

I. ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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FROM STRUCTURE TO STYLE. MERLEAU-PONTY

ABBED KANOOR

PhD, Senior Research Fellow.
University of Tübingen.
72074 Tübingen, Germany.
Director of a Research Program.
International College of Philosophy, Paris.
75005 Paris, France.
E-mail: abbed.kanoor@ciis.uni-tuebingen.de

In this article I try to show that there is an evolution in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the concept *structure*. *Structure* is neither an entity nor an a priori principle, but the expression of certain configurations of sense and meaning. There is a transition from a static to a dynamic approach, paralleling a movement from a philosophy of *structure* to a philosophy of individuation. There exists for each individual a general *structure* of behavior as a unity expressed in certain constants of its conduct. The *structure* is a momentary manifestation of the general orientation of the passive-affective life in its bodily expressions. Structuration is the act of creating order in the perception of the surrounding situation and the process of taking a position in it. By doing so Merleau-Ponty replaces the Gestalt psychology with a philosophy of the living being. This essential philosophical intuition culminates in the concept of *style*, which becomes an important element in Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenological aesthetics and phenomenology of world appearance.

Keywords: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, structure, style, form, biology, behavior, Gestalt, aesthetics.

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ОТ СТРУКТУРЫ К СТИЛЮ. МЕРЛО-ПОНТИ

АББЕД КАНООР

PhD, старший научный сотрудник.

Университет Тюбингена.

72074 Тюбинген, Германия.

Руководитель исследовательской программы.

Международный колледж философии в Париже.

75005 Париж, Франция.

E-mail: abbed.kanoor@ciis.uni-tuebingen.de

В этой статье я пытаюсь показать, что в понимании Мерло-Понти понятие *структуры* претерпевает эволюцию. *Структура* — это не сущность и не априорный принцип, а выражение определённых конфигураций смысла и значения. Имеет место переход от статического к динамическому подходу, параллельный движению от философии *структуры* к философии индивидуации. Для каждого индивидуума существует общая *структура* поведения как единство, выражающееся в определенных константах его поведения. *Структура* есть мгновенное проявление общей направленности пассивно-аффективной жизни в её телесных проявлениях. Структурирование — это акт упорядочивания в восприятии окружающей ситуации и процесс занятия позиции в этой ситуации. Тем самым Мерло-Понти заменяет гештальт-психологию философией живого существа. Эта важная философская интуиция находит своё наивысшее выражение в понятии *стиля*; такое понятие становится важным элементом поздней феноменологической эстетики Мерло-Понти и феноменологии мира как явления.

Ключевые слова: Морис Мерло-Понти, феноменология, структура, стиль, форма, биология, поведение, гештальт, эстетика.

Le réel est un tissu solide...

(Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 11)

*Rien n'est plus difficile que de savoir
au juste ce que nous voyons.*

(Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 85)

An essential feature of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of philosophy is the correlation he establishes between the philosopher's point of departure, i.e., her basic philosophical *gesture*, on the one hand, and the *singularity* of her philosophy, on the other. All the details of the fundamental philosophical gesture, even tics and abnormalities, and all the elements of a philosophy, its deviations and even its 'mistakes' are significant. They compose all together *the* philosophy of a philosopher, which is in all its manifestations the unfolding and development of the fundamental philosophical gesture. Each philosopher is, in a sense, the philosopher of a singular problem or gesture. But what is Merleau-Ponty's own problematic? Or rather, what is his own

philosophical gesture? Merleau-Ponty is the philosopher of oppositions: nature and consciousness, body and soul, *Eye and Mind*, *Sense and Non-Sense*, philosophy and non-philosophy, *Visible and Invisible*. His philosophical gesture, however, is not to consider these dichotomies in their binary opposition or in a transcending dialectic leading to a third synthetic element, but to think them through the existing tension between them and to see the apparition of the one in the other. In this context his philosophy establishes itself as a thinking of the *in-between* and shapes a series of concepts appropriate to this function in order to think the un-reflected. The concepts of *structure* and *style* also have an important significance in this context. They are two essential moments of his philosophy of *sens* (sense/meaning) and at the same time indications of a transition from a static to a more dynamic philosophical thinking.

1.

Merleau-Ponty's first major work, *La structure du comportement*, contains the first examination of a problem that can be considered one of the central themes of his philosophy: the relationship between nature and consciousness in their irreducibility to each other. It is Gestalt theory that gives Merleau-Ponty the possibility of a bridge, that is, an explanatory model to describe the inner life of the living being through its behavior. The form and the structure of behavior are neither a thing nor an abstract idea, but the expressions of an organic unity. The main object of Merleau-Ponty's critique in *La structure du comportement* is the dogmatic objectivism of psychologies such as Watson's behaviorism and Pavlov's classical conditioning theory. The concept of behavior plays the main role in this confrontation insofar as it elucidates the consciousness not as an entity in a mechanistic causal relationship with the world (like the brain for example), but in a dynamic exchange. Merleau-Ponty questions the presupposed immediate correlation between stimulus and reflex as well as the explanation of animal behavior by the function of localizable bodily organs. It is wrong to understand the living being as a receptor of impulses coming from the outside, finding their way to the center of the nervous system and exciting the living being to react to them by a movement. The center of the nervous system is not located in a certain organ of the body. The organism is a whole that regulates its function according to the given situation, and insofar as it acts as a whole, its center is everywhere and nowhere.

