Naturalism, Objectivism and Everyday Life

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Abstract
In this paper I analyse the role of naturalism and objectivism in everyday life according to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Whereas Husserl attributes the naturalistic attitude mainly to science, he defines the objectivist attitude as a naiveté which equally applies to the natural attitude of everyday life. I analyse the relationship between the natural attitude and lived experience and show Husserl's hesitation regarding the task of phenomenology in describing the lived experience of everyday life, since he considers this experience to be too objectivistic. I use Merleau-Ponty's work to argue that objectivism is an essential characteristic of lived experience and that phenomenology should therefore find ways to integrate it into its descriptions while simultaneously suggesting ways to overcome its rigidity in order to renew perception. I finally propose that the project of the naturalisation of phenomenology could be one of the ways to connect lived experience to the objectivism of everyday life.

1. Introduction

You enter a dark space, with a large screen at the back, showing snow-covered mountains. The images are jittery, shifting rapidly from one mountain to another. An unpleasant sound, probably the wind, adds to the feeling of unease, which makes you want to turn away from the screen. In the middle of the dark space stands a cubicle, a small chamber. Through its only window you can see a wooden table with a metal jug, a glass of water and a small video monitor showing another snow-covered mountain. Yet this time the mountain is calm and stable, and to this are added beautiful, peaceful murmurs in Spanish issuing from the room. After the tiring experience of the agitated mountains outside, listening to the murmurs and observing the interior of the room with its majestic mountain is a welcome relief, an enchanting experience of calm and stability.

Bill Viola's 1983 installation *Room for St. John of the Cross*[1] provides a contemporary glimpse of what St. John of the Cross experienced in 1577, during the nine months he spent in a Toledo prison

[1] Image reproduced here by permission of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

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after his arrest by the Spanish Inquisition. Far from being discouraged by his daily torture or by the impossibly small size of his windowless cell, the Spanish mystic and poet wrote in prison some of his most beautiful poems, which we can hear as they burst out of the tiny room in the middle of the dark space. Here is the beginning of one of them:

I went out seeking love
and with unfaltering hope
I flew so high, so high,
that I overtook the prey.

That I might take the prey
of this adventuring in God
I had to fly so high
that I was lost from sight;
and though in this adventure
I faltered in my flight,

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yet love had already flown so high
that I took the prey.[2]

What is this prey that the poet is looking for? What is this love that he went out to seek? The restless movement of the mountains on the big screen might remind us of a flight high in the mountains, yet this particular flight is aimless: the flyer or pilot is apparently never satisfied with any mountaintop, and he or she is therefore repetitively and tediously in quest of a different one. I said earlier that Bill Viola's work is contemporary, and indeed, the hectic search for new achievements characterises everyday life in modernity much more than in St. John of the Cross's times. Every action and every object are today immediately followed by a need to look further, to reach another peak, so that one never attains anything for good. Everyday life is repetitive in nature: one repeats to a large extent numerous perceptions and actions. This repetition may give me a feeling of comfort, control and homeliness, but modernity seems to go against repetition, since it offers an unprecedented amount of stimuli and possibilities for action. As a result I may tend to forget the inevitability of my everyday life and think that I can overcome repetition, be it on a personal, professional, cultural or social level. But *Room for St. John of the Cross* reminds us that it is precisely by trying to avoid repetition, aiming at new achievements and peaks, that I finally find myself trapped in a repetitious life which is not satisfactory or homely. It is only by giving up the 'rat race' of everyday life and turning to solitary concentration, as St. John of the Cross was forced to do, that I may not only reach the mountaintop, but also be able to remain there, if not in reality then at least in my imagination.

St. John says that in order to seize my 'prey' – any goal that I might wish to attain for good – I need to get so high that I become 'lost from sight'. It is a certain detachment from everyday perception that permits a different, sharper vision. It is only through bracketing everyday experience that a deeper, steadier, but also more creative experience can emerge. Indeed, St. John of the Cross, in his prison, had lost his free everyday life; but in this way he was able to contemplate it and to arrive at a different form of reality. He acquired a new, lasting presence precisely by succumbing to absence; he achieved an unexpected freedom precisely by fully accepting his imprisonment. In other words, he managed to turn the stifling

[2] St. John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), 721.

