

An Analysis of Time's Involuntariness in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology*  
Through Habits and Their Constructive Interruption

Gabrielle Polce

A Major Research Paper  
in  
The Department of Philosophy

Under the co-supervision of  
Dr. Emilia Angelova  
and  
Dr. David Morris

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Philosophy) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2017

## Abstract

### An Analysis of Time's Involuntariness in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* Through Habits and Their Constructive Interruption

Gabrielle Polce

Phenomenological accounts of temporal awareness are distinctive because they highlight the way time is radically involuntary. When attending to the progression or transitions of phenomena, we find that the temporal relations between moments are immediately given as a whole, without our participation. This paper explores how Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* accounts for this involuntariness.

An exegesis of Al-Saji's work on racist vision, *A Phenomenology of Hesitation*, contextualizes this discussion by demonstrating what is at stake in accounting for time's involuntariness. Al-Saji uses a language of affect to describe why racist vision is problematic. Al-Saji uses affect as a framework for describing the involuntary temporal relations implicit within perception. By focusing on how time is structured at an affective level, Al-Saji accounts for how racist vision can be changed. In this course of this account, Al-Saji criticizes *Phenomenology of Perception* because it fails to provide the conceptual tools for giving an explicit account of time's radical involuntariness.

Using insights from Al-Saji's critique, I argue that Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* can generate a nuanced account of time's involuntariness without an explicit account of affect. Building on the readings of Sallis, Kelly, and Casey, I investigate the connections between time, subjectivity, and habits made in the *Phenomenology*. I argue that Merleau-Ponty posits an impersonal time as the condition of subjectivity. That premise has consequences for how we should understand the *Phenomenology*'s account of habit. The upshot of this reading is that the *Phenomenology*'s account of habit is consistent with Al-Saji's account of racist vision.

## Contents

Introduction.....	1
1 On the naturalization of race as a clue to involuntary temporality.....	3
2 Temporality as affective hesitation.....	8
3 How Al-Saji's analysis motivates re-reading the <i>Phenomenology</i> .....	13
4 On <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> 's subject and involuntary temporality.....	14
5 On habitual movement's temporality.....	22
Concluding argument.....	25
Bibliography.....	27
Endnotes.....	28

---

## Introduction

Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (hereafter *PhP*) distinguishes its account of perception from traditional mind-body dualism by describing perception from the position of an embodied consciousness. By attending to our mundane bodily goings-on, our perceptual life, Merleau-Ponty shows that our body is the implicit context in which perceptual relations with the world emerge (*PhP*, 103/130). The main way our body structures our perception is through habitual movement. The way we relate to or perceive a situation depends on the habits we approach that situation with (*PhP*, 143-8/177-83). Suppose a puddle is in my way while I walk down the street. When I avoid it, I make no calculations of the length of my stride, the shape of the puddle, etc. Ways around the puddle appear in my approaching it, without my conscious participation. This movement is automatic, but attributable to me; I avoid the puddle. Generally, there is an important sense in which motor habits belong to my body but function in an involuntary way in perceptual life (*PhP*, 138-9/170-1).<sup>1</sup>

However, to adequately describe perceptual phenomena, we must also describe their implicit temporal structure, or *temporality*. Although the puddle becomes an avoidable obstacle through my movement toward it, this spatial dynamic is inherently a temporal one (cf. *PhP*, 140-1/174-6). There is a progression in my movements as I approach the puddle, avoid it, and leave it behind. My embodying this progression provides a basis for being aware of my walk as a temporally extended episode. Crucially, however, the time in which my habits play out should be construed neither as a skill my body develops nor a circumstance it acclimates to. I am passive towards temporality; temporal relations are given independently, before, so to speak, my body and its habits become involved. The temporal structure of experience is thus *radically involuntary*. This essay aims to investigate this radical involuntariness.

---

Al-Saji's "A Phenomenology of Hesitation" (hereafter *PH*) describes how this kind of radical involuntariness precedes habits. She accomplishes this through a Bergsonian analysis of perceiving race as a "property of the visible body" (*PH*, 137). Since race perception feels immediate, any automatic, potentially racist, responses to others feels justified. *PH* accounts for this immediacy in terms of *affect*, our receptivity in a given situation. For Al-Saji, when I have a visceral reaction to seeing a racialized other (e.g. contempt), my response's affective deep-seatedness depends on my inability to be affected in some other way by that person. *PH* describes this inability in terms of the radically involuntary temporal relations implicit within my visual habits. This is the Bergsonian element of Al-Saji's framework; describing the affectivity of racializing perception gives an accounts of how temporality structures the habits which give rise to perception. On Al-Saji's view, since *PhP* lacks an account of this kind, it cannot account for temporality's radical involuntariness (*PH*, 152-3).<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I argue that, even without an explicit language of affect, *PhP* can generate an account of the involuntariness particular to temporal relations. I begin by elaborating Al-Saji's account of the habitual perception of race (section 1). I then analyze her account of the temporality undergirding habits in general (section 2). With this theoretical context in mind, I outline what I believe is the best version of Al-Saji's criticism of *PhP* (section 3). Finally, I develop a reading of *PhP*'s account of temporality which addresses these issues (section 4). Here I elaborating the connection made between temporality and subjectivity in *PhP*'s "Temporality" chapter. Following Kelly's *The Subject as Time*, I argue that this chapter posits a radically involuntary temporality as the condition of subjectivity. In the concluding argument, I use Casey's "Habitual Body and Memory in Merleau-Ponty" to explore the consequences of this reading for *PhP*'s descriptions of habit. The upshot of my argument is that, on this reading of

---

*PhP*, habits are grounded in a temporality which ontologically precedes the body. In my view, this allows *PhP* to assimilate *PH*'s insights and avoid its criticism, without an explicit account of affect.

### **On the naturalization of race as a clue to involuntary temporality**

As mentioned above, a premise central to *PhP*'s account is that habitual movement structures perception. This is *PH*'s starting point for describing how we see race. Al-Saji's aim in *PH* is to describe both the habitual workings of this vision and how these habits might change.<sup>3</sup> Her account of seeing racialized others assumes that perception relies on habits but is not completely determined by them (*PH*, 138). Although Al-Saji will ultimately supplement this with an account of affect, it is worth exploring why she begins with habits.

For Al-Saji, describing vision in terms of habits is useful because vision structures the manifestation of visible objects "according to the tacit ways our bodies relate to and move in the world, allowing certain aspects of that world to be foregrounded" (*PH*, 138). Al-Saji follows Merleau-Ponty in using figure-ground relationships to describe how habits shape perception. Habitual movement, such as the gaze, creates the sense or appearance of an independent object by generating a figure-ground relationship/structure in which the object is the figure (*PhP*, 69-70/95-6, cf. 154/189).<sup>4</sup> Suppose I am looking through a crowd for a friend. When I finally see my friend, they 'jump out' at me and the crowd softens. I still see the crowd, but, as my friend's face sharply presents itself, the crowd becomes more ambiguous. The way my friend manifests as distinguished from/appearing against the crowd is what my gaze *does* in this situation.

