance, the fields of eye-movements, of manual movements, or the field of the movements of the ears, heart or lungs. Each of these particular fields and their combinations motivate specific kinds of behaviors, insofar as behaviors are forms of motor intentionality.

Secondly, however, the gross morphological organization of the body is not sufficient in order to account for the instinctive behaviors. Obviously, the spider is able to perform a greater range of movements than those that will be performed in the particular instinctive behavior. Thus, the question remains, how are these specific triggers and intentional movements (such as attacking) selected amongst all possible movements? Here, Keeping suggests that the coordinating activity of the nervous system is also required for the emergence of the intentional schemata that delimit the instinctive behaviors. He claims that the morphological organization of the body, together with the "coordinating activities of the nervous system", specify "a range of possible behaviors and a set of preferences within that range".[446] In other words, the bodily organization would constitute an environment or the horizon of meaningfulness, and a set of preferences within this environment. The body itself, as an organization, would act as constitutive of meaningfulness of a background field and also implicit intentional schemata for instinctive behaviors.

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444 Keeping 2006, 183.
445 SC, 11–2/13. Merleau-Ponty refers here to V.F. von Weizäcker's article "Reflexgesetze" (SC, 12n1/226).
446 Keeping 2006, 187.

The advance of Keeping's idea is that it accounts for the fact that the instincts are not inherent, but rather change as the structure of the body changes. Accordingly, it would explain why certain instinctive behaviors emerge spontaneously in a certain phase of development of the living being, and may require prior learning. Accordingly, Keeping claims that in order to explain instinctive behavior, no extra-bodily factors (such as innate, preformed schemas of behavior) are needed.

We might therefore interpret Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *a priori* of intentional schemata, not in terms of innateness but in terms of the structure of the body. Accordingly, when Merleau-Ponty uses the concepts of "naturality" and the "biological" as specific modes of existence, these notions refer to the embodied meaning, and to the instinctive intentionality. The study of instinctive behavior has resulted in two aspects of the instinct. On the one hand, the instinct relates to pre-given intentional schemata that emerge *spontaneously* from the body. On the other hand, the instinctive behavior refers to an intentionality that operates at a lower capacity level.

# 3 BIOLOGICAL EXISTENCE

> "Then the organism, in turn, confronts the physico-chemical analysis not with the actual difficulties of a complex object, but with the *in principle* difficulties of a meaningful being."[447]

The current task is to explicate Merleau-Ponty's claim according to which the primitive, uncontrollable behaviors in our (human) body, which are named in his contemporary scientific studies as *instincts* and *reflexes*, contribute to our understanding of a primitive kind of existence at the basis of our personal existence. Merleau-Ponty calls this primitive mode of being in the world of our body "biological existence".

But what does biological existence mean, and what is its function in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*? Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of biological existence in the chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception* called "The body as an object and mechanistic physiology".[448] In that chapter he deals with the question of how to convincingly account for the human being as a psychophysical being: what is the relation between the observed physiological processes of the body and the subject's experience? The chapter discusses the relations between the "psychical" and the "physiological"[449] by taking up three issues: *first* the parallel between the externally-observed configuration of the sensing body and that which is sensed by the subject in question, *second* the experience of a phantom arm, and *third* a person's relation to his or her organism as a relation of repression. All of these issues end up with the idea of *existence* as a common ground of the physical and the psychic.

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[447] PhP, 69/57.
[448] PhP, 87–105/75–91. Merleau-Ponty presents some further aspects of biological existence in the later chapters "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity" (PhP, 114–172/100–148), "The Body as a Sexed Being" (PhP, 180–202/156–178) and "The Body as Expression, and Speech" (PhP, 203–232/179–208).
[449] PhP, 100/87.

*First*, Merleau-Ponty mentions the parallel between the observed physiological configuration of the experiencing subject's body and the form of the experience. Having demonstrated earlier in *Phenomenology of Perception* that the empiricist sense-data theory of perception fails, Merleau-Ponty's point of departure is that all of our sense data are unified by figure-background configurations. This configuration is also found in the physiological organization of the sensing body, which refutes the mechanistic theory according to which the body receiving stimuli would be like a physical thing influenced by mechanical causality.[450] The physiological configuration parallels the perceived behavioral form of the body of an experiencing subject, and this perceived form of intentional behavior resembles the form that the subject in question is self-aware of in the experiencing.[451] Merleau-Ponty exemplifies the parallel between the perceived form of a bodily movement and the form of experience by referring to the experience of one's own body:

> "I only foresee what this form might be […] by turning back to the body I currently experience, for example, the way my hand moves around the object that it touches by anticipating the stimuli and by itself sketching out the form that I am about to perceive".[452]

In other words, I experience a specific connection between the movement of my touching hand as I see it and the particular tactile form of the external object that I touch with my hand (and that I directly experience). Accordingly, as I observe another person's touching hand, I cannot only observe an isomorphism between the physiological configuration of her body and the perceived structure of her intentional behavior of touching, I can also attest to a connection between the intentional movement of the other person's hand and their inner tactile experience (that I don't directly experience).

*Second*, in the chapter in question, Merleau-Ponty takes up the experience of a phantom limb[453] in order to demonstrate that the subject's experience is co-determined by the physiological conditions of their body (such as the link between sensory conductors and brain) and by psychic phenomena such as personal history, emotions or beliefs.

In conclusion, he argues that one needs to articulate the *common ground* of the physiological and the mental – a whole within which the physiological conditions and mental factors would be two interdependent component parts. As is well known, he terms this psycho-physical whole *existence* (or being in the world): he argues that the physiological conditions and the mental determinants have to be conceived as two aspects of existence.[454] Merleau-Ponty's argument is similar to an argument that Husserl presents in *Ideas II*, where he distinguishes between two attitudes: a "naturalist" and a "personalist" attitude. An aim of the distinc-

450 PhP, 87/75.
451 PhP, 89/77.
452 PhP, 90/78.
453 PhP, 90–3/78–80, /82–85.
454 PhP, 94–5/81.

tion is to make a fundamental difference between the orientations of natural sciences and human sciences. The "naturalist attitude" is an attitude that relates every object back to a totality of realities or real things, to a world of things. The "personalist" attitude instead takes the intentional accomplishments, the world as it is present for a subject who is intentionally related to the world, the world of experience, as ultimate. The foundational relation between the body and the person can be apprehended in two "radically different manners", depending on the attitude. In "naturalist" attitude the person appears as an annex of the body while, in the "personalist" attitude, the body appears as *expression* of a spiritual being.[455] The question of psycho-physical relations emerges in a specific sense in the naturalist attitude, in which the psychic and the physical are conceived as two distinct realms. Instead, from the standpoint of the personalist attitude, an intentional accomplishment is a whole that has both a bodily and a mental aspect, but it does not appear as composed of relations between two realities. According to Husserl, the personalist attitude has a primacy over the naturalist attitude, and the realms of the psychic and the physical-bodily, including their specific kind of conditional relations, can only be constituted on the basis of their primal unity in intentional accomplishments.

In short, Merleau-Ponty's notion of existence is equivalent to Husserl's idea of the relation between the subject and its surrounding world, as it is conceived within a "personalist" attitude. However, it must be pointed out that the transition from the naturalist to personalist attitude is not a transition to a domain of the person, that is, the field of experience constituted by the activity and taking position of the ego. The relations of the Ego and its surrounding world covers many levels, some of which occur passively, before any egoic activity. Accordingly, the instinctive experiences are not excluded from the domain of the personalist attitude. Merleau-Ponty also thinks that there are strata of forms of existence, which means that the body is a temporally or developmentally ordered complex of overlapping configurations, from the primitive bodily functions such as breathing to the configurations of the body involved in higher-level activities such as drawing, playing an instrument, discussing, writing or mathematical thinking.

In other words, Merleau-Ponty thinks that the existence as a whole consists of different levels or modifications that overlap. In particular, in the chapter in question, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes two levels, biological and personal existence, and accounts for their relation. He introduces the idea of existence with the example of the instinctual behavior of an insect,[456] thus suggesting that existence is a concept that also applies to animal behavior: there are forms of animal existence.[457] The insect's act of substitution of a removed leg with a healthy leg is an

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[455] Hua4 (IdII), 204/214.

[456] We have already provided a more detailed analysis of the instinctive behavior, taking guidance of Keeping's view on Merleau-Ponty's conception of the instinct. See subchapter 2.3.

[457] PhP, 92–3/80. Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of existence or being-in-the-world in *The Structure of Behavior*, 136/125–6. There he writes initially of animal behavior: "Les gestes du comportement, les intentions qu'il trace dans l'espace autour de l'animal ne visent

example of animal existence. It is a question of a behavior uncontrolled by the insect and typical with respect to the insect's bodily organization. However, it does not count as a mechanical movement. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty suggests that, insofar as the insect's behavior shows up (for the perceiver) as an intentional movement, this implies that the insect "has a world", even if the kind of behavior indicates that the insect is intentionally related to the world (or if not the world given in its proper sense, the milieu as the immediate surrounding environment)[458] in a not properly perceptual manner.[459] Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty writes that the insect in its instinctive behavior is motivated or "called" to act, it "lives" the situation that has a practical signification for it, and the situation involves a "bodily recognition" and a "tracing out" of a structure. Merleau-Ponty claims that the insect's instinctual existence involves some kind of primitive experience. This primitive instinctual experience of the insect – the instinctive givenness of the environment and the "object" of the act, and even the self-awareness of the subject of instinct – is mediately indicated by the observed behavior.

After introducing the instinct as a mode of animal existence, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the reflex movements observed in the human body are other primitive forms of existence. As he writes: "[i]n fact, reflexes themselves are never blind processes: they adjust to the 'sense' of the situation, they express our orientation toward a 'behavioral milieu' [...]".[460] Furthermore, he claims that reflex and perception are two modalities of existence of our body.[461] In short, he claims that there are primitive forms of existence at the ground of our perceptual and personal bodily life which resemble the instinctual behavior observed in animals.

After having discussed phantom limb and introduced reflex-behaviors as indicative of a primitive modality of existence, Merleau-Ponty ends the chapter by accounting for the relation between the two modes of existence, namely the biological and personal existence.[462] He argues that the relation is complex in that it has two aspects. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty characterizes the relation between the personal and biological existence in terms of sublimation and repression and in terms of a temporal relation to an original past. Later, in *Phenomenology of Perception,* he also writes of the relation between biological and personal existence as a relation between two rhythms.[463] As he writes:

> "The […] sublimation of biological into personal existence [...] is made both possible and precarious by the temporal structure of our experience. Through its horizon of the immediate past and the near future, each present grasps, little by little, the totality of possible time; it thereby overcomes the dispersion of moments, it is in a position to give our past itself its definite sense and to reintegrate into personal existence even *this*

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pas le monde vrai or l'être pur, mais l'être-pour-l'animal, c'est à dire un certain milieu caractéristique de l'espèce […] une certain manière de traiter le monde, d'être-au-monde' ou 'd'exister'."

458 Merleau-Ponty operates with the distinction between milieu (*Umwelt*) and the human world (*Welt*). PhP, 102/89.

459 PhP, 92–3/80.

460 PhP, 94/81.

461 PhP, 94–5/81.

462 PhP, 98–105/85–91.

463 PhP, 186/162.

> *past of all pasts* that the *organic stereotypes lead us to notice* at the origin of our volitional being."[464]

In the context of the chapter in question, it is obvious that the "organic stereotypes" and "reflex-movements" both refer to the same biological modality of existence, which is a deep stratum of existence underlying personal existence.

My focus in the chapter in question is focused on this level or modality that Merleau-Ponty calls biological existence (and also as organic life or the organism). What is Merleau-Ponty's characterization of biological existence? In short, I will show that, according to Merleau-Ponty, both instincts and reflexes belong to the level of biological existence.[465] I will then explore four essential features – *autonomy*, *generality*, *cyclicality* and *blindness* – by which Merleau-Ponty characterizes the instinctual level of the existence of our body. Finally, I will explore Merleau-Ponty's account of the relation between biological and personal existence.

## 3.1 Reflexes as Organic Stereotypes

> "[O]ur reflexes express a species *a priori*. These stereotypes are not for that matter a destiny […] clothing, jewelry, and love transform the biological needs from which they are born […] The organism and its monotonous dialectics are thus not foreign to history […]."[466]

In the chapter "The body as an object and mechanistic physiology" Merleau-Ponty presents an interpretation of reflexes, according to which reflex-behaviors should be understood not as autonomous mechanisms but as primitive forms of intentionality – that is, they involve sense and they exhibit a meaningful relation to the world.[467] Reflexes exhibit a "biological" mode of existence, being in the world.

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[464] PhP, 100/87.

[465] Accordingly, when he describes primitive behaviors of humans, Merleau-Ponty does differentiate between reflexes and instincts. Nevertheless, it is clear that reflex-behaviors differ from the so-called instinctive behaviors of insects, such as spiders' web-building behavior. Varela, for instance, emphasizes the difference between reflexes and instincts. According to him, instincts differ from reflexes insofar as they are rigid and more complex. Merleau-Ponty's example of the insect's leg-substituting behavior would count in Varela's terms as reflexive, not instinctive behavior. See Varela 2003.

[466] PhP, 103–4/90. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty does not develop further the idea that reflexes are species specific. In the chapter "Freedom" Merleau-Ponty mentions that "I am not surprised to find them [the intentions related to the body as a system of perception] in all psycho-physical subjects who have a similar organization to my own" (PhP, 502/465). However, the idea of features common to bodies similar to mine, which might constitute a pre-scientific sense of "species", is not significant here.

[467] When Merleau-Ponty writes of reflexes in *Phenomenology of Perception*, he refers to two different things. On the one hand, he develops his own interpretation of the reflex-behaviors, according to which reflexes are intentional and involve sense (PhPr, 94/81, 100/87, 102/89, 104/90, 517/479). On the other, he criticizes the "classical notion" of the reflex as an autonomous sub-conscious mechanism. (PhP, 95/81–2, 142/124, 144/126, 168/145, 170/146, 180–3/156–9, 206/182, 250/224).

What is Merleau-Ponty's conception of reflex-behaviors? What are the distinctive characteristics of reflexes? What makes reflexes intentional, and what does it mean that they express an *a priori,* as Merleau-Ponty writes in the above passage?

In the following, I will prepare for an analysis of Merleau-Ponty's conception of reflexes by taking up Paul Ricoeur's and Kurt Goldstein's theories of the reflex. Paul Ricoeur's theory is useful because it provides a lucid classification of reflex-behaviors and thus introduces us to the subject. Goldstein's holistic interpretation of reflexes, which he presents in the book *The Organism,* influenced Merleau-Ponty's conception. Firstly, Goldstein stresses the idea that, in spite of the apparent autonomy of reflex-movements from the other parts of the body, reflexes should be understood as involving the whole body. They are bodily behaviors in which the movement of a specific part of the body is so clearly distinguished from other parts of the body that one does not immediately see how the whole body is involved in the occurrence of the movement. Second, reflex-behaviors are either forms of what he calls "catastrophic behavior" or primitive performances, as they are intentionally related to the environment.

If reflexes are primitive forms of intentionality, and if they "adjust to the sense of the situation",[468] as Merleau-Ponty characterizes them, then they are nothing other than instinctive behaviors.

### 3.1.1 Ricoeur's Classification of Reflexes as Incoercible Movements

Reflexes are particular kinds of movements observed in the body.[469] A movement typical to reflex is such that a specific part of the body appears as sharply distinguished from the other parts of the body, and the movement appears as disconnected from the movement of the organism as a whole. A reflex does not show up as an intentional movement. It seems to lack the agent, the aim or a relation of a subject to the environment. Instead, the immediate impression is that the reflex is a mechanical kind of movement. Reflexes look like the mechanical movements we attest amongst physical things. They seem to involve a typical, constant relation between the thing causing or triggering the movement and the moving thing. A ball hits another ball, and launches its movement. In a similar manner, a patella reflex is triggered by a clearly distinguishable thing, such as a hammer. The hammer hits a specific part of a leg, and this sets off a movement. It is as if the reflexes would be non-intentional mechanisms within the living body.

In the next subchapter I will deal with Kurt Goldstein's critique of the interpretation of the reflex as a mechanism, and his explication for the reason that reflexes look like mechanisms. Before that, I will present Paul Ricoeur's classification of reflexes. Ricoeur endorses Goldstein's critique, and likewise he believes that reflexes are intentional behaviors, not mechanisms. However, he sees re-

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[468] PhP, 94/81.

[469] Goldstein 1995, 136. Goldstein writes: "As we have seen, reflexes are not abstractions. […] The reflexes are certainly processes of a certain kind, but since they take place within the organism, we are justified in asking what meaning they have, if any, for the organism."

flexes as uncontrollable and stable patterns of behavior. Ricoeur gives three descriptive criteria for reflex-behaviors. Reflexes are 1. "relatively stereotyped", 2. "easily isolable" and 3. "always incoercible".[470] It is remarkable that Ricoeur distinguishes "reflexes" from what he calls "preformed skills". The most important distinguishing feature is that reflexes are *incoercible*. Reflexes are bodily movements, and they are classified according to different functions in the body. However, these movements are not shaped by effort, control, will or learning.

Ricoeur classifies different kinds of reflex-movements with regard to their "function" in the body. On the one hand, there are reflexes of protection and defense, and on the other, there are reflexes of appropriation, accommodation and exploration.[471]

Reflexes that protect the body are, for instance, movements that are required for the unimpeded functioning of sense organs: blinking of eyelids, flowing of tears, sneezing and nasal excretion.[472] Here we can add a reflex-behavior that Merleau-Ponty mentions in *Phenomenology of Perception*, namely the "knitting of eyebrows" that protects the eyes from the sunlight.[473] There are also reflexes of expulsion related to protection of digestion and breathing: cough and vomiting. Finally, there are reflexes as reactions to pain: exhaustion, shock and aggression. Ricoeur distinguishes these reactions from the movements that anticipate pain (and danger), such as raising hands to protect oneself from a projectile. Ricoeur argues that the latter movements have to be classified as "preformed skills", insofar as they bear a relation to the surrounding environment, and insofar as they are potentially controllable and plastic.[474] Instead, the former movements are "quasi-mechanical". Shedding tears, for example, has an unchanging, stable behavioral pattern that cannot easily be controlled or shaped. Similarly, Ricoeur claims that pain reflexes are "localized and relatively adapted movements".[475] A reaction of shock after a sudden pain always "upsets the will", so that the very behavioral form of the reaction does not become subject to elaboration and control.[476]

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470 Ricoeur 1966, 234.

471 Ricoeur 1966, 234. Ricoeur's distinction corresponds to Goldstein's distinction between proprioceptive and exteroceptive reflexes. (Goldstein 1995, 137, 142). Goldstein claims that the "exteroceptive reflexes", ultimately, are not reflexes but performances: "Through them the organism does something that is important for it as a whole, which aids its coming to terms with the environment. The exteroceptive reflexes are not embedded in performances, they are performances themselves". Goldstein 1995, 142.

472 Ricoeur 1966, 234.

473 PhP, 226/200. Merleau-Ponty aims to show that initially stereotyped bodily movements such as "knitting of eyebrows" become expressive of cultural and spiritual significances, such as the "act of meditation".

474 Other examples are extending hands before falling, protecting the abdomen and the pit of the stomach, pushing away, hitting. Ricoeur mentions here also the impulses of fear: fleeing, waiting, hiding, attacking. These are potentially controllable movements: "We learn to elaborate them, to correct them, and even to reverse them in feints" (Ricoeur 1966, 237–8).

475 Ricoeur 1966, 234.

476 One of the examples presented by Merleau-Ponty comes close to a reflex-kind of reaction to pain. He writes of a spontaneous reaching with the hand at the point at which a mosquito is biting (PhP, 120/106).

The second group of reflexes that Ricoeur distinguishes are the reflexes of "appropriation, accommodation, and exploration". The reflexes of appropriation are for example the "sucking-reflex" of the newborn infant, salivation and mastication. Of the reflexes of exploration, Ricoeur mentions a specific group of eye-movements: "blinking my eyes at the sudden approach of an object or under the effect of a strong, sudden light", "following an object which remains within my field of vision with my eyes" or "focusing my eyes on a near object".[477] We could add here the convergence of the eyes "destined to permit clear vision" that Merleau-Ponty mentions, and which has a central role in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of vision.[478] By the reflex-movements of accommodation, Ricoeur means movements such as the preparatory positioning of the body in order to be oriented within a situation, and in order to be able to receive sensory data.[479]

The "exploratory" reflexes, Ricoeur notices, cannot be clearly distinguished from "preformed skills", insofar as the movements of the eyes, for instance, are to a large extent controlled by us and related to our doings. Nevertheless, he claims that it is possible to distinguish between stereotyped, unchanging movements of the eyes and controllable eye-movements. Accordingly, the preparatory movements of attention are "partially incoercible". One of the preparatory functions of reflex-movements is an adjustment of the body for the skillful movement.[480] Ricoeur mentions that these reflex-movements are in the most part not in conflict with skilled movements.[481] The reflex-movements of accommodation and exploration become components of the skills of observation and exploration.

Thus, Ricoeur suggests that reflex-behaviors are distinct from "preformed skills". The initial bodily movements of locomotion, grasping and manipulation are preformed skills, because the shape or the pattern of these movements is adjusted to the relational, perceptual, affective and needful life. These movements are also subordinated to training, and to a formation of new skills. As Ricoeur writes, preformed skills provide "motive themes" of "indefinitely transposable variations and increasingly more complex compositions".[482]

Reflex-movements, instead, appear as having a constant, rigid or stereotyped form. This is why they seem to be isolated, both temporally and spatially, from the whole of the living body. Reflexes are relatively independent with regard to the changing and developing skills. Hence, the first appearance of the stereotyped movements gives the observer a "promise" of a mechanical explanation of the living body: the promise is that in these non-intentional movements we might have evidence of mechanisms underlying intentional behavior.

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477 Ricoeur 1966, 239.
478 PhP, 226/200.
479 Ricoeur 1966, 239.
480 Ricoeur 1966, 240.
481 To be sure, here a tension between control and stereotyped movements is possible. Consider, for instance, trying not to blink one's eyes.
482 Ricoeur 1966, 241.

### 3.1.2 Kurt Goldstein's Interpretation of Reflexes

Goldstein's aim is to show that reflex-movements are only seemingly non-intentional. A closer scrutiny demonstrates that the so-called reflexes must be understood as modifications of what Goldstein calls *performances*: "in the reflex […] we are dealing with a special type of coming to terms of organism and environment – a performance of the whole organism in a peculiar configuration".[483]

Goldstein calls observable intentional behaviors "performances". Goldstein defines the term "performance" in the following way:

> "we call performance of an organism any kind of behavior, activity, or operation as a whole or in part that expresses itself overtly and bears reference to the environment".[484]

For instance, physiological processes are not performances because they are non-intentional events and processes that occur within the body. They don't disclose any behavior. Performances are intentional accomplishments or actions that are related outward or outside of theirselves to the external environment. Examples of performances are walking, grasping, or looking at an object. According to Goldstein, the accomplishments of protecting oneself and escaping (which is a reaction of turning-away from an endangering situation) are also performances. The performance of flight is an accomplishment that bears a relation to that which one needs to avoid.[485] In general, Goldstein specifies performances as a coming to terms of the organism with the environmental stimuli through a behavioral accomplishment.

Goldstein distinguishes two classes of reflex-movements. There are either proprioceptive (Eigenreflex) or exteroceptive reflexes (Fremdreflex).[486] Both of these are related to performances. The main idea is that reflex-movements, if they are scrutinized, are subject to variation, and this variability can only be accounted for by taking into account the situation of the performing organism as a whole, which the reflex-movements are part of.

*First,* proprioceptive reflexes refer back to performances, insofar as their "aim" is the *return* of an equilibrium or a balance required by the performances.[487]

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[483] Goldstein 1995, 133.
[484] Goldstein 1995, 42.
[485] According to Goldstein's account, flight is related to the feeling of anxiety. Anxiety is a relation of the subject to a circumscribed area of "inadequacy", that is, of that which the subject is not able to conceive as an object. Anxiety is an affective relation to something like an imminent "catastrophe", something that would establish a disordered state of aloofness. From this arises a need to turn away.
[486] Cf. SC, 46/44. Merleau-Ponty characterizes the proprioceptive reflex as a self-regulative reaction of an organ.
[487] Goldstein also distinguishes "functional significance" from "survival importance". He writes: "In the normal organism, the two usually go hand in hand inasmuch as here preservation also means preservation of the intrinsic nature so far as it is possible. In the pathologically changed organism, the preservation of existing potentialities, the survival importance, comes to the fore." (Goldstein 1995, 47–8)

Reflex-phenomena are related to a balancing of the body's relation to the environment, and therefore Goldstein calls reflexes "equalization-phenomena".[488] These reflexes occur in situations in which the equilibrium of the organism is shaken, and their aim is to retrieve the balanced state. However, the balanced state refers back to the organism's task at the moment when the disturbance occurred. One needs to understand the preferred behavior of the organism in order to explicate the balanced situation the reflexes return to. The disequilibrium is an anomalous state that disturbs that which the organism was aiming for. The determining factor is the "nature" or the normal state of the organism. The understanding of proprioceptive reflexes is dependent on the preceding normal state.[489]

*Second*, Goldstein claims that the exteroceptive reflexes, which correspond to Ricoeur's exploratory reflexes (exploratory movements of the eyes, adjustment to the environment), are not really reflexes but performances, insofar as they are determined by an intent.

As we already pointed out above, Goldstein claims that reflexes are not abstractions.[490] Reflex movement appears isolated from the remaining body: blinking of the eyelids seems to occur automatically and independently of the workings of the other parts of the body. However, he suggests that the configuration of the whole body, of which reflex is a part, must be taken into account. Reflex entails a particular figure-ground relationship of the whole body.[491] Reflex-movement is a "figure" in a reaction pattern of the whole organism: "The 'reflex' is the figure, while that which occurs in the rest of the organism is the background. The background is significant, insofar as "any change in the remaining organism at once modifies the reflex, the figure".[492]

There are four factors that determine the reflex-reaction: the external milieu, the internal milieu (of the body), potential reactivity (of the particular bodily field), and the quality of the stimulus (weak, strong, nociform, etc.).[493]

The internal milieu is the total condition of the organism. What motivates the change in the internal milieu of the organism, in that it establishes an isolated movement? The isolation is effected either by the artificial (experimental) elimination of the reaction of the rest of the organism, or by a pathological segregation (such as in the case of a brain lesion).[494]

The external milieu is the environmental constellation that determines the demands on the organism and specifies its task. The environmental conditions give rise to reflex-movements if the external milieu is sufficiently abnormal. Reflex-movements emerge in "border situations". Border situations are characterized by an abnormal temporal isolation of a particular event (from the temporal continuity) or an abnormal spatial isolation of a stimulus. *First*, there are sudden

488 Goldstein 1995, 138.
489 With this respect Goldstein's analysis is reminiscent of Husserl's account of the relation between orthoaesthetic and abnormal experience. See Hua4 (IdII), §18 b & c, 58–75/63–80.
490 Goldstein 1995, 136.
491 Goldstein 1995, 134.
492 Goldstein 1995, 134.
493 Goldstein 1995, 133–4.
494 Goldstein 1995, 134–5.

changes and anomalous events the organism is not prepared for. Reflex-movement, then, is a reaction to this sudden change. *Second*, there are artificially modified environmental conditions which prevent the subject from relating to the milieu adequate to the normal performances. Reflex-movements emerge when there are sudden, intense or excessive environmental stimuli.[495] According to one example, when one walks over a newly plowed field in the dark, it is likely that "reflex-movements" occur, insofar as the field of perception is reduced (darkness), and the ground is full of inadequate, random shapes.

In general, reflexes emerge in *anomalous* situations, that is, in situations that the organism cannot adequately deal with. Reflexes are enacted in situations that the organism cannot handle, because they occur too suddenly, or because a part of the body or the environment is abnormally isolated, in that the organism cannot adequately respond to it. Accordingly, Goldstein claims that reflex-movements are forms of *catastrophic behavior*, the aim of which is the *restoration* of the normal, mean level of functioning of the body.

According to Goldstein, only if one distinguishes these four factors, one is able to account for the variability of the reflexes. For instance, in the Babinski phenomenon a normal reflex-like "grasping" movement of the toes is turned into a movement of withdrawal of the leg. The Babinski phenomenon occurs in patients with brain lesions. According to Goldstein, the lesion in brain cortex makes the organism incapable of voluntary action, in that there are no adequate voluntary performances for the organism. Accordingly, the normal [concordant] environmental situations that demand voluntary reactions become dangerous and sources of anxiety for the subject. As he writes, "the organism reacts to them with protective automatic defense or flight reactions."[496] Thus, the stimulation of the sole does not motivate a "grasping" reflex – "a rudiment of a voluntary grasping" – but a movement of withdrawal.[497]

Goldstein accounts for the different movements of the sole as "rudimentary grasping" and as a "flight-reaction". The flight-reaction is a protection of oneself from the imminence of an uncontrollable or dangerous situation. Both grasping and flight are tasks, forms that can be actualized by varying behavioral patterns. If the stimulated body is in a different position (changed posture of the leg, changed ventral position, changed position of the head), a different movement adequate to flight or grasping is motivated. Goldstein's conclusion is the following: "The normal plantar reflex and the Babinski phenomenon thus represent different forms of the organism's coming to terms with a stimulus […] under different conditions of the whole organism."[498]

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[495] Goldstein 1995, 140, 143.
[496] Goldstein 1995, 119.
[497] In the same passage, Goldstein interestingly notices a difference between human and animal reactions: "In human beings the withdrawal may represent itself only in a rudimentary form, namely, in an isolated dorsal movement of the big toe, while in animals a withdrawal of the whole leg, even the whole body, occurs […] animals react with a greater part of the body; human beings, only with an isolated movement." Goldstein 1995, 119. See also Merleau-Ponty, SC 16/17–8.
[498] Goldstein 1995, 119.

Thus, according to Goldstein, stable behavioral patterns have a marginal role within the total life of the organism. The normal [concordant] behavior of the organism does not revert to stable patterns, but is incessantly adapted to the changes of the environment. Goldstein claims that the normal life of the organism consists of an incessant tension between the milieu adequate to the organism's performances and the surrounding world that is not adequate (or familiar).[499] Thus, normal life is a continuous process of a "creative" adaptation or adjustment to a new and unfamiliar milieu. Within this process the patterns of behavior also change incessantly.[500]

However, the human adaptive capacity has its limits: the environment must not differ too radically. Reflex-movements are "phenomena of equilibrium" that emerge in abnormal environmental conditions. A reflex-movement is *only pertinent* with regard to an *excessive* or *inadequate* situation. Thus, reflexes can be explained as modifications of performances – but normal behavior cannot be explicated as a modification of reflexes.

## 3.2 Merleau-Ponty's Conception of the Reflexes as Instincts

Merleau-Ponty follows Goldstein's account of reflexes.[501] According to Merleau-Ponty, reflexes are not mechanical movements, but particular kinds of intentionality or parts of intentional accomplishments. Goldstein argues that reflexes are variable according to the situation, which shows that they are intentional and not mechanical – they are accomplishments of aims with differing means depending on the situation. Moreover, the primitive performances, even if they are more or less centered to a specific part of the body, involve the adjustment of all the other parts of the body. Conversely, the configuration of the body affects the manner in which the performance in question is to be effectuated. In short, reflexes resemble the primitive instinctive behavior. Or, as Merleau-Ponty contends in *The Structure of Behavior*:

> "Since our least conscious reactions are never isolable within the whole of nervous activity, since they seem guide in each case by the internal and external situation itself and capable, up to a certain point, of adapting themselves to that which is particular

[499] Goldstein 1995, 105–6. Goldstein writes: "For each organism, not everything that occurs in the outer world belongs to its milieu. The only events that normally prove themselves as stimuli are those with which the organism can come to terms in a manner such that its existence […] is not essentially disturbed. […] Events in the outer world that do not permit this do not become effective in the normal organism, except when they are of abnormal intensity. In this case they do not lead to actual performances but to the phenomenon of shock of the whole organism, which endangers its continuity as a system and that I have therefore called catastrophic reaction."

[500] Canguilhem was influenced by Goldstein's idea of health (see Canguilhem 1966, 116–7). On Goldstein's influence on Canguilhem, see Wolfe 2015, 199–202.

[501] This is clearly seen in SC, 40–1/39–40. In the first chapter of *The Structure of Behavior*, "Reflex-behavior", Merleau-Ponty provides a detailed argumentation for a holistic interpretation of reflexes, even if they are interpreted from a physiological point of view. SC, 1–54/3–51.

> to it, it is no longer possible to maintain sharp distinction between 'reflex' activities and 'instinctive' or 'intelligent' activities which the classical conceptions established theoretically. An opposition cannot be set up between a blind automatism and an intentional activity whose relations with the former would moreover remain obscure."[502]

His analysis of biological existence ignores the question of catastrophic flight-reactions.[503] Instead, by the reflexes he means exteroceptive reflexes. The reflexes are "reactions that resolve a problem posed by the milieu", and they are "true actions" that do not aim at restoring a disturbed balance.[504] Accordingly we can say that, insofar as Merleau-Ponty writes of reflexes in the chapter "The Body and Mechanistic Physiology", he means instinctive intentional behaviors. Thus, instincts provide the observable aspect of *biological existence*.

What then is Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the instinct and accordingly of the biological mode of existence? First of all, it is a question of a primitive form of intentionality or of *existence*, being in the world. This means that the instincts in their intentional structure involve both a primitive subject or a self and a world or surrounding environment (milieu), towards which the instinctive subject tends. In other words, one can ask, *who* or *what* is the subject of instinct, and *what kind of world* does the instinct relate to? I will return to these questions concerning the self and the world of biological existence below. However, before that I will explore three main, interrelated features that, according to Merleau-Ponty, are characteristics of biological existence, and which could be named *autonomy*, *generality* and *cyclicality*. Each of these qualities need to be explicated. Finally, one must also provide an explication for what it means that biological existence is a *primitive* or *first* mode of existence.

### 3.2.1 Autonomy

In *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty does not provide a systematic account of biological existence. Instead, his characterizations of the primitive mode of existence are scattered, and they can mostly be found in the first part of the book ("The Body") and in the chapter "Sensing".[505] However, Merleau-Ponty presents his views on the reflex and instinct in the chapter "The body as an Object and Mechanistic Physiology".[506] The three features of *autonomy*, *generality* and *cyclicality* are presented in that chapter.

*First*, by autonomy Merleau-Ponty means that the instinctive behaviors are uncontrollable or incoercible: they operate regardless of one's will, agency or control. In this regard, they could also be said to belong to the dimension of original

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[502] SC, 44/43.
[503] Merleau-Ponty discusses the proprioceptive reflexes in the first chapter of *The Structure of Behavior* (SC, 46/44–5). Following Goldstein, Merleau-Ponty contends that the proprioceptive reflex is a limit-reaction of the organism in which the organism aims at neutralizing a dangerous, anomalous stimulation. Anomalous stimulus corresponds with an anomalous reaction – it is a question of a pathological behavior, in which the subject is not able to adequately respond to the situation.
[504] SC, 46/44–5.
[505] PhP, 81–232/69–208; 240–280/214–289.
[506] PhP, 87–105/75–91.

passivity.[507] As Merleau-Ponty writes about gaze, which is here meant to be an example of biological existence:

> "When I am overcome with grief and wholly absorbed in my sorrow, my gaze already wanders out before me, it quietly takes interest in some bright object, it resumes its *autonomous* existence."[508]

In other words, the gaze – which is also the opening example of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the reflex in *The Structure of Behavior*[509] – is an accomplishment of focusing on a "bright object" that occurs in spite of my will, that is, whether or not I will it. The movement of the gaze also occurs in spite of my interests, that is, whether or not I care for it. Even if in one's wakeful life the gaze is subject to control (I can look left if I want to) and regulated by one's interests, commitments and tasks, at a primitive level the gaze is an instinctual movement of my body that cannot be controlled.

Merleau-Ponty also expresses the autonomy by writing that the incontrollable existence "streams forth" or "flows" through me without my "complicity" or my "authorship".[510] Likewise, I cannot decide on whether or not I will sense something,[511] and I am not the agent of falling asleep.[512] However, we carry on breathing at the moment of dropping off.[513] Instead of being active agents, we are passive recipients of the instinctual movements of our body – they just happen to us. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty calls the kinds of autonomous existence "anonymous forces" or "powers".[514] Our willful and controlled position-takings, acts and commitments constitute ourselves as individual persons – our personal character is constituted in them. Instead, Merleau-Ponty thinks that the anonymous powers do not in themselves specify us as individual persons.[515]

To be sure, Merleau-Ponty does not claim that biological existence would be the only kind of anonymous power. For example, acquired social behaviors or one's acquired habitual behaviors can also appear in one's life as autonomous, impersonal "agents" that are operative regardless of one's decisions or control.[516] Thus, the anonymous power of biological existence has to be distinguished from the cultural and social, insofar as it is an autonomous existence of the body. As we have seen, reflexes and instincts are such behaviors that do not have their

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[507] As we have mentioned, in *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty associates the question concerning our "natural body" (distinguished from "cultural body") and Husserl's analysis of "originary passivity" (SC, 227n1/249). See page 72, footnote 278 in this work.
[508] PhP, 99/86.
[509] SC, 5/3.
[510] PhP, 193/168, 250/224.
[511] PhP, 250/224, 503/465–6.
[512] PhP, 191/167.
[513] PhP, 245/219. Merleau-Ponty writes: "I breathe slowly and deeply to call forth sleep, and suddenly, one might say, my mouth communicates with some immense external lung that calls my breath forth and forces it back."
[514] PhP 190/166, 249–50/223–4.
[515] To be sure, there might be a manner of breathing specific to the particular body or the particular organism.
[516] PhP, 191/167. See also PhP, 103/90, 160/139, 400/363, 411/374, 418–9/382.

origin in the "cultural world" one has grown into, or habits one acquires during one's life, but in the organization of one's body.[517]

In addition to passivity, autonomy means that the kinds of biological existence are initially regulated by nothing other than the bodily disposition or bodily "*a priori*".[518] For instance, insofar as breathing or gaze are kinds of biological existence, they have an original intentional structure that is determined by the structure of the body. The physiological parallel to the instinct is a pre-established sensory-motor circuit – a connection of the nervous system between the receptor and effector via the afferent and efferent conductors and the reflex-center – which is organized according to the particular, *pre-established* form of behavior. For example, Merlau-Ponty writes that "one sensorimotor circuit is a relatively autonomous current of existence within our total being in the world".[519]

### 3.2.2 Generality

*Second*, according to Merleau-Ponty it is characteristic of instinctive intentionality that a "generality" is emphasized in it. This means that, in the instinct, a pre-given intentional schema overrides the accomplishment. The subject of the instinct is imprisoned in the pre-given general form, and it accomplishes it blindly. This stands in contrast to the acquisition of habits and new skills, which are processes of particularization of this general form. Accordingly, as we will see, the retentional process of the receding of an accomplishment into the past is a process of "generalization", in which the accomplishment is emptied of its intuitive content. If an intentional schema emerges spontaneously from the structure of the body, there is also reason to think that, in its initial state, this schema is empty of experiential content.[520]

Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "Insofar as I have hands, feet, a body, and a world, I sustain intentions around myself that are not decided upon and that affect my surroundings in ways I do not choose. These intentions are general in a double sense, first in the sense that they constitute a system in which all possible objects are enclosed: if the mountain seems large and vertical, then the tree appears small and diagonal; and second in the sense that these intentions do not belong to me, they come from farther away than myself and I am not surprised to find them in all psycho-physical subjects who have a similar organization to my own."[521]

We have already dealt with this aspect of the instinctive behavior in the last chapter. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is the specific capacity-level of the instinct that imprisons it to its pregiven intentional schema. Accordingly, if the instinct is imprisoned to the schema, it appears as fixed, literal and stereotypical – that is, relatively unresponsive to changes in the environment. As Merleau-Ponty puts

[517] Another question is, of course: to what extent a "cultural world" is inscribed in the very morphological organization of the body.
[518] PhP, 93/80, 104/90, 198/173–4. See also SC, 133–4/122–3.
[519] PhP, 102/89.
[520] Below, in Chapter 7, I will show that there is a mode of consciousness that corresponds to the generality, which is the experience of an atmosphere.
[521] PhP, 502/465.

it, instinctual behavior is imprisoned to specific kinds of configurations of the environment. The adequate configuration, the "natural situation", is "prescribed" for the instinct. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty exemplifies this by the "absurd errors" and the "incapacity to learn" that is characteristic of instinctual behavior. For instance, the instinctual animal attempts to catch "the prey" only if its appearance fulfills the prescribed configuration of the sign-stimulus of a valid "prey", regardless of whether or not it has been previously revealed as inedible. Merleau-Ponty remarks that the instinctive behavior does not react to the features of the actual situation, but to the "literal" characteristics of the pre-given complex of stimuli.

The instinct is at the mercy of the appearance of the fitting characteristics of the environment to which it is adapted. Thus, the instinctual behavior, in order to function adequately, must have a consistent surrounding environment. Merleau-Ponty claims that this holds also for the primitive biological existence at the ground of our personal existence. As embodied, we are inhabitants of a "physical world" that is a world of "consistent 'stimuli'" and "typical situations".[522] Or, as he writes:

> "my life is made up of rhythms that […] have their *condition* in the banal milieu that surrounds me."[523]

Here I understand the "banality" of the milieu as environmental configurations that are structurally adequate for the primitive instinctive life of our body. Roughly speaking, this means that the surrounding environment must, in its structure, contain the sign-stimuli for the instinctive behaviors of breathing or gaze – that is, the environment must be "breathable", "viewable" and also "perceivable". I think that when Merleau-Ponty writes of a "primary pact" between the body and the world, he is thinking about the structural adaptedness of the body to its surrounding environment.[524] The primary pact corresponds to an instinctive, already-established configuration, in which the sign-stimulus that will count as a "problem to be solved" or "a tension" for the body is pre-given and fixed.

Merleau-Ponty compares the stereotyped instinctual behavior to habits and social roles. Namely, both habits and social roles can become "generalized"[525] or "congealed"[526] and emptied of the engagement of the individual person in the actual situation, in which case one merely follows an "already scripted role", even if it would not fit into the demands of the situation.[527] Thus he can draw a

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[522] PhP, 99/86.
[523] PhP, 99/86.
[524] PhP, 193/168. Merleau-Ponty also suggests that there is a pact "between X and the world in general", which is "more ancient" than the first act of perception. PhP, 293/265.
[525] PhP, 160/139.
[526] See, for example, PhP, 228–9/202.
[527] PhPr, 100/87, 103–4/90. In addition, Merleau-Ponty thinks that the body makes it possible for the personal existence to lose itself in a specific general form of existence – in which case one does not merely play the social role but becomes immersed into it, losing one's freedom: "[…] my body is indeed the possibility for my existence to resign from itself, to

comparison between the "*a priori* of a threatened prince" and a "species *a priori*".[528] I will return to this issue below, as I take up the theme of repression. However, the instincts are originally stereotypical or banal: they do not seem to involve any subject that responds to the demands of the actual situation, and therefore they do not imply the subject as a person in any manner. The subject of instinct is not specified as an individual person or even as an individual, but instead as the subject of the adapted or pre-established body.[529]

Here we have to make two remarks. *First*, the instinctual behavior is not mechanical but involves improvisation and plasticity within its narrow framework. It is, in spite of the narrowness, a question of a "problem" – a "poorly formulated problem", as Merleau-Ponty writes – set to the self of the instinct. Even if it is stereotyped and monotonous, it is a question of a "monotonous kinetic melody".[530] *Second*, the instinct does not necessarily involve any notion of "a prescribed form of behavior" or a "preformed task". Instead, the instinct is imprisoned because it is a primitive, or in Merleau-Ponty's terms, a non-integrated form of behavior. Thus, it can be at the same time a question *both* of a self-actualization of the organism according to its inner norm, a movement of life towards the world which constitutes it as an individual living being – *and* existence whose behavior is narrowed down as it exists toward a limited world.

### 3.2.3 Cyclicality

Finally, the third characterization of biological existence is *cyclicality*.[531] This is a feature of the instincts that is closely related to the two other features of autonomy and generality. Namely, with the idea of cyclicality, Merleau-Ponty refers to the observation that, insofar as instincts are stereotyped (or "literal") and incontrollable, they do not develop or change but merely repeat or recur. Besides, the cyclicity can be associated to the periodicity of the instincts.[532] Thus, Merleau-Ponty writes, distinguishing the temporality of biological existence from the properly historical temporality:

> "These two histories probably never completely overlap: one is banal and cyclical, the other may be open and singular, and it would be necessary to reserve the term "history" for the second order of phenomena if history were a series of events that not only have a sense, but provide themselves with that sense."[533]

It must be pointed out that Merleau-Ponty distinguishes here two histories: a cyclical "history" and an open "history". Here he might follow Husserl's claim that all psychic realities have a history, just for the reason that they must be described

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make itself anonymous passive, and to settle into a pure formalism [*une scolastique*]" (PhP, 192/167).
[528] PhP, 103–4/90.
[529] Another term for the subject of instinct is "natural self" [*moi naturel*]. PhP, 199/174, 250/224, 399/362, 502/464.
[530] SC, 122/133.
[531] PhP, 104/90, 484/447, 517/479.
[532] See the preceding chapter.
[533] PhP, 104/90.

in terms of a temporal flow. Husserl contends that "two temporally contiguous cycles of external circumstances would affect the same soul in similar fashions, but within the soul itself the psychic unfolding of states could not be the same, for the earlier state functionally determines the following one."[534]

Thus, the cyclicity that Merleau-Ponty has in mind is not a material cyclicity, but a cyclicity related to the instinctive intentionality, which, as existence, has a psychic aspect. We will see that Merleau-Ponty describes it in terms of "natural time".

The instinctive behaviors exhibit a repeating structure, a "monotonous kinetic melody". The instinctual reaction to the pre-defined sign-stimulus is an engagement into the same problem over and over again.[535] Cyclicality is also related to the regularly recurring configuration of the environment, such as the alternation of day and night, the alternation of the seasons, or the alternation of the condition of one's body, such as menstruation, wakefulness and sleeping, activity and rest, and the repeating rhythm of nourishment, digestion and defecation.[536] Applied to the instinct, the idea is that the regular periods of certain environmental or bodily conditions correspond with cycles of certain kinds of behavior.

But why should cyclicality be thought as a central feature of the instinctive behavior and biological existence? Aren't the recurrent events of the environment and the body finally only present for the observer, who can compare, for instance, the successive movements of the frog and notice their similarity and the repeated failure? Why the should cyclicality belong to the primitive, instinctive behavior itself? Merleau-Ponty contends, though in a context of his analysis of temporality, that in order to conceive a temporal cycle, one has to distinguish "the point of arrival from the point of departure".[537] In other words, there must be a subject who can distinguish the beginning, ending and recurring of the cycle. Otherwise, "cyclicality" would not make any sense.[538] Here Merleau-Ponty's claim is reminiscent of Heidegger's analysis of the "clock" in *Being and Time*. The clock, which is a "physical system in which an identical temporal sequence is constantly repeated"[539] or "a handy thing that has become accessible in its regular recurrence",[540] is only possible within the framework of the temporality of Dasein, in particular in its temporal mode of "making present by awaitingly retaining".[541]

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[534] Hua4 (IdII), §33, 138/145.
[535] Cf. PhP, 97/84.
[536] A related issue in biology is that of the "circadian rhythms". See Rosato (ed.) 2007, v–vi.
[537] PhP, 484/447.
[538] Merleau-Ponty uses the argument in the chapter "Temporality" in order to claim that the temporal subject could not be thought of as "eternal" for the purported reason that the temporal dimensions of past, present and future are interchangeable. The cycle has a beginning and ending. The cycle begins again (repeats) when it has ended. The cycle would not make any sense if the beginning and the ending could not be distinguished. Thus, Merleau-Ponty contends, if the temporal dimensions were originally interchangeable – the future is a "past to come", and the past is "a future that has passed" – then also the beginning and the ending would be interchangeable and they could not be distinguished. Accordingly, temporal subject as a continuity, passage and thrust – which Merleau-Ponty conceives in terms of perpetual recurrence – would not make any sense.
[539] Heidegger 1992, 4E.
[540] Heidegger 1992, 393.
[541] Heidegger 1992, 394.

But Merleau-Ponty gives the cyclicality, understood as the perpetual recurrence of time, a deeper constitutive significance, and he places it at the core of the structure of the temporality of the subject. This is what he calls the "natural time", the "generalized time" or the "pre-personal time". In the last chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Freedom", there is an important passage which is worthy of being cited in its entirety:

> "We have seen that there is no such thing as natural time if we understand this to mean a time of objects without subjectivity. There is, however, at least a generalized time, and this is even the time intended by the common notion. This time is the perpetual starting over of the series: past, present, future. It is like a disappointment and a repeated failure. This is what we express in saying that time is continuous: the present that it brings to us is never really present, since it is always past when it appears, and the future has there but the appearance of a goal toward which we are moving, since it soon arrives in the present and since we then turn toward another future. This is the time of our bodily functions, which are cyclical like them, and it is the time of nature with which we coexist. It only offers us the outline and the abstract form of a commitment, since it continuously gnaws away at itself and undoes what it has just done. As long as we oppose the For-Itself and the In-Itself without any mediation, as long as we do not perceive that natural outline of a subjectivity between ourselves and the world, and that pre-personal time that rests upon itself, then acts will be necessary to sustain the springing forth of time [...]".[542]

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty joins together a host of important themes: natural time as continuity, cyclicality, perpetual recurrence and failure "that rests upon itself", our bodily functions which provide an "outline of subjectivity", and the need to recognize their constitutive significance with regard to the subjectivity. At the same time a difficulty and a challenge of interpretation emerges from these connections. What are the "bodily functions" which are cyclical, like the natural or pre-personal time?

I think that the bodily functions mean the instincts, and accordingly the idea of cyclicality refers here to the cyclicality of the instincts (or the biological modification of existence). The idea is further clarified by another passage in the chapter "Temporality", in which Merleau-Ponty claims that the structure of temporality must contain a structure of original passivity:

> "[w]hat we call passivity is not our reception of an external reality or of the causal action of the outside upon us: it is being encompassed, a situated being – prior to which we do not exist – that we perpetually start over and that is constitutive of us."[543]

In short, the instinctive behaviors found in our body inform us of the biological or pre-personal mode of existence, which is a mode of elementary passivity or of our being situated, or still the structure of natural time. I will elaborate on the connection between "bodily functions" and temporality below in chapter 4.2. Now the task is to explicate the relation between the instinct, cyclicality and the passive, perpetually recurring dimension of temporality.

I have already shown that the instincts are autonomous and stereotyped and cyclical. It must be added that if the instinct is cyclical, that is, if it repeats the

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[542] PhP, 516–7/479.
[543] PhP, 488/451.

same cycle, this also implies that it is monotonous. Monotony means that the repeated cycles are not differentiated from each other. Merleau-Ponty also characterizes "natural time" as monotonous. If, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "[t]he synthesis of time, like that of space, is always to be started over again",[544] the monotonous level of temporality is this perpetual starting over again, the flowing of the flow of temporality, in which there is almost *nothing that* flows or differentiates the flow for the subject. In particular, the encounter of "natural time" is related to pathological moments in which the subject, so to say, has lost the affective interest, and at the same moment the time has "collapsed". Merleau-Ponty refers to a first-person report in which the person says that, at the moment of collapse, he had lost the experience of the passage of time, the capacity to orient towards a future. Accordingly, the things had lost their "soul" or "sense". As the person writes in the report:

> "[w]hat is the future […] One cannot anticipate it […] Everything is in question […] Everything is so monotone, morning, noon, and night […] Everything always begins again."[545]

Merleau-Ponty interprets this as a degradation of the body into an organism, and accordingly a dispersal or dissolution of the experience, which amounts to a losing a "single hold" of the objects. Because of the dispersal, the world "falls to pieces or is broken apart".[546] In other words, there is an affective interest that *both* holds things together within the frame of a unique life, *and* brings about *a differentiation* to the surrounding world. Natural time is the elementary modification of temporality which remains flowing, even at the moment in which the affective interest degrades: this is a monotonous mode of temporality, a recurrence in which (almost) nothing is differentiated as enticing or as affectively prominent. Merleau-Ponty also characterizes natural time as a "limit of temporal dispersion"[547] or a time of "always identical nows", in which "life flows back upon itself".[548]

Thus it could be said that, according to Merleau-Ponty, the temporal mode of the instinctive, biological existence is that of an undifferentiated flow. This is confirmed by Merleau-Ponty's depiction of the natural time in the chapter "[t]he body as a sexed being":

> "[t]he instant of natural time establishes nothing. It must immediately be renewed, and is in fact renewed in another instant. Sensorial functions by themselves do not make me exist in the world."[549]

However, at this point a problem arises. Instinctive behavior, in spite of its being *autonomous*, *stereotyped* and *cyclical*, shows up for the observer as affectively interested. As Merleau-Ponty also writes, "[w]hen I am overcome with grief and

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544 PhP, 163–4/141.
545 PhP, 327/295–6.
546 PhP, 327/295.
547 PhP, 398/361.
548 PhP, 192/167.
549 PhP, 193/168.

wholly absorbed in my sorrow, my gaze already wanders out before me, it quietly *takes interest* in some bright object [...]".[550] Our reflexes "adjust to the 'sense' of the situation" and "turns toward" the stimuli[551]. Besides, the insect in its instinctive behavior "continues to exist in the same world and carries itself toward this world with *all of its powers*".[552] In short, the reflexes cannot be without interest and without "powers". If they would not have any interest, they would not be responsive to the sign stimuli at all.

Thus, what is the affective interest of the instinctive, pre-personal biological existence, if it is not properly speaking an affective interest of the person? How is it possible that, at the same time, *on the one hand* the instinct is cyclical, monotonous, and thus at the limit of affectivity, and *on the other hand*, takes interest in its environment? What is this "subpersonal" mode of affectivity? I will return to the question concerning affective experiencing and the instinct in chapter 6.

### 3.2.4 Blindness

We still have to elaborate Merleau-Ponty's way of comprehending the subject of the instinct that he gives in the chapter "The Body as an Object and Mechanistic Physiology". If instincts are intentional, they involve a subject or a self. One must then ask, who or what is the subject of the instinct, as informed by the observation of the instinctive behavior? The subject of the instinct is impersonal or anonymous, insofar as it remains imprisoned into "generality". Merleau-Ponty characterizes the subject of the instinct as an anonymous "one"[553] or as the X.[554] This subject, as he puts it, cannot be named or "placed among other perceiving subjects".[555] Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty claims that, insofar as the subject of the instinct remains bound to a stereotyped form of behavior issued in the structure of the body, it feasibly appears as a member of a group of similarly structured bodies:

> "Insofar as I have hands, feet, a body, and a world, I sustain intentions around myself that are not decided upon […] These intentions […] do not belong to me, they come from farther away than myself and I am not surprised to find them in *all psycho-physical subjects* who have *a similar organization* than my own.[556]

However, in the chapter "The body as an object [...]", Merleau-Ponty gives a depiction of the subject of the instinct as a lower-level or primitive self. Actually, he again takes up the analysis of the instinctive behavior that he conducted in *Structure of Behavior*. The instinctive subject is exemplified by an insects' behavior when one of its limbs are cut off and when the limb is merely tied. When the limb is cut off, the insect substitutes the lacking limb with the other limbs. However, when the limb is tied, the substitution does not occur, and the instinct tries to

[550] PhP, 99/86.
[551] PhP, 94/81.
[552] PhP, 92/80. I have added italics.
[553] PhP, 249/223, 277/249.
[554] PhP, 190/166, 293/265.
[555] PhP, 514/477.
[556] PhP, 502/465.

liberate the tied limb. Merleau-Ponty concludes that the instinctive subject is not in any manner conscious of the substitution as a distinct goal that could be attained by varying means. Simply, in the case of the instinct, the bodily condition (being or non-being of the limb) immediately motivates the behavior.[557] The insect is totally engaged in its instinctive situation in a way that it cannot be aware of anything outside it: the subject of the instinct "continues to exist in the same world and carries itself toward this world with all of its powers."[558]

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty continues, the subject of instinct is not aware of the "total sense" of the situation that triggers the behavior, and the surrounding environment is not "wholly articulated and determinate".[559] However, the instinctive subject experiences the situation blindly as an "open" situation. By "openness", in this context, Merleau-Ponty means that there is no determined goal or object present for the subject. Instead, the subject of the instinct is aware of a mere tension regulated by the stereotyped structure involved in the instinct. Merleau-Ponty compares the felt tension to the manner in which the first notes of the melody "call for a certain mode of resolution".[560] A characteristic feature of the instinctive self is that the instinct *remains* blind. Even when the instinctive behavior is "satisfied" by an object (for instance, when the frog catches the prey), the object is *not disclosed* to the instinct as the goal of the action. Accordingly, that which looks like an attainment of a goal for the external observer does not develop or shape the self-awareness at a strictly instinctive level.

