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Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature and Intercorporeality. An Embodied Model for Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics

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April 2018

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted for another degree, at University College Cork, or elsewhere.

Signed: _____

Carlo Guareschi

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Abstract

This thesis considers Merleau-Ponty's concepts of nature and intercorporeality in order to develop an embodied model for the contemporary environmental aesthetics. The first chapter provides an outline of the contemporary debate within environmental aesthetics. The second chapter clarifies the husserlian background in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. The third chapter analyzes the concept of bodily experience and nature within Merleau-Ponty's works and underlines their relevance for the contemporary debate. The fourth and last chapter is elaborates an embodied account, phenomenologically oriented, of our experience of nature.

Introduction

This thesis investigates the concept of nature in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and employs this notion to develop an embodied model for environmental aesthetics. My claim is that nature is relevant to aesthetics for two reasons: first, the concept of nature was neglected in the development of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline. Only recently has this situation changed thanks to the increasing attention toward environmental problems and the emerging of a new sub field of aesthetics called "environmental aesthetics"[1]. Second, the concept of nature plays a key role in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. I claim that Merleau-Ponty's conception of nature is fruitful for the development of a phenomenologically oriented environmental aesthetics that focuses on nature and bodily experience. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology reveals that nature, and its connection with bodily experience, are central issues for aesthetics.

This thesis is articulated in four chapters: (1) *Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics*: *Perspectives and Problems*; (2) *Husserlian Key Concepts in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology*; (3) *Bodily Experience and Nature in Merleau-Ponty's*

[1] Regarding the debate within Environmental Aesthetics see for instance: Bannon 2011; Berleant1992, 1997, 2010, 2012, 2014; Brady 2003; Brown and Toadvine 2003; Budd 1996, 2002; Carlson 1979, 1984, 2000, 2007; Carlson and Lintott 2007; Leopold 1970.

Phenomenology; (4) *A phenomenological debate toward Nature.* The main assumption of this thesis is that it is impossible to understand nature without considering what it means to experience nature: for this reason I focus on bodily experience and intercorporeality intended as a carnal and bodily interconnection of bodies.

In the first chapter, I focus on the two main models of appreciation and experience of nature – the cognitive model elaborated by Carlson and the model of engagement elaborated by Berleant. I compare Carlson's and Berleant's models and claim that both models lack a phenomenological understanding of nature. Paragraph *1.1* focuses on Carlson's environmental model. According to Carlson, in order to experience and appreciate nature we need scientific knowledge and common sense. Against this background, Carlson assumes that given the correct aesthetical categories provided by natural sciences, we can experience everything aesthetically and this is because natural sciences inform our aesthetic appreciation of objects in general. Consequently, for Carlson nature is always good because we can correctly appreciate it under the appropriate scientific categories. What emerges is the idea that only a science-informed appreciation permits a correct – and consequently good – appreciation of nature. Regarding this, it is important to stress that Carlson does not provide a definition of such "goodness" of nature but rather seems to use "good" and "correct" as interchangeable terms. In this chapter, I explain why scientific knowledge may support our appreciation of nature, but this knowledge is neither necessary nor sufficient for such an experience. Furthermore, I underline that Carlson neither provides an adequate definition of common sense nor clarifies why, according to his model, such common sense is required in experiencing or appreciating nature. More precisely, I point out that Carlson's model is confronted with three main problems: 1) this model does not explain the relationship between scientific knowledge and common sense; 2) the assumption of the aesthetic goodness of nature seems to be more a moral category rather than an aesthetic one; 3) if one assumes that scientific knowledge is the only thing we need in order to have experience of nature, then it is hard to understand how it is possible to conceive of environmental aesthetics as a discipline autonomous from natural sciences. I want to stress that there are different concepts of nature, one of which is tied to the idea of natural science but this is not the relevant one for my thesis. Contra Carlson, I

suggest that environmental aesthetics might be developed in autonomy from natural sciences if its main focus is put on our experiences of nature in connection with bodily experience rather than with scientific categories. In order to provide an exhaustive presentation of the environmental model, I consider also three possible integrations of the same model that have been suggested in recent literature:

(a) Saito's claim that we should integrate the environmental model with an analysis of myths and folk tales that describe the human encounter with nature.

(b) Matthews' proposition of an empirical integration of the cognitive model. For Matthews it is necessary to integrate Carlson's model with the consideration of perception because perception informs how to appreciate objects. An empirical knowledge based on perception may identify the correct properties for a correct aesthetic appreciation of nature.

(c) In addition to these possible integrations of the environmental model I also discuss Brady's imagination based model. I find Brady's position especially stimulating because she provides an interesting critique of Carlson's model that is in line with my own perspective. Brady underlines the importance of perception and imagination, and claims that scientific knowledge is not sufficient for natural appreciation. This is because, in Brady's view, natural appreciation also requires that we perceptually explore things and use our imagination. In order to explain this point, Brady points out four forms of imagination, which will be fully explained in the first chapter: a) exploratory imagination; b) projective imagination; c) ampliative imagination; d) imagination related to truth.

In chapter *1.2*, I present Berleant's engagement model based on bodily experience. Berleant's model presents two interesting characteristics: it assumes bodily and perceptual experience to be central for the understanding of our environmental experience by considering (and criticizing) Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Berleant claims that it is impossible to appreciate and experience nature without taking into consideration bodily experience because we cannot but bodily relate to our embodiment. Given this, Berleant recognizes the centrality of *aesthesis*, which is the perceptual dimension of experience. Starting from the centrality of *aesthesis,* Berleant focuses on the perceptual dimension of bodily experience and evaluates the concept of the flesh,

elaborated by Merleau-Ponty in his later works. Despite the fact that Berleant recognizes the meaning of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and correctly pinpoints the link between living body and environment, he criticizes Merleau-Ponty's framework and claims that the French philosopher remains tied to a dualistic perspective. On the contrary, I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's perspective is not adequately appreciated by Berleant: As this will be extensively discussed in chapter three, the concept of flesh is what allows Merleau-Ponty to formulate the intimate relationship between humans, humans and animals, creatures and things, and creatures and nature in terms of intercorporeality. As Casey suggests, this intimate link appears first and foremost in our connection with landscapes, which illustrates the role of bodily experience in the dialectic between place and space. This because according to my consideration of the embodied experience of nature, landscape appears as the first place where the human-nature encounter happens.

Starting from Casey's suggestion, I consider landscape as a case study that is fruitful for the understanding of the fundamental relationship between beings and nature and, in paragraph *1.4*, I investigate Merleau-Ponty's concept of landscape. There, I clarify that, even though there is no proper philosophy of landscape within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the philosopher employs the concept of landscape in order to describe a first and immediate encounter with what he specifies as nature. In Merleau-Ponty, the experience of landscapes relates to the experience of nature and world: landscapes are conceived of as spatial and concrete places where we experience nature. According to his view, experience of landscape requires three main features: perceptual activity, spatiality, and body.

The analysis of landscape as case study is further pursued in paragraph *1.5*, where I consider the perspective elaborated by the phenomenologist Casey. Casey starts from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and emphasizes the potential that a phenomenology of the body has for the understanding of landscape. Casey identifies two key features of landscape: layout and surface. Layout is the concrete displaying of the possible activity of our perceptual structure. The surface is what connects a specific landscape with other landscapes. This connectivity of surfaces requires bodily activity and its motility. Embodiment is an essential feature of human beings – and living

organisms more generally – that allows moving and exploring. In these activities, the body connects us with a specific landscape, which is itself connected with other landscapes. The body is what generates the dynamic between place and space, between a concrete and individual *locus* (a specific carnal presence of a body within a certain landscape) and space (intended as a mathematical and quantifiable spatiality, and as a fixed and objective system of coordinates).

Casey's borrowing from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology indicates Merleau-Ponty's importance for a contemporary debate within environmental aesthetics. However, an adequate understanding of Merleau-Ponty's insights about nature and aesthetical experience requires an investigation into his main phenomenological presuppositions, which are the topic of chapter *2* and *3*.

Chapter *2* is an investigation into the Husserlian background of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Here, I discuss Husserl's phenomenology to understand its contributions to Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of a phenomenology of body and nature. In paragraph *2.1*, I focus on Husserl's differentiation between eidetic reduction (a reduction that abstracts from the existence of individual entities to identify the essential structure of those entities) and transcendental reduction (which is meant to disclose the sphere of pure consciousness). Starting from these two reductions, Husserl develops the idea of a consciousness that constitutes itself through an intersubjective dimension. As we will see, the Husserlian idea of transcendental intersubjectivity – the idea that the ego constitutes itself in relationship with others and that through others we constitute a shared world – is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty. The Husserlian analysis of intersubjectivity also discovers the *Lebenswelt* (life-world): a pre-logical and intersubjective dimension that functions as a substratum of different human practices.

In paragraph *2.2*, the attention will go to the Merleau-Pontian interpretation (and reformulation) of Husserl's idea of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty starts to develop his idea of phenomenology in dialogue with Husserl's works and, in particular, from Husserl's idea that perception provides immediate access to the world. For Merleau-Ponty, what the phenomenological reduction discovers is not a mere pure ego with a definite structure of consciousness, but rather a pure ego that is transcendentally connected with the transcendence of the world. The centrality of the shared world is

important, for Merleau-Ponty, in order to avoid a solipsistic conception of the pure ego. What is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty is the intersubjective dimension of experience intended as carnal intersubjectivity proper of our being primarily bodies. Although ego and other egos are co-present in the perceptual dimension, one ought not to understand the relationship between egos as merely based on their mutual conscious activities, but rather on their bodily interaction. If Husserl develops his idea of transcendental intersubjectivity starting from the reduction of the pure ego cogito, Merleau-Ponty takes the bodily worldly condition as the starting point for understanding intersubjectivity.

The centrality of an embodied worldly condition steers Merleau-Ponty's interest for the *Lebenswelt*. In paragraph *2.3*, I underline that there is an unsolved ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty's usage of the terms world and *Lebenswelt*. Sometimes Merleau-Ponty is differentiating between them, sometimes he is using them as interchangeable. In Husserl, *Lebenswelt* is the layer of experience that precedes conscious practices, however – as Melle (1996) claims – this layer is intended as spiritual-cultural world. For Merleau-Ponty, the *Lebenswelt* is conceived more as the point of connection between nature and culture. In order to develop a possible investigation of this primordial level, Merleau-Ponty considers Cézanne's aesthetics. In his paintings, Cézanne investigates our primitive encounter with things and world, in doing this – for Merleau-Ponty – the painter is pointing out to the idea that there is something that exceeds subjectivity: nature.

In chapter *3*, I direct my attention to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of bodily experience and nature. In paragraph *3.1*, I focus on the perceptual connection between egos and world, which is enabled by what Merleau-Ponty – following Husserl – labels as "operative intentionality." This operative intentionality relates to the motricity that inheres in the body and establishes a pre-predicative unity with the world. We are perceptually linked to the world and other egos and this experience opens up a horizon of possible perceptions and experiences. In fact, according to both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, we are perceiving things through bodily inspection. The operative intentionality of the body generates what Merleau-Ponty calls "situational spatiality" (which is the spatiality of our own body that Merleau-Ponty analyses in the *Phenomenology of Perception*). The body generates a primordial form of spatiality and presents a pre-

reflective form of intersubjectivity in virtue of its duplicity. For instance, in the case of double sensations – my right hand is touching the left hand and in doing this it recognizes itself as touching touched hand – the body is given to itself as an object and as a perceiving being at the same time. According to Merleau-Ponty, there is an intertwining between sense organs, but also between bodies and bodies-things.

In paragraph *3.1* (a), the issue of expressivity is considered in relationship to the body. In virtue of its spatial dimension, the body shows the explorative function of the *Leib* (living body). I stress how for Merleau-Ponty the body is the primordial expressive space. Our body – in its activity, gestures and speech – creates meanings that are open to other subjects (Merleau-Ponty's example is a pianist who plays a sonata, which thus becomes perceivable and usable for everyone). Expression, according to Merleau-Ponty, is the movement that constantly connects subjects with the world; the body expresses the intimate connection between consciousness and nature, their mutual implication.

Paragraph *3.2* develops the analysis of nature, which is pivotal to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology since the fifties. In his writing on *Nature*, which are mainly based on lectures Merleau-Ponty gave at the College de France in the 1950s, he discusses Descartes, Kant, Schelling, Bergson, Whitehead, and Husserl as well as modern biology and natural sciences to answer that question. On his reading, all these sources (although to different extent) tend to neglect the pre-reflective meaning of nature, intended as a layer of experience that precedes our cognitive activities. Merleau-Ponty considers this layer without focusing on consciousness, but rather on the correlation between consciousness and nature. Nature in its autonomy is expressive, it generates things (rocks, lakes, and so on) and creatures, and these things are used by human beings in order to continue the expressive process (humans are using those things in order to make art, for example). In order to understand Merleau-Ponty's development of his own phenomenology of nature, it is necessary to consider his dialogue with Husserl. I develop this in the sub-paragraph (a). Here, I point out that Husserl's perspective on nature oscillates. On the one hand, nature is intended as spiritualized nature (nature is the correlate of the ego). On the other hand, nature is intended as something that exceeds subjectivity, something that is not a mere correlate of an ego. In the sub-paragraph (b), I stress that in Merleau-Ponty nature is the ground for any experience and

that the body is what puts us in primordial contact with it. This insight is further elaborated in the sub-paragraph (c), where I argue that for Merleau-Ponty the body expresses an intimate connection with nature and language mirrors this intimate kinship. In order to explain this point, Merleau-Ponty develops a comparison between the phenomenon of double sensations and language, focusing on the process of differentiation. In the phenomenon of double sensations (e.g. the touching-touched hand), each hand recognizes itself as a touching-touched thing, but in doing so each hand is not coinciding with the other hand. According to Merleau-Ponty, language mirrors the same process of differentiation because each sign is identified as different from other signs. Language – as a spoken language – has an historical and concrete dimension that links passivity and activity, past and future and in this it mirrors the passivity-activity presents in the case of touching hand language. This link of passivity and activity – that Merleau-Ponty sees in what he calls processes of sedimentation – requires the consideration of a grounding element, which Merleau-Ponty traces back to nature. In his course notes of the year 1959-61, Merleau-Ponty conceives of nature as a "non-philosophical" element that exceeds any conceptualization and that requires a new framework: according to Merleau-Ponty, this is art. Art is fundamental in order to understand the primordial dimension of nature.

In paragraph *3.3*, I focus on Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of intercorporeality and the flesh. In order to approach nature from a phenomenological perspective, it is necessary to consider the intertwining between ego-egos, cogito and world, body-bodies. I claim that intercorporeality is an original structure of experience behind any differentiation between subject and object. In introducing the idea of flesh, Merleau-Ponty advances the idea of interocorporeality as an experiential situation intended as articulation of entities that share a general carnality. Intercorporeality is the pre-reflective ground of the shared and intersubjective dimension. In the last part of the paragraph, I consider the concept of flesh, fundamental for the understanding of intercorporeality, in its three meanings: a) flesh as encroachment/crisscrossing; b) flesh as a prototype of being; c) flesh as generality and anonymity. These three meanings of flesh within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology are relevant in order to understand his idea of intercorporeality

based on the carnality of the body, which sets Merleau-Ponty's theory apart from the Husserlian idea of the correlation between body and ego.

After gaining a grip on Merleau-Ponty's understanding of nature in the chapters *2* and *3*, in chapter *4* I put this notion to use, by coming back to the debates in environmental aesthetics. In paragraph *4.1*, I consider three authors: Donohe, Bannon and Berleant. Donohe proposes a phenomenology of nature based on genetic phenomenology. Donohe invokes the concept of *Lebenswelt* and helps us understand the relationship between subject and object by focusing on the interconnection between beings and nature. Bannon proposes that meanings and values come up from the relationship between nature and beings: every being is a nexus of relations and the value of nature is to be found within this relational character that joints subject with other subjects, creatures and nature. Starting from these phenomenological perspectives, I focus on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in order to claim that his perspective could be useful in order to elaborate a new approach for environmental aesthetics. A phenomenological account for environmental aesthetics centers around the dimension of *aesthesis*: the sensible and perceptual layer of experience. However, it is necessary to specify what this aesthetic experience is. In this respect, I consider Berleant's perspective because he advocates the idea of an experientially based aesthetics. According to Berleant, the environment is "nature lived" (Berleant 1992: 10), the environment is the medium that requires our action. This implies considering bodily experience and perception, issues that lead Berleant to conceive of environmental aesthetics as aesthetic ecology. This framework is interesting because it underlines the role of living body and perceptual activity, but it is plagued by two main problems:

(a) Berleant elaborates an aesthetic ecology that focuses on experience in general, but he does not analyze the concept of nature to a satisfactory extent.

(b) In investigating the perceptual dimension of aesthetic experience, Berleant adopts an anthropocentric framework.

On the contrary, I highlight that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology focuses on nature and elaborates a framework based on intercorporeity that avoids any anthropocentric limitation. In his perspective, we can find a direct interconnection between creatures and nature. I deal with problem (a) by focusing on four aspects: 1) nature as auto-production

of meaning and expression. Nature connects creatures but at the same time it exceeds them. 2) Nature as something that transcends creatures. 3) Nature as the base of experience. 4) We are part of nature and nature is part of us, and this means that there is not such a dualism (subject-nature) that Berleant endorses.

Regarding problem (b), I welcome Berleant's focus on the body, although the body remains "our own" body in this theory. By contrast, for Merleau-Ponty, the body (understood in terms of flesh) leads to the idea of intercorporeality, which is not restricted to the bodies of individuals. Accordingly, experience intended in terms of flesh (carnality) is a structure of reality in general. By relying on Oliver Kelly (2009), I clarify that the human-animal relationship should not be intended in hierarchical terms, but rather as a lateral kinship (a carnal inherence). I argue that integrating Berleant's model of engagement with the Merleau-Pontian idea of intercorporeity conduces to a real enlargement of aesthetic experience that includes also non-human beings.

In paragraph *4.2,* I go back to Berleant's model and I stress two critical problems in his interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in order to suggest an integration with the concepts of flesh and intercorporeity. I claim that this reading of Merleau-Ponty is not accurate and that a correct understanding of his phenomenology helps in formulating a proper environmental aesthetics based on bodily experience. Berleant fails to understand that Merleau-Ponty's kinship thesis (the touching-touched hand, the touching-touched body) implies also the idea of difference (in its being touching-touched hand, my left hand, for example, recognizes itself as different from my right hand). Furthermore, the body should not only be conceived in its perceptual functions – as Berleant does – but, following Merleau-Ponty, also in its connection with language. Merleau-Ponty conceives body in its being both symbolism and expression; Berleant misses the organic connection between body, language and nature. In addition, I point out that Berleant's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty is misleading. Berleant claims that Merleau-Ponty remains faithful to the dualistic tradition he tried to overcome, on the contrary I suggest that his phenomenology is a genuine effort to overcome such a dualism. Berleant conceives the notion of *écart* (the gap between two different entities) as an example of such a failure, on the contrary I claim that Merleau-Ponty was starting

from the idea of flesh in order to show the process of differentiation of different sentient beings.

In paragraph *4.3*, I claim that bodily experience is a necessary condition – even though not sufficient – for the possibility of experience. This is an experience that, with Merleau-Ponty, I understand as intercorporeal. This intercorporeity captures the relationship between bodies, but also the relationship between bodies and nature; this is because intercorporeity is environmentally based, as Taipale (2014) highlights when he stresses that we live in an intersensory environment. Assuming this, I conclude that a phenomenologically inspired environmental aesthetics should be based on these features of experience and, by doing so, can configure itself as autonomous discipline able to enter dialogue with natural sciences, but without depending on them.

Chapter 1 - Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics: Perspectives and Problems

From the point of view of the history of aesthetics, nature almost disappeared from the philosophical debate around the end of the eighteen century. This concept was predominant in authors such as Schelling (1988) and Kant (1987) (especially in his *Critique of Judgment*); but it was with Hegel that the aesthetical interest changed from nature to spiritual products. If, for Kant and Schelling, nature occupied a central role in their investigation, then for Hegel (1998) it was not as important to analyze nature, because nature is considered less valuable compared to the artistic product of the spirit. His strong critique of Kant's aesthetics and his conception of natural beauty was based on the view that the focus of aesthetics should be on art intended as a sensible expression of the spirit. Since Hegel and up until the emergence of phenomenology, aesthetics was mostly characterized in both the continental and analytical tradition as philosophy of art.

Without exhausting this complex issue in the history of aesthetics, it is sufficient to highlight that this characterization of aesthetics as philosophy of art occurred even though in the first definition provided by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten[2] (1750), aesthetics appeared to be a theory of the liberal arts and a theory of the sensible experience. Historically speaking, it is not surprising that with the characterization of aesthetics as a philosophy of art the analysis of the experience of nature disappeared. Although in the twentieth century both Simmel (2007) and Ritter (1962) wrote about nature and landscape, it is not possible to consider their works as an exhaustive philosophical investigation on these issues. However, the issue of the experience of nature returned cogently around the end of the last century. Aestheticians or, better yet, environmental aestheticians such as (among others) Aldo Leopold (1970), Allen Carlson (1979, 2008), Emily Brady (1998), Malcom Budd (1996, 2002) and Arnold Berleant (1997, 2012, 2014) published several works concerning the problem of nature

[2] Baumgarten (1970).

and, sometimes, landscape. This renewed aesthetical interest for nature and its appreciation was contingent on increasing attention for the preservation of wild areas and natural parks, and parallel to the growing process of urbanization and related problems. It was in that period that environmental ethics and environmental aesthetics became popular between the experts of aesthetics and architects. Nowadays, environmental aesthetics is still influential and it is in dialogue with different disciplines[3]; moreover, the epistemological question concerning the autonomy of environmental aesthetics as its own philosophical field is still open. Even though the predominant way of interpretation of environmental aesthetics comes from authors distant from phenomenology, it is necessary to stress that authors such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty could provide important tools to root the autonomy of environmental aesthetics in the perceptual experience of nature. In the line of this tradition, some philosophers such as Casey [4]and Toadvine[5] are using a phenomenological approach to deal with issues close to the concerns of Carlson and Berleant. The aim of this thesis is to show that starting from a twofold definition of aesthetics as both theory of art and theory of sensible knowledge makes possible the re-thinking of environmental aesthetics in its autonomy as a specific field of applied aesthetics. In order to do that, it will be useful to make explicit what role phenomenology can play in such a project. From a certain perspective, Considering Carlson's model, the phenomenological approach appears to be diametrically opposed: while Carlson argues for the requirement of scientific knowledge and common sense in order to appreciate nature, phenomenology highlights the pre-categorial experience of nature. Carlson considers nature in its goodness, while, on the opposite, for a phenomenological environmental aesthetics the evaluating activity is a second order of thetic activity that becomes clear only once the perceptive experience is analyzed. Furthermore, an environmental aesthetics that is phenomenologically oriented considers bodily experience as a

[3] Especially in the environmental philosophy of phenomenological orientation. In this field of research, namely eco-phenomenology, philosophers engage often a fruitful exchange with psychology (especially with the work of James Gibson), biology (Merleau-Ponty started this line of investigation), human science such as cultural geography, architecture and agronomy.

[4] Casey (1998)

[5] Toadvine (2003)

fundament of our being in nature and consequently requires the investigation of the ontogenetical level in which subject and nature are co-synthetizing together.

Specifically, the aim of this chapter is to explore the relationship between landscape and nature, and then to investigate the dominant models of appreciation of nature within contemporary environmental aesthetics. According to what Simmel and Ritter have showed, it is impossible to investigate landscape without reflecting on its interconnection with the natural environment; at the same time and in virtue of this relationship, it is difficult to understand clearly what a landscape is. Landscape as a relevant aesthetic object might represent an adequate case study to better analyze the relationship between concept and perception, nature and culture, in our lived experience of environment. The first step of the phenomenologically oriented considerations of this chapter will be to examine the predominant model in the field of contemporary aesthetics: the cognitive model, as this has been formulated by Allen Carlson and implemented by others such as Emily Brady. This analysis will identify the problem of the cognitive model, a model based on the relevance of scientific knowledge for the appreciation of nature, and then to provide an extended investigation of the alternative model, i.e., the aesthetics of engagement, based on the relevance of body for the appreciation of nature, and its own phenomenological limits. The analysis of the aesthetics of engagement facilitates a consideration of the position of eco-phenomenology and consequently of the central position of Merleau-Ponty's for a phenomenological environmental aesthetics. If the cognitive model elaborated by Carlson proposes to consider the role of scientific knowledge as central in our appreciation of nature, then, on the contrary, phenomenology allows us to appreciate the ontological basis of our bodily experience of nature. Starting from this background it is possible to elaborate an environmental aesthetics in which landscape is central to understanding the interrelation between nature and culture, facts and concepts.

1.1 The cognitive approach in Environmental Aesthetics

Despite the irrelevance of the concept of nature in the aesthetic debate of the last century, it is becoming an important term within contemporary environmental aesthetics. The re-consideration of nature in the aesthetic field is due to the work of the aesthetician Allen Carlson, who, in his famous article *Appreciation and the Natural Environment* (published in the 1979), started to investigate the possible differentiation between artistic and natural appreciation. After this influential article, many philosophers began to engage in the debate in continuity with Carlson's analysis. In this paragraph, the attention focuses on the cognitive model of positive aesthetics formulated by Carlson and other authors. Considering the cognitive approach and its limits is crucial because this highlights the need of a different interpretation of natural experience based on phenomenological methodology.

According to Carlson (1979) our appreciation of artworks depends on our knowledge of them. Works of art are products of human creation, and the appreciation of them is based on our knowledge of how and what to appreciate about these artefacts. On the contrary, natural objects are not products of human activity and require a distinct mode of appreciation. Carlson provides three different possible models of natural appreciation: the object model, the landscape model, and the natural environmental model. The object model is considered in comparison with art, this is because when we are appreciating natural objects we are focusing our attention on their physical aspects, as it happens in the appreciation of non-representational sculpture[6]. For Carlson in both, natural and artistic appreciation of non-representational sculpture, natural objects and non-representational sculptures are appreciated in their individuality – cut off from their surroundings – and this modality of appreciation is aligned with the traditional aesthetic approach. According to Carlson, the main limitation of this model is that the natural object is completely removed from the natural environment. The object model considers the natural object as an artwork, but without differentiating between artistic and natural appreciation. In the landscape model, nature and its objects are appreciated as a

[6] For example, abstract sculptures.

painting; in emphasizing only the visual aspects of our appreciation of nature this model appears to be inadequate.

After the investigations of the limits of both object model and landscape model, Carlson introduces his environmental model as follows:

> Our knowledge of the nature of the particular environments yields the appropriate boundaries of appreciation. […] We thus have a model which begins to give answers to the question of what and how to appreciate in respect to the natural environment and which seems to do so with due regard for the nature of that environment. And this is important not only for aesthetic but also for moral and ecological reasons (Carlson 1979: 274).

In order to specify the proper knowledge of the natural environment, Carlson introduces science and common sense. In his article *Nature and Positive Aesthetics*, Carlson stresses the relationship between perceiving natural objects, scientific categories and his conception of positive aesthetics. Concerning the first concept, Carlson stresses that scientific knowledge modifies our perception of nature because science provides us with the concepts by means of which one can appreciate the correct properties of the natural objects. This should make clear why this perspective is called "cognitive." The strong claim is that we can properly appreciate nature by relying on our scientific background. However, this model does not explain if people who do not have scientific knowledge and without a strong preparation in natural science – such as children or ordinary people – could experience and appreciate nature or not. Carlson is aware of this problem: in order to solve it, he appeals to the notion of common sense – a notion that, however, remains vague and unclear in his elaboration of a cognitive model. Specifically, it remains difficult to find in Carlson's approach a specification of what the precise balance is between scientific knowledge and common sense in our natural appreciation. Without specifying this point, Carlson continues his investigation providing a definition of positive aesthetics, which is the 'claim that the natural world is essentially good [7]. It follows that the natural world must appear as such when it is

[7] Carlson uses the term 'aesthetically good' often in his papers. In a paper entitled *Nature and positive aesthetics*, Carlson clarifies this term: 'Positive aesthetics claims that the natural world is essentially aesthetically good. It follows that the natural world must appear as such when it is appropriately aesthetically appreciated. If the view sketched above is to account for this, the natural world must appear aesthetically good when it is perceived in its correct categories, those given and informed by natural

appropriately aesthetically appreciated' (Carlson 2007: 227). The connection between scientific knowledge and positive aesthetics is clear: to appreciate nature as essentially aesthetically good implies an appreciation of it under the correct categories that are provided by science. In order to specify what it means to correctly appreciate nature, Carlson continues his investigation in parallel with the consideration of the appreciation of artworks. In the case of art, for Carlson, categories are not related to the goodness of artworks. Consequently, it is impossible to have a positive aesthetics in the field of art. On the contrary, 'unlike works of art, natural objects and landscapes are not created or produced by humans, but rather "discovered" by them. Only once they are discovered can description, categorization, and theorizing proceed' (Carlson 2007: 229) For Carlson, we create scientific categories only once we encounter natural objects and landscapes. This categorical activity allows humans to improve their intelligible understanding of nature. Natural objects are prior of scientific categories, but once we have encountered natural objects these categories allow us to appreciate natural goodness.

At this stage, one objection that immediately arises is whether it is necessary to consider nature as always good. What makes this problem even more pressing is the fact that Carlson highlights that science makes more intelligible certain natural properties such as order, regularity, harmony and so on and adds that 'these qualities that make the world seem comprehensible to us are also those that we find aesthetically good' (Carlson 2007: 229-20). In another article contained in the work *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism. From Beauty to Duty*, Carlson affirms that the environmental model provides an interesting element for an extension of the field of aesthetics. Carlson claims that this model allows us to appreciate almost everything, and implies that this appreciation 'must be centered on and driven by the object of appreciation itself'. (Carlson 2007: 129) According to Carlson, starting from this peculiarity of natural appreciation, we can indicate the possibility for a general aesthetics:

> An aesthetics that expands the traditional conception of the discipline, which narrowly identifies aesthetics with the philosophy of art. Instead of

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science' (Carlson 1984: 28). However, I claim that Carlson seems to use "good" and "correct" as interchangeable terms.

> simply an aesthetics of art, the results is a more universal aesthetics – an aesthetics frequently termed *environmental aesthetics*. Finally, by initiating a more universal and object-centered aesthetics, the Natural Environment Model helps align aesthetics with other areas of philosophy, such as ethics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind, which are increasingly rejecting archaic, inappropriate models in favor of a dependence on knowledge relevant to the particular phenomena in question (Carlson 2007: 129).

In Carlson's perspective, positive aesthetics represents an enlargement of the aesthetic field. Developing the natural environmental model allows us to conceive environmental aesthetics as a universal aesthetics in which appreciation receives its autonomy from the categories of the artistic appreciation and consequently aesthetics receives its own autonomy like other philosophical disciplines. However, it remains unclear how it is possible to conceive environmental aesthetics in its own positivity while its autonomy is still dependent to scientific knowledge. In addition, it is not clear why do we need this sophisticated connection between appreciation, scientific categories and positive aesthetics in order to align aesthetics with other fields of philosophy.

To sum up, the three problematic points that occur in Carlson's natural environmental model are: (i) the balance between common sense and scientific knowledge, (ii) the aesthetic goodness of nature, and (iii) environmental aesthetics as a general aesthetics that focuses on our forms of experience more generally. The first problem will be considered in what follows. The other two problems will be analyzed in the next sub-paragraph.

A. The first problem

(I) Saito's defense of the cognitive model

Carlson argues that in order to appreciate nature and landscapes both scientific knowledge and common sense are necessary. Firstly, it is interesting to notice that the emphasis here is directly on appreciation, and not on the experience of nature. One

could argue, in line with phenomenology, that experience of nature (in its pre-reflectivity) precedes the act of appreciation and evaluation. Secondly, Carlson does not provide a definition of what he means by "common sense". In this regard, it seems plausible that Carlson introduced this concept in order to enlarge the possibility of natural appreciation for people who do not have a scientific background. Nevertheless, is scientific knowledge truly necessary and sufficient to appreciate nature? At this point, it seems that the options are two: either people need both common sense and scientific knowledge, and the lack of one of these hampers the appropriate appreciation of nature, or common sense and scientific knowledge are alternatives and a subject needs only one of these to appreciate nature. If this is the case and if common sense is sufficient for the appreciation of nature, then it is not clear why Carlson introduces the criterion of scientific knowledge.

Common sense allows us to appreciate correctly nature, and scientific knowledge could be helpful in improving the understanding of natural environment, but not natural appreciation tout court. Within the debate regarding the cognitive model there are many attempts to defend or integrate it with a specification of common sense and empirical knowledge. For example, Saito proposes to integrate scientific knowledge with myths and folk-tales, and Matthew suggests to consider not only scientific knowledge but also empirical knowledge seen as a type of knowledge that drives normatively our perceptual appreciation of natural objects. It is important to highlight that within this debate on the cognitive model a form of appreciation not based on scientific knowledge appears. This view is developed by Emily Brady in connection with an analysis of the relationship between perception and imagination within our appreciation of nature. In what follows, the two defenses of the cognitive model and a first non-science based perspective will be analyzed. Afterward, a proper consideration of the main alternative model – the aesthetics of engagement elaborated by Berleant – will be provided.

A possible defense of Carlson's model comes from an article written by Yuriko Saito entitled *Appreciating Nature in Its Own Terms*. Saito suggests that the understanding of nature in its own terms 'must be based upon listening to a story nature tells of itself through all its perceptual features' (Saito 2007: 155). Firstly, from the quote it appears clearly that perceptual activity is an implicit assumption in this perspective. In addition,

in order to specify how we can appreciate nature in its own terms, Saito explains the use of scientific knowledge and introduces the function of myths and tales. Regarding scientific knowledge, Saito specifies that 'we are not proposing that "science will lead to an aesthetic appreciation", but rather that our aesthetic appreciation of nature must be informed and adjusted by relevant scientific fact' (Saito 2007: 156-57). Saito, following Carlson, emphasizes that science is not directly conducive to an aesthetic appreciation, but at the same time this aesthetic appreciation 'must be informed' by scientific knowledge. Yet, what seems to be genuinely new in Saito's perspective is the integration of common sense with narrative descriptions of nature: as she puts it, 'this experience of nature is most frequently and readily articulated in artistic, poetic expressions' (Saito 2007: 156-57). Saito states that poetic expressions are based on the observation of secondary qualities[8] and provide a description of natural objects and landscapes based on personal perceptual experience.

In describing the functions of these narrative descriptions, Saito differentiates them into universal narratives and bioregional narratives. The first kind of narratives are more general; while bioregional narratives (i.e. Native American narratives, myths), on the contrary, are strongly related to specific places. For Saito, on the one hand there are narratives that explain the whole origin of the earth, they provide a cosmological explanation. On the other hand, bioregional narratives provide an account of the peculiarity and origin of certain natural objects in specific regions. As Saito puts it:

> While universalizing, totalizing narratives may also stem from the same genuine wonder as to how nature came to be and why it is the way it is, the more specific the observation and attention become (as in bioregional narratives), the more sensitive we are to the diverse ways in which natural objects speak about their respective history and functions through their sensuous qualities (Saito 2007: 163).

[8] For Saito, these poetic expressions are different from sciences that conduce far away from the appreciation of perceptual features: 'for example, the molecular structure of a rock or the medicinal value of a spring seems too removed from our immediate perceptual arena to be realized on the sensuous surface' (Saito 2007: 161). On the contrary, 'the geological origin of a mountain, the anatomical structure of an animal, or the camouflage phenomenon of an insect is embodied or manifested in the observable features of the object, and we appreciate the way in which each object is telling about its origin, structure, or function' (Saito 2007: 161).

Saito provides an interesting account of how folktales could be helpful in describing our appreciation of nature in its connection with a specific history of appreciation. The possible inclusion of myths and folk-tales in the knowledge necessary for our appreciation of nature does not yet provide an account of why we need scientific knowledge and common sense in our appreciation of nature. Despite this unsolved problem of the natural environmental model, Saito provides interesting elements to consider nature in its own terms. In fact, the main aim in Saito's perspective is to explore whether it is possible to find tools in human nature that allow us to let nature express itself as itself.

(II) Patricia Matthews: an empirical integration of the cognitive model

As it has been showed before, according to Carlson, we need scientific knowledge and common sense to appreciate nature aesthetically: on this view, sciences are providing us with the categories necessary to individuate aesthetic salience in natural objects. It is possible to notice in Carlson's view that there is no interest in the idea of phenomenal experience. Other authors have tried to fill this gap: Patricia Matthews, in her article *Scientific Knowledge and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, tries to defend the cognitive approach and to enlarge the knowledge required for natural appreciation with empirical knowledge. The main point for Matthews is that 'empirical knowledge does not tell us what is aesthetically valuable about an object, but by allowing us to perceive normal states of objects, empirical knowledge helps to reveal aesthetic properties and aesthetic values' (Matthews 2007: 190).

Defending Carlson's view, Matthews notices that, if scientific knowledge indicates how to appreciate correctly nature, then empirical knowledge shows what the object is. Accordingly, the appropriate appreciation of natural objects should be based on the correct, empirical perception of them. For Matthews, 'the sort of knowledge we are interested in is knowledge that will give us perceptual norms, i.e., indicate which

features are standard, contrastandard and variable' (Matthews 2007: 193). Consequently, this knowledge allows appreciating and perceiving the correct properties for an aesthetic appreciation of nature and thus provides a limitation of the empirical knowledge relevant for this appreciation.

Focusing on the perceptual experience of the salient properties of natural appreciation, Matthews chooses to define this model as a "perceptual model." This because, as she puts it, 'perceiving under a concept takes time and experience' (Matthews 2007: 196). Matthews highlights the relationship between knowing, perceiving and experiencing. By contrast, Carlson focused his investigations only on the type of knowledge necessary for aesthetic appreciation. In the perceptual model, perceptual experience is central. Matthews, like Carlson, does her investigation in parallel to the consideration of the knowledge inhering in artistic appreciation, and finds two conceptions of this knowledge: a thin and a thick conception. According to the first one, in appreciating artworks, we focus merely on their surface, their perceiving features. On the contrary, a thick conception of knowledge implies our engagement with the possible symbolic meaning of artworks. At the same time, Matthews underlines how nature differs from art. If we are appreciating paintings, we aesthetically evaluate some properties, but we are not usually concerned with the material used for the artwork (i.e. the kind of wood that constitutes the support for the canvas). This is different in the case of appreciation of nature. As Matthews states, 'part of what we appreciate about nature is the way that objects change and develop, and particular states of nature that we are able to catch throughout this change. So nature has what we might call surface depth, and this means that, in this respect, the range of relevant knowledge for nature will be greater than for art' (Matthews 2007: 201).

Matthews is trying to enlarge Carlson's perspective. For Carlson, artistic categories are necessary for the appreciation of an artwork, and scientific knowledge is necessary in order to appreciate natural objects. Matthews highlights that it is impossible to define the type of knowledge necessary for the appreciation of nature in comparison with the type of knowledge necessary for artistic appreciation, and this is because we need a wider range of knowledge than art in order to appreciate nature. There are two reasons

for this claim: sometimes we need to notice the inner change of a natural object[9], natural objects have a role within a context and interact with the surrounding environment. According to Matthews, enlarging Carlson's model allows us to integrate scientific knowledge with empirical knowledge through the connection of experience. As she puts it, 'by expanding and refining the analogy that Carlson makes between categories of art and empirical knowledge, I hope to have shown that the use of categories in art provides a guide for the function of empirical knowledge in aesthetic appreciation of nature and the kind of knowledge that is required' (Matthews 2007: 202).

Although this emphasis on experience is very interesting, I contend that Matthews' perspective does not solve the problem found in Carlson's natural environment model, because it does not explain why it is necessary to have scientific knowledge to correctly appreciate nature. This being said, I believe that Matthews' enlargement and refining of Carlson's model provides stimuli for a reconsideration of the relationship between experience and appreciation of nature.

(*III) Brady's Imagination based model*

Carlson bases his model on the relevance of scientific knowledge and on the ambiguous concept of common sense for our appreciation of nature. Matthews tries to integrate this scientific knowledge with empirical knowledge and empirical observation. On the contrary, Emily Brady formulates an alternative non-science-based model of appreciation of nature in her article *Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*. Brady elaborates a model that does not consider scientific knowledge as necessary for our appreciation of nature. She underlines that the first problem with Carlson's model is 'understanding what counts as the scientific knowledge which is supposed to guide appreciation in the natural environmental model' (E. Brady 1998: 140). According to Brady, the use of scientific knowledge does not clarify what our

[9] 'In a natural object, such as a tree, the surface is aesthetically relevant, but we also take an aesthetic interest in the inside of a tree, whether on account of its rings, the grain of the wood, or whether it is hollow or solid' (Matthew 2007: 200).

aesthetic appreciation of nature is and consequently it is an insufficient factor. For Brady, in order to create a good model of appreciation, we need to meet two criteria. Firstly, 'we need a model of aesthetic appreciation of nature that carves out a distinctive place for aesthetic appreciation' (E. Brady 1998: 141). Secondly, this model should 'provide an understanding of aesthetic value as not merely personal or arbitrary' (E. Brady 1998: 141). This second point is central, because according to both Carlson and Brady, a non-arbitrary value of nature could guarantee the preservation of nature itself. In order to meet these criteria, Brady proposes a model based on an aesthetical response to nature in which imagination and perception play an essential role[10].

For Brady the perceptual attentiveness to the relevant perceptual properties is linked with the activity of imagination, an object presents specific perceptual properties and we have to explore them. At the same time, imagination enlarges our experience and enriches our perceptual activity. In order to describe this connection, Brady describes four types of imagination: exploratory, projective, ampliative, and revelatory imagination.

Explanatory imagination 'is the most closely tied to perception of the various modes we use. Here, imagination explores the forms of the object as we perceptually attend to it, and imagination's discoveries can, in turn, enrich and alter our perception of the object' (E. Brady 1998: 142). The second type of imagination, projective imagination, works in order to create new perspectives on a certain object 'by projecting images onto them' (E. Brady 1998: 142). In the third kind of imagination – ampliative imagination – Brady remarks on its active power. As Brady puts it, 'in contemplating the smoothness of a sea pebble, I visualize the relentless surging of the ocean as it has shaped the pebble into its worn form. I might also imagine how it looked before it became so smooth, this image contributing to my wonder and delight in the object' (E. Brady 1998: 143-4). The fourth type is related to the discovery of an aesthetics truth: 'when my alternative contemplation of the valley, glaciers and all, reveals the tremendous power of the earth to me, a kind of truth has emerged through a distinctively aesthetic experience' (E. Brady 1998: 144).

[10] Emily Brady uses the expression: 'perceptual exploration'.

After introducing these four types of imagination, Brady points out that it is difficult then to define when imagining remains tied to the object (a proper mode of imagining) and when this act rather leads far away from the structure of the object and mystifies it (in this case we have an improper mode of imagining). Brady proposes two solutions to this problem. Firstly, she proposes the conception of active detachment or disinterestedness. Secondly, she suggests to compare 'imagination to a virtue, so that we "imagine well" when we use imagination skillfully and appropriately according to the context of aesthetic appreciation (E. Brady 1998: 145). This active practice can be understood as 'spotting aesthetic potential, having a sense of what to look for, and knowing when to clip the wings of imagination. This last skill involves preventing the irrelevance of shallow, naive, and sentimental imaginative responses which might impoverish rather than enrich appreciation' (E. Brady 1998: 146).

