

The Concept of Motivation in Merleau-Ponty: Husserlian Sources, Intentionality, and Institution

Philip J. Walsh

Abstract:

Merleau-Ponty's relation to Husserl has been understood along a spectrum running from outright repudiation to deep appreciation. The aim of this paper is to clarify a significant and heretofore largely neglected unifying thread connecting Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, while also demonstrating its general philosophical import for phenomenological philosophy. On this account, the details of a programmatic philosophical continuity between these two phenomenologists can be structured around the concept of motivation. Merleau-Ponty sees in Husserl's concept of motivation a necessary and innovative concept that we must formulate in order to properly theorize the anonymous and passive functioning of "operative intentionality." Motivation is the principle that bridges this domain with the egoic life of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's focus on anonymity, bodily habit, and other facets of operative intentionality are thus not a repudiation of Husserl's analyses of intentionality, but rather a deepening of the notion of consciousness. I conclude by showing how Merleau-Ponty's early work on motivation lays the conceptual groundwork for his later rethinking of intentionality in terms of institution, and thus mature ontology of the flesh.

Keywords:

Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Motivation, Intentionality, Passivity, Temporality, Institution

1. Introduction

Merleau-Ponty's relation to Husserl has been understood along a spectrum running from outright repudiation to deep appreciation. Influenced by Hubert Dreyfus's critique of Husserl, a distinct strand of Anglo-American philosophy of mind and cognitive science reads Merleau-Ponty, already in his *Phenomenology of Perception (PhP)*, as rejecting the major tenets of Husserl's transcendental philosophy in favor of a thoroughly embodied and situated view of human subjectivity.¹ And while Merleau-Ponty himself frequently describes his project as a continuation of Husserl's, even more traditionally continental readers often write this off, maintaining that "the Husserl Merleau-Ponty finds reason to praise is frequently an extrapolation of his own philosophy."² While these commentators generally recognize that the *Phenomenology* is more sympathetic to Husserl than the later work, namely *The Visible and the Invisible (VI)*, many nevertheless argue that already in *PhP*

¹ See, e.g. Dreyfus and Hall, *Husserl, Intentionality, and Cognitive Science*, "Introduction"; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*; and Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*. See also Thompson *Mind in Life*, "Appendix A," who reverses his view of Husserl, explaining that it was in large part due to his understanding of Husserl deriving from Dreyfus.

² Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 27.

Merleau-Ponty rejected Husserl's "egoic philosophy of consciousness" and moves toward the ontology of the flesh developed in the later works.³

The question of Merleau-Ponty's continuity with Husserl is therefore not only important for understanding the overall continuity of the phenomenological tradition, but for understanding the internal continuity of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre as well. Although the question of his continuity with Husserl is logically distinct from the question of the overall continuity of his own works, the issues have important bearing on one another. For those who read the later philosophy of *VI* and its ontology of the flesh as constituting a radical break with the earlier philosophy of consciousness, the discontinuity of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre can be seen (at least partly) in terms of how and when he breaks with Husserl. On the other hand, if his oeuvre is more internally consistent and the later ontology of the flesh does not constitute a radical break with the earlier work, then we might see Merleau-Ponty's own continuity as (at least partly) due to an overall continuity with Husserl. Finally, one might hold that although Merleau-Ponty's own oeuvre is more continuous than not, his philosophy remains nonetheless discontinuous with Husserl in significant ways.⁴ Of course, the issue of Merleau-Ponty's unity with Husserl is not the *only* way to approach the issue of the unity of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre. My only aim here is to show that it is a *productive* one.

My aim in this paper is to clarify a significant and heretofore largely neglected unifying thread connecting Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.⁵ On my account, the details of a programmatic philosophical continuity between these two phenomenologists can be structured around the concept of *motivation*.⁶ Husserl introduced this concept in his early work, and it plays an increasingly prominent role throughout his career.⁷ Merleau-Ponty then made this concept central to his account

³ Heinämaa, "Anonymity and Personhood," 124. Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène* is perhaps the most influential reading along these lines. See also Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy*, and *Implications of Immanence*; Al-Saji "A past"; and Fóti, *Tracing Expression*. Heinämaa, "Anonymity and Personhood," does not maintain this reading and I am only citing her summary of the debate. See also several of the essays published in Toadvine and Embree, *Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl*, (viz. Toadvine's "A Chronological Overview") for the view that Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* is largely more sympathetic to Husserl than his later work.

⁴ Beith, *The Birth of Sense*; Hass "Sense and Alterity," *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*; Morris, "The Enigma of Reversibility"; Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self*; Landes, *Paradoxes of Expression*; Apostolopoulos, "Intentionality, Constitution"; and Muller, "The Logic of the Chiasm" do not see the ontology of flesh and other related notions developed in *VI* as a radical departure from Merleau-Ponty's earlier work, *contra* Barbaras.

⁵ Thus, this paper differs from other reconciliatory approaches to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty that proceed by highlighting points of overlap among disparate themes shared by the two philosophers. Zahavi, "Merleau-Ponty on Husserl" is a useful example of the latter approach.

⁶ See Walsh, "The Sound of Silence" and "Motivation and Horizon" for discussions of the concept of motivation in Merleau-Ponty and Husserl, respectively.

⁷ The concept is introduced in the first chapter of the First Investigation of *Logical Investigations* (Hua. XIX. §§2–4) in a discussion of meaning and signs. See *Ideas I* for its role in his analysis of the horizon structure of the noema (Hua. III-1. §44, §47, §140). *Ideas II* and *Thing and Space* include extensive analyses of spatiality, motility, and embodiment that all

of intentionality, specifically in *PbP*.⁸ Before going into more detail on the nature of this concept and its status as a significant unifying thread from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty, let me make two preliminary points. First, in spelling out how the concept of motivation structures the continuity between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, I do not thereby claim to definitively and exhaustively clarify the relation between these two philosophers. The account offered here does, however, fill in a significant piece of the overall puzzle in that its central concern is how Merleau-Ponty's conception of intentionality is continuous with Husserl's, despite frequent claims to the contrary concerning the anonymous bodily, temporal, and passive dimensions of Merleau-Ponty's characterizations. Second, this account focuses primarily on the Merleau-Ponty of *PbP* because of the centrality of the concept of motivation to the theory of intentionality therein. In doing so, it provides a framework that importantly constrains how we might deal with the larger questions of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre's consistency and his overall relation to Husserl. For example, those who read Merleau-Ponty as already "rejecting" or "overcoming" Husserl's philosophy of consciousness as early as *PbP* will have to reckon with the centrality of the concept of motivation to his theory of intentionality and that fact that this is a major Husserlian inheritance. For those inclined to read Merleau-Ponty's later work as consistent with his earlier work, the concept of motivation (along with its Husserlian origins) and its central role in the theory of intentionality will likely have to be understood as anticipating various aspects of the ontology of the flesh. If Merleau-Ponty's later work does in fact break with his earlier work, then a precise articulation of this discontinuity will benefit from attention to how Merleau-Ponty may have come to see the concept of motivation as inadequate in various ways.

As noted above, several commentators have read *PbP* as breaking with Husserl, specifically with regard to Merleau-Ponty's characterizations of intentionality in terms of *anonymity*. Whereas Husserl's theory of intentionality remains anchored in "egoic consciousness," Merleau-Ponty's conception of intentionality focuses on the anonymous and largely passive functioning of a "pre-predicative" bodily "being-toward." Merleau-Ponty refers to this deeper structure of intentionality in its pre-predicative functioning as "operative intentionality." Thus, one might say that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty fundamentally part ways on the constraints of a phenomenological theory of intentionality; that is, they disagree on how much we can say, while remaining properly

feature motivation (Hua. IV.§§56ff.; Hua. XVI.§51). Husserl's later texts begin to integrate the concept of motivation with his analyses of time-consciousness and affectivity (*EJ*, §16; *APS/Hua*. XI.§§26–41).

⁸ Although my focus in this paper is *PbP*, it should be noted that already in 1942, in *Structure du Comportement*, Merleau-Ponty was citing Husserl's *Ideas I* about the 'intentional "motivations" underlying the existential index of perceived objects' (Toadvine, "A Chronological Overview," 233).

phenomenologically grounded, about the anonymous pre-egoic nature of intentionality. I argue, however, that there is in fact a deep continuity between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on this point. Rather than repudiating Husserl for remaining anchored in egoic consciousness, Merleau-Ponty sees in Husserl's concept of motivation a necessary and innovative concept that we must formulate in order to properly theorize operative intentionality. Motivation is the principle that bridges the anonymous pre-predicative functioning of operative intentionality and the egoic life of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's focus on anonymity, bodily habit, and other facets of operative intentionality, therefore, does not constitute a repudiation of Husserl. Rather, as I will demonstrate below, these groundbreaking analyses in *PbP* share in a deep conceptual substructure anchored by the concept of motivation. While the bulk of this paper is devoted to this task, I conclude by arguing that Merleau-Ponty's later work on the concept of *institution*, and thus his mature ontological notion of *flesh*, are part of an overall conceptual progression stemming from his early conceptual work on motivation.

I proceed by explicating the connection Merleau-Ponty saw between motivation and the deep structure of operative intentionality (§2). I then clarify how both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty located the originary sense of motivation in volitional phenomena and how they found both perceptual and non-perceptual forms of experience to share a common motivational structure (§§3-4). Articulating the motivational structure of experience ultimately hinges on how one understands the interplay of activity and passivity in experience. I go on to show how both philosophers complicate the notion of passivity, and thus how Merleau-Ponty's characterizations of the anonymous, pre-egoic, "passive" dimensions of operative intentionality are continuous with Husserl's project and can be understood with respect to the unifying thread of motivation (§5). I conclude by showing how the complication of activity and passivity via the concept of motivation lays the conceptual groundwork for Merleau-Ponty's rethinking of intentionality in terms of institution, and thus constitutes an important conceptual bridge between the analyses of consciousness and intentionality in *PbP* and the ontology of the flesh in *VI* (§6).

2. Motivational character discloses the structure of intentionality

2.1. Husserl's breakthrough: operative intentionality

Merleau-Ponty took Husserl's great "discovery" to be operative intentionality ("*fungierende Intentionalität*," which Merleau-Ponty renders "*l'intentionnalité opérante*"). Husserl's great innovation, Merleau-Ponty claims, is not simply the notion of intentionality as the essence of consciousness:

“there is hardly anything new in the claim that ‘all consciousness is consciousness of something’” (PbP lxxxi/17).⁹ Rather, it is the “enlarged notion of intentionality” that Husserl arrives at when he distinguishes between act intentionality – which is the intentionality of our judgments and of our voluntary decisions (and is the only intentionality discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) – and operative intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*), the intentionality that establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life, the intentionality that appears in our desires, our evaluations, and our landscape more clearly than it does in objective knowledge. (PbP lxxxii/18)

Note that Merleau-Ponty is not claiming that operative intentionality is *only* at work in our desires, evaluations, and our “landscape,” just that it appears more clearly in these cases. Operative intentionality, it will turn out, functions pervasively throughout all forms of experience. It is a “discovery, beneath the intentionality of representations, of a more profound intentionality, which others have called existence” (PbP 124 fn. 57/154 fn. 1). It is “already at work prior to every thesis and every judgment” as a kind of “‘Logos of the aesthetic world’” (PbP 453/492). Most strikingly, operative intentionality lies “beneath act or thetic intentionality...as its very condition of possibility” (PbP 453/492).