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repetition of everyday life into a repetition which is peaceful and harmonious. To a great extent this is also the aim of the phenomenological enterprise: giving up life in order to reclaim it differently. This is the power of phenomenology. But it seems that herein lies also its weakness: can phenomenology teach us different forms of the everyday without fleeing from it to isolated inner spheres?

2. Lived Experience, Naturalism and Objectivism

Phenomenology is commonly identified with Edmund Husserl's maxim 'back to the things themselves!'.[3] And yet, more than a century after this enthusiastic and appealing call, not only do we seem to remain quite distant from the things themselves, but we also hardly understand what these things really are. Are they everyday things or rather extraordinary ones? Are they physical or mental objects? Are they empirical or purely transcendental?

All along his career, from the *Logical Investigations* onwards, Husserl has maintained that phenomenology describes the essence of *lived experience* (*Erlebnis*) and its correlate (its 'object') in the world.[4] The lived experience is the concrete, present and spontaneous experience of perceiving, feeling, moving and speaking. It is a rich and multi-perspectival experience, revealing the deeper layers of our everyday experience. It is a combination of the moving mountains and the abiding image seen in the monitor: a combination of the outside and the inside, of world and consciousness, of multiplicity and unicity, of variation and essence. But one difficulty remains unresolved in Husserl on which I would like to elaborate here: if lived experience, as it is described by phenomenology, actually differs from the everyday pre-reflective experience, then who exactly lives it? Can we say that the big screen represents everyday perception whereas lived experience involves both? And if this is the case, what should be described by phenomenology?

A clarification of the term 'lived experience' would help to grasp the difficulty. But when we examine Husserl's writings, we find that in order to explain what lived experience is, he tends to start by naming what it is *not*. Parallel to his discovery of the phenomenological reduction, at the beginning of the 20th century, Husserl developed a systematic criticism of the philosophical movements

[3] E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations* I, trans. J.N. Findlay (New York, NY: Humanities Press, 1970), 252.
[4] Ibid., 249.

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which, according to him, overlooked the essence of lived experience: first psychologism,[5] then naturalism[6] and finally objectivism.[7] I will focus here on the last two attitudes which tend to be merged by Husserl, but do not refer to the same thing. Husserl defines naturalism in 1911 as a positivist tendency to treat reality as obeying the physical laws of nature, and to consider consciousness only as a secondary phenomenon.[8] The objectivist attitude, on the other hand, is treated in *The Crisis of European Sciences* and in the 1935 *Vienna Lecture*, where Husserl attributes it to both science and philosophy, and defines it first and foremost as *naïveté*: 'the most general title for this naïveté is objectivism, taking the form of the various types of naturalism, of the naturalization of the spirit'.[9] We see here that objectivism is expressed through naturalism, and Husserl is not always careful to distinguish the two: 'In the attitude directed toward the surrounding world, the constantly objectivistic attitude, everything spiritual appeared as if it were [simply] spread over [the surface of] physical bodies'.[10] Both naturalistic and objectivist attitudes are materialistic and are oblivious to the dependence of the physical world upon consciousness. However, I would suggest that the objectivist attitude is more primordial, as the term naïveté implies, and is therefore an intermediate term between the natural attitude of everyday life and the naturalistic attitude of science. I will first try to elaborate on the objectivist attitude before I connect it to the natural attitude of everyday life.

Objectum in Latin (similarly to *Gegenstand* in German) means 'that which lies in front' or 'that which is presented'. It is a self-enclosed, well-defined, detached and independent entity, which we can observe whenever we wish, since it does not change: it is frozen in a timeless space. This does not mean that it *never* changes, but rather that it is understood as if it were an autonomous entity, regardless of its

[5] See E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations* I, §§17–51.

