

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Exploring Perception in Philosophy and Modern Art: Introduction to Spatial Perception from Merleau-Ponty's Perspective

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Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

## Abstract

The innovation of Merleau-Ponty is considering the body as existence or ontology. He admitted that a mechanical psychologist could not explain our experience of the body. Thought and body are inseparable. Also, uncertainty, or as Merleau-Ponty says, bouncing, is a feature of true philosophy. Merleau-Ponty knew that he was living in a period in which two forms of absolutism overshadowed everything: absolute Christianity and absolute Marxism. He introduced perception to establish a connection between consciousness and objectivity, from the contrasting perspectives of Empiricism and Rationalism. Merleau-Ponty follows Cezanne in rejecting dualism and its transformation into sight and action, emphasizing the integration of the soul and body. The soul is not separate from the body, and sight is related to thoughts; therefore, beliefs are rooted in a person's existence. Another innovation of Merleau-Ponty is the presentation of the role of the body in emotional perception. Merleau-Ponty opposes any idea that seeks to separate the soul from the body; he believes in a unified subject or Gestalt, rather than an isolated emotion or consciousness.

Phenomenology, based on Merleau-Ponty's annotations, is a philosophical method. It aims to extract the hypotheses that humans make about themselves and their world, based on scientific and practical purposes, and to experience them in a perceptual world. Merleau-Ponty follows Hegel in believing that time rises in human beings. Although humans exist in the world, they live in a continuum of time, moving towards the future while reflecting on their past experiences and possessions. The nature of this research is explanatory; moreover, given the holistic subject, the primary approach is operative.

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**Running title:** Perception in Philosophy and Modern Art

**Keywords:** Merleau-ponty, perceptual world, Art, Philosophy, Modern.

## 1. Introduction

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is one of the most important French philosophers of the twentieth century. He was influenced by both philosophy and psychology (Pirmozic, 2000). His philosophy is philosophical. In other words, he believes that imaging is a way through which, without the need for psychological and scientific hypotheses, a clear description of real experience can be achieved (Ghoreyshi, 2013). Merleau-Ponty's earliest writings are "The Behavioral Structure" (1942) and "Phenomenology of Perception" (1945). These books provide evidence of psychology. The primary focus of Merleau-Ponty is on the super body, which is pre-constitutional, pre-physical, ideological, and transient, as well as on the biology of the universe. Merleau-Ponty was more interested in later Husserl's work and used unedited content from the Husserl archive (Sakalowski, 2017).

## 2. Foundations of ontology

### 2.1. The dependence of the subject on the body and the world

Merleau-Ponty's innovation is to consider our body as the way of being or existing in the world. He begins by arguing that a mechanical psychology of the nervous system cannot justify or explain our bodily experience. Our bodily experience finds its basis in our existence - that is, in the mode of our bodily existence (Piravi Vank, 2010).

"When I contemplate the nature of subjectivity, I realize it is interconnected with the body and the world. My existence as a subjective being is inherently linked to my physical body and the world around me. Objectively speaking, the subject that I am cannot be separated from this body and this world."

### 2.2. Merleau-Ponty's Views on the World

The existence of the world precedes my thoughts about the world. The world is not a collection of theoretical structures, but a situation in which we find ourselves. The world does not tolerate precise distinctions of "either-or" and does not allow the differentiation between black and white, existence or non-existence. A philosopher does not examine phenomena and knowledge of things from a superior or inferior perspective to understand their relationship to them. "The one who looks is definitely not a stranger in the world he looks at" (Pirmozic, 2000)

The world is not a collection of theoretical structures, but a situation in which we find ourselves. However, since each person's situation is unique, it is possible that the realities of different individuals vary. Our unique and shared world is the same living world that we experience.

If we assume that the body is cognitively known as the mind, we have committed a cognitive and a metaphysical error. The mind and the body are inseparable in the reality of the living world.

### 2.3. Rejection of the theory of causality

Merleau-Ponty begins by rejecting the doctrine of determinism. He believes that there is no direct causal relationship between the individual and his body, or between the individual and his environment and society. Causality is rejected by this philosopher because it is a theory that abandons the subject and focuses solely on the object. In other words, it can be said that according to determinism, the subject does not exist because it cannot intervene in the relationships of domination and subordination, which are essential and unavoidable (Piravi Vank, 2010).