Generally speaking, figure-ground relations denote the perceptual results of habitual movement. As results, they imply a process by which we perceive. To demonstrate this point, let us analyze a description from *PhP* which Al-Saji cites (*PH*, endnote 18):

---

When the child becomes habituated to distinguishing between blue and red, we see that the habit acquired with regard to this pair benefits all the others... Is the decisive moment of habit thus to be found in this moment of insight, in the advent of a “color-perspective,” or in this intellectual analysis that subsumes the givens under a category? ... This particular manner of vibrating and of attracting the gaze we call “blue” and “red” must be manifested from the outset upon the “blue” and “red” panels the child is shown... The gaze obtains more or less from things according to the manner in which it interrogates them, in which it glances over them or rests upon them. Learning to see colors is the acquisition of a certain style of vision... - *PhP*, 154-5/189-90

Here, Merleau-Ponty aims to describe how a child learns to distinguish between a red panel and a blue panel, from the child’s point of view. At first, comparing the panels is ambiguous for the child because their colors admit of no explicit distinction. Eventually, the difference in color becomes the explicit difference between blue and red. If we account for this as the child either becoming aware of objects’ pre-existing colors or representing colors more adequately, then we fail to describe how the child learns. In this case, assuming the distinction between blue and red overlooks both the child’s original vision and the transition it underwent. For Merleau-Ponty, the child’s learning consists in the differentiated colors emerging *within* the original, ambiguous vision. The differentiated colors emerge as a simultaneous modification both of the child’s gaze and of how the panels appear as figures against a ground. It is important to stress the term ‘modification.’ It is, “from the outset,” the same panels which the child’s gaze “obtains more or less from.” The child neither sees ‘new’ panels nor have they replaced one set of eye movements for another. The panels differentiate themselves along a new axis as the same gaze becomes more discerning. The relationship between the child’s first visual perception and their second is one of *elaboration*; the first vision disambiguates itself in becoming the second (*PhP*, 155/190). For our purposes, what is important about this description is that it clues us in on how the child’s

---

perception is intrinsically temporal. This transformation is not something happening to the child's vision but something that the child's vision does. The ambiguity of the panels' original colors offers itself to the child as potentially distinguishable, implying a future, more elaborate vision. The distinguished colors in the second vision present themselves as making sense of a prior ambiguity/uncertainty, relating the child's new vision to a past one.

Al-Saji's account of racializing vision begins by giving a description of the habits of seeing race, with the goal of elaborating on their inherent temporal dimension. When describing 'racializing vision,' *PH* focuses on cases which involve immediate, visceral reactions to racialized others (*PH*, 133-7). By accounting for these reactions in terms of habits, Al-Saji highlights how race perception results from habitual movement. Our *racializing habits* lack "the improvisational fluidity and responsiveness of habit more generally" (*PH*, 138). Suppose I am taking the bus, a black man sits beside me, and I involuntarily clutch my bag in fear. My fear appears to me as a perceptual consequence of his presence. My sight naturalizes my reaction to the black man; I *see* him as scary. *PH*'s account of such cases focuses neither on why these reactions are morally reprehensible nor on how they misrepresent racialized others. Instead, it works to describe how perceptual attributions emerge. In this example, my racializing visual habits are both "more and less" than ordinary vision (*PH*, 138-9). They are 'less' in the sense that they are not as open to other ways of seeing as vision usually is; the "dynamic ability of vision to change is partially closed down" (*PH*, 138). My fear in seeing the black man is visceral in this sense because it prevents me from reacting differently. Racializing vision is also 'more' in the sense that its objects "are taken to correspond to... *only* that which this vision sees" (*PH*, 139). In being closed off to change, racializing habits figure racialized others more rigidly. This generates an experience of being strongly determined by them. By making the black man

---

intrinsically threatening, my fear becomes an “objective or natural reaction” to him (*PH*, 139). This motivates blaming the man for my fear by undermining my ability to see that my perception has third-person conditions (i.e. my cultural, political, and historical context; cf. *PH*, 140-1).<sup>5</sup> To summarize, racializing habits lend themselves to *naturalizing* racist reactions by limiting vision’s flexibility.

For Al-Saji, however, this analysis is incomplete because it fails to address the “mechanism... by which racializing perception inscribes its cause in the racialized body” (*PH*, 140). Although racializing habits are characterized by a sense of being determined by the racialized others, how this sense emerges is unaccounted for. Describing perception solely in terms of habits restricts us to describing habitual movements and their perceptual results. For instance, in discussing visual habits, we consider how our gaze generates figure-ground relations in perception. However, this account lacks explicit descriptions of how our gaze maintains itself, how transitions between gazes occur, how different gazes are interrelated, etc. By identifying racializing perception’s *affective* structure, Al-Saji continues describing race perception but builds on her analysis of racializing habits by describing how these reflexive limitations emerge and persist.<sup>6</sup> Al-Saji’s shift towards affect is motivated by the need to describe racializing perception in a more processual way.

Before considering the affect implicit within racializing perception, let us summarize how Al-Saji describes the relationship between affect and perception. Habits orient us in a given situation by generating figure-ground relationships. Affect, however, “enacts a ‘useless’ self-relation or self-perception – the body’s effort on itself” (*PH*, 145). Importantly, “self-perception” denotes a reflexive dynamic differing from, but running parallel to, habitual motion. Recall how my gaze helped me look through a crowd, structuring my search for a friend. Suppose that,

---

unable to find my friend, I am overwhelmed. Becoming anxious, my thoughts race as my chest tightens, but this does not replace my gaze. Rather, like a flavor or an atmosphere, my anxiety *characterizes* my gaze. My friend will still stand out against the crowd when found, but my search is frantic. While my gaze orients my search, my anxiety orients how, in being overwhelmed, I relate to myself. My chest tightening is me self-perceiving, or feeling, my anxiety. Describing my anxiety involves attending to how I am passive in being overwhelmed by the crowd. This is not “mere inertia,” however; affect involves “a situated response” which “is not a response that acts on that situation directly” (*PH*, 145-6). The term “response” denotes the involuntary activity of my body’s being passive towards what affects it. My body *undergoes* a situation, changing neither its habitual responses nor the situation itself. Instead, it creates an awareness of that situation which is *pre-perceptual*, preceding and underlying habitual motion (*PH*, 146).

