

ART HISTORY

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PHENOMENOLOGY AND INTERPRETATION

BEYOND THE FLESH

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The ethical quandaries surrounding issues of subjectivity and the interpretation of art often revolve around the questions of who is representing, who is represented, and who is looking; and around how these dynamics produce and reproduce visual systems of power on the basis of gender, race, and libidinal desire. On a slightly different trajectory, phenomenology interrogates how we interpret in the first place. Though it presumes that the artwork and the spectator situate one another within a shared network of sense, this is not to say that information is easily communicated between them. The viewer's task is not to ascertain the artwork's objective meaning, but rather to respond to the artwork with the question, 'how does this artwork mean to me?' The ethical charge of this questioning lies in its acknowledgement that the meaning of the artwork is not inherent but rather presents itself to the spectator, historian, or critic through the body's actions, reactions or non-actions. Meaning may be either enabled or encumbered by the viewer's response to the artwork.

In this way a phenomenological approach to writing art history usually entails an analysis of how an artwork's meaning presents itself through the spectator's field of perception. It is predicated on an understanding of the meaning of the work of art as co-extensive with – as defining and defined by – the spatial, temporal and material conditions it shares with the viewer. What is often at stake in a phenomenological interpretation is the issue of how the artwork brings these conditions to attention. The most significant contribution of phenomenology, however, is not simply that it raises questions about this embodied experience of art, but that it calls both the body itself and the meaning of the artwork into question through one another. Otherwise put, a phenomenological standpoint presumes that the work of art and the viewer are enmeshed in a contingent encounter, in which 'embodiment' is neither a natural or predetermined position from which to interpret, nor is the meaning of the artwork inherent to the object. Phenomenology has thus served as a counterpoint to art-historical analyses that explain the meaning of an artwork through deference to the historic context (or socio-political framework) from which it emerged. That is to say, it challenges the presumption that the artwork's meaning is confined to its historic period, as well as the presumed stability of a given context. This is not to suggest that phenomenology ignores the ideological apparatuses at work in

artistic production and reception. On the contrary, it addresses them in the most trenchant way by investigating how structures of language and power materialize in the artwork, the spectator, and the relationship between. In this way, it asserts that the materiality of the artwork, and the way in which it presents itself to the viewer, actually constitutes what we understand to be 'historic context'.

Insofar as phenomenology takes the relation between the viewer and the artwork to be variable, it foregrounds the fact that the writing of art history, and particularly making claims about the meaning of the artwork, takes place through acts of interpretation. While it may seem that this would invite a kind of relativism – as though as many meanings could be 'applied' to an artwork as people to 'read into' it – in fact the real risk is not that phenomenology might invoke a plurality of meanings, but, quite the opposite, that it might permit a solipsistic interpretation that would close down the potential meanings of the artwork. That is to say, the main concern is that the historian's reading of the artwork cloaks it in a narrative that affirms her or his preconceived judgement of it, thus limiting the possibilities and power of its meaning.

The spectre of solipsism is not merely present in the discipline of art history, but appears to have haunted phenomenology since its inception. Indeed, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh, which is predicated on the entanglement of the subject with others and with things of the world, aimed to deflect various charges of solipsism. He insists: 'We are interrogating our experience precisely in order to know how it opens us to what is not ourselves.'¹ As I will discuss, the intertwinement with the other, or with the art object, forecloses a totalized knowledge of it. It does mean, however, that one is always privy to the object's invisibility, the way in which it defies categorization, judgement, and historical narration. The crucial issues for art historians in their deployment of phenomenology, then, are, firstly, how the embodied entanglement with the artwork reveals its resistance to preconceived meanings, and, secondly, how its taciturn quality gives rise to meanings beyond the restrictions of the interpreter's assumptions.

Perhaps it is precisely because phenomenology has had to contend with the charge of solipsism that it has also had to account for the ethical dilemmas of interpretation. Though a phenomenological approach in the wake of Merleau-Ponty often emphasizes the spectator's individual (because bodily) experience of the work of art, it nevertheless also posits this encounter as a precondition for an intimate awareness of the material object and a description of it that responds to its subtleties. It therefore positions the viewer in a state of extreme openness to the artwork that allegedly precedes any preconceived notions about it, and gives rise to the inevitable crystallization of sense into knowledge – be it an aesthetic judgement, historical categorization, or conceptual assessment. The phenomenology of art is located at the crossroads between a receptive mode of confrontation – one that is acutely aware of the way in which the artwork initially presents itself to the senses – and a commitment to making a critical statement about what and how the artwork means in the history of art now. Otherwise put, the writing of art history generates a disarticulation between the embodied experience of the object in its sensorial excess and the interpretation one brings to it. The ethical impetus of phenomenology is to reveal this disarticulation as it occurs.

In speaking about phenomenology as an approach to art history that is attentive to the artwork's alterity, I will focus on three areas in particular: embodiment, intentionality, and mode of confrontation. My goal is to show how each of these recurrent themes galvanizes the ethical questions of art-historical interpretation. I will examine post-1960s art, with particular focus on post-minimalist sculpture and the rise of installation art, as way of highlighting the stakes of a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology's influence in the discipline is more varied than I can undertake to explain in depth here.² This discussion aims to highlight its strengths and drawbacks, as well as point towards its convergences with other methods of art-historical inquiry.

THE PROBLEMATICS OF THE FLESH

Phenomenology is often associated with the notion of embodiment, and this is largely due to the considerable influence of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings. In the 1960s, that theorist's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1959) had a profound impact on artists, critics, and art historians, particularly in the United States. Though since then other theorists of phenomenology have come to the foreground of the discipline, his work still poses a number of ethical challenges that are worthwhile considering further.³

Merleau-Ponty initiated a line of questioning on the *a priori* conditions of perception. He hypothesized that perception is founded on a pre-objective awareness of oneself as interwoven in a network of sense with other people, objects, and the world. Moreover, each of the body's senses, particularly the senses of touch and sight, inform one another to produce a coherent perception. His term 'the aesthesiological body' best captures this notion of a subject that is both physically embedded in the fabric of the surrounding world and wholly geared towards garnering sense from it with every facet of the body, in its every motion, gesture, and expression.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty deliberates on the issue of how and why one perceives the world and things as stable and coherent, despite one's mobility and infinitely shifting perspective. He puts forward a critique of Kantian transcendentalism, which argues that the perception of objects as constant results from our logical understanding of those objects. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty maintains that prior to any concept of the world, the body is engaged with it in a pre-logical encounter by which the subject comes to grips with objects as part of a wider system that constitutes the spatial and temporal environment. Because of this pre-cognitive multi-sensorial contact, the world has a unified appearance within the perceptual field. Among the most significant aspects of Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of the bodily experience are his insistence on the primacy of the sense of touch, and his emphasis on the active, expressive body. He argues that tactility gives the fullest articulation of the object's visual properties. From the sense of touch, which localizes an object in its environment, the other senses formulate an understanding of that object's implicit nature, including its colour and organization in relation to other things and one's own body. For this reason, perception is not achieved by senses that passively await stimulation from the external world, but rather is delivered through the movements, gestures and expressions of the body.