The phenomenology of sense perception shows that freedom for genuine and effective action must simultaneously involve an attachment to something in the past and a detachment from it in the future, depending on the situation and creativity.

### 2.4. The Non-Necessity of Existence

Merleau-Ponty's rejection of worship is based on his belief in God, where he considers the non-necessity of existence and the role of misfortune and entrapment as key factors. His philosophy dismisses the concept of an infinite or absolute existence, focusing instead on the world's wonder and strangeness, emphasizing inherent possibilities. This perspective aligns with atheism. Merleau-Ponty defines philosophy as the act of revealing truth, akin to art, rather than simply contemplating pre-existing truths. Merleau-Ponty argues that the blind faith in the absolute certainty of the world and the anticipation of a completely understandable world, when it seeks to align with a theoretical structure, is feeble and ineffectual, possessing equal strength in practice (Pirmozic, 2000).

### 2.5. Merleau-Ponty's perspective on the concept of space

Classical science assumes a clear distinction between space and the material world. According to the findings of modern science, space consists of a series of diverse areas and dimensions that can no longer be perceived as homogeneous regions. Instead of a world where the distinction between sameness and otherness is clearly defined based on their belonging to different principles, we live in a world where objects cannot be deemed alike. It appears that form and content are intertwined, and the boundary between them has vanished. In such a world, the solid framework that once constituted a uniform Euclidean space is absent. We can no longer make an absolute distinction between space and the objects that occupy it, nor between the pure idea of space and the tangible landscape that presents itself to our senses (Merleau-Ponty, 2012).

Space therefore no longer the environment or the medium of entities. These entities, that would allowed for allowed an absolute is equally close all of them, all, to them. This observer would be them, a mediator without mass, or without spatial position - in short, a pure mediator of reason.

**Organic Relation to Space:** Our relationship with space is not a distant connection between a disembodied subject and

an objective entity. Instead, it is an inherent connection situated in a space that is linked to its natural environment (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). The human being is not just a mind and a body, but a mind with a body, a being that can only truly grasp the reality of things because, as we know, its body is among things.

## 2.6. Praise for Socratic philosophy and condemnation of intellectual certainty

Doubt, or what Merleau-Ponty refers to as Socratic questioning, is the hallmark of a true philosopher. Merleau-Ponty was aware that he lived in a period overshadowed by two forms of dogmatism: an unreflective, unexamined, and oppressive dogmatism of Christianity, and an unreflective, oppressive dogmatism of Marxism. He tried to distance himself from these two forms of dogmatic thinking by relying on Socratic philosophy. According to Merleau-Ponty, "dialectics is merely a way for the philosopher to articulate what everyone inherently knows is good."

The dialectical mode of thinking is intended to replace causal thinking. In his book "The Structure of Behavior," Merleau-Ponty introduces for the first time the idea that the human being is an embodied subject. The embodied subject is an irreducible and dialectical combination of body and mind. Merleau-Ponty argues that a new interpretation of behavior can find its philosophical meaning when causal or mechanical thinking is replaced by dialectical thinking (Pirmozic, 2000). In Table 1 below, a concise overview of the ontological foundations of Merleau-Ponty has been provided.

**Table 1.** Summary of the Foundations of Merleau-Ponty's Ontology (Adapted from: Pirmozic, 2000)

Merleau-Ponty's Perspective:	Subject
Subject and body are inseparable from the world: the unity of mind and matter	Subjectivity
The world is not a series of theoretical structures, but a situation in which we find ourselves	The essence of the world
The world is unique and shared; it is the same living world that we experience	Experience of the world
The theory of causality and the theory of absolute freedom are rejected with the concept of "situated being"	Causal relationships
Denial of the necessity of being and disbelief in absolute existence	Necessity of being
Rejects the system of the senses	The system of the senses
Uncertainty (there is no absolute certainty)	Certainty
Objects cannot be regarded as completely identical	Objects
No absolute distinction can be made between space and the objects that occupy it	Distinguishing between space and objects
Our relationship to space is not a distanced objective-subjective relationship	Human relationship with space
Rejection of absolutism and dogmatic thinking, turning to the dialectical method, skepticism or Socratic questioning	Absolutism
Dialectical thinking should replace causal thinking	Dialectical thinking

## 3. Epistemological Foundations

### 3.1. Primacy of Perception

Our first and real contact with the world is a pre-reflective observation. Such contact leads to only one conclusion: "Something exists." This pre-reflective contact is so because it has not yet been cognitively categorized (it is cognitively uncategorized). At the beginning of our lives, we have a free and unclassified attitude towards our environment. This is the purity of pre-reflective experience, the fundamental truth that signifies our connection with reality. However, when we learn to see the world, this purity disappears.

