

Intentionality, Constitution and Merleau-Ponty's Concept of 'The Flesh'

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Abstract: Since Husserl, the task of developing an account of intentionality and constitution has been central to the phenomenological enterprise. Some of Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of 'the flesh' suggest that he gives up on this task, or, more strongly, that the flesh is in principle incompatible with intentionality or constitution. I show that these remarks, as in Merleau-Ponty's earlier writings, refer to the classical, early Husserlian interpretations of these concepts, and argue that the concept of the flesh can plausibly be understood to advance a refined account of intentionality and constitution. Instead of a first-personal, unidirectional act or embodied motor project, intentionality is a latent openness to things, where the roles of subject and object are reversible. Whereas the view of constitution as meaning-bestowal is untenable, the flesh has a constitutive role, which is supported by a 'constitutional passivity' from the subject. On this reading, Merleau-Ponty's later work aims to develop basic tenets of his earlier thought, albeit at a critical distance, an attempt he thought was continuous with the central problems that Husserl claimed a phenomenological philosophy must grapple with, even if Merleau-Ponty's answers to these problems are not Husserl's.

In *Ideas I* §84, Husserl claims that intentionality, the capacity of consciousness to be directed toward something in experience, is 'the main theme of phenomenology'.¹ Shortly after this remark, Husserl links this characteristic feature of consciousness with what he calls 'the greatest problems of all', namely, how it is that the sensory data of experience, such as colour, sound or texture, are formed or constituted into unities of meaning, or objects of a definite kind, in conscious experience.²

In his later writings, Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of 'the flesh' (*la chair*), arguably the conceptual centrepiece of his later work, suggest that the concept marks a clear break with the phenomenological concepts of intentionality and constitution that we find in Husserl. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, he claims that the flesh 'has no name in any philosophy', suggesting, *prima facie*, no common lineage with these classical phenomenological terms (VI 147/181).³ He also claims that '[i]f being is to disclose itself, it will do so before a transcendence, and not before an intentionality' (210/260). The reflective relationship of the flesh, we are told, is better understood by bypassing the distinction between 'consciousness of' and 'object' (141/184). These and other remarks suggest that the conclusion that Merleau-Ponty's later work does not aim to articulate an account of intentionality and constitution is well motivated.⁴

To be sure, Merleau-Ponty takes pains to show that the phenomenological concepts of act, judgment, intentionality and constitution cannot capture the essence of the flesh. However, his often negative appraisals of intentionality and constitution ought to be understood to refer to their classical, early Husserlian formulations, and should not be taken as rejections of intentionality and constitution tout court. The task of this paper is to investigate the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's later thought, and especially the concept of the flesh, can be understood to advance a refined account of intentionality and constitution, which builds on but modifies the view offered in *Phenomenology of Perception*. By marshalling textual evidence from Merleau-Ponty's later writings, I suggest that the flesh can plausibly be understood to advance an account of intentionality and constitution, even if this is not its stated central aim and even if the account ultimately departs from key tenets of Husserl's early view and reworks Merleau-Ponty's own.

I begin by considering Merleau-Ponty's reasons for rejecting an intellectualist, act-analysis of intentionality and constitution in the *Phenomenology*. While his reasons for doing so persist during the period of *The Visible and the Invisible*, in his later work the *Phenomenology's* account of operative intentionality as embodied, active motricity, gives way to an increased emphasis on the passive and latent features of intentionality and constitution. Drawing on evidence from *The Visible and the Invisible*, I show that Merleau-Ponty develops an account of 'latent intentionality', on which directedness to objects is accomplished through a passive openness that is more radical than that advanced in the *Phenomenology* (section 2) and 'passive constitution', whereby meaning is constituted or comes to givenness through a relation of reversibility between subjects and objects (section 3). These accounts of intentionality and constitution are both modelled after the flesh's features. While directedness to objects and the manifestation of meaning are now largely explained in ontological terms that seem unconnected to intentionality and constitution, his idiosyncratic and often creative reading of Husserl's analysis of double-sensations in *Ideas II* in the 1959 article 'The Philosopher and His Shadow' confirms that Merleau-Ponty is comfortable with framing reversibility, latency and other late concepts in terms of intentionality and constitution. The accounts of intentionality and constitution that Merleau-Ponty claims to find in the later Husserl, however, are actually his own.

If this is right, it shows that Merleau-Ponty's later work aims to further develop, albeit at a critical distance and with a new conceptual armature, basic tenets of his earlier thought. It also shows that he understood this attempt to be continuous with the central theme and set of problems that Husserl claimed a phenomenological philosophy must grapple with, even if Merleau-Ponty's answers to these problems are not Husserl's.

1. Intentionality and Constitution in *Phenomenology of Perception*

The account of intentionality and constitution in Merleau-Ponty's later work can be better understood by first considering why he rejected intellectualist

interpretations of intentionality and constitution in favour of active motricity in the *Phenomenology*, positions that influence the view advanced in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

In the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty develops (following Fink) an account of 'operative intentionality' (*fungierende Intentionalität*), a pre-predicative, pre-reflective, tacit awareness of the world and openness to its solicitation (PhP xxxii/18; 441/480; 453/492). Operative intentionality allows for directedness to objects without explicit thematization. Unlike the classical view of intentionality formulated by Brentano, where intentionality is the mind's ability to be directed toward a mental object, operative intentionality is exhibited in our seamless and rudimentary ability to navigate space, use objects and engage in a number of complex bodily activities, a form of comportment that Merleau-Ponty calls 'motricity'.⁵ He argues that we must understand 'motricity as original intentionality' (139/171) because 'intentionality, rather than positing its object, is toward its object' (472/510). Embodied subjects need not seek a correlated object if they are to think, act or live in the world; their correlative objects are already present within the world, as pre-given, meaningful cores that subjects are already directed to by living in the world, an embodied activity that 'is itself an original intentionality' (407/447).

This account is unlike Husserl's early view of intentionality in the *Logical Investigations*, which he retained at least through *Ideas I*. Husserl articulates a tripartite account of intentionality, on which first-personal directedness to objects is divided into an intentional act, its meaning content and the object intended.⁶ On this view, mental life is 'about' some object through an active directedness toward it. For example, my judgment that my cat is hungry, a case of mental directedness toward an object, can be explained by analyzing it into my act (a judgment), the content of my judgment ('that my cat is hungry') and my intentional object (my cat's hunger).

Husserl's account of constitution is intimately bound up with his view of intentionality. To say that I intend an object through a mental act also means that I constitute a meaningful relation to that object, that is, I take it to be a certain way or see it as an object of a certain sort. Husserl holds that in consciousness, it is not the case that

things given simply are; rather, seeing consciousness—apart from mere attentiveness—is just acts of thought formed in certain ways, and things, which are not acts of thought, are nonetheless constituted in them, come to givenness in them—and, as a matter of principle, show themselves to be what they are only when they are thus constituted.⁷

Consciousness's activity, or meaning-bestowal, allows an intended object to present (or 'give') itself under a certain light (as *my* cat, for instance).⁸ In *Ideas I*, it is ultimately the active sense-giving noesis that animates objects.⁹ The noesis constitutes an object on the basis of certain first-order sensory ('hyletic') data: my perception of the cat as black, small, etc. serves as partial conditions for my seeing (viz. constituting) the cat as mine. I am thereby directed toward the constituted, intended object or noema.¹⁰ The claim that the meaning of objects constituted in experience fundamentally derives from consciousness (which Husserl claims is

the source of everything in §86 of *Ideas I*) is an assumption that Merleau-Ponty takes exception to in the *Phenomenology*.