With the help of this conception of irremediable "openness" or "blindness" of the subject of the instinct, the monotony or cyclicality of the instinctive behavior becomes more understandable. The subject of the instinct can be at the same time "open" *and* almost totally enclosed within the confines of the "inner diaphragm"[561] that prescribes the sign-stimulus and its corresponding behavior. As a result, insofar as the subject of the instinct cannot be aware of anything outside this diaphragm, it always starts from scratch, so to say. Accordingly, the instinctive self is dispersed, which means that it is always fully engaged in what it is tending towards, with no awareness of any unity beyond these engagements, or of any comprehensive background within which these engagements could be differentiated. Below, I will elaborate on this idea by linking the limited or incomplete awareness of the instinct to Husserl's concept of the impressional present.

When Merleau-Ponty writes that perception involves an integration of "distracted and dispersed 'consciousnesses', namely, vision, hearing, and touch",[562] this does not mean that the biological existence would consist of a plurality of selves. The behaviors belong to one organism, to a whole system of the body, or to one individual living being which, at the primitive level of instinctual behavior, is *dispersed* into the varying particular instincts: it is the same body that executes the primitive movements of breathing or focusing the eyes.

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[557] PhP, 92/80.
[558] PhP, 92/80.
[559] PhP, 93/81.
[560] PhP, 93/81.
[561] PhP, 95/81.
[562] PhP, 399/363.

Finally, it has to be noticed that even if the instinctual self remains bounded to an "impressional" awareness, it can *outline* or *sketch out* a higher-level self. Accordingly, the instincts can initiate higher-level forms of consciousness. In particular, Merleau-Ponty describes the *instinctual movement* of the sense organs, which in itself is not yet perceptual, but rather preparatory for the emergence of perception, the world (as a horizon of horizons) and personal existence. Thus, Merleau-Ponty claims that the eyes can "follow the contours of an object" at a level where there is no object present yet.[563] I will return to the function of outlining or sketching out in chapters 6 and 7. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "The body is the vehicle of being in the world and, for a living being, having a body means being united with a definite milieu, merging with certain projects, and being perpetually engaged therein."[564]

## 3.3 The Organic Body, Repression and the Past

> "[O]ur body […] can only be recovered and taken up by an individual life because this life has never transcended it […] as is seen in the *disease* in which the bodily events become the events of the day".[565]

Up to now I have explored four central aspects of biological existence: *autonomy*, *generality*, *cyclicality* and *blindness*. Next, I will account for Merleau-Ponty's conception of the place of biological existence as a deep stratum within the stratified whole of human existence. In particular, I will account for his idea concerning the relation between biological and personal existence, which is, according to Merleau-Ponty, analogous to a relation of *repression*.

In summary, the point is that biological existence and a repressed existence share two features: on the one hand, they are both overridden by a general intentional schema. On the other hand, they both are affectively vivace; that is, from their underlying passive or deep position, they exert affective force on the person. In this respect, both repressed existence and biological existence differ from habit. Habits are constituted in re-productive renewal of the experience. In habituation the non-intuitive past possession, insofar as it is reproduced or retained, is available for the subject. Habituation is a process of renewal in which the intentional schema becomes extended, transposed, refined or changed. Instead, biological existence and repression lack the availability and the transposability of the intentional schema. Nevertheless, they appear as powers, other "projects" that are operative underneath the personal projects.[566]

Let us first characterize more generally how Merleau-Ponty characterizes the role of biological existence within the life of the person.

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563 PhP, 276–7/248–9.
564 PhP, 97/84.
565 PhP, 101/87.
566 According to my interpretation, Merleau-Ponty does not argue that the person would be constituted on the basis of a purported repression of the organism.

*First*, biological existence is ontogenetically first and has an initiating function with regard to higher-level operations of existence.[567] However, the initiating function remains operative throughout the life of the individual person. For instance, Merleau-Ponty claims that all higher-level perceptual acts necessarily have their beginning in the lower-level instinctive behaviors of the sense organs. The instinctive "vigilance of the senses" sketches out the outline of perception, and this preparatory operation basically makes waking up possible.[568] In addition, Merleau-Ponty thinks that the instinctive behavior of the anonymous bodily functions is operative continually or perpetually, at the margins or at the underground of our personal experiencing life, initiating it and making it possible:

> "[...] this blind adhesion to the world, this prejudice in favour of being does not merely occur at the beginning of my life. It gives every subsequent perception its sense, and it is started over at each moment."[569]

A *second*, related "function" of biological existence is that the body in its specific total organization constitutes a system of "all possible objects".[570] Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty seems to think that there is an instinctive basis for the initiation of the human world as the "horizon of horizons" inscribed in the structural organization of the body. In a similar manner as the particular bodily functions sketch out particular fields of existence (such as the sense fields of vision, touch and hearing), there is a holistic organization or an integrity of the body – a body schema – that perpetually sketches out the outline of the subject who exists in the world as a horizon of infinity. Merleau-Ponty accounts for this in terms of a specific relation between the whole and the partial functions within the human body.

*Third,* on the basis of the two above-mentioned roles of biological existence, Merleau-Ponty endorses the obvious view, according to which the underlying bodily functions *maintain* or *support* higher-level perceptual, personal and social life. The body "keeps us alive", as he puts it.[571] A related claim is that the supporting instinctive background operations of the body are hidden in the normal qua concordant life of the individual, and they become noticed only at moments of the anomalous events in which this normal life of the individual becomes disturbed. Merleau-Ponty's depiction is compatible with later phenomenological descriptions of bodily disturbances and of illness that operate with a distinction between the transparent body and the body as an obstacle, though this must not be mixed up with Merleau-Ponty's critique of the body as a "transparent envelope" of the subjectivity.[572] During the harmonious course of experience the body

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[567] In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty does not provide a detailed account of the different stages of development of human life. In a passage, he suggests that in the intra-uterine life perception in the proper sense is not yet constituted. He writes: "nothing was perceived in intra-uterine life, and this is why there is nothing to remember. There was nothing but the sketch of a natural self and a natural time. This anonymous life is merely the limit of the temporal dispersion that always threatens the historical present." PhP, 399/362.
[568] PhP, 191/167.
[569] PhP, 294/265.
[570] PhP, 502/465.
[571] PhP, 99/86, 101/87. See also, PhP, 171/147.
[572] See, for instance, PhP, 187/163, 239/213.

is experienced as the intermediary[573] while the focus is on the project to be accomplished, and the body remains "transparent" in that it does not become noticed or thematic.[574] At the moment of disturbance, the body shows itself as an obstacle to the act or the project that was about to be accomplished, and it forces a turning of attention away from the current project to the "project" that the disturbed body imposes. Thus, biological existence becomes highlighted for the experiencing subject when its harmony with the higher-level operation is disrupted.[575] The disturbance of breathing is an exemplary case of a disruption that discloses biological existence. The need to breath becomes the most acute task if the condition of the air required for normal breathing is drastically changed. In this situation, breathing appears to us mediately through its inhibition as an urgent need to breath well. In this example, biological existence is disclosed as the "open" task that guides one towards a "completion", that is, towards "satisfying" the performance of breathing.[576]

The issue of bodily disorders, disturbances and illness is complex, and we cannot go into it in more detail here. For example, in *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty uses as his examples very different kinds of disorders such as sickness,[577] a malfunctioning of a particular bodily function such as breathing, malfunctioning of the eye or blindness,[578] or a general degradation of the integrity of existence, which can be due either to a brain lesion (in the case of Schneider)[579] or a grave mental disorder (a developed state of schizophrenia).[580] It is obvious that these different kinds of disturbances should not be mixed up with each other, and that each of them would require a closer study in order to do justice to their particular features. What is common to these different instances is that disturbances of particular functions or of the general integrity of our body can make available or block fields of affective and perceptual phenomena. Thus, if the body "keeps us alive", this has two meanings. On the one hand, the body "keeps us *alive*": there are vital functions of the body that literally keep up a general well-being or health. On the other, the body "keeps *us* alive": our higher-level capacities, that which is constitutive of ourselves as active and socially engaging persons, depend on lower-level biological existence.

*Finally*, it remains to be mentioned that, besides the function of "keeping alive", initiating or "making possible", biological existence *resists* the higher-level forms of existence. Merleau-Ponty accounts for the emergence of perception in terms of a synthesis. When the higher-level mode of existence emerges, it *integrates* or *sublimates* the lower-level functions in that these functions become parts

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573 PhP, 161/140.
574 This is also the manner in which Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of the body in operative intentionality. The body itself is not originally experienced as an object. PhP, 121–2/107, 478–9/441–2.
575 See Sholl 2015.
576 Gernot Böhme suggests that our body as nature can also be revealed in intensive moments of joy and of being energetic. See Böhme 2010, 236. Kristin Zeiler has coined the concepts of "dys-appearance" and "eu-appearance" of our body. See Zeiler 2010.
577 PhP, 101/87.
578 See, for instance, PhP, 257–60/230–4; SC, 219/203.
579 More on Schneider, see chapter 5.
580 PhP, 327/295–6, 339/306.

regulated by this new, more encompassing structural whole. But, as he also claims, the lower-level functions do not lose their autonomy in this institution of a new structure, and they do not become totally integrated. Thus, the integrated structure is permeated by a tension between the integrity of the new unity and the disparateness of the unified parts.[581] Accordingly, the unified parts resist the higher-level structure. The initial instincts develop into plastic forms of behavior, to learning and habituation. The movements of breathing and gaze, insofar as they operate within the existence of a person, are reshaped according to the habits and practices of the individual. Merleau-Ponty writes that the style of the individual is visible in the reflexes.[582] However, breathing and gaze never become totally reshaped according to the higher-level needs or capacities.

Let us compare, for example, the learned motor skill of crawling to instinctive breathing. Crawling is the principal manner of changing one's position and it dominates locomotion until the proper walking is appropriated by the child. When the child actually learns to walk, little by little they cease crawling. It is not only that the same tasks that were accomplished by moving on hands and knees would now be accomplished in the new manner, because on the other hand exploring walking is enjoyable in itself, and on the other, it establishes unprecedented tasks. The time when crawling dominated the motile life of the individual recedes into their past. It is left behind and pushed away by the new way of moving. Perhaps some of the tasks that were actual at this stage also fade away.

By contrast, the performance of breathing does not fade away in a similar manner. The movement of breathing is controllable, and there are individually and socially variable manners of breathing. Furthermore, there are particular expressive gestures of breathing, and vocal behaviors are constituted partly on the circulation of air. Finally, the performance of breathing can be substituted by an artificial ventilation system, and at least it is conceivable that one might maintain higher-level performances with such a system that would dispense one of having to accomplish the act of breathing.[583] However, the movement of breathing fulfills a task that cannot be pushed aside, as it perpetually "starts over" again, and as its necessity is shown by the disturbance of breathing. Thus, the instinctive breathing always accompanies higher-level activities. While we write, run, talk, etc., we always breathe at the same time. Personal existence, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, is never indifferent to the particular rhythm of biological existence.[584] Merleau-Ponty affirms that there are extreme moments in which the urgency of one's ongoing project almost totally overrules the anonymous functions of the body: "when I am in danger, my human situation erases my biological one".[585] However, apart from extreme situations, the fully passive biological existence resists the projects and accomplishments of the individual person:

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581 The tension between the integrating whole and the disparate parts is articulated, for instance, in PhP, 186/162.
582 PhP, 100/87.
583 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_ventilation
584 PhP, 186/162.
585 PhP, 99/86.

> "most of the time personal existence represses the organism without being able to transcend it or to renounce it".[586]

As this last quotation also shows, Merleau-Ponty explicates the relation between biological and personal existence by comparing it to the relation of the person to a repressed past project.[587] As we will see, we have to be careful in interpreting what the specific aspect of the relation is between the biological and personal that the phenomenon of repression will clarify. Merleau-Ponty writes that "with the help of repression, our bodily condition is related to *the temporal structure of existence*".[588]

The central point in Merleau-Ponty's argument is the similarity between the ways in which *a repressed past project* and the *biological existence* haunt the present situation and the present project of a person, making it incomplete and to some extent inauthentic. They both are *general*, that is, *anonymous* projects that distract and have an influence on the life of the person in a "silent manner", that is, without their explicit awareness. Moreover, the person bears an undecidable relation to both, which means that he or she is not able to renounce or transcend either the *past project* or *the organic existence*.

First of all, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates how a repressed project becomes a generalized past project that still haunts the present of the person. According to Merleau-Ponty, a repression of a project originates in an event, in which the person encounters a barrier or an obstacle that irrevocably blocks that which the subject was aiming at.[589] If we follow his examples, repression can have its beginning in becoming impossible in a love-affair, career, artistic enterprise or a child's

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[586] PhP, 99/86.

[587] Eran Dorfman has provided an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's account of the repression of the organic body. He associates the repression of the organism with Heidegger's conception of Falling (*Verfallen*). Dorfman claims that the obstacle of the organism that is overlooked in the repression is the body as a lack, or as an "existential loss", and he compares the original negativity of the body to the lacking hand in the phenomenon of the phantom arm. Furthermore, Dorfman relates the issue of repression to the question of authentic existence. Dorfman's interpretation is interesting, and to some extent I am in accord with it. For instance, when Merleau-Ponty deals with the question of lability of spatial levels, he remarks that along with the experience of lability of spatial levels we sense our contingency, and this amounts to an experience of horror, vertigo and nausea. Accordingly, positing a fixed spatial level is a "forgetting" of this contingency. (PhP, 294/265.) However, it is not fully clear, how all the elements of Dorfman's interpretation are connected to each other. See Dorfman 2015.

[588] PhP, 99/86.

[589] PhP, 98/85. Merleau-Ponty's account of repression is congruent with the general meaning that Freud gives to the concept. It might be said that repression as a pushing away a project that has encountered an obstacle is an instance of repression in Freud's sense. Nicholas Smith gives a good explication of the concept of repression of Freud, bringing it to a relation with Husserl's phenomenology. As Smith remarks, in his early popular works Freud gives a narrow definition of repression as a mechanism of defense, and as flight or escape before an unbearable, stressful situation. Merleau-Ponty's characterization of repression is more general, insofar as it is a question of keeping away of an obstacle that has rendered one's project impossible to pursue. With this regard the characterization is fitting with Freud's more general definition of repression as an effort of "pushing something away from consciousness" (Smith 2010, 44). However, we also have to take into account that in Freud's theory what is primarily repressed is not something encountered in the world, but something stemming from within the subject itself, namely, the drives. See, for instance, Freud 1981, 157–72, and

life within a "parental universe". If the path of a project can no longer be pursued because of the barrier, the situation cannot be resolved by the person until either the obstacle is overcome or the project is abandoned. For instance, Merleau-Ponty retells in this manner Freud's example of a young man who has lost a book that his wife has given to him.[590] The inability to find the wife's book is interpreted as being motivated by repression. The young man "pushes away" everything that is related to his wife having lost the affective attachment to his wife.[591]

Those lost "tender feelings" have made the love affair and the commitment to live together impossible. Obviously, the altered emotional situation that now conflicts with the commitment of marriage and sharing the future would demand a rethinking of one's relation to it. This might not become a problem, and it might not become a difficulty one cannot deal with. One might think through the commitment to the love affair again, accept a different way of living the marriage, for instance on a basis of a friendship, or then decide to divorce. Besides, it might be possible that the obstacle was overcome, and the passionate feelings would come back. But it can also happen – which is purportedly the young husband's case – that the contradiction between the lost feelings and the commitment is *not* resolved in either manner: the lost feelings wont come back, and one cannot think through the commitment but instead sticks to it. The contradictory situation then becomes a *traumatic*, *unbearable* experience: the husband cannot encounter it face to face or he cannot deal with it. He feels anxious over the traumatic situation he cannot deal with. In this case the resolution is to *push away*, to *repress* the unbearable situation.

However, in Merleau-Ponty's example, what happens to the repressed impossible project *during the course of time* is important. As time goes by, the preceding actual experience involving the project that was carried out before the occurrence of the barrier recedes into an increasingly distant past. In this process the experience becomes "generalized". Here Merleau-Ponty's account is reminiscent of Husserl's description of the retentional process as a process of a degrading intuitivity, affective force, and determinacy.[592] That which is temporally more distant appears more indeterminate. Merleau-Ponty also claims that the distant intentional lived experiences lack precision and identifiability, and they retain only an abstract style or a general form.[593] As he writes:

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Smith 2010, 44. See also SC, 192–195/177–181, where Merleau-Ponty interprets Freud's notion of repression in Goldstein's terms as disintegration and ambivalence. Goldstein 1995, 258.

590 The example is found in Freud's *Introductory lectures on psychoanalysis*. See Freud 1991, 82–3.

591 As Freud retells the story told by the young man, "I found her too cold, and although I willfully recognized her excellent qualities we lived together without any tender feelings". Freud 1991, 82.

592 See Hua11, §35. Merleau-Ponty mentions the process of degradation, when he deals with the issue of temporality. See PhP, 478/441, 483/446.

593 PhP, 84/72, 382/346.

> "All repression is [...] the passage from first person existence to a sort of scholastic view of this existence".[594]

The subject remains *fixated* to the project or the situation that cannot be abandoned: "having the force neither to overcome the obstacle nor to abandon the enterprise, he remains trapped in the attempt and indefinitely employs his forces to renew it in his mind".[595] In the example, the husband still wants to be, or rather he still remains this past person for whom the unbearable thing *did not happen*. New situations and projects will come into his life, but – and this is a significant matter in Merleau-Ponty's example – all the new commitments are, so to say, haunted by the still silently retained past project. The subject does not fully engage in or appropriate any new project as long as he still devotes a part of his powers to maintaining the past enterprise. But another important point is that as time goes by *and* the past project remains pushed away (in that it is not dealt with in any manner and remains impossible), it fades away and loses its "substance" or content, and becomes a mere empty structure. This process could be related to the fading away of a skill one has ceased to exercise. Finally, the past project – as it is temporally distant for the person – lacks precision and identifiability, and retains merely an abstract form or style:

> "[the repressed project] is sustained by a previous experience, or rather by the memory of having had this experience, and then by the memory of having had this memory, and so on, to the point that in the end it only retains its essential form."[596]

In short, the repressed project is a generalized, "formalized" structure of existence that still haunts one's present and it is experienced as a "particular anxiety".[597] Merleau-Ponty further argues that if a project becomes generalized in this manner, it becomes an anonymous and uncontrollable power. Thus if, for the husband, his wife has ceased to exist for him and "he had closed his life off from her, he had suddenly pushed to the side all behaviors that related to her", this closing off is not a voluntary act.[598] Instead, it is seen in the husband's "forgetting" of the book given by his wife. The young man is not able to look for the book in the most obvious place. He has not absolutely lost the book, in that it would be difficult or impossible to find. The book given by his wife is there in one of his drawers, but he is only able to find it after the feelings toward her awaken again. The disparateness between the retained impossible project and the actual field of presence establishes a conflict within the field of presence between that which is actually present, and that which is affectively available and thus able to become noticed by the subject. The project that the subject is committed to, or the affective atmosphere that guides the subject's desires and projects, determines the field of that which incites the subject and that which the subject will focus on.

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[594] PhP, 98/85.
[595] PhP, 98/85.
[596] PhP, 98/85.
[597] PhP, 98/85.
[598] PhP, 189/165.

Merleau-Ponty explicates the anosognosic aspect of the experience of a phantom arm in a similar manner: there is a conflict between the actual bodily condition in which the hand is lacking, and the subject's desire to keep up projects that include the presence of the hand. In the case of the phantom arm, the subject overlooks the lacking arm insofar as he or she is committed to these projects. The subject pushes away the fact that the actual arm is not there. As Eran Dorfman puts it, "the patient cannot face the mutilation, negates it and sticks to the past world together with its no-longer-possible projects".[599]

In what manner does the phenomenon of repression clarify the relation between biological and personal existence? On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty argues that all of our personal projects are haunted by a generalized "project" of the organic existence that one cannot do away with. As we have seen, the instinctual intentionality is, like the repressed impossible project, imprisoned in *generality*. They both are anonymous, uncontrollable powers that are not within reach of the person. On the other hand, we cannot do away with biological existence. Thus, inasmuch as the repressed past project restrains us from authentically engaging into new projects, the organic past prevents our personal engagements of becoming complete.

Merleau-Ponty has the latter point in mind when he writes that "[m]ost of the time personal existence *represses* the organism". The claim becomes problematic if we draw too big conclusions from the analogy between the "repressed" biological existence and the repressed past project. Why should we *repress* the organism? The instinctual behavior was never *our* project and it never became impossible, and in this manner unbearable.[600] However, as Merleau-Ponty points out, we bear an undecidable relation to the instinctive existence that spontaneously stems from our body, and this resembles the undecidable relation to the impossible past project. We cannot decide to abandon biological existence inasmuch as we cannot decide to abandon the past impossible project:[601] "most of the time personal existence [is not] able to reduce the organism to itself or itself to the organism." Merleau-Ponty suggests that personal existence essentially contains a tendency to completeness: it is as if it would like to be the one who reduces the organism to itself *completely*, to lock up the *entire* life into the personal engagement. This does not mean a voluntary will to control everything. There is a tendency to completeness in emotions such as sorrow. Biological existence hinders these situations from becoming complete:

> "After this moment [of being wholly absorbed in my sorrow, in which it seems that my sorrow completely fills my life] in which we *attempted to lock up our entire life*, time […] again begins to flow".[602]

[599] Dorfman 2015, 128.
[600] With this regard Merleau-Ponty's conception differs from Freud's speculation on "organic repression". See above, page 104, footnote 425.
[601] PhP, 100/87.
[602] PhP, 100/86.

If there is a sense of "pushing away" organic existence, it would be related to the sense of completeness belonging to one's personal existence. In particular, Merleau-Ponty thinks that there is a sense of completeness that belongs to presence:

> "[E]ach present grasps, little by little, the totality of possible time; it thereby overcomes the dispersion of moments, it is in a position to give our past itself its definite sense and to reintegrate into personal existence even this past of all pasts that the organic stereotypes lead us to notice at the origin of our volitional being".[603]

By this Merleau-Ponty means that each present situation – which is a perceptual, personal-level phenomenon – presents itself as a temporal centre and a perspective from which the past and the future moments appear as more or less distant. Accordingly, if one's past project (which provides a past perspective to the world) remains repressed, a conflict remains between the actual situation (the actual project) and the retained past project. A part of one's strength is consumed into silently retaining the impossible project. In a similar manner, biological existence can be conceived as a deep power that hinders the completeness of the present. Merleau-Ponty points out that the organic existence hampers even the moments we think are the most radically decisive – for instance, if one feels that the situation is totally hopeless. According to him, this also holds for deep pathological states:

> "the most advanced states of melancholy, where the patient settles into death and, so to speak, makes it his home, still make use of the structures of being in the world in order to do so, and borrow from the world just what is required of being in order to negate it."[604]

Thus, he suggests that there are moments in which the project of the person renounces the organic condition.[605] Merleau-Ponty has in mind situations of full action, such as Saint-Exupéry's combat flight above Arras in the First World War.[606] Momentarily, the configurations of the body imposed by the total action might not be hindered by the obstacles of the instinctual behaviors of breathing, the general condition of tiredness, the changes to one's condition induced by wounds, etc. Momentarily, the rhythms of biological existence would be almost totally integrated or "sublimated" under the forms of the personal acts. But besides these extreme moments, the organic existence is taken as an instinctual intentionality of the body that the personal project is not able to overcome. Overcoming the organic condition might be something like speaking without breathing or reading without blinking one's eyes. A complete engagement to a project would amount to a denial of the behavioral structures of the organic life, if not risking one's life.

The *second point* is that the personal existence also silently "feeds" the instinctive operations of the body. The past repressed project is structurally similar to the biological existence, insofar as both are anonymous and general. Merleau-

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603 PhP, 100/87.
604 PhP, 339/306.
605 PhP, 99–100/86.
606 PhP, 99n1/514–5.

Ponty contends that the past project in repression becomes generalized and "dormant" exactly because it has become impossible and cannot be taken up again.[607] The project is retained, but as it cannot be taken up or accomplished, it fades away and becomes more and more distant like a skill that one does not exercise. In this process of becoming temporally more distant, the project retains only its abstract form:

> "All repression is thus the passage from first person existence to a sort of scholastic view of this existence, which is sustained by a previous experience, or rather by the memory of having had this experience, and then by the memory of having had this memory, and so on, to the point that in the end it only retains its essential form."[608]

As we saw above, in Merleau-Ponty's view instincts are also behaviors regulated by an abstract and fixed form. The difference between the two pasts, the impossible past project and the organic past that guides the instinct, is that the latter, insofar as it is inscribed in the very structure of the body, does not refer to any former present project. Accordingly, the structural organization of the body, as it remains resistant to the forms of the personal existence, refers back to the "past of all pasts",[609] or to an "absolute past".[610]

## 3.4 Biological Existence and Phenomenological Explication of the Pre-Personal

> "There is, then, another subject beneath me, for whom a world exists before I am there, and who marks out my place in that world. This captive or natural mind is my body, not the momentary body that is the instrument of my personal choices and that focuses upon some world, but rather the system of anonymous 'functions' that wraps each particular focusing into a general project."[611]

Up to now I have explored the central features of Merleau-Ponty's conception of biological existence, as he presents it in the first part of *Phenomenology of Perception*, which are *autonomy*, *generality*, *cyclicality* and *blindness*. I have also explicated Merleau-Ponty's account concerning the role of this instinctual mode of existence as a past project of existence that haunts all our personal accomplishments and rules out their pretended completeness in a similar manner than we push aside or repress a past impossible project. But what is the significance of the concept of existence for a phenomenological analysis? What have we gained by characterizing the primitive mode of behavior and of existence in terms of *autonomy*, *generality*, *cyclicality*, *blindness*, and – lastly, as functioning in our personal life as a past that is similar to a repressed past?

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607 PhP, 98/85.
608 PhP, 98/85.
609 PhP, 100/87
610 PhP, 160/139.
611 PhP, 294/265.

Let us sketch out some possible phenomenological questions related to biological existence. One possible question is about the sense constitution of the reality of the psycho-physical conditioning. Given that there is a realm of the psychic and a realm of the physical (or the physiological), how can we conceive of the relations between these two domains of realities. For instance, how does it become possible to conceive that a change of one's experience is related to a change in the physiological condition of one's body in its relation with the environing things? On what basis can I understand that putting on eyeglasses, conceived as a change of my physical body (or one's body like a thing similar to other physical things) in its relation to the other bodies, parallels with my altered visual experience. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty attempts to show that the question concerning psycho-physical conditioning refers back to a personalistic attitude, in which we understand a particular form of being in the world as a totality that has both a psychic and physical aspect.

But biological existence evokes another question, which is a question of *empathy*: in what manner does a manifest intentional behavior of a perceived body contribute to the perceiver's understanding of the experience of the subject in question and, at the same time, of their own experience? If the third-person observation of an intentional behavior and the indirectly indicated first-person experience of the subject of the perceived behavior are parallel, if they are two aspects of one and the same intentionality, then the third-person analysis of instinctive behavior is methodologically significant for phenomenology: it is important for the purposes of understanding the phenomenon of the biological existence. The perception of intentional behavior provides us with *one* aspect of biological existence, *another* aspect of which is the experience. In short, the concept of existence *prepares* for a phenomenological analysis of constitution.

Merleau-Ponty also characterizes existence as a third term between a thing "in itself" and the being of a consciousness "for itself". As he writes:

> "They [Gelb and Goldstein] have done more than anyone else in overcoming the classical alternative between automatism and consciousness. But they have never named this third term between the psychic and the physiological, between the for-itself and the in-itself, to which their analyses always lead them and that we will call 'existence.'"[612]

Accordingly, there are possible alternative interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's conception of biological existence that are worth mentioning here.

*First*, we might think that Merleau-Ponty is suggesting a new regional-ontological category. In addition to being in itself, and being for itself, we have to conceptualize existence as an irreducible, universal category in order to conceive certain types of beings. Actually, as we have seen, this is, to some extent, Merleau-Ponty's project in *The Structure of Behavior*. However, from the (Husserlian) phenomenological point of view, the ontology as an account of universal essences is not the ultimate aim of philosophy. Instead, the regional ontologies give rise to a phenomenological analysis of correlation, which aims at disclosing the

[612] PhP, 142n1/520–1.

experiential accomplishments by which the sense of the categories in question is constituted.

Thus, as we have also seen, Merleau-Ponty begins *The Structure of Behavior* with an analysis of living beings, but the ultimate purpose of the analysis is to support the claim that perception is an original mode of intentionality in which the living being is attained as living. However, if this leads to the further problem, which is to provide a phenomenological account of perception, why would one then have to return to the initial ontology of existence, which would have a founding role with regards to perception? It would hardly be a satisfactory result of a phenomenological analysis of perception to state (again) that existence is an irreducible ontological category. Thus, something like the ontology of existence (or Gestalt-ontology) more likely plays the role of an initial point of departure than the ultimate result of analysis in *Phenomenology of Perception*.[613]

Therefore, the idea that Merleau-Ponty would be complementing the phenomenological analysis of perception with a metaphysics of life is misleading. I think that the ultimate sense of the concept of biological existence is not that it would refer to a reality of the organism, independently of the phenomenological task of disclosing perceptual life.

We have to look for the context of the above passage of *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which Merleau-Ponty writes of the existence as the "third term". The dichotomy of consciousness and automatism is problematic because it does not allow one to provide a satisfactory description of the bodily experience of grasping (and perhaps even the instinctual awareness of the body of the sleeper).[614] Here we clearly see that the purpose, at the background on the comment concerning existence, is to understand the phenomenon of grasping. We don't have to think that Merleau-Ponty would attribute an awareness to each and every observed intentional or purposeful behavior (including animated figures). Instead, his claim in this particular context concerns a specific bodily awareness of grasping. The idea is that one will fail to properly understand the bodily awareness of the subject of grasping if one operates with an overly narrow conception of consciousness. By and large, we might think that biological existence is a concept that serves the aim of a phenomenological analysis of perception.

This motivates *another* interpretation, according to which biological existence would not play any significant role in the very analysis of perception. The interpretation would accord with Kurt Goldstein's analysis that the organic body must be accounted in terms of intentionality. However, this is an analysis of the observed living body, not an analysis of our lived-bodily experience itself. Biological existence would not point out an instinctual consciousness at the core of

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[613] The idea of an ontology of existence would be that *existence* refers to an ontological level at the ground of the two perspectives, the perspective "from without" and the perspective "from within". This ground would play the role of a nexus, thanks to which the two perspectives are reversible aspects of the same.

[614] PhP, 142/124. Dreamless sleep is not dealt with in the passage. However, Merleau-Ponty mentions it in the footnote, as part of Gelb and Goldstein's argument: "They maintain the idea of an 'automatic localization that would not include any consciousness of space, since it even takes place in sleep' (sleep being here understood as absolute unconsciousness) (PhP, 142n1/521)".

perceptual experience. The intentional body appears in a very different manner for the external observer than for the experiencing subject him- or herself. Consequently, when we turn to a phenomenological analysis of what is involved in perception as it is given to the perceiving subject theirself, we cannot lean on descriptions of the body as observed "from without".

However, the problem of this interpretation is that Merleau-Ponty's use of the concept of biological existence indicates that it has a specific role with regard to the analysis of a pre-personal kind of experiencing, awareness or consciousness.

Thus, according to a *third* interpretation, the one that I adopt here, biological existence provides a leading clue to an analysis of the phenomenon of an instinctive experiencing, or of a primitive layer of sense constitution. The observation of the instinctual body is not insignificant. It means that a full phenomenological analysis of perception might require third-person observations of primitive, instinctive behaviors of our body.

The observed instinctual movements of our sense organs (which Merleau-Ponty also calls the "anonymous vigilance of the senses")[615] while we are in the state of a dreamless sleep would then be significant. It would also be significant that we can observe instinctual movements in our and in the other's (animal or human) body which the subject in question *is not aware of* or *cannot articulate directly himself*.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty provides an explication of his take on the indirect approach as he accounts for hallucinations during the last part of the chapter "Thing and the Natural World".[616] He claims that first-person reports of the hallucinating person, which describe the hallucination "from within", should not be taken word by word because the reports can be contradictory. To interpret the report as an opinion or belief that could be squared with a non-hallucinating person's beliefs would be to ignore the altered attitude, the specific modification of the hallucinatory experience that motivates the reports. But then the question follows, is it possible to understand, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the altered attitude behind the beliefs? Namely, one might think that there is nothing to understand beyond them, and that the phenomenal quality of the experience – that what it is like to undergo the hallucinatory experience – cannot be attained or distinguished from the semantic content of the report. As Merleau-Ponty contends, the same problem applies to understanding the other's experience or one's own past experience: "The one who conceives of the hallucination, or of other, or of his own past, never coincides with the hallucination, with others, or with his past such as it was."[617] Obviously the problems also hold for the pre-personal phenomenon, and Merleau-Ponty explicitly mentions it as he deals with the pre-personal phenomenon of sensation.[618]

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615 PhP, 191/167.
616 PhP, 388–9/352–4.
617 PhP, 388/352.
618 We will return to the issue of pre-personal sensibility in subchapters 7.1 and 7.2.

In his answer, Merleau-Ponty argues that, in the understanding of the hallucinating person's verbal report, it is a question of two perspectives in a situation of communication. The observer (or the doctor) has a certain understanding of the words, which is based on their present situation, which differs from the situation of the hallucinating person. The semantic content indicates an experience that is incomprehensible for the observer, or at least difficult to understand from their perspective. However, if there was no pre-reflective articulation of experience behind the explicit semantic content of the words, the observer's perspective would appear to them to be as private and incomprehensible as the hallucinating person's experience. Accordingly, one could not distinguish between more or less comprehensible or incomprehensible verbal reports. Merleau-Ponty claims that the verbal report expresses the pre-reflective articulation of experience, the "text of experience", and understanding the hallucination is a situation of communication and tension between two experiences: the observer's current experience and the hallucinating person's differing experience.[619]

The situation is not essentially different when one is faced with one's past experience. The current situation is already in tension with one's past situation. This becomes evident, for instance, when one reads one's past diaries: the past descriptions of one's emotions, beliefs or commitments might seem strange or naïve. One does not coincide with the past situation, and, as Merleau-Ponty contends, one cannot "relive the past in its reality".[620] Consequently, we are not in any better position to immediately reflect on our *own* hallucinations than the *other's* hallucinations. Merleau-Ponty even claims that my hallucinations are as impenetrable for my reflection as the other's:

> "[i]f the philosopher gives himself hallucinations by means of an injection of mescaline, either he gives in to the hallucinatory momentum and then he will live the hallucination and not know it, or he will preserve something of his reflective power and then his testimony […] will always be questionable."[621]

However, Merleau-Ponty adds that this does not mean that approaching the impenetrable – in our case, the pre-personal, instinctive experiencing – would not involve *any kind* of change in the understanding of the approaching person. According to him it is not a question of two isolated subjects. Rather, it is a question of an emphatic relation, a "being-with" that both implies *and* influences the subject's understanding of their own current situation. Understanding one's past experience or the other's experience is in both cases a bilateral issue. The patient, by his intervention, may correct the doctor's or the observing person's understanding of experience. Now, in the case of observing the instinctual behaviors of the other's or one's own body, the appearing structure of a behavior indirectly motivates an understanding of the experience of the subject in question – and at the same time has an influence on the observer's understanding of *his* or *her own experience.*

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619 PhP, 388/353.
620 PhP, 389/353.
621 PhP, 389/353.

In short, the phenomenological understanding of instinctive experiencing is thus an endeavor in which one's current experience is in an emphatic relation of communication with the pre-personal experience indirectly indicated by the instinctive behaviors. Thus, third-person observation of the instincts can lead us to an unprecedented phenomenological reflection on the levels of the proto-perceptual experience, and to a deeper understanding of what is it to perceive.

But what are the elements of the indirect approach of the pre-personal? First of all, the characterization of the instinctual behavior's *autonomy*, *generality*, *cyclicality* and *blindness* function as leading clues for indirectly approaching the pre-personal level of experiencing. These characterizations function as kinds of conditions for imaginatively reflecting on a pre-personal awareness – which involves both a self-awareness, an awareness of its "object", and a drive or an urge towards. In particular, the characterizations mark similarities and differences between our current experience and the primitive experience. The primitive instinctual experience is a lower-level awareness, so we can, at least initially, contend that it lacks some of the characteristics of the higher-level awareness. The autonomy refers to an experience that involves no awareness of control; generality indicates an experience that involves no awareness of oneself as an individual; cyclicality, as we have seen, indicates a dispersed experience that has no awareness of the difference between more and less valuable accomplishments; and finally, blindness indicates an awareness that has no object in view.

However, *second*, the inquiry into the phenomenon of the pre-personal is not a question of constructively imagining the experience solely on the basis of these indicative characterizations. In this regard it differs from thinking of animal experiences, the plant awareness or the awareness of imaginary characters and fictional creatures. It also differs from the endeavor of developing new forms of our bodily existence and awareness on the basis of the imagined behaviors or observed animal or plant behaviors.[622] This is not to say that these projects could not be useful with regards to the inquiry at hand, but the quest for the pre-personal phenomenon is an inquiry into a deep stratum of our own past or already-established bodily experience at the core of perception. This means that the indirect approach must have repercussions in our perceptual awareness.

622 This kind of approach has been adopted by some theater or performance groups, such as the Finnish group "Other Spaces" (*Toisissa tiloissa*). See https://toisissatiloissa.net/en/.

# 4 HABIT AND NATURAL TIME

In this chapter I will explicate Merleau-Ponty's characterization of biological existence, according to which the "biological" modification of existence refers back to existence at a primitive level of cyclical temporality. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes the cyclical time of the primitive functions of our body from the historical time of the existing individual. In the following, I will clarify this distinction by examining Merleau-Ponty's conception of habit-acquisition and his conception of natural time. An understanding of habit and natural time will be important for the phenomenological analysis of motor intentionality, affectivity and sensing that will be conducted in the following chapters.

I will take up the theme of habit-acquisition from the point of view of development and change: according to Merleau-Ponty, habituation is the phenomenon of establishing new fields of experience. But his central claim is that a new field of experience can only be established if there is a corresponding change in one's own body. Habit-acquisition is thus, by necessity a "reworking and renewal of the body schema".[623] According to Merleau-Ponty, all habituation is embodied.[624] Habit-acquisition is the essential phenomenon of the development and change of human persons. Merleau-Ponty's account of the elements of the development of an experience is then important in order to account for the cyclical biological existence. As we will see, within the basic level of biological existence there is no such reworking of the body schema, at least not in the same sense as in habit-acquisition. There is a difference between an experiential unity of development of habituation, and the lower-level experiential unity of dispersion that characterizes biological existence.

I will proceed by first introducing the characteristic features of habituation, and then deal with the question of natural time.

[623] PhP, 166/143.
[624] PhP, 177/153.

## 4.1 The Habit

The phenomenon of habituation has two central aspects. *On the one hand*, habituation is an acquisition of a new intentional lived experience. Merleau-Ponty points out that if habituation is viewed from the side of the body, it can be an adoption of a new gesture or bodily movement, or an incorporation of a new object or instrument. Thus, for example, learning to walk, dance or to speak are acquisitions of new bodily gestures. Instead, being habituated to clothes, learning to use glasses, to play the piano or to drive a car are incorporations of new objects or instruments. However, both object-incorporations and new gestures change the manner in which we experience things. To use Merleau-Ponty's example, learning to perceptually distinguish colors is by necessity also an acquisition of a new gesture of the gaze.[625] Accordingly, when a blind person is habituated to use a cane, the scope of their sense perception is enlarged.[626] In short, habituation is an acquisition of a new gesture or an incorporation of a new instrument, and accordingly an acquisition of a new kind of experiencing.

*On the other hand*, habit is a process of becoming familiar with something, and a constitution of a stable disposition.[627] Habituation is a process of becoming used to the newly acquired gesture or object. Becoming used-to by a repeated accomplishment of the new acquisition is a process of generalization or a formation of a disposition. Habituation constitutes an affective tendency to stick to that which is familiar. But it also constitutes the acquisition as a capacity that can be performed absentmindedly and without active effort. For instance, walking initially appears as something difficult, unfamiliar and uncontrollable. Learning to walk demands us a lot of effort of focusing. During the process of habituation, which consists of a concordant repetition of the performance, walking becomes familiar, easy and unobtrusive. In Merleau-Ponty's famous example, a woman who has been habituated to move wearing a hat with a long feather does not have to make any effort of focus or calculation of distances to succeed in keeping the hat within a safe distance from the surrounding obstacles. The hat has become incorporated in the lived body, and its distance and location is sensed "just as we sense where our hand is."[628]

Both of these aspects – acquisition of a new habit, and the process of habituation as generalization – are important for our purposes. First, as we characterize the acquisition of a new form of embodied intentionality, we have to keep in mind the question of natural time. How does natural time, where there is apparently no acquisition of new gestures or objects, differ from the habit-acquisition? Second, the account of the process of habituation as generalization allows us to better understand how the intentional lived experiences are in general conditioned by pre-given general dispositions or capacities. We have to distinguish

625 PhP, 178–9/154.
626 PhP, 177/153.
627 PhP, 171/147.
628 PhP, 167/144.

between intentional schemata constituted by habituation, and the intentional schemata that emerge spontaneously from the body.

### 4.1.1 Acquisition of a New Habit

Merleau-Ponty points out that in the process of learning the subject acquires "the power of responding with a certain type of solution to a certain form of situation".[629] Habit-formation is a process in which a new disposition, a new type of intentionality is formed. He criticizes the conception, according to which habit establishes an associative synthesis of disparate elements and brings order to an initially non-ordered state.[630] Acquisition of habit is not an intellectual synthesis in which a variety of objects are first noticed and then operations of comparing and calculation are accomplished with these already given objects. Instead, the acquisition of a new gesture requires that the type of intentionality is given spontaneously, but this does not mean that it would suddenly emerge out of nothing. Instead, there are two stages in the acquisition of a new gesture or object: first, there is a preceding phase of transition in which there appears an experience of a disequilibrium or a tendency which orients the subject blindly towards the acquisition; and second, there is a phase of confirmation in which the new gesture becomes accomplished, either in a failing or a successful manner. In either case, the accomplishment functions as a fulfilment of the prior blind anticipation, and *gives it retroactively a new determination*. From now on, the anticipation is not blind, but becomes provided with content gained from the fulfilment. In short, Merleau-Ponty depicts the acquisition of a new skill or a new signification as a process of learning and experimentation, of trial and error or success. However, one central point is that the body of the trial must be provided with an ability to stretch out towards the prominent, but not-already-determined new gesture, even if in the initial phase it was only a blind attempt.

Another, related claim is that when we actively learn new skills, we must be already endowed with an intentional schema of the body for the skill to be learned. It is not thinkable that an intentional schema would emerge on the basis of no intentional structure at all. Merleau-Ponty does not deny that, in the beginning of the life of the subject, the movements are still uncoordinated.[631] However, these movements are endowed with implicit intentional schemata. As we will see, Merleau-Ponty characterizes the initial appearance of the spontaneously emerging intentional schema as an atmosphere, which has a selective and orienting function with regard to the movements. Thus, Merleau-Ponty contends that there are intentional schemata that are instinctive in the sense that they occur spontaneously from the functional structure of the body. In the initial phase of the acquisition of a new habit the subject is endowed with an atmosphere that anticipates the movements, and the movements themselves that appear as uncoordinated. To be sure, a child's acquisition of grasping or walking and the adult's

629 PhP, 166/143.
630 PhP, 166/143.
631 To be sure, Merleau-Ponty does not consider habituation occurring within the original passivity.

acquisition of the skill of playing a new instrument differ a lot with respect to the person's situations. While learning to walk might be considered as following the stage of crawling, and the atmosphere for walking might occur as a spontaneous new affect, the adult's beginning to practice a new instrument is more a less a deliberative decision. Moreover, the adult person already knows a lot about music and instruments, and the process of learning might involve intellectual accomplishments such as reading about playing and listening to teacher's instructions. Nevertheless, also in the case of adult learning, the process of acquiring new skills is ultimately a modification of the bodily movement. And the bodily awareness must be provided with an intentional schema that is modified when the new acquisition is established.

Another point to be made is that even if an initial body schema is required as an atmosphere that guides towards the establishment of the new acquisition, initially this schema guides blindly and becomes *determined* only by the successful encounter. Thus, we can say that the acquisition of the habit is subject to the vicissitudes of the surrounding environment and the objects. To simplify, the encountered terrain determines the kind of walking acquired, and the encountered musical instrument determines the kind of playing. If acquisition of a new habit is preceded by a phase of anticipation, the new acquisitions are always first established as sudden and even as anomalous events. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "A system of definite powers suddenly decenters here and there, breaks apart, and is reorganized under a law that is unknown to the subject [...]"[632]

Learning to walk, for instance, is a process in which a particular sensory-motor pattern of behavior emerges "from [...] uncoordinated movements".[633] The event of walking is preceded by a phase of an affective tension, an atmospheric urge, in which one feels an incitement for a particular movement. The way of coordinating the body in order to actualize the movement is, however, still obscure. The nearer one is to the first successful steps, the more imminent and more coherent are the movements. When the walking succeeds for the first time, it is experienced as a sudden and anomalous event in which the body "allows itself to be invested"[634] with a new behavior, bringing forth new significance.

For our purposes, the central question is, what is the body that allows itself to be invested with a new movement expressive of a new meaning? An important thing is that habit-acquisition requires a certain capacity-level, a certain extension of the scope of the available horizon or, in still another words, a certain radiation or affective propagation of the newly acquired gesture to the past and the future process of learning. Simply, if we would not be able to retain the accomplishment, it could not be repeated or identified at the moment of a new, similar accomplishment. A modification of a body schema is a modification of a capacity or of the pre-given possession that will be retained over the singular accomplishments. If

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632 PhP, 226/199.
633 PhP, 226/200.
634 PhP, 226/200. See also PhP, 171/148.

our body would immediately forget that which it had accomplished, the upcoming accomplishment would not be experienced as a fortifying repetition.

### 4.1.2 Habituation, Concordant Repetition and Generalization

According to Merleau-Ponty, an associative repetition is a necessary component of the process of habituation. A single, ephemeral act of walking does not yet provide a disposition or a skill for walking, nor does it constitute walking as a familiar experience. It is possible, that we have single flowing moments of success in doing something without being able to repeat that particular action. Having walked once does not guarantee the ability to walk again a moment later, not to mention walking on different terrains and in different situations. The habit of walking is constituted in the process in which the act of walking is repeated again and again in a successful way. The constitution of habit is due to frequent effectuation of a particular act. Merleau-Ponty points this out with respect to the constitution of stable, preferred beliefs: "we must recognize a sort of sedimentation of our life: when an attitude towards the world has been confirmed often enough, it becomes privileged for us."[635]

Anthony Steinbock has offered a detailed analysis of the temporal process of habituation in his interpretation of Husserl's genetic phenomenology of normality and abnormality.[636] Steinbock conceives habit-formation in terms of type and typicality. He characterizes typicality as the endurance or the validity over time of a certain way of behaving and perceiving.[637] A way of behaving is typical when it involves anticipations of its pertinence over situations which are unknown to the subject, so that the subject "can recognize something […] never seen before as 'typical'".[638]

Steinbock starts off with the remark that a frequent accomplishment of a particular brings about a modification of this act. The repeated confirmation modifies the act in the manner of making one more familiar with it. Besides, it constitutes the act with a temporal density. We feel more confident with a certain

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635 PhP, 504/466.

636 Steinbock 1995, 124. Steinbock remarks that the problems of normality and abnormality are not customarily seen as Husserl's questions. Steinbock proposes to organize, to collate and distinguish Husserl's concept of normality and abnormality due to "the profilic and unorganized state of Husserl's reflections" (Steinbock 1995, 127). Another remark is that the genetic phenomenological concept of normality is constituted within the temporal experience of the individual. Therefore, it is a conception of normality that differs from normality as "natural, original, usual or average" (Steinbock 1995, 148). Steinbock's account also bears reference to Goldstein's and Canguilhem's views on normality. For instance, Goldstein writes: "What we need is not only a generally valid concept of the norm, which should avoid the 'subjective', but a concept on the basis of which the concrete facts can really be comprehended" (Goldstein 1995, 325).

637 Steinbock 1995, 159–160. Steinbock also relates typicality to Goldstein's idea of a "practical constant". According to Goldstein, the practical constants are the necessary condition for the identification of an organism: "[T]he organism proper presents itself as a structural formation that […] retains a relative constancy. If this were not the case, it would never be possible to identify a given organism as such." (Goldstein 1995, 265.) Related concepts in Goldstein's account are "preferred behavior" and "adequate performance" (Goldstein 1995, 266, 282).

638 Steinbock 1995, 160.

skill as it is being repeated. Accordingly, the skill becomes more enticing for us, and we become more prone to accomplish it again. That which has been concordantly repeated becomes more prominent at the expense of other acts. Finally, the familiarity also make it easier for the subject to accomplish the skill in new, unfamiliar surroundings. A habituated subject does not need support or a trigger from the actual surrounding environment in order to accomplish the act. For example, an experienced musician does not need so much initial support from the surrounding milieu in order to succeed in playing a piece of music. By specific preparatory activities, they are able to produce a particular expressive environment, even if the actual environing world would be unfamiliar and would not offer any particular support for the expression. The ability for successful expression in unfamiliar situations in turn enforces one's musical style.[639] According to Merleau-Ponty, a skillful organist is able to prepare an unknown organ within a relatively short space of time. Merleau-Ponty compares the musician's preparatory movements to a settling into a new house. The organist adjusts the relevant directions and dimensions of the instrument, within which certain emotional and musical values can be established.[640]

According to Steinbock, familiarity is an awareness of "again and again". In habituation, a particular accomplishment becomes typical: a typical surrounding environment correlated with a typical bodily movement and position. Steinbock calls the process in which habit is constituted typification. The experience of the typical is an attitude towards that which is not present and unknown to one. Habit is an attitude of expecting a particular structure of experience to succeed in unexpected situations. Typicality bears an expectation that is bound to last through discordances.[641] The more typical something is, the more it is experienced as constant, stable, ready-made and unchanging. As Steinbock writes, "[e]ven though we have not yet experienced diverse aspects of a thing […] typification prefigures similar concordant features, making precisely those (and not other) aspects that are foreshadowed particularly prominent, affective as expected."[642]

### 4.1.3 Habituation as Constitution of the Environment

In the following, I will continue a bit more with Steinbock's analysis of habituation in order to bring forth his idea of terrain as a typical and familiar milieu. It is important to bring forth this aspect because it makes it clear that habituation is not only about the change in the feeling of one's body or in new experiences, but

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639 Steinbock takes up an example from the vegetable kingdom: "The fact that certain species of shrub (like mint and sagebrush) grow in soil that becomes toxic (abnormal) to many grassland species, and actually contributes to the (normal/optimal) toxic levels for their privileged reproduction by secreting the toxins that reduce the germination or growth of grasses, is a case in point" (Steinbock 1995, 158).
640 PhP, 170/146–7.
641 See also PhP, 504–5/467, where Merleau-Ponty claims that habituation is the phenomenon that founds the idea of "probability" (of a similar behavior to occur in similar circumstances).
642 Steinbock 1995, 159.

is also a constitution of the way in which the surrounding environment appears. Steinbock's idea of terrain corresponds with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "cultural world".[643] The acquisition of habit does not only constitute the body as a typical body, it also involves a typical environment. Habits are typical ways of dealing with the environment, familiar structures of interaction between one's own body and the world as experienced. Walking is a relation with a passage that is walkable, grasping a relation with objects that can be taken to the hand, or driving a bicycle a relation to the bike and to the terrain which is suitable for cycling. When a particular action is performed for the first time, there is no awareness of the environment that is adequate for the action. The objects dealt with in the primal performance are not experienced within any horizon of expectations. The process of concordant repetition of a performance constitutes the particular environment with a horizon of anticipations and familiarity. Accordingly, the familiar environment is given as an affective structure that is present as an atmosphere. Within this atmosphere, the specific elements of the environment that bear a relevance for the habitual accomplishment are selected and emphasized.[644] For the subject who has a habit or a skill for something, an actual environment – related to the habitual or familiar environment – can be experienced as inciting a particular action: for the musician, an instrument appears as calling for musical expression, etc.

The environment constituted in genetic density is not just any environing-world, but a typical milieu. It has the sense of a preferred and familiar context for a particular form of life. Steinbock calls the typically familiar milieu a *terrain*,[645] distinguishing it from the actual environing-world or the milieu (*Umwelt*). Whereas the environing-world is the actual surrounding environment, shared between many different habitual forms of life that provide the source of anomalies, conflicts, change and renewal, the terrain is attached to a specific, typical way of living.[646] Steinbock distinguishes three characteristic features of the terrain.

*First*, the terrain differs from the actual, materially or physically present world.[647] In some respects, the terrain and the actual environing-world overlap. A typical environment is constituted in the process of the frequent confirmation of elements in the environing-world. However, the actual surroundings change, whereas the familiar or typical environment (that is, the environment adequate to a certain typical behavior) is relatively stable. For instance, when people move to unfamiliar locations, they might experience conflicts insofar as the new surrounding environment does not support their habitual activities. Clear felling, closing of a bar, change of the location of a library, or the closing of a factory – these drastic changes in the environment make explicit the typical ways of living

643 See PhP, 160/139.
644 Steinbock 1995, 163.
645 Steinbock 1995, 162.
646 This corresponds to Goldstein's distinction between the milieu and the surrounding world: "For each organism, not everything that occurs in the outer world belongs to its milieu. […] We much make a clear distinction between the surrounding world, in which the organism is located, and the milieu that represents only a part of the world – that par that is adequate to it [...]" (Goldstein 1995, 105–6).
647 Steinbock 1995, 165.

related to them. The changed environing-world is experienced as atypical, which expresses a conflict between the terrain and the environing-world. Terrain is that which exerts "typical affective force". The terrain has affective pull: it calls for a particular practice, highlights or emphasizes features that are optimal for a particular form of behavior, fading or excluding others. Accordingly, the same environing-world can give rise to different terrains: a forest serves as a shared environment for different typical-familiar environments.[648]

The *second* feature of the terrain is that it is essentially related to the subject's interest: there is a specific affective relation to a terrain. As Steinbock puts it, there is no terrain in itself.[649] A change of location is not sufficient for the terrain to change. The pertinence of the typical surrounding environment is dependent on the sustenance of a typical way of living attached to it. Similarly, the environing-world is not simply a new terrain, but it has the potential to become such. *Finally*, Steinbock claims that "a terrain is never simply abandoned" because it is integrated into a particular form of life.[650] A terrain disappears only if the habitual way of living related to it is abandoned.