### 3.2. Sensory perception: a necessary and sufficient condition for contact with the real world

Merleau-Ponty, like all of us, has forgotten his pre-reflective contact with the world. Husserl taught him that the world is a collection of idealistic and ideational structures, while Sartre taught him that the world is nothing but Merleau-Ponty's own design. In fact, he thought about the world following predetermined paths laid out for him by Husserl and Sartre, until finally, in his last and most profound book, he deviated from this path, both visible and invisible, and admitted:

We see things ourselves. The world is what we see. Sense of belief is common to all people. Although sensory belief is justified in itself, this does not mean that we should harbor doubts and suspicions about our connection with the world (Pirmozic, 2000). The existence of primordial matter leads to the formation of a unified world of perception for humans.

### 3.3. Perception

Perception is not only a passive and reactive act but also a creative one. The principle of the priority of perception states that perception lays the most basic foundation for understanding, and therefore, its exploration should take precedence over all other levels, including cultural levels and particularly the realm of science (Spielberg, 1969). Sense perception is not an action but a background from which all actions emerge. Merleau-Ponty believes that neither the empiricist schools nor the proponents of the school of authenticity of reason could respect the right to intervene in bodily experience (Piravi Vanak, 2010: 95). Sensory perception does not present itself as an event in the world to which the concept of causality can be applied.

### 3.4. Criticism of the authenticity of Descartes' mind

According to Merleau-Ponty, Descartes overlooks the fact that we need a body in order to reach the truth. Descartes believes that it is logically necessary to rely on the mind without the body (authenticity of the mind). Descartes believed that the mind can lead us to truth, but Merleau-Ponty argued that relying solely on rationalism reduces our experience of the world to a few unreasonable and indefensible thoughts, ideas, or concepts.

### 3.5. Critique of the two schools of thought: the primacy of reason and the primacy of experience

The opinion of both schools is based on the assumption that the world is entirely clear and obvious, and in both doctrines, our real experience is negated. In fact, the reference to the living world stops at two kinds of classical presuppositions: the primacy of reason and the primacy of experience. The root of both schools can be found in what Merleau-Ponty refers to

as the "presupposition about the world," which is the idea of an objective, pre-existing world made up of sense data that lack meaning. This world either passively contributes to the formation of perceptual phenomena or is shaped through activities like judgment. Merleau-Ponty introduces perception to establish a connection between consciousness and the world, albeit from a perspective different from that of empiricism and rationalism. From the empiricist perspective, perception is seen as a passive process, involving various objective elements that are absorbed from the environment. According to Merleau-Ponty, the main assumption of the schools advocating the primacy of experience and the primacy of reason is based on the fundamental separation between cognitive particularity and psychological subjectivity, inside and outside, and the assumption of a physical world that is intrinsically clear, defined, and easily accessible to consciousness. Perception, as Merleau-Ponty sees it, differs significantly from abstract thought and rationality according to proponents of the primacy of reason. Perception is not detached from the world; rather, it is an active process that engages with the world (Piravi Vanak, 2010).