There are two primary passages that he cites, both in a footnote to his claim that operative intentionality lies beneath act or thetic intentionality as the condition of its possibility.¹⁰ The first passage comes from early in Husserl’s career (1905), in his lectures on time-consciousness, in which Husserl describes “the time-constituting flow” as “absolute subjectivity,” and says that “what we called ‘act’ or ‘intentional experience’ in the *Logical Investigations* is in every instance a flow in which a unity becomes constituted in immanent time (the judgment, the wish, etc.), a unity that has its immanent duration and that may progress more or less rapidly” (ITC, 80/Hua. X.76).¹¹ The second passage comes from much later in his career (1929), in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, where Husserl describes a “living intentionality” that “carries me along...determin[ing] me practically in my whole

⁹ Citations of Merleau-Ponty’s works are formatted with an abbreviation denoting the text followed by English translation/French edition page numbers.

¹⁰ Husserl does not actually use the term *fungierend* (which Merleau-Ponty renders as ‘operative’ [*opérante*]) in either of these places that Merleau-Ponty cites. Merleau-Ponty adopted this term from Fink, who, writing in 1939, similarly argued that Husserl’s “decisive, fundamental insight” was not simply that consciousness is always consciousness-of, but rather that consciousness is “*laden with sense*” in virtue of “*functioning [fungierende] intentionality*” which “operate[s] in concealment” (Fink, “The Problem,” 51).

¹¹ Citations of Husserl’s works are formatted with an abbreviation denoting the English translation and page number followed by the standard Hua edition and page number, with the exception of *Experience and Judgment (EJ)*, which has no corresponding Hua edition.

procedure, including the procedure of my natural thinking...even though, as actually functioning, it may be non-thematic, undisclosed, and thus beyond my ken” (*FTL*, 235/Hua. XVII.242).

Two points are worth noting here that will subsequently guide our more detailed analysis of operative intentionality. First, operative intentionality can be provisionally understood in contrast with what Husserl calls “act” or “thetic” intentionality. The latter is the intentionality characterizing *explicit* or *thematic* acts of thinking or attending to something, discussed in contemporary philosophy of mind in terms of mental *states* with discreetly individuated *contents*. Operative intentionality, on the other hand, can be better understood as the intentionality (or, *directedness*) characteristic of skillful bodily activity.¹² It is *non-thetic* or *unthematized* insofar as explicit attention to it disrupts it in its dynamic and flowing attunement to a goal or general situation. This first point makes clear, to some extent, why both Fink and Merleau-Ponty characterize operative intentionality as “hidden” or “lying beneath” – its resistance to explicit thematic attention is somehow essential to it.¹³ Second, as made evident by Merleau-Ponty’s citation of Husserl’s time-consciousness manuscript and the placement of his discussion of operative intentionality in the chapter on temporality in *PbP*, operative intentionality is fundamentally connected to the temporal form of consciousness. There is something about the very nature of temporal flow—or better, temporal *becoming*—that conditions all intentionality.¹⁴ I will return to this point below (§5).

2.2. Motivation: a “fluid” concept

Merleau-Ponty formally introduces the concept of motivation in the chapter “‘Attention’ and ‘Judgment’” in the Introduction to *PbP*. Its placement at a key pivot point in the Introduction is indicative of its overall importance. After laying out the shortcomings of empiricism and rationalism (or “intellectualism”), he calls for “a new genre of analysis” that “open[s] up a *phenomenal field*” (*PbP* 54/80). This new genre of analysis requires “the phenomenological notion of *motivation*” which “is one of those ‘fluid’ concepts that must be formulated if we want to return to phenomena” (*PbP*

¹² This characterization, it should be emphasized, remains provisional. Upon more detailed analysis in §4.2, we will see that operative intentionality is not limited to the domain of bodily action.

¹³ See de Saint Aubert, *Le Scénario Cartésien*, for a careful discussion of the influence of Fink on Merleau-Ponty. While it is important to note that Merleau-Ponty’s later ontological project diverges from Fink’s development of the notion of operative intentionality (see §6 below), as de Saint Aubert claims, Fink’s influence on Merleau-Ponty was profound, inducing in him “un élan phénoménologique plus conquérant, dont on retrouve le souffle jusque dans *Le visible et l’invisible*” (*Le Scénario Cartésien*, 142).

¹⁴ See Zahavi, “Brentano and Husserl” for discussion of Husserl’s intricate theory of inner-time consciousness and pre-reflective self-awareness, including reference to Husserl’s use of *‘fungierende Subjectivität’* in one of his intersubjectivity manuscripts.

51/76). This characterization of motivation comes sandwiched between descriptions of operative intentionality, that “*non-thetic* consciousness...that does not possess the full determination of its objects...a *lived logic* that does not give an account of itself” (*PhP* 50/76). Thus, we can read the characterization of motivation as including three interrelated claims: first, motivation is a “fluid” concept; second, motivation is a necessary concept for returning to phenomena—that is, for conceptualizing operative intentionality; and third, returning to phenomena requires fluid concepts.

Merleau-Ponty's characterization of motivation as a “fluid” concept comes from Husserl's use of the term “*Fließende*” in *Experience and Judgment*. There, Husserl acknowledges the ultimate experiential ground of all judgment—the “*Urdoxa* of ultimate, simply apprehensible substrates” and its correlative “doxic consciousness [*Glaubensbewusstsein*]”—as a “domain of the fluid” (*EJ*, 59/60). This acknowledgement by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty claims, was only “making explicit and thematizing the processes of analysis that he had himself applied for a long time, as is clearly shown in the notion of motivation, which is already found in his work prior to *Ideen*” (*PhP* 51 n. 59/76 fn. 1). Another key passage from *Experience and Judgment* comes in a footnote that Merleau-Ponty cites *twice*:

[I]t should be emphasized that the method of mathematical thinking of essence is, as a *method of idealization*, in important points to be distinguished from the intuition of essences in other subjects, whose fluid types cannot be apprehended with exactitude. (*EJ*, 353 n. 2/428 n. 1).

From this and the aforementioned *Urdoxa* passage, we can see that Husserl recognized that the most basic level of experience that lies prior to and is presupposed by the contents of egoic consciousness is essentially indeterminate or “fluid.” The fluid indeterminacy of this domain, however, does not preclude it from being the domain of an *a priori* science of essences, although the essences intuited therein may lack the exactitude of those in other domains: “*for every objective sphere*” – namely, that to every domain of investigation belongs, in principle, a possible *a priori* science, and that there is “not the slightest reason” to consider *a priori* thought to be exclusive to mathematical thought (*EJ*, 353/428). If the domain of investigation is essentially fluid, pinning down its essential structures therefore calls for fluid concepts.

Taking stock, we see that Merleau-Ponty took his introduction of the concept of motivation and his characterization of it as a fluid concept to be the continuation of a central insight already at work in Husserl. Returning to phenomena means returning to operative intentionality—the “living” intentionality silently at work beneath the “higher” achievements of egoic consciousness (attention and judgment). Furthermore, the domain governed by operative intentionality is still characterized as

a domain of *consciousness*, albeit a “*non-thetic* consciousness” or “a consciousness that does not possess the full determination of its objects” (*PhP* 50/76). This domain is essentially indeterminate or “fluid.” Its fluidity does not preclude the intuition of its essential structures, but does call for fluid concepts that can somehow bring something essentially indeterminate to expression. Merleau-Ponty is claiming that Husserl’s concept of motivation is such a concept and has actually been employed in the latter’s analyses as early as the *Logical Investigations*. Thus, when it comes to motivation, Merleau-Ponty sees a significant phenomenological insight that Husserl made early in his career and that he increasingly became clearer on in his later work as something that was there all along.

3. Volitional phenomena and the originary sense of motivation

3.1. Motivation in action

Husserl and Merleau-Ponty involve the concept of motivation in analyses of indication, perceptual constitution, the horizon-structure of the noema, empathy, time-consciousness, passive synthesis, motor skill, and freedom. In order to grasp how motivation functions in such disparate phenomena, we must first establish an intuitive understanding of what the concept is meant to designate. Upon seeing the extremely broad role that both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty grant this concept, suspicions of equivocation are certainly warranted. On this front, both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty connect what they take to be the general and pervasive sense of motivation with its everyday meaning in volitional phenomena. In his initial introduction of the concept in *Logical Investigations*, Husserl notes that “talk of ‘motives’ was at first alone confined” to the field of volitional phenomena (*LI I*, 186/Hua. XIX.35). In *Ideas II* he connects the “very broad sense” of motivation to the “*practical attitude*” (*Ideas II*, 199/Hua. IV.190). And in a footnote in *Ideas I*, we get Husserl’s most straightforward statement of how the technical concept of motivation remains rooted in its everyday meaning in talk of volitional phenomena:

This basic concept of motivation resulted for me right away with the specification of the purely phenomenological sphere in the *Logical Investigations*...It should be noted that this concept is a *universalization* of the very concept of motivation, in keeping with which we are able, for example, to say that ‘wanting some purpose’ motivates ‘wanting the means.’ Moreover, while the concept of motivation undergoes various shifts for essential reasons, the respective equivocations become anything but dangerous and even appear as necessary depending upon how the phenomenological states of the matter are clarified. (*Ideas I*, 86 n. 8/Hua. III-1.101 n. 1)

Merleau-Ponty likewise connects his technical sense of motivation to its more everyday meaning. In his analysis of depth perception, he claims that “Convergence and apparent size are neither signs nor causes of depth: they are present in the experience of depth, just as the *motive* – even when it is not articulated and separately thematized – is present in the decision” (*PbP* 270/307–8). In the case of action, motives do not function as *causes*. Merleau-Ponty’s example is a journey to attend a funeral. The journey is motivated by certain facts, namely a death. The fact of someone’s death does not physically cause my journey, but rather “offer[s] reasons for undertaking it. The motive is an antecedent that only acts through its sense” (*PbP* 270/307–8). The death “motivates my journey *because* it is a situation in which my presence is required” (*PbP* 270/307–8).¹⁵

This emphasis on the “because” gives us the most general sense of motivation: an experiential if-then relation.¹⁶ It is not reducible to the if-then of causality since, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, motives act through their meaning or *sense*. Or, as Mark Wrathall clarifies this, terms in the descriptions of motivational relations do not enjoy the same extensionality as those of causal relations.¹⁷ A causal relation holds between two *relata* regardless of the terms we use to describe it so long as those terms refer to the same entities. But in the case of motivation, if an object or state of affairs is presented under a different description, it may no longer mean the same thing for me and thereby lose its motivational force. Furthermore, the if-then of motivation is also not reducible to the if-then of logical entailment. While in the example above Merleau-Ponty speaks of the death as not a cause but a “reason” for the journey, we can likewise see how nothing about the fact of the death *necessitates* the journey in the way premises *entail* a conclusion. One could certainly describe the death as a reason for the journey as one formulates an antecedent in a rational relation to a consequent, but clearly one could recognize the death as a reason for the journey and nonetheless not make the journey.¹⁸

Unlike causality and entailment, therefore, motivation is a “because” or “if-then” relation that essentially involves the subjective context of the one *for whom* the relation holds, it is a relation

¹⁵ In Aristotelian terms, the death is not the efficient cause of the journey; however, it is the final cause of the journey – the “for the sake of which” the action is performed – and it is a part of the formal cause of the journey insofar as it is a “journey to my friend’s funeral.” So, it is a cause in some sense of the word, but just not in the limited sense often employed by contemporary philosophers, namely philosophers of action working in the wake of Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes.”

