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## INTENTIONALITY IN PERSPECTIVAL STRUCTURE<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

Intentionality is a principal concept in phenomenology, conceived by Husserl and others as the directed nature of consciousness. But in English-spoken philosophy and science on human action, the term "intentionality" is associated with the purposes of actions. In both of these very different concepts we find a tight coherence between the subject-object relation and the very idea of intentionality. In Husserl's phenomenology the subject side is known as "noesis," "intentio" or "cogitatio," and the object side is called "noema," "intendum" or "cogitatum." The close connection between intentionality and the subject-object relation may be explicated by two principles: A "structural" principle of rational orientation, namely the correspondence between subjective perspectives and objective aspects, together with a "dynamic" principle of organizing activity ("acts" or "agency") which places the subject in a dichotomy with its passive objects. As it will appear from the following pages, both of these principles are examined in various ways and surpassed by Merleau-Ponty. Our interrogation of the perspective-aspect correspondence - which make up the major part of this essay - uncovers a different kind of perspectival structure: the figure-background structure which spontaneously appears in perception and expression. The critique of the principle of the active subject - which will only be discussed very briefly - thematizes how Merleau-Ponty's analyses of deep intentionality are associated with new notions of sociality and time.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy has been presented (e.g. by Lyotard 1991) as a radical departure from Husserl. In my understanding, however, Merleau-Ponty is the primary heir of phenomenology: starting with the most serious problems which Husserl left unsolved, treating them along lines which Husserl also had some notion of, and often returning respectfully to Husserl when new challenges to the development of phenomenology were confronted. Moreover, the renewal of the concept of intentionality is a continuous and brilliant discussion in Merleau-Ponty's works. Though the explicit mentioning of *fungierende*, operative, latent or bodily intentionality is not so very frequent in his works, it remains an underlying and implicit theme. The through and through phenomenological theme of intentionality marks Merleau-Ponty's own position in his explorations of structuralism and Heideggerian ontology. Sometimes, surely, he expresses his critical distance to the traditional notion of a "philosophy of intentionality." But this is always to emphasize how his own position departs from the philosophy of conscious

acts that Husserl remained associated with. The nature and implications of Merleau-Ponty's "archaeological" findings - in perception, in expression, in our entire bodily-social existence - clearly indicate his commitment to the exploration of intentionality<sup>2</sup>, and thereby, its conceptual maturation in coherence with the unfolding of a more profound phenomenology.

## II. *On the reading of Merleau-Ponty's works*

The development in Merleau-Ponty's works may in several ways be regarded as divided into phases. For the framing of our discussion on his conceptualization of bodily intentionality it is of particular interest whether the phenomenological character of his philosophy may at any time be questioned. The division that might indicate any ruptures or jumps at all in his view of phenomenology comprises five phases. A first phase, pointing to phenomenology through a discussion of theory of science, is marked by *La structure du comportement* (The structure of behavior) from 1942. Various levels of explicating the human body and behavior are discussed, and an irreducible, intentional level is identified as the highest. *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Phenomenology of perception) from 1945 introduces a second phase with unequivocal focus on phenomenological philosophy. Later in the 1940s comes the third phase, where Merleau-Ponty broadens out his work and becomes more occupied with psychology and other social and cultural sciences together with politics, but without - for that reason - indicating a change of his phenomenological position. The fourth phase unfolds from about the beginning, and fifth at the end, of the 1950s. He first becomes interested in structuralism and later in ontology, which is clearly manifested respectively in the collection of essays reassembled 1960 in *Signe* (Signs) and in the book *Le Visible et l'invisible* on which he was working at the time of his death in 1961. Surely, it is the last change in Merleau-Ponty's orientation that is most relevant to the questioning of a continuous phenomenological position in Merleau-Ponty. In his foreword to this unfinished work by Merleau-Ponty, Lefort gives a subtle introduction to the text. As he relates it to the earlier works by Merleau-Ponty, however, he only presents *The Visible and the Invisible* as taking up again the early analyses from *Phenomenology of Perception* in order to envelop them in a new ontology which permits a criticism of "the philosophy of reflection, dialectics and phenomenology" (Lefort 1968, xxi). Thereby, Lefort's interpretation left the impression of an almost complete rupture in Merleau-Ponty's development and a departure from the phenomenological position. Kwant's acknowledged investigation (1966) of Merleau-Ponty's unfinished book did not unequivocally refute this impression. On one hand, he points to the fact that Merleau-Ponty now - more directly than in the earlier texts collected in *Signs* - is critical towards the predominant (i.e. Husserlian) understanding of phenomenology. On the other hand, Kwant concludes his discussion of the topic in this way:

Merleau-Ponty is convinced that he does not deny phenomenology but contributes to the revelation of its real meaning. His last work demonstrates the metaphysical impact of the phenomenological tradition. (Kwant 1966, 228).

The standpoint that Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy marks a complete shift in relation to his earlier, phenomenological position has been prevailing among scholars for a long time. Two well-known representatives of this view are Madison (1981), who - close in line with Lefort's statement - finds that in the end Merleau-Ponty left phenomenology in order to take up ontology, much like Heidegger had done. Schmidt (1985) on the other hand, claims that Merleau-Ponty was rather leaving phenomenology in order to enter into structuralism. Gradually, however, a growing number of texts (e.g. Barbaras 1992, Hall 1977, Kono 1992, Richir 1986, Taminiiaux 1972, Waldenfels 1987) dealing with this issue and pointing to the continuity of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological position have impressed the general understanding of his philosophy. Of course, this agreement leaves open questions about how to weight Merleau-Ponty's early analyses against the late ones (- and how his views of various general and specific matters change over time).