### 3.6. Return to the objects themselves

In the introduction to the "Phenomenology of Perception," it states: "The world is not what I think, but what I live in." From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, the concept of "returning to the objects themselves" is entirely distinct from the idealistic idea of referring to consciousness. He refuses to follow Husserl and seeks the origin of the world in the subject. The absolute reference point one must consider is the world itself, as experienced by the mind before any conceptual intervention. Therefore, the concept of "return to the objects themselves" refers to a world that exists before any cognition takes place. Identification always refers to this world, and any scientific description of it is abstract, symbolic, and secondary. It can be likened to a geographical map in comparison to a landscape where we already possess knowledge and understanding of what a forest, a meadow, or a river is. In Merleau-Ponty's thought, interpretation (reduction) is a means of rejecting idealism. It can be said that the most significant achievement of his phenomenology is the fusion of extreme objectivism and extreme subjectivism in the conception of the world (Piravi Vank, 2010). The phenomenology of sense perception is dedicated to teaching us how we can see and how we can be. It shows us how we can become something different from what we were before, at a time when we were unaware of the new way of seeing that grants us access to the origin. "In a sense, learning how to see is the easiest thing in the world." We just have to put aside scientific and common sensory preconceptions and allow ourselves to flow with the current of existence and synchronize and pay attention only to what we can perceive through our sensory perception. But in another sense it is more difficult, for it requires us to become children again (or, in other words, to be unaware of what we have painstakingly learned) while maintaining the critical acumen necessary to distinguish this way of seeing from the rational preconceptions of the school of primordial reason and primordial experience. According to Merleau-Ponty, reflection is an attempt to describe the world as it is experienced, free from scientific interpretation. Phenomenology is a descriptive science and should be distinguished from any explanatory science because phenomenology cannot regard the reality of the world, which is at the center of any scientific investigation, as certain and presupposed.... In phenomenology, the relation to the world is established through reflection. A reflection that thinks on the basis of the unconscious, a reflection through which not the world is in man, but man is in the world (Piravi Vanak, 2010).

### 3.7. Absolute Observation and Absolute Observer

The task of science is to pursue the continual clarification of a specific or tangible fact. This leads to the understanding that a tangible or concrete fact, like a classical model, cannot solely rely on intuition but must be supported by scientific reasoning. The scientist of today no longer harbors the illusion that he can penetrate into the heart of things as they are in themselves. We can no longer delude ourselves with the idea that in science, a kind of pure reason, independent of circumstances, allows us to perceive things as they are, free from all human influences, as God sees them (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). In Table 2, the perspectives of Merleau-Ponty regarding epistemological foundations in this area have been addressed.

**Table 2.** Summary of the Epistemological Foundations of Merleau-Ponty (Adapted from: Merleau-Ponty, 2012)

Subject	Merleau-Ponty's Perspective:
Our connection with the world	Our most basic and real connection with the world is pre-reflective experience. Such a connection leads to a single judgment: "Something exists."
Purity of experience	The existence of the imperative (purity of pre-reflective experience) forms a unified perceptual world for humans.
Perception	Perception represents the most basic or fundamental level of cognition.
Rationalism	Relying on rationalism (the authenticity of reason) does not lead us to truth.
Having objectivity	We are not confronted with a given objective world.
Perception and the world	The act of perception is not separate from the world.
Referring to the world	The absolute ground to which we must refer is the world itself, as the mind experiences it before any conceptual interference.
Referring to objects	The "return to the objects themselves" is a reference to the world that precedes all scientific cognition and determination.
Prejudice	Avoiding preconceptions
Phenomenology	Phenomenology is a descriptive science and should be distinguished from any explanatory science.
Finding objectivity	It is not possible to arrive at objectivity without human influence.

## 4. Foundations of Anthropology

### 4.1. Unity of mind and body

According to Merleau-Ponty, the human being cannot be studied based on the dualism of mind and body, subject and object, as these dualisms overlook the body and its crucial role in knowledge acquisition.

### 4.2. The Interdependence of Soul and Body in Merleau-Ponty's Thought

The body is, on the one hand, a mass of chemical compounds constantly interacting with each other and, on the other hand, a dialectic between the living being and its environment. Furthermore, the body exists in a dialectical relationship between the individual and the social group. In general, the body is a whole made up of pre-existing patterns and pre-acquired energies. The body serves as the acquired dialectical ground on which a higher formation takes shape, while the soul represents a new meaning that emerges (Pirmozic, 2000).

### 4.3. The Arc of Attention and Identity

Merleau-Ponty describes the process of sensory perception with the help of an "arc of attention". He posits that our rational and sensory experiences can be directed in completely different directions (possibility of divergence), which enables us to determine our position in the world (Pirmozic, 2000). Through the concept of the attentional arc, we can perceive a continuum of meanings that link the moments of our lives to our identity. Since we have a physical body as the locus of meaning-making, everything we deeply feel is intimately connected to our existence. Since the body is mobile and active, it positions itself in the world and interacts with the world, giving meaning to our human experience of the world (Pirmozic, 2000).