Moreover, the behavior has a background of sensorimotor dynamics, which is determined by the exchange of the animal with its environment and prepares the mode of *apparition* of the stimuli. Neither the stimulus nor the animal's reaction is the real starting point. The outset of this interaction goes back to the relationship between

the living being and its environment. The form of the reaction, i.e., the constitution of the behavior, is determined by the specificity of the animal's engagement with its environment. "The character and the structure of the response are modified depending on whether the entire nervous system or only a part of it is involved. It is precisely this qualitative alteration of behavior that the classical reflex theory considers as an appearance" (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 19)¹. Therefore, the relation between the stimulus and the reflex could thus be explained the other way around or as Merleau-Ponty puts it: "one could also say that the behavior is the first cause of all the stimulations" (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 13). But what exactly does this proposition mean?

Merleau-Ponty's structural analysis of behavior exposes two aspects of the living being's adaptability: 1) It perceives the given environment and its own involvement in it as a *situation* with a recognizable *form*. 2) It actually responds in its behavior to the recognizable *form* in the given *situation*. Thus, behavior is not at all the repetition of a pure response, but the *adapted* response to *comparable situations* in which the living being has recognized a *form* in the *situation* and anticipates the value and cost of a particular response. In contrast to Pavlovian conditioning theory, the formation of a behavior cannot be explained by a purely causal relationship to external stimuli, but by a learning process through which the quality of the relationship to the environment is determined. Each behavior is not an individual action but crystallizes as a special case of a general ability. The animal recognizes the form and actually responds to that form. The evolution of this systematic learning forms the minimal history of behavior. Here we find the origin of Merleau-Ponty's own notion of structure with counterparts such as *sense*, *meaning*, *function*, *situation* and *value*.

To gain insight into the meaning of structure in Merleau-Ponty, we need to find an appropriate approach to the process of structuration. Beginning with *La structure du comportement*, we find in his approach to nature and anthropology a philosophy of *sens* (sense/meaning) that is distinct from functionalism and Gestalt psychology. The core of this approach can be identified as the search for a sense-giving unity. The living being is involved as a whole in the exchange with the world. This observation makes the distinction between center and periphery relative². Beyond the anatomy

¹ « L'allure et la structure de la réponse se modifient selon que le système nerveux tout entier ou une partie du système seulement y contribue. C'est justement cette altération qualitative du comportement que la théorie classique du réflexe considère comme une apparence » (Merleau-Ponty, 2009, 18).

² "The object of biology is to grasp that which makes a living being a living being, that is, not—according to the realist postulate common to both mechanism and vitalism—the superposition of elementary reflexes or the intervention of a 'vital force,' but an indecomposable structure of behavior" (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 48).

of stimulus and reflex—common to behaviorism and conditioning theory—and the anthropomorphism—his main critique of Gestalttheorie—, Merleau-Ponty is looking for “the relation to the whole of the organic state” and which is to be found not in “linear causality” but in “circular causality” (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 15). To understand circular causality, we must go beyond the classical picture offered by psychological empiricism on the one hand and physiological atomism on the other. They are two sides of the same coin, according to which the organism already has a toolbox of sensorimotor instruments and applies them in response to local excitations. Such ontological pre-established structures should be given up to prepare the field to observe what Merleau-Ponty calls “the theatre where a qualitatively variable process unfolds” (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 69). We have to replace the image of the distinct and isolated stimulus exciting the distinct and isolated reflex by the competition of a multitude of external conditions, all capable of being called the cause of the reaction. Explaining the activity of the nervous system through a direct flow from the sensual receptors until the effector organs (“longitudinal phenomena”) does not help us to grasp the complexity of the organic behavior. It must be replaced by a perspective, which takes into account a pre-selection of external conditions through factors such as biological value of the stimulus, form, structure and configuration (“transverse phenomena”) (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 14). It is not the individual stimulus but the structure of the situation, which creates the reaction:

The genuine excitant of conditioned reactions is neither a sound nor an object considered as individuals, nor an assemblage of sounds or objects considered as groups which are both individual and confused, but rather the temporal distribution of sounds, their melodic sequence, the relations of the size of objects and, in general, the precise structure of the situation. (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 56)

Structuration is the very process of this form creating mechanism with two essential aspects: (1) *Coordination*: the creation of a unity of sense manifested in the juxtaposed parts³. (2) *Dissociation*: the detachment of the realized pattern in the local excitation from its specific spatiotemporal context⁴. We can bring both aspects together under the concept of *constitution* that Merleau-Ponty uses in his early work

³ « La coordination est maintenant la création d’une unité de sens qui s’exprime dans les parties juxtaposées, de certains rapports qui ne doivent rien à la matérialité des termes qu’ils unissent. C’est d’une coordination de ce genre que la physiologie du langage a besoin » (Merleau-Ponty, 2009, 96).

⁴ « Les excitations locales réparties à la surface des récepteurs subissent, dès leur entrée dans les centres spécialisés de l’écorce une série de structurations qui les dissocient du contexte d’événements spatio-temporels où elles étaient réellement engagées pour les ordonner selon les dimensions originales de l’activité organique et humaine » (Merleau-Ponty, 2009, 81).

and develops in *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Structure is *constituted* as a pattern in the perceptual encounter with the given situation. Structuration, then, is an improvisation that takes place in perception as a variant of sense-constitution, though not as objectification as Husserl understands it, but as functional sense-constitution or, in other words, as an implicit knowing before knowing⁵. The body in its movement is the genetic field of structuration.

