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From Intentionality to Differentiation: Expression as a Genealogical Matrix and its Ambiguous Ontological Use by Merleau-Ponty

De la intencionalidad a la diferenciación: la expresión como matriz genealógica y su uso ontológico ambiguo por Merleau-Ponty

Da intencionalidade à diferenciação: expressão como matriz genealógica e seu emprego ontológico ambíguo por Merleau-Ponty

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Abstract: the objective of this article is to present and discuss the different uses of the notion of expression by Merleau-Ponty. If originally this notion was aimed at explaining how meaning perceived in the solitude of the body's sensible life becomes shared meaning in intersubjective communication, over the years it came to be applied in another way, namely, as a genealogy, in which meaning is no longer described as the experience of an intentional subjectivity inserted in the world, but as a system of differentiations shared in a generic way. Expressiveness became a formal operator that would rival the notion of intentionality, even though Merleau-Ponty did not definitively achieve this result. This leads me to reinterpret the status of the notion of Brute Being, addressed in his unfinished project of writing an expressive ontology. To reach this objective, I propose a review of the three main matrices from which Merleau-Ponty thought – critically – about the notion of expression, specifically, Politzer's narrative theory, Saussure's semiology and Leibniz's ontotheology.

Keywords: Merleau-Ponty; expression; differentiation; ontology; brute being.

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Resumen: el objetivo de este artículo es presentar y discutir los diferentes empleos de la noción de expresión por parte de Merleau-Ponty. Si originalmente la noción de expresión estaba dirigida a explicar cómo el significado percibido en la soledad de la vida sensible del cuerpo se convierte en significado compartido en la comunicación intersubjetiva, a lo largo de los años pasó a aplicarse de otra manera, a saber, como una genealogía, en la que el significado ya no se describe como la experiencia de una subjetividad intencional inserta en el mundo, sino como un sistema de diferenciaciones compartidas de manera genérica. La expresividad se convirtió en un operador formal que rivalizaría con la noción de intencionalidad, aunque Merleau-Ponty no alcanzó definitivamente esta consecuencia, lo que me lleva a reinterpretar el estatus de la noción de Ser Bruto, con el que opera su proyecto inacabado de escribir una ontología expresiva. Para lograr este objetivo, propongo una revisión de las tres principales matrices a partir de las cuales Merleau-Ponty pensó –críticamente– la noción de expresión, precisamente, la teoría narrativa de Politzer, la semiología de Saussure y la ontoteología de Leibniz.

Palabras clave: Merleau-Ponty; expresión; diferenciación; ontología; ser bruto.

Resumo: o objetivo deste artigo é apresentar e discutir os diferentes usos da noção de expressão por Merleau-Ponty. Se originalmente essa noção visava explicar como o sentido percebido na solidão da vida sensível do corpo se torna sentido compartilhado na comunicação intersubjetiva, ao longo dos anos ela passou a ser aplicada de outra forma, nomeadamente, como uma genealogia, na qual o sentido não é mais descrito como a experiência de uma subjetividade intencional inserida no mundo, mas como um sistema de diferenciações compartilhadas de forma genérica. A expressividade tornou-se um operador formal que rivalizaria com a noção de intencionalidade, ainda que Merleau-Ponty não tenha alcançado definitivamente esse resultado. Isso me leva a reinterpretar o estatuto da noção de Ser Bruto, abordada em seu projeto inacabado de escrever uma ontologia expressiva. Para atingir esse objetivo, proponho uma revisão das três principais matrizes a partir das quais Merleau-Ponty pensou – criticamente – sobre a noção de expressão, especificamente, a teoria narrativa de Politzer, a semiologia de Saussure e a ontoteologia de Leibniz.

Palavras-chave: Merleau-Ponty; expressão; diferenciação; ontologia; ser bruto.

1. Introduction

My objective is to present the transformations that Merleau-Ponty's notion of expression underwent over time, and explore how it gained prominence, to the point of becoming a formal operator to rival the notion of intentionality. This enabled Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 13) to consider the connection between the sensible world and the symbolic world on a new ontological basis, even though he did not reach this point definitively (1962, p. 405). This leads me to question

the status of the notion of Brute Being, explored in his unfinished project of writing a new ontology.

The importance of the notion of expression is already evident in the first texts by Merleau-Ponty (1942), in which he postulates that meaning is not primarily a representation of a reflective consciousness, but rather about "the way in which time is expressed in each body" (p. 114), generating an originally sensible community that would later be established in symbolic institutions as semantic value or historicity. Thus, all dimensions (perceptive and intersubjective) must also be understood "from the temporality that is expressed in them" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 495), since "time and meaning are one and the same" (p. 487). But: What is the same in the sensible temporal sense and in the socio-historical sense? In what way does sensible temporality continue to be expressed as semantic temporality?