The habitual limitations of racializing perception are undergirded by a *racializing affect*. For Al-Saji, racializing vision involves an involuntary lack of “openness to unanticipated (and not immediately cognizable) difference” (*PH*, 140). Prior to racializing perception, “all is given” in our pre-perceptual awareness; what demands a response in a given situation is delineated in advance “according to racializing schemas” (*PH*, 144-5). Racializing affect is teleological in that it facilitates the smooth functioning of racializing habits. Recall my fear of the black man. Put simply, I possess, in this case, a readiness to fear the black man that is so efficient that it generates the illusion of causality. If clutching my bag and looking at him correspond to my racializing habits, then my immediate, intense attentiveness is the affective medium for the whole situation. This attentiveness places me in fearful anticipation, motivating corresponding habitual responses, attributions, and blame.

---

Al-Saji describes this teleological structuring in terms of how racializing affect relates a situation's successive elements, or its temporality (*PH*, 141-2). Racializing affect is characterized by a rigidity of both past elements, i.e. the situation I react to, and future elements, i.e. the possibilities present to me in my reaction. The past is "overdetermined and fixed in its sense"; it guarantees particular kinds of possibilities. In my fear, the black man becomes intrinsically threatening; his presence is a sufficient condition for my being afraid. Correspondingly, my "possibilities are projected and mapped in advance"; the future becomes pre-emptively certain. In attending to the black man, my scrutiny is not exploratory. I search for traits, expressions, etc. which threaten me and confirm my situation. The deterministic structure of these relations generates the present situation in which I feel completely determined by the man. This temporality of utter necessity makes explicit the dynamics beneath racializing habits' reflexive limitations. My racializing habits play out in accordance with the temporal structure of my pre-perceptual awareness. By rigidly circumscribing how perceptual situations play out, racializing affect hides my contributions to race perception from myself.

### **Temporality as affective hesitation**

Summarizing *PH*'s account thus far: racializing perception must be understood as a racializing affect in order to describe how it "inscribes its cause in the racialized body... at a prereflective level" (*PH*, 140). Al-Saji's investigation can be summarized in three main points. First, racializing visual habits are a *mode* of vision structured by an inability to change. This inability generates the feeling of being strongly determined by racialized others. Second, racializing vision's habitual limitations depend on a racializing affect; a teleological occlusion of potential new forms of vision occurs at a pre-perceptual level. Finally, this occlusion plays out as a temporal structuring. *The dynamics of racializing affect are a form of involuntary,*

---

*intratemporal relating which generates the sense of being strongly determined by racialized others.* With this in mind, we will discuss *PH*'s account of the interruption of racializing perception.

Al-Saji aims to show that racializing perception is *necessarily* open to being transformed through interruption. This claim is distinct from her previous descriptions of racializing habits/affect because it depends on an account of racializing perception's temporal conditions of possibility. In *PH*, Al-Saji assumes that our experience of temporal relations is radically involuntary, viz. that temporality is attributable to neither our deliberate actions nor our body's habitual/affective activity. On this view, we are *only* passive to temporality, depending on it without affecting it, and this sheer passivity manifests itself explicitly in certain forms of affect, or pre-perceptual awareness. Thus, although Al-Saji continues to describe temporal experience, at the point of sheer passivity this is also a description of time as an independent structure. This motivates thinking of time as a condition for experience, rather than a mere characteristic of it. Our analysis of Al-Saji's account shares these assumptions but will abstain from explaining how Al-Saji's ontology relates to her descriptions.<sup>7</sup>

The assumption that perception is grounded in a temporality which precedes experience gives Al-Saji's claim, that interruption can transform racializing perception, its necessity. Following Bergson, *PH* denotes this assumption with the term 'hesitation.' "Hesitation" refers both to time as "ontological ground" (i.e. the most basic, given temporal structuring of experience), and to the particular forms of awareness or "phenomenological opening[s]" which reveal that structure (*PH*, 149). This equivocation highlights two points. First, attending to our most basic temporal awareness leads us to an underdetermined, independent temporal structure. Second, this implicit temporal structure can manifest itself explicitly in ordinary perceptual life.

---

Al-Saji's thesis is that racializing perception is open to change because, like all perception, it enters a state of hesitation when interrupted. The rest of this section flesh this out. We begin by elaborating on Al-Saji's description of the structure of ontological temporality, as it presents itself in experience. We will then examine her account of the embodiment of this structure and its relation to racializing affect.

Al-Saji defines hesitation as "the ontological interval wherein time... acts in experience" and "is felt as delay" (*PH*, 142). This is distinct from how our ordinary sense of time is structured by habitual movement. Whereas we usually have a clear sense of how what has happened shapes what will happen, the central characteristic of ontological time is that "the whole is not yet given" (*PH*, 143). At this level, time's progression is a process without pre-determined conditions or outcomes and, Al-Saji notes, "what is must be understood as tendency and becoming rather than thing" (*PH*, 143). Let us elaborate with an example. Suppose that I am intently listening to my friend tell a joke. Right before the punchline, they are suddenly interrupted. Up to this point, the flow of our exchange allowed me to habitually follow it, ready to react to the punchline. The interruption of the joke also interrupts this attentiveness. Crucially, there is a moment of surprise, like "the lifting of a spell" (cf. *PhP*, 185/220), between when our conversation ends and when I react to the interruption. In this interlude, however short or temporary, my habits fail to structure my experience.

Like with racializing affect, Al-Saji describes this form of awareness in terms of its pre-perceptual temporal relations. In this habitless state, temporality takes the form of *tendency*, a non-teleological becoming or "nascent change of direction" (*PH*, 143). When the joke is interrupted, I lose the future which my habits projected, i.e. the punchline. However, I am also deprived of my orientation in the situation before the interruption, i.e. the joke's set-up. In

---

tendency, Al-Saji notes, the past ceases to be a static guarantee of future possibilities, becoming “reconfigured through the passage of events” (*PH*, 143). The past’s relation to the present is ambiguous and it conditions future events in an indeterminate way.<sup>8</sup> Since how the past conditions the present is ungraspable, no determinate set of possibilities presents itself; the future “escapes prediction” (*PH*, 148). Correspondingly, the present, becomes a “search without finality” (*PH*, 143). The incompleteness of these temporal relations generates an openness without expectations, characterized by a “creative potential” (*PH*, 148). In the joke example, when my attention is left hanging, I lose my sense of the conversation and where it is going. Disoriented, I am only vaguely aware that the conversation has led me to an unexpected situation and that something, which is at this point indistinct, will follow from our exchange. Tendency is thus a form of temporality distinct our usual perception of time. By making the sense of how the past relates to the present and future extremely ambiguous, it leads to a situation where I must wait for things to clear themselves up.

Recall that tendency appears as a form of affect, viz. a pre-perceptual awareness or self-relating. Al-Saji calls this *hesitating affect*. It is “the bodily experience of hesitation” (*PH*, 143), involving a transition from habitual motion to tendency. As in the previous example, tendency emerges during an interlude where habits no longer structure experience. This temporary replacement of habitual progression “prefigures the delayed habit, making it visible as an anticipated future among others in the world” (*PH*, 143). Hesitating affect posits the prior context of habitual movement in awareness. When my attentiveness to my friend is interrupted, I am not only aware that I did not anticipate the interruption; I become aware of my attentiveness prior to the interruption. In place of habitual perception’s automatic expectations (e.g. the upcoming punchline), hesitating affect allows me to feel potential habitual responses without

---

assuming the corresponding habits (e.g. my sense of the progression of the interrupted conversation).

