
COMPLICITY OF MEANING
AND THE ORIGINAL PRESENCE:
INTERTWINING RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE LIFE-WORLD
IN MERLEAU-PONTY

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ABSTRACT. This work attempts to trace the intertwining relationship in the *life-world* as Merleau-Ponty describes it in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. As we start to reflect on his concept of body, the world, the others, and the *I*, we begin to realize the originality that each of these terms conveys, thereby enriching our experience in the world. Under these circumstances, we will no longer place the *I* as the center of meaning, but as the *complicity of meaning* due to its intertwining relationship with the *life-world*. The *original presence* brings an ambiguity that is ungraspable by objective thought, although it is experienced in the very situation that we encounter ourselves.

KEY WORDS. Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, perception, complicity of meaning, original presence, intertwining, body, other, world, ego, cogito, I.

1. INTRODUCTION

The preface in the *Phenomenology of Perception* starts with the question of what phenomenology is. The entire work is an attempt to place phenomenology in a transcendental field of philosophical investigation. In doing this, Merleau-Ponty establish a new conceptualization through his radicalization of the intertwining of the *original presence*. The *original presence* will be our thread to understand his ideas on phenomenology.

The task of phenomenology is to rediscover the naïve contact with the world, in other words, to place essences back within the existence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, xx). It is not a matter of getting away from the world, or even conceiving ourselves as a part of the world as a simple object of the natural sciences, but it is an effort to return to the existing world prior to knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, xxii), to a world that is already there,

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prior to every analysis that we could confer on it. Thus, the world is not an object of my thought; it is the natural milieu and the field of all my thoughts and of my explicit perceptions (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, xxiv).

The relationship between the other and ourselves, with the paradox that will involve (the *Ego* realizes that there are others *Egos*, invalidating a complete reduction into a single *Ego*), is only possible to be understood if the *Ego* and the *Alter Ego* are defined by their situation, comprehending this inherence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, xxvi). According to Merleau-Ponty, the *Cogito* has, up until our present day, devalued the perception of others, becoming the other kind of product of my *Ego*. Thus, he proposes that the *Cogito* must find us in a situation that would encompass my embodiment in a nature, revealing the possibility of an historical situation. This historical situation is characterized by revealing us as *being in the world*.

The recognition of the historical situation prevents any separation between us and the world in the process of reduction. In fact, what is presupposed to be suspended, bracketing, is our pre-conceptions that normally transforms the *I*, the others and the world into mere things, as objects of an *Ego*. The reduction is not a separation, but instead, reveals our intertwining, our situation in the world as *being in the world*. Therefore, the reduction needs to be grasped as paradoxical and latent, since it will always show our situation as intertwining. The essence in the reduction is not to seek a general idea, or a reduction to a theme of discourse; rather, bringing the spectacle of the world prior to every thematization (Merleau-Ponty 2012, xxix). The constant reduction will be shown by its constant relation between *Dasein* (existence) and *Wesen* (essence) (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, xxviii).

Merleau-Ponty is not trying to eliminate consciousness, but to reveal instead its *original presence* as intertwined in the world. That means the world is not what we think, but what we live; we become open to the world, which is not an attempt to transform the world as a kind of possession. In this way, the world is not what we think, but what we perceive. Our consciousness becomes open to the world as having a constant interest (*operative intentionality*) (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, xxxii) to what appears in its mode of givenness (*original presence*). The task of philosophy would be to place—what offers, before our eyes, and invite us to take note of its mode of givenness that brings its own genesis of sense.

The sense that comes through its mode of givenness must not be transformed into an absolute Spirit (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, xxxiv), but intertwined with experience, because the phenomenological world is not a pure being, but instead shares meaning. The same can be said about consciousness; it is not a pure consciousness, it shares meaning and *complicity* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 448). Thus, philosophy as a *radical reflection* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, xxxv) will involve an infinite dialogue, and in

addition, will not know just where it is going, but will involve also a constant and open reflection.