[6] See in particular E. Husserl 'Philosophy as a Rigorous Science', trans. M. Brainard, in *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* II (2002 [1910–11]), 249–295. In his 1906/7 lectures on 'Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge', Husserl even adopts religious terms in order to characterize naturalism as a 'sin against the Holy Spirit of Philosophy' (*Husserliana XXIV*, 177).

[7] See E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology,* trans. D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

[8] Husserl, 'Philosophy as a Rigorous Science', 79.

[9] Husserl, 'The Vienna Lecture', in *Crisis*, 292.

[10] Ibid., 293.

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development in time (evolution, historicity) and in space (interactions with the environment). The naïve attitude, that is the objectivist attitude, sees itself as absolute.[11] It does not recognise the relativity of its present perception and therefore loses the ability to transform it and its objects. It neglects the dynamic, environmental, subjective and cultural aspects which are constitutive to any perception of any object although they remain hidden behind its apparently stable appearance. As a result the objects are taken for granted and do not incite a perception which may transcend or transform them.

Indeed, the naturalistic attitude of science is, in a way, more critical than the naïve attitude of objectivism as it is deployed in everyday life.[12] Science is often aware of its limited scope. It does not claim to achieve an absolute perception, but rather to understand the causal relationship between different parts of the object. However, science, too, tends to forget that it was itself what constituted the objects as stable entities, whereas in reality they are partial and incites new perception and categorisation. To give an example, when the physicist or the geometrician looks at a cube he or she sees in it six sides and does not notice that only three of them can be seen at once. This might seem trivial, but it is precisely the overlooking of these hidden sides that enables both objectivist and naturalistic perceptions to use the cube or inquire into it as a static entity, overlooking its potential richness beyond its immediately apparent qualities which are conceived as simply given. In other words, both objectivist and naturalistic attitudes tend to forget not only the subject, but also *the other side* of the object, what Husserl names *Abschattungen* (gradations, adumbrations, profiles or shadowing).[13]

Indeed, it may be that there is nothing interesting to see on the other side of the cube, but what counts is the recognition that *there is* an 'other side'; that what we see is not the whole picture. This opens up two directions generally ignored by the objectivist and the naturalistic attitudes: the first concerns the external world, for example the cube which is discovered by phenomenology as a thing which never reveals more than half of its sides, and is thus more mysterious than it appears at first glance. The second and interrelated direction concerns our own perception of the cube, that is, the way I try to fill in the blanks and overcome the inherent limitations of my finite

[11] See Sebastian Luft, 'Husserl's Phenomenological Discovery of the Natural Attitude', *Continental Philosophy Review*, **31** (1998), 159.

[12] Ibid., 161–162.

[13] See, for instance, E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 39–41.

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perspective. Since I need a solid enough world to live in, I must make every day countless corrections and approximations, seeing this three sided shape here as a cube, this oval shape there as a plate, etc. Indeed, this approximating perception is the condition for normal everyday life, but it is important to be aware of the partiality of my own perception. In this way I would prevent the objects around me from becoming *too* stable, as if I had perceived them from all perspectives and from all moments in time. Being reminded of perception's relativity, I would be able to renew it, looking for other ways to see the world and myself.

3. Discovering the Natural Attitude

I asked above *who lives lived experience?* But the question seems now to become: *who holds the objectivist and naturalistic tendencies?* Since Husserl's main target was naturalism, the answer did once seem to be simple: the naturalistic attitude is held by *science* and by the philosophy influenced by it. Modern science, since Galileo,[14] has concentrated on creating geometric-like artificial structures, measured and quantified according to fixed rules, which led to the 'mathematisation of nature'.[15] Indeed, one could respond that this critique concerns only classic mathematics and physics, whereas today much more dynamic models are used in other domains of science. But Husserl's emphasis is less on the scientific method as such, and more on its blind use, particularly on its dangerous extrapolation from the natural sciences to other domains and especially psychology, that is the science of the psyche. It is not possible, he argues, to understand what a human being is and what it is for her to have a world by quantifying and measuring perception and objects. It is rather subjective experience that should be at the centre of the humanities and social sciences if we wish for them to have any meaning at all. Otherwise they become (and still are) a pure *techné*.[16]

Husserl would certainly be hostile to contemporary experimental models in psychology that aim to quantify and predict the behaviour of individuals and groups, not because these models are wrong *per se*, but because they are partial and, at least in some areas, blind to their

[14] In the 1935 'Vienna Lecture' Husserl talks more broadly about Western culture since Euclid as detaching itself from lived experience in favor of geometrical models of it (*Crisis*, 269–299).

