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"An Entirely Different Kind of Synthesis": Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's Analysis of Space in the *Phenomenology of Perception*

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Merleau-Ponty begins the *Phenomenology of Perception* by explaining that phenomenology aims to uncover our primitive contact with the world (vi), and so may give us an account of space as it is lived. While appreciative of scientific explorations of the world and space, Merleau-Ponty asserts that all knowledge garnered from scientific inquiry is originally "gained through [one's] own particular viewpoint" and built upon our primordial being-in-the-world (*PP* ix; xiv).[1] In an effort to get

[1] "Being-in-the-world" is a term originally coined by Martin Heidegger to characterize the human (Heidegger uses the word "Dasein" to refer to humanity) way of being and to overcome the traditional view of intentionality as being between a subject and an object. Being-in-the-world, as the term suggests, is a unitary ontological structure by which humanity is tied to the world. It is not the case that human subjects just exist and can take up occasionally as something extra a relationship toward the world. Humans are coexistent with the world and never free from Being-in; it is what even makes the taking up of relationships toward objects possible. Also "the world" in the sense of being-in-the-world is not external to Dasein either (Heidegger is not an idealist; Nature can be when no Dasein exists), as it involves the practical interaction of Dasein with things. The world appears to Dasein according to its mood (disposition) and the unreflective projection of its own possibilities. For instance, doors appear as "things that can be opened" without any concentrated analysis. Humanity's possible interactions with things define itself and the things with which it interacts, so that "there is no gulf to cross, no wall between two worlds [subject and object] that requires a window" (Delancey 362). As the world is understood in terms of Dasein's possibilities, which also change, the world appears in a "horizon." Dasein is "open" to this horizon, within which particular truths about the world are disclosed. Thus, humans are not in the world like flies in a bottle or subjects to an objective world, but humans are intimately immersed with

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at this genesis of human experience, phenomenologists like him choose to "bracket" (suspend the assumptions and conclusions of) the positive sciences' "naturalistic attitude." While not following scientific methodology, Merleau-Ponty also carefully explains his study is not going to follow the approach of traditional philosophy either, which he identifies with the methods of the intellectualists (typically identified as the rationalists and transcendental idealists) and the empiricists. Instead, his approach will look at the body-subject as the absolute source and perspective in understanding the world (*PP* 70; Carman 221).[2] Furthermore, throughout the Phenomenology he critiques the traditional philosophical positions in light of his phenomenological investigations. Merleau-Ponty believes these investigations will show that the world is not a fixed and determinate environment naively set before us (empiricism), nor absolutely constructed by a unifying consciousness (intellectualism); rather, the world lies before us to be uncovered, but nonetheless it will transcend all our descriptions.[3] Merleau-Ponty holds that phenomenology will "slacken," not sever, "the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice" (*PP* xv).

In this sense, as Liu Shengli has understood, the *Phenomenology*'s project is archaeological. It aims to uncover the primordial structure of the world that is buried underneath the sedimentation of scientific, traditional philosophic, and common sense prejudices (132). So Merleau-Ponty hopes he can accomplish this while abandoning the analytic "idealism without reverting to the naïveté of realism" (*Parcours* 66). The strategy he employs is not to engage in transcendental metaphysics, but to examine pathological cases recorded by scientists and psychologists that may reveal our primal experience of being-in-the-world. For instance, in discussing our perception of spatial orientation, he writes, "We must examine such exceptional cases in which [spatial orientation] disintegrates and re-forms before our eyes" (*PP* 284). If he can show that intellectualism and empiricism cannot explain these cases, then Merleau-Ponty thinks this will demonstrate their falsity (or at least their incompleteness), and show how they both may be rooted in a more primordial space (Kockelmans 306).

In this paper, I will investigate Merleau-Ponty's analysis of space and his own account of spatial orientation. First, I will look at his treatment

each other in a community of symbols, practices, and social institutions of their making by which a world appears.

[2] Merleau-Ponty believes the body is in the world like the heart is in the body. The body makes the world continuously alive, breathing life into it and sustaining it from inside of it, so that they inseparably form one system (Kockelmans 278).