Emily Brady claims that her model provides several advantages. First, this model is aesthetically based because what is central here is not specifically scientific knowledge but some elements, such as perception and imagination that are proper to ordinary aesthetic experience. Secondly, this aesthetic model avoids the constraint of scientific knowledge and facilitates a predominantly aesthetic appreciation rather than a scientific one. For Brady this point is crucial, because this advantage is relevant especially in the practical preservation of a certain landscape when the decision-making process regarding the landscape interacts with many individuals with more or less specific or professional backgrounds. Lastly, this model 'is more inclusive, more open to the aesthetic experiences of inhabitants, visitors, developers, local government, etc., in working out the best solution' (E. Brady 1998: 146).

This alternative model presents interesting points for a proper aesthetic conception of natural appreciation. The inclusion of perception and imagination in our appreciation of landscapes, environments and natural objects is remarkable. This non-scientific model stresses the relevance of perception in our appreciation of nature; it is specifically in this regard that I will suggest phenomenology could be helpful.

B. Problems two and three.

However, before considering the details of a phenomenological approach toward environmental aesthetics, it is necessary to come back to the two other problems of Carlson's model, namely the claim that nature is always aesthetically good and the conception of positive aesthetics as a general aesthetics. The idea that nature is always good and the conception of positive aesthetics as a general aesthetics are strictly connected because Carlson bases his conception of positive aesthetics on considering the centrality of the aesthetically goodness of nature. It is important to highlight that the analysis provided by the authors relates to the cognitive model starts from the consideration of the aesthetic properties of nature, but leads to a moral consideration of it. The value of good seems to be primarily a moral category rather than an aesthetic one.

This confusion between aesthetic values and moral values within the understanding of aesthetics elaborated by the cognitive model leads to reduce environmental aesthetics to an environmental ethics. Paolo D'Angelo highlights that 'often environmental aesthetics is dissolved in a general environmental ethics, the abandonment of aesthetic analysis in favor of an inclusion of it in a discourse that has its reference points in morality' (D'Angelo 2001: 87. My translation). Furthermore, in considering the parallelism operated by Carlson between artistic categories and scientific categories, D'Angelo highlights a strong asymmetry and its consequent problem:

> The historical-stylistic categories are, in fact, aesthetic categories, while scientific categories are not. The functional comparison should be corrected. If the comparison is made, on the artistic end, not with the historical-stylistic categories, but for example with the physical and chemical categories, […] the real correspondence would be with the chemical data on colors, or with the data concerning the physical supports, and so on. However, it seems that Carlson is inclined to claim something different, specifically that the scientific categories function regarding nature like the historical information in the case of artworks. […] In fact, the role of scientific knowledge for the aesthetic appreciation of nature seems to be most correctly comparable with, for example, the iconographical data for the painting (D'Angelo 2001: 100-1. My translation).

D'Angelo criticism is in line with the one proposed in the paragraph 1.2. Firstly, his emphasis on scientific knowledge makes it impossible for many people having the proper categories to perceive environments and landscapes. Secondly, D'Angelo notices that:

> If it were accepted Carlson's thesis that natural history, regarding the environment, has the same function of the one that history of art has concerning aesthetic appreciation of artworks, then it would be impossible to understand what is an aesthetics of nature because it would coincide with a cognitive or scientific experience (D'Angelo 2001: 101. My translation).

What D'Angelo points out is the difficulty in understanding environmental aesthetics in its autonomy, i.e., as distinct from cognitive or scientific knowledge. It seems plausible to object to Carlson that, if scientific knowledge is the cognitive requirement for appreciating nature, then it is difficult to explain in which way environmental aesthetics differs from ecology or biology. If Carlson's natural environment model is accepted, then the proper aesthetic analysis of natural experience is misled. Consequently, if these objections are true it is impossible to assume that positive aesthetics becomes a general aesthetics.

To recap, Carlson's natural environment model presents three main problems. Firstly, Carlson does not provide a clear account of what balance of common sense and scientific knowledge we need to appreciate nature. Consequently, it is possible to appreciate nature only for experts who possess all the scientific categories. Secondly, claiming the goodness of nature is dangerous because focusing on the moral value of nature may thereby reduce environmental aesthetics to environmental ethics. Thirdly, positive aesthetics is not autonomous because it depends on the scientific knowledge proper of natural science.

1.2 The non-cognitive approach to Environmental Aesthetics: Arnold Berleant

In the previous paragraph, the dominant approach in environmental aesthetics was discussed. Despite the fact that this model generates some problems, it constitutes one of the two main perspectives in the contemporary debate within environmental

aesthetics. Firstly, the model is based on the issue of appreciation and does not focus on the experience of nature. Secondly, it appears to be narrow because it excludes from natural appreciation people that do not have an adequate scientific background (e.g. children). In what follows the alternative model, defined as "aesthetics of engagement", will be discussed. Despite the differences presented by cognitive model and the aesthetics of engagement, it is interesting to notice a strong element held in common. As it has been previously shown, Carlson's positive aesthetics, in considering nature as always aesthetically good, aims at an enlargement of the concept of aesthetics. Berleant tries to do the same: focusing on the role of bodily experience in our appreciation of nature, Berleant proposes to consider aesthetics as a general discipline that deals with the broad field of aisthesis. In what follows, I analyze Berleant's perspective for two reasons. First, it contextualizes Merleau-Ponty in the contemporary debate using his philosophyit against the dominant model, namely the cognitive model. Secondly, I contest Berleant's reading of Merleau-Ponty by explaining why it is misleading in his understanding of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Berleant's model is useful primarily insofar as it employs for first Merleau-Pontian concepts within the environmental aesthetic debate. However, I argue Merleau-Ponty provides stronger tools for the elaboration of a proper embodied model than Berleant seems to recognize.

Berleant's aesthetics of engagement presents at least two important elements for this current research on a phenomenological approach to environmental aesthetics. First, this account is based on our bodily experience of nature, which – as we will see – resonates with Merleau-Ponty's ideas. Second, Berleant explicitly considers the relevant relationship between nature and landscapes. In what follows, my analysis will initially focus on Berleant's account of landscape and its interaction with natural environment. In a second step, the relevance of his analysis for phenomenology and the limits of an aesthetics of engagement will be considered. Given the interesting phenomenological elements provided by Berleant's account, it remains necessary to consider the structure of our natural experience and its relevance for the possible foundation of environmental aesthetics in its own autonomy.

In the book *Living in the landscape. Toward an aesthetics of environment*, Berleant draws a distinction between environment and landscape. According to him,

"environment" is a general term that refers to both human and biological elements, environment always implies that nature is in interaction with human beings. On the other hand, "landscape" is a more specific term that expresses the subjective experience of a certain location. More precisely, he says that 'we can express this somewhat differently by saying that landscape is a lived environment'. (Berleant 1997: 13).

According to Berleant, it is impossible to sunder our aesthetic experience from social and cultural patterns. This element is central because it shows that aesthetic appreciation is certainly fundamental, but at the same time could be influenced by culture and by social praxis. For example, a certain population might be inclined to attribute particular values to a specific landscape insofar as it is relevant for their own cultural identity. In virtue of this connection between different layers (perceptual, social and cultural), Berleant claims that 'environment is a name for a complex, integrated whole, and its aesthetics is a dimension of that whole'. (Berleant 1997: 15).

Despite the fact that Berleant tries to differentiate between landscape and environment, he considers landscapes as strongly interrelated with the environment. If environment is intended without any reference to social and cultural values but rather conceived in its own natural dimension and organic connection with human beings, then Berleant defines landscape as an experience of a certain location (culturally and socially defined). However, Berleant sometimes seems to express the ambiguous idea that landscapes are the general surroundings of our experience, like environments. He writes that 'for most people, the lived, the living landscape is the common place setting everyday life'. (Berleant, 1997: 16). This ambiguity between the term environment and the term landscape remains in his work[11]. According to Berleant this is due to the general meaning of the word environment itself, in fact etymologically the term "environment", 'denotes the region that surrounds something' (Berleant 1997: 29).

The term "landscape" also presents difficulties because the ordinary way it is usually understood. As Berleant puts it, 'with landscape, too, we can identify a range of

[11] A possible way to disambiguate could pass through an investigation of the connection between body, landscape and their connection with the world, as Edward Casey (2001) suggests. Casey writes: 'In short summation: landscape and the body are the effective epicenters of the geographical self. The one widens out our vista of the place-world-all the way to the horizon-while the other literally incorporates this same world and acts upon it' (Casey 2001 (a): 690).

alternatives, from the panoramical landscape, […] to the participatory landscape that intercorporates the appreciator perceptually. […] As with environment, the issue of separation from or continuity with the perceiver remains problematic' (Berleant 1997: 30). Berleant relates these difficulties with two different interpretations about the relationship between nature and subject; one of which spells the relationship in terms of separation, the other in terms of continuity. According to the first interpretation, nature is what is external to human nature, is something conceived as "separate and apart". Consequently, nature appears to be separate from the human realm and it appears to be differentiated from the concept of artificial. For Berleant, this conception is mirrored by the natural sciences, which understand nature in its spatial and temporal coordinates. The second conception intends nature in its intimate relationship with humans. This conception presents the idea of the world as an enormous ecosystem that encompasses humans and their activity. These two main perspectives on nature imply different approaches to environmental aesthetics.

The first conception insists on the idea that environmental aesthetics investigates the beauty of the visual environment and landscapes. The second conception of nature, endorsed by Berleant, emphasizes the necessity of an aesthetic investigation of our experience in relationship with nature. In this sense, environmental aesthetics considers the perceptual and bodily activity of the subject/viewer. Given this second interpretation, it is possible underlining the normative role of environmental aesthetics. As Berleant puts it: 'a normative dimension suffuses the perceptual range, and this underlies positive or negative value judgments of an environment. Environmental aesthetics thus becomes the study of environmental experience and the immediate and intrinsic value of its perceptual and cognitive dimension' (Berleant 1997: 32). This normative aspect is the element that allows for a possible dialogue between environmental aesthetics and other disciplines. This element is interesting because it shows that for Berleant the role of experience is central.

The aesthetics of engagement underlines the meaning of aesthetics for practical purposes and re-evaluates the centrality of experience[12]. At the same time, it is

[12] In a recent article, Berleant claims the importance to assume experience as a central to think about the significance of the environment. As Carlson puts it: 'the fundamental meaning of environment is its

important to ask whether this claim suffices for a foundation of environmental aesthetics on its own terms. Berleant stresses the embodied and engaged experience of nature and introduces the fundamental issue of values, intended as axiological entities that we can properly appreciate. At this stage, it is necessary to show how Berleant refers to phenomenology. In fact, in the last chapter of this thesis, I will claim that phenomenology can help in describing our environmental or natural experience, and can also provide the theoretical background to fund the environmental aesthetics on experiential basis.

In order to specify his conception of aesthetics of engagement, Berleant recurs to phenomenology and specifically to key concepts of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology: flesh, continuity and chiasm.

According to Berleant, the concept of flesh expresses the idea of homogeneity between our body and world. Berleant underlines how Merleau-Ponty developed this concept in considering vision and especially touch. What is relevant here is the idea of the being seen of the body (I perceive my body as a material thing between objects but also I recognize that I can see other things other beings and myself through it. Eyes are sense organs that are part of my own body) and the being seen of the world. This form of reversibility is proper also of touch. Berleant stresses that the being touched of the touch leads to a divergence between subject and world: 'flash that in touching others touches itself also attempts to use the same perceptual modality as the basis of reconciliation. In so doing, however, it embodies the very division it endeavors to overcome – the separation between touching and the touched' (Berleant 1997: 102). What Berleant focuses on is the idea that despite the Merleau-Pontian attempt to find an adherence of our body and the external world, a divergence (*écart)* is always presents.

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human meaning. As Carlson puts it: 'the fundamental meaning of environment is its human meaning, more pointedly, its meaning in experience' (Berleant 2014, 66). Starting from this assumption, the environment appears to be the broader concept and then is possible to pass through the aesthetic experience in order to arrive to the environmental aesthetics, which could be understood as an ecological aesthetics. However, for Berleant it is necessary to re-evaluate the ecological meaning of our aesthetic experience and then a holistic conception of environment. Therefore, 'for starting with experience, all experience is actually contextual and so can be understood ecologically. And as experience is primarily perceptual, it is always aesthetic. Finally, taken most broadly, we come to understand the idea of environment as ecological aesthetic. From this line of reasoning, then, the aesthetics of environment is ecological' (Berleant 2014: 67).

Perceptually speaking we are connected with the world. My body is experiencing other bodies in virtue of its being part of them. At the same time however, the fact that my body recognizes himself as a perceiving body differentiates it from other common things. It is in this regard that Berleant introduces the conception of continuity between body and world.

The notion of "continuity" explains the relationship between world and body to explain this, Berleant's is referring to the idea of body as a "point zero" of our being in the world, it is the primary connection with something outside. It is in virtue of this possibility of the body to be an organic part of the world rather than being a mere "out in the world", that Berleant considers the concept of chiasm.

The idea of 'chiasm' expresses the connection between body and world, seer and seen, touching and touched, our body and others bodies. Berleant recalls how this concept expresses the idea of "co-functioning" between bodies and so between others and myself. For Berleant, in this co-functioning, this belonging together of different entities, each of these alternate terms do not merely imply the other person but rather 'incorporates the other' (Berleant 1997: 105).

Despite the fact that Berleant recognizes in Merleau-Ponty the attempt to formulate a view in which subject and world are intimately connected, he is still critical about his results: 'here Merleau-Ponty comes close to expressing the idea of continuity as an explicit and vivid metaphysical principle, but he never quite succeeded in emancipating himself from the powerful and insistent dualistic tradition' (Berleant 1997: 105). Berleant's position is relevant to my thesis because it relies upon Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Berleant, in my opinion, correctly underlines an embodied perspective according to which we are not mere spectators of nature but rather participants. However, Berleant is formulating his perspective starting from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology without specifying how he intends to develop it. Furthermore, Berleant has not clarified exactly how phenomenological methodology might provide the basis for a radical embodied model. In fact, the aim of my present research is to show that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can provide the correct concept on which environmental aesthetics can be founded (cf. chapter 4). In the following section, I underline that what Berleant argues is already stated in Merleau-Ponty's works and

furthermore that despite his dualistic critique to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the engagement model itself – as it is elaborated by Berleant – appears to be itself antrophocentric if not duaistic

1.3 Berleant's engagement model: a critical evaluation.

At this stage, it is necessary to evaluate Berleant's model and its limits. As we have seen, on Berleant's opinion, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology does not overcome the problem of dualism. Certainly, Merleau-Ponty terminology includes dualistic terms such as body and mind, myself and others. However, especially when it comes to the notion of the body, Berleant's analysis concurs that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology remains a conception of the 'relation between two discrete entities and their continuity' (Berlean 1997: 105). On the contrary, a close reading of Merleau-Ponty's texts shows that the flesh is the primary correlation between world and subject. This idea of an intimate inherence between subject, subjects and world emerges quite clearly in Merleau-Ponty's late notes collected under the title *Nature*:

> The concern is to grasp humanity first as another manner of being a body – to see humanity emerge just like Being in the manner of a watermark, not another substance, but as *interbeing*, and not as an imposition of a for-itself on a body in-itself. Because the Nature of which we spoke (it can be obviously be only Nature perceived by us) and the mode of being that we describe will be clarified by description of the human body as perceiving: it is the same *Ineinander* that we gradually approach from the two ends, an *Ineinander* that is not that of a thing in a thing, not a de facto *Ineinander*, but rather one ratified by our lived, perceived *Ineinander* (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 208).

In the previous quotation, one can clearly detect the strong non-dualistic direction of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. The *Ineinander* is not a connection between our body and the world, but exactly what constitutes our inherence in the world. It is such "being with" and not just "outside of", that unveils the aesthetical dimension of our appreciation and experience of nature intended in its perceptual structure. However, Berleant seems not to appreciate the strong ontological conception of our bodily

experience that is emphasized by Merleau-Ponty. It is exactly following this aim that Merleau-Ponty says that:

> It is not a surveying of the body and of the world by a consciousness, but rather is my body as interposed between what is in front of me and what is behind me, my body standing in front of the upright things, in a circuit with the world, an *Einfühlung* with the world, with the things, with the animals, with other bodies (as having a perceptual "side" as well) made comprehensible by this theory of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 209).

Merleau-Ponty invokes a strong and intimate relationship between body and nature, subjects and other beings, and this appears to be different from Berleant's conception of bodily experience of nature in which the issue of an *Einfühlung* (empathy) with the world remains not explicitely considered. Despite this difference between Berleant's model and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty it is interesting to notice a similarity with some contemporary phenomenological investigations within eco-phenomenology, namely Casey's analysis of space and place[13]. This similarity helps to underline the possible connection between the engagement model and a phenomenological approach on the environmental aesthetics. This possible connection pass through the landscape. Berleant highlights that the required connection between body and environment is expressed in place and stresses that landscape appears to be "our lived environment". According to Berleant, in fact, 'place is the world that is my flesh, as Merleau-Ponty would say. […] A landscape, an environment, even more, *is* embodied experience. As such, it is our flesh, our world, our selves' (Berleant 1997: 108).

In recent years, Berleant focused his attention to the concept of landscape. According to his view, the landscape mediates between nature and humans. Landscape – in its being a specific place – implies considering landscape as the first place in which we are experiencing the world. It becomes clear that Berleant wants to provide an account of the experience of landscape, which appears to be a specific space within the

[13] Casey (1998) differentiates between space and places. Space can be described in mathematical language and is characterized by its objective (primary) qualities such as height, depth and breadth. On the contrary, place has the character of the "here" determined by my body and its mobility. Casey stresses that space is universal and characterized by primary quality (extension), place is particular and characterized by secondary qualities. This differentiation is important because it is considering the phenomenological tradition (Husserl and Merleau-Ponty especially) that Casey lets emerge the role of the body for a re-evaluation of the concept of place.

environment intended as the region that surrounds something. At the beginning of his paper, Berleant specifies that:

> The appreciator is in the landscape, an integral part of the landscape, and not an external spectator. We do not enter a landscape. […] We find ourselves there, here, part of it. It is an experience of being present and, by one's presence, contributing to the formation of the landscape and to its unique tonality (Berleant 2012: 3).

Berleant analyses the concept of landscape in experiential terms and considers both the perceptual and artistic appreciation in a mutual connection rather than as alternatives. The first step is indeed to consider the two kinds of appreciation in relation to their experiential character. For Berleant, landscape appears to be a relevant object in virtue of its being appreciated in both art and everyday experience. In addition, according to Berleant our artistic appreciation of landscape could inform and shape our natural appreciation of it, and so the reverse. Interestingly, Berleant[14] is highlighting the common element in both kinds of appreciation. He thinks that 'the appreciation of landscape constitutes a unitary experience, whether in art or in nature. It only becomes a problem if we start inquiry by separating the two, nature and art, and turning them into objects of appreciation' (Berleant 2012: 9). Landscape allows us to consider aesthetic appreciation in its narrow meaning, what Berleant call the "aesthetic field". Berleant does not want to deny the peculiarity of both types of appreciation, but at the same time he stresses the centrality of bodily engagement in the appreciation of landscape painting or gardens. This is because, according to him, in appreciating peculiar artworks we are

[14] Differently, Budd underlines the difference between natural and artistic appreciation. Budd is clear about his aesthetical aim regarding natural appreciation: 'the aesthetic appreciation of nature, as I understand the idea, requires not only that nature is appreciated as nature but that this appreciation does not essentially involve perceiving or imagining nature as a work of art' (Budd 1996). It is necessary to stress that Berleant speaks in term of continuity between natural and artistic appreciation regarding to the peculiarity of landscape, Budd is rather concern properly to the judicative activity related to the natural appreciation in general. However, if Berleant is focused on the bodily engagement with nature, Budd is more concerned with the definition of the properties that make an item appreciable as natural item. Despite this difference, Budd is more close to Berleant than to Carlson. This because for Budd, natural items are inserted in a complex context (nature) and allow for a con-penetration of knowledge and perceptual experience: 'for knowledge of the nature of a natural phenomenon to be able to effect a transformation of the subject's aesthetic experience of it, the knowledge must such that it can permeate or inform the perception of the phenomenon, so that what the subject sees it *as* is different from how it is seen by someone who lacks the requisite knowledge' (Budd 1996: 218).

modulating and executing our perceptual activity. Furthermore, this experience displays a kind of knowledge different from scientific and objective knowledge. In this case what we have is bodily knowledge, a form of knowledge tied to the concreteness of our embodied participation with the world. According to this view, it becomes necessary to consider our "being-in-the-world".

According to Berleant, landscape displays a complex relationship between natural and cultural perception, individual and social perspective and consequently between experience of place and experience of being in the world:

> This movement to ontology is thus no mere digression but is very much germane to landscape experience, and this experience, in turn, tells us much about what it is to be in the world. At the same time, such a view of the issue carries us beyond landscape appreciation, indeed, beyond appreciation altogether (Berleant 2012: 10).

According to Berleant, the appreciation of landscape and its being a configuration and interrelation between experience of place and nature gives us the possibility to rethink the centrality of our experience. This peculiar type of aesthetic appreciation appears to be 'an aesthetics that informs ontology and […] an ontology that informs aesthetics. With this we arrive at new terrain where a different philosophical landscape lies before us' (Berleant 2012: 10). These considerations hence offer an opportunity to rethink aesthetics as a discipline that belongs to both, philosophy of art and a theory of sensible experience.

At this stage of the analysis, one can remark a common element between Carlson's cognitive model and Berleant's aesthetics of engagement. In both perspectives there is an enlargement of aesthetics as a discipline, but in Carlson's perspective this happens in virtue of the aesthetically goodness of the natural world; in Berleant's perspective this becomes possible because of the central role of experience. The two models are very different in their theoretical frameworks, but both aim to develop aesthetics not only in the sense of philosophy of art.

The main problem concerns how to reconcile two different assumptions. The first one is the assumption implicit in positive aesthetics, namely that the aesthetically goodness of natural world is guaranteed by a proper appreciation that is based on the

correct categories provided by science. However, this cognitive model does not consider bodily experience as fundamental for our appreciation of nature. The second assumption is the centrality of perceptive and bodily experience of nature proper of the engagement model. However, such a perspective based on the relevance of aesthetic and bodily experience does not specifies how it might be possible to include the relevance or the role of scientific knowledge.

The aesthetics of engagement presents interesting elements to pursue a phenomenological analysis of environmental aesthetics and might provide important stimuli in order to formulate a phenomenological perspective on nature more generally. Berleant suggests to consider the concept of landscape and the new possibilities it opens for aesthetical investigations. This connection between landscape and nature is relevant because, as we will see, Merleau-Ponty considers landscape as our first place of contact with nature. This is why I will now discuss Merleau-Ponty's ideas about landscape in order to, then, broaden my analysis to the deeper and wider issues concerning the notion of nature in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy (cf. chapter three). Indeed, in this section I introduced two exponents of the contemporary debate in environmental aesthetics in order to contextualize Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and its philosophical consequences within the contemporary context. Assuming a phenomenological perspective implies both a critique of the cognitive model elaborated by Carlson and a critical evaluation of Berleant's model of engagement. This will lead to a proper phenomenological formulation of an appropriate embodied model for the understanding and experience of nature.

1.4 The concept of landscape within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy

Merleau-Ponty does not provides an account of landscape in his works. It is also difficult even to argue that a clear conception of landscape runs implicitly throughout his philosophy of nature. This notwithstanding, it is possible to find some passages in which Merleau-Ponty uses landscape to clarify his account of nature. This point is not without relevance considering that the term "landscape" appears many times within *Phenomenology of Perception* (hereafter *PP*) and in relationship with the concept of

world and experience of nature. Furthermore, it is necessary to highlight that Merleau-Ponty develops his investigation into the concept of nature starting from the triad landscape-space-world – and under the influence of Eugen Fink, as I will explicate later in chapter two.

I now review the passages in which Merleau-Ponty addresses the notion of landscape. In the fourth chapter of PP, Merleau-Ponty describes the phenomenal field and the possibility of a pure quale, the acceptability of a pure data of sensation free from any kinesthetic activity of the subject. It is at the very beginning of this consideration that Merleau-Ponty provides the example of landscape:

> The problem is to understand these strange relations woven between the parts of the landscape, or from the landscape to me as an embodied subject, relations by which a perceived object can condense within itself an entire scene or become the imago of an entire segment of life. Sensing is this living communication with the world that makes it present to us as the familiar place of our life. The perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness to sensing (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 53).

The example of landscape is relevant because it shows that our relationship with the world and nature is made possible by our "thickness to sensing". This "thickness to sensing" puts my body and landscape in an intimate relationship. Rather than appearing as a mere object, landscape represents the spatial and concrete perceptual *locus* within which we, as incarnate subjects, can experience our life. In this consideration, three components of landscape come up: perceptual activity of the subject, spatiality and body. This emphasis on spatiality leads to a consideration of another passage in PP in which landscape appears in its spatial relevance.

Merleau-Ponty's assigns to spatiality the primordial level of experience, this primordial dimension appears correlatively to our "situational spatiality" determined by our body. In its configuring as a point zero of any kinesthetic activity[15], the body literally inhabits space and time. Landscape appears to be the concrete place in which we participate in the appearing of spatiality:

[15] The body is the necessary medium for any movement and perceptual activity.

> The positing of a level is the forgetting of this contingency, and space is established upon our facticity. Space is neither an object, nor an act of connecting by the subject: one can neither observe it (given that it is presupposed in every observation), nor see it emerging from a constitutive operation (given that it is of its essence to be already constituted); and this is how can magically bestow upon the landscape its spatial determinations without itself ever appearing (PP: 265).

Space is present in landscape without being exhausted by its physical conformation. Spatiality appears to be the primordial layer that is already there and that is constantly presupposed in the continuum of our perceptual activity. My bodily experience of landscape is a spatial experience that does not focus on space itself. The body is what leads to consider the connection between expressivity and spatiality, as Merleau-Ponty points out of our body, 'it is the very movement of expression, it projects significations on the outside by giving them a place and seesto it that they begin to exist as things, beneath our hands and before our eyes' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 147). In his paper, Lucia Angelino recalls this line of interpretation and highlights two different perspectives on movement in Merleau-Ponty. According to Angelino, one movement is the "movement radiation" where the kinesthetic activity contributes to moving and speaking. The other movement is entitled "movement-gesture" in which 'beings take on the form enacted by an act of the body' (Angelino 2015: 298). Starting from movement it is possible to find the intertwining between motility and form of gestures, and consequently the emerging of expression that connects both our perceptual body in its link with nature and our high level of expressivity, such as culture and speech. Referring to the two previous movements, Angelino says that: 'the rhythmic conjunction of the two movements, which occurs at the highest level in the graphic or spoken expression (or act of expression), transform the very dynamic of the visible into the expression that it already was, causing the advent of culture (history) in the same groove in which nature expresses itself' (Angelino 2015: 298).

Merleau-Ponty deals with the issue of the relationship between nature and culture in many course notes and work notes. Sometimes this issue is explicitly addressed and sometimes it is only hinted towards, at the same time the question of a nature/culture interaction runs through all Merleau-Pontian investigations. Angelino stresses how it is necessary to carefully consider the issues of nature and expressivity, because it is only

on that basis that it is possible to remark on the continuity between nature and culture. It is clear that is in landscape as place of our bodily presence that the possible synthesis of the external world and the constitution of an objective space starts. This bringing to expression of different forms of spatiality implies a connection between bodily motricity and external world and an intimate continuity between nature and culture. In this sense, starting from the natural presence of our body we are expressing not only space but also new formations (such as art, language, history and so on) that are proper of a different layer of experience, namely culture. As Angelino says, there is a movement of expression of nature in itself but also an expression of nature within the cultural world. This movement of expression starts then in the motricity of the body – as Angelino highlights in both, movement-radiation and movement-gesture – and conduces not only to culture and human expressions, but also to the natural world, as Casey suggests with his interpretation of landscape[16]. This movement of expression conduces to an intimate relationship between nature and humans, a relationship that is central in Merleau-Ponty's work.

We find here the idea of a fundamental kinship between subject and nature that is made possible by our bodily presence in a certain landscape. Landscape is a certain place that, on the one hand, refers to the wider realm of nature; on the other hand, in virtue of its composition, is the *locus* for our bodily experience. At the same time, landscape implies the relationship between the body as a point zero of our orientation and the world that is already there. For example, I perceive the landscape of the Cliffs of

[16] Casey's analysis of the expressivity in the natural realm is posed at the level of lived experience; what Casey is underling is the concrete dimension of the phenomena of expression. The relevance of such an enlargement of expression to nature is twofold. On the one hand, it allows Casey to find in the level of first-person experience the "environmental imperative" which conduces to directly experiencing environmental risks and distresses. For Casey, glance consents to perceive directly environmental damages and this provides generates the first source for an ethical response. At the same time, Casey's treatment of expressivity within the surface – there is a strong interconnection between landscape, surface and then environment as a concatenation of surfaces – allows us to consider landscape under a new light, namely its experiential dimension. Before trying to provide such an enlargement of landscape, it is necessary to understand Casey's conception of expressivity. This consideration is undertaken starting from the question concerning the existence of the equivalent of face in nature. As Casey says, in nature we do not have faces but rather 'we do find centers of intensity and expressive surfaces, all set within the element of the earth' (Casey 2007: 378). Consequently, it is possible to attribute expressivity and intensity – elements proper to the facial physiognomy – to something non-human. Casey proposes to see landscape as the concrete and experiential place in which intensity and expressivity become non-human. Casey proposed to facialize not only the entire human body, but also 'the layout of the landscape in which that body is emplaced' (Casey 2007: 379).

Moher through my body, I am perceiving the morphology of the place, the strong wind and the huge waves that are crashing on the cliffs. However, this specific landscape is not cut off from the surrounding. I know that I am in specific place of Ireland, this place is close to other places and I can also guess that at the end of this mass of water there is the North America. At the same time, if I abstract from my bodily immersion within this specific landscape then I can draw a map of this place and provide specific and objective spatial coordinates. However, this last form of objective space is different from the situational spatiality of my bodily experiencing of the landscape. Hence, Merleau-Ponty considers space, body and landscape as fundamentally correlated. The interaction between landscape and space – even through the medium of the body – is present in Merleau-Ponty's perspective. There is a passage in PP in which Merleau-Ponty analyzes the relationship between landscape and space in the pathological case of schizophrenia. In this analysis, Merleau-Ponty is recalling Strauss's[17] differentiation between geographical space and landscape. Merleau-Ponty is considering the experience of one schizophrenic patient for whom suddenly the "common" landscape is 'snatched away from him by some alien force' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 300). Merleau-Ponty noticed how another kind of spatiality suddenly interfered with the normal spatial perceptual activity of this patient, 'it is as if a second limitless sky were penetrating the blue sky of the evening' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 300). As Merleau-Ponty stresses, a different space produces an interference within the experiential landscape of the

[17] Straus E., *Vom Sinn der Sinne*, Berlin: Springer, 1935, 290. Strauss differentiates geographical space and landscape as follows: 'in the landscape we are surrounded by an horizon. […] The geographical space does not have horizons. In the landscape we are moving always from one place to another; every place is determined only by its relationship with adjacent places within the circle of visibility. We can only passing by one part of space to the other. […] The geographical space is a close space and it is transparent in all its own structure. Every place of this space is determined by its position in the all, and lastly by its relationship with the zero-point in the system of coordinates that order this space. (Strauss, Maldiney 2005: 71-72. My translation). One should also add that, according to the conception of the geographical space, there thus emerges the activity of drafting maps. The geographical space is something potentially objective, and on the other hand, landscape signifies the centrality of our presence. For the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to highlight how the connection between landscape and horizon links Casey, Merleau-Ponty and Strauss. The differentiation between geographical space and landscape, as described by Strauss, is referred to by Merleau-Ponty in his *PP* and resonates in Casey's analysis. In considering Strauss text, another important element emerges. Strauss highlights that the human world could not be reduced to just one of these conceptions of space: 'the perceptive human world is between landscape and physics. […] Because it confines with both, with landscape and physics, staying between them, it remains ambiguous in itself, and not only for the observer (Strauss, Maldiney 2005: 73). These sentences do not resolve the tension between landscape and geographical space, between place and space, but point out the richness of the perceptive dimension.

schizophrenic patient. According to Merleau-Ponty, this interference between two different spaces is what characterizes schizophrenia:

> This second space permeating visible space is the one that composes, at each moment, our own manner of projecting the world, and the schizophrenic disorder consists merely in that this perceptual project is dissociated from the objective world such as it is still offered by perception, and it withdraws, so to speak into itself. The schizophrenic patient no longer lives in the common world, but in a private world; he does not go all the way to geographical space, he remains within "the space of the landscape", and this landscape itself, once cut from the common world, is considerably impoverished (PP: 300).

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty landscape is a form of spatiality, but also a form of lived space. The arising of a second spatiality obstructs the normal projecting in the intersubjective world. This relegates the pathological space within itself and the schizophrenic remains closed in an impoverished and unshared spatiality. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's analysis shows that spatiality is an important element in our being present in a precise landscape. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty pays attention to the concept of space rather than systematically considering landscape. However, in his philosophy, landscape has a strong experiential connotation. This appears clearly in a passage in *The Visible and the Invisible* (hereafter VI), in which Merleau-Ponty is again using the term "landscape":

> Each landscape of my life, because it is not a wandering troop of sensation or a system of ephemeral judgments but a segment of the durable flesh of the world, is qua visible, pregnant with many others visions besides my own. […] When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts (*VI* 1964: 123).

The focus of the private space makes the schizophrenic cut off from the intersubjective world and makes him unable to share a common world. In this pathological case the fundamental correlation between subjective and intersubjective space appears. Given that lived places are the primordial level of experience, landscape

as a "segment of the durable flesh of the world" becomes an intersubjective experience of spatial possibilities. Landscape becomes the perceptually pregnant place that refers to the pre-categorical level of experience. This connection with the pre-categorical level will be developed by Merleau-Ponty in connection with the analysis concerning nature and expression. An extended consideration of these problems will be given in the third chapter of the thesis.

As it has been previously highlighted, there is no exhaustive account of landscape within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. However, in the passages in which the term is used, the relationship between space and landscape appears to be central: landscape is the perceptual local display of spatiality and, at the same time, space is something different from this aesthetic display.

Space appears to be both an objective space and a lived space that remains present in the different layers of experience. On the one hand, landscape is the perceptual display that I have available because of my bodily presence. On the other hand, space generates from my bodily movement but is does not remain perceptually based. Perceiving landscapes means perceiving different surfaces, things and objects that reflect a peculiar characteristic of a specific portion of the territory. Space requires a bodily activity at the very beginning, but then it might become something abstract and purely quantifiable (i.e. maps, geometrical figures, and so on). We might say that landscape is spatial but not reducible to space, on the other hand, lived space requires always landscape and bodily experience and abstract (objective) space does not. The important thing is that within Merleau-Ponty's investigation of body and spatiality the lived space emerged. This primordial space is connected with both movement and expression and it becomes the focal element for the consideration of non-human expressivity.

1.5 Casey's view of Landscape

A contemporary phenomenologist, Casey provides an interpretation of landscape based on Merleau-Ponty's concepts of body, expression and spatiality. This perspective is useful because links two elements that are present in Merleau-Ponty's works but

without an explicit connection: landscape and nature. Furthermore, it shows that landscape is a fruitful case study for the understanding of nature. Casey presents a broad conception of landscape in which the experiential dimension assumes a central and founding role; landscape appears to be the singular concrete configuration composed by two elements: layout and surface. In defining layout, Casey (Casey 2007) specifies that he is using this term in the acceptation taken from Gibson's terminology. Layout is the concrete displaying of the possible activity of our perceptual structure, whereby this visible and perceptual layer is composed of surfaces. Consequently, environment appears to be a "combination of surfaces". Both the elements are in a relationship of correlation, layout is the perceptual display of a certain surface. This surface implies certain specific affordances, but at the same time is correlated to other surfaces. In virtue of its surface, landscape is intimately connected or in continuity with nature. Layout appears to be perceptually characterized, surface is connoted by expressivity. According to Casey, surfaces have some properties – such as coloration, elasticity, and so on – that permit to perceive expressivity not only in human face or body but also in things and non-humans[18]. These key features of landscapemake possible to relate the visual and perceptual layer with our bodily experience, but at the same time (and especially thanks to the presence of a surface) Casey highlights how any landscape is connected with the continuity of the environment. For Casey, it is the layout and its specific affordances that concretely connect the subject with a specific environment.

Casey holds that the body is fundamental because it gives us a concrete presence in nature. As he specifies, in virtue of our bodily presence 'places are embedded in us, they become part of our very character' (Casey 2001 b: 415). In this work, Casey introduces landscape as an element in which the dynamic relationship between space and place becomes possible. This dynamic is important because, if space is a general and abstract concept that guarantees the location for a singular things, place is then characterized by the concrete and historical presence of the subject:

[18] This concrete display of landscape shows our direct experience of environment and, at the same time, it seems to allow our immediate response to environmental distress. This directness of a landscape allows us to consider expressivity as human-nature element.

> Landscape is the capacious scene wherein the coadunation of places in a given region arises; it is the matrix of places without us, hence the antipode of habitus as the matrix of schemes within us. It is the arena in which cosmos and hearth, otherwise such disparate terms, connect and animate each other. As such, it shows hearth and cosmos to be not merely dichotomous but ultimately continuous with each other (Casey 2001 b: 418).

On the one hand, landscape highlights the concrete and local dimension of our interrelation with nature – and landscape is the material element of this experience – on the other hand, it is possible to figure out a wider conception of landscape. Landscape allows switching from a human-centered concern to a non-human focus; it appears to be the experience (our being bodily in a specific and peculiar portion of a territory) that posits us within the non-human element. Landscape seems to link to the kind of spatiality that Merleau-Ponty calls situational spatiality – as it will be considered in chapter three – and in this connection between place and space, the necessity to assume landscape as a necessary element within our experience comes up. It seems impossible to deny that spatiality is involved within landscape, but is also impossible to reduce landscape to the idea of objective and quantifiable space.

In another paper, Casey (2001 a) specifies his conception of the relationship between body, place and landscape. Casey specifies the correlation between three elements: self, body and landscape. The first term refers to the 'agency and identity of the geographical subject' (Casey 2001 a: 683), the body is the link between the self and a specific place and landscape presents as in a unity a specific pattern of places. Starting from this triad Casey continues to specify the difference between landscape and space in order to avoid considering it as a mere middle term between body and place. In this regard, Casey is clear:

> The intrinsic difference between place and space is nowhere more evident than in the role of a primary feature of landscape, its horizon. Every landscape has a horizon, yet space never does. The horizon is an arc within which a given landscape comes to an end – an end of visibility, of presence, of availability. […] As a boundary, the horizon does not merely close off the landscape; it opens it up for further exploration, that is, for bodily ingression and exploration (Casey 2001 a: 690).

The relevance of corporeal movement in our experience of place and landscape is recognized by Casey. Starting from the differentiation between space and place, Casey considers phenomenology as the branch of philosophy that provides a different understanding of spatiality. The reconsideration of bodily experience leads to a conception of space tied to our bodily perceptual possibilities. It is especially in Merleau-Ponty that Casey sees the emerging of such a view. According to Casey, Merleau-Ponty shows a conception of space in terms of expression defined by the activity of our body. This view implies that space is not something merely objective and calculable but primarily the place of our being here through our body. As Casey underlines, 'just as the body continually exhibits "expressive movement", […] so the space in which it moves becomes an expressive space, having its own physiognomy and moods, its affectivity and style' (Casey 1998: 230). It is important to understand that within our place-landscape, as Casey calls it, the bodily synthesis of the external world starts. The necessity to consider the relationship between body, expression and movement in its generative relevance emerges clearly in Casey's analysis. As he puts it: 'Merleau-Ponty teaches us not just that the human body is never without a place or that place is never without (its own actual or virtual) body; he also shows that the lived body itself a place. Its very movement, instead of effecting a mere change of position, constitutes places, brings it into being' (Casey 1998: 235). It is relevant to highlight that the issues of bodily movement and expressive space stressed by Casey are fundamental also for Merleau-Ponty's understanding of nature. Casey's analysis and his application of Merleau-Pontian concepts are important for two reasons: first, Casey makes the issue of landscape central in contemporary environmental aesthetics. Second, in doing this it becomes this makes it possible to consider landscape as a case study for the understanding of the relationship between body and nature. Casey's perspective underlines the relevance of the connection between body, landscape and nature; a connection that remains hidden within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and neglected in the contemporary debate. Casey develops a concept of expressive space that is relevant for my thesis because it applies directly to our bodily presence conceived as immersed in a landscape. This allows for the recuperation of the bodily aspect in its aesthetic dimension and inwhithin an non-antrophocentric perspective. Casey delineates a

conception of embodied experience that enlarges the human perspective. In fact, it is not only the body that is conceived as a focus of experiences/experience (as Merleau-Ponty underlines) but also the landscape in itself becomes the nexus for other possible landscapes and of the nature/culture correlation. Casey's lets emerge ainitiates a new position within the contemporary debate where the body is not merely in connection with the environment as Berleant argues, but rather appears to locates itself in a specific *locus* (landscape) where both of them (body and landscape) become expressive. The body expresses the perceptual possibilities of continuous synthesis and intercorporeal interaction among boydy-bodies and between different surfaces. At the same time, a landscape can expresses itself in continuous interaction with living beings and other landscapes. These intercorporeal relations involves not only humans but also material elements (such as rocks, trees , etc.), animals, and different landscapes leading to an aesthetical perspective where the focus is not on the appreciation of something but rather the sensible layer of experience in general. According to my view, this perspective should be integrated with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. This is because Casey is highlighting the bodily dimension of landscape but is not considering the relationship between landscape and nature directly. What I am claiming is that starting from the intercorporeal experience of landscapes we should investigates what nature is and what kind of experience it involves. It is for this reason that I assume Casey's analysis on bodily experience, space, and landscape in order to develop them further in relationship to the issue of nature.

1.6 Conclusions

In paragraph 1.1, I have illustrated the cognitive model elaborated by Allen Carlson and improved especially by Saito, Matthews and Brady. However, this approach lacks the consideration of the experience of nature and focuses on the role of scientific knowledge for our appreciation of nature. In paragraph 1.2 Berleant's theory and its emphasis on engagement has been outlined. This model – that considers Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body – ascribes a central role to our bodily presence within nature. However, the aesthetics of engagement does not provide an appropriate description of our bodily experience of nature. This limit leads to the consideration of Merleau-Ponty and conduces specifically to underline the role of landscape in the experience of nature (paragraph 1.4). The concept of landscape appears frequently in Merleau-Ponty's works, however an explicit analysis of the concept is absent. Regarding this implicit relationship between landscape and nature, Casey's phenomenological investigation of the relationships between place and space and between landscape and environment clarifies the role of landscape in our experience of nature. Furthermore, Casey's analysis specifies the role of bodily experience and expressive space, elements that will be considered in the next chapter.

Before tackling this issue – that leads to the consideration of the intimate connection between nature and humans – it is necessary to stress how Merleau-Ponty's conception of nature was developed in dialogue with Husserlian phenomenology. This point is crucial because, on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy develops against a phenomenological background. It thus becomes necessary to underline and clarify Merleau-Ponty's methodology in light of Husserl's idea of phenomenology. On the other hand, it is necessary to underline the specific view that Merleau-Ponty provides of nature, which starts from a Husserlian ground but develops it further. In order to draw possible phenomenological implications for contemporary debates within environmental aesthetics, it is necessary to clarify affinities and divergences between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl. I suggest that only by phenomenologically delineating the concept of nature makes possible to point out some useful remarks for the ontological insights implicit in the environmental aesthetics.

