ABIDE BY ME(T), Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

Incorporating Merleau-Ponty's 'Pre-Objective' Perception into Material Engagement Theory

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ABIDE BY ME(T), Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

Incorporating Merleau-Ponty's 'Pre-Objective' Perception into Material Engagement Theory

Abstract: MET's goal of 'taking material culture seriously' in cognitive archaeology has been met with praise for its novel approach and scepticism for its radical theoretical claims. MET has argued that we are ontologically intertwined with the material world, and as a consequence the material world is constitutively intertwined with our cognition. Recent criticisms have argued that MET can accomplish its research without such strong claims. In line with these criticisms, this paper aims to improve MET's ontology and phenomenology by replacing MET's current ontological claim with Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-objectivity'. We argue that 'pre-objectivity' ontologically ties us to the world but does not co-constitute our cognition. Furthermore, MET's currently uses phenomenology to support their ontology, however this results in phenomenological claims that are unjustified. Having 'pre-objectivity' as the ontological grounding for MET will allow for a cleaner discussion of phenomenology and ontology where the former justifiably supports the latter.

Introduction

In the field of cognitive archaeology, Material Engagement Theory (MET) stands out as one of the most radical frameworks through which to assess the ancient human mind. MET brings together the 4e cognition (extended, embodied, enactive and embedded), phenomenology and materialism in order to form a new conception of action and agency grounded within the ontological entanglement between humans and our material world. Colin Renfrew, Lambros Malafouris and Bruno Latour all contributed in the development of MET, although Malafouris' book *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement* (HTSM) remains the largest and most complete text describing MET (and thus Malafouris will be the spokesperson for this paper). MET commits to the ontological claim that the world co-constitutes our mind and that our minds are not located in our brain or body but is rather location-less as it emerges from engagement with the world. As a result, the minds of ancient humans were neither confined to their brains nor their bodies. Thus analysing artefacts within the MET framework allows researchers to make informed inferences about the lived experiences of ancient humans.

Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* attempted to situate our subjectivity in the body which marked a crucial pivot from his predecessors (Heidegger, Husserl, and Hegel).

While his theoretical dismantling of the intellectualist and empiricist traditions resembled that taken by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason,* Merleu-Ponty's advocated that our rational subjectivity is rooted in a 'pre-objective' perception rather than transcendental idealism. 'Pre-objectivity' is an ontological claim that grounds all human perception and explains the ambiguity that we often experience within perception. We are leaving this definition vague for the moment in order to fully discuss it later in the Merleau-Ponty section.

The purpose of this paper is to amend METs current use of phenomenology and ontology in order to strengthen its theoretical framework which frequently comes under criticism for its strong and under-defended claims about our ontology and our minds. MET faces two problems with regards to its ontology and phenomenology. The first is that its strong ontological and philosophy of mind stances attract criticisms to its framework, when it's not necessary to make such strong claims in order use an MET approach to cognitive archaeology. The second is that it uses phenomenology to defend its strong ontology which is a weak defense and a misuse of phenomenology. Thus, their ontology is poorly defended and brings in criticism and its phenomenology is poorly deployed and doesn't allow for a proper phenomenological discussion.

Incorporating Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-objective' provides a solution to both of these problems. The first is that using 'pre-objectivity' as MET's ontology allows for a clearer discussion of both phenomenology and ontology because the phenomenology is not being used to defend ontological claims for which it has no justification to do so. The second is that 'pre-objectivity' is better suited for a scaffolded model of the mind and can take on the criticisms currently faced by MET. Furthermore, 'pre-objectivity' is not compatible with 'methodological individualism' and thus can serve as its ontology while preserving its methodological focus.

To begin, we will explain MET's ontology and theory of the mind. Painting a full picture of MET is beneficial because many of it claims are counter-intuitive, however each counter-intuitive claim supports one another and thus it makes the most sense to describe them fully before progressing. Afterwards we will describe Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-objectivity' and then why it would benefit MET to adopt 'pre-objectivity' as its ontological grounds.

ONTOLOGY

"In the vast syntax of the world, the different beings adjust themselves to one another...Place and similitude become entangled..." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Introduction to Ontology

MET's ontology is a relational ontology which examines the dynamic interactions between humans and the world, or the "between" processes coupling "brains, bodies and things" (HTSM, p.77). According to MET, the coupling between bodies and the world cannot be described using an enabling principle whereby the world enables the completion of cognitive tasks, but is not sufficiently involved to be considered a constitutive part of the process. For example, doing math is easier with a pen and paper because we offload some of the smaller processes, such as remembering the numbers involved, onto the paper. This is an enabling relationship as opposed to constitutive because the problem was solvable without the tools. MET disagrees with this, and claims that both the tools and the world around us, which we use everyday to reduce cognitive demands, transforms the cognitive tasks themselves and thus cannot be considered enabling with respect to cognition but rather constitutive. For example, the strengths and limitations of fishing rods led to further developments in fishing, such as using waders or ringing up multiple lines. A tool was used to overcome the task of catching a fish, and the use of the tool led to further transformations in the act of catching fish. Thus, a fishing rod became a constitutive part of the act of fishing in times and places where fishing rods were used. This relationship between humanity and tools is not simply an epistemological necessity for MET's project, but rather, according to MET, represents the ontological status of our relationship with tools. This strong ontological stance has its roots in Actor Network Theory (ANT) developed by Bruno Latour (who has worked closely with Malafouris) and Michel Callon whose non-anthrocentric 'general symmetry' approach to agency as it connects humans and tools is used to justify MET's strong ontological claims.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) & Ontology