In a wider perspective, Merleau-Ponty applies the concept of Gestalt to three orders of *physical*, *vital* and *human* and describes them as three basic types of structure « *matière* », « *vie* », « *esprit* » in a hierarchy of forms. In doing so, he finds a way to overcome the antinomies materialism/spiritualism and materialism/vitalism, since the concepts of order, value and sense are not necessarily and only limited to one of these domains. Each order is related to other orders and at the same time defined by its dominant character. In other words, the unity of each order is immanent and must be understood as an internal dynamic of meaning and structuring:

In the internal unity of these systems, it is acceptable to say that each local effect depends on the function which it fulfils in the whole, upon its value and its significance with respect to the structure which the system is tending to realize. (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 131)⁶

The Gestalt is a sign and leads us to a unity, which is not imposed from the outside on the entity. The forms are the manifestation of what Merleau-Ponty calls “immanent intelligibility” (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 140)⁷, i.e., an immanent functional core in the background of structuration. The structure itself cannot be observed, but only understood⁸.

We find here the elements of a concept of consciousness, which is not Kant’s *Vernunft*, Hegel’s *Selbstbewusstsein* or Husserl’s *absolutes Bewusstsein*, but a “new idea of reason” (*nouvelle idée de la raison*) as Merleau-Ponty calls it in a later work

⁵ « Le processus physiologique qui correspond à la couleur ou à la position perçue, à la signification du mot, doit être improvisé, constitué activement au moment même de la perception...Ce ne sont pas les stimuli qui font les réactions ou qui déterminent le contenu de la perception. Ce n'est pas le monde réel qui fait le monde perçu » (Merleau-Ponty, 2009, 97).

⁶ « Dans l'unité intérieure de ces systèmes, il est permis de dire que chaque effet local dépend de la fonction qu'il remplit dans l'ensemble, de sa valeur et de sa signification à l'égard de la structure que le système tend de réaliser » (Merleau-Ponty, 2009, 142).

⁷ He borrows this concept from Buytendijk and Plessner in *Die physiologische Erklärung des Verhaltens*.

⁸ « ...elle n'est pas quelque chose qui s'observe, mais plutôt quelque chose qui se comprend » (Merleau-Ponty, 2009, 70).

(Merleau-Ponty, 1996, 7). It is a new conception of reason, which does not function through the application of categories to a given content, but through the intentional taking position in the given situation and the bodily reaction to it. Merleau-Ponty's observation is here phenomenological, but not strictly speaking like Husserl's noetic-noematic correlation between a sense-constituting consciousness and a meaningful constituted world. We perceive a form and an order in the apparition of the objects and the behavior of organisms. These phenomena are our point of departure, but also the point of passage to a higher level of observation: the form indicates a sense, which we understand without having constituted it. We cannot deny the anthropomorphism of categories such as form, value, structure and meaning. Nevertheless, it is not a matter of projecting concepts into nature, but rather of translating structural processes into human language. There is a correlation between language and structure. Not that language creates structure. Language responds to structures, because we are dealing in language with the same configuration that we perceive in our sensory encounter with the world. In other words, the starting point is form, not consciousness. This is the reason why even physical form reveals a certain structure without being fully comprehensible to consciousness.

To summarize the insights from Merleau-Ponty's early work, we can say: structure is neither an entity nor an a priori principle, but the expression of certain configurations of sense and meaning⁹. For example, before the "objective" study of a physical thing, we first observe it in the lifeworld as a unity with internal equilibrium as an expression of its physical structure. We observe its form as the manifestation of its internal unity. In a higher ontological level, this internal unity gives the whole living being the character of an "indecomposable individual" (*individu indecomposable*) (Merleau-Ponty, 2009, 153). This is an essential philosophical intuition for Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenological philosophy: there exists for each individual a general structure of behavior as a unity expressed in certain constants of its conduct. The structure is a momentarily manifestation of the general orientation of the passive affective life in its bodily expressions. The distinction between the essential and the accidental becomes relative here. Each particular apparition reveals in a way the essence of the individual. The individual as a whole has a tendency to a unity in its orientation toward the world:

...one is led to the idea that there exists a general structure of behavior for each individual which is expressed by certain constants of conduct, of sensible and motor thresholds, of affectivity, of temperature, of blood pressure [...] in such a way that it is impossible to find

⁹ « la matière, la vie et l'esprit comme trois ordres des significations » (Merleau-Ponty, 2009, 147).

causes and effects in this ensemble, each particular phenomenon expressing equally well what one could call the 'essence' of the individual... Thus, each organism, in the presence of a given milieu, has its optimal conditions of activity and its proper manner of realizing equilibrium; and the internal determinants of this equilibrium are not given by a plurality of vectors, but by a general attitude toward the world. (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 148)

The singularity of the individual structure is thus due to its dialectical relationship with the world and to the way it finds its own way to achieve equilibrium within it. The individual is bodily engaged in the world and the world is the field of its "vital" sense-constitution. The strangeness of the world is reduced through the process of structuration to the point, where the stage of the most comfortable and adapted action (the habit) is reached. It is here that Merleau-Ponty distances himself from Gestalt theory: against its materialism of explaining the forms based on cerebral isomorphism, Merleau-Ponty follows Kurt Goldstein and admits that the perceptive form is the result of the functional process of structuration, that organism applies to its environment (Bimbenet, 2003, 56). Structuration is the act of creating order in the perception of the surrounding situation and the process of taking a position in it. By doing so Merleau-Ponty replaces the psychology of form by a philosophy of the living being. Or, if we want to go one step further and focus on consciousness, we can say that he turns to a phenomenological anthropology.

2.