### 4.4. Schneider's example emphasizes that giving meaning to action is embodied subjectivity, not abstract self-transcendence

Schneider was a soldier in World War I and suffered brain damage on the battlefield. Schneider couldn't direct his attention to anything besides the present moment; he was preoccupied with past events and the future of his life. He had no coherent interpretation of the meaning in his life. Merleau-Ponty discovered that Schneider's "arc of attention" had collapsed. Merleau-Ponty states that Schneider's disability is not purely neurophysiological, and his illness is not separate from consciousness. On the contrary, his condition attests to the unity of mind and body. According to Merleau-Ponty, the disruption in the functioning of the embodied subject has led Schneider to lack continuous personal identity (Pirmozic, 2000).

### 4.5. Our Dependence on Others

Self-awareness relies heavily on our awareness of others, especially their behavior and speech. Merleau-Ponty argues that a coherent understanding of self-awareness is heavily influenced by our awareness of those around us. Therefore, our self-awareness is always influenced by the language and communication skills we have learned from others.

### 4.6. Existentialist ethical requirements and responsibilities

Existentialist ethical requirements and responsibilities dictate that we cannot absolve ourselves of individual responsibility by believing that our actions are solely determined by our dependence on others. Additionally, we cannot completely escape our dependence on others by assuming that free will allows us to shape our future without becoming disconnected from our true selves. Table 3 provides a summary of the Anthropological foundations of Merleau-Ponty in this regard.

**Table 3.** Summary of the Anthropological Foundations of Merleau-Ponty (Author) (Adapted from: Merleau-Ponty, 2012)



Merleau-Ponty's Perspective:	Topic
Rejecting the unity of mind and body—subject and object	The unity of mind and body
The body is, on one hand, a mass of chemical compounds, and on the other hand, it is dialectical between the living being and its surrounding environment. Additionally, the body is dialectical between the subject and the social group.	The essence of the body
The body is an acquired dialectical substrate on which a higher formation takes shape, and the soul is a new meaning that emerges [after the body].	The dialectic of the body
The body is mobile and active, placing itself within the world and facing towards the world.	Characteristics of the body
Our existence as embodied subjects gives meaning to our human experiential world.	Subjectivity
The body is the core of significance because it acts as a general function and yet exists and is vulnerable to illness. We learn in the body to experience the unity between nature and existence.	Body performance
Our self-awareness is always dependent on our awareness of others; escaping this dependency means becoming alienated from oneself.	Self-awareness

## 5. Foundations of Sociology

### 5.1. Critique of Sartre's Dialectical Materialism

The major philosophical difference between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre revolves around the role of dialectics in philosophical thought. Merleau-Ponty generally believed that Sartre embraces dialectical philosophy, which is rooted in the thoughts of Hegel and Marx and is based on argumentation of both/and rather than either/or. Thus, Sartre presents a deceptive dialectical analysis of our political life. Merleau-Ponty argues that the failure of Sartre's dialectical and materialist philosophical framework is rooted in his dualistic ontology. In Sartre's ontology, the world is a combination of a *pour-soi* (mind) and an *en-soi* (being) (Pirmozic, 2000). Merleau-Ponty disagrees with Sartre's interpretation of the social world as a site of conflicting perspectives. He asserts that by stating "the other is history (history is the others)," he considers history in conjunction with the social world (Piravi Vanak, 2010).

### 5.2. Merleau-Ponty's Orientation towards Marxism and Disillusionment with It

Merleau-Ponty believed that understanding Marxism revealed its absence of abstractions and generalities. Instead, it engages with real human relationships and social classes. It imparts an ethic that emphasizes responsibility and genuine enthusiasm. This is contrary to the school of ethical science (Piravi Vank, 2010). Merleau-Ponty saw in Marxism an understanding of the "flesh of the historical body." This is the interaction between the material substructure and human conceptions. He once envisioned a time when people would no longer feel ashamed of being a Marxist. The Korean War, which began in 1950, was initiated by communist North Korea's invasion of South Korea. Afterward, he fell into a deep depression. He had written in support of Marxism. But many disappointments and disillusionments with his past writing left him full of regret.