Given the intimate relation between the concepts of constitution and intentionality in Husserl, Merleau-Ponty's rejection of a unidirectional, mental act-analysis of intentionality also rules out the early Husserlian account of constitution.¹¹ If the subject is directed toward the world by means of pre-reflective embodied connection, then the meaning that guides the intending of objects, persons or places does not begin in the subject and flow to the world. Summarizing the results of his analyses in the 'Temporality' chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty claims that

In the hollow space of the subject himself, we thus discovered the presence of the world, such that the subject could no longer be understood as a synthetic activity, but rather as *ek-stase*, and that every active act of signification or of *Sinngebung* appeared as derived and secondary in relation to this pregnancy of signification in the signs that might well define the world. (453/492)

The world and objects are already meaningful and do not depend on the subject's active sense-giving to become intelligible.¹² Drawing on Heidegger's understanding of *ekstasis*, Merleau-Ponty holds that we are always open to and oriented toward meaning in the world prior to mental synthesis. In his appraisal of the 'classical' view of intentionality and constitution, he claims that

the natural reference of the matter to the world leads us to a new conception of intentionality, since the classical conception that treats the experience of the world as a pure act of constituting consciousness only succeeds in doing so to the exact extent that it defines consciousness as absolute nonbeing, and correspondingly pushes the contents back into an "hyletic layer" that belongs to opaque being. (253/290)¹³

In this way, Merleau-Ponty rejects 'intellectualist' accounts of both intentionality and constitution.¹⁴ That is, he breaks with the claim that intentionality is a unidirectional mental activity; his analyses of bodily intentionality and motricity have disclosed a tacit and pre-reflective, but still meaningful, embodied means of having the world and intending objects, which does not reduce consciousness to an empty, synthetic activity in waiting or 'absolute non-being' before it directs itself to objects. He does not reject the claim that all experience is fundamentally intentional, nor does he reject the claim that meaning is constituted in embodied experience; he rejects the view that intentionality is explained by mental activity, as in Husserl's early intentional and constitutive analyses.¹⁵

While Merleau-Ponty claims that 'we do not think the object and we do not think the thinking' of an object, many passages ultimately explain intentionality and constitution in terms of the subject's embodied activity in perception (248/286). Transcendence, the ability of consciousness to be open to its world, to take up and ultimately to transform what it is directed to and engaged with, is a characteristic feature of bodily intentionality and is understood as an 'act' that 'I

perform' (*j'effectue*) (407/447–448). One illuminating instance of this activist tendency is his analysis of our intending of physical things. While the thing is invested with meaning and value prior to our intending it, its meaning only comes to givenness on the basis of our taking up the thing, that is, only given our bodily comportment toward it: 'Thus, a thing is not actually given in perception, it is inwardly taken up by us, reconstituted and lived insofar as it is linked to a world whose fundamental structures we carry with ourselves and of which this thing is just one of several possible concretions' (341/383).

Even if meaning inheres in the world prior to its explicit assignment by a subject, and even if bodily activity is solicited by the world, meaning in objects is only disclosed given our active engagement with the object, enabled by structures that subjects have within themselves. As in the early Husserlian account, the subject's intentional activity is a privileged condition for the manifestation of meaning, even though Merleau-Ponty understands passivity to always be implicated in experience.¹⁶ This tendency is also clear in his analysis of Schneider, which leads him to make a distinction between centrifugal movement, in which subjects abstractly consider possibilities for action and centripetal movement, in which subjects' projects 'polarize the world, causing a thousand signs to appear' (115/143). This analysis shows that normal centripetal movement imbues a situation and a perceptual field with values that suggest certain courses of action, which are the direct 'stamp' of a subject's pre-reflective activity (133/165).

That Merleau-Ponty's positive account of intentionality and constitution emphasizes the importance of subjective activity can also be seen in the 'Temporality' chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Having claimed that the ambiguity of the body is explained through the ambiguity of time and that '[t]ime is the measure of being', he ultimately locates temporality in the cogito: 'I myself am time' (445/483). He also claims that the synthesis of the object appears through subjective temporality, further grounding meaningful directedness to objects in the subject (250/287). While temporality is not a mental product, temporal experience is possible only given a subject's insertion into her milieu, a taking up of her past and an anticipation of her future. The fact that temporal experience is explained in bodily terms does not mitigate the centrality of subjective activity, which, in the 'Temporality' and 'Cogito' chapters, is posited as a basic structure that explains other regions of experience.¹⁷

2. Flesh and Intentionality

As in the *Phenomenology*, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty continues to reject the view that objects or the world itself are intentional correlates (a position he later identifies with Sartre) (VI 99/133). Instead, 'it is through openness that we will be able to understand being and nothingness ...'. However, unlike the *Phenomenology*, the privileging of openness over activity, motricity or embodied insertion into a milieu suggests a different account of how the subject accesses the objects it is directed to. While passivity and openness were always presupposed in the

Phenomenology's account of intentionality, they receive renewed importance in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

Merleau-Ponty now privileges openness largely because his understanding of sensible and nonsensible objects has changed. In the *Phenomenology*, he claimed that we 'find in the sensible the proposition of a certain existential rhythm' that, having solicited us, can be taken up (PhP 221/258). While ambiguity always characterized the perceived, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, the sensible, which Merleau-Ponty also describes using the terms 'being' and 'world', cannot be as easily taken up or accessed through bodily insertion into a milieu, for it is 'latent or dissimulated' (VI 101/135). Perceptual objects are not only ambiguous; even if we see them, Merleau-Ponty contends that their properties are to a significant degree non-transparent and in effect concealed from us. This means that the sensible can no longer be adequately disclosed, even partially, by the direct activity associated with motor intentionality or the body schema.¹⁸

Both the sensible or visible and the non-visible are understood as 'flesh'. Flesh is defined as an 'element of being': it is a basic structure present in any region of being that can be experienced or conceived of (139/182). Most basically, by 'being' or 'world', Merleau-Ponty means to refer to individual or collective cohesive unities of meaning, both material and immaterial. As he indicates, in his later thought, he begins from the premise that 'there is being, there is a world, there is something; ...there is cohesion, there is meaning' (88/119). In the last full chapter of his posthumously published manuscript, Merleau-Ponty's description of the flesh begins by asking after the relation between a seer and what she sees. He notes that the seamless contact we have when we see objects makes it seem 'as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible' (130/170). This seamless contact gives rise to a question, however: if vision seems to be formed in and guided by objects, why is it that vision 'unveils them' instead of covering them over? (131/171). This suggests that the question of how subjects can make contact with objects they are directed to lies at the heart of the account of the flesh.

One possible explanation of the success of vision can be ruled out from the start: there 'are not first things identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would first open himself to them ...' (131/171). The subject is not passively affected by objects, nor does she animate an inert object.