### 4.1.4 The Physical World

It is obvious that Merleau-Ponty does not think that the cultural world, the typical milieu of acquired habits, would be constituted on the basis of a sense-less physical world. Instead, that which Merleau-Ponty calls the "physical world" in *The Phenomenology of Perception* is the spontaneously emerging surrounding environment, to which the body is related due to its functional structure prior to any habituation. The physical world can be characterized as the particular composition of air, gravity, temperature, lighting conditions etc. As we will later see, according to Merleau-Ponty the body as a system of perception is geared to these conditions. As he points out, the "physical" or "biological" world appears at the moments in which the basic intentional operations are inhibited. This occurs, for example, when the condition of the air becomes so bad that we cannot breathe, or when the temperature becomes too high. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "sometimes [the body] restricts itself to gestures necessary for the conservation of life, and correlatively it posits a biological world around us".[651]

Habit-acquisition requires a higher capacity-level than the performance of the primitive operations of biological existence. Namely, as we have seen, the *modification* of the pre-given intentional schema in experience requires this power to adhere to that which is encountered in the fulfillment of the schema, namely, in the frequentation with the environing world. The acquisition and further modification of an intentional schema is distinct from an act which is predetermined by the schema. As we will see in the next chapter, there is a difference between

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[648] Steinbock 1995, 164.
[649] Steinbock 1995, 165.
[650] Steinbock 1995: 166.
[651] PhP, 171/147. See also Böhme 2010, 235–6.

literally following a pre-given intentional schema and transposing the schema. Habit-acquisition and habituation are phenomena in which the intentional schema is by no means followed "to the letter", but dynamically modified in the accomplishments, according to the requirements of the actual environment. Strangely enough, transposing the intentional schema in order to take the actual situation into account requires a capacity to stretch beyond the actual or the impressional sphere. Similarly, habituation as an associative repeating of an accomplishment requires a retentional awareness of the former accomplishment.

According to Merleau-Ponty, there is a pre-personal power of habituation that conditions the development of our life. This power is a movement of existence towards the thing and the world. However, habit is a "mode of this fundamental power".[652] Citing Paul Valéry, Merleau-Ponty writes that the body lends "a bit of renewable action and independent existence to the momentary movements of freedom".[653] In the case of habit this occurs at a level in which the subject transcends the immediate field of the intuitable, and stretches out towards the non-intuitive.

As we will see next, natural time is a level of temporality in which this stretching beyond the impressional sphere – in order to identify a past act in reproductive association, or in order to transpose the actual movement – is lacking.

## 4.2 Natural Time and the Field of the Impressional Present

In the following, I will clarify the mode of temporality related to natural life of the body. This is the dispersed, self-perpetuating temporality that Merleau-Ponty calls "natural time". According to him, natural time is a rudimentary mode of temporal flow characterized by a mere iteration of the present moment. In natural time the flowing character of time, the flow as an incessant process of self-temporalization, or a passage of time, becomes emphasized. An essential feature of the experiencing as a temporal flow is an incessant becoming of a new present that pushes the former present into the past.[654] Or, in other words, time is the unique movement that "simultaneously separates and brings together".[655] Because of this basic character of the flow, each and every intentional lived experience, insofar as it is a synthesis that occurs in the present, is "simultaneously taken apart and remade".[656] Ultimately, the intentional lived experiences emerge, they have a certain duration, and they recede in the past.

All unities of experiences are temporal unities. Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, makes a distinction between the temporal unity of an object and the temporal unity of experiencing or of consciousness itself. Importantly, however, he also distinguishes temporal unities at different levels of constitution, and at different

652 PhP, 171/148.
653 PhP, 171/148.
654 PhP, 277–8/250.
655 PhP, 383/347.
656 PhP, 278/250.

levels of abstraction. What is, then, the level of natural time? In the following, my claim is that by natural time Merleau-Ponty wants to think about temporality at a level that Husserl calls "the impressional present".[657] In short, to use Husserl's terms, the impressional present is a modification of temporality in which the retentional and protentional expanse of time is restricted to that which is fresh and intuitable.[658] Just because natural time is the temporality of the impressional present, or as we also can say, because it is an experiencing provided with a limited scope of affection, it can be characterized as *both* indeterminate *and* consisting of instinctive syntheses and associations. When we think about the impressional present, we are thinking about the experiential field of dispersed intentional lived experiences.

The experiences characterized by natural time belong to the pre-personal sphere of experience, though not all pre-personal experiences are impressional.[659] Moreover, natural time is the field of presence in its disintegrated, dissolved or dispersed form. In this regard, natural time occurs beneath the person's free acts, and it also appears as a power that hinders our freedom. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "My voluntary and rational life thus knows itself to be entangled with another power that prevents it from being completed and that always gives it the air of a work in progress. Natural time is always there."[660]

Merleau-Ponty associates the appearance of natural time, on the one hand, to moments of regression or "collapse" of the person.[661] In these moments of regression the subject becomes closed off from personal and communal projects. It is a condition of personal existence that the subject is oriented towards the future, that is, towards the personal and communal projects to be accomplished.[662] As we have seen, a futural orientation means a retention of past accomplishments and an anticipating projection of the features of the environment, determined by the horizon of familiarity established in a habitual practice. At the moment of regression, this projective orientation is lost. Accordingly, the affective call and the understanding of the sense of the projected environment is lost.[663] For example, in a moment of regression related to a mental disturbance, it occurs that

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657 Hua4(Id2), 336/348; Hua11, 129/174, 138/184, 169–70/217–8.
658 Hua11, 168/218.
659 Namely, as Husserl contends already in *Ideas II*, re-productive associations are possible within the realm of the original passivity. See Hua4, 255/267.
660 PhP, 398/362.
661 PhP, 191–2/167, 192/168, 294/265, 339/307.
662 PhP, 187–8/163–4, 191–2/167.
663 As Merleau-Ponty also describes the state of dispersion of a patient: "he *scarcely* hears any longer, he *scarcely* sees any longer, and he has *almost* become this spastic and breathless existence struggling on a bed. The intensity of indifference is such that it becomes an indifference toward X, and indifference toward life, and an absolute indifference". PhP, 190/166.

> "for the patient, nothing ever happens, nothing comes to pass but always identical 'nows'; life flows back upon itself and history is dissolved into natural time".[664]

The moment of regression is also a closing off, a locking up or a freezing.[665] On the other hand, he suggests that the natural time can be approached through a voluntary, "analytic" perception, in which one actively closes oneself off from the human environment and focuses on the body or the object, such as the pulsation of blood in the ears or play of light on a wall.[666] The moments of "collapse of time" seem to lead to an anonymous experience in which the present moment merely perpetuates or repeats. The recurrence of the now that appears as always identical is distinguished from the flow of particular, oriented, meaningful experiences and practices. At the moments of natural time, the coexisting and succeeding experiences appear to cease to motivate each other, unlike in our normal experiencing.[667]

In addition to the moments of regression and the analytic reflection on the body, Merleau-Ponty mentions a third instance of natural time. This is an indifferent or "formless" existence (*existence informe*) that precedes properly perceptual acts. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the intra-uterine life might be thought on the basis of the modification of natural time. Here he also suggests that dispersed experiencing at the level of natural time excludes the capacity to remember. As he writes,

> "nothing was perceived in intra-uterine life, and this is why there is nothing to remember. There was nothing but the sketch of a natural self and of a natural time. This anonymous life is merely the limit of the temporal dispersion that always threatens the historical present."[668]

In short, Merleau-Ponty combines two thoughts: a phenomenological, reductive reflection on the impressional present, and the experiential moments of regression. The following passage is telling with this regard:

> "There is, however, at least a generalized time, and this is even the time intended by the common notion. This time is the perpetual starting over of the series: past, present, future. It is like a disappointment and a repeated failure. This is what we express in saying that time is continuous: the present that it brings to us is never really present, since it is always past when it appears, and the future has there but the appearance of a goal toward which we are moving, since it soon arrives in the present and since we then turn toward another future. This is the time of our bodily functions, which are cyclical like them, and it is the time of nature with which we coexist. It only offers us

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[664] Matthew Ratcliffe applies a similar kind of depiction to deeper forms of depression. According to him, depression in a deeper form can be described as a disability to make sense of the possibility of anything being practically significant for anyone (Ratcliffe 2013, 585–6). He cites a retrospective first-person report: "I watched others throwing a ball for a dog […] Why? Where was the sense in such repetition" (Brampton 2008, 249; cited in Ratcliffe 2013, 584).

[665] PhP, 191–2/167–8.

[666] PhP, 191–2/167–8, 339/307. See also PhP, 347–8.

[667] PhP, 325/293. Merleau-Ponty writes: "In the natural attitude, I have no *perceptions* […] Rather, I have a flow of experiences that implicate and explicate each other just as much in simultaneity as they do in succession.". About the mutual connectedness of perceptual experiences, see also PhP, 350–1/317.

[668] PhP, 399/362.

the outline and the abstract form of a commitment, since it continuously gnaws away at itself and undoes what it has just done."[669]

### 4.2.1 Merleau-Ponty's Characterization of Time as a Perpetuating Stream

How does Merleau-Ponty justify the characterization of the temporal flow of experience as a perpetuation? In short, there are two reasons, both of which are found in Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the temporal flow in the chapter "Temporality".[670] First is that Merleau-Ponty wants to account for the fixed structure of temporal flow. The temporal objects are experienced within an incessant process or passage in which a moment undergoes a modification from being anticipated to being present and past. The structure of the flow, within which temporal objects become present and past, however, is not modified and it does not change. Thus, the temporality must have an unchanging structure. But – and this is the second reason – the fixed structure must not be an a-temporal or eternal form. According to Merleau-Ponty "[t]ime must not merely be, it must come about […]".[671] What is, then, fixed but temporal? Merleau-Ponty's answer is that the "fixed" nature of temporality is that which repeats or perpetuates itself. The structure of time, having the three temporal dimensions or modalities of present, past and future, does not itself flow, but it renews or iterates itself.

In the chapter "Temporality", Merleau-Ponty accounts for the consciousness of time in terms of Husserl's distinction between the enduring temporal objects that are constituted within the stream of consciousness, and the self-constitution of the temporal flow itself.[672] The former, which Merleau-Ponty calls the "constituted time", concerns the manner in which temporal objects appear. In the unity of a melody, different notes are heard one after another. During the course of the experience, a phase of the melody arrives, becomes present, and then undergoes a modification in which it recedes in the past or "sinks" until shriveling up into oblivion.[673] Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl's key claim, according to which the past note does not appear as recalled in a distinct act within the experience of the lasting unity of the melody, and the becoming note is not anticipated in a distinct act. Instead, the past and future phases are directly retained and anticipated (in protention) in a non-thematic, passive manner that belongs to the very continuity of the melody. The unity of the flow of temporal moments forms the core of the experience of temporal objects. Originally, consciousness of time is characterized by a "double horizon of originary past and originary future".[674]

However, the order of the moments of the temporal objects, and the ipseity of the present moment, are preserved even when they sink into the past. Thus, the process of sinking into the past is a transformation of a self-identical moment, in which it becomes modified as an increasingly distant or remote past. In other

669 PhP, 516–7/479.
670 PhP, 469–495/432–57.
671 PhP, 474/438.
672 This is a cardinal distinction in Husserl's analysis of inner time-consciousness. See Hua10(PCIT), §35.
673 PhP, 483/446.
674 PhP, 484/448.

words, the melody, when it becomes more and more remote, does not become formless, or the order of its moments do not suddenly appear as changing their parts.[675]

All temporal objects undergo a similar kind of modification. This implies that the temporal structure itself appears as fixed and not itself something that undergoes a modification. Nevertheless, the temporal structure is a constant flow.[676] Merleau-Ponty borrows Heidegger's insight on the temporal dimensions,[677] according to which each temporal modus is co-determined by the others: the past "is a previous future and a recent present", the present "an impeding past and a recent future", and the future "a present and even a past to come".[678] It is not sufficient to present the flow as a static, simultaneous multiplicity of instants. Instead, it is one single "organic" movement in which the instants "differentiate themselves from each other".[679]

In short, temporality always appears as one single flow and not as some kind of *eternity* or *indiscernibility* of the instants of time. Merleau-Ponty depicts the flowing unity of time as the form of a fountain that remains unchanging while the water that goes through it changes.[680] Temporal objects, contents or moments that pass through time (the flowing water) are not correlated with a constituting eternal subject, but with a constituting flow. Merleau-Ponty also characterizes the constituting flow as an "indivisible thrust", a "springing forth", or as a "transition-synthesis".[681]

Another key idea that Merleau-Ponty borrows from Husserl is that the constituting flow also constitutes or "temporalizes" itself. The idea of self-temporalization makes sense if one considers singular experiences and the flowing of experiencing as two distinct elements of the temporality of experiencing.[682] *First*, the flow consists of singular, transitory, changing and temporally distinct experiences. *Second*, we can conceive of the flow of experiencing, or in Merleau-Ponty's terms, the "cohesion of life", as an abiding dimension. The flow of experiencing underlies and "encompasses" singular experiences, and it is not reducible to any singular experience.

This implies that not only objects are given as temporal, but also the experiences of these objects become past and thus something intra-temporal. For instance, I look out of the window and see a tree, and after this I hear a melody. At the moment in which I listen to a melody, the tree that I saw already recedes into the past, and I am related to it in retention while I am actually listening to the melody. However, not only the tree but also the constituting act of looking at the tree is retained. Thus, I do not only grasp the tree as a past, but also my act as a past, intra-temporal event. In a similar manner, within the lasting experience of

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675 This does not exclude the possibility of forgetting the melody or recalling it incorrectly.
676 PhP, 479/442.
677 See Heidegger 2010, 334.
678 PhP, 481/444.
679 PhP, 479/442.
680 PhP, 482/445.
681 PhP, 484/446. With the latter term Merleau-Ponty refers to Husserl's analysis of passive synthesis.
682 PhP, 481/444, 485/448. See also Zahavi 2005, 66–7.

a melody, as Dan Zahavi puts it, "each retention preserves not only the preceding conscious tone but also the preceding primal presentation".[683] If there was not any retention of the temporal phase of the temporal object, the order of the flowing moments would not be preserved. The just-passed impressions would be retained, but they would not have any order of precedence or succession: there would be an unordered "chaos". However, on what condition we do retain the temporal phase of the object? We retain the temporal phase if we do not retain only the impression of the object, but *also* that the object was present *having* its preceding and succeeding moments. The order of the flow is due to a process in which the flow *becomes* a part of the flow: time becomes temporal or temporalized by itself.

The ultimate temporal consciousness is both a passive, unregulated, uncontrollable and spontaneous streaming unity, and the particular, distinguishable experiences that are constituted within the unity. The problem, according to Merleau-Ponty, is to think these two as aspects of a same process of self-temporalization, and not to fall into a dichotomy in which the two would be divided into distinct entities. Self-temporalization of the living present is a process in which the present phase incessantly becomes a retained past. This streaming movement constitutes a differentiation, a temporal split, a lag or a distance within the subject, which makes a primitive "self-reflective" grasp of oneself possible:

> "Time tears me away from what I was about to be, but simultaneously gives me the means of grasping myself from a distance and actualizing myself as myself."[684]

For this reason, Merleau-Ponty characterizes the flow of self-temporalization as a process of self-affection or self-manifestation.[685] A retained past intentional lived experience exercises an affective force on us: it radiates to the present phase of the flow. Here, Merleau-Ponty adopts Husserl's answer to a problem of regression: namely, if there was an unconsciousness at the heart of consciousness, if the very flowing of the flow would not be self-aware, if consciousness would not be disclosed to itself, another flowing consciousness would be needed in order to disclose the flow. The answer is that there is no need for a second flow in order that consciousness would become reflected and disclosed, because the stream of consciousness is a process of being affected by oneself within the very movement of differentiation of the stream. Thus, there is something like a luminosity of the very temporal flow that grounds the possibility of a reflective self-awareness of oneself. The primal self-awareness of experiencing has been characterized by a "livedness" of the experiences.[686] Instead of an unconsciousness at the center of the temporal flow, there is a self-consciousness with a varying scope of affection. The scope of affection determines the above-mentioned retentional and protentional expanse, that is, where the radiation reaches, and to which extent the subject is affected by the retained past and the protended future.

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683 Zahavi 2005, 68.
684 PhP, 488/451.
685 PhP, 487/450.
686 Taipale 2009, 39.

Here it is not necessary to discuss in more detail the difficult problematic of the self-awareness of time-consciousness.[687] It is sufficient to remark that Merleau-Ponty aims at describing a fundamental level of experiential self-givenness as a self-affection that belongs to the very flowing of the original temporality. Merleau-Ponty is affirmative to the idea of "an original and immediate non-objectifying self-givenness".[688] However, he is careful not to claim that this self-givenness would be a static, complete or self-enclosed matter. Instead, it is a self-givenness of an original stream, a flow which is a unity of presencing (primal presentation) in a differentiation or "absencing". Thus, self-temporalization is a structure of experiencing or a temporal structure of livedness of the experiences that is operative in each and every experience. The contents of the experiences are variable, but their character of livedness remains the same. As I already showed, the incontrollable flow of experiencing, once it is established in birth, is perpetuated. Merleau-Ponty characterizes it as a "situated being that we perpetually start over and that is constitutive of us".[689] Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty thinks that the unity of experiencing is ultimately a unity of a temporal flow that lasts beyond the order and disorder of particular experiences. Accordingly, the temporal modification of natural time is a modification of this unity, and if it is dispersed, this does not mean that the ultimate temporal continuity of experiencing would be broken off.

There is no unconsciousness at the center of the temporal flow, but a self-consciousness with a varying scope of affection. The scope of affection determines the above-mentioned retentional and protentional expanse, that is, where the radiation reaches, and to which extent the subject is affected by the retained past and the protended future. This is also the manner in which the impressional present becomes defined. Let us next explicate Husserl's conception of the impressional present.

### 4.2.2 The Impressional Present

Basically, a temporal unity is a unity of a single temporal object that endures through continuous but separable phases. Even if one abstracts from a multiplicity of objects, and even if one abstracts from any relations between different sense

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[687] The question concerning the "primal impression" is a subject of debate: is it a question of a non-conscious process that becomes aware of itself, or whether it is a process that is itself self-aware? For instance, Zahavi claims that the primal impression is an ultimate mode of self-awareness. The argument for this is that an unconscious primal impression could not be retained. Here Zahavi refers to Husserl, according to whom the meaning of the primal impression as a "now" would be incomprehensible if it would be unconscious (Zahavi 2005, 69): "It is just nonsense to talk about an 'unconscious' content that would only subsequently become conscious. Consciousness is necessarily *consciousness* in each of its phases" (Hua 10, 119). Jacques Derrida, and more recently Claude Romano have accounted for the structure of time-consciousness in a different manner. Romano conceives of the core of temporality in terms of an "event". The 'presence' of the event "is not something present, but presence of something constitutively absent". Accordingly, "the event discloses itself *as present* only if it appears as *past*, in the light of its future", that is, when it is constituted as (having) *sense*. (Romano 1999, 182.)

[688] Zahavi 2005, 70.

[689] PhP, 488/451.

contents, one can contend that the unity of a single object is an enduring flowing connection of the phases of duration that follow each other, making up a lasting continuity of an object. For instance, a single sound, as it is heard, appears as a lasting duration. When a sound is heard, the sound's unity is by necessity constituted of transient moments of hearing the sound. This holds for all experienced objects: there are no static, non-temporal appearances or experiences, but all conceivable or thinkable objects are ultimately lasting temporal unities.

Merleau-Ponty does not think that the dispersed natural time would correspond to this kind of a purely indeterminate temporal field. A field of temporal flow, a field of a pure succession and coexistence of data, in which no associative relations between the data was constituted, would be totally indeterminate. In fact, if a melody is conceived from a point of view of a pure temporal continuity, then no different contents of the notes, nor associative relations between the different contents, would be constituted. The unity of melody would then only be a temporal binding together of the successive phases, regardless of the contents of the phases of the melody. However, biological existence is characterized by a blind, instinctive tendency and an intentionality that has a specific content. In the need to breathe or in the movement of the focusing of the eyes, there is an urgent awareness of the particular need, and a selection of this particular prominent unity. To regress to the level of the bodily functions cannot mean a regression to a level of an experiential state of total affective and perceptual indifference. In a state of a total affective and experiential indifference, the conditions that trigger the breathing would not be differentiated as urgent and one would not be motivated to breath at all. Merleau-Ponty contends that the level of natural time is not affectively indifferent. There is an anonymous vigilance of the eyes during the sleep, and the gaze "takes interest" in some object while we live through a state of affective regression.[690] If the gaze, as an impersonal force, has an interest, then it must not be affectively neutral or indifferent.

Instead, we can find a modification of temporality that corresponds with natural time if we look at Husserl's conception of the impressional present. Husserl makes the distinction between impression and reproduction already in *Ideas II*, so this distinction must be acknowledged by Merleau-Ponty. Impressions refer to "original sensations", which are prior or pre-given with respect the acts of the Ego.[691] By associating impressions with primal sensibility, Husserl refers to a field of phenomenological study, that which is titled in *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* (hereafter "*APS*") as "original passivity". As he points out, "the emergence and disappearing" of "sensuous impressions" occurs according to certain laws, which can be studied.[692]

A theory of association is an important part of *APS*. In his analysis of the phenomenon of association Husserl engages into a more detailed, systematic study of the ways in which the impressional sense data can be connected with each other. The phenomenological explication of associations presupposes the

690 PhP, 100/86.
691 Hua4(Id2), 336/348.
692 Hua4(Id2), 336/348.

basic constitution of temporal unities, and the theory of time-consciousness. As Husserl notices, "the phenomenology of association is, so to speak, a higher continuation of the doctrine of original time-constitution".[693] Furthermore, the account of association must presuppose the "universal laws" of coexistence and succession of temporal unities.[694] If, on a lower (or more abstract) level, a temporal unity of a single lasting object is a streaming of a manifold of appearances, on a higher level there is a necessary unity of coexistence and succession of multiple objects within a unique temporality.[695]

Husserl points out that the phenomenological reflections concerning time-consciousness and coexistence and succession concern *whatever* objects or data, regardless of their content. In this sense, these reflections are abstract and formal. Instead, the phenomenology of association shifts the focus on a more concrete level, insofar as it now takes in the question of the *content* of an object and relations between *contents* of objects.[696]

What is important, with respect to natural time, is that Husserl divides his phenomenological analysis of association into two parts. On the one hand, one can reflect on the associations that can appear within the sphere of the impressional present. On the other, on a still more concrete level, one can explore the reproductive associative relations. We have already pointed out that the difference has to do with the temporal scope of radiation or affective force of the experience. The impressional sphere is the sphere of experience which is intuitive, while the sphere of reproductions also contain that which is recalled, remembered and expected. Remembering and expecting are related to contents that are no longer intuitive. Besides remembering and expectation, what is left out of the field of the impressional are "all types of phantasy, all types of conceptual acts, valuing and willing activities".[697] What is this difference between the impressional sphere and the sphere of reproduction? Let us clarify the distinction by looking at Husserl's account of the retentional modification of an intentional lived experience.

According to Husserl, the temporal center of the experience is the primal impression. This is also the center of affective and intuitive vivacity. For instance, while we listen to a continuous tone, the actually intuited phase of the tone changes. That which is actually given in intuition is only "a small and extensive portion" of the tone.[698] As actually given, the phase of the tone is at the peak of "most intensive intuitability".[699] Then, as it begins to recede in the past, the intuitability of the phase of the tone gradually loses its affective force, until it comes

693 Hua11, 118/163.
694 Hua11, 127/172–3.
695 Hua11, 127/172. Here I will not go to Husserl's explication of the coexistence and succession. Merleau-Ponty follows this account, as can be seen in the following passage: "Time in the widest sense, that is, the order of co-existences as well as that of successions, is a setting to which one can gain access and which one can understand only by occupying a situation in it, and grasping it in its entirely through the horizons of that situation" (PhP, 383/347).
696 Hua11, 128/174.
697 Hua11, 129/174–5.
698 Hua11, 169/218.
699 Hua11, 169/218.

"to the point of nil intuitability".[700] However the phase still exerts *affective force* when its intuitability is lost. In other words, there is a certain expanse of the still intuitable retention. According to Husserl, there is no sudden closing off of the intuitability, but a gradual degradation and a becoming nil. The fresh, intuitable retention is surrounded by an expanded experiential scope of "empty retention". This means that, after losing its intuitability, an object or, as in the above example, a phase, becomes "empty" of intuition. In another words, it is not anymore directly at hand or within the immediate reach. However, that which is not intuitable anymore, is "still given to consciousness […] in the special sense, namely, as affective".[701] While the object still continues to recede in the past, also its affective force or radiation attenuates little by little. Husserl depicts this process as a gradual emptying of content.[702] As we have seen in chapter 3, Merleau-Ponty presents a similar account of this process of degradation.[703]

However, the central point with regard to our purposes is that an object that has become empty of intuitability cannot be awakened in a similar manner than a still-intuited object. An associative awakening of something "already given to consciousness" differs from the awakening of the "concealed". Remembering is an example of the latter. In remembering, affective force "radiates back" into the empty consciousness that is still vivace. Remembering is a kind of associative reproduction that renews an intentional lived experience that has already become non-intuitive. However, the field of the impressional present also consists of a manifold of associative awakenings, and Husserl suggests that these associations can be phenomenologically studied by a reductive limitation of the research to the field of the intuitive. The field of the intuitive or of the impressional consciousness reaches "as far as retention that is still living reaches", it consists of "a unified multiplicity of sense data (visual data, sound data, etc.)", and it is "constituted in simultaneity and succession".[704]

Thus, the field of the impressional consciousness is reached by abstracting from "the distant horizon of forgetfulness and […] the realm of rememberings", from the "transcending apperceptions arising from further reaching subjective lawful regularities", and from the "modes of knowledge acquired in the life of the world, aesthetic and practical interests, values and the like".[705]

Nevertheless, the field of the intuitable is not bereft of affectivity: Husserl mentions that there are functions of affectivity which are "founded purely in the

[700] Hua11, 169/218.
[701] Hua11, 170/218.
[702] Hua11, 170/218–9. Husserl writes: "[T]he end is completely undifferentiated: its lack of differentiation arises from complete powerlessness of affection. By every retentional procession losing its affective force in the process of change it itself becomes dead, it can no longer progress by fusing under prominence; for positive affective force is the fundamental condition of all life in dynamic connection and differentiation; if it is decreased to zero, its life ceases, precisely in its vivacity."
[703] See subchapter 3.3.
[704] Hua11, 138/184.
[705] Hua11, 149–50/196–8.

impressional sphere".[706] Remarkably, these include "originally instinctive, drive related preferences".[707]

### 4.2.3 The Impressional Present and Natural Time

Now, we can see how Husserl's delimitation of the impressional present corresponds to the natural time. It is not a question of a pure temporal flow without any difference in content, or without any relations of associative motivation. Instead, there can be a relatively rich life of motivational relations between the multiplicity of coexistent and succeeding "objects" of senses that are given within the scope of that which is intuitable. I will return to the theme of associations in chapter 6.[708] It is also possible to conceive of a sudden emergence of a blind, instinctive tendency, and it is possible to conceive of urgent needs such as the need to breathe, provided that the need is triggered by the elements present within the scope of the intuitable.

However, at the same time, we can conceive of the limitedness of the impressional present. For instance, a self-identical object of perception appears as a unity that transcends the intuitive experience and requires a capacity to reproductively awaken the preceding experience of the object, which has already become emptied of intuitability. In this manner we can conceive of the *dispersion* of natural time. An experience reduced to what is intuitable becomes dispersed, insofar as the non-intuitive does not radiate towards the center of presence. As we saw above, habituation requires a certain scope of affection, in other words, an expanse of that which comes through to us. Acquisition of habit requires a reproductive capacity: it requires a capacity to awaken the emptied past act at the moment of accomplishing the act again. If the past act does not affectively radiate, then there simply is no constitution of genetic density, and the process of habituation cannot take place. Thus, Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "The instant of natural time establishes nothing. It must immediately be renewed, and is in fact renewed in another instant. Sensorial functions by themselves do not make me exist in the world."[709]

To conclude, we can conceive of natural time as a lower capacity-level or a regression of the subject, in which the horizonal awareness or the scope of affective radiation is diminished. In this manner we can understand that natural time is a mode of temporality which can consist of intentional syntheses, such as the intentional, instinctive movement of the eyes, and yet remain a dispersed temporal continuity. The time of our bodily functions is dispersed, which means that there is no awareness, either reflective awareness or an unthematic bodily awareness, which would reach out over the small circle of the impressional present. One aspect of the natural time, which is an experience imprisoned to the actuality, is that the intentional lived experiences are well based on pre-given intentional

[706] Hua11, 150/198.
[707] Hua11, 150/198.
[708] See subchapter 6.3.
[709] PhP, 193/168.

schemata that occur spontaneously with respect to the actual surrounding environment, and motivate intentional lived experiences, but there could not be any acquisition of habit either in the sense of a modification of the body schema and acquiring a new signification, or in the sense of constitution of familiarity through the process of habituation, which is a concordant repetition.[710] Learning requires, to use Husserl's terms, reproductive association. In this manner we can understand Merleau-Ponty's claim that natural time is *cyclical*, and the *physical world* as the actual surrounding environment is *monotonous* and *stereotyped*, unlike the historical time and the cultural world, in which intentional lived experiences develop.

Finally, we have to keep in mind that, according to Merleau-Ponty, natural time is a modification of a capacity-level. In other words, natural time is not a disappearance or emergence of specific intentional schemata. Instead, it is a modification of the relation of the subject to the acquired structures that guide the intentional experience. This is also why natural time is not a disappearance of the possession of transcendence or of the horizon of the world. It is wholly possible that a subject lives within the horizon of the world, but the level of experiencing is regressed to the level of "natural time".

In the following chapter, we will clarify these ideas further by examining Merleau-Ponty's analysis of motor intentionality.

[710] Again, this claim does not imply that reproduction could not be a pre-personal phenomenon.

# 5 MOTOR INTENTIONALITY

Up to now we have been elaborating the idea that biological existence is an intentional lived experiencing that operates at a lower level. In the last chapter I brought forth a contrast between habit and natural time, and pointed out that Merleau-Ponty associates biological existence with natural time. But then, I also suggested that natural time can be considered on the basis of Husserl's reduction to the impressional present in his phenomenological investigation of passive syntheses of association. The impressional present is characterized by a limitation of the retentional expanse, or the scope of that which comes through to the subject, to that which is intuitive. The subject restricted to the scope of the impressional present is aware of a horizon of an intuitive past and future, but this subject cannot operate with non-intuitive possibilities.

In the following chapters, I will focus on how Merleau-Ponty applies this notion of the limited horizonal awareness in order to distinguish a level of biological existence with respect to three central aspects of consciousness, motility, affectivity and sensibility.

In the chapter at hand, I will deal with motor intentionality and the awareness of one's own body in actions. The thematic focus is in particular in the chapter "The Spatiality of the Body and Motricity", where Merleau-Ponty explores patient Schneider's pathological motor intentionality. What does Schneider's case teach us about the limitedness of the field of experience? And what does it tell us about biological existence? As we will see, Schneider's case bears some similarities with Husserl's reduction to the "impressional present", even though one has to keep in mind that these two experiences should not at all be thought of as equal. According to Merleau-Ponty Schneider's problem must be ultimately thought as a diminishing of the field of experience, and in the case of motor intentionality, a reduction of the available motor field. This is the point of similarity between the impressional consciousness and Schneider's pathological experience: in both cases the scope of affection is narrowed.

But what is a motor field, and why does Merleau-Ponty take up the notion of the experience of a background field, horizon or a space of experiencing when he explores the experience of one's own body? The reason is that the awareness

of one's own body does not consist of purely temporally succeeding experiences. Instead, one's own body is experienced as a *whole* that consists of a multiplicity of coexistent partial experiences. We touch things with different limbs and different parts of the skin, and the sensations of external touching objects are immediately located in certain places in one's own body. Here, Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl's analysis of the localization of bodily sensations in *Ideas II*. The localized sensations have a constitutive significance with regard to the perception of objects. The perceived objects entail an awareness of an ordered system of sensations which correspond with an awareness of an ordered movement of one's own body. But the awareness of the ordered movement of one's limb also entails an awareness of the other body parts in the background. We must have kinesthetic sensations of the movement of our eyes in order that we see what we see. The ordered movement is an ordered temporal unity, and as we have seen, the awareness of a temporal unity occurs in passing through the phases of the unity. At each phase in which we sense the movement, we must also be aware of the past phases and the anticipated phases of the movement in order to be aware of the ordered unity, such as when we look left, or when we figure out the spatial shape of an object. Each phase, which is present at a time, is thus surrounded by a temporal horizon. However, we are not only aware of our eyes, but also our hands, legs, fingers, back and the overall posture of our body. The other parts of the body are coexistent, simultaneous kinesthetic sensations which have a varying spatial location. The actual kinesthetic feelings and the visual sensations are at the focus or the center of the experience, while the other kinesthetic feelings and external sensations remain at the background. There is a certain normal posture that the body must have in order that focusing on a particular visual object is possible: simply, for example, I cannot turn around at the same time. To conclude, the experience of one's body is a spatial awareness of a multiplicity of points that have a systematic order.[711] Merleau-Ponty uses the term *body schema* for the order that guides the awareness of one's own body in perceptions and actions. The systematic order of the body schema is a configuration consisting of a spatial and temporal center and margins or background. This is also why the awareness of one's own body implies an awareness of a horizon.[712] Only if there is a certain capacity to be aware of the surrounding background, and not only of that which is at the spatial or temporal center, perceptions of objects and motor intentionality of actions are possible. And the case of Schneider is about what occurs if the scope of this awareness of what remains in the background becomes abnormally reduced.

There has recently been a lively discussion of Merleau-Ponty's use of Schneider's case for his purpose of formulating a conception of motor intentionality.[713] Johann Schneider was one of the patients treated and examined by Kurt Goldstein in the hospital in which he worked as the director. Goldstein's studies

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711 PhP, 114/100.
712 PhP, 117/103.
713 On the recent discussion, see, for instance, Dreyfus 2007, Kelly 2002, Romdeh-Romluc 2007, Jensen 2009, Mooney 2011 and Rietveld 2013.

also provide the main source for Merleau-Ponty's treatment on the subject.[714] Schneider was wounded by shrapnel during the First World War, which issued in a variety of problems in his motor, affective and perceptual life.

As is well known, specifically in the long chapter "The Spatiality of the Body and Motricity", Merleau-Ponty argues for the claim that motor intentionality implies an original kind of awareness of the spatiality of one's own body which is not a reflective or thematic awareness. The awareness of motor intentionality does not have the propositional form "I think that". Instead, Merleau-Ponty suggests that practical awareness of movement possibilities is an awareness of an actual capacity to do something or an actual incapacity to not do something. Merleau-Ponty formulates motor intentionality on the basis of Husserl's conception of the horizonal awareness of a practical possibility, which according to Husserl is an awareness of an "I can".[715]

In the recent discussion, one of the central points of contention has been whether Schneider's pathology essentially reveals the same kind of motor intentionality that is operative in normal life, or whether Schneider's intentional life is altered in every regard, in that his pathological motor intentionality differs with significant regard from normal action awareness. I will opt for the latter interpretation. Schneider's pathological motor intentionality lacks something that essentially belongs to the normal action awareness or full-fledged absorbed skillful coping. Insofar as Schneider's experience is characterized as a lack of a capacity, or as a dissociation of capacities that are normally integrated, it is a question of a lower-level intentionality. However, this does not mean that the pathological experience could be characterized simply as lacking *some feature* of normal experience, but is otherwise similar to it. Instead, Merleau-Ponty thinks that all the other partial capacities that make up the total experience become adjusted and undergo a change when one of its central capacities disappears, or when a new central function, such as vision, emerges. To compare Schneider's case to another example used by Merleau-Ponty, the tactile experience of a blind person is not equal to the tactile experience of the person who also sees, because in this latter case the sense of touch is permeated by the structure of the field of vision.[716] Schneider's pathological experience is a unique configuration of existence that somehow involves all his partial capacities and skills.

Nevertheless, as Rasmus Thybo Jensen emphasizes, Merleau-Ponty characterizes Schneider's illness as a contraction of the awareness of action possibilities. Schneider's problem must also be accounted as a lowering or diminishing of a

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[714] See Jensen 2009. The clinical value of Goldstein's documentation of Schneider's case has been debated (see Goldenberg 2003; Jensen 2009; Mooney 2011). For one thing, Schneider's later, seemingly easy recovery has raised doubt over the truthfulness of his comportment and verbal reports during Goldstein's examinations. However, there are good reasons to believe that Schneider was not just pretending in order to please the observers. See Jensen 2009 and Mooney 2011.

[715] PhP, 160/139. In *Ideas II* Husserl claims that the faculty of free movement can be accounted for as an "I can" (Hua4, §38). See also Hua4, §60 a) "The 'I can' as logical possibility, as practical possibility and impossibility [...]".

[716] Below, I will return to the theme of vision and blindness. See subchapter 7.2.

capacity-level.[717] It is not that Schneider would have suddenly lost a specific ability, such as in the case of becoming blind and losing the sense of vision. Instead, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that Schneider's problem has a general character. It is an overall reduction of the capacity-level. In short, my contention is that, according to Merleau-Ponty, Schneider's problem is a general diminishing of a level of capacity to act, to be affected, and to perceive – and this diminishing is a contraction of the awareness of horizon – but because of this general disorder, certain acts remain impossible to carry out, and they remain lacking.[718]

Schneider's problem is a diminishing of the expanse of the "motor field",[719] a restriction of the scope of availability to the actual.[720] Schneider's pathological intentionality is a motor intentionality and affectivity "bound" to the actual.[721] Merleau-Ponty accounts for Schneider's problem in terms of the actual and the possible:

> "The normal person *reckons with* the possible, which thus acquires a sort of actuality without leaving behind its place as a possibility; for the patient, however, the field of the actual is limited to what is encountered in real contact or linked to these givens through an explicit deduction."[722]

Here we can see the link to Husserl's notion of the impressional present. As we will see, we can conceive of the field of the actual as that which remains intuitive. Accordingly, the possible, or as Merleau-Ponty also puts it, the projected, belongs to that which stretches beyond the intuitively present. Schneider's experience should not be thought simply as equal with a primitive instinctual level of intentionality, or with the dispersed temporality of natural time. However, on the basis of Schneider's experience we can have more tools to conceive of biological existence as a boundedness to the actual, which he has conceived as a kind of "reduction" to the impressional present. In other words, we can approach instinctive, pre-personal motor and affective intentionality by modifying Schneider's case.

In the first subchapter (4.1) I deal with the issue of motor intentionality more generally. Merleau-Ponty characterizes motor intentionality as an unthematic, pre-reflective and spontaneous bodily awareness of the orientation, spatial location and the form of the object intended in its action. When one performs an action, one has a specific bodily "understanding" of oneself and the action-related objects, which is not a reflective or thematic consciousness[723] of the body or of the objects. When, for instance, one grasps an object, what is intended is the object to

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717 Jensen 2009.
718 Mooney 2011, 365. Mooney writes: "[I]llness is […] its own unique configuration of existence".
719 PhP, 136/119. Merleau-Ponty writes: "[T]he disorder consists in a shrinking of the motor field, from now on limited to the actually tangible objects and to the exclusion of that horizon of possible touching that surrounds them for the normal subject". See also, PhP, 126–7/111.
720 See also PhP, 129/114.
721 PhP, 158/137.
722 PhP, 127/112.
723 PhP, 124/109.

be grasped, and the action does not involve any separate perception, representation[724] or image of the body to be moved.[725] But neither does one need to reflect on or thematically refer to the object to be grasped, or to think about the object under a unifying ideal meaning in order to grasp it.[726] In motor intentionality the body has a practical understanding of its action possibilities and of its object directly and fluently within the progression of the performed movement itself.[727] A central feature of motor intentionality is that the vectors that guide movement within the action require an awareness of a pre-given behavioral body schema.[728]

In subchapter 4.2 I will account for Schneider's pathological motor intentionality, and in subchapter 4.3 the purpose is to look at biological existence as a further modification similar to Schneider's case. What is the modification of the motor intentionality brought forth by the contraction of the action possibilities which amounts to the boundedness to the actual? One counterintuitive feature of the contracted intentionality is that it, too, requires a possession and an awareness of a *pre-given* intentional schema. This seems odd because the intentional schema, insofar as it is *pre*-given, is precisely past and in this sense not actual. Purportedly, Schneider's capacity-level has altered, so the horizonal expanse of motor intentionality is contracted. The non-intuitive does not bear affective force for him. However, it seems not to make sense that he is still able to perform actions that are familiar and habitual to him. However, it is the case that Schneider's habitual possessions, the latent or implicit schemata for action, are awakened when Schneider is at the workplace. Shouldn't one, instead, lack any guidance for behavior, if one is bounded by the actual?

Here one has to look critically at the notion of the actual. The actual should not be understood as a now-point in objective time, the "now" in the series of "nows" that have no properties, or experience as a succession of isolated sensory givens.[729] Accordingly, Schneider has not lost his habitual possessions. However, what has been modified is the manner and the situations in which these latent possessions become actual capacities, and the manner in which Schneider accomplishes these pre-given possessions.

*On the one hand*, Schneider retains the skills but cannot creatively modify or transpose them. In particular, it will be shown that, in Merleau-Ponty's account, a significant feature of normal motor intentionality is what Timothy Mooney calls the capacity for transposition. The capacity for transposition is an ability to creatively develop previously unimaginable movements in order to adapt to new situations. Mooney claims that, in Schneider's case, precisely this capacity is diminished, insofar as Schneider to some extent sticks to the very past forms of habitual

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724 PhP, 161/140.
725 PhP, 120/106, 123/108.
726 PhP, 123/108. Merleau-Ponty writes: "The workbench, the scissors, and the pieces of leather are presented to the subject as poles of action." See also PhP, 161/140, 168/145.
727 This claim does not imply the impossibility of bodily actions directed towards recalled, fantasized, imagined or virtual objects. For instance, writing with an imaginary keyboard differs from writing with a perceived keyboard. However, just like in the latter case, the imaginary keyboard does not have to be represented as an object of reflection.
728 PhP, 160–1/139–40.
729 PhP, 178/154, 384/348, 472/435.

practices. In Chapter 3 we saw that Merleau-Ponty draws an analogy between biological existence and the functioning of a repressed past. Biological existence qua instinctive intentionality is an existence "imprisoned" to and overridden by a pre-given intentional schema. The general intentional schema, inscribed in the very organization of the body, is similar to the repressed past in that the intentional schema remains unavailable for the subject. In this manner boundedness to the actual amounts to being overridden by a past.

*On the other hand,* Schneider *retains* the habitual actions, but the manner in which these skills are *awakened* is modified. The possessions can be put into practice only when the motivating context is intuitively present. All of Schneider's associations occur within the sphere of the impressional present. Accordingly, biological existence at the dispersed level of intentionality is motivated only by the actually present sign or trigger. When the trigger appears, and as much as it is present, the cycle of behavior will continue. When the trigger disappears, the behavior will fade away. Thus, with the intentionality radically bounded to the actual, we encounter that which we are always already doing insofar as we, as bodily beings, are in part instinctive beings, or as Merleau-Ponty writes, "the movement by which [consciousness] throws itself into a thing and into a world by means of its organs and instruments."[730]

## 5.1 The General Characteristics of Motor Intentionality

Merleau-Ponty argues for the originality of the motor intentionality by criticizing the so-called intellectualist theory of action. To borrow Rasmus Thybo Jensen's phrasing, according to the intellectualist theory intentional action can be rendered intelligible in terms of two notionally separable components; conscious intention and physical movement.[731] The intellectualist theory of action is thus compatible with the Cartesian dichotomy between the mental and the physical, and with a purely natural-scientific understanding of the body motility. Or, in other words, it is compatible with a dichotomy between "movement as a third person process and thought as a representation of movement."[732] In Merleau-Ponty's view, this is also the account of "classical psychology", which aims at adapting the theory of action and movement to the idea of a domain of objective nature that consists of purely physical objects.[733] The intellectualist theory begins with a definition of consciousness as positional and reflective awareness of an object.[734] Accordingly, there is no specific consciousness of the actual movement of one's body because one only becomes conscious of the movement when one reflects on it or thinks about it.[735] The experience of the movement of one's own body would

730 PhP, 178/154.
731 Jensen 2009.
732 PhP, 128/113.
733 PhP, 110–1/97–8, 121/106.
734 PhP, 121/106.
735 PhP, 128/113.

be like the experience of the movement of external objects because we would be conscious of our moving body only at the moment we began to reflect on it and conceive it as an object.[736] The thinking of movement, according to the intellectualist theory, is a propositional understanding of movement or action, such as when one understands what it means to "jump" or "move one's arm", or "trace a circle in the air".[737] Furthermore, we become conscious of a movement or an action when we become able to subsume it under a category, like when we expressly recognize the movement in question as an instance of jumping. In the intellectualist account depicted by Merleau-Ponty, without such a propositional ability to categorize the singular actions under general concepts, the consciousness of movement is dispersed into a mere reception of a mass of sensory data.[738] Thus, according to the intellectualist theory, actions must consist of the two components of a conscious intention that represents or thinks *about* the action (its goal, the forms of the movements to be performed), and the physical movement that is causally initiated by the conscious intention. Moving one's body would be causing movements in one's own body, and to this extent it would be similar to moving external objects with one's body.[739]

Now, as Jensen puts it, according to the intellectualist theory of action the representational consciousness is a necessary and sufficient condition "for the possibility of performing intentional actions in the normal immediate way".[740] As Jensen shows, Merleau-Ponty's critique of this theory, in which he makes use of Schneider's pathological experience, is twofold. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that reflective and positional thinking of action is not *necessary* for accounting for Schneider's pathological intentionality, and for the same reason it is not necessary for normal motor intentionality. On the other hand, the representational awareness is not *sufficient* for accounting for motor intentionality.

In order to understand how Merleau-Ponty argues for these two claims, we have to see how Merleau-Ponty, following Goldstein, accounts for the difference between Schneider's pathological and normal motor intentionality.[741] On the basis of his observations of Schneider's behavior and his experiences, Goldstein makes a general distinction between concrete and abstract movement. Schneider can perform so-called *concrete* movements, but cannot execute *abstract* movements. More generally speaking, Schneider has difficulties in perceiving shapes and sizes of both external objects and his own body, and in performing actions if the objects to be perceived or the tasks to be performed are isolated (abstracted) from the flow of the actual meaningful situation and the urgencies of everyday

736 PhP, 110/96–7.
737 PhP, 127–8/112–3.
738 PhP, 140–1/123.
739 PhP, 110/97.
740 See Jensen 2009.
741 In fact, Merleau-Ponty does not only refer to Schneider's particular case. He also makes use of other kinds of pathological motor intentionality. For instance, Schneider has grave difficulties in perceiving simultaneous multiplicities or recognizing immediately the forms or shapes of objects. There are other patients, whose perceptual abilities are normal, but who cannot perform abstract movements.

life.[742] For example, Schneider has difficulties in moving his limbs on request, describing the positions of the parts of his body if asked, localizing tactile sensations, and recognizing objects "pressed against his body".[743] Instead, he *is* capable to perform fluently ("with extraordinary speed and confidence")[744] actions such as taking a handkerchief and blowing his nose, lighting the lamp with a match taken from a matchbox, finding a mosquito bite in his body, or the actions required by the wallet-making work during his rehabilitation (such as sewing the leather and cutting the lining).[745] The perceptions and actions that are not available to Schneider are isolated from the meaningfulness of the current situation, and arbitrary with regard to the urgent need, demand or desire of the subject. The latter actions, instead, are habitual and familiar, and as Jensen puts it, "performed in the run of everyday life".[746] Concrete movements are those performed in concrete, ongoing situations, while abstract movements are performed independently of the demands of the situation or the current context.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty exemplifies the difference between concrete and abstract movement by referring to the experience of another patient, who is unable to point to his nose, but able to grasp it on command.[747] A similar kind of example is one patient's ability to knock on the door in front of him, if the door is within reach (and "graspable") – but inability to perform the movement of knocking, if the door is too far away, and out of the immediate reach.[748] Applied to Schneider's case, one could say that Schneider is not able to execute the action of pointing to or even grasping his nose if it must be done upon request (insofar as the motivation for the task is arbitrary), but he is able to grasp his nose if he wants to blow it.[749] The two movements, which as observed physical movements might appear as indistinguishable (bringing one's finger to his or her nose), differ with regard to the subject's attitude. Thus, one has to take into account the subject's situation and the attitude demanded by the task.

Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that reflective and representational thinking of action is not *necessary* for accounting for motor intentionality by appealing to the fact that Schneider (like the other pathological cases) is able to execute the concrete movements (the habitual, familiar actions) to a certain extent fluently and spontaneously. The execution of a concrete movement, such as finding a mosquito bite in one's leg, requires an anticipation of the goal and of the locations

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[742] Merleau-Ponty writes that concrete movements are performed in "the busy world" [*le monde plein*]. PhP, 129/114. Business or fullness of the world means an environment in which there is no room for any kind of reflective distance, abstraction or isolation of the actions.
[743] PhP, 119/105.
[744] PhP, 119–20/105.
[745] PhP, 121/106–7. Jensen 2009.
[746] Jensen 2009.
[747] PhP, 120/106.
[748] PhP, 136/119.
[749] PhP, 121–2/105–6. In fact, Schneider would be able to point to his nose if it did belong to some concrete, habitual situation. Namely, he is able to do a military salute, if he succeeds to get engaged into the concrete situation which the particular gesture is part of. However, Schneider does not express this gesture freely, but as if he was following an already scripted text. Namely, the performance cannot be interrupted, and Schneider cannot abbreviate or modify the gesture in any manner. (PhP, 121/107.)

of the appropriate objects (the hand, the location of the bite in the leg) during the course of the movement itself. But the question is the following: if Schneider is able to touch his leg in case of a concrete movement in a concrete situation, but not able to do it in an abstract situation, what is this knowing anticipation of the location of the object to be grasped, *which is not* pointing towards it or which is not done by one's arbitrary will or upon the other's request? As Merleau-Ponty asks,

> "[i]f I know where my nose is when it is a matter of grasping it, how could I not know where my nose is when it is a matter of pointing to it?"[750]

The representational awareness requires the capacity to refer to things by pointing to them. It requires a capacity to demonstrate and to represent the locations of the body and of the objects in the environment by isolating them at will. For instance, I am able to voluntarily reflect on my leg and say "*this* is my knee", or I am able to freely look in front of me and point out that "*that* there is a stone".[751] However, this is what Schneider (or the other patient) cannot do. Nevertheless, Schneider performs fluently habitual actions related to urgent situations, as long as these situations are not interrupted and as long as they do not involve disturbing, context-strange elements.[752] But Merleau-Ponty contends that these actions are not mechanical in the manner of classical reflex-mechanisms.[753] Instead, they involve an understanding of the appropriate locations and shapes of the body parts and related objects. In short, when Schneider is engaged in the task of cutting the lining with scissors, he must have a spatial and temporal understanding of the lining-to-be-cut, his hand grasping the scissors, and the positioning of the rest his body, during all the different phases of the action. And this understanding of the body and of the object within the movement is not a reflective or indicative awareness of the locations. The intellectualist theory of action, as it operates with the narrow notion of representative consciousness, cannot account for Schneider's skillful coping when it is a question of habitual, context-familiar actions.

However, as Merleau-Ponty also claims, the representational consciousness characterized by the intellectualist theory of action is not *sufficient* to account for Schneider's pathological or normal motor intentionality. This is because Schneider can in fact, to a certain extent, represent the actions in a meaningful manner. Even if he cannot perform pointing acts or other abstract movements, and even if he cannot imagine them visually, he does understand what it means to "trace a circle in the air", for example.[754] He knows what a successful gesture of drawing a circle in the air is, and on this basis he can attempt to constructively perform

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[750] PhP, 120/106.
[751] A similar example is the "analytic operation" by which one isolates a color from the co-perceived surroundings. See PhP, 260–1/234–5.
[752] PhP, 122/107.
[753] PhP, 141–2/124.
[754] PhP, 156/136. Merleau-Ponty writes: "[h]is responses may be slow, but they are never meaningless, they are those of a mature and reflective man who is interested in doctor's experiments."

the movement, piece by piece. Or, as Merleau-Ponty describes, Schneider can make random attempts by moving his body until he happens to move in the correct manner – in this way he "finds" the correct movement.[755] Accordingly, he is able to think about the actions in a meaningful manner and to understand the meanings correctly, even though his mental operations differ from those of normal operations of intelligence.[756] But his way of performing actions on the basis of such an understanding is laborious and does not correspond to the normal spontaneous manner that actions are performed in. Instead, Schneider is obliged to construe actions in the laborious manner of proceeding step-by-step (I will return to this below), exactly because he lacks the normal capacity for abstract movements.[757] On this basis Merleau-Ponty claims that Schneider's representative capacity is not sufficient to account for normal motor intentionality.

If the intellectualist theory of action fails, then what are the characteristics of motor intentionality? At this point we have to take into account an ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty's argument pointed out by Jensen. The problem, originally taken up by Richard Zaner,[758] lies, in short, in the following inconsistency: on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty seems to claim that even if some abilities are lacking, Schneider's motor intentionality is preserved, and for this reason it provides an example of what motor intentionality (both pathological and normal) is. On the other hand, the claim is that Schneider's pathological situation does *not* account for normal motor intentionality. The patient "is said both to have a preserved and an impaired non-representational familiarity with his own body and his surroundings".[759] Thus, the question is: should we look in the description of Schneider's pathological experience for our own (normal) capacity, which is normally hidden, or is his case finally not comparable with ours? I will not go into the details of this problematic. I think Merleau-Ponty's text clearly supports Jensen's "moderate" interpretation, according to which pathological and normal motor intentionality are comparable, and we can point out some similarities between them. However, it is clear from Merleau-Ponty's methodological considerations that the pathological and normal should not be thought of as equal, which implies that we should not downplay the difference between them.[760] To be sure, Merleau-Ponty thinks that *contrasting* the pathological experience with the normal will disclose characteristics of experience that would otherwise remain difficult to point out.[761] What makes the contrasting comparison in particular possible is the fact that Schneider's illness was preceded by his past normal adult life, and for this reason he can attempt to execute these past performances on the basis of a substituting activity. In other words, he can (to some extent) successfully perform some of the same tasks that we perform normally – such as drawing on the

755 PhP, 122/107, 124/109.
756 PhP, 148–9/129–30.
757 Merleau-Ponty makes notice that Schneider is able to construe certain abstract movements, because he was able to execute them during his life *before* the wound. He attempts at maintaining the past performances, even if "their foundation has collapsed" (PhP, 160/139).
758 Zaner 1971, 186n1.
759 Jensen 2009.
760 PhP, 125/110.
761 PhP, 152–3/133.

basis of a visually given model (which is a task that he could also perform normally before being wounded) – but with different means, more laboriously, slowly and with peculiar results.[762] However, Merleau-Ponty claims that the normal cannot be deduced from the pathological, nor the pathological from the normal. Furthermore, he claims that the normal and pathological do not share any common partial function (such as vision, touching, perceiving a shape, counting, understanding a narrative or performing a movement), because *all* the functions are to some extent modified and have their pathological (such as in Schneider's case) and normal versions. The sense of both the pathological and normal experience in all of their partial aspects must be grasped on the basis of the whole of the experience.[763] In short, I think that both pathological and normal motor intentionality share the negative determination, according to which they cannot be accounted for in terms of representational consciousness. This negative determination correlates with some common features. However, when the difference between these two modifications is considered, the question becomes far more complex.

What is Merleau-Ponty's general characterization of the motor intentionality? One can describe the awareness of the object, of the surrounding environment, and the self-awareness in motor intentionality. Let us begin with the awareness of oneself in motor actions. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that when we move our body, we are not aware of our body as reflected, pictured or thought. For instance, when I grasp or point to a pen on the table, the focus of my action is on the pen and not on my moving hands, nor the rest of my body. As Romdeh-Romluc writes, in Merleau-Ponty's model of action, actions are not guided and controlled by thoughts of actions, but by "perceived opportunities for action".[764] In fact, the perceived opportunities can remain unreflected. This is clarified by the fact that we often do things absentmindedly. For example, while walking with a friend along a certain route in a city, one might be talking and thinking about wholly different things (such as the friend's news).