ANT advocates for a non-anthropocentric conception of agency whereby it is not an *a priori* value but is rather a value that emerges from the way in which the network is analysed. The specific dynamic of any particular relationship takes form according to the perspective under which the relationship is observed. Traditional conceptions of agency, in contrast, assign humans agency *a priori* and the materials that we use to complete tasks are simply enabling in helping us achieve our tasks. This places humans at the top of the pyramid of agency because systems are organized with respect to how we manipulate the world around us. Taking irrigation in Mesopotamia as an example, the agents are the humans who are in need of water, which is scarce, in order to farm crops for survival. They built dams, canals and ditches in order to control the water's movement. Under ANT, the dams and canals that are were built were also doing a significant amount of the work; without them the water would flow as it would without interference and would not have served the Mesopotamian's purposes.

But how would the canals become agents? Under ANT, humans are not the only actors. In ANT, "An "actor"…is a semiotic definition -an actant-, that is, something that acts or to which activity is granted by others…An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action." (Latour 1996, p. 373). Drawing from semiotics, ANT maintains that actors are only definable in terms of their relations with one another (in semiotics, signs only have meaning within the context of other signs). Assigning *a priori* value to human actors in a system does a disservice to the actual movements within the system, which to bring back to irrigation, is not reducible to human labour alone.

However, using a semiotics approach carries the risk of agency becoming a trivial designation. ANT in response makes the ontological move to claim that the symbolic meanings of the entities and the entities themselves are inseparable. Latour calls this "…an elevation…" of the objects and phenomena being observed because they are no longer bound by finite empirical properties (Latour 1990, p.10). By making this move ANT dissolves the distinction between representations and material objects, a move which MET uses in its ontological claim concerning humans and their tools.

MET has adopted much, if not all, of the ANT paradigm, and resituated it within its own framework. Firstly, ANT's ontological conflation of signs and things supports MET's claim that tools are always constitutive of the tasks that they are employed to complete. The starting point of analysis is neither the human agent's prior intentionality nor is it the functional deployment of the tool. Rather, the engagement is considered a system which transforms all agents involved. Secondly, the 'general symmetry' of agency within ANT further supports MET's 'primacy of engagement'. Distributing agency in terms of relationships and associations ensures that artefacts, in their time, were not simply subservient to the needs of their users. Under ANT, claims about ancient human life can be inferred from artefacts because the artefacts are not simply extensions of symbolic representations; they in fact co-constitute the representations. This allows MET to bypass 'methodological individualism' in order to engage the life-world of ancient humans.

There are many criticisms that can be levied against this approach, however before we address the problems with MET's ontology we will explore MET's theory of mind to see how ontology and mind interact, before addressing the problems in MET's framework and developing a solution using Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-objectivity'.

Material Minds: Enactive & Extended

"I call out to Him in the darkness. But it's as if no one was there. Perhaps there isn't anyone."
The Knight Antonius Block, *The Seventh Seal*

Introduction: M(4)ET

One of the questions that most concerns MET is 'Where is the mind?' MET strives to answer this question to solve what it perceives as one of the largest paradigmatic fault that a plethora of field make; that the mind is located within the brain, also known as neurocentricism or internalism. Neurocentricism encompasses a variety of positions within the philosophy of mind literature whose underlying claim is that the mind is entirely or mostly confined to the brain. However the claims of neurocentricism extend beyond the location of the mind. Representations play a strong role in a neurocentrist paradigm, which is often

cashed out as a primary driver of our rational actions within the world. Wyn (1995) for example, claims that handaxes could not have been made without a prior blueprint of the finished product because of the precision required to create the axe. The shape and mechanic skill required was too specific to have its origins emerging through engagement. Therefore, the intention must have been prior to its inception. Artefacts are only the product of mental activity and thus only give us limited access to prior minds. This results in what's known as 'methodological individualism'.

 'Methodological individualism' holds that the amount of knowledge we can glean from artefacts is necessarily limited because the mind is largely if not entirely an internal entity. This is not an explicit position that is defended but is rather a characterization of a an internalist paradigm within cognitive archaeology. 'Methodological individualism' holds that we can garner socio-cultural knowledge given the forms, dispersal and materiality of artefacts. However we cannot get equally valid knowledge about ancient humans minds or their experiences because these two phenomena are locked away in the brain not left in artefacts. This presents a methodological wall to cognitive archaeology however MET, in line with 4E cognition, believes that this position misrepresents the nature of the mind and engagement.