In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty further developed his argument that perception arises from the body's intimate connection to the world. Through the metaphor of the chiasm he describes an intercorporeal relationship, whereby what we know of ourselves and others is generated by a sense of the body's flesh as intertwined with, what he calls, 'the flesh of the world'. The ontology of the flesh, however, elucidates more than a physical connection with the external world. The figure of the chiasm has both bodily and linguistic connotations. Derived from the Greek letter 'chi' (X), it implies a criss-crossing structure, as is found, for example, in the optic chiasm, the point in the brain where the optic nerves from the right visual field cross to the left side of the brain and vice versa. In rhetoric, a chiasmus is a figure of speech involving two clauses, in which the second clause inverts the order of words in the first, as in the phrase 'Fair is foul and foul is fair'. This structural intertwining and inversion is the basis of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the constitutive relation between the body and language, between the subject and the other, between the seer and the visible, between the one who touches and the one who is touched. Perception does not come simply from seeing and touching; it is developed through the sense of being seen and touched as well. The subject of the aesthesiological body knows itself as both subject and object to another, is both seer and seen. These two domains of experience, the visible and the invisible, respectively, are the reverse and obverse sides of embodied perception. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty extends this model of reversibility to the relationship between the senses of vision and touch, postulating that the latent tangibility of the world is the condition of its visibility. Vision is founded on pre-cognitive touching, gesture and movement, and thus the look behaves like a hand that 'envelops, palpates and espouses visible things'.

For this reason, the term 'embodiment', as it appears in the history of post-minimalist sculpture, and more recently in that of installation and virtual art, is understood to refer to the spectator's state of quasi-immersion in the artwork. A phenomenological interpretation often assumes that the viewer is not merely physically located in relation to the artwork, but is actually incorporated by it, and formulated as a viewing subject through this corporeal relation. But even this description does not do justice to the more complex predicament of the chiasmic relation, for if it were merely the case that the artwork formulated the viewing subject, in the sense that it prefabricated how the viewer sees it, there would be no need for critical or historical interpretation. Perception would be reproduced from one viewer to the next. A phenomenological account of the artwork would merely describe how it 'enframes' the viewer (to borrow a phrase from Heidegger) as though art is merely a technological apparatus that anticipates and produces its own viewer.⁴ In fact, Merleau-Ponty's fleshly ontology prevents us from understanding the relationship between art and the spectator in this way precisely because of his fundamentally ambiguous definition of the flesh.

Judith Butler astutely asks what exactly Merleau-Ponty means when he refers to the 'flesh', for this term is not to be taken as simply synonymous with the body *per se*.⁵ It might be more accurate to say that the flesh is the shared corporeal condition between oneself and the world which makes visibility possible. Thus, corporeity is not limited to the individual body; it is the more generalized elemental state of the world. Merleau-Ponty writes: 'The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element", in

the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being.⁶ Merleau-Ponty goes to great pains to expand his notion of perception from individual sense reception to a broader notion of the visible that evokes the body’s touch, motility, and expression and coalesces it into a ‘style of being’. He thus explains the discrete body’s entrenchment in and communicability with the world at large.

Interestingly, this relation between the body and the world, between oneself and another, between vision and touch – a relation that Merleau-Ponty describes as ‘reversibility’ – comes to fruition in *The Visible and the Invisible* through an analogy to language and speech:

As there is a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, and as at the point where the two metamorphoses cross what we call perception is born, so also there is a reversibility of the speech and what it signifies; the signification is what comes to seal, to close, to gather up the multiplicity of the physical, physiological, linguistic means of elocution, to contract them into one sole act, as the vision comes to complete the aesthesiological body.⁷

In this way, embodiment itself is not just a corporeal foundation, but is the prerequisite for thinking outside oneself and interacting with that which lies beyond the horizon of one’s own being. There is thus a certain malleability to Merleau-Ponty’s definition of the flesh that has led art historians away from the body as a topic (the question of how bodies are represented in art, for example) and toward questions about how the body functions as a locus of transaction; how discursive relations are incorporated; and, more strongly, how this process of incorporation in the visible (the relation between artwork, spectator, and the visible world) constitutes the trajectory of an artwork’s meaning. The art historian’s goal is therefore not to uncover an objective meaning, but to explain the work of art through reflection on the tenor of its appearance to her or him, and how this appearance positions her or him as a viewing subject.

A phenomenological description, however, is not meant to concretize this relation between viewer and object; rather, it enacts what Merleau-Ponty terms an interrogative mode, a way of following experience through a questioning of it without deducing a thesis or definition of Being (whether the artwork’s or the spectator’s) that could be realized as fact. Since phenomenology takes a prior ontological connection between the viewer and the object as a starting point, the goal is not to question the meaning of the object as a discrete entity. Instead, it is to ask what brings the subject and the object into relation, such that the question of their meaning to one another might be posed in the first place. In this respect, Butler argues, Merleau-Ponty concurs with Heidegger’s insistence in *Being and Time* that the ontological relation that binds subject and object leads the path of questioning, and that it is in being guided by this interrogation that meaning is discovered.⁸ Thus, when Merleau-Ponty declares that interrogation is an ontological organ that bears the ultimate relation to Being, he echoes Heidegger’s statement that ‘in what is asked about there lies also *that which is to be found out by the asking* [*das Efragte*] ... Inquiry, as a kind of seeking, must be guided beforehand by what is sought. So the meaning of Being must already be available to us in some way.’⁹



1 Robert Morris, *Untitled (L-beams)*, 1965. Stainless steel in 3 parts, dimensions variable. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art (gift of Howard and Jean Lipman). Photo: © Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Bearing in mind the primacy of the ontological connection between the subject and the object, we can understand phenomenology's influence in North America in minimalist and postminimalist art beginning in the 1960s. Michael Fried's condemnation of minimalist art as theatrical, for example, is at its basis an observation that the art objects were conceived and built with the express purpose of acknowledging the spectator's place in the space of exhibition. The artist Robert Morris thereby justifies this alleged 'theatricality' by claiming that there was a trend in post-war art to expose the process of production as part of the artwork itself, a move that revealed the ontological primacy of the subject-object relation. In positing the artwork as unformed, or at different stages in its formation, artists presented the artwork in a state prior to its emergence as a distinct object. They therefore positioned the basis of the artwork's meaning in the interaction between its raw materiality and the bodily behaviour of either the artist or the viewer. In his 1970 essay, 'Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated', Morris traces this tendency to Jackson Pollock, whom he sees as one of the first artists to attempt this surfacing of the interaction between materials and artistic process. The drip technique, he suggests, directly involved the use of the entire body as opposed to merely the hand and body. Pollock investigated how paint behaves within the restraints of gravity in such a way that the canvases divulge the possibilities of form that arise from the tension between the body's movement and the set of constraints imposed by the natural world and the materials. In this way, Morris concludes,

postwar art became engaged in making its means visible in the finished work. By 'means', he is referring to the 'factors of bodily possibility, the nature of materials and physical laws, the temporal dimensions of process and perception'.¹⁰ He does not merely speak of a stable relation between the artwork and the body that views it, but makes the stronger contention that the artwork is predicated on the exploration of the limits and possibilities of bodily behaviour. To retrieve the artwork's meaning, then, would be to track this exploration.