Merleau-Ponty (1945) cannot answer this question based on his notion of the body as "global existential consciousness" (pp. 18-189). From the fact that the sensible and the semantic are expressed temporally, it does not follow that they are the same thing. This matter demanded from Merleau-Ponty not a new theory of consciousness, but a new look at the connection between temporal meaning and expressiveness. As I demonstrate, Merleau-Ponty does realize that, perhaps, temporal meaning is not a content (noematic) and the expression an action (noetic) that communicates or transmits the content. That is, as Merleau-Ponty begins to think after reading Ferdinand de Saussure, expression is not different from the temporal sense itself, since time is nothing more than a system of differentiation between bodies, whether they are sensible or instituted, such as the differentiations that distinguish and connect linguistic signifiers to one another. This leads to a new understanding of the notion of expression, which ceases to be the capacity of body-consciousness for temporalization to become a system of differentiation in which bodies emerge at the same time as distinct and correlated as signifiers to one another. Expressiveness is no longer an attribute of an intentional center, or the property that such a center would have for communication. Expressiveness has become a formal operator to describe the birth of meaning in general in terms of a system of differentiation.

Now, would there be a connection between this new understanding of the use of the notion of expression and the shift in Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project - for example - towards an ontology of the Brute Being? At least, it is precisely the idea of differentiation (presented through the allegories of chiasm, encroachment, intertwining and reversibility) that lead Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of the carnality of the Brute Being. In this article, I seek to examine the different ways in which Merleau-Ponty thought about the notion of expression, as well as to discover the extent to which, given the changes it has undergone, a new theoretical matrix was drawn, which would have led – among other thematic shifts – to a very peculiar way of doing ontology, in which Being

is not properly described, but rather genealogically produced in terms of multiple processes of differentiation between parts that are, in principle, indistinguishable.

It is not a question of showing, as Renaud Barbaras (1993) has already done, in his remarkable article entitled *"De la parole à l'être: le problème de l'expression comme voie d'accès à l'ontologie"*, that the notion of expression was moving from linguistics to ontology, to the point of becoming "this infinite conversion of silence into word and of the word into silence", as if expression was "a mode of being of Being" and the Being that which "sustains this conversion" (p. 80). Although I agree that this reading can also be made, I mainly take into account Merleau-Ponty's reluctance to completely move away from phenomenological motives, especially from intentionality theory. It is rather a matter of emphasizing the genealogical-structural role that the notion of expression acquired throughout Merleau-Ponty's writings, which would lead us to the most radical consequence that, as a thesis, there would be no distinction between Being and expression, insofar as the Being would correspond to the implication triggered by the differentiation process typical of the bodies' expressiveness. In other words, as a thesis and unlike Barbaras' interpretation, Being would not be what sustains the passage from silence to speech or vice versa, but rather that which coincides with reversibility itself, if we consider reversibility as one of the ways of introducing the system of differentiation with which Merleau-Ponty began to define what expression is.

In short, in this article, the focus is on highlighting the way in which Merleau-Ponty incorporated the notion of differentiation and in which terms it would have allowed him to write a different ontology, think on another way, use another matrix, even though this ontology did not go beyond a project. As can be seen in the divergent interpretations of Lefeuvre (1976, pp. 264-265), Hottois (1988, p. 171), Dias (1989, p. 152), Mazis (1989, p. 265), Dillon (1997, p. 16), Richir (1992, p. 23), Barbaras (1993, p. 73), Petitot (1993, p. 295), Carbone (2011, p. 21), Moura (2012, p. 117), Colonna, 2014, p. 68), Ballabio (2018, p. 112), Silva (2019, p. 304), Andrade (2021, p. 148-149), it cannot be said that Merleau-Ponty (1960, pp. 96-97; 1969, p. 149) created a single new ontology, but rather many essays, leaving us with "more than ideas, matrices of ideas", including the one I wish to demonstrate.

2. Expressiveness from the Intentional Point of View: the Temporal Ambiguity of Body-Consciousness

Already in the book *La structure du comportemen*t, Merleau-Ponty (1942, p. 114) uses the notion of expression to explain how - in the different forms (or structures) of the organization of behaviors - a sense of autochthonous totality (as a Gestalt) can be perceived by an organism.

> The thresholds of perception in an organism, as we were saying, are among the individual constants which express its essence. This signifies that the organism itself measures the action of things upon it and itself delimits its milieu by a circular process which is without analogy in the physical world. (Merleau-Ponty, 1942, p. 161)

Specifically for behaviors that become conscious, which is to say, that develop the ability to use signals in a symbolic way, as is the case with humans, "[…] the act of speech or of expression makes us go beyond the universe of use-objects which we have described until now" (1942, p. 188, note 1). The act of expression allows the human to rise to the condition of spectacle to himself, opening the field of knowledge (1942, p. 188). So that, for every animal, "the use of the sign" opens up the possibility "that it ceases to be an event or a presage […] and becomes the proper theme of an activity which tends to *express* it" (1942, p. 131).

This explains Merleau-Ponty's interest in Georges Politzer's expression theory, although he was not in full agreement with it. In the form of a narrative theory, Politzer describes expressiveness as the capacity that language gives an individual to produce the meaning of his or her own experiences in the world. However, according to Politzer (1975, p. 212), it is not the externalization of an understanding that a consciousness would silently intuit, as formulated by the psychologies Politzer called abstract. On the contrary, expression is rather the life of consciousness itself, its concreteness, which is nothing more than its pragmatic and social life, existing only through symbols. For, it is only through words that an act ceases to immediately adhere to the medium and rises to the condition of a spectacle to itself. In this sense, Politzer (1975, p. 133) says, before an experience is said, it does not exist as meaning.