However, the motor actions, such as walking, have their focal points and are related to the surrounding environment and perceived things. As Merleau-Ponty famously writes, we never move our objective body.[765] I don't expressly move my hands to the pen, as if I was moving an object near to another object. Instead, I grasp the *pen* with my hands. This is also the case when I execute movements directed to my own body, such as when I grasp my nose. In this case I am focused on (or the action is directed to) my nose, and not on my moving hands. Of course, I can look at my hand as I perform the action of grasping my nose, but in this case, I perform another act (which is simultaneous to the movement of grasping) in which I focus on the hand but not on my focusing eyes through which I see the hand. Merleau-Ponty contends that the (normal) experience of the

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762 PhP, 153–4/134. See also PhP, 260/233. Merleau-Ponty writes: "[I]n the organism, […] the functions of replacement are never the precise equivalent of the damaged ones and only give the appearance of integrity".
763 PhP, 125/110.
764 Romdeh-Romluc 2007, 45.
765 PhP, 123/108.

body is multi-modal,[766] and we experience the body as a sensing-sensed, or a subject-object.[767] This does not alter the fact that when we perform movements, we are aware of our moving body in an unreflective manner. As Joona Taipale points out, this distinction between the internal (kinesthetic self-awareness) and the external applies to the most primitive kinds of inner feelings.[768] To move one's body is, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "to aim at the things through it".[769]

What is then the mode of givenness of the thing or the object of action? The awareness or the understanding of the object of action is, so to say, immanent to the act of moving. The perceived objects related to actions can be characterized as "opportunities for action". Merleau-Ponty claims that the understanding of the object with regard to the goal of action does not involve any external thinking of the object outside the very execution of the action. My moving hand is aware of the nose or the pen "to-be-grasped" directly at the very outset of the act of moving. The movements "anticipate directly their final position" regardless of any intermediary act.[770] The object of a particular action, during the execution of the action, is not given as an affectively neutral, or identifiable as separate from the sense of the action. This holds for both concrete and abstract movements. When I grasp my nose, the nose is given as something to-be-grasped. When I point to my nose, the opportunity for the action of pointing must be immediately given with the perceived pen. The object is given, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, as a "highly determinate thing toward which we are thrown".[771] To be sure, (normally) we are aware of the same objects as related to multiple, different actions. However, the particular actions intend the objects with a particular sense.[772] The nose to-be-grasped differs from the nose to-be-pointed-at, the nose to-be-blown, and the nose to-be-drawn. An approaching football can be perceived as an "opportunity to make a goal", or as "a danger to be avoided". In this sense the abstract movements such as the acts of pointing or of lifting one's hand arbitrarily at will also intend the goal of the action in a determined and exclusive manner. The object of action is given from the outset as determined within the framework set by the intentional schema of the action that is possessed by the actor. Thus, the action or the movement does not intend the object stripped of its sense, but the object endowed with a specific motor physiognomy determined by the action.[773]

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766 PhP, 270–1/243.
767 PhP, 111/97. Unlike later in *The Visible and Invisible,* in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty does not focus in particular to the double sensations nor does he pay attention to the constitutive significance of the peculiar experience of double touch (for example, touching one's hand with another hand). See VI, 184/141.
768 Taipale 2014, 42–3.
769 PhP, 161/140.
770 PhP, 110/96.
771 PhP, 161/140.
772 Of course, there are indeterminate actions and complex actions.
773 PhP, 153/134. Consider the following case. A friend requests me to give to her the particular glass in the table. Here the object is specified and the request is not about a certain property of the object. However, even if I could identify the particular object, but could not figure out the motor trajectory needed in order to grasp the glass, if the glass was not given to me (or to my hand) as graspable, I could not perform the action.

This does not mean that actions and movements would create their objects. Instead, as we normally immediately perceive and sense the forms (sizes, shapes and locations) of the objects, the objects appear as disposed for particular kinds of actions, soliciting or "pulling forth" particular movements.[774] As we will see below, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes the abstract movement from concrete movement as the ability to *project* schemas of actions to the surroundings, that is, to conceive of action possibilities, which are not given in the actually present environment.[775] However, even if one acts according to "virtual" or projected objects, such as the action possibilities delimited by the conventional rules of football (goal, touchlines or offside), these rules are not expressly thought or represented in distinct acts by the players, rather they immediately solicit and guide the particular actions of football players.

Next, it must be mentioned that the object of the movement is not given within an indifferent background, that is, within a purported neutral objective space or time. Accordingly, if a particular part of the body is (or certain parts of the body are) highlighted (a hand in grasping, a foot in kicking, a head in turning one's head, or the fingers in writing with a keyboard) in every action, all the other parts of the body accompany the action as its background. Therefore, all actions imply particular postures of the whole body, and an awareness of both the highlighted body part(s) and the awareness of the temporal and spatial background of the body. Both normal and pathological motor actions, insofar as they are fluently performed, require an awareness of a "background" that guides, animates and unifies the movement, and that is not an externally linked representation.[776] When one listens to a melody, each of the subsequent tones must be accompanied by an awareness of the past tones and the tones to come. If the awareness of the background would be lacking, one would not actually hear the melody, but only isolated tones. The immediate visual perception of the shape and the size of the object requires an awareness of the background of the visual field each time one focuses on some particular thing or feature within the field.[777] In a similar manner, the unifying schema of the action must be retained and anticipated in the background of each phase of the movement, and likewise one must be aware of the locations of parts of the body at the background of the highlighted parts. For instance, as I write with the keyboard, sitting on a chair, I don't lose the grip of where my legs are or how they have to be positioned in a successful posture of sitting. When I begin to write or when I focus on the text on the screen, I do not suddenly lose the grip of the rest of the body and fall down.[778] As I write the word "word", pushing the key "o" with a finger (in my case it is the right hand's ring finger) is endowed with an immediate awareness of its position within the tem-

[774] PhP, 161/140.
[775] PhP, 127/112.
[776] PhP, 128/113.
[777] As we will see, Schneider lacks the capacity of visual recognition, because his awareness of the visual field is diminished. Schneider sees only in the direction he looks, and he sees only the objects he focuses on. PhP, 157–8/137.
[778] See Taipale 2014, 86–88.

porally developing motor schema, so that the turn to push it comes after the finger that pushes the key "w" (left hand's middle finger).[779] The spatial and temporal background that is given in a particular movement has a particular determination. The physiognomy of the action to be executed is a figure-background-structure, in which the focal movement and its temporal and spatial background are moments in one whole.[780] Or, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, every movement takes place within the external milieu of the surrounding environment, and the internal milieu of one's own body.[781] Without the awareness of the intentional motor schema that informs the body of its unifying form at each phase of the movement, that is, if the goal of the action is not incorporated in the motor intentional schema, one simply cannot perform the movement. Actions are sensory-motor performances, which means that some kind of perception or sensing of the location and the shape of the object action is required for the action to be possible (for instance, I must be aware of whether the pen to be grasped is on my left or right side).[782] However, according to Merleau-Ponty, the pathological cases of apraxia show that the perceptual capacity to identify shapes, sizes and locations of objects is not sufficient to perform movements with regard to them. A person suffering from apraxia perceives space in a normal manner, but the capacity to reproduce perceived gestures by moving is lacking. The person in question can spontaneously say that what they see is a cube, but as they attempt to draw it, the arm rests immobile, even if the gesture to be performed is intellectually understood.

In short, Merleau-Ponty claims that all actions (both pathological and normal kinds of motor intentionality) require a direct awareness of the object of the action, a motor understanding of a motor signification.[783] All actions also require a self-awareness, but the awareness of oneself in movement is not reflective or thematic – instead the bodily self-awareness accompanies and motivates the action that is focused on its object or goal.[784] Furthermore, all actions – both normal and pathological – require an awareness of a background horizon that surrounds the focal point of the action. This background horizon is both temporal and spatial, both internal and external, and it is an awareness of the determined unity of the action or the intentional motor schema guiding the action. Finally, the awareness of oneself, of the object and of the horizon in movement, do not imply any component of a distinct act of reflection, control or deliberation. The self-awareness, awareness of the goal and of the horizon are three moments of the progression of bodily movement and they do not necessarily involve any preceding mapping out of the movements-to-be-executed.[785] Even if pathological and normal

[779] Schneider's case provides us with the example: what if the awareness of the background was lacking?
[780] PhP, 162–3/140.
[781] PhP, 160/139–140. Merleau-Ponty thinks that the internal and external milieu (the configuration of one's own body, the configuration of the external environment) are two inseparable moments of movement.
[782] See also PhP, 153–4/134.
[783] PhP, 128/113, 167/144, 243/217.
[784] PhP, 59/48–9.
[785] PhP, 163/140.

motor intentionality differ from each other, and even if tracing out this difference is an important task, they both share these general characteristics. Thus, even if Schneider cannot properly perform abstract movements, he has to be able to perform some kind of movements. He cannot just lack motor intentionality, because in that case he could not perform any actions at all.

## 5.2 Pathological and Instinctive Motor Intentionality

We have already sketched out the difference between Schneider's pathological and normal motor intentionality. As we saw, Schneider is capable of performing so-called concrete movements, but incapable of executing abstract movements. Schneider cannot perform actions at will, or on request. The actions must find their motivation from the current, urgent situation. As described above, during his rehabilitation work as wallet-maker, Schneider was able to fluently perform the tasks that were included in the process of making a wallet. Furthermore, within this familiar and actually present context of work, he was also able to shift tasks, such as stop the cutting and begin the sewing. Likewise, Schneider was able to perform a gesture such as drawing a circle in the air after a preparatory movement, which consists of finding the beginnings of a correct kind of movement. Schneider launches his body into several blind attempts to move. Only once his body happens to move in a correct manner (that Schneider is able to recognize) is he able to finish the movement, provided that the execution of the task is not interrupted. In a similar manner, Schneider can perform a military salute, if he first succeeds in finding the overall posture required by the gesture. He then executes the military salute as part of "all the marks of respect" without being able to abbreviate the action only to its necessary gestures.[786]

Now, what is Merleau-Ponty's account of Schneider's distinctive modification of motor intentionality? First of all, it must be noticed that, according to Merleau-Ponty, Schneider's problem affects all the partial capacities of his life, such as intelligence, perception, language and motility. Moreover, the pathology concerns all the different senses. Thus, Merleau-Ponty claims that no partial function in Schneider's life has remained intact by the pathology.[787] A detailed description of Schneider's behavior shows that his actions are modified and abnormal everywhere. Instead, the problem in question must be described as something like a general degrading of his capacity level[788] or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, a disturbance of an "intentional arc".[789]

Merleau-Ponty characterizes Schneider's pathology with a group of closely-related features. First of all, he characterizes Schneider's problem as a *contraction*

[786] PhP, 121/107.
[787] Merleau-Ponty uses this fact when he argues against an interpretation of Schneider's problem, according to which the problem would be merely *visual*. See PhP, 130–140/115–22.
[788] The formulation is Goldstein's, cited by Jensen 2009.
[789] PhP, 158/137, 184/160.

*of the background field* of action possibilities available to him. The "halo" of background that surrounds actual perceptions or the actually felt phases of movement is abnormally diminished, in that Schneider simply does not have a perceptual and motor awareness of those possibilities that the normal person has. More particularly, Schneider's awareness of the background is bounded to the actual, context-familiar situation. This means that, whereas normally we are able to *reckon with the possible*,[790] that is, we are aware of the background of motor possibilities that reach beyond that which is actually present or urgent, Schneider lacks this awareness. This lack amounts to a lack of a *"function of projection"*, which is a capacity to project *non-actual* (an in this sense absent) or non-familiar action possibilities into the immediate surroundings. The function of projection makes it possible to act with regard to a *virtual* or *imaginary* situation, and to freely *transpose* the actual intentional schema: to shift the task, to combine it with other tasks and to abbreviate it. Thus, the function of projection provides normal motor intentionality with a certain degree of "unreflective freedom",[791] flexibility and plasticity of activity, whereas Schneider's field of spontaneously modifiable action is fairly limited.

Let us contemplate the connection between these features that belong to Schneider's "boundedness to the actual". First of all, Merleau-Ponty does not operate with a dichotomy between the actual and possible in the sense that one is aware or unaware of the possible. Instead, he writes of the contraction and extending of the horizon of action possibilities, thus suggesting that the extent to which one can be aware of the possible is a matter of degrees. For instance, as Hubert Dreyfus has pointed out, Schneider's experience cannot be simply accounted as a lack of any relation to the possible, because in that case he would not be able to perceive anything or perform even concrete movements.[792] The more rudimentary perceptions and actions require some kind of spatial and temporal horizon. If Schneider is unable to recognize the shapes and sizes of perceived objects in voluntary and "analytic" perception, he must be able to perceive objects in a meaningful manner as part of his practical actions in context-familiar situations. If Schneider's concrete actions are guided by intentional schemata, this guidance requires a conception of possibility or potentiality as an anticipation of that which is to come, and also a conception of retaining the past phases at each moment of the action. To be sure, insofar as actions – including Schneider's pathological actions – are temporally extended, they require a certain kind of time-consciousness with its structure of retention, primal impression and protention.[793]

Merleau-Ponty thinks that the contraction of the horizon of possibility corresponds with a lack of a function of projection. This is disclosed by looking at the substitute means by which Schneider attempts to successfully execute the ab-

[790] PhP, 127/112.
[791] The term "unreflective freedom" is coined by Rietveld 2013. See Rietveld 2013, 38–39.
[792] Dreyfus 2007, 65–6.
[793] See subchapter 4.2.

stract movements that he fails to do spontaneously in everyday life and the abstract movements he is asked to do. In these cases, he has to proceed by a step-by-step method or by a method of finding the correct movement by chance. For example, if he has to locate a point of his body in which he is touched, he proceeds by first moving the whole body, then a part and then a finer part – thus gradually limiting the possible area of the body where the touched point is located.[794] Moreover, if he cannot recognize a form of an object touched on his body immediately, he needs to actively move himself in order to produce partial perceptions by which to identify the shape. In both cases, Schneider has to construe the unitary shape by deducing it on the basis of partial, dispersed movements and perceptions he is capable of. In the case of drawing a circle in the air, Schneider succeeds to grasp the action if his body by chance happens to move along the lines of the beginning of the circular trajectory. Schneider is able to carry on the already-given movement of his body. In fact, experimenting with random attempts is part of the normal process of learning a new skill. As Romdenh-Romluc mentions, "I cannot learn to roller-skate by sitting in a chair and thinking about doing so, I have to launch myself into attempts to roller-skate".[795] Thus, Schneider's situation is to some extent similar to someone who does not possess the intentional schema required by the particular skill. However, the difference is that unlike the learner, Schneider in fact possesses the skill of "tracing a circle in the air". He just cannot use his skill at will or on request until it is motivated by the actual situation.

On the basis of these and other examples, Merleau-Ponty suggests that Schneider's perceptions and actions lack the awareness of the background-horizon, which links them immediately to that which is not found in the immediate surroundings. Schneider's partial impressions, which are endowed with a contracted horizon, are "opaque, closed in upon itself".[796] Merleau-Ponty also describes Schneider's tactile sensations as having a "viscosity".[797] It is as if Schneider could not bear a perceptual or motor awareness of anything that lies beyond the actual context and actual surrounding environment.

To this boundedness to the actual, Merleau-Ponty contrasts the normal person's reckoning with the non-actual. It has to be noticed that it is not a question of being able to think about the possible. Instead, in normal action and perception, the immediate perceptions and phases of movement are endowed with a perceptual and motor awareness of a horizon of possibility of that which is non-actual (and more extended than in Schneider's case). As Merleau-Ponty writes,

> "The normal person *reckons with* the possible, which thus acquires a sort of actuality without leaving behind its place as a possibility; for the patient, however, the field of the actual is limited to what is encountered in real contact or linked to these givens through an explicit deduction."[798]

[794] PhP, 124/109.
[795] Romdenh-Romluc 2007, 46.
[796] PhP, 127/111.
[797] PhP, 127/111.
[798] PhP, 127/112.

One of the features of the extension of the horizon of motor intentionality is that it allows for action with regard to movement possibilities that are strictly speaking absent from the actual situation – projected, constructed, imaginary, alternative or arbitrary motor schemas. As Merleau-Ponty writes, the background of concrete movement is the actually-given world. A concrete, given situation is, for instance, the case when walking with a friend on a road and one has found something demanding urgent action (such as a dying animal run over by a car)[799]: one then waves one's hands to the friend from a distance to come and see what has happened. This engaging situation can be compared to another, similar situation in which nothing has really happened, and one waves one's hands just for the sake of waving hands, or in order to pretend that a serious accident has occurred. In the first case, it is a question, in Merleau-Ponty's words, of a "real" situation: the motivator of the emergency is actually there, the dying deer is present in flesh and blood and for all the senses. In the second case, the urgent situation is "constructed" or projected at will, and there is nothing in the actual perceived environment that would motivate this particular action (if not the opportunity to fool the friend from a distance). Similarly, we are normally able to act with regard to imaginary or fictional situations and partners (as in playing and acting).[800] All these actions require an awareness of a horizon of opportunities of action that are not found in the actual surrounding environment.

Projection can also mean "marking out borders and directions in the given world"[801], meaning instantly and arbitrarily established borders and groupings that motivate actions. For example, in an experiment presented by Merleau-Ponty, the doctor divides the table on his side and the patient's side, and asks the patient to perform actions that take this division into account.[802] Accordingly, there are actions that demand forming groups and divisions on the surrounding environment.[803] The normal accomplishment of tasks often requires such an instant and "creative" establishment of groupings, perspectives and "lines of force". As Merleau-Ponty claims, these projections must be both perceived and given as action possibilities – otherwise they cannot motivate any performances.

In spite of his deficiency, Schneider is able to perform habitual and socially constituted actions, such as working as a wallet-maker or showing marks of respect. How is it possible that Schneider can perform habitual, familiar actions? How is it possible that Schneider possesses various skills, even if his general capability-level is restricted to the so-called concrete movements?

What is it to possess a skill for action? The possession of a skill is disclosed when we focus on the learning and acquisition of a new skill. A skill is acquired during a process of habituation, which involves repeated attempts at doing the intended action, for instance playing a violin. The movements to be performed

799 The example is from Mooney 2013. See PhP, 128–9/113–4.
800 Komarine Romdenh-Romluc exemplifies the projection with an example of movie-making, in which a movie actor fights against an imaginary alien opponent, insofar as the 3-D image of the fighting alien will be only later added in the film.
801 PhP, 130/114–5.
802 PhP, 130/114.
803 PhP, 130/114–5.

(moving the bow, tapping the fingers) initially feel alien. At first, one has to get accustomed to the overall posture of holding the violin and the bow, and in the beginning one learns to successfully move the bow back and forth. One has to find the successful movement by making random attempts. Here, one can lean on a teacher's verbal guidance and watch them play, or they might physically correct the posture and move the learner's hands. In one way or another a particular kind of movement must be found or "caught" that produces a nice sound and feels like it resonates. Once the movement is found, it can be repeated. As the posture and the initial, rough movements are repeated, they become familiar. The becoming familiar of the initial unrefined overall postures and movements makes it possible to refine the postures and movements. For example, one can begin to move the bow along the different strings, and to move the bow at different distances and speeds. Then one can begin to tap the fingers simultaneously with moving the bow, etc. The already-acquired familiar movements are, to use Husserl's term, sedimented, and they provide a "naturally" experienced ground for the acquisition of new movements. As Romdenh-Romluc points out, the acquired movements correlate with perceived opportunities of movement.[804] If one does not have any skill for playing the violin, the instrument does not immediately pull forth the action of playing. At the beginning of learning, the instrument is seen as offering the opportunity for the unrefined posture of holding the violin and the movements, but the idea of performing even a simple melody still seems far-fetched. When the learning process progresses, and when one possesses more refined skills, a tune written on a sheet of paper awakens perceptions and action possibilities with regard to performing a tune with the violin.

To be sure, if one possesses more skills, accordingly one perceives more opportunities for certain kinds of action in the environment, and in a certain sense the perception of the environment might be richer.[805] However, the extension and contraction of the background horizon must be distinguished from the "amount" of skills one possesses. The possessed skills and the level of capability of executing them are distinct. Merleau-Ponty exemplifies the difference between the level of capability by the degree of fatigue. He writes that one's horizon of action can be rich or impoverished, corresponding to the degree of energy one has. In fatigue the background-horizon of thought becomes reduced to a few obsessive ideas, while in a wakeful and energetic state one is

> "directed towards all [one's] thoughts, and each word that is spoken in front of [one] engenders questions or ideas, regroups and reorganizes the mental panorama, and appears with a precise physiognomy".[806]

The diminishing of the degree of capability does not remove the skills, the acquired intentional schemata one possesses, but insofar as it generally reduces

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[804] Romdeh-Romluc 2007, 46.
[805] To be sure, skills are for the most part selective and they exclude each other. One has to distinguish between a person who has a highly developed but specific area of skillfulness (such as violinist or a marathon-runner) and a person who is able to do a lot of different things.
[806] PhP, 151/132.

one's awareness of the background horizon, it affects the manner in which the skills can be performed.

To be sure, here one has to remember that, in Merleau-Ponty's account, Schneider's disorder as a contraction of the horizon is not directly comparable to the contraction of the horizon in a normal person's state of fatigue. However, insofar as Schneider's horizon for perception and action is diminished, he cannot perform the skills he possesses in the same manner as before the disorder. As Mooney points out, Schneider's way of carrying out his habitual actions differs from normal habitual actions. Mooney also remarks that the evidence on Schneider's habitual performances is not sufficient, but Schneider seems to be unable to abbreviate or reorganize his familiar actions, formulate new actions as new combinations of the habitual acts, or change their order. According to Mooney, Schneider and the other patients with a similar problem lack the plasticity of the normal "fluid and evolving repertoire of skills and skill combinations".[807] For example, as Mooney contends, a patient able to use a hammer might not be able to hammer with a screwdriver, which would require taking hold of the object in an atypical manner. We can see that this action would require a projection of a possibility that is absent from the given situation. Given that the person would also possess the skill for screwdriving, the action would require one to detach the schema of hammering from the actual shape of the hammer, and to apply it to the object that is perceived as offering the opportunity for screwdriving. It would require a projection of another opportunity that is in contradiction with the actually given opportunity for action. In short, even Schneider's habitual actions might lack a certain flexibility and plasticity that is present in the normal execution of habitual actions. Again, we can compare Schneider's lack of flexibility to normal instances such as giving a speech by wholly relying on a text written in advance[808] or playing a piece of music *prima vista,* with or without a written score. Consider, for instance, when a musician is drawn to play an unfamiliar song with a band whose members are otherwise already familiar with the piece of music. The band advances and does not wait, and there is hardly any clearance or leeway for free actions. One is therefore obliged to proceed rather blindly, hoping to survive through the score. Here we can see what Merleau-Ponty means with the notion of "taking something literally", if it is applied to action.[809] We take a pre-given schema or an instruction to act (a written text, a piece of music, or in Schneider's case the verbal instruction) literally, if we do not modify it in any manner, but follow it with every regard.

I have so far pointed out the following general features in Merleau-Ponty's description of Schneider's pathological experience: *contracted background field*, *boundedness to the actual*, *lacking of projection* and the incapacity of *transposition*. As I have also shown, for Merleau-Ponty it is not a question of possessing or lacking

[807] Mooney 2013, 374.
[808] PhP, 127/112.
[809] PhP, 121/107. It must be pointed out that the French phrases Merleau-Ponty uses are *prendre au sérieux* (to take literally) and *sens propre* (literal sense).

particular motor skills, but a general degradation of capability. Next, I will consider biological existence as another version of the boundedness to the actual. Thus, what is peculiar to the existence at the lower level of natural time is not related to the possessed particular skills or actions.

## 5.3 Motor Intentionality and Natural Time

Here, the aim is to characterize the impressional modification of motor intentionality as a more radical contraction of the horizon of action possibilities than in Schneider's case. Of course, this approach differs considerably from the description of Schneider's pathological experience. If Merleau-Ponty provides an ample analysis of Schneider's experience, he does not provide us with a description and study of existence strictly at the level of natural time. One can also ask, what would be an example of a degradation to the level of biological existence? In the following, I will offer a brief analysis on the basis of the above-mentioned distinctive features: *contraction of the background*, *boundedness to the actual*, *lack of projection* and *non-transposability*.

*1. Contraction of the awareness of the background.* First, Schneider's awareness of the background horizon surrounding that which he actually perceives is contracted. When he attempts to perform an abstract movement, he contends that his sense impressions are dispersed and they lack a certain "fullness" that would allow for immediately perceiving and performing the requested action. Accordingly, Schneider's kinesthetic feelings are dispersed and lack the background. But the reason for this is that the landmarks for the action are not found in the actual environment, nor in the actual condition of Schneider's own body. Instead, in the concrete situations, the "fullness" is encountered and the "landmarks" that guide the action are given. It is like the moment we find a piece of a melody we attempted to remember. Once a piece of melody becomes actualized, we are able to finish the rest of the melody. At each moment of the wallet-making activity, Schneider knows what to do next because the concrete situation guides the action.

Furthermore, Schneider can, at least to a certain extent, perform a complex consisting of multiple actions (such as cutting and sewing) within the confines of the familiar situation, and to shift the tasks as long as the alternative tasks are given within the current context. Accordingly, Schneider must not be totally absorbed by a single task and he must bear at least some kind of awareness of the other actions in the background, even if he is not aware of absent or context-alien possibilities.

Now, if Schneider's background is bounded to the actual *situation* (which can consist of multiple actions) we can suppose that the instinct does not have any awareness of a background outside the current *action*.

*2. Boundedness to the actual.* Accordingly, the instinctual awareness would be fully absorbed in its current task. The tasks might involve different combinations and configurations of the instinctual body, but the instinctual subject is only

aware of one action at a time. Consider the following example, which is a modification of Merleau-Ponty's example of the insect's instinctual behavior. If, for instance, Schneider's right hand (if it was the hand he used to cut the leather with) was lightly injured (in that it remained operational) but bound up, he might occasionally try to use his left hand for cutting. This would require an ability to ignore the still operational hand and use a different hand for the accomplishment of the same task. It would not be possible for the instinct: if the right hand was still operational, its performative possibility would fade out other possible means for the task. The instinct would be absorbed to the task (whose intentional schema was imposed by the body and triggered by the perceived opportunity to act) to the extent that no other means of accomplishing the task could be in sight at the same time. Namely, when the focus would be on the task of cutting, all the focus on the side of the subject's own body would be on the tied hand which was the habitual agent of the task. Outside this effort, the free left hand would not motivate this particular action nor be pulled forth by the leather to be cut (if it would not belong to the pre-given habitual schema of action).

This does not mean that there could not be a multiplicity of signs given in the surroundings of the instinctual subject. However, if Schneider can be engaged in one familiar situation at a time, the instinctual subject could be engaged only in one action at a time.

*3. Projection.* As we showed above, according to Merleau-Ponty, Schneider is unable to "conjure up" opportunities for action that are not found in the "busy world"[810] of the actual situation (of the external environment and of the body). Merleau-Ponty called this capacity a function of projection. However, the different means for accomplishing the same task might be given to him within the confines of the current situation, provided that these means are actually present.

The instinctual awareness, if it is immanent to the action, appears for the observer as a "projection", insofar as it is determined by the body of the subject of the instinct. Air for the bodily function of breathing (an opportunity to breath) differs from the air as it figures in the functioning of the eyes (an opportunity to see clearly). But the instinctual action is only triggered by the actual presence of the proper sign. The instinctual subject is not aware of any task-transcendent opportunities of action, even if they were given in the actual environment, and it cannot "project" any alternative means to accomplish the task at hand. For the instinct, the task is not separable from the means of accomplishing it.

*4. Non-transposability & "literality".* We have to distinguish Schneider's motor intentionality from instinctual motor intentionality with regard to the *transposability* of the action. Schneider is not able to abbreviate, recombine or otherwise restructure the familiar schema of action, to the extent that these reorganizations require a projection of context-alien elements. For instance, he could not use the scissors for some other purpose than cutting. But within the familiar context it seems that Schneider's awareness leaves a possibility to recognize errors and learn from them. If, for instance, a safety pin was left attached in the leather to be cut and would hit by the scissors, Schneider would be able to remove it. Or

[810] PhP, 129/114.

if the leather to be cut had a plastic sheet under it, Schneider would be able to remove the plastic after finding out that cutting the leather was abnormally difficult. We can conceive of a flexibility of behavior in changing situations, which does not require a projection of absent possibilities.

In fact, the instinctual behavior is flexible too, within the confines of the pregiven intentional schema of the action. For instance, the movement of focusing the eyes must differ with regard to whether the object to be focused on is on the left or right side. Thus, we can say that, also in the case of the instinctive action, the body schema is transposable.[811] But what is transposed or configured are not the tasks themselves nor the context-familiar means to accomplish one task – but the elements of the body within the task imposed by the body and the situation.

Because of his pathological situation Schneider does not perform the abstract movements in a flexible manner, but "literally" – he does all the marks of respect that must be done in a concrete situation in which military salutes are made. He is imposed by the "unfolding of the whole" of the concrete situation, and he is not able to freely modify this unfolding. If Schneider remains "literal" with regard to the current concrete situation, the instinct remains "literal" with regard to its current action. The intentional schema imposed by the structure of the body remains out of reach of the subject of instinct. Accordingly, the subject of the instinct is not able to "learn from the encountered errors", insofar as its schema of action is not modified by that which is encountered during the action.

5. *Perception of an object.* Finally, it has to be noticed that the instinct, insofar as it remains within the confines of its current task, cannot be aware of its object as an act-transcendent unity. Specifically, (perceptual and motor) awareness of an object requires a grasp of an identity of an object with regard to varying tasks. However, if the subject of the instinct – as it is supposed here – is fully absorbed in performing the task, so that it is not aware of any task-transcendent background, it simply cannot perceive any kind of object in this sense. For the instinct, all the distinct determinations of the object are dispersed to the extent that there is only one determination at a time. At the purported level of the instinctual awareness, the apple to be thrown away and the apple to be eaten do not form any identity that would reach beyond the confines of these two actions.

Here we see that Merleau-Ponty's analysis of pathological motor intentionality is fruitful for his considerations of instinctive modifications of affectivity and sensations.

[811] PhP, 165/142.

# 6 AFFECTIVITY AND INSTINCTS

Merleau-Ponty writes in the beginning of the chapter "The Body as A Sexed Being" that the issue at hand in the first part of *Phenomenology of Perception* is the discovery of the relation between the embodied subject and the world. The aim is to show and to account for the specifically articulated – pre-reflective, and unthematic – manner in which our own body by necessity appears to us when we experience the world, things and other experiencing and acting subjects.[812] The awareness of one's own body has constitutive significance with respect to the sense of the world, things and other subjects. Without a bodily understanding of the world, things and other subjects would never be constituted for us, and if this capacity would be diminished, such as in Schneider's case, they would lack the sense in which they were intended in our past normal experience.

In the last chapter[813] I explicated Merleau-Ponty's conception of motor intentionality, aiming to find tools in the analysis of patient Schneider's pathological motor intentionality for a further explication of the instinctive kind of motor intentionality. It occurred that the instinctive motor intentionality can be conceived as a spontaneously arising intentional movement, articulated according to an inherent possession (or intentional schema). However, the subject of the instinct remains limited to the field of the actual, which Husserl would call "impression"[814] or "the impressional present".[815]

I will now shift the thematic focus to the issue of affectivity, which Merleau-Ponty takes up in the above mentioned chapter, "The Body as A Sexed Being".[816] Just like in the preceding chapter, in the following my main task is to locate the organic, instinctive intentionality as an underlying basis of consciousness, and to articulate its constitutive significance, but now with respect to affectivity. In particular, the question is, how does Merleau-Ponty account for the instinctive affectivity. Is there a desire that is instinctive, but how does Merleau-Ponty articulate

812 PhP, 180/156. In particular, Merleau-Ponty points out that the body is the "place" of our "appropriation" of space, the object and the instrument.
813 See chapter 4.
814 Hua4(Id2), 336/348.
815 See page 165.
816 PhP, 180–202/156–177.

it? Does such a desire play any constitutive role within perceptual experience, and the way in which the sense of the world and objects is constituted?

Let us first explicate how the theme of the instinctive affectivity becomes an issue in the chapter "The body as A Sexed Being". In general, the chapter explicates the constitutive significance of the lived body for the affective intentionality. Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty makes use of a distinction between the epistemic, axiological and practical spheres of experience.[817] Affective intentionality is not epistemic, insofar as its object is not properly the object of perceptual, cognitive or theoretical interest. The affective intentionality, or affect-consciousness, is related to affective values of objects.[818] The affective values of objects bear an essential relation to the subject's affects: moods, emotions, desires, drives and needs. Simply put, the coffee cup that I see in front of me would not have the value of being desirable, had I not the need to have coffee. In *Ideas II* Husserl specifies the affect-consciousness in this manner. He thinks that the act of perceiving or attentively noticing the coffee cup, simply seeing it or looking at it, differs from another act, namely, the act of desiring the coffee.[819] Simply seeing or noticing the coffee cup and desiring the coffee are clearly different acts. Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty uses the terminology of values in order to describe the specific intentional "object" of affects. For instance, an erotic intentionality, which is an instance of affect-consciousness, is such that it "gives external stimuli a sexual value or signification".[820] More generally speaking, affective intentionality is intentionally directed to the affective value or affective signification of objects.

Merleau-Ponty takes up the distinction between the epistemic and affective consciousness in the beginning of the chapter "The Body as a Sexed Being". The epistemic mode of perception is one that he calls "objective perception".[821] Objective perception is characterized by the fact that it is regulated or guided by (or the subject is intentionally oriented towards) the appearing object itself. In objective perception, an inexhaustible thing appears within a manifold of limited perspectives to it, thus signaling that it exists "in itself", regardless of the perceiver. Instead, the affective value of the object is by necessity related to the subject of the affect. The coffee cup appears as desirable just because I need coffee. Thus, our affective milieu is "the sector of our experience that clearly has sense and reality only for us".[822] The affective milieu is regulated by our drives, needs, desires, moods or emotions. The theme of the chapter at hand is determined in this manner.

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[817] See Hua4, 7/9; PhP, 180/156, 398/361.
[818] According to Krueger, Merleau-Ponty defends an *externalist* approach to emotions. See Krueger 2020. See also Slaby 2008 for an explication of affective intentionality in the context of recent discussion on the nature of emotions.
[819] Furthermore, we can distinguish between simply noticing an object and engaging into an explication, observation or other kind of investigation of the object itself (which, if the object in question is one's own experience, is a self-reflective endeavour).
[820] PhP, 182/158.
[821] PhP, 183/159.
[822] PhP, 180/156.

Our focus in this study is on Merleau-Ponty's conception of the instinctive aspect of affectivity. We can find in the chapter four issues which are significant with regard to the question of instinctive affectivity.

1. *Unthematic and Projective Affective Intentionality*. Affective intentionality involves an unthematic bodily self-awareness. Merleau-Ponty suggests that something entices or stimulates us affectively only if it "speaks" to our body in the first place.[823] The intentional lived experience of an affective situation is motivated by a bodily "understanding", not by a mechanical, non-intentional bodily function. Accordingly, the essence of the affective experience is not reached if it is decomposed into the components of self-enclosed inner feelings and a representation of an object.[824] There would be no affective experiencing without sensible data, but these sensations must be spatially and temporally localized in one's own body in an ordered manner. There must be a spatial and kinesthetic self-awareness of the body schema that corresponds to the physiognomy of the affect.[825] Just as we saw in the last chapter, here too Merleau-Ponty makes use of Schneider's pathological experience in order to justify this claim. Now, the issue is about Schneider's sexual life.

Schneider can, to some extent, represent sexual or erotic acts, and he knows what they mean. Furthermore, there is no injury or any specific physiological problem in Schneider's genitals (as we recall, Schneider has a wound in the back of his head).[826] Nevertheless, Schneider is sexually (and in general, affectively) idle.[827] As was explicated earlier, Schneider's problem is a diminishing of horizonal awareness. That which Schneider actually senses lacks spontaneous references to the not-anymore-intuitive past or to the projected, not-yet-intuitive future. We have seen that Merleau-Ponty distinguishes Schneider's pathological and normal perception and motility in terms of the extension of the available background field. The background field or horizon is an essential component of sense perceptions and of kinesthetically felt bodily movements: each actual sense impression and each actual kinesthetic self-feeling is endowed with an awareness of all of that which remains in the surrounding background. The difference can be described, for example, in the following manner. While we perceive a trunk of a tree in front of us, we are immediately aware of both its back side and of the parts of the tree that are hidden from us, but which need to be perceived in order to recognize the perceived thing as a tree. However, if the awareness of the hidden sides and perspectives of the tree was lacking or diminished, we would not immediately recognize the appearing thing as a "trunk" of a tree, since the present view would lack the "fullness" that referred to these other aspects, and nothing in this present view would immediately make us recognize the actually seen as part of the unity of the total shape of the tree. Merleau-Ponty thinks that the affective life of the subject also varies in terms of the extension of the horizon

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823 PhP, 183/159.
824 PhP, 180–2/156–8.
825 As we will see, we can distinguish between impressional (or instinctive) and projective awareness of a physiognomy.
826 See chapter 5.
827 PhP, 181–2/157–8.

available for the subject of experience. The extension of the background of affectivity on its part determines what we can become affectively interested in, where our affections reach, or what kind of affective situations we can engage in.

Schneider cannot engage in a sexual situation. He cannot spontaneously keep up the affective physiognomy of the projected sexual schema that would guide his desire. According to Merleau-Ponty, normal erotic intentionality is dependent on a retaining and a projection of non-intuitive contents. The projection of an affective value must be distinguished from representation. It is not a judging or any kind of thematic or positing kind of intentional lived experience. The emergence of sexual desire does not depend on an elevation of the desired object or the pleasurable situation into a theme or a representation (but it surely can include fantasized objects or representations of particular objects), nor does it depend on judging or believing that an object is sexually stimulating. According to Merleau-Ponty, erotic intentionality is, first and foremost, an unthematic bodily understanding of an affective physiognomy. As he writes:

> "There is an erotic 'comprehension' that is not of the order of the understanding, given that the understanding comprehends by seeing an experience under an idea whereas desire comprehends blindly by linking one body to another".[828]

Erotic intentionality is an unthematic bodily intentionality, and it also entails a projection and a reproduction of an affective schema that includes non-intuitive (non-actually present) contents. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty claims that erotic intentionality is not constituted by any activity. It is not originally a personal-level phenomenon. Instead, it belongs to the very infrastructure of human existence.[829] Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that sexual desire does not need our active attention or our active position-takings in order to emerge. A feeling of being erotically stimulated emerges without one's notice, and it does not depend on our active attention on the desired object. Yet, it is dependent on the capacity to transcend the actual surrounding environment. Erotic intentionality is yet another example that Merleau-Ponty uses to support his more general claim that the human characteristic of transcendence is originally a pre-personal level phenomenon, which means that it is neither something actively acquired, nor something constituted on the basis of an active turning towards objects.[830]

2. *The Organic Infrastructure of Affects.* However, Merleau-Ponty does not only argue that affective intentionality rests upon a pre-personal capacity for projection. Another central question is, how is the typical structure of an affective schema determined? Is there an initial, spontaneous, instinctive determination of an affective schema, or are affects solely dependent on the subject's exchange with the world, things and other subjects? My claim is that Merleau-Ponty indeed

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[828] PhP, 183/159.
[829] PhP, 182/158. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "[T]he normal extension of sexuality must rest upon the internal powers of the organic subject".
[830] It remains to be asked, what would be an erotic desire within original passivity. The desire in question would be both articulated and a totally blind tendency, if blindness means being not turned towards and aware of any object of desire.

thinks that the instincts have an original constitutive role with regard to affects. What is, according to him, the import of the instincts to the subject's affective life?

Instinctual drives emerge spontaneously, and they require a possession of some kind of pre-given schema. Insofar as the instincts are drives toward, tendencies or tensions which point towards a direction of resolution of the tension, they have an orientation towards a satisfaction. Moreover, they are not oriented towards whatever satisfaction, and they do not reach out for the satisfaction in whatever manner.

Merleau-Ponty claims that the affective physiognomies of the individual human persons could not be reduced to a bunch of inherent, elementary affective structures. For instance, when we become occupied by a sexual desire, we do not become subjugated to an inherent, unchanging, and non-individual schema of an instinct. Merleau-Ponty is sympathetic to Freud's claim that libido is not an instinct, if the instinct is understood as "an activity naturally oriented toward determinate ends."[831] The individual's "manner of being in the world – that is, toward time and toward others – is projected in his sexuality".[832] This means two things. On the one hand, the particular affects of an individual person necessarily bear a relation to the individual's typical general character (for example, the character of being introvert or extrovert). On the other hand, an affective structure is dependent on the total situation of the individual person, and the situation differs at each moment of the individual's life. For instance, if one picks two different episodes of erotic desire at different phases of the individual person's life, one can contend that they are not exactly the same. The situation changes incessantly. The present situation differs from a past situation merely by its temporal index: even if the content of the experience remained the same, the second experience differs from the first, insofar as the second is a repetition of the first. But situations also differ greatly with regard to the contents. We can consider different stages of life: childhood, adulthood, old age. Challenges differ, new capacities are acquired, beliefs change, and there are changes in one's social relations or in one's surrounding environment. The typical structure of an affect, such as erotic desire, reflects these differences and changes in the subject's situation. Thus, if we want to understand why sexual desire (which is: the particular type of affective schema that guides erotic intentionality, the kind of anticipated and retained sexual cycle that spatially and temporally determines the accentuations within the perceived. Whatever intensifies the desire or pushes the desire away (how does the desire emerge, how does it fade away, what is the typical "cycle" or the "dynamic schema" of an episode of a sexual encounter or a sexual act?) has typical, individual characteristics that recur in the person's life history.[833]

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831 PhP, 185/161.
832 PhP, 185/161.
833 See for example, PhP, 195–6/171. In the chapter "The Body as a Sexed Being" Merleau-Ponty explicates, how sexuality reflects the individual's general character, our human condition, and intersubjective relations. To be sure, the social, cultural, gender and also colonial aspects of sexuality could (and should) be included here, and Merleau-Ponty can be accused of not providing a satisfactorily comprehensive list of the variety of existential structures expressed in an individual's sexual desire or sexual life.

However, Merleau-Ponty also holds that one cannot provide a sufficient account of a particular affect if one abstracts from the underlying organic basis of affects and thereby thinks that the contents of the affects are merely constituted by the person's existential situation. Sexual life reflects our total character and situation, but "[it] is not a mere reflection of existence".[834] A sexuality abstracted from the organic body would become an epiphenomenon: the explication of an individual's sexual desire would be nothing other than an explication of the individual's general character and situation.[835] However, it makes sense to distinguish between divergent domains of affectivity: a sexual desire differs from a desire to overcome a challenge, and it differs from an appetite, a delight in vision, and from a pleasure of speaking with other people. We don't regard the pleasure of drinking water as a specifically sexual pleasure, or the sorrow over the death of a close friend as a sexual affect. We can distinguish the non-sexual character of these other types of affects. Sometimes these other affects can indeed have an expressly erotic character. For instance, it is possible that drinking water would be related to someone's sexual desire, but then again, we recognize a difference between the non-sexual and the sexual. Moreover, the particular affective domain of sexuality might not play a prominent role in an individual's affective life. However, at the same time one might still have a strong affective pull in some other fields of life such as the work, or the political or artistic life.[836]

Merleau-Ponty argues that sexual desire is distinguished as a specific domain of affectivity, because it bears an essential relation to the erogenic zones of the body and the sexual organs.[837] Likewise, for instance, the specific sensitivity of the mouth and the sense organs constitute divergent domains of affectivity, related to the specific bodily location and the instinctual functioning. Affective intentionality (or affect-consciousness) bears a necessary relation to an organic infrastructure. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "biological existence gears into human existence and is never indifferent to its particular rhythm. This […] does not prevent 'living' [*leben*] from being a primordial operation from which it becomes possible to 'live' (*erleben*) such and such a world, nor does it keep us from having to eat and breathe prior to perceiving and reaching a relational life […] Thus vision, hearing, sexuality and the body are not merely points of passage, instruments, or manifestations of personal existence."[838]

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[834] PhP, 185/161.
[835] PhP, 186/162.
[836] PhP, 185–6/161–2. Merleau-Ponty also contends that one might have a particular technical skill in sexual encounters but no specific affective interest in it. For instance, in the life of a person working within the field of sex-work, the sexual encounters are frequent and ordinary, but the motivation behind these encounters is in the majority of the cases other than the person's own sexual desire, such as earning money and gaining economic independence (see, for instance, Vuolajärvi 2018). Sexuality appears as a particular dimension of affectivity that may play a greater or minor role within the life of an individual.
[837] It is tempting to see that Merleau-Ponty falls prey to a simplistic view according to which the male genitals, in their socially normative manner of functioning, provide the paradigmatic example of the sexual instinct. However, I do not see that the view presented by Merleau-Ponty would necessarily imply some sort of biological essentialism.
[838] PhP, 186/162.

As part of the argument for this claim, Merleau-Ponty contends that original instinctive desires make up a necessary component of affective intentionality.

3. *Instincts Make Possible the Transition to Wakeful Life.* In an important passage of the chapter "The Body as a Sexed Being", Merleau-Ponty accounts for the transitional moments in one's conscious life. On the one hand, there is a transition in which the subject loses the grip of a wakeful, communicative and projective life and is regressed into a passive state of anonymous life. On the other, one must also account for the transition from the anonymity of the sleep to the activity of wakefulness.[839] In this context, Merleau-Ponty notices that sense organs retain their anonymous vigilance while we sleep. Both falling asleep and waking up are made possible by the impersonal functions of the sense organs.[840] He also introduces the notion of "natural time". By natural time Merleau-Ponty means the modification of the temporality in non-wakeful experiencing. He characterizes natural time in terms of monotony and repetition: natural time consists of "always identical 'nows'", and in it "life flows back upon itself".[841] Finally, Merleau-Ponty presents the idea that the anonymous functioning of sense organs makes waking up possible because it constitutes, before the proper awakening, an empty sketch of genuine experiencing and "presence in the world". The "sensorial functions by themselves do not make me exist in the world",[842] but they, so to say, mime the form of wakeful intentionality. Merleau-Ponty compares the "imitating" function of the sense organs to our preparatory attempt to fall asleep by imitating the posture and breath of the sleeper, or to the preparatory rituals that imitate the life of the god.[843] These preparations do not themselves make the sleep or the trance effective, but they prepare beforehand a place – an "empty sketch" – for the arrival of such existential transformations.

3. *Instinct as an Underlying Power.* In the chapter "The Body as a Sexed Being", Merleau-Ponty not only inquires into explicit acts of sexual desire. At the end of the chapter "The Body as A Sexed Being" he also deals with sexuality as an underlying form of affectivity that functions as a motivating force behind other, non-sexual acts. Within the total life of a monadic subjectivity, sexuality is a genetically prior, deeply sedimented general background power that motivates other acts, both sexual and non-sexual. Sexuality is a motivating force behind rational decisions and communicative acts. Sexuality can also be identified as one of the motivators behind the bursting out of a mental disturbance. Now, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the manner in which the instinctive affectivity functions within the individual's life is analogous to the manner in which a sedimented past intentional lived experience functions as an underlying motivating power.

How does sexuality appear as a deep, underlying form of affectivity? What is the phenomenological evidence for the deep functioning of sexuality? And in

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839 These issues are not alien to Husserl, nor does he exclude them from his phenomenological problematic. For instance, he deals with the alternation of wakefulness and sleeping in various places in *Ideas II*. Cf. in particular Hua4 (Id2) §26, "Alert and Dull Consciousness".
840 PhP, 191/167.
841 PhP, 191/167.
842 PhP, 193/168.
843 PhP, 191/166.

what manner does an instinctual affectivity motivate particular forms of existence, in that "sexuality can motivate privileged forms of my life".[844] Merleau-Ponty's answer to these questions is that an underlying sexuality appears as an *atmosphere*. The idea of atmosphere allows one to think about a deep underlying content that secretly motivates experiences on the surface, but without having to presuppose unconscious representations.[845]

*Questions.* Questions arise from these four issues. Here, I am interested in questions that demand a complementary, more detailed account of the instinctive affectivity. I do not intend to show that Merleau-Ponty's claims would be wrong, or that they would demand a totally different approach. Instead, the idea is that the claims he makes need to be supplied with complementary explications. The task of this chapter is to provide these complementary explications.

*First,* there are questions concerning the *determination* and the *dynamic capacity* of the instinct. What is the instinctive schema, if must it be determinable as distinct from the total life of the individual? And how can an originally instinctive drive become linked to a power of "adhering to different milieus, of determining [the subject] through different experiences"?[846] A related question is, how can the intentional schema of an instinctive drive become altered?

*Second,* there are questions concerning the *primordiality* and the *capacity of initiation* of the instinct. What is an instinctive form of affectivity, if it is thought as an intentional lived experience *prior to* human existence in its proper sense, namely, as adherence to different milieus and as being re-determined thereby? How can an instinctive drive initiate the properly existential life?

*Finally*, questions emerge that concern the deep functioning of the instinctual drive. How can a deep functioning instinct, such as a sexual drive, exercise a motivating force with regard to other, non-sexual experiences?

*The Tasks of the Chapter.* One task is to render comprehensible how affects can develop and change within the individual's life. We can distinguish between two different situations in which an affective schema changes, depending on whether the affect is already determined or not. An affect is determined if it entails an awareness of a pre-given schema of what it is to live through such an affective episode. It can be compared to how our acquaintance with external things develops. When we encounter an object for the first time, we don't have any understanding of its behavior in different situations. As the encounters accumulate, the different characteristics of the object are inscribed in the schema. To be acquainted with an object means that we encounter the object with an already established horizon of expectations and anticipations. The development of an affect can also be compared to the acquisition of a new skill and to the process of habituation. A new skill, at the beginning, is totally indeterminate. The practice, which consists of single instances of performing the skill, changes the schema. There are performances in which still indeterminate aspects of the skill become determined, and the schema is refined. Accordingly, there is a difference in

[844] PhP, 196/172.
[845] PhP, 196/171.
[846] PhP, 185/161.

whether an affect occurs spontaneously, for the first time, or whether one is already acquainted with the affective schema. Furthermore, new affective encounters can fortify the affective schema, enrich or alter it, and new unprecedented instances of the affect can be found. The instinctual affective tendency is the first, spontaneous occurrence of an affective schema. This means that the affective schema is still indeterminate and empty, insofar as it lacks any acquaintance with the affect in question. Thus, the instinct is, in this specific sense, a blind tendency. Accordingly, the task is to account for the instinct as a blind tendency.

The development of the affective schema is a kind of "objectivation". In subchapter 5.1 I will deal with the distinction between affect-consciousness and objectifying acts. Husserl characterizes affective experiences as higher order acts: affect gives value to an already constituted object but does not constitute any new characteristics of the object itself. For this reason, affective experiences are non-objectifying acts. There are two problems in this account with regard to the explication of instinctive affectivity. On the one hand, the account of affectivity as a non-objectifying act does not explicate well the dynamic capacity of affects. On the other hand, the suggestion that affect-consciousness always requires a constituted object is problematic. It does not account for the instinct as a blind tendency, which in its spontaneous beginning the instinct is not provided with a constituted object. Thus, we have to ascribe a specific component of objectivation peculiar to affects themselves, and we have to provide an account of an indeterminate but articulated instinctive desire which thus has a dynamic potential to be determined.

Subchapter 5.2. demonstrates that a blind but articulated tendency can be thought as an atmospheric feeling. Bower suggests that a newly emerging instinct does not appear as an active feeling, but as a passive framework of preferences. He describes the situation like this:

> "the subject comes to the field of experience with certain general 'preferences', although it is entirely unaware of them at first, and that what stands out in this field is only what accords with these preferences to the greatest degree."

Thus, Husserl speaks of a 'passive preferring' that occupies itself exclusively with the one thing it deems 'important', while it 'passively runs roughshod over another.'"[847] Thus, instincts could be characterized as atmospheres that color the field of experience, instead of active, episodic emotions or instantiations of desire.

In subchapter 5.3. I will lay the basis for the account of the dynamic character of the instinct by going through the basic elements of a phenomenological theory of affection. Husserl's account of affect-consciousness and his theory of affection are different things. If affect-consciousness gives value to an already constituted object, affection is about the process of how an object becomes attentively noticed in the first place. Thus, unlike affect-consciousness, affection is about feelings provided with a dynamic character. The theory of affection not

[847] Bower 2014, 6–7.

only accounts for how attentively noticed objects emerge, it also provides an explication for the manner in which novel associative syntheses are formed within unnoticed, passive experiencing through processes of awakening.

Subchapter 5.4 focuses on Bower's argument, according to which curiosity, which is a kind of objectifying accomplishment, must be the primal instinct. The instinct of curiosity is the common component of every other instinctual striving because it is responsible for the development of each and every instinctual striving.

What would Merleau-Ponty's take on this issue be? I will claim that Merleau-Ponty would claim something similar to Bower because he stresses the inherent connection, "osmosis", of an originally instinctual affectivity and existence.[848] The "power of adhering to different milieus" could then be thought as the primal instinctive desire, the general atmosphere within which all the instincts develop.

Finally, the subchapter 5.5. explicates the difference between impressional and projective affectivity, and then returns to the issue of the "empty sketch". As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty accounts for Schneider's pathological experience in terms of a diminishing of the scope of affection, which Merleau-Ponty also terms the intentional arc. As his scope of stimulatability is diminished, Schneider lacks the motivating force of the non-intuitive, empty experiences. On this basis we can conceive of the instinct as an impressional affect which lacks the capacity of adhering to the milieu. Without this capacity, instincts at this level of experiencing remain dispersed. The impressional affects (or the feelings and spontaneous tendencies at the impressional level) stem spontaneously with respect to the triggering object-like unities that appear in the actual surrounding environment. However, these affects cannot be identified for themselves – they will not get any self-determination through encounters with objects of satisfaction.

## 6.1 Affect-intentionality as Non-objectifying Consciousness Founded on a Constituted Object

In the beginning of *Ideas II,* Husserl's aim is to account for the characteristic features of theoretical acts. In this context, he carries out an inquiry into the difference between cognitive and affective acts. According to him, the difference lies in the type of attitude by which these acts intend its object: whereas theoretical acts are characterized by different modifications of *believing*, *doxa*, the affective acts involve *valuing*.[849] In the translation of *Ideas II* the difference has been taken into account by using two terms, "objectifying" and "objectivation".[850] The acts

[848] PhP, 197/172.
[849] Hua4(Id2), 17–18.
[850] In *Ideas II*, the same term *objektivierende Akt* refers to two different classes of acts: theoretical and doxic acts. The translator has distinguished them by using the terms "objectifying" and "objectivating". The first term specifies the narrower class of theoretical acts (See Hua4, §3), whereas the second term refers more generally to all doxic acts, involving the valuing

endowed with a doxic attitude are "objectivating" acts, which means that when we live through an experience in question, we actually live in a belief concerning the object.[851] The theoretical intentional lived experiences are characterized by an interest directed to the object itself. The valuing acts, on the other hand, are necessarily founded on constituted objects, and they involve beliefs about objects. However, unlike theoretical acts, they are not properly objectifying, for the reason that when we are engaged in an affective relation to an object, we intend the object with regard to its value.

To be sure, Husserl does not claim that objects would be constituted merely in theoretical acts. The theoretical acts are founded on pre-given unities of objects. Husserl claims that primal objects are given in sensibility, and the unities of objects, for instance, objects of perception, are further constituted in what he calls an "aesthetic synthesis".[852] Thus, an act of simply perceiving a unity of an object is non-objectifying because it does not involve a belief or a thematic grasp of the object. However, before the theoretical grasp, series of perceptions constitute unities of objects provided with an awareness of a typical style of their behavior. The acquaintance with a specific object enriches and changes along with the accumulation of perceptual encounters, as new objects are occasionally found, etc. In short, our acquaintance with the world changes and develops without theoretical acts. However, it is significant that the distinction between believing and valuing, and between objectifying and non-objectifying acts, can seem to become generalized, and become applicable also within the sphere of pre-theoretical experience. Namely, we could operate with the distinction between the spheres of perceiving and feeling, and claim that the pre-theoretical sensuous syntheses are provided with an original interest with respect to the objects, while feelings are always related to values of already unified objects.

