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# Corporeity and the Eurocentric Community: Recasting Husserl's Crisis in Merleau-Ponty's Ontology of the Flesh

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to develop a phenomenological account of community which would not be pervaded by Eurocentric assumptions. Such Eurocentrism is what Husserl's phenomenological framework has been accused of. I first reconstruct Husserl's phenomenology of community in his late transcendental phenomenology by examining the Vienna Lecture. I show that Husserl's Eurocentrism is encapsulated in his account of corporeity, which simultaneously recognizes the importance of corporeity and its necessary overcoming in *theoria*, which originates in the European philosopher. I then argue that Merleau-Ponty, through his rigorously embodied phenomenology, can offer a non-Eurocentric phenomenology of community. Elaborating on the Husserlian insight of corporeity, notably the perceptual experience and the *écart* at stake in the encounter with other bodies, allows Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh to recast community from and with the body as an open, situated, and non-archeo-teleological structure, allowing phenomenology to reimagine inter-cultural encounters away from tropes of European exemplarity.

## Keywords

Merleau-Ponty – Husserl – body – community – Eurocentrism

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## 1 Introduction

The figure of Europe resists characterisation in many scholarly disciplines, and philosophy is no different in this regard. Phenomenology, for one, has attempted to develop a philosophical account of Europe,<sup>1</sup> more specifically through Husserl's later writings. The *Crisis of European Sciences*<sup>2</sup> and other essays, such as the "Vienna Lecture," directly tackle the question of communities and Europe's role in it. However, this construction has frequently been characterised as Eurocentric, albeit along different lines: Husserl's tendency to assign responsibility to Europe;<sup>3</sup> his ranking of lifeworlds according to their capacity to attain the entelechy of universal reason;<sup>4</sup> the hubris of a view from nowhere that is at stake in the phenomenological epochē;<sup>5</sup> or his inability to distinguish between Europe as an empirical-anthropological type and Europe as an absolute idea<sup>6</sup> have been criticized as pervading his phenomenology of community with unsurpassable Eurocentric assumptions. Simultaneously, scholars have urged for the need of a non-Eurocentric and decolonial phenomenology,<sup>7</sup> which concerns, perhaps in an exemplary way, European philosophers and philosophers of Europe. Is there a possibility to think community *phenomenologically* without it being necessarily a *Eurocentric* phenomenology of community?

To hazard an answer to this question, this paper will proceed in a two-step argumentation. I will first, in section 2, substantiate what specifically makes Husserl's late transcendental phenomenology a Eurocentric phenomenology of community. I argue that this Eurocentrism is to be found in Husserl's

- 1 Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009); Simon Glendinning, *Europe – a Philosophical History, Part 1: The Promise of Modernity* (Routledge, 2021).
- 2 Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
- 3 Andreea Smaranda Aldea, 'Making Sense of Husserl's Notion of Teleology: Normativity, Reason, Progress and Phenomenology as "Critique from Within,"' *Hegel Bulletin* 38, no. 1 (May 2017): 104–28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2016.70>, 124.
- 4 Seyla Benhabib, "Another Universalism: On the Unity and Diversity of Human Rights," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 81, no. 2 (2007): 7–32, 8.
- 5 Walter D. Mignolo, "Decoloniality and Phenomenology: The Geopolitics of Knowing and Epistemic/Ontological Colonial Differences," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2018): 360–87, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.32.3.0360>.
- 6 Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry, an Introduction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 135; Carmen De Schryver, "Empirical-Anthropological Types and Absolute Ideas: Tracking Husserl's Eurocentrism," *Husserl Studies*, 8 August 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10743-022-09312-6>, 14.
- 7 De Schryver, 14; Mignolo, "Decoloniality."

intersubjective teleology, which recognises the universal necessity of corporeity in the making of communities but differentiates Europe as the community of men who can *abstract themselves from their bodies*. It is precisely because intersubjective corporeity is subjected to an archeo-teleology that is necessarily *European* that community takes on Eurocentric colours. I then proceed in section 3 to explore how phenomenology could, if at all, provide an account of the community which would not be based in Europe's superiority or primacy. I contend that Merleau-Ponty can offer a non-Eurocentric phenomenology of community as he provides a phenomenology of community that relies more consistently and robustly on Husserl's insight of corporeity – consequences the latter had failed to bring forth. The negative epistemic claim of the body as a necessarily perceptual, and hence perspectival and partial, entity, combined with the positive claim of the deflection [*écart*] that is at stake in the encounter of bodies, reveals a phenomenology of community that is characterised by the concreteness and openness to the experience of the foreign and a fundamentally non-archeo-teleological structure. This new phenomenology of community is not, as De Schryver has argued, “de-transcendentalising”<sup>8</sup> and thus *solely* inductive and empirical. Rather, Merleau-Ponty radically recasts transcendental phenomenology by rendering transcendental *idealism* irrelevant.

## 2 Husserl's Vienna Lecture: Bodies and the Eurocentric Community

*The Crisis of European Sciences*<sup>9</sup> is Husserl's last attempt to formulate a comprehensive transcendental phenomenology. Commentators have highlighted how surprising such a text is, as it represents a decisive turn toward history in a phenomenological framework that had hitherto been resolutely a-historical, and even anti-historical.<sup>10</sup> In this monumental work, Husserl diagnoses the crisis of European modernity as resulting from a “misguided rationalism” (C, 290) which has pervaded the European (and beyond) understanding of life, and within it, of the world and of others. On the contrary, the transcendental phenomenology that Husserl puts forward aims at recovering the genuine “entelechy of humanity” (C, 15), which he deems “essential” to the making of a “rational civilisation (...) which (...) consciously directs human becoming” (*ibid*). To understand how exactly rationalism enters and saturates the

8 De Schryver, 22.

9 Hereafter designated as C.

10 Carr, in Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, xxxi; Paul Ricoeur, ‘Husserl et Le Sens de l'Histoire,’ *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 54, no. 3/4 (1949): 280–316.

making of communities, that is, the “intersubjective constitution of the world,”<sup>11</sup> I argue that bodies, and more precisely corporeity, play a central role in this intersubjective making of the world. If corporeity is indeed acknowledged as central in Husserl’s early phenomenological inquiry,<sup>12</sup> bodies have been overlooked in readings of the *Crisis*,<sup>13</sup> and even more so in the Vienna Lecture. I argue instead that they form the root of Husserl’s diagnosis of the European community as damaged because caught up in a broader “crisis of European humanity” (C, part 1). Consequently, bodies also form part of the *communal* solution that emerges out of this crisis and the problematic figures of such solution – not least in the Eurocentrism of the phenomenological community as a beyond-bodily community.