In this way, Politzer (1975, p. 146) positions himself against Freud's thesis that the meaning of dreams is unconscious. If it is true that the dream can have a meaning, this meaning only occurs after the dreamer expresses in words what he supposedly dreamed. This is equivalent to saying that the dream itself comes true in the narrative. If the dream has a meaning, it is rather an effect of the narrative's expressiveness. Here, however, is a thesis with which Merleau-Ponty cannot agree. Although he had been inspired by Politzer's studies, for Merleau-Ponty, expression is not limited to designating the way in which the narrative, in the form of speech, would make known the meaning that the dreamer would not otherwise have understood concerning his own dream, or the worker in relation to his own action. Furlan (1999, p. 117) argues that, unlike Politzer, for whom the narrative expresses a meaning because it produces it to the extent that it is told, Merleau-Ponty is concerned with showing that this meaning is not limited to the relevance of "my" narratives or "my" social actions. On the contrary, for Merleau-Ponty, the expressive dynamics of the narrative or social action also involve a "depth" in which it would be sustained, which is the

habitual body, understood thus as the impersonal way in which I link myself with the world and with the other.

Merleau-Ponty (1942) regards consciousness not only as the "place of meanings" expressed by signs, but as the "place of the lived" (p. 232) expressed in signs, which involves an elongated temporal dimension, such as that proposed by Husserl in the *Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Intimate Consciousness of Time* (1893-1905). For Husserl, before our consciousness of acts glimpse – in something given – a "material object", we constitute the "temporal object" (*Zeitobjek*t) of which this "datum" (*Datum*) is an "original impression" (*Urimpression*). More precisely, we represent for ourselves the flow of impressions, within which that data emerges as a "figure" (Husserl, 1984, §11, p. 29). To do this, our consciousness relies on what Husserl (1984, §10, p. 28) considers to be a "remarkable fact" (*Merkwürdig*), namely, that "each subsequent phase of the flow is in itself a continuity in continuous growth, a continuity of pasts". Everything happens as if there were a "series of present moments" (*Reihe der Jetzpunkte*), in which each moment does not disappear with the advent of the next, much less is it reduced to this one. On the contrary, each old instant remains alive as the moments flow into the following ones and is represented as a profile of what it was in the previous instant, transforming in each new instant into the indication of the continuity of something that no longer exists. This is because each instant is a "point of origin" (*Quellpunkt*) of a continuous "flow mode" (*Ablaufsmodus*), which is projected onto each subsequent instant, making each subsequent instant the "retention of each new previous point", so that a continuum (*Kontinuum*) of retention and retention of retention is formed. And it is for this reason, in short, that consciousness can, at every moment, carry out the symbolic "production" (*Erseugnung*) of the object that endures, given that this is nothing more than the intellectual synthesis of the profiles that, from the past, are given as retained profiles.

That is why, unlike Politzer, Merleau-Ponty would say that expression is not related exclusively to semantic production in the actuality of a dream, pragmatic or perceptual situation. It involves the fact that, to present itself as a figure or semantic value, the word needs to rely on a temporal background, and thus remains expressed in an almost silent way, as an operative intentionality, according to Husserl's terminology. We must recognize the Gestalt distinction between the temporal background expressed as operational or habitual intentionality and the figure produced in the narrative in terms of symbolic acts. Understood as the gestalt relationship, that is, as the non-independence between habitual intentional background and current symbolic experiences, the notion of expression should clarify the intentional way in which the meanings would come to exist in each one of our behaviors, whether they are syncretic, amovable, or symbolic. In other words, expression defines the intentional dynamics of our behavior, the way in which our body is temporally structured in the environment, such that it could emerge on its own as consciousness, which also means, as a figure or meaning.

For this reason, especially in the *La phénoménologie de la perception*, Merleau-Ponty uses the notion of expression to designate something beyond that derivative function which we perform when we speak prosaically, simply repeating an already established use of signs. In the scope of our symbolic experiences, "to express... is to ensure, using the words already used, that the new intention takes up the inheritance of the past, it is with a single gesture to incorporate the past into the present and weld them to a future" (1945, pp. 449-50). In the scope of our perceptual experience, in turn, the notion of expression designates the "miracle" that mundane things reveal to us "through our body", that is, the manifestation of an interior on the exterior, the manifestation of an excess beyond of things which appears in space (1945, p. 369); and even before our symbolic behaviors can be currently linked to these spatial manifestations (1945, p. 279). As Merleau-Ponty believes, if it is true that perception takes place in transcendence, if it is true that the thing "is constructed before our eyes, through the organization of its sensible aspects" (1945, p. 373); it does not mean that the body is limited to revealing "objects as a light illuminating them at night" (1945, p. 279). To perceive a surface, for example, "it is not enough to visit it, it is necessary to retain the moments of the journey and connect the points of the surface with one another" (1945, p. 279). This is only possible because there is a "prehistory" of perception in the body, a "sedimented" history that does not need intellectual synthesis, since it is expressed in a habitual way (1945, p. 279).