In the same way that Morris emphasizes the bodily behaviours involved in the process of making the artwork, Rosalind Krauss underscores the bodily behaviours at stake in viewing it. Indeed, she argues that Morris's work thematizes the very gestures by which one perceives the world. In *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977) she suggests that Morris's *Untitled (L-beams)* is analogous to the human body (plate 1). For this work, Morris positioned three identical large plywood Ls in different positions relative to the ground; one upended, another on its side, and a third standing on its two ends. Though each is 'objectively' the same, the *a priori* structure of the beams is not visible. The appearance of their difference from one another is the basis of their sculptural meaning. Morris's work, she argues, addresses itself to the way in which our bodies and gestures are dependent on the other beings who perceive them. The L-beams 'serve as a kind of cognate for this naked dependence of intention and meaning upon the body as it surfaces into the world in every external particular of its movement and gestures'.¹¹ Morris uses phenomenology as a framework through which to understand a trend towards revealing the means of the artwork's production, and thus sees artistic meaning as rooted in the relation between the artist and the object. However, Krauss deploys it in order to disrupt the notion that the object possesses an inherent meaning (which is usually taken as the expression of, and an analogy for, the inner psychological life of the artist), and locates it instead in the relation between the art object and the viewer.

There are two important implications to this understanding of the artwork's contingency: first, it presents a model of interpretation that is based on the communication between viewer and object; and second, insofar as this communication is predicated on a shared language, it raises a dilemma concerning the point at which an object's expression may depart from a viewer's interpretation. Since the meaning of the artwork is activated in the encounter between object and viewer as two discrete entities, it is their separation from one another that sparks interrogation, gesture and movement in the first place. Merleau-Ponty writes: 'We understand then why we see the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being . . . It is that the thickness of the flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.'¹² Once again, it is significant that Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh, and particularly the embodied subject's interrogative mode of encounter with others and the world, operates under a linguistic model. As Butler argues, the relations to which the 'interconnective tissue', or flesh, give rise are parallel to a linguistic web in which the totality of language supersedes apparent differences.¹³

Butler's observation raises the question, if, as Heidegger suggests, one's interrogation of the world is already guided by it on the basis of one's ontological connection to it, does this not ultimately close down the possibility that the world (including the Other, and, as in this case, the art object) can express something

more than or different from what one already expects to perceive in any given encounter? In art history, does phenomenology prevent new meanings from arising in presuming to link the object and the viewer together in the condition of shared flesh? If the object invites a particular look, and a specific path of questioning, what allows the possibility of reading it differently? How can one ask new questions if all the answers are presupposed? Or, to modify the question, can a different look ever find its place in the chiasmic relation between the seer and the object?

Luce Irigaray criticizes Merleau-Ponty on precisely the grounds that the flesh ontology risks masking the alterity of the other and the subject from one another in the totality of the embodied relation. Irigaray argues that the model of the chiasm never delineates a recognizable distinction between oneself and the flesh of the world, so that the phenomenological subject exists in a state of primordial indeterminacy akin to being in the womb. Because Merleau-Ponty does not identify a point of birth and separation for the subject, the visible world becomes like the interior of the maternal body to which the subject has unencumbered tactile access. The subject never really sees what lies outside the sensory network of the flesh in which she or he is immersed, and therefore cannot see the other and the world from outside an egocentric position. The flesh is a totalizing structure that reaffirms the subject's centrality in the world through bodily perception. Perception occurs within a 'fog' or 'mist' of the seer's intentions, and the subject is thus incapable of a truly reciprocal exchange with the other. Irigaray maintains that this failure to recognize a process of differentiation results in a model of perception based on solipsism. All sensation becomes translated into 'Sameness', a visible world that merely fulfils one's perceptual expectations so that no true understanding of difference can register. She writes:

The world cannot be perceived without language, yet all language exists virtually in silence. All that remains to be said is that the world is isomorphic with the subject and vice versa, and the whole is sealed up in a circle ... According to Merleau-Ponty, energy plays itself out in the backward-and-forward motion of a loom. But weaving the visible and my look in this way, I could just as well say that I close them off from myself. The texture becomes increasingly tight, taking me into it, sheltering me there but imprisoning me as well.¹⁴

Irigaray's assessment of the flesh ontology raises the doubt that there is ever an opportunity for the subject to perceive the alterity of the other and the world. Her focus is on how the intimacy of the chiasm both relies on metaphors of the feminine body, and at the same time disavows the specificity of that body. Thus, sexual difference is negated in order to reinforce male subjectivity as the default, central, and universal position of perception. This analysis is equally applicable to other differences; as post-colonial theorists have explained, differences such as race, religion and nationality are defined within a framework that supports and justifies the ideology of the colonizing empire. At its core, Irigaray's argument is that at the threshold of one's perceptual field all differences are inhibited or construed in such a way as to reinforce what the seer already knows about his or her place in the world. The seer is never really shaken, touched, or moved out of this solipsistic standpoint by that which does not fulfil the intention of his or her look. The act of seeing and the visible world are merely extensions of the seer.

Interestingly, Irigaray seizes Merleau-Ponty's idea of an interrogative mode, and indeed it becomes the basis of an ethical relation that would allow irreducible difference to register. For Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty does not fulfil the promise of this possibility, however. She argues that 'the phenomenology of the flesh that Merleau-Ponty attempts is without question(s). It has no spacing or interval for the freedom of questioning between two.'¹⁵ What is required is a disruption of the system of signification that sublimates differences, an ethical imperative that is initiated for Irigaray by the paradigmatic questions: 'Who art thou? ... Who am I? What sort of event do we represent for each other when together?' The ethical relation, then, is one that both recognizes the co-implication of oneself with the other, and at the same time gives rise to a recognition of the other's excess beyond that co-implication.

THE INTENTIONAL EXPERIENCE AND EMBODIED ACTION

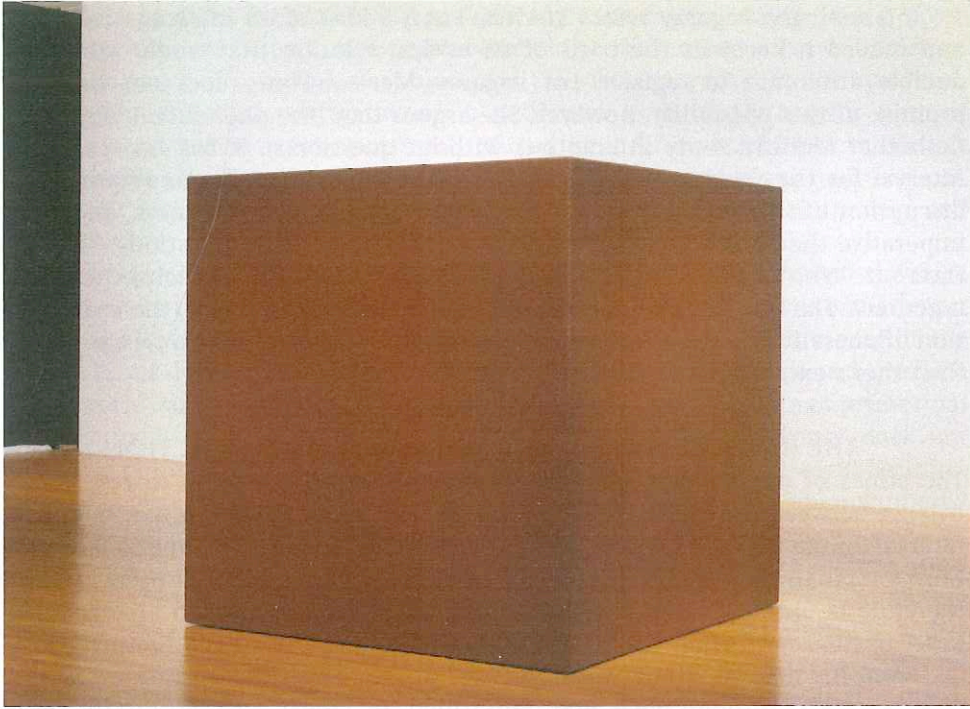
The ethics of phenomenological interpretation, it seems, comes to rest on the balance between the seer's intentionality and her or his return to the 'spacing or interval for the freedom of questioning between two'. To speak of intentionality is to raise a topic that has been at the heart of phenomenology since Husserl. It might therefore be useful to investigate the term, and its appearance in art history, in order to consider further the ethical terrain of phenomenological interpretation.