Merleau-Ponty will show the necessity to return to the phenomenal field. In this context, there is a perceived sense that is different from the universe of understanding, a perceptual milieu different from the objective world, and a perceptual being that is not yet determinate (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 48). In this phenomenological structure, we cannot find a cause-effect relationship, but a sort of operative reason that orients the flow of phenomena.

The task of a transcendental phenomenology is to return to the lived world beneath the objective world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 57). It is the effort to bring to light a pre-scientific life of consciousness (*Transcendental subjectivity*) (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 59). It is not an irrational approach, but a new orientation to the consciousness itself through intention analysis. Two different attitudes or perspectives emerge in transcendental phenomenology, and these emerge simultaneously. 1) The *natural attitude* emerges as such, and now what was taken for granted is seen as given. 2) The phenomenological attitude. In the phenomenological (or transcendental attitude—sometimes these are referred to in the same way), two dimensions emerge: a) “*transcendental subjectivity*”, which is the human being no longer taken for granted, but viewed in terms of its power and limits of sense and meaning giving; b) the perspective of the phenomenologist him or herself. This phenomenologizing activity that describes sense and meaning emerges as the relationality of *sense-giving* and *sense-giveness* or *transcendental subjectivity* and *world*.

Thus, the transcendental subjectivity will present a new *cogito* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 51), a latent one, brought by a new reduction (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 61). He describes phenomenological reflection as a radical one that is never completed in itself. It does not mean a reflection without *purpose*; but it is sensitive to the birth of norms. It is not a kind of *genealogy* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 55) in order to seek the conditions that make being possible; it goes beyond as an open attitude toward the modes of givenness.

In short, Merleau-Ponty phenomenology sees the world as a *problem*—not in the sense that it is something to be resolved, but in the sense of mystery. This gives rise to the origin and originating of meaning and sense, of our relation with others, and our (intersubjective) inheritance of a world. In this context, we will seek to analyze the *body*, the *world*, the *other*, and the *I* in an intertwined way, presenting them as *original presences*, to wit, in its mode of givenness.

2. THE BODY

Merleau-Ponty depicts a body schema whereby it has its own givenness. First, the body is presented as an indivisible possession (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 100), in other words, the parts of the body are not laid out side by side, but rather envelop each other so that I know the position of each of my limbs through a body schema. For a second definition, the body is not a mere result of associations established in the course of experience, but rather the global awareness of my posture in *the inter-sensory world* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 102). It means it can be compared to a form that entails all parts together as a background. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of our hands leaning on the table, bringing together all other single parts of my body supporting the very act itself. This situational spatiality of the body, that expresses that my body is in and toward the world, is always presented always in terms of the figure-background (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 103), whereby our body expresses itself as a whole.

For Merleau-Ponty, every movement has a background, so that both the movement and the background are moments of a single whole (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 113). The movement does not originate without a background, to wit, it is not originated *ex nihilo*, but it is an immanent movement, an original manner of relating to an object. The movement of my body emerges within a situation. In both abstract movement (the constructed world) and in the concrete movement (the given world) the movement emerges the very situation; in a planned or unplanned occasion, a situation emerges. For example, thinking or not in the gesture, like giving a farewell, represents a background situation which is necessary to produce the gesture itself.

Unlike the Kantian subject that posits a world, i.e., the consciousness establishes the synthesis of the object; Merleau-Ponty says that the living present (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 130) must be the synthesis produced. It does not mean that consciousness is cut off, it means that the consciousness has its own background, its modes of givenness, and the body is always there. The living present makes the synthesis of the past and the future through what Merleau-Ponty calls the *intentional arc* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 137). The intentional arc names the tight connection between the agent and the world. The life of consciousness and the perceptual life are subtended by this intentional arc. The intentional arc creates the unity of the senses; the unity of the senses with the intelligence, and the unity of sensivity and motricity.