### 3 European Modernity: the Body in Crisis

The Vienna Lecture, entitled “Philosophy and the Crisis of Humanity,” is published as an appendix to the *Crisis of European Sciences*. It comprises the transcript of a lecture delivered in 1935, in which Husserl attempts to bring forth the causes of the essentially modern “life-crisis of European humanity” (C, Part 1), which has to be uncovered through an understanding of the “concept

- 11 Dermot Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction*, Cambridge Introductions to Key Philosophical Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 225.
- 12 James Dodd, *Idealism and Corporeity: An Essay on the Problem of the Body in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1997); Joona Taipale, *Phenomenology and Embodiment: Husserl and the Constitution of Subjectivity*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014); Sara Heinämaa, ‘On the Transcendental Undercurrents of Phenomenology: The Case of the Living Body,’ *Continental Philosophy Review* 54, no. 2 (2021): 237–57, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-021-09534-z>.
- 13 Readings of the *Crisis* have tended to focus on the themes of rationality and scientific discourse (Dodd 2004; Moran 2012; Baratelli 2022), teleology Di Huang, ‘Normativity and Teleology in Husserl’s Genetic Phenomenology,’ *Husserl Studies* 38, no. 1 (April 2022): 17–35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10743-021-09297-8>; Aldea, ‘Making Sense of Husserl’s Notion of Teleology’; Jacques Derrida, *Le Problème de La Genèse Dans La Philosophie de Husserl*, 1<sup>re</sup> éd, Epiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990); Timo Miettinen, *Husserl and the Idea of Europe* (Northwestern University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx0779x>, and intersubjectivity and community (Anthony J. Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1995)), but none, to my knowledge, explicitly take up the role that corporeity and bodies play in either of these themes.

of Europe as the historical teleology of the infinite goals of reason" (C, 299). In other words, the crisis of European Modernity is tied to the very concept of *Europe*, and uncovering this concept and its teleology is the condition for both the diagnosis and the solution to this crisis. Such crisis takes its roots in "misguided rationalism" (C, 290), which affects all spheres of life, including the way in which Modernity conceives of the body and its relationship to "spirit" (C, 271), which Husserl repeats on several occasions in the Lecture. Modernity, according to Husserl, misconstrues this relationship as it grants the primacy of Nature over spirit [*Geist*]: instead of being a "interrelation, a *manifestation*" (C, 294), Modernity subordinates the spiritual understanding of bodies to its natural understanding. In this construction, the spiritual is "spread over the surface of physical bodies" (C, 294) and its "spatiotemporal being" is inserted "within nature" (C, 294). The spirit becomes a "real annex to bodies" (C, 294) understood as natural mechanisms. According to Husserl, this "dualistic world-view" (C, 294), more than a mere "absurdity" (C, 294) which can be traced back to Descartes, distorts our understanding of communities. Indeed, as Husserl explains earlier in the lecture, "each individual human psychic life is founded upon corporeity, and thus each community upon the bodies of the individual human beings who are members of it" (C, 271).

As Modernity attributes one fact about bodies, that is, being *part of Nature*, the conceptualisation of community becomes predicated on this natural-objectivist worldview. Annexing the spirit to bodies, therefore, misses "the importance of meaning on the foundation of life" (C, 295) and thus of communities as meaningful, that is, of spiritual entities generated and sustained by *meaning*. Communities stay subordinated to nature and to their scientific observation in the form of the "humanistic disciplines" (C, 271), which "remain limited to intuitive finitudes" (C, 271), rather than unveiling their intrinsic, indeed essentially *spiritual* potential. The crisis of European sciences is thus a crisis of the very possibility of a community to live by what it truly is, and this impossibility is rooted on the misunderstanding of corporeity as the founding act of communities. Recovering the essence of Europe's historical meaning, which Husserl always comprehends in terms of the teleology of Reason,<sup>14</sup> thus entails recalibrating the role that bodies ought to play in the intersubjective process of *finding* and *founding* the community. Husserl then offers a reorientation of what a community founded "upon corporeity" (C, 271) could mean.

14 Ricoeur, "Husserl et Le Sens de l'Histoire," 289.

#### 4 The Husserlian Reorientation of Bodies: Historicity and the Teleology of Corporeity

Corporeity, Husserl recalls, forms the basis of subjectivity as “bodily existence and thus as realities ordered within universal space-time” (C, 292). This description highlights the continuity of Husserl’s phenomenological framework, which puts corporeity as an “animate organism [*Leib*]” (*Cartesian Meditations*<sup>15</sup>) at the centre of his philosophy. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl contends that intersubjectivity occurs first and foremost through the recognition of other bodies *as* animate flesh. This recognition of other bodies *qua* bodies inhabited by another consciousness depends on the “apperceptive transfer” (C, 292) that occurs between my body and that of the other, in which I understand the similarity between my inhabited body and the other’s. This apperceptive transfer is epistemically followed by the phenomenon of *pairing*, defined as “a universal phenomenon of the transcendental sphere” (C, 292), which leads to a recognition of an equivalence between my *ego* and the *alter ego* that I perceive and thus the possibility to go beyond one’s own *ego*. Apperception is thus an analogical process in which the ‘I,’ the ego, remains the ground on which common acts of meaning-giving can emerge. Intersubjectivity is indeed always subordinated to originary subjectivity and egology.<sup>16</sup> Thus, rather than breaking altogether with the primarily egological account of the *Cartesian Meditations*, the renewed phenomenological approach of the *Crisis* inserts intersubjectivity *qua* founded on bodies within a teleological-historical framework and enriches Husserl’s account of corporeity. Indeed, the subjectivity that is founded upon corporeity acquires two new dimensions in the *Crisis*: a historical and a teleological one. Subjectivity after Husserl’s turn to history exists as “generative intersubjectivity,”<sup>17</sup> that is, as the capacity of individual bodies to ‘communalise’ themselves through their bodies not only through static apperception, but also as part of a historical process. Bodies, in a generative process, are both inserted within existing *normed* communities and able to contribute to and sustain communities which have their own norms and traditions.<sup>18</sup> Husserl’s framework of *historicity* [*Historizität*] is a *structural* framework that is common to all human bodies. It is universal and shared without hierarchisation between communities conceived as lifeworlds

15 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, 12 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publ, 1999), 99. Hereafter designated as *CM*.

16 Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis*, 246; Dodd, *Idealism and Corporeity*, 4.