Let us now clarify Husserl's distinction between objectifying and non-objectifying acts, as it shows up in *Ideas II*. A theoretical act of judging something and a valuing act of giving value to something both require that this something is already given beforehand. Theoretical acts (explicating, attentive grasping, judging, attributing, collecting, forming groups, links and collections) are higher-

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and practical acts that are endowed with "believing" (See Hua4, §7). But, Husserl writes: "Theoretical acts are the ones that are properly or explicitly *Objectivating*; to have Objects in the proper sense, or to have objects, the characteristic grasping and *positing attitude* of the theoretical subject is required" (Hua4(Id2), 16/18).

[851] Merleau-Ponty makes notice of Husserl's distinction between objectifying and non-objectifying acts, when he distinguishes "existential" or "anthropological" experienced spaces from "natural" space that underlies them. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that for Husserl the objectifying act is not originally a theoretical or representative act, but is a founding doxic attitude that constitutes the unity of perceptual lived experiencing. As he puts it: "[n]atural and primordial space is not geometrical space, and correlatively the unity of experience is not guaranteed by a universal thinker […]." (PhP, 340/307). In this context, Merleau-Ponty refers to Husserl's *5th logical investigation*, where Husserl accounts for the concept of an "objectifying act". See Hua19, 496–519/158–170.

[852] Hua4, §8 and §9. The "aesthetic synthesis" delimits the field of investigation of "passive synthesis", which Husserl investigates in detail in *APS*.

order accomplishments that are based on pre-given objects.[853] Thus, the theoretical explication of the object does not constitute the object in question. Instead, the "objectivity in question is already consciously constituted *prior* to these theoretical acts".[854] There is a difference between simply seeing a blue sky, attentive noticing of the blue sky and attentively grasping and explicating the features of the blue sky, or judging that the sky is blue. When I focus on and begin to observe the blue sky, I grasp the sky in a novel manner (for instance, I might distinguish parts of the sky, consider their differences and link these parts into groups), and accordingly the sky is provided with new layers of sense. However, the blue sky itself is not first created in these theoretical acts, but must already have been perceived and appear beforehand. Thus, there are sense unities which have not arisen "from whatever sort of theoretical, valuing, or practical spontaneities."[855] Attentive turning toward grasps the object in its objectivity. It involves an interest in the specific characteristics of the object, and can give rise to explications and theoretical accomplishments. For this reason, Husserl also calls the active grasping of the object an "objectifying" act.[856]

Now, Husserl claims that a similar structure, according to which a spontaneous act is a higher-order accomplishment based on a pre-given object, also applies to the axiological intentional lived experiences.[857] A higher-order act, which is an act of valuing, is founded on a pre-given affective lived experience. Simply put, I might make a value-judgment, saying that the sky is beautiful, on the basis of a pre-given feeling of the beauty of the sky. However, here the original, unreflected affective experience differs from the simple perception or the simple noticing. Namely, the affective experience is already a kind of higher-order act: when I take pleasure in seeing the blue sky, this *presupposes* the simple perceptual act in which the blue sky is given. As Husserl writes:

> "We had earlier drawn a contrast between just being conscious, by way of seeing, of the blue sky and the theoretical performance of this act. But we are no longer performing the seeing in this eminent sense when we, seeing the radiant blue sky, live in the rapture of it. If we do that, then we are not in the theoretical or cognitive attitude but in the affective."[858]

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[853] In the beginning of *Ideas II* Husserl characterizes shortly the manner in which spontaneous and active theoretical accomplishments emerge out of passively experienced pre-given objects. Once accomplished and sinking down into the past, the spontaneous theoretical acts themselves undergo a modification in which they are transformed into passively experienced pre-givennesses (that is, they become "sedimented"), which then can function as a basis for further acts, appear as suddenly occurring memories or give rise to "sudden ideas", etc. In short, Husserl presents the thematic of active life of the egoic accomplishments (the original spontaneity of thinking, feeling or doing) and egoic activity being surrounded by a passive, anonymous life (their being passively processed by means of laws of association) of these acts. See Hua4, §9.

[854] Hua4, 4/6.

[855] Hua4, 17/19.

[856] Hua4, 3–4/5–6. Husserl writes: "Again, it is one thing to be conscious at all that the sky is blue, and it is another thing to live in the performance of the judgment (that the sky is now blue) in an attentive, explicitly grasping, specifically intentional way."

[857] Hua4, 7/9.

[858] Hua4, 8/10.

Husserl claims that theoretical, affective and practical attitudes are modifications of the same intentional lived experience. While I look at the blue sky, these attitudes can be set in a competing relation, driving me to differing directions of orientation: I might want to observe the sky (for instance, if a friend living far away has requested me to describe the peculiar visual outlook of the Finnish sky), but at the same time the beautifulness of the sky compels me to immerse myself in the feeling of its beauty. Now, affective experiences, acts of feeling, give value to already constituted objects. The feelings can be evaluated and elevated into higher-order judgments about values of objects. However, the pre-theoretical immersing or "abandon" in the feeling originally constitutes a value of a pre-given object. Husserl expresses it clearly in the following passage:

> "Living *in the simple sense intuition*, the one on the lowest level, and performing it theoretically, we have theoretically grasped *a mere thing* in the most straightforward manner. When we pass over to the aesthetic grasping and judging of value, we then have more than a mere thing, we have the thing with the 'what' character (with the expressed predicate) of the value; we have a value-thing. This value-Object […] is an Object of a higher level."[859]

Thus, Husserl's claim is that affective acts are based on already perceived objects. Feelings are directed to values, and values can be thought only as values of objects. For this reason, feelings do not in themselves bring about any new objects or new characteristics of the objects. To be sure, Husserl contends that affects endow the object with a new layer of sense, which is their value. However, the affect-consciousness is driven by an already given characteristic of the object, and is not oriented towards any new, unprecedented characteristics. The blue sky looks beautiful as it already looks. Had I never noticed the blue sky in the first place, I wouldn't have found out how beautiful it is. One might also find delight in what has been theoretically accomplished related to the blue sky, such as the configurations of relations between the shades of its colors. But, again, the feeling of delight is related to these theoretical objects, which presuppose their prior theoretical disclosure. Finally, I might be glad that I succeeded in making such a grouping. In this feeling of gladness, I give value to my own accomplishment, which presupposes that it has already become disclosed to me. I must be able to reflect on the former intellectual accomplishment, and only then I can have a feeling related to it.

Husserl adds that each and every non-objectifying feeling is implicitly objectifying, because it "allows objectivities to be drawn from itself by means of a shift, a change in attitude".[860] If I find an object beautiful, then it is quite obvious that the object now has a new quality. The feeling constitutes the object as beautiful. However, this value is not made explicit or thematized in the feeling itself. Instead, becoming aware of the feeling of beauty is, again, a cognitive act.[861]

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[859] Hua4, 9/11.
[860] Hua4, 16/18.
[861] Once the theoretical act is accomplished, one can immerse in the act-quality of the new theoretical act. For instance, it might be enjoyable or intriguing to judge on the feeling.

It is an implication of this account that affects a lack a dynamic character. Only a cognitive (either theoretical or pre-theoretical) interest leads to bringing new objects into appearance, while affects remain stuck with already given objects. It is also implied that the object valued in the affect is "neutral" with regard to the affect in question. The appearing object is a necessary component of the affect: it is the *loved, hated, desired, needed, pleasurable, ugly, beautiful* or *to-be-avoided*. For instance, if there would be nothing to enjoy, then there would be no enjoyment at all. A blind person cannot become immersed in the feelings that arise with regard to visual objects. Instead, if we enjoy of something, this something can also appear without the enjoyment: we can find blue sky pleasurable, but the sky can also be simply noticed without any specific affective relation to it.[862]

In short, it seems that in *Ideas II* Husserl operates with a sharp distinction between the cognitive and the affective, or between simply perceiving an object and a theoretical grasp of the object, on the one hand, and giving value to the object in feeling, on the other. The affective experiences are one-sidedly founded on some constituted sense content, and they lack a dynamic character. Husserl also operates with a similar distinction in his *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses*. In paragraph §50,[863] he contends that his analysis of passivity (including the phenomena of association, affection and reproduction) has abstracted from the affect-consciousness, and suggests that the relation between passive experiencing and active turning towards can be analyzed separately within the sphere of feelings.[864] Thus, a cognitive turning toward in attentive noticing has to be distinguished from a turning toward in feeling. Accordingly, the question is, what if, instead of the arousal of cognitive interest (exploration, explication, getting to know the object better), we turn toward the object in feeling, in which case we turn towards the value of the object, and feel the object, for example, as "pleasurable" or "painfully lacking"? An example of such a turning towards is, simply, the manner in which a particular feeling becomes strengthened, and how a particular feeling can engage the subject more and more. For instance, a feeling of thirst can in the beginning appear as a weak feeling at the margins of our experience. It then arises little by little, finally engaging us wholly. At that moment the subject will be enticed to ignore all other engagements, and "turn toward" the lacking glass of water in the feeling of thirst.

However, Husserl admits that when one is seized by the affect, the orientation is not towards the object of the affect itself. The thirst is not about the glass of water, but about getting the water in order to satisfy the "painful lack". Thus, Husserl repeats the above explicated account of affect-consciousness: feelings do not originally entail any discovery of new aspects of the object. In feeling, the

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862 Nevertheless, it has to be noticed that Husserl does not claim that purely affectless intentional lived experiences would be possible. In *Ideas II* he seems to hesitate on this issue, as he asks, whether intentional lived experiences without any affect-consciousness would be possible at all. See Hua4, 16/18.

863 The title of the paragraph in question is "The Constitutive Accomplishments of Affect-Consciousness. Affection of Feeling and Turning Toward in Feeling. Will and Desire." See Hua31, 5–11 (APS, 277–283).

864 Hua31, 5 (APS, 277).

objective sense of the object does not go through any enrichment.[865] There are no new determinations of the objects found in the feeling, no empty horizons of the object are fulfilled nor connections to other objects established. Again, the reason for this is that the feeling is related to the specific, valuable sense of the object. Since value requires a prior disclosure of this sense of the object, a "path of objectivation" underlies the intentionality of feeling. Some feelings impose their intended sense to the object. If I approach the glass of water with an enraging feeling of thirst, I will surely ignore its other possible aspects or characteristics, and orient only to the particular aspects that are appropriate to the need.

In his explication of affect-consciousness in *APS*, Husserl contends that feelings bear a one-sided relation to the object. The affects are not guided by an interest in the characteristics of the object itself. Instead, an affect is regulated by the pre-given, already possessed sense of the object. Thus, if the blue sky looks beautiful, or if an apple tastes delicious, it is a specific quality of the blue sky or the apple that guides these forms of affect-consciousness. Affect is an intentional lived experience whose path has already been trodden, a feeling regulated by a predisposition. Again, just as in *Ideas II*, here too Husserl contends that these feelings are potentially constitutive of new appearing objects (or new qualities of the appearing object) only insofar as feeling provides the object with value, which then can become disclosed and identifiable:

> "What [every consciousness] itself brings to consciousness as non-objectifying is at the same time given to consciousness with an objectlike character; in this way, a path of possible identification is instituted."[866]

To be sure, Husserl's explication of feelings, stimulations and enticements in *APS* is not reduced to the analysis of turning toward in feeling. He does not claim that the objectifying acts would have nothing to do with affective force or an affective enticement exerted by the object-like unities. For one thing, in his analysis of passive synthesis, Husserl examines the phenomenon of *affection*. If affect-consciousness means a feeling related to already constituted objects, affection refers to a stimulation radiating from object-like unities, which are not yet objects of proper attention, but which eventually lead to appearances of objects. Theory of affection is about the process in which a passively experienced object-like unity *becomes* an object in the proper sense. It is a remarkable thing that, according to Husserl, this process has to do with a specific kind of awareness of a *tension*. There is a feeling of tension that is *relaxed* when something becomes more prominent, or when an object becomes noticed. This "feeling" also applies in the sphere of affect-consciousness. There is a "satisfaction" in becoming more stimulated by and finally in turning towards a feeling.[867]

I will deal with Husserl's theory of affection in the following subchapter. Next, I will explicate why a sharp distinction between consciousness of object

[865] Hua31, 6 (APS, 278).
[866] Hua31, 6 (APS, 279).
[867] Hua31, 9 (APS, 282).

and consciousness of value is problematic,[868] and why it proves to be problematic with regard to a phenomenological theory of instincts. Then, the question is, how does Merleau-Ponty apply the distinction between the epistemic and the axiological?

To begin with, Anthony Steinbock claims that the distinction is problematic from a genetic phenomenological perspective, and that this is due to Husserl's static distinction between the affective and cognitive elements of experience:

> "within his static phenomenology, [Husserl] views affect-consciousness as one-sidedly founded upon a layer of consciousness that is 'neutrally' epistemic, subsidiary to a founding objectifying consciousness".[869]

An evident problem is that a theoretical endeavor that strives towards "deeper epistemic content"[870] apparently involves feeling and valuing. If cognitive experience was thought as affectively neutral, it would then be difficult to understand the dynamic force behind higher cognitive accomplishments. Steinbock contends that, according to Husserl himself, the higher cognitive acts involve affects: "the higher the cognitive motivation, the less neutral is the cognitive activity, the more the affect-laden is the consciousness that comes into play as an epistemic striving."[871] For example, not only a newly found mathematical formula gives rise to a new affect, but the search for the formula is itself laden with feelings. Epistemic striving as *an affectively charged search* for new objects and characteristics of objects cannot be accounted for if affect-consciousness is always related to an already constituted object.

Another, major problem of the sharp distinction is that it makes it impossible to account for the way in which we become cognitively attentive of objects in the first place. Namely, as Steinbock contends, passively experienced, pre-given object-like unities (or prominences) must entice us or draw us towards in one way or other in order to be noticed and focused upon. In other words, the object-like unities must exert affective force on the subject. However, the exact manner in which a prominence would *entice*, *stimulate* or *draw us toward* when there is no object properly present yet (not necessarily even a perceived unity), remains unclear. Clearly, stimulation is not an affect-neutral cognitive accomplishment, but has to do with feeling and value.

The problem also becomes poignant if we want to consider instincts as intentional lived experiences that do not entail any already constituted unity of an object. As we have seen, this is the manner in which Merleau-Ponty thinks about the instincts. The instincts have to do with value, and different instincts can be distinguished according to their particular values, but they do not impose on us spontaneous experiences of values of constituted objects. This is because the instincts, as they emerge spontaneously, and as they belong to the sphere of original passivity, are supposed to precede any encounter with an object in the proper

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[868] Here my purpose is not to suggest any interpretation of Husserl's view on the issue, but to apply this to the explication of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.
[869] Steinbock 2004, 26.
[870] Steinbock 2004, 27.
[871] Steinbock 2004, 27.

sense. In other words, the instincts are not suddenly emerging desires of objects. In their initial stage, they do not involve any determinate, guiding awareness of exactly *what* is desirable. An emerging instinct is a "poorly formulated problem", and in this specific sense it is a "blind" striving. If we claim that the spontaneously emerging instinctive drives have a necessary place within the constitution of experience, and as we have seen this is Merleau-Ponty's view, then we have to account for two things. *On the one hand*, we have to account for an articulated but blind striving. *On the other*, we have to account for the dynamic capacity of this striving to be satisfied, and a capacity to be self-disclosed and identified as the result of this process of satisfaction.

The opposition between object and value makes the instinct unthinkable with regard to both of these requirements. This can be seen in Matt Bower's critique of Nam In-Lee's and James Mensch's interpretations of Husserl's account of instincts. According to Bower, both interpretations are based on a sharp distinction between objectifying and non-objectifying acts. If Steinbock contends that higher cognitive strivings must be endowed with an affect-consciousness, Bower focuses on the lower-level instinctual strivings and claims that a specific kind of striving for "objectification" must be thought as a component of even the most primitive forms of consciousness. The drive for "objectification", which here means a dynamic striving for more unity, is not a theoretical accomplishment, nor an affectively neutral cognitive accomplishment.

According to Lee, there is a specific mode of affection related to objectifying intentionality, but the affective force related to it has nothing to do with the consciousness of value. However, it is hard to conceive of an awareness of an enticement of an object-like prominence that draws us towards *without ascribing* any value to this awareness, as if it were value-neutral. Instead, Bower insists that one must distinguish between an experience of constituted values, and an experience of value as constituting (eventually leading to an appearance of an object). In the first case the valuable object is already given, for instance an apple I want to eat. In the second case there is a specific feeling that facilitates the constitution of objects.

Bower is critical of Mensch's distinction between objectifying and non-objectifying instincts, basically for the same reasons as in Lee's case. Mensch distinguishes an instinct that constitutes objects from the instincts related to values. Non-objectifying instincts have to do with a specific value, but they do not intend to any object: "some instinctive experiences are affective experiences that do not present an object or that are not episodes of thematic awareness of something."[872] Objectifying instincts do not entail any value, but they are constitutive of objects: "an object comes to be given through the synthesis of a manifold of appearances without affection".[873] Mensch suggests that an objectifying instinct consists of an instinctive striving without affection, that is, without any enticement exerted on the part of the object. This instinct would be something like a feeling of push without any pull, a drive without the awareness of being-drawn-by. But, as

[872] Bower 2014, 8.
[873] Bower 2014, 8.

Bower remarks, an attempt to account for the instincts on the basis of the heterogeneity of the object and value renders the instincts unintelligible. Therefore, every instinct must have a non-objectifying and objectifying moment.[874] The instincts entail a non-objectifying moment, insofar as the instincts are endowed with a spontaneous predisposition, an affective schema that constitutes the specific value of the instinct. However, all instincts also contain a tendency toward 'a condensed or focused enjoyment, and finding an object of desire is a satisfaction of this tendency. Bower claims that a satisfaction, such as enjoying eating an apple, is already a focused experience of enjoyment, which has a disclosing function for the affect.[875] Accordingly, and as we will later see in more detail, Bower's idea is that just because every instinct contains a component of "objectification", in Husserl's late theory of the instincts the instinct of curiosity has a status of a *primal instinct* within the order of instincts.

How does Merleau-Ponty conceive of the distinction between the epistemic and the affective? When Merleau-Ponty's initial description of erotic intentionality in the chapter "The Body as a Sexed Being" is reminiscent of Husserl's account of affect-consciousness. Merleau-Ponty suggests that affects are guided by the value of an already possessed affective physiognomy. Erotic intentionality is not guided by an interest towards the perceived object itself. It is oriented according to an *affective physiognomy*. The sexual schema appears as an accentuation or point of emphasis in what is perceived or sensed. As Merleau-Ponty famously writes:

> "the body is not perceived merely as just another object, this objective perception is inhabited by a more secret one: the visible body is underpinned by a strictly individual sexual schema that accentuates erogenous zones, sketches out a sexual physiognomy, and calls forth the gestures of the masculine body".[876]

Here Merleau-Ponty's example is basically similar to Husserl's example of affect-consciousness. Sexual desire is not a cognitive interest in the other's body, but an interest in the strengthening or continuance of the sexual situation.[877] The other's body needs to be perceived in the first place in order that the sexual desire can arouse. And, conversely, the other's body can be perceived "neutrally" and without any desire, such as in Schneider's case.

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[874] Bower 2014, 13.
[875] Bower 2014, 13.
[876] PhP, 182/158.
[877] Merleau-Ponty also deals with the distinction between affect-consciousness and objectification when he analyzes hallucinations. In the intentional lived experience of hallucination, that which is sensed is regulated by the total intention of the subject's being, not by the object. Hallucination is a modification of perception, in which the regulation of the sensed has become dominated by the predispositions of the subject, thus imposing to themselves a value of reality. More generally, Merleau-Ponty contends that all perceptions entail a tension between subject's possessions (needs, desires, project and habits) and the object itself. He also characterizes the tension as one between the object as an inexhaustible unity of ever new determinations, and the object as already determined by the predispositions. These are two powers oriented to somewhat different directions. The analysis of hallucination shows that Merleau-Ponty does not consider the interest in the object itself only as a theoretical endeavour, but as already founded in sensibility. See, PhP, 394/357–8. See also Romdenh-Romluc 2007b.

However, as we pointed out above, Merleau-Ponty ends up with the problem of instinct and with the problem of the development of the affective physiognomy within an individual's life. But if affects have to do with values of objects and not with perceived objects, how do affects change? And if instincts are blind and articulated strivings, in that they lack an object, how could they develop at all? We have seen in the preceding chapter that Merleau-Ponty accounts for the development and change of experience of the world in terms of acquisition of habit. Habituation is a sensory-motor acquisition of new significance or a new object. According to Merleau-Ponty, acquisition of a new perceptual sense is always a modulation of the body schema too, an adoption of a new expressive gesture.[878]

The new gesture and the new perceptual sense do not suddenly pop up out of nothing. The emergence of a new sense is preceded by a blind expectation and anticipation. There must be a drive towards the strengthening of that which is blindly anticipated, because otherwise one would merely stick to the value of what is already given. Merleau-Ponty ascribes this desire towards the blindly expected to the power of the "movement of existence" or "active transcendence".[879] Even if active transcendence is not a theoretical interest, it can be characterized as an interest for "objectification", not in the sense of thematically grasping an object, but in the sense of establishing a new unity of sense. Does he think, then, that there would be non-objectifying instincts? And if the body can "regress" to the level dominated by instinctive biological existence, how can one escape from this regression?

Merleau-Ponty wants to explicate sexuality both as an original instinct, and as something that is developed and altered within the development of an individual person. He characterizes this as an ambiguous relation between sexuality and existence. Sexuality must "rest upon the internal powers of the organic subject", and erotic intentionality must maintain a peculiar relation "with the existence of sexual organ[s]".[880] Existence, then, is a power of adhering to different milieus and "of acquiring structures of behavior".[881] The originally instinctive drives can only develop insofar as they are merged into the "objectifying" movement of existence, and the affects change according to the total situation of the individual.

In short, by emphasizing the ambiguity between sexuality and existence, Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that a strict opposition of value and object does not hold. It remains for us to clarify the process by which our "natural powers" suddenly merge with "a richer signification" of the acquired habit.[882]

878 PhP, 171/147–8.
879 PhP, 178/154.
880 PhP, 182/158, 186/162.
881 PhP, 185/161.
882 PhP, 179/155.

## 6.2 Instincts as Articulated Blind Tendencies

Affect-consciousness does not only mean explicit emotional episodes that have their specific dynamical structure and that involve particular objects. Affects are also unnoticed feelings, moods or attunements that are effective in the passive background of the field of experience. Merleau-Ponty (and likewise Husserl) hold that our actual feelings and emotions are always surrounded by a passively experienced background affective field. Merleau-Ponty characterizes the manner of givenness of the background affect as a givenness of an atmosphere. Let us cite again the passage in which he claims that sexuality, insofar as it is an underlying affective structure that motivates other, non-sexual affects and acts, appears as an atmosphere:

> "Sexuality is neither transcended in human life nor represented at its core through unconscious representations. It is continuously present in human life as an atmosphere. […] [sexuality appears as] that always obscure part of ourselves that we sense beneath our representations, that individual haze through which we perceive the world."[883]

### 6.2.1 Atmospheric feelings

An atmospheric feeling appears in an indirect manner, in the way the objects appear.[884] In fact, here it is not a question of giving value to a specific object, such as taking pleasure in the taste of an apple, or wanting to find something to be hit in a fit of rage. It is more like a fatigue or a headache, which may at first appear as a certain difficulty in focusing on the objects. The obscure feeling of distress that surrounds the objects might be subsequently localized and identified as a headache. The experienced space has affective qualities.[885] We feel the atmosphere, such as when visiting a particular place we speak of there being "something in the air", or when we sense the "climate" of a social setting. We often retrospectively share the feelings about the atmosphere we felt when we participated in a collective event, if it appeared to us as having an exceptional attuning, such as strange, threatening or relaxing.

Merleau-Ponty draws an analogy between the atmospheric feeling and background coloring, lighting or odor. A coloring, for instance, makes us see the external objects around us in a certain manner or through a certain "air", without being itself present as a particular, identifiable object.[886] Moreover, atmospheric colors correspond with certain passively experienced movements and postures of the body.[887] The color and the bodily posture, insofar as they function as constituting the coloring, are experienced like a field within which objects are given,

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[883] PhP, 196/172.
[884] This mode of appearance has to be distinguished from the affect-consciousness as a giving value to an object.
[885] See, for example, Fuchs 2013, 613.
[886] PhP, 242/216–7.
[887] See PhP, 243–4/218. "Blue is what solicits a certain way of looking from me […] It is a certain field or a certain atmosphere offered to the power of my eyes and of my entire body."

not as an object or a prominent unity in itself. The atmospheric color and body posture remain passively experienced and unnoticed.[888] However, the coloring and the corresponding body posture, and likewise the atmospheric feeling, can change. In a similar manner as colors correspond with body postures, atmospheric feelings also have their counterpart in the general schemas of kinesthetic bodily self-awareness.

The general arrangement can be *favorable* or *unfavorable* with regard to more specific intentional acts. The atmospheric feeling disposes us to the selection of particular kinds of affects (and other acts), excluding others. Again, Merleau-Ponty exemplifies a similar kind of phenomenon with respect to sensing colors:

> "The color of the visual field makes the subject's reactions more or less precise, whether it involves performing a movement with a given amplitude or showing a determinate length with his fingers. With a green visual field, the valuation is precise; with a red visual field, it is imprecise by excess. Movements toward the outside are accelerated by green, slowed down by red. Red modifies the locating of stimuli upon the skin in the direction of abduction. […] Now in a general manner, adduction signifies that the organism turns toward the stimulus and is drawn out into the world; abduction signifies that it turns away from the stimulus and retreats toward its core."[889]

Thereby Merleau-Ponty suggests that different atmospheres can be different atmospheric orientations such as turning toward the outside or retreating from the external world. The atmospheres accelerate, encourage or help certain particular performances emerge.

Steinbock characterizes the affective coloring in terms of the "affective milieu". One can have an interest towards something or turn towards something attentively only insofar as this something is "effectively given in a milieu".[890] As Steinbock puts it:

> "In order for my attention to be directed toward my milieu or to my 'milieu-things', in order that I take an interest in them or even perceive them, the milieu must already be pre-given as experienced in its efficacy to me".[891]

The experienced, pre-given efficacy of the milieu is a felt atmosphere that encourages the accentuation of certain orientations or constellations of things, in a similar manner as different background colors bring forth different shapes of the colored things. If the milieu changes, we often feel that something has changed without knowing exactly what. Such variations of the milieu can be changes of lighting, a sudden stopping of a background noise (for example, the hum of a fridge), the darkening of the room, but also a removal of a painting from the wall.[892]

The different atmospheres can be felt attractive or repulsive. For instance, we may feel that something is not quite right or that we don't feel well without

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888 PhP, 243/217. Merleau-Ponty writes: "[r]ed can exaggerate my reactions without my noticing."
889 PhP, 242/216–7.
890 Steinbock 1995, 151.
891 Steinbock 1995, 151.
892 PhP, 371/335. Merleau-Ponty takes this example from Scheler.

being able to point out why. Moreover, the atmosphere can be a felt tension that "waits for a response".[893]

### 6.2.2 Instinct as an Atmospheric Urge

I have now presented some features of atmospheric feelings. These characteristics can also be applied in the phenomenological analysis of background needs and interests. There are particular desires, strivings and interests related to particular satisfying conditions, such as a hunger that involves a desire for a slice of bread or the need for some water to drink. We can now also consider atmospheric interests that do not in themselves specify any particular interest, but instead delimit a field of possible interests.

Bower clarifies the passively experienced desire by relating it to the manner in which the acquired habits constitute a field of presence with a certain atmosphere. When someone possesses skill for doing something, his or her disposition functions as a coloring background. This background coloring fosters the becoming actual of particular affects, acts and objects related to the skill. Accordingly, it excludes others. But the important thing is that the disposition passively determines that which will probably affect the subject or that which will become prominent without pre-determining any *particular act or object*.

A habit or a motor skill correlates with a familiar environment, a milieu typical to the disposition, in which the skill can be practiced. To take up Merleau-Ponty's example, the skill of an experienced organist is not limited to a particular organ. The organist is able to set up other organs in such a posture that the organ becomes a responsive environment to his or her particular style of playing. The familiar surrounding environment must fit with the disposition. Thus, the skill constitutes an acquaintance with the environment that is favorable with regard to the practicing of the skill. The one who disposes the skill recognizes the atmosphere in which the habitual practice can be made, and is able to organize the right kind of "terrain" for it.[894]

We can conceive of an instinctual, blind but articulated, tendency. The atmospheric desire is a background mood for a particular field of experience. The atmospheric desire remains unnoticed, and it does not entail the appearance of any pre-determined, particular object. However, it functions like a coloring that makes one orient toward certain prominent acts, affects or objects, neglecting others. We are selectively related to what particular desires or affects will be crystallized, according to the atmospheric desire. This desire is experienced in an unnoticed, passive manner: it is a background feeling or a mood. The atmospheric desire is not an actual desire, but an affective tendency that encourages the actual-

[893] PhP, 305/275–6.
[894] Steinbock uses the word "terrain" for the familiar environment, or the "typically familiar milieu". Steinbock 1995, 162.

ization of some particular interests related to some particular objects. The atmospheric desire is endowed with "passive preferences".[895] Whenever we have a particular determined affect, we are already attuned in such a way that encourages the selection of this affect.

Insofar as the atmospheric urge does not come with an awareness of any particular aim or goal, it can account for an articulated need without a determination. The atmospheric desire can be exemplified as a feeling that we want or need something, or that there is a tendency, without being able to determine or point out what we want or what the tendency is about.

A spontaneously emerging instinct, in its initial state, can be conceived as an atmospheric desire. Thus, we don't have to conceive of instincts as particular, suddenly emerging desires that are oriented towards a determined goal. Atmospheric desire is both blind *and* articulated. It does not specify an object, but its scope of passive preferring is limited. The instinct, conceived in this manner, makes a particular field of objects of satisfaction, or possible instantiations of affects desirable, while excluding some other fields. This field is also related to particular locations and postures of the body.

As Merleau-Ponty contends, the specific, deeper-level affective relation to a field can both make selectively possible and close off particular affects and intentional acts. If the deeper affective relation to a field changes, it affects all the particular accomplishments that are constituted within the field. The instinctive, organic functions have the role of keeping the field at work. Simply, if the visual field is disturbed, then it affects all the visual structures in the individual's life.

## 6.3 Basic Elements of the Theory of Affection

In the following, we will deal with the question of how the dynamic capacity of affects is possible? As we contended above, affect-consciousness and affection are different themes in Husserl's phenomenological reflections, at least in *Ideas II* and *APS*. While, under the term affect-consciousness, Husserl focuses on feelings that give value to an already constituted sense content, affection refers to the process in which a passively experienced object-like unity becomes noticed and takes on the sense of an object in the proper sense. In the subchapter at hand, I will focus on the elements of Husserl's theory of affection.

We have already dealt with the issue of passivity. Consciousness, for Husserl, is not merely a spontaneous, wakeful and active intentionality. If consciousness is a temporal stream, spontaneous wakeful acts of the ego appear as belonging, one at a time, to a unique radiating focal and thematic center within the stream, surrounded by passive modes of experience that occur at the margins or in the background of the experience. A central issue is that we are not always awake and that the distinction between wakefulness and sleep (or some other form of non-wakefulness) is not a distinction between two excluding opposites.

[895] Bower 2014, 8.

Instead, we can be more or less wakeful, and more or less sleepy. However, even if we leave aside the problematic of the alternation between wakefulness and sleep, and focus on our active life, we have to take into account the passive background surrounding activity, and the complexity of the relations between activity and passivity. For instance, every spontaneous act, once that it has been accomplished, sinks into the past. In this process of sinking down or degrading the act undergoes a modification. Roughly speaking, it becomes part of the passive background of experience. However, it is clear that this does not mean (at least in normal experiencing) that the past act would lose its stimulating force for the ego for whom the act is not anymore actual, and who continues to live in other spontaneous acts. In Husserl's terms, one can say that the past intentional lived experience of an object is retained, or that it still radiates back towards the ego. We can also say that the past intentional lived experience still exerts affective force on the ego. Then, because of the affective force or the radiation, the past act can, for instance, suddenly pop up and be brought to mind as a memory. The notion of radiation is also implied in the apprehension of unities. A unity of a temporal object consists of moments that temporally exclude each other: only one moment can be actual at a time, while other moments are either already-past or still-coming. The impressional present is surrounded by a horizon of past moments and anticipated future moments. This horizon can only be held if there is a radiation of affective force of the past and future moments. We can then consider a higher-level unity, such as the unitary identity of a perceived thing, which extends over different acts of perception. Our acquaintance with a particular thing consists of separate, temporally more or less distant spontaneous episodes of perceptual experiences of the thing. A unity of the empirical thing can be constituted only if the past encounter with the thing is retained and awakened during the new, now actual encounter. If the past intentional lived experiences still exert affective force on the ego which observes the thing, they contribute to the actual observation by constituting a horizon of anticipation, an intentional schema that guides the actual exploration.

In order to clarify these kinds of phenomena, we need an account of how objects can exert an affective force on us, or how we can distinguish different levels of how object-like unities stimulate us at various degrees of force, at the margins of our wakeful and active experience, even if we do not actively notice them. Here we enter the thematic of the theory of affection. However, it is important to notice that the theory of affection that Husserl develops in *APS* is related in the first place to an account of original passivity. The question is then, what are the modifications of attention in the process in which an object-like unity, which does not yet have a status of proper object, becomes attentively noticed, and what are the attentional modifications included in the shift from passivity to activity? We have already showed that, according to Husserl, the lowest level of activity is receptivity, which is a becoming complicit with the call or to the enticement of the object-like unity or of a prominence. Thus, Husserl thinks that all activity has its basis in the radiation coming from the exteriority which,

as we will see, has a central implication concerning the instinctive drives: the instinctive drives cannot be conceived only on the basis of a purely inner impulse, but rather the instinctive impulse is a form of affection conditioned by an addressing that radiates from the outside. Reception of a call of a prominence then undergoes an attentional modification, in which the ego *turns towards* the object. In short, every givenness, every appearance of an object is preceded by a *response* of the ego.

We can roughly distinguish between, on the one hand, feelings related to constituted objects or pre-given intentional schemas, and on the other, feelings related to dynamic transitions from pre-givenness to givenness, or from a lower to a higher level of stimulation. As indicated above, the feeling of a prominence that calls for attention can be characterized as a feeling of *tension* that is *relaxed* when the prominent object-like unity becomes more prominent.

In the following, I will go through some of the basic claims involved in Husserl's more detailed account of affection, as he presents it in *APS*. I will first deal with Husserl's claim that every prominence (and thus all consciousness) exerts affective force. Then I will inquire into *contrast, similarity* and *predisposition* as conditions that motivate the strengthening of the affective force. Third, I will consider the claim that affection radiating from the field of experience would be a limit-case of affection. Fourth, I deal with the notions of passive awakening and the propagation of affection. I will conclude the subchapter with Bower's claim that Husserl's theory of affection, as it is presented in *APS*, is abstract in that it lacks an account of the order between different kinds of affections.

### 6.3.1 Does Each and Every Experienced Unity Exert Affective Force on the Subject?

In *APS* Husserl hesitates over the question of whether it is possible to be conscious of whatever kind of unity without any affective force. He ends up denying this possibility:

> "[E]verything that is constituted in relief for itself […] necessarily exercises an affection to some degree or other".[896]

As we have already indicated, a common understanding of affects might hold the opposite to be true. As Bower contends, feelings are usually thought of as following a presentation of an object. An affect follows a constituted object or given sensory data. I hear the sound of a chainsaw, which then provokes an affect in me: the sound irritates me. I would first of all already find myself being attentive to the sound. The sound would already be present for itself, occupying the field of my experience, appearing in relief for itself. The sound would also be heard as separated, isolated from the other, surrounding things. Already hearing it, I would be affected by it and then, in my feeling, value that which I hear as irritating, unpleasurable. Another clear example is tasting something: I taste ice

[896] Hua11(APS), 161/209.

cream and it tastes delicious. The pleasurable feeling is dependent on the appearance of the ice cream. Tasting is an active accomplishment in which the tasted is actually present. To be sure, it is possible that someone put ice cream in my mouth while I was sleeping or occupied with some activity – let us say that someone managed to put ice cream in my mouth while I was boxing. In this situation, I might not notice the taste of the ice cream at all, and I would not have any valuing affects related to the taste. There are feelings that arise only when I have attentively noticed an object.

Husserl claims that there must be some stimulating affective force that provokes in us the turning towards the object. This stimulating affective force must differ from the felt value of the already-constituted object. There is a stimulation that makes us attentively notice the sound of the chainsaw or the taste of the ice cream in the first place. And, clearly, it is not the delicious taste of the ice cream that awakens me to notice it.[897] Merleau-Ponty also recognizes the significance of the passive sphere of experiencing with regard to attention. He suggests that an appearance of an object is preceded by a process of paying attention:

> "my act is neither originary nor constituting, it is solicited or motivated. Every focusing is always a focusing on something that presents itself as something to be focused upon".[898]

Another, related claim is that no sensory data can appear neutrally, without affective value. Husserl admits that it is hard to make evident the radiation of affection of the passively experienced, unnoticeable objectlike unities at the margins of our experience. However, if we presupposed the possibility of unities with nil affective radiation, it would become impossible to think about the manner in which these unities became noticed:

> "that something which was not there at all for the ego – a pure affective nothing – should become an active something for the first time, precisely that is incomprehensible".[899]

Thus, Husserl suggests that there is a gradation of affection, but no zero of affection (or a duality between affection and no-affection), for methodological reasons.[900] It is not imaginable that an affectively null, neutral unity would suddenly become stimulating. Accordingly, it is not possible to remain totally affectively indifferent *and* have sensations, even at a lowest level of sensory fusion. Or, as Bower puts it, it is "impossible to imagine [affectively neutral] sensory data [any kind of content] first appearing and then taking on an affective value".[901] In short,

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[897] As Husserl writes: "one cannot say: The hyletic datum exists prior to the turning toward and has a pleasant characteristic by virtue of which it [subsequently] awakens my curiosity" (Hua Mat VIII, 324, cited and transl. by Bower in Bower 2014, 3).
[898] PhP, 305/275.
[899] Hua11, 163/211.
[900] Hua11, 163/211.
[901] Bower 2014, 3.

there are unnoticed affective allures of prominent data, which can be weaker or stronger, but no prominences with lack of affection.[902]

This claim has an implication concerning the thinking of an instinctual drive. Namely, if there is no awareness of a prominence or formation of unity without any affective force, this also excludes the possibility of a self-feeling or a push of instinctive striving that would lack any call on the side of the non-ego. In other words, there is no push without pull. Or, as Steinbock puts it, "[i]ntentionality is not a one-sided structure that stems from consciousness; it is bilateral, as it were, an '*active-active' structure*, a '*constitutive duet*'."[903]

But how does the affective force of a prominence become stronger? According to Husserl, the unnoticed, pre-given prominences (which, thus, precede the turning towards of the ego) become more prominent by way of processes of awakening and of propagation of affection, according to laws of association of contents (such as affinity, contrast and pairing). As we will see next, the experience of contrast has a particular constitutive significance with regards to the initial awakening that raises the affective force of a prominence.

### 6.3.2 Contrast, Similarity and Articulated Tendency

The field of experience in our wakeful life contains a multiplicity of objects.[904] For instance, the visual field is filled with perceived objects that we actually see. Some of these sensible objects are in front of us, some at the side, some again behind us and co-noticed at the margins of the visual field. In addition, there is a multiplicity of unnoticed but noticeable visual prominences.[905] It appears that the field of experience, at every moment, consists of a multitude of prominences, stimulating us at varying intensities: while some of them are more stimulating to us, others remain even more in the margins. In every case, attentive focus on a particular object is a *selective* accomplishment. When we turn towards a particular object, other objects fade into margins and are to some extent excluded. The stream of experience consists of a variety of prominences, so instead of a singular intentional act bordering on sheer emptiness, a particular act is surrounded by a background consisting of a plurality of "competing" forces. If we answer to the call of a prominence, and focus on something – if, for instance, I stop writing and turn to listen more carefully to the sounds of the television series coming from the next room – the other prominences are to some extent disregarded and fade in the margins. I am somehow aware of all of the surrounding things within the field of experience, but it is not possible to focus on all the things at once. Thus, there is a structure of centre-periphery or foreground-background.

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902 Hua11, 163/211.
903 Steinbock 2004, 24.
904 Husserl points out that the analysis of the phenomena of association begins at a level of constitution which presupposes time-consciousness, temporal unities and the syntheses of coexistence and succession. Hua11, §27.
905 As we already remarked above, Husserl distinguishes between co-noticed objects and unnoticed objectlike unities. See page 68, footnote 255.

Merleau-Ponty characterizes the experience of focusing with the term *anchorage.*[906] For instance, I can let my gaze wander around and "move over" the things that I see without paying attention to anything in particular. If, by contrast, I choose a particular object and start to focus on its particular visible features, what is at issue is a concentration, a stopping or an anchoring of the floating gaze. The casting of an anchor to a specific object allows the continuity of the exploratory movement of the gaze within the chosen scope of the focus. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "When I focus on [an object], I anchor myself in it, but this "pausing" of the gaze is but a modality of its movement: I continue within one object the same exploration that, just a moment ago, surveyed all of them. With a single movement, I close off the landscape and open up the object."[907]

As we see, Merleau-Poncy characterizes the anchorage as a selection and exclusion:

> "it is necessary to suspend the surroundings in order to see the object better, and to lose in the background what is gained in the figure […] because objects form a system in which one object cannot appear without concealing others."[908]

Anchoring, the perceptual attachment, is a "reprise", a taking up of something which is at the same time a "leaving out".[909]

Under what conditions does something draw attention and motivate the anchoring within the field of experience?

The first, important motivating condition is an experienced contrast, or differentiation. As Bower remarks, no content in itself – that is, due to its material features – exerts affective force. On the one hand, this follows from the claim that no content, no material features can *appear* in a neutral manner prior to affection. On the other hand, the strength of affection depends on the differentiation of the content from other contents. Thus, no content is in itself attractive or stimulating, but only relative to the other contents within the field of experience. Consider, again, the blue sky. A specific part of a blue sky has a specific content, but since it hardly appears as differentiated from the other parts, it does not draw attention. Consider also a tapestry on the wall full of exactly similar, small figures. In this case, none of the figures draws attention, even if the figures might be interesting or intriguing with regard to their content (consider, for example, small figures of the President of the Republic of Finland on the tapestry on the wall of the President's office). In contrast, a sudden loud noise – an aircraft that flies over the sky – awakens one's attention immediately if it appears on a still background.

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[906] On Merleau-Ponty's use of term anchorage, see PhP, 81/70, 93/81, 117/103, 169/146, 285/257–8, 287–90/258–61, 293/264, 322/290, 323–5/292–3, 373/337, 476/439, 478/441, 501/463, 520/483.
[907] PhP, 70.
[908] PhP, 70.
[909] Steinbock 1995, 149.

Husserl contends that contrast is a motivating element that functions pre-eminently within the impressional present.[910] As we see now, the impressional present is the field of original sensibility. The contents that are actually sensed are in fact made up of contrasts, or differentiations, in which case the starker contrasts "drown out" milder contrasts. As we noticed, non-differentiated contents are hardly stimulating attention at all, while a violent blast "drowns out not only the affective particularities of the acoustic field, but also the particularities of all other fields."[911] In between the extremes of contrast and uniformity, the field is made up of differentiations. The differentiations are only constituted in relation to the other contents within the field. As Husserl contends, "we stand in a relativism of affective tendencies".[912] The relativism simply means that a single sense content may be endowed with a variating affective force depending on the other prominent sense data. A particular flash in the sky has a stronger stimulating force related to a dark sky, and weaker related to a sky full of lightning strikes (in which case the contrast is milder). A white shape has a stronger affective force in contrast to a black background, but a weak affective force related to a white background (it does not jump out, stand out or shine through). Similarly, we can consider a loud noise in contrast with a quiet ambient noise, and the same loud noise within a steady rhythm of exactly similar noises. In this manner, experience of contrast functions as the condition of affective stimulation.

Husserl does not claim that contrast alone would strengthen stimulation of a prominence on us.[913] As we will see below, there is also an inherent tendency for the unification of the similar contents. Before dealing with the phenomenon of the propagation of affection, it must be noticed that an implicit intentional schema also functions as the condition for affection. Let us explain the imports of contrast and disposition with an example. While sitting in a library, I focus on a clock on the wall. Why, among all the things that I see around me (the bookshelf, the people reading on the tables or walking through the room, the sounds of cars outside, etc.), I am enticed by the clock? On the one hand, the answer might refer to the specific value that the clock has for me in my specific situation. I am disposed with a specific interest to focus on the clock: a theoretical, phenomenological interest to disclose the experience of focusing, a need to turn the eyes away from the computer screen, the aesthetic interest directed towards the beautiful form and harmonious design of the clock or the need to check what time it is. On the other hand, the focus might be explained by a contrast: the clock would be presented in a sharp contrast with the environment. It might stand out as an extraordinarily shining, colorful object within an otherwise visually flat field, or if it was a cuckoo clock, it might make a sudden, loud noise in sharp contrast with the silence of the library. If the clock was not perceptually easy to differentiate, I should have a strong affective interest for the clock (an urgent need to know what time is it), or I should be habituated to find the clock at its place, in order to notice

910 Hua11, 149–50/197.
911 Hua11, 150/197.
912 Hua11, 150/197.
913 Hua11, 149/197.

the clock and become focused in it. In the second case, I should be strongly occupied by some other activity, or in a stark emotional state forcing me to overlook the clock, so that I would not notice the clock at all.

However, we can also ask, how did I become engaged in the urgent need to check the time in the first place? Here, again, we can find multiple contents: at each moment, my field of experience contains a multiplicity of possible acts and emotions, each tendency exercising an affective force at a different degree of intensity. Instead of being occupied by the feeling of urgency, I might have been engaged in a theoretical observation, or in an experience of beauty, etc. In a certain manner, the competing tendencies must also be differentiated from each other by contrasts in order to exert their stimulating force.

I will not inquire into the issue of what stimulates us in more detail. The important thing is to notice that we can ask whether any contrast could be stimulating without *any* predisposition, that is, pre-given affective physiognomy.

### 6.3.3 Passive Awakening and the Propagation of Affection

Differentiation, by contrast, is an awakening within the impressional present. Contrast is a relation between two contents, which means that when the contrasting content appears, the retained contrasted content is awakened.[914] Thus, Husserl characterizes the field of presence as one that is in a constant change of its order:

> "Every living present brings an ever new original constitution of the object, ever new perceptual data in extensive articulations, as ordered particular data, as a kind of ordered world; that is, an ever new source of a new affective force that can spread over the nexuses in an awakening manner, spread over the unities constituted in retention, and that can make possible syntheses of fusion, of connection, of contrast in every coexistence."[915]

In other words, new associative syntheses occur all the time in the backgrounds, or margins of our experience. Steinbock makes a distinction between a present awakening, a retroactive awakening and a futural awakening. In order to exemplify the present awakening, I apply here Steinbock's example of climbing to the domain of gardening. Weeding is a tricky part of gardening, especially if the shape of the plant to be saved is not yet known to the gardener. In the beginning, one might perceive only an undifferentiated mass of little green plants. At some point of time, however, a plant becomes suddenly differentiated by its different shade of green. Accordingly, one becomes more stimulated or excited by it, all the while passively experiencing it. It is a question of affective force becoming stronger, more intense, while we do not pay attention to it. Then it might be the case that the first plant etches a new unity: suddenly a whole series of plants with this similar shade of green appears, ordered according to a line (according which they were planted). It simultaneously calls forth and unites a series of similar-looking plants, which become paired according to their common content, the

[914] Accordingly, all relations of association entail retention and awakening.
[915] Hua11, 172/221.

lighter shade of green.[916] Accordingly, a new unity becomes constituted. The plants become members of this unity (or in Husserl's terms, *nexus*), and as members they now exert stronger affective force. The plants with a lighter green shade are now given as articulations of a row of planting. This is an example of how affection becomes propagated to the members of the unity, beginning with the first awakening.

Awakening can also be retroactive. Consider, for instance, how a unity of a melody or a rhythm becomes recognized retroactively, after being already heard for a while. When we start listening, we might hear no unity at all. Suddenly a moment of a rhythm is accentuated, and as this more contrasted accentuation is heard, we catch the rhythm. From then on the past phases (which were not parts of anything) are now "re-interpreted" as parts of the rhythm. The present phase is now also perceived as a part of the rhythm. Rays of affection radiate back, or "propagate", from that which is now heard to the retained past phases, and a frame of referential implications becomes set. Furthermore, now the retained past phases, insofar as they have a new determination as members of the rhythm, have a stronger affective force than before.

Finally, the propagation of affection has implications with regard to one's futural orientation. A frame of referential implications can be conceived as a style that implies an anticipation of its continuance. The call for a particular futural course is intensified insofar as the givenness 'lingers' or repeats itself. For instance, the repeating of a rhythm consolidates it, and we will be more strongly motivated to anticipate something similar.[917] The anticipation exerts its affective force on the present: as we expect something to continue, we tend to ignore some other prominences.

It is remarkable that, according to Husserl, we can distinguish a mode of passive awakening and propagation of affection that functions within the restricted sphere of the impressional present (or the "closed circle of living present", as Steinbock puts it). This means that the present, even if the constitutive import of reproduction is abstracted, is not fixed, rigid or inflexible, but is pervaded by an incessant anonymous life of awakenings, propagations and formations of associative syntheses. But it must also be noticed that, without the constitutive import of reproduction, the field of the impressional present could not constitute any act-transcendent identities. Accordingly, it remains in a specific sense dispersed. This makes it possible to consider instinctual tendencies as flexible, and self-repeating or "cyclical". We will return to this issue below.

### 6.3.4 Uraffektion and the Affective Force of the Field of Experience

Next, we have to pay attention to a claim suggested by Bower. According to the claim, not only the affectively prominent unities exert affective force, but also the field of experience, within which the unities appear, exerts affective force. However, this is a limit-case of affective force.

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916 Steinbock 2004, 29; Hua11 150–1/178–9.
917 Steinbock 2004, 30.

We have seen that, according to Husserl, no prominent objectlike unities could appear without at least some degree of stimulation. But what about the phenomenal field as a whole? Steinbock contends that there is never a pure "nothing" of affection, and that we can meaningfully speak only of a gradation of affection. He suggests that there is no "nil" of affective force. In the same breath he also claims that a totally undifferentiated field of affective forces is only possible as an endpoint of the process of sinking down into past. Indeed, Husserl characterizes the final point of gradual degradation of affective force as a kind of unconscious.[918]

In contrast, Bower remarks that "affection is not first of all the isolation of some particular sensory datum or group of sensory data".[919] According to him, there is an affective relation to the field of sense as a whole. A sense field can appear only if it appears affectively. However, there is a difference between affection of the whole field and the affection of data or groups of data occurring within the field. Affection of the whole field is a limit-experience, which Husserl in some of his manuscripts calls "primal affection" (*Uraffektion*).[920] Primal affection is a specific affective relation, in which no prominence, no alluring force or no call for response is at play – accordingly, the subject has no specific interest with regard to the whole of the field. It is an affective relation to an undifferentiated whole.[921]

### 6.3.5 Theory of Affection is Abstract

So far, we have given a more detailed account of affection. We have been focusing on the theory of affection because it gives us further tools for clarifying instincts as intentional lived experiences. In the following, we will concentrate on Matt Bower's interpretative claim, according to which, in his late theory of instincts, Husserl contends that instinct of curiosity must be thought as the primal form of affectivity.

Bower claims that the Husserl's later characterization of the instinct of curiosity is basically grounded on his earlier theory of affection. The later characterization brings the theory of affection to a more concrete level. The theory of affection is abstract: it distinguishes, for instance, different motivating forces of affection, and it distinguishes laws of association, but it does not account for the order of different kinds of affections within the life of the individual experiencing being. However, a more concrete genetic phenomenological account should provide an explication of what are purportedly the primal forms of affectivity, and how the forms of affectivity develop.[922] In *Ideas II* Husserl mentions that the spiritual Ego can be apprehended as an organic whole of faculties, and "of the development of these faculties in a normal typical style following the stages of infancy,

[918] Hua11, 167/216.
[919] Bower 2014, 4.
[920] Hua 39, 483.
[921] Hua Mat VIII, 191, cited in Bower 2014, 4 (translated by Bower).
[922] Bower 2014, 7.

youth, maturity, [and] old age".[923] The more concrete analysis of affectivity aims to answer such questions. It distinguishes between different kinds of affects, and questions their order. It studies the place of particular kinds of affects within the temporal stream of the experiential life of the subject. Bower claims that Husserl's later phenomenological inquiry into instinctive intentionality provides such a concrete analysis of different kinds of affective intentionality and their systematic order.[924]

We can contend that Merleau-Ponty's analysis of sexuality also operates within this more concrete level, even if it definitely lacks detailed explications concerning the above questions. However, as we have seen, Merleau-Ponty deals with the question of the place of sexuality within the life of the person. In particular, we need a more convincing explication for his claim that sexuality is a general power that is present within the life of the person like an atmosphere. For this aim, Bower's account of the dynamic process of particularization of forms of affectivity is illuminative.

## 6.4 Curiosity and the Development of the Instincts as a Process of Particularization

According to Bower's interpretation of Husserl's later phenomenological analysis of instinctive intentionality, there is an elementary drive, a simple urge that is a component part of every other affective relation. Bower suggests that this primal form of affectivity would be that which Husserl terms *curiosity* (*Neugier*).

Curiosity, as it is commonly understood, has a connotation of an interest that is free of practical needs. When we are curious about something, we don't need this something. Merleau-Ponty also describes curiosity in this sense in the chapter "Sensing", associating curiosity with an interest for analyzing and observing that which we see, such as why the color of the sheet of paper in the shadow is not "less white"?[925] However, in its specific sense as a primal form of affectivity, curiosity is not value-neutral or related to mere leisure, luxury or "aloofness from the pressuring cares of life".[926] Curiosity is a basic instinctive drive because it is a general urge for being affected by something. It is a drive towards the "hyletic what" of experience.[927] At the level of the lived body, Bower characterizes curiosity as an urge for kinesthetic self-awareness. Curiosity is primarily a drive related to the joy of executing movements.[928] Insofar as every other particular drive is dependent on an interest of becoming particularized and determined, they are conditioned by curiosity. If nothing would be accessible for us

[923] Hua4, 255/267.
[924] Bower 2014, 1.
[925] PhP, 261/235. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty writes that the sensible quality "is the peculiar product of an attitude of curiosity [*curiosité*] or observation".
[926] Bower 2014, 8.
[927] Bower 2014, 8.
[928] Bower 2014, 8.

as prominent, if there was no drive directed towards the presence of the object in the world, no determinate interest could be possible.

### 6.4.1 Particular Drive-Intentionalities and Their Order

Bower throws into relief that Husserl, in his late phenomenological reflections, distinguished different kinds of instinctive drives (such as eating, breathing, sex and self-defense), and considered the timing (the emergence and the fading out) and the proper rhythms of the drives within the life of an individual experiential life. Moreover, Husserl was interested in the particular order of the drives.[929]

A central question related to the concern with the order of the instinctive drives is about the most simple, elementary and, in this sense, first drive.[930] Bower argues that, for Husserl, the primal form of affectivity, which is the component that makes the other drives possible, is what Husserl calls curiosity (Neugier).[931] If curiosity is the basic element which cannot be lacking in other drives, then it also must be something inborn or innate – an urge that is there from the start. Beginning with curiosity, we could understand the development of the other instinctive drives, and the dynamic development of the drives in general.