### 5.3. Merleau-Ponty: We are Condemned to Meaning

Every situation that confronts us contains its own history and meanings. The meanings that we cannot ignore, the truth, imply that we are not entirely free, as we do not create the world from scratch (Pirmozic, 2000). According to Merleau-Ponty's belief, the dialectic is between the world and the ego and is experienced through the human body. This body is universal and, therefore, social, material, and limited by spatial and temporal conditions. Given this, our freedom is not absolute but rather modified and restricted by the situation in which we find ourselves (Pirmozic, 2000): 1) Sociologism (social determinism) and 2) Historicism-Groundism.

#### 5.4. Belief in Conditional Freedom

Since the subject is embodied and situated in the world, it is in a "situation," or more precisely, a subject with a "situation." Like Sartre's subject or consciousness, it cannot act absolutely freely. According to the division that Merleau-Ponty makes between "general and incidental purposes" related to the general structures of the world and "explicit and immediate purposes" related to personal decisions, freedom can only exist within individual limits and explicit purposes, as it cannot operate in the realm of general purposes. Merleau-Ponty argues that if we label every action driven by consciousness as free, as Sartre suggests, or view human freedom as absolute, then there is ultimately no freedom (Piravi Vank, 2010).

#### 5.5. Human and Society

Humanity is not the result of a collection of individuals or social thinkers. Humanity is a complex matter: each individual can believe in their own truth from within, yet no one can think or make decisions without already being entangled in specific relationships with others (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). There is no way to live with others that would relinquish the responsibility of being oneself, that would allow me to have no opinion; there is no "inner" life that is not the first step towards establishing a relationship with another human being. In this ambiguous situation, imposed on us due to our physical bodies and personal and shared histories, we can never attain total peace (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). In the modern world, the certainty and self-confidence of the old worldview, whether in art, knowledge, or action, are no longer prevalent. Modern thought reveals two characteristics: incompleteness and ambiguity. Table 4 illustrates a Summary of the Sociological Foundations of Merleau-Ponty.

**Table 4.** Summary of the Sociological Foundations of Merleau-Ponty (Adapted from: Merleau-Ponty, 2012)

Topic	Merleau-Ponty's Perspective:
Historicism	"The other is history (history is the others)"
Human relationships	Emphasis on real human relationships and social classes rather than abstractions
Meaningfulness	We are condemned to meaning
Freedom	Freedom is conditional freedom because it is related to an embodied being that cannot be independent of its past and future, and separate from the situation it is in
Society	Society has its own specific identity and influences human decisions, but individual responsibility is never abandoned

## 6. Basics of art and aesthetics

### 6.1. Art and the Perception of the World

In this it is impossible to separate separating objects from their mode appearance. impossible. How can a poet or a painter express anything other than their encounter with the world? An artwork is akin to a perceptual experience: its essence must be seen or heard, and any attempt to define or analyze it, although valuable for preserving this experience, cannot replace direct perceptual experience. Painting does not imitate the world but creates an independent world of its own. It is impossible for form and content—what is said and how it is said—to be unrelated to each other (Merleau-Ponty, 2012).

### 6.2. Art and the Artist

The artist conveys a personal narrative of objects to their audience not by describing that narrative in a language subject to laws, but by creating something and embodying that narrative. The artist can evoke a similar experience in those who are willing and able to respond to it. According to Merleau-Ponty, the task of "philosophers and painters" is not to confirm or negate the existence of essences; rather, they are there to apprehend essences. Merleau-Ponty considers Cézanne to be in line with his philosophy by denying dualistic conflicts and their elimination in the "act of seeing," emphasizing the lack of distinction between "mind and body" and "thought and vision" in Cézanne's works. The self is not separate from the body, and thought is not separate from seeing; beliefs and ideas are merely embodied and manifested in facial expressions and states. The painter's task is not merely representation and expression; they are engaged in the work of "the mystery of becoming visible" and "the emergence of the individual in nature" (Asadi Mahalchali, 2016). Merleau-Ponty argues that Cézanne's paintings disrupt habits. Cézanne challenges the disruption of certainties and the suspension of our previous scientific and everyday assumptions about nature and life. Merleau-Ponty considers Cézanne a phenomenologist who, not using concepts but his own art, keeps our relationship with the world "half-open." As its tight knots loosen, it gives us the courage to rethink. Cézanne is neither at the pole of idealistic paintings nor at the pole of the raw realism of naturalism. He is situated where the constant and eternal flux of existence is present. His only true feeling is the "sense of wonder" (Shayganfar & Zia Shahabi, 2012).