From his mentor, Franz von Brentano, Husserl inherited an interest in how objects appear through what Brentano called 'psychical acts'. Essentially, Brentano initiated a line of questioning into how objects are perceived through psychical phenomena such as judgements, emotions and presentations (by which he means the manner in which consciousness refers to an object). Husserl ultimately argues that there is no perception of objects without these psychical acts and he binds the two together under the term 'intentional experience'. He notes, 'There are ... not two things present in experience, we do not experience the object and beside it the intentional experience directed upon it, there are not even two things present in the sense of a part and a whole which contains it: only one thing is present, the intentional experience ...'¹⁶

Using an example that calls to mind Tony Smith's *Die* (plate 2), Husserl demonstrates not only the inextricability of the perceived object and the visual experience but also how intentional experience reveals the object as a stable entity. He writes:

I see a thing, e.g. this box, but I do not see my sensations. I always see *one and the same box*, however it may be turned and tilted ... In the flux of experienced content we imagine ourselves to be in perceptual touch with one and the same object ... For we experience a 'consciousness of identity' ... Must we not reply that different sensational contents are given, but that we perceive or 'take them in the same sense' and that to *take them in this sense is an experienced character through which the 'being' of the object for me is first constituted.*¹⁷

The intentional experience is at the core of perception; the presentation of the thing, in this case a box, constitutes its essence (being) for the seer. In other words, the subject's perception of the object reveals its essence. Cinching together the being of the thing with perception, Husserl turns attention away from empirical statements about the world and towards questions of how it appears.



2 Tony Smith, *Die*, 1962. Steel, 6 × 6 × 6 ft. New York: Museum of Modern Art. © Tony Smith (ARS). Photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

In doing so, however, Husserl opens the possibility of an anthropomorphic world, in which things do not merely exist in and of themselves, but rather as things that present themselves quasi-consciously to the subject. In the case of the perception of a box, the sense of it comes as an experienced character, or a 'consciousness of identity'. When Michael Fried addresses Smith's *Die* in 'Art and Objecthood', he emphasizes how the object's theatricality stems from its anthropomorphism. At 6 feet high, the object stands at an imposingly human scale, a fact that shows how, in its very construction, the object acknowledges, and aims to interact with, the spectator who views it. As a stable object that is identical from every vantage point, *Die* overcomes any influx of sense that may come from moving around it. In this respect, it seemingly presents its 'being' as a cube to the viewer.

Yet in anticipating a viewer and addressing itself to her or him, *Die* demonstrates its own intentionality, reversing the relation so that it appears not simply as an object but as an 'other' who is experiencing, or at least responding to, the spectator. Through this shifting between its status as an object for the viewer and as an anthropomorphic object for whom the viewer is the object, *Die* implements an awareness of the reciprocity underlying the intentional experience. *Die*'s anthropomorphism brings the matter of reversibility to bear on intentionality. And it is the possibility of a reversible relation that Merleau-Ponty grapples with in his model of the chiasm, and which for Irigaray is the threshold to the domain of ethics.

For Merleau-Ponty, the intentional experience is mediated by the body, and not merely by psychical acts. Indeed, in his later work, he attempts to completely

relocate the intentional experience to the body and eschew notions such as 'acts of consciousness' or 'states of consciousness'.¹⁸ Indeed, what is most relevant for Irigaray, despite her critique, is that Merleau-Ponty shows a striking awareness of the complexity of the meeting of two intentional perceivers. He describes the coupling of oneself with another in such a way that the subject is thrown out of the world she or he already knows, and returns to a state of exploration, not just of the other, but of oneself through the other. As soon as we see other seers, he explains:

I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes ... For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying [itself to it] carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange statute which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated, by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life ... And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression.¹⁹

Much as Merleau-Ponty attempts to forestall the charge of solipsism in his elucidation of the embodied subject, Irigaray insists that in the very bodily gestures of expression, the subject ultimately fabricates the other through a projection of the intentional experience and ultimately re-establishes her or his own perception as primary. Thus, she posits that reversibility is in actual fact a sort of animism in which seeing and the visible, oneself and the other are merely two metamorphoses of oneself.²⁰ She suggests further that when the body and its expressions 'apply themselves', they are not seeking a reciprocal touch, but are reinforcing and repeating the relation that the subject already knows. And so, in Merleau-Ponty's many vivid examples of how touch elaborates vision and creates a passage to the world and others, a certain hierarchy is established through active gestures that ultimately cover over the other and the world: my hands form tirelessly; my body clasps the other's body; my eye envelops and palpates the world, and so forth.

The difficulty of bringing the intentional experience to bear on the embodied condition appears, then, in the conflation of actions that deliver tactile sense with those that seek a stable and defined sense of the object, the other, and the world. The interrogative mode that Merleau-Ponty advocates is perhaps at odds with the expressive actions that forge the intentional experience of the embodied subject. Or it may be more accurate to say that the subject's interrogation through expressive actions closes her or him off from the world and the other. This criticism of the relation between the subject and another person might be equally pertinent to the relation between a spectator and an art object. This is not to suggest an easy parallel between other people and objects, but rather to propose that there is always a general risk that the subject inhibits reciprocal communication with the world in her or his interrogation of it.

It is with this dilemma in mind that we might consider Alex Potts' discussion of sculpture in the late 1960s and early 1970s.²¹ Potts argues that at this time artists were questioning the parameters that defined the medium of sculpture; more precisely they were challenging the presumption that sculpture should be defined in terms of a harmonious relationship between the material of the object and its structural form. He posits that painters and sculptors alike were blurring



3 Joseph Beuys, *Felt Suit*, 1970. Felt suit and wooden hanger. © ARS, NY. Photo: Tate, London/ Art Resource, NY.

the definitions of their respective media by privileging the tactile and through an unrelenting focus on the raw materials of the object, a move that subsequently led to the disappearance of the category of sculpture altogether. Where traditionally, a presumed separation of visual and tactile senses had underpinned the distinction between painting and sculpture as media, in the 1960s the widespread investment in the substance of artistic materials forged a common field of practice between the two. Joseph Beuys, for example, cultivated a shared space for two-dimensional and three-dimensional media in *Felt Suit* (1970), a work that like many of his projects considers the physical qualities of its material, felt (plate 3). It does so, however, in such a way that it negates formal structure. Though *Felt Suit* is suspended from a wooden hanger on the wall, the fabric is heavy and one is instantly aware of its mass. Furthermore, its thick bulk and stark lines override the human form that a piece of clothing would normally connote. Like his many other works which foreground unprocessed materials such as fat, wax and wood, Beuys' use of felt overturns the notion that a work of art emerges through the process of endowing an inchoate material with a compelling structure.²²