In the following, I will present the reasons that Bower (interpreting Husserl) gives for the claim that curiosity is the minimal form of instinctive drive-intentionality.

What is curiosity and what makes it the minimal instinctive tendency? First of all, the meaning of the minimality must be given some detail. Curiosity is the element or a component of other drives (or of instincts, as Bower calls them), insofar as it must be presupposed in order that other kinds of drives can function at all. The key point is that all particular drives have an objectifying function. They specify an object, either by determining the object explicitly, or by instituting an affective atmosphere within a field of presence, that is, by distributing the total phenomenal field into domains of attractive and unattractive objects.

The other instinctive drives are conditioned by the fact that the subject must be in contact with a world.[932] There must be a tendency for experiencing the world. In this regard, Bower criticizes Nam In-Lee's view according to which the instinct of self-preservation would be the primal drive. Even if the drive for survival and self-defense would have a central unifying function,[933] they are conditioned by the relation of the self to the external world. It is conceivable that the subject has some kind of relation to the world without any drive for self-preservation. Instead, it is not conceivable that the subject would lack any relation to the world, but have a drive for self-preservation.[934]

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929 Bower 2014, 7.
930 Bower 2014, 7.
931 Bower 2014, 7.
932 Bower 2014, 7.
933 Lee 1993, 168.
934 Paul Schilder, whose work on the body image was amongst those cited by Merleau-Ponty, reports cases of persons who did not experience almost any pain or could not associate the pain with their personality. This also involves the patient's interest towards the painful feelings. Schilder writes: "There are cases in which the perception of pain is seemingly preserved,

Bower mentions that curiosity surely seems a strange opponent for a basic drive, insofar as we normally understand it as a higher-order attitude related to leisure, and perhaps not a drive at all. Curiosity is ordinarily understood as an urge for the excitement we feel when something that we don't yet know is revealed to us. For example, this is the case when we have a hunch that something interesting is happening behind the corner, and strive to look there out of pure curiosity, without any deeper motivation. Curiosity can also be conceived as the cognitive power of wanting to know more about an object. Curiosity can be conceived as a value-neutral, theoretical attitude we can enter into at a moment we don't have any pressing concerns.

However, Husserl's phenomenological concept of curiosity has to be understood in a specific sense. First of all, it is not a question of a value-neutral, purely objectifying attitude.[935] Bower argues that, for Husserl, there is no value-neutral form of affect-consciousness. Every affect involves a component of valuing. In general, nothing could draw attention if it was not attractive and if it could not exert a specific kind of enticement or feeling of tension, which Husserl calls a "pleasure-allure". Curiosity is a drive behind all drives insofar as it has the dynamic potential for the disclosure of the object of desire, or a specific domain of objects. Namely, curiosity is a general tendency for experiencing something. It is a drive for being affected and a drive for being more stimulated. As Bower puts it, curiosity is an instinctive drive that begins with no antecedent presentation of the object as valuable, but discloses and determines its object.[936] All particular drives that have determinate objects are more complex forms of objectification that share the "basic structure" of curiosity.[937]

### 6.4.2 Details on Curiosity

What does curiosity aim at? What is its "object"? Bower highlights a passage in which Husserl claims that curiosity strives for the "hyletic what" itself. The primal instinctive drive is directed towards the "original affection that emanates from prominent 'contents'."[938] What does it mean to strive for the "hyletic what"?

The hyletic content of the experience refers to the phenomenal or the impressional aspect of the experience. Every intentional experience has a phenomenal aspect insofar as there is something "it is like to" live through that experience of something. Tasting a tomato, seeing a huge building, thinking of a piece of music – these all have hyletic content of what is it like to live through these intentional lived experiences of objects. But atmospheric affective experiences also

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although the individual does not take into consideration the pain he actually feels" (Schilder 1999, 101). Further in the passage in question he states: "It seems that that at any rate in cases of that kind the pain is less connected with the body-image; it is dissociated from it, and, accordingly, from the personality […] We may also say that the patients are curious about the sensation which they cannot perceive completely." (Schilder 1999, 103.)

935 With this regard Bower's interpretation differs from those of Lee (1993) and Mensch (2010). See Bower 2014, 8.

936 Bower 2014, 7–8.

937 Bower 2014, 8.

938 Hua Mat VII, 323. (Translated by Bower, cited in Bower 2014, 8).

have a phenomenal aspect. There is something it is like to live through a specific atmosphere of a sexual desire, which differs from the atmosphere of sadness. In this respect, experiences are non-exchangeable. A blind person can transpose structures from the visual world to their field of presence (one can have feelings of colors and shapes by touching them) with the aid of people who can see, but they cannot live through visual experiences, and lack the phenomenal awareness of what is it like to experience visual objects. In the above passage, Husserl claims that the original affection of what it is like to experience something is desirable and pleasurable in a particular manner. To experience something, to feel something, is enjoyable and desirable in itself.

Here we can find a connotation to curiosity in its common-sense meaning. We are curious as we have a desire for the disclosure of what something is like. There is a thrilling moment when we are at the point of seeing what is around the corner, when a kept secret is finally revealed, or when one is waiting to see an old friend (say at the railway station) and is eager to know what they look like, how they are getting on, how will they react to one's presence, etc. There is a specific feeling related to something's becoming present for us. In cases like this, we wait for the new aspect of the object to show up. Basically, we are waiting for the actualization, the objectification of the becoming object. But curiosity as a primal affect has to do with the tendencies that Husserl depicts when he describes the processes of affection in which the affective force is heightened. There is a tendency to be awakened by a contrast, a tendency for passive awakening, and a tendency for the propagation of the affect. Curiosity is responsible for these passive tendencies which constitute syntheses, and which end up with active turning towards the object.

Speaking of pleasure can be misleading with respect to curiosity, insofar as curiosity in the elementary sense is purported to be related to each and every particular drive. If curiosity is a pleasure in experiencing something, then it seems to follow that also painful experiences are pleasurable in this sense, and even that the more painful the experience is, the more it satisfies the curiosity drive. What would be the pleasure behind self-defense, aggression and painful experiences? Moreover, curiosity in the common-sense meaning means a drive that is realized in an attentive behavior. When we are curious, we turn towards something in order to see or to hear what it is. We look for forms, something to get a grip of. However, if curiosity should be a basic drive, then it should be also related to the moments of rest and relaxing, letting our mind flow and taking it easy.

Yet Bower claims that the elementary nature of curiosity is shown by the fact that one cannot consider curiosity as an acquisition. Instead, every acquisition is dependent on the drive towards something prominent. Curiosity is the primitive way in which one comes into contact with the exterior and the alien. This is why Husserl titles it "the lowest, all-founding interest".[939] Thus we can consider it as a drive that allows us to notice the pain and to localize it, a capacity without which the painful experience would not be experienced as painful and

[939] Hua Mat VIII, 325. (Cited and translated by Bower 2014, 9)

alerting. The subject must be affectively present with the field of experience in order that the particular drives can become actual. Affective idleness might be considered the opposite of curiosity. At the limit of affection there is an absolute disinterestedness, which corresponds to a monotony of the field of experience in which nothing makes any difference or moves the subject. This monotony does not arise from a monotonous environment. In certain limit-experiences, nothing becomes prominent – nothing makes sense – even if one stays within one's familiar environment. The minimal form of affectivity is thus that in which we are able to be affected by something, and in which we are driven to recognize something. Curiosity is measured against a limit of a total lack of affective interest.

### 6.4.3 Curiosity as a Self-Developing Drive

Bower claims that curiosity is also behind the dynamic capacity of the instinctive drives to develop. He mentions that the role of curiosity as a primal form of affectivity is reinforced if it can be demonstrated that curiosity has the potential to initiate other affective relations. He aims to show that curiosity not only functions in setting the other strivings in motion, but also plays a role in their further development.

To begin with, the drive towards something prominent does not stop when a prominence becomes more differentiated, stimulating or noticeable. According to Husserl curiosity gets further pleasure in the establishment of associative connections. Associations are stronger modes of prominence. The simplest associative experience, noticing something again, makes the object-like unity more prominent. As something is noticed again in a recognition that awakens, and a connection with a past is established, there is more to be satisfied for curiosity, in that there is more that stands out, more relief and contrast. Thus, as Bower explicates, the pleasure of recognizing something is a more intense form of curiosity.[940]

The same phenomenon is disclosed by Steinbock in his analysis of Husserl's concept of optimality.[941] There is a tendency in experience towards the maximum of richness of what appears. The perceptual field can have more or less differentiation and richness, and the things can be presented with more or less clarity. The basic striving is towards the presentation in which "the *most* of the *same*" appears.[942] For instance, the book in front of me can be more or less visible, with regard to the lightning, to the surrounding objects, to my distance to it, etc. As I am curious what something looks like, I tend towards seeing more of it. On the other hand, I lack curiosity if I feel that the thing does not have anything else to offer (for example, as I don't feel any urge to look under the table, since I know already what I am supposed to find there). However, the same is true not only of explicit acts of "curiosity", but also of our affective relations in general. The *more* we are expected to experience something or in something, the more forceful the affect related to it.

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940 Bower 2014, 9.
941 Steinbock 1995, 138–143.
942 Steinbock 1995, 139.

Another matter that Bower brings forth is that curiosity is the driving force behind the development, the improvement and the diversification of the forms of affectivity. The idea is that curiosity explains why the basic affective forms do not just repeat themselves and remain identical in one's conscious life.[943]

The crucial moment for the development of a drive is the event in which the atmospheric desire becomes an actual affection. The becoming actual of an affect can be thought as a satisfaction of curiosity. A tension is relaxed when a pleasure-allure becomes a pleasure-affection. But the passage into pleasure-affection has also a revealing function: the goal and the path towards the goal are disclosed when the formerly indeterminate striving is fulfilled with a particular object, and associated to a particular manner of approaching the object. In the disclosure of the fulfillment, the goal is experienced as a goal. If the preceding stage was experienced as an indeterminate striving, now the experience of the fulfillment could be described as "*this* is what I was searching for".

When a striving is disclosed, it becomes determined by the link to the particular object (goal) and the particular manner of approaching it. From this moment on, the schema of the drive becomes determined by the encounter: by the particular satisfaction and the particular means of approaching the satisfaction. Insofar as the schema becomes determined, it can be repeated – that is, the past act can be awakened, associating it as similar to a newly occurring act. On the basis of repetitions of the performance, the drive is constituted with a specific style and familiarity. The drive becomes linked to a particular object that is valued as satisfying or not.[944]

Furthermore, the disclosure of the drive at the encounter of a particular object and of a specific manner of attaining it determines and differentiates the drive in the first place. Every particular drive has a specific direction and a specific character of enjoyment.[945] When a striving is satisfied, a particular prominent object or a path of enjoyment (that is, affective schema) is selected, while others are neglected. Yet curiosity as a general striving for something more prominent allows for the refinement and further development of the particular drive. There is a process of differentiation, in which an initial general drive produces "diverging offshoots". For instance, a general atmospheric instinct of nourishment becomes determined when it leads to a becoming actual and finding a path of satisfaction. This determined drive is then further specified into varying desires for different nourishing things. However, in the same manner the drive for nourishment can be conceived as a specification of the more general instinct of curiosity. Initially, there is a tendency towards *whatever* prominent objectivity. As this tendency finds satisfaction in the objects, "diverging offshoots" are produced, and specific drives are constituted. However, the general tendency remains behind the specific drives, allowing for the constitution of further refinements.

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943 Bower 2014, 9.
944 Bower remarks that it is not a question of a sudden leap into a relation to an object, but a process of a gradual shaping of the instinctive activity in that it looks more and more like proper intentional act.
945 Bower 2014, 10.

## 6.5 Instinctive Schema and Instinctive Accomplishment

In the beginning of the chapter we posed questions concerning the instinctive affectivity. What is the mode of appearance of an instinctive tendency guided by a schema that is not acquired by learning, but that emerges spontaneously? How does an instinctive tendency develop, that is, how does the orienting or guiding schema change? And how can a wakeful life emerge from a non-wakeful, instinctive drive? Now we can provide an answer to these questions.

First of all, what would the initial appearance of a spontaneously emerging instinctive tendency be? The difference between a spontaneously emerging instinctive schema and a sensory-motor schema acquired by learning is that the latter becomes constituted in a frequenting with the surrounding environment and with the surrounding objects, while the former is still lacking the content and determination that is constituted by the intercourse with objects. The initial instinctive desire is a "poorly formulated problem", which does not yet *know* what it wants. The instinctive drive, in its initial state, is articulated according to an intentional schema, but this tendency lacks any fulfillment. The indeterminate or blind tendency is not yet endowed with the experiential acquaintance brought about by particular experiences of fulfillment, satisfaction or disappointment.[946] We have accounted for the first appearance of an instinctive desire as an articulated but indeterminate tendency.

We have emphasized that the instinctive schema, does not initially contain any information about a specific object of satisfaction. Instead, the blind tendency sketches out a particular field, a domain or "a place" of objects. We can distinguish between experiences of prominences or objects, and the experiences of fields of objects, for instance the visible objects and the sense field of vision. We have shown that Merleau-Ponty's explication of atmospheric experiencing of colors and sexuality implies that he is committed to the claim that there must be a passively experienced affective relation to the fields of experience, in addition to the particular experiences related to the prominences or the objects within the field. Fields of experience differ from each other and they have their proper characteristics, and this is comprehensible just as we can conceive of the appearance of different background colors. The original fields of affective experience issue from the body, insofar as the body consists of multiple subsystems, which provide their proper sources of feelings. The affective experiencing of a field is an experience of an atmosphere. The appearance of an instinctive desire (as guided by a spontaneously emerging affective schema) is an atmospheric feeling. In this manner we can account for the original instinctive affects.

If an instinctive desire is guided by a particular schema, the schema must correspond with a particular emphasis on certain locations of one's own body. The instinctive desire is both oriented towards something indeterminate, and it is a certain feeling of one's own body. As we have shown in chapter x, according

[946] To be sure, the blind tendency can become familiar to the subject *in its obscurity*, if its occurrence is repeated. One can then recognize the obscure feeling that one had before.

to Merleau-Ponty the configuration does not correspond to the objective locations of the body. The same local area of the body can have a varying sense, according to the configuration. Paul Schilder, one of the psychologists who introduced the notion of the body schema, and to whom Merleau-Ponty refers when he deals with the subject, has explicated the affective configurations of the body. For instance, he claims that the feelings of the openings of one's own body can have a differing affective significance:

> "[b]y them we ingest air, food, sex products; by them we eject urine, sex products, feces and air. We have therefore distinguished points in the postural model of the body. These points are at the same time points of erotic importance. It is worthy of note that through the openings we also fulfill the functions of our life […]."[947]

We have also dealt with the question concerning the development and change of the instinctive desires. The capacity of the instincts to develop requires us to conceive of an extended notion of "objectification". "Objectification" in this extended sense does not mean an explicit, thematic grasping of an object, but the establishment of a new unity of an object, or a new sense. Bower's analysis has thrown into relief that all instincts must contain an aim toward unification, an aim toward making the desire and its object(s) and path of satisfaction more prominent and effective. Furthermore, the satisfaction or fulfillment of an instinctive striving can be thought as a self-disclosure of the instinct. When, for instance, an object of satisfaction is found, this focused enjoyment becomes associated with the means by which the enjoyment was attained. The initial, atmospheric instinctive drive becomes provided with particular content.

For example, what is the manner in which a spontaneously emerging atmospheric tendency becomes specified as a hunger? Initially, there is a blind urge accompanied with feelings of unease, but no awareness of how to satisfy the feeling. There is no predetermined path of satisfaction, and the blind tendency is not distinguished as hunger. The initial tendency appears as an atmospheric feeling. At the moment in which the need finds satisfaction, for instance if the need becomes satisfied in the enjoyment of chewing and swallowing, the originally blind urge becomes determined with respect to the means of achieving the pleasure, and with respect to the specific object. Only from this moment on, the urge is "thematized", in that the subject is provided with a particular manner of living through the path of satisfaction of the need. Now, the intentional schema of satisfying the swallowing of the food can be repeated and recognized, and it also can give rise to further modifications and modulations. It can have repercussions in the other parts of the body because the body operates within a symbolic horizon, the initial act of swallowing adopts a more general signification. The first act of satisfying a hunger by swallowing becomes sedimented. On the one hand, the act of eating is refined as it is repeated in varying environments and situations, but on the other, it is followed and accompanied by other urges, acts and acquisitions, thus becoming in part modified by them. Finally, as a general form, the specific schema constituted in swallowing can be transposed, for instance, to the

[947] Schilder 1999, 124.

visual field, in that one can "swallow with one's eyes", etc. Within this associative process the initial affective urge, first particularized by a chance encounter with a satisfying object, becomes entangled with all kinds of structures. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "existence is the very operation by which something that had no sense takes on sense, by which something that only had a sexual sense adopts a more general signification, by which chance is transformed into reason, or in other words insofar as existence is the taking up of a *de facto* situation."[948]

### 6.5.1 Existence and Curiosity

In his theory of affection Husserl distinguishes a striving for heightened prominence of associations (contrast and differentiation, affective propagation, etc.). All instinctive drives are accompanied by a specific feeling of tension that is relaxed when appearing unities become more prominent – eventually leading to an active turning toward an object or a feeling. In his late analysis of instincts, Husserl accounts for this tendency in terms of the instinct of curiosity. The instincts have a self-determining capacity – an initial field can lead to instantiations of particular affects – if they are provided with this tendency towards prominence. I think that the analysis of curiosity does not contradict Merleau-Ponty's view of biological existence. Instead, it provides a complementary clarification of what Merleau-Ponty means by the movement of existence.

Bower suggests that we can consider the instinctual beginning of conscious life as a stage in which the *only* possessed instinct was the instinct of curiosity. All the other instincts would then be particularizations of this primal affective striving. Bower describes it as something like a joy of performing movements, and the initial tendency to distinguish the bodily fields of sensitivity themselves.[949] I will not focus on this complex issue in more detail here. To be sure, Merleau-Ponty does not provide us with a scenario concerning the order and the development of the instinctual drives. It makes sense to think that the other instincts require the pre-given possession of something like curiosity. However, this does not exclude the spontaneity of the instinctual drives. According to Merleau-Ponty an instinctual schema retains, so to say, something spontaneous and non-derivative. In other words, the instinctual drive issues from the *a priori* functional organization of the body. This organization is a transcendental fact, as Merleau-Ponty makes one understand at the end of the chapter "The Body as a Sexed Being". "All that we are", he writes, "we are on the basis of a factual situation".[950] In short, we could say that we live in an atmosphere of curiosity, *and* in the atmospheres of the divergent fields of affectivity constituted by the bodily functions.

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948 PhP, 197/173.
949 Bower 2014, 12.
950 PhP, 199/174.

### 6.5.2 Curiosity and the Scope of Affection

Here we have to take into account the following distinction. So far, we have described curiosity as a specific content of an instinctive drive. This content specifies curiosity: it is a drive towards prominence, a tendency that is satisfied when we attain more unity of something. Accordingly, this tendency is triggered when we sense the potentiality for something to become more prominent. However, the possession of the instinct of curiosity has to be distinguished from the actual accomplishment of curiosity. Likewise, if we use Merleau-Ponty's terms, the possession of transcendence is distinct from the actual movement of existence toward the world and the things. If we accept this distinction, it makes sense to claim that we cannot lack the possession of curiosity or existence, but we can be curious or we can exist to a greater or lesser degree.

By a transcendental necessity, curiosity cannot be acquired because it is the very inner condition of acquiring something. Accordingly, *a transition* from an absolutely enclosed "non-existential" life to existence is unthinkable, insofar as existence is this movement of transition itself. But if we focus on an individual experiencing life, then it is evident that we are not equally stimulated by prominences at every situation. We can be more or less affectively idle, and it is by no means clear that the "power of existing" undergoes an alteration when we fall asleep.

In the chapter "The Body as a Sexed Being" Merleau-Ponty deals with regression of existence. Regression is both a diminishing of the power of existence, and a regression to a lower level of existing. Regression to a lower level of existing means that we lose the actual capacity to accomplish certain acts. Simply, when we fall asleep, we cannot originally accomplish acts of perception or of communication with the others. In the following, I will explicate Merleau-Ponty's account of regression as a restriction of the scope of affection, which is also a dispersion of the field of experience. Merleau-Ponty deals with three examples of regression: sleep, Schneider's disturbance, and the mental disturbance of the girl who loses her voice.

We are already familiar with Schneider's case. Schneider's altered affective experience can be characterized as a diminishing of the *temporal scope of affection*.[951] If conscious life is viewed as a temporal stream, then it consists of a radiating temporal center of an ego. The center is surrounded by a close circle of intuitive experiencing, including the temporal phases of the present, a retained past and an anticipated future. But as the distance from the center grows, the radiation becomes weaker. For instance, after an experience has been lived through, it goes through a retentional modification in which it sinks down more and more into the past. At some point, the past experience loses its intuitive character, and it is not "at hand" any more. Accordingly, we can conceive of an intuitively anticipated future, and a non-intuitive future. Husserl contends that it is a feature of normal experience that even if a past experience has lost its intuitive character, it can still exercise affective force on us. We can conceive of a scope of affection,

[951] This is another manner of saying that horizonal awareness is contracted.

which is the extension of that which still affects the ego-center or radiates to the ego, either as past or as anticipated. In other words, it is the scope of that which can "come through to us", or that which can motivate us. That which remains out of the scope cannot spontaneously stimulate us, it is hardly awakened or it hardly motivates our experiences. If we apply this to affective intentionality, it means that we become affectively idle with regard to all that which remains out of the scope of affection. To be affectively engaged in a sexual situation requires awakening of non-intuitive contents. This, as we already know, Merleau-Ponty depicts as a capacity of projection. Merleau-Ponty's explication suggests that because Schneider is not able to spontaneously project these non-intuitive contents, and because he thus remains imprisoned within his diminished scope of presence, the sexual desire simply does not emerge.

The other example of regression is the case of a young woman who loses her voice.[952] Her initially deliberate escape from an unbearable situation is eventually transformed into a closing off of a domain of affectivity. The unbearable situation is a love affair prohibited by the woman's parents. She reacts to the situation by refusing to speak. But then she also loses the capacity to speak altogether, and she loses her appetite. The state of affective indifference becomes a regressive state of an affective stagnation, in which the patient is not able to choose to begin to speak again. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "For the patient […] movement toward the future, the living present, or the past, and the power to learn, to mature, and to enter into communication with others are all somehow blocked by a bodily symptom; existence has become entangled and the body has become 'life's hiding place'. For the patient, nothing ever happens, nothing takes on a sense and form in his life – or, more precisely, nothing comes to pass but always identical 'nows'; life flows back upon itself and history is dissolved into natural time."[953]

In the aphonic woman's case, too, the pathological experience is a diminishing of the scope of affection. However, now the narrowing is motivated by a mental disorder that blocks or closes off projection of affective situations that entail non-intuitive contents. We can consider a situation in which we could well perceive things around us, but they would lack any affective sense. As Fuchs claims, this kind of situation narrows the subject's understanding of either other subjects' or his/her own motivations. It becomes hard to understand why things are done, if the motivations of actions appear as affectively indifferent.[954]

Finally, Merleau-Ponty presents sleep as a regressive experience in which the scope of affection becomes narrowed. The sleeping subject is an "unseeing and nearly unthinking mass, confined to a point in space and no longer in the

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[952] Merleau-Ponty borrows the analysis from the Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger. Merleau-Ponty leans on Binswanger's report of his treatment of a patient in his Bellevue asylum in Switzerland in 1935. Binswanger writes of this case of hysteria in an article "Über Psychotherapie". In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty refers to this article. More on Binswanger's case, see Lanzoni 2004. See also Smyth 2014, 101–4.

[953] PhP, 192/167. Merleau-Ponty borrows the phrase "life's hiding place' from Binswanger.

[954] This would be a case in which the perceptual understanding of sense unities would remain intact, but the affective (and accordingly the practical) understanding of sense unities was narrowed down.

world".[955] To be sure, Merleau-Ponty does not claim that we would be transformed into non-living or non-human entities while sleeping.[956]

However, like in the cases of disturbance, in sleep we regress to a restricted experiencing in which we become affectively idle with respect to the properly perceptual intentional lived experiences. This means that we also become affectively idle with regard to perceived objects. Again, sleep is characterized by the "monotonous" temporal flow of natural time consisting of "always identical 'nows'".[957]

But here arises a problem. Namely, the regressed state is not an absolute idleness or an absolute monotony. In sleep, just like in the other forms of regression the intentional accomplishments of our bodily functions such as sense organs remain effective. We have seen that Merleau-Ponty characterizes these functions in terms of "biological existence", as a primitive kind of intentionality and not as a mechanism. It follows that, at the regressive level, intentional accomplishments are performed. According to Merleau-Ponty, our sense organs remain in a state of vigilance while we sleep, and this is what makes it possible to wake up. Thus, he claims that we do not become totally closed off from the world because of the "anonymous vigilance of the senses."[958] It is not clear what Merleau-Ponty means by the anonymous vigilance of the senses. Certainly, he refers to our sensitivity to auditive, felt and also visual stimulants while we sleep: regardless of the stage of the sleep, certain stimuli can wake the sleeper up in certain situations. This is an indirect demonstration of a passive sensitivity to external stimuli. It is basically similar to the way in which we notice that we have been passively aware of something. For instance, first we point out that something has changed in the aural milieu, then we remark that a constant noise, coming from an excavator operating at a near construction site, has stopped. But this shows that we have been aware of the noise of the excavator all the time, but without noticing it. In a similar manner, the fact that a sound wakes one up demonstrates that one has been sensitive to sounds all the time while sleeping. But Merleau-Ponty might also refer to the activity of the body, such as the rapid eye movements which characterize the REM stage of the sleep, or sleepwalking. While it is not sure whether the functioning of the rapid eye movements is related to focusing on visual objects, sleepwalking surely involves an intentional orientation with regard to the environment. In any case, the crucial question here is: how can we conceive of an intentional accomplishment at the level of regression? Merleau-Ponty writes, referring to the state of regression: at each moment "some new intention springs forth from me" and the bodily existence "offers me some form of living".[959] The level of natural time seems to combine two inconsistent matters: on the one hand, it is monotonous and self-repeating. On the other, at each moment, new intentions spring forth from the body. An intention is articulated, which means that it has a specific content. A temporality consisting of identical

[955] PhP, 191/166–7.
[956] PhP, 192–3/168.
[957] PhP, 191/167.
[958] PhP, 191/167.
[959] PhP, 192/168.

nows, however, is not ordered by any specific content. How can there be an awareness of self-repeating temporality *and* awareness of specific intentions?

In the following I will provide a rough answer to the problem. The self-perpetuating natural time and spontaneous intentions become consistent if we think about the regression as a diminished scope of affection, which also constitutes the regressive experience as *dispersed*.

First of all, when we fall asleep, we do not suddenly lose all of our possessions. It would be absurd to think that all of one's possessions would disappear and then they would have to be acquired again when one wakes up. Normal sleep, for instance, is not a phenomenon of losing one's acquired capacities. As Hanne Jacobs claims, the retaining of our habits might make it possible that when we wake up, we remain the same persons as before.[960] Instead, it is the individual's *capacity to accomplish* his or her possessions that is altered in the regression.

We can recall that in Bower's characterization of the self-determination of the instinctive drive, the self-determination appears as an awakening that entails a retention of past experience. We can recognize a rhythm retroactively after suddenly hearing a particular contrasting accentuation in the rhythm. This requires that at the moment of awakening the past is still intuitively retained. In a similar manner, an initially blind but articulated striving becomes constituted with a new sense retroactively at the moment in which the focused enjoyment radiates back to the retained past experience of tension. Or, again, in a similar manner, an already articulated striving becomes constituted with a new sense. But what happens at the moment of the focused enjoyment if the past is not retained? We can suppose that the associative synthesis will not then be constituted, and the pregiven affective schema will not become reshaped. This is the case of *dispersion*. Exactly because the past experience is *not* retained at the moment of enjoying the relaxation of the tension, this "satisfaction" does not motivate a *retrospective* identification of the experience in question. It only sets the beginning of a new intention, a new "sketch" or "offer", insofar as the situation has been altered. We can think that sleep is a state of regression of the movement of existence, in which the instinctive functioning of the eyes remains imprisoned to a diminished scope of affection, and lacks the dynamic capacity.[961] But does it mean that we have sensations? On the one hand, we can conceive of dispersed sensations, in which nothing really appears. But on the other, we can conceive of sensations that become immediately "translated" into the dream,[962] and finally sensations regulated by wakeful, active life.

The emerging of different but dispersed intentions without development amounts to repetition and monotony. Without retrospective identification and

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960 Jacobs 2010, 340.

961 Schneider's case of restricted horizonal awareness must be distinguished from sleep as a diminished scope of affection. Namely, on the one hand, Schneider does not sleep all the time, and his life must be characterized on the basis of the alternation of wakefulness and sleep. On the other, Schneider's non-wakeful life is also affected by his condition, insofar as he rarely dreams.

962 PhP, 196/171–2.

recognition, the moments of presence appear identical. This is a way of understanding the two claims made by Merleau-Ponty. On the one hand, "[s]ensorial functions by themselves do not make me exist in the world". The functioning of the senses, at the regressed experiential level, remain impressional and temporally dispersed experiences.[963] However, thanks to its incessant functioning, this "[b]odily existence, which streams forth through me without my complicity, is [a] sketch of a genuine presence in the world."[964] The empty sketch can be understood as the way in which the dispersed subject relates to his or her possessions. A possession remains at the passive background of experience, if there are no accomplishments in which it could be actualized. For instance, one might possess a skill for playing violin, but at the same time would feel that practicing the skill would be too challenging in one's current situation. The sleeper possesses the skill for wakeful perceiving, but the accomplishment of the perceptual synthesis requires an extended scope of affection. However, Merleau-Ponty suggests that in the process of waking up, the bodily posture of perceiving is at first emptily attained before the very event of awakening. Thus, we can conceive of the focusing movement of the eyes that is articulated according to the atmosphere of perception without ending up with perceiving.

The atmospheric intentionality makes it possible to conceive of a preceding empty sketch. We live in the atmosphere of our possessions, and these possessions can drive us forward as blind, passive preferences, even if we could not actually accomplish them. Furthermore, the passive possessions will remain in their state of passivity and of generality if they remain dissociated from active accomplishments. In addition to the acquired possessions, we have dealt with instinctive possessions that stem spontaneously from the structure of our body. Biological existence refers to instincts, spontaneously emerging intentional schemas, which function at the margins of active, wakeful life as underlying atmospheric offerings. Instincts characterize an initial situation. Merleau-Ponty sums up this relation, as he writes:

> "We might say that the body is the 'hidden form of self-being', or, reciprocally, that personal existence is the taking up and the manifestation of a being in a given situation."[965]

[963] The dispersion in question should not be confused with an absolute exteriority of parts.
[964] PhP, 193/168.
[965] PhP, 193/169. Merleau-Ponty borrows the phrase "hidden form of self-being" from Binswanger.

# 7 PRIMAL SENSIBILITY AND THE PERCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS

In the work at hand, we have been tracing the constitutive role of the spontaneous, instinctive functioning of the body in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of perception, by articulating the thematic field framed by the concepts of biological existence and natural time.

There are two aspects of biological existence. When Merleau-Ponty thinks about biological existence, he thinks, *for one thing*, about an *a priori* intentional schema that regulates the instinctive drive.[966] We can distinguish between an intentional schema that emerges spontaneously from the body, and an intentional schema that is acquired. We have seen that Merleau-Ponty believes that the former has a constitutive role, insofar as the body constitutes originally divergent fields of experience. Our own body is a constant source of spontaneous instinctive drives. In its initial state, such a drive, which is a blind but articulated striving, appears as an atmospheric intentionality. Moreover, a deep affective relation directed to the field itself is the requirement for all the particular affective relations constituted within the field. If the deep affective relation is lost, all the acquired particular affective relations, which are built on its basis, also lose their sense.

*Second*, the instinct can be conceived as being at a lower or reduced capacity-level. Here, the emphasis is not on the kind of schema that regulates the accomplishment, but on the specific modification of the experiencing. In this second meaning, biological existence refers to an intentional accomplishment that occurs within a reduced temporality, which Merleau-Ponty calls natural time. Natural time is a primitive, lower level of temporality, characterized by perpetuation and dispersion. I have accounted for natural time as an impressional modification of temporal extension. This is a modification in which the scope of affection of the experiencing subject is reduced to the field of the intuitive. Thus, when we think of biological existence in this sense, we think about a restricted scope of experiencing. As we have seen, when Merleau-Ponty explores natural time, he focuses

[966] Cf. PhP, 104/90.

on the experiences of regression or experiences of the collapse of time, such as sleep. Biological existence characterizes the primitive intentional accomplishments that remain effective within the reduced sphere of affection. We still breathe and our sense organs retain their anonymous vigilance while we are in a state of dreamless sleep. I have shown that Merleau-Ponty considers biological existence a primitive form of intentionality rather than a mechanical functioning of our body. Experientially, this means a dispersed experiencing, a stream of intentional lived experiences reduced to the impressional present.

It is worth noticing that these two meanings of biological existence should not be confused. We can conceive of the two ways of approaching biological existence independently of each other. *On the one hand*, we can conceive of intentional schemata that spontaneously emerge from our body without the reduction of experience to natural time. We can experience spontaneously emerging atmospheric desires at the margins of our active and wakeful life and within our already developed adult life. For instance, when we age, our bodily situation changes, and it brings about new feelings. If we ask why we have just these kinds of obscure feelings, this can lead to an answer that invokes the naturally changed structure or functioning of our body: these feelings are typical to "old age". The question here is, what is the initial mode of appearance of a new intentional schema? But this question not only concerns instinctive drives, but also, for instance, the emergence of novel geographical, social, historical or technical situations. Thus, the more specific question is about the appearance of an intentional schema of the body.

*On the other hand,* when we inquire into the specific modification of experiencing, which is experiencing at the level of natural time, we do not have to take into account the question of whether the intentional schema that regulates the experience is spontaneous or acquired. For example, an adult person who falls asleep or who falls into some other non-wakeful state does not merely possess spontaneous schemata. For instance, the person's acquired skills, habits and commitments constitute his or her predisposition. As we have seen, according to Merleau-Ponty, these possessions must be inscribed in the body itself – they must be incorporated – in order for them to make sense for the subject. In short, the appearance of an instinctive (a priori) schema can be explored without taking into account the level of instinctive accomplishments, and the appearance of a primitive, reduced experiencing can be explored without taking into account the instinctive schema.

The chapter at hand explicates Merleau-Ponty's view on primal sensibility and the perceptual unity, making use of the analyses on biological existence, natural time and instinctive affectivity. Primal sensibility is instinctive in both of the above meanings. Sensing is founded on an original, deep intentionality of the sense field that emerges spontaneously from the body, and primal sensibility occurs at a primitive impressional level. As we will see, Merleau-Ponty clarifies both of these aspects of sensibility. In the chapter "Sensing" he uses these two explications to argue that sensing is not a reception of structureless sense qualities. According to Merleau-Ponty, these two explications are also central for the

conception of sensing that a phenomenological reflection will disclose, contrary to a critical (or intellectualist or spiritualist) kind of reflective philosophy of consciousness.

However, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological conception of sensing seems to contain two contradictory claims. On the one hand, he claims that primal sensibility and sensory experiencing appear as self-enclosed. When we characterize the sensing that occurs in us, we encounter something like an anonymous self which is articulated like a closed Gestalt-structure. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "it is not made of external parts […] each part of the whole is 'sensitive' to what happens in all of the others and 'knows them dynamically'.[967]

A particular sensory experience such as vision is an experiencing limited to a field:

> "the self who sees or the self who hears is in some sense, a specialized self, familiar with a single sector of being".[968]

According to Merleau-Ponty's famous phrase, when we examine sensibility, it appears that we are not the proper subjects of perception. Instead, the subject of perception appears as an anonymous self that perceives "in us". One reason for this lag between the person and the subject of sensing is that the sensing subject is a limited lower-level experiencing while the subject who perceives inter-sensory unities and transcendent objects always experiences something more than the actual sensation. Contrary to the sensory subject, I am aware of a beyond of the sensation:

> "I always feel that there is still some being beyond what I currently see, and not merely more visible being, but moreover a depth of the object that no sensory withdrawal will every fully exhaust."[969]

In other words, my awareness is not limited to the impressional sensation, nor to a field of sensing. Finally, I am aware of perceived things as inter-sensory unities and as transcendent unities which are not exhausted by any particular appearance of the thing. Instead, Merleau-Ponty claims that "[s]ensation can only be anonymous because it is partial", and the sensory subject appears as limited to the sense field:

> "[v]ision is a thought subjugated to a certain field and this is what is called a sense."[970]

On the other hand, however, Merleau-Ponty holds that sensing is not closed to itself. Instead, he claims that the whole idea of an unconnected and closed sensation has its basis in an analytic attitude that isolates the sensation from a more

[967] PhP, 248/222.
[968] PhP, 250/224.
[969] PhP, 250/224.
[970] PhP, 251/225.

original, synesthetic unity. In the original, pre-reflective and non-analytical experiencing, the senses communicate with each other through the unity of a core of significance. Merleau-Ponty even contends that an "originary layer" of sensing "is prior to the division of the senses".[971]

Is sensing self-enclosed and divided into divergent fields of sense, or is it a unity that precedes the divergence? Are these claims compatible or do we have to deny one of these claims? In other words, should we contend that, in the original sense, sensing is never a self-enclosed Gestalt-unity, and that the idea of analysis abstracts from the original synesthetic unity of sensing. Or, should we make the contrary claim, according to which the synesthetic unity is a higher-order phenomenon in which the originally disparate sense experiences become united?

As in the preceding chapter, my aim here is to bring clarity to the idea of limitedness and divergence, in this case with respect to primal sensibility. Accordingly, my interpretative claim is that, although the perceptual unity is an original (and not derived) phenomenon, like the movement of existence with respect to affectivity, the unity of perception has its counterpart in the irreducible disparateness of the fields of senses. In fact, the perceptual phenomenon of gathering together or connecting could not be thought without the irreducible component of an instinctive, limited sensing. The unity of perception is a unity of incompossibles.

I will begin by clarifying Merleau-Ponty's account of sensations, according to which to sense is to adopt a particular type of intentionality. Sensing requires that the body adopts a particular posture or a way of moving – a body physiognomy coordinated according to a dynamic schema. Merleau-Ponty suggests that we could not sense anything if we were not "functionally" disposed for sensing. Sensing does not begin with a simple noticing, but any noticing implies that the sensing body already possesses the capacity to sense. Here we will relate Merleau-Ponty's account to Husserl's theory of association. Besides, sensing involves an awareness of two co-existents: the sensed and the sensing moving body, and sensing as a temporal process can be distinguished into the two moments of anticipation and the actualization of the communion. Insofar as it is a communion, even the most elementary sensing is an existential adherence to the world. The temporal process of sensing contains a "non-worldly" moment, but this is the initial atmospheric feeling that precedes the instantiation of the sensation.

Sensation is not an adherence to the world in a proper, perceptual sense. Namely, as I will bring about in the following subchapter (7.2), the communion of sensation occurs at a primitive, limited level of experiencing.

Subsequently (subchapter 7.3), I will focus on Merleau-Ponty's view on the unity of the senses, and I will explicate his account of sensing as an experience consisting of a tension between a divergence of senses and an inter-sensory unity. Finally, in subchapter 7.4, I deal with Merleau-Ponty's attempt to reconcile divergence and unity of sensing by considering divergence and unity as two aspects of temporality.

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[971] PhP, 262/236.

## 7.1 Sensation as Movement and Communion

Merleau-Ponty's claim that awareness of sensation is by necessity accompanied by an awareness of the movement of one's own body is striking. This is because if we focus on how simple sensations such as colors or sounds appear to us, we do not notice any particular movement of our body, or at least we do not recognize any link between our body's movement and the changes of sense qualities. For instance, I can make apparent the felt movement of my eyes as I focus on different parts of an external perceived object, or as I look left. However, if I look at the blue sky or perceive a red surface, I do not seem to feel any particular eye-movements linked to the appearance of the color. Simple sensations seem to appear spontaneously, without any further ado. Besides, it seems that simple sensations have a particular physiognomy only insofar as they are conceived as sensations of a perceived object, and insofar as they become framed by the contours and the surfaces of the object. This idea is supported by the other apparent fact, which is that we can see the same colors while performing very different kinds of bodily movements. A blue color, for instance, does not restrict our movements, and the color will not suddenly change when our posture, distance or type of moving changes.[972] Instead, if we turn our head or approach an object, then the object's appearance changes. We could further focus on the fact that the object's color is a certain typical manner of appearing in changing circumstances (such as distance and lighting).[973] The red lamp is thus distinct from the red book, and the differences between the appearances of the two red colors correspond with different bodily movements by which we approach lamps and books. However, we cannot easily distinguish between the bodily movements related to the differences between colors if they are not thought as colors of objects or as "real" colors. Thus, it would appear convenient to claim that spatially appearing objects are constituted with respect to a corresponding bodily movement (the inspecting gaze, approaching the object and moving away from the object, or going around the object), but simple sensations could in principle be constituted in a non-spatial manner that does not correspond to any appearing bodily movement.

Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty is critical of the idea of simple sensing. In the beginning of the chapter "Sensing" he attempts to show that sense qualities such as colors do not in fact appear regardless of an appearance of a particular movement or posture of one's body. He claims that colors, even if they are not thought as colors of objects, correspond with different body postures and with bodily

[972] As we will later see, Merleau-Ponty claims that the perceptual constancy of the appearing color is a characteristic feature of normal, wakeful perception. Instead, for a person under the effect of mescaline, the sensed colors will not remain constant in the manner of perceptual constancy. Instead, that which is happened in the other spheres of sensibility, such as the appearing movements, affects them.

[973] As Merleau-Ponty was acquainted with *Ideas II*, he surely knew Husserl's analysis of the constancy of color and other sense qualities as appearing qualities of objects that he carries out in the first section of the book. See Hua4, section one, "The Constitution of Material Nature". Merleau-Ponty takes up the issue of constancy in *Phenomenology of Perception* in the first part of the chapter "Thing and The Natural World". See PhP, 345–366/312–331.

manners of vibrating. Sensations of colors can be distinguished as different rhythms or vibrations. If simple color sensations are constituted by particular bodily movements and postures, they cannot be thought as elementary qualities that would precede or cause movements. Sensations are constituted within particular movements, and to sense a color is to have adopted a body posture and to live through an intentional lived experience.

In order to show the link between bodily movement and a color, Merleau-Ponty invokes exceptional, pathological cases. In certain pathological cases[974], sensations of red and yellow directly motivate smooth movements, while sensations of blue and green are always accompanied with "jerky movements".[975] Merleau-Ponty also refers to Goldstein's view, according to which colors are associated with specific motor values. Goldstein distinguishes between two general attitudes with respect to the world: an attitude of turning towards the stimulus and an attitude of retreating from the world, and claims that while red and yellow amplify the attitude of turning towards stimulus, blue and green emphasize the attitude of turning away.[976] Merleau-Ponty then contends that the link between motricity, sensation and affect, which can be clearly articulated in pathological cases, is also found in normal sensing. However, in normal sensing, the motor accompaniment of color sensations remain in the unnoticed margins, and they appear as connected to certain atmospheric feelings or affects.[977] He claims that, for instance, the green color is not only reflectively associated with peacefulness, it is experienced with the feeling of calming down.[978] According to Merleau-Ponty, the link between movements and sensations can only be accounted if both the movement and the color-sensation are thought of as two complementary aspects of a certain general manner of being in the world. The particular physiognomy of color corresponds to a particular body schema and posture, and the postures are expressive of general attitudes, such as an attitude of conquest or an attitude of escape and retreat.

Merleau-Ponty furthers his argument by demonstrating that color sensations are preceded and made possible by a gearing up of the body. In this gearing up we take the proper posture and attitude for the reception of the color. Thus, he aims to show that we sense colors because we are disposed to receive the particular colors. As Merleau-Ponty famously writes:

> "Blue is what solicits a certain way [an ordered manner] of looking from me, it is what allows itself to be palpated by a specific movement of my gaze".[979]

Again, Merleau-Ponty refers to experiments that show that, even before the appearance of the sensations, we experience a feeling of a certain body posture or a

974 PhP, 241–2/216. Merleau-Ponty refers to Goldstein's and Rosenthal's study on persons with disturbances of frontal cortex.
975 PhP, 242/216–7.
976 PhP, 242/217. See Goldstein 1995, 210–11.
977 PhP, 242/217. Merleau-Ponty writes: "[R]ed can exaggerate my reactions without my noticing".
978 PhP, 243–4/218.
979 PhP, 243/218.

bodily attitude when particular colors are showed to one with a low intensity. In some pathological cases, the patients can recognize the colors on the basis of the reaction of their own body, such as clenching of teeth.[980] Thus, he claims that colors are always experienced as certain dispositions of the body, and in some exceptional cases these particular bodily feelings can be more clearly distinguished.

So far, we have explicated Merleau-Ponty's two claims: that sensations correspond with felt movements or motor amplifications of the body, and that sensations correlate with certain general attitudes toward the world. Another, related claim is that sensations are intentional and that they involve two co-existents: the sensing (sensory-motor) subject and the external sense-object. According to Merleau-Ponty, sensations are not inner feelings. A sensation is characterized by a *communion* between the sensing and the sensed. And insofar as sensations are not pure affectively neutral qualities but endowed with certain affective values, a sensation entails a proposition "of a certain existential rhythm", and a taking up of this proposition by the sensing subject as "[s]lipping into the form of existence that is thus suggested".[981] Contrary to the everyday understanding, Merleau-Ponty claims that sensations entail propositions of certain general affective attitudes. More generally speaking, sensations as intentional lived experiences have a sensible, motor and affective aspect. Sensing thus requires two things. *First* it requires that we are existentially disposed to receive the sensation, and *second*, it requires that we comply with the call or the proposition of the sensation.

Next, I will pay attention to the idea of communion. By the idea of communion, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the simple sensations are also pervaded by a structure of call and response, which we have explicated above in terms of passive stimulation and active reception and turning towards. The actual accomplishment of sensation, then, is a moment of turning towards, which is temporally preceded by moments (or modifications) of a "complying with" and being passively stimulated or "called by". Just like Husserl in his theory of affection, Merleau-Ponty claims that there are no pure, affect-less prominences or sensations. Accordingly, there is no pure inner push towards sensing without an enticement exercised from the side of the sensed. Sensation is ultimately a *dual* structure, consisting of a relation of affective radiation between *two* (even though this relation is not a symmetrical relation). Before the actual sensation, the sensing subject is enticed or affected by the radiation issuing from the sensed. This is at the same time a proposal of an intentional experience with *particular content and value*, insofar as sense qualities "radiate a certain mode of existence around themselves".[982] Thus, complying with this proposition of the sensed is, at the

980 PhP, 244/218.
981 PhP, 247/221.
982 PhP, 221. This characterization is reminiscent of Husserl's depiction of the "webs of motivation" built around perceived unities in *Ideas II*: "Apprehensions of things and of thingly nexuses are 'webs of motivation': they are built through and through from intentional rays, which […] refer back and forth" (Hua4, 224–5/236). In another passage Husserl draws an analogy between the unity of the thing and the identifiable style of intentional lived experiences (of the personal Ego): "Surely, 'associations' are formed, references back and forth de-

same time, reception of this style of experiencing with specific content. The actual sensation, the turning towards sensing, is not just an appearance of sensation, but an acceptance of this intentional experience and its value, appropriating the sensation, or finding it as one's "momentary law".[983]

In short, Merleau-Ponty thinks about the communion of sensation according to a model of operative intentionality: complying with sensation is somehow similar to yielding to an affect, to giving up to an inclination for doing something or to accepting someone's proposition. Or, turning towards sensation is similar to yielding to the music's suggestion for dancing.

Merleau-Ponty characterizes the appearance of the sensible before the actualization of sensation as a "confused problem" and "vague solicitation".[984] The call or the enticement, so to say, remains indeterminate before the moments of reception and turning towards. The reception that is made on the part of the subject is a necessary condition of sensing, and the reception confirms the sensation. But the reception of the sensed is not merely a structureless "attack" of the sensed. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty also contends that the subject of sensation must find the proper attitude and posture in order to answer the solicitation. For this reason, the subject who can comply with the sensed, also *subtends* the sensed. Merleau-Ponty exemplifies this with a feeling of conflict if a color is received with an improper attitude. Blue, for instance, cannot be received with the attitude for red.[985] On this basis, Merleau-Ponty contends that the dual relation between the sensing and the sensed is more like a *pairing* of the two than an invasion of one to the other: we do not just receive sensations without any further ado, but are forced to take a proper attitude towards them. However, he adds that an attitude alone, without the enticement of the sensed, "is never sufficient to make [one] truly [sense]".[986]

Merleau-Ponty's characterization of sensation as communion and as a pairing suggests that it is a question of a phenomenon of association. But Merleau-Ponty does not provide us with a more detailed account of the manner in which this association between the sensing and the sensed is intensified and brought about. We have seen that Husserl's theory of affection in *APS* is based on an analysis of the ways in which contents of experience can be associated and how their affective stimulation is heightened, assuming that the experience is a temporal flow of successive and coexistent data. Let us recall that, according to Husserl, the phenomenon of contrast is significant with regard to the heightening of stimulation. Contrast functions as a condition of stimulation as well as the subject's being disposed to receive the sensation. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that if we are not disposed to grasp a rhythm, we simply cannot comply with it. But we can

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velop, just as they do with the unnoticed sensuous and thingly 'backgrounds'. Thus, a content is already there, and in the subsequent reflection, in the remembering, I can and I must encounter something already formed." (Hua4, 252/264.)

983 PhP, 247/221.
984 PhP, 248/222.
985 PhP, 248/222.
986 PhP, 248/222.

also ask: what awakens us to be aware of the rhythm of an intentional lived experience in the first place? A rhythm with particular content must be somehow distinguishable within the phenomenal field. For instance, we might not notice a rhythm at all before a particular accent becomes emphasized. Thus, it seems that it is not sufficient that we are disposed to comply with the particular content of the sensed. We also must be disposed to be stimulated by contrasts and to be aware of differentiations. We will return to this issue at the end of the subchapter. Merleau-Ponty deals with it when he explicates the process of unification of sensing.

## 7.2 Two Kinds of Limitedness: the Impressional Sensation and the Specialized Sense Field

Next, I will examine Merleau-Ponty's explication for the feature of sensing that the communion or the associative synthesis of sensation occurs anonymously. The synthesis of sensing is a passive synthesis. One of the central themes of the chapter "Sensing" is the distinction between the passive synthesis of sensing and perception, and the synthesis brought forth by egoic activity. We acknowledge a variety of ways to actively establish links, groupings or connections between appearing objects. This requires that we attentively grasp or notice the objects to be connected together. The objects are first grasped as self-identical and separated from the other surrounding objects and the surrounding environment. On this basis it becomes possible, for instance, to count objects: the items found in a room, friends, memories or gods. Passive synthesis refers to the matter that associations, links, connections and groupings already appear before the active attention towards the objects, and the active accomplishments carried out with the noticed objects. Among the variety of passive syntheses, we can distinguish the associative communion between the sensing and the sensed in sensation.

### 7.2.1 The Anonymity of Sensing

Merleau-Ponty suggests that the phenomenon of the blue sky is a particularly good example for disclosing the anonymity of the community of sensation. The sky is a prominent example of sensation for two reasons: on the one hand, in our everyday life the blue sky is engaging. We are attired and drawn by the blue sky. The sky is one of the spatial objects within our environment[987] that has considerable affective force in enticing us to look at it, and perhaps momentarily leave other projects or things aside. But, on the other hand, the sky is not a properly material object, and the blue color (or the smooth and deep color) is an

[987] In *Ideas II*, Husserl contends that the sky appears to us as a non-material-real spatial object, that is, a spatial object (similar to a rainbow or sun) that lacks certain material determinations. Indeed, sky is provided with a typical behavior in changing circumstances and with this regard sky is experienced as *real*, but it lacks clear contours, it cannot be touched it does not appear to have weight, etc. See *Ideas II*, 36–7/40.

essential part of the phenomenon of the sky.[988] This means that when the blue sky draws us towards, it does not compel us to reflect on the sky or to analyze its parts. Instead, the sky calls us for *sensing* the color. The intentional modification of sensing a sensation becomes salient in the phenomenon of the blue sky. Accordingly, sensing a blue sky is also a kind of reduction: it amplifies the sensing aspect of experience, while suppressing others. Thus, the experience of the blue sky motivates us to reflectively articulate – both from the side of the sky and from the side of the sensing subject – what it is like to sense the sensation, not what is a reflected sky like or what is it to reflectively or thematically approach the sky. Merleau-Ponty suggests that what we find out if we reflect on this specific lived experience will inform us about an essential characteristic of sensing more generally.

What is, according to Merleau-Ponty, specific to the experience of the blue sky? Merleau-Ponty points out that the amplification of sensing amounts to an attenuation of the reflective distance, either to the sky or to one's experience. As much as the sensing-modification of experiencing becomes more dominating, our freedom as deliberating, reflecting and self-distancing persons diminishes. As sensing the sky heightens, we feel increasingly abandoned to the sensing, or saturated by the sensed color. We feel ourselves losing our reflective stance or reflective self-consciousness, inasmuch as it appears that we *join* with the sensed color. Moreover, it appears that the impressionality of the experiencing is heightened, while the awareness of act-transcendent identity is diminished. Finally, in approaching sensing the blue, we approach an anonymity.

As Merleau-Ponty famously writes, when we are occupied with sensing the blue sky, we "plunge into this mystery".[989] Furthermore, "my consciousness is saturated by this unlimited blue", in that I am fulfilled or saturated "by this sky that gathers together, composes itself, and begins to exist for itself".[990] Thus, he suggests that in sensing we approach an anonymous synthesis of sensation which appears as regulated by the sensed itself.

In short, the phenomenon of the blue sky is a kind of momentary reduction or regression, a receding from the active person and coming closer to the passive, impressional and anonymous level of sensing. In particular, Merleau-Ponty characterizes this movement of modification of the level of experiencing as approaching an impressional closure, which is also a becoming limited by the experience. Thus, Merleau-Ponty suggests, by examining this experiential transformation, one can characterize the subject of sensation as the level of experiencing which is approached.

Merleau-Ponty characterizes the subject of sensation in two respects. On the one hand, sensing subject is *limited*, and on the other, it *possesses a specific skill*.

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[988] To be sure, sky does not appear always as blue. However, blue appears as the "real" or "optimal" color of the sky, provided that the optimum refers to waking life and daylight. For instance, we acknowledge the difference between the sky filled up with clouds or fog, and the clear sky. A cloudy sky appears as a sky that is covered by clouds. I leave it unquestioned here, to what extent these considerations are relative to a geographical or cultural context.
[989] PhP, 248/222.
[990] PhP, 248/222.

The subject of sensation appears as anonymous and foreign because it operates at a limited level of experiencing, while our personal experience extends over this limitation. Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the foreignness of the sensing subject might suggest that, when we approach sensation, we encounter another experiencing subject. Merleau-Ponty writes that I do not experience myself as the true subject of sensation, that *one* perceives in me, and that sensation concerns "another self".[991] However, this should not be interpreted to signify that when I look at the blue sky, I encounter another experiencing subject, or that my experience would be split up into two experiences. To be sure, there is an irreducible difference between my sensation and the sensation of another subject. When I approach my sensation, I don't encounter another sensing being. My sensing of the blue sky is within my embodied experiencing, and it is motivated by an immediate kinesthetic self-awareness of my own body. Sensation is not mine if it is ascribed to the other's body, located at a specific spatial distance to my own body. Thus, sensing might involve an appearance of "another self", but not an appearance of another body or another experience.