In contrast to the neurocentric paradigm, 4E's general claim is that that neither the brain nor the skin confines the mind. This is explored in four different fields, embedded, embodied, enactive and extended theories of mind all of which are committed to reconfiguring the location of the brain. Broadly speaking, embodied cognition focuses on the mind as its found in the body, embedded cognition discusses how the environment helps to shape and constrain cognition, enactive claims that the mind emerges from interactions between the brain and the body, and extended advocates that the mind extends beyond the skin to incorporate the world into our cognitive processes. While not co-extensive, there is lots of overlap between both the "E's" and with neurocentric claims (a lot of 4E literature incorporates a neurological research). Thus, most 4E models apply for a compatibilist position whereby the mind is not simply the brain, but the brain still is the primary mover of cognition.

Using 4E cognition, MET seeks to solidify its ontological claims by arguing that our ontological entanglement with the world both grounds and results in our cognitive

entanglement with the world. The mind is nowhere because it only emerges within engagement. In what follows we will focus on the enactive and extended conceptions of the mind, as MET is most concerned with these, showing that the commitments MET requires that we make in order to avoid neurocentricism open it up to heavy criticism.

Enactive

Enactivism's core claim is that the mind emerges as a result of action and engagement within the world. Addressing the claims being made by the computational models of the mind at the time, enactivism claimed that, "'Inner' and 'Outer' are not preexisting separate spheres, but mutually specifying domains enacted or brought forth by the structural coupling of the system and its environment." (Thompson 2007, p.26) 'Inner' and 'Outer' in this context denotes the traditional separation of body and mind, as well as mind and environment. Enactivism does not want to dissolve these boundaries, but rather wants to resituate them within a process of enaction. As we engage the world, the world brings out cognitive characteristics that would not make sense outside of the context of the initial engagement.

Another focus of enactivism is the dynamic coupling between bodies and the world, which is similar to but different from the ontological entanglement that MET advocates for. According to enactivists, being dynamically coupled with the world produces a bi-directional feedback loop from which our experience emerges. In other words, our action in the world produces subjectivity. This dynamic coupling also means that the traditional boundaries mentioned earlier are a dishonest portrayal of our bodies and minds. There are material differences between a body and a football, but that material division cannot account for the ways in which a football may have contributed to an individuals' experience. In this tradition, subjectivity is simply the result of living in a material world.

The connections from enactivism to MET are multiple. Firstly, they share similar ontological commitments but have different research directions. Using enactivism, MET has

further justification to elevate the status of materials as the co-constitutors of subjectivity because in the enactive framework, "interactive cognitive extension[s] [are] to be the primary and default condition of mind rather than an occasional exception to an otherwise internal mind" (Froese et al. 2013, p.6). Ontologically this can be cashed out that the world co-constitutes our subjectivity.

The biggest difference between Enactivism and MET is that MET uses its ontological grounding to justify their claim that the mind has no location while enactivism doesn't go this far. This coincides with MET's rejection of any neurocentricism; if the mind has a location then the mind still pertains to some structure that has been assigned beforehand (even if it emerges through engagement). Enactivism doesn't go as far as to say that an emergent mind is the same as a location-less mind (which we will explore more later). This difference marks one of the crucial ways that MET has separated itself from other 4E theories of mind; for MET can be no compatibility between any internalist conception of mind and 4E cognition.

Extended

The Extended Mind Hypothesis (EM) was first developed by Clark and Chalmers in their paper *The Extended Mind (*1998), and was the first systematized attempt to claim that both mental contents and mental processes can be externalized. An important distinction between this claim and enactivism is that enactivism never claimed that the mind was necessarily located outside of the brain, rather that the rise of our experience came from the dynamic coupling between the body and the world. Enactivism is often combined with the extended mind however the extension of the mind is not explicitly entailed by the enactive emergence of the mind.

EM's most famous example of Otto and Inga uses the externalization of memory. In this example, both Otto and Inga need to get to the Museum of Modern ART (MOMA) in New York. Inge remembers where to go and makes it there without a problem. However Otto has Alzheimers and cannot remember how to get there without some sort of tool. Therefore in

order to make it to the MOMA, he needs to write down the directions to the MOMA in his notebook. They both arrive at the MOMA and as Clark & Chalmers point out, "...the essential causal dynamics of the two cases mirror each other precisely." (Clark & Chalmers 1998, p.13).

The first reading of EM that Clark & Chalmers offer is the parity principle which would claim that Otto uses his notebook as a functional extension of his memory. In other words, remembering where the MOMA required the recollection of certain semantic memories that Otto, because of his Alzheimer's, did not have reliable access to and thus he externalized the equivalent process. In other words, the brain's processes have been outsourced to the world.