[3] The world Transcends all that is uncovered about it. As Martin Heidegger aptly noted, to uncover or disclose one thing involves hiding something else.

of the empiricist and intellectualist explanations of space, and then I will show why Merleau-Ponty thinks they cannot accommodate our experience of spatial orientation. This will lead him to consider extreme cases of how humans orient themselves in space, which he believes draw attention to a third, primordial spatiality. Merleau-Ponty proposes that this spatiality is constituted through the synthesis (or "pact") of the "pre-objective body" with the natural world via "motor intentionality."[4] Then I will discuss how he draws attention to this pre-personal body-subject in the *Phenomenology* and what it entails for the formation of spatial levels. Finally, I will examine how Merleau-Ponty believes that aesthetic and pathological experiences reveal a plurality instead of a unity of space. While Merleau-Ponty argues that his phenomenological investigation shows that being is essentially spatial, I show how his conclusions can be interpreted as applying to the being of Dasein, or as to being in general.[5] Both interpretations may bear some problematic consequences for Merleau-Ponty's study by either showing that because he confuses our inability to analyze the basis of space with the essential spatiality of human being, his arguments' justification is incomplete, or that he fails to recognize that his phenomenological approach cannot possibly reach his conclusions.

The Historical Backdrop

Merleau-Ponty begins his treatment of space by reviewing historical philosophical concepts and dismissing them without much explanation, likely because their refutations are well-known or presumed (*PP* 283–84; Priest 102). In this section, I will explain these perspectives along with their refutations. The Greek Atomists' void, Plato's medium of mathematical ratios, and Aristotle's focus on place can all be seen as examples that Merleau-Ponty says treat space as a relationship of container to content. The error of this position is implied: if space is not an extra thing above physical objects (and it does not appear that space is a thing), then it cannot be a container because, presumably, only things can be containers. Considering space as a logical container, similar to the way that classes contain members, also cannot work because space is anterior to the spatial regions carved out of it. This carving function, by which the regions are distinguished and divided from the whole of space, makes it nothing like a logical container.

[4] Merleau-Ponty also calls this specific gearing of the body-subject on to the world "operative intentionality." For some explanation of this concept, see my section on the pre-personal subject and motor intentionality."

[5] This is not to suggest that there are not other ways to read Merleau-Ponty on this subject. These are simply the options that have occurred to me.

In another description of space as "an ether in which all things float" or as a logical setting in which things are arranged, Merleau-Ponty seems to be referring to Newton and Leibniz (284). He claims that they are discredited along the same lines as the other container concepts.[6]

Merleau-Ponty then brings up another idea of space which treats space as a characteristic all objects have in common, like Descartes' *res extensa*. If space were an intrinsic property of objects, then with each distinct object there would be a numerically distinct space. Presumably, this runs against our intuitions, as objects seem to be related to the same space; they are spatially located, not spatial.[7] Merleau-Ponty labels this first group of philosophical accounts of space as spatialized or physical space. They all characterize space as something real out in the external world, either by virtue of being a medium, a property of objects, or a relationship between objects, which would all persist even if no minds were to exist.

Then Merleau-Ponty turns to what he calls geometrical or spatializing space.[8] Space is the form by which all external experience comes and is unified. Transcendental idealism offers a classic example of this position, since it claims space is a pure mental perception, a power of sensibility that makes the arrangement of objects possible. The term "geometrical" aptly describes this account of space, since Kant's "Transcendental Aesthetic" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* attempts to show that the a priori truths of arithmetic and geometry can only be known because space and time are pure forms of human sensibility (Cutrofello 7). For Kant, empirical perceptions could never grant the apodictic and necessary truths of geometry, which he believes are valid for all possible objects in space. There is something right in the transcendental move since Merleau-Ponty calls the spatialized space naïve and the spatializing space reflective. Merleau-Ponty even uses similar language to describe his and the transcendentalist's positions (*PP* ix; 284). He believes transcendental idealism catches space at its source (the subject), by recognizing that spatial relationships are sustained through the subject.

[6] As a critique of Newton this makes sense (a similar container idea is advanced), but with Leibniz it is not clear why Merleau-Ponty rules out this understanding offhand. However, it is difficult to know if Merleau-Ponty really treats Leibniz's relational understanding of space and time in the *Phenomenology*, since he does not expound on these concepts or mention names of thinkers who hold them. This could easily be my own false attribution.

[7] Despite Merleau-Ponty's implied argument here, I do not see why this is true. While it is true things have spatial location, this does not seem to rule out that they are also spatial. Objects seem capable of both occupying space and being spatial.

[8] Merleau-Ponty does not limit spatializing space to transcendental idealism. While discussed earlier in spatialized space, Descartes' extension also seems to be part of this intellectualist group that thinks the pure ego can intuit the structure of the world, and that space is geometrical.