In *Phénoménologie de la perception* Merleau-Ponty considers Gestalt psychology as a theory whose philosophical background is to be found in the phenomenology of Husserl. The fact that Wolfgang Köhler writes about the phenomenological description; that Kurt Koffka, Husserl's former disciple, describes form not as an event in the world but as an internal law of constitution; that Husserl himself uses in his later philosophy terms such as *Konfiguration* and *Gestalt*, are all indications in Merleau-Ponty's eyes of a convergence between Gestalt theory and phenomenology. However, these similarities do not cover the main points of divergence between them: 1) The attitude of Gestalt theory towards naturalism and causal thinking is neither radical nor consistent. 2) Gestaltists ignore the fact that psychological atomism is a special case of theoretical dogmatism concerning the determination of the world and treat consciousness as an assemblage of forms. Merleau-Ponty paraphrases Husserl's thesis that there is a gap and no parallelism between psychology and phenomenology. The philosopher must take a methodological step from the *natural* attitude—in which psychology, even Gestalt theory, is involved—to the *transcendental* attitude.

We need to have a brief look at the meaning of the transcendental for Merleau-Ponty if we are to understand the philosophical status of structure in his phenomenology of perception.

We find in *Phénoménologie de la perception* the same approach to structure as a variant of signification, namely the biological *sense* of the situation. Here again, Merleau-Ponty seeks what he calls “another type of intelligibility” (*un autre type d’intelligibilité*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 18) discernible in behavior. Nevertheless, there is a crucial shift in emphasis from *La structure du comportement* to *Phénoménologie de la perception*: he now seeks the pre-objective field of meaningful structuration in the immanent subjective experience. To arrive at this field, he accomplishes a double philosophical process: 1. Reorientation of the presupposed “objective” explanation to its origin in the *phenomenal* field; 2. Transition from the *phenomenal* field to the *transcendental* field.

The first step, inspired by Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, challenges the positivist approach of perception. The perceptual field consists not only of “things” (*choses*), but also of the “void” or “empty space” between the things (*vide entre les choses*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 23)¹⁰. The empty space is a constitutive negativity of the sense and the meaningful structure of objects in the perceptual field. Merleau-Ponty’s approach does not follow the Kantian tradition that attributes spontaneous activity to reason and consequently deprives perception of any form of spontaneity. Instead, Merleau-Ponty draws on the German Romantic approach to sense perception as articulated by Herder and Goethe. This means that rather than taking sense perception as a passive process of collecting impressions, he encourages us to reconsider our perceptual experience (specifically the act of seeing) in the richness of its activity. Sense perception is an encounter with *sens* (sense/meaning) in the context of world experience as an apparition field that Merleau-Ponty calls “the spectacle of the world” (*le spectacle du monde*). The perceptual world is not composed of qualia, but determined by the “vital value” of the objects embedded in the thickness (*épaisseur*) of the intentional horizon—Merleau-Ponty refers to it as “intentional tissue” (*tissu intentionnel*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 64)¹¹. The immediate contact of consciousness is thus not with the impression, “but the meaning, the structure, the spontaneous arrangement of parts” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 67).

In the second step, i.e., the transition from the *phenomenal* field to the *transcendental* field, Merleau-Ponty pursues the original living experience (*la couche d’expéri-*

¹⁰ He adopts the formulation from Koehler in *Gestalt Psychology*.

¹¹ (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 61).

ence vivante) as the ultimate source of the sense-constitution. He wants to bring the philosophical triad self-others-world (*moi-autrui-monde*) to its primordial source, where its three poles are to be thought in their “nascent state” (*à l'état naissant*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 48, 69). The core of the transcendental project of *Phénoménologie de la perception* is the study of this triad according to the original living experience. He shares this orientation with Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, but with the essential difference that he presupposes no absolute consciousness. There is no *Ur-Ich* as the intentional center of the sense-constitution, but an “intentional arc” (*arc intentionnel*), in which the consciousness itself is rooted and involved. The transcendental turn means for Merleau-Ponty, as for Husserl, the dismantling of the dogmas of the natural attitude: sense and truth, as essential moments of the transcendental field, have their primary foundation in the process of sense-constitution. Psychology, too, becomes relevant for phenomenologist only insofar as it reveals a dimension of sense-constitution of the world¹². While the emphasis on the sense perception in the phenomenal field uncovers the lifeworld behind the presupposed “objective” world, the passage from the phenomenal field to the transcendental field reveals the sense-constitutive process, which determines the world appearance. The structure is in this process the very *genesis* of the world in its apparition:

But although the Gestalt may be expressible in terms of some internal law, this law must not be considered as a model on which the phenomena of structure are built up. Their appearance is not the external unfolding of a pre-existing reason. It is not because the ‘form’ produces a certain state of equilibrium, solving a problem of maximum coherence and, in the Kantian sense, making a world possible, that it enjoys a privileged place in our perception; it is the very appearance of the world and not the condition of its possibility; it is the birth of a norm and is not realized according to a norm; it is the identity of the external and the internal and not the projection of the internal in the external. (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 70)

As Merleau-Ponty formulates it this passage: 1) Structure is not a pre-given model or an a priori form, which exposes a pre-existent reason; 2) Structure is the world-apparition itself, not its condition of possibility; 3) Structure is not the projection of an internal norm or pattern onto the external world, but the encounter or the identity of the internal and the external. It is not a psychological pattern projected on objects, but the very genesis of the norm and the pattern itself in the world apparition.