Chapter 2 - Husserlian Key Concepts in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

Nature emerges as a central issue in the investigation of Merleau-Ponty since the beginning of his work, and it is a topic which importantly affects Merleau-Ponty's philosophical relationship with Edmund Husserl. In this chapter, I provide a brief explanation of various Husserlian concepts in order to clarify Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of phenomenology. I argue that it is impossible to comprehend Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in general and his elaboration of the con concepts of nature and intercorporeality without grasping his strong engagement with Husserl's phenomenology. Apart from his philosophical dialogue with Husserl, Merleau-Ponty also frequently visited the Husserl Archives in Leuven[19]. Although there are many references to Husserl's works in Merleau-Ponty's first work *Structure of Behavior*[20], it is specifically in the preface of the PP that Merleau-Ponty opens his theoretical dialogue with a direct discussion of the phenomenological method. As Ted Toadvine remarks, 'given Merleau-Ponty's access to this considerable quantity of materials, it is not

[19] Van Breda explains that Merleau-Ponty wrote him a letter in order to obtain the permission to come to Leuven to consult Husserl's manuscripts (the second volume of *Ideas* and *Experience and Judgment*) useful for the drafting of the PP. As Van Breda writes about Merleau-Ponty's visit in Leuven, 'in the course of the visit, I had the opportunity to introduce him to Eugen Fink. Although each man encountered serious difficulties in expressing himself in the language of the other, they enjoyed a long and very interesting exchange of opinions' (Van Breda 2006: 250). This article by Van Breda is relevant because clearly shows the manuscripts Merleau-Ponty consulted at the time of his working on the PP. According to Van Breda, Merleau-Ponty consulted *Experience and Judgment* and three other dossiers, 'the first dossier contained Landgrebe's typed transcription of volume II of the Ideen, completed between 1924 and 1925. […] The second dossier was also a transcription by Landgrebe, completed in Prague between 1936 and 1938. Merleau-Ponty makes several references to it in the Phenomenology and he returns to it again in "The Philosopher and His Shadow". […] Above all, they contain elaborations of the idea of the intentional genesis of the most original layers of consciousness of things, and a doctrine of the transcendental aesthetics, understood in Husserl's own terms. On the cover of the manuscript Husserl summarizes its contents as follows: Umsturz der Kopernikanischen Lehre in der gewöhnlichenweltanschaulichen Interpretation. Die Ur-Arche Erde bewegt sich nicht- Grundlegende Untersuchungen zur phänomenologischen Ursprung der Köperlichkeit, der Räumlichkeit der Natur im ersten naturwissenschaftlichen Sinne. Alles notwendige Anfangsuntersuchungen' (Van Breda 2006: 250). It is necessary to stress that this last manuscript was strongly influential also in the middle and last phase of Merleau-Ponty's work when he was dealing with the problem of passivity, constitution and nature. Van Breda cites another transcription consulted by Merleau-Ponty, 'made by Eugen Fink from the paragraph 28 to 73 of Husserl's last great work, Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie' (Van Breda 2006: 251).

[20] Hereafter *SB*.

surprising that his *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, published in 1945, is laced with references to Husserl's published and unpublished works' (Toadvine 2002: 236).

The constant reflection on Husserl's works and, consequently, on the possibilities of phenomenology as a philosophical method, assumes in Merleau-Ponty the form of an investigation concerning the different aspects implied in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl[21]. In following with this line of analysis, Merleau-Ponty started to structure his philosophy especially in a dialogue with the published and unpublished works of Husserl.

As a starting point, it is opportune to consider Merleau-Ponty's "genetic" interpretation of Husserl According to Toadvine, such interpretation passes through three main phases: a) Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Husserl's reduction; b) Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Husserl's conception of other egoes and intersubjectivity; c) Merleau-Ponty's consideration of Husserl's conception of nature. In the first phase, Merleau-Ponty is interested mostly in Husserl's reduction and considerations on perception. This period is characterized by a strong attention to *Ideas I, Ideas II, Formal and transcendental logic, Cartesian Meditations* and *Crisis*. In the second phase (which Toadvine associates with the years from 1949 to 1952, Merleau-Ponty's teaching years at the Sorbonne), Merleau-Ponty dealt with the problems related to the experience of other persons[22]. Especially focusing on this topic through a reading of the *Cartesian Meditations*, Merleau-Ponty is considering the Husserlian conception of the alter ego and its limits. As Toadvine puts it (1999), at the end of this analysis, 'Merleau-Ponty finds Husserl unable to account for the experience of others due to the Cartesian conception of the cogito to which he remains committed' (Toadvine 2002: 250). Starting from his interpretation of otherness within Husserl's work, Merleau-Ponty considers the correlation between transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity. He reflects on the difficult relationship between the perspective of modern sciences – that considers the world as something external and quantifiable – and the perspective of reflective philosophy, as Merleau-Ponty calls it, focused on the idea of subjectivity. As

[21] Themes addressed by Merleau-Ponty are, among others, the relationship between psychology and phenomenology, the possibility of the reduction, and the constitution and transcendental role of intersubjectivity.

[22] See for instance Merleau-Ponty (2010).

Toadvine puts it, 'the phenomenological reduction, according to Merleau-Ponty, splits the horns of this dilemma by recognizing our inherence in a physical and human world while, at the same moment, suspending the affirmations this inherence entails in order to bring them to consciousness and reflect upon them' (Toadvine 2002: 253).

Toadvine highlights that in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy the need emerges to consider a pre-theoretical layer of experience. This need brings to light the necessity to reflect on phenomenology in its being a science of essences. In the eidetic reduction[23], which breaks the natural attitude in order to grasp essences, Merleau-Ponty sees the possibility to find a relationship between empirical and eidetic levels in a way that permits us to consider the two levels in both their own dignity and interaction. Continuing in this line of analysis – and in considering the possible relationship between phenomenology and human sciences – Merleau-Ponty considers the Husserlian concept of history and the relationship between phenomenology, philosophy and metaphysics. In this regard, the body assumes a central role in both his phenomenological development and his reading of Husserl.

In the third phase (1952-61, according to Toadvine's classification), during which Merleau-Ponty produces a tremendous amount of notes and lectures, Husserl remains a central to Merleau-Ponty's thinking. On the basis of this material, it becomes possible to draft the lines of an investigation concerning the relationship between perceptual experience and nature, and consequently an analysis of the pre-given ground of our experience[24]. Toadvine stresses how 'Merleau-Ponty finds in Husserl an oscillation between breaking contact with nature, reducing nature to the status of a noema through a phenomenological reduction of the natural attitude, and recognizing a continuity with the natural and pre-reflexive as the foundation for scientific and philosophical thought' (Toadvine 2002: 266).

[23] According to Husserl, The eidetic reduction is the necessary step in order to open the field of transcendental subjectivity. In fact, eidetic reduction allows to find the proper *eidos* of an individual object. We perceive or experience an individual object, in order to find out its *eidos*, thanks to the eidetic variation, we should vary all the contingent characteristics of an object until we find out something that properly makes is what it is. One classical example of this eidetic reduction concerns its application to the the sound: one can image a sound without a specific spatial localization, but not without its duration.

[24] Emblematic in this regard: Merleau-Ponty (1964, 1996, 2003).

Starting from a focus on *Ideas I* (2014) and *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (2013), passing through the consideration of *Ideas II* (1989), *Cartesian Meditations* (1999) and the *Crisis* (1978) and arriving at the analysis of some latest manuscript[25], the concept of reduction still remains one of the main connecting elements in this last phase of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. According to Merleau-Ponty, the reduction allows to grasp a dimension situated beyond the subject-object dichotomy that is founding for any theoretical attitude. It is following this interpretative line of the "pre-given" and "pre-theoretical" that 'Merleau-Ponty turns his attention toward the body, intersubjective relations, and the sensible world, drawing extensively on *Ideen II*, but also on *Ideen III* ' (Toadvine 2002: 271).

Merleau-Ponty notices Husserl's shift from a strong logical concern to a focus on the *Lebenswelt* and the bodily dimension of experience, especially starting from the manuscript of *Ideas II*. For Merleau-Ponty, this different focus represents the starting point for his own investigation, and consequently influences his interpretation of the phenomenological reduction. The practice of reduction uncovers the dimension of the lived world that is implied in any theoretical attitude. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, this conception becomes the basis for the investigation of the possible limits of phenomenology itself. Despite the fact that Merleau-Ponty developed this dialogue with phenomenology for his entire life, Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project has been objected by commentators as non-phenomenological because it does not consider the methodological aspects of a phenomenological analysis such as, for example, the difference between eidetic and phenomenological reduction. For instance, Elizabeth A. Behnke[26] considers the proximity of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy with Husserl's original project in terms of similarity of contents rather than in terms of a shared methodological project. According to Behnke, Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl is characterized by 'an interpretative engagement with the content of Husserlian text rather

[25] Husserl E., *Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: the Originary Ark, the Earth, Does Not Move* and Husserl E., *The World of the Living Present and the Constitution of the Surrounding World That Is Outside the Flesh*, in Merleau-Ponty (2002).

[26] Behnke analyses the relationship between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty starting from the Merleau-Pontian interpretation of the concept of constitution. In this paper, the author stresses some influent aspects of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy but at the same time highlight how 'Merleau-Ponty's reading/writing of Husserl, […] stands in serious need of supplementation by a renewal of genuinely Husserlian phenomenological practice' (Behnke 2002: 50).

than a concern for adopting a phenomenological attitude, consulting experiential evidence for ourselves, and carrying Husserl's research tradition further' (Behnke 2002, 49).

In line with this sort of criticism, Thomas M. Seebohm focuses the consideration on Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of reduction and points out an evident lack in his analysis. According to Seebohm, in considering only the pre-theoretical level that requires the centrality of our bodily experience, Merleau-Ponty does not pay enough attention to "how" we can arrive to that layer of experience. As Seebohm puts it, 'the question of "what is given" can only be answered with and after the question of the "how of giveness" in Husserl's method. Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology or, to be more precise, his phenomenology of concrete human existence, speaks immediately about the "what"' (Seebohm 2002, 66). Both these objections are delineating a commonality of contents but a profound difference on the level of phenomenological methodology. These positions are plausible, yet it is noteworthy that in the formulation of his own phenomenological approach, Merleau-Ponty was aware of the necessity of methodological considerations.

In order to assess these criticisms, I have organized this chapter as follows: in the first paragraph, I will provide a brief sketch of Husserl's phenomenological methodology and his interpretation of the phenomenological reduction in *Ideas I,* his conception of transcendental intersubjectivity in the *Cartesian Meditations* and the concept of *Lebenswelt* in the *Crisis*. In the second paragraph, I will analyze Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserl's phenomenological reduction and transcendental intersubjectivity. The third and last paragraph will consider the Merleau-Pontian understanding of the concept of *Lebenswelt* and its relevance for the further formulation of the concept of nature.

2.1 The Husserlian Background in Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty opens his PP with an introduction devoted to a discussion of the meaning of phenomenology. This reading of phenomenology passes through some

fundamental concepts of Husserl's philosophy: eidetic and phenomenological reduction, pure consciousness and transcendental intersubjectivity. Before analyzing the concept of transcendental subjectivity, it is necessary to understand Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the concepts of reduction and pure consciousness. The aim of this paragraph is not to provide an extended account of Husserl's philosophy in *Ideas I*, but rather to provide a brief outline of few key concepts useful to comprehend Merleau-Ponty's idea of phenomenology. This because the concepts of eidetic reduction, phenomenological reduction and pure consciousness appears in Husserl's *Ideas I* but are then re-proposed in later works such as *Cartesian Meditations* and *Crisis*, works that strongly influenced Merleau-Ponty.

In *Ideas I* Husserl exposes his idea of phenomenology as a science of essences and this represents the starting point for Merleau-Ponty in his introduction to the PP. Furthermore, Husserl clarifies what he means with the terms reduction and natural attitude. The relationship between natural attitude – intended as a form of attitude that takes the presence of the world as granted – and the *epoché* is fundamental for the understanding of the novelty introduced by the phenomenological practice. Since the first chapter, Husserl clarifies that intuition is the base for the apprehension of essences. This connection with intuition however does not means that we can apprehend essences with the attitude proper of our common and scientific practice, but rather, in order to see essences, we need a change in of attitude. For example, biology presupposes the existence of the world insofar as it studies organisms. However, for Husserl a proper essence corresponds to each individual thing. With the term 'essence,' Husserl means the "what" of something individual or factual. This link is relevant because it connects contingency with necessity and universality with intuition. Each individual thing has its own necessary being so and so, and this "what" – as Husserl calls it – has the character of universality[27], it is it is what allows a thing to be what it is, by circumscribing possible and impossible ways for it to be what it is. This 'what' has the character of universality as it pertains to something 'in general' or 'as such' (e.g., colour in general,

[27] In order to clarify this link, Husserl claims that: 'each individual material thing has its own essential kind of being and, at the highest level, it has the universal kind of being of a "material thing in general," together with a determination of time in general, duration in general, figure in general, materiality in general' (Husserl 2014: 11).

or colour as such). This connection between necessity and universality within intuition is what opens a new field of analysis and leads to the consideration of the phenomenological method.

Firstly, Husserl clarifies how it is possible to switch from the psychological level to the eidetic level of analysis by means of a practice of eidetic reduction. In a phenomenological and eidetic attitude the aim is to abstract from the existence of individual things and to focus on the structure of the conscious subject that is performing the intentional activities. Secondly, he specifies the transcendental reduction:

> *The phenomena of transcendental phenomenology will be characterized as irreal*. Our reduction, i.e., the specifically transcendental reduction, "purifies" the psychological phenomena of what lends them reality and thereby any fit or classification in the real "world". Our phenomenology is to be a doctrine of the essences, not of real but of transcendentally reduced phenomena. […] The transition to the pure essence delivers, on the one side, knowledge of the essence of the real, and, on the other, with respect to the remaining sphere, knowledge of the essence of the irreal (Husserl 2014: 5-6).

For Husserl, phenomenology as science of essences is a science of the irreal as opposed to real, i.e., object of possible experience in space and time. Starting from this perspective, Husserl qualifies the passage from facts to essences in terms of change in the modality of seeing. In operating this changing of perspective, Husserl is not interested – at least in *Ideas I* – in the concept of world, but rather in the phenomenological sphere of pure consciousness (the ego cogito in its own structure and without any commitment with the natural attitude). Accordingly to Husserl, even if essences can be grasped within the facticity in virtue of a proper modality of intuition (eidetic intuition), then it is clear that essences become a peculiar object proper of a different sphere of investigation. As Husserl clearly remarks, '*positing* and apprehending *essences* by way of initially intuiting them *does not in the least imply a positing of any kind of individual existence; pure truths of essences do not contain any claim about facts at all*' (Husserl 2014: 14-15).

At this stage, the difference between the eidetic reduction and phenomenological reduction arises. The eidetic reduction leads to the essence of an empirical fact. However, it is in performing the transcendental reduction that we reach the sphere of a pure consciousness, a sphere that is irreal because not entangled with any natural belief. Husserl remarks that in the natural attitude we are assuming the world as always "there". Through the phenomenological reduction, the focus becomes the ego that performs the eidetic reduction itself.

At this level of the phenomenological reduction, consciousness appears as a phenomenological residuum; the reduction leads to a completely new sphere of investigation that appears to be the proper field for a pure phenomenological investigation. Starting from an unreflected attitude toward the world, we operate an *epoché*, understood as the suspension of all beliefs regarding the existence of non-existence of any objects and, ultimately, of the world.

Previously, it has been shown that the eidetic reduction discloses the essence (the "what") entities and that the phenomenological reduction affords the essence of consciousness. Both these reductions start from intuition, but reach two different fields. Husserl remarks this in the second chapter of *Ideas I* entitled *Consciousness and Natural actuality* and clarifies that the analysis of the pure consciousness starts from the 'general principle that each individual occurrence has its essence that can be grasped in eidetic purity' (Husserl 2014: 59).

In order to reach the level of pure consciousness, it is necessary to start from its entanglement with the world, with concrete objects and experiences and then to operate a change of perspective that brackets them and opens the content proper of consciousness. The analysis of perception highlights objects as transcendent in the sense that it is impossible perceiving object in their totality because we perceive only aspects (profiles) of them. This transcendence of objects is related with the immanence of

experience[28], this means that experience of something on the contrary is not given in profile but simply given. This brings to the idea of the absoluteness of consciousness, (as we will see, this is an idea that Merleau-Ponty revised under the light of Husserl's latest manuscripts). Husserl tackles the issue of absoluteness of consciousness in contrast to the natural attitude: 'a new attitude must in fact be possible, a new attitude that, with the suspension of this psychophysical universe of nature, nonetheless retains something – the entire field of absolute consciousness' (Husserl 2014: 91). Considering this level of pure consciousness implies a reflection of these acts without pay attention to the things they are referring. As Husserl remarks:

> We "bracket" the acts carried out; for the new investigations, "we do not go along with these theses". Instead of living *in* them, carrying them out, we carry out acts of reflection directed at them, and we apprehend them as the *absolute* being that they are. We live now completely in such acts of the second level, where what is given is the infinite field of absolute experience [*Erlebnisse*] – the *basic field of phenomenology* (Husserl 2014: 91-92).

Husserl relies on the idea of the absoluteness of experiences to claim that consciousness is thinkable as independent from the world.[29] In order to delineate how it becomes possible to analyze this pure ego, Husserl investigates reflection. In the natural attitude, we find a pure ego that flows in many *cogitationes*, we observe a cogito engaged with the belief in the existence of the world and its objects. Nevertheless, thanks to the eidetic reduction we recognize something that remains identical in all these experiences. In order to elucidate that, Husserl use the expression '*transcendence in immanence*': the pure cogito is something that is present in the flux of experiences without changing along with every single *cogitatio*. Considering this, it is necessary to explain not only how it is possible to change from the natural attitude (empirical ego in

[28] '*The* "*contingent*" *thesis of the world thus stands over against the* "*necessary*" *thesis of my pure ego and life as an ego*, a thesis that is utterly indubitable. *It is possible for everything given in person also not to exist; it is impossible for any experience given in person not to exist*' (Husserl 2014: 83).

[29] This is a controversial claim, which is being interpreted in different ways. Following Zahavi (2018). I find most convincing the interpretation that this independence is not a metaphysical but a phenomenological independence. According to this view the difference between consciousness and world is that consciousness self-manifests, but the world requires consciousness for its manifestation as that to which the world becomes manifest.

this case) to the pure ego but also how it is possible to describe the structure of this pure consciousness in itself. In order to explicate this change of focus, Husserl highlights that 'the phenomenological method moves entirely in reflection' (Husserl 2014: 139). With the term reflection, Husserl is referring to acts that are able not only to thematise different *cogitationes* but also to analyze them in an 'evident way' (Husserl 2014: 142). Husserl is clear regarding the role of reflection: 'reflection is, as we may also put it, the name for the consciousness' method of knowing consciousness at all' (Husserl 2014: 142). Reflection is a method available for every consciousness and implies a modification of the natural attitude toward the world because moves the focus from the experience of something to the structure of this experience in itself. This move is a modification in the sense that not every experience is experienced in its undergoing but rather in reflection. As Husserl remarks:

> We speak here of a modification insofar as each reflection essentially emerges from alterations of attitude, by means of which a pre-given experience or datum of experience (the unreflected experience) undergoes a certain transformation, precisely in the mode of the reflected consciousness. (Husserl 2014: 142).

This role of reflection leads to the analysis of the pure consciousness and, consequently, to the consideration of issues such as intentionality and the relationship between noesis and noema. However, the issues of intentionality and the relationship between noesis and noema exceed the present discussion.

The concepts of eidetic reduction, phenomenological reduction and pure consciousness have been briefly outlined within the context of *Ideas I*[30]. This analysis indicates the centrality of the sphere of pure consciousness for Husserl's phenomenology. However, it is important to highlight that these concepts are considered in later Husserl works –

[30] However, it is necessary to underline that it is possible to find different kinds of phenomenological reduction within Husserl's philosophy. Concerning this matter see Luft 2004. In this paper, Luft explains three different ways of practicing the reduction. The "Cartesian way" (that leads to the level of the pure ego conceived without any worldly meaning); "the psychological way" (assuming the structure *ego-cogito-cogitatum*, the investigation focuses on the eidetic structure of consciousness without consider it in its transcendental dimension) and the "way via the life-world" (here the analysis concerns transcendental consciousness in his constituting the world). This analysis is useful in order to understand the development of the phenomenological practice within Husserl's works. Regarding the relationship between phenomenological reduction and pure ego, see for instance Luft (2015).

Cartesian Meditations and C*risis* – in connection with the issues of intersubjectivity, issues that are important for Merleau-Ponty's developed of his understanding of phenomenology.

(I) Transcendental Intersubjectivity

The *Cartesian Meditations* are an elaboration of two lectures Husserl gives at the Sorbonne in the 1929. They are fundamental for understanding Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl since there Husserl provides an account of his notion of transcendental intersubjectivity. The aim of this brief paragraph is to delineate Husserl's reaction to the objection of transcendental solipsism, objection related to the idea of pure consciousness emerged especially in *Ideas I*. This concept of transcendental intersubjectivity is a central theme for the elaboration of intercorporeality within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

In the first meditation, Husserl exposes the idea of *epoché* and transcendental-phenomenological reduction. In this analysis, Husserl follows the methodology exposed in *Ideas I* and remarks on the necessity of bracketing the world as existing for me in order to reach the level of pure consciousness. This "bracketing" opens the sphere of the pure ego and its *cogitationes*. The concern is to secure apodictic evidence for this transcendental subjectivity, but without falling into a perspective that conceives the pure ego as a pure solipsistic subject. Regarding this point – and differing from *Ideas I* – Husserl introduces the necessity of a phenomenological understanding of intersubjectivity. As Husserl remarks: 'as a matter of fact, we shall see that, in a certain manner, a transcendental solipsism is only a subordinate stage philosophically; though, as such, it must first be delimited for purposes of method, in order that the problems of transcendental intersubjectivity, as problems belonging to a higher level, may be correctly stated and attacked' (Husserl 1999: 30-31). The transcendental solipsism remains a necessary step within the phenomenological method.. However, in order to operate a genuine transcendental phenomenology what is required then is the structure

of this transcendental experience of the pure ego that becomes a new focus only if we practice a transcendental reflection.

According to Husserl, it is necessary to pass from natural attitude (for example a perception of a tree) to a reflective attitude (intended as *a posteriori* analysis of what happened when I perceived that tree). Furthermore, in order to reach the transcendental level, it is necessary to pass from natural reflection to transcendental reflection. In this new kind of reflection we are not interested in reproducing the original process of perception, but rather in finding what can be found in that specific process. In practicing the phenomenological reflection what arises is the "disinterested onlooker" that exemplifies the idea of transcendental solipsism:

> If the Ego, as naturally immersed in the world, experiencingly and otherwise, is called *"interested" in the world*, then the phenomenologically altered – and, as so altered, continually maintained – attitude consists in a *splitting of the Ego*: in that the phenomenological Ego establishes himself as *"disinterested onlooker",* above the naïvely interested Ego. (Husserl 1999: 35).

The same ego can split in two attitudes: the natural and the transcendental. This means there are two different attitudes within the same ego and both require a different investigation. In both attitudes, we can practice the eidetic reduction, but if in the case of the reduction of the natural attitude we are directed to the *eidos* of singular objects, then in the case of pure ego we are searching for the *eidos* of pure consciousness. As Husserl underlines, within the phenomenological sphere of the pure ego it is necessary to investigate not only the intentional structure of consciousness[31] but also the pure ego in its genetic activity. The pure ego is the intended also in its own constitutive activity according to which it constitutes itself and objects. .

Husserl clarifies that ego 'constitutes himself for himself in, so to speak, the unity of a "history"' (Husserl 1999: 75). The remarkable point is that the ego is not only producing itself in a unity of history but it also is constituting new objects that are meaningful not only for its genetic activity but also for others. The ego constitutes himself not only in a solipsistic manner but also in relationship with others: 'the

[31] Husserl describes the structure of the consciousness with the scheme: *ego-cogito-cogitatum*.

transcendental constitution of such objects (cultural objects, for example), in relation to *intersubjective* activities, presupposes the antecedent constitution of a transcendental intersubjectivity' (Husserl 1999: 78).". Husserl analyses specifically the concept of transcendental intersubjectivity in the fifth and last meditation, but before doing that he proposes his interpretation of transcendental idealism[32]. However, I do not intend to consider this issue within this thesis.

In the fifth meditation that Husserl provides an account of his idea of transcendental intersubjectivity. The challenge of this section of the *Cartesian Meditations* is to show how "something other" emerges within the level of the pure ego. In practicing the transcendental reflection, the pure ego recognizes itself as different from something. According to Husserl, this uniqueness of the ego points out to the presence of the other intended as another ego. As Husserl remarks, '*what is specifically peculiar to me as ego, my concrete being as a monad*, purely in myself and for myself with an exclusive *ownness*, includes <my> every intentionality and therefore, in particular, the intentionality directed to what is other' (Husserl 1999: 94). This reference of intentionality to something other implies the growing awareness of the ego regarding something that is other to himself. This recognition of otherness broadly intended constitutes the base for the recognition of other egos. Within this process of self-explication of the pure ego, Husserl does not find only the recognition of the being non-alien of the ego but also the retaining of what Husserl calls '*unitary coherent stratum of phenomenon world*' (Husserl 1999: 96). The idea of world as a stratum of any intentional act seems to emerge within the pure ego itself.

This recognition of the centrality of the world in its being a unitary coherent stratum seems to come up within the pure ego. This element, in addition to the emergence of otherness, seems to contradict the objection that sees Husserl endorsing a solipsistic and idealistic perspective. Moreover, Husserl specifies that this unitary coherent substratum within the pure ego is something different from the unitary world that we assume in the

[32] The explanation of transcendental idealism proposed by Husserl is presents in Merleau-Ponty's preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Concerning the issue of Husserl's Transcendental Idealism, see Bernet (2004). Here the author proposes an understanding of Transcendental Idealism that conjugate both the transcendental pure ego and the empirical ego and considers the intersubjective dimension of experience.

straightforward natural attitude. In order to specify this presence of the world at the level of pure consciousness, Husserl uses the term "nature". This nature is different from the world intended in the natural attitude, but is rather understood as '"*Nature" included in my ownness*"' (Husserl 1999: 96). This nature – that Husserl defines as "*mere nature*" – is not intended as something that links the pure ego with the concretely bodily existence. In his transcendental reflection the pure ego recognizes himself as unique and consequently as a different from anything else. This otherness assumes the form of "mere nature" and also the form of otherness intended as other egos; this appears when Husserl remarks that in this recognition of myself as unique, I am also becoming aware of myself as an organism with perceiving organs.

It is necessary to clarify both the idea of world as intentional substratum presents within the pure ego (the world intended as an intentional pole) and the idea of reduced world in its role for the constitution of something alien (the world as an element of otherness within the ego itself). It is the second sense of world that brings Merleau-Ponty to consider nature in its absolute otherness and then in its difference from the world. The world is an immanent transcendency in the sense that it comes up as an alien presence within the self-explicatory activity of the pure ego. Once this otherness starts to be recognized then the ego becomes aware of other egos as members of the same intersubjective world[33]. This reduced world becomes '*a determining part of my own concrete being*' (Husserl 1999: 106). According to Husserl, in the first level we find the constitution of other egos. These other egos allows the constitution of different forms of otherness that for Husserl are – for example – the objective nature and the objective world. This constitution of different forms of otherness implies a '*universal superaddition of sense to my primordial world*' (Husserl 1999: 107) that represents the second level within my primordial world. In the constitution of these others, they are not conceived as isolated but rather they are constituted in a community that have a shared world. As Husserl puts it:

[33] See Zahavi (2001). In this work, Zahavi provides an exhaustive account of Husserl's transcendental intersubjectivity in both edited works and numerous manuscripts. Furthermore, Zahavi considers the experience of intersubjectivity and the experience of others with Husserl's transcendental framework focusing on the emerging of the idea of a common world.

> *In this world* all Egos again present themselves, but in an Objectivating apperception with the sense "*men*" or "psychophysical men as worldly Objects". By virtue of the mentioned communalization of <constitutive intentionality>, the transcendental intersubjectivity has an intersubjective sphere of ownness, in which it constitutes the Objective world; and thus, as the transcendental "We", it is a subjectivity for this world and also for the world of men, which is the form in which it has made itself Objectively actual (Husserl 1999: 107).

This transcendental "We" is the result of the process of communalization of constitutive intentionality in which we are becoming men for men. Following this result, Husserl investigates the processes of constitution of others in details. However, for the aim of this chapter it is not necessary to analyze these passages. Rather, it is important to underline that this concepts of transcendental intersubjectivity and "transcendental We" open the field of the so called *Lebenswelt* (life-world). This connection between pure ego, constitution of otherness, transcendental intersubjectivity and then *Lebenswelt* is essential for the understanding of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

(II) Lebenswelt

The concept of *Lebenswelt* emerges within Husserl's later philosophy, the necessity of an investigation of this concept arises within the development of phenomenology because: 'there has never been a scientific inquiry into the way in which the life-world constantly functions as subsoil, into how its manifold prelogical validities act as grounds for the logical ones, for theoretical truths' (Husserl 1978: 124). Since the very beginning this prelogical subsoil is intended in its intersubjective dimension and in its becoming the substratum of different human practices (such as, for example, science, culture and social practices). Husserl qualifies this subsoil as *Lebenswelt* and he specifies the steps required in order to characterize its structure. Following the phenomenological methodology underlined in *Ideas I* and *Cartesian Meditations,* Husserl remarks that the first step required is to practice transcendental *epoché* about

the objective sciences. The suspension of our engagement with sciences is advocated in order to understand the "how" of the givenness of this life-world. It is necessary to highlight that the task Husserl is developing in the *Crisis* is not to define an ontology of the life-world. Husserl himself points out the necessity of formulating this new ontology,[34] but he clarifies that such new ontology must be premised on another reflection focused rather on the general structure of the life-world. What is required is a change of perspective in our understanding of the world, according to which we are not concerned with the straightforward engagement with world any longer. What allows this change of perspective is the fact that in the natural attitude we are implicitly assuming that the world exists with all its objects. However, we recognize that the world in itself is not something like an ordinary object.

The world as the horizon of all possible activities requires a different conscious attitude. The passage from one attitude to the other is clear: '[We are referring to the] accomplishment of a reduction of "the" world to the transcendental phenomenon "world," a reduction thus also to its correlate, transcendental subjectivity, in and through whose "conscious life" the world, valid for us straightforwardly and naively prior to all science, attains and always has attained its whole content and ontic validity (Husserl 1978: 152-53). In considering this mode of givenness of the world, Husserl also underlines the emerging of the intersubjective and shared world. This intersubjectivity seems to appear not only within the pure ego but emerges as fundamental for the structure of the world itself. In analyzing the nexus of experiences, the presence of others as member of a world arises. Along this process, we recognize that the other is not just emerging as another organism, but rather as another ego with his own possible experiences. This perspective conduces to a specific understanding of this primordial world, as Husserl puts it:

> All the levels and strata through which the syntheses, intentionally overlapping as they are from subject to subject, are interwoven form a universal unity of synthesis; through it the objective universe comes to be—the world which is and as it is concretely and vividly given (and pregiven for all possible praxis). In this regard we speak of the "intersubjective

[34] Husserl defines this future task as an elaboration of an ontology 'understood as a concretely general doctrine of essence for these *onta*' (Husserl 1978: 142).

> constitution" of the world, meaning by this the total system of manners of givenness, however hidden, and also of modes of validity for egos (Husserl 1978: 168).

Despite the fact that the constitution of the world as a universal unity of synthesis emerges, Husserl himself recognizes that there is a paradox. This because the subject who is constituting – in connection with other egos – the world as a phenomenon recognizes himself as incorporated in that world. Nevertheless, in this process of recognition the emergence of the intersubjectivity solves this initial paradox. The inquiring back into the level of the constituting ego in its intentional possibilities requires for Husserl a step further, namely the introduction of the concept of genesis[35]. Within this level of transcendental intersubjectivity, what we attain is 'the correlation between the world and transcendental subjectivity as objectified in mankind' (Husserl 1978: 187).

The awareness of being part of mankind implies that we consider this intersubjectivity within the world as a transcendental problem. Each transcendentally reduced ego conceives others as egos with their own life expressed both in the natural and transcendental attitude[36]. The presence of such transcendental problems within the concrete life of egos leads Husserl to attain the problems of generativity and transcendental history. As Husserl puts it:

> Also appearing thereby, in different steps, first in respect to human beings and then universally, are the problems of genesis [*Generativität*], the problems of transcendental historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*], the problems of the transcendental inquiry which starts from the essential forms of human existence in society, in personalities of a higher order, and proceeds back to their transcendental and thus absolute signification (Husserl 1978: 188).

This quote shows that Husserl is starting to consider a new field of inquiry for phenomenology insofar as a broad conception of *Lebenswelt* arises along these considerations. This life-world appears at the hearth of subjectivity but links with the

[35] Through the transcendental *epoché*, we reach the apodictic pure ego in its constitutive acts and this layer leads, on the one hand, to the recognition of others. On the other hand, in this becoming aware of other egos the pure ego attributes to others the property of being human beings with their own constitutive intentional process.

[36] In this regard Husserl is clear: 'This naturally extends into the realm of the transcendental problems which finally encompass all living beings insofar as they have, even indirectly but still verifiably, something like "life," and even communal life in the spiritual [geistige] sense' (Husserl 1978: 188).

concrete presence of egos and their activity, social and historical. After this brief outline of Husserl's arguments regarding the life-world, it may be helpful to consider Steinbock's analysis of the concept of *Lebenswelt*. Steinbock introduces five meanings of the concept of *Lebenswelt*, the fifth one helps in understanding Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of *Lebenwelt*, as we will see in the next lines. In fact, the Merleau-Pontian understanding of Husserl – and his idea of *Lebenswelt* – is devoted to an elucidation of this complicated relationship between ego and intersubjective world.

Concerning the life-world, Steinbock, in his book *Home and beyond. Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*, describes different acceptations of the concept of *Lebenswelt* within Husserl's analysis. Specifically, Steinbock individuates four provisional uses: 1. Life-world as intuitable (intended as prescientific), 2. Life-world as a foundation of sense (the foundational experience of the life-world is intended as ontological primary in opposition to the ideal and objective interpretation on the world provided by sciences). 3. The subjective-relative life-world (the life-world becomes relativized to our own objective truths in a specific socio-cultural context); 4. Life-world as an essential structure: the eidos of the perceptual world. According to Steinbock, this fourth acceptation is developed by Husserl in order to contrast the conception of life-world intended as a subjective-relative: 'the perceptual world is the "lifeworld a priori", […] here the lifeworld a priori functions in relation to the diverse cultural life-worlds as an eidos does in relation to its particular instances' (Steinbock 1995: 96). Starting from these four provisional senses, Steinbock cashes out the fifth, and for him, the most fundamental one: the transcendental concept of the life-world. I do not intend to discuss Steinbock's reading of Husserl. However, this last meaning provides interesting stimuli to understand not only the complexity of this concept within Husserl's conception of *Lebenswelt* but also to consider the connection between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl. In fact, Steinbock identifies two main characteristics of the transcendental life-world, world as horizon and earth-ground. I believe that both features are central in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of this concept. As Steinbock claims: 'the lifeworld viewed transcendentally in a regressive procedure has two modalities: world-horizon and earth ground. Both horizon and ground are constitutive conditions of experience and express two transcendental elaborations of how the

lifeworld functions as pregiven' (Steinbock 1995: 121). The concept of earth-ground refers to the idea that the earth necessarily is the ground, the concrete substratum of any activity. The idea of horizon remands to the idea that the earth has not only a physical connotation but, in its becoming a world for humans, opens a series of possible experiences. In this sense, the world-horizon is the field of all possible human activities and practices.

The concepts of horizon and earth are central in Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserl and for his analysis of nature. The issue of horizon brings the fundamental role of body and perception (the horizon of the perceptual field) into consideration. The concept of earth appears in Merleau-Ponty's course note on nature when he is elucidating the relevance of Husserl for his formulation of nature. The interesting point is that this transcendental conception of life-world requires further analysis, for both Merleau-Ponty and Steinbock. In Husserl, it is possible to recognize an oscillation or tension between, on the one hand, the necessity to consider the peculiarity of the life-world as a ground and, on the other hand, the attempt to reduce it to the correlate of the intentional ego. Moran (2012) underlines how for Husserl the *Lebenswelt* is an intertwining between nature and culture. According to Moran, 'the life-world therefore encompasses both the world of 'nature' (as it presents itself to us in our everyday dealings with it, including mountains, sky, plants, animals, planets and so on) and the world of 'culture', including ourselves, other persons, animals, social institutions, artifacts, symbolic systems, languages and religions' (Moran 2012: 184). Proposing to consider life-world in its being horizon, Moran claims that: 'the life-world provides a living context or 'world-horizon' (*Welthorizont*) which precisely makes humans human' (Moran 2012: 186). Merleau-Ponty was aware of this "world-horizon" structure of the life-world but instead focus on it he veered to the consideration of nature.

2.2 Merleau-Pontian Interpretation of Husserl's Idea of Phenomenology

In the preface of PP, Merleau-Ponty draws out the coordinates for his phenomenological investigation and passes through a consideration of the

phenomenology as science of essences, the validity of the phenomenological reduction and the analysis of the question of transcendental idealism. Accordingly, in what follows, I will mainly focus on these topics[37].

In the first lines of his preface, Merleau-Ponty clarifies that for him phenomenology is 'the study of essences' and furthermore that, despite Husserl's emphasis on the transcendental attitude, phenomenology still maintains a connection with something that is 'prior to reflection'. In opposition to reflective philosophy[38] that considers as a proper investigation a reflection that goes back to a mere interiority of the subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty provides a different conception of reflection:

> I began to reflect, my reflection is reflection upon an unreflected; it cannot be unaware of itself as an event; henceforth it appears as a genuine creation, as a change in the structure of consciousness, and yet this involves recognizing, prior to its own operations, the world that is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself. The real is to be described, and neither constructed nor constituted. This means that I cannot assimilate perception to syntheses that belong to the order of judgments, acts, or predication (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxiii)[39].

These lines provide important elements for the delineation of both Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology and his formulation of a phenomenology of perception. Firstly, Merleau-Ponty points out the necessity to understand reflection as a mediate grasping of experience. An account of the reflective practice should consider

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[37] In addition, it is possible to grasp Fink's influence on Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl's phenomenological method. In fact, in considering the question "what is phenomenology?" Merleau-Ponty is dealing directly with the issue of phenomenology as a science of essences posited by Husserl in *Ideas I*. At the same time, the constant underlining of the relationship between essences and facticity shows a strong influence of the famous article *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism*. This influence is relevant not only from an historical point of view. In fact, it is well known that Merleau-Ponty was introduced to Eugen Fink at the Husserl Archives in Leuven by Van Breda. This influence is also theoretically relevant, in fact, centrality of the concept "form of the world" provided by Fink in connection with the Husserlian idea of reduction is relevant for the Merleau-Pontian reading of the relationship between philosophy and non-philosophy (theoretical aptitude and the pre-reflective layer of experience). This is because what Merleau-Ponty defines as non-philosophy (nature and art), should be considered from within phenomenology without using a theoretical framework that aims to exhaust it in terms of objectification.

[38] Merleau-Ponty specifies what he means with the term reflective philosophies and what is their philosophical error: 'The error of reflective philosophies is believing that the meditating subject could absorb the object into his meditation or grasp the object upon which he is meditating without remainder, or that our being reduces down to our knowledge. As the meditating subject, we are never the unreflective subject whom we seek to know' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 64).

[39] The Introduction to the PP in numbered with roman numbers.

that reflection necessary analyses experience a posteriori. Secondly, perception gives us a primordial access to the world before any objective attitude. As Merleau-Ponty puts it 'perception is not a science of the world, nor even an act or a deliberate taking of a stand; it is the background against which all acts stand out and is thus presupposed by them' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxiv).

Merleau-Ponty assumes that perception connects intimately subjectivity and external world, however in order to grasp the meaning of this claim it is necessary to clarify also the relationship between subjects that is perceptually configured. In order to deal with this problem, Merleau-Ponty focuses the attention on the problem of Husserl's transcendental idealism and underlines that in Husserl the "other" appears as a paradox in virtue of the fact that this "otherness" comes up within the sphere of the pure ego. Merleau-Ponty is defending the idea that the transcendental idealism presented by Husserl is not reducible to a conception of a subjectivity seen as an impartial spectator. According to this view, that for Merleau-Ponty is proper of a pure reflective philosophy, the subjectivity appears to be what constructs the world. Instead, Merleau-Ponty seems to opt for a conception, according to which the subjectivity has constitutive power, but at the same time receives this possibility from its being part of the world. Obviously, this perspective links to a belief in the perceptual primacy of our experience and its inexhaustible process and to the idea of phenomenological reduction conceived as an ongoing project: 'the most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxvii). Despite the fact that phenomenological reduction conduces to transcendental subjectivity, this does not means reducing this practice to the discovery of the pure ego. Rather, it appears plausible to conceive of the phenomenological reduction as a practice that opens up the layer of pure ego transcendentally and intimately connected with the transcendence of the world. Starting from this perspective, Merleau-Ponty uses the Heideggerian formula being-in-the-world that becomes possible 'against the background of the phenomenological reduction' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxviii).

This need of a suspension of the natural attitude follows Husserl's conception of phenomenological reduction as he develops it in *Ideas I*. However, if for Husserl this practice leads to essences intended as a main phenomenological focus, then for

Merleau-Ponty they are a necessary step for the phenomenological practice but not its end. As Merleau-Ponty remarks:

> But here the essence is clearly not the goal, but rather a means. […] The necessity of passing through essences does not signify that philosophy takes them as an object, but rather that our existence is too tightly caught in the world in order to know itself as such at the moment when it is thrown into the world, and that our existence needs the field of ideality in order to know and to conquer its facticity (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxviii).

This interpretation of the phenomenological investigation expresses a difference between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, starting from Husserl's formulation of the phenomenological reduction Merleau-Ponty highlights the necessity to bring this investigation far from any idealist and transcendental point of view.

Sara Heinämaa (1999) stresses how Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserlian phenomenological reduction is motivated by areinterpretation of the transcendental dimension of the pure Ego within the facticity of the flesh. Starting from this background, Heinämaa claims that Merleau-Ponty 'does not reject Husserl's analysis of intentionality; but proposes a problematisation of its condition of possibility' (Heinämaa 1999: 56). In order to problematize this possibility of the intentional analysis, which Husserl pursues according to the eidetic method at the level of the pure ego, Merleau-Ponty proposes to return at the level of facticity that the phenomenologist can make object of the same eidetic analysis. Heinämaa stresses that for Merleau-Ponty an intentional analysis, which remains blind to this pre-thetical level of experience, will be limited to a pure intellectualistic investigation. Starting from this assumption, Heinämaa shows Merleau-Ponty's attitude with respect to Husserl's phenomenology. Even if Merleau-Ponty recognize the importance of the concept of *Lebenswelt* in the latest Husserl's phenomenology, he still 'rejects the subsequent reduction that is supposed to allow us to study the constitution of the phenomena in transcendental consciousness' (Heinämaa 1999: 57). However, Heinämaa promptly remarks how this reading is motivated by a transcendental idea, which is nonetheless different from the idea of a transcendental ego.