In comparing these two senses of space, Merleau-Ponty seconds William James in maintaining that spatialized space and our everyday perception of space are a loose and unordered plurality, while spatializing (geometrical) space unifies the space into one (*Pragmatism* 81; *PP* 284). Geometrical space is isotropic, so that a pure change of place could conceivably occur for an object without it changing in the least.[9] Merleau-Ponty recognizes such a spatial change at odds with modern physics.[10] However, he does not want to critique spatialized or spatializing space with scientific analysis—the "naturalistic attitude" has been bracketed after all—but with humanity's lived experience of space. He believes that a turn to experience will reveal an alternative to these two treatments of space and "provide a basis for [space's] unity by means of an entirely different kind of synthesis" (214).

The Phenomenological Exploration

Once Merleau-Ponty finishes his brief discussion and analysis of historical accounts of space by the philosophical tradition, he turns to reflecting upon our everyday spatial orientation. We perceive space as having directions like in front, behind, up, down, and so forth (Talero 444). But how does space come about as being oriented in such a way that objects can look "the right side up" or inverted (Cataldi 35)? To answer this question, Merleau-Ponty introduces two exceptional cases that he believes disclose the formation of spatial orientation. The first involves a study by Stratton on retinal inversion.[11] By putting prismatic lenses on a subject, the whole world appears unreal and upside down (*PP* 285–86). Over a course

[9] Unless, of course, one admits the reality of "Cambridge properties," where the object might change by "being-to-the-left-of" or "being-to-the-right-of" (or at least far away from) regions of space it was not before.

[10] In *The World of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty observes how classical physics was compatible with the Kantian notion: "The fields of geometry and physics remain entirely distinct: the form and content of the world do not mix. The geometrical properties of the object would remain the same after the move were it not for the variation in physical conditions to which it is also subject. Or so it was assumed in classical science. Everything changes if, with the advent of so called non-Euclidean geometry, we come to think of space itself as curved and use this to explain how things can change simply by being moved. Thus space is composed of a variety of different regions and dimensions, which can no longer be thought of as interchangeable and which effect certain changes in the bodies which move around within them. . . . we have a world in which . . . it seems as though form and content are mixed, the boundary between them blurred" (50–51). Of course, Merleau-Ponty gets some of the details wrong here. It is not from the adoption of non-Euclidean geometry, but rather from Einstein's revolutionary general theory of relativity (the idea that physics and geometry are interdependent) that shifts the Newtonian conception of space.

[11] When light enters our eyes it is inverted one hundred and eighty degrees, but soon the image is flipped so that we see as we do. While humans naturally invert images, Stratton's experiment with prismatic lenses inverts visual images before they reach the eye.

of days, the world steadily becomes more real and the body progressively rights itself, especially when one is more active and mobile. Eventually, the subject's actions follow his objectives without error, and it becomes easier to locate sounds. When the glasses are removed, objects are no longer inverted, but appear strange even to our "normal" vision.

The typical explanation of this experiment is that the visual world inverts, while the tactile world remains "normal." With the two worlds not coinciding, reconciliation is achieved slowly over time by translating the new visual experience into the old. Once a habit is made, the old concept fades away and confusion comes to an end. But Merleau-Ponty rejects the explanation. He can see why one would immediately make this judgment, but as I will explain, he believes that neither empiricism (spatialized space) nor transcendental idealism (spatializing space) can account for what occurs in Stratton's experiment.

Empiricism must assume that the spatial orientation (and thus the topsy-turviness) is given directly by the course of sensations themselves. But taken by themselves as sensations, upright and inverted have no meaning, and so have no direction to pass on to the passive subject. No content is oriented in itself. The empiricist may agree and claim that uprightness is a nominal description of our ordinary bodily field and that inversion is what happens in relation to this ordinary field once the glasses are put on. Merleau-Ponty thinks this provides the empiricist with little. In Stratton's study, we have systems of appearances that change during the course of an experiment with no change in how the stimuli are ordered. We need to know why these appearances are anchored at one moment in the tactile field as upright and in the visual as upside-down, and why they straighten out. By themselves, the "objective relationships as ordered on the retina through the position of the physical image do not govern our experience of 'up' and 'down'" (*PP* 288). Empiricism thus fails to explain the orientation as given in a real space and real objects that the mind represents. If empiricism were the case, meaning that space is something external to the mind that we experience, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the world would have to have altered itself during the time period of reorientation to right itself for the subject (Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze* 78). So presumably, no explanation of our spatially-orientated experience can be given through the empiricist account.