Rather, Merleau-Ponty's preferred explanation of flesh, in accordance with the definition of flesh as an ontological element, emphasizes the peculiar feature of perception noted above: the flesh designates a relation of reversibility between seer and seen. On this view, to see is also to be seen, to touch is to be touched. The flesh upsets the classical view of perception, where perceiving is unidirectional. Instead, perceiving and perceived stand in a relation of empathy (*Einfühlung*). Perception is not only the active seeing or judging of an object; to perceive is to be open to the object's solicitation, to allow one's vision to be guided and directed by the object's properties.

In a note from May 1960, Merleau-Ponty claims that 'my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body

is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world' (VI 248/297). The flesh is present in either term of the relation between seeing and seen or thinking and thought. The body looks out toward objects in the world, but it can also be seen. By calling body and world 'flesh', Merleau-Ponty attempts to describe the seamless contact we experience while seeing the world. In everyday experience, we typically feel of a piece and wholly integrated with our environment. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty describes this experience by saying that the world 'encroaches' (*empiète*) on the body.¹⁹

Merleau-Ponty is clear that in describing the sensible and nonsensible in admittedly 'enigmatic' terms, he is attempting 'to avoid the classical impasses', namely, those between subject or consciousness and object, constituted and constituting (137/178). For this reason, as has often been noted, he does not standardly use the language of 'intentionality', 'constitution', 'consciousness' or even draw on many of the conceptual tools he developed in the *Phenomenology*.

Still, as the 'Intertwining-Chiasm' chapter suggests, the flesh speaks directly to a classical phenomenological question: it explains how the subject, no longer understood as embodied cogito or sense-giver, makes contact with an object, which in turn is not inert, passive hyle or ambiguous solicitor. Instead of asking this question in classical terms, Merleau-Ponty asks 'whether every relation between me and Being, even vision, even speech, is not a carnal relation, with the flesh of the world' (83–84/114). That the link between subjects, objects and world is carnal, however, is another way of saying that the (non-material) flesh mediates subject, object and world relations. In this passage, Merleau-Ponty describes the intentional object we are directed to in ontological terms: we relate to 'being', not to an object. And yet, as the note from May 1960 quoted above shows, an intending perceiver is to be understood according to 'the flesh of the body', while the object (or 'being') they perceive is defined as 'the flesh of the world' (248/297). In other words, Merleau-Ponty has renamed the terms of intentionality, and the flesh is present in both parts of the subject-world or subject-object relation. The logic specified by the flesh generalizes to all types of phenomena, including the non-visible or intangible (144/187).²⁰ Accordingly, 'once a body–world relationship is recognized' it becomes clear that my flesh is somehow present in the world and vice versa (136 n.2/177*).

Now, unlike the body–world relation that the account of motor intentionality develops, the intentional relation supported by the flesh does not originate in subjects. As we saw in the *Phenomenology*, motor intentionality is an activity that I bring into existence. In the 'Preface', written after the work was completed, Merleau-Ponty holds that 'I am the absolute source' (PhP 9/xxii). He means that the perspective of consciousness lies at the heart of the explanation of any meaningful phenomenon, *a fortiori* of intentionality. Despite the fact that the world motivates our projects, Merleau-Ponty ultimately retains an asymmetrical relation of explanatory priority between subject and world, favouring the former. This clear privileging of the subjective perspective no longer obtains in *The Visible and the Invisible*, where, according to the account of reversibility, subject and world or object occupy points of equal importance in intentional relations. Merleau-Ponty is clear

that the flesh is not primarily supported by our existential projects, 'and it is indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are dealing with here' (VI 136/178). That the flesh 'is not contingency' but 'a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself' makes clear that its structure does not derive from the subject, understood as a particular individual or phenomenological subjectivity as such (146/190).²¹ More often than not, in the *Phenomenology*, the concept of 'style', viz. the particular manner that we use our body to interact with the world, refers to a personal quality of the habit body.²² Now, it refers to an impersonal structure that our embodied engagement is guided by. Hence, an explanation of how subjects intend objects cannot look primarily to the habit body and its intentional capacities, even though we continue to make contact with the world through embodiment. Still, the possibility of a rigorous and unified account of intentionality remains, for the flesh is a general principle definitive of perceptual experience (139/181; 131 n.1/171) and 'lies in every visible' (136/177). Directedness to objects is enabled by the relation of reversibility characteristic of the flesh, which allows each relatum to see and be seen, that is, intended.

Despite the apparent functional similarity between the flesh, as I have outlined it above, and the classical role of intentionality, Merleau-Ponty nevertheless stresses that the 'quasi "reflective" redoubling' of the flesh 'does not convert what it apprehends into an object and does not coincide with a constitutive source of perception' (249/298). He also denies that Being, as it is described by the flesh, is disclosed by intentionality (210/260).

But as in the *Phenomenology*, talk of a rejection of intentionality (and constitution) should be understood to refer to the classical, intellectualist readings of the term. In a working note from February 1959, Merleau-Ponty claims that Husserl's concept of *Einströmen* in the *Crisis* is a paradigm of 'latent intentionality' (*l'intentionnalité latente*) (VI 173/224–225). *Einströmen* ('to stream in') refers to the flowing in of natural life in the transcendental sphere, thereby undercutting a supposed division between natural and transcendental life.²³ For Merleau-Ponty, this term captures well the complicity between subjects and objects described by the flesh. Accordingly, with 'latent intentionality, intentionality ceases to be what it is in Kant: pure actualism, ceases to be a property of consciousness, of its "attitudes" and of its acts, to become intentional life'. Here too, we see that Merleau-Ponty wants to jettison an overly active view of intentionality centred on the subject.

Intentional life describes an inseparability between subjects and objects, one that Merleau-Ponty thinks the early Husserl ignored, considering intentional relations in terms of an object's presence to 'immanent consciousness'. As we have seen, such a description is untenable for Merleau-Ponty, for contact with the sensible is possible only through the reversibility between seer and seen. But this revision in Merleau-Ponty's position does not, as the note makes clear, prevent an analysis of the distance and reversibility between subjects and objects in terms of intentionality; we need only recognize that this intentionality is latent.²⁴

Intentionality must be latent because according to the flesh, the objects that a subject sees are not immediately present to her consciousness, but remain at a

distance (*écart*).²⁵ That the subject does not determine the object through an act entails that the subject must be passive, in an openness that awaits solicitation of an object (181/232). To say that intentionality is latent means that a greater degree of receptivity, one unlike that found in the largely active account of motor intentionality, supports contact with an object.

Having dispensed with act intentionality,

It is necessary to take up again and develop the *fungierende* or latent intentionality which is the intentionality within being. That is not compatible with "phenomenology", that is, with an ontology that obliges whatever is not nothing to present itself to the consciousness across *Abschattungen* and as deriving from an originating donation which is an act, i.e. one *Erlebnis* among others ... (244/293).