In highlighting the impossibility of the transcendental reduction, Merleau-Ponty is not arguing for the impossibility of a radical phenomenology but rather he is pointing out a conception of phenomenology as an endless practice. I find Heinämaa's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's conception of reduction convincing, especially when she remarks that 'when Merleau-Ponty states that a total reduction is impossible, he is not restricting the scope of a phenomenological reduction. He is arguing that the basis of experience and meaning cannot be made fully explicit: something remains ambiguous in every attempt to clarify and illuminate' (Heinämaa 1999: 59)[40]. However, it is necessary to consider if Merleau-Ponty's lacks of distinction between eidetic reduction and phenomenological reduction leads to a real abandonment of the phenomenological approach. Regarding this issue, it seems plausible to assume that Merleau-Ponty avoided focusing on the difference between eidetic reduction and phenomenological reduction probably for two main reasons. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty most likely granted the idea that the eidetic reduction could be practiced also by non-philosophers[41] consequently what mainly matter for him is the understanding of the

[40]In the same line of Heinämaa, Joel Smith (2005) points out that Merleau-Ponty is providing his own reading of Husserl reduction that surely implies a conception of being-in-the-world but that, at the same time respects the demand of a transcendental dimension. Smith shows that it is in virtue of our meditative Cogito that our "être au monde" appears, consequently 'the world, relations to which are constitutive for us, is the world as it appears to consciousness, as phenomenon. But the world as phenomenon, the phenomenological world, is precisely that which survives the phenomenological reduction' (Smith 2005, 560). In stressing this phenomenological dimension, Merleau-Ponty is not remaining linked with a mere facticity of the world, but rather he is trying to highlight the presence of the world as a phenomenological residuum within the phenomenological reduction. Thus, 'être au monde, our non-cognitive, pre-objective relation to the world is to be understood – can only be understood – as a relation to the phenomenologically reduced world – the world as it appears. The object of description in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is the phenomenological world' (Smith 2005: 560). Smith remarks that this phenomenological attitude reveals the pre-theoretical dimension of the world and seems to conflict to the idea of Husserlian transcendental elucidation of the phenomenological world. At this stage, Smith suggests to consider the Merleau-Pontian ideas of the impossibility of reduction as intimate connected with this opacity of the world. This idea is against any mere idealistic interpretation of Husserl's reduction and is strongly connected with the idea of transcendence of the flesh expressed by Heinämaa.

[41] In his article *Phenomenology and the sciences of* Man (1964), Merleau-Ponty is considering the question of phenomenological reduction and eidetic reduction within a dialogue between phenomenology and human sciences. Recalling *Ideas I*, Merleau-Ponty is specifying that in this work Husserl is setting psychology as a science of facts apart from phenomenology that 'is a universal reflection that attempts to make explicit and to clarify conceptually all the intentional object that my consciousness can envisage' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 56). In this article, Merleau-Ponty clarify that psychology uses the method of induction in order to find eidetic structures of a consciousness as an object of observation. However, 'the definition of the notions which will enable us to understand these facts belongs [check the quotes – it should be singular] to phenomenology' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 58). Merleau-Ponty focuses the consideration of the eidetic reduction in relationship to eidetic psychology. He is admitting that is

phenomenological reduction. In fact, the phenomenological reduction could be performed only within a phenomenological framework devoted to the discovery of the pure ego. On the other hand, it appears clear that Merleau-Ponty's main phenomenological concerns on the pre-categorical experience and nature requires a peculiar attention of the relationship between the reduced ego and the world. This becomes particularly clear when, in order to clarify the intimate connection between facts and essences, Merleau-Ponty recalls precisely Fink's conception of reduction[42].

Fink's was very influential in Merleau-Ponty understanding of the connection between phenomenological reduction and world. According to Fink, the *epoché* uncovers the belief in the world as a "transcendental dogma" (Fink 1970: 110), this phenomenological practice starts from our being-man-in-the-world and then leads to discover the transcendental layer of our own dimension. Fink shows how the *epoché* brackets the accepted dimension of our existence in the world in order to display the double movement of the phenomenological reduction. By "double movement", I mean the following: if the *epoché* suspends the accepted positivity of our being in the world, then the phenomenological reduction firstly leads to the field of the transcendental ego and, secondly, it leads back to the presence of the world. Starting from this first step it becomes possible to consider the transcendental ego in its intentional structure (*ego-cogito-cogitatum*) and in its continual activity that makes evident the correlation to the world in its transcendental dimension.

The intentional structure of the reduced transcendental ego conduces Fink to assert that 'phenomenology disconnects the belief (as the universal world-apperception) in the world in order ultimately to know the world' (Fink 1999: 115). The transcendental

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possible to practice an eidetic psychology, but at the same time this possibility is related to the husserlian idea of *Wesenschau*. The intuition of essences is what uncover the relation of one individual fact with its essence, and as Merleau-Ponty remarks – and quotes a passage from Ideas I – that 'this Wesenschau is not the exclusive possession of the phenomenologists' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 72). Despite the fact that eidetic psychology concerns eidetic structures, this psychology, according to both Merleau-Ponty and Husserl, does not reach the level of transcendental ego. This level pertains to phenomenology and though it requires an eidetic analysis of the natural attitude (empirical psychology), this is seen only as a first step for the operating of a proper phenomenological reduction.

[42] The influence of Fink in Merleau-Ponty's conception of phenomenology is documented. Merleau-Ponty met Fink at the Husserl Archives in Leuven and consulted under his supervision the unpublished manuscripts of the Crisis and also Fink's unpublished *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*. It is not surprisingly that in the preface to the *PP* there are many references to Fink's published paper *Husserl's Philosophy and Contemporary Criticism* and the unpublished text of his *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*.

reflection displays a form of reduction that leads to consider the ego in his ability to self-reflect on himself from the "outside". Thus, it becomes possible to grasp a pure ego that experiences, in an act of reflection, itself as impartial spectator in respect to the natural flux of experience. However, according to Fink the world, as a transcendental residuum, is still presents at this level. For Fink the centrality of the transcendental sphere consists in its correlation with the world as being for a transcendental subjectivity.

The *epoché* suspends the natural belief in the world and consequently the phenomenological reduction opens the field of the transcendental ego and its structure (*ego-cogito-cogitatum*). At the same time, the transcendental cogito self-explicates his own activity in his correlation with the world and in doing so, it appears to be not an overlooked spectator but rather a subjectivity transcendentally involved with the world. It is necessary to specify that at this level the ego should be considered in its pure dimension, so it seems possible to assume that this pure level is not experiencing within the world, but instead with the world as a noematic correlate[43]. The phenomenological reduction should be considered, according to Fink, as a "leading back" of the philosophizing subjectivity to its transcendental dimension that accepts the world as a residuum. As Fink remarks:

> The true theme of phenomenology is neither the world on the one hand, nor a transcendental subjectivity which is to be set over and against the world on the other, but the world's becoming in the constitution of transcendental subjectivity. As the logos of the world which is discovered by the reduction as the transcendental acceptance-phenomenon, "phenomenology" is the theoretical exhibiting of the world-forming constitution: it is essentially "constitutive phenomenology" (Fink 1970: 130-31).

[43] This perspective diverges from the interpretation of the noema more recently developed by Drummond. Drummond proposes a different reading of the noema and reduction: 'we recognize the noema as an intentional moment (an abstractum) of the experience and as ontologically identical but not perfectly coincident with the intended objectivity' (Drummond 1992, 104). The noema as an abstractum emerges within the practice of the reduction toward our natural attitude: 'the abstraction which is the phenomenological reduction does not transform the objectivities of our ordinary experience by abstracting from them; it transforms instead our activity by abstracting from a positing central to our determinate, natural experiences' (Drummond 1992, 107). Both perspectives consider the question of the noema within the practice of the phenomenological epoché, nonetheless if in Fink this analysis brings to a possible coincidence between noema and world, then in Drummond the noema appears as an abstract moment of our abstraction from the thematic attitude.

The intimate relationship between transcendental ego and world implies that 'the world is interpreted idealistically in phenomenology, but this does not signify a subjectivism which is burdened with the natural attitude's concept of the subject, but rather the scientific exhibiting and systematic unfolding of the world's constitutive ideality' (Fink 1999: 139). I want suggest that it is following this idea of the reduction that Merleau-Ponty remarks:

> The best formulation of the reduction is the one offered by Husserl's assistant Eugen Fink when he spoke of a "wonder" before the world. Reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world; rather, it steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connects us to the world in order to make them appear (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxvii).

In empathizing the centrality of the world, Merleau-Ponty is trying to provide a peculiar interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology that does not consider the pure ego as a main focus. In the previous paragraph, the issue of transcendental intersubjectivity as a central issue for Husserl's later though emerged. He accepts the transcendental solipsism as a subordinate step within the phenomenological method that leads to the consideration of other egos and to the analysis of the transcendental "We". This idea of transcendental intersubjectivity is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology and for his interpretation of Husserl. The concern for the issue of intersubjectivity arises in the preface and in connection with his analysis of the phenomenological reduction. Merleau-Ponty is then following Husserl's idea that a correct practice of the phenomenological reduction unveils a level of pure ego that is not solipsistic intended but rather seen in its intersubjective experience. However, it is important to understand why the issue of intersubjectivity is so important for Merleau-Ponty. Furthermore, starting from the idea of intersubjectivity Merleau-Ponty elaborates the ideas of flesh and intercorporeality. The issues of flesh and intercorporeality will be considered in the next chapter.

Although Merleau-Ponty analyses the question of others specifically in the preface and in the fourth chapter of the PP, the issue of intersubjectivity intended as a carnal intersubjectivity (its being firstly an anonymous connection of bodies) appears also in

Merleau-Ponty's later works such as *Husserl at the limits of phenomenology* and *Signes*. It is important to focus on PP because in the later work the issue of intersubjectivity is re-elaborated primarily in terms of intercorporeality (as psychophysical connection between embodied subjects).

Merleau-Ponty recognizes that the alter ego appears to be a paradox for Husserl because the appearing of the other being starts within the sphere of transcendental subjectivity. What Merleau-Ponty seeks is the clarification of the appearing of the other intended as truly in him-self rather than for-me. The paradox of the alter ego emerges insofar as the other is intended merely as other for my own consciousness. Merleau-Ponty underlines the necessity to consider ego and alter ego not starting from their mutual conscious activity but rather from their inherence in a situation, from their being external to each other. The carnal inherence expresses the idea of correlation between subjects in a shared (primarily perceptually and then culturally or socially) world and implies that 'I do not discover merely my presence to myself, but also the possibility of an "outsider spectator"' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxvi).

If Husserl elaborates his transcendental intersubjectivity starting from the reduction to the pure ego cogito, then Merleau-Ponty's attempt is to elaborate intersubjectivity starting from the worldly condition. Merleau-Ponty recognizes that when Husserl conceives transcendental subjectivity as an intersubjectivity, nonetheless he remarks the necessity to start directly from this intersubjectivity. It seems clear that Merleau-Ponty is still committed with a philosophy of consciousness; his reading of the phenomenological reduction testifies the will to unveil a new idea of cogito based in his primarily openness to the world and otherness rather than seen it in terms of self-reflection. For Husserl the practice of the suspension of the natural attitude and then the practice of the phenomenological reduction leads to the pure ego that has within his structure an intersubjective dimension. In Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological practice conduces to the consideration of the fundamental and primordial inherence of the ego to the world. It seems that the analysis does not stop at the level of the constitutive ego, but rather conduces directly to the facticity of intersubjective experience. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

> The true *Cogito* does not define the existence of the subject through the thought that the subject has of existing, does not convert the certainty of the world into a certainty of the thought about the world, and finally, does not replace the world itself with the signification "world". Rather, it recognizes my thought as an inalienable fact and it eliminates all forms of idealism by revealing me as "being in the world" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxvii).

Merleau-Ponty is following Husserl, however he emphasizes the role of the bodily dimension of this "being in the world". In the section of the PP entitled *Others and the Human World*, Merleau-Ponty continues with his analysis of intersubjectivity and Merleau-Ponty underlines the role of the body in the constitution of intersubjectivity. This carnal co-presence of egos through their bodies implies a perceptual and fundamental inherence. This perceptual dimension consents the recognition of other consciousness in its bodily presence, the body (in its connection with consciousness) becomes consequently a "body-for-us" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 367). The body allows the becoming aware of the "We" and thus the consciousness becomes "perceptual consciousness" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 367). According to Merleau-Ponty, given our bodily and perceptual existence, it is necessary to recognize that consciousness is embodied and that the ego is fundamentally intersubjective before being aware of himself.

In order to clarify this relationship, Merleau-Ponty uses the term internal relation. Our consciousness is primarily a perceptual consciousness and this implies that it lives through the body and the horizon of the perceptual field. Both the body and the perceptual field are given in profiles and adumbrations because we never have the full presence of them, but rather we are constantly perceiving and synthetizing the various aspects of things. In this embodied situation, the other appears to be a completion of my perceptual system because he sees profiles of the world and of myself that I do not see. This internal relation has an intersubjective structure, as Merleau-Ponty remarks: 'the other person is not enclosed in my perspective on the world because this perspective itself has no definite limits, because it spontaneously slips into the other's perspective, and because they are gathered together in a single world in which all participate as anonymous subjects of perception' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 369). On the one hand, this bodily conception of intersubjectivity represents an anticipation of Merleau-Ponty's

later concept of chiasm (the intertwining between body and world, body and other bodies, bodies and myself). On the other hand, this idea of the single world intended as a ground leads to the issue of the *Lebenswelt*. This because for Merleau-Ponty the world is seen in both its perceptual and cultural dimension.

2.3 The role of the Lebenswelt in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology

The accent on the perceptual and corporeal dimension of subjectivity leads Merleau-Ponty to a clarification of his ontological aim: 'the ontological world and body that we uncover at the core of the subject are not the world and the body as ideas; rather, they are the world itself condensed into a comprehensive hold and the body itself as a knowing-body'(Merleau-Ponty 2012: 431). The articulation of this ontological thesis is developed in other works, but starting from the analysis of bodily experience in PP, Merleau-Ponty continues in his elaboration considering the question of *écart* (our non-coincidence with the external world, even though we are part of it) and the question of nature. After introducing the idea of the centrality of world and body in the core of subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty casts doubts on the conception that considers the world as a product of the labor of consciousness. For Merleau-Ponty a philosophy of consciousness that stresses the absoluteness of mind remains entangled to a view that sees the world as dependent from the consciousness. On the contrary, for Merleau-Ponty it is necessary to reframe the investigation assuming as central our "primordial faith":

> We are in the world, which means that things take shape, that an immense individual asserts itself, and that each existence understands itself and understands others. All that remains is to recognize these phenomena that ground all of our certainties. The belief in an absolute spirit or in a world in itself and detached from us is no more than a rationalization of this primordial faith (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 431).

The question of the primordial faith leads to the issue of nature, intended as a ground for the experience. From the 1956 to the 1961, Merleau-Ponty approaches the issue of

nature in relationship to a continuous reconsideration of his own phenomenology and in a direct dialogue with the latest works of Husserl. Thus, it is relevant to consider briefly the reading Merleau-Ponty provides of the concept of *Lebenswelt*. Furthermore, it is necessary to highlight that the change of focus from world to nature does not imply necessarily an ambiguity between both. Considering nature means, for Merleau-Ponty, investigating a primordial layer of experience in which emerges the genesis of subjectivity, reality and idealities (intended also as cultural, artistic and scientific). Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the *epoché* is intimately connected with the issue of a factual experience of external reality. According to Merleau-Ponty's reading of the *epoché*, what is suspended is the natural attitude implicit in our worldly life. In providing this interpretation, Merleau-Ponty is following Husserl, but what matters for Merleau-Ponty is not the sphere of pure subjectivity with his *cogitations* – even when this is not conceived of in a pure solipsistic – but rather in an intersubjective perspective. Practicing the *epoché*, according to Merleau-Ponty, means to recuperate the world as a fundamental element of subjectivity in itself. It is necessary to ask what brings then to the analysis of the concept of nature and to clarify if Merleau-Ponty uses the terms world and nature as interchangeable.

Before dealing directly with these issues, it is necessary to spell out what is the role of the world in connection with the *Lebenswelt*. In fact, Merleau-Ponty passes from consciousness to the world through perception. In doing so, he underlines the role of the lived body and reinterprets the role of the *epoché*. This understanding leads Merleau-Ponty to consider the world as a horizon of actions that discloses itself within subjectivity.

In Merleau-Ponty, the issue of *Lebenswelt* is not secondary or a mere matter of interpretation of Husserl's latest philosophy. In this regard, Dermot Moran (2012) clarifies that Merleau-Ponty not only engages a lifelong dialogue with Husserlian phenomenology, but also that Merleau-Ponty was "gifted" in noticing aspect of Husserl's phenomenology that otherwise would have been unnoticed[44]. In the section of

[44] According to Moran not only Merleau-Ponty was influenced by Husserl at the very beginning of his philosophical legacy in his analyses of the reduction and the pre-reflective layer of experience, but also 'Merleau-Ponty's late conception of "intertwining" or "chiasm" is deeply influenced by Husserl's concepts of "interweaving" (*Verflechtung*) and "in-one-another" (*Ineinander*), especially as encountered

the *Notes de cours 1959-1961* entitled *La Philosophie en Face de Cette Non-Philosophie*, Merleau-Ponty is connecting three issues of Husserl's phenomenology: transcendental reduction, *Lebenswelt* and nature. This link appears in Husserl's *Crisis* when he says: 'the world, exactly as it was, for me earlier and still is, as my world, our world, humanity's world, having validity in its various subjective ways, has not disappeared; […] during the consistently carried-out epoché, it is under our gaze purely as the correlate of the subjectivity which gives it ontic meaning, through whose validities the world "is" at all' (Husserl 1978: 152). Despite the fact that an ambiguity concerning the difference between world and nature is present within Merleau-Ponty's works, a clear explanation of his understanding of the Husserlian concept of *Lebenswelt* appears in his *Notes the course 1959-1961*.

Since SB, Merleau-Ponty was concerned with the relationship between consciousness and nature in an open dialogue with sciences. With the PP, he continues this style of philosophizing in order to explain the fundamental role of our bodily experience and the idea of the direct relationship between subject and world trough perception. As it has been previously underlined, this path was strongly influenced by Husserl and, specifically in his dealing with the issue of world in relationship with the problem of solipsism, by Eugen Fink.

Despite the fact that the relationship between subject and object, self and world is present since the beginning of his philosophical path, it is only at the end of his activity that Merleau-Ponty deals directly with the relationship between *Lebenswelt* and nature. In the previous analysis concerning the idea of world, it appears clear that this requires a re-consideration of the phenomenological practice of the transcendental reduction. I suggest that the issue of nature brings Merleau-Ponty in a different direction from the one of Husserl. As Ulrich Melle claims, 'Husserl's idealistic conception of the relationship between nature and spirit is radically spirit-centered. Nature in itself and independent of spirit and its meaning-giving acts is first of all only an abstraction and secondly a mere substrate for the meaning-giving acts and goal-directed activities of spiritual beings' (Melle 1996: 34). Furthermore, Melle clearly claims that, according to

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in the *Crisis* texts. Merleau-Ponty himself explicitly credits Husserl with what he calls his "prophetic" discovery of the concept of *Verflechtung*' (Moran 2012: 280).

Husserl 'Nature is incessantly and necessarily spiritualized and humanized' (Melle 1996: 34).

Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, conceives nature as something non-reducible to subjectivity. This point will be explained extensively in the next chapter, however it is important to highlight that the different idea of nature in Merleau-Ponty derives from his interpretation of *Lebenswelt*. The issue of *Lebenswelt* leads Husserl to the consideration of a layer of experience that precedes even the scientific and objectifying practice. However, this idea of pre-categorical and pre-given world is not intended as something merely natural, as something merely perceptual. As Melle clearly shows, 'the life-world is a spiritual-cultural world. Culture in the broad sense comprises all realities, which have predicates of meaning' (Melle 1996: 24). What comes up from Husserl then is the idea that this pre-givenness of the life-world does not exclude axiological and cultural layers of experience, but rather is passible of those connotations. Despite the fact that Merleau-Ponty seems to formulate the idea of a non-spiritualized nature, he is starting from the same conception of life-world. In his *Notes de course 1959-1960*, he develops an analysis of the *Lebenswelt*.

The analysis of the relationship between philosophy and non-philosophy develops since the preface of the PP and emerges strongly in another course notes of the 1953[45], in which Merleau-Ponty is reconsidering the role of consciousness within his philosophy and the possibilities that a phenomenological consideration of perception provides. In this notes Merleau-Ponty clarifies the philosophical necessity to consider three moments of our experience (Merleau-Ponty 2011: 53): quality, space and movement, the world as nature. This triad finds the proper expression and consequently its proper transformation in three moments as well: tools, the artwork and the world intended as a world of culture. At the end of this schema, Merleau-Ponty highlights the 'relationship between nature and culture', underling the necessity to consider the intimate relationship between both elements.

The moment of quality of our experience means that in our perceptual experience there is a direct encounter with the external world. At the same time, this perceptual activity is characterized by our spatial insertion in the texture of reality through our

[45] Merleau-Ponty (2011).

abilities of movement. At this stage, the natural participation within the world should find an expression in a different level of experience. This happens with our manipulation of objects and our artistic activities. This perspective presupposes that there is a dialectic between sensible world and perception; in order to bring to expression what we perceive within the natural world it is necessary an intimate connection between perception and thought.

In a passage of these notes devoted to the sensible world and the world of expression, Merleau-Ponty uses the terms 'logos de la perception' (Merleau-Ponty 2011: 54)[46] and 'logique perceptive'(Merleau-Ponty 2011: 54)[47], and claims that we need an analysis of the 'Double rapport: le perçu est pour être pensé, la pensée est du perçu'(Merleau-Ponty 2011: 54)[48]. According to Merleau-Ponty, once we are considering the relationships between subject-world and perception-thought in term of expression, then it is necessary to consider the relationship between nature and culture. This line of analysis is still presents few years later, when Merleau-Ponty is dealing directly with the issues of nature and life-world. If in this notes of the 1953 perception is in the focus, in the latest notes then he is considering life-world and nature within the practice of reflection and transcendental reduction. The practice of the transcendental reduction reveals the pre-reflective layers within a subject that, in recognizing this original passivity, recognizes himself as a subject in the world. Merleau-Ponty is trying to avoid any form of solipsism, this because the danger of an absolutisation of the pure ego leads to the perspective of solipsism that makes difficult to account for an alter ego that is constituted and constituent. If for Husserl the analysis of the life-world leads to a reconsideration of his conception of transcendental ego, then for Merleau-Ponty this concept leads to an elaboration of both a philosophy of nature and the concept of flesh and to the investigation of the possibility of our thinking about the natural element that does not reduce it to a mere conscious element.

In his *Notes de course 1959-1960,* Merleau-Ponty uses the term 'oubli', according to him we have a 'double oubli: oubli de la Nature avant l'idéalisation, la mathématisation

[46] 'Logos of perception' (my translation).
[47] 'Perceptual logic' (my translation).
[48] 'Double relation: the perceived could be thought, thought of the perceived' (m translation).

– du mond pré-scientifique, pré-théorétique, pré-objectif' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 76)[49]. Once again, nature is related to the question of the world. This point is not secondary because it seems that there is a dialectic between nature and world, it appears to be an excess of sense behind our mundane experience, behind our natural – in the sense of world-related – experience of the world. This emerges especially when Merleau-Ponty, in the same passage, clarifies that also the analysis of perception – if intended in term of identification with the real – leads to a form of idealization. For Merleau-Ponty the analysis of perception should not bring to an idea of correspondence of the world to our thought. If we consider the perceptual activity in this manner, then we are arriving at a conception that idealizes the factual dimension of this fundamental experience. This is why Merleau-Ponty prefers to interpret perception in term of union with the carnal world. Recuperating this dimension of union allows to elaborate a perspective different from the one developed by science. This idea leads Merleau-Ponty to the introduction of the concept of "*Stiftung*" (institution), ideas that Merleau-Ponty considered also in his lectures on institution and passivity[50]. According to Merleau-Ponty the perspective

[49] 'Double oblivion: oblivion of nature in front of both idealization and mathematization – of the pre-scientific, pre-theoretic and pre-objective world' (my translation).

[50] It is important to notice that the concept of institution was introduce by Merleau-Ponty firstly in order to overcome the dualistic problem of the relationship between consciousness and object, subject and world. This struggling with the dualistic relationship between subject and object appears in the course notes from the Collège de France (1954-55) in which Merleau-Ponty is considering the concepts of institution and passivity in order to overcome this problem. In his Foreword to the work Institution and Passivity (2010), Claude Lefort remarks that the concept of institution, intended not as mere human product but rather as something that allows a constant perpetuation and reactivation of the institutive power, allows Merleau-Ponty to elaborate the concept of passivity. According to Lefort, that 'should lead us to conceive a genus of being that shows the deficiencies of the traditional conception of Subject' (Merleau-Ponty 2010: xxix). This conception of passivity recalls Husserl's investigations in his *Analysis Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses* (2001), nevertheless Merleau-Ponty was informed by Father Van Breda of this manuscript, but he never had the occasion to read it. In Merleau-Ponty this analysis of the passivity is related not only with the emerging question of the relationship between reduction, world and pre-categorical residuum but also with the issues of unconsciousness and sleep. My aim here is not to provide an account of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of unconsciousness, dream and sleep and of his relationship with psychoanalysis. Rather, to show how this consideration is connected with the necessity of a rethinking of the transcendental subjectivity. Merleau-Pontian consideration of unconsciousness, dream and sleep emerges from a focus on the symbolism implicit in these passive state and which, differently from Freud, is not connected with forms of repression. On the contrary, this symbolism re-presents in these forms of experience the dialectic between the imaginary and the real: 'by examining this symbolic function we will examine the manner in which the sleeper is taken into in order to absent himself, without absenting himself. Exact relation between the "imaginary" and the "real"' (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 151). Furthermore, 'the symbolism is not indifferent functioning of consciousness in connection with present "stimuli". It is at the service of the existentialia, i.e., 1) of recent events, 2) insofar as they echo former events. It delimits a functioning which is not "consciousness of something"

developed within science, as Husserl suggested, brings to the 'oubli de l'opération de Stiftung masquée par ses propres résultats' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 76)[51].

The objectifying attitude of science is misleading because it considers only the fixed results of the practice of sedimentation and institution. Despite the fact that according to Merleau-Ponty oblivion is proper of the movement of any tradition and process of sedimentation within it, it is necessary to reinterpret philosophy from a different starting point. At this stage, it is necessary to understand if we can assume that the world appears to be the expression of *Stiftung*. I suggest that the answer is affirmative. This does not imply that the world is something fixed that we know only in terms of representations, but rather that the world expresses the dynamic of *Stiftung*. As Merleau-Ponty clarifies in a comment on the concept of *Stiftung*, recuperating the concept of life-world implies recuperating also the historical sedimentation that is in us. It is exactly in this sense that Merleau-Ponty is understanding what Moran defines as a "world-horizon" that hallows the being-human of humans. Along these lines, for Merleau-Ponty we recuperate 'une générativité spirituelle qui ne soit pas oubli: ce serait l'adéquation au Lebenswelt' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 76)[52]. If according to Moran the life-world in Husserl appears to encompass both nature and culture, then for Merleau-Ponty the *Lebenswelt* is the point of connection between nature and culture, nature and history, this because in virtue of its dynamic is the place of the process of sedimentation. Merleau-Ponty clearly states that life-world is both nature and culture[53] and that it has a specific status that should be properly investigated.

Starting from this conviction, Merleau-Ponty claims that the rediscovery of the life-word is the proper characteristic of phenomenology. This allows considering the pre-reflective dimension beyond the theoretical activity of both science and philosophy.

(simple, general function, Erkenntnistheoretisch), but development of a "world-for-me" (oneirism of wakefulness, quasi-"reality" of dreams)' (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 151). This point is relevant because it highlights how, in dealing with some issues of psychoanalysis, Merleau-Ponty was trying to overcome the dualistic structure of his earlier philosophy. On the contrary, Husserl 'had a little to say, at least in print, about emotional states, and even less about the unconscious. […] Husserl starting point for the analysis of consciousness is the waking ego. Other forms of consciousness (sleep, dreaming, trance, come, even death) must be seen as modifications of this primary wakefulness (Wachheit)' (Moran 2005: 142-3).

[51] 'There is an oblivion of the Stiftung because it is covered by its own results' (my translation).

[52] 'Spiritual generativity that is not oblivion: is rather the adequation to the *Lebenswelt*'

[53] 'Le Lebenswelt, c'est la nature, mais aussi la culture' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 76); '*Lebenswelt* is both nature and culture' (my translation).

According to Merleau-Ponty, this primordial dimension implies an analysis of philosophy in itself and requires a reconsideration of philosophy as engaged in the factual world. This idea is in connection with the process of sedimentation of history and culture and leads to consider a form of intentionality that is not closed within the pure ego and its possible correlative objects but rather connects intimately the ego with his own historical development and world. In recalling the *Vienna Lecture*, Merleau-Ponty highlights the necessity of reconsider the intentional bond that connects tradition with subjective intentions and their expressions. This triad is understood in its dynamic process expressed by the concept of sedimentation. Traditions (but also culture) are sediments of intentions that brings to a shared exteriority subjective intentions, in this movement of sedimentation these intentions becomes shared and then passible of further re-actualizations.

Starting from this Husserlian idea, what Merleau-Ponty proposes is a philosophy that starts from these interconnections between culture and nature and between subject and others: 'pensée de la sédimentation, contact avec l'Être total avant separation de vie préthéorétique et de Gebilde humain' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 84)[54]. This perspective allows positing a fundamental question to our understanding of some dualistic problems such as: consciousness-world, nature-culture, self-others. In Merleau-Ponty, these problems are addressed by invoking the idea of transcendental intersubjectivity in Husserl. It is clear that if in Husserl the life-world connects to the pure ego intersubjectively intended, then for Merleau-Ponty it seems that this concept leads to an overcoming of the classical concept of subjectivity.

I suggest that world, even if fundamental, implies a structure of correlation between bodily, intentional subject and the external reality. The life-world is seen in its connection with our own activity as humans. At the same time, this natural basis is what is expressed in our cultural production that in turn reflects on the *Lebenswelt*. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's examination of Cézanne is significant[55]. According to

[54] 'Thinking of sedimentation, contact with the total being before the separation between the pre-theoretical level and the human form' (my translation).

[55] Cézanne plays an emblematic role within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. According to Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne is not simply painting but rather posing a real philosophical question with his painting activity. Cézanne not only investigates the so called 'être brute', 'être savage', or in other terms the pre-logical layer of experience; but furthermore, at the eyes of Merleau-Ponty Cézanne is doing real philosophy. This

Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne is painting our primitive encounter with things, but at the same time in doing that he is providing us a new framework for the understanding of the life-world. The circularity appears to be virtuous because instead of leading us away from the life-world, cultural products and activities might potentially conduce us to understand this specific layer. Despite its relevant role within phenomenology, for Merleau-Ponty the life-world seems to point to a dimension that exceed the one proper of the life-world. I would like to suggest that this dimension is exactly nature. The only way to understand the passage from life-world to nature, granted that this is possible, is to comprehend the statement formulated by Merleau-Ponty in his introduction to the PP in which he claims the necessity to move 'from the fact of our existence to the nature of our existence, that is from *Dasein* [existence] to *Wesen* [essence]', quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The cultural-natural structure of the life-world, intended by Merleau-Ponty in its facticity, requires considering the eidetic level not as pure abstract level of investigation but rather as entangled with our facticity. This implies the assumption of our constitution as natural and cultural and at the same time the understanding of the dynamic of this correlation.

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point appears clear if we consider the relevance of non-philosophy for Merleau-Ponty. What emerges in Cézanne is the philosophical relevance of non-philosophy in itself. This point is highlighted by Merleau-Ponty when he claims: 'Rather than apply to his work dichotomies, which moreover belong more to the scholarly traditions than to the founders—philosophers or painters—of these traditions, we would do better to let ourselves be persuaded to the proper sense of his painting, which is to challenge those dichotomies. Cézanne did not think he had to choose between sensation and thought, as if he were deciding between chaos and order. He did not want to separate the stable things that appear before our gaze and their fleeting way of appearing. He wanted to paint matter as it takes on form, the birth of order through spontaneous organization. He makes a basic distinction not between "the senses" and "intelligence" but rather between the spontaneous order of perceived things and the human order of ideas and sciences' (Merleau-Ponty 2007a: 73). Cézanne is pivotal for his capacity to investigate the fundamental correlation between thought and sensation, and his effort to lead the investigation to the basic level of generativity in which it is impossible to divide radically between what is felt and what is thought. This line of creative investigation is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty and his later formulation of an indirect ontology based on the idea of the richness of what is non-philosophical. In this regard, De Warren (2013) stresses that philosophy, according to Merleau-Ponty, fails in expressing a direct contact with being. Starting from this assumption - that for Merleau-ponty implies a rethinking of phenomenology itself, as it has been previously underlined – then for Merleau-Ponty 'Philosophy must enter into contact with "our questions" (nos questions)—our philosophical questions—in modernist art. Rather than pose the question of art to philosophy, Merleau-Ponty effectively poses the question of philosophy to art' (De Warren 2013: 86). It is this posing the question of philosophy of art that appears how the richness of *Lebenswelt*, its being both cultural and natural, can provides the track to investigate the more fundamental question of the nature of our existence. For an outline of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of painting focused on Cézanne, see for instance Johnson (1996).

Our entanglement with the life-world requires then an eidetic description of the 'nature of our experience' in which the so-called system of equivalences between brute being of nature – with our corporeal intersection – and cultural dimension of productivity. In fact, the interpretation of the passage from the facticity of existence to the nature of our existence in terms of passage from *Dasein* to *Wesen* shows a certain faithfulness to the Husserlian perspective. Merleau-Ponty seems to accept the Husserlian conception of essences, and, in considering Husserl's *Ideas II* and *Crisis*, he underlines the emerging of a new dimension defined as a life-world. However, if in Husserl the accent remains on the correlation between subjectivity and external world, in Merleau-Ponty the analysis is now focusing on the ideas of *Ineinander* and intercorporeality. According to Merleau-Ponty, a philosophy focused on subjectivity fails to understand the relationship with something non-philosophical[56] and that conduces philosophy to its own crisis. Starting from this problematisation of philosophy itself emerges the idea that it is necessary to elaborate a 'philosophie qui est non-philosophie = non-Théologie, non anthropologie, non positivisme' and, as a consequence, 'nous reviendrons de là, à une formulation philosophique plus précise de notre ontologie' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 392)[57].

This necessity, funded within the *Lebenswelt*, of considering something non-philosophical leads to the consideration of nature and its connection with bodily experience intended as intercorporeality.

[56] With the expression "non-philosophical" Merleau-Ponty intends an element that resists to any form of possession, intellectual and physical. In this context, Merleau-Ponty is referring to nature. This idea will be clarified in the next chapter.

[57] 'Philosophy that is non-philosophy = non-Theology, non-Antrophology and non-positivism; we will return to philosophical formulation more precise than our ontology' (my translation).

2.4 Conclusions

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology starts from a reading of the phenomenological reduction influenced by Husserl's re-interpretation of this issue under the light of his developing of transcendental intersubjectivity. In recognizing the centrality of intersubjectivity, Merleau-Ponty analyses the paradox of the alter ego within Husserl's framework. This issue leads to a conception of subject and intersubjectivity that assumes as a first step the investigation of the intimate connection of subjectivity with the external world, rather than start from the ego-subject and then reconstructing how this intersubjectivity emerges. This centrality of the world requires a clarification of the concept of *Lebenswelt*, this because life-world connects Merleau-Ponty's philosophy with Husserl's phenomenology but also because this concept represents the point of arrival for Husserl, but the starting point for Merleau-Ponty. For Husserl, life-world represents a layer of experience that is beyond natural and scientific attitude and appears to be pre-categorical; this new layer seems to be the most fundamental core of our experience. Merleau-Ponty agrees with this assumption, but then he oscillates between the consideration of life-world and the analysis of nature without providing a clear differentiation between them, as we will see in the next chapter. Comprehending Merleau-Ponty's reading and interpretation of Husserl's philosophy is a necessary step for two reasons: first, it allows one to understand the gaps Merleau-Ponty underlines within traditional phenomenology (namely: nature and bodily intersubjectivity). Second, it leads to a proper definition of Merleau-Ponty's own phenomenology and consequently to elaborates its potential for an embodied model within the environmental aesthetics debate.

Chapter 3 - Bodily Experience and Nature in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

Body and bodily experience play an important role in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Since his first work (SB), body appears as a fundamental issue for Merleau-Ponty's formulation of his phenomenology. The so called "embodiment"[58] assumes then a philosophical significance insofar as for Merleau-Ponty this specific condition leads to a reconsideration of the relationship between consciousness and nature. Focusing on perceptual bodily experience requires re-interpreting the concept of consciousness and action within the perceptual field. Preliminarily, it is necessary to highlight how the development of the notion of body was influenced by the reading of the manuscripts of *Ideas II* at the Husserl Archives in Leuven. Even if the significance of *Ideas II* is undeniable, the aim of this paragraph is neither to provide a reconstruction of Merleau-Ponty's reading of that seminal book, nor to provide an historical and theoretical comparison between the two philosophers concerning body. Rather, the aim is to delineate Merleau-Ponty's account of body and bodily experience and to clarify its relevance for his analysis of the concept of nature. A phenomenological analysis of the body is presents within PP and prominently reappears in Merleau-Ponty's lectures and course notes on nature in the fifties. Furthermore, based on textual evidence, I want to argue that only by understanding the issue of bodily experience can we arrive at an understanding of nature within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It is relevant to note that the issue of body is developed in relation to the problem of the other egos, which leads to the issue of intercorporeality, as I will develop at the end of this chapter. Not only is the body conducive to the issue of nature and to the necessary consideration of the idea of intercorporeality, but it also requires a consideration of the idea of expression. The body configures itself as an expression of an interior (consciousness) to the external world, but not only in terms of signification (intended as communication of meanings through language), but also in terms of concrete actions that materially change the

[58] Regarding the issue of embodiment in phenomenology, see for instance Jensen e Moran (2013). With this term, I refer to the recent trend in philosophy – and especially in phenomenology – that focuses on the role of living body.

environment. I argue that this point is clear already in SB and that it emerges even more clearly in PP and in *Nature*, in which Merleau-Ponty considers the body as symbolism, as it will be clarified later on in this chapter.

The move is clear: our being is perceptual, our experience of this corporeal being is bodily defined, and therefore the analysis of the body permits a reconsideration of the dualism subject-object in term of corporeality. More specifically, body has a peculiar duality – it has a subjective side (it is my body), but it is also a body among other bodies – that avoids the postulation of any strong dualism between subject and object, mind and world, consciousness and object. This assumption enables Merleau-Ponty to focus primarily on bodily experience and perceptual activity and then to consider intersubjectivity[59] intended in terms of corporeality. In what follows I consider part one of PP and then *Nature* in order to explain Merleau-Ponty's conception of body and its link with the issue of nature.

3.1 Bodily experience

The analysis of the body within PP relates to the analysis of perception, spatiality and mobility. Accordingly, perception links the subject directly with the external world. This conviction is articulated in three significant passages by Merleau-Ponty, two in the introduction of the PP, the last one in the introduction to the first part of the work. A brief analysis of the passages is necessary to understand the structure of the argument behind his conception of body. In the introduction to PP, Merleau-Ponty links perception with truth and clarifies their relationship as follows: 'to seek the essence of perception is not to declare that perception is presumed to be true, but rather that perception is defined as our access to the truth' (Merleau-Ponty 2012/14: xxx). Perception not only leads to truth but also directly links subjectivity with the world intended as 'what I live' (Merleau-Ponty 2012/14: xxx). If the relationship between subject and world is pre-reflective and correlative, then it is necessary to clarify how we should interpret intentionality. Granting this, for Merleau-Ponty mental states –

[59] For the connection between intersubjectivity, alterity and a possible ethical formulation within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy see for instance Daly (2016).

intended as intentional – refer to an object external to consciousness, then it is necessary to explicate how it is possible for these mental states to link with pre-reflectivity. In order to clarify this point, and before considering the next passage concerning the correlative relationship between subject and world, it is necessary to expose briefly what Merleau-Ponty intends with the term "intentionality".

As it has been said above, Merleau-Ponty assumes that consciousness is consciousness of something. However, in order to characterize his perspective of perception and bodily experience, Merleau-Ponty is referring to Husserl's conception of operative intentionality that Merleau-Ponty understands in terms of pre-reflective intentionality linked to motor and bodily activities. According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl differentiates between two forms of intentionality. The first form is the traditional view of intentionality intended as the property of mental states that makes them directed towards something. The second form, and the most fundamental one, is the operative intentionality 'that established the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life, the intentionality that appears in our desires, our evaluations, and our landscape more clearly than it does in objective knowledge' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxxii).

The idea of operative intentionality allows Merleau-Ponty to rethink the relationship between subject-object, consciousness-world, and leads him to propose a perspective that assumes as a fundamental the unity between world and life. The idea of unity of these two elements conduces to what Merleau-Ponty qualifies as an enlarged conception of intentionality that permits understanding phenomenology as method in terms of phenomenology of genesis. The idea of genesis relates to the description and analysis of the correlative connection between consciousness and world/nature, subject and object. In order to specify this structure of the relationship, Merleau-Ponty avoids a conception that conceives consciousness as a unique constitutive element of reality. This methodological problem leads to considering the third passage in which Merleau-Ponty clarifies the key ideas of his conception of perception and embodiment.

In the third passage under consideration, taken from the introduction to the first part of the PP devoted to the analysis of the body, Merleau-Ponty is considering the notion of horizon. Husserl develops the idea of horizon in relationship with the analysis

of perception and Merleau-Ponty is starting from this point in order to develop this concept in connection with the body[60]. In perceiving things, we are not able to exhaust all the profiles, but rather we are synthetizing them step by step in a bodily inspection. Merleau-Ponty grants this assumption and claims that 'the horizon, then, is what assures the identity of the object throughout the exploration. […] To see is to enter into a universe of beings that *show themselves*' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012/14: 70). The horizon is not only perceptual, but also temporal because each perception of profiles has a concrete and a temporal course. This opening is then the co-opening onto the world, time, things and other subjects; it is an opening that is constitutive of the experience in itself. In the introduction perception appeared in its being indubitable, now perception appears in its ontological primacy and in its being a form of 'ecstasy' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012/14: 73).

The centrality of perception and its founding role leads Merleau-Ponty to consider both bodily experience and the relationship between bodily experience and cognition. This link comes up when Merleau-Ponty analyses the connection between past, present and future within perception. If I perceive a house here and now, then I have perception of specific details and profiles, but I do not perceive the wall behind, for example. In order to perceive all the profiles of the house, I should explore it with a bodily exploration. However, an exhaustive perception of all its sides in one single act remains impossible[61]. According to this structure, any actual perception has a past and a future and this peculiar structure leads to the formation of a specific concept (the concept of the object house with all its aspects, the idea of time, and so on) within the context of a lived experience. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

> My present, which is my point of view upon time, becomes one moment of time among all others, my duration becomes a reflection or an abstract

[60] In *Ideas I* Husserl's is clearly connecting the idea of horizon with experience: 'This horizon, however, is the correlate of the components of indeterminacy that essentially adhere to the experiences themselves of the thing, and these components leave open – always in an essential way – possibilities of fulfillment that are by no means arbitrary, but instead motivated, prefigured in terms of the essential type to which they belong. Every currently actual experience points beyond itself to possible experiences that point themselves in turn to new possible experiences, and so on ad infinitum' (Husserl 2014: 90).