The process of sense-constitution is the core of transcendental analysis that Merleau-Ponty shares with Husserl. But whereas Husserl only takes the individual

¹² « Une psychologie est toujours amenée au problème de la constitution du monde » (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 73).

subjective experience as a starting point to then take over the noetic-nematic correlations, or to arrive at the intuition of the essence (*Wesensschau*) and the intersubjective objectivity, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the *singularity* of the individual subjective experience. The thinking ego is not for Merleau-Ponty the bearer (*Träger*) of the absolute transcendental consciousness, as Husserl would say. It is an ego engaged in the creative operation of the sense-constitution, which draws its motivation and its orientation on one hand from (i) the *facticity* of the unreflective, that is to say the world in its situative apparition, and on the other hand from (ii) the *particularity* of the situated individual subject. The *facticity* of the world apparition and the *particularity* of the individual subjective experience are both elements of Merleau-Ponty's own phenomenological approach to the transcendental. He seeks a philosophical thinking that takes seriously what he calls "resistance of passivity" (*la résistance de la passivité*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 75) and rebels against philosophical universalist approaches, which are not subordinated to any situation. The particularity of the individual subjective experience is the point of departure for a more radical awareness and opens the way to think the *spectacle of the world*. The core of this philosophy could not be the autonomous transcendental subject:

The core of philosophy is no longer an autonomous transcendental subjectivity, to be found everywhere and nowhere: it lies in the perpetual beginning of reflection, at the point where an individual life begins to reflect on itself [...] A philosophy becomes transcendental, or radical, not by taking its place in absolute consciousness without mentioning the ways by which this is reached, but by considering itself as a problem; not by postulating a knowledge rendered totally explicit, but by recognizing as the fundamental philosophic problem this presumption on reason's part. (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 72–73)

It is not in the abandonment of the particularity of situated subjective experience, but in the deepening of this particularity and in the attempt to problematize philosophical reflection and reason itself from this particularity, that we find the basis of sense-constitution. Every act of sense-constitution has its root in the corporal engagement of the subject in the world and has its beginning in the corporal orientation toward the world. We can attribute to Merleau-Ponty a phenomenological Leibnizianism. While the differential singularity of a monad in its world perception distinguishes it from other monads and Leibniz arguments by this means for an ontological perspectivism, Merleau-Ponty pleads for a phenomenological perspectivism: the individual subject, by virtue of her/his particular situation determined by the embodied existence, has a singular world perception that constitutes her/his particular perspective and the horizon of her/his sense-constitution. Here, *style* as a phenomenological concept acquires an essential relevance, because as the point of connection between

the internal and the external, style represents both mentioned aspects (facticity and particularity) of the transcendental sense-constitution.

3.

Merleau-Ponty is strongly influenced by Husserl and André Malraux in his use of the concept of style. Regarding the meaning of style in Husserl's phenomenology, we can say: our pre-theoretical experience reveals a structural interrelationship (*Strukturzusammenhang*), which the phenomenologist systematically studies as experience-style of the world-experience (*Erfahrungstil der Welterfahrung*). Husserl calls it „Weltstruktur“ in *Phänomenologische Psychologie* (Husserl, 1968, 64–67). The phenomenological concept of world-structure is a whole that operates in the background of the lifeworld experiences and connects them to each other in a unity through categories such as universal spatiotemporal form and causality. The world is itself in this approach a „Universalstil“, as Husserl formulates it in *Formale und transzendente Logik*, i.e., a universal style known to us before the phenomenological reduction but to be identified as the correlate of our intentional acts after the accomplishment of the phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1974, 289–290). In his manuscripts *Zur Lehre vom Wesen* Husserl describes the essence of this universal style as a system of concordance (*System der Einstimmigkeit*), which gives unity to all our natural experiences. The world as a universal style is a pure form (*reine Form*) that unites experiences (Husserl, 2012, 304–307). Thus, style means for Husserl above all a coherent style of experience, which manifests itself as concordance (*Einstimmigkeit*). The structure of the world is thus a noematic correlate and, as such, the result of the intentional activity of consciousness.

In contrast to Husserl's epistemological approach that considers structure as an aspect of cognitive experience, Merleau-Ponty understands structure in *La structure du comportement* as the expression of the inclusion of corporal existence in its surrounding world. It is an organic unity and not a noematic correlate that connects the activities of the corporal existence (Boer, 1978, 21–26, 77). The structure is neither an objective entity in the world nor a psychological form. The corporal existence as spatial, linguistic and sexual being reaches significant structures in all its activities, which are the expression of its adaptation to the world and of the perceptuality of the world for it. Merleau-Ponty's approach to the concept “style” must also be understood in this context. In his book *Du lien des êtres aux éléments de l'être* shows De Saint-Aubert in detail how a conceptual turn takes place in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy from 1945 until 1951: there is a movement from classical philosophical concepts widely used until 1945 toward topological figures such as *empiètement*, *enjambement*, *chi-*

asme, entrelace, cercle and so on (Saint-Aubert, 2004, 19). In other words, concepts and figures hitherto used to explain the relation between the objects, find themselves a philosophical relevance. At the same time, a transition takes place from the phenomenology of perception (relation of beings to each other) to the ontology of the sensible (elements of being itself). *La prose du monde* and its contribution to the concept of style is an important step of this transition.