The illumination of operative, bodily intentionality is a task for Merleau-Ponty at the beginning as well as at the end of his *oeuvre*, pronounced in the preface of *The Phenomenology of Perception* and in the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*. I find, however, that the topic of intentionality is frequently undervalued if not neglected by Merleau-Ponty scholars. Though almost any serious discussion of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy would mention or even emphasize his attempt to surpass the subject-object distinction, it is not so easy to find interpretations that maintain Merleau-Ponty's own critical stance, which - exactly through the conceptualization of an intentionality which is bodily - implies the phenomenological understanding of cognition, consciousness and the ego as *derived* dimensions of experience and praxis. Kwant (1966) is overtly in doubt about how to designate Merleau-Ponty's understanding of intentionality in *The Visible and the Invisible*, but mostly leans to talk about a "pre-intentional" level of being (ibid. 220-226). To point out a remarkable example of the erudite negligence of Merleau-Ponty's renewal of the concept of intentionality, we could look at a distinguished scholar such as Levinas, who is certainly well acquainted with phenomenology and usually regarded as a post-phenomenologist, positioning himself in the prolongation of and opposition to phenomenology, which follows from his close critique. In *Beyond intentionality* (Levinas 1983), where he argues that intersubjectivity is found in immediate experience and before any intentionality, it is most surprising that he does not mention Merleau-Ponty at all. Thus, the intentionality that Levinas is determined to surpass is delimited by perfect noematic-noetic matching in a presence and by an immanence to thinking where no "exteriority" can really be transcendence. In *Intersubjectivity: Notes on Merleau-Ponty* and in *Sensibility* (Levinas 1990a, b respectively), Levinas states his criticism of the understanding of

intersubjectivity which Merleau-Ponty presents in "The Philosopher and his Shadow," an essay in *Signs* where Merleau-Ponty discusses Husserl's *Ideen II*. The problems which Levinas seems to have with Merleau-Ponty's rendering of sociality and intentionality are discussed elsewhere (Keller 2001). For now, I just want to point to the remarkable claim whereby Levinas draws a conclusion about Merleau-Ponty's (and Husserl's) position: "In the phenomenological theory of intersubjectivity, it is always the *knowledge* of the alter ego that breaks egological isolation." (Levinas 1990a 58) As Levinas mentions, knowledge is closely associated with cognition and consciousness. So, according to him, Merleau-Ponty's position in "The Philosopher and his Shadow" does not differ much from the well-known Husserlian phenomenology. Levinas may perhaps be right as to Husserl's position; Lyotard, among others, has also suggested that it remained "a meditation on knowledge" (Lyotard 1991, 31). However, the focus of Levinas's attention is on a few peripheral sentences and not on the main point of Merleau-Ponty's text, which is to illuminate the intersubjective, bodily intentionality of experiences and practices that are more basic than cognition. Unfortunately, Levinas's reading of Merleau-Ponty is not so very unusual. For example, in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, which was launched only a few years ago, the article on Merleau-Ponty (Pietersma 1997) also presents him as a philosopher who is occupied by cognitive, epistemological topics, and in the relatively large article on intentionality in the same encyclopedia Kersten (1997) only mentions Merleau-Ponty in a clause.

The reception of recurrent and essential themes of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy must, of course, be an interpretation. This interpretation has to reflect upon certain inconsistencies in his writings. Merleau-Ponty philosophical style is explorative and "analytically questioning" in the sense of searching for origins (like Heidegger and Foucault), rather than building systems (like Hegel) or "explicating answers" (like Ricoeur). His usually very elegant and deep investigations often challenge established concepts, and are not "at any price" restricted to a consistent vocabulary. Thus, it is even more problematic than by "the ordinary" interpretation of texts to pick up individual sentences from Merleau-Ponty and try to construe them out of their contexts. We have to understand Merleau-Ponty through the points he is making and at the level of his own argumentation. Furthermore, we have to acknowledge the explicit self-criticism in Merleau-Ponty's late works, where *Phenomenology of Perception* is blamed for "bad ambiguities" (the use of unmediated contrasts as a kind of "dialectic" description), and for being bound by the vocabulary of the philosophy of consciousness that the very same text is an attempt to surpass. Unfledged and self-defeating notions like "passive synthesis" and "tacit *cogito*" are symptoms - more than a cure - of this problem. On the other hand, the difficulty of his late works and notes consists first and foremost in the unfinished character of the major work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, and in the fact that the very exciting notes to this work and to his courses, which he left us by his sudden death were not at all prepared for the public. Consequently,

Lefort in his foreword to *The Visible and the Invisible* pointed out the very big difference between the fragmentary style of the working notes (that make up a large part of this book) and the elegant analyses and reflective discussions that characterizes Merleau-Ponty's writings.

In general, the discussion of Merleau-Ponty's works demands a careful attention to the differences between interpretation and reconstruction of his philosophy. If reconstruction means collecting "bits and pieces" across Merleau-Ponty's texts, comparing and interpreting this material in order to demonstrate through-going lines, then this essay is a product of reconstruction. Perhaps it must also be called a reconstruction in the sense of applying a somewhat foreign methodical approach to his works. But this does not mean that there is any attempt to unfold an "unthought-of" element in Merleau-Ponty, whereby it might be suggested to strengthen his position in some way. The effort is simply to explicate the "answers" that he delineates through his questioning analyses: to illuminate Merleau-Ponty's general conceptualization of that bodily intentionality, which he repeatedly discovers in different dimensions and domains of our existence, when his analyses "break through" the formation of subject-object relations and clarifies the phenomenology of more immediate experience and practices beneath that formation. So, rather than keeping close to one or more of Merleau-Ponty's specific analyses, the aim is to present the general picture of how the analysis of primordial intentionality disintegrates and dissolves the characteristics of the subject-object relation. Far from (for that reason) being an introduction, the attempt is to outline what characterizes Merleau-Ponty's understanding of intentionality, and to hopefully indicate how very central and almost ubiquitous it is in his writings, implicitly or explicitly. Obviously, this essay can only be a small contribution to a thorough interpretation and presentation of Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of intentionality. For one thing, the focus of the essay is, as mentioned previously, restricted to the "structural" discussion of the subject-object relation as a perspective, leaving aside the "dynamic" discussion of the active role of the subject. With the following pages I hope, however, to make it clear that Merleau-Ponty offers us more than some fine analyses of pre-theoretical perception and expression: he situates phenomenology beyond a philosophy of consciousness, cognition and the ego.

### III. *Pre-thematic openness*

With the perspective and the corresponding aspect, intentionality is understood like an elementary attitude or standpoint towards some current or imagined situation. But, as it will appear, we know of more immediate levels of intentionality, according to Merleau-Ponty. The intentionality may just be our orientation in situations that emerge as well-known but yet quite undetermined by any judgement on our hand. There is even an intentionality with a further openness, where situations (that still can be very trivial) occur

as equivocal or indistinct. We may, for instance, be caught by the incoherent or obscure components of a situation as a passing and insignificant "invitation," "question" or "opportunity," and respond adequately without really noticing it. In elementary everyday situations we are able to explore alternatives, meet hindrances and be comfortable without actually thematizing anything (i.e. having a problem delineated, selected and then processed forth to a solution). The thematizing - where we apply particular perspectives and notice the corresponding aspects that appear - only takes place as an interruption of the more spontaneous and "free-floating" attention whereby we accomplish our everyday routines. This spontaneous attention may merely need a hint of a focus, or it may only be focused in a very transient way.