[61] Regarding the understanding of the issue of adumbrations in perception, Sean Dorrance Kelly proposes a comparison between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty: 'On Husserl's account, therefore, the hidden features of an object are indeterminate in the sense that I have not yet sensibly determined what they are' (Sean Dorrance Kelly 2004: 80); in Merleau-Ponty, 'the indeterminate features of the object are not merely features of which I have no current experience. […] Rather, the indeterminate features are those that I am experiencing, although not as determinate features of the object' (Sean Dorrance Kelly 2004: 80).

> appearance of universal time, and my body becomes a mode of objective space. […] The positing [position] of a single object in the full sense of the world requires the composition [or co-positing] of all these experiences in a single, polythetic act. Therein it exceeds perceptual experience and the synthesis of horizon' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 73).

It is clear that what matters for Merleau-Ponty is not the analysis of a pure cogito with its structures, but rather the lived dimension of subjectivity, a dimension analyzed in connection with the constitution of the world. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty claims that 'we must describe the appearance of being, and we must come to understand how, paradoxically, there is *for-us* and *in-itself*' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 74). This last claim has a significant meaning because clarifies how perception has an ontological relevance insofar as it secures the existence of the perceived object.

Previously, three significant passages that compose Merleau-Ponty's main argument concerning bodily experience have been analyzed. The argument can be summarized as follows: perception is a true contact with a being that should be considered in its physical presence. In order to clarify this statement, Merleau-Ponty explains his idea of perception as an indubitable connection with the external world. Then, in order to clarify how it is possible to conceive this being in terms of corporeality, Merleau-Ponty specifies the idea of horizon as a subject-horizon and world-horizon that configures itself as a connection of the two poles. To specify the relevance of the body for the entire argumentation it is necessary to pose two questions: what is the role of the body within this perspective? Then, starting from the duality of body – body as peculiar object (for-me) but also as object among objects (in-itself) – how does it become possible to arrive at the idea of intercorporeal being?

Merleau-Ponty considers these problems within his description of the body. Precisely, in the PP Merleau-Ponty focuses on the body and its proper form of intentionality linked to spatial experience. Despite the fact that this perspective starts from the assumption of the centrality of consciousness, the genetic role of the body also arises. This conception will then be developed in *Nature* in connection with the idea of inter-being. The body is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty's ontology, its duality is necessary for the formulation of intercorporeality and inter-being because this structure represents an effort in the direction of a non-egological conception.

In criticizing the view that considers the body as mere mechanical object, Merleau-Ponty is considering the psychological phenomenon of double sensations[62]. This phenomenon highlights the fact that the body is irreducible to a mere object – different from mere objects it is actively touching – but at the same time is an object between objects because it is also passively touched. This is for two reasons. The body is a material thing that is in concrete contact with things and the environment. Bodily experience is a passive and receptive encounter with other bodies and our organs are receiving sensations from this encounter. In this sense, the body is a thing. However, in perceptual actions, 'the body catches itself from the outside in the process of exercising a knowledge function; it attempts to touch itself touching, it begins "a sort of reflection", and this would be enough to distinguish it from objects' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 95). The body perceives, but in performing this activity it recognizes itself not as merely present in the external world, but also as a perceiving being. The example of the touch is illuminating in this regard.

The hand is touching things, but insofar as one hand is also able to touch the other, it is able to recognize itself as a touching being. This elementary act initiates a first form of reflection. This primordial form of reflection defines the body as different from mere objects.

The background idea is that the body has a material existence that should be not reduced to the conception of body as a sum of organs plus the capacity of reflection. Merleau-Ponty expresses this view very clearly when he states that 'the contour of my body is a border that ordinary spatial relations do not cross. This is because the body's parts relate to each other in a peculiar way: they are not laid out side by side, but rather envelop each other' objects' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 100). This conception of the bodily schema[63] leads to the issue of spatiality and echoes the conviction that the intertwining is not only between bodily parts but also between body, bodies and things. My body is an organic unity of different organs and sense organs, and – according to Merleau-Ponty

[62] Merleau-Ponty is referring to the example of the touch where hands are at the same time touching and touched.

[63] The bodily-schema is a pre-reflective presence of our corporeity in connection mainly with mobility. This concept should be differentiated from bodily-image conceived as the conscious and conceptual awareness of our own bodily functions. Regarding these issue see for instance Gallagher (1986) and Gallagher and Cole (1995).

– I am moving and perceiving with the implicit or pre-reflective awareness of this unity (bodily schema). In my perceptual activities, my sense organs are communicating with each other (i.e. in certain cases I am seeing what I am touching) and this shows, for Merleau-Ponty, a carnal intertwining between them. Furthermore, my body is in direct contact with the environment and with other objects (I am seeing and touching things, for example) and bodies (I am perceiving and interacting with other bodily subjects). This means that there is an intertwining between my sense organs and between my body and other objects and bodies. The assumption of the enveloping between different parts leads to a conception of spatiality understood as situational spatiality, intended as the spatiality that my body experiences in its carnal presence. Situational spatiality brings to the link between mobility and bodily intentionality:

> When the word "here" is applied to my body, it does not designate a determinate position in relation to other positions or in relation to external coordinates. It designates the installation of the first coordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, and the situation of the body confronted with its tasks. Bodily space can be distinguished from external space and it can envelop its parts rather than laying them out side by side because it is the darkness of the theater required for the clarity of the performance (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 103).

The Husserlian idea of body as a point zero of any orientation appears from this quote. In the chapter *The Aestheta in their Relation to the Aesthetic Body* of *Ideas II*, Husserl characterizes the body as follows: 'the body is, in the first place, the *medium of all perception*. […] Connected with this is the distinction the Body acquires as the bearer of the zero point of orientation' (Husserl 1989: 61). This idea of the body is developed along the analysis of the kinesthetic functions and the consideration of the role of the body in the constitution of psychic reality. Husserl highlights a point that is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty's PP, namely the duplicity of the body. The body is a thing between things, it is in a causal relation with the external world. At the same time, the body is a "turning point" because 'the causal relations are transformed into conditional relations between the external world and the Bodily-psychic subject' (Husserl 1989: 169).

In Merleau-Ponty, this perspective develops in connection with a genetic idea of space and motricity. The body is not only a medium of experience, but also the concrete element that constitutes spatiality. According to Dermot Moran, there is a continuity and agreement between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty not only concerning perception and body, but also regarding the transcendental attitude. As Moran puts it: 'in some of his unpublished manuscripts, Husserl […] claimed that transcendental subjectivity requires an insertion not only into transcendental intersubjectivity (something Merleau-Ponty recognizes and explicitly emphasizes) but also into embodied subjectivity' (Moran 2010: 193). Following this interpretation, 'Merleau-Ponty agrees with Husserl's criticism of the manner the natural attitude can become distorted into the naturalistic, objectivistic attitude. Against this, Merleau-Ponty remains a committed transcendental philosopher, but he rejects the view that transcendental philosophy commits him to accept an all-constituting intellectual mind which is a transcendental subject' (Moran 2010: 193). Even if Merleau-Ponty, at least according to Moran, remains faithful to Husserl's intention – especially regarding the direction he points out in the late manuscripts – there still is a change of accent within Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the relationship between subject and nature. This relationship will be considered later on, now it is necessary to highlight how Husserl's perspective of body conduces to a different conception of nature. In fact, for Husserl nature remains a spiritualized nature, on the contrary for Merleau-Ponty nature has its own independence from the conscious subject.

At the end of a paragraph entitled *Empathy and the Constitution of Nature*, Husserl specifies how nature required something different from itself in order to be understood: 'the analysis of nature in our consideration of nature thus proves to be in need of supplementation. It harbors presuppositions and consequently points beyond to another realm of being and of research, i.e., the field of subjectivity, which no longer is nature' (Husserl 1989: 180). These last lines of the chapter open the Husserlian analysis concerning the constitution of the spiritual world and express the idea that nature requires the consideration of the structure of the pure ego. In Husserl's philosophy, the analysis of bodily experience is conducive to the consideration of the spiritual world as a necessary integration for the understanding of nature, differently in Merleau-Ponty we

have ‘the problem of subjectivity and of its overcoming’ (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 228). Starting from this simple intuition, Merleau-Ponty focuses the consideration on the being of a carnal and bodily being. This relevance of the body imposes a reconsideration of the relationship between thought and action (motricity). In this regard, Merleau-Ponty clarifies that both movement and space are not something merely represented but something primarily experienced: ‘consciousness is being toward the thing through the intermediary of the body’ (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 140). However, it is necessary to highlight how the body not only generates situational spatiality, but also opens a peculiar relationship between space and time.

Merleau-Ponty employs the term “intentional arc” to specify the correlation between time and perceptual activity. The “life of consciousness” situates itself in time and space because of bodily dimension and then overlapped in multiple relationships. Consequently, our perceptual activity implies a spatial dimension, but also a temporal course. We have a past but also a future, in our perceptions, acts and so on. If our different forms of activity have a temporal course, then something different happens for the body: ‘just as it is necessarily “here”, the body necessarily exists “now”; it can never become “past”’ (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 141). Such a never-becoming-past of the body constitutes a specific form of unity that connects body, perception and thought. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: ‘this intentional arc creates the unity of the senses, the unity of the senses with intelligence, and the unity of sensitivity and motricity’ (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 137). This primordial nexus of space and time acts as a genetic process of connection between consciousness, body and world in terms of continuity. Our bodily presence represents then a constant now that permits the encounter not only with the world but also with our own dimensionality in its spatial and temporal being. Bodily experience inaugurates a primordial experience of spatiality that precedes any representation; this feature of the body leads then to the so called pre-reflective layer of experience. At this stage, the crucial point is how to interpret this pre-reflectivity and also how to explicate the passage from the experience of it to the awareness or knowledge of the same.

Firstly, it is important to underline that consciousness, body and things are not seen in terms of discrete elements but rather in terms of continuity; for Merleau-Ponty

mind is born out of nature and maintains an organic bond with it. This means that it is impossible to conceive mind or consciousness as a necessary and sufficient condition of possibility for the existence of nature. Secondly, consciousness is not posed as a first and main element of the relationship, especially regarding space and time. Of course, the subject could know them in space and time from an objective perspective. However, they as primordial elements are not a product of consciousness. Rather: 'I am of space and time. […] The synthesis of time, like that of space, is always to be started over again. The motor experience of our body is not a particular case of knowledge; rather, it offers us a manner of reaching the world and the object, a "praktognosia", that must be recognized as original, and perhaps as originary' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 141).

Merleau-Ponty admits the fact that we can have a bodily memory and knowledge[64] that is exemplified in the acquisition of habits. However, by these considerations Merleau-Ponty is analyzing the expressivity proper of body and space. The concept of habit as something that becomes a fixed acquisition that does not stay 'neither in though nor in the objective body, but rather as the mediator of a world' (Merleau-Ponty 2012/14: 146). The role of the body as mediator indicates that the body, on the one hand, leads to the external world and that, on the other hand, the body is what opens up new possibilities for the subject[65].

[64] Merleau-Ponty conceives habits as expression of this bodily dimension of knowledge and memory: cf. PP 2012: 145-146.

[65] A clear example of this idea is the following: an organist should learn how to type the keyboard of an organ or piano. In learning these patterns the organist is guided by an intention (i.e. make a proper sound), but this intention does not posit the notes immediately in terms of objective space, like in the pentagram. This is because the objective space is proper of the theory of music (namely harmony). Now, clearly the organist should learn how to make music and not just random sounds and that is why knowledge must inform the execution. However, what Merleau-Ponty is pointing out is the acquisition of the spatiality of the instrument, its carnal availability for the execution. What happens then is that 'the subject who learns to type literally incorporates the space of the keyboard into his bodily space' (Merleau-Ponty 2014: 146). The example goes further in describing the case of this organist playing an instrument new to him. In this case, an expert organist – just with a little bit of rehearsal – could play the unfamiliar instrument and execute the same piece without knowing the new organ or piano. What happens is that the organist is not having a representational knowledge of all the parts, pedals and stops of the new organ. Rather, 'he sizes up the instrument with his body he incorporates directions and dimensions' (Merleau-Ponty 2014: 146). The example of the organist in his practice with a new instrument illustrates a peculiar form of bodily knowledge: the body incorporates new coordinates within a specific bodily schema. Furthermore, the example also highlights the expressive function of the body: body is not only something that acts within the world and expands the individual possibilities but also expresses – in the sense that shows to the outside and to the others – something. With his practice and through the body, the organist creates an expressive space in which the sonata is perceivable.

3.1.a The expressive body

In virtue of its duplicity, the body appears as an expressive space in itself because the spatiality of the body is primarily linked to the exploration of the external world. Consequently, the body expresses this explorative function. The case of the organist discussed in the footnote above is again helpful to illustrate Merleau-Ponty's point: through the body the agent projects meanings in the external space, making a specific thing (i.e. the sonata) perceivable and available for everyone. We can assume that, more generally, the body should be understood as the primordial expressive space in itself. Consequently, our body 'is the very movement of expression, it projects significations on the outside by giving them a place and sees to it that they begin to exist as things, beneath our hands and before our eyes' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 147). This assumption recognizes the peculiarity of the body and re-evaluates its ability to create meaningful things available for other people (like in the example of the organist quoted before). It is not only consciousness that imposes a sense to the world because what comes up is the idea that the body is 'our general means of having a world' (Merleau-Ponty 2012/14: 147).

Our body inaugurates meanings that are open to other subjects and interpretations, in doing that the body 'projects a cultural world around itself' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 148). This centrality of the body does not totally exclude a conception of consciousness in terms of signifying activity, but at the same time does not reduce this specific activity to consciousness. This is the first step for conceiving of body and mind in non-dualistic terms:

> The experience of the body leads us to recognize an imposition of sense that does not come from a universal constituting consciousness. […] My body is this meaningful core that behaves as a general function and that nevertheless exists and that is susceptible to illness. In the body we learn to recognize this knotting together of essence and existence that we will again meet up with in perception more generally (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 148).

In underlining body in its expressive functions, Merleau-Ponty shows that the body is literally communicating with others and expressing subjectivity itself. This

consideration of the body leads Merleau-Ponty to recall the consideration of phenomenology as a science of essences, an issue that he explores in the introduction of the PP. In the introduction, Merleau-Ponty claims that it is necessary to pass from the fact of our existence to the nature of our existence (from existence to essence). With his articulation of the analysis on the body, it appears that this relationship becomes concrete within our bodily experience. The body is not a mere support for our conscious activity, but rather a condition of possibility for our experience.

Following the Merleau-Pontian analysis in PP, bodily experience has a signifying and expressive character. However, these considerations of body, motricity and spatiality underline the necessity of a better understanding of the relationship between body and cultural-symbolic functions that body performs. It is not surprising then that this specific feature of the body – its being a projection of the cultural world, its being expression – is considered in Merleau-Ponty's notes collected under the title *Nature*. This necessity to consider bodily also in its symbolic and expressive function is recognized by Merleau-Ponty himself when, in the section of the PP entitled *The Body as Expression, and Speech*, he claims that what the body starts is the movement of expression of something to someone else within a shared world (the performance of the organist that is performing or creating a sonata, for example). This movement of expression is already known within aesthetic practices: 'aesthetic expression confers an existence in itself upon what it expresses, installs it in nature as a perceived thing accessible to everyone, or inversely rips the signs themselves – the actor's person, the painter's colors and canvas – from their empirical existence and steals them away to another world' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 188).

This quote clearly indicates that in artistic practices something comes to existence in nature. It also explains why Merleau-Ponty continues his analysis in comparison with aesthetic considerations. The issue of body leads then to the consideration of nature and aesthetic praxis, especially in his later works[66]. Before analyzing the relationship between body, nature and art, it is important to underline that Merleau-Ponty – two years after the publication of PP – emphasizes the centrality of the

[66] Merleau-Ponty (1996, 2007b).

body and connects it with the issue of intersubjectivity[67] once again. Furthermore, he clarifies what he means with the expression "primacy of perception" in a way that makes explicit his interpretation of perception. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: 'by these words, the "primacy of perception" we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent logos' (Merleau-Ponty 1964 (b): 25). The expression "nascent logos" is meant to show the idea that consciousness or mind and its epistemological functions come from a direct contact with nature:

> It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality. This experience of rationality is lost when we take it for granted as self-evident, but is, on the contrary, rediscovered when it is made to appear against the background of non-human nature (Merleau-Ponty 1964 (b): 25).

In PP the centrality of body and its expressive force emerges. This analysis is developed in connection with motor intentionality and spatiality. Emmanuel de Saint Aubert (2008) explains this point very clearly. According to De Saint Aubert, in the fifties Merleau-Ponty oscillates between the idea of a possible revision of the notion of consciousness and the idea of its possible abandonment. Merleau-Ponty rejects a positive notion of consciousness according to which consciousness contemplates objects from a detached point of view and that possesses itself as an object in reflection. This view implies a closure of consciousness in itself that forbids any genuine understanding of consciousness as a relationship. According to De Saint Aubert, this is the reason why Merleau-Ponty introduces the notion of expression: 'ouverture àun tiers inclus qui n'est pas pour autant véritablement donné, l'expressivité brise la clôture de la conscience classique et contrarie la clareté d'une donation à sens unique. Elle redonne ainsi une

[67] As Merleau-Ponty puts it clearly: 'just as my body, as the system of all my holds on the world, founds the unity of the objects which I perceive, in the same way the body of the other—as the bearer of symbolic behaviors and of the behavior of true reality—tears itself away from being one of my phenomena, offers me the task of a true communication, and confers on my objects the new dimension of intersubjective being or, in other words, of objectivity' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 18).

consistance et un devenir à la relation' (De Saint Aubert 2008: 89)[68]. Along these lines, De Saint Aubert also argues that Merleau-Ponty develops the analysis of consciousness in relationship with motor perception and the constitution of the bodily schema. For Merleau-Ponty the goal is to provide an account that could explain how it becomes possible for us to project a cultural dimension starting from within the natural one in virtue of our bodily experience. This movement of expression is not a mere making public of an interiority, but also the creation of meaning that is not an imposition. Expression then is a movement – connected with the motricity of the body – that maintains a constant correlation between subjectivity and world. Waldenfels in his paper *The Paradox of Expression* explicates that expression is transition: 'expression itself takes on the form of a transitional phenomenon. The transition takes place as expression, as much in the synchronic as in the diachronic view; nature is transformed into culture, the past into future' (Waldenfels 2000: 94). This transitional movement is what maintains in intimate connection the mind and world, nature and culture, ego and others.

It has been previously shown that body is a medium that locates subjectivity in the world. The body intended as a medium is not a mere presence, but rather a movement of expression that poses human beings in continuity with nature. This explains why there is a transformation of nature in culture and vice versa. One of Merleau-Ponty's last notes is the *Resumption of the Studies of Nature,* where he gives a hint of his understanding of nature. Within this explanation – which will be the object of the next paragraph – Merleau-Ponty clarifies the place of the body in his philosophy of nature. The idea of body as nexus leads to the idea of corporeal existence and then to the idea that there is a fundamental inter-being between body and things, body and bodies, human beings, animals and nature. Bodily experience, then, is not only understood in its role for human beings, but also investigated in its connective function (its configuring itself as inter-being).

The body as a nexus overcomes a conception based merely on a founding consciousness because it assumes a fundamental role for the birth of cognition

[68] 'Opening to a third included which is not really given, the expressivity breaks the closure of consciousness classically intended and counteracts the clarity of the one-way donation. It thus restores a consistency and a becoming to the relation' (my translation).

consenting to understand the intimate relationship between subject and world. According to this view, consciousness is deprived of its philosophical primacy[69]. Organizing a different and non-dualistic philosophy of nature means, for Merleau-Ponty, 'to see humanity emerge just like Being in the manner of a watermark, not as substance, but as *interbeing*, and not as an imposition of a for-itself on a body in-itself' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 208). Hence, the body expresses – in the sense of bringing to visibility – this intimate link between consciousness and nature[70]. Body's symbolic function is expressive in the sense that brings to existence something else, it makes concrete and in an inter-subjective perspective (the cultural world) things that are not only perceived under a first person perceptual activity but also and possibly co-experienced. However, the crucial element is that bringing something to expression in not a mere replacement of something (perception) with something else (a word, a painting and so on). Expression, in its making visible and available something that otherwise will remain hidden, links to the issues of institution and sedimentation[71]. The passage from expression to sedimentation is central for the understanding of nature.

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[69] In this regard, Merleau-Ponty is clarifying that in considering nature, we should start to assume that humans are not animality plus reason. Rather, at the very beginning we should consider them in their being primarily corporeality.

[70] The concept of expression is presents in Husserl's *Ideas II* and it appears in connection with the body. Specifying the fact that there is a connection between the spiritual layer of the ego and the body, Husserl claims that there is an expression 'which allows us to interpret, on a broad scale, the other's Body as a Body for a spiritual life' (Husserl 1989: 296). The point is that in Ideas II expression is making manifest a spiritual ego in the physical body. According to this view expression appears to be expression of an interiority (spiritual ego) to something external (body). This point is relevant for Husserl's conception of empathy and consequently for Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserl's intersubjectivity. However, expression in Merleau-Ponty is not reduced to the expression of an interiority but appears to be something more widely. As Landes (2013) highlights, the concept of expression passes through all Merleau-Ponty works and it is in Phenomenology of Perception that it emerges in its centrality even at the level of perception. Landes stresses how perception is expression in its 'creative taking up' (p. 81) but also how expression is crucial in communication: 'communication is not about knowledge, but about an expressive body gearing into expressive gestures (or traces of expressive gestures) such as to bring about "reciprocity" between intentions' (Landes 2013: 92). If on the one hand the last quote leads to the issue of expression in Husserl's perspective in Ideas II – the body conceived of as an expression of the spiritual ego – on the other hand, it appears that the movement of expression in Merleau-Ponty has a central role. As Landes highlights, expression plays a central role from perception to communication, art and politics in the sense that according to Merleau-Ponty sensations are taken up by a subject not in a passive way but in a transitional mode.. Expression is not a merely bringing something out, but rather taking up elements present in the world, giving them a mining and open them to further synthesis. This is true for perceptual activity but becomes clear in the world of culture or arts, layers in which physical supports are expressing meanings that are open to re-interpretations.

[71] In his book *Tracing expression in Merleau-Ponty. Aesthetics, Philosophy of biology and ontology*, Véronique M. Fóti highlights this necessity recalling Merleau-Ponty's lectures on Institution and

Expression is seen as a dynamic process that starts in connection with the presence of other beings since the very beginning. An artist is expressing something he is experiencing, he constitutes something in facticity (a novel, a painting, and so on) and the meaning-intention is shared in an inter-subjective process. That is why in his course notes *Institution and Passivity*, Merleau-Ponty is speaking in terms of the institution of a work of art. If in the moment of constitution the work is still related to the subject (the work is related to private intentions and projects), then once it is ready it becomes an instituted fact, something that has a proliferation of interpretations, for example. M. Fóti (2013) highlights how Merleau-Ponty differentiates between constituting and instituting. This because once a work is created it becomes meaningful also for others. As Fóti puts it: 'the key notion is no longer that of the subject (not even of the body-subject) but that of the "field" (*champ*), which is trans-subjective and structured by the import of symbolic forms' (Fóti 2013: 35). It is hence not surprising that in *The Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty is considering both language and art under the light of expression. Merleau-Ponty focuses on the act of expression, but points out that usually 'we believe expression is most complete when it points unequivocally to events, to states of objects, to ideas or relations, for, in these instances, expression leaves nothing more to be desired, contains nothing which it does not reveal, and thus sweeps us toward the object which it designates' (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 3).

However, for Merleau-Ponty, if we focus on the product of expression (the sedimented meanings) rather than focusing on the process of expression, then we stay tied to the idea of language as a mere system of signs connected with specific meanings without understanding its dynamic creative force. Merleau-Ponty accepts this aspect of expression because he agrees on the fact that expression makes something available. However, his effort is to understand the process that conduces to sedimentation of shared meaning and to conceive expression as ongoing and dynamic process. In order to show this point, Merleau-Ponty is bringing to examination the example of literature and artistic expression more broadly. As he puts it, in reading a book, we are not merely

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passivity. Furthermore, M. Fóti puts in continuity Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of expression with his conception of nature. The core idea is that expression is presents within human experience and also in nature but is not conceived as something 'not introduced into nature by humans, nor even by animal life, but it is primordial, having always already begun anonymously' (M. Fóti, 2013: 11).

engaged with signs (letters, words, propositions) and grammatical understanding, but rather we are forgetting them and then we engage with the meanings they are expressing. There is a common language between the author and the reader, but the expressive function in not closed within this common level. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes two languages: a shared language (language as an institution), and the language that is creating itself in expressive acts[72]. This duplicity of language, its being inter-subjective but also shared and creative, mirrors the duplicity of bodily experiences in which the body is had by the subject but in an intimate connection with other bodies. Within the subjective activity of language and art, within their being product of someone, there is a sedimentation that puts them in an inter-subjective context of signification. It is not a mere expression of an interior to the exterior, but rather a creation of sense that implies the past and projects itself in the future. The movement of expression appears to be the core of Merleau-Pontian understanding of the cogito:

> We must understand that language is not an impediment to consciousness and that there is no difference, for consciousness, between self-transcendence and self-expression. In its live and creative state, language is the gesture of renewal and recovery which unites me with myself and others. We must learn to reflect on consciousness in the hazards of language and as quite impossible without its opposite (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 17).

The self-transcendence of consciousness does not lead to a solipsistic perspective, but rather to a fundamental view of intersubjectivity. This idea is in line with Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl's transcendental subjectivity, but conduces to the investigation of language and art in their lived practice. Furthermore, the idea of institution of an expressive act brings to a conception that sees expression as something dynamic that extends in a trans-subjective field. To fully understand the expressive role of the body, it is important to clarify its connection with nature.

[72] Merleau-Ponty uses the terms 'sedimented language' and 'speech'. (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 13)

3.2 Nature

Nature appears as pivotal issue within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in the late fifties; this is attested especially in the course notes from the Collège the France 1956-1960 but also in his latest published work *Eye and Mind* and in the preparatory notes for the unfinished work VI[73]. In order to grasp the philosophical relevance of nature within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological framework it is important to answer two main questions: what is nature? Furthermore, how we can characterize the experience of nature? The first question will be addressed in what follows, the second one will be considered especially in the last chapter devoted to the formulation of an embodied model in environmental aesthetics. A clarification of what nature is might provide important elements for the understanding of natural experience focusing on perception rather than scientific knowledge. This allows a reformulation of the engagement model proposed by Berleant in phenomenological terms.

The course notes from the College the France provide key elements for the understanding of Merleau-Ponty's developing of his own phenomenology. These notes develop an interpretation of nature that considers both history of philosophy and science. Merleau-Ponty puts forward his interpretation of nature in dialogue with Descartes, Kant, Schelling, Bergson, Whitehead and Husserl, but also in connection with modern biology and natural sciences. In what follows, I want to focus mainly on the Merleau-Pontian reading of the concept of nature in the history of philosophy, considering briefly Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Schelling and then focusing specifically on Husserl's perspective. This is for two reasons: on the one hand, his interpretation of the history of philosophy allows us to specify his phenomenological framework regarding nature. On the other hand, this reading of the history of philosophy – focusing on the issue of nature – enables one to appreciate the aesthetic dimension of our experience of nature. At the very beginning of the first course, Merleau-Ponty asks himself if it is possible to properly understand the notion of nature, and he answers this question affirming that, in order to get the proper philosophical

[73] Hereafter "VI".

meaning of nature, the focus should be on "primordial" nature. Investigating the primordial nature for Merleau-Ponty means investigating the 'nonlexical meaning always intended by people who speak of "nature"' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 3).

In granting this pre-reflective meaning[74] of nature, Merleau-Ponty is focusing on fundamental layer of experience that precedes our cognitive (thetic) activities. This claim is in continuity with the idea of operative intentionality specified in the PP, but leads to a reconsideration of the relationship between consciousness and objects. In PP the structure of the analysis is top-down (from consciousness to perception), but with the focus on nature Merleau-Ponty starts directly from the pre-categorical level. As Barbaras (2001) underlines, nature is a pivotal element for Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of an ontology and changes the consideration Merleau-Ponty made in PP: Merleau-Ponty is not considering nature starting from perception, but rather is starting from nature in order to understand better perception in its ontological relevance. Merleau-Ponty is considering this level without starting from the assumption of a sense-bestowal consciousness: 'nature is what has a meaning, without this meaning being posited by thought: it is the autoproduction of a meaning. […] Yet nature is different from man: it is not instituted by him and is opposed to custom, to discourse' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 3). The idea of autoproduction of meaning connects with the issue of expression. Nature, in its autonomy, has its own process of generation and creation. It seems that for Merleau-Ponty nature is generating things (rocks, lakes, and so on) and being (living beings in general through biological process), but in doing that is also providing elements for human process of creation and expression (humans can use natural elements in order to continue the process of expression in a symbolic level, for example). The expression of meaning relates to consciousness insofar as consciousness is able to express itself in meaningful activities (such as communication). However, the fundamental layer – nature – has its autonomy and is able to produce its own meanings. This idea of nature as expressivity poses men in continuity with nature but also leads to conceive of nature in its autonomy: 'Nature is the primordial. […] Nature is an enigmatic object, an object that is not an object at all; it is not really set out in front of

[74] I propose to understand the Merleau-Ponty's expression "nonlexical" in terms of pre-reflectivity.

us. It is our soil [*sol*] – not what is in front of us, facing us, but rather, that which carries us' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 4).

Although the idea of nature as something primordial can be associated with the concept of *Lebenswelt*, the two ideas are different. Nature precedes any possible cultural and historical activity, according to Merleau-Ponty. However, it is not clear why Merleau-Ponty talks of 'nature' instead of 'world'. For the purpose of this thesis, I do not intend to tackle this issue of interpretation[75].

Merleau-Ponty develops his concept of nature focusing on Descartes[76], passing through the so called "humanist conception" of nature elaborated by Kant[77], and arriving then to what he calls the "romantic conception" of nature in which we find Schelling, Bergson and Husserl. .

Especially, Schelling[78] is phenomenologically relevant for Merleau-Ponty's interest in nature because Schelling specifies nature as something that sustains any cognitive activity but at the same time remains pre-reflective and un-thematized. As

[75] Nonetheless, it is important to remark that there is an ambivalence in Merleau-Ponty's analysis and that, as de Saint Aubert underlines (2008), with the developing of the analysis of this primordial level nature leaves space to the idea of "chair du monde". What emerges, however, is the idea that nature in its being a soil is not reducible to the world as correlate of consciousness' activity.

[76] With Descartes, nature is reduced to extension and is subjected to a mechanistic interpretation, it becomes possible to have a clear and evident knowledge of nature in all its elements.

[77] Kant accords the centrality to a constitutive subject. Kant's idea of passivity of experience requires that in order to construct nature we must receive something that is not known in advance. This leads to the consideration of the subjectivity and its constitutive power and, as Merleau-Ponty underlines, to the consideration of 'a naturans that operates in us' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 22). According to Merleau-Ponty, the relevance of both "something brute" (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 21) – the idea of nature as something pre-reflective – and the subjective constitutive power show a double meaning of nature. In the first meaning nature is impoverished because nature is merely 'the simple correlate of perception' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 23). According to the second meaning, that follows from the idea of "something brute", 'Nature will be such as the legislative activity of understanding reveals it. […] There is an a priori of Nature' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 23).
This double meaning is what emerges from Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, but it is in the Critique of Judgment that Kant tries to connect these two meanings. There, Kant introduces two key concepts: reflective judgment and finality of nature. Reflective judgment is a judgment that does not subsume an individual under a concept but rather finds 'an internal link that makes for an agreement between my perception and the demands of reason' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 24). This formulation of the reflective judgment remains, for Merleau-Ponty, tied to an accentuation of the subjective power of constitution. This judgment does not explain anything about nature in itself. The same can be said of Kant's concept of finality given that this 'does not belong to natural beings, but we must think it in regard to them' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 24). This means that finality is not something proper of nature, but rather something within human reason that allows thinking living organisms. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: 'Kant opposes human being to the cosmos and makes all that there is of finality rest on the contingent aspect of humanity – freedom' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 26).

[78] For a clear reconstruction of the influence of Schelling in Merleau-Ponty's conception of nature, see for instance: Robert Vallier (2013).

Angelica Nuzzo (2013) underlines, 'in Schelling's philosophy, Merleau-Ponty finds the first explicit endorsement of the phenomenological need proper to all philosophical thematization of Nature' (Nuzzo 2013: 218)[79]. According to Merleau-Ponty, there are two main elements in Schelling's philosophy of nature and both are close to his own philosophy: the intimate connection between subjectivity and living beings in general; nature conceived as a substrate (the pre-reflective ground) of meanings. These elements are articulated by Merleau-Ponty in the framework of a philosophy of expression that considers perception as central. It is necessary to elucidate these two central elements.

According to Merleau-Ponty, Schelling considers nature as a primordial and pre-objective, configuring nature as the necessary ground for any form of experience[80]. This common ground allows an articulation between different kinds of experience and also between different kinds of beings. Merleau-Ponty clarifies this internal articulation of beings in Schelling as follows: 'the development of Nature consists in that the higher is lifted up to a higher potency – not by suppression, but by elevation. We pass from physical to living being by an internal development and not by a rupture' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 41).

Given this internal development, human beings arise from the activity of reflection. The "I" emerges, according to the Merleau-Pontian interpretation of Schelling, in a reflective activity. However, it is necessary to recognize how it is possible for the "I" to emerge in continuity with the natural ground. Merleau-Ponty sums up the reflective process in Schelling as follows: 'in order to find itself in this mirroring reflective [*reflet*] of intellectual intuition, the "I" must be already preliminarily recognized in this primordial identity' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 42). With the

[79] With the expression "phenomenological need", Nuzzo refers to Schelling's underlining of pre-reflective beings that results fundamental for Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Nuzzo clarifies the phenomenological relevance of Schelling within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. She underlines that Schelling tries to specify the "brute something" underlined by Kant (the passive receptivity of sensations) but left within a humanistic framework. According to Nuzzo, Schelling grasps the intimate connection between body and nature and recognize nature as pre-reflective ground. Thus, 'we can claim that Schelling's Naturphilosophie follows in the aftermath of the 1790 Critique because it assumes that the notions of life and feeling are no longer transcendental concepts of a reflective faculty of judgment separated from Nature (and reflecting on it), but are guiding threads of a phenomenological inquiry into Nature to which we originally belongs' (Nuzzo 2013: 220).

[80] Merleau-Ponty notices that nature is the common ground for both organic and inorganic; this idea of a strong kinship between individuals within a same ground fits perfectly with the Merleau-Pontian idea of empathy with the world. This implies a coexistence that is not expressed in terms of polarities (subject and object) but rather shows that the focus is on the genesis of living beings from a shared nature.

term "primordial identity," Merleau-Ponty means the intimate connection between human beings and nature. This implies that subjectivity recognizes himself as human in this intellectual process of reflection. In order to assume this maintenance of pre-reflectivity within the reflective attitude, Merleau-Ponty follows Schelling and affirms: 'there must be in the things a preparation of what will then be explicit sense' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 42).

Reflective activity breaks the continuity between human beings and nature; reflection brings to the fore the question of the "I" and its rupture with the pre-reflective being, but relates also to the issue of meaning. Concerning meanings, usually it is possible to embrace two possible approaches: meanings are natural, or meanings are products of consciousness. If we assume that meanings are natural then we could endorse naturalization of experience tout court[81]. On the contrary, if meanings are mere products of consciousness then we make nature a product of human consciousness. In his interpretation of Schelling's philosophy, Merleau-Ponty is considering a third possibility that avoids any form of dualism or naturalism. Merleau-Ponty remarks that

[81] It is well known that Husserl rejects naturalism insofar as the sphere of the pure consciousness requires a new methodology (namely phenomenology) and a consequent suspension of our natural attitude. In explaining the idealistic turn in Husserl's phenomenology, Moran reconstructs Husserl's critique to naturalism and underlines how: 'True phenomenology will grasp the original givenness of consciousness precisely as modes of self-givenness rather than as entities in any naturalistic sense' (Moran 2000: 139). According to Moran, if naturalism claims that 'every phenomenon ultimately is encompassed within and explained by the laws of nature; everything real belongs to physical nature or is reducible to it' (Moran 2000: 142), then for Husserl this view is not consistent, as Moran claims: 'In contrast to the outlook of naturalism, Husserl believed all knowledge, all science, all rationality depended on conscious acts, acts which cannot be properly understood from within the natural outlook at all. Consciousness should not be viewed naturalistically as part of the world at all, since consciousness is precisely the reason why there was a world there for us in the first place. For Husserl it is not that consciousness creates the world in any ontological sense, […] but rather that the world is opened up, made meaningful, or disclosed through consciousness' (Moran 2000: 144). Regarding the project of a possible naturalization of phenomenology, see for instance Petitot, Varela, Pachoud, Roy (1999). For a possible phenomenological objection to this project of naturalization see for instance Zahavi (200). Regarding the relationship between Merleau-Ponty and naturalization see for instance Toadvine (2013). In this contribution, Toadvine starts from Husserl's critique of naturalism and then introduces Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of naturalism. The author claims that the issue of naturalism emerges especially within Merleau-Pontian investigation of nature and clarifies how Merleau-Ponty provided an interpretation of naturalism that fits with transcendental phenomenology but at the same time "pushes naturalism beyond itself". As Toadvine puts it: 'From one angle, his approach is resolutely anti-naturalistic insofar as he maintains Husserl's insistence on the irreducibility of the transcendental perspective; consciousness cannot be derived from the universe of blosse Sachen. From another angle, however, Merleau-Ponty is actually pursuing the very project of naturalism insofar as he takes seriously the inherence of consciousness in the nature from which it emerges; but his manner of describing this inherence pushes naturalism beyond itself, since thinking nature from within explodes traditional metaphysical categories' (Toadvine 2013: 371).

for Schelling meanings exist 'by way of the human subject' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 42), but at the same time he underlines that 'what lives in Nature is not mind or spirit, but rather the beginning of meaning in the process of ordering itself, but which has not fully emerged' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 42). Schelling provides the idea that nature constitutes the base (the soil) for the genesis of meaning that finds in human activities its complete expression. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

> We are the part of a Nature of which we are also the children. It is in human being that things become conscious by themselves; but the relation is reciprocal: human being is also the becoming-conscious of things. Nature leads, by a series of disequilibria, toward the realization of human being, which in turn becomes the dialectical term of it (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 43).

Human beings are part of nature and nature is constituted within human consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty underlines, for Schelling reflective activity fractures the unity between man and nature. At the same time, human beings become conscious of this fracture as a tension toward the re-establishment of the unity. The break is what allows a conscious understanding of the pre-reflective status of nature. Ted Toadvine (2009) recognizes this paradoxical relationship between reflective and pre-reflective, and asks the same question about the relationship between pre-existing nature and bodily perception. Toadvine highlights the presence of two selves (natural and personal) in the work of Merleau-Ponty, the anonymous self is connected with the environment, this anonymous bodily existence follows 'rhythms established by the typicality of its relations with an everyday environment' (Toadvine 2009: 61). The personal self is a conscious subject that is involved in continuous acts of intentionality. These two selves are not intended as two distinct substances, but rather in terms of "founding". As Toadvine puts it: 'the personal self is an expressive determination of the anonymous or general self, dependent on and emerging from this anonymous self, but also called for by it and sustaining it by bringing it to expression' (Toadvine 2009: 63). The main point is to understand the specific role of reflection in connection with the activity of expression. The possibility of a proper reflective activity emerges as a second order

reflection, as Toadvine points out, able to recognize its genesis in the "unreflective and originary past" (Toadvine 2009: 64).

Normal reflection reduces nature to the thought of nature and leads to the pole of subjectivity without considering the grounding role of nature. In other words, in this practice we are reducing nature to a concept without maintaining the bond with the pre-reflective and carnal dimension of it. On the contrary, radical reflection is something that is aware of 'its own radical dependency on conditions that exceed its thematization' (Toadvine 2009: 65). Despite the ambiguity of Merleau-Ponty's claim, I suggest understanding the expression "conditions that exceed its thematization" as nature. This radical reflection does not impose meaning on nature, but rather maintains the link with the unreflective nature. This unreflective history is, according to Toadvine, 'the co-natural bond between the anonymous body and the world' (Toadvine 2009: 65). According to Toadvine, there is a first transcendence proper to nature with respect to the perceiving body: nature is not reduced to body, but rather bodies are linked to nature. However, there is a second transcendence, a transcendence of the pre-reflective nature in respect to the reflective activity of the subject. In this sense, even if we can think about nature, it remains irreducible to our cognitive activity. Nature is a resistant element insofar as it is not a mere product of subjectivity but is still connected with its activity. These two transcendences have as a common link to the body because it is at the same time our point of connection with nature but also the point of connection between reflective activity and the exceeding element (nature). The idea of nature as a resistant element, which appears in Schelling's philosophy and remains as a central element in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, is what constrains philosophy to 'an ongoing meditation on the very possibility of philosophy' (Toadvine 2009: 66).

Starting from a Merleau-Pontian perspective, Schelling's philosophy understands nature in its being a soil and consequently as something that resists any effort of objectification. At the same time, nature finds a proper expression in human beings and in their reflective activity. This reflectivity, instead of being considered as a rupture from nature, is conceived by Schelling as the awareness of the pre-reflective level that persists at the core of reflective subjectivity. This particular conception of reflectivity as connection is what influences Merleau-Ponty's formulation of radical

reflection. As Toadvine claims: 'the task of phenomenology converges with that of a philosophy of nature by seeking the grounds for reflection in a prereflective moment that makes reflection possible while exceeding it' (Toadvine 2009: 68). This convergence between phenomenology and philosophy of nature requires a consideration of Merleau-Ponty's exposition of Husserl in his course notes on nature. This consideration comes in three parts: (a) an oscillation in the consideration of nature: nature as spiritualized nature and nature as grounding element (b) bodily experience, (c) the experience of the earth.

(a) *Husserl's ambiguity concerning nature*

Merleau-Ponty claims that in Husserl the ambivalence regarding the concept of nature is based on his will to overcome natural attitude. On the one hand, phenomenology, through the phenomenological reduction, is meant to lead to a sphere of pure experience characterized by the noesis-noema relation; this means that nature 'seems enveloped by philosophical consciousness' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 71). On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty underlines how this rupture with this natural attitude implies clarifying it in its relationship with the pre-reflective. In this sense, 'Husserl wants to understand what is nonphilosophical, what is preliminary to science and philosophy' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 71). According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's philosophy is characterized – especially in *Ideas I* – by a rupture from the natural attitude and by an attention to the sphere of pure consciousness. These two focal points require the reduction of nature to a correlate of conscious activity (spiritual nature). On the other hand, for Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's later works veer to the understanding of the pre-reflective layer of experience that sustains our conscious activities (the "something brute"). Starting from this ambivalence of Husserl's conception of nature, Merleau-Ponty develops his perspective. Merleau-Ponty starts his analysis from the consideration of the Husserlian idea of *bloße Sachen* (pure or mere things intended as without any reference to action or value predicate, the term *bloße Sachen* refers then to the idea of absolute and pure subject: the pure transcendental ego) in order to stress the fecundity of Husserl's oscillation.