¹⁶ Husserl characterizes the essence of motivation this way in *Logical Investigations* (*LI I*, 186/Hua. XIX.34), *Ideas II* (*Ideas II*, 238/Hua. IV.227), and *Analyses Concerning Active and Passive Synthesis* (*APS*, 238/Hua. XI.188).

¹⁷ Wrathall, “Motives, Reasons, and Causes,” 119.

¹⁸ Morrison, “Experience and Causality,” 562.

that obtains under a description of things as they are for the subject of the motivation-experience.¹⁹ This is the essence of motivation that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty think generalizes across such broad domains of experience. Consider Husserl's example of reaching for a piece of food to eat (*Ideas II*, 228/Hua. IV.216–17). I want something to eat because I am hungry. I see a piece of fruit and am motivated to grab it. My conscious state of being hungry is not sufficient to motivate my action. If there were nothing to reach for, I would not reach. But my experience of seeing the fruit on its own is also not a motive. The experience of seeing the fruit (or, speaking more loosely, the piece of fruit itself) only functions as a motive for my reaching action in the subjective context of being hungry and my background knowledge that fruit tastes good, is nutritious, etc.²⁰ As Husserl puts it, "The Object stimulates me in virtue of its *experienced properties* and not its physicalistic ones" (*Ideas II*, 228/Hua. IV.216). The fruit is experienced as having properties such as being edible, being tasty, etc. Returning to Merleau-Ponty's characterization, I experience the fruit as *meaning* something; the piece of fruit operates on me *through its sense*. It is only in the context of a subject for whom objects or states of affairs can mean something that actions are motivated.

As an experiential if-then, motivation blends passive and active experiential character. In each case of motivated action there is "an '*undergoing of something*,' a being *passively* determined by something, and an *active reaction to it*, a transition into action" (*Ideas II*, 229/Hua. IV.217). In being motivated to act, I *find myself* affected. Things (objects, properties, states of affairs) are presented to me as *compelling, soliciting, or demanding* a response. The transition from being passively affected to the formation of an active response is not discontinuous. My action *emerges from* or *grows out of* the passive determining. As Merleau-Ponty often characterizes this transition, "every voluntary taking up of a position is established against the background and upon the proposition of a pre-personal life of consciousness" (*PhP* 216/252). Egoic consciousness is incessantly inheriting this anonymous "pre-personal life of consciousness." This is what it means to say that the ego *finds itself* motivated. The motivated action need not be one that is a product of a deliberative decision.²¹ Undertaking a

¹⁹ As Wrathall puts it, "we only capture the motivational relationship if we describe the relationship as it exists for the agent" ("Motives, Reasons, and Causes," 120). And as O'Connell puts it, "being motivated, unlike physical states such as being caused...cannot be described in terms independent of how things appear to the agent who is motivated" ("On Being Motivated," 582).

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty and Edith Stein (in *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*) tend to speak of objects, properties, and states of affairs themselves as motives, whereas Husserl's speaks of experience of such things as motives. I do not think this is a major difference. It is clear from the context that Merleau-Ponty and Stein are talking about the things themselves *as* they are experienced. The difference in emphasis is just to make sure we do not take *the fact that one is having such and such an experience* to be the motive, but rather *the way in which one experiences X* to have motivational force.

²¹ My use of "volitional" is thus closer to Aristotle's sense of "voluntary" action in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book III, which he claims both humans and animals share in, as opposed to "chosen" action, which (for Aristotle) is exclusive to humans.

process of deliberation is itself a motivated course of action. As Merleau-Ponty says in the journey example, the motive is present *in* the decision to act a certain way, even if not explicitly. Indeed, the *motivated* does not “merely succeed” the *motivating*, but rather “clarifies it” and makes it “explicit...such that the motivated seems to have preexisted its own motive” (*PbP* 51/76). In being passively determined by the way something is meaningfully presented to me I am already in the midst of an active response insofar as the meaning or sense of my passive undergoing is bound up with the active response it motivates. In other words, we can only individuate motives in terms of the specific motivational force they carry, and this essentially requires reference to the action (or set of possible actions) thereby motivated.

The passive undergoing and active responding at play in this sense of motivation and action can be usefully contrasted with the stimulus-response dyad. When Husserl speaks of how experiencing something as beautiful is a “stimulus” to turn and take pleasure in regarding it, or how the stale air of a room “stimulates me to open the window” he is using the term “stimulus” [*Reiz*] in a “fundamentally new sense” (*Ideas II*, 229/Hua. IV.217). As Anthony Steinbock notes, Husserl appropriated the concept of stimulus from 19th Century German empirical psychology and physiology, which deployed it in descriptions of mechanistic causal relations (between nerve cells, muscle contractions, etc.). In its new phenomenological sense, a stimulus is not “a contextless power or third-person force” like the impact of the doctor’s hammer on my knee to trigger a kick reflex, but rather a motivational solicitation that the subject (ego) can heed, attend to, or disregard.²² The subject is *free* with respect to motives, but this freedom is not experienced as a totally voluntaristic autonomy free from the affective force that compels one toward a course of action.

Locating the originary sense of motivation in the sphere of volitional phenomena provides an evidentiary ground for grasping the general essence of motivation that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty extend over broader domains of experience. If the felt unity of active and passive experiential character characteristic of motivation as found in volitional phenomena turns out to be a much more pervasive character of conscious experience in general, then we might come to understand this motivational character of consciousness by drawing a conceptual connection between consciousness and action. That is, if a notion of action is essential to the concept of motivation, and all or most of the domain of conscious experience can be understood as involving action in some sense, then we

²² Steinbock, “Translator’s Introduction,” xliv–xlvi.

may more straightforwardly see the sense in which consciousness *in general* has a motivational character.

A natural place to begin exploring such an hypothesis is to consider what exactly Husserl meant by ‘act [*Akt*]’ in his descriptions of consciousness as “mental acts.” In *Logical Investigations* Husserl explicitly disavows any active connotations to the term ‘act’ and considers it a technical term of art, adopted from the act psychology of Brentano and other contemporaries, that just means “intentional experiences” (*LI II*, 102/Hua. XIX.393). As Ben Sheredos has argued, however, by the time of *Ideen* and his mature phenomenology, we have to understand the mental acts that Husserl spoke of as indeed being *acts* and not simply ‘states’ or ‘events’ of consciousness. In distinguishing phenomenology from descriptive psychology, Husserl “came to insist that mental acts were to be understood in terms of a free performance of the pure ego, construed as a fundamental subjectivity which was distinct from, and which could execute (or, was free to ‘live in’) mental acts.”²³ The pure ego is essentially the active source of the constitution of objects, that is, of the constitutive achievements or accomplishments of consciousness whereby transcendent objects appear and are articulated as unities of sense.

This strategy, however, requires understanding an exceedingly broad range of conscious life as forms of action, and thus threatens to stretch the concept of action so thin that it becomes unrecognizable. A more promising strategy, therefore, is to recognize that while Husserl and Merleau-Ponty located the originary sense of motivation in paradigmatic cases of action they did not thereby seek to exhaustively define motivational character in terms of action. Motivation (in one form or another—either in the pre-predicative or explicitly predicative form of a reason one acts from) may be a necessary condition for action, but not a sufficient one. A much broader domain of experience may share in the motivational character of consciousness—with its peculiar blend of activity-emerging-from-passivity—that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty make salient in the examples discussed above, while still lacking other features of full-fledged action.

3.2. *Motivation: a valid phenomenological construction*

The sense in which perceptual intentionality is an “active achievement” or “performance” by a “free ego” through which objects are “constituted,” and how motivation is implicated in such analyses, will be further specified in §4.2. Before turning to how motivation figures in such wide-

²³ Sheredos, “Act Psychology and Phenomenology,” 193. See also Husserl, *Ideen I*, 154; 184–85/Hua. III-1.179, 214–15.

ranging descriptions, we need to see how describing such a variety of forms of experience in terms of motivation is phenomenologically valid. For although it may be possible to give coherent descriptions of intentionality in terms of action or activity, and thus as having a motivational character, it may be objected that such descriptions are *speculative*. Lacking any basis in intuitive evidence, and thus involving only theoretical *posits* rather than phenomenological *discoveries*, such descriptions would no longer be phenomenological descriptions at all.

Characterizations of phenomenological findings as uncovering something “hidden,” or “discovering” what is undisclosed, may sound odd to many contemporary philosophers, who take phenomenology to be a descriptive characterization of experience as it is *for the subject* (hence, as she is aware of it). And it might sound out of step with Husserl’s conception of phenomenology insofar as it is to be guided by his “principle of principles,” that phenomenological method must remain anchored in “originary givenness [*originären Gegebenheiten*]” (*Ideas I*, 43/Hua. III-1.51). This, however, does not preclude so-called “deeper” structures from phenomenology’s purview. For the phenomenologist, studying the parts and relations that make up the structure of experience must begin with and remain anchored in the phenomenal character that discloses this structure. This is *not* to say that the structure of experience depends on its character. Rather, it is a methodological commitment to phenomenal character as the epistemic point of access to experiential structure. Experience having a certain character—that is, disclosing itself to us in the way that it does—depends on it having a certain structure. But, for the phenomenologist, the character of experience is the only valid form of evidence for claims about experiential structure. In other words, we individuate parts of experience and their relations on the basis of how experience is disclosed through its character.

My proposal for understanding how what I am calling the motivational character of experience discloses the deeper structure of operative intentionality follows Steven Crowell’s notion of a *proper* (versus *improper*) phenomenological “construction.”²⁴ A proper phenomenological construction is one that retains a connection to intuitive givenness by theorizing the conditions of possibility for what is intuitively given to be given in the particular way it is. An improper construction lacks such a connection. Understanding phenomenological method as including valid constructions (or better, “reconstructions”) of the structure of experience is necessary for understanding how phenomenology can lead to “discoveries,” and is not exhausted by reading off

²⁴ Crowell, “Authentic Thinking.”

the contents of experience that are presented with full intuitive givenness. A good example, cited by Crowell, of such a “discovery” or “finding” is the analysis (found in both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty) of perceptual intentionality as being structured by our embodiment. The body (the lived body, not the body that I observe, but the body that I *perceive with*) is never *given* to consciousness in the way that objects are; rather, the body is the condition for the possibility of the perceptual field being disclosed in a particular way. Embodiment *conditions* or *structures* experience rather than being an object disclosed in experience.²⁵ More specifically, a proper phenomenological reconstruction does not merely posit conditions of possibility, but rather *finds* the structures that condition the experience *within* it as *constitutive* of it – as an aspect of the experience that one was, in some sense, aware of all along. This is what differentiates phenomenology from a Kantian inquiry into conditions of possibility. Rather than *positing* conditions of possibility, phenomenological description *discloses* structure. Experiential structures cannot be disclosed and articulated in the same way objects of experience can, but this does not render them phenomenologically *impalpable*. They are experienced *marginally* or *non-thetically*.