In the last chapter of *Phénoménologie de la perception* Merleau-Ponty argues that the singularity of the individual is undeniable but not absolutely self-contained. The “present” of the individual is at once the present of the world and of others. Individuality is formed along a constant reference to a shared world with others. The point of departure for the personal individuation lies in the factually situated bodily relation to the world and its development, i.e., in the way the individual articulates its sense of self from a singular perspective and forms its individual identity as a personal style. Personal style is described in *Phénoménologie de la perception* as an existential gesture that allows one to put herself in the ontological mode of another’s existence. The possibility of impersonating someone else is an essential feature of style. We can impersonate someone without being completely able to verbally describe her style. The same approach to the style is present in *La Prose du monde*, but deepened in both an artistic and an ontological sense. Following Malraux, he defines artistic style as an inner meaningful relationship that the artist maintains from his present to the past of his artistic life and to his preceding artistic works:

For him, everything still lies in the present, and the feeble accent of his early works is eminently contained in the language of his maturity, just as Euclidean geometry is a special case of some general geometry. Without looking back on their earlier works and by the sole fact that they have fulfilled certain expressive operations, the writer and the painter are endowed with new organs, as it were. In this new condition, they experience the excess of what is to be said beyond their ordinary capacities—unless a mysterious fatigue, of which there are historical examples, intervenes. They are able to pursue the same meaning “further”, as though they fed on their own substance and grew from their own gifts, as if every step taken made the next one possible, or finally, as if each successful expression prescribed another task for the spiritual automaton or founded an institution whose efficacy it could never establish once and for all. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 57)¹³

¹³ « Pour lui tout est toujours au présent, le faible accent de ses premières œuvres est éminemment contenu dans le langage de sa maturité... Sans se retourner vers leurs premiers ouvrages, et du seul fait qu'ils ont accompli certaines opérations expressives, l'écrivain et le peintre sont doués comme de nouveaux organes et éprouvant, dans cette nouvelle condition qu'ils se sont donnée, l'excès de ce qui est à dire sur leurs pouvoirs ordinaires, sont capables... d'aller dans le même sens “plus loin”... » (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, 80–1).

The unity of the style is therefore not a matter of chronological succession, but of an experienced relationship with the past. Starting from the maturity of his present, the artist feels the accent of his past works as an *orientation* and an *internal impulse* to continue in the same direction and express, what is to be said and has not yet been said. For the same reason, an artist like Cézanne finds himself in front of the mountain Sainte Victoire compared to a simple observer as if he was equipped with an additional perceptive organ that allows him to see what the simple observer is unable to see.

The essential point is that the artist's style begins already before his creative work in his meaningful relation to the world. Style has its origin in a « moment fécond », as Merleau-Ponty puts it, before any established sense and meaning, where the artist devotes his sense-generating gaze to objects. The meaning is not presupposed here, but to be created. In this creative moment—and the question is whether a deliberate distance from style is possible—the artist is in a sense-giving encounter with the world, where not only his creative occupation, but also his perception contributes to his style:

We must see it emerging at the point of contact between the painter and the world, in the hollow of the painter's perception, and as an exigency which arises from that perception. Malraux demonstrates this in one of his better passages: perception already stylizes. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 59)

Through his style, the artist produces a “coherent deformation” (*déformation cohérente*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, 128) of our world-perception, by which the appearance of the world gets a new articulation in a different perspective. In this manner, the style of an artist is a variation of the possible meaningful relation to the world, but in a new form, which imposes itself as violence or deformation of the previous forms. The artist's style and the continuity of his or her meaningful perception of the world create a resonance that targets the aesthetic sensibility of the observer, so that the perceptual articulation of the appearance of the world for the observer also undergoes a modification.

However, it is not the artist who creates this resonance. His creative work is in fact a response to the resonance, which comes originally from the appearance of the world. In other words, there is in the sensational aesthetic encounter with the world, and specifically in the artistic process, a mute manifestation of expression. Consequently, the origin of the artistic style is in the perception itself. The world does not require a particular static and definitive structure beforehand, but makes possible an open range of appearances. Merleau-Ponty refers to Malraux: “All style is giving form to the elements of the world which permits the orientation of the world to one of its

essential parts” (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 60)¹⁴. This means that the appearance of the world includes orientations and articulations that allow us to take them as perceptual pivots to generate new articulations of meaning. The style means in this phenomenological aspect the activation of possible articulations, which already exist in the world apparition. The style is thus everywhere and nowhere. It is the possibility of creating a meaningful articulation, which is neither totally familiar nor totally strange.

The style in the perception is a dimension of the world-style, that is to say the possibility of a significant articulation in the appearance of the world itself. There is thus a relation between the esthesiology (Cueille, 2002) and ontology of the sensible. As the title of the essay *Langage indirect in La prose du monde* suggests, there is an unarticulated but articulable indirect language in the appearance of the world. To say it differently, there is no objective world spirit, which would have charged the world with meaning. But there is an aesthetic-sensational Logos in the world¹⁵. The esthesiology is an effort to articulate this unuttered Logos and a way to discover the language of the invisible. The world-style means here the preliminary schema of the sense in the world apparition, which does not manifest itself in the perception as sense but as direction and orientation:

It is sufficient that we shape in the manifold of things certain hollows, certain fissures—and we do this the moment we are alive—to bring into the world that which is strangest to it: a meaning, an incitement, sister to those who draw us into the present or the future, toward being or nonbeing. [...] Style exists (and hence signification) as soon as there are figures and backgrounds, a norm and a deviation, a top and a bottom, that is, as soon as certain elements of the world assume the value of dimensions to which subsequently all the rest relate and through which we can point them out. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 60–61)¹⁶

A world style exists as soon as certain elements of the world apparition take the function of a turning point and bring an order into being, which gives the possibility to arrange other elements of the world apparition. In analogy to the work of art, in which the style gives the artist an orientation, also in the world apparition in the per-

¹⁴ « Tout style est la mise en forme des éléments du monde qui permettent d’orienter celui-ci vers une de ses parts essentielles » (as cited in Blanchot, 1971).

¹⁵ « Logos des lignes, des lumières, des couleurs, des reliefs, des masses...présentation sans concept de l’Être universel » (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, 71).