Significantly, Potts suggests that the insistent attentiveness to the tactile sense evoked by unformed materials displaces the structural qualities associated



4 Claes Oldenburg, *Floor Cake*, 1962. Synthetic polymer paint and latex on canvas filled with foam rubber and cardboard boxes, 58 3/8 in × 9 ft 6 1/4 in × 58 3/8 in. © Claes Oldenburg. Photo: Museum of Modern Art, NY/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

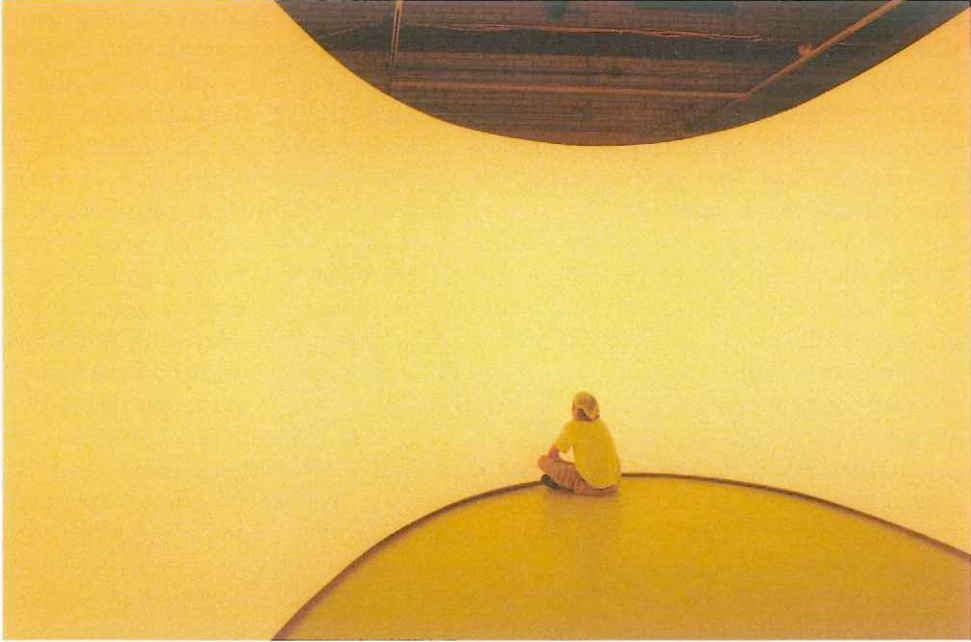
with sculpture, such as plastic form. Indeed, in the case of *Floor Cake* by Claes Oldenburg the overwhelming invitation to touch effects the deformation of the art object (plate 4). Here, the sculpture of an oversized slice of cake, made of canvas and stuffed loosely with foam rubber, invites the sense of touch by evoking food that is handled and tasted. At the same time, because it is enlarged and pliable the work verges on an amorphous heap of matter. It is therefore precisely because *Floor Cake*, in its gigantic size and yielding shape, anticipates and pursues the spectator's touch, or at least a tactile eye, that its armature has collapsed.

Potts maintains that before the 1960s the understanding of medium specificity was grounded in the presupposition that the structure of the object emerged from the mind's way of processing the distinct sensory effects produced by the particular medium. In the case of sculpture, the form of the object would figure the mind's grasp of three-dimensional space delivered from the sense of touch. However, works such as those by Beuys and Oldenburg exacerbate tactility, bringing it to an extreme that exceeds form, and thus yielding no perceptual grasp as such, only an abundance of matter. Furthermore, the artwork as excess of material can also be understood as a visual spectacle, traversing sculpture in its appeal to the pictorial imagination. For this reason, Potts argues, in the contemporary era the notion of sculpture as a discrete medium has been liquidated.

What is interesting about Potts' analysis for phenomenology is his demonstration that the structural integrity of the object is rendered redundant in the quest for an unencumbered tactile access to the artwork through which the spectator assumes a position of quasi-immersion in the texture and substance of its material.²³ The armature that defines the object and separates it from the spectator crumples in the wake of her or his interrogation of its materiality. This situation reiterates Butler's supposition that the fleshly ontology risks subsuming difference within the totality of the intersubjective relation. Within the paradigm offered by the flesh, the object becomes amorphous and the medium of sculpture is dispelled into a postmedium condition that delivers a multi-sensory experience in which tactility is co-extensive with visuality.

The postmedium predicament that Potts describes also opens onto a series of historiographic difficulties in the field of contemporary art history, such as the problem of how to track changes, transitions, and developments that are not bound to a medium.²⁴ The phrase 'installation art', for example, is readily used to describe contemporary art, specifically works that are self-consciously integrated into and responsive to the space of exhibition and the spectators that occupy it. Yet installation remains a broad category that refers to a wide variety of media and practices, and calls upon any number of discursive frameworks, many of which stem from phenomenology, from relational aesthetics to institutional critique, theories of identity and embodiment, to site-specificity and the political economy of art. The appearance of this category arose from the incisive exposure of the broader social, political and economic fields determining artistic production and reception that coincided with the rejection of medium specificity in the 1960s. However, the term is not, in and of itself, rooted in a specific critical investment with regard to the art in question. Indeed, the word 'installation' suggests that the art merely reifies the structural relations between the spectator and the artwork that it aims to reveal. Indeed, as Jonathan Crary argues, installation might give the mistaken impression that much contemporary art gives the spectator a clear sense of position through spatial homogeneity.²⁵ Thus, in the same way that the chiasmic relation runs the risk of fulfilling the subject's solipsistic fantasy of the other, the notion of installation art is haunted by the possibility that it will merely satisfy perceptual expectations and stabilize the spectator's pre-existing sense of her or himself.

The Danish artist Olafur Eliasson acknowledges this risk in his installation projects, though ultimately they strive against this tendency. His works deploy various strategies to disrupt the viewer's orientation. The installations situate spectators in constructed environments that alter the expected dimensions of a space by, for example, building a ground that slopes upward on one side, or by saturating the space with colour, or again by framing it with angled mirrors so that multiple perspectives interfere with the singularity of one's own view. However, despite these attempts to upset the viewer's position of visual mastery of the space, implying the contingency of perception on the varying temporal, spatial and environmental conditions, there is a certain ambivalence in the titles of Eliasson's works which, time and again, refer to the individuality of the spectator's perceptual experience through an emphasis on the word 'your': *Your color memory* (2004, plate 5), *Your spiral view* (2002), *Your space embracer* (2004), *Take your time* (2008) and so forth. On the one hand, the titles are a restatement of Merleau-



5 Olafur Eliasson, *Your colour memory*, 2004. Wood, stainless steel, fluorescent lights and colour filter foils (red, green, blue), control unit and projection foil, 323 × 530 × 887 cm. Berlin: Neugerriemschneider. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

Ponty's initial claim that perception is mediated through the subject's bodily contact and intertwining with the world. At the same time, the insistence that this sensual experience is confined to the limits of individual perception is a concession to the solipsism of the embodied condition.