As Don Welton explains this, Husserl increasingly came to see phenomenology as a process of unfolding or articulating what is implicitly contained in the explicit content of experience (CM, 45/Hua. I.82).²⁶ That which is implicit in an experience is thought of as “those ‘pre-constitutive’ levels that are implied by its surface structure.”²⁷ In gradually coming to understand phenomenology as articulating these pre-constitutive levels, and thus practicing what Crowell describes as “proper construction,” Husserl came to see these deeper levels of experience “not only as presupposed but also as *productive*, not only as a ‘condition’ but also as a ‘source.’”²⁸ In other words, although the pre-constitutive levels of experience may only be experienced non-thetically, they nevertheless leave a phenomenal signature at those higher levels of constitution that are more straightforwardly disclosed in reflection. The concept of motivation designates this phenomenal signature of these deeper structures, namely the bodily and temporal dimensions of operative intentionality. Thus, the ultimate significance that Merleau-Ponty sees in Husserl’s concept of motivation is the promise of connecting phenomenological analyses of egoic consciousness to the anonymous operative intentionality functioning “beneath” it. The anonymity of operative intentionality is not something cut off from the life of egoic consciousness, and thus beyond phenomenology’s purview. Rather, the personal

²⁵ This example comes from Crowell, “Authentic Thinking,” 131, who is summarizing an example from Charles Taylor.

²⁶ Welton, *The Other Husserl*. See also A.D. Smith, “Husserl and Externalism,” 316, who makes the same point.

²⁷ Welton, *The Other Husserl*, 234.

²⁸ Welton *The Other Husserl*, 234.

and the anonymous pre-personal are “but two moments of a single structure that is the concrete subject” (*PbP* 477/514–15).²⁹

Another way of putting this is to say that the motivational character of experience constitutes the ‘what it’s like’ of basic experiential structure. Lying beneath the surface structure of act intentionality, familiar to us in the subject-object structure of everyday perceptual experience, is the structure of operative intentionality that “accomplishes” or “achieves” act intentionality. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty characterized this deep structure of intentionality by generalizing the everyday notion of motivation as found in analyses of volitional phenomena. Motives compel; they have affective force. Motives involve a felt unity between a passive undergoing and an active doing. The felt unity of motivation blends these passive and active aspects into a unitary experiential form. The doing emerges from or grows out of the passive undergoing. The passive undergoing *feels the way it does* or *means what it does* or *makes sense* only in connection with the doing it motivates, even if one does not so act. This felt unity that blends passive undergoing with active response is an experiential if-then. This is not a unity of essence—there is nothing essential about a journey to a friend’s death. Nor is this a unity of causation, for it operates at the level of sense and only functions in virtue of meaning in a subjective context. Rather, it is a “functional” or “operative” unity that orients the flow of experience.

4. Motivation as the movement of consciousness

Merleau-Ponty, recall, claims that motivation is a fluid concept that is necessary in order to return to phenomena. I have interpreted this claim as meaning that the concept of motivation as disclosed in the domain of volitional phenomena can be validly applied beyond that domain such that we can see how a wide variety of experiential forms have a motivational character. How wide a variety? In this section I argue that Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl, came to see motivational character as constitutive of perceptual life. The analysis of the constitution of perceptual objects via the interplay of bodily position, movement, and spatiality is grounded in the motivational character of experience. The motivational character of experience, however, extends beyond perceptual life. After detailing the centrality of motivation to the nexus of concepts necessary for a phenomenology of perception, I will turn to its (perhaps less obvious) centrality to the phenomenology of non-perceptual consciousness.

²⁹ See Heinämaa, “Anonymity and Personhood,” for further argument that Merleau-Ponty’s discourse on anonymity does not constitute a departure from Husserl’s philosophy of egoic consciousness.

4.1. Perception: the constitutive nexus of embodiment, space, and motility

For both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (at least in *PbP*), perceptual objects are not simply *given*, but rather *constituted* through the activity of the perceiving subject. One of the earliest contributions to Husserl scholarship was Merleau-Ponty's corrective to popular misconceptions of Husserl's notion of constitution (which continue to persist). To say that the object of perception is constituted by the activity of the subject is not to say that the subject brings the object into existence, or is an utterly unconstrained creator. Rather, it is to say that the object is given for a subject of experience, or becomes meaningful for a subject, insofar as it is necessarily disclosed according to a law that governs the series of possible ways it can appear in relation to the subject. Objects are 'constituted' through the activity of the subject insofar as the object *as experienced* or *as sensed* essentially depends on how it can be given to a subject. The "one-sidedness" of perception is the structure according to which all of the specific sides or profiles of an object are essentially correlated to a specific perspective or point of view on it. The total network of possible profiles/perspectives is the object's "horizon."³⁰ Husserl came to understand the analysis of intentionality to simply *be* horizon analysis. That is, to analyze consciousness as intentional and thereby having "content" just is to "explicate" or "unfold" its horizon and situate that which is explicitly given within a network of further possible ways it could be given (*CM/Hua*. I.§20).

A full explication of Husserl's notions of horizon and constitution and their role in phenomenological analysis lies beyond the scope of this paper, but two things are worth mentioning here. The horizon structure of experience can be understood logically as opposed to phenomenologically, and it is the concept of motivation that makes Husserl's notion of horizon a uniquely *phenomenological* notion grounded in intuitive givenness.³¹ In a purely logical sense, one could understand the horizon of an experience as the set of possible experiences logically compatible with the way in which an object is presented at a specific moment or from a specific view. To use Husserl's example, in the experience of looking down at a tabletop, the manner in which it is given is logically compatible with an indefinitely large horizon of further determinations of the table. The table could have four legs, or five legs, or ten legs. There is nothing *essential* about the currently given profile that logically determines how many legs it has. But the horizon of possibility implicated in any experience is not simply the horizon of *logically* compatible property determinations. The horizon

³⁰ See, e.g. Husserl *TS*, 44/Hua. XIV.51; Husserl *Ideas I*, 87/Hua. III-1.101–2.

³¹ See Walsh, "Motivation and Horizon," for further argument on this claim.

of possibilities is always a horizon of *motivated* possibilities (*Ideas I*, 279–80/Hua. III-1.324–25), and motivated possibilities are those delineated by a subject's history and capacities.³² The horizon of possibilities within which an object is constituted therefore makes essential reference to not just an ideal subject, but a concrete subject situated in space and time, for whom a unique horizon is motivated.

Furthermore, we must also note a phenomenal and non-phenomenal sense of motivation in horizon analysis. While the horizon of *motivated* possibilities for further object determinations (and the manifold of correlative disclosive acts) is certainly more constrained than the horizon of *logically* possible further object determinations, the former is still indefinitely large and cannot be plausibly understood as somehow “phenomenally present” to the subject or “right there” on the surface of consciousness waiting to be introspected. The total horizon of motivated possibilities thus functions largely as a system of counter-factual dependencies that determine the degree to which the subject would be surprised or not given the way the series of appearance of the objects unfolds.³³ If the table turns out to have no legs and is being suspended by a magnetic field, one would be surprised in virtue of the horizon of motivated possibilities for the continued disclosure of the object being frustrated. There is a narrower sense of motivated horizon, however, that can be understood as phenomenally palpable to the subject of experience. This is the horizon of “immanent” anticipations of how an object will continue to be disclosed in the flow of movement that brings it further into view. When Husserl initially introduced the concept of motivation in the first chapter of the First Investigation of *Logical Investigations*, he describes it as the “felt-belonging” of two moments of experience. This initial characterization takes place in the context of indication relations, whereby one's awareness of something *motivates* an awareness or expectation of something else. The two moments of experience can be reflectively parsed in terms of discreet contents, but in the actual flow of experience, “If *A* summons *B* into consciousness, we are not merely simultaneously or successively aware conscious of both *A* and *B*, but we usually *feel* their connection forcing itself upon us, a connection in which the one points to the other and seems to belong to it” (*LI I*,

³² Importantly, the “history and capacities” at work here exceed the personal history and sedimented habits of the individual subject. The historicity of the subject is also a product of the trans-generational cultural and organic forces that shape the anonymous normality constitutive of the subject's experiences. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing this point. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes this anonymous aspect of subjectivity more than Husserl, such that one might think that this is where these two philosophers part ways. I do not think Merleau-Ponty departs from Husserl on this point, however, and will discuss this in further detail below (§5). The relevance of Husserl's later work, which began dealing with issues of historicity and “generativity,” should be noted here. For more extensive discussion see Steinbock, *Home and Beyond*.

³³ Yoshimi “Husserl's Theory of Belief,” 124–25.

187/Hua. XIX.36). In *Ideas II* Husserl asserts that “If we examine the structure of consciousness that constitutes a thing, then we see that all of nature, with space, time, causality, etc., is completely dissolved into a web of immanent motivations” (*Ideas II*, 238/Hua. IV.226). Thus, while the motivated horizon of possibility within which an object is constituted can be understood in a non-phenomenal sense, as an “ideal structure,” the originary sense of horizon is rooted in the way perceptual objects are disclosed through webs of indication relations. A profile of an object (and the correlative disclosive perspective) *indicates* further possible profiles (and their correlative disclosive perspectives), and indication is a function of the “felt-belonging” of the motivational character of perceptual experience.

As horizontally structured by motivation relations, perceptual intentionality is necessarily embodied and spatial. This is a major theme of *PbP* and repeatedly analyzed across Husserl’s corpus. In his analyses, Husserl lays out how perception, object, body, space, and movement form an inextricable nexus of concepts. To the series of appearances of the object as it is constituted within a horizon structure essentially belongs a correlative series of “kinaesthetic” sensations, an awareness of movement and bodily position. Husserl describes these two series as “dependent systems” that form a “constitutive duet” (*APS*, 51-52/Hua. XI.14–15). The series of appearances of the object is “kinaesthetically motivated” (*APS*, 52/Hua. XI.15) insofar as one’s consciousness of the lived body’s movement and potential for further movement forms the subjective context that provides a sense of continuity for the continued unfolding of appearances of the object. That is, the series of appearance through which the object is constituted have a motivational unity because they necessarily and always unfold in a systematic connection with the ongoing series of kinaesthetic sensation.³⁴ This is not to say that one’s kinaesthetic consciousness of the body is an *explicit* or *thetic* form of experience. But it would be incorrect to call the system of kinaesthetic sensations *unconscious*. Rather, the kinaesthetic series functions as an anonymous and non-thetic – but nevertheless *constitutive* – aspect of a much richer overall experience. Furthermore, as Joona Taipale lays out in rich detail, in addition to the constitution of the perceptual world, this “constitutive duet” of kinaesthetic and exteroceptive awareness is simultaneously and equiprimordially constitutive of one’s embodied self-awareness. Self-awareness or subjectivity here just is the temporally flowing

³⁴ Biceaga, *The Concept of Passivity*, 27.

kinaesthetic “self-affectivity” that serves as the motivational context into which all exteroceptive sensing is continuously integrated.³⁵

The kinaesthetic-perceptual structure forms a series of experiential “if-thens” indexed to the subject’s capacity for free movement. The concept of space is thereby already implicated in this analysis. Objects are constituted in horizons of possible bodily movement within space. This complex structure is lived through in the form of the experiential if-then of motivation. Furthermore, the experiential if-then of motivation is in fact what *generates* this structure. An immobile lived body is thinkable, according to Husserl, but only “as a limit-case.” “[I]mmotility,” only makes sense as “the null-point of movement” (*Ideas II*, 298/Hua. IV.284). Elsewhere Husserl notes that “the ‘I hold still’” must be included among the “multiplicities of kinaesthetic processes having the peculiar character of the ‘I do,’ ‘I move’” (*Crisis*, 161/Hua. VI.164). Motility, or the subjective sense of free movement or being poised to freely move, is therefore what Husserl seems to find as the primary site of disclosure for the complex interrelation of body, space, and object within the horizon structure through which perceptual objects become constituted.