The second reading is called the complementarity principle which states that by extending our mental processes into the world, we are transforming those brain processes. Instead of the notebook satisfying the equivalent brain processes, the notebook complements what's happening in the brain. One example of this reading is van Leeuwen et al's [(1999) discussed in Clark (2003)] example of the artist using their sketchpad to complete the ideas that were too difficult to complete solely in their head. Externalizing our mental imagery facilitates creative expression because it allows us to explore alternative interpretations of our mental images (for more, see Chambers and Reisberg 1985) and solidify them in the action of creating them.

MET relies on the complementarity principle to justify its claims that the mind ahs no location; if it can be extended there's no reason to assume it has any fixed location. If the mind can be extended into the world and emerges from engagement, then the mind has no location but can only be defined in within the context of engagement. This picture fills in the non-anthropocentric ontology that it drew from ANT; under this model of 4E cognition, the mind can only emerge and make sense in terms of the material as well as socio-economic constraints.

Where is the mind...who cares?

MET's conception of 4E cognition seeks to create a model that is free from the vestigial influences of neurocentricism, which present the problem of 'methodological individualism' and the primacy of representations over engagement. Despite the underlying claim of 4E

cognition being the reorientation of the mind from the brain, MET is highly critical of the ways in which 4E cognition still hangs onto its Cartesian roots. For example, Malafouris has praised embodied cognition's position that the body is the root of how we structure our conceptualizations of the world rather than our representations. However, he criticizes the position for defining the mind in terms of the body; if the brain is an arbitrary designation for the mind then according to Malafouris, so is the body. Even EM literature is considered too "computational", because "minds are being recognized and reconfigured as dynamic embodied machineries, but remain, above all problem-solving machines." (Malafouris & Renfrew 2010, p.7) MET separates itself from mainstream 4E cognition by demanding that, in line with its ontological claim that the world co-constitutes our mind, the dynamic externalization of the mind via engagement is a necessary function of the mind. But is this tenable?

Theiner & Drain (2016) convincingly argued that MET actually has better explanatory power using cognitive scaffolding where the mind is causally dependent on the world, rather than the radical ontological commitment that the world is constitutively intertwined with cognition. They use Malafouris' reading of Linear Tablet B to show how the same reading can be accomplished with more moderate claims. Linear Tablet B was a series record of administrative data encompassing economic transactions as well as records of offerings to the gods and goddesses in Mycenae (the oldest dated at 1450 BC). Originally Malafouris uses this discussion to make the argument against both internalist accounts of the mind and the parity principle as offered by *The Extended Mind* (Clark & Chalmers, 1998) in favour of the complementarity principle of EM. According to Malafouris, Linear Tablet B was more than the externalization of memory; the engagement with the clay produced a new system of memory. The clay that the tablets used dried quickly, and therefore smaller tablets were used for short-term storage and once the information was verified it was transferred to a larger tablet for more permanent storage. Like the fishing rod example from before, the materials used in the task transformed the task itself producing more than a functional extension of memory but rather a whole new system of memory rooted in the material affordances of the engagement.

Theiner & Drain lay out Malafouris' 4E reading of Linear Tablet B as requiring two projects, claiming that the former of does not entail the second. Malafouris' first claim is that the physical properties of the tablets played a role in their development and deployment, which suggests a more dynamic relationship than a conservative representational stance would allow. The tablets, far from being neutral substrates on which memory data was externalized, rather transformed "...the physical boundaries of the problem's space, and thereby [restructured] the problem-solving process. " (HSTM, p.72) According to Theiner & Drain, this is handily explained using cognitive scaffolding which claims that we deploy tools within the world in order to solve problems or to "make it possible for the human mind to come to believe things that it would never otherwise come to believe or imagine."(Malafouris & Renfrew 2010, p.7 [citing Clark 2010]) However this reading is compatible with a neurocentric reading, and therefore Malafouris makes the second move to claim that this is indicative of an ontological intertwining between the scribes and the tablets. Not only are mind and world ontologically intertwined, but the mind is also necessarily extended because it is neither located within the brain nor within the world.

However, a scaffolding model is compatible with Malafouris' analysis of Linear Tablet B without its large ontological claims and that this analysis can even be done without extending the mind. The enactive position allows for the emergence of a particular 'cognitive milieu' without begging the question of where the mind is or by radically extending the mind. Scaffolding cognition with an enactive approach still accounts for the particularities of the process of creating Linear Tablet B because it is context sensitive and highlights the emergent properties of engagement. But the mind can also human-centric and thus not lost in between the world and the human. It is not necessary for the world to co-constitute the mind; rather it is sufficient for the mind to be causally dependent on incorporating tools in order to solve tasks.

Sterelny also argues that debating the location of the mind is a "red herring" to investigations into ancient minds. Malafouris' strong claim is that the mind is not located anywhere, it is a between property that cannot be isolated from its parts. However, this results in constant investigations into the nature of mind rather than how it was used in ancient peoples. Sterelny is pointing how that the 4E project of MET takes away from its initial project

which was not to assess the status of the mind but rather to investigate how ancient people experienced their world. MET believes that it requires its strong claims in order to make that investigation, however the cognitive scaffolding example showed that it does not.