The idea of conceiving a consciousness independent of the body would lose its very essence, its mode of givenness. Consciousness essentially needs the intermediation of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 140). In this sense, movement is learned when the body has understood it, and can move through it, responding the solicitation of things without any repre-

sentation. It would be absurd to say that the body is there and at that time. If you say so, you make a clear separation between consciousness and the body. The body will be just something and not a lived body. In fact, Merleau-Ponty will say that the body inhabits space and time. The lived body makes the synthesis of time (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 141) so that the past and the future are made present through it. The body is a lived presence that goes beyond itself, embracing the time without any necessary representation.

The body catches and understands the movement, and the acquisition of habit is a grasping of significance. There is an understanding of the body in the acquisition of a habit. Merleau-Ponty quotes the example of the blind man's cane (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 144), whereby the blind man touches things with his cane in order to enrich his sensitive powers. The cane, through the habit of touching things, becomes an extension of the body, a sensitive zone. The movement of the body builds a familiarity around itself so that a habit is constructed. In the very habit, it is not necessary to have a representative knowledge in the sense that we can move, but the body itself has a kind of understanding that make possible a familiarity with the space.

The body, in fact, is not just there as an object, but it is our anchorage in a world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 146). When someone learns to play an instrument, the executions of the acts are moved by an intention, but this intention does not posit the keys, the strings, the leathers as objective locations. Instead, it incorporates the space of the keys, the strings, the leathers into his bodily space. In this sense, the body becomes our general means of having a world and makes possible a spatial relation for us.

In terms of position, we cannot say that we are in front of our body or behind our body, building a separation between our body and our consciousness, but we should say that we are our body (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 151); we are in our body. We are the ones who hold these arms and these legs and move them expressively in a certain style.

The body performs a kind of synthesis that is not constructed by a categorical idea, but through the familiar, through the habit. When we touch an object, all the movements that compose the act, like the muscles, the nerves, the inclination of my body through it, together perform a single gesture. When the cane becomes a familiar instrument, the world of tactile objects expands, and the cane becomes similar to my gaze; it no longer begins at the skin of the hand or at the gaze of my eyes, but at the tip of the cane. The cane is now an appendage of the body, an instrument with which is perceived to be an extension of the bodily synthesis.

In our relation to the world, as a living presence, we develop a certain bodily style like a vision style (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 155), a touching style, a hearing style, and so on. That means that the body is not an object for

an *I think*, but a lived body, a totality of lived meanings that moves toward its equilibrium. Waldenfels, as a reader of Merleau-Ponty, writes: "I am the entire ear, I live in the voice, in the gaze, in my hand, and in the sexuality (Waldenfels, 2000, 378)". For this author, I develop a *politic of senses* (Waldenfels, 2000, 379-388), having, thus, a style of looking, one for hearing, one for moving, and so forth. The execution of a synthesis or an equilibrium elaborated by the body itself, demonstrates that there is not a thematized organization of our body in its very relationship with the world, but our style that is characterized by the history of our being that exist only as historically situated (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 177).

Clearly, we can perceive that Merleau-Ponty defends a certain *original presence* in the body itself which is essentially relational, one that builds a style through its relational history. Also, Merleau-Ponty will even say that there is an unknown law (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 189) whereby a sudden intertwining precipitates the existence of a new cultural being.

In Merleau-Ponty, Taylor Carman senses that the body must be always conceived as a background, making possible transcendence itself, by breaking the dichotomy between the transparency of consciousness and the opacity of objective reality (Carman, 1999, 206). Thought and sensation as such occur against a background of perceptual activity that is understood in body terms by engaging in it. In terms of the *original presence*, the body is not just something inserted or seen as a certain orientation through things, or event situated here or there; instead, it carries with it a certain *complicity* with the meaning, not a *self-complicity* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 168), but a shared *complicity* in the process of constitution, as a permanent background, blurring the distinction between subject and object.