[15] Husserl, *Crisis*, 21–59.

[16] Husserl, *Crisis*, 56–57.

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limitations. They take some narrow parameters of human behaviour, detach them from other elements, measure them, and finally assume that these models reflect human behaviour in general. We have been recently informed, for instance, of research which observed the brain patterns of literature PhD candidates while they were reading Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park,* distinguishing between two patterns or styles of reading: attentive and distracted.[17] For Husserl, the image of a PhD candidate reading inside a huge fMRI scanner would be the prototype of the crisis not only of European sciences, but also of European culture in general. He would claim that the reduction of the rich and subjective experience of reading into two gross 'objective' types contributes nothing to the understanding of this experience and is more likely to obstruct it. The abrupt move from subjectivity to objectivity, from intentions and feelings to facts and numbers, creates models of reading which ignore the large spectrum of un-measurable data which do not fall under either attention or distraction. And this ignorance has dangerous consequences, in Husserl's emphatic words: 'Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people'.[18]

Now, if we previously thought that it was only science which held the naturalistic attitude, we have here an indication that it actually affects also everyday women and men, who live in our contemporary technological, materialistic and utilitarian society. People in the scientific era have themselves become 'fact-minded': they are preoccupied with exterior, objective elements without considering their contextual, subjective and cultural ingredients.[19] The naturalistic attitude of science thus influences, accentuates and strengthens the objectivist attitude of everyday life. It encourages us to believe that the objects are complete and independent, and yet, as the big screen in *Room for St. John of the Cross* shows, something in the everyday resists objectivism, since every object, every mountaintop, is soon abandoned in favour of the next one. The everyday attitude, I suggest, is paradoxical: it is attracted to objects, but is never fully satisfied with them, quickly turning away from one object to another, thus confirming and refuting objectivism at the same time. In order to understand this paradoxical and ambiguous everyday

[17] See http://news.stanford.edu/news/2012/september/austen-reading-fmri-090712.html.

[18] Husserl, *Crisis*, 6.

[19] This criticism will be further developed by Martin Heidegger, especially in 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *Basic Writings,* ed. D. Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 311–341.

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attitude towards objects, I suggest conceiving it now in the light of what Husserl names *the natural attitude*.[20]

The natural attitude is first mentioned in Husserl's 1907 seminar *The Idea of Phenomenology*, before being further developed six years later in *Ideas I*. Husserl does not define the natural attitude as naturalistic or objectivistic *per se*, but says rather that it consists of our everyday way of looking only at the *existing* world, believing in 'a world that has its being out there'.[21] However, doesn't taking reality as it is equally mean ignoring the other side(s) of the object? The common trait of the objectivist, the naturalistic and the natural attitudes is that all three are satisfied with ready-made categories, names and objects. Phenomenology consequently aims to bracket the natural attitude in order to arrive at lived experience, but the problem is that everyday experience itself is dominated by an objectivist tendency, so it is not at all clear what would be left over if we bracketed it. If phenomenology aims to describe the things themselves as they appear in lived experience, and if lived experience in the natural attitude misses the things themselves in favour of frozen objects, we seem to return to the same persistent question: who lives lived experience?

Husserl has gradually become aware of this problem, and in order to solve it he makes in *Ideas II* a distinction between natural (*natürlich*) and naturalistic (*natural/naturalistich*) attitude.[22] The natural attitude refers to the Life-world (*Lebenswelt*), the spontaneous world of praxis, whereas the naturalistic attitude characterises the natural sciences, referring to the causal, objective and mechanistic world. Husserl says that only the natural attitude is primordial, and he calls it personalistic, that is, an attitude of a person relating to her surrounding world, contrary to the attitude of the scientist who is not affected by what he or she analyses and treats it from a distance.