The operative intentionality developed in the *Phenomenology* is akin to the latent intentionality of *The Visible and the Invisible* in that both are pre-reflective and unthematic. But in Merleau-Ponty's later work, these features of operative intentionality are deployed to describe passive reception of objects, rather than pre-reflective activity. Unlike the operative motor intentionality of the *Phenomenology*, in *The Visible and the Invisible* intentionality is ultimately explained in the ontological terms of the flesh, which it is structurally akin to. This account breaks with classical phenomenology only if one is wedded to unidirectional act analysis to explain directedness toward the world. Clearly, as Merleau-Ponty shows, these are not the only possible accounts of intentionality, or of phenomenology.²⁶

Still, one might plausibly ask: given that intentionality in Merleau-Ponty's later work remains non-cognitive, embodied and relies on a significant degree of passivity, is it not simply another version of motor intentionality? After all, Merleau-Ponty calls this intentionality 'operative', a term he used in the *Phenomenology*, and even refers to our 'motor projects' in his last published piece, 'Eye and Mind'.²⁷

Indeed, the intentionality of the flesh presupposes the unthematic, pre-reflective, practical engagement of the phenomenal body, which Merleau-Ponty now calls 'the body as sentient' (VI 136/177). While these features are necessary components of fleshly intentionality, Merleau-Ponty no longer thinks they are sufficient to explain directedness to objects. In his 1953 course *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, Merleau-Ponty claims that despite the advances his analysis of perception made over classical accounts, it

remains all the same ordered to classical concepts such as: perception (in the sense of a position of an isolable, determinable object, considered as a canonical form of our relations with the world), consciousness (... a centrifugal power of *Sinngebung* that finds in things what it put into it), synthesis (which presupposes elements to be unified)..., matter and form of knowledge.²⁸

Merleau-Ponty quickly notes that he thinks he has shown that we are not the sole constitutors of the perceived world, that synthesis is never complete, and that there is no perceptual matter that is not also formed, that is, that sensible

objects do not solely rely on us for their meaning.²⁹ Still, he claims that the concepts he enlisted to demonstrate these results, including 'field' and 'passive synthesis', were 'often negative': they aimed to undermine 'classical concepts', but in doing so, they maintained the emphasis on subjectivity found in classical accounts.

Thus, for example, while Merleau-Ponty's account of 'solicitation' emphasized that directedness to objects always depends on what they give to us ('[t]he sensible gives back to me what I had lent to it, but I received it from the sensible in the first place', PhP 222/259), the analysis of solicitation in colour sensation is ultimately dependent on subject-oriented terms. In the end, 'the perceived spectacle does not belong to pure being. Taken precisely as I see it, it is a moment of my individual history, and, since sensation is a reconstitution, it presupposes in me the sedimentations of a previous constitution ...' (222–223/259–260). Even if one takes issue with Merleau-Ponty's evaluation of what he accomplished in the *Phenomenology*, it does seem that some of its key concepts are, in fact, oriented around consciousness, even if it is understood as being-in-the-world.

As the account of solicitation suggests, Merleau-Ponty's analyses of motor intentionality in general always presuppose some subjective activity as a condition for the manifestation of or engagement with objects in our milieu, even if they emphasize that this condition is not a mental synthesis, or that it relies on passivity. To consider yet another example, the 'motor possibilities' that enable touch have it that 'I can only effectively touch if the phenomenon encounters an echo in me, if it is in accord with a certain nature of my consciousness' (330/372). While the identity of touched objects is not the result of a mental synthesis, it is nevertheless 'established upon the unity and the identity of the body as a synergetic whole'. Here again, the condition that subjectivity be a self-grounding unity is the *sine qua non* for the intending of objects.

This condition is precisely what the intentionality of the flesh seeks to move beyond. The latency or passivity that supports contact with objects is not a direct result of the subject's activity, and perception is guided by a principle that is not ultimately explained by features of subjectivity. These characteristics become clearer once one recognizes that

... consciousness is intentionality without acts, *fungierende*, that the "objects" of consciousness themselves are not something positive in front of us, but nuclei of signification about which the transcendental life pivots, ... that the chiasm, the intentional "encroachment" are irreducible, which leads to the rejecting of the notion of subject, or to the defining of the subject as a field, as a hierarchized system of structures opened by an inaugural *there is*. (VI 238–239/287–288)

If intentionality is of this nature, then objects are not ultimately given on the basis of our engagement with them. Instead, the subject, which is defined here according to the broadened concept of a 'field' (*champ*) first worked out in the *Phenomenology*, really is structured by what it is directed to, that is, by what 'there is', beyond our immediate grasp; the structure of the perceptual field is not

primarily mediated by our projects. Unlike in the *Phenomenology*, this intentional relation allows for the in principal reversal, identified here by the terms 'encroachment' and 'chiasm', of subject and object. That the intending subject can also pass to the status of object, that is, that the subject's perception is guided by the object's features, entails that the subject is open to and determined by what it intends to a greater extent. Accordingly, intentional analysis must be equally focused on the object. Merleau-Ponty no longer adds the qualification that the world's conditioning of our perception is ultimately enabled by consciousness. In effect, this amounts to a more radical understanding of the solicitation that Merleau-Ponty argued in the *Phenomenology* is characteristic of intentional relations.

Not only does the evidence from *The Visible and the Invisible* show that Merleau-Ponty is not opposed to giving a revised account of intentionality, it also makes clear that there is a new, originary intentionality 'within being'. This account is not simply compatible with the flesh, for it is the flesh that enables the relationship of latent reversibility, through which subjects intend objects and vice versa. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty could not put the claim more clearly: the flesh 'makes the fragmentary facts dispose themselves about "something"' (140/182).

Throughout *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty likens the reversibility of the flesh to the experience of our hands touching each other (see for example 133–135/173–176). When he reads Husserl's analyses of double-sensations in *Ideas II* §§36–37 in 'The Philosopher and His Shadow', he claims that when 'I touch myself touching ... my body accomplishes "a sort of reflection"' (S 166/271). Here 'there is not just the unidirectional relationship of the one who perceives to what he perceives. The relationship is reversed, the touched hand becomes the touching hand'. In this relationship, the distinction between subject/object and noesis/noema is blurred, and '[h]ere, we have a type of being'.

In addition to describing an ontological category, Husserl's analyses also purportedly provide an account of intentionality. On the basis of his descriptions of Husserl's analyses, Merleau-Ponty asks: 'What will intentionality be then if it is no longer the mind's grasping of an aspect of sensible matter as the exemplification of an essence, no longer the recognition in things of what we have put there?' He claims that '[t]he intentionality that ties together the stages of my exploration, the aspects of the things and the two series to each other is neither the mental subject's connecting activity nor the ideal connections of the object. It is the transition that as a carnal subject I effect from one phase of movement to another ...' (167/272–273). Husserl's analyses therefore presuppose or require a non-mental, non-synthetic relation to objects and point instead to an account of intentionality as a moving transition of an embodied subject that does not fully objectify what it is directed to.³⁰ This characterization of intentionality, which Merleau-Ponty has earlier identified as 'latent intentionality' (S 165/269), as well as his claim that Husserl's descriptions in *Ideas II* blur the distinction between noesis and noema and the reflective relationship between touching and touched hand, make it seem as if his account of intentionality is largely influenced by, if not adopted from, Husserl's account of double sensations.