> My body is the place or, rather, the very actuality of the phenomenon of expression (*Ausdruck*); in my body, visual and auditory experiences, for example, are pregnant with each other, and their expressive value grounds the pre-predicative unity of the perceived world, and, through this, its verbal expression (*Darstellung*) and intellectual signification (*Bedeutung*). My body is the common texture of all objects and is, at least with regard to the perceived world, the general instrument of my "understanding". It is he who gives meaning not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects such as words. (1945, p. 271)

Used in a generic sense, the notion of expression designates the "irrational power that creates meanings and communicates them," of which speech is only a particular case (1945, p. 221). It is a spontaneous power, by means of which the body makes "a past and a future exist for a present", or a capacity of the body to "unite a present, a past and a future" (1945, p. 276). According to Andrade (2020, p. 133), the expression of time is both the organizing principle of phenomena and the one responsible for the measurement of perceptual life and the things that appear in it. For Merleau-Ponty it would be necessary to admit that "that nothing exists and that everything is temporalized" (1945, p. 383). It follows that, expressively, the body "segregates time or, rather, becomes that place in nature where, for the first time, events, instead of impelling one another into being, project around the present a duplicity, that is, a horizon of past and future through which they receive a historical orientation" (1945, pp. 276-277).

Now, if in body consciousness, meaning is expressed as time, if time and meaning are one and the same, what would distinguish meaning as lived habitually and perceptually from meaning after it has become symbolic? If expressiveness is "the way in which time is expressed in each body", generating an originally sensible community that would later be sedimented in symbolic institutions as semantic value or historicity; if all dimensions (perceptive and intersubjective) must also be understood "from the temporality that is expressed in them" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 495), since "time and meaning are one and the same" (1945, p. 487); what is the same in the sensible temporal sense and in the socio-historical sense? In what way does sensible temporality continue to be expressed as semantic temporality?

3. The "Bad Ambiguity" in the Notion of Body-Consciousness and the "Good Ambiguity" in The Notion of Expression

In his application to the *Collège de France,* in 1952, Merleau-Ponty concedes that the answers to these questions are not formulated in the *La phénoménologie de la perception*. When it comes to clarifying the link between impersonal life (of past habit and future perception) and culturally represented life (as human historicity), Merleau-Ponty (1962) can only teach us a bad ambiguity: "the study of perception could only teach us a 'bad ambiguity', a mixture of finitude and universality, of interiority and exteriority" (p. 409).

This is because, in this book, Merleau-Ponty's (1945, p. 374) argument favors a centralizing or intentional cut, which always seeks to describe events from the point of view of a container called "someone", albeit anonymous, as is the case of the body turned into consciousness based on its temporal (or operational) intentionality. After all, until 1945, Merleau-Ponty was interested in saying precisely what the world of perception is and what regions of existence can be distinguished in it. His perspective was of a global existential consciousness, that is, of a body invested with an operational intentionality and, in this sense, passive to the spontaneity of time. Consequently, the entire discussion that would explain the relationship between these domains, as well as its connection with human life shared in a symbolic way, was left in the background. It would be necessary to invert this order and start from the genealogy, according to a comment made by Merleau-Ponty (1955) on the way Karl Marx describes reality: "Marx's philosophy does not so much give us a certain truth hidden behind the empirical history, but rather presents us with empirical history as a genealogy of truth" (p. 93).

From 1945 onwards, Merleau-Ponty argues that to describe the connections between the perceptual world (and its presumed anonymous

temporality) and the semantic world of interpersonal coexistence, genealogy would have to be given more prominence, that is to say, it would have to be the starting point.

This does not mean that, in the *La phénoménologie de la perception*, the genealogical discussion was not formulated. An essay on genealogy, which is the peculiar way in which Merleau-Ponty addresses the issue of operational intentionality (as shown by Moutinho, 2006, p. 54) can be found in this book. A theory of expression was constructed from a cross between Husserl's (1984) lessons on the phenomenology of the intimate consciousness of time, and the notion of Gestalt used by Kurt Goldstein and the psychologists of Form, especially Adhémar Gelb, with whom he worked between 1918 and 1930. This is the sense in which, in clear allusion to Goldstein (1971, pp. 12-13), Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 419) describes the body as an eminently expressive space, a spontaneous dynamic of mutual remission between the world, the organismic functions and another person. Such dynamics are ensured, in turn, not by a natural law, an a priori principle, a judgment or a central neurological function, but by a system of impersonal equivalence, in which phenomena in inertial space-time are spontaneously articulated as a field of reference, a background from which phenomena, such as behaviors and intentions, or the perception of oneself and another emerge. The ultimate meaning of this expressiveness is the temporal format of the movements of transcendence that, from a habitual and impersonal background, the current body triggers towards a future (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 239).

In any case, this expressiveness is a body's prerogative, the way in which the body takes back for itself the nascent order in things, in others and itself. Although Merleau-Ponty speaks of an expressiveness of language, this, as was understood at that moment, is a bodily gesture. Although he speaks of the expressiveness of things, of a "perceptual evidence" (1945, pp. 236-237) that is revealed "in the ipseity of the thing" (1945, p. 269), this is evidence such as we know it, a whole perceived "with our body" considered "as a subject of perception" (1945, p. 239). In this way, the genealogical point of view continues to be subordinated to a centralizing intentionality, to the primacy of an individual's point of view, even if it is not a mental or psychic self, nor a pure or transcendental self (according to Sacrini, 2008, p. 53). Even so, in the La Phénoménologie de la Perception, expression must be generated somewhere, which is the body as a global existential consciousness. It is an ambiguous place, at once current and oriented towards the future based on habit, thrown into the transcendence of things and other consciousnesses, but according to an orientation whose matrix is itself, which leaves unanswered the question: to what extent does the ambiguity of one explain what is communicated to the other?