3. THE WORLD

The world has its own *original presence*, in other words, before human existence the world already existed. Indeed, the natural world is given as existing in itself, and, in order to exist, it does not need our perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 158). Nevertheless, it is crucial to reestablish our natural contact with the world so that we can discover ourselves (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 212), for we live in the world through our bodies. Despite the body has its *original presence* like the world itself, in terms of meaning both reveal certain *complicity*. The *original presence* of each one (body and the world) implies that they are intertwined with one another. In the very core of their experience they belong to each other.

The world experienced is not a system of relations that fully determines each event, but it represents an open totality whereby a synthesis can never be completed (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 228). The unity between the body and the world is not a real unity like a general system where

everything is connected, similar to a mathematical system; further it is constituted through experience, in other words, the unity is constitutive. The possibility of the constitution of meaning cannot be one-sided, but must be shared.

The idea of a unique space is without meaning when we see it in terms of our experiential relationship in the world. The spatiality of the world is lived through my corporeality. This shows that each sense organ interrogates the object in its own way (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 232), and becomes itself an agent of a certain type of synthesis. As we live in this world through our body, the body itself will obtain its own style. The perceiving person will have an historical thickness, a way of looking, of touching, smelling, to wit, he takes up a *perceptual tradition* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 248) that will be confronted with a present.

The body ties a present, past, and future together by its own way of being in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 249). It projects a double horizon of the past and future around the present, acquiring an historical orientation. It is not a grasp of a unique time, as the body secretes time; time has significance in our relation with the world. History will always presuppose a pre-history (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 250) that will maintain history itself. There will be no present if perception does not preserve a past in its present depth. The dynamics of subjectivity, which search for objectification, discover through time that an absolute possession of ourselves by ourselves finds in the present certain dynamism. This dynamism shows that the future is always filled by a new present so that time escapes to the precise extent in which is grasped. The dialectic of constituted time and constituting time transforms the possibility between the created and the creating. Therefore, the problem of subjectivity will be properly understood by reflecting upon time and by showing how *the time we know* only exists for subjectivity, because without subjectivity, the past in itself is no longer and the future in itself is not yet. Merleau-Ponty draws the conclusion that the *time we know* would not exist without subjectivity.

The radical reflection needs to posit this dynamism of time, this ambiguity that is present to us as unreflective by its latent contiguity. Thus, a reflection that attempts to understand itself needs to go back to experience, revealing a *perceptual field* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 251) against the background of the world. Hence, reflection only fully grasps itself if it refers to the unreflective fund it presupposes (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 252), the recognition of a pre-reflective that accompanies all my reflection. The reflections' grasp must recognize its ungraspable nature.

The *temporal wave* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 277) brings with it the space and time together in order that perception be properly understood as coexistence and as succession. The wave that touches the tip of my thumb on the beach carries with it a background of the world that unreflectively

supports that very moment. The world touches our body, and our body lives that touch. The field of presence given by the perception, itself, throws us in the situation, in the dimension of coexistence and successive-ness. If there is a synthesis, it would be a transition synthesis, which accomplishes, or allows the passage of the temporal wave.

Time and space provide possibilities that bind one another into an intimate and inseparable dimension. The space, more than its simply geometric coverage, is characterized by coexistence, namely, lived relations that intertwine themselves, that communicate with each other, forming a cohesive and unique whole. Thus, understanding time without space, would be like reading a history book without being able to turn over the page or even to be able to read the first word; understanding the space without time would be like reading a history book with blank pages.

There is a relation between the object and us that we call movement. Such movement happens through *displacements* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 279) in space and time. When we say that an object is enormous or tiny, or that it is far or near, we say so based on my body position. The size, the distance, and the position of things are characterized through the orientation of my body through the objects. Notwithstanding, the objects, despite their abstraction received, have their own *original presence*. Movement is nothing without a moving object that traces it out and establishes its unity. As Merleau-Ponty says: "We pass from a thinking of movement that destroys it to an experience of movement that attempts to ground it, but also from this experience to a thinking without which, strictly speaking, that experience would signify nothing (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 285)". In order to understand the phenomenon of movement we cannot just see a world made up of things, we need to recognize the movement as a transition, a *passing by* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 288). This transition of time cannot be thematized, yet the thinking experience gives us the expression of the thought itself, which brings signification. Despite the fact the thinking on movement destroys the movement itself, the thought expresses itself, and the expression of our thinking is made by significations.