Al-Saji stresses that hesitating affect *replaces* habitual movement; “to feel is to no longer repeat the past automatically” (*PH*, 143). Hesitating affect is not a determinate response to profound interruptions of habit.<sup>9</sup> Such a response would depend on an orientation re-established after the moment of hesitation. Instead, just as habits emerge alongside perceptual orientation, interruptions and hesitating affect appear together; there is no interruption without hesitating affect and vice versa.<sup>10</sup> If my concentration is broken, for example, my surprise is not a response; it is part of the breaking of my attention. Thus, Al-Saji notes, hesitating affect interrupts habitual movement “by modulating and transforming its temporality” (*PH*, 147). In general, when my habits are interrupted, it is not simply that my body ceases its habitual movement. My body replaces habitual movement with the embodiment of tendency. This places me in a position to consider my habits’ contingency and malleability, giving my body “the potential to destabilize itself and transform” (*PH*, 145). My awareness becomes non-teleological by virtue of being open to being affected by unanticipated elements of a situation (*PH*, 148-9, section 5). This opens up “routes for feeling, seeing, and acting differently” (*PH*, 143).<sup>11</sup>

We can now outline how this applies to racializing perception. Recall that racializing perception is characterized by the experience of being strongly determined by racialized others and that this experience is generated by a racializing affect. Al-Saji is arguing that this can be changed by “the creation of situations and attachments that bring hesitation about” (*PH*, 149). When racializing perception is interrupted, the perceiver hesitates and racializing affect temporarily transitions into hesitating affect. This changes experience’s temporality from a deterministic structure, which facilitates racializing habits (e.g. fearfulness), to tendency, which

---

suspends these habits, presenting them as contingent. When undergone consistently, this suspension allows the body to be affected in new ways, leading to changes in racializing habits. Since the possibility of the interruption of habits can never be completely foreclosed, the structure of racializing perception is, therefore, always open to change.

### **How Al-Saji's analysis motivates re-reading the *Phenomenology***

Although Al-Saji's focus in *PH* is on racializing perception, her account has consequences for interpreting *PhP*. Al-Saji explores some of these consequences in her criticism of Young's *Throwing Like a Girl*. Since Young's essay involves using *PhP*'s account of habits to describe feminine embodiment, Al-Saji's criticism also applies to *PhP*. For Al-Saji, Young idealizes habitual movement by describing it as a seamless taking up of possibilities immediately present to us (*PH*, 151-2). On this view, the only way for a subject to hesitate is for the effectiveness of her bodily movements to be frustrated through an assumption of her own inability.<sup>12</sup> By taking seamless habits to be "the norm of bodies in general" (*PH*, 152), Young and, by extension, *PhP* reduce interruption of habitual movement to the privation of the functioning of habitual movement.<sup>13</sup> Recall again the example of the interrupted joke. On Al-Saji's reading, Young/*PhP* can only say that the habitual progression of my conversation has been stopped. My listening habits become conspicuous for me through their failure to automatically structure my perception. Such a view overlooks my experience of the interruption itself and its potential to change my habits, described above. Generally, Al-Saji's criticism of Young/*PhP* is that this framework cannot account for how interruptions can be potentially constructive via hesitation (understood as hesitating affect).

In order to avoid this outcome, "the phenomenological model of [habitual motion] needs to be revised" (*PH*, 152). My goal is to re-interpret *PhP*'s account of habits in order to show that it

---

can accommodate a robust description of what happens when our habits are interrupted. If Al-Saji's insights into constructive interruption can be assimilated into *PhP*'s framework and descriptive language, then this revision will be successful.

In contrasting her account with Young/*PhP*'s, Al-Saji highlights three features of her account which serve as clues for reworking *PhP*'s account (*PH*, 152). First, hesitation “stems... from the structure of temporality that sustains habit.” Our experience of interruptions of habitual motion give rise to a singular temporal structure (i.e. tendency) because they show us a temporality implicit within all habits. Second, hesitation “corresponds to the *indeterminacy* within habit.” The temporal underpinnings of habit are essentially underdetermined, in contrast with our ordinary sense of time. Finally, hesitation “expresses the constitutive passivity” of habit. The temporality revealed by interruptions as undergirding habits is not attributable to us but is radically involuntary. Thus, a reading of *PhP* will successfully avoid Al-Saji's charge if it can show that habits are grounded in a radically involuntary and indeterminate temporality, which would persist if those habits are interrupted.

### **On *Phenomenology of Perception*'s subject and involuntary temporality**

While Al-Saji connects habit and involuntary temporality through an account of affect, this section argues that *PhP*'s account of subjectivity allows for a similar connection. Although this is not equivalent to the extensive account of affect which *PH* puts forward, I believe that it allows us to account for how habits are implicitly, necessarily passive (viz. for their constitutive openness to change).<sup>14</sup> There is some precedent for this reading of *PhP*. In “A Past Which Has Never Been Present,” for instance, Al-Saji elaborates on the ontological commitments implicit within the “Sensing” chapter's grounding of reflection in an “original past” (*PhP*, 252/289). Lawlor anticipates elements of Al-Saji's analysis in “The End of Phenomenology” by stressing

---

the attribution of ‘original’ to ‘past.’ For both authors, this passage outlines a kind of ontological primacy of the past. The past appears as a condition for our conscious awareness but one of which we have never been aware.<sup>15</sup> However, Al-Saji and Lawlor believe that the primacy of the past is uniquely implicit in the “Sensing” chapter and that most of *PhP*’s descriptions incorrectly privilege presence to consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Kelly’s *The Subject as Time* (hereafter *TS*) provides an interesting contrast in this regard in that it aims to show that the “Temporality” chapter grounds subjectivity in an *impersonal* time. On Kelly’s view, the “Temporality” chapter is engaged in making a similar, implicit ontological claim as the “past which has never been present” passage. If Kelly’s reading is correct, then this passage is not anomalous but instead highlights a feature of subjectivity, applicable to all of *PhP*’s account, which the “Temporality” chapter elaborates.

Our analysis of *PhP* begins with an elaboration of how its “Temporality” chapter connects subjectivity and time. This elaboration aims to describe the sense in which, for Merleau-Ponty, “[s]ubjectivity... takes up or lives time” (*PhP*, 446/485). This connection is important because it contextualizes Merleau-Ponty’s account of the involuntariness of time. In light of this account, we argue that Merleau-Ponty ascribes a *radical* involuntariness to time, thereby accounting for it as an independent/ontological condition for subjectivity. The proceeding, and final, section explores the consequences of this conclusion on *PhP*’s earlier descriptions of habit.