Therefore, to understand why communication is not just a mixture between self and other, to understand how our thoughts take up and expand our impersonal (habitual and perceptual) life; it would be necessary to free the

genealogical discussion from this intentional "archaeology" of the body-consciousness – to borrow the notion highlighted by Barbaras (1993, p 64). A description of the field's dynamics in a broad sense would be needed, and not only of the body as a global existential consciousness. It would be necessary to think of expression not as an attribute of the body-consciousness and its temporal intentionality, but as a formal operator of a genealogy. Consequently, the direction of research would have to be changed, and would cease to be a phenomenology of the body's temporal experiences and become a genealogical "theory of truth" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 402) based on the expressive processes in which bodies would participate in, for example, a communicative praxis.

In this sense, says Merleau-Ponty (1962) in the text he sent to the *Collège de France*: if it is true that the study of the world of perception from an "ambiguous center" that could express it entails a "bad ambiguity", if it is true that the search for the "place" of expressiveness implies an undecidable domain between the prepersonal and the personal, the singular and the universal, it is also true that:

> But there is a "good ambiguity" in in the phenomenon of expression, a spontaneity which accomplishes what appeared to be impossible when we observed only the separate elements, a spontaneity which gathers together the plurality of monads, the past and the present, nature and culture into a single whole. (p. 409)

Expression must be understood beyond the body as global existential consciousness. It cannot be limited to describing the bodily dynamics, the temporal functioning of this ambiguous field, both particular and universal. It is necessary to recognize, in the phenomenon of expression, the dynamics of generality itself, which involves not only the temporal ambiguity of the body, but also coexistence in a broad sense. Perhaps, in this way, in accordance with Saint Aubert (2005, p. 28), the internal difficulties of the centralizing-intentional perspective, which consist precisely of understanding how the plurality of subjects, the various dimensions of time, the singularity of perceptions and the universality of the knowledge that assumes them can be overcome.

4. Expression From a Genealogical Point of View: Differentiation

In fact, in texts such as *La doute de Cézanne* (1964b), *Le roman et la métaphysique* (1966), *Humanisme et terreur* (1947), all written after 1945, Merleau-Ponty affirms that he no longer sets out to restore the world of perception (from the point of view of the consciousness that perceives it). On the

contrary, his research aims to explain "how communication with others and thought returns to and goes beyond the perception that initiated us into truth" (1962, p. 402). Merleau-Ponty does not abandon the previous motif, but rather that resolves to return to it from a genealogical point of view, in terms of a description of the expressiveness inherent to intersubjective coexistence and perceptual generality, which would then be a way of clarifying the matters lacking clarity in the *La phénoménologie de la perception*.

For example, the study of the dynamics implicit in the experience of coexistence required Merleau-Ponty to deepen the discussions on the meaning of the notion of praxis which, in the first two books, had already led him to reflect on how perceptual life, the order of work, language and history would be related to one another. From now on, unlike the manner in which these themes appeared in his writing prior to 1945, Merleau-Ponty does not intend to say who is the subjectivity that reveals itself before the other or who is this other that puts me in contact with that which I did not know about me. On the contrary, he is now interested in describing "how" they relate, "how" the other and I communicate. The emphasis is therefore on the "how" and no longer on the "what", giving the term expression a prominence that it had not previously had.

This is precisely how Merleau-Ponty begins to consider expressiveness in the experience of communication. Merleau-Ponty moves away from the discussion on the psychology of language to polemicize with Saussure's semiological analysis. According to Merleau-Ponty's commentary (2001, pp. 85-86), Saussure demonstrated the terms in which language, as an autonomous system, is not an instrument with which humans become capable of sharing private occurrences. On the contrary, bodies, once captured by signifiers, are thrown into language as an autonomous system of differentiations, in which they are born as humans, which means to say, as vociferous and transposable occurrences. If there can be something like a reason, history, and communications, that is a consequence of the fact that signifiers allow bodies to have an infinite number of connections, to the extent that each signifier is represented (or differentiated) from the other, from where each one can become a particular that is both distinct and correlated.

> [...]. Which Saussure saw was precisely this framework of chance and order, this resumption of the rational, of the fortuitous, and his conception of the history of language can be applied to history as a whole: in the same way that the engine of language is the will to communicate ("we are thrown into language", situated in language and committed by it in a process of rational explanation with others), so also which moves all historical development is the common situation of human, their will to coexist and to be recognized. (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 82)

Consequently, Merleau-Ponty (2001) observes:

> finds here the capital philosophical problem of the relationship between the individual and the social. For him, the individual is neither the subject nor the object of history, but one and the other simultaneously. Thus, language is not a transcendent reality in relation to all speaking subjects, like a fantasy formed by the individual. It is a manifestation of human intersubjectivity. (p. 85)