Let us first consider briefly the application of perspectives in ordinary socio-cultural life, like everyday conversation and routine action. Then, perspectives on physical things are discussed, i.e. the case that is often understood as the more literal and prototypical kind of perspectives. Different perspectives and corresponding aspects overlap dynamically as well as structurally in an everyday conversation. In dialogue or discussion there is always the possibility of diverging interpretations of the communication's theme, of how interesting it is and how it relates to other topics. Only if we are content with a very abstract and superficial description - a "picture book phenomenology" - may an ordinary conversation be regarded as a course of phases where a number of perspectives "occupy the scene" one by one. This is not to deny that in communication we do in varying degree approach situations where certain perspectives stand out. Perhaps a surprising remark suddenly indicates a completely different point of view and then the conversation may evolve into a debate or dispute. But not until the divergence is obvious are we forced to make up our minds (and perhaps take up meta-communication) about the differing perspectives which apparently were in the conversation.

Another example: The certainty whereby we perform routine actions is not based on a constant "monitoring" of everything that goes on. I get the vacuum cleaner out, do the cleaning, and put the vacuum back in its place largely without bringing forth anything that deserves being called a thought concerning the cleaning. On the contrary, my attention flows away from the performance of the routine. But of course, the routine activity implies a certain dynamics which now and then tends to call on, interrupt, distract or steal my attention: a chair is difficult to move or the wire falls out of the plug outlet.

Now, if we regard the meaning of "perspective" in the sense of a visual view of some physical matter, the case is similar to the outlook on a socio-cultural matter. Strictly speaking, what we see quite immediately when we use (or just relate to) well-known everyday things is not the appearance of the things in aspects. Immediately, you don't see a coffee cup as it appears in an aspect "from on side of the cup." There is not any aspect (or perspective) present for you. What you see at once is the very cup and the whole of it. You

don't have to investigate it further before pouring coffee into it. Again, there are indistinct boundaries between being in a habitual situation with its open possibilities of changing in different directions and being caught by something within the situation which challenges the routine features of the situation by calling for particular attention: Perhaps, the cup is unhandy because the handle is very small.

One more example: Strictly speaking, a greengrocer's goods - arranged on the footpath in front of the shop - don't make up any specific object, such as the invariance or sum of the aspects in which the arranged merchandise can appear to us. Mutually, these aspects are not clearly distinct, and together they don't precisely make up any definite set. Merely within certain delimited structures of experience and practice, e.g. that of the fruit grower, the greengrocer or the passing potential customers, may it for instance be remarkable that a red apple could be found in the box with pears. It is entirely on the basis of a much more open structure of experience and practice, that we may assume some specific perspective on the single apple in its context and thus reduce it to an aspect: a fascinating play of form and colour, a merchandise with a specific price, a refreshing or disappointing taste, or a missile.

In the usual, unproblematic perception we simply don't experience a perspective or its corresponding aspect<sup>3</sup>. It requires a certain distance to our own immediate experience - some degree of objectification - to realize a subjective perspective or an aspect of the object:

I perceive before me a road or a house, and I perceive them as having a certain dimension: the road is a country road or a national highway, the house is a shanty or a farm. These identifications presuppose that I recognize the true size of the object, quite different from that in which it appears to me from the point at which I am standing. We frequently say that I restore the true size on the basis of the apparent size by analysis and conjecture. This is inexact for the very convincing reason that the apparent size of which we are speaking is not given to me. It is a quite remarkable fact that the uneducated have no inkling of perspective and that it took a long time and much reflection for men to become aware of a perspectival deformation of objects. Thus, there is no deciphering, no mediate inference, from the sign to the signified, because the alleged signs are not given to me separately. Merleau-Ponty 1989 p. 46-7; modified from 1964b p. 14-15.

Immediate perception cannot be understood as a cognitive relation between form and matter (or thought and object) as it is indicated by the correspondence of perspective and aspect. To perceive is to *feel meaning* or to find oneself embedded in a meaning. Perception is a bodily structuring of meaning, common to emotions, actions, sense impressions, thoughts and linguistic expressions. As the very body we are, *le corps propre*, we have a good hold of the reality and facticity of things without first having to relate to possibilities and necessities of their appearance and attributes. This bodily-organized meaning seems to become paradoxical as soon as it is attempted to



objectify it: we notice the things and topics in a perspective, and yet, in perception we are beyond the perspective beforehand.<sup>4</sup> Actually, this is not a paradox but rather an indication of different levels of the perceptual structuring of meaning together with the vertical emergence of intentionality across these levels.

A more principal opposition has been touched upon, and should now be made clear. We may become conscious that what we experience, are doing or just did is contingent upon a (more or less) specific perspective: I thought the cup was for drinking but it was only for decoration. Likewise, we may rightly regard actions and opinions as contingent upon some perspective. Still, the specific perspectives which we may recognize remove us, and it could be far, from what is actually experienced and done spontaneously. These perspectives are objectifications that appear as more distinct and definite than the instant and direct relations which we first and foremost have with the world as the bodily beings we are. Only when we have problems, when we reflect upon difficulties or hindrances with self-awareness, may descriptions in terms of perspectives and aspects roughly be adequate renderings of what we actually experience and practice. The pre-perspectival openness is a pre-thematic openness.

Descriptions in terms of perspective and aspect don't go to "the very matter" of immediate experience and don't, in a sufficiently radical way, bracket scientific pre-conceptions of perception. We might attempt to summarise what Merleau-Ponty found below the corresponding perspectives and aspects as a myriad of tentative and incomplete perspectives, some unresponsive to or in conflict with each other and some mutually confirming, some accentuated and others marginal. We will see, however, that a more adequate rendering of Merleau-Ponty's conception of intentionality in immediate perception requires a *redefinition* of the term "perspective."