For Merleau-Ponty, the dynamism of thinking and perceiving passes through our body. The difference is that thinking destroys movement, and perceiving preserves the transition of time. The body scheme is capable of making the synthesis of space and time due to its relational nature. If there is a kind of adaptation of the body, that would be not a pure passive adaptation, but a possessive one. My body invades the things with its eyes, hands, and legs. In others words, my body invades the things with its expression. The *knowing body* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 295) has a passive and an active relation with the world. The world itself has its own mode of given, which brings with it its own expression. The *original presence* of the world is made by innumerable backgrounds, carrying a temporal wave,

showing its pure essence into existence itself. To understand our anchorage in this world, our living presence in this world, is also to understand the necessity of a phenomenology that places the essence back to existence.

In reflecting we need to seek the originality (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 302). Reflection cannot enclose itself in objective thought, but needs to restore its context through reflection. The consciousness of the world is not established upon self-consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 311). The world carries with it its *original presence* that is a flux which we cannot grasp, turning us unaware of ourselves, because our consciousness is in relation with the contemporary world. Like Merleau-Ponty, Alfred Schutz also conceives consciousness as an ungraspable flux. For Schutz, the inner stream of duration is not made of layers that appear as something static, instead, it constitutes a *continuous flux* (Schutz 1967, 45), a constant transition from a *now-thus* to a new *now-thus*. As a result, the stream of consciousness cannot be grasped by reflection because it belongs to the spatio-temporal world of everyday life. Therefore, in this broken stream-of-consciousness, since we do not have a complete consciousness of the world, how can we have a complete grasp on ourselves?

For Merleau-Ponty, reality is neither a decisive construction of our consciousness, nor a privileged appearance, but instead, a *framework of relations* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 313) whereby appearances just happen against a background. It is necessary to recognize that we live as relational beings in this world, and that the meaning is shared, not posited. The perception of the world will always have a background as our *field of presence* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 317). It neither operates as an isolated machine, nor is posited by an isolated consciousness. In this sense, the world is an open and indefinite unity in which we are situated.

The body is our general power of inhabiting all of the world's milieus. It is the access to all transpositions, and it keeps the world constant whereby the special-temporal relation is lived through our body as an *essential coexistence* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 325). For this reason, we can only understand consciousness and the world in terms of coexistence, in other words, as relational, and consequently, as a phenomenon neither posited nor determined. The phenomenology of perception, revealing the *life-world* as a phenomenon, prevents all attempts at transforming the world into a static block, or an automaton.

When we compare the work of our hands with the work of our finger, we can also perceive the distinction and identification against a background of an overall power of a limb that does not need to be consciousness by our thinking, but instead, elaborates its unity through the *I can* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 328). Not only can we use our fingers and our entire body as a single organ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 330), but the unity of the body

that can also capture the tactile perceptions obtained by one organ which is immediately translated into the language of other organs.

The perception through our senses are all connected with each other through *symbiosis* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 331), in other words, there is a certain manner the world has to invading us, and a certain manner that we have of receiving it. This symbiosis is lived through the unity of our body that makes the constancy of things in the world to have a meaning for us; it makes the complexities of our bodies work together with the complexities of the world.

We perceive these things not only because we have eyes, or hands, but together with our senses we also maintain a field of experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 332). Neither do have a limb that works alone, nor a single thing in the world that is responsible for the entire spectacle in the process of the constitution of meaning. The background of my body works in connection with the background of the world through a symbiosis that constitutes our field of experience.

As Merleau-Ponty points out, the body performs a kind of dialogue (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 334) with the world. At the same time that it takes possession of the world, it is possessed by the world. Objective thought cuts the ties that unite the thing with the embodied subject, bringing the tendency to a separation and congealing of the constancy of the world for the purposes of a static analysis of it.