### 6.3. Embodiment of the Subject: The Central Theme in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy

Merleau-Ponty's initiative involves highlighting the unique role of the body in sensory perception. He opposes any perspective that believes in the separation between mind and body and considers the subject as a whole or gestalt, not just pure feeling or awareness. In his view, the subject of sensory perception has acquired bodily awareness, not just pure awareness or a passive body. Merleau-Ponty considers embodied subjectivity as a prerequisite for its existence in the world. Therefore, he not only rejects the Cartesian dualism of mind and body but also finds attributing authenticity to each of them insufficient for explaining cognition. He believes that the embodied subject is the perceiving subject, and fundamentally, it is through the embodied subject that experience becomes possible (Ghoreyshi, 2013). According to Matthias's account, Merleau-Ponty believes that human identity (our mentality) is significantly shaped by our physical or

bodily aspects. Understanding the world is a result of inclusive perception, rather than being solely derived from abstract thinking or the operations of a detached mind or consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body is not the "objective body" of biology. Instead, he refers to the "phenomenal body" — the body that we experience from within; the body that is oriented towards the world (Salimizadeh, 2012). Merleau-Ponty rejects both empiricist and rationalist perspectives. According to him, neither of these views is based on a phenomenological description. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology involves a return to a simple descriptive engagement with the world, a pre-reflective involvement with the world. The term he uses for this direct and pre-reflective engagement is perception. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the body, mind, and world are completely intertwined and inseparable (Ghoreyshi, 2013). He utilizes the concept of body-subject in the phenomenology of perception to denote the notion that the body, mind, and world are intricately interconnected and inseparable, in contrast to the focus of Cartesian thought. Merleau-Ponty argues that the philosophical notion that consciousness bears the burden of all perceptions of the world is fundamentally flawed. From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, you cannot be conscious without a body. The mind and body are inextricably intertwined. The world is not something we merely think about; it is a space in which we live our lives. Perception is a direct connection with the world, and this connection shapes our active engagement with the objects around us, giving meaning to things because our interests are embedded in them (Ghoreyshi, 2013). According to Merleau-Ponty, perception is not, as the empiricists claim, a passive reception of representations of objects, nor is it, as the idealist philosophers have said, the creation of the world from ideas in the mind. Evidence exists in the world, but not in the same way as physical objects do. Evidence is a subject that influences the world just as the world influences it, implying that we are inherently embodied subjects. Therefore, just as mentality intertwines with corporeality, according to Merleau-Ponty's words, it can be said that the nature of the world in which the "body-subject" plays a role is also intertwined and takes on an incarnate form. An embodied worldview is the enduring physical connection among human beings. The world is truly the coherence of our experiences, and surely the unity of the world as a meaningful structure is necessary for the coherence of our experiences. The world without the experiences of individuals is meaningless. The world is not inherently meaningful; instead, it serves as the foundation and backdrop of our lives, a pre-existing stage on which we live and think (Asadi Mahalchali, 2016). According to Merleau-Ponty, being in the world is akin to engaging in a dialogue with things. Since we are interconnected with the external world, we can be influenced by it. Dialogue can only occur when there is someone else present to speak to. Merleau-Ponty explains and affirms time through the concept of the duality of temporality, stating that we are only free in a situation where we can be. A significant aspect of an individual's circumstances that impacts their freedom is their past choices. By considering this, we are embodied subjects, and our past choices are sedimented in our bodies. Our present time continuously transcends the past, but the nature of transcendence is shaped by what has happened before (Ghoreyshi, 2013). According to Eric Matthews, Merleau-Ponty has shown that human identity is not static but evolves over time by introducing concepts such as body-subject, being-in-the-world, and temporality. The fluidity of human identity over time has implications for how people interact with each other in society. He believes that humans live in a cultural context, not just in nature. Being socially aware in the world means understanding the world we inhabit with other individuals who share similar characteristics, attributing shared significance to cultural and natural elements, and consequently forming connections with one another grounded in these shared experiences. In the social realm, awareness entails recognizing the world we inhabit alongside other individuals who, like us, attribute shared meanings to