Merleau-Ponty seizes on this primordial notion of motility in the very same place that he introduces the concept of motivation in the Introduction to *PhP*. He is discussing a perceptual illusion in which “A subject whose oculomotor muscles are paralyzed sees the objects move toward the left when he believes himself to be turning his eyes toward the left” (*PhP* 48/74). Typically, when looking at a stationary object, the kinaesthetic consciousness of moving one’s eyes to the left brings with it a change in the object’s location within the visual field while the object continues to appear stationary. But in this illusory case, consciousness of moving the eyes does not bring with it the typical alteration of the visual field, as there is no alteration of the images on the retina. But because consciousness of moving one’s eyes to the left (or what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the consciousness of the intention to do so) typically brings with it an alteration of the field, there is an illusion of movement within the field. As Merleau-Ponty explains:

The movements of one’s own body are naturally invested with a certain perceptual signification, they form a system with external phenomena so tightly woven that external perception “takes account” of the movements of the perceptual organs, and it finds in them,

³⁵ Taipale, *Phenomenology and Embodiment*, 24–30. Taipale provides an excellent account of how self-awareness, sensibility, and the lived-body are co-constituted by intertwining motivational unities of experience. And while Taipale’s account frequently employs Husserl’s concept of motivation, he does not explicitly define it or provide a detailed exposition of the unifying role it plays across Husserl’s analyses of different forms of intentionality (or Merleau-Ponty’s).

if not the *explicit explanation*, then at least the *motive* for the intervening changes in the spectacle and can thereby understand these changes immediately. (*PbP* 49/74)

His point is the Husserlian point of kinaestheses and object-appearances operating in a constitutive duet: ‘the sliding of the landscape is ultimately *nothing other* than its fixity at the end of a gaze that is believed to be in movement’ (*PbP* 49/74, my emphases). The way objects appear within the space of the phenomenal field is constitutively tied to movement.

Like Husserl’s understanding of kinaestheses in their motivating function, Merleau-Ponty understands the constitutive movement-space-object relationship as experientially lived. Movement is not understood as “displacement” in space, as we might think of it when we visualize a rolling billiard ball. The latter is an example of “objective movement” (*PbP* 243/281) in geometric space, which is derived from a more fundamental notion of movement, which Merleau-Ponty describes as “an original intentionality, a manner of being related to that is distinct from knowledge” (*PbP* 407/447); “a modulation of an already familiar milieu” (*PbP* 288/326); “a variation of the subject’s hold upon his world” (*PbP* 280/317); “motion that generates space,” that is distinct from “objective movement in space,’ which is the movement of things and our passive body” (*PbP* 406/447).

This primordial notion of movement in Merleau-Ponty is ultimately a further articulation of the motivational character of experience precisely in the sense in which it differs from the notion of objective movement in geometric space. The latter form of movement, “displacement,” is a function of causal relations that do not operate in the affective context of meaningful significance—what Merleau-Ponty calls “sense.” Motility as the sense of free movement (or possibility for free movement), on the other hand, includes a *felt normativity* that is a function of the experiential if-then of motivation. The notion of felt normativity was already implicit in the description of the everyday sense of motivation in action. An action is motivated insofar as it is compelled or demanded by a fact or situation. In virtue of a passive undergoing the subject experiences a felt demand for an active doing. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty both locate this motivational normativity in perceptual experience with the idea of perceptual optimality.

Merleau-Ponty is perhaps clearer on this point than Husserl, but the two are in essential agreement. The horizon structure within which objects are constituted through bodily position and movement in space is not experienced in the form of judgmental positing, imaginative variation, or explicit expectation. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, “The distance between me and the object is not a size that increases or decreases, but rather a tension that oscillates around a norm” (*PbP*

316/356). Perception operates through a kind of experiential normativity that is experienced as a tension that demands being relieved by obtaining an optimal “hold” on the situation, by becoming fully “geared in” to it (*PbP* 261–72/298–310). In the case of depth perception, one adjusts one’s eyes and the overall position of one’s body in order to situate objects as standing in determinate distance-in-depth relations to the body and to one another. In avoiding diplopia (blurry double-vision), the body is oriented by norms such as solidity, equilibrium, unity, and depth.³⁶ Husserl makes the same point at several places in his corpus, notably in *Thing and Space* in which he explicates a notion of perceptual optimality, explaining that perception is teleologically oriented towards a “limit” (*TS/Hua*. XVI.§36).³⁷ As Maxime Doyon puts it:

[W]e stand in a motivational context in which things exercise a normative pull on us. Such an experience is “normative,” since it triggers a kinaesthetic response on our side (at least potentially): seeing things as thus and so is accompanied by an awareness of (more or less specific) movements I could make in regard to the object in order to optimize my experience.³⁸

The “triggering” in question here, of course, is motivational and not causal, as Doyon goes on to note.

4.2. *Generalizing motivation beyond perceptual consciousness*

A phenomenological analysis of perception begins with the subject-object structure as it is given in reflection: the subject passively receives the fully determinate mind-independent object that is “out there.” This understanding of objects, however, depends on and is generated by experiential structures that govern the essential possibilities for how an object can be disclosed for an experiencing subject. The object always appears as situated in a horizon, and that just means within a motivational matrix of possible perspectives. That matrix of possible perspectives inheres in a structure of possible spatial relations to the object, with spatial relation necessitating a motile body. The motile body experiences its motility as the affective and normative force that motivates and

³⁶ See Rojcewicz, “Depth Perception in Merleau-Ponty” for discussion.

³⁷ The key difference between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on this point may be in Husserl’s understanding of optimality in purely epistemic terms. “It is in this conception of absolute or perfect givenness and its corresponding notion of truth that the contrast with Merleau-Ponty is most evident. Since Merleau-Ponty does not effectuate the reduction (at least not in the relevant sense) and has not laid much emphasis on the idea of perception as a cognitive activity, let alone one with an infinite task, his analysis is restricted to a phenomenological analysis of perceptual optimality as a lifeworldly phenomenon with practical standards of satisfaction” (Doyon “Husserl on Perceptual Optimality,” 180).

³⁸ Doyon “Husserl on Perceptual Optimality,” 183.

orients its relation to the object. The constitution of perceptual objects can thereby be understood as the *movement* from indeterminacy to determinacy.³⁹ It is the *transition* or *becoming* that is important here. As Fiona Hughes puts it, Merleau-Ponty is concerned with the *shift* or transitions between *Gestalten*, “not just with the *results* of such switches.”⁴⁰

Perceptual *states* or *acts* with determinate content may be the starting point of our reflections on experience, but we see from the preceding analysis that such states are effected through the movement of transition from indeterminate to determinate. The movement of transition from indeterminate to determinate is precisely the underlying operative intentionality that “achieves” or “accomplishes” act intentionality. In the flow of movement (understood in the primordial sense of an “original intentionality” that “generates space” as a “modulation of a milieu”), the corresponding series of appearances that disclose the perceptual object are not linked to one another through some explicit act of the subject. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, they pass into one another through a “transition synthesis” (*PbP* 277/315). The concept of transition synthesis in Merleau-Ponty derives from Husserl’s notion of passive synthesis, which can already be found in the Sixth Investigation of *Logical Investigations*, where Husserl asserts that the unity of the series of appearances is a “*unity of identification*” and *not* “the unity of an *act* of identification” (*LI II*, 285/Hua. XIX.678–79, original emphases altered). The identity that unites the series is “performed,” not “meant,” and “does *not* therefore arise through *our own synthetic activity*” (*LI II*, 284–85/Hua. XIX.678).

Husserl is clear that this very same structure of intentionality obtains in the case of non-sensuous experience. In the Sixth Investigation he argues that the concepts “perception” and “object” mutually assign sense to one another and must be broadened to make sense of more general forms of experience:

What shall we call the correlate of a non-sensuous subject-presentation, one involving non-sensuous structure, if the word ‘object’ is not available to us? How shall we speak of its actual givenness, or apparent givenness, when the word ‘perception’ is denied us? In common parlance, therefore, *aggregates, indefinite pluralities, totalities, numbers, disjunctions, predicates* (right-ness), *states of affairs*, all count as “objects,” while the acts through which they seem to be given count as “percepts.” (*LI II*, 281/Hua. XIX.672)

Later, in the lectures on active and passive synthesis he claims that

³⁹ Behnke, “Merleau-Ponty’s Ontological Reading,” 42.

⁴⁰ Hughes “A Passivity Prior,” 421 n. 6, emphases altered.

Whenever we speak of objects, no matter what category of objects they may be, the sense of this manner of speaking about objects originally stems from perceptions as lived-experiences originally constituting sense, and therefore an objectlike formation. (*APS*, 57/Hua. XI.19)

All of this is not to say that non-perceptual “objectlike formations” are disclosed or “perceived” with exactly the same intuitive character as sensuous perception. Rather, it is to say that insofar as an “object” stands before consciousness it does so according to a structure that, if considered in sufficient generality, is the same structure that inheres in sensuous perception. This is the horizon structure: the structure through which objects (or “objectlike formations”) are constituted in the *motivated movement from indeterminacy to determinacy*. If constitution is fundamentally a form of movement, it will also be fundamentally bodily and spatial in a sufficiently generic (but not therefore “merely analogous” or metaphorical) sense.