#### IV. *Transcendence*

Originally, intentionality is a transcendence in two different senses: transcendence of the subject position in any particular subject-object dichotomy and transcendence of "facticity." In the first sense, we are "absorbed" in the reality of current events, and in the second, we are, furthermore, absorbed in a subjectivity exploring and structuring the non-factual (i.e. the potentials) in the present. The visual fixation of a point in its field or an event in its situation, through movements of the eyes in compensation for body movements, is a prototypical indication of how we are situated "out there" in the sensible structure of a social and physical field. In a working note Merleau-Ponty writes:

The constancy of the fixed point and the mobility of what is this side of it and beyond it are not partial, local phenomena, and not even a bunch of phenomena: it

is one sole transcendence, one sole graduated series of *divergencies* [écarts] - The structure of the visual field, with its near-bys, its far-offs, its horizon, is indispensable for there to be *transcendence*, the model of every transcendence. Merleau-Ponty 1964a p. 284; modified from 1968 p. 231; original emphases.

With immediate intentionality we are absorbed in contexts that are not presented to us as objects. We do not experience any separation between ourselves and the affair with which we are occupied in an engaged way. For a time we "lend," as it were, all of our attention to an event, including a vast structure of experience and expectations which surrounds the focus of the current perception as different horizons. In the transcendence you do not yet exist as an observer or spectator who may set up various specific perspectives. All that you know of here and now is positioned around a centre down there in the football match, face to face with your favourite movie star, in the action of the novel, in the political discussion at the lunch table, or in the topic of your work process. To the same extent that the transcendence locates you "out" at the centre of the events, the socio-cultural field is also "inside" you: you feel the excitement in the body when a goal is about to be scored or when the movie star wants to be embraced.

In this intertwining and lack of differentiation between us and the world there is no complete standstill. Something new is always about to take place. Some potential possibilities are always approaching their accomplishment or dissolution. Immediate intentionality is always transcendence in this sense of some inclination or project whereby the present situation points beyond what is actually given. This indicates that different kinds of transcendence are all features of the subjectivity associated with intentionality. Any facticity at the foreground of our attention is always-already surpassed because intentionality has a momentum of imagination. Intentionality is a movement, structuring the reality as it is unfolding towards something potential. This mark of the imaginary is also basic to the lay out of any subject-object relation and for ideas of objectivity.

The transcendence makes it hard to regard immediate intentionality as something that has to do with the perspective-aspect correspondence of a subject-object relation, *even if the* perspectives and aspects are interpreted as no more than potential and equivocal. Initially, the entities that "compete about" and "appeal to" our attention are not at all aspects or perspectives, but *Gestalten*. A gestalt is a unity, which differs from everything else, a figure differing from its background. Meaning emerges as a simple difference between the gestalt of a "something" and "everything else." By reflection, we may learn that this "everything else" makes up the background for the gestalt: namely the world and our existence, *both* structured in relation to this particular gestalt. So, the *Gestalt* is a "something," a positive particular (- rather than nothing or something else), a "pregnancy" (simultaneous with the structuring of time and space) implying the relation between a perceiving body and a sensible world. This does neither involve the *thought* of

"something" nor the *idea* of "anything" (*etwas überhaupt*). Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the *Gestalt* is far from any framework of "cognition," "consciousness" or "subject-object relations"; as a primordial transcendence, it implies our immediate being-in-the-world.<sup>5</sup>

In different kinds of expression and perception, we know of *gestalts* as meaningful structures, which are not yet as well formed as ideas or thoughts but merely ambiguous figures, perhaps coming to take on more precise forms. In its immediate appearance, a *gestalt* may be a quite indeterminate figure the near background of which is then correspondingly obscure. The background of the *gestalt* may eventually imply our entire existence, which then for a while acquires a co-ordinated direction (a point of orientation) in this *gestalt*. Thus, the *gestalt* may be the presence of "something" surprising that immediately catches our full attention, like the expression "hey!" from somebody nearby who we don't already observe. For a moment, it is like this expression is the centre of the world, as if everything has to be structured anew and could only find a meaning with this point of departure. Certainly, the *gestalt* may also be "something" which in a more habitual and ingrown way draws us into a similar immediate structuring.

Husserl declared that phenomenological analysis goes to "the very matter" and describes experience as it is, without theoretical prejudices. But prominent phenomenologists like Husserl himself and Gurwitsch were caught by the common sense idea of a perspective, which is also established in classical painting and in natural science approaches to psychology. Merleau-Ponty's more stringent and radical analyses of perception unveiled that, far from being at the vertex of a perspective pointing out into an environment, we are "out there" among the physical things. This is in just as literal a sense as when the matter is about taking part in sociocultural communities. Spontaneous experience is simply not associated with any impression that the experience originates in ourselves. Meaning is not confined by physical location, and we are not *in* our bodies. We *are* lived, intentional bodies, immediately occupied by and situated in meaningful physical, social and cultural matters.

Immediate perception is transcendence because it is bodily structuring of meaning through and through: there simply is not any "space" for a subject or an object. Nor does the *gestalt* simply foreshadow an object (which is yet obscure). It is just as much an omen of the subject (which may bring more order to the object). To understand what the *gestalt* is, implies to lay open the bodily and expressive character of perception. Merleau-Ponty points out that we must

recognize a primary process of signification in which the expressed does not exist apart from the expression, and in which the signs themselves induce their meaning externally. In this way the body expresses the entire existence, not as an external accompaniment to it, but because existence fulfils itself in the body. This incarnate meaning is the central phenomenon of which body and mind, sign and significance are abstract moments.

Merleau-Ponty 1945 p. 193; modified from 1962 p. 166.

Immediate perception "keeps more than it promises": we safely ground our expectations and thoughts on the transcendence by an intentionality which reaches far beyond what might be given by any cluster of aspects in correspondence with their perspectives. Perceptual faith, the intimacy and confidence that characterize pre-thematic openness and transcendence, is a particular and basic kind of conviction. Our reliance on immediate perception is not of the same kind as the reliance we may have on a thoroughly contemplated judgement. I am not testing any thesis when I reach for the coffee cup. Nor do I - with a cool and objective mind - realize that a proposition was falsified, when suddenly the cups start to jump across the table. At first, I am alarmed or at least surprised, and not until a moment later do I establish the thematic perspective in which the "cups" are carnival novelties. The body holds an immense perceptual faith in the world that is implied as a background for positing and judging on any empirical thesis. So, it is not least due to this perceptual faith that firm and robust conviction can make up the implicit background structures of rationality, as intentionality leads on to the emergence of perspective-aspect correspondences.

Transcendence implies a confidence with the world which marks the entire structure of our experience and subjective identity. But this basic conviction is not infallible knowledge. On the contrary, pre-thematic openness and transcendence (not least the tentative anticipation and projections of possibilities beyond the facticity) are marked by contingency and ambiguity. Thus, we are eminently capable of living with a faith that upon thematic reflection turns out to be based on and tightly integrated with chance. This is an ontological peculiarity of our existence, not merely a modern (or post-modern) condition. "Wild being" is the term Merleau-Ponty uses for this thorough unification of familiarity and contingency, of conviction and ambiguity, which characterizes intentionality before the appearance of any perspective-aspect correspondence.