17 Zahavi, in Sebastian Gardner and Matthew Grist, *Transcendental Turn* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 239.

18 Steinbock, *Home and Beyond*.

[*Lebenswelt*], including those whose *substantive* historicity is radically different from the European from which Husserl speaks:

According to the old familiar definition, man is the rational animal, and in this broad sense even the Papuan is a man and not a beast. He has his ends and he acts reflectively, considering the practical possibilities. The works and methods that grow [out of this] go to make up a tradition, being understandable again [by others] in virtue of their rationality. (C, 290)

The Papuan's inclusion in the category of 'mankind' reflects Husserl's *universal* recognition of the fundamental historicity of *any man* (who "has his ends" and "acts reflectively") and thus *any community* (which is "tradition" in virtue of the "rationality" of the men composing it). Indeed, scholarship on Husserl's theory of community have highlighted the unsurpassable and universal character of the historicity of communities, which delimit the boundaries of lifeworlds, that is, civilisational communities existing as unities through traditions, norms, and customs.<sup>19</sup> This leads, in turn, to a theory of interculturality in which historical communities relate to one another in terms of a responsiveness toward the alien, between homeworld [*Heimwelt*], and alienworld [*Fremdwelt*]. In this reading, Europe and India cannot relate to one another as their lifeworlds are strange to each other, but Europe can understand that India, as a community, has its own ability to form meaning – and *vice versa*. This theory of interculturality is thus predicated on an idea of historical horizontality which derives from the analogical-historical structure of bodies. It is based on the mutual recognition of the fundamental relativity of one's lifeworld, in which Europe would be one lifeworld amongst others. This reading is correct when treating Europe, India, or China as empirical-anthropological types.

However, those readings fall short of Husserl's understanding of History for two reasons. First, they do not incorporate Husserl's own central critique of Levy-Bruhlian relativist anthropology – a critique that led him to write the *Crisis*.<sup>20</sup> Understanding communities as nothing other than historical would make them "fleeting waves" (C, 6). In the Vienna Lecture, Husserl claims that this "category of all historicity which relativises itself in many strata (...) cannot suffice" (C, 275). Second, and more importantly, those readings are unable

19 R. Philip Buckley, "Husserl's Rational *Liebesgemeinschaft*: Reason and Community," *Research in Phenomenology* 26 (1996): 116–29; Steinbock, *Home and Beyond*; Miettinen, *Husserl and the Idea of Europe*.

20 De Schryver, 14.

to account for the singular position of the primacy of the European community in Husserl's late works. For Husserl, Europe is not an example of a home-world amongst others:

There is something unique here that is recognized in us by all other human groups, too, something that, quite apart from all considerations of utility, becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves even in their unbroken will to self-preservation; whereas we, *if we understand ourselves properly*, would never Indianize ourselves, for example. (C, 275)

Indeed, Husserl recognises that humans share a common orientation not only toward community, but toward a specifically *rational* community: intersubjectivity, because it is initiated as a corporeal process that all human beings are part of, forms a primary universality that is common to all human groups. However, this *purely* historical orientation of communities is exceeded in the case of the European community by a radically new “breakthrough” (C, 15), which springs from rational animality, but also radically detaches the European community from all other communities: “just as man and even the Papuan represent a new stage of animal nature, i.e., as opposed to the beast, *so philosophical reason represents a new stage of human nature and its reason*” (C, 290, my emphasis). Europe is, in this account, uniquely characterised by philosophy, which Husserl defines as the “theoretical attitude” (C, 285). Only in Europe, and more specifically in Greece, does the capacity to escape practicality emerge. This means that Husserl introduces not one, but two breakthroughs in History: between animal and (rational) man, but *also* between rational man, which the Papuan is a part of, and the properly *philosophical human*, which is first and foremost the *Greek philosopher*.

What is genuine philosophy, and why is it discovered in Greece according to Husserl? The difficulty of Husserl's position lies in the fact that he considers the birth of philosophy in Greece as *neither* a contingent *nor* necessary phenomenon. Indeed, the historical-teleological method for Husserl consists in a “questioning-back” [*Rückfrage*],<sup>21</sup> a *reconstruction* of teleological History from the present. In this regard, Greek bodies have the character of the “primal foundation” [*Urstiftung*],<sup>22</sup> regardless of the contingency or necessity of the merging of philosophy with the *existence* of the Greeks. It is rather a

21 David Carr, ‘Husserl and Foucault on the Historical Apriori: Teleological and Anti-Teleological Views of History,’ *Continental Philosophy Review* 49, no. 1 (March 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-015-9362-0>, 136.

22 Husserl in Burt C. Hopkins and Steven Galt Crowell, eds., *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. Volume 3*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), §45.



*fact*, which consists in the *founding* by the Greeks of a communalisation of a new sort, and hence a *singling out* of the Greeks from the historical structure of bodies.

According to Husserl, what differentiates the Greek attitude from the Indian and Chinese philosophical systems is that, although both are universal in scope, they remain trapped within a “mythical-practical attitude” (C, 285) – their framework is, in Husserl’s account, *universal* but *finite*.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, the Greek breakthrough consists in performing a “voluntary *epochē* [ἐποχή] of all natural praxis” (C, 282), that is, “turn[ing] away from all practical interests” (C, 285). In this discussion of the Greek breakthrough, Husserl refers to the *epochē* as the suspension of all practical, and hence corporeal, orientation. It is a temporary movement of *abstraction* from one’s practical turning-toward the world, and hence a *moment* that enables a theoretical reorientation. In other words, the Greek breakthrough does not consist in escaping from the world altogether to reach the theoretical contemplation of idealities, but rather to *momentarily* withdraw from the world, and hence to bracket one’s body, in order to overcome the naïve or natural attitude towards the environing world [*Umwelt*]. The Greeks, through that performance, discover science by uncovering “absolute theoretical insights” (C, 283), that is, insights which are not rooted in historical, concrete, and bodily experience, but which only pertain to the realm of ideas and thus of *infinity*, detached from the *finitude* of the surrounding world. The reduction is thus a “disengaging of the particularizing instances,”<sup>24</sup> a detour which consists in retiring from the world, amongst which the bodily sensations and situation, in order to grasp essences, and with it the most important of all: philosophy as universal science. This theoretical discovery is immediately linked to an ethical imperative: by uncovering the natural attitude, the Greeks are compelled to a new “attitude” (C, 298) which is *ethical* because it is an attitude of critique, of the rejection of naïve presuppositions about the world, tradition, or blind faith. In other words, the Greeks invent *philosophy* altogether, which can only be *rigorous science*, beginning with the absolute ground, the *Urstiftung* of the Greek discovery, and ending in absolute Reason.<sup>25</sup> It is a radical break with the natural attitude, a “discovery of human provinciality”<sup>26</sup> and thus of the universal as *infinite*.