The intellectualist asserts that up and down are relative positions, but then he cannot understand the experience of something being inverted since one cannot stand outside of the relativist position to have an orientated experience of space. Admitting that some privileged objects can take up a position in space in and of themselves brings back empiricism and its difficulties. While the constituting mind traces out all directions in space, it has no spatial orientation without an absolute here or starting

point to confer directional significance on its spatial determinations. So the intellectualist cannot even understand how to explain our experience that something could look topsy-turvy in the first place: "there is nothing, for a constituting mind, to distinguish the experience before from the experience after putting on the glasses, or even anything to make the visual experience of the 'inverted' body incompatible with the tactile experience of the 'upright' body, since it does not view the spectacle from anywhere" (*PP* 288). If the new orientations arose through the constitutive functions of the mind, how could any perceptual field resist transposition (292)? Nothing should look inverted and unreal at all.

The mutual failings of spatialized and spatializing space for Merleau-Ponty point to a third spatiality, which can accommodate the results of Stratton's experiment. This third spatiality would involve an absolute (something fixed) in the sphere of the relative that is rooted in and influenced by appearances, but can survive their total disorganization (i.e., the spatial reorientations of extreme cases and experiments). It will be encountered where form and content mingle. To disclose this third spatiality, he looks at an experiment by Wertheimer, where a subject sees the room he occupies only as reflected by a mirror tilted forty-five degrees to the vertical. In the mirror, the room's walls seem slanted, people moving in the room seem to lean to one side or another, and objects fall obliquely. Surprisingly, within half-an-hour the visual spectacle becomes vertical. Thus, there is a spatial reorientation without any motor exploration whatsoever.

For Merleau-Ponty this shows how bearings are taken by a global act on the part of the perceiving subject, based on the projected possibilities of the subject's embodied being-in-the-world. Both the perception of the slanted room and the adjusted perception had their own "spatial levels," or ways that a lived space appeared for the subject. Merleau-Ponty argues that these "spatial levels" should not be confused as being rooted in the physical body's orientation or "the symmetry axis of our body as a synergic system" (*PP* 291). No doubt the actual body plays a necessary part in establishing the spatial level, but the orientation is not the result of the objective body, but the body as an open field of possible corporeal actions (Olkowski, "Introduction" 3).[12] This is what Merleau-Ponty calls the "virtual body."

[12] Edward Casey argues that Merleau-Ponty neglects providing us an account of what the bodily basis of the spatial level is and suggests it is found in human beings' upright posture (*Getting Back* 80). I am not sure that Casey is right here. First, it seems to me the Merleau-Ponty clearly indicates that the spatial level is constituted by the synthesis of the virtual body with the world, not the actual body. The bodily basis would be that which provides the full range of "I cans" available in the situation. Second, Casey's claim seems either trivial or wrong. If Casey simply means our uprightness has a large impact on the formation of human spatial levels, then the point seems to be trivial since spatial levels would be formed without it. Furthermore, Casey's search for a bodily basis would remain incomplete. On the other hand, if Casey means our uprightness is the foundation

It seems that the slanted room provided coordinates for the subject's old "spatial level" to anchor into a new one. The virtual body accepts these coordinates, and in so doing adopts the virtual space of the tilted room and its possible situations (Low 280). By such an act it inhabits a field in which it is properly "located," a primordial space for the actions that may be performed by a human actor (Deutsch 210–11). Applying his explanatory hypothesis to the Wertheimer case, Merleau-Ponty argues that:

> As soon as Wertheimer's subject takes his place in the experimental situation prepared for him, the area of his possible actions—such as walking, opening a cupboard, using a table, sitting down—outlines in front of him . . . a possible habitat. At first the mirror image presents him with a room differently canted, which means that the subject is not at home with the utensils it contains, he does not inhabit it, and does not share it with the man he sees walking to and fro. After a few minutes, provided that he does not strengthen his initial anchorage by glancing away from the mirror, the reflected room miraculously calls up a subject capable of living in it. (*PP* 291)

A similar approach is used to explain the Stratton case. In both experiments, the virtual body drives the subject to inhabit the spectacle by gearing the body (as a set of potential actions) onto the world. The world calls forth and invites certain kinds of movements and kinds of action to which the pre-personal body-subject responds (Olkowski, "Introduction" 3).[13] The integration that the embodied subject experiences between itself and the environment takes place when the subject's motor intentions make a pact with the world which allows the body to possess the world. In other words, the subject now has the enjoyment of space. So Merleau-Ponty follows James and Husserl as seeing the body as a constituting "storm-centre" or "zero point," but places the focus on the virtual, not actual body (Behnke

for a spatial level, I cannot see how he is right. It seems to me that other animals form spatial levels (it seems more reasonable to assume so than to not), which do not have an upright posture. Casey does not explain himself here.

