

**Proceedings of the
European Society for Aesthetics**

Volume 9, 2017

Edited by Dan-Eugen Ratiu and Connell Vaughan

Published by the European Society for Aesthetics

esa

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Founded in 2009 by Fabian Dorsch

Internet: <http://proceedings.eurosa.org>

Email: proceedings@eurosa.org

ISSN: 1664 – 5278

Editors

Dan-Eugen Ratiu (Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca)

Connell Vaughan (Dublin Institute of Technology)

Editorial Board

Zsolt Bátori (Budapest University of Technology and Economics)

Alessandro Bertinetto (University of Udine)

Matilde Carrasco Barranco (University of Murcia)

Daniel Martine Feige (Stuttgart State Academy of Fine Arts)

Francisca Pérez Carreño (University of Murcia)

Kalle Puolakka (University of Helsinki)

Isabelle Rieusset-Lemarié (University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)

Karen Simecek (University of Warwick)

John Zeimbekis (University of Patras)

Publisher

The European Society for Aesthetics

Department of Philosophy

University of Fribourg

Avenue de l'Europe 20

1700 Fribourg

Switzerland

Internet: <http://www.eurosa.org>

Email: secretary@eurosa.org

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Volume 9, 2017

Edited by Dan-Eugen Ratiu and Connell Vaughan

Table of Contents

Claire Anscomb <i>Does a Mechanistic Etiology Reduce Artistic Agency?...</i>	1
Emanuele Arielli <i>Aesthetic Opacity</i>	15
Zsolt Bátori <i>The Ineffability of Musical Content: Is Verbalisation in Principle Impossible?</i>	32
Marta Benenti <i>Expressive Experience and Imagination</i>	46
Pía Cordero <i>Towards an Aesthetics of Misalignment. Notes on Husserl's Structural Model of Aesthetic Consciousness</i>	73
Koray Değirmenci <i>Photographic Indexicality and Referentiality in the Digital Age</i>	89
Stefan Deines <i>On the Plurality of the Arts</i>	116
Laura Di Summa-Knoop <i>Aesthetics and Ethics: On the Power of Aesthetic Features</i>	128
Benjamin Evans <i>Beginning with Boredom: Jean-Baptiste Du Bos's Approach to the Arts</i>	147

Paul Giladi <i>Embodied Meaning and Art as Sense-Making: A Critique of Beiser's Interpretation of the 'End of Art Thesis'</i>	160
Lisa Giombini <i>Conserving the Original: Authenticity in Art Restoration</i>	183
Moran Godess Riccitelli <i>The Aesthetic Dimension of Moral Faith: On the Connection between Aesthetic Experience and the Moral Proof of God in Immanuel Kant's Third Critique</i>	202
Carlo Guareschi <i>Painting and Perception of Nature: Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetical Contribution to the Contemporary Debate on Nature</i>	219
Amelia Hruby <i>A Call to Freedom: Schiller's Aesthetic Dimension and the Objectification of Aesthetics</i>	234
Xiaoyan Hu <i>The Dialectic of Consciousness and Unconsciousness in Spontaneity of Genius: A Comparison between Classical Chinese Aesthetics and Kantian Ideas</i>	246
Einav Katan-Schmid <i>Dancing Metaphors; Creative Thinking within Bodily Movements</i>	275
Lev Kreft <i>All About Janez Janša</i>	291
Efi Kyprianidou <i>Empathy for the Depicted</i>	305
Stefano Marino <i>Ideas Pertaining to a Phenomenological Aesthetics of Fashion and Play : The Contribution of Eugen Fink</i>	333
Miloš Miladinov <i>Relation Between Education and Beauty in Plato's Philosophy</i>	362
Philip Mills <i>Perspectival Poetics: Poetry After Nietzsche and Wittgenstein</i>	375
Alain Patrick Olivier <i>Hegel's Last Lectures on Aesthetics in Berlin 1828/29 and the Contemporary Debates on the End of Art</i>	385