Ultimately, MET's strong claims about the nature of mind open it up to theoretical criticisms. In the next section, we will explore Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology before embarking on why Merleau-Ponty's pre-objectivity provides a better ontological grounding for MET.

PHÉNOMÉNOLOGIE

"All in all is all we are" – Nirvana, *All Apologies*

Introduction

In this final section, we will introduce Merleau-Ponty's ontology of 'pre-objectivity' as an alternative to MET's existing phenomenology and ontology with a few advantages. MET believes that tool and niche construction begins with and is developed through material engagement as opposed to having their origins in representations. Merleau-Ponty would agree that representations cannot be the origin of engagement. However Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-objective' claim does not require that the world co-constitutes our mind in an ontological sense nor does it require a commitment to the mind being location-less. 'Pre-objective' perception is materially grounded, but its ontological stance only claims that this is the truth of perception not the mind. Thus the positive project of MET, using artefacts to find real facts about ancient humans, remains in tact however it becomes less susceptible to the criticisms it draws for having it large claims.

In Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, he wrote an example of walking on the beach surrounded by a forest. In the distance, one part of the forest looked incongruent and for a moment he could not tell if what he was looking at was part of the forest or not. Suddenly it became clear that the ambiguity was the mast on a boat marooned on the beach. After he perceived the boat, he asked himself how he was able to distinguish the wood from the boat and the wood in the forest but came to the conclusion that while there may have been reasons for why he was able to make the distinctions, the scene didn't become clear because those distinctions came to mind; they simply got clearer as he approached. Finding the reasons came after he was made aware of the boat and the forest, putting perception in front of reflection. What this example tried to articulate is how when we reflect about the world, we reflect on a world that has already been constituted in perception. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls 'pre-objective' perception. Our ability to reflect on, remember, and experience the world is predicated on our ability to perceive the world.

The pre-objective position that Merleau-Ponty set out to describe comes out in opposition to two contrasting epistemological traditions, empiricism and intellectualism, both of which have contrasting answers to the question of how is subjectivity is constituted. In arguing against empiricism, Merleau-Ponty uses 'pre-objectivity' to show that perception is intentional, a perception-of objects in the world, and that pre-objective perception is the foundation the very mechanisms that empiricism claims constitutes subjectivity, namely memory and association. Against intellectualism, Merleau-Ponty claims that 'pre-objective' perception is not organized by rationality which is why it is truly 'pre-objective' instead of being 'rational'.

Before we move on to Merleau-Ponty and MET we will first situate 'pre-objectivity' within the positions it originally was meant to criticize. It should be noted, that the debates between these positions are being condensed given that the purpose of describing empiricism and intellectualism is not to explore Merleau-Ponty's full refutation of their claims, but rather to articulate the claims of 'pre-objectivity' within the academic ecosystem in which it was developed.

Against Empiricism

The empiricist position was characterized as the position held by psychologists at the time when *Phenomenology of Perception* was written and is the heir to the empiricist legacy. Empiricism's primary focus is on objects within the world being determined by their objective qualities which are strung together in subjectivity largely by sensation, association and memory. Empiricism characterizes sensation as the 'units of experience' meant to describe how the object of perception looks within perception. For example, my water bottle is glass and has been tinted brown. These two qualities show me two things, one is the bottle's physical composition, and the brown is a certain way in which the bottle reflects light before it hits my retinas. These sensations reflect a one-to-one relationship between the object and the sensation because the object is the sum of finite qualities. Empiricism's goal is to determine the physical laws that underpin perception in order to create a science of perception derived from its physiological workings. Thus, characteristics of perception like meaning and intentionality have little place in studying perception when it can be explained using the objective qualities of the world and the objective qualities of our body.

However one glaring issue is that things do not appear to us uniformly, which means that there needs to be another mechanism to account for variation in perception. Empiricism calls upon memory and association in order to explain these variations, that our experience is largely constituted by memory and, by virtue of having different experiences in the world, perception is incongruent between individuals. Association and memory, not the object itself, cause any variations in perception because neither are entirely reliable. However for Merleau-Ponty, the empiricist position appealing to memory as the content of our perception is problematic because its claim is circular. There is no doubt that memory plays a significant role in contributing to our subjective experience. However memory requires perceptual content in order to recall past perceptual content; memory is a memory-of something else. This means that perceptual content needs to be organized prior to not within memory recall. Thus, it

cannot be prior to perception, and critically for Merleau-Ponty, this means that perception arrives into our subjectivity already organized.