The “Temporality” chapter’s goal is to “revise our idea of the subject” by considering time on its own terms (*PhP*, 433/472). In “Time, Subjectivity, and the Phenomenology of Perception,” Sallis argues that describing subjectivity is “the comprehensive problem” of *PhP*.<sup>17</sup> It will thus be beneficial to sketch out the context of Merleau-Ponty’s temporal analysis of subjectivity, which Sallis also identifies.<sup>18</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity’s relationship with the world is structured by transcendence; describing what a subject is requires that we describe how

---

phenomena *transcend* it in a mundane, non-metaphysical, sense. This requires reconciling “how presence to myself... is simultaneously a derepresentation” which “throws me outside of myself” (*PhP*, 381/422). I can never, in examining a book, for instance, take it all in at once. If I look at the back cover, then the front cover, spine, and pages are hidden from me (and so on for every other perspective of it). ‘Transcendence’ denotes how the givenness/appearance of the book depends on its hidden elements, or alterity. The book transcends me as an independent thing because it is impossible to have an exhaustive presentation of it; the book’s transcendence appears in the perspectival nature of my perception. This relationship, between what I can and cannot see, understand, remember, etc. of the book, also structures how I do/might relate to it. These relations become implicit elements of my sense of self (e.g. as a reader). Generally, *PhP* implies subjectivity in its descriptions of the dimensions of our existence (e.g. sexuality or spatiality) by describing *transcendent* phenomena, characterized by persistent juxtapositions of absence with presence. Time, however, is distinctive for Merleau-Ponty because subjects are temporal “in virtue of an inner necessity”; describing time elaborates on the transcendence characterizing other dimensions of existence and, by extension, subjectivity itself (*PhP*, 432-3/471-2).

Essential to describing time is the distinction between “constituted time” and temporality (*PhP*, 438/476-7). As Kelly notes, constituted time is the result of an “object-intentionality model of awareness” in which time is taken as an object, completely constituted and available to the subject (*TS*, 200-2). This includes partitioning time into seconds, days, years, etc. and describing atomistic events in terms of their place within those divisions. Merleau-Ponty’s problem with reducing time to constituted time is that constituted time assumes “the result of time’s *passage*” without ever making this passage explicit; time “must not merely be, it must

---

come about” (*PhP*, 438/476-7). We might, for instance, break a song down by marking how many seconds each note lasts and collecting the succession of notes into sets denoting the song’s overture, chorus, etc. While producing this broken up song is premised on perceiving the notes’ progression (so as to measure their interrelation), it does not clarify their original succession.

The “Temporality” chapter seeks to make time’s passage explicit by describing time as temporality, viz. “not [as] an object of our knowledge, but rather a dimension of our being” (*PhP*, 438/477). Temporal relations “emanate... from my perceptual field itself”; I do not represent temporality, I “hold it in hand” or “reach” for it (*PhP*, 439/478). In listening to the song, I have access to more than just its present sounds. The previous notes still ring in my ears, gesturing towards a melody which immediately develops according to its motif. This immediate access to absent parts of the song does not consist of mental acts on my part (i.e. remembering past notes or imagining future ones). Instead, this access is part of listening to (i.e. perceiving) the song; it is essential for hearing it as a song. Our awareness of temporality is a process underlying the objects/acts involved in ordinary perception (*TS*, 205).<sup>19</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, temporality is a processual significance, “a network of intentionalities” (*PhP*, 440/479),<sup>20</sup> which is inherent in the world and which grounds our ordinary experience of (constituted) time.

Merleau-Ponty elaborates on this tacit temporal awareness by describing the ‘movement’ of time or the flow of phenomena. A ‘moment’ in temporal awareness is not a distinct whole related to other moments, the way independent objects are interrelated. Rather, the distinctions and relations between moments are inherently ambiguous. This is because transitioning between moments of time involves a simultaneous unity and disunity which is *intrinsic* to those moments (*PhP*, 442-3/481-2).<sup>21</sup> For example, as I walk down a familiar street, I see a string of buildings, trees, lampposts, etc. As I reach my destination, I am implicitly aware that I was led there by

---

these vistas. I do not conclude this, however, by mentally reconstructing what I saw, as though the parts of the street were mutually exclusive to each other. Instead, what I see *allows/leads* me to reaching other sights, by virtue of being connected to them. This connection, however, is not identity because each sight also *withholds/occludes* the others. My cousin's house might be just down the way from the pharmacy, but I have not arrived at the pharmacy when I arrive at my cousin's house. I must walk past one to reach the other. More generally, temporal awareness involves a *transition synthesis* in which moments are brought together as a perceptual whole by way of being distinguished from one another.

By reworking the relationship between the present and the past/future, transition synthesis makes explicit the relationship between temporality and subjectivity. As a dimension of our tacit temporal awareness, the present is never sheer presence. At any given moment in walking to my cousin's house, what I see dynamically refers me to both what I saw, as a continuation of where I have been, and what I might see, as a continuation of where I am. Considered at the level of transition synthesis, the present moment is inherently incomplete because it "is not locked within itself but transcends itself toward a future and toward a past" (*PhP*, 444/483). Merleau-Ponty elaborates what it means for a moment of transition to be differentiated from other moments by *echoing his earlier description of transcendence*. Merleau-Ponty's point is that, like my spatial examination of the book, my tacit experience of temporality is perspectival. In being a position in which a past and future can appear, the present is transcended by them (cf. *PhP*, 443/482). The relationship between present and past/future is weaker than identity but stronger than mutual exclusivity. Although the present moment does not provide us with a fully elaborated past/future, it presents the relatedness of time's dimensions "all at once" (*PhP*, 444/483). The absence of past and future is intrinsic to the present itself. The upshot of elaborating transition synthesis in terms

---

of transcendence is that in temporal awareness we are always confronted with an immediate, inexhaustible complex of temporal relations.

The structuring of transition synthesis in terms of transcendence shows that the appearance of temporality is a persistent, structural elaboration of subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty notes that transition synthesis is something we “accomplish”; “temporal dimensions... make explicit... a single thrust that is subjectivity itself” (*PhP*, 444-5/484; cf. *TS*, 207). Since any description of temporality must be oriented by an already given temporal significance (i.e. descriptions begin by referring to elements of experience), transition synthesis only explicitly appears retroactively, as within our ordinary perception. This is not to say that our access to time is mitigated by perception, as though there were a filter between us and time itself. Rather, the point is that an *identity of temporal presentation with subjective life* is implicit within transition synthesis. The structuring of temporality can only be described in terms of the elaboration of a significance within embodied existence (which earlier parts of *PhP* describe). In the earlier example of walking down a street, the transitions described were simultaneously caught up not only in an implicit understanding of embodiment (walking, sight, sense of direction, etc.) but also of projects/motivations (e.g. running errands, visiting family, listlessly wandering, etc.). These assumed aspects are not hindrances to describing my walk’s temporality; they are the manifestation of that temporality. Although, in ordinary experience, we can distinguish our sense of self from the structure of time, Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions show that, at the level of transition synthesis, temporality and subjectivity are *identical*.