Evidently, Merleau-Ponty does not seek in semiology studies to explain the systematicity in the way signs work, but to understand how expressiveness can be an effect of the differentiation between signifiers. This required Merleau-Ponty to shift the discussion about the nature of expression from grammar to communicative praxis, which eventually led him away from Saussure (1962, p. 405). Ultimately, in accordance with Merleau-Ponty's evaluation, in his synchronic approach to language, Saussure limits himself to mapping the distinguished differential groups present in a living language, without explaining how they are linked to one another. In the diachronic approach, with its historical bias, Saussure limits himself to showing how the already established differential groups are modified over time. He does not touch on their mutual reference and how they remain expressed in one another. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty continues, as he tries to glimpse the genesis of expressivity, it is necessary to capture language in operation, to understand it from within, from the position of those who exercise it. This is why Merleau-Ponty will transfer to speech that in which Saussure's semiology only admitted in written or formal language, namely, the manifestation of a kind of systematicity triggered by differentiation. Such systematicity is just what Merleau-Ponty calls expression. For this reason, he states, speech actualizes not only the differentiations between present (or synchronic) signifiers, but also between those that are present and those that are absent (diachronically). In speech, according to Merleau-Ponty (1960, p. 111), there is a double implication between synchrony and diachrony, which makes communication a system in action, open and temporal, in such a way that - in the contingency of a saying in the present - the signifiers “express” (albeit silently) the system from which such signifiers are differentiated, as well as the change that such signifiers introduce into such a system.

The novelty brought by Merleau-Ponty, through this turn towards a synchrony of speech, is the dynamics that grammar veiled in the context of language, specifically the asynchronous temporality of communication (according to Moutinho, 2006, p. 72).When we place ourselves in the condition of someone who must produce meaning for those who do not yet have it or understand what appears to us as an unprecedented articulation, we have no alternative but to resort to non-current signifiers, to processes of differentiation which are in another time and that therefore, would be excluded from the synchronous cut in principle. It follows that: if it is true that the differentiation between signifiers is the secret of the systematicity of language, if it is through this differentiation that a meaning is expressed as a whole, the event of differentiation is not the effect of a series of successive ones (diachrony) nor of

disjunctive ones (synchrony). The event of differentiation is indeed the result of speaking praxis, that is, it is the spontaneity that communicative praxis lends to speakers, allowing them to share signs brought from other times, as well as profiles brought from the impersonal world of perception, all in favor of new and ambiguous discourses, both symbolic and sensible. This implies admitting that, in communication, each speaker inhabits a prolonged time, which is not an already defined series, nor the effect of an intentional matrix located in the body, as Merleau-Ponty previously thought, but rather a system of differentiations always underway, in which the different dimensions of time, the difference between time and space, between perceptual spatiality and symbolized historicity, are produced in an ambiguous and transitional way, to the extent that each communicative action expresses the other possibilities - from which it is distinguished and with which it is linked. Therefore, expressiveness is not a prerogative of a universal or a particular being, be it a consciousness or a reflective body, but rather the radicalization of Husserl's thesis of the *a priori* of correlation. It is not the acts (noetic) and the correlates (noematic) that define the correlation, but rather the ambiguous and indeterminate correlation that produces its terms.

Expressiveness, therefore, is no longer an attribute. It is now a productive dynamic in the strong sense, which could lead us to compare Merleau-Ponty's expression theory with Gilles Deuleze's theory of desire, in which he also proposes a notion of production, which he calls "machinic", although I am not convinced that Merleau-Ponty would have completely renounced the theory of an intentional nucleus, as is required in a radically machinic perspective, according to Deleuze (1994, p. 90). For him, "the whole of phenomenology is an epiphenomenology" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 90), and Merleau-Ponty "only surpasses intentionality to found it in the other dimension" (Deleuze, 1993, p. 146,), keeping as its core a presupposed commitment to an orderly, intrinsic, and natural meaningfulness. Anyway, I cannot demonstrate here that Merleau-Ponty's expression theory develops *avant la lettre* a Deleuze machinic style. Especially because, unlike Reynolds & Roffe (2014, p. 231), it is not my objective to deal with this subject here. But I can at least say that, in Merleau-Ponty's texts written after 1945, I have found another way to understand expressiveness (according to Saint Aubert, 2012, pp. 23-24; Silva, 2019, pp. 71-72; 2010, p. 194). The expressiveness characteristic of communication – and the way in which we find ourselves implicated as a single community of possibilities – is not a predicate of speaking bodies, but of the field of temporal indivision formed by the cultural and the prepersonal. Expressivity is such a field, the "activity of originating differentiation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, p. 47) and according to which, for one thing to be differentiated from another, it must simultaneously call into battle that same thing, or something else from which it is differentiated, which includes the impersonal world of perception, as if, in some sense, it were laterally linked to them (Merleau-Ponty, 1960, p. 51), together forming an undivided without synthesis or coincidence, a field of indivision for the benefit of

continuous differentiation, which makes each body a *pars totalis* of an *omnitudo realitatis*.