[13] Stephen Priest thinks that Merleau-Ponty is wrong in holding that objective locations cannot have a constitutive role in dictating spatial orientation (109). To counter this claim, he observes that standing in front of an object contributes to the object's front being presented to the subject. I think Priest is right in giving them a part in the constitutive role, but Priest incorrectly assumes that Merleau-Ponty rules this out. As I will explore in the section on the pre-personal subject, Merleau-Ponty was quite favorable to this idea, and grasps it in this notion of a question and answer relationship between the body and the world.

146).[14] To possess a body is to understand space and to be capable of adjusting spatial levels (*PP* 292–93).

However, a quick reflection on Merleau-Ponty's account of space as a precession of "spatial levels" shows that an infinite regress threatens: each spatial level's orientation presupposes the one before it, so that space is always constituted before any spatial level (Kockelmans 288; *PP* 293). Merleau-Ponty is aware of this problem but does not think that it shows his investigation to be "a mere expression of defeat" (qtd. in Cataldi 35). Instead of thinking we should avoid this regress or inquire why existence is spatial, Merleau-Ponty believes his analysis, with its infinite regress, lays bare the essence of space and the spatiality of being. This archaeological inquiry has uncovered that being is being-situated and that space has its basis in our "facticity."[15]

What is Merleau-Ponty's argument for these claims? Stephen Priest has helpfully reconstructed the main pieces of his argument (112). First, Merleau-Ponty claims that all beings are related to the perceived world. This perceived world is only grasped in terms of direction. If that is the case, then there is no being that is not oriented. If all beings are so oriented by necessity, then it is not possible to find an occasion where one can find a basis for space (*PP* 294). This argument appears to be valid, but some of its claims are empirical instead of logical. It may be the case in all possible worlds that to perceive a world requires orientation, but it may not.[16] I admit it is perplexing to think of alternatives; perhaps all subjects would necessarily be related to the world so as to be unable to find space's basis.

[14] In James' later explorations in radical empiricism, he said of the body that "the world experienced (otherwise called the 'field of consciousness') comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest. Where the body is is 'here'; when the body acts is 'now'; what the body touches is 'this'; all other things are 'there' and 'then' and 'that.' These words of emphasized position imply a systematization of things with reference to a focus of action and interest which lies in the body; and the systematization is now so instinctive (was it ever not so?) that no developed or active experience exists for us at all except in that ordered form. So far as 'thoughts' and 'feelings' can be active, their activity terminates in the activity of the body, and only through first arousing its activities can they begin to change those of the rest of the world. The body is the storm centre, the origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in all that experience train. Everything circles round it and is felt from its point of view. The word 'I', then, is primarily a noun of position, just like 'this' and 'here.' Activities attached to 'this' position have prerogative emphasis, and, if activities have feelings, must be felt in a peculiar way" (*Essays in Radical Empiricism* 170). As both Edward Casey and Shaun Gallagher have noted, Kant should not be left out of this tradition either. He thought that the spatial relations would be unimportant unless oriented directionally by referring them to the sides of our body (Casey, *Fate* 202; Gallagher 347).

[15] Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty generally use this term to refer to the way that humans find themselves in the world (the way by which humans interact with their surroundings in everyday life).

[16] It is difficult to conceive of an alternative (a non-oriented perception of the world), but human ingenuity and imagination seems like a questionable basis for determining what is possible.

But if this is not logically possible, Merleau-Ponty should spell this out better.[17] Furthermore, even if he could prove this, it would only provide us with an argument for why beings could not investigate the basis of space. It would serve more like Kant's noumenal barrier, limiting the scope of reason, but it would not demonstrate the spatiality of being.

Of course, one could respond that Merleau-Ponty's project is to uncover an understanding of being (ontology) from phenomenological inquiry, which relies upon and is understood through humanity's being-in-the-world. With Dasein's being-in-the-world in mind, Merleau-Ponty could think that all inquiries into being that neglect our being-in-the-world cannot be talked about and are pointless; all discussion is at least speculative and unjustifiable. While Merleau-Ponty clearly makes the logical claim that "*every conceivable being* is related either directly or indirectly to the perceived world," it is difficult to determine the scope of this comment, and the literature is divided on this subject (*PP* 294; emphasis added). For instance, Merleau-Ponty makes the claim that being is essentially spatial and situated, but it is hard to discern whether this claim is metaphysical or phenomenological. Interpreted as metaphysical, many philosophers would doubt this broad statement, since they think many things (numbers, abstract objects, universals, and mental states) are at least not clearly spatial, and a possible world might exist with only them in it. If Merleau-Ponty would prove otherwise, he must show how all these things are spatial after all. He cannot prove how spatiality is essential to being by simply showing that human beings are spatial.