The nexus of concepts body-space-movement undergo a transformation here, but this involves a valid phenomenological construction rooted in the intuitive evidence provided by the general motivational character found in such non-perceptual forms of experience. There remains a passive undergoing out of which an active response emerges and is felt as demanded. Subjectivity is fundamentally embodied insofar as it exists in a space of possible movement through which it can bring objects to determinacy. The “body” at play here is not the physical body, but rather the “body” as organizational principle of intentionality. The body is a point of opacity, a functional nexus of motivational if-then relations. Another way of articulating this is to understand embodiment in terms of habit and sedimentation. Recall that motivation relations only function in virtue of a subjective context of experience, but are not logical or ideal connections. The current profile of the house available from my perspective *indicates* a certain series of further profiles of the house, and thus *motivates* a correlative series of house appearances, but there is nothing about the currently visible side that *necessitates* or *entails* how the further sides will look. The motivated series is a function of the subject’s history, his background beliefs about houses and relevant concepts of houses. Thus, while the motivating and the motivated stand in a *functional* rather than *essential* relation, the operation of motivation relations does reveal something essential about subjectivity in general: namely, its historicity. Experiences *sediment*. The subject brings a historical thickness to bear on its current field of experience and the motivation relations that are “live” in the experience are a function of this sedimented history that forms the subjective context of its present experiences.⁴¹

⁴¹ The “sedimented history” that constitutes the overall motivational structure of the experience includes an even broader set of conditions than the one’s unique to the individual subject mentioned here (see footnote 19 above). As

This structure can be understood in sufficient generality to see how it obtains in non-perceptual consciousness. Insofar as subjectivity necessarily unfolds in the context of an inherited sedimented history, all forms of experience will occur in a context of perceptual or cognitive capacities rooted in that history. In both *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas II* Husserl describes the “rational motives” that can be operative in purely cognitive operations such as solving a proof. A mathematician may err in taking premises to indicate the truth of a conclusion when relying on the “habitual knowledge” sedimented through rote “blind learning on authority” (*LI I*, 185/Hua. XIX.34). An invalid conclusion still falls “under the heading of motivation of reason” since it is generated out of the “sediment of previous acts of reason” (*Ideas II*, 233/Hua. IV.221). The “I can” of motility is the same “I can” of acts of rational inference. In both cases, the subject constitutes an object(-like formations) through a kind of “free movement” of consciousness that brings something to determinacy within a space of possibility.⁴² This freedom is not a total liberty since the kinds of moves the subject can make are oriented by the capacities that have sedimented through prior experiences. This sedimented history forms the “habit body,” which functions as the context in which motivational if-thens are experienced as an affective normativity that solicits or demands a certain orientation in the subsequent ego-performance. To say that subjectivity is essentially embodied just is to understand it as the “substrate” of habitualities or tendencies evident in the motivational character of experience (*CM/Hua*. I.§32).

Understanding consciousness as fundamentally embodied in this generic sense lies at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's project in *PbP*. In addition to his extensive analyses of perceptual experience in terms of movement and sedimented habitualities, he also discusses a similar “‘world of thoughts,’ a sedimentation of our mental operations, which allows us to count on our acquired concepts and judgments” (*PbP* 131/163). Like perception, thought navigates “a sort of mental panorama with its accentuated regions and its confused regions, a physiognomy of questions, and intellectual situations” (*PbP* 131/163). Strikingly, it is in the context of this discussion of the “movement of thought” (*PbP* 132/163) that Merleau-Ponty quickly moves to the generalization that “The structure ‘world,’ with its double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity, is at the center of

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes (but is also hinted at in Husserl's later writings), egoic consciousness incessantly takes up and finds itself situated within an anonymous “pre-history” constituted by one's organism, one's socio-cultural history, and the “world” in general. Whether and how the concept of motivation connects this anonymous aspect of subjectivity to egoic consciousness is an important point that address in further detail in §5.

⁴² Cf. Boghossian's recent work on the nature of inference as a “movement” of thought and the necessity of consciousness for understanding inference in this way (Boghossian, “What is inference?” and “Delimiting the Boundaries”).

consciousness” (*PbP* 132/163). It is in this sense that “Every consciousness is, to some extent, perceptual consciousness” (*PbP* 416/455). The “new *cogito*” called for in the Introduction is explicated in terms of “an entire ‘sedimented history’ that does not merely concern the *genesis* of my thought, but that determines its *sense*” (*PbP* 416/456).

5. The problem of pre-egoic passivity

Thus far our strategy for extending the fluid concept of motivation over increasingly broad domains of consciousness has been to find the sense in which different forms of experience involve the peculiar blend of passivity and activity found in the everyday sense of motivation in action. Perceptual experience and non-sensuous thought experience share a general motivational structure, and the horizontal, embodied, spatial, and motile structures of experience thereby. Further broadening the account of the motivational character of consciousness encounters a problem, however, when we reach domains of experience from which egoic activity is entirely absent. Perceiving and thinking, Husserl claims, are always “*active performances of the ego*” which necessarily presuppose “something already pre-given to us” (*EJ*, 72/74). In other words, according to the structure of motivation that we have laid out thus far, an experience must blend a passive undergoing with an active response in order to have a motivational character. But experience seems to have a deeper and more basic unity prior to any egoic involvement or accomplishment. Egoic consciousness finds itself motivated by a phenomenal field that pre-exists it. Furthermore, this field is not a blooming buzzing confusion. It is already structured, and this structuring is what solicits egoic involvement. How, then, should we make sense of Merleau-Ponty’s initial claim that motivation is a concept that we need to *return* to the phenomena? If “the phenomena” are not (entirely) constituted through egoic activity, but are in fact (partly, already) constituted within the “anonymous pre-history” that egoic consciousness inherits, then does not the concept of motivation only take us to this point of intersection? In other words, it would seem that the descriptive power of the concept of motivation runs up against a limit: egoic consciousness finds itself motivated, and thus the concept of motivation is useful for articulating the intentionality of egoic consciousness, but the forms of synthesis constitutive of the phenomena prior to any egoic involvement cannot be described as having a motivational structure.

For Husserl, the pre-egoic constitution of the phenomenal field is governed by principles of temporal genesis and “hyletic association.” Surprisingly, however, he still characterizes these principles in terms of motivation. This section will unpack what Husserl means and argue that

Merleau-Ponty characterization of these pre-egoic domains of experience as “anonymous” does not constitute a break from Husserl’s characterization of them in terms of motivation.

5.1. *The motivational unity of temporal genesis*

Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty complicate the active/passive distinction, and invoke the concept of motivation, when analyzing the relation of the temporal becoming of consciousness to the nature of subjectivity. Husserl straightforwardly claims that the temporal unity of consciousness is in fact a unity of motivation (*Ideas II*, 239/Hua. IV.227–28; *APS*, 624–28/Hua. XI.336–39). Consider a completely unexpected experience, such as “the night sky lit up by a meteor shower” or hearing “quite unexpectedly the crack of a whip” (*Ideas II*, 239/Hua. IV.227). In these cases it would seem that no part of the ongoing experience stands in a motivational relation to the subsequent phases of experience. But even here there is a motivational unity, Husserl claims. Prior to any active positing by the ego, “the temporal forms themselves motivate each other. In this sense we can say that even the pervasive unity of the stream of consciousness is a unity of motivation” (*Ideas II*, 239/Hua. IV.228).

This seemingly radical claim rests on Husserl’s understanding of the retention-impression-protention structure of time-consciousness, specifically on the nature of protention. Husserl is not a pointilist about consciousness. Isolating an absolute present as a *point* without duration is an abstraction from concrete temporal thickness of the present that we live through. Consciousness is not a series, but a “development” (*APS*, 628/Hua. XI.339); an “incessant process of becoming...not a mere succession” (*APS*, 270/Hua. XI.218). The present is always experienced in relation to what has just passed. What has just passed is *retained* by the present as the condition or context into which the present becomes integrated. On the one hand, this retaining is purely passive. The present surges forward and the past is retained like a comet’s tail. On the other hand, in its function as context that conditions the incessant integration of new nows, the retentional thickness of consciousness is always-already a protentional reaching forward, and this is what gives it a motivational structure:

Indeed, it is a primordial law that every retentional course—in pure passivity, without co-participation by the active ego—immediately and steadily motivates and thus generates intentions of expectancy that are determined in the sense of a similarity of style. (*APS*, 611/Hua. XI.323).

Thus, while Husserl describes the temporal unity of consciousness as purely passive in some sense, by characterizing it as a motivational unity that “generates” a forward-reaching intentionality, he also

locates an element of activity blended into this passivity. To put it differently, an element of spontaneity is endogenous to the otherwise purely passive flow of retention in time-consciousness. Furthermore, and important for establishing Merleau-Ponty's continuity on this point, Husserl characterizes this pre-egoic motivational unity as a "similarity of style" that establishes the possibility for the further constitution of sense.⁴³

Merleau-Ponty likewise complicates the active/passive distinction in his analysis of the temporality of subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty often characterizes the temporal syntheses that pre-structure the phenomenal field as happening prior to egoic involvement, and subsequently being "taken up" or "inherited" by egoic consciousness. These pre-egoic syntheses, however, already establish a continuity of "style," just as Husserl described the motivational unity of the retention-protection structure: "Prior to what I see and what I perceive, there is certainly nothing visible any longer, but my world is carried along by intentional lines that trace out in advance at least the style of what is about to arrive" (*PhP* 439/478). Like Husserl, however, the anonymity of these pre-egoic syntheses does not preclude their being understood as having a motivational unity since even within the "pure passivity" of temporal genesis a productive or "generative" element emanates forth.

Merleau-Ponty frequently qualifies his characterizations of temporally prior pre-egoic passive syntheses being taken up by the active ego with reminders that such descriptions are the product of analysis and not the nature of concrete subjectivity as it is lived through. "We are not," he reminds us, "an activity tied to a passivity, a machine surmounted by a will, or a perception surmounted by a judgment; rather, *we are entirely active and entirely passive, because we are the upsurge of time*" (*PhP* 452/491, my emphases). Just as Husserl claimed that the retentional nature of time-consciousness is motivationally tied to the protentional expectancies it generates, Merleau-Ponty claims that "The act of seeing is *indivisibly prospective* (since the object is at the end of my focusing movement) *and retrospective* (since it will be presented as anterior to its appearance, along with the 'stimulus,' the *motive*, or the prime mover of every process since its beginning)" (*PhP* 249/286–87, my emphases). In other words, the motivational unity of perception (whereby the *motivated* is experienced as clarifying and completing an indeterminate motive) can be understood as a temporal unity ("indivisibly prospective and retrospective"). Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty says in several places, and often in quite evocative terms, "Subjectivity, at the level of perception, is nothing other than

⁴³ See also, Taipale, *Phenomenology and Embodiment*, 29–30.

temporality” (*PbP* 248/286). The analysis of temporality just is how we gain access to the concrete structure of subjectivity (*PbP* 433/472).

Immediately following his discussion of Husserl on the retention/protection structure of temporality, and the claim that subjectivity just is the upsurge of temporality, Merleau-Ponty returns to the themes of activity and passivity and their complication. Identifying “concrete subjectivity” with temporality allows Merleau-Ponty to clarify what he only “provisionally called passive synthesis” (*PbP* 451/490). In the end, the passive syntheses of temporality are not passive in the sense of “receiving a multiplicity” (*PbP* 451/490). We should not think of temporal syntheses as happening in a non-egoic anonymous realm, in which roughly hewn proto-phenomena take shape and subsequently “impact” upon the ego. And although Merleau-Ponty does seem to describe perception this way at times, at this later stage of *PbP* he is clear that what we might distinguish as the active and passive domains of experience are in fact wholly bound up with one another and can only be parsed at the reflective level, removed from the flow of concrete subjectivity. Again, just as Husserl finds an active, generative element within the otherwise “passive” retentive flow, Merleau-Ponty refuses to characterize the passivity of temporality (and therefore subjectivity) as wholly devoid of an active moment:

Indeed, it is clear, I am not the author of time, any more than I am the author of my own heartbeats, nor am I the one who takes the initiative of temporalization [...] And yet, this springing forth of time is not a mere fact that I undergo; I can find in time a recourse against time itself, as happens in a decision that I commit to, or an act of conceptual focusing. Time tears me away from what I was about to be, but simultaneously give me the means of grasping myself from a distance and actualizing myself as myself. (*PbP* 451/490).