It is worth emphasizing that this *omnitudo realitatis* is at the "intersection and interval of words," according to Merleau-Ponty (1960, p. 53), and not necessarily in a container, like the body, as he understood prior to 1945, or in a Being that establishes itself. This is what Merleau-Ponty would presumably propose later according to some commentators, among them, Barbaras (1997, p. 23), who understands it as "a dimension or a principle of unity that has no other content than the future to which the parts will give rise, the 'imminence of the whole in the parts'" (Barbaras, 1997, p. 23), as if the meaning of the whole were contained in the parts always imminently, until expressiveness came to bring it to light. Quite the contrary, if the meaning is imminent, it is because the bodies participate in a system of differentiation, and not because it is contained in the parts as an imminence that expression would liberate.

According to my reading, there is no difference between meaning and differentiation processes. If there were, the expression would once again be just an intermediary. On the contrary, after 1945, expressivity – and not only the meanings that are engendered in it - became a "shared structure", the process of resuming old narratives in the face of the other's narrative or, on the contrary, the incorporation of the other's narrative into my old narratives. It is about "the impetus of speaking subjects who want to understand themselves and who assume, as a new way of speaking, the worn-out remains of another mode of expression" (1969, p. 50). It is, to speak of inter-corporeality, an experience of "decentering", in which I polarize myself in the actions carried out by the other, as well as receiving an orientation or perspective from them. My feeling, now, seems to "extend" (1969, p. 188) as a carnal generality (1969, p. 29), within which I and the other become "transferable meanings" (1969, p. 194). In some way, semiology not only frees the theory of expression of the psychology of the self (whether mental, psychic or transcendental), but also channels a new way of describing experience in general.

It is no longer a matter of describing the experiences of a consciousness, but rather, the spontaneous expressiveness of the world as a process of differentiation. Merleau-Ponty now considers that the destiny of his theory of expression is to become a description of experience in general and no longer of the experiences of body-consciousness. The theory of expression is no longer written in the context of a phenomenology of consciousness and, yes, as the formal operator of a "genealogy of truth", which is the name chosen by Merleau-Ponty for the project that, after his death, was published with the title *Le visible et l'invisible* and in whose pages the revelation of a drift towards the ontological is evident.

5. Expression as Differentiation and its Application in the Field of Ontology

I argue in this article that one of the most important consequences of this genealogical way with which Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 409; 1968, p. 21) began to use the notion of expression was a new understanding of its philosophical possibilities. It is as though he would have realized now that the genealogical study of the spontaneous expressiveness of the world as a process of differentiation would coincide with the advent of a new theoretical matrix, from which he could conceptualize a morality, an aesthetics, a literary philosophy, even a new ontology. How to connect the genealogical use of the notion of expression to the project of a new ontology, for example? What would be new in this ontology? At least, it is precisely the idea of differentiation (presented through the allegories of chiasm, encroachment, intertwining and reversibility) that would guide Merleau-Ponty descriptions of the carnality of the Brute Being.

As already mentioned, in his application to the *Collège de France*, Merleau-Ponty mentions a new project, which he calls "Genealogy of truth." During the course entitled *La ontologie cartésienne et la ontologie aujourd'hui*", taught in 1960-1961, Merleau-Ponty (1996, p. 166) proposes to "philosophically formulate our ontology that remains implicit". It was then a matter of returning to the rudiments of ontology that had been in place since the work *La structure du comportement*, in which the adequacy of Husserl's theory of operative intentionality was contemplated for reading Leibniz's perspectivism without bringing back the idea of pre-established harmony (Merleau-Ponty, 1942, p. 237). Leibniz's perspectivism is precisely the origin of the concept of expression to which Merleau-Ponty was introduced by Politzer's *The Foundations of Scientific Psychology*. (1975, p. 70). It also provided important ideas for Husserl's *Lectures on Phenomenology of the Intimate Consciousness of Time*, especially in the *Cartesian Meditations*, in relation to the possibility of intersubjective communication in the realm of transcendental consciousness (Husserl, 2012, pp. 114-115), according to Jiménez Restrepo & Duque Naranjo (2023, p. 144). It cannot be assumed, of course, that Merleau-Ponty would have surrendered to ontotheology, or the reading that Husserl gave of Leibniz's monadology. Within the scope of the new project, the notion of expression returned for Merleau-Ponty in another way. It was now directed to describe another phenomenon, which is genealogical differentiation. And this is precisely explained in the working notes added to the posthumous book *Le visible et l'invisible* which was an attempt to read Leibniz from another point of view.

In fact, although Saussure had given Merleau-Ponty a way of thinking about a community of origin in which particularities could arise from one another without the prior admission of a private continent, such as the "I" (psychic, mental or transcendental); it was through the reflections of Gottfried W. Leibniz – now genealogically reread – that Merleau-Ponty is able to transform the notion

of expressivity into a formal operator of a new ontology. After all, with the notion of expression, Leibniz (2017, pp. 2, 24, 36) looks towards a new conception of "being", which questions, in particular, the ontology proposed by Descartes, for whom the "being" of entities corresponds to acts of objective representation established in the immanence of thinking subjectivity. As is known, for Descartes the imago or ideational representation of a transcendence is not a copy of the transcendence itself, but the presence of the "being" of the transcendence in the immanence of the spirit. Leibniz (2012, pp. 14, 29) cannot accept this theory, since it implies the unnecessary duplication of reality, as if being itself existed independently of the entity that it should found. Worse still, by reducing being to acts of subjectivity, Descartes would transform ontology into an exclusively psychological enterprise, as if the intelligibility of beings owed nothing to the transcendence of the event. This is the sense in which, unlike Descartes, Leibniz (2017, pp. 2, 7, 19, 24, 36, 77) begins to conceive the act not as being (in itself), but as the pulse of being, the triggering element of being or, simply, its "expressive sign". Being, in turn, is no longer understood as that which would be held in some container (in the thinking substance, for example), to be conceived as the very activity of expression of an infinite virtuality around each act or profile. This allows Leibniz to conceive of a virtual community among the many acts. It would not be about the material composition of the acts among themselves; such a composition would correspond to an exclusively static vision of possible relationships. In fact, it would encompass the infinite possibilities expressed by each monad.