Husserl thus suggests that the natural attitude is not naturalistic, but is rather equivalent to the looked for lived experience. Both

[20] For an analysis and genealogy of the natural attitude in Husserl see Luft, 'Husserl's Phenomenological Discovery of the Natural Attitude', 153–170; DermotMoran, 'Husserl's Transcendental Philosophy and the Critique of Naturalism', *Continental Philosophy Review*, **41** (2008), 401–425.

[21] E. Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), 106.

[22] E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 189.

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lived experience and the natural attitude are characterised by a naïveté, but this does not make them impoverished or problematic. However, only a few pages earlier Husserl admits that one can also *live* in the naturalistic attitude,[23] which turns out to be not only theoretical and a part of science, but also practical and possibly part of the everyday. Husserl adds that there is confusion between the different attitudes, a confusion which can only be cleared up by phenomenology.[24] Yet this confusion seems to be quite consistent, and is attested to by other mature works of Husserl, especially *Experience and Judgement*.[25] In this posthumous work Husserl distinguishes between *doxa*, the everyday natural attitude, and the *Urdoxa*, the primordial natural attitude, which is the passive and silent belief in the existence of the world.[26] Every specific content of the everyday natural attitude (*doxa*) uses idealisations, that is linguistic categories and objective classifications which make this attitude once more objectivist, if not naturalistic. Husserl is thus obliged to admit that the natural attitude has a strong objectivist tendency, and in order to overcome it he carries out long analyses of its silent basis (*Urdoxa*) which, precisely through its tacit belief in the existence of the world, precedes the existence of any specific object. Although Husserl does not say so explicitly, it seems that it is in the relationship between the *Urdoxa* and the *doxa*, between silence and language, passivity and activity, that the secret of the renewal of everyday perception lies, that is, the solution of the crisis of European culture.

How can this renewal take place? One of the most interesting things about *Room for St John of the Cross* is that it not only brackets the natural attitude, as phenomenology does, but also accentuates it, such that it is understood precisely through its suspension. It shows what kind of lived experience the natural attitude provides (the big screen), and what other life it aims at (the monitor). Can we find such a combination – suspension *and* accentuation – in phenomenology as well? The notion in Husserl which is the closest to this is the 'Life-world', which is introduced in order to solve the crisis of European sciences. But surprisingly enough, when it comes to concretely describing this world, Husserl prefers to supply mostly

[23] Ibid., 183.
[24] Ibid., 190.
[25] E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, trans. J.S. Churchill and K. Ameriks, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), in particular §§10, 13.
[26] Ibid., 59–60.

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transcendental descriptions of a purely formal experience.[27] It seems that, for Husserl, any introduction of *concrete* reality into the Life-world runs the risk of accepting objectivist idealisations,[28] which would contaminate it and draw the crisis into it. Despite the need to combine the transcendental and the empirical, the suspension of the everyday and its manifestation, it seems that Husserl finally prefers the inner room to the jittery mountains. The only way to escape humanity's loss of meaning, the only way to escape the chaotic and mechanical everyday, is to pretend it is not there, to turn one's back on it. Husserl thus warns against humanity's crisis but it seems that his only solution is to construct phenomenology far away from it, on a solid yet abstract ground, turning the Life-world into what Paul Ricœur calls 'phenomenology's lost paradise'.[29]

4. Merleau-Ponty between the Empirical and the Primordial

The phenomenologist who has been perhaps the most loyal to Husserl, through daring to pursue what the founder of phenomenology could not always himself, was Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For him, the things themselves are characterised as 'that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*'.[30] This world is very close to Husserl's Life-world. And yet, in order to attain it, Merleau-Ponty suggests a new method, named *radical reflection*: 'radical reflection amounts to a consciousness of its own dependence on an unreflective life which is its initial situation, unchanging, given once and for all'.[31] Radical reflection is thus paradoxical, since it is supposed to reflect upon the unreflected. Consequently, it can no longer remain a purely transcendental method, nor a purely theoretical one, since the introduction of the unreflected sphere into theory inserts the latter back into the world and makes it lose its distance. Radical reflection is thus, to a certain extent, a form of perception, yet one which is aware of its origins: a reflective perception or a perceptive reflection.