Michaela Ott	<i>'Afropolitanism' as an Example of Contemporary Aesthetics</i>	398
Levno Plato	<i>Kant's Ideal of Beauty: as the Symbol of the Morally Good and as a Source of Aesthetic Normativity</i>	412
Carlos Portales	<i>Dissonance and Subjective Dissent in Leibniz's Aesthetics</i>	438
Isabelle Rieusset-Lemarié	<i>Aesthetics as Politics: Kant's Heuristic Insights Beyond Rancière's Ambivalences</i>	453
Matthew Rowe	<i>The Artwork Process and the Theory Spectrum</i>	479
Salvador Rubio Marco	<i>The Cutting Effect: a Contribution to Moderate Contextualism in Aesthetics</i>	500
Marcello Ruta	<i>Horowitz Does Not Repeat Either! Free Improvisation, Repeatability and Normativity</i>	510
Lisa Katharin Schmalzried	<i>"All Grace is Beautiful, but not all that is Beautiful is Grace." A Critical Look at Schiller's View on Human Beauty</i>	533
Judith Siegmund	<i>Purposiveness and Sociality of Artistic Action in the Writings of John Dewey</i>	555
Janne Vanhanen	<i>An Aesthetics of Noise? On the Definition and Experience of Noise in a Musical Context</i>	566
Carlos Vara Sánchez	<i>The Temporality of Aesthetic Entrainment: an Interdisciplinary Approach to Gadamer's Concept of Tarrying</i>	580
Iris Vidmar	<i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Gifted Man: What Lies in the Mind of a Genius?</i>	591
Alberto Voltolini	<i>Contours, Attention and Illusion</i>	615

Weijia Wang	<i>Kant's Mathematical Sublime and Aesthetic Estimation of Extensive Magnitude</i>	629
Zhuofei Wang	<i>'Atmosphere' as a Core Concept of Weather Aesthetics</i>	654
Franziska Wildt	<i>The Book and its Cover — On the Recognition of Subject and Object in Arthur Danto's Theory of Art and Axel Honneth's Recognition Theory</i>	666
Jens Dam Ziska	<i>Pictorial Understanding</i>	694

***Painting and Perception of Nature:
Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetical Contribution to the Contemporary
Debate on Nature***

Carlo Guareschi¹
University College Cork

ABSTRACT. This paper is meant to investigate Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the relationship between artistic experience and nature in his works *Notes de cours 1959-1961*. This paper addresses two questions: What is the role of aesthetic experience within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology? Consequently, what is the ontological relevance of the connection between art and nature? The general aim of this paper hence is to delineate the relevance of art for a phenomenological investigation of nature. In the *Notes de Course 1959-1961* Merleau-Ponty starts with a consideration of our problematic understanding of nature and then develops an investigation of painting. This is because his idea of pre-categorical experience utilizes a deep understanding of nature as an element necessary for a genuine phenomenological understanding. The relationship between philosophy and art highlights also the necessity, delineated by Merleau-Ponty, to analyze phenomenologically the relationship between philosophy and what he labels 'non philosophy'. Starting from this strong bond between art and phenomenology I underline and propose how it becomes possible to conceive nature in non-human and non-anthropocentric terms. This becomes possible, according to Merleau-Ponty, if one assumes that we have not to ask philosophical questions of art but rather to be philosophically informed by art and artistic practice concerning the possible understanding of nature in its alterity. The suggestion being that only following this path would allow the formulation of a philosophy able to develop a proper conception of nature.

1. Introduction

The topic of this paper is Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the relationship between artistic experience and nature in his work *Notes de cours 1959-*

¹ Email: cguareschi85@gmail.com

1961. As Adorno claims in his *Aesthetics Theory*, the concept of nature disappeared within the field of aesthetics after Hegel; except for the current debate within environmental aesthetics, it is possible to recognize a general lack of interest in nature, and in its aesthetic experience, which seems to nicely fit Adorno's statement. However, this paper intends to resist Adorno's claim by suggesting that the aesthetical turn in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology re-proposes an ontological and fundamental interest in the bond between art and nature. Against this background, this paper addresses two questions: What is the role of aesthetic experience within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology? Consequently, what is the ontological relevance of the connection between art and nature? The general aim of this paper is to delineate the relevance of art for a phenomenological investigation of nature. The issue of aesthetic experience arises in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, where such an experience is intended mainly as perceptual experience, but this topic remains at the core of Merleau-Ponty's later works. Starting from the relevance of the relationship between perception, body and perceptual field, Merleau-Ponty often connects an investigation of the perceptual dimension with the reflection of painting activity.