23 Glendinning, *Europe – a Philosophical History, Part 1: The Promise of Modernity*, 186.

24 James G. Hart, *The Person and the Common Life: Studies in a Husserlian Social Ethics*, *Phaenomenologica*; 126 (Dordrecht; Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 43.

25 Marcus Brainard, “For a New World”: On the Practical Impulse of Husserlian Theory, *Husserl Studies* 23, no. 1 (19 March 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10743-006-9016-5>, 25.

26 Kenneth Knies, *Crisis and Husserlian Phenomenology: A Reflection on Awakened Subjectivity* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350145245>, 194.

## 5 Bodily Teleology and Husserl's Eurocentrism

This performance of the *epochē* and thus the beginning of philosophy both emerge, for Husserl, only in Greece. Jacques Derrida comments on the intersection of the Greek people as an "anthropological subjectivity"<sup>27</sup> and philosophy: "at a certain moment, the pure idea of philosophy came and merged itself with the destiny and the existence of a people or of a group of men."<sup>28</sup> This means that it is "existence [that] produced philosophy" (C, 298) rather than philosophy being uncovered, unveiled by the Greek bodies. The birth of philosophy is thus inextricably linked to one community in this *unremovable fact*, which is European through and through. In other words, the question is not whether *only* the Greek community could have discovered philosophy in its historical framework – though that *may* also be true –, but rather the *fact* that the discovery of universality indeed happened in Greece. The contingency or necessity of geography is thus replaced by this *fact* which conditions any *present* understanding of Europe. In the historical-teleological *Rückfrage*, philosophy is *irremediably* associated to Greece. Derrida concludes:

In this respect, Europe should be able to be replaced by Asia or by Africa. Husserl would not dispute that Europe in its empirical facticity has no privileged relation to the idea of philosophy. And yet, Europe, philosophy's spiritual place of birth, its mysterious and immaterial residence, resists variation. There is a European *eidōs* merging itself with the idea of philosophy.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of *theoria* gets confused not only with Greece as a nation but also with Greek bodies themselves, who become philosophising rather than merely historical bodies, thus bringing forth their teleological character as an infinite "orientation toward reason" (C, 15). Indeed, the *epochē* is performed by the Greek philosopher, who alone is able to temporarily suspend the world and his or her bodily insertion in it in order to become a "nonparticipating spectator, a surveyor of the world" (C, 285). The "division of humanity"<sup>30</sup> between an "empirical group" (*ibid*) and a teleological-European one depends on the relationship of humans to their bodily existence. Because Reason can be enacted only through a certain relation to one's body, characterised by the momentary

<sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Le Problème de La Genèse Dans La Philosophie de Husserl*, 254.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 250–51.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

*suspension* of its worldly and practical immersion towards Ideality, a line is drawn between enumerative humanity [*Menschenheit*] and signifying humanity [*Menschentum*].<sup>31</sup> And this line *happens*, in Husserl's phenomenology, to be drawn between an enumerative humanity represented by the Papuan, the Chinese, the Indian, and a signifying humanity represented by the Greeks.

Husserl thus characterises the European community as founded on the work of the community of men, that is, philosophers, who can abstract themselves from their own bodies, that is, suspend their practical, corporeal orientation in order to contemplate. A curious movement thus occurs in the Lecture: Husserl has, first, to acknowledge the necessity of corporeity in the intersubjective making of communities. This essential *historical* step is itself immediately overcome by the possibility of one historical community, Europe, to open onto something *other* than historical. Europe is the one historical community that is also teleological: as it goes beyond that *embodied* historicity to attain Ideality as pure *theoria*, Europe becomes a historical-teleological community which guides all other (merely) historical communities towards Reason in an unavoidable expansion.

Intersubjectivity, in this European all-encompassing framework, becomes subordinated to teleology as a strive, both spatial (toward other historical contemporary societies) and temporal (in a progressive movement of History), toward Ideality. This subordination of bodies to Ideality is at the centre of Husserl's Eurocentrism, that is, of his claim that the European community occupies a preeminent, exemplary place within the lifeworlds. It is only through *theoria*, and thus the overcoming of *merely* corporeal-historical experience, that the European lifeworld can claim its position as the *vanguard* of the absolute meaning of the world – both the governing principle [ $\alpha\rho\chi\eta$ ] and a strive toward infinite Reason:

Only then could it be decided whether European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea, rather than being merely an empirical anthropological type like “China” or “India”; it could be decided whether the spectacle of Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of one absolute meaning. (C, 16)

*European* bodies are the only bodies who can, albeit momentarily – and thus *not* doing away with corporeity entirely –, abstract themselves from their immanence to reach Ideality. The inclusion in that teleological intersubjectivity, is more demanding than historical intersubjectivity. The acts of meaning-giving

31 Ricoeur, “Husserl et Le Sens de l'Histoire,” 298.

within the European community have to be *philosophical*: they must (temporarily, through the *epochē*) overcome embodiment to reach, in an infinite manner, *theoria* and the idea of Reason. Eurocentrism in Husserl lies in the very process of European community-making: only *certain* bodies, those who can abstract themselves from practical corporeality, are granted the *original* (*factual*, not *essential*) capacity to reach this new “stage of humanity” that is “philosophical reason” (C, 290).

One might object that precisely given Husserl's teleological framework, which aims at the universal, the split between the empirical and teleological humanity, to use Derrida's distinction, can and indeed *should* be overcome for Husserl. However, this sublation can only occur through a process of *Europeanisation*, of learning-to-go-beyond-one's-body, of learning-to-become-philosophical. In this conceptualisation, “even the Papuan” (C, 290) is included in the possibility to meaningfully interact within a community and contribute to it, but the Papuan is not capable, in Husserl's word, of interacting within the scope of the European community in his present condition – he or she would have to *Europeanise him- or herself* to be included. This is an important point, because one would be tempted to retain Husserl's insistence on the fact that European humanity carries within itself the “universality of absolute Spirit” (C, 289), and thus does not limit *in principle* and *in the long run* the scope of Reason to Europe. Husserl seems indeed to maintain the “latent possibility of a universal idea of communality and communal critique.”<sup>32</sup> However, the very process of *Europeanisation* that the “Papuan” (C, 290) has to undergo in order to be considered a legitimate universal agent of Reason is deeply problematic and shows that this universalism is an *a posteriori* universalism. The empirical-anthropological types have to be first subjected to a process of *imposition* of Reason – because such theoretical attitude cannot come from *their* bodies – in order to be legitimately considered as part of European, that is, universal humanity. This epistemic primacy of the Greek philosopher in the making of universality maintains hierarchies as it is the experience of a *conditioned* universality. The Papuan, therefore, cannot *from the beginning* participate in the “rule” (C, 16) of Reason: in this new European humanity, in which one either “becomes a philosopher or learns from philosophers” (C, 287), the Papuan is condemned first to *learn*, that is, to be subjugated to Reason, due to his or her inability – still according to Husserl – to *momentarily transcend* his/her body, however rational this body may be. Therefore, the *infinite* and *universal* scope of Reason does not make Husserl's phenomenology of community