In summary, the transcendence of perspective-aspect correspondence in immediate perception and expression implies perspectives in another sense, - quite different from any kind of subject-object relation, namely figure-background perspectives. Now, we are talking about perspectives with *gestalts* at their vertex. The world and our existence are structured as a joint "entity," a background that holds the implicit meaning of the *gestalt*. *Gestalt* and background may be further differentiated and explicated by reflection. Thereby, the background may show itself as a "double ground" (or a double series of concentric horizons): a world and an existence. Still, in the unreflected immediacy of the *gestalt*, there doesn't even appear any correlation between the world and our existence. No distance, separation, or difference between the world and us has to emerge immediately. The spontaneous distinction or distance (*écart*) is merely between a *gestalt* and a background, and thematization of this distinction reveals correlation between the world and our existence in the figure as well as in the background.

## V. *The structuring of figure-background perspectives*

Merleau-Ponty's critique of the subject-object perspective - of intentionality as the noematic-noetic correspondence between an object's aspect and a subject's perspective - is well-known. His inspired and critical occupation with the Gestalt psychology has also frequently been pointed to. But it has not attracted so much attention that this psychological inspiration made it possible for Merleau-Ponty to clearly express a distinctive and ground-breaking phenomenological discovery: The uncovering of primordial intentionality as the structuring of figure-background perspectives, the meaningful orientation which is already given in structures of transcendence and pre-thematic openness.

Another phenomenologist who was also inspired by Gestalt psychology, Gurwitsch, has criticised (1964) Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* for not being based upon a noematic-noetic analysis of perception. The answer to this is, of course, that phenomenology in its quest for "the very matter" in the phenomena and in its uncompromising analyses of origins is directed towards the analysis of the most immediate manifestations of intentionality, and hence it must necessarily become an "archaeology" of perception and expression. Still, quite a few phenomenologists do not seem to realize that the concepts and tools of noematic-noetic analysis are incompatible with this archaeology, and thus that the noematic-noetic principle turns into a dogmatism that is a hindrance to the maturation of phenomenology. Obviously, Gurwitsch did not appreciate that precisely the careful phenomenological study of immediate intentionality leads to insights that cannot possibly be grasped in noematic-noetic analyses or reformulated as noema-noesis correspondences. The conceptualization of these phenomenological insights requires the vocabulary of structure, figure-ground and *Gestalt*. When Merleau-Ponty used this vocabulary in his analyses of intentionality, it was because he had *unveiled* intentionality as a structural orientation in our immediate gestures and perception, and because the unmistakable figure-background perspective of that intentional structuring offered a more profound approach to phenomenological explication and description than the dogmatic noematic-noetic analysis.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of structure is central not only to his idea of science, but to his phenomenology in general. Several scholars (e.g. Boer 1978, Lanigan 1972, Waldenfels 1980, 1985) have emphasized the continuous phenomenological approach that we find in the development of Merleau-Ponty's concept of structure. Furthermore, Taminiaux (1976) and Chadarevian (1990) have both pointed to the fact that the initial notion of structure (to be found in *The Structure of Behavior*), which Merleau-Ponty adopted through his critical studies of Gestalt psychology, largely remained in play when the psychological interest changed into a linguistic and finally an ontological concern. The interesting Gestalt psychological finding is not the well-know experimental shifting between a figure and a background. It is the

primacy of the *Gestalt*: the immediacy of a meaningful figure standing out from its background, a significant "entity" which spontaneously has its meaning simply by appearing in the coherence with - and in the distinction from - its "surroundings." The fact that Merleau-Ponty's analyses of intentionality cultivated the notion of immediate figure-background perspectives does not imply that he can be categorized together with the gestalt psychologists. He was explicit in his criticism of Gestalt psychology for not being aware of the "nature" (i.e. the conceptual implications and theoretical potential) of its own findings. This criticism points to the thoroughly phenomenological character of Merleau-Ponty's understanding: If immediate experience has the structure of dynamic figure-background perspectives, this means that the figure can be any negligible gestalt and the background ultimately is related to our whole life-world. The phenomenological explication of this origin reaches the metaphysics of our situated existence, the spontaneous and continuous structuring of a field between the infinitesimal-intangible "here-and-now" of the present and the infinite-intangible "everywhere-and-always" of the life-world. Therefore, the "background" cannot be fully "objectified" or turned into a figure, and neither can the "foreground" and its figures ever be any fully transparent presence. Furthermore, the understanding of the figure-background perspective as a situation already implies the socio-cultural structure of praxis as well as experience, which Merleau-Ponty indicated, for instance, with his notion of comportment as the common structure of human behaviour and consciousness.

Later on, when Merleau-Ponty's explication of structure is inspired by Saussure's linguistics, new terms like "difference" or "deviation" are to some extent substituted for the figure-ground distinction. But basically, the analysis of language remains centred around the perspectival formation of gestalts, just like the analysis of perception was. Language is not first and foremost a system of relations and differences. It is the event of communication, which always stands out on the background of a field, a linguistic community. And this field is spontaneously organized with orientations towards that communication and its particular expressions. For Merleau-Ponty, there is no structure without an orientation, and this orientation is towards "a center," a presence. As Dillon points out (1993), Merleau-Ponty's notion of the presence is closely associated with the relationship between figure and background, and this precisely marks the phenomenological understanding over and above the structuralists' understanding of structure.

In *The visible and the Invisible* the crucial phenomenological notion of presence is held up against the intangible, invisible, tacit and in so far absent, which none the less influences the structuring of the presence. This absent is not simply non-existent, but appears as traces in the presence, as a negativity in between what positively appears. That is why Merleau-Ponty focuses on the reciprocity, the complementarity, the chiasm and circularity between the presence (or the visible) and the absence (or invisible). In other words, he

discusses the interrelatedness between the explicitness or appearance within a foreground and the implicitness or latency within a background. Obviously, he has now become more attentive to the thematization and explication of the background in its impenetrability. The approach to this remote background has to be indirect (or negative): focusing on its interplay with a foreground. In the borderland between the two, at the horizons of our experience and practices, we find not only ambiguity, but a reversibility between alter and ego, between the speaking and the signified, the visible and the seer, the touching and the touched. This is not at all an "isolated reversibility," like the figure-ground switches in the experimental settings of the gestalt psychologists, but on the contrary an inter-changeability due to the common ambiguity and background adherence. In *Philosophy and Non-philosophy since Hegel* Merleau-Ponty (1976) notices several times that the reversibility is a latent intentionality that breaks the uni-directional relation of a noesis grasping its noema.