In the *Notes de Course 1959-1961* Merleau-Ponty starts with a consideration of our problematic understanding of nature and then develops an investigation of painting. This is because his idea of pre-categorical experience allows for a deeper understanding of nature. The relationship between philosophy and art also highlights the necessity to analyze phenomenologically the relationship between philosophy and what he labels as 'non philosophy'. The importance of this connection is fundamental for two reasons: first, this links philosophy directly with art. To do or make art is investigating the pre-categorical level that Merleau-Ponty is aiming to unveil with his phenomenology. Second, the so-called 'non philosophy' refers to the idea of otherness that characterizes nature, otherness that should be investigated phenomenologically in a proper manner. Accordingly, phenomenology should take art and nature into careful consideration. This perspective is fundamental for a possible formulation of an aesthetics of nature that considers our relationship with nature not only in terms of aesthetic appreciation but, more widely, in terms of experience. As a starting

point, it is necessary to stress that art and nature are linked together in Merleau-Ponty's works and are considered in comparison since the very beginning of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical path. However, I will focus on Merleau-Ponty's later notes in which the urgency of an aesthetical investigation is intimately tied to the question of nature and where these issues emerge from a wider consideration of experience.

2. Experience in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

In the previous section, I posed two necessary questions: What is the role of aesthetic experience within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology? Consequently, what is the ontological relevance of the connection between art and nature? Starting with the first question, we might say that experience is, together with intentionality, the biggest theme of phenomenology. In Merleau-Ponty experience appears to be a fundamental element for the development of a philosophy of the body. Consequently, we might say that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is a phenomenology of bodily experience. In Merleau-Ponty's view, bodily experience presents two main aspects: perception and movement. Perception directly links the subject with the external world. For Merleau-Ponty the world is "what I live" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. xxx)². If the relationship between subject and world is primarily correlative rather than intellectual, then it is necessary to clarify how we should interpret intentionality. In connecting the idea of perceptual access to the world with the issue of body, Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of operative intentionality, a concept elaborated starting from the consideration of Husserl's analysis of body and the pre-categorical level of experience. 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 most fundamental one, is the operative intentionality 'that establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life, the intentionality that appears in our

² The preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* is numbered with roman numbers.

desires, our evaluations, and our landscape more clearly than it does in objective knowledge' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. xxxii).

The idea of operative intentionality allows Merleau-Ponty to rethink the relationship between consciousness and world. Starting from this conception of intentionality, Merleau-Ponty criticizes the idea of body intended as a mere mechanical object. In order to provide his own conception of body, Merleau-Ponty considers philosophically the psychological data of double sensations. The idea is that if body is irreducible to a mere object, then it is possible to consider it as both a peculiar object and an object between objects. This for two reasons. Firstly, the body is a material thing that is in concrete contact with things and the environment. Bodily experience is a perceptual encounter with other bodies. In this sense, body is a thing. However, in this perceptual action '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, p. 95).

The body perceives and in performing this activity it starts to recognize itself also as a perceiving thing. In this regard, the example of the touch is illuminating. 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. However, in Merleau-Ponty this characteristic does not conduce to an absolutisation of subjectivity, but rather to the consideration of this fundamental double sensation as an element of correlation with otherness, broadly intended. Merleau-Ponty claims it 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' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 100). This conception of the bodily schema leads to the issue of spatiality and echoes the conviction that the envelopment is not only between bodily parts but also between body, bodies and things. Our movement relates to the environment but not only for survival purposes. Rather, our body

inaugurates meanings that are open to other subjects and interpretations. This centrality of the body does not exclude a conception of consciousness in terms of signifying activity, but at the same time does not reduce this specific activity to consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: ‘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’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 148). The body is literally communicating with others and expressing subjectivity itself. 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, p. 188).

According to Merleau-Ponty, in artistic practices something comes to existence within nature, and it becomes clear 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 (*Eye and Mind, Nature*). For him the goal is to provide an account that could explain how it becomes possible to project a cultural dimension 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. Expression then is a movement that is maintained in a constant correlation of subjectivity and world. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is impossible to grasp this movement of expression without understanding the role played by the body, understood as the original place of this expression.

Bodily experience then is not only conceived in its role for human beings, but also investigated in its general function. This passage is central because it clarifies the importance that Merleau-Ponty gives to it within his phenomenological framework. The body’s symbolic function is expressive in the sense that it brings to existence something else, it makes concrete and in an intersubjective perspective (the cultural world) things that are not only

perceived under a first-person perceptual activity but also co-experienced. Expression is seen as a dynamic process that starts in connection with the other since the very beginning. This connection overcomes the conception of consciousness and language based on the centrality of signifying acts in favor of the centrality of expression. An artist is expressing something, is experiencing, is constituting something in facticity (a novel, a painting, and so on), but then the meaning-intention is instituted in an intersubjectivity and opens to a possible proliferation.