¹⁶ « Il suffit que, dans le plein des choses, nous ménagions certains creux, certains fissures, — et dès que nous vivons nous le faisons, — pour faire venir au monde cela même qui lui est le plus étranger : un sens, une incitation sœur de celles qui nous entraînent vers le présent ou l’avenir ou le passé, vers l’être ou le non-être...Il y a style (et de là signification) dès qu’il a des figures et des fonds, une norme et une déviation, un haut et un bas, c’est-à-dire dès que certains éléments du monde prennent valeur de dimensions selon lesquelles désormais nous mesurons tout le reste, par rapport auxquelles nous indiquons tout le reste » (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, 85–86).

ception a given sketch is present. The artist's style is the accomplishment of the same trace or sketch initiated in his perception:

It is always only a question of advancing the line of the already opened furrow and of recapturing and generalizing an accent which has already appeared in the corner of a previous painting or in some moment of his experience. The painter himself can never say—since the distinction has no meaning—what comes from him and what comes from things, what the new work adds to the old ones, what he has taken from this, and what is his own. There is a triple resumption through which he continues while going beyond, conserves while destroying, interprets through deviation, and infuses a new meaning into what nevertheless called for and anticipated it. It is not simply a metamorphosis in the fairy tale sense of a miracle or magic, violence, or aggression. It is not an absolute creation in an absolute solitude. It is also a response to what the world, the past, and previous works demanded of him, namely, accomplishment and fraternity. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 67–68)

The artist has a rich sensibility for the articulations of the world apparition. But this richness is potentially present in every perception. Before the act of the expression, the present of the perception is not neutral and without meaning. There is a call addressed to the subject of the perception. There is a demand of expression.

The “present” of perception has a foundational character—Merleau-Ponty refers to Husserl's concept of foundation (*Stiftung*)—, which singles it out from the past and the future. It carries in itself a potential turning point for articulating the world through its appearing moments in a new perspective (Cueille, 2002, 119). To this temporal orientation of the world apparition belongs the creative power of the present. Expression, language and art are all oriented toward the future. The artwork is always unaccomplished because it lies partly in the future. In other words, the artwork is unaccomplished because perception itself is unfinished and represents the world only in partial perspectives. The artist's dynamic retrospective relationship to the past of his artistic life, the creative power of the present with its foundational character, and the excess of meaning that constitutes the future horizon of his art, are all rooted in perception itself. Artistic, literary and philosophical creation are based on the bodily anchoring of perception in the world:

We must therefore recognize that what we call a “glance” a “hand,” and in general the “body” constitute a system of systems devoted to the inspection of a world and capable of leaping over distances, piercing the perceptual future, and outlining, in the inconceivable platitude of being, hollows and reliefs, distances and gaps—in short, a meaning. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 78)¹⁷

¹⁷ « Il faut donc reconnaître sous le nom de regard, de main et en général de corps un système de systèmes voué à l'inspection d'un monde, capable d'enjamber les distances, de percer l'avenir perceptif, de dessiner dans la platitude inconcevable de l'être des creux et des reliefs, des distances et des écarts, un sens » (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, 110).

In other words, each perception is a world perception, since the foundation of the sense-draft (*Sinnentwurf*) it prepares is rooted in the world apparition. But this does not mean that the subject of perception is always aware of this world dimension and, like Cézanne, tries to perceive and represent *l'instant du monde*.

The sequence of the collected works of an artist during the exhibition gives us the impression of recognizing the unity of the modulation of her style. We can extend this unity, juxtapose the artworks of different artists side by side and talk about their belonging to a certain artistic form (for example surrealism from Goya and Piranesi to Klinger and Ernst) or to a certain school of art (for example, Parnassianism). But the question is: how far can we continue this extension and generalisation? It actually has no definite limits. Then there is a unity of common style, as Malraux shows in *Le musée imaginaire* (Malraux, 1965). To this common general style belong all the artworks as to a universal body. The works of art are individual meaning-sketches projected onto a universal draft, that in the end they all work on an original text, which Merleau-Ponty calls *the prose of the world*. The chronological unity of the exhibition is a factual history. But there is an implicit history in a deeper dimension that relates these artistic manifestations. The style of an artist is “shared by others” (*participable par les autres*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, 137) not only because of its form, language, or technic, but because an artist’s style, as a modality of perceiving the world, is new but not foreign to other artists. The style of an artist has an affinity, a relationship to the styles of other artists. The artistic styles are related to each other because their manifestations in the artworks can be translated to each other as structures of meaning.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to show that there is an evolution in Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the concept *structure*. There is a transition from a static to a dynamic approach, paralleling a movement from a *philosophy of structure* to a *philosophy of individuation*. This movement culminates in the concept of *style*, which becomes an important element in Merleau-Ponty’s later phenomenological aesthetics and phenomenology of world appearance. He adopts Malraux’s definition of artistic style as a coherent deformation. The artist reinterprets the world from his or her singular horizon of sense-constitution and world apparition:

Malraux shows perfectly that what makes “a Vermeer” for us is not that this canvas was painted one day by the hand of the man Vermeer. It is the fact that it embodies the “Vermeer structure” or that it speaks the language of Vermeer, that is, it observes the system

of equivalences according to which each one of its elements, like a hundred pointers on a hundred dials, marks the same deviation. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 70)

The essential question is no longer what structure Vermeer's work has in common between *A View of Delft* and *The Milkmaid*, but what makes this structure possible. By structure here we mean a certain system of equivalences that is repeated in several of Vermeer's works. We all know how differently the world appears to us after an intense visit to an exhibition: the vividness of colorful but vague scenes according to Monet, a more geometric vision according to Cézanne, a sensitivity to blue according to Jean Fouquet, and an affinity for the beauty of hands according to Quintin Massys. Nevertheless, these particular systems of equivalence are the individuating moments of a more general sense-making process behind them, which the concept of style names. When visiting the exhibition, we do not look at the structures objectively, but reappropriate the perspective and style of the artist.