32 Miettinen, *Husserl and the Idea of Europe*, 4.

less problematic, as the postulate of such infinity and universality is rigged by the position of superiority of European bodies in its *archē* [ἀρχή].

The European community that Husserl fleshes out, because it accounts for corporeity in a way that renders its overcoming necessary *but* restricted to certain people (Europeans *qua* philosophers), is at once ideal and exclusive. On this point, then, I agree with Mignolo,<sup>33</sup> Benhabib,<sup>34</sup> and De Schryver<sup>35</sup> that Husserl's Eurocentrism lies in the attempt to offer a neutral point of view that would legitimise the ranking of lifeworlds, in a confusion of Europe as an absolute idea and as an empirical-anthropological type. However, I add that this whole movement occurs *through the body*, which is the condition of possibility both of the recognition of lifeworlds and of the (temporary) overcoming of those lifeworlds. Corporeity thus concentrates both the intercultural potential that Husserl describes in the coexistence between bodies and the simultaneous hierarchisation of bodies along Eurocentric lines. Is a phenomenology of community necessarily condemned to its Eurocentric charge?

## 6 Merleau-Ponty's Ontology of the Flesh and (Non-Eurocentric) Community

Merleau-Ponty and Derrida both attempt to correct Husserl's Eurocentric pitfalls, which De Schryver discusses in her article. In particular, De Schryver sees Merleau-Ponty as locating Husserl's Eurocentrism (although Merleau-Ponty himself never directly identifies it *as* Eurocentrism)<sup>36</sup> in his insufficient attentiveness to the empirical dimensions of life. Husserl's "transcendental emphases"<sup>37</sup> undermine "the multiplicity of the possible forms of life."<sup>38</sup> According to De Schryver, Merleau-Ponty would want to get rid of the transcendental commitment in Husserl in order to get rid of Eurocentrism. Although I share De Schryver's aim of reflecting on a phenomenological Europe that would not be pervaded by Eurocentrism, I will argue against this

33 Mignolo, "Decoloniality."

34 Benhabib, "Another Universality."

35 De Schryver, "Empirical-Anthropological Types."

36 Merleau-Ponty comments on Husserl's *Vienna Lecture* on several occasions, notably in *Signs*, Evanston, 1964, and *Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man* in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1982), defending Husserl as being "far from chauvinism" (89). He nonetheless points toward several inconsistencies and shortcomings in Husserl's theory of interculturality.

37 De Schryver, 3.

38 Ibid.

reading of Merleau-Ponty: Merleau-Ponty's framework indeed challenges Husserl's Eurocentric phenomenology of community, but not by staying solely on de-transcendentalised grounds. Merleau-Ponty's works should be taken as a whole, and his comments on Husserl's 'Vienna Lecture' have to be understood in relation to his own concepts, which articulate a far more complex picture of bodies, communities, and Europe's place in their making. Merleau-Ponty, by *taking the body seriously*, that is, by unravelling the consequences stemming from the *fact of embodiment*, is able to produce a conceptual framework that opens the possibility of non-Eurocentricity in thinking bodies instituting and instituted by communities. This framework recasts transcendental phenomenology by stripping the transcendental *idealism* component that Husserl had retained.

The questions that Husserl raises in the *Crisis of the European Sciences* remain central to Merleau-Ponty's works: he, too, links the crisis that Europe is living through as founded on a mischaracterisation of the relation with others and with the world. As he exposes in *Sense and Non-Sense*:<sup>39</sup> "we still had the leisure to think of others as separate lives, of the war as a personal adventure; and that strange army considered itself a sum of individuals" (*SNS*, 141/164f). This misconstrued relationship of individuals to each other – their intersubjective relationships – is what drives Merleau-Ponty's later writings, especially *The Visible and The Invisible*,<sup>40</sup> in which he characterises his own effort to renew ontology as being explicitly related to Husserl's attempt in the *Crisis*: "my whole first part has to be conceived in a very direct, contemporary manner, like the *Krisis* of Husserl" (*VI*, 184/234f). This first part of the book links the problem of the European community with the problem of intersubjectivity. In it, Merleau-Ponty contends that "the I-Other problem" is a distinctively "*Western problem*" (*VI*, 221/270f). If Merleau-Ponty shares Husserl's concerns about the crisis of the European community, his analytical framework radically departs from Husserl's late phenomenology. Indeed, as we will see, Merleau-Ponty's embodied framework cannot lend itself to the same conclusions as Husserl concerning community and Europe's primacy. Merleau-Ponty's "ontology of

39 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1996. *Sens et Non-Sens*. Bibliothèque de Philosophie. Paris: Gallimard. Translation: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964). Thereafter designated as *SNS*. The references of the French original version are designated as following: "334f"

40 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1964. *Le Visible et l'invisible : Suivi de Notes de Travail*. Paris: Gallimard. Translation: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968). Thereafter designated as *VI*.

the flesh”<sup>41</sup> offers an understanding of the intersubjective making of communities that is characterised by a strictly non-archeo-teleological embodied framework, thereby avoiding the Eurocentric tropes which make Husserl’s account problematic.