What is, then, the "another self" or the "natural self"? As we will recall, the synthesis of sensation requires a sort of accomplishment on the part of the sensing subject. We sense only if our sensing body *complies with* the enticement of the sensed. But, as Merleau-Ponty now shows, this does not mean an accomplishment of a person-subject who carries out the accomplishment within the sphere of egoic activity, that is, with attentively noticed objects. It is not us who initiates the synthesis of sensation. Instead, the communion is already operative at the moment we begin to thematize or explicate the sky. We already perceive the blue sky when we begin to focus on it and to articulate it. Thus, the act of making thematic is grounded on another accomplishment, that of carrying out the communion of sensation. However, as the subject who carries out the communion becomes more at the foreground of experience, we lose the awareness of ourselves as free, deliberative and reflectively self-aware beings. Or, still in other terms, to regress to the level of sensation means to regress to a stupor and depersonalization.[992] Of course, Merleau-Ponty does not mean that we would feel alienated every time we look at the blue sky. However, the possibility of abandonment belongs to the structure of the experience in question, and what is experienced as a calming feeling and as a momentary escape from the pressing concerns in one's life can be transformed into some more intense form of experiencing that would count as self-alienation. In any case, the phenomena of regression and self-alienation give Merleau-Ponty reason to contend that the anonymous subject of sensing and the free subject of making thematic and of reflecting never coincide. In one's wakeful, deliberative and free life, sensing by necessity remains in the margins or the passive background of experience.[993]

Merleau-Ponty does not content himself with the characterization of the foreignness of the subject of sensation. It is remarkable that, in a short passage, he

[991] PhP, 250/223–4.
[992] PhP, 249/223.
[993] PhP, 249/223.

aims at describing life at the level of sensation. He attempts to describe what it would like to live through the impressional bodily awareness embedded in a rhythmical unity with what is sensed. To be sure, we cannot just descend to the level of sensation and directly reflect on this intentional lived experiencing. The attempt to set oneself at the level of the sensation leads to a sort of stupor because, in order to descend to the level of sensation, one should abstract from oneself as a person.

Merleau-Ponty bases his attempt to imagine a sensory awareness on the idea of a limit-experience. Accordingly, in the description he makes use of that which we experience as the absolute limits of our awareness, namely our own birth and death. In order to genuinely reflect on how one would experience one's own birth or death, one should be able to live through the event of birth and the event of death. This implies a capacity to follow the experience preceding birth, and the event following death.[994] However, if birth and death are conceived as the absolute beginning and end of the subject, there is in principle no experience before birth and after death. Birth as the beginning of experience, and death as the end of experience cannot be genuinely lived through, since these limit-experiences are not purportedly within a flow of experiencing, but the beginning and the end of the flow. Instead, all personal experiences can only be constituted *within* a flow, as active experiences surrounded by a horizon or by a margin of passive experiencing. One cannot genuinely conceive the event of birth as one's own birth. As Merleau-Ponty writes, one's birth and death are *pre-personal horizons*, and the subject of birth and the subject of death by necessity have to be characterized as anonymous. Insofar as one is aware of oneself as a person, one is always already born and still alive. In this manner, birth and death are limit-phenomena.

Merleau-Ponty applies the limit-phenomena of birth and death in two meanings. *First*, one cannot set oneself at the impersonal level of sensation and maintain one's position as a reflecting person because, at that level, there is purportedly no reflective self-awareness. Sensory experiences, similar to birth and death (but also dreams, intense emotional states, intense hallucinations and traumatic experiences), are impersonal, and this is why they can be approached only indirectly.

*Second*, Merleau-Ponty also applies the example of birth and death as limit-phenomena in order to characterize the limitedness of sensation. The subject of sensation does not reach beyond the field of sensation:

> "[b]eing at the extreme the first, last, and only one of its kind, every sensation is a birth and a death. The subject who experiences it begins and ends with it, and since he can neither precede himself nor survive himself, sensation necessarily appears to itself in a milieu of generality".[995]

In other words, Merleau-Ponty suggests that sensation is a limited experiencing for "whom" the beginning and end of the sensation appear as absolute limits. He

[994] PhP, 249–50/223.
[995] PhP, 250/223–4.

suggests that sensation is absolutely not aware of that which transcends its scope of experiencing. Again, we encounter here the idea of experiencing at a level of a limited scope of affection.

Now, the difference between our transcending awareness and the sensation's limited awareness is that, unlike sensation, we are aware of non-actually intuitive objects. We can genuinely think about our past experiences or possible future experiences. We can conceive of inter-sensory unities, and unities of transcendent things. In order for these unities to make sense, they must involve non-intuitive contents. My awareness includes contents that extend beyond that which is given within the present moment, and I can imagine and project non-present and non-actually intuitive possibilities. Instead, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the sensing of the blue sky teaches us that when this particular intentional lived experience is intensified, and as I approach the subject of sensation, I lose this capacity to transcend the immediate experience.

Besides the limitedness and anonymity of the subject of sensation, Merleau-Ponty adds that the sensation is an awareness of a certain, partial aspect of the world. The sensation of the blue sky is a visual accomplishment of the eyes. The sensation must be provided with a pre-given motor and sensory schema. Merleau-Ponty suggests that this schema emerges spontaneously in the body, as he writes that the sensation allows us to grasp a "*given* life of consciousness", and that the intentionality of sensations is related "my eyes, hands and ears", which are "*natural* selves".[996] Moreover, he writes that sensation is a modality of existence "destined to a physical world".[997] Thus, when we encounter sensing, we also encounter the divergent fields of the senses, and a primal sensing at a level of the instinctive intentionality.

Natural self is, therefore, a spontaneous bodily acquaintance with a partial sector of the world, which is operative at a level of a limited scope of experiencing. Another term used by Merleau-Ponty is "specialization": the subject of sensation has a special skill for accomplishing the synthesis of sensation.[998] Here we can think about specialization through being habituated to doing something. A professional diver, for instance, has been shaping their body for years by exercising the specific movements. As we have seen, habituation constitutes a pre-given horizon for accomplishing actions. Habitual actions can be carried out absent-mindedly, and they are inscribed in the body of the diver. In the following, we will see that acquiring a "natural" skill such as learning to look at things also requires a process of habituation. However, thinking about the way in which habituation occurs in the sphere of sensing requires taking into account the limited level of experiencing within which sensing originally operates. Learning to see is not originally an egoic activity of learning (even if it can include active focusing). Instead, the emergence of vision occurs within passive experiencing. Moreover, as we have already seen with respect to the question of affectivity, if we abstract

[996] PhP, 250/224.
[997] PhP, 250/224.
[998] PhP, 250/224.

from transcendence and remain within the limited scope of affection then the affective propagation through awakening becomes restricted. It might be said that the "natural selves" do not in themselves adhere to the surrounding world, but remain within the dispersed and "cyclical" sphere of natural time. A proper acquisition of a habit, as Merleau-Ponty contends, requires intercourse with objects that awakens and modifies the pre-given schema, and is not merely driven by it.

The "natural self" has a skill insofar as it is guided by a pre-given intentional schema, but it accomplishes this schema *within the instinctual level of experiencing*. Thereby, the schemata will not be provided with new content as a result of this accomplishment.

We see that when Merleau-Ponty writes about limitation and specialization, there are two notions of being limited at work here: the temporal limitation to the field of the impressional present, and the limitedness to a specific sensory field of experiencing, which excludes other, divergent fields of senses.

### 7.2.2 Divergence of The Fields of Sense and Spontaneous Intentional Schemata

How does Merleau-Ponty account for the divergence of the fields of sense? Here we encounter again the theme of the instinctive intentional schemata that emerge spontaneously from the body. We saw that according to Merleau-Ponty the original instinctive drives towards the fields of affectivity constitute the irreducible heterogeneity of our affective experiencing. This also holds for the original fields of sense, such as touch, hearing, vision and the sense of smell.

We have already seen that sensing is correlative with intentional awareness of the movement of one's body. Sense fields determine specific, "specialized" intentional schema for movement and sensing. Another aspect of specialization is that the sensory self, the "natural self", is "familiar with only one sector of being".[999] A sensory field entails particular motor possibilities, and has its specific horizon of "I can", and thus provides an access to a specific "system of beings".[1000] Corresponding to the motor fields of the senses, there are distinct typical sensory environments or "worlds": the visible, tangible, audible, touchable, odorous, tasteful. Insofar as the specific motor domains are limited, their corresponding environments also have their limits that they cannot surpass. For the person, these contours are drawn within the more comprehensive horizon of the world. For instance, vision is limited by a horizon of things not seen, "or which are even invisible".[1001] In short, sensory selves are subordinated to their fields. But what does it mean that there are divergent fields? What does it mean that vision, for instance, cannot be substituted with hearing or touch? What appears as irreplaceable?

[999] PhP, 250/224.
[1000] PhP, 250–1/224.
[1001] PhP, 251/224–5.

Through the analysis of sensation Merleau-Ponty ends up depicting a heterogeneity of specialized sensory selves, familiarities with specific areas of movement and sensibility, which do not reach beyond themselves. We will soon see that, in Merleau-Ponty's account, the heterogeneity of the senses is essential, insofar as it is constitutive for the inter-sensory, multi-modal unity of sense perception.

To a certain extent it can be claimed that every practical, sensory-motor accomplishment or practice constituted by habit-acquisition is, by necessity, limited and appears within a more comprehensive horizon of the world. A cultural practice or a language is always limited, or it belongs to a particular lifeworld that has something beyond it. In general, as Merleau-Ponty says, a present life, even if it appears as a center, can always be re-conceived from the perspective of another, more comprehensive or different future present.[1002] What is, then, specific in the limitedness of the sensory experiences?

The limitedness of the sensory experience is evident in the experience of blindness: we cannot have any visual experiences if we lack the proper functioning of the eyes. Merleau-Ponty refers to a blind boy's articulation of his experience of the manner in which the visual objects are present for him. The boy (as well as blind persons normally) knows many details about the visual world by conversations and by the fact that he lives in a world which is dominated by the visual:

> "Those who can see […] are related to me through some unknown sense which completely envelops me from a distance, follows me, goes through me, and […] holds me in some way in subjection to it".[1003]

Merleau-Ponty remarks that the descriptions of the visual world of a person who is blind from the birth remain empty. They pose a general question that the other senses cannot respond to. There is a difference between a "poorly formulated question" and an "empty question". The former is related to a spontaneously emerging field of experience, which is experienced as an atmosphere. The latter refers to the fact that this atmosphere, this affective, sensory and motor relatedness to a field, is lacking.[1004]

Another example is the experience of the acquisition of sight of an operated person born blind.[1005] Right after the operation, the person experiences a sudden, anomalous change:

> "the blind man who has been operated upon finds the world to be different from what he had anticipated […] The blind person's world and the world of the normal person

[1002]PhP, 398/361–2.
[1003]PhP, 259/233.
[1004]In his lectures on child psychology, Merleau-Ponty mentions the idea of "ultra-things" (a notion he borrows from Henry Wallon), which is similar to the notion of the "empty question". The child's world is surrounded by things that remain empty for the child, insofar as the child yet lacks any capacity to be intuitively aware of these things. See CP, 192–3.
[1005]PhP, 256–60/231–3.

> differ not merely in the quantity of the matter available to them, but moreover in the *structure* of the whole."[1006]

The anomaly interrupts the blind person's habitual and familiar sense experience which is initially still dominated by the sensory-motor structure of touch.[1007] Accordingly, the person is amazed about the new sense of spatiality brought forth with the visual experience. The visual experience has something unprecedented in it, something that could not have been given within the domains of the other senses.

Just after the operation, habitual sensory-motor patterns of the other senses are applied to the eye-movements. For instance, "one patient, operated upon after eighteen years of blindness, attempts to touch a ray of sunlight."[1008] The operation has repercussions with regard to both bodily movement and perception. In the beginning, colors are grasped in the manner of smelling an odor that surrounds us and "intrudes upon" us.[1009] The visual field remains obscure and improper as long as the subject is not accustomed to use his gaze.[1010] During the following process of transition, Merleau-Ponty writes, the subject begins to understand "what 'seeing' is", and begins to move his or her gaze "in the manner of a gaze, and no longer in the manner of a hand."[1011] Finally, the new situation changes its appearance from an anomaly to a new optimal way of seeing. For the experiencing subject, the rupture leads to something new and more encompassing.[1012]

What is at stake in the phase of transition, in which one acquires a proper manner of seeing? First of all, it is a question of a passively experienced, incontrollable shift in one's way of experiencing. To be sure, the shift in which one learns to use the eyes might be fostered by voluntary activities, such as giving attention to the movement of the gaze, but, as Merleau-Ponty contends, a deliberate, free activity is not sufficient or necessary for the shift to occur.

What motivates the phase of transition, and incites one's learning to see? We could say that, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, the operation marks out a shift from the vision as an empty question to vision as a poorly formulated question. That is, the field of vision emerges and appears in this initial state as – in affective, motor and sensible manner – as an indeterminate atmosphere. According to Merleau-Ponty, the incitement for the proper vision is not motivated by the body alone. Instead, it is felt as a tension or as a disequilibrium, both in the phenomenal

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[1006]PhP, 259/233.
[1007]The application of the movement typical to touching to visual perception is reminiscent of Schneider's manner of perceiving: Schneider recognizes a circle only by following its contours part by part. Thus, we have two examples of "touching with the eyes". However, in the two cases the motivations for "touching with the eyes" differ. In one case the subject is living through a transitional phase in which the optimal manner of seeing is lacking. In the other case the horizonal awareness has been generally reduced, and for this reason the subject cannot see and anticipate by movement that which transcends the visual object at the current focus.
[1008]PhP, 260/233.
[1009]PhP, 258/232.
[1010]PhP, 258/232.
[1011]PhP, 258/232.
[1012]Cf. Steinbock 1995, 144.

field and in one's body. Identification of an object within the phenomenal field is only possible if it is preceded by an experienced tension, in which what is sensed appears as "imperfect" in an obscure manner. Merleau-Ponty describes a similar kind of transition when he reflects on how the synthesis of the inter-sensory object is brought about.[1013] Focusing on an object and identifying an object tends "toward the unique object as toward the resolution of this tension and the fulfillment of the act of seeing".[1014] The tension is at the same time a tension felt in the phenomenal field, and a tension felt in the body, so that it is impossible to say whether the body or what is sensed would act as the motivator of the learning. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

> "For persons born blind and having been operated upon for cataracts, in the time following the operation it cannot be said whether it is the non-coordination of the eyes that prevents vision, or if it is the confusion of the visual field that encourages non-coordination; whether they do not see because they fail to focus, or if they do not focus because they are lacking something to see."[1015]

Acquisition of proper vision thus requires a prior tension felt in the visual field. Acquiring vision is a process that develops as an exploration that communicates with what is seen. The atmospheric feeling of disequilibrium indicates the direction in which the movement of the eyes has to develop in order that the visible appears more complete, better, more optimal or more satisfying. The spontaneously emerging instinctive drive of vision does not pre-determine objects, but selects the field of the possible encountered objects. The proper encounter, the "focused enjoyment" of seeing, has a determining significance for the former blind tendency. The field of vision becomes determined as a field of vision as the satisfying manners of seeing are accumulated. We can apply here the idea of awakening that we developed in the last chapter. If the formerly indeterminate movement ends up with an object seen, and if the past movement and the atmospheric feeling are retained at the moment of the satisfying or successful seeing, then the satisfaction propagates to the retained movement, and reshapes it. From now on, the intentional schema of the visual becomes modulated, endowed with a content of the visual object. The optimal manner of seeing is thus indicated by the intentional schema issuing from the body. However, it only becomes determined – that is, the poorly formulated question becomes answered – by the encounter with the seen objects and environment.[1016]

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[1013]PhP, 266–270/239–242.
[1014]PhP, 268/241.
[1015]PhP, 267/240.
[1016] We see here that normality *qua* optimality, which is in question, differs from a social or statistical normality. What is optimal is strictly speaking related to what is experienced as preferable by the individual. Finding focused satisfaction in seeing better does not immediately involve anything in a sense "now I see like the others see" or "now I see like an average person sees". Furthermore, the individual's optimal manner of seeing can be socially or statistically abnormal, it is possible that one's optimal seeing remains in conflict with the manner in which the others see. However, finding a focused satisfaction is relative to the surrounding environment. There is a difference whether one acquires a vision in a dark cave or in bright daylight.

To conclude, each sense is provided with a proper field, "world" or domain of experiencing, which cannot be substituted by the other domains. For example, the sensory field of touching has its own peculiar order of spatiality. Remote simultaneities do not originally appear in the touch. In order to touch two remote objects, one has to move the touching organ from the place of one object to the place of the other. The movement between the two touchings takes time, and there is a necessary temporal lag between the two objects. Merleau-Ponty also remarks that the structure of lighting and the illuminated object does not have any clear analogy within the realm of touch.[1017] Thus, the sensory fields are irrevocably limited:

> "The senses are distinct from each other […] insofar as each of them brings with it a structure of being that can never be precisely transposed".[1018]

Thereby, we can understand what Merleau-Ponty means by the limitedness of the sensory self. Our habitual acquisitions are multi-modal: they are transposed from one field of sense to the others in an unrestricted manner, while it makes sense to say that a sensory self only senses, moves and desires that which belongs to its domain. However, we see also that the limitedness of the sensory self differs from the limitedness of sensation. Sensation, as it is characterized by Merleau-Ponty, refers to the limitedness to the impressional and excludes the reproduction of the non-intuitive. Instead, limitedness to the sensory experiencing does not exclude the reproduction of the non-intuitive. At least, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the understanding of vision develops by itself, and also seems to be subject to habituation, that is, of being subjected to new optima of what it is to see, all while remaining limited to its initial field.

## 7.3 The Inter-Sensory Unity

We can see that in the chapter "Sensing" Merleau-Ponty distinguishes different layers of sensing. He himself point out this differentiation between layers, as he writes:

> "When I see an object, I always feel [*éprouve*] that there is still some being beyond what I currently see, and not merely more visible being, but also more tangible or audible being, and not merely more sensible being, but moreover a depth of the object that no sensory withdrawal will ever fully exhaust".[1019]

In other words, Merleau-Ponty lists the following aspects of sensing: the sensation limited to the impressional present, the sensory experience (for instance, vision) limited to a field of sense, the inter-sensory experience and the depth of a transcendent perceived thing. We have already accounted for the unity of the

[1017]PhP, 260/233.
[1018]PhP, 260/234.
[1019]PhP, 250/224.

impressional sensation and the unity of a sense field. According to my interpretation, biological existence or instinctive intentionality refers to Merleau-Ponty's thinking of these two lower-level unities of experience, one limited by a restricted scope of affection, the other limited by an awareness of an original field.

However, we have to present his account of the further inter-sensory unity and the transcendent unity of the perceived thing. This is because our aim is to see the constitutive significance of biological existence with respect to the latter unities. The claim is that, even if Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the originality of the inter-sensory unity and of transcendence, he does not downplay the role of instinctive intentionality. He claims that the unity of the senses and the unity of the perceived thing are pre-personal phenomena, just as much as the impressional sensations and the sense fields. To be sure, the communicative associations between the sensory experiences are not acquired. Besides, transcendence of the thing cannot be acquired on the basis of some purported preceding level of non-transcendence. It is a central claim in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* that transcendence is a phenomenon of original passivity, inscribed in the body itself. The stretching over the intuitive, and being aware of the horizon of the world, are characteristic of our passive phenomena. Thus, we have to account for these higher-level unities in order to disclose the significance of the equally important instinctive side of our experience, which we have been revealing by taking up the theme of biological existence.

Let us first focus on Merleau-Ponty's account of the communication of the sense fields.

Even if the sensory fields are irreplaceable with regard to their general structure, the specific structures established within a particular field are transposed to the other fields. The sensory experiences appear as influencing each other within an inter-sensory whole. The tactile experience of a person who is able to see cannot be compared to the tactile experience of the blind person, insofar as in the former case the touch is influenced and re-organized by the visual field.[1020] In the same manner, the visual field is affected by the sonic experiences. Merleau-Ponty notices how the aural, musical space motivates a change in the visual appearance of the space of a music hall.[1021] The affective, visual value of the seen hall, alongside the appearing musicians and the listeners, becomes eroded by the power of the music. What can be seen around suddenly loses its affective force as music takes place. Thereby, the sensory fields themselves can be in a relation of conflict and competition within the totality of the phenomenal field – just like the phenomenal field consists of a multiplicity of prominent objects drawing us towards them with varying intensities.

We must distinguish between what Merleau-Ponty means by the *divergence* of the sensory experiences and the *division* or *isolation* of sense fields or sensations. Merlau-Ponty contends that a sense field or a sensation appears as isolated only if one turns toward what one sees in a specific analytic and reflective attitude. There is a specific interest to isolate a sensation, a curiosity oriented towards

[1020]PhP, 252/225–6.
[1021]PhP, 260/234.

"what we really see", or "what we really hear".[1022] These kinds of questions imply a thought that what we really sense requires an abstraction from the import of the other sense experiences, and to approach sensation as *purely consisting* of the data of a particular sense. On the basis of the analytic attitude we can conceive of the senses as divided and isolated. However, prior to the analytic attitude, we do not experience such isolation or division, although this does not downplay the irreducible divergence of the senses. Instead, in the non-analytic perception, sensory experiences are both divergent and they are in a relation of inter-sensory communication. Moreover, as we have seen, the non-analytic perception contains the possibility of regression into a particular sensory experience. The possibility of regression signifies that even if we possess a horizon of the world, the unifying horizon does not always appear in a similar manner.

According to Merleau-Ponty, in the non-analytic perception there is no modification of the sensation in which what is sensed would appear as clearly isolated and separate from the other sensations. Sensations are by necessity influenced by each other. Merleau-Ponty shows this by referring to an experiment in which a mode of appearance of a sound and a color is modified with regard to its intensity. Accordingly, the sensation varies between two extremes, which could be called an exteroceptive and interoceptive appearance. The exteroceptive extreme is the appearance of the sound or the color as a property of an object. The interoceptive extreme is the appearance of these sensations as inner, felt vibrations of the whole body.[1023]

*First*, an objective color or sound appears in a definite place: it is the green book or a sound of a violin. But, as we will soon see in more detail, the sensation as a property of an object does not appear as isolated. *Second*, an atmospheric color or sound is experienced as diffused around the object, having no specific place. This is, for instance, the color of a reflection or a halo, or the atmospheric sound that levitates in the space, and it is located in between the body and the objects. In this case, too, the sensation has its particular characteristic related to outside itself, and to its non-material manner of appearing. *Third*, color and sound can be experienced as particular feelings in one's body: the red color as a vibration of one's gaze, or a sound as vibrating in one's ear. In this modification the sensations are felt in the body, but in such a manner that the place of the body in which they are felt can be determined. As is evident, in this case the sensation becomes fused with a feeling of touch. *Finally*, at the other extreme, the color or sound is so forceful that it invades the whole body. In this case, the sensation cannot be located in a specific place in the body since the experience overflows into the body in its entirety. Accordingly, the sensation can be recognized only by its specific accent. For instance, if the sound is loud enough, the "auditory rhythm fuses cinematic images together and gives rise to a perception of movement".[1024] If these are the degrees in which a sensation can appear to us in a non-

[1022]PhP, 261–2/235.
[1023]PhP, 263/236–7.
[1024]PhP, 263/237.

analytic or non-abstract manner, in none of them does it appear as strictly-speaking distinct from the other senses.

Sensations as qualities of objects are permeated by synesthetic associations. For instance, the immediately sensed whiteness of the snow is associated with the coldness and the melting form of the snow. Thus, colors of objects are manifestations of the "inner structures of the things".[1025] The perceptually constant whiteness of a sheet of paper is not a sensation of a pure quality of white, but its appearance is related to a constant (typical) way in which the appearance of the color changes in relation to its typical lightning-environment, which consists, among other things, of shadows and shades.[1026] Thus, for example, we never sense an abstract black sense quality, but, for instance, a black as "a dark power that shines from the object, even when it is covered over by reflections".[1027] Moreover, the colored areas and the surface colors are not the only modes of appearance of colors. The appearance of a color depends on a variety of external associations: there are colors of transparent bodies, atmospheric colors, the color of shimmer, the color of glow, of shine and of lighting.[1028] Synesthetic experiences basically mean these associative connections of the sensations to the other sensations and objects.

We can distinguish different degrees of synesthetic experiences. Usually, the associations remain at the background of perception, contributing silently to the significance of what is seen. Thus, the whiteness would change its sense, if it was associated with whipped cream rather than snow. In some momentary experiences (such as taking hallucinogenic drugs) and pathological cases the synesthetic associations are effectuated as actual, phantom-like sensations. Merleau-Ponty points out a bunch of examples of such hallucinatory perception. For instance, a person under the influence of mescaline reports that when he taps a piece of iron upon the windowsill, the trees become greener.[1029]

Let us take up again the sensing of the blue sky. In fact, the sensing of the blue sky does not only concern the eyes. Instead, the whole body must accompany the sensation. I cannot, for instance, be running, jumping and hitting nearby objects *and* be immersed in the sensation of the blue. If the color-sensation dominates, this means that the other parts of the body are also geared for the sensing.

A famous example is about the motivational correlation between the movement of the eye and the appearance of the landscape. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "When I have the intention of looking to the left, the movement of the gaze quite naturally translates as an oscillation of the visual field: the objects remain in place, but only after a momentary vibration."[1030]

[1025]If we follow Husserl's analysis of the material thing in *Ideas II*, we can say that the things in question can be phantom-like things, real things, real-material things, etc.
[1026]PhP, 261/235.
[1027]PhP, 352/319.
[1028]PhP, 353/320.
[1029]PhP, 264/237.
[1030]PhP, 59/49.

When Merleau-Ponty characterizes the perception of an inter-sensory thing, he adds a further spontaneously emerging schema of the body. In order that perception is possible, it is not sufficient that there are divergent senses and each have their specific skills. Besides, there must be a schema that coordinates the senses together in a unity of a self-identical object, and there must be an instinctual tendency for this coordination. This means that the thing is not given as if it would be optimally given only for one specific sense. For example, even if the blue sky invites one in particular to sense its color, the blue sky itself immediately awakens the other senses: what is it like to touch or grasp the blue sky, what is it to approach it in movement, whether it feels warm or cold, and what does it sounds like. This means that I do not approach the sky merely as a visual sensed thing. The typical and optimal manner of perceiving the sky is not reducible to a particular sensory experience. Thus, we must be provided with a schema that orients us towards the inter-sensory thing, and which coordinates the divergent sensory experiences. Accordingly, this schema sets up a maximum of an inter-sensory richness of a thing, which is not a maximum of visibility, taste, feeling or audition. Simply, we perceive a material thing in an optimal manner, if it is given with respect to a certain correspondence between the sensory experiences. A table, for instance, appears as real[1031] if it is given visually but also as a texture that can be touched, and as having a specific sound. We experience the inter-sensory thing as abnormal or unreal if some of these aspects are too intense or if some of the aspects are lacking. Consider, for instance, that a contact microphone is attached to a table, and the sound signal is amplified and filtered reverberation. It follows that each time the table is touched, it produces an abnormally loud and deep sound. The table does not appear anymore as a normal table, but as a strange amplified body or an instrument. The point here is not that a group of normal perceptual things is inherently pre-determined for us. The specific type of a thing, the experience of a thing as real, which is its typical manner of behavior in different and changing circumstances, is something that is empirically acquired during the intercourse with the thing. Furthermore, this typical schema of the thing is something that develops and evolves. However, we must be endowed with an original perceptual interest and a capacity to deal with a thing as an inter-sensory unity, since otherwise the thing would not have the sense of reality.

Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, in addition to the sense fields, our experience develops within a "field of existence".[1032] The body as a whole is geared or disposed for perceptual accomplishments. We feel an atmosphere that guides or calls for the configuration of the body in its relation to a specific tension of the phenomenal field: it is felt how the parts of the body that are to be configured in that perception of a thing can be actualized. The body as an inter-sensory system

[1031]Here Merleau-Ponty's analysis is reminiscent of Husserl's phenomenological investigation of the experience of the reality of a thing and self-awareness of one's own body as an ortho-aesthetic system in *Ideas II*. See Hua4, §18 b).
[1032]PhP, 367/332.

constitutes the horizon of a *maximum* of perceivability, an optimal richness for a sufficient clarity for a particular thing.[1033] As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "I perceive a thing because I have a field of existence and because each phenomenon that appears polarizes my entire body, as a system of perceptual powers, toward it."[1034]

## 7.4 Transcendence

We must add a crucial feature to the description of the natural powers of the body that ground the perceptual accomplishment. The synergic unity of the body that is geared to the perceived thing, the horizon of the maximum of perceivability, is not sufficient for the emergence of perception and the perceived thing as it is experienced by us.

In short, the problem is that perception would lack the capacity for transcendence. For Merleau-Ponty, transcendence is a multifaceted phenomenon that characterizes the human experience. Transcendence is manifested, for instance, as the ecstatic temporality, the inexhaustible thing, the world as a horizon of horizons, and the body as a "system of equivalences". One of Merleau-Ponty's central claims in *Phenomenology of Perception* is that transcendence is inscribed in our bodily existence. Throughout the work, Merleau-Ponty criticizes the critical idea of the intelligent activity of pure thinking as the foundation for experience. But the claim that predicative thought is founded on perception should not imply that transcendence is somehow derived from a prior, non-transcendent bodily experience. Accordingly, if perception would be defined as a limited system endowed with a bodily teleology, one would miss the crucial problem of transcendence.[1035]

First of all, the transcendent unity of the perceived thing should not be overlooked. If the perceived unity was thought as the norm of an optimum of richness of perceivability, and the thing was reduced to an optimum, the thing would lack the sense of transcendence. The perceived thing reduced to the correlate of a perceptual system of the body would be nothing other than the end of a bodily teleology or "the norm of our psycho-physical arrangement".[1036] Does this notion succeed in characterizing the essential incompleteness of the perceived thing?

One aspect of the incompleteness of the perceived thing is that the thing always appears as something more than what was expected of it. The optimum of the thing is prescribed by its pre-given type. However, we acknowledge that there is no final perception which would show us the type or the schema of the

[1033]PhP, 367/332.
[1034]PhP, 367/332.
[1035]Merleau-Ponty's neo-Kantian or idealist adversary might point out that Merleau-Ponty does not succeed in thinking about the foundation of thought in perception. See, for instance, Gardner 2017, 18. However, I believe that in his phenomenology Merleau-Ponty ignores the philosophical approach in which one aims at thinking of the foundation of transcendence in a putative non-transcendent being. See the introductory chapter of the work at hand.
[1036]PhP, 372–3/337.

thing exhaustively, once and for all. Always a new perception that could motivate a renewal of the schema of the thing remains possible. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, each appearance of a thing is "an invitation to perceive more".[1037] The schema of the perceived thing itself does not remain static, but develops and changes. To be sure, we have seen that there is still something more in transcendence than a mere development of the schema through learning. Namely, the development itself is not framed by a pre-determined task, but rather occurs at a symbolic level. The schema of the thing is inscribed into a "symbolic" system of equivalences.

However, even if the thing was determined merely according to a pre-given optimum of perceivability, it would not render the system of perception as non-creative or non-developing. A system of optimal perception of a thing must be adaptive to an indefinite number of unpredictable situations. Even if the aim would be limited to perceive a tree according to a pre-given schema of an optimal tree, the variable environments in which the subject would encounter the tree are not prescribed. The possible movements that my body will perform during my life are not encoded in my body. The limbs must be able to adapt to different positions and movement-patterns in sitting, walking, descending, jumping. The same eyes adapt different movements in seeing objects that have a different size, shape, location, distance. If I want to take my coffee cup, and I find it on my left side, I have to turn left in order to reach it. If the cup is on the right, I have to turn right. It is *not* pre-determined, *in what exact position* the object is to be reached, or what shall be the exact movements that are required in order to satisfy an aim at a given situation. If there is a living system of correspondences, the system must be plastic: an "endless" amount of movements and bodily positions must be available. A living being whose sole task would be to walk would have to accomplish walking on different kinds of terrains, and the terrain in which the walking is to be accomplished is not determined beforehand. In short, even if the aim would be determined beforehand, its manners of being realized would not be predictable. In short, a certain endlessness is already implied by the claim that the living body is not a mechanism. The living being is not an inert mechanism because it is plastic within the limits set up by the pre-determined task.

What is then the difference between the inexhaustible reality of the perceived thing and the thing as a mere optimum? Merleau-Ponty's answer seems to be that the perceiving subject *acknowledges* or *is aware of* an insurmountable difference between the thing and its appearances. Moreover, the perceiving subject, so to say, tolerates this lag.

The thing appears to us as seen from *all* sides at once, in that no single appearances of it would exhaust it. There is a difference, whether or not the subject of experience is aware of the inexhaustibility. An aspect of the presence of the thing "in itself" is that the thing appears as autonomous, or "not interested" of the perceiving subject. Correlatively, the thing can appear as inhuman, hostile

[1037]PhP, 269–70/242.

and foreign.[1038] It is this appearance of hostility and autonomy that are markers of the reality of the thing. Another aspect of the sense of reality of the thing is that its partial appearances appear as equivalent with respect to each other. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "The 'real' is this milieu where each moment is not only inseparable from the others, but in some sense synonymous with them, where the 'appearances' signify each other in an absolute equivalence."[1039]

What does it mean that the appearances of the thing are "absolutely equivalent"? They are equivalent in the sense mentioned above, according to which an essential feature of the experience of the thing is that *no one of the appearances* completely fulfills the thing. There is an experienced, rudimentary sense of infinity in the perception of the inexhaustible thing. In this context, Merleau-Ponty takes up Cezanne's aim at succeeding in painting the appearance of the reality of the thing. This, however, requires the painter to take into account the inexhaustibility of the conditions that make up the presence of the object of perception: "Each fragment of a visible spectacle satisfies an infinite number of conditions, and it belongs to the real to contract an infinity of relations into each of its moments".[1040] Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty evokes the difference between the artificial and the real.[1041] That which is perceived as real appears as distinct from that which is fictional or artificial, insofar as it has the sense of an inexhaustible depth.[1042] We perceive the thing as a unity of an infinite exploration. Finally, the "infinite conditions", that are present in the perception of the transcendent thing also provide a foundation for the experience of the *materiality* of the appearances of the thing. The appearances, distinguished from the thing in perception, are present as "absolutely equivalent", and perceived matter, perceived materiality is given as "that which does not exhaust the thing".[1043]

The perceptual awareness of materiality correlates with a tolerance of *confused objects*. We do not ignore objects which have not determined sense, and these indeterminate objects do not (at least normally) arouse anxiety or catastrophic reactions of escape in us. The example of a confused object is a perception of "someone". Merleau-Ponty exemplifies this in the following way:

> "If I am waiting for someone at the door of a house on a poorly lit street, each person who comes through the door appears momentarily under a confused form. *Someone* is

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[1038]PhP, 372/336. Merleau-Ponty writes: "But the thing is unaware of us, it remains in itself. […] The thing is […] hostile and foreign, it is no longer our interlocutor, but rather a resolutely silent Other […] a Self that escapes us […]."
[1039]PhP, 373/337.
[1040]PhP, 373/338.
[1041]PhP, 373–4/338. Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the artificial and the real is reminiscent of Kant's distinction between artefacts and organisms. See subchapter 2.1.3, page 95, footnote 383. Here we can add that according to Kant, the notion of the organism's self-production is (by a transcendental necessity) "contradictory", ungraspable and "inscrutable" (Kant 1987, 249, 254). Here Kant's characterizations come close to Merleau-Ponty's notion of "inexhaustible depth" of that which appears as real.
[1042]PhP, 374/338.
[1043]PhP, 373–4/337–8.

> leaving the house, and I do not yet know if I can recognize this person as the one I am waiting for".[1044]

Perception of *someone* requires some kind of tolerance for a situation in which the subject cannot yet make sense of the specific type of what is perceived. A transcendent feature of perception is the tolerance for the appearance of materiality relatively independent of any particular intentional schema. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the transcendence of the perceived thing entails the sense of materiality, and gives rise to nonsensical, inhuman material nature.[1045] We can compare this to the subject of the instinct. The subject of the instinct is precisely not able to *wait for a friend*. The instinct, supposed that it was driven by a pre-given schema of an intercourse with a friend, is only triggered at the moment in which the friend is recognized. The unrecognizable figures who come out of the door, just would not suffice for an accomplishment of staying, waiting and anticipating. The instinctive subject would merely be driven by some other actual trigger, or then become confused by the situations. On this basis we can contend that, for an instinctive subject, there would be no sense of nor tolerance for any kind of amorphous materiality.

To conclude, there is a crucial difference between the thing as pre-determined by a pre-given optimum of perception, and the thing as "unaware of us". This latter appearance of the thing must be added to the inter-sensory unity of the thing, and it is included in the sense of the perceived thing as real or as transcendent.

Another aspect of the essential incompleteness of perception is that perceptions and their objects are not situated within a limited surrounding environment, but each perception, object and determined horizon appears within the indefinite horizon of a world. Merleau-Ponty is explicitly committed to the claim that, in human experience, the unique horizon of the world cannot be something acquired: the possibility of the world is "forever established by the first sensory experience, as narrow or imperfect as it might be",[1046] and "[t]he world is on the margins of the infant's first perception, like a still unknown though irrecusable presence".[1047] All experiences are accomplished within the unique horizon of the world. In this regard, the horizon of the world is like a sensory field. The possession of a field of vision, once it emerges, is given as permanent. We do not cease to possess a field of vision, even if there are moments in which our eyes are closed. After opening one's eyes, or after waking up, one does not have an experience of the visual field emerging for the first time. Instead, one has an experience of seeing again.[1048] The visible things take part in a continuity of a possession that reaches over the moments of break. A sensory field is a particular field within a

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[1044] PhP, 374/338.
[1045] PhP, 376/340. Merleau-Ponty writes: "What is given is not the thing alone, but also the experience of the thing, a transcendence in the wake of a subjectivity, a nature that shines forth through a history."
[1046] PhP, 379/343.
[1047] PhP, 378/342.
[1048] PhP, 379/343.

more extended whole of perceptual life. The horizon of the world, instead, is co-extensive with the whole experiential life.[1049] It is "set up" with the first experience, and it remains the permanent horizon of each and every experience. Merleau-Ponty claims that the world is at the horizon of dreams and of the most advanced states of mental disorders.[1050] The whole perceptual life is acted out within the horizon of the world.

Now, what do we have to think about the body schema, if the lived body is the correlate of the transcendence of the thing and the unique horizon of the world? Evidently, the body cannot be understood merely as a system geared for optimal perception. The body must also be understood as a unity of transcendence. Merleau-Ponty suggests that, in addition to the body as the body of sensation, of sensory experiences and of inter-sensory unity, there is an open and indefinite[1051] structure within which all bodily sub-structures are by necessity inscribed. According to Merleau-Ponty, the bodily condition is that the body itself is "a ready-made system of equivalences and of inter-sensory transpositions".[1052] The body schema as this general system is a correlate of what Merleau-Ponty calls natural world, and the system of body and world provides a "universal arrangement" of all types of perceptual unfolding,[1053] or is the place of "all possible themes and styles".[1054] If the body schema was conceived merely as a "synergic system" that would delimit the possible configurations according to the pregiven value of an optimal perception, the particular acts would only have a "literal", non-figurative sense. Instead, the bodily expressions have a figurative sense, insofar as they are inserted within the general symbolic matrix of the body, in which their possible associations are undefined and unlimited. What shows that one's own body is experienced as an inexhaustible system? I will demonstrate this by showing an example of the bodily experience of space as a system of equivalent positions.

When we examined Schneider's case in chapter 4, we attributed the transcendent, projective capacity to a capacity of transposition of acquired skills. A skill is obtained as a particular way of satisfying an aim. A specific movement of the hand, for instance, is included in the intentional accomplishment of successfully grasping an object. The question is whether the physiognomy of the movement can be detached from the urgent context of satisfying the need to grasp. What makes it possible that the same movement can be performed in other situations, and that the same kind of movement can be performed by other parts of the body for some other purposes? Moreover, what makes it possible to renew

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[1049]Merleau-Ponty writes: "one can conceive of a subject without an auditory field, but not of a subject without a world". PhP, 379/343. In this context Merleau-Ponty refers to Edith Stein's reflection (in her work on phenomenological grounding of psychology) on the unity of the temporal stream of experience and the unities of sensory fields such as the sense of hearing. Stein 1922, §2, 10–12.

[1050]PhP, 339/306. According to Merleau-Ponty "[…] the most advanced states of melancholy, where the patient settles into death and, so to speak, makes it his home, still make use of the structures of being in the world in order to do so [...]".

[1051]PhP, 270/242.

[1052]PhP, 271/244. See also PhP, 165–6/142–3.

[1053]PhP, 341.

[1054]PhP, 341, 476.

the initial schema of the movement of grasping in unforeseeable situations? It appeared that these capacities require skill transposition. For instance, as Mooney writes:

> "Accessing skill transpositions virtually opens up a life of fantasy and playfulness, not just one that surmounts obstacles to practical tasks. We can prefigure immediate outcomes that are never actualized, since they are not of their nature urgent or important."[1055]

Mooney points out that Merleau-Ponty does not apply the notion of transposition capacity to Schneider's case, even if it would have been fruitful.[1056] Merleau-Ponty takes up the theme on another occasion. However, the aim is basically the same, which is to demonstrate that bodily transcendence is a fundamental feature of human experience. He refers to a study of patients who are not able to correctly imitate the movements of the person standing in front of them.[1057] When the doctor raises his right hand, the patient raises their left hand. The patient imitates the movements correctly only if the doctor stands beside them, or if they can follow the other's movements from the mirror. According to Merleau-Ponty, the problem is that the parts of the body are present for the patient in their "absolute locations", and they are not "inserted in any system of correspondences".[1058] Normally, we are able to immediately transpose the locations of the body parts, in that the hand we see on the left side of the body of the other person standing in front of us, is the right hand for him. What appears as the left side from our point of view, appears as the right side from the perspective of the other. Accordingly, the motor tasks are immediately transposable, in that we are immediately able to imitate the other's movements as they are located for them.

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the fact that the patient's problem is not a problem of intelligence.[1059] Instead, it is a problem of a primary motor function. As Grünbaum, cited by Merleau-Ponty, writes, what is altered is the "the capacity for motor differentiation of the dynamic body schema".[1060] In the transposition the actually felt locations of the parts of the body appear within an enlarged horizon. The "left hand", as it appears to us, is not limited to its actual location. There is a primary function, which makes it possible that our body is not only present in the posture and position it occupies at the moment. Besides, the body is inserted within a spatiality of "transpositions, equivalents and identifications".[1061]

We can apply the capacity of transposition, and instead of body parts, think about partial motor physiognomies and tasks of the body. In the successful imitation of the opposite person's limb movements, one must be able to stretch out

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[1055]Mooney 2011, 376.
[1056]Mooney 2011, 377.
[1057]PhP, 164–6/141–2. Merleau-Ponty refers to a study conducted by A. Grünbaum, "Aphasie und Motorik", *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 130 (1930).
[1058]PhP, 165/142.
[1059]PhP, 165/142. According to the study, the patients are able to understand the verbal orders and the directions. Instead, they are not able to apply and to adjust "the objective definition to their own body".
[1060]PhP, 166/143.
[1061]PhP, 166/143.

beyond the actual felt locations of one's own limbs. Our actual hand, for instance, cannot be experienced at two different places simultaneously. Thus, the transposition requires that the hand is coordinated in relation to a non-simultaneously-present location. The simultaneous non-present location of one's own hand appears in the manner of "as if". It is "as if" one's hand appeared in such a manner, if it was experienced from another point of view. Similarly, the physiognomy of the movement of the hand is detached from the actual movement and the actual task, being inserted into a field of non-actual potentialities. This is only possible, if the experiencing subject is not fully or totally engaged in the actual task. Only if an affective, motor and sensible physiognomy is detached from its limited field and inserted in a system of equivalences can it be associated with and fused with other physiognomies.

Merleau-Ponty applies the notion of the symbolic system of the body to Husserl's conception of anonymous, passive association. As we remember, the example that Merleau-Ponty borrows from Husserl in *The Structure of Behavior*, is concerned with the active and passive level of language. There is a difference between linguistic communication and an associative play with already acquired words. Accordingly, acquired gestures of the body can be expressive of actual intentional acts, but we can also freely play with the acquired bodily gestures. Furthermore, even when we do not play with the gestures, or accomplish the intentional acts related to them, the retained gestures become passively associated to other gestures, and they function as a motivating force for associations in the passive background of experience, just like words have their anonymous, passive life, too. The bodily movement of swallowing, just as much as the word "snow", have their own passive life of associations. Swallowing might originally be related to a satisfaction of the need to nourish oneself. However, once the gesture is accomplished, it is detached from its initial context and inserted within "an open system of an infinity of equivalent positions in different orientations".[1062] In other words, the scope of the possible associations of this particular pattern of movement is endless, and not limited to any particular use. Consequently, the gesture of swallowing can become expressive of whatever it is suitable to, according to its specific pattern. The structure related to swallowing becomes a unifying symbol for different kinds of intentional acts. Here we can take up again the case of the young woman who loses her speech. Merleau-Ponty shows that swallowing can be used as a general clue for explicating the woman's symptoms. The sensitivity of the mouth happens to have a privileged role in the individual's life. The symptoms, then, are unified around the mouth: swallowing and assimilation, speech and communication. Speech is figurative of communal existence, and insofar as the girl desperately "wants" to escape from the social, this becomes expressed by the losing of the speech.[1063] Swallowing, on the other hand, symbolizes in general all kinds of intentional lived experiences of assimilation. The woman is not able to come to terms with (that is, to "swallow") the prohibition to see her beloved, and this motivates an inability to swallow food.

[1062]PhP, 165/142.
[1063]PhP, 187/163.

An original need related to hunger finds its satisfaction in the movements of the mouth (chewing and swallowing that particularize eating as the point of satisfaction of hunger). Mouth has also the central role in the development of speech. However, eating and speaking are not isolated bodily phenomena. Through eating and speaking, mouth becomes figurative of all kinds of relations of assimilation, and of all kinds of relations to the others, notwithstanding the other possible significances. Speaking has a symbolic function for sociality, but if it symbolizes the relation to the others, this symbolic relation is a relation of an incarnate significance. To speak *is* to keep up one's social relations. Merleau-Ponty claims that the symbolism of the expressive body makes possible an existential analysis that brings forth relations of figurative meanings within the individual's life. A refusal of sociality, as in the case of the aphonic girl,[1064] can motivate a loss of speech, and the refusal "to swallow" the prohibition that is imposed by the girl's mother can motivate an inability to swallow food, insofar as accidental encounters in the life history of the individual have given rise to the mouth as a preferred site for expressing escape from an unbearable situation.[1065]

In short, Merleau-Ponty's claim is that the unity of the body as an open system of equivalents is a pre-personal and incoercible matter. Thereby we can understand what he means as he writes:

> "[...] it is the definition of the human body to appropriate, in an indefinite series of discontinuous acts, meaningful cores that transcend and transfigure its natural powers".[1066]

## 7.5 Connection and the Connecting

I have distinguished in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of sense perception four layers of experience: the impressional unity of sensation, the unity of a sensory experience, the inter-sensory unity and the transcendent unity of the perceived thing.

The layers of sensation and sensory experience characterize the side of sensing, which is limited, partial and divergent. The layers of inter-sensory and the figurative perception characterize sensing as a communicative unity, as situated within an unlimited field of transpositions, and as an institution of transcendence. To be sure, both of these aspects – which could also be named the "biological" and "human" aspect of existence – issue from the structure of the body itself, and they are phenomena of original passivity. The role of the lower-level sensations and sensory experiences with respect to the inter-sensory and transcendent unity of the thing remains to be explicated.

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[1064]See subchapter 6.5.

[1065]Merleau-Ponty explains that the expressions of an unbearable situation may motivate different reactions, depending on the life histories of the subjects. Thus, the fact that loss of speech was the preferred reaction in the case of Binswanger's patient, is clarified, when it is revealed that in her life there were a series of incidents, in which the "particular sensitivity of mouth and throat" played a central role (PhP, 187–8/163).

[1066]PhP, 226/199.

The impressional sensations and sensory experiences are necessary for the inter-sensory and the transcendent perceptual unity in two manners. *First*, Merleau-Ponty claims that they in part constitute the thickness, opacity and depth of the perceived thing. Without the instinctive sensing, the thing would lack its thingness. *Second*, when the unity of the body is characterized as a temporal process, biological existence appears as the anterior, initial phase, from which the body gathers together and constitutes the unity of perception. Natural time is the initial temporal phase in the temporal order of phases of unification.

### 7.5.1 The Example

It is worth recalling that Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between a possession of a capacity, and an actual accomplishment of a capacity. Now, the perception of the transcendent and inter-sensory unity as a thing is also an accomplishment of a capacity. If our conscious life is conceived as a temporal stream, it appears that these perceptual accomplishments come and go within the stream. Merleau-Ponty characterizes the unity of sensory experiences as an incessant process of "integration of the senses into a single knowing organism".[1067] Consequently, a question arises that concerns the emergence of a singular perceptual accomplishment. How does the synthesis of perception occur? Does it consist of different temporal phases? What is the initial state prior to the very occurrence of the synthesis? What is the transition from a possession of the capacity of perceptual unity to the accomplishment of it? Does the possession before the accomplishment have the same sense than after the accomplishment?

Perception in which the inter-sensory unity and the depth are constituted is accomplished by a process of synthesis. The inter-sensory synthesis that occurs in the act of perceiving a unitary object is the end of a process of gathering together. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the paradigmatic example for the phenomenon of synthesis of perception is the process in which a unitary vision of a thing emerges from the visual experience of a double image. We have already mentioned this when we dealt with the question of the emergence of a new sense field. Let us now elaborate this famous example a bit more.

For instance, when one lifts one's finger near to one's eyes and focuses on a point at a distance, two images of the finger appear. When one brings the focus on the finger, suddenly the visual images disappear and merge into a unitary vision of the finger. Merleau-Ponty points out characteristic features of the synthesis, both with respect to what appears before the accomplishment of the unity, and after it. For him, the double images exemplify a disequilibrium of the sensory experiences. The disparate monocular images are correlated with eye-movements that do not converge,[1068] and they "wander vaguely *in front* of the things, they have no place in the world".[1069] The synthesis of the images that emerges at

[1067]PhP, 270/243.
[1068]PhP, 267/240.
[1069]PhP, 269/242.

the end of the process of focusing is correlated with the emerging synergy of the eyes, in which they are used "as a single organ by a unique gaze".[1070]

It is evident that, in the example, the synthesis occurs passively. It is ruled out that the synthesis could be attained, for instance, by comparing the two images and finding similarities between them.[1071] We can reflect on the images of the double vision, and, indeed, compare them. The images have the same colors, shapes and sizes of objects, and they are located at the same distance. Moreover, my finger appears in both of them. But as I accomplish this comparison, nothing happens. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "the unity of the object keeps us waiting, right up until the moment when the focusing conjures [the disparate images] away".[1072]

Moreover, as we contended above, the synthesis is not motivated by the bodily movement alone: it is as much an experienced disequilibrium of the images, as a felt tension in the body.

The synthesis of vision functions as an example of experiential syntheses more generally. It consists of a preceding phase of disequilibrium and the phase of the accomplishment of the synthesis, which appears at the same time as a fulfillment and a "satisfaction" of the preceding tension. The preceding phase can be characterized as the presence of an atmosphere, which we saw is the "poorly formulated question". A possession whose affective force intensifies, and which is about to be accomplished, reminds of itself as a heightened tension, as an atmosphere that draws towards a response. The response, then, is a gathering together of the body, which allows one to engage in the accomplishment in question. The synthesis of vision also bears the characteristics of syntheses at different levels. It characterizes a unification of monocular visual images into one object, as well as the unification of sensory experiences into one inter-sensory unity and transcendent object.[1073]

### 7.5.2 A Question concerning Thickness and Depth

Let us now focus on Merleau-Ponty's claim that the limited and partial sensing is a necessary part of our experience of opacity, thickness and depth. First of all, he associates the experience of opacity or thickness with the passivity of the perceptual synthesis. This is part of his critique of the intellectualist presupposition that every synthesis requires an active ego that operates the synthesis. Namely, an intellectualist claim is that an embodied experiencing would lack the awareness of the connecting. We can only articulate any synthesis when we reflect on the object or the experiencing itself. The only synthesis that we can be aware of, directly and originally, is the synthesis of reflective thinking. This is a synthesis that operates on thematic objects. For instance, I can form a group of the objects

[1070]PhP, 269/241.
[1071]PhP, 266/239–40.
[1072]PhP, 266/240.
[1073]PhP, 270/243.

I thematically see around me (my body, a coffee cup, a lamp, a table), and this is one way in which a connection between objects is made. Here I am aware of myself as the connecting subject. Apart from this, there is no awareness of synthesis. There is no evidence of a passive synthesis. Contrary to this, Merleau-Ponty claims that a passive synthesis can be attested as a necessary condition for givenness of the thing as independent of the appearances of it for the experiencing subject. If we suppose that the synthesis of perception would be an active synthesis, it would appear as produced by the subject of experience in question, just as much as I am aware that when I explicitly mention that the coffee cup is white, this proposition does not occur spontaneously in the world, but is something dependent on my act of explication of the characteristics of the cup. Accordingly, everything would appear as "mine":

> "my consciousness would penetrate the world all the way to its most secret articulations, intentionality would transport us to the heart of the object […] the perceived would not have the thickness of a present".[1074]

Consequently, the synthesis of perception must appear within the sphere of original passivity. It must not be based on a preceding act, and not be conceived as a phenomenon of secondary passivity, because there is in principle no original constitutive synthesis of an active subject. Thus, perception is, by necessity, a phenomenon of original passivity:

> "In perception […] we merge with this body that knows more than we do about the world, about motives, and about the means available for accomplishing the synthesis".[1075]

To be exact, however, this does not respond to our question that concerns the constitutive significance of the sensation and the sensory experiencing with regard to the synthesis of perception. To be sure, the only requirement is that the synthesis of perception is based on a power of the body – an intentional schema that emerges spontaneously from the body – that it is "a latent knowledge that our gaze uses".[1076] But we have seen that this knowledge must not be the knowledge of the visual because the visual field is partial. It is not a question of a desire to see more or to immerse in seeing, but a tendency oriented towards the inter-sensory unity of the perceived object. If we stick to the question concerning the constitutive significance of sensation and sensory experiencing, however, we have to ask, what would be the inter-sensory unity and the unity of a transcendent thing without the limited sensations and sense experiences? It would mean that at the moment of accomplishment of the unity, the divergence of the sense fields and the limitedness of the impressional sensation, would disappear. We have to look at Merleau-Ponty's characterization of perceptual depth and opacity in order to see whether this is a feasible way of accounting for perception.

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[1074]PhP, 275/247.
[1075]PhP, 275–6/248.
[1076]PhP, 275/247.

In fact, the example of the transition to binocular vision is significant, also for the reason that it provides an example of how the depth of the thing is experienced. The visual field correlative to the double vision appears as floating "in front" of things, having "no place in the world". The emergence of the unitary vision and the perceptual synergy of the body is at the same time a progressing into perception of the thing itself in its "carnal presence", in its "ipseity" or "aseity".[1077] To be sure, this determination is established only when the synergy is established. At the moment of the emergence of the double vision, a relation of depth appears, namely, an awareness of a distance between the sensible appearances and the thing itself. Now, the preceding tension and tendency becomes determined with respect to the result: the experience of depth and opacity of the unitary thing teaches us that which is lacking in the preceding disequilibrium. The preceding "monocular images" appear as "dependent" on me or in my possession, like phantoms, contrary to the perceived thing that appears as out there. The tension and the tendency to synergy is, at the same time, a preparation of depth. However, the unitary vision does not appear as composed of disparate visual fields, nor the inter-sensory unity as composed of distinct senses. The disparate visual fields of the two eyes appear as disparate only to the extent that no depth of the object appears. Accordingly, we might say that the transcendent object appears only to the extent that the experiencing stretches over the impressional present. Why, then, should we think that these lower-level experiences would be constitutive parts of the higher-level unity?