[27] For a detailed analysis of this problem see E. Dorfman, 'History of the Lifeworld: From Husserl to Merleau-Ponty', *Philosophy Today,* **53** (2009), 294–303.

[28] See Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 41–51.

[29] P. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, trans. K. Blamey and J.B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 14.

[30] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), ix (hereafter PhP).

[31] PhP, xvi. See also PhP, 280.

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In this way Merleau-Ponty reverses the usual hierarchy between *doxa* and *episteme*, between the natural attitude and scientific or theoretical attitude:

> We shall no longer hold that perception is incipient science, but conversely that classic science is a form of perception which loses sight of its origins and believes itself complete. The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of lived experience which is beneath the objective world.[32]

Science is defined as an unreflective perception, contrary to the radical (and perceptual) reflection of philosophy. But what of the natural attitude? Is it reflective or not? Merleau-Ponty calls for a new perception, or rather an old, primordial perception of the world which has been forgotten by science, and which we need to learn anew.[33] He prefers to speak of a primordial experience rather than a transcendental one, and yet, it is not clear if this primordial perception can take place in the everyday. If radical reflection is Merleau-Ponty's version of the phenomenological reduction, what experience does it describe? Does it bracket the natural attitude of everyday life, or does it rather expose and magnify it, like Bill Viola's artwork does?

I would suggest that Merleau-Ponty's work, and in particular *The Structure of Behaviour* and the *Phenomenology of Perception*, tries to reflect both the big screen and the small monitor, both the natural attitude and primordial perception. It does so by employing a two-fold and seemingly contradictory treatment of naturalism and objectivism, declaring first that they are wrong, before showing that they nonetheless contain a certain truth, so that one moves between the two poles rather than choosing only one of them. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, criticises the oblivion of the origin of objects, that is, their mute raw material which stands at the basis of perception and cannot be fully thematised and objectified. But, on the other hand, he is not content with an abstract criticism of this oblivion, and rather dedicates a large part of his work to a detailed analysis of empirical findings in order to insert them into a phenomenological model of perception. He shows that certain versions of philosophy and science, which he names intellectualism (subjectivism) and empiricism (objectivism), are indeed mistaken,

[32] PhP, 57, translation modified.

[33] 'True philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world' (PhP, xxiii). See also E. Dorfman, *Réapprendre à voir le monde: Merleau-Ponty face au miroir lacanien* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).

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but he does this not in order to dismiss them. Rather, he confronts them with phenomenological categories, such as intentionality, constitution and sedimentation in order to reconnect the empirical perception to its origins which only phenomenology can attain.[34]

In particular, Merleau-Ponty takes the pathology of the brain-damaged patient Schneider and similar cases and 'corrects' the explanations of the physiologists Geld and Goldstein. He identifies the various symptoms as all belonging to what he characterises as the loss of the function of projection,[35] and he defines this function as the ability to perceive and act upon the virtual and not only upon the actual, that is, to introduce absence into presence in order to renew perception. But here comes a surprising and original move of Merleau-Ponty: the loss of the function of projection is soon revealed to be not just a pathological incidence which is external to normality, but rather a very extreme case of everyday objectivism. For both Schneider's pathology and objectivism remain prisoners in what they already acquired and are unable to renew their objects: 'For these patients the world exists only as one readymade or congealed, whereas for the normal person his projects polarize the world, bringing magically to view a host of signs which guide action, as notices in a museum guide the visitor'.[36] The congealed ready-made world is here attributed only to pathology, but Merleau-Ponty is soon obliged to admit that it equally concerns everyday life:

> We live in a world where speech is an institution. For all these many commonplace utterances, we possess within ourselves ready-made meanings. They arouse in us only second order thoughts; these in turn are translated into other words which demand from us no real effort of expression and will demand from our hearers no effort of comprehension.[37]

The analysis of pathology is thus an oblique way for Merleau-Ponty to criticise the objectivist tendency of the natural attitude without denying it.[38] Indeed, he wishes to reawaken a more primordial pre-

[34] 'This is why we had to begin our examination of perception with psychological considerations. If we had not done so, we would not have understood the whole meaning of the transcendental problem, since we would not, starting from the natural attitude, have methodically followed the procedures which lead to it' (PhP, 63).