But Husserl's text supports neither claim.³¹ Quite simply, Husserl does not draw any conclusions about the noema, noesis or intentionality in §§36–37. He confines himself to providing a phenomenology of sensations and their bodily localizations during tactile experience. Nor does he draw any conclusions about a new category of being.³² Instead, Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl's supposedly new account of intentionality is very much an exposition of his own views of intentionality.³³ While Merleau-Ponty was influenced by Husserl's analysis of double-sensations in touching, which, by calling attention to the reflexive awareness of tactile sensations, are akin to the logic of the flesh, he adds major substantive conclusions to this account when he identifies a new 'type' of being, a term that is used to characterize the flesh in *The Visible and the Invisible* (VI 149/193).³⁴ As I noted above, the move to explain intentionality in terms of ontology is a key characteristic of Merleau-Ponty's account of latent or operative intentionality in his late work, one that is not shared by *Ideas II*.³⁵

Thus, the description of intentionality in 'The Philosopher and His Shadow' does not indicate a gradual substitution by or effacement of the concept in favour of the flesh, as it might seem, even if the account breaks with the 'idealized' version found in Husserl and modifies basic premises of the *Phenomenology*.³⁶ Merleau-Ponty adds the important new feature of latency to the account of operative intentionality first developed in the *Phenomenology*, which he now thinks is best described with the concept of the flesh. Not content with the merely negative conclusion that it is not act-based, he claims that the solution to the question of intentionality 'can only lie in examining [the] layer of sensible being or in becoming accustomed to its enigmas' (168/273). He holds that intentionality must be a latent transition because 'the sensible order is *being at a distance ...*' (167/273). That is, the sensible is defined by the *écart*, the 'distance' or 'divergence' between the perspectives of seer and seen that prevents a simple one to one correlation between subject and object. In other words, Merleau-Ponty claims that intentionality will be defined in terms of an analysis of the ontological structure of the objects to which subjects are directed, a task he sets for himself during the latter part of his career.

In articulating an account of the distance between seer and seen, *The Visible and the Invisible* shows that it is distance from and passivity in relation to an object that brings it to us, a 'distance [that] is not the contrary of...proximity' (VI 135/176). Accordingly, while the distance between seer and seen, that is, the passivity that prevents a frontal possession of a seen object, might be thought to undercut access to objects and meaningful experience, it actually enables it: '[w]hat it does not see is what makes it see, is its tie to Being, is its corporeity, are the existential by which the world becomes visible, is the flesh wherein the object is born' (248/296). Because the flesh creates or 'gives birth' to objects by establishing a distance between them, it allows subjects to be directed to them and, given Merleau-Ponty's premises, to feel as though they are also intended by objects. In this sense, the flesh is a condition for the possibility (or an 'existential') of the appearance of objects.

It only seems that an intellectual, act-based account of intentionality is sufficient to account for our directedness to objects because 'perception qua wild perception

is of itself ignorance of itself, imperception, tends of itself to see itself as an act and to forget itself as latent intentionality, as *being at ...*' (213/263). Despite appearances, 'wild perception' or 'imperception' (in the quotation above, 'what it does not see') is not the contrary of perception; these terms are Merleau-Ponty's creative way of describing vision prior to our reflection on it, a process that, according to him, tends to turn vision into a discrete mental act, thereby obscuring a more basic union with objects. Instead of foreclosing on the requirement to provide an account of intentionality, Merleau-Ponty radicalizes it with his concept of the flesh.³⁷ This shows that the question of whether Merleau-Ponty's later work advances an account of intentionality (and constitution, as we will see below) cannot be reduced to a merely verbal or terminological dispute. To be sure, the issue is in part definitional: Merleau-Ponty rejects one definition of intentionality in favour of another. But two distinct definitions of intentionality entail two distinct accounts of the structure of experience, and the latter does not consist in a merely verbal quarrel. In each case, 'intentionality' refers to a different phenomenological account of how subjects are directed to objects.

3. Flesh and Constitution

As with intentionality, while many of Merleau-Ponty's remarks about constitution in his corpus reject an intellectualist, act-based account, others do not, even in *The Visible and the Invisible*.³⁸ My aim in this section will be to argue that while Merleau-Ponty holds that the reading of constitution as *Sinngebung* is untenable, in his later work, he aims to articulate an account of how meaning is formed in fleshly experience, thereby answering a basic phenomenological question traditionally answered by an account of constitution: how phenomena in experience are meaningfully given.³⁹

As I already noted, there are multiple senses of constitution in Husserl (and in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl), making it difficult to say with certainty which sense of the term Merleau-Ponty is rejecting. However, when Merleau-Ponty refers to constitution, he is often concerned with the issue of the source, manifestation and formation of meaning.⁴⁰ Accordingly, when discussing Husserl, 'constituted' standardly refers to that which already has meaning, while 'constituting' refers to the process or source of meaning formation. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty rejects a view on which the subject, as constituting, produces a constituted world.⁴¹

Merleau-Ponty's later account of meaning formation must, as in the account of intentionality above, take account of a reformulation in the object it aims to describe, namely, meaning itself. From the mid 1950s, Merleau-Ponty developed a view of meaning on which sense or meaning (*le sens*) is divergence (*écart*).⁴² In the 1955 lectures on passivity, he claims that sense is

divergence between two or more perspectives. [...] [It is] inconceivable without the perspectives between which it is outlined, belonging to the

things as much as to me, taken up but not created by me—Sense [is] like determinate negation, a certain divergence [*écart*]; it is incomplete in me, and it is determined in others. The thing, the sensible world, are only ever completed in others' perception. (IP 136/182)

This account, later extended to inanimate objects and the non-visible, entails that the meaning of objects cannot be explained in terms of a single perspective intending or experiencing an object. Even a straightforward description of my seeing of a table, for example, must refer to others' (in principle or actual) views of the table. For Merleau-Ponty, sense is akin to Hegel's concept of 'determinate negation' because, while it seems that the meaning of the table is adequately accounted for in our intending of it, when perspectives on the table that are alien to or different from ours are also taken into account, we get the conditions for a richer and fuller account of the table's meaning. The divergence that characterizes the sensible requires that other perspectives, or objects themselves, contribute to the meaning that we see, hear or read in them.

As with our mode of accessing objects, passivity is necessary for meaning to emerge in experience. If meaning does not derive from acts, a different account is required to explain its emergence. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty identifies a 'constitutional passivity' at work in our experience of meaning (136/182). This passivity is non-direct and 'lateral'. It is lateral in part because constitution must work obliquely, taking into account perspectives that are alongside our own. In many of his later texts, Merleau-Ponty uses the term 'lateral' in contrast to views on which intentionality, constitution or meaning are defined in terms of a unidirectional, frontal act, as in the matter-form account of constitution in Husserl's *Ideas I*.⁴³

Certainly, if meaning is characterized by lateral divergence, then constitution 'cannot be a centrifugal *Sinngebung*', nor can it be explained in terms of the passivity at work in motor intentionality (VI 181/232). Meaning is in part sedimented by time, in the way that a particular interpretation of a text is passed on through generations. We are born into a world in which we find already-meaningful wholes (88/119). Yet, it is difficult at first to see how the flesh, often characterized in terms of an encounter in the present between beings that are in principle reversible, can take account of a complex definition of meaning on which meaning is also historical and instituted.

An answer suggests itself by recalling the definition of flesh as an element or principle. The flesh, and in particular the *écart* that defines it, 'forms meaning' because it is 'a first institution, always already there' (216/266). As a principle of meaning formation, the *écart* divides past from present, seer from seer and seen, etc. It is prior to any particular subject or meaningful experience. Instead, it allows for the manifestation of sense to the subject, since it separates a subject from the source of meaning (the world, objects, others, a text) that will relay sense to the subject in the relation of reversibility characteristic of the flesh.