The identity of subjectivity and temporality is the sense in which we should understand Sallis’ point, cited earlier, that describing subjectivity is “the comprehensive problem” of *PhP*. However, for Sallis, this is a purely descriptive connection. Once the problems with constituted

---

time and the link with subjectivity are properly elaborated, all that is left, on Sallis' view, is to show how the structure of time possesses the same features as the structure of subjectivity.<sup>22</sup> While Kelly agrees with these descriptive similarities (*TS*, 208, 210), he argues that Merleau-Ponty's account transitions from "a phenomenology of consciousness's perception of time" to "an investigation of the temporal being of consciousness" (*TS*, 208). On Kelly's view, the "Temporality" chapter does more than relate subjectivity and temporality through descriptive similarities; it makes the (at least implicit) ontological claim that subjectivity is grounded in temporality. For instance, Merleau-Ponty notes that temporality "as an indivisible thrust and as a transition, alone can make time as a successive multiplicity possible, and what we place at the origin of intra-temporality is a constituting time" (*PhP*, 446-7/485). This description elaborates how constituted time (i.e. "successive multiplicity") is grounded in temporality/temporal awareness (i.e. "transition"). However, it takes the "origin" of time (i.e. "intra-temporality") to be a "constituting time." If we take "intra-temporality" to refer to temporality, then Merleau-Ponty seems to be saying that subjectivity is not only described by temporality's structure but is also *involuntarily constituted* by temporality itself (i.e. Kelly's view; *TS*, 208).<sup>23</sup> However, Sallis might object that the "constituting time" which Merleau-Ponty refers to is in fact temporal awareness and that the constitution in this case refers to the emergence of constituted time. I believe that later points in the "Temporality" chapter undermine this reading and that an investigation of Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of the involuntariness of time will show how Kelly's reading is supported by the text. If, as Sallis claims, *PhP*'s account is purely descriptive, then temporality's involuntariness, albeit revelatory of subjectivity's structure, is not distinct from other kinds of experienced involuntariness. If, as Kelly claims, *PhP*'s account involves an ontological premise, then temporality is independent of subjectivity and our experience of it is

---

*radically* involuntary.

Consider how, despite their descriptive identity, Merleau-Ponty stresses the priority of temporality in elaborating how “temporality clarifies subjectivity” (*PhP*, 449/488). He begins by noting that “[w]e will never understand how a... constituting subject can posit... itself within time.” As seen in *PhP*’s descriptions of transition synthesis, we never find ourselves in the position of actively shaping time. If we assume that temporality is generated by subjectivity, then we encounter the paradoxical conclusion that we, as subjects, are somehow completely beholden to a temporal structure that we have generated. Instead, Merleau-Ponty notes that “if the subject is temporality, then self-positing ceases to be contradictory” because “time... is the one who affects” and “is the one affected” (*PhP*, 449/488). As we have seen, time is distinctive because there is a transcendence involved in transition synthesis. Time’s passage is generated by the past pushing on/affecting the present towards a future; the flow of temporality emerges out of a self-affecting relation. However, prior descriptions have shown, first, that this flowing is not attributable to subjectivity and, second, that subjectivity manifests as a transcendence of past and future at the level of transition synthesis. Thus, subjectivity’s structure emerges out of temporality’s *impersonal* (i.e. preceding the subject) self-relation/self-affection.

For Merleau-Ponty, this plays out in experience as an utter passivity to time. Although temporality has a reciprocal relation with itself, we are only affected by it. Transition synthesis is implicitly a “passive synthesis” in which “I am not the author of time” but “time flows through me” (*PhP*, 451/490). Temporality is the progression undergirding awareness; subjects do not contribute to it but its significance is irreducibly contextualized by subjective existence. Recall my walk once more. In considering it on a moment-to-moment basis, I lose sight of how my relation to the street structures how I see it because the progression of sights *is given* to me.

---

However, these changes necessarily orient me; a tacit sense of how what I see fits into my perceptual life is always available to me. Involuntary transitions between parts of the street make up its independence from me, and this independence is the context in which my walk's orientation emerges. In general, for Merleau-Ponty, this passivity to time, as an "acquired spontaneity" which structures ordinary experience, is "constitutive" of subjectivity (*PhP*, 451/490). Passivity to temporality is therefore a *permanent* context of subjective existence because subjectivity is generated by temporality. Prior to any form of the awareness, the subject emerges out of an impersonal time's affectation of itself by itself (*TS*, 209). This is an ontological claim. While this elaborates on previous descriptions, by positing a condition of possibility for subjectivity Merleau-Ponty aims not only to describe the identity of temporality and subjectivity, but to explain it (*TS*, 209-10). This forces us to reject Sallis' interpretation.

### **On habitual movement's temporality**

Our analysis of the "Temporality" chapter supports Kelly's view that *PhP* provides an account of time as an incomplete, radically involuntary condition of possibility for subjectivity. While *PhP* elaborates this through an investigation of temporal awareness, this conclusion applies to all of subjective experience. Recall, that Al-Saji criticized *PhP*'s account of habit. A direct response to Al-Saji's criticism must show that subjectivity's passivity to temporality is implicit in its habitual perception. To this end, we will analyze how subjectivity's constitutive passivity is implicit in *PhP*'s description of habit.

Casey's *Habitual Body and Memory in Merleau-Ponty* (hereafter *HM*), is relevant for our purposes because it analyzes the complex set of relations between the body, habit, and the past. Casey aims to look at Merleau-Ponty's account of *sedimentation*, a memory associated with habit which is fundamentally different from recollection, the representational activity usually

---

associated with memory (*HM*, 281-3). As Casey notes, sedimentation is a non-volitional process by which situations appear as being “continually resumptive of acquired experience” (*HM* 284). Recall our first example of avoiding a puddle while walking down a street. In this case, the ‘sedimentation’ of my walking habits refers neither to a strictly passive accumulation of previous avoidances nor to a purely automatic puddle-avoiding response. My habitual avoidance of the puddle assumes a continuity between the amalgamation of my previous experience and the affordances of the present situation. Casey is here fleshing out the figure-ground relationship characterizing habitual perception by elaborating on how the ground itself performs a kind of activity. The automaticity of my habit emerges because my previous experiences actively structure my capabilities (e.g. my avoiding the puddle). The activity of sedimentation is a complex relation of past to present in which “the past is fully immanent in the present” (*HM* 285).