If memory cannot be our foundation for our experience, and according to empiricists our experience of meaning in the world comes from memory, then where does meaning emerge? The second response from Merleau-Ponty is that we are not passive perceptual sponges; rather our perception is intentional so that when we perceive something it is a perception-of something. We intend towards objects and in doing so, forge a relationship with the object. For example, when I eat macaroons it is not simply a physical transaction to satisfy my physiological needs. I expect that they will be as tasty as they usually are; I anticipate their loveliness without knowing in advance exactly what I'm going to taste. In other words, I strike up a relationship with the macaroons that encompasses the whole spectrum of contexts in which the relationship situated. My relationship with macaroons is not exhausted by their flavour profile nor by my taste in food, I intend towards eating macaroons which brings out an experience much lusher than their material qualities and my physiological mechanisms. Thus, by intending towards objects we find meaning within the objects that goes beyond a physiological exchange but through a relationship that we establish with the world.

To summarize, Merleau-Ponty's criticisms of empiricism have necessitated that our perception must constitute our experience prior to memory or association, and must be intentional which is where our experience of meaning comes from. So how do we intend towards the world? Do we use our reasoning to guide our perception so that we may create relationships with the world? In this next section, we will explore the intellectualist position to show how our 'pre-objective' perception is not constituted by rational processes but rather exists prior to our rationality.

Against Intellectualism

Intellectualism offers some advantages over empiricism. Unlike empiricism, which takes the atomistic constitution of the world as the constitution of our perception, intellectualism argued that our rationality plays a constitutive role in perception in the form of judgments. By applying our concepts about the world to the world, we see the world as more

than mere sensations and instead are able to see things as more than blobs of different qualities. Furthermore, constituting our experience through our judgments means that what we judge the world to be like is how we see the world. As such, perception is both intentional and has meaning because our judgments about the world constitute how we see the world.

However, this does not give our judgments free reign to perceive whatever we may please; intellectualism still believes there is an objective world that exists as a "...fixed stimulus." (Carman 2008, p.54). Merleau-Ponty uses the example of the moon to articulate this point. According to the intellectualist, if the moon appears to be larger on the horizon than at its zenith it's simply the result of inattention or a lack of sufficient scrutiny because the moon is the same size on the horizon as it is in the sky. The perceptual differences between the different positions of the moon do not constitute real differences in the size of the moon. While we can add intelligibility to the world, which makes it appear to have meaning, intellectualism believes that illusions within our experience, such as perceiving the different sizes of the moon, are not the true character of our experience and are in fact mistakes. The world given to us in perception, constituted by our judgments, is given to us clearly and our mistakes are simply poor judgments.

One of the primary issues that intellectualism faces is that it distorts what a judgment actually means. In intellectualism, if we see the world as it is than we have made a correct judgment about the world. But as Merleau-Ponty (2015) points out, "Ordinary experience draws a...distinction between sensing and judgment...judgment is the taking of a position, it aims at knowing something valid for me at every moment of my life, and for other minds, actual or possible; sensing...is giving one sense over to appearance without trying to...know its truth. This distinction disappears in intellectualism." (p.43). If we can only perceive the objective world through correct judgments then this leaves little room for thinking about the world. Judgments in the intellectualist traditions do not allow us to take a position within the world, because the choice between a correct and incorrect judgment leaves us with the world presented to us in clarity and the world distorted by a mistake in our judgments. Merleau-Ponty characterized this saying, "What intellectualism lacks is contingency in the occasions of

thought." (Merleau-Ponty 2015, p.43). Thus, there is no room for pondering because confusion in our judgments amounts to a mistake.

More importantly, if intellectualism is correct then our experience is infallible because there is no difference between what we see and our beliefs about what we see. If what we experience is the result of our judgments about the world then how do you draw the truth line between a neuro-typical individual who experiences the world and someone who frequently hallucinates? It's possible to say that this hallucinating doesn't correspond with other experiences of the world, however this appeals to other individual's subjectivity. There is no way to address this issue within perception for the intellectualists because it would require addressing the perceptual content, all that empiricists argue that we perceive, that intellectualists believe do not factor into our experience. Without our rationality, intellectualism believes that these qualities only amount to vague blobs of sensory qualities. Therefore there's no way to determine what's true or not without engaging the contents of perception.

For Merleau-Ponty, the issues that face intellectualism provide justification for a conception of perception that is not wholly constituted by our reasoning or judgments. Judgments sitting at the seat of perception are not really judgments because there is no possibility for taking a stance on the world. There is simply the objective world and mistakes in the form of illusions. Furthermore if perception is rationally constituted then there is no meaningful distinction between the objective world and hallucinations. As long as we perceive, then our judgments within our perception will feel infallible. Without addressing perceptual content, which according to intellectualism is just atomistic qualities in the world, there is no way to prove that hallucinations are more or less true than the objective qualities in the world. Thus, perception requires more than our intellect to give us our experience living in the world.