[35] PhP, 128–130.

[36] PhP, 129.

[37] PhP, 213–214.

[38] For a more detailed analysis of the role of pathology in *Phenomenology of Perception* see E. Dorfman, 'Normality and Pathology: Towards a

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objective perception, but he cannot ignore that '[w]e are obsessed by objective thought'.[39] This 'obsession' makes us forget even the most primordial phenomenon which is the body itself: 'Obsessed with being, and forgetful of the perspectivism of my experience, I henceforth treat it as an object and deduce it from a relationship between objects. I regard my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world'.[40]

We see here how close the naturalistic attitude of science is to the objectivism of the natural attitude, both forgetful of their perspectivism. Whenever we get closer to the empirical world we find that the distinction between science and everyday life, between naturalism and objectivism are blurred, as is well expressed by the following passage:

> There is an empirical or second-order perception, the one which we exercise at every moment, and which conceals from us this basic phenomenon [perception as the origin of knowledge], because it is loaded with earlier acquisitions and plays, so to speak, on the surface of being.[41]

Phenomenology thus aims to bracket the natural attitude in order to arrive at the things themselves, but it soon discovers that the natural attitude holds a truth which can never be fully bracketed. As Merleau-Ponty says in his article on Husserl, 'it is the natural attitude, in reiterating its own procedures, that collapses in phenomenology', but he immediately adds that this reiteration and collapse paradoxically lead to the discovery that 'there is a truth of the natural attitude – There is even a secondary, derivative truth of naturalism'.[42] What can this truth be? I would suggest that it is the inability to maintain the bracketing: the empirical necessity to believe in the being of the world (*Urdoxa*), which is soon translated into the belief in the being of objects (*doxa*). In the same way that

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Therapeutic Phenomenology', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, **36** (2005): 23–38.

[39] PhP, 393.

[40] PhP, 70.

[41] PhP, 43. Translation modified.

[42] M. Merleau-Ponty, 'The Philosopher and His Shadow', in *Signs*, trans. R. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 164. See also *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. A. Fisher (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), which Merleau-Ponty concludes with the question: 'Is there not a truth of naturalism?' (201).

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Bill Viola exposes everyday perception not by dismissing it, but rather by accentuating it and comparing it to a more internal and secret perception, Merleau-Ponty, too, starts with empirical data as perceived by the objectivist attitude, not only in order to bracket it, as Husserl does, but in order to show its relationship with the world of pre-objective and primordial perception.

Merleau-Ponty thus inverts the relationship between the primordial and the empirical: even if the empirical is a second-order expression of the primordial, of lived experience, it is only on the basis of this second-order expression that lived experience can show itself. I would even say that it is only on the basis of this second-order expression that lived experience can be *lived* in the first place. The reason for this is not only methodological – phenomena being covered over too much by naturalistic and objectivist constructions – but also essential. For if the natural attitude is a movement between the objective and the pre-objective, then the very essence of perception is always involved with objectified constructions. Objects are a part of our world, and it would be nonsense to want to return – even on a purely transcendental level – to a pre-objective world. Rather, the question should be how objects can be renewed, transformed and transgressed, giving way to other objects and other perceptions. Bill Viola's work, for instance, shows a certain perception of objects which can be called 'modern', looking for them and then abandoning them hastily for other, quite similar objects. Indeed, Husserl's discussion of the modern crisis of European culture and Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the obsession for objects form a first step towards understanding modern perception. But phenomenology, because of its wish to attain the a-historic or trans-historic *eidos* of things, is often reluctant to engage in such an analysis of modern perception. It wishes to describe perception in general, but it cannot avoid arriving time and again at 'second order' expressions, which actually point to a concrete, historical state of perception. Can phenomenology transgress its initial eidetic endeavour and embark upon a critique of contemporary culture and perception?