In conclusion, in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy aesthetic experience is intended as both perceptual experience (*aisthesis*) and artistic experience. In a conception in which the sensible level is prominent, the analysis of perceptual experience represents the pivotal element of investigation. Perception is related to sense organs and leads to the consideration of bodily experience *tout court*. Bodily experience appears in its expressive role regarding both the shared world of culture and nature. Consequently, aesthetic experience is what allows us to rethink the idea of nature. The fundamental role of aesthetical experience is tied to the idea that the body is expressive, this means to consider the specific practices in which bodily experience and expression appears interwoven (namely: painting). It now remains to clarify what the contribution of art is for this reinterpretation of the concept of nature.

3. Nature and Art

Considering the connection between nature and art means to analyze the richness of aesthetic experience broadly intended. Furthermore, the concept of nature has a prominent role within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. However, it is in his last works that nature is directly considered in its philosophical and phenomenological relevance. Firstly, I intend to summarize very briefly Merleau-Ponty's idea of nature, considering his course notes published under the title *Nature*. Then I would like to connect this perspective with the link between nature and art elucidated by Merleau-Ponty in his notes for the course 1959-1961.

His lectures' notes at the Collège de France of the years 1956-60 –

published under the title *Nature* – contain a detailed analysis of the idea of nature. These course notes are relevant because they directly connect Merleau-Ponty's investigation of body with the analysis of the concept of nature, also because they show the rethinking of his idea of phenomenology itself. At the very beginning of the first course, Merleau-Ponty asks himself if it is possible to study properly the notion of nature, and he replies to this question affirming that in order to get the proper philosophical meaning of nature the focus should be “primordial” nature. For Merleau-Ponty, investigating primordial nature means investigating the ‘nonlexical meaning always intended by people who speak of “nature”’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 3). In granting this nonlexical meaning of nature, Merleau-Ponty is focusing on the fundamental layer of experience that precedes our cognitive activities. This claim is in continuity with the idea of operative intentionality specified in the *Phenomenology of Perception* but leads to a reconsideration of the relationship between consciousness and objects. This is not the place to consider extensively these intense notes, for now it suffices to notice that the expression of a “nonlexical meaning of nature” implies the idea that ‘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, p. 3). The idea of autoproduction of meaning connects with the issue of expression, or better, is conducive to assuming that nature is expressivity. This conception of nature poses humans in continuity with nature but also leads us to conceive 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 us. It is our soil [*sol*] – not what is in front of us, facing us, but rather, that which carries us’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 4). Starting from this view, in what follows I will focus on the very first part of the course notes 1959-61 in which Merleau-Ponty deals directly with the connection between nature and art. The relevance of nature emerges 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, p. 39).³ This situation of “non-philosophy” that characterizes humanity in a specific period presents two specific elements. The first element of this situation of non-philosophy is connected with the capitalistic system. 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).

The second element, instead, relates directly to Merleau-Ponty’s 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, p. 42).⁴ The negative meaning of the state of non-philosophy connects with the inability to think nature in a proper manner. Considering that nature is a pivotal element for Merleau-Ponty, it appears that a wrong conception of nature implies a failure of philosophy. The implicit assumption is that nature has meaning only within human history, an assumption that is in opposition to Merleau-Ponty’s idea of nature as “primordial presence”. What Merleau-Ponty proposes is then the ‘redécouverte d’une Nature-pour-nous comme *sol* de toute notre culture, 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, p. 44).⁵ 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. However, this critical situation of non-philosophy – expressed socially in the development of the capitalistic system, scientifically in the emerging of positivism and philosophically in the forgetting of the idea of nature – is positively contrasted by culture and arts. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: ‘[les symptômes culturels et la possibilité de la philosophie.] Tout ce qui précède, [sont] les «résonateurs» émotionnels qui amplifient et font sentir à [un] immense public

³ ‘State of non-philosophy’. My translation.

⁴ ‘Crisis of rationality within our relationships with nature; logic of technical development; The bomb – the atomic energy’. My translation.

⁵ ‘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.