To take just one example of this kind of meaning formation, consider the constitution of the meaning of history. According to Merleau-Ponty, the meaning of the

past is not pre-given in historical documents or in the testimonies of those who came before us, nor is it invented by subjects in the present. Instead, '[w]hat is given is their intersection, the articulation of these perspectives on each other': the perspective of the past and that of the present are necessary for the constitution of history. The meaning of the past is formed and further clarified by the way that we receive and reinterpret what is handed down to us, a set of historical data whose meaning we never fully determine (because it can be taken up again and modified according to a different perspective in the future) (IP 133/179).

Merleau-Ponty is clear that, as a principle, the flesh 'makes the facts have meaning' (140/182). This remark demonstrates that a key role of the flesh is that of meaning formation, traditionally explained by constitution. What makes the flesh different from the classical act account of constitution is that it is not, strictly speaking, located in subjectivity, understood individually or intersubjectively. Rather, the subject participates in it and does not form it. As 'a relation of the visible with itself', the flesh 'constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own' (140/182). In other words, constitution takes place in a reciprocal or reflective ('coiling over'), co-constitutive relationship between two or more terms and not from one (the subject) to the other (its constituted object).

Hence, constitution is understood as the unfolding of a principle of intertwining or reversibility between seeing subjects and the world. Unlike the view of constitution in Husserl, or in the *Phenomenology*, the quote above indicates that constitution does not begin from the subject. Instead, the subject is constituted as a seer or perceiver by the flesh, which can in turn constitute us as objects or entities that are in principle visible to others. Flesh constitutes subjects and objects by instantiating itself into subject-object relations, as a universal to a particular (142/184). Despite the fact that it is prior to the activity of the subject, instead of disqualifying the flesh as a source of constitution, its structure requires that the subject's activity in constitution take the form of a passivity open to the principle governing sensibility and ideality, which 'constitutes itself in itself' (249/297). The flesh is a third term, between subject and object, serving as 'their means of communication'. Given that we are 'of' flesh, we participate in the process of constitution passively (hence, the need for a 'constitutive passivity' on our part), which 'lets the perceived world be', thereby relaying the meaning of the sensible to us (102/136).

Merleau-Ponty does not hold that constitution or vision 'lets the perceived world be' because subjectivity is divested of any active role at all in sense constitution. To be passive and open to objects means that a seer does not first animate an object through a noesis, or impose meaning upon the object or state of affairs, or even make sense of the world directly through embodied motricity. While embodied activity remains part of constitution, the subject must await the solicitation of objects in a way that, as I noted above, Merleau-Ponty thinks is more radical than the account of passivity and solicitation developed in the *Phenomenology*. It is more radical because the subject's passivity is such that she can pass to the level of object, that is, a subject can feel as if the object really is directing her sight and understanding of the spectacle in front of her (139/181).

For example, if I look at a table and am reminded of a table that my grandmother used to own, I see the table as similar to my grandmother's. According to Merleau-Ponty, this case of meaningful seeing cannot be explained by my direct apprehension of properties in the table that are similar to those of my grandmother's table, nor can it be explained simply by invoking my using or walking around the table and the memories those activities trigger. Rather, on his account, the condition for a meaningful experience of the table as similar to my grandmother's is that I first passively take in the particular shade of brown, or the shape of the table, that flows from it to me. This affords me the possibility of remembering my grandmother's table and seeing this one as similar to hers.

An example from the *Phenomenology* will help to further bring out the relevant difference between Merleau-Ponty's earlier and later understanding of constitution. In the *Phenomenology*, he stressed that constitution could not be understood as the sense-giving act of a subject (PhP 465–466/504–505). Still, in a discussion of the all-important topic of temporal synthesis, a condition for experience that the 'Temporality' and 'Cogito' chapters tell us is co-extensive with subjectivity itself, Merleau-Ponty claims that 'my body creates time instead of undergoing it' (*il fait le temps au lieu de le subir*) and holds that 'my body takes possession of time and makes a past and a future exist [*il fait exister*] for a present' (249/287). Even though he denies a *Sinngebung*-style view of constitution, Merleau-Ponty nevertheless maintains that the temporal flux, which in other places he stresses is thoroughly permeated by passivity, is in the end actively formed by subjectivity. And given that 'time and sense are one', this position ultimately lies at the heart of the *Phenomenology's* account of the genesis of sense as such (450/489).

By contrast, from the mid 1950s until the end of his life, Merleau-Ponty develops an account on which a passivity that is no longer subordinated to activity takes on a greater constitutional role. In one working note, he calls this a 'passivity of our activity' (VI 221/270). Using the example of temporality, he shows that on this view, the present is progressively constituted as a retention, but that this is importantly not a direct effect of my activity: 'I ... am not the author'. Yet, this is still an account of the constitution of retentions, since a distinct unity of sense is formed out of our present experience. Ultimately, this account of constitution is explained by the structure of the flesh.

In short, the flesh is constitutive because it divides subject and object, seer and seen, etc., thereby allowing for the meaningful intelligibility of experience. Meaning is constituted between these two in principle reversible terms and not from one to the other: 'the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of [her] corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication' (135/176). In other words, the flesh makes an 'object' appear that, because it can become a quasi-subject, is endowed with the ability to relay meaning to a seer, as in the case of the table above, or in the way that two participants in a dialogue speak to each other and clarify the meaning of each other's statements and intentions. While one speaks, the other becomes a (temporary) passive listener, only to soon exchange

this role for a more active one. Through their mutual exchange, the meaning of their conversation and respective positions is further determined.

In 'The Philosopher and His Shadow', Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that this passive, lateral account of constitution derives from Husserl's analyses of empathy and nature-animal relations in *Ideas II* (in addition to his analyses of double sensations). After describing Husserl's account, he asks: 'So what is the result of all this as far as constitution is concerned? By moving to the pre-theoretical, pre-thetic or pre-objective order, Husserl has upset the relationships between the constituted and the constituting' (S 172/280–281). But this does not entail a rejection of constitution. Rather, it shows that 'the forces of the constitutive field do not move in one direction only; they turn back upon themselves' (173/282). Here, there is 'propagation, encroachment or enjambment that prefigures the passage from the *solus ipse* to the other person, from the "solipsist" thing to the intersubjective thing'.