Interestingly, Eliasson's work is usually discussed in terms of how it invites the formation of new social relations within the space of exhibition. Crary, for example, argues that the perceptual disruptions at play in Eliasson's installations establish 'conditions out of which other events might tentatively occur, out of which communication, interpersonal exchange, and provisional forms of understanding might be possible.'²⁶ From this perspective, the excesses of perception that invite interrogation also generate the need for 'interpersonal exchange'. This is not to say that installation subsumes all viewers into one. Rather, it provokes viewers to reconstitute themselves in response to a shared set of environmental alterations that at once posit, and elicit a striving beyond, the solipsism of perception. Not only are the limits of the flesh understood by phenomenology in linguistic terms, then, a domain that extends far beyond the relation between the subject and the other, they are the locus of the subject's constitutive relationship with the world as an ethical response to its excess.

RECIPROCITY AND THE ETHICS OF INTERPRETATION

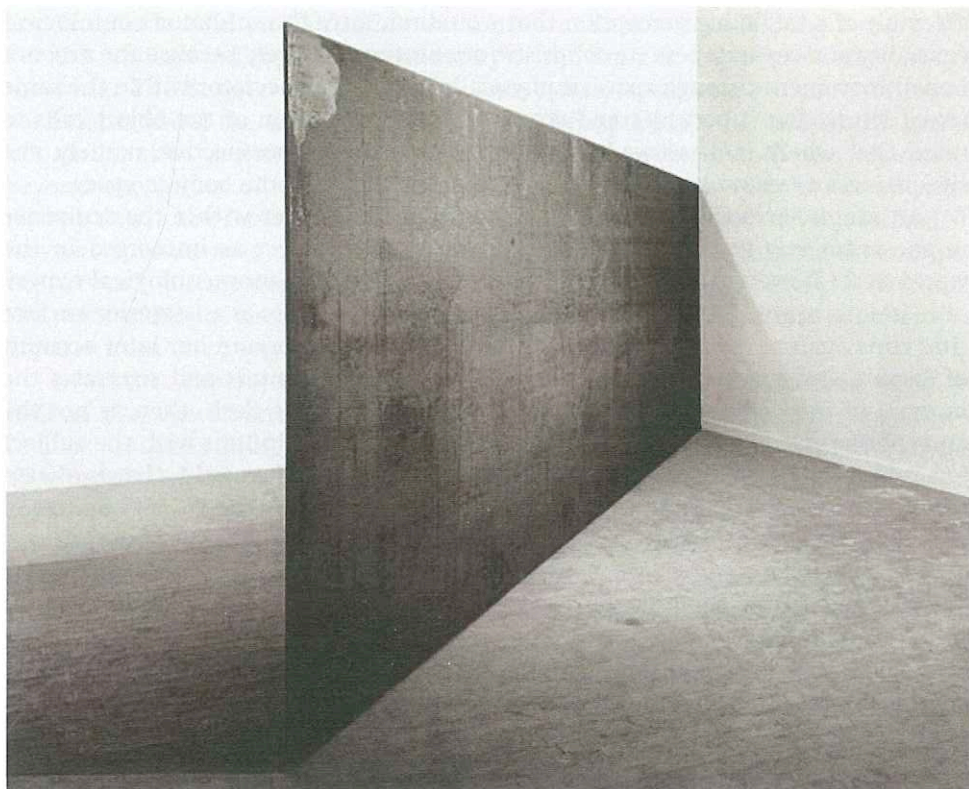
The dispersal of specific media into a postmedium condition is now often described as a field of social, political, psycho-sexual and bodily relations. It signals a turn towards an exposure of the limits of the embodied subject as a

means to identify the parameters within which the interrogation of the artwork takes place. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the flesh is not confined to the relationship between oneself and an other, or oneself and the world, but rather is socially charged insofar as it includes the communication of language as well as the expression of the body. The issue at stake in a phenomenological account of art is therefore how the totalizing bond of the flesh might be the site at which new possibilities of interpretation, beyond individual investments, are born. How does phenomenology reinvigorate a truly interrogative mode, in the sense Irigaray intends, as a questioning of the other/object that recognizes its fundamental alterity?

In her reading of Merleau-Ponty, Judith Butler notes that despite the solipsistic orientation of the senses, there are significant ways in which Merleau-Ponty shows how the world flesh overcomes the closure of the subject's perceptual field. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty points to the excess of the other and the world in the fleshly relation, often grappling with the asymmetry between the subject's perceptual grasp and the intentional object. He is impelled to concede that the reversibility of the flesh 'is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization ...'²⁷ However, he explains that this 'incessant escaping' is not an ontological void or a non-being. It is 'spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another.' In other words, it is precisely because of this asymmetry that the subject is hinged to the world. Butler considers this equally in semantic terms, recalling the use of the chiasmic structure in grammar, in which the order of words in one of two parallel clauses is inverted in the other. Thus, a phrase such as 'when the going gets tough, the tough gets going', appears to have a formal symmetry, but in fact there are two meanings of the term 'going' and two of the word 'tough', so that the two clauses are not semantically equivalent at all.²⁸ In a similar way, she argues, despite its seeming totality, the flesh always has the potential to escape itself.²⁹

It is this potential for meaning to exceed the fleshly relation between the artwork and the spectator that allows for a phenomenology of difference. One might consider, for example, Rosalind Krauss's use of phenomenology in her reading of Richard Serra's work, as a means of thinking sculpture outside a modernist narrative. In *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Krauss challenges the assumption that sculpture can be read as an inherently meaningful object, the form of which is taken to be an analogy for the private psychological space of the artist in which thought is generated. Krauss presents a counter-narrative, in which meaning is externalized and seen to occur in the intertwining between the spectator and the object. The sculpture and the spectator are brought together in a 'field of reciprocity', which Krauss defines using the metaphor of a passage – a moment-to-moment experience of movement through time and space. More strongly though, she elucidates the formation of meaning through this movement, so that not only are the sculpture and the spectator bound to one another as though in a common flesh, but meaning emerges through the spectator's motility, actions and gestures in response to the artwork.

In her analysis of Richard Serra's work, bodily actions become synonymous with gestures of interpretation. Or, to put it another way, Krauss shows how the object comes into consciousness through the activity of the viewer. She observes that in the early 1970s, Serra began to structure the sculptural object as a kind of



6 Richard Serra, *Strike: To Roberta and Rudy*, 1971. Hot-rolled steel, 96 × 288 × 1 1/2 in. Installation view, Lo Giudice Gallery, New York, 1971. © Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Photo: Peter Moore.

perceptual cut in a given space, thus inviting the spectator to actively suture together the continuity of the visual field in her or his movement through that space.³⁰ For example, Serra's *Strike: To Roberta and Rudy*, an 8-foot high and 24-foot long steel plate that projects out of the corner of the room, interrupts a clear view of the space (plate 6). Krauss notes that as one moves around *Strike*, it contracts from a flat plane to a single line when one faces it head-on, and then expands once again to a plane. Correspondingly, the space is blocked off, then opened up on either side of the edge, and finally blocked once again.³¹ In its alternation between a plane that occupies the visual field, obscuring the surrounding space, and an invisible depth that gathers behind a single edge, *Strike* cuts the visible world and locates the spectator as 'the operator of this cut' who must work to reconvene visual continuity. For this reason, Krauss sees a parallel between the perceptual effect of Serra's work and a cinematic montage, whereby the spectator knits together meaning from completely disparate shots that appear in sequence in a film. Likewise, Serra invites the spectator to suture together a perception of space through embodied action. Thus, Krauss states that the wholeness of the viewer's body becomes the guarantor of the reconstructible wholeness of the room's continuity.³²

Much as the spectator actively re-forms a coherent view across the visual break that the sculpture presents, however, the artwork nevertheless prevents the

assembly of a totalizing perception that would reinforce the spectator's ontological centrality and separateness – a solipsistic orientation. Precisely because the artwork impels movement through space, it physically locates the spectator within the same visual fabric that it occupies and structures. The disruption of the object calls to mind that which is disavowed from the transcendental perspective, namely, the situatedness of vision in the body, and the situatedness of the body in space.