It is worth noting here that in this dense characterization of the not-quite-fully-passive passivity of temporal becoming, Merleau-Ponty echoes some of the language of decision used in his initial characterizations of motivation (*PbP* 270/307–8; see §3.1 above). Temporality cannot be thought of as a purely passive flow that simply carries one along, just as committing to a decision cannot be thought of as initiating a deterministic causal sequence. Deciding to act is a motivational phenomenon, and the motive is always present *in* the decision, not as a prior fact or event that one “undergoes.”

This section has argued that although Husserl and Merleau-Ponty recognize that there is an important sense in which the flow of temporality is passive, both complicate this view and arrive at an understanding of temporal genesis as an inextricable blending of passivity and activity. Husserl

straightforwardly describes this as a unity of motivation. While not quite as explicitly in terms of motivation, Merleau-Ponty's discussion is not a departure from Husserl. In seeking to “restore a temporal thickness to the *Cogito*” (*PhP* 420/459), Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the “opacity of an originary past” that is always-already present in consciousness (*PhP* 366/408). But this opaque pre-history that consciousness incessantly takes up is not *other* than consciousness. Rather, “The structure ‘world,’ with its double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity, is at the center of consciousness” (*PhP* 132/163). As the earlier sections of this paper have clarified, this “double moment” – of temporality, of activity-within-passivity – at the center of consciousness is aptly characterized by the motivating-motivated structure prevalent throughout Merleau-Ponty's analyses of perception. In typical perceptual life we dwell in the motivated phenomena, which we may trace back to a flux of indeterminate motives. The motivated *appears* to preexist its own motives, but in fact can only be said to *clarify* them (*PhP* 51/76). Tracing the genesis of full-fledged egoic intentional phenomena back to the passive and indeterminate milieu of motives takes us back to the “anonymous life” which is “merely the limit of the temporal dispersion that always threatens the historical present” (*PhP* 362/404).

5.2. *Motives as the trace of our general sensitivity to the world*

Though Husserl speaks of the temporal structure of consciousness as its most universal and basic form of unity, he more carefully notes in several places that this form of unity actually operates at a level of formal abstraction removed from the concrete flux of experience. We can understand the basic unifying principles of experience with temporal concepts, namely *simultaneity* and *succession*, however these are only “universal forms of order” and “form is nothing without content” (*EJ*, 73/76). As Dan Zahavi puts it, “Time consciousness never appears in pure form but always as a pervasive *sensibility*, as the very sensing of the sensations.”⁴⁴ The “sense of a similarity of style” that is characteristic of protentional determining is a function of what Husserl calls “association” or “associative syntheses.” “Association is only at work in the protentional path of original time-constitution,” Husserl writes, noting in multiple places how normal language fails us when we understand association as “passive” (*APS*, 118–20/Hua. XI.75–77).

On Husserl's account, these associative syntheses operate according to basic principles of *similarity* and *contrast*, forming *prominences* (*EJ*, §§16-17). Sensory “hyle” come pre-grouped into broad

⁴⁴ Zahavi, “Merleau-Ponty on Husserl,” 19–20.

genuses. The steady background tone is part of one's overall *auditory* field, which stands in contrast to one's *visual* and *tactile* fields in the overall phenomenal field. Within the auditory field the steady perduring of the tone is achieved through the persistent similarity of the tone-phases that temporally constitute it. Were there to be a variation in pitch or volume there would still be a persistent similarity making it *this* tone, but the variation would also mark a contrast and thus a prominence in the field. A patch of red stands out from a white background. The whirring of a leaf-blower stands out from the background hum of the classroom projector. Though Husserl does not explicitly formulate his notion of "prominence" in this way, Corijn Van Mazijk offers a plausible account:

[T]he affective quality of sensory experience can be understood as co-varying with the contrast established through immanent association. The subjectively felt intensity of sensory fields can be taken to stand in relative proportion to the sharpness of contrast established in immanent association.⁴⁵

In other words, the most basic organizational form found in the passive pre-givenness of the phenomenal field is "not that there is always a figure that stands out from a background; rather, it lies in [Husserl's] contention that what comes into relief is always charged with significance, effective in the sense of exerting an affective force (*affectiver Kraft*) on an intending subject."⁴⁶

The promise that Merleau-Ponty finds in Husserl's concept to of motivation, recall, is that it allows us to return to the "silent" functioning of operative intentionality, which he characterizes (citing Husserl) as the "*Logos* of the aesthetic world" (*PbP* 453/492; see §§2.1-2.2 above). Husserl's account of associative syntheses summarized above are his attempt to theorize this most fundamental level of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty takes up a similar task in characterizing our basic bodily sensitivity to the world in his discussions of sensation, and "the thing and the natural world." The anonymous pre-egoic sensitivity of the body constitutes the "milieu of generality" in which sensation arises (*PbP* 224/261). Sensation "arrives from beneath myself, and it results from a sensitivity that preceded it and that will survive it" (*PbP* 224/261). "I see blue because I am *sensitive* to colors" (*PbP* 223/260). In its general and incessant sensitivity to the world, my body – as the moment of anonymity at the heart perception – exists as a "pre-personal adhesion to the general form of the world" (*PbP* 86/113).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Van Mazijk, "Husserl and Sensory Awareness," 15.

⁴⁶ Steinbock, "Saturated Intentionality," 66.

⁴⁷ See also *PbP* (251/289, 265/302, 352/394) for characterizations of sensation as an anonymous moment of perception that is the product of the "adhesion" of the body (or the organism) to the thing (or the world).

The anonymity of the sensory fields taken up in perception does not preclude them from the overall motivational account of consciousness. Rather, they form “my primitive complicity with the world” (*PbP* 448/487). This “complicity” with the world is further characterized as the “flow of motivations that carry me into [the world]” (*PbP* 309/348). Providing an *analysis* of sensation – this “primitive complicity with” or “pre-personal adhesion to” the world – requires that I “express myself” and thus “*crystallize* a collection of indefinite motives” (*PbP* 309/348). That is, the anonymous pre-egoic bodily life and sensory fields that solicit constitutive egoic involvement are not separate from consciousness. “My being and my consciousness are one, rather, because ‘to be conscious’ is here nothing other than ‘being toward...’” (*PbP* 448/487). Anonymity and egoic life are “but two moments of a single structure that is the concrete subject” (*PbP* 477/514–15). All of this is to say that Merleau-Ponty finds sensation *in* perception rather than *prior to* or *behind* perception. We must be careful here however, since (as seen above) he also characterizes the sensory moment of perception as “prior” to or “beneath” perception. But we already have the resources for clarifying this from our discussion of the motivational structure of perception and other forms of experience. We can only “excavate” or “reconstruct” the field of motives on the basis of finding ourselves motivated; that is, on the basis of how we find ourselves affected. The motivated is not the ontological ground for the motivating, but is the epistemic point of access for any articulation of it. As Merleau-Ponty puts this, “the thickness of the pre-objective present” is where we find “the starting point for ‘explanations’” (*PbP* 457/496). Here, in this “thickness,” we find the motivational traces of “our corporeality, our sociality, and the preexistence of the world” (*PbP* 457/496).⁴⁸

6. Conclusion: from motivation to institution

The previous section argued that the concept of motivation plays an important role in understanding how both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty sought to theorize the deepest levels of passive synthesis that constitute the phenomenal field. These domains are perhaps the most distal

⁴⁸ In this essay I have mainly focused on Merleau-Ponty’s characterizations of the bodily nature of the anonymous pre-egoic domain, at the expense of any discussion of the how the socio-cultural world—with its own history, sedimentations, and horizons—similarly operates within the anonymity of operative intentionality. I pass over this issue due to space constraints, and not for its lack of significance in accounting for the overall motivational situation in which the ego is enveloped. Indeed, providing a reconstruction of the overall motivational situation of a given experience necessarily invokes the entire “world” in the broadest sense of the term, including the organic, socio-cultural, and even cosmic pre-history of the subject. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this point. (See also note 24 above.)

phenomenological constructions that the originary evidence of consciousness permits. But the “originary evidence” disclosed in phenomenological reflection is not a static, transparent field simply laid out before the mind’s inner eye. It possesses a motivational force that carries us into an opacity, affording a reconstruction of the dialogue between body and world. While Merleau-Ponty’s discourse on anonymity may seem to depart from Husserl’s discourse on structures of transcendental consciousness, he in fact never abandons Husserl’s methodological principle of beginning in egoic consciousness and theorizing “outward.”⁴⁹ His repeated insistence on the significance of Husserl’s concept of motivation, I have argued, is due to his recognition of it as the key principle for bridging the anonymous pre-predicative functioning of operative intentionality and the egoic life of consciousness.

And while it is true that Merleau-Ponty’s later work seems (at times) to explicitly eschew Husserlian talk of consciousness, the conceptual framework thus far developed by this paper remains a productive lens for understanding the overall unity of Merleau-Ponty’s oeuvre.⁵⁰ This concluding section will argue that Merleau-Ponty’s later ontological turn, namely the conceptual reorientation from a “constituting” subject to an “instituted and instituting subject” (*IP* 6/35), is predelineated by the conceptual architecture—anchored in the concept of motivation—built up around the analyses of passivity and temporality in *PbP*. Following Mauro Carbone, Merleau-Ponty’s self-described departure from “the philosophy of *Erlebnisse* to the philosophy of our *Urstiftung*” (*VI* 221/270) can be understood as a development of the notion of operative

⁴⁹ See Heinämaa, “Anonymity and Personhood” for further argument on this point. I am in fundamental agreement with Heinämaa, although she does not discuss the role of motivation in the story of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’s continuity on this point.

⁵⁰ Consider this working note from his lectures on Husserl near the end of his career:

The discovery of operative intentionality has never led Husserl to abandon [the philosophy] of *Bewusstsein*, of constitution, of intentional analytic—nor has he ever disavowed the distinction *Tatsache-Eidos*.

Are we going to say therefore that Husserl refuses to make the passage to ontology in Heidegger’s sense? To the problematic of negativity?

Naivety: what’s at stake is not the recognition of an error—but the mutation of concepts.