For Merleau-Ponty a thing is not necessarily an object. It has a unit of value (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 335) perceived and elaborated by our field of experience. Merleau-Ponty brings the example of a bouquet of flowers, wherein we can perceive the intention of love. Such love is in the bouquet in which carries its message. The perception ties us to a world of signification that always has our body as a background.

The thing and the body are related to one another by way of constitution. We only grasp the unity of our body in the unity of the thing (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 336). The entire reality is made by the unity of the thing, in its power of plenitude and through the indistinguishable character from its appearance (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 337). That means, despite the *evidentness* of the thing, we cannot grasp each layer of the thing itself by our subjectivity. The plenitude of the thing will be destroyed by any attempt to define it. However, the plenitude will be a constant if we can understand its insurmountability.

Our point of view is based on the world as its background, and will find its synthesis as always having the body as the background. The natural world is the horizon of all horizons, and the style of all style (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 345). It is from the world that we have the certainty of our personal and historical life. The world understood as open fosters the idea

of a consciousness also open and dynamic. Thus, the ambiguity of the world reveals the ambiguity of consciousness.

The time that is constant in the spatiality of the world brings us the certainty of our existence and leaves in the world a sense of insurmountability that is revealed to our consciousness that also sees itself as a continuum. The contradiction between the reality of the world and its incompleteness is also found in the ubiquity (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 346) of consciousness and its engagement in a field of presence. Merleau-Ponty says that we only know ourselves in our inherence in the world and time; that means that we only know ourselves in *ambiguity* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 360).

4. THE OTHERS

Time passes and we can do nothing about it, because it operates by itself so that all our use of time cannot conceal it. The same happens with space; we cannot not live in the world we are in. Space and time penetrate the center of our own universe and intertwine with it. As the senses have their proper style, our behaviors embrace a cultural style due to our interactions with nature and the others. Nature and its surrounding objects, symbols, and even institutions bear a mark of culture. For example, if a native from the Amazon forest in Brazil enters the northeastern backlands in Brazil, he is not just penetrating a new territory; he is going to perceive a new world surrounded by a different culture that will deeply influence his own. As time passes, it is possible to perceive a transformation in his body-style in dealing with nature. The ground he walks on now has different obstacles, fostering a new cultural style of walking. In a gradual sense, the landscape brings new aesthetical feelings, the body adapts to new foods, and even the language changes to a different dialect. However, despite all these changes, the Amazon will forever be carved in his flesh.

The intertwining process in the world, wherein we encounter others, carries with it the expression of a culture. These cultural acts become anonymously sedimented in my body; they penetrate us as we interact within the very world we live. Despite its anonymity, culture represents that contact with civilization. It deeply influences our very human nature, becoming an experience through the tools that the civilization adopts. Thus, in the experience of culture, we also have the experience of the near presence of others under a *veil of anonymity* (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 363). The cultural object and the behavior report to a civilization, a style that brings a history of others that anonymously live culturally, using objects and acting in certain ways.

Merleau-Ponty asks: "How can the word 'I' be made plural? [...] How can I speak of another 'I' than my own (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 364)?" The

other's body is the first cultural object, the one whereby all others exit, the bearer of behavior in which it is a report of civilization. The existence of others prevents and affronts objective thought; we no more see ourselves as the unique consciousness, because we need to deal with others differently than we deal with the object. The other is not an instrument or even a cultural instrument, but the bearer of history, the bearer of a lived-body, and the bearer of another *I* other than our own. Through the other we perceive and learn to rediscover the world and ourselves as in the world among others. The paradox of the outside consciousness gives us the possibility of revealing the nature of our own consciousness as intertwining. The other body that thinks and feels breaks down a pretentious solipsist world to reveal, instead, a world that is shared, where we live among other, a world of possibilities.