Synthèse

Combining the criticisms of empiricism and intellectualism give us a good picture of what Merleau-Ponty means by 'pre-objectivity'. According to the criticisms of empiricism, perception must be intentional and be prior to memory or association both of whom rely on

perceptual content in order to exist. If perception is intentional, our experience of the world has meaning as a result of our forging a relationship with objects in the world. Following the criticisms of intellectualism, perception must have a pre-rational part of it because if it's only constituted rationally then the lines between hallucinations and the objective world is blurred. 'Pre-objectivity' is neither rational, nor without intention. As Toadvine (2000) notes, "The "natural self" of the body…is anonymous and general; it demonstrates an intentionality and temporality distinct from that of the reflective cogito". 'Pre-objectivity' is our original acquisition of the world which, like us, is intentional and pre-rational.

Both empiricism and intellectualism sought to claim that the way in which we perceive the world can only be explained in terms of "clear and distinct" (Dillon 1997, p.18) perception. Ambiguities and confusion are seen as faults and not the true character of perception. However as we have shown, a definition of perception that only has its clear characteristics leads to inconsistent positions. Merleau-Ponty in contrast embraced ambiguity as being central to perception, but not the only characteristic of perception. 'Pre-objectivity' and rationality co-exist which explains the clarity and lack of clarity that we experience within perception. More importantly, having both of these characteristics of perception ensures that perception is our primary and only way of knowing the world.

Another feature of 'pre-objectivity', particularly important for the connection between MET and Merleau-Ponty, is that 'pre-objective' perception is an important part of describing how we perceive at all times. In a loud restaurant you focus on the person you're trying to hear, but the other sounds don't disappear. If you're looking deeply into the face of the person you're listening to, the area around them does not disappear because you're only paying attention to their face. Through our senses we are always tied to the world through our perception. For the purposes of MET, this is an important ontological grounding.

Merleau-Ponty & MET

"The perceived world is the always-presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence." Merleau-Ponty, Primacy of Perception (p. 13)

MET's Phenomenology: "The Cognitive Life of Things"

In order to discuss how Merleau-Ponty's conception of 'pre-objectivity' improves MET, it's important to first discuss how MET uses phenomenology in its framework. MET's problems with phenomenology emerge from one major problem in the framework which is how phenomenology is deployed. Despite attempting to describe how ancient people thought, which would put phenomenology in a central role in its investigations, MET currently only uses phenomenology to support its ontology. So we are ontologically intertwined with the world because objects appear to us as more than their objective qualities and we think through the world rather than as a disembodied consciousness. Analytically this makes poor use of phenomenology especially given that its project is trying to infer valid phenomenological facts about ancient peoples. Malafouris' conception of "the Cognitive Life of Things" bears many resemblances to Merleau-Ponty's account of perception, however it is not justified in defending its ontological claim that the world co-constitutes the mind and that the mind is location-less.

"The Cognitive Life of Things" echoes that within perception the world is more than the sum of its objective qualities, a claim we've seen in our discussion of Merlau-Ponty. Malafouris' counter-intuitive defence for this approach is to draw from ANT and say that if our material world co-constitutes our subjectivity then objects are not simply objects; they are partly subjects as well. In forming a constitutive part of our subjectivity they acquire a partial subjectivity of their own. This line of argument is very similar to ANT's justification for giving objects agency. Objects can be agents insofar as they constitute a part of the network of action and "things have a cognitive life because minds have a material life" (Malafouris 2011, p. 4).

Malafouris and Koukouti add to this claim using Heidegger's concept of 'thingness' as a way to distinguish between objects and things with personal value. Objects that are partly subjective are no longer considered objects in the sense that they have objective qualities that

we observe. This is because "the vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that it holds" (Heidegger 1975). For MET, this can be used to mean that the way in which we attach ourselves to objects are not exhausted by our recognition of their qualities but rather in how we experience the object. For example, imagine the sentimental value someone's grandfather's lighter might have had for him or her because it was in their grandfather's pocket as he fought during World War II. The lighter would have lived a life alongside their grandfather, and in the pocket of this individual the lighter would feel different than any other lighter. While not all material objects connect us in this inherited sense it does communicate how an inert object could come to occupy a place (or a void) in someone's life that is specific to the context in which the object was used.

This conception of objects is critical to MET's project because it further supports the claim that artefacts give more than simply traces of the mind, and that they instead formed part of the world of those involved with the artefact when it was created. Drawing upon phenomenology allows MET to explore how its ontological claims are supported in our experience.

MET's Phenomenological Problems

Concerning phenomenology, the issue faced by MET has which is that it uses phenomenology to justify its ontology. "The Cognitive Life of Things" incorporates many phenomenological insights into MET's framework, yet used in defense of ontological intertwinement is required to make claims that it can't support. To return to the lighter example, MET would go as far as to say that the lighter's significant sentimental value supports their ontology because the sentimental value is a result of the mutual entanglement between the owner of the lighter and the lighter itself. So the lighter appearing as more than its objective qualities within experience is meant to justify ontological entanglement. Yet, this move isn't justified because sentimental attachments bringing out qualities in objects that are not explicitly entailed does not necessarily mean that the object in question co-constitutes our subjectivity. As mentioned before, a scaffolded conception of the mind can accommodate this

position with far less commitments. If phenomenology cannot justify their ontology than this leaves their ontology with another criticism that is difficult to justify.