[les] contrecoups du développement de la technique – Mise en question, par ses conséquences, de ce «monde technique» lui-même” (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 46).⁶

Merleau-Ponty individuates cultural elements that allow us to rethink philosophy and to criticize the “ultra-artificial” and technical conception of the world. These cultural symptoms are: poetry, music, painting and psychoanalysis. In the following lines, I’ll focus on his analysis of painting.⁷ Merleau-Ponty considers the idea that contemporary painting deals with the idea of genesis rather than conceiving itself as a form of representation. Instead of representing objects or reality in general, modern painting (especially in the figures of Cézanne⁸ and Klee), represents the movement of expression of reality itself. In order to highlight this idea, Merleau-Ponty is claiming that ‘la peinture est un mouvement, un mouvement qui germe dans l’apparence. [...] Parce qu’elle est nature naturante, [...] parce qu’elle donne ce que la nature veut dire et ne dit pas: le «principe générateur» qui fait être les choses et le monde’ (Merleau-Ponty 1996: 56).⁹

⁶ ‘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.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty’s started to consider painting since the very beginning and it remained central for his entire philosophical development. In his *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty provides a powerful comparison between philosophy and art when he claims: ‘Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne – through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state. As such, phenomenology merges with the effort of modern thought’ (Merleau-Ponty 2012: xxxv). In the same year of the publication of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty published also his influential essay *Cézanne’s doubt*, devoted entirely to the aesthetical consideration of the relevance of Cézanne’s painting. Painting does not occupies a prominent roles only in Merleau-Ponty’s early philosophy, but is relevant also in his last period. In the *Notes de cours 1959-1961*, Merleau-Ponty investigates the problem of nature in connection with the artistic elaboration of it made by Klee. In the same period, Merleau-Ponty published also *The Eye and Mind*, in which – again – art emerges as central for a philosophical re-thinking of our own experience.

⁸ Concerning Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of Cézanne, see for instance Merleau-Ponty (2007, a).

⁹ ‘Painting is a movement, a movement that germinates within appearance. 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.

This assumption 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 transposes natural perception into an artefact, Merleau-Ponty proposes seeing painting as a genuine understanding of our experience of the perceptual world. Assuming this idea of a perceptual world that exceeds any representation implies that painting is not resemblance but rather an “écart” (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 52) that expresses something other. Merleau-Ponty makes this point clear: ‘décharger la tableau de la fonction de ressemblance pour lui permettre d’exercer la fonction 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 accent d’être, met en relief sa manière de *Welten*, d’être monde’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 53).¹⁰

Merleau-Ponty is proposing an idea of art that is very close to his idea of philosophy, instead of being a 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, in his notes Merleau-Ponty is considering Paul Klee¹¹ – is not a marginal element of interest but allows for a clarification 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 appears to be central for rethinking philosophy. Painting brings to expression nature and makes this dynamic visible; Insofar as the activity of painting is a lived practice, it is movement.

Painting creates visible objects and so expresses the movement that connects perception with nature, nature with culture. This intimate

¹⁰ ‘Discharge painting from its function of resemblance in order to allow it to exercise 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.

¹¹ In his analysis of Klee, Merleau-Ponty is referring to Grohmann’s monography entitled *Paul Klee*.

connection passes through the artistic practice that configures itself as nature, a nature that becomes expressed. According to Merleau-Ponty's analysis in these course notes, contemporary philosophy is missing precisely this bond. Once we assume that painting is nature, it becomes possible to understand why Merleau-Ponty finds a philosophical relevance in it. 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 incompréhensible pour [la] science et [le] quotidien. Les apparences [sont] prises comme «parabole» de cet être. L'art donnant [les] symbols des apparences (i.e. leur généralisation, leur derivation 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).¹²

Merleau-Ponty considers painting not only as a sort of philosophy but also as a 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 experience itself. What comes up is the idea – expressed also by Klee – that painting unveils and expresses a dimension that is unconceivable to science and daily life attitude. Through its making something appear – in a painting for example – the painter creates a symbol that comes from his being entangled and perceiving nature. At the same time, this artwork does not resemble reality how it is but rather provides a frame, a possible different view of the same reality that is open to different fruitions and interpretations. However, it is clear that for Merleau-Ponty it is not merely question of hermeneutical considerations but rather a question of ontological relevance. What Cézanne and Klee are doing with their paintings is not only

¹² '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.

creating symbols but rather a making literally visible an ontological dimension forgotten by philosophy itself. This relationship with the pre-categorical manifests the exigency to rethink philosophy itself and its understanding of reality. Merleau-Ponty clarifies that for him philosophy is not merely *theoria* but rather the thought of the connection between theory and the pre-theoretic level, in other words philosophy should become a thinking of ‘leur tissue commun’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 84).¹³ Art is aware that symbols are not things themselves (they express them) and creates 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.