The possibility of others emerges when we no longer conceive of consciousness as a constitutive consciousness and as a pure being-for-itself (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 367), but rather when we restore its perceptive nature, as subject of behavior, as a being in the world or existence. Under these conditions, the antinomies of objective thought disappear. As we are not transparent for ourselves (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 368), so that a sort of consciousness would find itself isolated without a body; but because we have a body, we are relational, we have a potential power of exploration that puts us in the situation. The re-establishment of an incarnate consciousness reveals its relational perceptive nature wherein we find ourselves in the world among others. This being in the world among others brings the possibility of a culture that is shared and lived as relational.

An objective thought encounters its tension point at the core of our relational nature as human beings. As we claim to be more than an object before the other, the other, in turn, do the same in relation to us. Waldenfels would say that there is a claim that breaks my own pretensions (Waldenfels, 200, 392), by which we find ourselves no more alone in this world. We can say that the very nature of solidarity, the attempts to bring peace for the world, and everything that prevents the egoism, and self-aggrandizement also represent our very nature as relational beings. For Merleau-Ponty, the anonymity of others and ourselves is not understood in terms of exclusions, but in terms of inclusiveness as relational beings in the world, having an *original presence* due to our *complicity* with culture. The *complicity* of meaning that is lived through our relational nature knock down the *complicity* of our objective thought.

Different from Max Scheler, Merleau-Ponty does not see a person as *psycho-physical indifferent* (Scheler, 1973, 389), but psycho-physical intertwined in the world among others. The cultural values under our consideration were built through our relational nature as human beings. The body of others is already no longer a simple fragment of the world, but

brings its own elaboration, a certain view, and a certain handling of things in the world. The primordial perception unveils an *original presence* that is revealed in the modes of given of the world, the body, the others, and the *I*. They are not separate items but intertwined and, at the same time, with an original presence preventing any attempts of objective thought.

Despite having pre-intersubjectivity, a pre-cultural world whereby the other and the *I* are intertwined, we will never grasp the other in his totality. The other will be the other to us, and we will be the other to them. The behavior and even the other's words are not the other himself, his feeling assumes a different sense to us than to himself. For him, these are lived situations; for us, they are presented (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 372). Under these circumstances, the other conveys his own originality that cannot be stripped out by the *Ego*. This *original presence* of the other together with my original contributions enriches the relationship between us. The *common situation* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 373) that we share together unveils its originality with a background of tradition. Accordingly, we do not imprint or inform reality, we live in the situation, i.e., we transform and are transformed by the *life-world*.

As Merleau-Ponty says, we need to have a constitutive consciousness, because the moment that we are about to communicate, to find a common world we also find the impossibility of knowing the difference between the *Ego* and the *alter Ego*. The constitutive consciousness brings the contribution of the *Ego* to the *alter Ego*. The difference between objective thought, which does not leave room for others, for a plurality of consciousness, and the constitutive consciousness, which carries the possibility of others, is that objective thought is closed, and the constitutive consciousness is opened. The moment that constitutive consciousness is thought as the reality, it is immediately realized as objective thought.

Merleau-Ponty asks this question: How can we become the universal subject, if another person immediately deprives us of this universality? The answer is due to the fact that we are given to ourselves (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 377) in situation; engage in a physical and social world, which means that situation is never concealed from us. Every experience will forever appear to us intertwined in-between particularity and generality. Thus, although our being brings its *original presence*, this very originality is made only through the world and through others.

Accordingly to Merleau-Ponty, we must rediscover the social world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 379) after the natural world. The social world is a permanent dimension of existence, for we are situated in relation to it; it exists silently and as a solicitation. This anonymity means that the social world is not the scientific world or the objective world, but a lived world that is social and is always thought of as a background in silence and in solicitation. Anonymity and background are essential qualities of the

original presence, the anonymity by its freedom in expression without objectification, and the background by its readiness, presenting the situation as horizon.