Needless to say, Husserl does not draw these conclusions about constitution in the sections of *Ideas II* that Merleau-Ponty quotes from.⁴⁴ The language Merleau-Ponty uses here, especially the concept of 'encroachment' (*empiètement*), and the reflective relation he thinks characterizes the view of constitution in *Ideas II*, are actually the terms with which he develops his account of the flesh, terms that Husserl does not use in the pages Merleau-Ponty refers to.⁴⁵ The claim that constitutive capacities 'encroach' on or trade places with seemingly non-constitutive sources (like inanimate, ostensibly constituted objects), or that they can themselves become subject to these processes, are basic tenets of Merleau-Ponty's account of constitution in his later work. And the claim that this view of constitution stresses the centrality of intersubjective meaning generation ('the intersubjective thing') is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's view of sense as divergence between perspectives. Husserl certainly began to develop a complex account of intersubjective constitution in *Ideas II* and in subsequent texts that took account of sources of meaning that are not directly located in the subject, like historicity, generativity and intersubjectivity.⁴⁶ While Husserl holds that the constitution of entities in the past precedes the activity of subjects in the present and is an intersubjective and intergenerational undertaking, Merleau-Ponty's description of constitution above is more akin to his own view that it is the diverging and reversible perspectives of subjects and objects, in particular, that characterizes intersubjective constitution. While intersubjectivity became, for Husserl, the basic ground upon which the constitution of any objectivity unfolds, Husserl did not afford constitutive power to objectivities themselves, a claim that Merleau-Ponty attributes to him here but which is actually a premise that has its origins in Merleau-Ponty's own thought.⁴⁷

It would seem, then, that the version of constitution described above captures the essence of the flesh's reversibility that governs and intertwines subject-object relations. A basic 'encroachment' also mediates the fleshly relation between subject and object (VI 230/279). Given that Merleau-Ponty develops a new type of intentionality, designed to access the distinct ontological structure of reality described by the flesh, it is not surprising that he has also identified a revised account of constitution. His redefinition of consciousness entails that 'immediately, the non-objectifying intentionalities are no longer in the alternative of being subordinate or

dominant, the structures of the affectivity are constitutive with the same right as the others ...' (239/288). That is, it is no longer the case that constitution is restricted to largely active intentional processes. Constitutional passivity or affectivity, the ability to receive the meaning contained in space and time, objects and other people, and the self-constituting principle of the flesh are not derivative accounts of constitution but correct weaknesses in the classical account. Indeed, it is on the basis of the flesh's constitutive power that we 'constitute the constitutive consciousness', an abstraction that only seems to undergird our experience of meaning (171/223; S 179/292–293). Only because we are subject to a constitutive principle that does not derive from us but which nevertheless allows us to make sense of experience and objects in the world, can we subsequently posit that our own subjective activity ('constitutive consciousness') is responsible for the meaningful appearance of things. According to Merleau-Ponty, this reverses the order of constitutive priority.

In addition to evidence from *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty's reflections on Husserl's analyses of constitution in *Ideas II* suggest that he wants to further develop a view of constitution that he claims to find in the later Husserl: 'Originally, a project to gain intellectual possession of the world, constitution becomes increasingly, as Husserl's thought matures, the means of unveiling a back side of things that we have not constituted' (S 180/293). Constitutive analyses ultimately lead us to see that a whole host of objects are unconstituted in the classical sense but still meaningful, which disabuses us of the idea that subjectivity is ultimately sufficient to form the world's meaning. What we have not constituted through an intellectual activity is of constitutive significance: the experience of finding cohesive unities of meaning that we have not formed or clarified indicates that the formation of meaning is not a function of the acts (mental or embodied) that animate objects.⁴⁸ This result is disclosed by the logic of the flesh, which gives us access to the multiple sources of meaning already in the world that we can subsequently take up and further develop but never fully mediate. Merleau-Ponty's later thought allows us to recognize a 'constitutive transcendence' at work in experience, that is, a mode of sense constitution that we participate in but only by being radically open to the world (VI 233/282).

4. Conclusion

I have argued that evidence from Merleau-Ponty's later texts demonstrates that even if he is opposed to a narrow reading of intentionality and constitution, the flesh is nevertheless a source of meaning formation and governs how subjects access objects, functions that are traditionally explained by constitution and intentionality. That Merleau-Ponty claims the flesh is ontological should not lead us to conclude that it does not explain how meaning is formed and how we are directed to objects. For philosophical questioning, which interrogates being, always returns to the questioning subject: '[one] who questions is ... a being that questions [oneself]' (120/158). At the very least, the fact that Merleau-Ponty claims the flesh supports a constitutional passivity and a latent intentionality gives us

reason to believe that he would accept a reading of the flesh in these terms. After all, Merleau-Ponty makes clear that one of his aims in *The Visible and the Invisible* is to understand consciousness and sensibility differently, not to reject them outright (142/185).

I also hope that this reading will help to further clarify the concept of the flesh, which, as Merleau-Ponty admits, is fundamentally enigmatic. Interpreting it in light of these classical phenomenological themes arguably makes the descriptions and terms with which Merleau-Ponty defines the flesh more intelligible. To be sure, a longer study could provide a fuller account of fleshly constitution and intentionality. Here, I have mainly attempted to show that Merleau-Ponty aims to provide such an account. That he does gives us good reason to believe that his later work attempts to answer two classic, central problems of phenomenology, even if Merleau-Ponty often overestimates the extent to which certain features of his account are anticipated by Husserl.⁴⁹

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NOTES

¹ Husserl 2014: 161.

² Husserl 2014: 169.

³ The following conventions will be used to cite Merleau-Ponty's works in text: *The Visible and the Invisible* = VI; *Phenomenology of Perception* = PhP; *Institution and Passivity* = IP; *Signs* = S. Citations to each text refer to the English translation and French original, separated by a slash. I have made only slight modifications to existing translations.

⁴ See S 92/150; VI 62/89, 103/137–138, 219/268–269, 244/292–293, 249/298, 254/302–303 for other instances where Merleau-Ponty defines his later work in opposition to intentionality and constitution.

⁵ Brentano 1973: 88.

⁶ Husserl 2001: Investigation V §17.

⁷ Husserl 1999: 71–72.

⁸ Constitution is a complex concept in Husserl and underwent many revisions. My characterization above does not capture the full range of meanings of the term, but serves only to provide a schematic view of constitution, necessary for understanding Merleau-Ponty's appraisal of it. See Sokolowski 1964 for a classic study on the topic.

⁹ Husserl 2014, §§87–90; §93.

¹⁰ Given the aims of this paper, I cannot address the longstanding debate about the interpretation of the noema in Husserl. For two different accounts, see Føllesdal 1969 and Sokolowski 1984.

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty does not have a stable understanding of constitution in the *Phenomenology*. As Behnke notes, the various senses he associates with constitution make a unified treatment of the term difficult (Behnke 2002: 32). Above, I focus on the 'intellectualist' view of constitution, which is one of the more recurring meanings of the term.

¹² See PhP 43–44/67.

¹³ As a note to this passage indicates, Merleau-Ponty also has the French neo-Kantian Pierre Lachière-Rey in mind here, whose reading of Kant often uses the Husserlian language of act and constitution (see for example Lachière-Rey: 1932) (PhP 539 n.2/290 n.1).

¹⁴ See Behnke 2002: 39–41

¹⁵ See Heinämaa 1999: 56. While Merleau-Ponty says in the 'Preface' to the *Phenomenology* that 'the real is to be described, neither constructed nor constituted', he nevertheless uses the word 'constitution' to describe the formation of meaning in a number of passages (see for example PhP 186/220, 189/223, 221/258, 261/298, 288/326, 370/412, 437/476, 450–451/489–490, 466/504).