cultural and natural elements. This process forms the basis for establishing relationships with one another grounded in these shared understandings. The social world is embodied and constantly changing. Due to the human individuals who create and shape their own thoughts, its subjectivity is also of the same kind as those individuals (Ghoreyshi, 2013). Perception requires a human being who is a member of a particular species. This subject is situated in the world; it must exist in a specific place and time; experiences of the world are perceived from a particular perspective; being in the world means being a subject; and like all things in the world, it is either material or physical. Therefore, we humans are both objects and subjects. We are inherently embodied and defined and identified by our bodies. As objects, like other entities, we have a responsive state and act to influence other objects around us. That is, we are both objects and subjects. Not only are we embodied, but we are also embodied subjects. However, our subjectivity, being embodied, is biological. Subjectivity and intentionality, according to Merleau-Ponty, are not limited to the human species. Even human intentionality is not solely related to our conscious awareness; instead, it is inherent in the existence of all living beings. Embodied subjectivity involves having an active existence driven by needs that prompt actions and are meaningful in relation to elements of the surrounding environment. Embodiment means that life in the world precedes intellectual awareness of the world; experience is fundamentally pre-reflective. According to Merleau-Ponty, any phenomenon we seek to understand, including human behavior, cannot be defined without reference to meaning and awareness. Value and meaning are intrinsic determinations of the organism that are only accessible through non-scientific understanding. To understand an action, we must comprehend its specific meaning. All living organisms behave in a purposeful manner because they are living beings. They have needs, interests, and goals that drive their actions. However, the distinction between humans and animals is human consciousness. Humans have language and other symbolic forms, allowing them to attribute explicit meaning to their actions. This implies that the goals driving human behavior can be intricate, unique, and personal. Even our biological goals can be expressed in different ways and shaped by specific cultures. Therefore, the intricate interplay among different forms of awareness, embodiment, and culture serves as the foundation of Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of humanity (Ghoreyshi, 2013).

## 7. Conclusion

Phenomenology, based on Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, is a philosophical method aimed at uncovering assumptions that we typically construct about ourselves and the world for scientific and practical purposes, and returning to the world as we directly experience it in pre-reflective perception. Merleau-Ponty stated in radio discussions in 1948 that the naked construction of the world through this mode of perception is not just an achievement of "modern philosophy," but also relates to "modern art." It is evident that his use of the term "modern" refers to philosophy and art from decades ago. He mentions names such as Cezanne, Jean Cocteau, Braque, and Picasso as examples of "modern art." In his view, painters and others, although different, work with a more effective form, akin to phenomenologists. According to Merleau-Ponty, the arts establish connections in ways that are independent of language rules. These rules are essential for everyday social interactions as well as for the advancement of science and knowledge. We must always use common vocabulary and expressions to articulate these purposes, regardless of our identities. For example, the word "table" should have the same meaning for both you and me.

Therefore, in social life and even in the sciences, we need something pre-established as well as a discoverable truth. According to Merleau-Ponty, the arts establish connections without following rules. The artist conveys a personal narrative of objects to their audience not by describing that narrative in a law-abiding language, but by creating something that embodies that narrative. This creation can awaken a similar experience in those who are willing and able to respond to it. The truth found in this way, namely the artistic work, is not something pre-existing waiting to be discovered, but something inseparable from the tools through which a connection with truth is established. In this sense, the artist brings truth into existence. Furthermore, truth is not pre-established in a way that is accessible to everyone. Awareness and attention: Awareness is always of something (the intertwining of the knower and the known). Embodiment of the subject (embodied subject or human subject embodiment): We access the world through the body, not just through the mind. Thinking is the product of awareness, and awareness itself is grounded in the bodily perceptions of the subject. Being-in-the-world: I can only be aware of my existence when I am aware of the world I am in. Human Existence's Temporality: Merleau-Ponty, influenced by Heidegger, believes that the essence of human existence is temporal. Although humans are thrown into the world, they move through the corridor of time and, based on their past and possibilities, look towards the future.

## Statements and Declarations

**Funding:** No funding

**Conflict of interests:** The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

**Ethical approval:** This study adheres to the Guidelines of the ethical review process of the Journal of Philosophia Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

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