However, if Merleau-Ponty is following Heidegger here in investigating the being of Dasein—how being is essentially spatial for Dasein—then these criticisms do not apply. But then there remains the difficulty of understanding why he compares and contrasts his study of space's essence with the intellectualists and empiricists. Perhaps it was for a general historical backdrop of accounts of space to orient his reader in the tradition, or more likely that Merleau-Ponty saw in them something correct that his phenomenological inquiry would incorporate into a more complete picture. Regardless of the exact reason, it is not clear that the infinite regress resulting from Merleau-Ponty's analysis leads to a clearer understanding of the essence of space and being in the sense understood by traditional philosophy. On the other hand, it does suggest an interesting way of thinking about the limit of our inquiry. Since space is presupposed in any human observation, spatiality does not come through constitution, but through the pre-personal subject that grasps the world. To avoid the infinite

[17] Merleau-Ponty's necessity may not be alethic, but he needs to at least spell out in more detail what necessity he is adopting, and why such necessity obtains in the case of spatial orientation.

regress of spatial levels, Olkowski believes that Merleau-Ponty opts for a pre-personal orientation for the experiencing subject rooted in a pre-personal, *anonymous* life that is located in the body ("Introduction" 3–4).[18] Merleau-Ponty contends that this pre-personal subject's contact with the world is more ancient than thought (the contact precedes it), saturates consciousness, and bestows upon us our primordial spatial level (Shengli 137). The uncovering of this subject is a central theme of the *Phenomenology*.

The Pre-Personal Subject and Motor Intentionality

Merleau-Ponty distinguishes the body-subject from the reflective, willful self. It lies underneath our personal existence, and is largely unnoticed until it gets in the way of an intended project. This body-subject is not just the source of our unconscious processes. Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty sees this pre-personal subject at play in many kinaesthetic circumstances: in the moving of our eyes, the slight adjustments of our head for our ears to hear a sound better, or the shifting of joints throughout the body as we intend toward objects (Behnke 143). Carl Ginsburg explains: "my eyes naturally move all the time. If I watch my own [bodily] process, I find a continuous shifting" (81). It involves adjusting the body to the world to increase our ability to carry out our practical goals and functions. This adjustment is so natural that trying to stop this bodily comportment is awkward and disorienting.

In fact, even more active movements seem hardly reflective. William James has given examples of such acts that are noteworthy. He observed that while having a conversation we might become conscious of a pin on the floor, or of some dust on a shirt sleeve ("What the Will" 242). Without interrupting the conversation we brush away the dust or pick up the pin. No express resolve is made; the perception of the object and the fleeting notion of the act seem to bring the latter about. James includes amongst these acts snacking on nuts when one is no longer hungry and they meet no express contradiction in the mind (if nothing stops it from having its way). And what about daydreaming? We even seem to find our thoughts swept away by currents we do not know where from.

For Merleau-Ponty these instances show our basic intentionality: the body's pre-reflective, spatial directedness towards the world (Reuter 72). Unlike Kant's and Husserl's transcendental egos, Merleau-Ponty's body-subject

[18] I am not certain whether this avoids the regress. Even if the primordial spatial level comes from the pre-personal body-subject, must not even this body have its own regress of spatial levels? How does it come to have one? Is it innately given at birth, or does it stem through an even wider regress? It is not clear how placing the regress's origins in the pre-personal life alleviates the issue.

does not provide the only foundation for meaning in this intentional relationship. The world also questions the body-subject, and its response is in the body's motility. The body's function cannot be understood without the world; their synthesis forms an inseparable system (Low 280–81). As a thing in between the for-itself and the in-itself,[19] Merleau-Ponty recognizes that the body functions something like a Kantian schemata. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant wondered how the pure categories of the understanding would necessarily apply to all possible experience. These pure concepts seem instantiated in the world, but we seem unable to directly intuit them. As a result, Kant decides that "there must be a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter" (*Critique* 272). For Kant, the third thing was the schematized categories, or the pure concepts of the understanding applied to our pure perception of time. Time, as occurring in every possible state of experience, provides the structure (rules and procedures) to ground and instantiate the pure concepts.