¹⁶ In the 'Temporality' chapter, Merleau-Ponty affirms that passivity underlies all temporal experience (442/481). While he claims that 'we are entirely passive and entirely active because we are the sudden upsurge of time', our passivity seems to depend upon embodied activity in the present, indicated here by the word 'upsurge' (452/491). In the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty often wavers on the question of just how subjectivity can be passive and active at the same time. He seems to recognize this himself, when he ultimately gestures to Husserl's account of time to explain his own, noting that '[s]uch is the paradox of what we can call, following Husserl, the "passive synthesis" of time—a term that is clearly not a solution, but merely a sign for designating a problem' (442/481).

¹⁷ The sometimes subjectivist terms Merleau-Ponty uses to explain experience (for example, his claim in the 'Preface' (adopted from Sartre) that 'I am the absolute source', PhP xxii/9) has led Barbaras to argue that the *Phenomenology* has strong overtones of idealism (Barbaras 2004: 14–17/33–36).

¹⁸ This is not to say that the *Phenomenology* did not claim that a thickness characterizes the sensible (see PhP 223/260). But this claim is broadened and expanded in later writings.

¹⁹ In later work, the term 'encroachment' is often used to describe intentionality and is frequently paired with the term 'transgression', a concept that takes up Husserl's term *Überschreitung* (see de Saint Aubert 2013: 157 for a list of passages where Merleau-Ponty links the two). I take these terms as alternate ways of describing what I call 'latent intentionality'.

²⁰ Among others, Merleau-Ponty gives the examples of sound, colour (VI 114/151) and language (VI 118/155–156).

²¹ While Merleau-Ponty claims in the *Phenomenology* that perception, style, or habit are 'anonymous', Sara Heinämaa has recently argued that the anonymity or generality of perception always refers to a personal self, or a particular individual (see Heinämaa 2015).

²² For example, see PhP 87/114, 151–155/187, 172/209, 189/224, 197/232, 342/384.

²³ See Dodd 2004: 218–220 for an analysis of this concept.

²⁴ See PhP 95/122, 104/131, 221/258 for early uses of 'latent'.

²⁵ See also 'Eye and Mind', Merleau-Ponty 1964b/2007: 357/26–27. See Merleau-Ponty 1964b/2007: 371/70–71 for the claim that the flesh makes vision possible.

²⁶ In reading notes on Gurwitsch's *The Field of Consciousness* from Spring 1959–Autumn 1960, Merleau-Ponty claims that a definition of phenomenology as pure constitution of the *Lebenswelt* amounts to 'the very negation of phenomenology' (Merleau-Ponty 2001: 186).

²⁷ Merleau-Ponty 1964b/2007: 354/17.

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty 2011: 45–46 (translation mine).

²⁹ Merleau-Ponty 2011: 46.

³⁰ See PhP 276–277/314–315, 344–345/386; 438/477, 446/485–486 for more on the *Übergangssynthese*.

³¹ This is not surprising given Merleau-Ponty's prefacing of his interpretation of Husserl with the claim that he is not advancing a literal or objective interpretation of Husserl but is attempting to bring out his 'unthought' (S 159–160/260).

³² Even if, following Dastur, one holds that in *Ideas II* 'Touching therefore is given an astonishing ontological privilege', there is little direct evidence in Husserl's text to support Merleau-Ponty's conclusion that Husserl is consciously developing a new type of being and intentionality (Dastur 2000: 39–40).

³³ See Carman 2008: 42–43.

³⁴ Merleau-Ponty's analysis of flesh also critically engages with Sartre's account. See Dillon 1988: 139–150 for an analysis of Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre's view of flesh.

³⁵ Even in the 'ontological way' to the reduction in the *Crisis*, Husserl does not explain intentionality by appealing to ontological categories. Instead, he explains pre-reflective intentionality in terms of the lifeworld, without drawing a one-to-one correlation between the lifeworld and intentionality. The ontological way remains but one way into the reduction.

³⁶ On this point, see de Saint-Aubert's meticulous overview of the development of the concept of intentionality (de saint Aubert 2005: 148–154).

³⁷ See Merleau-Ponty 2001: 182 on the need to 'reinterpret intentionality'.

³⁸ In addition to passages noted above, and those that will be considered later, see S 67/108 and VI 184/235, 190/241, 205/255.

³⁹ As Morris 2010 has noted, the issue of the origin of sense or meaning-formation is a key concern of reversibility.

⁴⁰ See for example Merleau-Ponty 1942/1967: 199/215; PhP 452–453/492, 466/504, 474/512; VI 88/119

⁴¹ To be sure, this characterization of the relation between constituting and constituted would also be a poor summary of Husserl's view of the matter, especially since Husserl develops a complex account of constitution in the final years of his life. See Zahavi 2001: Chapter 5 for an overview that brings out the intricacies of Husserl's later account of constitution, which has many points of convergence with key premises in Merleau-Ponty's later work.

⁴² While Merleau-Ponty stresses in the *Phenomenology* that meaning is sedimented through time, and that the phenomenal field is always meaningful prior to the activity of the subject, he also claims that 'perception does not merely discover the sense that [things] have, but rather, sees to it that they have a sense' (PhP 38/61). He also claims that the meaning of spatial orientation and direction depends essentially on our body (103/130–131). While I cannot explore these claims in further detail, they suggest that whatever meaning is, it depends essentially on the activity and existence of an embodied subject, thereby tying Merleau-Ponty's account of meaning to his account of subjectivity. While the subject of the *Phenomenology* is neither Kantian nor Husserlian, as Dillon has noted, the account of meaning still emphasizes the role of subjectivity (Dillon 1988: 146).

⁴³ For some examples, see Merleau-Ponty 2011: 205; IP 61/103; VI 78/108, 102/137, 125/164, 143/186.

⁴⁴ While Merleau-Ponty correctly notes that Husserl claims that the subjectivity of animalia is not given originally, because the psychic interior of another subject is only given in apperception, the understanding of subjectivity that Husserl is operating with is very similar to positions that Merleau-Ponty rejects (Husserl 1989: 163–164). While the subject is not given completely, for Husserl, it is defined as 'all its acts, states, noematic correlates and furthermore, ... the corporeality and the properties, or faculties, constituted in it in the inner attitude' (163). Merleau-Ponty would likely be uncomfortable with this definition.

⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty uses terms like 'enjambement' or 'empiètement' to positively characterize the commitments of his later ontology. See Hughes 2013: 435–439 and de Saint Aubert 2005: 36–60 for recent analyses of these terms.

⁴⁶ See Sokolowski 1964: 208.

⁴⁷ The remark that Merleau-Ponty approvingly quotes, namely, that logical objectivity depends on intersubjectivity, involves further commitments that Merleau-Ponty would surely reject, for example, the claim that this dependence entails that any subject whatsoever can satisfy a closed set of conditions that allow a thing to be given identically (Husserl 1989: 82–83). This is also true of the account of intersubjective constitution in the *Crisis* (Husserl 1970: 161–177).

⁴⁸ These positive references to constitution, together with the account of the flesh's constitutive features, suggest that the claim that there is 'a back side of things that we have not constituted' does not entail a resistance to constitutive analysis on Merleau-Ponty's part (cf. Toadvine 2002: 274).

⁴⁹ I would like to kindly thank Gary Gutting, Stephen Watson, audiences at the 2015 APA Pacific Division meeting (especially Larry Busk) and the Loyola University–Chicago Phenomenology Research Group (especially Hanne Jacobs) and the anonymous referees for EJP for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which generously supported this research.

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