It is certain that *Bewusstsein* no longer means the same thing when it is Heraclitus’ soul. Concepts for a philosopher are only nets for catching sense. Now certainly Husserl recognized that this concept of consciousness could still lure more sense. (*HLP* 53/64)

I read this as Merleau-Ponty showing an openness to the idea of an expanded sense of consciousness that goes beyond what he takes to be the overly intellectualist early Husserlian notion of act intentionality. As I have argued in this paper, expanding the “net” in order to “lure more sense” is precisely what the conceptual work on operative intentionality and motivation have been doing all along.

intentionality in an ontological register.⁵¹ In developing this claim, I am not arguing that Merleau-Ponty's later work, insofar as it can be understood as a further working out of operative intentionality and motivation, somehow ultimately remains “stuck” in “the philosophy of *Erlebnisse*.” Rather, I aim to show that there is a kind of internally consistent conceptual progression from the phenomenology of motivation to the ontology of institution. Merleau-Ponty's characterizations of the ontological structure *instituting-instituted* are an “endogenous supplement” to his characterizations of the phenomenological structure *motivating-motivated*.⁵² Given that an exhaustive account of this conceptual progression is not possible within the confines of this paper, here I mainly focus on material from the *Institution and Passivity* lectures (*IP*), specifically in their characterizations of the instituting subject in terms of normativity, temporality, and activity/passivity.

6.1. Normativity

We have already seen how Merleau-Ponty describes the motivational character of consciousness as a kind of normative force (see §4.1 above). Perceptual experience is constituted through a normative network of experiential if-thens that govern perception-action routines. The perceptual self-world relation is constituted by a kind of generative “movement,” lived through as a “tension that oscillates around a norm” (*PbP* 316/356). This normative characterization is echoed in his later discussion of artistic creation as a paradigmatic case of institution (*IP* 41–49/78–88). Here we have one of the more explicit characterizations of *instituting-instituted* in terms of operative intentionality and motivation. The institution of a certain style of painting is neither a matter of explicit choice nor a causally conditioned process. There is still a “sense of the process. This sense exists; there is an operative intentionality” (*IP* 46/84). Painters make choices, “But the painter does not produce the theory for it, does not know the reason for it. The ‘motive’ [is] *a certain expressive divergence in relation to a certain ‘norm,’* but not a choice in the sense of positing an end” (*IP* 46/85, emphases modified). A painter's work (or the style of a certain school of painting) is instituted insofar as it adheres to norms, but not in the explicit sense of consciously following a rule. Like paintings, “A book is a series of institutions” insofar as it has an “internal sense” that produces an

⁵¹ Carbone, *The Thinking of the Sensible*, 10. Furthermore, as de Saint Aubert has argued, while Merleau-Ponty was heavily influenced by Fink's development of the concept of operative intentionality, he makes a fundamental departure from Fink insofar as Fink's project remains classically phenomenological—aiming to “explicate” or “bring to light” the implicit aspects of intentional acts—whereas the later Merleau-Ponty comes to think of the mind-world relation ontologically, as a “reciprocal involvement” (de Saint Aubert, *Le Scénario Cartésien*, 145).

⁵² “Endogenous supplement” is Beith's term, but the point about the motivating-motivated structure is my own (Beith, *The Birth of Sense*, 161).

“external sense” (IP 11/41). The internal sense of a book project is characterized as “a divergence in relation to a norm of sense...It is this sense by divergence, deformation, which is proper to institution” (IP 11/41).

Merleau-Ponty repeatedly characterizes this notion of divergence-from-norm as “lateral.” The instituting does not “envelop” the instituted, as the constituting does the constituted. Rather, *Stiftung* is “the positing of a style, not a frontal grasp but a lateral divergence” (HLP 26/30). The “frontal relation” of the constituting-constituted model of *Sinnegebung* is now understood as “composed with a lateral relation which retains it and ballasts it, relativizes its *Sinnegebung* in advance” (IP 135/181). This notion of normativity as lateral divergence can be understood as part of the conceptual progression from motivating-motivated to instituting-instituted insofar as it is foreshadowed by the prior analyses of temporality.

6.2. Temporality

Temporality is also a process of continuous “lateral” divergence. “Time is not enveloping and not enveloped,” and as such, “is the very model of institution” (IP 7/36). As we have seen from the analyses of motivation-cum-temporality (see §5.1 above), both Husserl and the Merleau-Ponty of *PbP* already understood time as an opaque and generative thickness. Without the involvement of egoic consciousness, the past (retention) continuously generates and contextualizes (protends) the future as a continuity of style. It is not a radical conceptual leap, therefore, from the logic of motivation to the logic of institution. Both the motivating and instituting are a “past that has never been present” (*PbP* 252/289) insofar as they both

endow experience with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense, will form a thinkable sequel or a history—or again the events which deposit a sense in me, not just as something surviving or as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future. (IP 77/124)

As Don Beith points out, this notion of institution has a temporal logic best captured by the future perfect tense. On this logic, the structures of sense that emerge and are taken up in conscious life “paradoxically establish their own developmental past.”⁵³ In other words, the instituted emerges from a developmental past – the instituting. But this instituting developmental trajectory only becomes

⁵³ Beith *The Birth of Sense*, 54.

what it is in virtue of what it *will have become* – the instituted – which “retrogressively restructure[es]” it; or, as Beith evocatively describes it: there is a “retrograde becoming of the true.”⁵⁴

This counter-intuitive temporal logic, I argue, is striking similar to what we have already seen in Merleau-Ponty's characterizations of the motivating-motivated relation. Recall, the motivated does not “merely succeed” the motivating, but rather “clarifies it” and makes it “explicit...such that the motivated seems to have preexisted its own motive” (*PbP* 51/76; §3.1 above). Perhaps the key difference between the motivating-motivated relation and the instituting-instituted relation, and thus why this is a conceptual *progression*, is the shift from an epistemic to an ontological claim. Arguably, in *PbP* Merleau-Ponty is only making an epistemic claim: the motivated *appears* to preexist its own motives, but in fact does not. By the time of *IP*, he is claiming that the instituted is somehow *ontologically prior* to the instituting—the instituted somehow *retroactively grounds* the instituting, paradoxical as that may sound. It is not my purpose here, however, to evaluate whether this latter move is metaphysically coherent.⁵⁵ Rather, I simply aim to disclose the internally consistent conceptual progression at work across these phases of Merleau-Ponty's corpus. In fact, if we understand Merleau-Ponty's philosophical development in terms of this very logic of institution, then one way of understanding the overall argument of this paper, and specifically this final section, is that the concept of motivation is the developmental past that the later notions of institution and flesh come to retroactively restructure.

Furthermore, though Merleau-Ponty repeatedly attempts to differentiate himself from Husserl in these later discussions of temporality, we already have the resources (see §5.1 above) to see that they may not have been so far apart. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly insists that the temporal logic characteristic of his notions of institution and flesh has nothing to do with consciousness. The “mode of existence of institution, like that of the reactivated ‘past’ and of the ‘anticipated’ future, is not yet a content of consciousness” (*IP* 23/58). Husserl's analysis is “blocked by the framework of *acts* which imposes upon it the philosophy of *consciousness*,” and thus Merleau-Ponty thinks it necessary “to take up again and develop the *fungierende* or *latent* intentionality...within being” (*VI* 244/293). The point of this shift being that it is the past itself “that adheres to the present,” rather than “the *consciousness* of the past that adheres to the *consciousness* of the present” (*VI* 244/292). Recall, however, that as early as *Ideas II* Husserl claims that the “temporal forms *themselves*

⁵⁴ Beith, *The Birth of Sense*, 9.

⁵⁵ For more detailed discussion of this issue, see Beith, *The Birth of Sense*, who discusses the influence of Bergson on Merleau-Ponty to make metaphysical sense of this idea.

motivate each other,” and that the retention-protection structure functions passively and generatively in the form of a continuity of “style” (*Ideas II*, 239/Hua. IV.228, my emphasis; *APS*, 611/Hua. XI.323).

6.3. Activity, passivity, and the concrete subject

Time is the very model of institution insofar as it is a continuous generative “lateral” divergence from a norm, which Merleau-Ponty distinguishes from the “frontal” encounter of the *Sinnegebung* of act intentionality. The claim that act intentionality is ultimately anchored in operative intentionality comes full circle at this point as Merleau-Ponty now connects this lateral temporal relation to his ongoing interrogation of the activity-passivity relation, discussed above in the context of “concrete subjectivity” in *PbP* (see §5 above). Like temporality, “Passivity is never frontal...but always lateral, i.e. the subject recognizes itself as continuing a certain *Stiftung*, a certain perspective” (*IP* 135/181). Passivity is a “‘softness in the dough’ of consciousness,” a “constitutional passivity...present even within its acts, therefore, lateral passivity” (*IP* 136/182). Passages like these are grounds for reading *IP* as a continuation of, rather than a radical turn from, the analyses of concrete subjectivity in *PbP*. We “enter once more into the elucidation of the world and the subject,” Merleau-Ponty tell us, “In order to make this project—and therefore the surpassing of the activity (idealism) – passivity (finality) problem—understood” (*IP* 124/166–67).

We are no longer dealing with the frontal *Sinnegebung* of the *constituting* subject (of act intentionality), but rather the lateral (ultimately temporal, ultimately passive) relations of instituting-instituted. Like the motivating-motivated structure, the instituting and instituted are not distinct parts, but dependent moments of an inseparable underlying reality: “Therefore [there is an] instituted and instituting subject, but inseparably” (*IP* 6/35). Just as concrete subjectivity was characterized as an “upsurge of time” that is “entirely active and entirely passive” (*PbP* 452/491), the “constitutional passivity” of the instituting essentially includes a *generative*, and thus active, element. Again, the fundamental difference between the motivating-motivated structure and instituting-instituted structure may best be understood as the shift to an ontological register. While *both* are characterized as an inextricable blend of passivity and activity, the motivating-motivated structure is a reciprocal relation of *sense*, whereas the instituting-instituted structure is a reciprocal relation of *being*. “[W]e discover reciprocal reference and passivity-activity unity of *Fungeieren*” when we try to understand how act intentionality is realized in passive temporality (*HLP* 63–64/77). Merleau-Ponty’s mature work only deepens this analysis of the reciprocity of activity and passivity. Beyond

the deep structure of intentionality, there is a passive-active reciprocity at the basis of our relationship to being. This reciprocal structure ultimately forms “the fundamental characteristic of the flesh for Merleau-Ponty, and gives it its essential guidelines.”⁵⁶

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, my primary aim has been to establish the concept of motivation as an important unifying thread linking Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, namely in the way it functions as a conceptual undercurrent throughout the latter's *PbP*. While further work remains to determine the extent to which this thread can be woven into a larger account of the overall relation between these two phenomenologists, as well into any account of the overall consistency of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre, I hope that the brief analyses of this concluding section have at least illuminated the initial steps down those pathways. Merleau-Ponty's early work on motivation in *PbP* is a decisive moment in a long trajectory within the phenomenological tradition. In complicating the activity-passivity relation (along with attendant notions of temporality), this work presages his rethinking of intentionality in terms of the instituting and instituted, and thus constitutes an important conceptual bridge between the early analyses of consciousness and intentionality and the later ontology of the flesh.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ de Saint Aubert, *Le Scénario Cartésien*, 146.

⁵⁷ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer whose critical feedback greatly improved the paper. I am also grateful to Justin White for going to the library during a pandemic (while my university's library was closed) to help me track down a Merleau-Ponty reference.

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