If the figure-background perspective with its whole structural organization, its distinction of and orientation towards a Gestalt, is pre-objective and does not belong to a subject, then what *is* it? At levels of experience and practice where "things" and "ideas" stand out in their different dimensions, as matter and form, it can only be regarded as a third dimension "in-between" the two others. But at more immediate levels of experience and practice, the very differentiation between things and ideas, between matter and form, appears to be structured out of this third dimension which Merleau-Ponty calls "flesh." While this denotation is introduced as a completely new concept in philosophy, to be understood like an "element" in the pre-Socratic philosophy, it does indicate a practical-aesthetic and existential materiality of being as well as the lived intentionality, which Merleau-Ponty has taught us to associate with the body. So, the perspectival structure, which creates a *Gestalt* with a distinction, is the intentional organization of "flesh" or "being." None of these notions are foreign to "meaning" and "experience." But how is ideality and ideas associated with the structuring of figure-background perspectives?

In their critique of Merleau-Ponty, phenomenologists such as Kelkel (1988) and Richir (1992) are holding on to the idealism of the noematic-noetic approach: the "primacy of perception" is regarded as the primacy of a *comprehension* that subsumes sensation (in-itself incomprehensible) under the ideas of an intellect. The ambiguous, "wild" and dehiscent character of immediate perception, which Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, is either ascribed to a domain (in principle accessible for intellectual reflection) of marginal consciousness and "passive synthesis," or discarded as belonging to the domain of pre-comprehensible sensation. Perception is, again, conceived as a noematic-noetic match, the grip of ideality on the sensible, whether it is linguistically constituted through a conceptual act, or just the "pre-cultural" formation (*Gebilde*) of "pure things" (*blosse Sachen*) in noematic ideality. But, according to Merleau-Ponty, the relation between the sensible and the idea conveys primary connotations that are opposite to this Husserlian understanding.

The ideality that touches the sensible is a situating horizon, like an expressive style deeper than any thought, like a melodic fragment possessing us far beyond our notational grip of it, and like the very visibility of the visible. This ideality gives "the flesh" its axes, depth, and dimensions. It is not a "pure ideality," but rather a "natural generality" of the body and the world, which - to the contrary - implies that the "pure" ideality of language, thoughts, and knowledge also has its "flesh" and horizontal structures. So, before the ideas turn into ideas *of* something, before they turn into thoughts and comprehension, they are practical-aesthetic generalities, e.g. the perceptive-expressive style of a smell, a fascination, a squeeze or a moving about. Ideas possess close motivational and emotional connotations of pleasant or unpleasant, and possibly also a sense of right or wrong, while yet remaining at a distance from any judgement about objects.

It appears that the conception of a figure-background perspective as the immediate expression of bodily intentionality can be found as an explicit or implicit notion through the entire development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical thinking. Roviello's essay, *Les écart du sens* (1992) is one of the - surprisingly few - examples of an unfolding of that understanding. While her focus is on Merleau-Ponty's notion of ideas as dimensions and levels that situate experiences, she emphasizes that ideas are perceived, like things. Consequently, Roviello presents a rich outline of the opaque existence of ideas which "precede their essences": their mutual infiltration and contamination, their radiation, *Stimmung* and *vie atmosphérique* (ethical, aesthetic, tolerant, extremist, etc.), their style and elasticity, their incarnated logic, moving cohesion and temporality. All of this is lived with bodily intentionality, before and behind the well-regulated logical relations of ideas that we establish at the foregrounds and in the figures of our reflective discourses and attention.

When Merleau-Ponty says that we are "thrown into meaning," the point is that there is always a *Gestalt* making some sense, a figure which is meaningful by the very distinction from its background, and that the orientation of this figure-background perspective takes up our situation, our experience, our existence. This understanding of meaning differs radically from Husserl's notion of meaning as the noema which we hold up "in front of us," and which we distinguish from the noetic "experience" of holding it up. For Merleau-Ponty, original meaning is the oriented structure that differentiates "something." In this primordial structure, there is no room for any distinction between meaning and experience. So, it is also correct that original experience is the oriented structure that differentiates "something." Furthermore, as soon as the differentiation of an immediate figure-background perspective allows a noticeable distance between a "something" (appearing upon later reflection as "meaning") and a "something else" (appearing upon later reflection as "experience"), the two sides are probably at first reversible as a foreground and a horizon, perhaps even a communication between "two of a kind," rather than the subject-object



relation of noeses and noemata. After further differentiation, it may still not be quite adequate to say that "we experience meaning." That statement may conceal what actually goes on before, behind and within the massive profoundness of correspondences between our body and the world. The many and deep ways in which the meaning *that counts* here and now can play the active part on us or remains at a distance from us, as well as the many elementary ways in which experience is violent or risky. We fight with the predominant meaning of a situation or throw ourselves out into it. Finally, a noematic-noetic analysis with its established frameworks of objects and subject is forced - by the rigorous phenomenological investigation - to uncover its own incapability in one more respect: handling the tracks of significant absence within the presence of noema and noesis.

The importance of Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of intentionality as the structuring of figure-background perspectives has not been adequately received and endorsed by his posterity. Like Madison (1991) points out, Merleau-Ponty accomplished - in tight coherence with his uncovering of the perspectival (or "horizontal", as Madison puts it) figure-background structure of perception and language - a deconstruction of the "metaphysics of presence" together with a de-centering of the "pure logos" and "self-transparent Reason," - before structuralism, post-modernism and post-structuralism became popular. The ambiguity and the significant absence, which Merleau-Ponty found in the presence, together with the bodily reason, which he uncovered so systematically (cf. Métraux & Waldenfels 1986), are decisive aspects of his perspectival understanding of intentionality. Clearly, this understanding brings phenomenology more "abreast of the times" than Husserl's understanding of the *Gestalt* (in which the background is just the horizon that can be objectified as a new noematic *Gestalt*) and his more adequate understanding (1970) of "background" as the life world (an understanding that remained an aporia in relation to his philosophy in general). In the perspectival organization of rules, language games and forms of life that the late Wittgenstein suggests (1964) there is a similarity with Merleau-Ponty's position, but of course, without the phenomenological appreciation of intentionality and bodily-social being. Merleau-Ponty is also in line with the important turn from descriptive to interpretative phenomenology, which we find in Heidegger (1967) and Ricoeur (1991). Still, they do not share his deep understanding of bodily intentionality, which also allows the possibility of our arrival at the "center" of the ego, cognition or consciousness, and allows the institution of new discourses, experiences and practices, - to some extent structured through "a presence."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of the figure-background perspective is in play in post-structuralism. Derrida's "fighting" (1990) with "the centre" (in particular, "the presence") in structures seems to testify his awareness of the critical implications of Merleau-Ponty's position for structuralism and post-structuralism. Likewise, Merleau-Ponty seems to play an important role in the background when Foucault (1988) explicates a cultural history of the self

through the tight interplay between bodily-social being and practices of self-exposition.