The obvious answer is that if there were no divergent fields of senses and the limited field of the impressional present, there would be no *senses* that communicate or an *actuality* endowed with a radiation towards past and future. Furthermore, there would be no depth in the sense of a "beyond", since there would be nothing that was transcended.[1078] Here we encounter a complex logic, in which the relation between the lower-level and the higher-level unity appears as reciprocal, if not symmetrical. Even if Merleau-Ponty does not clearly bring forth this

[1077]PhP, 269–70/242.

[1078]To be sure, here we touch the center of disagreement between Merleau-Ponty and the philosopher of biology Raymond Ruyer, who criticizes Merleau-Ponty's notion of the organism as a perceived whole (Ruyer 1952, 215). Ruyer claims in his original, vitalist account of life that the self-organizing core of organic life is to be found in an immanent self-consciousness, or of being aware of itself in an "absolute glance" (*survol absolu*). In Ruyer's account that he presents in the book *Neo-Finalisme*, living beings in their self-producing capacity are primordially "absolute surfaces", and this primary field of life is "conscious of itself" in the mode of absolute glance. The self-consciousness as absolute glance can be approached by conceiving of a visual field, from which objects of perception and the dimension of depth are excluded by abstraction. The abstracted visual field provides an example of a living being as a form, where "organization and multiple relations are immediately given in an absolute unity which is not a fusion or confusion" (Ruyer 1952, 99). Merleau-Ponty could not respond to Ruyer's account at the time of his early work, insofar as Ruyer's work was published in 1952. However, he attempted to provide an alternative to Ruyer's account from the perspective of a philosophy of perception. This attempt is sketched out in the course notes on institution and passivity (IP, 168–9). There Merleau-Ponty criticizes Ruyer for ignoring the depth of perception and of postulating the absolute surface of the living form as something existing "in itself".

claim in the chapter "Sensing", we can apply his argument here concerning instinctive affectivity. Without an irreducible divergence of sense fields, the talk about different senses or about something that would transcend a limited sensory field would be insignificant when we characterize the unity of perception. Basically, the inter-sensory unity of the object might be constituted, even if one would possess only one sense. However, it would be required that this one sense was provided with an awareness of a beyond. Finally, just as the monocular images have the meaning of "floating in front of the world", the sense fields have the meaning of being "limited" only with respect to the inter-sensory unity of depth. There is no sense of limitation without the higher-level field, with respect to which the limited fields appear as *parts*.[1079] There is no divergence of multiple fields, if there is no comprehensive horizon within which the fields appear as divergent. We have to distinguish between dispersion and divergence: the dispersed experiences appear within a unitary temporal stream, but they do not appear as related with each other with respect to their specific contents, insofar as the contents of the one experience are not retained at the moment in which the other experience becomes actual. The divergent experiences, instead, belong to divergent fields but can be related with respect to their content. But even if the divergent partial fields can have a sense of partiality only within the unity, the unity also requires partiality, insofar as it is determined as a unity that is beyond the partial, and a unity that appears within an irreducible opacity or thickness. If the perceived thing is inexhaustible, it requires the appearances that do not exhaust it, and if the subject of perception is transcendent in the sense of an escape, it needs that which it escapes from.[1080]

### 7.5.3 The Initial Phase of the Temporal Process of the Synthesis

Lastly, I will explicate how biological existence functions as the initial phase, the dispersed temporal stream of natural time, from which the synthesis of perception is carried out. Here we will focus on Merleau-Ponty's account of the temporal phases of the synthesis of perception in the end of the chapter "Sensing".[1081]

Merleau-Ponty goes through the sequence of the phases of the synthesis of perception as he aims to answer the question, "what is the connected without the connecting [subject]".[1082] This question follows on from the idea of passive synthesis, which is a synthesis that is not provided with a reflective self-awareness of the subject of synthesis. The question is, how is it possible to be retrospectively

[1079]PhP, 250/224. Merleau-Ponty writes: "When I see an object, I always feel that there is still some being beyond what I currently see […] and not merely more of a sensible being, but moreover a depth of the object that no sensory withdrawal will every fully exhaust."
[1080]Here we approach a transitive logic: for instance, the entirety of the world does not have a determined content. Instead, it is the movement of disclosure of a determined world as partial and as a pointing out to a beyond.
[1081]PhP, 275–8/248–250.
[1082]PhP, 276/248.

aware of a synthesis? How is it possible that a synthesis is accomplished before it is present for anyone?[1083]

Let us consider the example of synergy of the eyes again. Before the synergy, there is strictly speaking no appearance of synergy at all but a feeling of disequilibrium. For the subject who has already habituated to vision, the disequilibrium is merely a passing moment, already determined by the resulting synergy of the eyes. But, as we saw, for an operated formerly blind person the disequilibrium is spontaneous, and it emerges for the first time and is not yet determined by its result. Before the disequilibrium there is a preceding state in which even the atmosphere of tension does not appear. We can recall that for the operated, formerly blind person, the state of transition, which can be characterized as an appearance of a "poorly formulated question", must be distinguished from the preceding blindness in which there is no question at all, or in which the question, received from the other, seeing subjects, remains empty. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes four phases in the accomplishment of connecting: initial non-ordered state, first attack, tension and unity.

The "first attack" here can be thought as the spontaneous emergence of the instinctive drive, namely, of a new atmosphere. It is preceded by an initial non-ordered experience, in which there is even no tension or tendency. Merleau-Ponty exemplifies this with how everything looks just after opening one's eyes: a flood of colors and "confused reflections"[1084] which is not yet "a spectacle of anything".[1085] The experience of a flood of sensations is not easy to conceive with normal vision, but it might be more easy to imagine as the initial state of anomaly, which is described in the case of the operated blind person. However, it can also be compared to the experience of apprehending a rhythm retroactively. At first, I hear a confused, non-organized sequence of hits: we do not figure out what the sequenced patterns of the hits are, but suddenly a particular emphasis of an accent functions in a stimulating manner, and establishes a new tension in the rhythm. This then gives a new determination to the already heard sound. In any case, any emergence of a new order is preceded by an experience which still lacks this order.

The second phase is the phase of tension established by the first attack. The first attack is not yet the establishment of the order. Instead, it is a sudden emergence of an atmosphere, or of the "poorly formulated question". We might conceive it as the *contrast* that first awakens one for the affective propagation of a sense, such as the specific accent that is then heard as the accent of the rhythm. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

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[1083]PhP, 276/248. I am not sure, whether the problem is basically the same as that which Husserl encounters in his analysis of passivity. It seems that a retrospective reflective awareness of a prior synthesis does not posit an essential problem of the limits of phenomenological methodology in Husserl's eyes. See for instance Hua4, 107–8/114–115.
[1084]PhP, 276/248.
[1085]PhP, 276/248.

> "Suddenly I focus upon the table, which is not yet there; I look into the distance although there is still no depth; my body centers upon an object that is still virtual and maneuvers its sensitive surfaces so as to make the object actual".[1086]

Through the first attack, a possession enters the scene, but still prior the accomplishment of the act that is indicated (blindly or in a more determined manner) by the possession. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the body sketches out the form of the possession as an atmospheric urge and feeling. It is a tension felt in the body and sensed as an enticement that is as yet without satisfaction in the accomplishment of the unity that the tension is oriented to. It is also an establishment of a new temporal order. The newly established sense becomes propagated in the past and in the future. Merleau-Ponty's characterization here is reminiscent of the phenomenon of affective propagation that we dealt with above.[1087] On the one hand, that which was sensed as non-ordered now becomes determined with regard to the disequilibrium: as it now has a place in an emerging order, it has "a place in the world".[1088] On the other hand, the atmospheric experience is oriented towards the solution of the disequilibrium. Merleau-Ponty describes this as a "retreat" into the near future.

Finally, the accomplishment of seeing an object again radiates to the future and to the past. Now, the appearances of the object become anticipated. But *also* the preceding temporal phases are from now on retroactively given as phases that preceded and led to this act of looking. The accomplishment of seeing becomes presented as "anterior of its appearance" or as the "motivator" of the whole process.[1089] In other words, the unity of perception is a satisfaction that retroactively gives a new sense to the earlier, still-unsatisfied experience: it appears as an accomplishment of focusing. At the moment of satisfaction, the preceding tendency is still retained, and it becomes identified in a propagating backward-radiation as the path leading to the act of unity.

However, Merleau-Ponty contends that, in spite of the retrospective "illusion", initially the unity of perception is accomplished in the original passivity on the basis of the spontaneous intentional schemata of the body. Initially there is no path as yet, but rather a blind tendency or a poorly formulated question. At the rock bottom of experience, the body, in the form of the instinctive intentional schemata, initiates the syntheses, or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, the body "secretes" time.[1090]

The claim that the body creates time might suggest that the body is somehow outside of time:

> "[the body] secretes time, or rather it becomes that place in nature where for the first time events, rather than pushing each other into being, project a double horizon of the past and future around the present and acquire an historical orientation".[1091]

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[1086]PhP, 276/248.
[1087]See chapter 6.
[1088]PhP, 276/248.
[1089]PhP, 277/249.
[1090]PhP, 277/249.
[1091]PhP, 277/249.

Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty does not mean that the body would be an ultra-temporal entity. Instead, the emerging syntheses of the body are situated within a temporal flow: ultimately all syntheses occur within a temporal flow which, as we have seen, is a process of self-affection of temporality. Thus, as Merleau-Ponty characterizes the emergence of the temporal synthesis, he does not attempt to describe a transition from a being outside of time to a being in time. Instead, it is a question of a formation of cohesion within a temporal flow. In particular, it is a transition from the pure flow or pure succession without appearance of difference in contents, to an ordered flow. It is the transition from the natural, self-perpetuating time to a historical, developing time.

The natural time is the layer of the sequentiality of the temporal flow in which each present experience is incessantly pushed into the past by a new, subsequent experience. Here we see yet another reason why the limited sensing or sensation acts as the condition of perceptual unity: the perceptual unity, too, is subject to the flowing of the flow. According to Merleau-Ponty, each perceptual synthesis appears ultimately as an accomplishment that becomes present, and which is by necessity pushed into the past by another present. The dispersion of the sequence of presents is another expression for the haecceity or singularity of the perceptual acts. If there was no limitedness in the sense of dispersion of the impressional presents, the synthesis as a re-production and retaining of the past would not make sense. The dispersion is another expression for the characterization, according to which each act becomes taken up by a following act, or for the fact that "every synthesis is simultaneously taken apart and remade by time".[1092] According to Merleau-Ponty, the ultimate context within which the synthesis of perception can be thought is the dialectic of constituting and constituted time.[1093] In this dialectic of the flowing presents, in which each present pushes the former present to the past. Each new act has the potentiality to put the old act in question, each new engagement can put the former engagement into oblivion. However, the new present also has a potentiality of conserving, repeating and confirming the former present in the form of synthesis of association.

Finally, we have to consider the following problem. If natural, dispersed time is at the foundation of perceptual synthesis, does this mean positing a pure, abstract form of time at the basis of perception? Namely, natural time appears as a pure succession or the pure flow bereft of any content. I have been suggesting in this study that natural time, as it is conceived by Merleau-Ponty, is not such a pure form, but a dispersed time at an instinctual capacity-level. At this level we can conceive of constantly emerging intentional schemata, or offers that arise spontaneously. However, the synthetic accomplishments of these offers remain dispersed. In this case there would be abstraction from retention and protention and abstraction from the associations between sensed contents. But what if these associations occurred within a limited sphere of the impressional present? It would follow that they would not be retained beyond the context of the actual.

[1092]PhP, 278/250.
[1093]PhP, 278/250.

In this case, the experience at the level of natural time is both synthetic and dispersed. The subject, at this level, is almost fully engaged in the current accomplishment or tension, and when the accomplishment becomes pushed into the past by a new accomplishment, nothing is retained of it. There is no contradiction in the idea that a temporal flow that appears as cyclical and repetitive consists of the appearance of dispersed contents of experience. But this is exactly what Merleau-Ponty suggests, as he characterizes the sensation as a communion, and the sensory experience as exercising a skill, but at a limited level.

# CONCLUSION

The main topic of this work has been the concept of *biological existence* in Merleau-Ponty's early philosophical project of phenomenology of perception. In this concluding section, I will do two things: first, I will summarize the main arguments and results of my thesis, and second, I will also formulate some new research questions which my thesis brings up and which I leave to subsequent studies for investigation.

The two central questions that I presented in the Introduction of the work were the following: (1) Does Merleau-Ponty's account of biological existence meet the methodological demands of his phenomenological approach? (2) What are the concepts and discoveries that properly belong to his transcendental phenomenological theory of biological existence?

The main argument of this work gives reasons for the claim that Merleau-Ponty's account of biological existence is an essential part of his early project of phenomenology of perception. At the same time, this amounts to giving a detailed account of Merleau-Ponty's theory of biological existence. Let us look through this argument.

First, I have argued that Merleau-Ponty's analysis of instinctive behavior is an essential part of the phenomenological analysis of biological existence: the analysis of instinctive behavior gives us leading clues for a further analysis of the primitive intentional lived experiencing denoted by biological existence.

I have shown that Merleau-Ponty's analysis of syncretic behavior in *The Structure of Behavior* partly motivates his thinking of biological existence. Syncretic behavior, exemplified by the attacking behavior of a spider, is bound by a pre-given schema of action which delimits the sign stimuli that will trigger the action. On the one hand, the pre-given schema is determined by the structure of the instinctive subject's body. I argued that Keeping is right to claim that, in Merleau-Ponty's account, instincts are embodied meanings, which does not mean that they would be innate. *Second*, syncretic behavior has a specific relation of boundedness to its intentional schema, insofar as it operates at a lower level of capacity.

I then showed, by providing an analysis of biological existence in *Phenomenology of Perception*, that, according to Merleau-Ponty, this also holds true for the instinctive behaviors of human beings, their bodies. The instinctive behavior is *blind* with regard to its object – it remains bound to *the generality of the intentional schema*, and it has a non-dynamic, *repetitive* and *cyclical* character. These characteristics of instinctive behavior provide leading clues for a further analysis: they are accessible by an eidetic analysis of the instinctive experiencing, and fruitfully so, that is, by the imaginative modification of a specific primitive intentionality of biological existence.

An important premise that shows the experiential aspect of biological existence is that Merleau-Ponty characterizes biological existence as having a specific kind of temporal aspect, that which he calls ”natural time”. I have explored the connection between bodily functions and natural time. Natural time is a dispersed unity of temporality. I have fleshed out the specific characteristics of natural time by contrasting it with the time of habit-acquisition, which is the power behind the life history of the individual subject. I argued that Merleau-Ponty's thinking of natural time agrees with Husserl's thinking of consciousness as reduced to an “impressional present”. The natural dispersed time characterizes experiencing at a level in which non-intuitive past and future contents are not retained. In other words, an experiencing is reduced to the impressional present if its retentional expanse is diminished. If the instinctive experiencing is a consciousness reduced to the level of the impressional present, it seems to lack reproductive associations and, accordingly, also the sense of a self-identical object.

The experiential state of being “bound to actuality” is further illuminated by the study of the Schneider's case and pathological motor intentionality. In Merleau-Ponty's analysis, Schneider's case demonstrates that motor intentionality is in part determined by the scope of affection and the extension of a horizonal awareness. Schneider cannot perform movements that require an unthematic bodily awareness of action opportunities which lie beyond the urgent situation, the familiar context, or the actual. In particular, it occurred that this is manifest in his incapacity to transpose the pre-given motor schemata. In Schneider's case, the power typical of the acquisition of motor habits is diminished: he cannot improvise with, abbreviate or reconfigure movements in ways that require surpassing actual and familiar contexts. As we emphasized, this does not entail that Schneider's motor intentionality would not be flexible within the confines of the actual or the familiar context.

Thus I have argued that, in the study of instinctive behavior and pathological motor intentionality, *two aspects of biological existence* are brought into relief: (i) instinctive intentionality is an intentionality bound to a pre-given guiding schema insofar as it operates with a limited scope of affection, and (ii) instinctive intentionality ultimately refers to the bodily infrastructure that constitutes and delimits instinctive schemata.

The study of affection and affective intentionality further clarified the structure of instinctive experience. In particular, a pre-objective experience, that is, an intentionality which is not aware of an object in the proper sense, was explicated

as a form of atmospheric intentionality. Atmospheric intentionality in this case characterizes an intentionality oriented towards an intentionally ambiguous or undifferentiated field. The awareness of the field by necessity grounds the intentional experience directed at objects in the field. The fields themselves can be delimited and distinguished from each other: thus, the field of vision differs from the field of audition, and from the field of sexuality. According to Merleau-Ponty, the instinctive awareness is initially an awareness of an intentionally ambiguous or undifferentiated field. The affective life of a subject develops when the subject encounters specific objects. The encounters with objects of satisfaction or dissatisfaction determine and shape the initially ambiguous and indeterminate affects. However, here we can distinguish between two levels of affectivity. It turned out that an encounter with a satisfying object, or the moment of "focused enjoyment", can reconstitute the pre-given schema and establish a new sense, such as happens in habit-acquisition, only if the preceding experience is retained at the moment of satisfaction. This, in turn, requires a certain expanse of the scope of affection. Instinctive experiencing, insofar as it operates with a diminished scope of affection, can be characterized as an experiencing that is blindly guided by an atmosphere, or as a "poorly formulated question", as Merleau-Ponty puts it in metaphorical terms. However, the answer to such a question does not particularize or determine the schema of the instinct. Thus, instinctive affectivity remains at a level of dispersed natural time.

I also emphasized that, among the instinctive schemata that emerge spontaneously in the body, we must distinguish and recognize the specificity of the drive for prominence, which is a drive for "objectification". Without such an instinct, the experience would lack all dynamic character. Matt Bower explicates this drive by the terms of curiosity. In Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception,* such a drive is identified by his characterizations of the *movement of existence* or the striving toward the world.[1094]

Finally, I applied the notion of instinctive experiencing in the analysis of Merleau-Ponty's study of sensibility. Wakeful perceptual experiencing includes two simultaneous layers of intentionality: (a) a sensation and sensory intentionality operating in a limited manner, and (b) perception operating at a higher level of perceptual unity and of accomplished transcendence.

The main argument of the work is justified on these bases. It should be clear that when Merleau-Ponty discusses biological existence and its relation to perception, he does not mean the body as a scientific object, or perceptual relations as relations between perception understood as a mental process and the body understood as a physiological organism. In spite of the somewhat unfortunate term "biological", Merleau-Ponty aims at delimiting a primitive intentionality that has a place in his account of the system of constitution. According to Merleau-Ponty, perceptual experiencing, when it is described from within, as lived and experienced, is inconceivable without an instinctive basis. Thus, in my study

[1094]PhP, 92/80. For instance, Merleau-Ponty writes of the animal existence: "The animal simply continues to exist in the same world and carries itself toward this world with all of its powers."

I have argued for an affirmative answer to the first question that I posited in the beginning: Merleau-Ponty's theory of biological existence meets the demands of his phenomenological approach and does not compromise it. In my study I have also given a detailed account of biological existence, with respect to both its behavioral and experiential side.

Let us add here some further concluding explications. I have argued that Merleau-Ponty does not propose any radical methodological reform of the classical phenomenology of Husserl in order to analyze biological existence. Biological existence, like the pre-personal phenomena of original passivity, cannot be directly accessed or described. We have seen that both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty depend on systematic analyses, descriptive comparisons and imaginative modifications of experience in order to approach its deepest levels. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty's method does not differ essentially from Husserl's eidetic analysis. The different levels of experiencing are brought forth when we vary a particular kind of intentional lived experience in free phantasy. What is found in eidetic variation is confirmed in intuition. Husserl does not deny that sources such as history, art and poetry could not provide a fruitful basis for imagination; on the contrary, he argues that they are able to broaden the limits of the researcher's imagination. In Merleau-Ponty's case, the sciences of behavior serve as sources that give landmarks for eidetic variation.

Biological existence comes to be thought of on the basis of instinctive behavior. Instinctive behavior helps Merleau-Ponty vary the experience with respect to its general scope of affection. A central insight occurs when the scope of experiencing is diminished, and the pre-given implicit intentional horizon shaped by the subject's acquired skills, habits etc. does not vanish. Instead, the experiential relation to the already acquired or pre-given possessions is altered.

In particular, instinctive experiencing accounts for the life which is "cyclical" or "self-enclosed". However, instinctive experiencing is not self-enclosed in the sense of being non-intentional. Furthermore, as we have seen, it is not an affectively idle or objectively unproductive life. Instinctive experiencing is enticed by an "object", even if this is not a proper self-identical object. Instead, the "object" of instinctive experience is given as a stimulating and guiding atmosphere. Furthermore, if instinctive experiencing is thought of as limited to the field of the impressional present, it then becomes possible to conceive of a variety of associative awakenings and passive syntheses of differentiations, affinities and contrasts that occur within this reduced sphere. Nevertheless, these awakenings remain dispersed and bound within the confines of the urgent and the actual. The kind of instinctive experiencing which lives within the atmosphere of the instinctive drive is at the mercy of the appearance of the triggering signs. The instinctive accomplishment emerges or surfaces when the sign appears, and it fades away as soon as the motivating conditions disappear from the field of actuality. Moreover, instinctive intentionality is never aware of *what* it is striving for. This can be compared to the sudden, spontaneous emergence of a new tendency or a new

desire related to our changed bodily situation. Initially, the tendency is indeterminate. We do not know exactly what we want – we merely feel that something has changed. But sooner or later we get to understand what the tendency is about. For instance, we might acknowledge that our condition has changed in that we need more rest than before. However, this is not originally due to the reflection or verbal explication of our new situation but due to the fact that rest has brought us an experience of focused satisfaction of the former, blindly felt tension. Now, the instinctive experiencing appears as self-enclosed, insofar as it does not stretch out of its dispersion.

In my work I have clarified Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the bodily infrastructure as an *a priori* organization of the organic parts of the body (hands, feet, eyes).

The bodily infrastructure, as we already pointed out, delimits original fields of experience. In this respect I am in accord with Keeping in arguing that the *a priori* of the body does not mean intentional schemata that would be *native* or *innate*, that is, present at birth. Instead, the concept of *the a priori of the body* refers to intentional schemata that are embodied meanings. In this manner, it becomes understandable that the instinctive drives can change during the individual's life, insofar as the structure of their body changes. Our body, then, appears as an incessant source of atmospheres. For example, our feet, thanks to their specific structuring, constitute an initial field of potential movement, and they "project" an environment adequate to this movement. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty claims that the body as a multi-modal structure offers the environment for the accomplishment of the synthesis of perception. The body is "geared" for perceiving. As we learned from the phenomenological analysis of localized sensations, we can be unthematically aware of temporal and spatial structures of the body independently of the appearance of the body as a physical thing.

The bodily organization is our factual situation. It is not contingent with respect to our experiential life. For instance, the manual field remains the source of all grasping and, in this way, a primal experiencing instituted by the bodily infrastructure of the hand is operative in each accomplishment of grasping. If we would lose the primal field, we would also lose all the manual operations. Thus, Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "If […] we conceive man through his experience, that is, through his distinctive way of articulating the world, and if the organs are reintegrated into this functional whole from which they are cut out, then a man without hands or without a sexual system is *as* inconceivable *as* a man without thought […] It is impossible to distinguish in the total being of man a bodily organization that one could treat as a contingent fact and other predicates that necessarily belong to him".[1095]

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty does not make the absurd claim that if someone would lack hands or a visual system, they could not count as a human being. Instead, the claim is that no single faculty, capacity or possession in the whole of human existence (in the above passage that faculty would be reflective thinking)

[1095]PhP, 198/173. Italics are mine.

could alone be identified as necessary for the transcendence characteristic of human existence, while the other faculties would be contingent. Instead, transcendence permeates all our capacities. As we have seen, the capacity of transposition, as well as the inscription of patterns of behavior into a symbolic plane of equivalences, is characteristic of transcendence.

The other crucial point in the above quoted passage by Merleau-Ponty is that the structure of our body, insofar as it constitutes the initial fields in which our experience develops, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, our "factual situation" [*situation de fait*].[1096] I have accounted for the relation that Merleau-Ponty characterizes as the relation of *Fundierung* between matter and form in terms of the relation between the initial field and the particularization of the field. The matter, here, is the initial field, and an example of such a field would be the manual field or the field of vision. It functions as "matter" insofar as it provides the basis on which further acquisitions are established. The form, instead, is the further acquisition that particularizes the field by giving it a determination. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "Form absorbs content to the point that content ultimately appears as a mere mode of form, and the historical preparations of thought appear as a ruse of Reason disguised as Nature. But reciprocally, even in its intellectual sublimation, content remains radically contingent as the initial institution or founding of knowledge and action, as the first grasp of being or of value whose concrete richness will never be exhausted by knowledge or action, and whose spontaneous method they will everywhere renew."[1097]

Ultimately, the institution of the field is something "radically contingent", not in the sense that we could *think* about or *grasp* any other kind of body infrastructure, but rather here it refers to the fact that the initial institution could not have taken place, and the living operations that support the initial fields also support the experiences constituted in these fields.

However, among the possessions of the subject, the transcendence of the body schema and the transcendent horizon of the world have a specific meaning. If they are considered in a systematic manner, their non-being is inconceivable. As we have already seen, the system of perception can be modified, and it varies in many ways. One can be blind or lack the visual structure of perception. One can be in a more-or-less wakeful state, or be more-or-less immersed in one's desires, dreams and emotions. However, Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl in arguing that the thought of a total change of the world (and of the system of perception) to *another*, *totally different* world, and the thought of the emergence of the world from a *totally different* world, are equally absurd.[1098] The reason is that thinking of two separate worlds presupposes a single world on the ground of which the thought of two separate worlds makes no sense at all. Without co-existence or communion, there is no sense of *two worlds*. Accordingly, it is inconceivable that the system of perception would change so that it would induce *a total change of*

[1096]PhP, 199/174.
[1097]PhP, 148/129.
[1098]See Hua1, §60; de los Reyes Melero 2013, 119.

*the system of experience*, and there would be another totally different world of experience. For this reason, the ideas of the becoming of the world and the acquisition of the possession of the world-horizon are inconceivable.

In the study at hand, the focus has been on the explication of Merleau-Ponty's conception of instinctive experiencing. The above consideration of transcendence, and of the world-horizon, show that there remain further questions. Finally, what is the difference between biological and human existence? Are the biological and human, as attributes of existence merely two modifications of the *same existence*, same life, but at different levels? What is, finally, the meaning of transcendence? The study at hand does not answer these questions but leaves them for future projects.

I have also excluded from this study the field of intersubjectivity and its constitutive functions.

Finally, a further question to be discussed elsewhere concerns the generative dimensions of instinctive experiencing and the *a priori* of the body. If one stays within the genetic perspective, then the embodied, incoercible systems of the body (instincts, the concordant system of perception) appear as initial infrastructures. The initial bodily organization surrounds my personal life, and as such cannot be thought otherwise. My personal life is always already temporally layered on the primal organization of my body. Biological existence, the natural life of the body, appears as the "past of the pasts", or an "orientation" that precedes perception as such.[1099]

Now, if one adopts a generative perspective, it becomes possible to conceive the instinctual infrastructure of the body, not as an "abyssal" matrix of experience, but as something that is *inherited* from the earlier generations. The infrastructure of the body is, so to say, inscribed into a more comprehensive trans-generational system of constitution.[1100]

In *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty mentions generative phenomenology[1101] several times but does not develop it further. In Husserl's phenomenology (as it is shown in particular by Anthony Steinbock and Sara Heinämaa),[1102] the awareness of oneself as a member of a generation is constituted by the becoming-aware of the limit-phenomena of birth and death. Experiencing oneself as such an individual requires that one is aware of one's own life as finite as well as the lives of one's co-subjects as similarly restricted by birth and death. A member of a generation is a finite individual being, one who is born and who dies, and one who is preceded and followed by others. In *Phenomenology of Perception* one can find Merleau-Ponty's conception of the phenomenon of birth, which is related to the "radical anteriority" of the anonymous, pre-personal life. Primarily, as is shown in the analysis of the pre-personal time, the limit of the egoic experience is the *perpetuating temporality*. Insofar as the perceiving person bears an inherent intentional relation to the anonymous life, perception contains

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[1099]PhP, 293/264.
[1100] This is argued by Sara Heinämaa in her article "Anonymity and personhood: Merleau-Ponty's account of the subject of perception". See Heinämaa 2015.
[1101]PhP, 489/452.
[1102]See Steinbock 1995.

a potential self-awareness of one's finitude, but also a potential self-awareness of a continuity (of anonymous life) beyond the finite being of oneself as a person. This would perhaps be Merleau-Ponty's version of how the awareness of a trans-generational perspective is constituted.[1103]

Let us conceive how the shift from the genetic to generative perspective would occur with respect to the field of vision. Now, from the perspective of the individual person, the initial affective and sensory-motor organization of vision establishes or institutes the field of visual things. The sensory experiencing necessary for the establishment of this field itself remains unknown to the person. I have demonstrated the fact that the gaze has its proper optimality for the experiencing individual by considering the passive shift that occurs when a former blind person begins to see for the first time: incoercible movements of the eyes prepare for the occurrence of the visual field at the passive margins of our wakeful life. They are the initial "skills", on which the habitual skills acquired during the life of the person are acquired. For the person, these skills and this initial optimality of the field of vision remains an original structure, an original relation to a visual environment which is due to the pre-given intentional schema that emerges spontaneously from the structure of the body. It is a visual horizon in which all the particular visual accomplishments can occur. As the bodily basis of our visual life, the "visual terrain" is not left behind or "never simply abandoned".[1104]

Now, viewed from a generative perspective, the body as the "birthplace" of vision is a part of a more comprehensive whole. One of the researchers who have touched on this issue is philosopher of education Ramsey Affifi, who has recently developed a concept of biological generativity.[1105] If we follow his analysis of generativity in biology, then we can distinguish between various relations.

*First*, the "terrain of visibility" is handed down from ancestors. The "terrain of visibility" is something that we take up, to which we somehow contribute during our visual life, and that we pass down to those who become after us. Here it is important to notice that it is not simply a question of a cultural tradition or of visual culture. Namely, *besides* the "terrain of visibility", what is also handed down to us are the various practices, techniques and socially normative ways of seeing and of looking at things. We are born into a specific visual environment, which moreover is mediated by technologies. If we consider the current visual environment surrounded by the screens of computes and smartphones, and by the emerging technologies of virtual and augmented reality, it seems quite evident that the current generation is born to a very different kind of visual world than, say, the generation of the people who lived at the beginning of 20th century.

But is the "terrain of visibility" itself changed within such technological developments? As long as one does not consider the body as part of an inter-generational framework, the terrain of visibility is left out of consideration. It is conceived as an a-historical, non-developing framework, in which all visual cultures

[1103] Cf. Heinämaa 2015.
[1104] See chapter 4.6.
[1105] See Affifi 2013.

emerge and fade away. Namely, the cultural visual tradition is something that one can take up only insofar as one has always already acquired the primal capacity of vision. Now, if this primal terrain of vision itself is seen as part of a tradition, it becomes possible to conceive it too as something that develops and changes in relation to the visual environments, the visual practices, technological environments, and the contributions of the individual visually experiencing beings. Here we have a kind of perspective similar to evolutionary development, in which the dynamics and changes of terrains of life are considered on a more extensive scale than that of an individual experiencing being.

*Second*, in the generative framework, the visual field becomes part of a simultaneous and diachronic community of bodies. Insofar as we are emphatically related to non-human animals, we are aware of different kinds of "visual terrains". On this basis it appears to us that the visual field of the frog or of the bird, for example, differs considerably from ours. In the lectures on nature, Merleau-Ponty deepens his conception of the bodily infrastructure as he explores the ethological studies of animal behavior. The ethological studies also bring forth a point of view of an ecosystem by showing, for instance, how the surrounding environments of two bodies provided with different structures can be contaminated.[1106] The generative perspective opens the system of perception up to the constitutive significance of phenomena of mimicry, markings, camouflage, displays and rituals. As Affifi writes:

> "The phenomenal world of one species or organism can imprint formal possibilities onto another, directing the future range of interactions possible for an organism before it has even begun interacting in the world."[1107]

Affifi goes as far as to characterize the natural life of the body within an ecosystemic perspective. According to him, the sustainable terrain of the human body is an adaptive relation to a particular environment consisting of specific "physical" configurations and other living beings. This ecosystem that sustains the human body is not only a phase within a temporal development, but also a member of an ecological community, related to other environing ecosystems of other living beings.

In short, the body as a system of correlations geared for the optimal perception now appears as a member of a community and of a tradition of bodies, which develop, change and interact which each other. Here we have to be careful with the senses of "community" and "tradition". What is at issue is a question of the philosophy of nature, and I do not have the opportunity to pursue this question within the confines of the present work. However, it is worth mentioning that in the ecosystemic approach we tend to a view of nature as a unified whole, and moreover a teleological whole, with a purpose or goal.

Darian Meacham and Anna-Pia Papageorgiou have developed a philosophical perspective to the body which they call "transgenerational epigenetics".[1108]

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[1106] Affifi 2013, 154–6.
[1107] Affifi 2013, 159.
[1108] Meacham & Papageorgiou 2008, 65.

They conceive of an epigenetic bodily memory that reaches over generations. Such a generative perspective may reveal links specific to previous generations, such that could make sense of inherited patterns of behavior that seem to be inexplicable from the perspective of the individual. For instance, there is empirical evidence of inheritance of the effects of nutrition on the physical characteristics of the body. Meacham and Papageorgiou refer to studies on a famine of ancestors in the Netherlands and Sweden. The Swedish research shows a correspondence between a famine of the paternal grandfathers and "a lower incidence of diabetes" of the grandchildren:

> "if the paternal grandfathers were exposed to a famine during their slow growth period, the period before the prepubertal peak in growth velocity requiring most energy consumption, the grandchildren had lower incidence of diabetes. However, if the paternal grandfathers were exposed to excess food, the grandchildren had a 4-fold higher incidence of cardiovascular disease".[1109]

Meacham and Papageorgiou also mention research that demonstrates an intergenerational transmission of psychological characteristics, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[1110]
These statistical correlations suggest that there would be a descriptive phenomenon of intergenerational sense-transmission. In fact, here we do not have to be occupied with the fact that the correlation does not have an explication in a change in genetic ancestry, and that the observed correlation for this reason calls for an epigenetic explanation.[1111] What is interesting from the present generative phenomenological perspective is the description, according to which, an episode of experiencing, related to particular environmental conditions – such as malnutrition of an ancestor – is inscribed in the "natural life" of the body in a process of establishment or institution, and transmitted to the body of a future generation. In other words, the episode of experiencing of the ancestor in the trans-generational past belongs to the bodily system that surrounds the perceptual life of the descendant. We have here an inter-generational pre-personal tradition in which the experiences and habituations of the individuals are related to a more general "history" of systemic correlations of the body. Meacham and Papageorgiou describe this in Merleau-Ponty's later philosophical terms as a "history of the flesh":

> "Each *institution* functions as a deformation or mutation in the *flesh*, which not only reactivates prior deformations, giving them new life, but also re-opens their horizons."[1112]

Meacham and Papageorgiou outline *flesh* as a kind of inter-generational body schema. We saw that, in his existential analysis, Merleau-Ponty characterized the

[1109]Meacham & Papageorgiou 2008, 67–8.
[1110]Meacham & Papageorgiou 2008, 68.
[1111]Meacham & Papageorgiou 2008, 69. As Meacham & Papageorgiou claim, the epigenetic sense-transmission has an explanation: "The laboratory studies demonstrate the mechanism whereby external environmental factors can change the phenotype of subsequent generations without changing the genotypic make-up."
[1112]Meacham & Papageorgiou 2008, 76.

life of the individual subject as an accumulation or a building up, in which various kinds of associations can emerge because each and every bodily expression is inscribed on a symbolic plane of equivalences. For example, consider the first time a child finds satisfaction when they eat and enjoy swallowing food. This new focused enjoyment is enacted by a particular bodily movement which is centered on mouth. However, the movement of swallowing does not remain limited within the confines of satisfying eating. We do not only swallow food but also, for instance, others' stories and insults. The movement that expresses satisfying eating functions as a figurative structure that reconfigures the meaning of all the other expressive gestures within the subject's body schema, and it becomes modifiable by the others. According to Merleau-Ponty, existence has a constantly reconfiguring horizonal structure that is modified and renewed by new experiences. Meacham and Papageorgiou claim that a similar kind of interchange occurs between the individual and the intergenerational horizon of an individual. The new expressions would not modify only the body of an individual, but the "natural" bodily horizon handed down to future generations:

> "[A]n experiential fact of subjective or collective life (as institution) […] is transmitted not only across an intersubjective field, but across an intergenerational field. Yet this happens not by way of the *institution* of sense as normally conceived (via an historical tradition) but rather through the *flesh*, that is, through the body itself."[1113]

A central problem related to the pre-personal tradition is concerned with the concept of the horizon of the world. Namely, it can be claimed that the whole idea of inter-generational development in which the individual partakes is only possible if we already have the horizon of the world. Thus, the infinite horizon of the world cannot develop within the tradition but rather involves the tradition – insofar as it is the condition of possibility of the very sense of tradition. According to Merleau-Ponty, the ultimate level of experience is a unity of self-temporalization. The unity of self-temporalization is a process in which the initially unreflected flowing of the flow becomes affected by itself, retained and distanciated for itself. Analogously, but within a larger scale, the body schema (or the symbolic body) is formed in the development of the living nature that prepares for the emergence of human life. However, nature (or the flesh) comes to be reflected for itself only in human life. The life of human perception is conceived, not as a pure negation outside of nature, but as a fold of nature. Let us end by citing the famous thesis that Merleau-Ponty puts forward in both of his early works but also in the late manuscript of *The Visible and Invisible*:

> "Thus, I am not, to recall Hegel's phrase, a 'hole in being,' but rather a hollow, or a fold that was made and that can be unmade."[1114]

[1113]Meacham & Papageorgiou 2008, 79.
[1114]PhP, 249/223.

## YHTEENVETO (SUMMARY IN FINNISH)

Ranskalaisen ajattelijan Maurice Merleau-Pontyn filosofisena päätyönä pidetty *Phénoménologie de la Perception* -teos pitää sisällään yksityiskohtaisen havainnon fenomenologisen analyysin. Edmund Husserlin klassista fenomenologiaa seuraten Merleau-Ponty ottaa lähtökohdakseen havainnon, kokemuksen, jossa objekti on annettu ”itsessään” läsnä olevana. Juuri tämän piirteen vuoksi havaitseminen on niin yhteisöllisyyden, vapauden kuin tieteellisen objektiivisuuden merkityskonstituution edellytys. Merleau-Ponty kuvailee kuitenkin myös havaitsemisen itsensä edellytyksiä, kuten esimerkiksi havainnon ajallista rakennetta ja anonyymiä ruumiinelämää havaitsemisen taustalla. Havainnon analyysin tehtävänä onkin selvittää havaintokokemuksen konstitutiivisen merkityksen lisäksi itse havaitsemisen rakentumista, havaitsemisen pohjarakennetta tai infrastruktuuria. Yksi *Phénoménologie de la Perception* -teoksen keskeinen väite on, että havaitseminen rakentuu osin havaitsijan ruumiin vaistonvaraisista toiminnoista.

Väitöskirja eksplikoi Merleau-Ponty teorian havaitsemisen vaistonvaraisesta pohjarakenteesta. Työn avainkäsite on *biologinen eksistenssi*. Merleau-Pontyn eksistenssin käsite viittaa merkityksellisesti jäsentyneeseen koettuun maailmaan, siis kokemusmaailmaan, joka on fenomenologisen reflektion ja teorianmuodostuksen lähtökohta. *Phénoménologie de la Perception* -teoksessa Merleau-Ponty erottaa biologisen eksistenssin persoonallisesta eksistenssistä. Näin hän tulee rajanneeksi esipersoonallisen, primitiivisen ja havaintoa edeltävän maailmakokemuksen tyypin. Väitöskirja selvittää, mitä Merleau-Ponty tarkoittaa biologisella eksistenssillä ja mitä ovat sen havaintoa edeltävän kokemuksen olemukselliset piirteet, johon käsite viittaa. Väitöskirja osoittaa, että käsitteen tieteellisestä konnotaatiosta huolimatta Merleau-Ponty ei argumentoi, että selvittäessään havainnon pohjarakennetta filosofin tulisi nojautua viime kädessä biologiatieteen tarjoamiin selityksiin. Sen sijaan elävien olentojen käyttäytymistieteelliset kuvaukset, erityisesti vaistomaisen käyttäytymisen luonnehdinta etologiassa, tarjoavat viime kädessä keinon määrittää ja kuvailla primitiivistä intentionaalista elettyä kokemusta.

Niinpä biologisen eksitenssin käsitteellä Merleau-Ponty *Phénoménologie de la Perception* -teoksessa viittaa ruumiin vaistonvaraisiin toimintoihin ja erityisiin vaistonvaraisiin kokemuksiin.

Väitöskirjan ensimmäinen luku on johdanto aiheeseen. Luvun aluksi selvitän Merleau-Pontyn filosofian projektia hänen kahdessa varhaisessa ja keskeisessä teoksessaan, *La Structure du Comportement* ja *Phénoménologie de la Perception*. Osoitan, että molemmissa töissä Merleau-Pontyn lähtökohta on transsendentaalisen fenomenologian projekti. Selvitettyäni tätä lähtökohtaa, eksplikoin Merleau-Pontyn näkemyksen fenomenologian perusperiaatteista ja muotoilen lyhyesti hänen käsityksensä havaitsemisesta sekä kokemuksen ruumiillisuudesta. Lisäksi eksplikoin keskeisiä käsitteitä ja erotteluita, joita Merleau-Pontyn selonteko biologisesta eksistenssistä pitää sisällään. Osoitan, että vaistonvarainen kokeminen, johon biologinen eksistenssi viittaa, vastaa sitä kokemuksen aluetta, jota Edmund Husserl kutsuu ”alkuperäisen passiivisuuden alueeksi”. Merleau-Pontyn

biologisen eksistenssin analyysi on siten yhteydessä Husserlin passiivisen kokemuksen analyysiin. Erityisemmin se passiivisen kokemuksen modifikaatio, jota Husserl kutsuu ”impressionaaliseksi nykyisyydeksi”, osoittautuu keskeiseksi vaistonvaraista kokemista jäsennettäessä.

Luvuissa 2 ja 3 selvitän Merleau-Pontyn tulkinnan käyttäytymistieteen perusteista, hänen käsityksensä organismista sekä vaistoista ja reflekseistä, jotka ovat primitiivisiä käyttäytymisen muotoja. Lisäksi luvuissa 2 ja 3 osoitetaan, että Merleau-Pontyn eksistenssin käsitteen taustalla on Husserlin ymmärrys ihmisestä, jota tämä kehitteli erityisesti *Ideen II* -teoksessa. Merleau-Ponty väittää, että biologiatieteen elävien olentojen käyttäytymistä ja erityisemmin ihmisen vaistonvaraista käyttäytymistä koskeva tieto viittaa pohjimmiltaan elävän olennon suhteeseen tätä ympäröivään maailmaan.

Luvulla 2 on kaksi tehtävää. Ensiksikin se esittää Merleau-Ponty argumentin, että käyttäytymisen havainnointi vaikuttaa epäsuorasti havainnoidun elävän olennon kokemuksen fenomenologiseen analyysiin. Sikäli kuin biologiassa, fysiologiassa ja kehityspsykologiassa havainnoidaan intentionaalista käyttäytymistä, niillä on yhtymäkohta fenomenologian kanssa. Toiseksi, luvussa keskitytään erityisemmin vaistonvaraiseen käyttäytymisen. Olettaen, että biologia tutkii eläviä olentoja, fysiologia ihmisruumista ja psykologia ihmismieltä, kysymykset, jotka Merleau-Ponty osoittaa biologialle, fysiologialle ja psykologialle ovat seuraavat: Minkä kokemuksellisten toimintojen ansiosta elävä olento, ihmisruumis tai ihmisen mieli saavat merkityksen juuri tieteen tutkimuskohteina? Mitkä kokemukselliset toiminnot mahdollistavat elävää olentoa, ihmisruumista ja ihmismieltä koskevan *tiedon* ja *selitykset*? Millaiselle subjektille näiden objektien tieteellisellä selittämisellä on ylipäänsä merkitystä?

On kuitenkin niin, että Merleau-Pontyn mukaan biologian, fysiologian ja psykologian fenomenologinen analyysilla on myös jotain annettavaa käsitykselle transsendentaalisesta subjektiviteetista. Toisin kuin tieteilijä, fenomenologi ei pyri muodostamaan selitystä tutkimuskohteestaan. Merleau-Ponty ajattelee, että tieteelliset teoriat välttämättä sisältävät implisiittisiä viittauksia ilmiöihin, toisin sanoen ne sisältävät luonnehdintoja koetusta maailmasta. Käyttäytymistieteelliset tutkimukset sisältävät piileviä kokemuskuvauksia. Siten tieteet osoittavat potentiaalisia kokemuksia tai tuovat meidät lähemmäs kokemuksia, ja tieteen piileviä kokemuskuvauksia voidaan käyttää fenomenologiassa apuna merkityskonstituution selvittämisessä. Tämä ei poista sitä seikkaa, että fenomenologia välttämättä alkaa transsendentaalisen reduktion toimenpiteellä, eli pidättäytymisellä asioiden olemassaoloa koskevista väitteistä ja erityisemmin pidättäytymällä tekemästä väitettä, että kokemukset koetaan mielessä, joka on objektiiviseen luontoon kuuluva olio.

Luku 2 käsittelee Merleau-Pontyn tulkintaa ihmisen biologiasta teoksessa *La Structure du Comportement*. Tulkinnassaan Merleau-Ponty seuraa erityisesti Kurt Goldsteinin Gestalt-teoreettista ja holistista lähestymistapaa, joka painottaa intentionaalisen käyttäytymisen hahmojen (Gestalt) merkitystä ihmisen ruumiin fysiologisten piirteiden selittämisessä. Muiden käyttäytymisen muotojen ohella

myös vaistot ovat merkityksellisiä ja intentionaalisia käyttäytymistapoja, vaikkakin ne kuuluvat alemmalle tasolle. Kuten Keeping (2006) on osoittanut, Merleau-Pontyn mukaan vaistot eivät ole viettienergioita tai mekanismeja. Sen sijaan vaistot ovat kokonaisuutta säätävän, konfigurationaalisen intentionaalisuuden tyyppejä, joiden erityisluonteen määrittää käyttäytyjän ruumiin rakenne.

Luvussa 3 näytän, että Merleau-Pontyn biologisen eksistenssin käsite pitää sisällään ajatuksen yhteydestä havaitun vaistonvaraisen käyttäytymisen ja käyttäytyjän itsensä esipersoonallisen kokemuksen välillä. Jäsennän Merleau-Pontyn *Phénoménologie de la Perception* -teoksessa hajanaista biologisen eksistenssin kuvausta käsitteiden sokeus (*blindness*), kaavamaisuus *(generality*) ja syklisyys (*cyclicality*) avulla. Luvut kaksi ja kolme päättyvät biologisen eksistenssin luonnehdintaan vaistokokemuksena, joka koskee erityisesti elävän olennon käyttäytymistä alemman tasoisten toimintojen tai vähäisemmän toimintakyvyn tasolla. Osoittautuu, että Merleau-Ponty luonnehtii elävän olennon vähäisempää toimintakykyä kokemuksellisesti, jolloin vähäisempi toimintakyky tarkoittaa ”affektiivisuuden alan” tai ”elämänalan” kutistumista.

Husserlin oivalluksen mukaan kokemus ei koskaan ankarasti ottaen rajaudu siihen, mikä on välittömästi annettu. Tietoisuutta on luonnehdittava keskusta-periferia-rakenteena. Kaikilla tietoisilla kokemuksilla on paitsi aktiivisuuden, huomion tai affektion keskus, myös tätä keskusta ympäröivä periferia, johon kuuluvat potentiaaliset tai mahdolliset, vielä tulossa olevat tai jo menneet kokemukset. Nämä potentiaaliset, perifeeriset kokemukset jollain tavalla koskettavat tai liikuttavat kokijaa ja ne vaikuttavat kokemukseen siitä huolimatta, etteivät ne ole huomion keskipisteessä. Kun kokemista muunnellaan suuremman tai vähäisemmän toimintakyvyn mukaan, voidaan huomata, että myös kokemuksen keskusta ympäröivä tausta on muunneltavissa. Toisin sanoen, kokemuksen mahdollisuushorisontilla voidaan ajatella olevan ala tai laajuus. Sillä, mikä tulee kokijan tietoisuuteen, toisin sanoen sillä mahdollisella tai potentiaalisella, joka koskettaa tai liikuttaa kokijaa, on laajuus.

Luvussa 4 hyödynnän ajatusta kokemuksen horisontin laajuudesta, ja sovellan sitä tulkintaan Merleau-Pontyn käsityksestä ”luonnollisesta ajasta” (*natural time*, *temps naturel*). Merleau-Pontyn mukaan biologisella eksistenssillä on erityinen ajallinen aspekti, jota hän kutsuu ”luonnolliseksi ajaksi”. Luonnollinen aika on hajautunut ajallisen kokemuksen muoto. Selvitän tätä asettamalla luonnollisen ajan vastakkain tottumuksen (*habit*) ajallisuuden kanssa. Siinä missä habituaalisuutta luonnehtii ajallinen jatkuvuus ja kokemuksellinen yhtenäisyys, luonnollinen aika viittaa kokemuksiin, joista tämä jatkuvuus puuttuu. Otan tässä yhteydessä avukseni Husserlin teorian ”impressionaalisesta nykyisyydestä”. ”Impressionaalisen nykyisyyden” luonnehdinta on Husserlin yritys ajatella kokemusta, jolta puuttuu affektiivinen suhde sellaiseen, mikä ei ole vielä tai enää luonteeltaan intuitiivisesti läsnä. Sikäli kuin vaistonvarainen kokeminen on tietoisuutta, joka on rajoittunut ”impressionaaliseen nykyisyyteen”, ei-enää-intuitiivinen menneisyys ja ei-vielä-intuitiivinen tulevaisuus eivät ole sen ulottuvilla eivätkä ne liikuta sitä affektiivisesti. Siten luonnolliseen aikaan sidottu vaistonvarainen kokija voi kokea

objektien ajallisen yhtenäisyyden ja niiden identiteetin vain hyvin rajatussa mielessä.

Luvuissa 5, 6 ja 7 tutkin vaistonvaraista intentionaalisuutta tarkastelemalla erikseen kolmea keskeistä ja toisiinsa liittyvää kokemisen aspektia: (i) liikeintentionaalisuutta, (ii) affektiivisuutta ja (iii) aistimista.

Luvussa 5 käsittelen Merleau-Pontyn tunnettua argumenttia, jonka mukaan ei-temaattinen ja ei-reflektiivinen kokemus omasta ruumiista on havaintokokemuksen olemuksellinen piirre. Merleau-Ponty väittää kuitenkin myös, että liikeintentionaalisuudella on eri muotoja riippuen kokemuksen horisontin laajuudesta. Merleau-Ponty hyödyntää argumentissaan Kurt Goldsteinin tapaustutkimusta ensimmäisessä maailmansodassa haavoittuneesta sotilaasta Johann Schneiderista. Tutkimus Schneiderin patologisesta liikeintentionaalisuudesta tarjoaa keinon selvittää sitä kuinka vähäisempi affektion ala (tai kutistunut kokemuskenttä) vaikuttaa kinesteettiseen tietoisuuteen ja liikkumisen mahdollisuuteen.

Luvussa 6 jäsennän vaistonvaraista affektiivista intentionaalisuutta. Selvitän esipersoonallisten vaistonvaraisten kokemusten piirteitä näyttämällä, että kyseiset kokemukset voi käsittää erityisinä ”tunnelman tietoisuuden” (atmospheric awareness) muotoina. Tunnelman tietoisuus on luonteeltaan määräytymätön ja ”sokea” sikäli kuin tietoisuus tunnelmasta ei pidä sisällään tietoisuutta erityisestä kohteesta.

Tästä huolimatta tunnelman tietoisuus tai ”tuntu” toimii valikoivasti ja voi lopulta johtaa siihen, että huomion kohteeksi valikoituu juuri tietty esiin piirtymäisillään oleva objekti. Merleau-Pontyn sanoin, merkityksellisyys, joka ohjaa objektin määräytymistä ja tunnistamista koetaan *tunnelmana*. Ruumiin rakenteemme rajaa erilleen alkukantaisia viettejä tai vaistoja, joilla on siten oma sisäinen ”merkityksellisyytensä”. Sisäisesti ”määrittynyt” vaiston suuntautunteisuus on aluksi epämääräinen ja se määrittyy vasta kohdattujen objektien tai nautinnon keskittymien myötä. Affektiivisen tunnelman analyysin pohjalta voidaan osoittaa, että on merkityksellisesti jäsentyneitä kokemuksia ilman määrittyneitä kokemuksen kohteita, merkityksellisyyttä, joka lähtökohtaisesti ohjaa kokemusta ja silti jättää kokemuksen jäsentymisen ympäristön sattumanvaraisuuksien armoille. Vaistonvaraista kokemusta, johon biologinen eksistenssi viittaa, voidaan siten luonnehtia affektiivisena intentionaalisuutena, joka on tuntua tai tietoisuutta tunnelmasta ilman määräytynyttä kohdetta.

Lopuksi luvussa 7 eksplikoin Merleau-Pontyn käsityksen havainnon ja alkukantaisen aistimisen suhteesta vaistokokemuksen analyysia hyödyntäen. Merleau-Ponty luonnehtii havainnon ja esipersoonallisen aistimisen suhdetta mereologisesti osa-kokonaisuus-suhteena: havaitseminen on osittaisten, ruumiissa jo ennalta toimivien sensorimotoristen aistimisalueiden yhdistämistä yhteen kokonaisuuteen. Havaitsemista edeltää esipersoonallinen tietoisuus aisteista ja aistinalueista, joille Merleau-Ponty myös antaa nimityksen ”luonnollinen itse” (*soi naturel*). Tulkintani mukaan tämä esipersoonallinen tietoisuus on ymmärrettävä vaistonvaraisena kokemisena. Kyseessä on kokemisen muoto, jota kokemuksen

määräytynyt kohde ei säätele, kuten havaitsemisessa. Sen sijaan ruumiin sensorimotoriset konfiguraatiot lähtökohtaisesti säätelevät aistimisen alueita. On kuitenkin myös olemassa vaistonvarainen pyrkimys tuottaa havaitsemisen synteesi. Merleau-Pontyn termein, alkukantainen aistiminen voi muodostaa hahmotelman havaitsemisesta ennen varsinaisen havainnon aktin toteutumista. Siten havaitsemisessa on alkujaan kyse passiivisesta ja ”sokeasta” assosiaation tai ”affiniteetin” ilmiöstä.

Väitöskirjani osoittaa, että kun Merleau-Ponty keskustelee biologisesta eksistenssistä ja sen suhteesta havaintoon, hän ei tarkoita ruumista tieteellisenä objektina tai havainnon suhteita suhteina mentaalisena prosessina ymmärretyn havainnon ja fysiologisena organismina ymmärretyn ruumiin välillä. Huolimatta siitä, että termi ”biologinen” on merkitykseltään osin harhaanjohtava, Merleau-Pontyn tavoitteena on ajatella alkukantaista intentionaalisuutta. Biologisella eksistenssillä vaistokokemuksena ymmärrettynä on siis perustellusti sija merkityskonstituution systemaattisessa esityksessä, jonka Merleau-Ponty *Phénoménologie de la Perception* -teoksessa jäsentää. Vastaavasti Merleau-Pontyn mukaan havaintokokemusta ei voida käsittää ilman sen vaistoperustaa, silloinkaan kun sitä pyritään kuvaamaan kokemuksellisesta lähtökohdasta. Siten tutkimuksessani väitän, että vastaus tutkimuksen alussa esittämääni kysymykseen on myönteinen: Merleau-Pontyn teoria biologisesta eksistenssistä vastaa fenomenologisen tutkimuksen vaatimuksiin.

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