## 7 The Embodied Subject: Perception, Perspectivity and Partiality

Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl (especially in *CM*, §5), approaches the question of the body, and more specifically of *other* bodies, through perception. As we have seen, in Husserl, perception is the condition for intersubjectivity to emerge. However, in this framework, no inherent limitation is posited to the phenomenon of *pairing*: pairing is that which enables the transcendental encounter, as it is the only possibility for a primal ego to meet other egos without reducing them to objects.<sup>42</sup> In the *Phenomenology of Perception*,<sup>43</sup> Merleau-Ponty reconstructs Husserlian insights on the centrality of corporeity in the making of intersubjectivity and attempts to fully draw their consequences. Therefore, the differentiation between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty does not lie in the positing of the primacy of perception over the primacy of Reason,<sup>44</sup> or in a radical rejection of the traditional phenomenological tools such as the phenomenological reduction,<sup>45</sup> but rather in the rigorous phenomenological application of Husserl’s conceptualisation of corporeity as a primarily perceptual experience. I concur with Pollard<sup>46</sup> and Smith<sup>47</sup> that Merleau-Ponty’s originality lies in building out of Husserl’s framework and taking perception seriously by drawing out its intersubjective consequences. This movement leads Merleau-Ponty to construct an account of corporeity

41 Mazzocchi, in Martin Breaugh et al., *Thinking Radical Democracy: The Return to Politics in Post-War France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 61.

42 Dodd, 4.

43 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de La Perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957). Translation: Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Donald A. Landes, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012). Thereafter designated as *PhP*.

44 Diana Coole, *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 33.

45 Taylor Carman, ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Mystery of Perception,’ *Philosophy Compass* 4, no. 4 (2009): 630–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2009.00221.x>.

46 Christopher Pollard, ‘What Is Original in Merleau-Ponty’s View of the Phenomenological Reduction?’, *Human Studies* 41, no. 3 (2018): 395–413, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-018-9471-y>.

47 Smith, in Thomas Baldwin, *Reading Merleau-Ponty: On the Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2007).

that is inevitably characterised by partiality and perspectivity, thus limiting intersubjectivity.

Perception implies, first, a questioning of the *constituting* role of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's "anonymous body" (*PhP*, 363/406f), that is, the most basic corporeal being, as animate flesh, does not perceive other bodies in the void, but *always already* in the world: "we are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in detaching ourselves from it" (*PhP*, 5/15f). This means that perception is always necessarily situated within a historical and geographical world: it is an act that is always undertaken *from somewhere* and *from a particular time*. Because of this, the presence of others is not solely *constituted*, but rather lived through the interposition of cultural objects in the world, which make me "experience the near presence of others under a veil of anonymity" (*PhP*, 363/406f). Secondly, and coeval to this first observation, our perception of the world can only be *partial*, as "reflection never has the entire world and the plurality of monads spread out and objectified before its gaze, that it only ever has a partial view and a limited power" (*PhP*, 62/88f). Perception constrains both our attitude towards the mundane world and towards *theoria* itself, since any act of reflection will necessarily be situated, preventing the possibility of complete description and understanding of experiences.<sup>48</sup>

These two modalities of perspectivity and partiality necessarily affect the relationship that bodies construct towards the world and other bodies. Merleau-Ponty makes a negative epistemic claim in putting forward the structure of perception:<sup>49</sup> he exposes the constraints which are placed upon the encounter with other bodies. The body, in that framework, cannot be seen as the "sole constitutor of sense."<sup>50</sup> Embodied agents are entangled with the world rather than intentionally directed towards it. This means that the relationship of the embodied agent to her surroundings will be characterised by a process of opaque, indeterminate, and ambiguous co-existence and of dialectical understanding rather than the analogical co-constitution that Husserl was arguing for. Merleau-Ponty's embodied agent cannot replace the Modern, constituting subject, because she cannot engage in acts of meaning-giving *alone*: she has to do it with the world (anterior and posterior to her) and with others (anterior and posterior to her). However, those acts of meaning-giving are ultimately constrained by the necessity of embodiment and its limitations:

48 Pollard, 405.

49 Bryan Smyth, 'The Primacy Question in Merleau-Ponty's Existential Phenomenology,' *Continental Philosophy Review* 50, no. 1 (March 2017): 127–49, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-016-9389-x>, 130.

50 Andrew Inkpin, 'Was Merleau-Ponty a "Transcendental" Phenomenologist?' *Continental Philosophy Review* 50, no. 1 (March 2017): 27–47, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-016-9394-0>, 32.



the intersubjectivity that is constructed ultimately remains limited to the embodied subject's sphere of ownness and hence prevents the possibility of a fully experienceable common world: "[a]s much as our consciousnesses construct through our own situations a common situation in which they communicate, it is nevertheless from the background of his own subjectivity that each projects this 'single' world" (*PhP*, 373/414f). Merleau-Ponty problematises here the Husserlian intersubjective account of community-making, which rests on a degree of harmony, cooperation, and understanding of normal subjects between themselves.<sup>51</sup> In a framework characterised by limited understanding and the unsurpassable perspectivity of one's body – a perceptual solipsism –, it is difficult to see how a phenomenology of community can emerge *at all*.

It seems, at this point, that the structure of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of community still follows Husserl's: Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, acknowledges that the primal fact of *being with others in the world* is not a sufficient condition to foster a meaningful community, although perception has already disabled the possibility of pure Ideality. The next step, then, would be for Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, to render community *meaningful*. However, Merleau-Ponty refuses to move towards teleology. On the contrary, his later works show a radical rejection of the traditional terms of phenomenology and offer an opening onto non-Eurocentric possibilities of considering community. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty recognises that the embodied framework that is put forward in the *Phenomenology* is still informed by embodied *consciousnesses*, making the negative epistemic claim of the intersubjective encounter unsurpassable. As he states himself, "the problems posed in *Ph. P* are insoluble because I start from the 'consciousness'–'object' distinction" (VI, 200/250f). In his later works, which remain more than ever concerned with the problem of the social intersubjective world, Merleau-Ponty further substantiates the position of bodies toward communities. The body, more than carrying perceptual possibilities, is also embedded in an overarching, intersubjective framework of coexistence – what Merleau-Ponty calls *flesh*. This further substantiation of bodies as not only *perceptual* but also *chiasmic*, interwoven in the flesh, is however fundamentally concerned with avoiding the deadly seas of teleology.