Merleau-Ponty claims that philosophy must re-gain this primordial contact and elaborate on it, and he is also pointing out the idea of inherence between nature and us. Starting from this point, it becomes necessary to interpret philosophy in its being focused on this interconnection that in *The Visible and the Invisible* assumes the form of an intercorporeality. This idea of intercorporeality appears from the background of Merleau-Ponty’s rethinking of phenomenology in connection with painting. Since his first essay on Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty was understanding the intimate bond the Cézanne felt between himself, his painting and nature. This shows the first effort to re-think nature starting not from the idea of consciousness but rather from the idea of correlation. Merleau-Ponty developed this idea of correlation between men and nature and arrived at the concept of intercorporeality. However, if for philosophy this idea of intercorporeality appears to be provocative and difficult, within the works of Cézanne and Klee it represents the fundamental assumption. The philosophical relevance of intercorporeality arises clearly later on in this course notes 1959-1961 when Merleau-Ponty uses clearly the term “chair du monde” (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 211), in this passage Merleau-Ponty expresses that intercorporeality is fundamentally not only between subjects but also between subjects and world. Merleau-Ponty explain that point as follows: ‘la «chair du monde» ce n’est pas métaphore de notre corps au monde. On

¹³ ‘Their common tissue’. My translation.

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, p. 211).¹⁴

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 poses to philosophy the question of how it is possible to think itself without falling into idealism or realism. Nature imposes itself as a non-philosophical element, in the sense that it could be an object of philosophical investigation but without being reduced by philosophy or science. 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, p. 372). This assumption, according to Merleau-Ponty, implies that phenomenology assumes as an element of investigating nature exactly because it brings phenomenology to its own limits.

Nature is a relevant issue within Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. In order to develop a phenomenology of nature, Merleau-Ponty claims that it is necessary to consider modern art. In considering especially painting it emerges that this happens for two main reasons. Firstly, modern art (and especially painting) does not intend its own praxis in term of resemblance with the external world; secondly, modern painting investigates not only the pre-categorical level that precedes any theoretical activity, but also conceives nature under a new light because intends nature its expressive movement. This conviction implies the idea that painting conduces to a conception of nature that brings phenomenology to its own limits.

¹⁴ ‘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.

4. Brief Conclusions

In the first paragraph, the centrality of experience intended as bodily experience has been highlighted. Merleau-Ponty presents a phenomenology of the lived body that considers bodily activity in its operative intentionality and expressivity. These two issues lead to the consideration of the correlation between body and nature but also between nature and culture. The bodily movement is considered in the continuity with the movement of production of nature, intended as autoproduction of meaning. What seems to emerge is a conception of continuity between nature and human beings (but also with others animals) and, consequently, between nature and culture. This idea of interconnection requires the consideration of art insofar as it is movement of expression proper of the human and cultural worlds. This implication between nature and culture leads to the philosophical necessity to consider the intercorporeality of experience, intercorporeality that appears to be a proper element of investigation for painters such as Cézanne and Klee. Consider intercorporeality as a fundamental element provides interesting stimuli to rethink our experience of nature in a non-dualistic perspective. This means that it becomes possible to think about nature starting directly from the dimension of intercorporeality (that is correlative and intersubjective) rather than starting from the point of view of subjectivity.

References

- Adorno, Theodor (1997), *Aesthetic Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- De Warren, Nicholas, 'Flesh made paint,' *Journal of the British society for phenomenology*, vol. 44 (1), 2013, pp. 78-104.
- Grohmann, Will (1970), *Paul Klee*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers.
- Merleau-Ponty Maurice (2007, a), 'Cézanne's doubt,' in T. Toadvine, and L. Lawlor (eds.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 69-84.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (2007, b), 'Eye and Mind,' in Toadvine, Ted and Lawlor, Leonard (eds.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, Evanston: Northwestern University, pp. 351-378.

Merleau-Ponty Maurice (2003), *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty Maurice (1996), *Notes de Cours 1959-61*, Paris: Gallimard.

Merleau-Ponty Maurice (2012), *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge.

Toadvine, Ted (2013), 'Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Lifeworldly Naturalism,' in L. Embree and T. Nenon (eds.), *Husserl's Ideen*, Dordrecht - Heidelberg - New York - London: Springer, pp. 365-380.