Although Serra's work might seem to locate the viewer within the sculpture in the same way that Merleau-Ponty describes the subject as immersed in the world flesh, however, Krauss's analysis shows that the phenomenological experience is determined by the way in which the artwork appears as an exterior surface that runs against the limits of the visual field. Furthermore, in her later account of Serra's work she posits the artwork as a fissure that binds and separates the horizon of the body with that of the world beyond it. The flesh, then, is not the amorphous envelope of the world that houses and is continuous with the subject but rather an abutment between the subject's body and the world, that is always transitive. Krauss argues that this jointure must be seen as the subject matter of the work.³³ The interpretation of the artwork, indeed the only meaning one could posit, is founded on the shifting conditions that the work sets against the body. Bodily action, then, is not necessarily an expression of the subject's will or pre-existing intention towards an object, which might manifest as the covering over, grasping, or assimilation of it, but rather is a response to the spatial conditions that the artwork asserts in the first place.

By insisting that the meaning of the artwork is determined by the friction between the artwork and the viewer's attempt to stabilize a perception of it, Krauss gets to the heart of the ethical dilemma: the question is whether the external world genuinely informs perception or whether the subject merely conceals/blankets it in her or his attempt to grasp it. She resolves the problem by maintaining that the relation between the body and the world is reciprocal. This is not to suggest that phenomenological interpretation is a kind of give-and-take between the material world and one's personal responses to it. On the contrary, her understanding of reciprocity assumes the asymmetry of this relation, as seen between the viewer and the artwork. To elaborate her alternative model of sculpture as passage, she remarks, 'the image of passage serves to place both viewer and artist before the work, and the world, in an attitude of *primary humility* in order to encounter the deep reciprocity between himself and it' (my emphasis).³⁴

Interestingly, a phenomenological interpretation here is a way of first, 'placing the viewer and artist before the artwork', which is to say that the artwork confronts the viewer/artist as something outside her or himself. Second, it is to demand an attitude appropriate to that placement. The term 'primary humility' is notable insofar as it assumes the bodily connection of the subject to the earth, for the word 'humility' derives from the Latin word *humilis*, meaning 'from humus', the decayed organic matter that composes soil. Humus evokes the elemental basis of growth, and the land into which the body is committed when it dies.³⁵ In advocating for humility as a humble stance or modesty of behaviour in the face of the artwork, Krauss insists on differentiating the viewer and the artwork from one another, despite the intimacy of the corporeal bond. What Krauss describes as a relation of deep reciprocity, a stance that recognizes both the continuity between the viewer and the artwork in a broader corporeal, spatial

and linguistic field and a fundamental differentiation between the two, recalls Butler's understanding of the asymmetry of the flesh as the locus of an excess of meaning. The suggestion is not that one cannot presume to know or make statements about the artwork (and the world) because it always escapes our grasp, but rather that, in order to do so, one must first be receptive to that which lies beyond the limits of what one knows. This is why Merleau-Ponty is at pains to insist that the flesh of the world is always imminent, but never realized in fact. Interpretation is not to make an initial proclamation about the meaning of the artwork (a statement of fact about it), but rather to respond to the demands the work makes of the viewer, particularly how it overturns, upsets or otherwise departs from one's expectations.

To further explore this disarticulation between the subject and the world, as well as the viewer and the artwork, art historians have turned to Emmanuel Levinas' understanding of ethics, particularly the paradigmatic encounter of the 'face-to-face' which he describes in *Totality and Infinity*. For Levinas, the subject is constituted as a response to the other's appeal or demand for recognition. Essentially, the other calls the subject into being – an imperative for the subject to differentiate itself. The other's command is the initial moment that the subject recognizes the other's irreducibility to her or himself. For Levinas, this recognition defines ethics: the subject is constituted as a fundamental acknowledgement of the other. The subject is therefore founded upon her or his ethical response – a confrontation with the alterity of the other, which Levinas calls the 'face'. He writes, 'The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me ... It does not manifest itself by these qualities ... It *expresses itself*.'³⁶

Clearly, Levinas is not concerned with the image of the other, but rather how the other exceeds that image, and thereby exceeds the subject's knowledge of it. Similarly, and to return to an earlier point, phenomenological interpretation does not attempt to explain the meaning of an image or representation, but to examine how art means, beyond and in spite of representation. Noticeably, Levinas insists that the face appears as a mode, as opposed to an image or set of qualities. Insofar as the face is a stance, or manner of being, it is best understood as a kind of bodily assertion. It is a presentation that exceeds, destroys and overflows the idea. Furthermore, as Alphonso Lingis explains, the ethical imperative of the face is a demand for bodily reciprocity. That is to say, the subject differentiates itself from the other in order to offer itself as a physical recognition to that other. For this reason, the other's face does not manifest as a look, but as a gesture, 'a pressure on the hand', or a 'shiver of the skin'.³⁷

Ethics, then, is an acknowledgement of the artwork's alterity that takes place through the interrogation of the limits of the perceptual field. For Krauss, this interrogation takes place through bodily acts that are predicated on a stance of primary humility in the presence of the object. In this mode of confrontation, actions are responsive rather than pre-emptive. Further, bodily actions are synonymous with gestures of interpretation. The artwork's demand for the expression of the body – and correspondingly, a revealing of the limits of the flesh – establishes reciprocity. Interestingly though, Krauss's notion of primary humi-



7 Pipilotti Rist, *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*, installation view, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2008. Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich and London. © Pipilotti Rist. Photo: Libby Rosof (<http://theartblog.org>).

lity is equally pertinent to artworks that distinctly limit movement and bodily action, as is often the case in installation art. Indeed, contemporary art has recently demonstrated a persistent investment in problematizing and encumbering movement. In many of Olafur Eliasson's works the viewer often remains still, or, in the many *Skyspaces* of James Turrell, the visitor lies down to fully experience the work, as though to literally enact humility as a 'grounding' of the body by relocating it to a horizontal register.

The specifically horizontal positioning of the body is particularly noticeable in Pipilotti Rist's video and sound installation *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* designed for the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2008 (plate 7). The richly coloured panorama created by a 25-foot high and 200-foot long video projection spanning three walls, saturates the senses with close-up images of tulips in a field, a hand reaching into dirt, earthworms, a snail, a pig sniffing the ground, the gentle lapping of water against a woman's legs. The camera explores these 'earthly' themes from a distinctly low vantage point, skimming the surface of the ground and water, and slowly homing in on the creatures and vegetation in such a way as to enlarge even the tiniest details.