The *original presence* (*Urpräsenz*) (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 381) comes as a solicitation and throws us forth (*Ursprung*) (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 382) in transcendence. As there is no transcendence outside the *life-world*, the transcendental subjectivity is essentially a transcendental intersubjectivity (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 378) due to its relationship with the other and the world. Under these circumstances, every other person exists for us as an irrecusably style or milieu of coexistence, as a readiness and as a solicitation.

5. THE I

To introduce the *I*, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the necessity of returning to the *Ego* in order to find a more fundamental *Logos* than that of objective thought, providing for it its relative justification as well its right place. Unlike Descartes, Merleau-Ponty's notion of existence is not made by the certainty of pure thought, but through our being in the world. Our being tends toward rather than encompasses (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 387) the world due to an essential intertwining in the *life-world* that brings us certain familiarity with our surroundings. The transcendence in things (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 388) does not mean that we possess or encompass them, but that our consciousness flees from itself and is unaware of itself in them. There is an original certainty previous to the reaches of objective thought. The fact that we bear day-to-day existence, touching, seeing, and smelling things, does not presuppose an objective thought, but a lived body that is also an original *Ego*, that conveys certainty to our being in the world. Therefore, we can say that Merleau-Ponty, instead of beginning with doubt (Descartes), begins with the certainty of my being in the world. The result of this inverse path traced by Merleau-Ponty prevents the presupposition of a universal *Ego*, universal truths, and a blind objectivity, posing an open situation. This inverse path does not mean that we will end up with an inevitable doubt, but with a transcendental certainty.

According to Merleau-Ponty, we cannot be certain about the reality just by thinking it, but because we are in situation. Under these circumstances, the certainty of my thought is derived from their actual existence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 402), whereby we meet up with ourselves in act. Thus, love, hate, and desire receive their certainty from the very experience of these feelings, i.e., from the act of them and not just by thinking them. Moreover, our doubt will have its certainty when we are engaged in the experience of doubt, which makes it exist as such.

As a characterization, the phenomenological method from Merleau-Ponty, to place back essence into existence, also the *I think* of Descartes

needs to receive its certainty from existence so that the consciousness can be reintegrated into existence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 403) as its right place. The transcendental phenomenology will have the task to place the consciousness in its *original presence* by its mode of givenness. Therefore, an intertwining and latent process will be revealed whereby we recognize an original Ego, a new Cogito that is unconceivable without its surroundings, background, and anonymity. Accordingly, the contact with ourselves should be accomplished in ambiguity (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 401) so that if we are situated, then we are surrounded and cannot be transparent to ourselves; our contact with the *life-world* break down the pretension of this transparency.

The evidence of the Cogito can be found by a *tacit Cogito* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 424, 426). The *tacit Cogito* is a Cogito only when it expresses itself; it appears prior to any philosophy or understanding, i.e., it has its own *self-awareness* in dealing with existence, and we can say it is existence itself in its expression. The consciousness must be rooted in existence in order to reveal its essence; it is encouraged through our inevitable experience in dealing with our surroundings where we are involved with things and others. The consciousness has a certain tactility deal to a body that reveals an intertwining relation that makes us participate as *complice* with the *life-world*, as part of its history, as *complice* of meaning.

6. CONCLUSION

The *original presence*, as a thread to understanding the intertwining relationship in the *life-world*, reveals the specific task of the transcendental phenomenology, that is, to evidence an essential ambiguity necessary to comprehend the very situation lived culturally and surrounded by the other and the world. It also reveals an encounter of originalities that places the *I* as a part of the history being active and passive in the process of transformation.

The *complicity of meaning*, as a term used by us to elucidate such ambiguity, displaces a pretentious objective thought that elaborates a world without ambiguity, and thus take possession of the meaning in order to thematize it. Therefore, the *complicity* of meaning comes to reveal a sharing of meaning in the process of its constitution. The subject is a part of the meaning and not its creator.

This work brings the possibility for us to amplify ethical elaborations that envisage the subject to the detriment of the planet or even prioritize the technical subject to the detriment of a creative subject. The *complicity of meaning* is placed in the context of sharing and sees the other and the world participating in the process of constitution of meaning.

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