The transition from structure to style in Merleau-Ponty is not only a transition from one focus of philosophical interest (nature, psychology, and anthropology) to another one (expression, language, and artistic creation), but indicates a development and even a shift in a *philosophie du sens* in the background of both concepts. We can even argue that the aforementioned focus shift from nature, psychology and anthropology to expression, language and artistic creation is itself the repercussion of Merleau-Ponty's own progress in the philosophy of sense-constitution. In his early works, the form and structure of behavior leads Merleau-Ponty to a more complicated philosophical reflection on meaning and sense-constitution. In later works, he offers a new philosophical perspective that is not rationalist, insofar as it takes into account the engagement of bodily existence in its environment, and not functionalist, insofar as it does not ignore contingency and improvisation in structuration. If we want to reformulate our thesis from the perspective of *Phénoménologie de la perception*, we can say that the structure is in *Structure du comportement* a medium to investigate the functional unity in the behavior of the living being, whose mechanism of sense-constitution is partly elaborated by Merleau-Ponty in that work, but finds its explicit clarification in the transcendental project of *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Merleau-Ponty's next step is to attempt to study the mechanism of structuration with its components such as the world apparition in its facticity, the individuality of the perceiver and the embodiment of the perceiver in its different dimensions such as spatiality, temporality, sexuality and language. The accomplishment of this step in the case of the human behavior finds its manifestation in the concept of style. In his phenomenology of style, Merleau-Ponty does not look for structures with pre-giv-

en formal models, as, for example Gilles-Gaston Grangers does in his philosophy of style¹⁸. Style, for Merleau-Ponty, means the particular articulation of the sense-constituting experience of world as the foundation of structuration, signification, language and communication. As the primordial symbolization of the individual in its bodily expression, style is undoubtedly one of the most essential moments of Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy of sense-constitution, but it is not the only one. Among other concepts, we can mention the concept of "institution," which Merleau-Ponty uses frequently in his later lectures on Nature at the *Collège de France*. The institution is a concept with the essential function of forming a threshold between nature and organism, nature and education, nature and culture.

Merleau-Ponty cannot be called a structuralist. He was the first French philosopher who wrote about Saussure. He was a close friend of Levi-Strauss, even personally encouraged him to present himself as a candidate for a chair at the *Collège de France*, and himself gave a speech introducing the chair of *anthropologie structurale*. Merleau-Ponty shares common ideas with Levi-Strauss concerning: i) the relation between nature and culture, insofar as both have a central anthropological disposition with concepts such as "order," "synthesis," "integration" and "structure"; ii) the phenomenon of childhood, insofar as they consider it as a transition from nature to culture—the child is for both from the beginning outside in the society and the language—; iii) the concept of the "symbolic," which for both is basically the ability to vary the multiple aspects of something around an identical core (*eidos*) (Bimbenet, 2011, 62–67, 71). Yet Merleau-Ponty is not a structuralist. His phenomenology, deeply rooted in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, keeps him at a distance from structuralism. His critical stance toward structuralism would be a continuation of the same critique he formulates toward Gestalt theory. Structure is the manifestation of a transcendental process of sense-constitution, which does not reduce itself to its manifestation. Structure is merely a point of departure, a moment of individuation and an indication that leads us to the dialectic of the thing and the world, the figure and the background, the visible and the invisible. Compared to philosophers like Simondon or Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty is much less interested in the forms themselves. His approach to structure is not as morphologically hierarchical as Simondon's *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d'information*—depicting a hierarchy of beings according to a morphological division—and not as associative and contingent as, for instance, Deleuze's *Le pli, Leibniz et le Baroque*—a holistic contextualization of

¹⁸ « C'est cette mise en place des structures effectives par rapport aux structures virtuelles et au non-structuré que nous avons nommée analyse stylistique » (Granger, 1988, 297).

a philosopher (Leibniz) in a larger cultural, aesthetic, and scientific aspect through the central role of a figure (the fold). Merleau-Ponty's analysis of structure is a thinking of the exigency in two aspects: 1. There is an immanent unity in the organism with a relation to the environment, which, as a process of sense-constitution and meaning creation, determines structure. 2. Merleau-Ponty's enquiry finds its point of departure not in isomorphism or morphology but in the contact point of philosophy with non-philosophy, i.e., psychology, psychopathology and anthropology.

Structure and style are at the same time two moments of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological anthropology, which Bimbenet calls "*humanisme à la limite*" (Bimbenet, 2011, 17), i.e., an anthropology that defines the fundamental features of human being in the limit situation. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty can be seen as an intermediary between early transcendental philosophy and the structuralist philosophies of the second half of the twentieth century. He admits the interrelation of the internal (consciousness) and the external (body and world), but not with the aim of reducing consciousness to a product of socio-cultural structures. What he is trying to explain is the unity despite the natural internal ambiguity and the self-coincidence despite the distraction. The philosophical results of this tension are concepts such as "*synthèse passive*" or "*cogito tacite*," which are not "self-defeating" as Kurt Keller argues (Keller, 2002, 378), but conceptual tools to investigate the ambiguities of embodied consciousness at its limits. With the phenomenological concept of style, we have the possibility to thematize the structuring process of sense-constitution, which has its root in the embodied situation and precedes the conscious act of linguistic meaning-constitution. Unlike structure, which could be considered as a moment of a greater social, cultural, ontological structuration, style reflects the internal anthropological unity from a subjective point of view.

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