Following this line of thought, Merleau-Ponty's body schema provides the a priori condition of our experience in the corporeal possibilities it structures in advance for our awareness of objects and the world (Carman 219). Taylor Carman explains how the body schema is not a set of formal rules, but a set of integrated skills (or habits) directed to the world prior to the application of concepts. This is captured in "motor intentionality," or in how the body senses that what it can and cannot do structures our perception of objects and space. So like the Kantian schemata, human reflexes as expressions of the pre-personal self provide a motor a priori, constructing and orienting the perceived world as a field of freedom for corporeal actions (Carman 204). This original intentionality provides the fundamental structure of being-in-the-world, opening up the non-objective consciousness of not the "I think," but the "I can" (Shengli 136; Behnke 144–45). Merleau-Ponty recognized that this outlook on our lived embodiment veered far from the empiricism that reduced the body-subject's habitus to a flux of associated habits, while rationalism saw it as subsumed

[19] The for-itself and in-itself are two aspects of being that Jean-Paul Sartre describes in *Being and Nothingness*. The for-itself is the being of consciousness (or the being of persons), while the in-itself is the being of unconscious objects in the external world. Merleau-Ponty shows how the body-subject does not fit in this distinction, as the body can be considered as both subject (what perceives and is conscious) and object. In fact, the body is often treated as an object or a text in cases of medical surgery or dental work, and for good reason. I experience my body as an object sometimes when my leg falls asleep and it feels like dead-weight that I have to carry along. But it is clearly not an object. The body is not encountered as being "over there," or as behind oneself. I cannot walk around my body as I would a chair in a classroom. My body is strangely both perceiver and perceived.

beneath the possessive agency of intentional acts (Watson 525). The body-synthesis or schemata makes possible the lived experience of the body within temporal horizons.

To demonstrate how clearly involved this body-subject is in our lives, Merleau-Ponty examines behavioral disorders like phantom limbs and anosognosia. While persons with amputated limbs recognize that their appendages are missing, their bodily behavior nonetheless indicates they maintain the projects associated with those limbs (Hadreas 78). "The utilizable objects," he explains, "precisely in so far as they present themselves as utilizable, appeal to a hand which I no longer have" (*PP* 95). As long as those suffering from these disabilities remain open to the actions that their lost limbs were capable, they will retain their practical field. This practical field is formed by a pact (or Cezanne's "joining of hands") of the pre-personal "motor intentionality" of the body-subject with the world (Hadreas 63).

In the famous case of Schneider's "psychic blindness," the war veteran could not perform abstract movements like pointing at his nose when asked of him.[20] Yet the habitual movements needed for enjoying his life are performed with extraordinary precision. Physiologically, the movements may look the same, so Merleau-Ponty thinks that the reason why Schneider performs these other habitual actions in such a manner must be found elsewhere (Reuter 73; *PP* 110–12). A phenomenological inquiry suggests that Schneider's injury has affected his lived world (what Merleau-Ponty calls his "intentional arc"), so that he cannot project a situation to smoothly perform abstract movements. All such cases point to our original motor intentionality, even if it is in showing how they are impaired.

In his section on space, Merleau-Ponty shows how our operative intentionality affects the construction of spatial levels. Our spatial being-in-the-world is provided by this pre-personal body-subject's motility. He explains, "for us to be able to conceive space, it is in the first place necessary that we should have been thrust into it by our body, and that it should have provided us with the first model of those transpositions, equivalent and identifications which make space into an objective system and allow our experience to be one of objects, opening out on an 'in itself'" (142). Our first

[20] Psychic blindness is typified by being unable to do basic abstract movements, such as moving arms and legs, when ordered out of context by a doctor (like being told to point at one's nose). Jennifer Barker explains that "psychically blind patients can only perform a movement by throwing their whole bodies into it, because the entire body is involved in every movement, and because any given movement is only significant, and only possible, as part of an intentional task. So, to cite examples from Merleau-Ponty, for a psychically blind person to mime 'hair-combing,' he would have to mime all parts of that task, including the holding of a mirror in the other hand. A psychically blind person couldn't simply mime a 'salute' by raising a hand to one's forehead, but also must stand rigidly at attention while making the hand motion" (87).

experience found us already at work in a world, rooted in this pre-personal subject (Kockelmans 289). For this reason Merleau-Ponty contends that bodies are not in space, but *of* space and *inhabit* space (Shengli 136). Our bodily habits and comportments bring about space, such that space is part of human being. So while the spatial level is only one way of constituting an integrated world, "far from my body's being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body" (*PP* 292; 102). Nonetheless, this space is not the determinate and fixed space of empiricism or transcendental idealism. As Maria Talero has wisely noted, the synthesis of body-subject and the flesh of the world motivates a particular way of relating to space; it does not necessitate one (444). The body and the world converse and cooperate to construct a preferential spatial orientation for the realization of corporeal action, a temporal and provisional effort. This leads to questioning the universality of space.