As Merleau-Ponty points out, the idea of nature as a sphere of pure things 'is the idea of the real, then in-itself, as a correlate of a pure knowing, and in a sense for Husserl this Nature contains everything, it extends itself of itself, without limits' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 73). Assuming that nature contains everything, for Merleau-Ponty means that 'everything is Nature, everything is attached to Nature' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 73). This idea of nature as everything leads to the explication of the primordial soil that sustains pure things. Merleau-Ponty follows this "return trip to a preliminary level" (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 73) and finds the body as a referent of the idealized layer of pure or naked things. In exposing his interpretation of bodily experience as a jointure between consciousness and nature, Merleau-Ponty recalls Husserl's idea of body as "I can" and as absolute "here". This description is relevant regarding the issue of *bloße Sachen* for two reasons. Firstly, body connects subjectivity with the pre-reflective layer, but at the same time, it represents the first possibility to develop a reflective thought[82]. Secondly, in virtue of its explorative role the body gives us the presence of others. This presence of others establishes an intersubjective dimension that is fundamental for the constitution of *bloße Sachen*. Merleau-Ponty is clear regarding this point: 'this carnal relation with other is altogether indispensable for thinking the *bloße Sachen*. […] From now on the idea of a thing-for-x is introduced, for every subject that communicates with us' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 76). For Merleau-Ponty we can reach the level of pure things only in an abstract sense that does not exclude, however, a pre-reflective and lived dimension where things are encountered in action.

Bodily experience should be intended as a kind of experience that brings the subject to his own periphery, as Bernet claims: 'instead of being the center of the human world, the bodily subject is thus transported to its periphery. This does not mean, as such, a relapse into a "barbarous" and formless nature, but rather a familiarization with a life from which culture has estranged the subject: the life of animals and things' (Bernet 1993: 63).

[82]Merleau-Ponty is referring to the experience of touch and to the reversibility thesis. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, recalling Husserl: 'We have the experience of a recovery between the contribution of the left hand and that of the right, and of reversal of their function. […] In this way I touch myself touching, I realize a sort of reflection, of cogito, of a grasping of the self by itself. In other word, my body becomes subject, it senses itself' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 75).

In this respect Merleau-Ponty's philosophy goes further than Husserl because the body is not only the mere "I can" for a subject, it provides the very connection with the primordial layer of nature. However, as Merleau-Ponty recognizes, this possibility is considered in the latest Husserl manuscripts. Merleau-Ponty himself admits that if Husserl tried to subjectivize things at the beginning, he then tried to change this dualistic perspective with the introduction of what Merleau-Ponty calls a "quasi-object" (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 77), namely the Earth. This concept, intended as a ground for any possible conception of "pure things", is emblematic of Husserl's rethinking of nature.

The concept of Earth plays a key role in Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserl and also in his development of the concept of nature. This concept not only closes the lecture of the year 1956-57, it also appears in the later work entitled *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. As Merleau-Ponty underlines[83], different from Descartes who considers the Earth as a body among others, Husserl analyses how it emerges as the soil for our experience. In commenting Husserl's manuscript, Merleau-Ponty claims:

> We have forgotten the notion of *Boden* ("ground"), because we have generalized it, situating the Earth among the planets. […] Our soil or ground [*sol*] expands, but it is not doubled, and we cannot think without reference to one soil of experience of this type. The Earth is the root of our history.

The fundamental role of the Earth in Husserl's philosophy is to ground the sphere of the *bloße Sachen*, and appears in its intersubjective dimension insofar as it appears to be the "root of our history". As Merleau-Ponty claims: 'Husserl rehabilitated the idea of nature by this idea of jointure to a common truth that subjects would continue but of which they would not be the initiators' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 78). Merleau-Ponty is focusing on this passage because it pertains to the idea of flesh[84], the

[83] Merleau-Ponty is referring to the Husserlian manuscript *Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth, Does not Move*.

[84] Concerning the relationship between Husserl's concept of Earth and Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of it see for instance Dylan Trigg *The role of the Earth in Merleau-Ponty's Archeological Phenomenology*. In this paper, Trygg provide an accurate analysis of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the concept of Earth in relationship with Husserl and clarifies the connection between nature and bodily experience. As Trygg puts it: 'the Earth, in its a geological and temporal depth, marks the existence of my flesh,

idea of a story that forgoes subjects implies accepting that our subjectivity emerges from nature. According to this view, human beings bring to expression this pre-history rather than imposing a meaning on it. Merleau-Ponty is not denying the possibility of conceptually understanding this fundamental nature that precedes us. However, Merleau-Ponty is rather underlining that any opposition between internal and external, concept and perception, is wrong because 'all that happens is not explained by interiority, or by exteriority, but by a chance that is the concordance between these two givens and is assured in Nature' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 78).

The introduction of the concept of Earth, according to Merleau-Ponty, shows the Husserlian effort to understand nature in a non-spiritualized sense but, at the same time, it leads Husserl to the problem of how to integrate this conception with his transcendental idealism. In this regard, Trygg (2014) claims that if Earth as ground, for Husserl, links to the constituting ego, then for Merleau-Ponty this element pertains to the consideration of a primal being (nature) resistant to transcendental subject. This difference between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty is relevant insofar as it leads to a different phenomenological practice. On the one hand, Husserl's double meaning of nature remains tied to the constitutive activity of the transcendental ego; on the other, Merleau-Ponty starts from this tension in order to clarify the relationship between phenomenology and a non-philosophical element (nature)[85].

(b) *Nature as a pre-reflective element*

The issue of a non-philosophical element appears also in Merleau-Ponty's course notes 1959-61. Before I specify what Merleau-Ponty intends with this term, it is necessary to consider Merleau-Ponty's course notes of the year 1959-60 entitled *Nature and Logos: the Human Body*. In the first sketch of these course notes, Merleau-Ponty explains his philosophical concern regarding nature that helps to understand the role of

constitutes the body in such a way that whatever secrets the Earth conceals are also concealed within myself' (Trygg 2014: 258).

[85] As Trygg (2014) clarifies that nature lads to the Merleau-Pontian conception of primordial being and, consequently, 'the Being in question is interchangeable with what Merleau-Ponty terms "Nature", in so far as it designates that which renders carnality possible at all without at the same time being isolated to a metaphysical world in its own terms' (Trigg 2014: 264).

phenomenology and its relationship with a non-phenomenological element. Firstly, according to Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is not concerned with a theory of knowledge of nature. Its main concern is the status of nature as nature. Phenomenology is searching for a primordial element that any theory of scientific knowledge implicitly assumes. Secondly, Merleau-Ponty's concern is not for a 'philosophy of Nature in the sense of a super-science' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 204). For Merleau-Ponty, nature is not an additional element that is differentiated from history, subjectivity and so on; rather we must intend 'Nature as a "leaf" of Being' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 204). Merleau-Ponty considers 'Nature as a leaf or layer of total Being' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 204) and as an 'expression of an ontology' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 204). It is necessary to clarify the meaning of this claim. To begin with, nature is not identified with being tout court, but is one of the layers of being (I am suggesting that another layer is body, for example). Secondly, this fundamental layer requires an ontology[86], it requires the consideration of what nature is and the understanding of its grounding role for experience. Nature is something existing and is something that we experience. My aim is not to exhaust the issue of ontology and being within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, but rather to understand the role of nature within his phenomenological framework.

Merleau-Ponty assumes that nature is: a) something fundamental. b) is a layer of being. c) it requires the formulation of an ontology. It is unclear if phenomenology directly implies ontology, or if phenomenology is something different from ontology. I endorse what Alphonso Lingis claims in his Translator's note to VI: 'The Visible and the Invisible was to be Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ontology. It required both a

[86] The issue of Being emerges clearly in VI. However, within already in Nature Merleau-Ponty expresses the necessity of a consideration of the relationship between bodily experience, perception and being. Barbaras (2000) expresses this idea in his fundamental paper entitled Perception and Movement. As he puts it: 'the being-sensible of the sensible is a foundation, an unfolding of an original space that is not yet geometrical. That is the reason why it is possible to say as well that the sensible is a presentation of transcendence as such, so that we can state too that it is the form of ontological transcendence. […] For Husserl, perception remains a relation of manifestation between the sensible data and the thing, called noema; this relation is performed by a transcendental consciousness and relies on subjective acts. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty brings to the fore the relation of manifestation itself, as the primitive meaning of perceived being: the reference of every sketch to the infinite series of other sketches— namely, the structure of the horizon—is for Merleau-Ponty the very meaning of Being. […] Consequently, in order to account for the perceived world it becomes necessary to accomplish an ontological reform. The perceived is not based on perception as a conscious act: on the contrary, perception is dependent on the perceived being. Perception is, in a way, a moment of Being, proceeding from its inner "distantiation" (écart), its essential transcendence' (Barbaras 2000: 83-84).

phenomenological inquiry into "the origin of truth" and a philosophy of Nature— of the "wild," uncultivated, preobjective Nature' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: xl). Merleau-Ponty's analysis on nature was fundamental for his further developments in VI, in order to understand the relationship between phenomenology and ontology, it is necessary to understand the role of nature in the change of perspective from PP and Merleau-Ponty's later works. The change in his phenomenological conception requires a different perspective toward the external world.

With the idea of operative intentionality, Merleau-Ponty puts forward a conception of an active subjectivity that constitutes itself within the world. However, the relationship considered is between consciousness and world, and consequently it does not completely avoid a polarity between subject and object. Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes this problem in a working note of the VI where he claims: 'the problems posed in *Ph.P.* are insoluble because I start there from the "consciousness"-"object" distinction' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 200). Later on, Merleau-Ponty recognizes the necessity of formulating an ontology of the "brute being" (as clearly appears in *Nature*), the considerations in PP are then preliminary but not decisive. In the analysis of *Nature*, a fundamental layer that represents the condition of possibility of perception arises. However, it is with the VI that the focus changes drastically with the issues of flesh and intercorporeality. These elements represent the focus of the next chapter. The aim is to formulate an ontology that understands beings and nature in their mutual genesis in terms of expression[87]:

> Nature in us must have some relation to Nature outside us; moreover, Nature outside of us must be unveiled to us by Nature that we are. We are seeking the *nexus*, and not the putting-in-place under the look of God. […] We have said that it is not a matter of a "theory of knowledge" (postulating an exhaustion of Being by the Being of science), nor a meta-science or secret science, but rather a reading of science itself as a certain (reduced)

[87] Regarding the idea of motor perception and emergence of meaning, see for instance Mazis (2016). The author analyses the relationship between subjectivity, world and primordial being considering the issues of silence (our prereflective engaging with the world) and depth. As Mazis claims: 'meaning occurs between things, and between things and our embodying being, as processes. […] It is not the articulation of a self or origin in the perceiver, but a nonfoundational co-emergence' (Mazis 2016: 21). In order to explain this co-emergence, Mazis considers the Merleau-Pontian idea of movement of vibration. See in this regard especially the second chapter of this work.

> ontology in the broader context of the relation with the most primordial being (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 206).

In order to formulate an ontology of the primordial being, Merleau-Ponty considers nature in its being the base of experience. From Merleau-Ponty's course notes of the year 1959-60 we can understand that at this time he was tackling the relationship between body, nature and meaning. This because these issues appear not only in his course *Nature and Logos: The Human Body* but also in Merleau-Ponty course entitled *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. These latest interests are functional in order to define a phenomenological and ontological framework that avoids starting from the subject-object dichotomy, a framework that constitutes the structure of the last and incomplete work VI. In the last page of the introduction to the course *Nature and Logos: The Human Body*, Merleau-Ponty specifies the task of his analysis and uses the term inter-being. This key concept implies taking humanity as emergent from nature, and considering the bodily connection of men, animals and nature. The philosophical starting point is not the relationship between consciousness, operative intentionality, perception and world; rather, Merleau-Ponty starts directly from the *Ineinander* that fundamentally characterizes our experience. Instead of considering humanity focused through its intellectual and cognitive abilities, Merleau-Ponty starts in stressing its primarily bodily structure:

> The concern is to grasp humanity first as another manner of being a body – to see humanity emerge just like Being in the manner of a watermark, not as another substance, but as *interbeing*, and not as imposition of a for-itself on a body in-itself (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 208).

The idea of inter-being, instead of underlining humans as prominent beings, locates them at the same level of other living beings; in fact the bodily nexus connects all of them. It is in these terms that the body is a general connective element. There is not an imposition of the sense of a subjectivity on a body considered in itself because this being and nature are not something separate that stand in front of subjects but rather permeate their own activity. Our own body is carnality connected with the flesh of the world (nature is not a metaphysical principle but rather a soil), but in its active

perceptual function explores external reality and generates also a first form of reflection (body as perceiving and perceived). In our inter-being we discover ourselves as not coincident with nature. There is a double function of this inter-being: on the one hand it leads to understanding the element of generality and anonymity of experience. On the other hand, it conduces to the diacritical constitution of a subject. The first aspect of this dynamism of inter-being is expressed by Merleau-Ponty's term "empathy with the world", meaning that there is a strong and intimate correlation not only between beings but also between subjects and between the world *tout court*.

The second aspect implies the concept of subjectivity in his connection with the genesis of meaning. The former element remains at the level of investigations in *Nature*. The latter requires a brief consideration of the work *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. The general and anonymous connection (inter-being) that we are experiencing firstly on an unconscious level is intersubjective (shared by all beings, organic and inorganic) and overcomes any representational conception of consciousness. This anonymous function of body calls for a theory of the flesh. This theory should clarify how the body is "interposed" (Merleau- Ponty 2003: 209) between the things that stand in front and behind us and also how the body is 'in a circuit with the world, an *Einfühlung* with the world, with the things, with the animals, with other bodies (as having a perceptual "side" as well)' (Merleau- Ponty 2003: 209).

Given this *Einfühlung* with the world, how should one understand subjectivity in terms other than the representational subject-object relationship? Merleau-Ponty is not denying the possibility of representation *tout court*, but is rather underlining that our access to this primordial inter-being is not primarily epistemological. This claim is justified by the fact that Merleau-Ponty is underlining an element of negativity within this relationship.

Within this experience related to inter-being there are at least two senses of negativity. Firstly, because we are perceptually embodied within nature there is always a negative counterpart of our perceptual activity. In fact, I perceive some profiles, but some others are hidden: this is the idea of negativity as invisibility. Secondly, this perceptual negativity is mirrored in the reflective practice. In the general and anonymous connection of flesh, we recognize ourselves as something and as not

something else. The inter-being is based on the anonymous and general flesh, 'we install ourselves in perceived being/brute being, in the sensible, in the flesh where there is no longer the alternative of the in-itself and the for itself, where perceived being is eminently being' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 210). Positivity (inter-being as flesh) always implies a negative counterpart, the relationship between positivity and negativity is not read in terms of exclusion, but rather in terms of mutual implication.

The body presents itself as 'a perceived thing that perceives itself, and thereby inserts the world between self and self – a mass of pleasure and of pains that are not closed in on themselves, but is used by us to please and to suffer from the world and from other (pleasure and reality)' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 210). In tackling inter-being in terms of correlation, Merleau-Ponty arrives at a paradox: body is a thing, but also the fundamental element for the perception of things, it is 'closed and open, in perception as in desire' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 210); what we have is a double nature that expresses itself in this duplicity. This duplicity of nature requires a re-consideration of the relationship between nature-subject and expression starting from what Merleau-Ponty considers the symbolism of the body. This idea of body as symbolism requires the assumption that 'expression here offers an alternative understanding of intentionality, which is neither the presentation of sense to consciousness nor the opening of a zone of non-being within the causally closed nexus of nature. It is rather the event of sense formed at the confluence of body and nature' (Toadvine 2009: 104).

(c) *Nature and Body: symbolism and language*

The understanding of bodily expressive and symbolic functions is fundamental also for the understanding of the issue of genesis of ideality in *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. Bodily schema permit us to re-interpret intentionality and meaning in terms of operative intentionality. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

> Symbolism: A term is taken as representative of another, *Auffassung als*
> →We refer then to the mind, carrier of the *als*, to intentionality, to meaning-
> but then: symbolism is surveyed; there is no longer a body. By saying that

> body is symbolism, we mean that without a preliminary *Auffassung* of the signifier and the signified supposed as separate, the body would pass in the world and the world in the body (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 211).

In order to deepen this idea of operative intentionality in connection with both perceptual activity and emotional resonance, Merleau-Ponty claims:

> Feeling or pleasure, because the body is mobile, that is, the power to be elsewhere, are the [means of the] unveiling of *something*. An organ of the mobile senses (the eye, the hand) is already a language because it is an interrogation (movement) and a response (perception as *Erfühlung* of a project), speaking and understanding. It is a tacit language (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 211).

Bodily experience is already a form of symbolism. As Merleau-Ponty says, in its double functioning (movement and perception as project) body is interrogation – in so far as it is exploring something "other" and also itself as an experiencing thing – and is also a response and understanding in the sense that body is taking something other (namely nature) in order to express it in both a specific behavior and spoken words. At this stage, Merleau-Ponty insists on the idea of a tacit language or silence[88], intending with this expression the idea that there is a pre-reflective communication between beings and nature that is not linguistically intended.

So far, we have seen that we are part of nature and nature is part of us. It is hard to reject this idea, considering especially that we have a physiological component insofar as we are living organisms. However, this idea does not support a reductive claim according to which human nature is completely explicable in terms of natural science. To underline this point, Merleau-Ponty focuses on the concept of body as expression and symbolism. This means that the body expresses this intimate contact with a non-human element in specific behavior, but also that this tacit element (tacit

[88]See for instance *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence* (1964). In this essay, Merleau-Ponty compares painting and language in order to understand their relationship with expression. Firstly, it clarifies that language is not only a fix code of signs, but is rather close to arts insofar as it is expressive. Secondly, this essay of the 1952 shows how the question of expression and language became cogent for Merleau-Ponty in the fifties.

because the first encounter with nature is not understood in term of conceptualization or language) remains present within the activity of speaking.

Merleau-Ponty claims that there is a kinship between logos and nature and this kinship mirrors the one that we have between body and nature. According to Merleau-Ponty, with our perceptual activity we are directed towards the external world, we are directly engaged with it. This perceptual activity presents the two functions proper to language (interrogation and response). It is clear that the interrogation-response is proper also of language, but it remains then to understand how we can interpret the presence of a silence (the pre-reflective of nature) within language. In order to explain this point, Merleau-Ponty firstly expresses the idea of the correlation between perception and language: 'each sign, being a difference with respect to others, and each signification a difference with respect to others, [means that] the life of language reproduces perceptual structures at another level' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 212).

There is a parallelism between perceptual activity and language: perceptual activity allows us to experience the external world, but at the same time allows us to structure our bodily schema in terms of differences from other bodily subjects. In fact, we perceive things, but also ourselves as different from other beings. Furthermore, in this perceptual activity each sense organ interacts with others but also specifies itself with proper capacities (hands are touching, eyes are seeing, and so on). For example, within the bodily schema one hand is touching the other and in doing so it feels itself as a touching touched, but also is recognizing itself with its own proper sense functioning. In order to recognize itself as a touching-touched hand, each hand is not coinciding with the other: the left hand is touching the right hand or vice-versa.

Language is structured in the same process of differentiation insofar as each sign is defined as different from others signs[89]. Each utterance is saying something and is

[89] Merleau-Ponty expresses this idea very clearly in his essay *On the Phenomenology of Language*. Considering the living language, and echoing Saussure, Merleau-Ponty claims: 'these elements form a system in synchrony in the sense that each of them signifies only its difference in respect to the others. […] there are only differences of signification in a language' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 88). In this essay, published in the 1951, Merleau-Ponty provides an interpretation of the problem of language in Husserl's philosophy and starts to present issues that become more and more important for his phenomenology during the fifties: language, sedimentation and intersubjectivity. Merleau-Ponty's focus on interest in this essay emerges clearly when he claims: 'what the phenomenology of language teaches me is not just a

also referring to objects and things, but is not expressing itself. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: 'logos in the sense of language, […] the proffered language, says everything except itself; it is reticent like the silent Logos of perception' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 212). We are using a code of which we are not the initiators to communicate and refer to the external world.

It seems plausible to claim that language in one sense always presupposes the silence of the encounter with nature[90]. The idea of silence connects perception and language: 'there is a Logos of the natural esthetic world, on which the Logos of language relies' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 212). The issue of the relationship between perception and language runs through another course Merleau-Ponty gave on Husserl in the academic year 1959-61 entitled *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. However, the aim of this consideration is not to provide an exhaustive account of Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of language, but rather to consider how Merleau-Ponty starts from Husserl's later ideas in order to link the issue of language with the issue of nature.

In the 1959-61 course, Merleau-Ponty comments on Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* in order to understand the relationship between ideality, history and ground (expressed by the idea of Earth), in order to do so Merleau-Ponty analyses two Husserl's manuscripts *The Origin of Geometry* and *Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth, Does not Move*.

According to Merleau-Ponty the first step is to understand that idealities are a-temporal but nonetheless present within the temporal becoming of humanity. Every ideality then is understood as follows: 'ideal sense is the sense of a field, a sense of initiation or a sense of openness which involves continuous production and reproduction' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 6). Not every geometrical discovery is something

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psychological curiosity. […] It teaches me a new conception of the being of language, which is now logic in contingency – […] – incarnate logic' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 88).

[90] Mazis (2016) underlines the presence of silence also within the sensible world: 'this silence is a potential depth of sense always present in the world through perception, found in the indefinite receding to planes and layers, points and planes of overlap, and connection of sense woven into other senses. When this silence, or heightened state of the senses, is entered into, there is a hush that is intrinsic to the inexhaustible depth of richness of sense constellated among a myriad of beings' (Mazis 2016: 27).

close within its own field, but rather it is an open field of possible future and possible interpretation and creation. It is in this sense that 'ideality is historicity' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 7). The effort is to think idealities in their connection with existence. As Merleau-Ponty claims: 'the historicity of an idea is the positing, through the living organism, of a task which is not uniquely his' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 7). A specific essence is then an openness for humanity in general. Merleau-Ponty is paraphrasing the Husserlian idea that an ideal object[91] (for example the Pythagorean theorem) is "supra-temporal" and "accessible to all men" (Husserl 2002: 96). This accessibility, for Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, is gained through language: 'how does geometrical ideality (just like that of all sciences) proceed from its primary intrapersonal origin, where it is a structure within the conscious space of the first inventor's soul, to its ideal objectivity? In advance we see that it occurs by means of language, through which it receives, so to speak, its linguistic living body' (Husserl 2002: 97).

Language links ideality with historicity and exemplifies why it is possible to consider ideality as a task for a plurality of subjects: by positing idealities in an intersubjective frame, language makes these idealities public. Language makes an ideality available to everyone because, in virtue of its structure, it lets emerge an ideality within a shared language. As Merleau-Ponty underlines, this is possible because language is already interwoven with other beings and the world[92]. This specific structure of language, which Merleau-Ponty finds also at the level of perception, emerges in speech. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: 'as a speaking and active subject I encroach upon the other who is listening, as the understanding and passive subject I allow the other to encroach upon me' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 8).

In the activity of speaking we find 'the overlapping of a passivity by an activity' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 8), because speech 'is my practice, my operation, my "*Funktion*", my destiny. Every spiritual production is a response and an appeal, a coproduction' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 8). Given the intertwining between body and nature, speakers and

[91] It is important to highlight that for Husserl, idealities are not only mathematical or geometrical entities but also cultural objects. As an example, Husserl brings "the structure of fine literature" (Husserl 2002: 96).

[92] Merleau-Ponty specifies this clearly: 'Language is borne by our relation to the world and to others, and language also bears and makes our relation to the world and to the others, and language also bears and makes our relation to the world and to the others' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 7).

listeners, Merleau-Ponty claims that we find 'a sort of "simultaneity" of the one and other, an *Urgegenwart*, which has no locus between the before and after […] a being prior to the distinction between essence and existence' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 8).

In describing the depth dimension of historicity of idealities, Merleau-Ponty finds a *Urgegenwart* (a primordial present) characterized by the simultaneity of activity and passivity, past and future, a sedimentation of sense that makes ideality in a living context. What Merleau-Ponty is searching for is then a "ground of sense" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 67). The topic of nature is mentioned again at the very beginning of the *Notes de Cours 1959-61* and in its connection with what Merleau-Ponty calls "état de non-philosophie" (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 39). According to Merleau-Ponty, this "state of non-philosophy" points out that there is a crisis of traditional philosophy. This situation of "non-philosophy" characterizes humanity in a specific period[93] and presents four aspects: a crisis of rationality within human society; a crisis of our understanding of the relationship with nature; a crisis in our understanding of truth; and the appearing of cultural elements that could contrast this crisis.

The first element of this situation of non-philosophy is described by Merleau-Ponty as follows: 'crise de la rationalité dans les rapports entre les homes' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 40)[94]. The social condition presents a crisis of rationality insofar as capitalism leads to a non-organic conception of human relationships (the specialization of each singular task for each worker within the same factory is a clear example of this). This critical situation requires an analysis of the alternative model presented by Marx. Despite the fact that the issue of Marxism is relevant within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy[95], I will not focus on this topic here.

The second element, instead, conduces directly to Merleau-Ponty philosophy of nature: 'crise de la rationalité dans nos rapports avec la Nature; Logique de l'évolution technique; La bombe – l'énergie atomique' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 42)[96]. The negative

[93] Historically speaking, it is necessary to underline that Merleau-Ponty was writing these notes in a period characterized by the technological advent of nuclear energy and, from the political point of view, from the diffusion of the communism within Europe.

[94] 'Crisis of rationality within human relationships' (my translation).

[95] See for instance *Humanism and Terror* and *The Adventures of the Dialectic*.

[96] 'Crisis of rationality within our relationship with Nature. Logic of technical development; the bomb-the nuclear energy' (my translation).

meaning of the state of non-philosophy emerges in connection with the inability to think of nature. This misleading conception of nature brings to what Merleau-Ponty calls "ultra-artificialisme" (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 42).

The developing of nuclear energy implies an ultra-developing of technique over nature, this means that instead of being used as a tool, technique becomes the proper condition of science. This technical idea of science leads to a form of domination toward nature: 'L'univers est univers des *constructa*' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 42)[97]. This pervasive scientific-artificial framework misunderstands not only our genuine relationship with nature, but also nature in itself because it reduces nature to an artifact. Consequently, instead of properly understanding nature, this "mélange de naturalisme et d'artificialisme" (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 42)[98] negates nature. The implicit assumption made by scientism is that nature has meaning only within human history, an assumption that is in opposition to Merleau-Ponty's idea of "primordial presence" elaborated in *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. Merleau-Ponty tackles this issue underlining that this "ultra-artificialism" at the same time affirms (as a construct) and negate nature (insofar as it is not conceived as meaningful in itself).

According to Merleau-Ponty, this scientific framework misses to investigate the genuine ground of experience. What Merleau-Ponty proposes is then the 'redécouverte d'une Nature-pour-nous comme *sol* de toute notre coulture, et où s'enracine en particulier notre activité créatrice qui n'est donc pas inconditionnée, qui a à maintenir [la] culture au contact de l'être brut, à la confronter avec lui' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 44)[99]. The idea of nature as "pour-nous" does not imply the reduction of nature to an artefact, but rather requires the idea of nature as a fundamental soil. This assumption leads Merleau-Ponty to point out the third element of the state of non-philosophy, namely the misunderstanding 'de nos rapports avec la vérité' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 44)[100]. The first three elements of this state of non-philosophy are negative, but the fourth element hints at a new possibility for the rehabilitation of the idea of nature and

[97] 'The universe is a universe of contructa' (my translation).
[98] 'a mix of naturalism and artificialism' (my translation).
[99] 'Rediscovery of nature for-us intended as soil of our culture, a soil on which our creativity is based appearing then not unconditioned. This creativity has to maintain culture in contact and permanent confrontation with the brute being' (my translation).
[100] 'Our relationship with the truth' (my translation).

of philosophy. The fourth element not only points out a positive task for a philosophical investigation but also explains how it becomes possible to phenomenologically deal with the non-natural element. At this point Merleau-Ponty introduces arts:

> Les symptoms culturels et la possibilité de la philosophie. Tout ce qui précède, [sont] les «résonateurs» émotionels qui amplifient et font sentir à [un] immense public [les] contrecoups du development de la technique – Mise en question, par ses conséquences, de ce «monde technique» lui-même (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 46)[101].

Merleau-Ponty individuates cultural elements that allow to rethink philosophy and to criticize the "ultra-artificial" conception of the world. These cultural elements are: poetry, music, painting and psychoanalysis. In what follows I focus only briefly on literature and more extensively on painting. I proceed this way because these two forms of art are linked with language and nature. Contemporary poetry and literature, according to Merleau-Ponty, operates a change in the understanding of language[102]. Instead of focusing on the relationship signifier-signified, authors such Mallarmé, Proust and Joyce elaborate an indirect signification. According to Merleau-Ponty, instead of elaborating a language that merely reports facts and thing, these authors explore an indirect mode of expression: 'moi-altrui-le monde délibérément mélangés, impliqués l'un dans l'autre, exprimés l'un par l'autre, dans [un] rapport latéral' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 49)[103]. However, it is painting that shows how it becomes possible to contrast the crisis of rationality.

Merleau-Ponty considers the idea that contemporary painting deals with the issue of creation of meanings rather than considers itself as a form of representation. This view is important because it considers art as a form of investigation of the pre-categorical encounter with the world. Instead of considering painting as code that

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[101] 'The cultural symptoms and the possibility of philosophy. All that precedes are the emotional resonators that amplify and make audible to a huge public the aftershocks of the technical development – Make in question, for its own consequences, of this technical world' (my translation).

[102] It is necessary to mention that recently a collection of course notes from the year 1953 it has been published under the title *Recerche sur l'Usage Litteraire du Langage* (2013). In these notes Merleau-Ponty anticipates some issue present in the *Notes de course 1959-61*.

[103] 'Myself-other subject-the world are deliberately mixed, they require each others, they express one for another, within a lateral relationship' (my translation).

transposes the natural perception in an artefact, Merleau-Ponty proposes to see painting (and arts in general) as a genuine understanding of our experience of the perceptual world. Consequently, contemporary art sees 'le monde perçu, amorphe, non par default mais par excès' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 51[104]). Assuming this idea of a perceptual world that exceeds any representation implies that painting is not resemblance but rather an "écart" (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 52) that express something other. Merleau-Ponty makes this point clear:

> Décharger la tableau de la function de resemblance pour lui permettre d'exercer la function d'expression, i.e. de présenter une essence alogique du monde qui, comme la ligne dont parlait Vinci, n'est pas empiriquement dans le monde et pourtant la ramène à son pur accente d'être, met en relief sa manière de *Welten*, d'être monde (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 53)[105].

Merleau-Ponty is proposing an idea of art that is very close to his idea of philosophy, instead of being tool of description or construction of a specific object (specifically nature) both configure themselves as expressions of that fundamental element. Under this perspective, art in general – and painting specifically – is not a marginal element of interest but rather allows to clarify the notion of "non-philosophical" that Merleau-Ponty describes as problematic for both his own philosophical context and phenomenology. What emerges is the idea that a non-philosophical practice (painting) deals with a fundamental element (nature) that is central in rethinking philosophy. Painting brings to expression nature and makes the dynamic correlation between subject and nature visible: 'La peinture est un movement, un movement qui germe dans l'apparance' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 56)[106]. Insofar as the activity of painting is a lived practice, it is movement. However, according to Merleau-Ponty, painting is not reducible to images 'précisément parce qu'elle est Nature. […] Parce qu'elle est nature naturante. […] Parce qu'elle donne ce que la nature veut dire et

[104] 'The perceived world, amorphous, not for defect but rather for excess' (my translation).

[105] 'Discharge painting from its function of resemblance in order to allow it to exercises its expressive function; i.e. to present the pre-logic (not-logic) of the world that, like the line Da Vinci spoke about, is not empirically within the world and yet brings it back to its own accent of being, that puts in evidence the "Welten", the being of the world'. (my translation).

[106] 'Painting is a movement, a movement that germinates within appearance' (my translation).

ne dit pas: le «principe générateur» qui fait être les choses et le monde (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 56)[107]. According to Merleau-Ponty, painting – in creating visible works – expresses the movement that connects perception with nature, nature with culture. According to Merleau-Ponty's analysis in these notes of the course, contemporary philosophy is missing precisely an understanding of this bond. Merleau-Ponty himself claims that painting is a form of philosophy:

> Donc [la] peinture [est] une sorte de philosophie: saisie de la genèse philosophie toute en acte. […] La peinture n'est pas «abstraite», disait Klee, mais «absolue» (i.e. radicale), i.e. retrouvant une position de l'être incomprehensible pour [la] science et [le] quotidian, i.e. être déjà là présupposé dans toute «explication». Les apparences [sont] prises comme «parabole» de cet être. L'art donnant [les] symbols des apparences (i.e. leur généralisation, leur dérivation à partir d'un possible plus vaste). C'est [une] philosophie non expresse. […] Le symbole n'est pas la chose même. […] Il ne dévoile qu'en voilant (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 58).[108]

Merleau-Ponty considers painting as a sort of philosophy in action. In its practice, contemporary painting is not pretending to render complete an experience that is approximate and inaccurate, but rather is bringing to expression the dynamism of this

[107] 'This because it is natura naturans, this also because it says what nature wants to say but does not say: the "generative principle" that make being things and the world' (my translation).

[108] 'So, painting is a sort of philosophy: seizure of the genesis of philosophy in act. Painting is not abstract, says Klee, but absolute (radical), i.e it rediscovers a dimension of being incomprehensible for science and daily life experience. The appearances are taken as a parabola of this being. Art gives the symbols of appearances (their generalization, their derivation from a vast possible). This is a not-expressed philosophy. The symbols are not the things in themselves. It only reveals by veiling'. (my translation). This quote mentions the name of Paul Klee. Klee is often quoted in these notes because it is considered by Merleau-Ponty as an artist engaged with the investigation of pre-reflective encounter with the world. This interpretation of Klee was influenced by Grohmann's book Paul Klee, which figures as a source in Merleau-Ponty's Notes de Course. In fact, Merleau-Ponty reports numerous quotes from that book. His appreciation of Grohmann's book emerge clearly since the very beginning of the Notes. In fact Grohmann focuses on Klee's painting of genesis: 'Klee from time to time seems mysteriously impelled to touch upon the mystery of creation – "Genesis" – the primal source of all Becoming where "the secret key to all things is kept". […] He saw everything from some far-off corner of creation where, as he put it, he discovered pre-exosting formulas of man, animal, plant, rock, and the elements' (Grohmann 1953: 11-12). Grohmann quotes a passage from Paul Klee's writings in which emerges his idea of painting as making visible (contrary to the idea of painting as a mere representation), idea taken by Merleau-Ponty and developed in his notes. As Grohmann reports, quoting Klee: 'Art does not reproduce the visible, rather it makes visible. Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth, things we either liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe, and that there are many more, other, latent realities' (Grohmann 1953: 21). Grohmann does not provide references to Klee's writing.

experience itself. This relationship with the pre-categorical manifests the urgent demand to re-invent philosophy itself and its understanding of reality. In the paragraph of these notes, entitled *La Philosophie en Face de cette Non-Philosophie*, Merleau-Ponty considers Husserl's phenomenology as a form of reaction to the crisis of traditional philosophy. Parts of these notes are devoted to the consideration of the issue of *Lebenswelt*, as it has been explained in the previous chapter. However, there is a passage where Merleau-Ponty explains the connection between philosophy and non-philosophy and points to the idea of intercorporeality. For Merleau-Ponty, philosophy is not merely *theoria* but rather is the understanding of the bond between theory and pre-reflectivity; philosophy should become a thinking of 'leur tissue commun' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 84)[109]. Art is aware that symbols are not things themselves (they are expressing them) and create a new world that expresses a primordial contact with nature. For Merleau-Ponty philosophy has lost this bond and should become aware of the same circularity. Circularity because it is '*Gebilde* humain, elle retombe au *Lebenswelt* et à l'histoire et s'y sédimente, alors qu'elle devrait être reactivation totale, pensé de la sedimentation, contact avec l'Être total avant separation de vie préthéorétique et de *Gebilde* humain' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 84)[110].

Merleau-Ponty claims that philosophy must re-gain this primordial contact and elaborate on it, philosophy must become aware of the potential of sedimentation in order to reactivate a proper contact with being. As Merleau-Ponty claims: 'la philosophie est déjà dans [une] reconnaissance de participation latérale de vie et psychisme à moi […] C'est cette philosophie d'interconnexion du tout que nous essayons de faire' (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 85)[111]. Merleau-Ponty is pointing out the idea of inherence between nature and us; he is assuming that life is something that emerges in us as human beings, but that is not reducible to our donation of sense. Starting from this point it becomes necessary to interpret philosophy in its being focused on this interconnection that in VI assumes the form of an intercorporeality. This aim appears

[109] 'Their common texture' (my translation).

[110] 'Human form, it falls back to the Lebenswelt and to history and sediment, then it should be total reactivation, thinking of the sedimentation, contact with the total Being before the separation between pre-theoretic life and human form' (my translation).

[111] 'Philosophy is already a recognition of the lateral participation between life and psyche within myself; it is this philosophy of a total interconnection that we should develop' (my translation).

clearly later on in these notes when Merleau-Ponty uses clearly the term "chair du monde" (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 211), in this passage Merleau-Ponty expresses that intercorporeality is fundamentally not only between subjects but also between subjects and world. Merleau-Ponty explains this point as follows:

> La «chair du monde» ce n'est pas métaphore de notre corps au monde. On pourrait dire inversement: c'est aussi bien notre corps qui est fait de la même étoffe sensible que le monde – Ni, naturalism, ni anthropologie: les hommes et le temps, l'espace sont faits du même magma (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 211)[112].

This accent on the "flesh of the world" makes explicit the meaning of the idea of a non-philosophical element introduced by Merleau-Ponty. This idea of something non-philosophical ties together at least four elements: nature, the state of non-philosophy, art and intercorporeality. Nature requires a philosophical investigation to be able to understand how it is possible to think of itself without falling into idealism or realism. Merleau-Ponty highlights this when he shows that idealism reduces nature to a human construct and, the other way round, that a realist approach tends to reduce human-nature in terms of naturalistic terms (but then also consciousness is naturalized). Nature imposes itself as a non-philosophical element, in the sense that it amenable to philosophizing, but not reducible to philosophical terms. Nature remains an excess, a sensible excess. As Toadvine highlights: 'insofar as philosophy is incapable of thematizing its own emergence, insofar as it remains conditioned by a nature that escapes its reflective recuperation, nature is disclosed indirectly as a silent resistance internal to philosophy's own movement' (Toadvine 2013: 372). This assumption, according to Merleau-Ponty, implies that phenomenology assumes nature as an element of investigation exactly because it brings phenomenology to its own limits.

Basing its investigation on consciousness, phenomenology forgot to consider the relationship between subject and world. Despite the fact that Husserl, in his last period, tried to overcome this framework, he never overcame a philosophy of consciousness. If Husserlian phenomenology poses as central the issue the fundamental ground of

[112] 'The flesh of the world is not a metaphor of our body within the world. On the contrary, someone might say: it is our body that is made of the same sensible fabric of the world. Not naturalism, not anthropology: men, time and space are made of the same magma' (my translation).

experience (Earth as a soil), then Merleau-Ponty takes the task to build phenomenology directly from nature. In face of this state of non-philosophy, Merleau-Ponty considers art as positive reaction and, specifically, highlights not only its philosophical relevance, but also its contribution for philosophy itself. According to Merleau-Ponty, philosophy should start to understand how art is investigating the so called "lateral" relationship with the world.

So far, we have seen three meanings of the "non-philosophical" element. The philosophical meaning of a non-philosophical discipline leads to the understanding of the fourth interpretation of this non-philosophical element. The act of painting engages in a pre-theoretical experience of the world defined by the prominent role of the body. With their expression of this bodily access to the world, painters provide a new element for philosophical investigation. Visual art, instead of merely representing things within paintings, expresses our encounter with them. In his last period, Merleau-Ponty deepened a new perspective of bodily experience, extending it to the idea of intercorporeality.

3.3 Intercorporeality

In Merleau-Ponty's view, the idea of nature requires a reconsideration of the relationship between ego and egos, cogito and world, body and bodies. The aim of this paragraph is to provide an outline of Merleau-Ponty's idea of intercorporeality, which emerges in his last works. I will start by taking Merleau-Ponty's article the *Philosopher and His Shadow* and VI into consideration.

The issue of nature links with the problem of the constitution of other beings, this problem can be formulated in this way: first, Merleau-Ponty conceives the body as a connective element between subject and world. In a second step, Merleau-Ponty recognizes how this perspective relies on the connection between consciousness and world. Based on this assumption, a conception of other beings becomes problematic: it is necessary to understand how it is possible to conceive other beings not as mere projections of ourselves. In order to overcome this problem of the correlation between

two discrete entities (egos in this case), Merleau-Ponty firstly formulates a proper phenomenology of the body and then applies it to the idea of intercorporeality.

In PP, bodily experience, intended in its perceptual structure, leads Merleau-Ponty to see perception as being in direct contact with the world and other subjects. However, bodily schema remains a structure of an individual ego. Despite the fact that body is a general element (everyone has a body), it remains something that pertains to a singular ego. In order to develop this generality of the body in direction of intercorporeality, Merleau-Ponty discusses the problem of other egos in the framework of his analysis of child psychology and pedagogy at the beginning of the fifties.

In considering how children develop the experience of the other, Merleau-Ponty criticizes the idea that we are merely inferring the existence of other egos by analogy, this is because it implies the idea that we are assuming the existence of otherness from our own existence, and this for Merleau-Ponty is not a form of genuine experience of other beings. In specifying this, he also introduces the notion of 'structure' in connection with bodily experience. As he writes:

> Today the problem is rightly surpassed by the notion of structure. The functioning other's body brings about, through its movements, a displacement of certain corporeal forms whose apprehension is not the simple sum of the perception of observed movements. My body is also not given to me as a sum of sensations but as a whole. A form, common to both visual and tactile perceptions, is the link through which they communicate. All happens as if the intuitions and motor performances of the other are founded in a kind of intentional encroachment, as if my body and the other's form a system (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 452).

Within children's experience, Merleau-Ponty detects a structure of corporeality that leads to the idea of a system of intercorporeality. This claim is based on the intuition that children and adults are intimately connected in joint activities in virtue of their being part of the flesh of the world[113], as Krueger (2013)[114] suggests. It is not that I perceive my own body and its perceptual functions and then, in a second moment I am attributing all these functions to others. Rather, all my senses are communicating as our

[113] Merleau-Ponty uses this expression in Notes de Cours 1959-1961, p.211.

[114] In his paper, Krueger discusses shared emotions in infants starting from the Merleau-Pontian idea of the flesh of the world.

body is communicating with other bodies in an "intentional encroachment". To put it in other words, Merleau-Ponty is not analyzing how it is possible for a consciousness to consider another ego by analogy. Rather, Merleau-Ponty is stressing how consciousness of different individuals appear from this bodily – and intersubjective – structure named intercorporeality. This bodily structure includes any individual body but is not reducible to them, it seems that this structure has the characteristics of generality and anonymity – it allows each subject to specify his own body – and it configures itself as not anthropomorphic. This idea of a bodily structure will be further analyzed by Merleau-Ponty in his article *The Philosopher and his Shadow* and will be defined as "flesh". The idea of an intercorporeal structure appears within Merleau-Ponty's interest for psychology. I would like to consider the development of this idea in Merleau-Ponty's later works and then to explain how Merleau-Ponty passes from bodily structure to intercorporeality. I suggest that intercorporeality is an original structure of experience *tout court* behind any differentiation between subject and object that connects intimately nature and humans (but also other beings) in a process of expressivity.

In his article *The Philosopher and His Shadow* of 1959, Merleau-Ponty provides an analysis of what he considers the unthought of Husserl's philosophy. This unthought is understood by Merleau-Ponty as the relationship between nature and intercorporeality. Merleau-Ponty elucidates this Husserlian unthought in three passages: a) delineation of the unreflected dimension within natural attitude; b) consideration of the problem of nature; c) analysis of corporeality and flesh.