While MET's phenomenology has similarities to Merleau-Ponty's, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology cannot be used to endorse MET's ontology either. MET's conception of objects as subjects sounds very similar to Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-objective' intentionality; perception is a perception-of objects and thus objects are not inert within subjectivity. However it does not follow from this that the world co-constitutes the mind. Objects-as-subjects requires that we make a statement about the ontological status of objects, whereas with 'pre-objectivity' objects as objects-of intention is only making a statement about the intentionality of our perception. With MET's claim, the ontological status of objects is raised because of how they appear in perception however this is a leap that Merleau-Ponty would not endorse. Phenomenology speaks to experience and objects of experience, not the ontological status of objects. So, defending its ontology with phenomenological claims distorts what phenomenology is justified in claiming which leads to an incomplete defense for a strong ontological stance.

A 'Pre-objective' Solution

By adopting 'pre-objectivity' as the ontological grounding for its project, MET no longer has to defend a strong ontological claim with phenomenology; rather its ontology and phenomenology merge which allows for a cleaner discussion of both its ontological status and its phenomenology. 'Pre-objectivity' also supports MET's bypassing 'methodological individualism'. It allows MET's primacy of engagement to be at the forefront of its research while curbing its strong claims so that it is less open to criticism.

For MET's project to remain intact, it must maintain that real data can be inferred from material artefacts. Its current ontological claim does this with support from cognitive science and phenomenology however as we've explored earlier its claims are difficult to defend. 'Pre-objectivity' gives us reasons why we have direct access to the world rather than the indirect

approaches of intellectualism and empiricism, however it also gives support to a methodology that isn't bound to 'methodological individualism'.

Merleau-Ponty's insistence that we do not conceive of things "...in the manner of reflective analysis and science" (Merleau-Ponty 2015, p.248) articulates that our relationship with the objects around as not being the sum of objective qualities. As mentioned earlier, the reason for this is that our 'pre-objective' perception is intentional. Meaning is in the world as we perceive it, and this gives justification to say that there was meaning in the creation of artefacts because the artefact was a result of an intentional relationship between ancient humans and their world. So in encountering artefacts, assuming that there is meaning beyond their functional role is a safe assumption.

On its own however, meaning in objects doesn't necessarily bypass methodological individualism. The meaning perceived by ancient peoples may have been scattered and held more privately than interpersonally. Merleau-Ponty even said that "Having the same organs and the same nervous system is not sufficient for the same emotions to take on the same signs in two different conscious subjects." (Merleau-Ponty 2015, p.195) If this is true, then any sign we take as being the result of a particular emotion may be presumptuous. Trying to infer the lives of ancient peoples through phenomenology requires that we assume too much in order to arrive at any conclusion.

While it's true that meaning has a private life, Merleau-Ponty would likely reject the idea that meaning is only held privately. Unlike Husserl, Merleau-Ponty did not see our experience as an internal phenomenon, "...for that implies that the subject's own internal states or properties can be conceptually carved off from the wider context of its situatedness and embeddedness in the world." (Carman 2008, p.36) This embeddedness is not limited to cultural or socio-economic contexts, but also the materiality that grounds our experience. Even though perception cannot be shared, that does not preclude other's perception from being seen from their engagements with the world because "...for Merleau-Ponty, perception is not an inner subjective phenomenon but...a manifestation of our being in the world." (Carman 2008, p. 42). In other words, perception is not an isolated phenomenon that can be fully separated from engagement.

Furthermore, this embeddedness requires 'pre-objectivity' because neither the intellectualist nor the empiricists would grant that perception is tied to our engagements with the world because in both traditions, the mind is elevated above our material engagements. 'Pre-objectivity' ensures that we are materially anchored and that we cannot fully dissociate from our experiences within the world that form the foundation for our ability to think abstractly. Having this ontological foundation ensures that 'pre-objectivity' is not bound by the criticisms of 'methodological individualism' because it stresses that perception is not solely an internal event. Therefore, 'pre-objectivity' cannot be used to support 'methodological individualism' which means that it is a suitable ontological alternative for MET's project.

Conclusion

We have argued that MET's framework attracts criticism that does not affect its research directions, but makes it seem like a less viable direction in cognitive archaeology because of its strong claims. However another issue faced by MET was its use of phenomenology, which was used to defend claims that phenomenology is not justified in defending. Incorporating Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-objectivity' fixes these framework problems by fixing its problematic ontology and poor use of phenomenology while also making it more compatible with a scaffolded model of the mind which preserves MET's methodological direction.

One of the motivations for writing this was to address the fact that the bulk of MET's criticisms have been directed at their framework rather than their research. MET's novel approach is promising in reconceptualising cognitive archaeology, yet its dismissals often ignore MET's approach because of its ontological commitments. Hopefully the alterations made in this dissertation help improve MET's framework in order to have more fruitful discussions about their conclusions.

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