The Plurality of Spaces

In the "Transcendental Aesthetic," Kant tries to prove that space is not a concept of relations among things in general, but rather a pure perception, through the claim that we cannot imagine anything but one universal space. Any talk of many spaces is only a confusion of place with space. These discrete spaces will turn out to be spatially related and so parts of the universal space. While Kant's argument has convinced many, it has been opposed by, among others, P. F. Strawson in his account of a mind in a "sound world" (Glock 35), and implicitly challenged in David Lewis' robust modal realism, which posits infinitely many possible worlds that are not causally or spatiotemporally related to one another (Lewis 70–71).[21]

Merleau-Ponty also disagrees with Kant's universal space, but does so for perhaps less obscure and metaphysical reasons than Strawson and Lewis.[22] He sees new spatialities opened up in our everyday experience, particularly through aesthetic perception of a painting or dance. He argues these spaces are not related to one another, if one means the ability to travel physically between them. Kant may have had a different criterion, but he did not give it (Priest 114). If physical travelability is the criterion, then it appears that Merleau-Ponty has presented examples of space that are not spatially related. Of course I can walk up to the piece of art, but I cannot

[21] For Lewis, while there may be possible worlds that are not spatiotemporal at all, consisting solely of numbers, there are numberless worlds that are spatiotemporal, but that are not related to this or any other space-time of another possible world.

[22] Whether Merleau-Ponty is correct in his critique of Kant will not be discussed in this paper. I will only advance the reasons for why Merleau-Ponty disagrees with Kant's notion of one space.

leave the space of the art gallery to join the space in the art work. Likewise, when I watch science fiction films I can see the space in which the action of the screen takes place, but it is not a space into which I can travel.

Beyond our aesthetic experiences, Merleau-Ponty mentions the privatized world and space of the schizophrenic. Kant might respond that the schizophrenic's mind is constituted differently, so that if he experiences space, his space must be one even if different from our space.[23] However, Merleau-Ponty suggests even more radically that "there are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences" (*PP* 340). Priest thinks this claim may be supported by thinking of the content of olfactory and some auditory experiences that seem unrelated to the spatial content of visual experiences, or the fact that I cannot step into the mental space of Cambridge in my imagination or the dream space of the Planet Zorgon (114–15; Shengli 318). With these collective considerations Merleau-Ponty adds his voice to others that doubt Kant's proof that only one space exists, and so that space is a pure form of perception, but he doubts it for phenomenological reasons.

Conclusion

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty reflects phenomenologically on extreme cases of how humans form spatial orientations to consider the body schema's role in constructing spatial levels, and the plurality of spaces open to perception. He surveys several different philosophical ideas of space, and shows that both empiricist and intellectualist viewpoints as they stand cannot explain how spatial orientation is altered in the experiments of Stratton and Wertheimer. This leads Merleau-Ponty to search for a third spatiality, which he believes is rooted in a synthesis of the body-subject and the world. Although Merleau-Ponty's precession account of spatial levels may admit an infinite regress, he thinks it nonetheless discloses being's spatiality and how being is situated. However, it is difficult to understand whether Merleau-Ponty's claims are metaphysical in the sense of speaking of being as a whole or as describing Dasein's being, given how he introduces and critiques other philosophical positions on space. If the former, then his claims appear to lack some justification in attributing the spatiality of human being to all being. This is not to say they are wrong, but that either he requires further analysis to substantiate them, or that the metaphysics he is undertaking cannot be proved (as far

[23] But is Kant then just saying we only experience one space at a time (no matter what space we experience, it is unified as one)? For a schizophrenic was not necessarily always in that condition, and so could then have had two different types of space (in pre-schizophrenia and post-schizophrenia).

as I can tell) by phenomenological reflection. Perhaps Merleau-Ponty is not aiming at a metaphysical proof, but then it is hard to see how his meditation has led us to the essence of space itself. Humans may only understand space through their own being-in-the-world, but that does not necessitate any reality's spatiality considered apart from them. And yet Merleau-Ponty might respond that Dasein's spatiality is the only space that we can reflect on and whose essence we can grasp. All other talk is groundless. Despite this problematic issue, Merleau-Ponty provides a novel and compelling account of how space is lived, and how the pre-personal body-subject impacts its constant formation.

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