The appearance of the past *in* the present is an ongoing, maintained activity, or *precipitation*, of the past *on* the present. Sedimentation “must be accomplished by an active *habituating*” (*HM* 285). For Casey, precipitation structures the way in which our bodies orient the world; a given situation implies a “passivity of enclosure” even while it allows for “the activity of getting to know our way around in a given circumstance” (*HM* 285).<sup>24</sup> ‘Precipitation’ refers to how pre-existing conditions of a given perceptual significance appear within, and actively shape, our experience of said significance. Ways around the puddle jump out at me through implicit resemblances (e.g. of the puddle, my movement, etc.) with previous episodes in my perceptual life. Casey’s point is that movement becomes, and continues to be, habitual through tacit references to bygone situations. Crucially, this temporal referencing is attributable neither to our volition nor even to our involuntary embodiment. Embodied circumstances are so

---

deeply situated within acquired habits/orientations that it becomes impossible to strictly distinguish between a situation I find myself in and my body's contributions to the appearance of that situation (*PhP*, 131-2/163).<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty seems to affirm this reading when he notes that habit's dependence on prior acquisition places "a depersonalization at the heart of consciousness" (*PhP*, 138-9/171).

Given our discussion of the "Temporality" chapter, we can identify that habitual motion's dependence on an absent structure is *a temporal dynamic of transcendence*. Precipitation is a kind of transition synthesis between moments of embodied, habitual motion; viz. prior movements, like past moments, actively ground our present habitual motion. Sedimentation is not an involuntarily representation of the progression of forms of habit; it is the open structure of that progression itself, a radically involuntary temporality relating forms of habit. To reiterate, there is no recourse to saying that precipitation is the product of an implicit or unreflective consciousness because the active-passive dynamic involved in precipitation is identified in the "Temporality" chapter as the result of a dependence on an impersonal temporality. This implies that, like with the structure of subjectivity, a passivity exists as the permanent context of habitual movement's dependence on prior acquisitions. Even if I am in a situation where my habits do not completely determine how I move/act, my very orientation depends on conditions I have no control over. My habitual embodiment appears as a transition from past forms of habit. More importantly, however, my habits emerge within a passivity to an independent temporality which relates those past forms to my present situation. If our reading of the "Temporality" chapter is correct, then it seems that the temporal dynamics involved in *PhP*'s description of habitual motion also implies an impersonal temporal ground of subjectivity.

---

## Concluding argument

While this is not an explicit description of the interruption of habits, I believe that this analysis is sufficient for avoiding *PH*'s criticism. Recall that Al-Saji highlights three flaws in *PhP*'s account of habit (*PH*, 152). First, *PhP* does not explicitly account for how habits are grounded in a radically involuntary temporality. Second, *PhP* does not describe how these underlying temporal relations are inherently incomplete/indeterminate. Finally, on Al-Saji's view, *PhP* fails to show how, through their dependence on temporal conditions, habits are intrinsically passive towards temporality.

Let us summarize our reading of how *PhP*'s account of temporality clarifies its descriptions of habit. The preceding discussion aimed to show that the terms which *PhP* uses to describe the temporality of habit, 'sedimentation' and 'precipitation,' can be read as implying a radically involuntary temporality. Casey's analysis shows that habitual motion depends on an activity of the past in order to generate our ordinary perception. Given our reading of *PhP*'s "Temporality" chapter, this relation between past and present can be described as a form of transition synthesis. First, the precipitation of the past into the present is not attributable to subjectivity; I am not directly responsible for how my embodied situation is necessarily contextualized by previous situations. Second, sedimentation does not determine in advance how habit will change because it is a form of transcendence. Through precipitation, habits are structurally open to absent, indeterminate possibilities which transcend them. Consequently, habits emerge and persist within a temporality which they do not actively constitute; habitual motion assumes a sheer passivity in which connections/similarities with past movements are given to us.

On this reading, *PhP*'s account of sedimentation elaborates the temporality of habits in a way similar to Al-Saji's use of affect in *PH*. Both accounts describe how independent temporal

---

relations underlie and structure habit in an underdetermined way. One might object that this only shows that sedimentation is implicitly a kind of affect. Whether or not this is true is beside the point advocated for in this essay. Our goal was to show that *PhP* implicitly does some of the major theoretical work which Al-Saji does with affect in *PH*. As mentioned above, this does not replace or undermine *PH*'s account. Rather, refuting Al-Saji's criticism shows that *PhP* is closer to *PH*'s account than Al-Saji claims and clarifies how *PH*'s account of racializing perception can be taken as an extension of *PhP*'s central descriptions.

---

## **Works Cited**

1. Al-Saji, Alia. "A Phenomenology of Hesitation: Interrupting Racializing Habits of Seeing," in *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. Emily S. Lee, 133-172. New York: State University of New York Press, 2014.
2. Al-Saji, Alia. "'A Past Which Has Never Been Present': Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of the Prepersonal," in *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 38, issue 1 (February 2008): 41-71.
3. Casey, Edward S. "Habitual Body and Memory in Merleau-Ponty." *Man and World*, vol. 17 (1984): 279-297.
4. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Tel Gallimard, 1945. English translation by Donald Landes as *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
5. Sallis, John. "Time, Subjectivity, and *The Phenomenology of Perception*." *The Modern School Man*, vol. 48 (May 1971): 343-357.
6. Kelly, Michael. "The Subject as Time: Merleau-Ponty's Transition from Phenomenology to Ontology," in *Time, Memory, Institution: Merleau-Ponty's New Ontology of Self*. eds. Kim Maclaren and David Morris Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2015.

## **Bibliography**

1. Lawlor, Leonard. "The End of Phenomenology: Expressionism in Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze" in *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, 80-94. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003.
2. Marratto, Scott L. *The Intercorporeal Self*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2012.
3. Renaud, Barbaras. "The Dualism of *Phenomenology of Perception*" in *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, 3-18. Indiana: Indiana University Press. 2004.
4. Staudigl, Micheal. "Towards a Phenomenological Theory of Violence: Reflections following Merleau-Ponty and Schutz." *Human Studies*, vol. 30, issue 3 (2007): 233-253.
5. Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing Like a Girl" in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*, 27-45. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A robust elaboration of *PhP*'s account of habitual motion will not be developed in this paper. See Marratto's *The Intercorporeal Self* (particularly ch.2) for an interpretation which informs my analysis of *PhP*.

<sup>2</sup> Due to spatial limitations, we will not discuss the accounts Al-Saji draws on in her use of affect, namely Fanon's (*Black Skin, White Masks*) and Bergson's (*Matter and Memory; The Creative Mind*).

<sup>3</sup> Although we will focus on *PH*'s and *PhP*'s accounts of visual habits, we will assume that these accounts can be generalized for all bodily habits.