A) According to Merleau-Ponty, to reflect on our straightforward natural attitude – as Husserl calls it – implies 'to unveil an unreflected dimension which is at a distance because we are no longer in a naïve way' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 1961). To practice the phenomenological reduction on our natural attitude means to recuperate an unreflected (or pre-categorical) dimension implicitly accepted. The phenomenological reduction in this sense is not natural and leads to consider nature not as it is intended by natural science but, rather, as something integrated to consciousness (at this stage Merleau-Ponty is equating the unreflected dimension with nature).

B) Merleau-Ponty puts forward the idea that it is necessary to formulate a phenomenology that does not start from the correlation between consciousness and

object. Nature seems to represent the best candidate for this analysis and Merleau-Ponty recognizes this possibility within Husserl's phenomenology: 'Husserl's thought is as much attracted by the haecceity of Nature as by the vortex of absolute consciousness. In the absence of explicit theses about the relationship of one to other, we can only examine the samples of "pre-theoretical constitution" he offers' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 165-66). According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl is strongly interested in the concept of nature, but he remained tied to his conception of pure consciousness. This is why for Merleau-Ponty it is necessary to start directly from nature and the idea of "pre-theoretical constitution".

C) The idea of body is what allows the formulation of the concept of flesh. Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty extends the concept of corporeality to that of intercorporeality. For Merleau-Ponty the reversibility of the body (its being a perceiving and a perceived body) 'overturns our idea of the thing and the world, and that results in an ontological rehabilitation of the sensible' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 166-67). Body is not a mere thing, but in virtue of its reversibility is a perceiving thing. The flesh, the carnality that pertains to physical objects is a general and anonymous connective element that links everything. Merleau-Ponty defines the flesh as follows:

> When we say that the perceived thing is grasped "in person" or "in the flesh" (*leibhaft*), this is to be taken literally: the flesh of what is perceived, this compact particle which stops exploration, and this optimum which terminates it all reflect my own incarnation and are its counterpart. Here we have a type of being, a universe with its unparalleled "subject" and "object", the articulation of each in terms of the other, and the definitive definition of an "irrelative" of all the "relatives" of perceptual experience, which is the "legal basis" for all the constructions of understanding (Merleau-Ponty 1964 (a): 167).

The term flesh is a concrete element of reality. This fundamental element has two features: it is something that does not allow any total coincidence between bodies and bodies and physical things (it "stops exploration"); it reflects the incarnate experience insofar as it is flesh. An example may be helpful to illustrate these two points. Our own body is composed by material parts (sense organs, the nervous system and so on); the physical borders of our body (our hands or legs, for example) are

moving within a concrete world. We are walking on a ground (grass and so on) and we are touching things that have a physical structure (artifacts, but also inorganic thing like stones). Furthermore, we are also encountering and bodily experiencing organic objects like plants, caressing living animals and shaking human hands. All these things are made by flesh, body included. It seems that flesh is a substance, something that stands in itself like a regular objects, but rather it is necessary to consider it as a characteristic that inheres to things and beings[115]. For Merleau-Ponty, this generality of the flesh implies a reinterpretation of the idea of intentionality, or better, a specification of the operative intentionality he introduced in PP. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the flesh in terms of a "universe with its unparalleled "subject" and "object", the articulation of each in terms of the other", this implies dealing with the problem of intentional correlation between a subject and the intended object.

In order to obtain an operative intentionality, it is not sufficient to explain the role of bodily experience (as Merleau-Ponty did in PP and NA), but also to explicate the link between corporeality and the sensible aspects of the world. In order to completely integrate the sensible within the operative intentionality, Merleau-Ponty considers all the explorative aspects of the perceptive and bodily experience of things (the perceptive course). As Merleau-Ponty puts it: 'it is the transition that as a carnal subject I effect from one phase of movement to another' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 167). Perception has a correlative function because the correlation between perceiving subject and perceived things is mirrored in the perceptual experience that we have of other beings: we constitute ourselves through others and other things. For Merleau-Ponty, without the explorative function of perception the experience of other beings will be impossible. The condition of possibility of this correlative genesis seems to be the flesh.

[115] For an elucidation of the multiple meanings of flesh in Merleau-Ponty see Hass (2008), p. 201. The author identifies three main usages of the term: flesh as carnality; flesh as reversibility (the hand is touching touched as the body as unity is perceiving but also perceived by other bodies), flesh as element of being. I would like to suggest that these meanings are interrelated. Merleau-Ponty starts from the idea of the flesh as a carnality, this carnality is what allows the first form of reflection (the example of touching) but also the appearance of others. Reversibility of the flesh is what allows encroachment between others and myself. At the same time, this correlative characteristic of the flesh connects directly with Being. However, for the sake of this work I am not dealing with the issue of being in Merleau-Ponty, an issue that is not directly considered in his own works. For an analysis of the ontological relevance of the flesh and its connection with the concept of desire see also Barbaras (2008).

For Merleau-Ponty the crucial passage then is to start the analysis directly from the flesh rather than assuming consciousness[116] as a main element. In this context, Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea of intercorporeality in connection with the problem of otherness, the body as a perceiving thing is prepared for 'understanding that there are other *animalia* and possibly other men' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 168). However, in virtue of the idea of flesh – a carnal interconnection between beings – the experience of other beings should not be understood in terms of introjection or analogy, but rather from an aesthesiological perspective. In considering this aesthesiological – and carnal – intersubjectivity Merleau-Ponty cashes out the idea of intercorporeality:

> The reason why I have evidence of the other man's being-there when I shake his hand is that his hand is substituted for my left hand, and my body annexes the body of another person in that "sort of reflection" it is paradoxically the seat of. My two hands "coexist" or are "compresent" because they are only one single body's hand. The other person appears through an extension of that compresence; he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 168).

Flesh as correlation is intended as a system of articulation of different beings and things; these elements share the same thickness of the sensible in virtue of their bodily dimension. In using the expression "organs of one single intercorporeality", Merleau-Ponty is expressing the idea that this co-presence is literally carnal. The intercorporeality that characterizes this experiential situation does not imply a mere presence of different discrete entities, but rather an articulation of entities that share a general carnality. At this stage, we know that the flesh has a character of generality, all organic and inorganic objects and beings have a carnal presence. The idea of the flesh is the starting point for the phenomenological reflection, this carnality – in its intersubjective dimension – is what allows the constitution of the world and beings (human or animal).

Intercorporeality is the pre-reflective ground for the shared and intersubjective dimension. Within this interconnected experience, for different beings it becomes

[116] Mauro Carbone (2004) claims that Merleau-Ponty tried to leave a philosophy of *Erlebnisse* in favor of a philosophy of *Urstiftung*. As Carbone puts it: 'sedimentation gives itself by virtue of our spatiotemporal Urstiftung in Being' (Carbone 2004: 13).

possible to interact communicatively. Intercorporeality guarantees an interconnection between the carnal relationship of bodies and the conscious and communicative activities of beings. There is an intertwining between the pre-reflective layer and the cognitive and linguistically shared one. Concerning human beings, Merleau-Ponty uses art (painters and musician) and language as examples to illustrate this intertwining. In the first example, the artist is concretely producing a work (a painting, the sonata) through his own body. This work then becomes available – as a perceptual thing but also as a meaningful thing – to other's perception and interpretation. Merleau-Ponty underlines that bodily activity of artists is a pre-reflective and necessary medium for their activity. In the second example, for Merleau-Ponty, through language human beings are making sounds through the body – using mouth and throat – and creating meanings that become perceptually available for everyone. Like in the case of art, in using language human beings are implicitly and pre-reflectively using their own body in its intercoporeal dimension. Merleau-Ponty considers then the relationship between these two layers in terms of reciprocal fulfillment: 'intercorporeality culminates in (and is changed into) the advent of *blosse Sachen* without our being able to say that one of the two orders is primarily in relation to the other' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 173).

Merleau-Ponty is underling primarily the encroachment between objective things (such as concepts) and intercorporeality. In order to become what Merleau-Ponty calls "logical objectivity", it is necessary that intercorporeality forgets itself as "carnal intersubjectivity". In underlining this encroachment, Merleau-Ponty clarifies also his conception of constitution: 'the forces of the constitutive field do not move in one direction only; they turn back upon themselves. Intercorporeality goes beyond itself and ends up unconscious of itself as intercorporeality' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 173). In order to reach the level of objective and shared things, it is not necessary to start from the idea of consciousness, but rather from the movement of generality – the intercorporeal intertwining – that goes beyond the subject-object and self-other distinction. Merleau-Ponty makes this point clearly:

> It is only the haze of an anonymous life that separates us from being; and the barrier between us and others is impalpable. If there is a break, it is not between me and the other person; it is between a primordial generality we

> are intermingled in and the precise system, myself-the others. […] Others and my body are born together from original ecstasy. The corporeality to which the primordial thing belongs is more corporeality in general (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 174).

This general corporeality – the "flesh" – is a fundamental structure of experience; given that the flesh is a general and anonymous connective structure, Merleau-Ponty points out that rather than primordial egos we have a "primordial We" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 175). The idea of the "primordial We" finds its pre-condition in the intercorporeal structure of experience. As Merleau-Ponty underlines, the "here" of my body intimately implies a relation with something that is beyond itself. In this essay of the 1959 the idea of flesh appears in connection with intercorporeality. However, it is in VI[117] that Merleau-Ponty characterizes the concept of flesh in a more detailed way. In this work, Merleau-Ponty specifies three main features of flesh: (a) encroachment/crisscrossing, (b) its configuration as a prototype of being (c) generality/anonymity. These three characteristics define the flesh, but I would like to claim that they also define intercorporeality, which I intend as an expression of the flesh.

a) *Flesh as encroachment/crisscrossing*

Flesh implies an encroachment or crisscrossing of two different relationships: ego-egos-world; tangible-visible within the same bodily schema. The assumption is this: perceptually we can investigate different objects (subjects included). Because of our body, we are encroached with and open to a sensible world with which there is a primordial perceptual kinship. On a second level, we have a crisscrossing of at least two sensations (tangible-visible) within the bodily schema. Merleau-Ponty advances the example of touch: my hand is a touching thing that becomes also a touched thing. I can touch my left hand with my right hand, in this case the right hand is a touching thing. At the same time, and within the same bodily schema, my left hand becomes a touched

[117] His last unpublished text of the 1961.

thing that can be activated and then becomes a touching thing in itself. However, there is a fundamental encroachment and crisscrossing between visible and tangible. In certain cases, the space of tangibility is visible, and the visible space is tangible. In other words, I can touch what I see and I can see what I touch. It is in this regard that Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea of thickness of the flesh: 'it is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeality; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 135). This idea of crisscrossing and encroachment clarifies that flesh is not something that we should add to entities but rather something that pertains to them, subjects included.

b) *Flesh as a prototype of being*

Merleau-Ponty does not provide a clear definition of flesh as a prototype of being. My interpretation of this idea is that, on the one hand flesh shares with Merleau-Ponty's idea of being at least the feature of negativity. On the other hand, flesh exemplifies the kind of experience that we have with being. The idea of flesh as a carnal relationship between subject-subjects-things and body-bodies leads to the consideration of negativity within intercorporeal experience. This because those elements are connected and share the same feature (the flesh) without fully coinciding; in the same way there is not a full coincidence between subject and being. There is a negativity that is proper of perceptual experience and being. The issue of negativity links to the question of being – a being that is not fully positive and posited in front of a knowing subject. However, this is not the place to consider directly this issue that requires a comparison with authors that are beyond the interest of this thesis (like Heidegger and Piaget)[118].

[118] In this regard, see De Saint Aubert (2006). In this work, De Saint Aubert elucidates all the sources Merleau-Ponty used for the formulation of his ontological conception. In this work, De Saint Aubert analyses the fonts of Merleau-Ponty's ontological conception, from philosophy to science. In considering Merleau-Ponty's ontology, insists on the fact that 'Merleau-Ponty insiste sur le fait que le corps vivant n'est ni premier ni second, mais pivot ontologique, existential de tous les existentiaux' (De Saint Aubert 2006: 202). 'Merleau-Ponty insists on the fact that the living body is neither primary, nor second, but rather an ontological pivot, an existential of all existentials' (my translation).

In order to understand the centrality of negativity for the characterization of flesh as a prototype of being, it is necessary to start from our own body. The Merleau-Pontian intuition is that we do not have a total visible and tangible experience of our own body. There are part of my body that sometime I can hardly touch, but for sure there are part of my own body that I cannot see by myself (i.e. my eyes or my back). In order to experience those parts that are "absent" in my own personal experience we need things (such as mirrors) and other egos. The intercorporeal dimension presents a negativity that links to being: 'carnal being, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 136). There is then an absence, a form of negativity within the visibility in general; within the visible body and within the visible things there are invisible aspects by definition.

c) *Flesh as generality and anonymity*

Merleau-Ponty cashes out this idea as follows: 'it is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 139). The flesh is sensible and pertains not only to the external world but is part of the subject itself. The anonymity of the sensible is situated within the subject himself and this allows a connection with the world. In order to specify this anonymous flesh, Merleau-Ponty claims that flesh is not a matter, it is not a material or spiritual fact, it is not mind and it is not a substance. In order to define the flesh we should use the term "element", 'in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of *general thing*, midway between the space-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 139). Considering flesh as an element casts doubts on the concept of subjectivity

as this is classically intended, because Merleau-Ponty's starting point is exactly the general and anonymous interconnection called flesh[119].

To summarize, we can say that the flesh is a crisscrossing of body and sense organs; body and bodies. This crisscrossing and encroachment opens up to the entire visible world but at the same time implies the fact that within this sensible being there are absences that are proper of the being in general. Furthermore, in virtue of its being a prototype of being, flesh is general and anonymous because it pertains to all existing things. Merleau-Ponty cashes out the idea as follows:

> If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, […] this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 140).

Following this passage, it seems plausible to claim that it is this conception of flesh that allows turning the idea of corporeality into the idea of intercorporeality: 'I can understand a fortiori that elsewhere it also closes over upon itself and that there are other landscapes besides my own. If it lets itself be captivated by one of its fragments, the principle of captation is established, the field open for other Narcissus, for an "intercorporeity"' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 141).

[119] Heinämaa (2015) claims that the anonymity of the flesh implies neither a selfless subject nor a collective of subjects. Heinämaa supports her claim by pointing out that Merleau-Ponty still uses a concept of subjectivity, but a subject that is twofold. Heinämaa explains this twofold subject by saying that: 'my personal acts are established (etablir) on the foundation (fond) of the anonymous operations of the ''one,''and on the other hand, the anonymous subject as such, i.e. as a subject of operations that contribute to the constitution of the perceptual scenery, receives its sense as a subject from my personal self' (Heinämaa 2015: 129). As Heinämaa underlines, Merleau-Ponty specifies this anonymous subject with the term "someone". Furthermore, Heinämaa, referring to some passages in Merleau-Ponty, interprets the anonymous subject in terms of perceiving and moving body. According to Heinämaa, 'what Merleau-Ponty then compresses with his concept of anonymity is the idea that the movements of our own body are given to us as unique modifications of a sensibility and motility implicated in the sensible thing' (Heinämaa 2015: 132). I agree with Heinämaa's view, however I am stressing that rather focusing on the coexistence of two selves – anonymous and personal – Merleau-Ponty is focusing on the anonymity rather than on the idea of subjectivity.

3.4 Conclusions

The first paragraph explores the central role of bodily experience. Starting from Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of perception and operative intentionality, the influence of *Ideas* II has been highlighted by investigating Merleau-Ponty's idea of body as a form of expression that puts in constant connection subjects and world. Within Merleau-Ponty's analysis, the issue of bodily experience is linked to nature and allows us to appreciate Husserl's influence once again. In fact, according to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl oscillates between a perspective based on the transcendental subjectivity and a consideration of a pre-categorical nature that is not reducible to the conscious activity of the pure ego. Starting from this oscillation, Merleau-Ponty puts forward a conception of nature conceived of a fundamental non-reflective layer of experience, a layer that should be considered as a non-philosophical element in the sense that it cannot be entirely explained by philosophy or natural science. This conception of nature presupposes a relationship between subjectivity and world that is not intended as imposition of sense by conscious beings on nature, but rather as genesis of sense from this fundamental correlation between egos and nature. Given that, Merleau-Ponty develops his idea of flesh and intercorporeality. Flesh appears to be the general element that pertains to all beings and has three characteristics: encroachment, prototype of being and anonymity. The flesh permits an enlargement of the conception of bodily experience because the body is not conceived as individual body, but rather in terms of intercorporeality.

Chapter 4 - A Phenomenological Debate Toward Nature

The idea of nature is central for the contemporary debate within environmental philosophy given its normative and experiential dimension. On the one hand, the debate focuses on the ethical dimension of nature and tries to understand if the value of nature is intrinsic or extrinsic. The point here is to understand whether we should preserve nature for its own sake or, rather, if we should protect it for the sake of human beings. On the other hand, environmental philosophers investigate the perceptual structure of our experience of nature, by focusing on its aesthetical features.

I think that phenomenology may be helpful in understanding nature and the bodily experience it requires. Especially, I think Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can play a crucial role for the contemporary debate. This is because Merleau-Ponty conceives nature in its experiential centrality which re-considers the relationship between subject and object, subject and nature in an intercorporeal perspective. Consequently, it becomes possible to conceive nature not in terms of substance, or such terms that require a framework within which nature is intended like an ordinary object, capable of intellectual and technological possession[120].

In the first paragraph (4.1), I will focus on the contemporary phenomenological debate on nature and I will consider (a) how the aesthetic ecology focuses on experience in general without expanding on the concept of nature. Furthermore, I will claim (b) that Berleant's model considers the perceptual dimension of aesthetic experience only within an anthropocentric framework. In the second paragraph (4.2) I will try to delineate an embodied model of experience of nature and I will underline Berleant's erroneous understanding of Merleau-Ponty's notion of écart (a), and Berleant's misunderstanding

[120] Phenomenologically, we should not consider nature as a mere thing or as an object.

of Merleau-Ponty's non-dualistic framework (b). In the last paragraph (4.3) I will develop an engagement model focusing on the notion of intercorporeality.

4.1 Nature: the contemporary phenomenological debate

Donohoe (2016) claims that we need to formulate a phenomenology of nature based on the idea of genetic phenomenology[121]. According to Donohoe, genetic phenomenology allows us to get to a fundamental layer (lifeworld) and then to conceive it in a different manner.

Donohoe refers directly to Husserl and understands lifeworld as 'the universal horizon of all experience' (Donohoe 2016: 23). As horizon of all experience, the lifeworld – that the author understands as nature – appears to be pre-given rather than merely given, like ordinary objects (such as, tables, bottles and so on). Ordinary objects stand immediately before us, whereas the lifeworld (or nature) is a horizon, something that at the same time limits our experiences and opens it to new courses of perception. This unveils nature's subjective/objective structure: nature is the ground of our subjective experiences, but at the same time it is a common ground for everyone. In referring to the ideas of homeworld (the world familiar to us that represents the base for our normativity and evaluation) and alienworld (the unfamiliar world), Donohoe claims that 'lifeworld horizon is at the same time a ground of every experience of homeworld or alienworld since it entails the world history of earth that belongs to every living thing of earth' (Donohoe 2016: 23-24). The lifeworld requires an intimate interconnection with subjects, it is impossible to conceive any possible experience without its entanglement with the liferworld horizon. For Donohoe, this interconnection requires necessarily a phenomenology of nature that 'opens us to a position of renewal and critique of our own sedimented presuppositions of meaning, and it allows us to think

[121] Donohoe links genetic phenomenology with natural world. For him, genetic phenomenology 'begins with the idea that the natural world is pregiven meaning that it is the presumed horizon of our experience of any object' (Donohoe 2016: 19).

anew our interrelation to lifeworld and to those beings and things with which we share the lifeworld' (Donohoe 2016: 29).

The phenomenological perspective Donohoe delineates suggests a re-thinking of the relationship between subject and object and underlines the interconnection – or, following Merleau-Ponty, the intertwining – between beings and nature. Following up on this suggestion, Bannon proposes seeing the appearance of meanings and values not in human conscious experience but rather within the relationship between nature and beings[122]. He clarifies how, within environmental ethics, the debate usually concerns where to locate the value of nature, and individuates two main perspectives concerning the understanding of values: the first one (objective) sees the value in a specific property or characteristic of nature; the second one (subjective) considers nature valuable only in relationship to the subject. However, as the author points out, both remain stuck in a dualistic conception that relies on two different substances. In order to deal with this dualism, Bannon proposes that we should consider lifeworld and its relational dimension in order to specify values outside the subjective-objective split. Bannon claims that lifeworld implies a system of corporeality that leads to a relational conception of meaning: 'in the lifeworld we experience ourselves as embodied, […] among other bodies imbued with meaning and value precisely because of our mutual embodiment' (Bannon 2016: 56).

It is necessary to underline that the accent on the mutual embodiment requires for Bannon an intimate relationship not only between living beings, but also between living beings, things, values and meanings. Consequently, values emerge within this encounter, within this relational structure of experience. Bannon highlights that phenomenology conceives of every being as a nexus of relatedness, but never poses meanings and values within these relations. Following this view and in underlining this shortcoming, for Bannon it becomes possible to overcome a strong substantial dualism between subject and object, where at the one level we have conscious subjects and at the other level we have perceived objects. Rather, focusing on the generality of embodied experience, what we gain is an experiencer and an experienced that may become an

[122] Bannon formulates his idea of nature as follows: 'nature, from this perspective, is a process that includes social relations and so, on this model of experience, there is no metaphysical differentiation between what is typically identified as the natural and the social' (Bannon 2016: 63).

experiencer itself. As a consequence, 'when we speak of nature in the environmental context, we are referring to how these processes operate at the level of places: Nature is the manner in which the bodies within a place establish a specific spatial and temporal order between themselves, always open to outside influence. […] Since value occurs in and through these relations, the world is also permeated with meaning and value' (Bannon 2016: 62-63).

The pivotal point is that, both the perspectives – one based on genetic phenomenology, the other one based on phenomenology and values – point out the necessity to consider this interconnected experience that nature involves. I want to argue that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy represents a good starting point to articulate this perspective and that phenomenology seems to be the appropriate candidate for a new approach within environmental philosophy. I would like to clarify what the role of a phenomenologically oriented environmental aesthetics might be. Providing a phenomenological account of environmental aesthetics means to recuperate the dimension of *aesthesis*, a dimension that appears to be fundamental not only for understanding aesthetic appreciation, but also for understanding experience more generally. In the third chapter of this thesis, I have underlined how aesthetics, since its genesis as a discipline, encompassed both, a philosophy of art and a theory of sensuous experience. Despite this double meaning, we can argue that aesthetics has been mostly understood as philosophy of art. Aesthesis remains a central theme within phenomenology[123] and is becoming relevant, if not essential, for environmental philosophy. However, what is exactly this aesthetic experience? Furthermore, why it is so relevant for environmental aesthetics?

[123] See for instance Brudzińska (2010). The author specifies four senses of "sensuousness" within Husserl's phenomenology: 'first, in the context of the analysis of intentional experience in the *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900–1901), sensation is analyzed with respect to its function in the structure of intentional acts. Secondly, there is the perspective of objectconstitution, where the "apprehension-content" model comes into question and a systematic differentiation between the concepts of sensation and phantasma is introduced. This perspective is of particular importance for aesthetic experience. Third, there is the viewpoint of the constitution of inner time-consciousness or the transcendental theory of primal constitution and temporalization. In this perspective, sensation is termed primal impression and acquires a transcendental function. Fourth, we have the phenomenology of the body that was strongly echoed in second-generation phenomenology and has been taken further—most recently, in the phenomenology of material or instinctive-affective genesis' (Brudzińska 2010: 9). In what follows I will focus on the fourth meaning of sensuousness, especially in relationship to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body.

Some suggestions come from Arnold Berleant. In formulating his aesthetics of engagement, he criticizes Kant's aesthetics of disinterestedness and advocates an aesthetics based on experience. Following his model, aesthetics configures itself as theory of experience in general; this means to consider experiences in general (art, sports, social relations, and so on) as the major focus of aesthetics. However, it is important to notice that Berleant develops this perspective in relation to environmental aesthetics, whereby the notion of environment is characterized as follows: 'environment, as I want to speak of it, is the natural process as people live it, however they live it. Environment is nature experienced, nature lived' (Berleant 1992: 10). In a recent book, Berleant (2010) enlarges his perspective and claims that: 'to regard aesthetic perception as the source of the knowledge process and as the test of knowing constitutes what we might call the aesthetic argument in epistemology' (Berleant 2010: 60). Berleant proposes to conceive aesthetics – intended in its perceptual dimension – as the base of knowledge. Aesthetics becomes for Berleant a pervasive field that is behind all possible experiences: 'aesthetics will emerge as a field that ranges not only over the arts and nature but that illuminates the full range of human culture and delineates a far-reaching, heterogeneous domain of knowledge and value' (Berleant 2010: 88).

Furthermore, Berleant specifies that aesthetics is not only engaged with positive or likeable values, but also with negative or dislikeable features. In fact, if aesthetics is the base of every experience and thinking activity, then everything in the world must have an aesthetical aspect. However, experiences are confronted not only with positive aspects (the pleasure of reading a good book, watching the majestic Cappella Sistina in Rome, petting a dog, and so on) but also with negative ones (Berleant's own example is terrorism[124]). For Berleant 'we can speak of negative aesthetic values, of negative aesthetics when, in the primacy of perceptual experience, the experience as a whole is in some sense unsatisfying, distressing, or harmful. Aesthetic experience is not always benign' (Berleant 2010: 141).

Berleant's perspective considers aesthetics as the fundamental layer of any experience. This general conception of aesthetics means that we can experience both

[124] See for instance Berleant (2010), chapter 10. Berleant claims that 'since aesthetics centers on direct sensory perception, it is clear that acts of terrorism have powerful aesthetic force' (Berleant 2010: 187).

positive and negative aspects. Furthermore, and this is Berleant's stronger claim, the aesthetic dimension is the pre-condition for any epistemological evaluation or appreciation. Regarding this point, it is clear that Berleant's perspective is the opposite of Carlson's cognitive model: instead of claiming the primacy of cognition in our aesthetic experience, Berleant argues that the perceptual and sensible dimension of our appreciation is the base for any possible aesthetic judgment. However, it is important to underline that the centrality of aesthetic experience, for Berleant, does not exclude aesthetic appreciation and cognitive experience, but it rather considers them as further aspects based on our engaged experience. My intention here is not to evaluate the perspective on negative and social aesthetics that he delineates in his work. I want rather to stress that the generality of aesthetic experience leads to a formulation of an aesthetic ecology. This idea of aesthetic ecology follows Berleant's idea that 'from the standpoint of sense perception, we experience environment continuously and in continuity' (Berleant 2010: 122-23). Berleant conceives environment not as a mere surrounding, but rather as a medium that asks for our reaction, which requires that we have a strong perceptual engagement with the environment[125].

Environmental aesthetics is configured then as an aesthetic ecology in virtue of the centrality of the perceptual dimension of experience that is fundamental for both natural environments and human environments (Berleant uses cities as an example of human environments). Each object or system of objects of perception is within a specific environmental context that requires a perceptual experience. At the same time, Berleant considers perception as a human activity that is culturally influenced: 'engaging with an object of art or an environment, then, can be thought of as an ecological event, as a cultural ecological occurrence' (Berleant 2010: 125). If the engagement has an ecological character, then aesthetics should be framed as aesthetic ecology: 'this reciprocity can be summarized by saying that the ecological concept of an all-inclusive, interdependent environmental system has an experiential analogue in

[125] Berleant cashes it out as follows: 'aesthetic appreciation is as context- dependent as any other experience, perhaps more so, inasmuch as appreciative experience is intensely and continuously perceptual. Another way of stating its contextual character is to describe appreciative experience as perceptual engagement and, since as appreciative it is determinedly
aesthetic, as aesthetic engagement. Engaging with an object of art or an environment, then, can be thought of as an ecological event, as a cultural ecological occurrence' (Berleant 2010: 125).

aesthetic engagement. This collaboration of sensory perception and sensory meanings in an aesthetic-artistic activity is, then, the expression of a cultural ecological process. We can think of aesthetic engagement, in fact, as an aesthetic ecology' (Berleant 2010: 125).

Berleant's perspective can be roughly formalized as follows: humans are in continuity with environments and all objects of appreciation are environmentally tied. The interconnection between humans and environments (human and natural) is based on perceptual experience and, consequently, any form of appreciation has an aesthetic dimension (and both positive and negative features). Considering aesthetics (referring to the idea of *aisthesis*) as a core element of experience in general leads to the claim that aesthetics is an aesthetic ecology. This aesthetic ecology is a general discipline that deals with experience *tout court*. I agree with the idea of an aesthetics of engagement, but I would like to underline two problematic aspects of this view.

Firstly (a), the aesthetic ecology focuses on experience in general and its perceptive features, but does not clarify the concept of nature at stake. Berleant endorses a phenomenological perspective, but he does not deal directly with the problem of nature from a phenomenological perspective. Regarding this point, I would like to suggest that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can provide fundamental contributions to an understanding of 'nature'.

Secondly (b), Berleant's model correctly underlines the perceptual dimension of aesthetic experience, but it does so only within an anthropocentric framework. We gain the "ecological situatedness" of our experience and appreciation that puts us in intimate contact with nature. However, the accent is on "our" experience as humans and there is not significant mention of a genuine experience proper of others living beings. If we grant this criticism, then the idea of engagement is an initially promising idea that requires a further development. Berleant's aesthetic ecology does not consider experience of animals, for example. To address these issues, I suggest to elaborate on Merleau-Ponty's idea of intercorporeality.

(a) *Berleant's lack of the concept of nature*

Merleau-Ponty proposes a phenomenological perspective with a peculiar focus on nature. As it has been previously underlined, this is because thinking about nature requires rethinking the role of the body and phenomenology itself. In his philosophy, nature comes up in relation to his elaboration of the idea of non-philosophy. To remind the reader, Merleau-Ponty refers to three phenomena by the term "non-philosophy": 1) his contemporary situation of non-philosophy due to the erroneous conception of nature; 2) arts (especially literature and painting) and what Merleau-Ponty calls cultural symptoms (psychoanalysis), intended as a thinking style that might help in dealing with the crisis of our understanding of nature; 3) nature. Considering these three aspects, it appears clear that reconsidering the idea of nature – a neglected issue lost in his contemporary philosophical discussion – leads to a reconsideration of philosophy itself (for Merleau-Ponty also to a reconsideration of the phenomenology itself). In the third chapter, I explained that nature can be understood as an auto-production of meaning and that this understanding overcomes the idea of subjectivity intended in its function of sense bestowal. This view on nature dismisses any subject-object duality and requires a reframing of the anthropocentric idea of experience. Following Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, we can recall four distinctive aspects of nature.

(1) Firstly, nature is auto-production of meaning and expression. By this definition, and considering the debate between subjectivism (nature's value as subjective dependent) and objectivism (nature has value in itself), nature is correlative and lies beyond this distinction. Nature is something that links us, rather than being in front of us, it is something that pertains to ourselves without exhausting human nature. Rather, nature exceeds human nature, it has its own expressions (plants, animals, humans, rocks and so on) and procedures (chemical, biological, and so on), but does not follow the rules of human activity. The example of climate change is helpful in this regard. The increasing of consumption of carbon fossil fuel follows the augmentation of human productivity, but does not follow natural development. The industrial system

responds to the technological framework of production rather than to the biological process of the earth. This shows two important things: on the one hand, nature has its proper manner of development. On the other hand, we as humans are able to interact and modify natural processes. The example of climate change is emblematic because it highlights the necessity 'to open unto the placing in question of the Being-object of Nature, unto the Nature that "we are", unto the Nature in us – and thereby to being a revision of the ontology of the object, a fortiori, since the leaf of nature detaches from the object and rejoins our total being' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 212-13).

If we take the example of climate change –a similar approach might be valid also for environmental pollution more generally – then it is not necessary to understand nature's value referring neither to the subjective perspective, nor to the objective perspective. The situation is far more complex and we should avoid a dichotomous framework. Nature, in its auto-production, is expressing itself in energies that are available for other beings (carbon, water, and so on). We can leave them as they are or we can use them and convert them (bringing them to expression within the human sphere) and – in extreme cases – modify the flux of nature. Extreme exploiting forms of natural elements or resources do not only modify natural processes but also our own wellness more generally. The main point is the necessary correlation between nature and us, this is because I am adopting Bannon and Donohoe's assumption of the strong interconnection between humans, values and nature, as I highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. However, I want to suggest that one should make a step further. The emphasis on experience is necessary, but this is not only required by the goal of formulating a proper environmental ethics. Rather, starting from this interconnected experience we can pose nature as central philosophical issue in an ontological framework that overcomes the exploiting logic of the subject-object relation (nature merely intended in terms of available energy); this means to investigate the nature that we are, and this implies a direct ethical commitment with nature. Following this line, we have different layers of investigation (natural sciences in general, sociology, arts, ethics and so on) that deal with different aspects of nature and our experience of it, but we find also a philosophical investigation that goes beneath all these layers and that underlines their own assumptions in order to put nature into focus. Especially in this regard, I

suggest that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology – but I would also like to say more generally: phenomenology as a methodology – is promising. The interconnection of beings and nature, the coming to expression of nature within beings, implies a direct commitment with nature based on intercorporeality and then beyond the subject-object distinction. This perspective requires a non-dualistic ontology that does not pose the accent on subjectivity, but rather considers the interconnection or correlativeness as a starting point: ontologically and ethically.

(2) This direct commitment relates to another important aspect of nature, its transcendence. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body focus at the very beginning on the kinesthetic features of bodily schema and its perceptual activity. I would like to underline that nature appears as correlative because it implies our bodies. In simple words, we are discovering nature because of our bodily functions, but at the same time our bodies are part of nature. The concept of transcendence is related then to both body/perception and nature, but in a double sense. It is this double transcendence of body and nature that is peculiar of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, in Husserl's philosophy bodily activity opens to the different aspects (or profiles) of things and bodies, but this kind of experience remains tied to a primary consideration of transcendental subjectivity. On the one hand, the body opens on to the world. On the other hand, this bodily activity that permits to explore the world should be investigated in order to understand the ego's structure of consciousness. In Merleau-Ponty, body and perception link subjectivity to the world. However, if bodily experience leads to the transcendence of things and beings, then it also leads to nature conceived as irreducible otherness: the transcendence of the body leads to the transcendence of nature.

This transcendence of nature, its being a "brute being", casts doubts on a conception of nature based merely on the continuity between beings and nature. Toadvine (2003) points this out clearly: 'nature in this radical sense is, if anything, the refusal of the hegemony of perception, language, and thought; it is the "pocket of resistance" and the unpredictable par excellence' (Toadvine 2003: 150).

We can interpret this "pocket of resistance" as negativity, nature is always beyond concepts and language, it is what Merleau-Ponty calls "wild being". The negativity of nature does not put in contrast beings and nature, but rather requires

rethinking their correlation. This idea of inherence without homogeneity is expressed by Merleau-Ponty with the concept of *Ineinander*.

(3) The third aspect of nature is its being the base of experience. If we consider that body and perception open subjectivity to nature, nature becomes expressed in beings' activities. This process of expression is based on inherence (*Ineinander*) between beings and nature. Merleau-Ponty starts his analysis from experience (bodily and perceptual) and arrives to the idea of *Ineinander* between body and bodies, beings and nature. Experience is fundamentally intersubjective and interconnected. We experience nature, but our experience does not exhaust nature, rather our experience is bringing to expression something that is never fully possessed. This inherence of body and bodies, beings and nature is expressed by the formulation of the idea of chiasm in VI and in Merleau-Ponty's sketch of the concept of intercorporeality. In fact, in order to reach an ontology that blurs the subject-object distinction, Merleau-Ponty frame the *Ineinander* in terms of intercorporeality. The fundamental intersubjectivity of experience starts not from the I-Thou relationship but rather from the interconnection between a multiplicity of bodies.

(4) Considering this fundamental bodily interconnection and the inherence between beings and nature means to understand nature in its being a double movement: we are part of nature, nature is part of us. The double movement is allowed by what Merleau-Ponty calls the flesh, idea considered in chapter 3. Flesh, in its generality and anonymity, is a connective element that directly links beings and nature.

Considering these four characteristics of nature means to consider nature in its fundamental relevance for each living being. Nature is neither an object, nor something that can be intended as a standing reserve in the Heideggerian sense[126]. Rather, nature is an auto-production of meanings that finds an expression in living beings. Using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology means to develop a conception of experiential nature that is not tied to the concept of subjectivity, but instead brings an understanding of the necessary intercorporeal dimension of experience. For Berleant experience is central, but it still remains an experience of a subject, which remains subject to risk of an

[126] See for instance the famous essay *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977). In this seminal essay, Heidegger interrogates the status of technology and underlines its being based on objective though that reduces nature to a mere standing reserve.

anthropocentric ontology. On the contrary Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh opens up an intercorporeal and not merely human experiential dimension.

(b) The model of engagement: an anthropomorphic framework

Within contemporary debate about environmental aesthetics, we find two different models – the cognitive model and the model of engagement. The model of engagement, in contrast with the cognitive one, emphasises the experiential dimension and leads to the idea of aesthetic ecology. The focus on bodily experience is meaningful and fits with the phenomenological method. However, I want to contend that Berleant's model still remains tied to an anthropocentric view. Previously, I underlined the characteristics of Berleant's aesthetics. I focused especially on its experiential dimension (in both its positive and negative features) and I underlined Berleant's consideration of aesthetics as a base for any epistemology. I also stressed how for Berleant the perceptual dimension of experience and its connection with environments (natural and human) contributes to the claim that a proper environmental aesthetics should be considered as aesthetic ecology, leading then to an enlargement of the discipline call aesthetics. I grant the emphasis on the bodily and perceptual dimension of experience and its engaging features and I also grant the relationship between aesthetics and epistemology Berleant proposes. However, this view is still committed to a dualistic perspective because Berleant is not able to overcome the connection between experience and subjectivity, subjectivity and objects and to then reach an intercorporeal dimension of experience. Berleant, like Merleau-Ponty, bases his analysis on corporeality and considers aesthetic appreciation as linked to bodily experience. Nevertheless, for Berleant such bodily experience is always "our" bodily experience, every aesthetic appreciation (positive or negative) is always "our" appreciation. In other words, the experiential dimension Berleant underlines is fully human and enlarges aesthetics only within the human field.

This point of view fails to fully understand experience with its intersubjective structure[127] that pertains to all beings (sentient beings and inorganic things). What I am

[127] Regarding the idea of Structure in Merleau-Ponty see Waldenfels (1980). In this paper the author considers the development of the idea of *Gestalt* and structure in Merleau-Ponty's work from the SB to

claiming is that Berleant enlarges/applies? the idea of aesthetics only within a human dimension. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty perspective extends it to the analysis to animals. The system of intercorporeality is a structure of interconnection that leads to a non-anthropocentric understanding of experience. Simon P. James (2009) considers the relationship between phenomenology, consciousness, and nature by defending phenomenology from a possible charge of anthropocentrism. What phenomenology, and Merleau-Ponty in particular, discloses is the idea of nature as indifferent to merely human concern: 'so the world – the natural world included – is not just for us, but for a panoply of non-human subjects as well. There is more to it than is revealed to us humans. And this is therefore one way that nature can disclose itself to us as a reality independent of human concerns. Yet there are others. For instance, nature can disclose itself as being indifferent to human concerns' (James 2009: 134).

It is necessary to clarify that the idea of the indifference of nature does not leads to a theory of detachment for natural appreciation. On the contrary, for James, the bodily connection between beings and nature implies that there is a nature that is not humanized at all. Nature has its own process of expression that might culminate in human expressive activities (such art, for example). However, the interconnection between humans and natural processes does not exhausts nature within human realm. The fact that there is a common and anonymous ground between beings, things and nature in general shows at the same time that there is always an *écart* between the connected elements. Specifically, in order to defend phenomenology from such a charge of anthropocentrism, the author introduces the concept of flesh elaborated by Merleau-Ponty.

In order to understand in what sense the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty might complement Berleant's perspective, let me recall the notion of flesh very shortly. In chapter three, I underlined that the concept of flesh expresses the idea of a carnal interconnection between beings and things. According to Merleau-Ponty, the flesh has three main characteristics: 1) it is something compact that does not imply a coincidence between the things or beings connected. 2) It reflects the reversibility proper of bodily

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VI and analyses the meaning of these two concepts for the development of an "intra-ontology" not based on the subject-object distinction but rather on the idea of interconnection between structures.

experience. 3) It is general and anonymous. The flesh is a sensible thickness that pertains and connects beings and things in virtue of their bodily (animals and humans) or merely sensible (things have a surface at least) parts. The generality and anonymity of the flesh, its being an interconnection, represents an alternative starting point for a phenomenological consideration based on consciousness, it is not surprising then that flesh is an object of investigation for environmental philosophers[128].

Bannon (2011) claims that: 'if flesh relations are constitutive of my body, my flesh, and what is constitutive of my body "already is in every visible," then every visible thing, as a participant in the common, sensible world, is engaged to some degree in chiasmic relations with other bodies, regardless of whether it appears in a human perceptual field. To be clear, I am claiming that each thing, independent of human sensibility, possesses its own flesh, which is to say that a thing is a collection of relations, which are defined by how it is open to its environs' (Bannon 2011: 347).

I endorse this perspective because it safeguards the idea that the flesh opens to a relational ontology fundamental for the environmental thinking. we can extend our analysis of experience to animal's experience. Rather than being merely a structure of human reality, experience intended in terms of flesh and intercorporeality is a structure of reality in general, shared by all beings and things. In the second sketch of his *Course Notes from the Collége the France*, Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea of intercorporeality after the consideration of the issues of human and animal bodies. What emerges, according to Merleau-Ponty, is an intimate intersubjective experience that pertains to all beings in virtue of their bodily and sensible dimension. Considering body in its phenomenological dimension means considering body as a 'macrophenomenon' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 216). This idea of body as macrophenomenon implies the idea of corporeal kinship between men and animals. Assuming that perceiving body is in direct

[128] See for instance the influential book by David Abram (1997). Intending flesh as an animate substance, Abram endorse a form of animism; Abram recognizes the reversibility proper of beings also in inorganic things. In order to defend this form of animism, Abram criticizes our understanding of language as reflective and abstract practice and proposes the animistic conception of language present in aboriginal populations. This connection between flesh and animism and the critique of any form of abstraction is not compatible with a proper interpretation of flesh within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Regarding this critique of Abram's view, see for instance Toadvine (2005). For a reconstruction of the recent debate concerning the concept of flesh see for instance Bannon (2001). The author analyses the debate concerning the idea of flesh and proposes to consider it a form of relation that overcomes any form of anthropocentrism.

connection with the world leads to the assumption that there is a penetration between bodies; the corporeality of my body is open to the corporeality of other bodies: 'my corporeal schema is a normal means of knowing other bodies and these know my body' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 218).

This reciprocity of bodies does not lead to conceive the human-animal relationship in hierarchical terms but rather in terms of lateral kinship. Oliver Kelly (2009) specifies this point underling the kind of kinship implied in Merleau-Ponty phenomenology of the body: 1) the kinship is an embodied kinship. 2) This kinship requires the introduction of the concept of flesh. Oliver underlines that the lateral[129] kinship between humans and animals on the one hand implies a commonality of structure (embodiment); on the other hand, this common structure does not deny difference between kinds of behaviors. Oliver cashes out this point as follows: 'this kinship neither erases all differences between animals and humans, thereby making them identical, nor erases any similarities between them, thereby making them radically separate. Instead, strange kinship allows for an intimate relation based on shared embodiment without denying differences between lifestyles or styles of being' (Oliver 2009: 222). This corporeal kinship that allows the expression of different styles of behavior requires the assumption that there is something between ourselves and animals: the flesh. The flesh underpins the phenomenon of intercorporality. As Oliver puts it:

> In a sense, Merleau- Ponty thickens the borders between human beings and all other beings, between us and our environment, with the thickness of flesh. What Merleau-Ponty calls the thin pellicle or skin of the world and its beings is always accompanied by a thickness. Moreover, the porous and pliable nature of the skin never makes it a firm boundary. Things get under the skin and through it; indeed, the skin alternately breathes and suffocates if the fluidity of the relation between the inside and outside is cut off. Ultimately this fluidity separates the inside from the outside even if they remain, in an important sense, distinct' (Oliver 2009: 223).