To reinforce her humble perspective, Rist constructed a large sculptural seating area in the shape of an eye. A grey, doughnut-shaped sofa set on a round white rug, surrounded a black interior space – the pupil located in the centre of the atrium. Visitors were invited to lie down on the sofa and view the video from a

supine position. In this way, Rist's installation invokes a stance of humility through which the viewer can enter into an appropriately transitive relation with the artwork. The experience of the video projection takes place on the sculptural eye, the very site where the viewer lies. That is to say, the figure of the eye becomes the point of transaction between the intensely colourful projection and the body as exposed surface. This horizontal position of abandon upends verticality, and with it, perceptual closure. Correspondingly, we can read this as a move from a solipsistic grasp of the world to a stance of openness in which interpretation is suspended and an abundance of sensation ensues. The interior subject is turned inside out as vision is relayed via the exterior surface of the body, a condition subtly implied by the title of the work, *Pour Your Body Out*. Rist thereby brings the body to an ethical stance before the artwork by foregoing both the standard upward position from which one usually views the world, and discouraging definitive actions (even reactions) in the space. Instead, the encounter between viewer and artwork, between the body and its elemental basis (a key theme of the installation), is forged through the limitation of the body, and attentiveness to the excess of the artwork.

CONCLUSION

The strength of phenomenology lies in its effectiveness at uncovering the way in which an artwork means: that is to say, the way in which it expresses, communicates or presents itself to a viewer. In foregrounding a bodily condition shared by the artwork and the viewing subject, and taken to be mutually constitutive of each, phenomenology opposes itself to historical narratives that wish to disavow the contingency of its statements of 'fact'. However, a legitimate criticism arises that in its deep concern with the individual embodied experience, phenomenology conceals the potential meanings of an artwork; or rather it obscures the possibility that the artwork is meaningful in 'other' ways. This risk became acutely present in the 1960s when a noticeable staging of the artwork's deformation appeared in conjunction with an emphasis on factility. The deconstruction of the artwork and the transition into a postmedium condition appears as the artwork's refusal to deliver itself to the senses in a totalized form.

As I have shown, the fleshly relation does not guarantee an exclusive knowledge of the artwork, nor can it be the pretext for a kind of positivist authority. However, by considering the flesh itself as interpenetrated by language, phenomenology opens the bodily relation to a larger social sphere charged with acts of communication (speech, motions, moods and expressions). The linguistic dimension of embodiment testifies to the fundamental disarticulation between the viewer's perception and the artwork itself, for this divide is the condition that impels communication, but also leads to slips and alterations in meaning. The ethics of interpretation in phenomenology thus hinge on an acknowledgement that the artwork cannot be reduced to preconceptions of its place in a seamless art-historical narrative. Ethical acknowledgement, moreover, appears as a distinct surfacing and overflowing of the limits of the embodied subject through gestures of concession or humility in the face of the artwork's alterity. In this attentiveness to the differentiation of the subject and the artwork from one another, and to how this provokes a specific mode of confrontation, phenomenology foregrounds the ethical dimension implicit in the aesthetic experience.

Notes

- 1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Preobjective being: the solipsist world', in Claude Lefort, ed., *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston, IL, 1968, 159.
- 2 To name just a few trajectories, the convergence of ecology with phenomenology has raised new lines of inquiry in the domain of geoaesthetics, earth art, and urban space; see Elizabeth Grosz, *Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, New York, 2008; Amanda Boetzkes *The Ethics of Earth Art*, Minneapolis, MN, 2010; Gary Shapiro, 'Territory, landscape, garden', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 9: 2, 2004, 103–15. The domain of relational aesthetics extends the phenomenological encounter to the socio-political sphere, provoking a rethinking of how the ethical relation can be developed into a model of community and political democracy; Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon, 2004; Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, New York, 2005. For scholarship on the encounter between the body and new media technologies, see Eugene Thacker, *The Global Genome: Biotechnology, Politics, Culture*, Cambridge, MA, 2005; Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, MA, 2001; Pierre Lévy, *Becoming Virtual: Reality in the Digital Age*, New York, 1998. This line of inquiry has also stimulated an interest in models of time, and particularly how new media technologies provoke varying experiences of time in the body; Mark Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media*, Cambridge, MA, 2004; Christine Ross, 'The temporalities of video: extendedness revisited', *Art Journal*, 1 65: 3, 2006, 92–9.
- 3 Particularly in the field of contemporary art, Henri Bergson's writing on temporality has become increasingly important, as has the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.
- 4 Martin Heidegger, 'The question concerning technology', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York, 1977, 19.
- 5 Judith Butler, 'Sexual difference as a question of ethics', in Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss, eds, *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, University Park, PA, 2006, 117.
- 6 Merleau-Ponty, 'The intertwining – the chiasm', in Lefort, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139.
- 7 Merleau-Ponty, 'The intertwining', 152.
- 8 Butler, 'Sexual difference', 113.
- 9 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York, 1962, 24–5.
- 10 Robert Morris, 'Some notes on the phenomenology of making: the search for the motivated', *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, Cambridge, MA, 1993, 73.
- 11 Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, MA, 1996, 267.
- 12 Merleau-Ponty, 'The intertwining', 135.
- 13 Butler, 'Sexual difference', 114.
- 14 Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, Ithaca, NY, 1993, 183–4.
- 15 Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 183.
- 16 Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*, trans. J.N. Findlay, London, 1970, 558.
- 17 Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 565–6.
- 18 Merleau-Ponty, 'Preobjective being', 158.
- 19 Merleau-Ponty, 'The intertwining', 143–4.
- 20 Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 172.
- 21 Alex Potts, 'The interrogation of medium in art of the 1960s', *Art History*, 27: 2, April 2004, 282–304.
- 22 Potts, 'The interrogation of medium', 288.
- 23 Potts, 'The interrogation of medium', 286.
- 24 There is also the added difficulty of defining contemporary art according to its historical position. The phrase 'contemporary art' is used to describe a great range of art since the 1950s. The rubric of 'the contemporary' therefore begs the question, what is shared in the art of the last five decades that continues to renew itself?
- 25 Jonathan Crary, *Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses*, London, 2003, 7.
- 26 Crary, 'Your color memory: illuminations of the unforeseen', *Olafur Eliasson: Minding the World*, Aarhus, Denmark, 2004, 223.
- 27 Merleau-Ponty, 'The intertwining', 147.
- 28 Butler, 'Sexual difference', 124.
- 29 Interestingly, she argues, it is precisely because Merleau-Ponty's essay on the flesh has this same potential to exceed itself, and to be read differently, that enables Irigaray's critique.
- 30 Rosalind Krauss, 'Richard Serra: sculpture', in Hal Foster and Gordon Hughes, eds, *Richard Serra*, Cambridge, MA, 2000.
- 31 Krauss, 'Richard Serra', 119–20.
- 32 Krauss, 'Richard Serra', 120–1.
- 33 Krauss, 'Richard Serra', 133.
- 34 Krauss, *Passages*, 283.
- 35 This is especially relevant to the relationship of phenomenology to ecology and geoaesthetics.
- 36 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, 1969, 50–1.
- 37 Alphonso Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility*, New Jersey, 1996, 101.