## 8 Merleau-Ponty's Ontology of the Flesh

Merleau-Ponty's later writings, most notably *Signs* and *The Visible and The Invisible*, move away from the embodied consciousness paradigm. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body played the role of an *agent*, that is, a subject

<sup>51</sup> Zahavi, in Sebastian Gardner and Matthew Grist, *Transcendental Turn*, 237.

which acts in the world and is still intentionally directed towards others and objects, although this intentionality is limited by perspectivalty and partiality. However, bodies do not only *see* and reflect – as they are seeing and reflecting, they are *seen* and *reflected upon*. Let us imagine a situation in which I am in a public space (a street, a forest, a town square ...). I see someone entering the space, and I begin to observe them. I am not simply sitting around, observing the other, without existing as well. Let us imagine that the other suddenly realises my presence, and our gazes meet. This is what Merleau-Ponty labels the “gaze of the other” [*regard d’autrui*] (VI, 58/84f): in the recognition of our mutual visibility, through our bodies, an exchange takes place. My perception, because it is *mine* and shows the world perspectivalty, stays interior – “I remain the sole *ipse*” (VI, 59/85f). However, the gaze that the other poses on me, displaces me, “calls into question the right I arrogated to myself to think it for all” (VI, 58/84f). As I become visible to the Other, and become aware of my own visibility, I feel “that I become flesh” (VI, 61/88f). The commonality which was exposed in the perception of the other’s body, through analogical perception and the world, is displaced. Instead, “[t]he other can enter into the universe of the seer only by assault, as a pain and a catastrophe; he will rise up (...) laterally, as a radical casting into question of the seer” (VI, 78/108f). The anonymous familiarity which I was feeling towards the other becomes a “forbidden experience” (VI, 78/108f.), which “must be if the other is really the other” (VI, 79/108f). The generality of the mutual perception of the public space and of each other is immediately truncated by our partial perspectives, in which, although they “coexist and intersect” (VI, 82/112f), remain characterised by the displacement of our proper points of view. Merleau-Ponty seems very close here to a Levinasian stance on alterity, characterised by the primordial ethical violence, which demands to “go toward the other where he is truly other, in the radical contradiction of their alterity.”<sup>52</sup> Consciousness is “put into question by the face of the other,”<sup>53</sup> without any possibility of reconciliation. But unlike Levinas, who posits another who “does not only come from context, but, without the mediation, signifies for himself,”<sup>54</sup> Merleau-Ponty does not forget embodiment. He instead retains a conception of the world as a fundamental link between alterities, “which connects our perspectives, permits transition from one to another” (VI, 13/29f), while doing away with a rigid conception of subjectivity which

52 Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 88.

53 Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre Homme* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1987), 52.

54 Ibid., 50.

still pervades Levinas's thought. The real becomes the "contact between the observer and the observed" (VI, 16/33f).

Let us continue our encounter. After having briefly observed each other, and thus mutually feeling our becoming visible to the other, the person comes to me, and starts a mundane discussion, commenting on the surroundings – the beauty of the townhall building, the weird statue next to us, the sun that feels nice. We may or may not share the same language, but we find a way of communicating through either an intermediate language which we both understand, or through one of us reaching out towards the other's mother tongue. As the discussion evolves, each of us contributes to the other's sentence, ideas, and reflections, subtly transforming each other in the process. Indeed, "speaking is not just my own initiative, listening is not submitting to the initiative of the other, because as speaking subjects we are *continuing*, we are resuming a common effort more ancient than we" (*The Prose of the World*,<sup>55</sup> 1973, 135). The very disorientation and distance which separated me from the other because of the reciprocal *mineness* of our perspectives thus becomes the *condition* for genuine encounter and dialogue to emerge. Discussion is only possible through what Merleau-Ponty names the deflection or divergence [*écart*]:

Discussion is not an exchange or a confrontation of ideas, as if each formed his own, showed them to the others, looked at theirs, and returned to correct them with his own ... Someone speaks, and immediately the others are now but certain divergencies by relation to his words, and he himself specifies his divergence in relation to them. (VI, 119/156f)

The divergence which is existential and irreducible between the other and me in that space becomes the very possibility of engaging with the other as such. Merleau-Ponty here operates a move away from intersubjectivity as an *analogical* process, as was the case for Husserl, and instead turns toward intersubjectivity as an inherently *dialectical* endeavour that is at the same time *dialogical*. Dialogue, therefore, represents both the experience of our familiarity and the limits of that familiarity because of our fundamental "non-coincidence" (VI, 124/187f), while not precluding meaning to emerge.<sup>56</sup> Apprehending the other means refusing any possibility of essentialisation of both our identities, as the

55 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Hereafter designated as *PW*.

56 One can see here the proximity with Derrida's framework of *différance*, of an alterity which is already present within oneself, as "the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the (...) production of the intervals without which the 'full' terms would not signify, would not function." Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*,

*écart* is both the singular experience of *mineness* and the openness to what is not mine (VI, 124/163f). Not unlike Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons, which entails that "the way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion,"<sup>57</sup> dialogue leads to the creation of a meaning which escapes both subjectivities undertaking the conversation. Merleau-Ponty's account of the encounter of the other through dialogue shows a dialectic not of constitution but of *institution*, understood as the "establishment in an experience (...) of constructed dimensions (...) in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense and will make a *sequel*, a history" (*Institution and Passivity*,<sup>58</sup> 2015, 8–9/50f). This institution is mutual and reversible: as I institute meaning upon the other, the other similarly institutes meaning upon me. The other becomes "instituting-instituted, i.e., I project myself in the other and the other in me" (*ibid*, 6/46f).

This is when another intersubjectivity emerges in Merleau-Ponty. The other and I, in the experience of mutual institution, are dissolved as mutually excluding subjects into a web which unites us. This is what Merleau-Ponty means by *flesh*: it is "not matter, is not mind, is not substance" (VI, 139/181f), but instead an "incarnate principle" in the sense of "an 'element' of Being" (*ibid*). The flesh designates a "non-identical identity"<sup>59</sup> in which beings can relate to one another as part of a common world, which is not based on the particular historicities of communities, but primarily on the encounter itself between bodies.

## 9 Revisiting Horizons

In this framework, where flesh and institution form the background of the encounter between bodies, the question of the making of communities emerges in radically different terms than Husserl's. Although both share the notion of infinity in the making of communities because of the intersubjectivity principle, which in Husserl as Merleau-Ponty signals the impossibility of *closing History*, Merleau-Ponty's late ontology questions both the possibility of finding an *archē*, an origin (which rested in the philosopher as the archonte

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and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 27.

57 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 383.

58 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution dans l'histoire personnelle et publique : notes de cours au Collège de France, 1954–1955*, 2015. Hereafter designated as *IP*.