## VI. *Generative and hyperdialectic intentionality*

Notwithstanding the potential value - for theory of science, theory of art as well as theory of ethics and politics - of the conceptualization of intentionality as the orientation of figure-background perspectives, it is a structural understanding that - at best - only illuminates the direct manifestation of intentionality. Our presentation has not yet done justice to the fact that in Merleau-Ponty's discussions of structure it is embedded in dynamics, a point that is prevalent in Boer (1978), Taminioux (1986) and Waldenfels (1991). Though the figure-background perspective is basically conceived as horizontal (not only horizontal) structure, it is almost impossible to avoid taking a vertical "thickness" or depth in regard as well. This vertical dimension is the third dimension - in between the object dimension and the subject dimension - in which there is a sedimentation of experience, practices and discourse, in which we have to think any archaeology and genealogy, and in which it becomes possible to conceptualize intentionality as a dynamic orientation. Of course, talking about a "before" or a "beneath" (instead of a "behind") like it has been done several times in the previous pages actually places us in this vertical dimension. This seeming lack of stringency is legitimized by a certain correspondence between the vertical and the horizontal dimensions: when intentionality structures a figure in the light of higher levels of sedimentation, this figure has its background in the depth of sedimentations. In general, however, the vertical dimension is not conceived as a figure-background structure, but as the *generative* characteristics of intentionality (in contrast to the definitiveness of a structure): the very structuring of perception and expression, the spontaneous organization of a field, the "taking up" a situation, making distinctions and order in something, the reflection on something, "taking a stand," etc. The structuring of time and space is also to be understood as generative intentionality. In relation to the horizontal dimension the generative intentionality is a tension or movement whereby any simple distinction between a figure and its background only initiates, establishes or culminates the structuring of a particular perspective (in the "rhythm" of e.g. a motive, a project or an institution and with the "tonality" of sexuality, fantasy, politics, etc.). This is also the context for vertical, "subject-critical" analyses of how we "get to ourselves," move from de-centred to centred modes of being through the intentional, generative and creative structuring of our existence.

Merleau-Ponty's critique of the notions of "the active subject" and the "noetic act" in Husserl's phenomenology points to more basic kinds of generative structuring through the bodily intentionality. There is a body subject before the ego, there is bodily reflection before consciousness, and there is anonymous existence before our existence as distinct individuals. In

order to understand the bodily, carnal reason that is implied with all this, we have to study it in the depth of the body's own structuring, the structuring of sociality, of perception and expression. Intentionality is continuously and profoundly structuring our existence before we can take it up ourselves. The very denotation of intentionality as "operative," "*fungierende*" or "latent" announces, of course, that it is not itself a phenomenon, it does not appear for us yet when its generative structuring takes place. This indicates an *a priori* character of generative intentionality - not in the transcendental sense, but in the old sense of "what comes first" and in the sense of "what is always-already given." The *a priori* in question is just as central to analyses of the vertical dimension as the uniqueness and creativity, the "more than a simple reproduction" that Merleau-Ponty always points to in perception and expression. The *a priori* of generative intentionality is the profound mode in which it takes up our existence before language, perception, sociality and the body appears to us in the ways that we usually talk about these matters. In other words, "language," "perception," "sociality" and "the body" mean something else in their *a priori* senses.

Just to briefly sketch what the body is *a priori*: It is *le corps propre*, i.e. "the actual body," the very body which we live, as opposed to the scientific and common sense ideas we have of it. What Merleau-Ponty indicates with this denotation is not simply "my own body," and neither is it simply the completely opposite, namely "the body itself," but includes both! It indicates the vivid polarities of anonymous and personal being as well as the continuities and discontinuities between the two. Everywhere in Merleau-Ponty's writings, the body is the lived, experienced way in which a physical mass and a biological organism are completely subsumed in a meaningful, sociocultural space. Everywhere is this body a subject that communicates with others and with the world before I really - as a conscious person - know of it, and everywhere is it also the body that I can "take up" and recognize as my own. But it is the dynamics of intentionality that determines in how far one or the other of these opposites is dominating. Furthermore, the body as a self in communication with other bodily selves and with the world has nothing to do with subject-object relations or interaction between social "agents." There are levels of reversibility between body-subjects, there are levels at which the bodies make up an open field with some or with none mutual delimitations, and there are levels of anonymous being at which we are socio-cultural practices and discourses or just meaningful "human flesh." The communication may just be the expression of what Merleau-Ponty calls "style" which does not have to involve the identification of any particular social relation or community.

Thus, to understand intentionality as "vertical being" implies the appreciation of the *a priori* structuring of subjects, time, movements, events, motives, etc. in a flesh and a body which we do not possess, but which possesses us. Still, this does not catch everything that Merleau-Ponty has emphasized about the dynamics of intentionality. The vertical dimension is

suitable for the conceptualization of intentionality that sooner or later attains its unity and coherent direction, such as the intentionality which we would be looking for in order to understand an action or a project that an individual, a group or an organization takes on. But intentionality is also the dynamics of our "wild" being, the incoherent, unfinished and equivocal. It is a multitude of forces: questions, invitations and encroachments together with spontaneous responses rather than definite answer. In short, the sensitivity and responsiveness together with the reversibility and the chiasm, which Merleau-Ponty laid open, indicate a third conceptualisation (and a third dimension) of intentionality. This is the intentionality of the *Spiel (jeu)*, which may be called "dialectic" in the sense of the "hyperdialectic," i.e. not any Hegelian teleology, but a *jeu* that we take part in and that is more out of our hands than in our hands: a perpetual genesis with partial surpassings within a plurality of positions, arrangements and projects.