5. Conclusion: Phenomenology and its Naturalisation

I would like to conclude by showing how the movement between the empirical and the primordial, between objectivist and phenomenological attitudes, can not only form a critique of modernity, but also serve as a model for the intersection between phenomenology and the natural sciences. The project of naturalising phenomenology is

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criticised by many[43] for its naturalistic tendency, taking empirical data as the starting point of the investigation and ignoring the transcendental point of view which is fundamental for Husserl. But if we now admit that the objectivist and naturalistic attitudes can never be completely avoided in life, science and phenomenology, we can outline a preliminary methodology which would neither blindly follow these attitudes nor crudely dismiss them. For the important thing is not to avoid objectivism and naturalism, but rather to explain their variation and movement. Phenomenology can indeed give us a better understanding of empirical data, but the empirical data can in return reveal phenomenology's own limitations. It can show phenomenology the limitations of perception itself and the tendency to negate these limitations in a modern world which yearns for quick movement between objects.[44] If until recently phenomenology did not have a significant influence on empirical psychology it is perhaps due to phenomenology's reluctance to accept its historic moment, the 'second order' expressions of perception which are a part of what it is to belong to a culture and which cannot simply be bracketed away.

It is thus the task of phenomenology, as a radical reflection, as a perception which does not forget its origins and which is aware of its own impact on mundane objects, to guide the cognitive sciences but also to dare to reshape its own models and consider seriously the empirical data despite and because of their naturalistic background. If the objectivist inclination is intrinsic to perception, it is the role of phenomenology to expose this inclination and criticise its abuse, but also to acknowledge its positive aspects. The naturalisation of phenomenology, conceived as a dynamic and mutual dialogue between phenomenology and science, is thus an opportunity for phenomenology to claim its relevance by readjusting its method to an ever more naturalised world. If we return to the experiment of reading Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park,* instead of dismissing it as 'alienating' or 'naturalising' rich perception, phenomenology can

[43] See Dan Zahavi, 'Phenomenology and the Project of Naturalization', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences,* **3** (2004), 331–347; Tim Bayne, 'Closing the Gap? Some Questions for Neurophenomenology', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, **3** (2004), 349–364; Morton Overgaard, 'On the Naturalising of Phenomenology', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, **3** (2004), 365–379.

[44] For a similar idea, yet without my emphasis on the truth of the natural and naturalistic attitudes, see Dan Zahavi, 'Naturalized Phenomenology', in S. Gallagher and D. Schmicking (eds.), *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 3–20.

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see it as an opportunity to reflect on the categories of 'attention' and 'distraction', trying to find the subjective correlates of these objective types as well as the broad spectrum between them. But it should also – and perhaps more importantly – take seriously the modern need for distraction, the need to leap from one book to another, and understand it as a historical phenomenon which nonetheless cannot be bracketed in favour of primordial perception. Attention and distraction condition each another, and every historical moment has its own variation of their relationship, a variation whose historicity phenomenology should interrogate.

Returning to Bill Viola's artwork, we can see that the objects of everyday perception are presented as mountaintops, that is, as natural objects, and yet, as I claimed, something in the natural attitude, at least in modernity, is not satisfied with this picture and refuses to linger on each mountaintop for more than a second. It yearns for a stable, eternal nature, and is frustrated by its inability to achieve this in everyday life. It is only in the internal room that the mountaintop is captured and maintained. But the inner room cannot and should not be perceived independently of external everyday life. Phenomenology's challenge is to criticise naturalism without constructing a new inner room, which would only duplicate the isolated laboratories of modern science. Phenomenology should rather try to reconnect the inner room to everyday perception not by condemning the results of science, but rather by showing how they stem from everyday perception and influence it in return. Only then can phenomenology start to accomplish its paradoxical task of suspending the belief in the objective world in order to better understand it.

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