<sup>4</sup> "To see an object is either to have it in the margins of the visual fields and to be able to focus on it, or actually to respond to this solicitation by focusing on it... With a single movement, I close off the landscape and open up the object... I apply my gaze to a fragment of the landscape, which becomes animated and displayed, while the other objects recede... Now, along with these other objects, I also have their horizons at my disposal, and the object I am currently focusing on – seen peripherally – is implied in these other horizons." - *PhP*, 69-70/95-6

<sup>5</sup> Although this cannot be investigated in detail, note that these subject-constituting conditions frame the moral alternative to naturalization. By continuously relinquishing the assumption that our perception of others generates brute facts, we become capable of exploring our relation to our perception's conditions. This becomes the context in which we can take responsibility for our reactions.

<sup>6</sup> I am taking the language of affect to be a kind of phenomenological description, which Al-Saji also seems to (cf. *PH*, 143, endnote 44). Thus, I assume that affect denotes conditions for the emergence of perceptual phenomena.

<sup>7</sup> However, Al-Saji gives a robust account of subjectivity's dependence on temporality through an exploration of the connection between Bergson's thought and *PhP*'s "Sensing" chapter in "*A Past Which Has Never Been Present*": *Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of the Prepersonal*.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to clarify that this does not mean that the past is merely occluded/hidden (i.e. that, if we had the right perspective, we could unambiguously identify how the past conditions the present/future). In the mode of tendency, the past *just is* ambiguous/underdetermined in itself. This changes only when ontological temporality is made implicit in a return to ordinary perceptual time.

<sup>9</sup> Here, we are discussing situations in which our habits no longer orient us. We might encounter interruptions of a different kind in which are hindered but still oriented towards particular possibilities. We will discuss neither the latter kind of interruption nor attempt to definitively

---

distinguish between the two.

<sup>10</sup> Although we will treat this point as purely descriptive, part of Al-Saji's justification for this generality is that hesitating affect brings out a temporality implicit in all of experience: "the possibility of interruption is inscribed within the same temporality that habit relies on to establish closure" (*PH*, 149).

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, going into detail about how this works would take us too far afield. For our purposes, it is enough to note that hesitating affect allows us to be receptive to elements of our situation which, in a habitual mode of embodiment, would not affect us. Consistent exposure to these elements gradually allows habits to change.

<sup>12</sup> See also pp.36-7 of *On Female Body Experience*.

<sup>13</sup> While *PH* focuses mostly on Young, an analogous criticism, explicitly of *PhP*, can be found in Staudigl's "Towards a Phenomenological Theory of Violence." Staudigl argues, similarly to Al-Saji, that *PhP* cannot provide a description of the experience of violence on its own terms, but only of the experience of the privation of seamless habitual motion.

<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, this is in no way a response to critiques of *PhP* in the vein of Barbaras' *The Being of the Phenomenon*. As will hopefully become clear, I am not saying that *PhP* provides a complete, explicit ontology, but only that *PhP* makes an implicit ontological claim which sufficient for an account of constructive interruption.

<sup>15</sup> If it is the case that "to be fully present to prereflective consciousness" means to be dependent on prereflective consciousness's present, then it is impossible to explain why Merleau-Ponty would use the adjective "originel" to modify the word "passé." If the past is dependent on the prereflective consciousness's present, then it is derivative from that present and is not itself original." – *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, 89-90  
See also Al-Saji's discussion of Dillon and Lawlor ("A Past Which Has Never been Present", 44-8).

<sup>16</sup> See pp.42, 47, 63 of Al-Saji's "A Past Which Has Never been Present" and p.93 of Lawlor's *Thinking Through French Philosophy*.

<sup>17</sup> "If indeed there are for Merleau-Ponty no principle and subordinate problems... it is because, in a sense, there is only one problem, the problem of subjectivity... The problem of subjectivity is not one problem among others but rather expresses the structural articulation demanded by the very project of a phenomenology of perception." – *Time, Subjectivity, and the Phenomenology of Perception*, 345

<sup>18</sup> See Sallis' discussion of this passage ("Time, Subjectivity, and The Phenomenology of Perception." pp. 346-347).

<sup>19</sup> "What Husserl does that is so philosophically interesting to Merleau-Ponty is that he turns his attention to the consciousness of succession that is characteristic of the operative intentionality of

---

the constituting self that makes possible the apprehension of a succession of consciousnesses and therefore of temporal objects... Merleau-Ponty seems unique among Husserl commentators... in that he appreciates that for Husserl, these three moments denote the mode of intentionality unique to the life of absolute consciousness..." – *TS*, 205

<sup>20</sup> This essay will not explicitly take up Merleau-Ponty's use of the Husserlian concepts of operative intentionality and passive synthesis (*PhP*, 441-2/480-1). For a short analysis of this relation see *TS*, 205-8

<sup>21</sup> "The springing forth of a new present does not *provoke* a piling up of the past and an upheaval of the future; rather the new present *is* the passage from a future to the present and of the previous present to the past... The "instants" A, B, and C *do not exist* in succession, they *differentiate themselves* from each other... Here there is no multiplicity of connected phenomena but rather a single phenomenon of flowing." – *PhP*, 442/481.

"A, A', and A'', on the one hand, and B and B' on the other hand, are not linked together through a synthesis of identification... but rather through a synthesis of transition (*Übergangssynthese*), insofar as they emerge from each other, and each on of these projections is only an appearance of the total rupture or dehiscence." – *PhP*, 442-3/481-2

<sup>22</sup> In other words, we take the identity of subject and time to mean that time is a structure and that this structure is identical with the structure of subjectivity. The take of Merleau-Ponty's analysis in this final stage is, hence, that of tracing out this identity. – Time, Subjectivity, and the Phenomenology of Perception, 354. See also pp. 354-7 for Sallis' analysis of this identity in terms of the features of transcendence, primal acquisition, and reflexivity.

<sup>23</sup> "And when we recall that Merleau-Ponty speaks of "time's synthesis" – not consciousness's synthesis – as "a transition synthesis," this remark suggests that he does indeed in the *Phenomenology* identify the self as time... and Merleau-Ponty maintains this identification of the subject as time because he considers time's ecstatic movement the very structure of the self's transcendence." – *TS*, 208

<sup>24</sup> "Habituation here takes its most concrete form in the body's inhabitation of the world, its active insertion into space and time... In fact, the habituation which such inhabitation accomplishes involves a delicate dialectic between the implied passivity of enclosure (for space and time undeniably act to contain us) and the activity of getting to know our way around in a given circumstance." – *HM*, 285

<sup>25</sup> "But this word "sedimentation" must not trick us: this contracted knowledge is not an inert mass at the foundation of our consciousness... my acquired thoughts are not an absolute acquisition; they feed off my present thought at each moment; they offer me a sense, but this is a sense that I reflect back to them... The acquired, then, is only truly acquired if it is taken up in a new movement of thought, and a thought is only situated if it itself assumes its situation." – *PhP*, 131-2/163