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## NOTES

- 1 This essay is derived from a subchapter in my book (in Danish) on phenomenology and work organization (Keller 1995). An earlier version of it was presented at the Conference of the Merleau-Ponty Circle July 29 - August 1, 1999 in Wrexham, U.K. I am grateful to the editors of *Chiasmi International*, and in particular Leonard Lawlor, for critical comments which improved the essay.
- 2 This is not to say that archaeology and intentionality are simply the backwards understanding and the forwards structuring of exactly the same matter. Liebsch (1993) explains how Merleau-Ponty differs from Ricoeur in their understanding of archaeology and teleology.
- 3 The assertion that the visual perspective is surpassed initially - that it can only be conditioned and indirect - implies that psycho-physical descriptions of perception has to be regarded as subordinate and of no more than a relative scientific value because they cannot describe perception as it is, but only in hypothetical models which are entirely based upon abstractions.
- 4 Among the various examples with which Merleau-Ponty illustrates this condition is the following: A road which leads far away towards the horizon is perceived as having one and the same breadth near by and out in the distant, but we may of course be thematic about what we see and deliberately observe a perspectival narrowing of the apparent breadth of the road.
- 5 Cf. e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1968, pp. 204-7. If the gestalt was simply an isolated object which we hold up before us in a certain perspective (or which we construct as the abstract invariance through varying perspectives), there would not be any transcendence in which we exist 'out there' where we always experience and practice more than facticity, namely the meaning structured by intentionality.
- 6 In Ricoeur, it is the depth - rather than the point - of this understanding, which I think is missing.

## L'intentionnalité dans la structure perspective

L'importance de la conception merleau-pontienne de l'intentionnalité a été sous-évaluée. Alors qu'il faudrait la considérer comme une dimension essentielle de cette philosophie et comme une étape décisive du développement phénoménologique, la notion d'" intentionnalité corporelle " n'a pas encore reçu la considération qu'elle mérite. Si l'on s'attache à la manière dont les travaux de Merleau-Ponty sont lus on aperçoit une certaine réserve, de la part des phénoménologues ou d'autres philosophes, concernant le fait que la cognition, la conscience et l'égo soient compris comme des dimensions dérivées de l'expérience et de la pratique.

Le renouvellement merleau-pontien du concept phénoménologique d'intentionnalité peut être interprété au fil de trois conceptualisations complémentaires : une dimension structurale, générative et enfin hyperdialectique de l'intentionnalité. Seule la première de ces trois dimensions est abordée dans cet article. Ainsi conçue l'intentionnalité se distingue en particulier de la définition noético-noématique de l'intentionnalité husserlienne, comprise comme perspective d'un sujet sur un objet. Cette définition rate la structuration spontanée et élémentaire de la signification qui revient à l'intentionnalité. Dans l'expérience et la pratique immédiates l'intentionnalité implique transcendance et ouverture préthématique. L'intentionnalité se caractérise par une spontanéité qui se révèle exemplairement si l'on remonte à la racine de notre expérience et de nos pratiques : à la perception et l'expression primordiales. Ce qui se découvre alors c'est la structure d'une perspective figure-fond, - ce qui est fort différent d'une perspective sujet-objet.

Cette redéfinition spectaculaire de l'intentionnalité comme structuration d'une perspective figure-fond, Merleau-Ponty ne cesse d'y revenir dans ses différents travaux pour l'affiner et la conforter. Cette conceptualisation n'implique aucune " métaphysique de la présence ", et la manière dont Merleau-Ponty l'associe à une nouvelle définition de l'idéalité est très éloignée de toute conception noético-noématique. Cette conception nouvelle d'une intentionnalité structurale oriente la phénoménologie vers une philosophie débarrassée de l'alternative entre sujet rationnel centré et sujet rationnel décentré. Cependant les dimensions générative et hyperdialectique de l'intentionnalité représentent des contributions elles aussi essentielles au nouveau concept d'intentionnalité corporelle ébauché par Merleau-Ponty.

## L'intenzionalità nella struttura prospettica

Il significato della concezione merleau-pontiana dell'intenzionalità è stata sottovalutata. Sebbene essa debba essere considerata come una via maestra nella sua filosofia e come un passo fondamentale nello sviluppo della fenomenologia, la nozione di "intenzionalità corporea" non ha ancora incontrato l'apprezzamento che merita. In un commento sulla lettura delle opere di Merleau-Ponty questa situazione è associata con riserve dei fenomenologi e di altri studiosi verso la sua concezione del sapere cognitivo, della coscienza e dell' *ego* come dimensioni derivate dell'esperienza e della prassi.

Il rinnovamento del concetto fenomenologico di intenzionalità da parte di Merleau-Ponty può essere interpretato secondo tre concettualizzazioni complementari: una dimensione strutturale, una generativa ed una iperdialettica dell'intenzionalità. Soltanto la prima è discussa dettagliatamente nel presente saggio. In particolare, essa è tenuta distinta dall'husserliana concezione noetico-noematica di intenzionalità come prospettiva soggettiva su di un oggetto. Questa concezione non coglie le caratteristiche dell'intenzionalità come spontanea ed elementare strutturazione del significato. Nell'esperienza e nella pratica immediate, l'intenzionalità implica apertura pre-tematica e trascendenza. L'intenzionalità è contraddistinta da una spontaneità che è assai evidente alle radici della nostra esperienza e delle nostre pratiche: nella percezione e nell'espressione primordiali. Ciò che risulta qui è la struttura di una prospettiva figura-sfondo, che è qualcosa di completamente diverso da una prospettiva soggetto-oggetto.

Il disvelamento rivoluzionario da parte di Merleau-Ponty dell'intenzionalità come strutturazione di una prospettiva figura-sfondo e corroborate e perfezionalo in tutto il corso della sua opera. Questa concettualizzazione non implica una "metafisica della presenza" ed il modo in cui essa é associata con la nuova nozione di idealita di Merleau-Ponty é molto lontano da qualsiasi concezione noetico-noematica. Il suo rinnovamento della concezione strutturale dell'intenzionalità segna lo sviluppo della fenomenología in una filosofia al di la delle alternative fra un soggetto razionale centrato e uno de-centrato. In ogni caso, le dimensioni generativa ed iperdialettica dell'intenzionalità sono contributi ugualmente importanti al nuovo concetto fenomenologico di intenzionalità corpórea che Merleau-Ponty ha sottolineato.