[129] Merleau-Ponty speaks in terms of lateral kinship in order to stress the corporeal overlapping of bodies that pertains to different species.

What Merleau-Ponty calls the "flesh of the world" connects beings and once again has ontological relevance. However, in order to understand the centrality of the flesh for the so call "interanimality"[130] it is necessary to clarify a couple of passages in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Firstly, the "flesh of the world" connects humans, animals and things (in virtue of their sensible aspects)[131]. Despite this interconnection, I am focusing only on organic beings because both perform perceptual activity and experience the reversibility of the body. It is hard to attribute the same capacities to inorganic things without falling in a form of animism. Secondly, starting from the embodied dimension – that is the dimension proper of the flesh – it becomes possible to understand the process of expression of life itself, expression that is intended as the becoming visible of life through bodies.

Firenze (2010) clarifies that in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy the core idea is that 'what moves the existence of humans and animals is the tendency proper of the bodily-perceptual dimension' (Firenze 2010: 327). According to Firenze this bodily-perceptual dimension tends to express itself in visibility, there is a being visible of the life itself. This expressive life comes to visibility in the bodily – or we can say intercorporeal – dimension of experience and shows the dynamic of nature that auto-presents itself in this continuous process of expression. This process of expression implies both positive and negative aspects that, contrary to Berleant, are not tied merely to human experience. The positivity relies on the fact that nature (or life) express itself in visibility and becomes present. At the same time, this positivity, this becoming to expression of life

[130] The issues of intercorporeality and interanimality are intimately connected, if not synonymous. Starting from the idea of perception as an openness on to the world, Merleau-Ponty considers bodily experience. The analysis of bodily experience leads to the recognition of the intersubjective character of it and, consequently, to the formulation of intercopopreality based on the flesh. Merleau-Ponty formulates the general idea of intercorporeality not only in relationship of human bengs, but rather – and even more generally- in relationship of humans and animals: interanimality. Mazis (2000) cashes out this concept as follows: 'Merleau-Ponty does approach again the sense of human interanimality from the perspective of evolution to assert that given his analysis, even in evolutionary terms, the intertwining of human and animal in the perceiving body means that humans are not rupture with the past or a new kind of being. We are not in a hierarchical relationship with animals in an evolutionary sense either, but rather in a lateral relationship, where human attributes are a transformation of other animals ones' (Mazis 2000: 244).

[131] Toadvine (2010) endorse this idea: 'the corporeal interrogation of the world rests on the reversibility of flesh that Merleau-Ponty often illustrates paradigmatically with the experience of tactile reversibility, the double-sensation of the two hands touching. If all corporeal behavior opens onto metaphysical interrogation of the world, then the reversibility of touch obviously cannot be restricted to the human hand' (Toadvine 2010: 256).

also through intercorporeality, also requires invisible aspects (negative aspects). There are always aspects of bodies that are not present to the sight, just as there are aspects of processes of nature that are not always immediately present to our perception. Merleau-Ponty cashes out this connection with humans-animals relationship:

> The relation of the human and animality is not a hierarchical relation, but lateral. […] Even mind is incredibly penetrated by its corporal structure. […] It is starting from the visible that we can understand the invisible. Starting from the sensible that we can understand Being, its latency and its unveiling. And reflection as the coming-to-self of Being, as the *Selbstung* of Being, without a notion of the subject. And finally, the inclusion of visible Being in a more vast Being' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 268).

Intercorporeality and animality leads to the re-formulation of the traditional conception of subjectivity starting from a different idea of experience. The humans-animals kinship expresses a conception of experience that implies an intimate relation between different kinds of beings and leads to endorsing a non-anthropocentric perspective where subjectivity is not the primary element. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body allows us then to recuperate the aesthetic dimension of experience – the bodily and perceptual dimensionality of intercorporeality – and to enlarge such an experience to non-human beings.

In conclusion, I claim that integrating Berleant's model of engagement with the Merleau-Pontian idea of intercorporeality leads to a real enlargement of aesthetic experience. This enlargement includes non-humans beings and is conducive to considering aesthetic experience – in its perceptual meaning – as a fundamental condition of experience. Rather than being absorbed by an aesthetic ecology, aesthetics appears to be a central discipline for our understanding of nature. Not only nature is a missing issue in Berleant's model, I also contend that his perspective lacks a proper formulation of the bodily aesthetics experience that the model requires. I argue that the model of engagement should be understood in terms of embodied model.

4.2 An embodied model for environmental aesthetics

The previous paragraph has highlighted the necessity to put nature into focus. Considering nature as a central element for a phenomenological environmental aesthetics leads to the consideration of bodily experience in its intersubjective dimension. The relevance of bodily experience relates to the intercorporeal dimension of experience, which is a dimension that enriches a mere consideration of subjective experience. The Merleau-Pontian assumptions combined with Berleant's model of engagement allows for a formulation of experience of nature in terms of embodiment. In what follows, I first recall Berleant's model and its main features as illustrated in chapter 1, underlining two critical points of its understanding of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. I then integrate his model with two main ideas developed in the third and fourth chapter: those of flesh and intercorporeality.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I focused on the two main perspectives within environmental aesthetics: the cognitive model and the model of engagement. The first model is endorsed by Allen Carlson and maintains that our appreciation of nature should be guided by cognition (specifically, concepts proper of scientific knowledge): on this view, an appropriate frame of cognitions allows us to appreciate nature properly. However, this account does not consider that it is possible to appreciate nature for people without any specific scientific knowledge in natural science (such as children for example), and it focuses on appreciation (on our ability to judge about nature and natural things) without really understanding what our experience of nature amounts to. Furthermore, focusing on these aspects, this model considers environmental aesthetics as dependent on natural science. On the contrary, Berleant's model of engagement focuses on bodily perceptual experience and opts for a phenomenologically oriented environmental aesthetics. We can find two main features of Berleant's model: 1) the central element is the perceptual and bodily activity of the subject; 2) in virtue of the generality and the environmentally situatedness of perceptual activities, aesthetics becomes a more general aesthetic ecology. In the previous paragraph, I suggested that

both these features need a philosophical integration. In particular, I have underlined how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy allows moving from a subjective relative conception of experience to its intercorporeal dimension. This way, the conception of aesthetics can be developed in a non-anthropocentric direction. Now, it is necessary to understand how this non-anthropocentric aesthetics becomes possible, which requires elaborating more on a embodied model in ways that fit with the experience of nature. In order to cash this out, I will start from two problematic aspects of Berleant's model: a) Berleant's erroneous understanding of Merleau-Ponty's notion of *écart*. b) Berleant's misunderstanding of Merleau-Ponty's non-dualistic framework.

(a)

In the first chapter, I highlighted that Berleant considers two possible understandings of the relationship between beings (Berleant focuses only on human beings) and nature. On the one hand, it is possible to assume a separation between beings and nature, but then nature is intended as something that is separate from human activity. On the other hand, it is possible to intend humans and nature as being in an intimate relationship. The engagement model endorses the second option and Berleant uses Merleau-Ponty's philosophy to explicate it. According to Berleant, the concept of flesh shed light on the the connection between humans and nature. As I underlined in the first chapter, Berleant refers to the Merleau-Pontian example of touch, but then he asserts that a gap between the touching and touched hand remains despite the intertwining between the two hands. Furthermore, Berleant considers other two points in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy that sustain the claim of the engagement model: continuity and chiasm.

The idea, explained by Merleau-Ponty in his texts, is that there is no hierarchy between beings, things, and nature, but rather a fundamental inherence of one in the other. This inherence is not something merely passive, but an active-passive overlapping that constitutes the process of nature and the reality of a shared cultural world. Against this background, I do not think that the issue of the gap between the two

hands that rises from the example of touch shows that Merleau-Ponty sticks to a dualistic metaphysics. The gap between touching hand and touched hand is fundamental in order to formulate a phenomenology where we have a lateral encroachment of beings that, despite sharing intercorporeality, preserve their individuality. It seems to me that Berleant perspective, based on the idea of continuity between humans and nature and on the idea of building aesthetics on the perceptual dimension, is committed to a vague idea of homogeneity, that neglects individuality.

At this point, nature might be reduced to the human sphere as it partially happens in Berleant due to his focus on human experience. By contrast, by taking the body – and intercorporeality – as starting point, one can think of the relation between nature and human beings in terms of continuity and difference. According to Merleau-Ponty, we are part of nature, nature is part of us, but "we", and "nature" remains two different actors of the ongoing process. In addition, following this intertwining, we understand that body is not only perceptual but also symbolic, as Merleau-Ponty claims in his NA. By contrast, for Berleant the model of engagement in based merely on perceptual bodily experience -- in doing that he is missing the organic connection between body, language and nature. Merleau-Ponty states this clearly when he says: 'all that precedes = the human body is symbolism. […] There is a logos of the sensible world and a savage mind that animates language, […] communication in the invisible continues what is instituted by communication in the visible' (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 226-27). As Berleant underlines, sensibility is fundamental, but in Merleau-Ponty we find a logos within the sensible and, consequently, within human experience as well. The continuity is not homogeneity and it seems that Berleant, when considering aesthetics as aesthetic ecology, is restricting the idea of experience, failing to recognize the richness of the intertwining and the *écart* proper of the continuity between humans and nature.

(b)

I think that Berleant fails to understand the complexity of Merleau-Ponty's perspective on embodiment. Focusing on the issue of *écart*, Berleant claims that Merleau-Ponty remains faithful to the dualistic tradition he tries to overcome. On the contrary, I think that his phenomenology represents a strong and fruitful effort to deal with it. At least, and contra Berleant, I would like to say that it is not the issue of the gap between the touching and the touched hand that might be problematic for Merleau-Ponty's anti-dualism, but rather his impossibility – even linguistically[132] – to leave the term "consciousness" aside. Merleau-Ponty himself claims the necessity to overcome the concept of consciousness in favor of something less subjective. In this line, Merleau-Ponty develops the idea of intercorporeality, but without specify if this concept allows to avoid the reference to the concept of consciousness. Surely, Merleau-Ponty tried to overcome the idea of a constitutive consciousness in favor of a conception that understand both body and consciousness in a correlative constitution. At the same time, Merleau-Ponty referred to the idea of consciousness even in his last works. My claim is that according to Merleau-Ponty it is impossible to understand consciousness without considering its fundamental relationship to intercorporeality. However, it is impossible to find a total abandonment of the concept of consciousness *in toto* within works.

Concerning specifically the issue of *écart*, I claim that Merleau-Ponty is not failing in his anti-dualistic attempt, rather he was considering the differentiation of different sentient beings starting from the idea of flesh of the world, and not merely from human experience in itself. The concept of flesh is meaningful to fully understand in what direction Merleau-Ponty was trying to overcome subject-object dualism and is pointing out the centrality of embodiment. In chapter 3, I started the consideration of the flesh from the assumption that it is a carnality that pertains to our body. However, insofar as it pertains also to other bodies (and maybe surfaces), it exceeds our individual embodiment. This is why flesh is connected with intercorporeality. I claim that

[132] Meleau-Ponty never putted aside terms such as consciousness, ego, subjectivity, and so on.

Merleau-Ponty starts his later ontological considerations from this idea of flesh – that is correlative – and tried to overcome the subject-object distinction. In one of his working notes for VI, Merleau-Ponty considers the issue of sensibility and clarifies his non-dualistic attempt: 'the sensible is precisely that medium in which there can be *being* without it having to be posited. […] The sensible is that: this possibility to be evident in silence, to be understood implicitly. […] The only thing that is seen in the full sense is the totality wherein the sensibles are cut out' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 214). The generality of sensibility – of the flesh – is neither posited by a conscious subject, nor merely tied to human experience.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh starts from the subject-object dualism and revises it considering beings in its continuity with nature and world, intended in terms of intercorporeality. In a working note of the VI, entitled *Flesh of the world – Flesh of the body – Being*, Merleau-Ponty explains this and claims that: '*flesh of the world*, described (apropos of time, space, movement) as segregation, dimensionality, continuation, latency, encroachment' (Merleau-ponty 1964: 248).

Our bodily dimension makes possible the encroachment between beings and world: 'that means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world. […] They are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping – This also means: my body is not only one perceived among others, it is the measurant (*mesurant*) of all, *Nullpunkt* of all the dimension of the world' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 248-49). In Berleant's model of engagement bodily experience, in its perceptual features, is the base for appreciation of nature and the enlargement of aesthetics, but it remains restricted to human experience.

In Merleau-Ponty, bodily experience leads to a non-anthropocentric view that underlines the aesthetic structure of experience *tout court* –precisely for this reason I am claiming that it is necessary to understand and describe the bodily structure at the base of the engagement model. The idea of continuity between sentient beings and nature is based on the sensible dimension of bodies (and surfaces) and avoids any possible reduction to a vague homogeneity. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy this *écart* does not lead to another form of dualism, but rather is what allows the expression of different

modalities of existence (for example: the being of subjects, the being of animals, plants and the being of the flesh). Between flesh of the world, flesh of the body and subjectivity there is what Merleau-Ponty defines as a simultaneity and intertwining[133]. However, there is a fundamental difference between the flesh of the world and the flesh of my body: 'the flesh of the world is not a *self-sensing* (*se sentir*) as is my flesh – it is sensible and not sentient' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 250).

Despite the fact that both are flesh, the flesh of the world is not self-sensing. At the same time, Merleau-Ponty specifies that the self-sensing proper of the flesh of living body becomes possible in virtue of its relationship with the flesh of the world: 'it is by the flesh of the world that in the last analysis one can understand the lived body' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 250). Merleau-Ponty reckons the correlation between body and world, even though the latter is not self-sensing. This perspective is fascinating but it leaves something ambiguous. The flesh is a correlative element in virtue of its connective nature. Merleau-Ponty points out the difference between flesh of the world and flesh of the living beings. The flesh of the latter is able of self-sensing (the example of the reversibility of the flesh goes in this direction). However, if we assume such a difference it is hard to understand how we can assume that both are made by the same flesh. Furthermore, according to this description it is impossible to understand if there is a difference between the flesh of the world, the flesh of animals, the flesh of plants and objects (or things). I believe that this point remains unsolved within Merleau-Ponty's works, although it is important to point out that Merleau-Ponty seems inclined to recognize a form of self-sensing in animals at least, for instance in his NA. However, it remains unclear how one should understand a difference (self-sensing) between two kinds of flesh (of the world and of the living body) that are supposed to be the same. One potential way to dissolve this ambiguity is to claim that both are the same flesh but, in virtue of the *écart*, human (and maybe animal) due to their experience of the flesh develop the ability (self-sensing), which is not possible to ascribe to objects, for example. This is not the place to deal extensively with this ambiguity, it suffices for now to point out that this powerful concept presents some problems.

[133] 'The flesh of the world is not explained by the flesh of the body, nor the flesh of the body by the negativity or self that inhabits it – the 3 phenomena are *simultaneous*' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 250),

To sum up, the carnality of intercorporeality (its being a carnal intercorporeality) is helpful in order to integrate Berleant's model and to enlarge it in a non-anthropocentric direction. Now it is necessary to specify how it is possible to enlarge this model using the concept of intercorporeality; this implies recalling some features of intercorporeality and then clarifying how to apply it to an environmental aesthetics that is phenomenologically oriented. The basic claim will be that intercorporeality expresses the complexity of *aesthesis*: aisthesis is required for a proper embodied model, from which the contemporary debate can profit.

4.3 Engagement model: an integration

Previously, I underlined that the model of engagement – based on bodily perceptual experience – has one main limit--it remains anthropocentric--and needs an integration from an embodied perspective. It is necessary to specify the issues of bodily experience and intercorporeality from a phenomenological point of view, in order to show their possible contribution to the development of an embodied model of engagement. To do so, I want to dwell upon some features of corporeality in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and then focus on its concept of intercorporeality. My claim is that those notions help in formulating a stronger version of the engagement model where the role of corporeality plays the crucial role. Furthermore, the issue of intercorporeality fits with the idea of nature previously delineated. This point is relevant, especially if one considers that, in his description of the connection between phenomenology and eco-phenomenology, Toadvine states that: 'our conviction that nature has value, that it deserves or demands a certain proper treatment from us, must have its roots in an *experience* of nature' (Toadvine 2003: xi)[134]. My claim is that this experience of nature an embodied intercorporeal experience of nature.

The issue of bodily experience is fundamental for phenomenology, especially within the contemporary debate concerning enactivism, neurophenomenology and

[134] The introduction is numbered with roman numbers.

phenomenology of embodiment[135]. One could say that bodily experience should be equally important for both environmental aesthetics and eco-phenomenology. Regarding the field of environmental aesthetics in general, it is possible to claim that Berleant's model is the main promoter of the centrality of bodily experience. Within eco-phenomenology and in a more general environmental aesthetics of phenomenological inspiration, the centrality of experience has been discussed, but not with a specific focus on embodied experience and intercorporeality.

The first claim I would like to make is that bodily experience is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience, but it is not sufficient. Without a bodily intertwining with the world there is not experience at all, an experience without a body is not communicable. We can admit that there is such an experience only within an intersubjective, communicable framework. Defending the necessity of bodily experience means to consider the main corporeal, but also pre-reflective features of the perceptual body. Considering the connection between body, self-constitution and environment starting from an Husserlian analysis, Taipale argues that '*we can perceive the environment only insofar as we are embodied*' (Taipale 2014: 40). The perceiving and living body (*Leib*) represents the point for any activity, self-constitution and intersubjective-constitution included. This is guaranteed by the perceptive structure in itself: the bodily-schema includes the possibility for the constitution of others[136]. As it has been highlighted in the second chapter, Husserl's second meditation explores how within the sphere of pure ego the idea of "something other" appears. However, in Husserl it seems that this "something other" appears to be another ego, whereas in Merleau-Ponty this something other is both another ego and nature[137].

[135] See for instance Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1996), Gallagher (2005), Gallese (2005), Gallagher and Schmicking (2010), Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991), Hutto (2005) and Thompson (2005).

[136] It is necessary to differentiate between bodily-schema and bodily image. The first one implies a pre-reflective and no conceptual process of constitution of our own bodily functions in terms of what Merleau-Ponty calls "situational spatiality". In the PP, Merleau-Ponty considers bodily-schema in its genetic role for the constitution of both subjectivity and spatiality, claiming that it is 'the global awareness of my posture in the inter-sensory world' (Merleau-Ponty 2014: 102) and that 'the subject actively integrates the parts according to their value for the organism's project' (Merleau-Ponty 2014: 102). Regarding the difference between bodily-schema and bodily image see for instance Taipale (2014), de Saint Aubert (2013) and Gallagher (1986).

[137] In Husserl, the idea of world is that of a substratum of any intentional act. As I highlighted in chapter 3, it seems that for Merleau-Ponty world is something consciously shared. Nature is a pre-reflectivity that connects humans and animals in a fundamental and pre-reflective sense.

Taipale argues that 'from the basis of the Husserlian account, one can distinguish between (1) the body as the immediate dimension of hyletic and kinesthetic self- affectivity, (2) the body as the dimension of localization (something that can be immediately sensed), (3) the body as something that can be partially perceived in the external environment, and (4) the body as a mere material thing in a causal framework' (Taipale 2014: 51).

I agree with this reconstruction, but I would like to underline that Merleau-Ponty accepts all the four points but elaborates further on the conception of the intercorporeal dimension of bodily experience[138]. The crucial point is to understand this dimensionality of bodily experience without reducing it only to a human feature. In order to do that it is necessary to elaborate more on the double structure of the body, and it is necessary to consider its being the place of self-affectivity. On the one hand, we should understand why bodily experience is relevant for the understanding of experience in general. On the other hand, the analysis of bodily experience in its intercorporeal dimension should provide a strong basis for a phenomenological engagement model. If we briefly consider what already emerges in the Husserlian account, then we can notice a duplicity. This duplicity in Merleau-Ponty becomes a reversibility that allows for the consideration of nature and beings in terms of continuity. There is a duplicity, the one proper of our own body and the one proper of intercorporeality. As previously highlighted, the example of touch shows the reversibility proper of a single body. This reversibility expresses a first form of bodily reflection that contributes to the process of self-constitution.

[138] Despite the fact that Merleau-Ponty is the one that formulates explicitly the idea of intercorporeality, it is necessary to underline that the issue of bodily experience in Husserl provides the necessary theoretical framework for such formulation. As Taipale claims: 'we are originally related to others already in perceiving the environment' (Taipale 2014: 70). Starting from this assumption, for Taipale Husserl lets an intersubjective dimension of perceptual experience emerge: 'in this sense, due to its horizontal structure, perception essentially involves the co-positing of an open infinity of possible co-perceivers: an "a priori intersubjectivity"' (Taipale 2014: 72). It is exactly this idea that leads Merleau-Ponty to enlarge corporeality to intercorporeality. Specifically, I want argue that the generality of intercorporeality comes from the atmosphere of generality and anonymity that permeates the "a priori intersubjectivity". Taipale cashes out this point when he says: 'Husserl stresses that this co-presence of others is original and requires no prior experience of others as such: others originally emerge as "implicata of my original intentional life"' (*Implikaten meines originalen intentionales Lebens*). In this sense, the horizonal structure of perception essentially implicates the possibility of simultaneous indetermined (unbestimmt) and anonymous co-perceivers' (Taipale 2014: 73).

This constitutive process is at the same time the constitution of an intercorporeal dimension. Through bodily reflectivity, we not only understand the being-touched of our touching hand, but also the being-touched of the sensing intercorporeal system. Recognizing our perceptual structure implies the recognition that within the shared world there are bodies that are perceiving/perceived like our own. This reversibility is not primarily something represented by the conscious subject, but rather experienced in first person and it implies that 'man-becoming-nature *is* nature-becoming-man, *and it is not*. This reversible relation is never complete because the disruptive latent intentionality keeps the field unstable, open to change' (Davis 2007: 129). This means that there is not a proper cognitive reversibility but rather a pre-reflective operation that directly connects body, bodies and nature.

Each person is becoming a man in relation with the constitution of men and, reversely, in doing so we are also becoming nature and nature is becoming us. This process is understood in terms of expression, as I underlined in chapter 3. Consequently, in addition to bodily reversibility, and to intercorporeal reversibility, we also have the reversibility of nature. The structure of intercorporeality is perceptually, or in a broader sense, environmentally based; self-constitution is tied to bodily motricity, environmentally situated corporeal experience and others. This intercorporeal system is aesthetically based because it founds its possibility in the generality of perception: 'what accordingly is appresented in thing- perception is an open infinity of co-*perceivers:* the implied "anyone" is characterized by the capability of perception, and thus anyone is to be understood as embodied. […] The perceived environment originally appears as being palpable, touchable, visible, audible, olfactory—not to *our* body exclusively, but to *any*body' (Taipale 2014: 76).

In Berleant's view, the aesthetic dimension allows an enlargement of aesthetics as a discipline. In a phenomenological framework, the aesthetical dimension and specifically the aesthesiological dimension of intercorporeality appears in its foundational centrality for experience in general, it thus might be considered as the condition of possibility – necessary but not sufficient – for experience *tout court*. I am claiming that Berleant misses this point and that considering the role of intercorporeality allows us to understand the process of constitution of both self and

nature. Nature is a fundamental element because it details the bodily process of self-constitution in both individual and intersubjective terms. There is then a necessary interconnection between bodily schema, intended in terms of joint schema[139] and environment. This is the link environmental aesthetics should consider. Taipale expresses this idea using the term intersensory environment: 'the intersensory environment and intersensory things are in a constant movement of becoming, and this emerging unity is the correlate of emergent bodily self- awareness' (Taipale 2014: 80). As Taipale remarks (2014), empathy requires embodiment, but this Husserlian assumption induces Merleau-Ponty to invoke an empathy with the world, a form of empathy that is focused also on non-human beings: animals and nature.

This fundamental embodied inherence implies at the same time an *écart*, between body and other bodies, but also in the relationship between beings and nature. Assuming the necessary correlation between beings and nature means considering their correlative process of constitution. As Toadvine (2014) underlines, this correlative process has a different meaning in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. For Husserl, nature remains merely a consciousness' correlate, in doing so the end of nature or world leaves the self untouched, intending this self as the transcendental self to whom nature meaningfully refers. According to Toadvine, by contrast, in Merleau-Ponty there is the attempt to conceive nature as something not subject-dependent, 'Merleau-Ponty's alternative is to grant a meaning to death by recognizing the dependence of consciousness on the contingent material and biological structures from which it emerges and that never cease to demand their due' (Toadvine 2014: 213). Nature, in its organic layer, is present within the self and contributes necessarily to its physical and psychological development. The phenomenological task is then to analyze this process without attributing to consciousness the primary role. According to Toadvine, accepting the idea of death means for Merleau-Ponty to accept the idea that nature has its own structure that influences the ego.

The embodied dimension of the self marks this natural finitude that should be phenomenologically considered in order to provide both an accurate description of

[139] Joint because it is constituted in correlation with other beings. I am assuming that each individual bodily schema requires an interaction with others for its own formation.

experience and an understanding of nature. Toadvine stresses a form of reversibility proper to the self that is not linked only to sense organs, but to the idea of life more generally. In fact, the self emerges from organic (biological) structures that influence it from morphogenesis to the end of life. This presence of an organic structure might be conceptualized and known but, according to Merleau-Ponty, is not reducible to the activity of the constitutive ego. Merleau-Ponty's perspective acknowledges the correlative relationship between nature (organic structure or materials that are outside human body but that at the same time are part of it) and consciousness (intended in its sense bestowal functions and intentional acts). Furthermore, this correlational relationship between the two terms becomes the focus of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

Rather than a strong separation between what Merleau-Ponty calls the "symbolic" and the "biological", there is an overlapping and *Ineinander* of the two that is mirrored in the intercorporeal bodily dimension. The aesthesiological intercorporeality is a basic structure that plays a key role in the development of intercorporeal subjectivity; it remains constitutive for subjective processes within an intercorporeal dimension. Fuchs (2016) develops this Merleau-Pontian concept in terms of interaffectivity:

> Using the phenomenological distinction between the *subjective, lived body* (*Leib)* and the *physical, living body* (*Körper),* we can also describe this mutual intertwinement as follows: The *lived body's impression* in the one person (A) becomes a *living body's visible expression* for the other person (B), and vice versa: the impression produced in B's lived body becomes a living body's expression for A. Thus, it is the peculiar "chiasmatic" structure of the body as the turning point of interior and exterior, as both *Leib* and *Körper*, which enables the interlacement of self and other in the process of mutual affection and perception (Fuchs 2016: 9).

The structure of intercorporeality plays a key role in the developing of affectivity in intersubjective and interactive terms, there is a chiasmatic and intertwining process where a subjective expression becomes expressed within lived body (the organic body), but at the same time the same expression becomes a "living body's visible expression" for the other subject that reacts in a certain manner. The

intercorporeal structure allows enacting an interaffective experience. Importantly, Fuchs underlines that this process does not require representational processes and mind reading; Fuchs explicitly invokes the Merleau-Pontian notion of intercorporeality and highlights that interaffectivity is pre-reflective bodily communication. The pre-reflectivity of intercorporeality is working in interaffective processes and also in what Fuchs defines as intercorporeal memory[140]: '*intercorporeal memory* means a prereflective, practical knowledge of how to interact with others in face-to-face encounters which is acquired already in early childhood' (Fuchs 2016: 11). Fuchs underlines that pre-reflective means implicit and unreflected but not merely sub-personal, this because this intercorporeal memory – important for the social environment – 'is open to individual creativity and social change' (Fuchs 2016: 14). Intercorporeality maintains its aesthesiological dimension in both expressive and social interactions and assumes a key role for the developing of complex human interactions. In his analysis, Fuchs stresses the temporal dimension of intercorporeal memory, a dimension that is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty's idea of sedimentation of meanings.

Fuchs connects this intercorporeal memory with the concept of habitus, and the idea of a shared history. Fuchs underlines the connection between history and intercorporeal sedimented memory recalling Merleau-Ponty: 'thus Merleau-Ponty's notion of intercorporeality gains an additional aspect: It means not only the primary familiarity of our bodies with each other, or their prereflective communication, but also the entanglement of human bodies in a shared history that is preserved in their implicit collective memory' (Fuchs 2016: 14). Intercorporeality in its pre-reflective dimension implies an implicit history (a sedimented history) that is part of the constitutional social process. This shared history, which comes up from the sedimented acquisition of specific capacities and experience of each singular body, involves a collective – intercorporeal dimension. However, it is important to notice that this history sedimented

[140] Fuchs (2012) elaborates the idea of bodily memory that represents the "first brik" for the understanding of this memory in intercorporeal terms. Fuchs cashes out this concept as follows: 'the body is then and ensemble of organically developed predispositions and capacities to perceive and to act, but also to desire and communicate' (Fuchs 2012: 11). Fuchs, in the same work, individuates six forms of bodily memory: Procedural memory, Situational memory, Intercorporeal memory, Incorporative Memory, Pain Memory, Traumatic Memory.

within intercorporeality links to the enacting process that happens between two or more bodily subjects.

As Fuchs (2016) underlines, each subject enacts at the same time previous motor experiences and prefigures future possible interactions according to the shaping presence of partners. This condition implies what Fuchs defines as joint procedural field, two subjects are connected by two bodily schema attuned according to a sensorimotor pattern that comes from a "shared history". Interactive processes are based on what Fuchs calls "*joint or dyadic body memory*" (Fuchs 2016: 15). In following this perspective, what happens for both Merleau-Ponty and Fuchs is that 'in social contacts, our lived bodies become extended such that they are intertwined with those of others in a way that prevents any conceptual or ontological reduction to isolated entities' (Fuchs 2016: 16). My aim here is not to consider the relationship between this "joint bodily memory" and social activities. This would require a consideration of the contemporary debate within collective intentionality[141]. For the sake of this thesis I want to underline the key role of intercorporeality, its connection with social activities through bodily memory and its pre-reflective dimension. Fuchs claims that intercorporeal memory is pre-reflective insofar as individuals activate such memory without representation or mindreading. In other words, we can say that there is a bodily and practical knowledge that is available to subjects in virtue of their bodily constitution. If we assume that, then it becomes clear that pre-reflectivity is linked with generality. Pre-reflectivity is a general feature of bodily beings and, in Merleau-Pontian terms, relates to nature intended as a resistant element.

Previously, I showed that for Toadvine there is a tacit cogito that is not always cognitively represented but that is working within our experience. This means that, like bodily memory, we are acting without always representing what we are doing. Now, this un-reflected cogito is linked with the generality and with anonymous functioning – or presence – of intercorporeality and nature. Nature appears there before us, and as Toadvine shows, nature is intended as an immemorial past already within our present: 'for Merleau-Ponty here, the immemorial moment within each present is nature at the first day, always re-creating itself anew' (Toadvine 2014: 214).

[141] See for instance Searle (1995), Bratman (1999), Pettit and Schweikard (2006) and Tuomela (2013).

This process of recreation is fundamental for the expressive relationship between beings and nature. Toadvine suggests that this is necessary to understand Cézanne's paintings as investigation of this pre-reflective encountering with nature, an encountering where from rough sensations – and before any representation – the anonymous – and intercorporeal self emerges. Toadvine cashes out this point as follows: 'Merleau-Ponty emphasizes here that this anonymous "someone" who senses in and through me is distinct from my personal self, from the self who says "I," but is rather that assemblage of "natural selves" that has already sided with and synchronized with the world' (Toadvine 2014: 215).

There is a pre-reflectivity of the sensing self, a pre-reflectivity that is natural, intersubjective and always present. This pre-reflectivity is natural because, as Toadvine underlines, it synchronizes with the organic rhythms of the body. At the same time, and referring to Merleau-Ponty, Toadvine understands it as a pre-reflective history: 'this prereflective history is the immemorial past of nature, a nature with which we coexist at the level of sensation, but which can never be fully recuperated by the reflective operations of the personal self' (Toadvine 2014: 215). Within experience there is a reversibility between an immemorial past that is concretely always here as nature and the temporality of the personal self. According to Toadvine, it is this immemorial past that functions as a ground for the experience and that creates the reversibility between us and nature; reversibility that we can experience but never fully thematize reflectively. Recalling the issue of reflection in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, Toadvine claims that:

> This irrecuperable past appears within our experience as the resistance that the unreflective offers to reflection, as the remainder that resists thematization even as it conditions reflection and makes it possible. It is our very inherence within nature, the fact that we can only open onto it from a situation within it, and that we can never fully thematize our own emergence from it, that necessitates this immemorial remainder (Toadvine 2014: 219).

The resistance of nature has two meanings: it is the ground of our own experience, on the one hand. On the other hand, the resistance of nature functions as immemorial remainder of our own naturalness. Between beings and nature there is a temporal and intercorporeal inherence and continuity that are nevertheless based on a

split. There is no homogeneity between beings and nature, but rather a reversibility that never leads to a coincidence, this reversibility is present within reflection when the self becomes able to think and to thematize nature without fully exhausting it. It is starting from this necessary corporeal bond between nature and beings that it is important to understand the peculiarity of environmental aesthetics and of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline.

In this thesis, I am not explicitly considering the difference between aesthetics and environmental aesthetics, at the same time I am implicitly assuming that aesthetics is a macro field and environmental aesthetics is a specific domain within that field that focuses on the experience of nature. Of course, I am claiming that both are not mutually exclusive but rather integrated. If we assume the role of aesthesis for an aesthetic analysis, then it is impossible to avoid any interaction between aesthetics and environmental aesthetics. Despite this, I am claiming that environmental aesthetics – and aesthetics – should not be considered as dependent from science (like Carlson claims) or neurosciences (as in the case of neuroaesthetics). Ecological aesthetics is one of the subfields of aesthetics as a discipline[142] that focuses on the relationship between beings and nature in a broad sense. If we assume this definition, then we can understand the relevance of the phenomenological contribution to this subfield. The relationship between beings and nature in its aesthetic and corporeal dimension represents a focus of investigation for phenomenology as a methodology devoted to the eidetic investigation of experience. In granting this, I am claiming that an ecological aesthetics, which is oriented phenomenologically, might be fruitful for an autonomous ecological aesthetics. Instead of considering ecological aesthetics as dependent on science on the one hand and observer's perceptual perspective on the other hand, phenomenology shows the intercorporeal, intersubjective and shared dimension of aesthetic experience.

[142] Toadvine cashes out the field of investigation of ecological aesthetics as follows: 'ecological aesthetics today incorporates studies of the aesthetics of nature, including natural objects and larger wholes such as ecosystems, gardens and landscape architecture, environmental and earth art, architecture and urban planning, and the relations between the different modes of aesthetic appreciation appropriate to these different domains. This extension of aesthetic consideration to both natural and built environments has led to a reconsideration of traditional aesthetic categories
of central tenets of aesthetic theory' (Toadvine 2010: 85).

Understanding this fundamental core of experience means to understand the structure and features of such an experience of nature that are neither merely tied to a first person point of view, nor the result of a scientific or epistemological framework. Starting from the experience of nature a phenomenological ecological aesthetics shows how our knowledge comes from aesthetic experience broadly intended. Considering this perspective, the relationship between knowledge and bodily experience is non-dualistic and non-hierarchical, but rather of mutual integration. If we grant this view, then ecological aesthetics – but also aesthetics as a discipline in general – appears autonomous in both its domain and investigation. This does not imply a separation between knowledge and experience, but rather an integrated perspective where different layers are at play. Aesthetic experience is not intended in hierarchical terms because there is not primacy of knowledge over perceptual experience, but is rather conceived as a rich and multilayered experience where concepts, sensations, perceptions and so on are all meaningful. Within ecological aesthetics then a categorical appreciation – how we proffer aesthetic judgments – should not considered as independent from both our bodily experience of something and scientific concepts – taken from natural sciences – should not be considered as a necessary and sufficient element for natural experience. At the same time, intercorporeal experience represents the pre-reflective core of aesthetics experience but it might be informed by a theoretical framework.

4.4 Conclusion

In the first paragraph (*4.1*), I contributed to the contemporary phenomenological debate concerning nature by focusing on the idea of nature intended in correlational terms. Furthermore, I proposed to consider an engaged model based on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology that heavily relies on the perceptual dimension of aesthetic experience. I suggested that this model has the potential to become the base for an environmental aesthetics, which is oriented phenomenologically.

As first step towards that goal, I evaluated the existent model of engagement elaborated by Berleant. In particular, I considered (paragraph *4.2*) three problems in

Berleant's model of engagement: it is anthropocentric, it fails to understand correctly the Merleau-Pontian notion of *écart,* and it misunderstands the Merleau-Pontian non-dualistic approach. Consequently, Berleant's model is not able to propose an aesthetic approach based on *aisthesis,* which is a concept that, for its understanding, requires a non-subject centered approach. Berleant's model of engagement is useful insofar as it highlights the experiential and lived dimension of our aesthetic experience. However, it considers the perceptual dimension of such an experience only in relation to subjectivity.

By contrast, I have shown in paragraph *4.3* that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology pins down the perceptual dimension of corporeality in a way that overcomes the subjective centered aesthetics and lay the foundation for a theory of intercorporeal aesthetic experience. In fact, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology explores the intercorporeal and bodily shared dimension of aesthetic experience and its connection with nature intended in terms of pre-reflectivity. This leads to an understanding of environmental aesthetics understood in its autonomy and conceived as a fundamental analysis of the intercorporeal dimension of aesthetic experience of nature.

Final Conclusion

In this thesis, I delineated the issue of nature in the contemporary debate within environmental aesthetics. In the first part, I considered the two dominant models – elaborated by Carlson and Berleant – and I pointed out that, rather than considering nature in-itself, both analyses concern only the human experience of nature. Carlson focuses on the cognitive and conceptual elements we need for appreciating nature; Berleant highlights our bodily engagement with nature without providing a description of nature within this framework. Carlson highlights the relevance of scientific categories for the appreciation of nature but remains tied to a conception focused on natural appreciation, Berleant underlines the role of the living body in our experience of nature. Despite this, he remains tied to the idea of the body as our own body without considering nature as something that exceeds bodily experience that has its own autonomy. Assuming this context, I argued for the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and specifically for the relevance of his conceptions of embodiment and intercorporeity for this debate. On the basis of this, I then began to formulate a phenomenological approach to environmental aesthetics, as Merleau-Ponty specifies.

Within this framework the necessity to clarify the relevant notion of nature is urgent. In my thesis I neither aimed at providing an exhaustive picture of different perspectives on nature, nor did I offer a rigid definition of nature. Rather, I assumed Berleant's claim that we should first consider the role of the body in our relation to nature and to the environment. I then clarified the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's perspective on embodiment is fruitful for such a clarification. Only then, and from there, could I approach a better understanding of nature. I thus did not presuppose a concept, but worked with a provisional and wide pre-understanding that came into better focus only through the investigations done in this thesis. Assuming a Merleau-Pontian perspective implied considering the issue of embodiment and the relationship between body and nature without reducing nature to a mere correlate of subject's consciousness.

Starting from Berleant's model of engagement and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, nature emerges as a pre-reflective element that is central

for human experience. Following Merleau-Ponty, I claimed that nature exceeds human experience but that at the same time human's expressions are in continuity with nature. I argued that bodily experience, intended in terms of intercorporeity, leads to the formulation of an environmental aesthetics phenomenologically oriented. Such a phenomenlogically oriented environmental aesthetics, differently from other perspectives that focus on subjectivity and the kind of knowledge required for the appreciation of nature, focuses on the bodily intertwining and link between creatures and nature. This means avoiding a form of anthropocentrism and developing a correlational perspective where the carnal dimension of bodily experience is central. At the same time, at least in his first development, such an environmental aesthetics does not consider the correlation between bodily experience, appreciation and knowledge. In this regard, further developments are required.

Contra Carlson, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty – that I consider in confrontation with Husserl's phenomenology – insists on the concrete and spatial dimension of the living body fundamental for the experience of nature, but differently from Berleant's model of engagement it highlights the fundamental connection between living body and nature, rather than considering only human bodily experience. In considering directly the issue of nature, in its intercorporeal dimension, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty allows formulating an embodied model for environmental aesthetics.

My assumption is that the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty is fundamental for an environmental aesthetics that assumes nature in its relevance for experience in general. This because, within Merleau-Ponty's works, it is possible to recognize the will to develop a deep analysis of the correlation between body and nature. Following his thought, I underlined the link between operative intentionality (the pre-reflective intentionality linked to the motricity of the body) and nature (intended as something pre-reflective: "the nonlexical meaning" of nature that Merleau-Ponty clarifies in his course notes). In order to formulate an appropriate embodied model for environmental aesthetics it is necessary to focus on this link; if an embodied environmental aesthetics would highlight the centrality of nature for human experience, then it has to understand and describe the intimate link and continuity between humans-creatures-nature. I

claimed that this starting point is fruitful in order to recognize nature's richness and importance for itself but also for human activities. In fact, as I highlight in chapter three and following Merleau-Ponty, nature appears to be auto-production of meaning. This means that we should intend nature in its autonomy and in its processes of generation and creation. Merleau-Ponty points out that what nature generates (natural element, things such as rocks, trees, creatures and so on) are elements that humans use for their own activities and processes of expression. This highlights a continuity between creatures and nature, a connection that relies not only on the biological and organic link – creatures need a natural element for their own growth and survival – but also on expressive activities like arts. This approach, instead of considering only one side of the correlation 'creatures-nature', formulates on both of them. In the process of expression – in making something available and open to possible interpretation, fruitions and elaborations – the continuity between humans-animals-nature comes up. What is relevant for it is the correlation of creatures and nature, based on the intercorporeal dimension. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is remarkable because intends this correlation in terms of a carnal intercorporeal dimension.

What I take from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is this carnal intercorporeal dimension that starts within the self-perception of our own body. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body highlights a bodily dimension that is not private or self related, but rather open to a fundamental intersubjective and shared living dimension. The case of double sensations – the touching/touched hand – extends to the touching/touched dimension of other bodies and animal bodies, this intercorporeal situation is the arrival of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy but also the starting point for an appropriate environmental aesthetics based on engagement. My claim is that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body leads to a fruitful integration of Berleant's model that overcomes any anthropocentric perspective and that recuperates the centrality of nature. Furthermore, I claim that using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body allows us not only to formulate an embodied environmental aesthetics but also to understand the perceptual and aesthetic dimension of the environmental experience, dimension that requires a phenomenological methodology able to describe the bodily structure of such an experience.

The emphasis I put on intercorporeity is due to the fact that this notion represents a challenge for the development of an environmental aesthetics phenomenologically oriented that considers the living and aesthetic dimension of our intertwining with nature. Further developments are required in order to develop a method that, rather than considering the relation between subjects and nature in terms of discrete entities, starts immediately from this carnal and intercorporeal intertwining. This means considering aesthetically both the bodily dimension of such intercorporeity and the intercorporeal dimension of social and political practices (such as landscape planning, and natural reserves protection) that shape and sometimes damage both nature and our relationship with it. The purpose of my work is to underline the fundamental intercorporeal dimension that necessarily sustains our experience and to claim for the development of a phenomenology of intercorporeity.

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