59 Mazzochi, in Breauth et al, 69.

of humanity in Husserl) and the possibility of teleologically *progressing* towards any ideal at all. Bodies within a community belong, without any primacy of one body onto the other, to a common structure of “chiasmic becoming,”<sup>60</sup> where the horizon of comprehension of the Other is a totality that is always in construction and can never end up in a “synthesis” (VI, 211/261f). Just like the hand can at once touch and be touched (VI, 9/24f), while needing the *écart* to feel either touch or being touched, bodies are ceaselessly creating meaning, engaging in a fusion of horizons, while leaving the horizon as always in construction and never final. Unlike Husserl, who envisages an archeo-teleological expansion from the philosopher to the philosophical community and culminating in the European humanity, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the impossibility of both a definitive *origin* – a monogenealogy – and a final understanding, of a possibility of transparent translation. Merleau-Ponty displaces the question of historical-teleological communities into transcendental “interworlds” (VI, 269/317f), concerned by the possibility of their self-understanding and necessarily going beyond themselves as their contours are defined. Interworlds are particular intermundane spaces (which are not *solely* spatial spaces) of encounter of subjects. However, unlike the Husserlian lifeworld characterised by the fundamental feeling of familiarity and norms,<sup>61</sup> interworlds, because they are founded on dialectical intersubjectivity, are inherently characterised by openness to the unfamiliar, strange other, and the to-come, as a world that is “always in the process of an unfinished incarnation” and as always going already beyond itself (VI, 209–210/259f):

The other is no longer so much a freedom seen from without as destiny and fatality, a rival subject for a subject, but he is caught up in a circuit that connects him to the world, as we ourselves are, and consequently also in a circuit that connects him to us – and this world is to us, is intermundane common space. (VI, 269/317f)

The horizon of indeterminacy forms a crucial part of the Being which Merleau-Ponty is describing. It is the very transcendental *condition* of the encounter with the Other, because this encounter is embedded in a larger framework of the flesh. Rather than a simple modality of Being, the horizon is a “new type of being” (VI, 149/193f) which pervades our approach to the world:

60 Coole, 171.

61 Steinbock, *Home and Beyond*, 233.

No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of things held together (...): it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it. His body and the distances participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being. (VI, 148–149/193f)

Bodies, therefore, become chiasmic beings, that is, differentiated corporeities still embedded within a larger, common structure defined as flesh. This flesh is itself characterised by a *sense*, both a meaning that is ceaselessly constructed by encounters and a direction toward which it is headed, that is, a *horizon* of possibility and actuality. This horizon, however, because it is primarily concerned with the encounter and the displacement which occurs in the *écart* between two bodies, that is, in non-coincidence, cannot be archeo-teleological. Indeed, it neither begins in a place that is recognisable and definable in its *boundaries* – the interworlds are immediately disfigured the instant they are created. Additionally, the horizon cannot provide a determined end for humanity. Because “the human world is an open and unfinished system,”<sup>62</sup> it can be accounted for negatively, as a non-teleology – because “such a philosophy cannot tell that humanity will be realised” (*HT*) –, but also positively, as the *promise*<sup>63</sup> which it holds. The unfinished, ever-to-come horizon becomes “the ability to enter into others and re-enact their deeds” (*SNS*, 94/115f), through our difference, thus ceaselessly creating and (self-)transforming the horizons in which we are caught up, in a transcendental yet never absolute way. Merleau-Ponty recasts here phenomenology as transcendental philosophy, but not as transcendental idealism: idealities cease to be the highest good of community, as was the case in Husserl. On the contrary, they are altogether ungraspable in their purity, as they are always pervaded by *bodily* experience and the impossibility of a complete reduction.<sup>64</sup> This new transcendentalism consequently radically recasts Husserl’s theory of interculturality, which had

62 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980). Hereafter designated as *HT*.

63 Again, the similarity to Derrida’s *to-come* is striking: “for democracy remains to come. Always indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but belonging to the time of the promise.” Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London: London: Verso, 2005), 101.

64 Hayden Kee, “Phenomenological Reduction in Merleau-Ponty’s ‘The Structure of Behavior’: An Alternative Approach to the Naturalization of Phenomenology,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 1 (2020): 15–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12452>.

been concerned with the teleological expansion of Ideality. For Merleau-Ponty, the encounter within and between historical units follows the same profoundly *historical* process of mutual visibility, reciprocity, intertwinement, and the decidedly unfinished deed. Merleau-Ponty proposes a phenomenology of community as processes of institution, meaning-making and -giving, fundamentally characterised by openness and reciprocity. Interworlds are, on this account, porous, permeable, ever-changing units, in which the encounter is at once momentary and transformative. In this interwoven spatial and temporal coexistence, the European community is but one interworld amongst others: it cannot be granted any sort of primacy because of the very structure of embodied intersubjective process. European exemplarity lies not in it being the vanguard of rational humanity, as was the case for Husserl, but as being a *sample* of humanity's diversity and ceaseless meanderings. What characterises Europe, then, in *particular*, would have to be the object of a phenomenology of the *European* community.

## 10 Conclusion

This paper attempted to think a possible way in which we could apprehend community in phenomenological terms which would not fall into the Husserlian trope of Eurocentrism. I showed that Husserl's historical-teleological phenomenology cannot but grant superiority to the European lifeworld, which, although departing from corporeity as the other lifeworlds, ultimately tries to detach itself from the body by "reasoning philosophically" (C, 290), that is, actualising *theoria* in an archeo-teleological manner. Husserl has to acknowledge the importance of corporeity in the making of communities in order to draw a distinction between *historical* communities which exist only through the body and the European teleological community, which exist through the body *and beyond it*. I then argued that Merleau-Ponty's conceptual framework is able to retain Husserl's fascinating insight on corporeity and strip it from its Eurocentric colour by rigorously applying Husserl's insights on corporeity. I reconstructed his phenomenology in light of the overarching question of the making of an open community. Through perception, which recognises the primordial perspectivity and partiality of bodies, and through the later concept of *flesh*, which embeds bodies in a framework of coexistence that is stripped from both *archē* and teleology, Merleau-Ponty is able to resist Husserl's monogenealogy (the European community stemming from the beyond-bodily-philosopher) and his teleology of bodies, on which his phenomenology of community rested. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology rather

points towards the possibility of a non-Eurocentric intersubjectivity, in which communities are necessarily situated, partial, porous, and rooted in intercultural coexistence, therefore preventing the very possibility of the epistemic *primacy* of one community over another. Merleau-Ponty's European intersubjective community thus leaves room for thinking the possibility of politics away from Eurocentrism, which does not mean that Merleau-Ponty resolves the problem of *domination* altogether. One might point toward the displacement of the question of politics towards bodies within a Merleau-Pontyan framework, particularly in the perceptual encoding of social hierarchies, along class, ability, racial, sexual, and gendered lines. One may wonder, then, how Merleau-Ponty's theory of coexistence can make room for the difficulty of a properly *symmetrical* intersubjective framework to emerge, as perception is necessarily always already a *political* and *social* perception, predicated on social structures which exist through power.

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