It is true that, to explain this community, Leibniz (2012, p. 25) introduced a theological principle, according to which the possibilities expressed by each monad would be harmonized in advance by a universal watchmaker, which is God. Just like the pulsive acts – through which the monads would reveal themselves to be invested with attributes, thus being able to distinguish themselves from one another– the possibilities expressed by each one would be established in advance. This is the sense in which, therefore, each monad would reveal the qualities of the other monads, establishing itself as a "point of view" in relation to the whole. From this it was deduced that, for Leibniz (2017, p. 27 and p. 28 and p. 30 and p. 31 and. 35 and. 42 and 55 and 69), communication between the monads would only be an ideal and interior connection with each one of them. In short, "inter-expression" would be the name of this ideal relationship, in the way in which, exclusively, the monads could appear in community, or dependent on one another. If one monad managed to affect another, if it could communicate with it, this would not mean that they had interacted physically, but rather that, ideally, they would express themselves mutually, because of divine choice. Ultimately, it is this divine choice, "or the (perfect) agreement of all created things with each individual and of each individual with all the others", that causes "every simple substance to bear relations (*rapports*) which express all the others (simple substances), and

consequently each individual appears as a living, perpetual mirror of the entire universe" (Leibniz, 2012, p. 24).

Even so, if each act expresses a horizon of possibilities, if this horizon contains the possibilities of all other acts, there is among them all the same inter-expressive community. Ultimately, it is this community that allows Leibniz to conceive monads as simple substances, devoid of parts and therefore deprived of extension, figure, or possible divisibility through which they could undergo an external action, but nevertheless invested with the ability to relate to one another. For Merleau-Ponty however, Leibniz himself failed to see the scope of the notion he introduced, which made him retreat in favor of a regulatory principle, which would be imposed on the monads as guarantor of their onto-theological harmony. This means that if Leibniz was right in stating that the various perspectives of our experience maintained among themselves (and towards the perspectives of others) a relationship of familiarity, without losing their particularity; if - to signify this familiarity - the concept of expression was well used there, this did not imply that the delimitation of this concept (as a property attributed by God to each substance, and according to a law of harmony formulated by this same God) should be accepted as appropriate. On the contrary, it is advisable to refute it since by reestablishing the figure of an internal principle in which meaning would be anticipated, this delimitation loses everything that the concept of expression would have to contribute to the problem of the relationship between particularity and generality.

That is why Merleau-Ponty decided to take Leibniz's concept of expression, introducing changes to it that would free it from monadological ontotheology. Thus, instead of speaking of expression as "the conception of perception-reproduction (on my body in itself of the exterior thing in itself)", Merleau-Ponty (1964a, p. 276) speaks of expression as a manifestation of a phenomenon in its raw state, that is, like a process of differentiation, as if it were gaining shape from others. Or "the expression of the universe in us is certainly not the harmony between our monad and the others, the presence of the ideas of all things in it— but it is what we see in perception, to be taken as such instead of explaining it". In this sense:

> The Being thus discovered is to be sure not the god of Leibniz, the "monadology" thus disclosed is not the system of monads substances; but certain Leibnizian descriptions— that each of the views of the world is a world apart, that nonetheless "what is particular to one would be public to all," that the monads would be in a relation of expression between themselves and with the world, that they differ from one another and from it as perspectives— are to be maintained entirely, to be taken up again in the brute Being, to be separated from the substantialist and ontotheological elaboration Leibniz imposes upon them. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 276)

It must be emphasized that it is not the Brute Being that is expressed or distinguished. Brute Being is the relationship or distinction process itself. This constitutes the main novelty of the notion of expression as genealogical differentiation which was introduced to the field of ontological reflections and with which Merleau-Ponty decided to take charge. Expression would be the ambiguous form according to which each part, whether a physical, vital, or symbolic phenomenon, while differing from other phenomena, would be linked to them not because it coincides with them, but because, in order to differentiate itself from them, it would maintain a relative proximity to them that would favor comparison or, more precisely, differentiation in relation to them. In this sense, in each individual part, the other parts would be "expressed" as a parameter. Hence a genealogical link that the parties - in a differentiation process - would share. Merleau-Ponty would call this link "non-coincident division," as if each part evoked, in a crude and indeterminate way, the others. It is, in fact, a generalization of the "figure and ground" relationship characteristic of the notion of Gestalt proposed by the psychologists of Form based on their interpretation of Husserl, despite it no longer being understood as a property of consciousness, nor even of the body - as Merleau-Ponty himself would have previously suggested (according to Moutinho, 2004, p. 40). If the figure rests on the background from which it stands out, if the background is always on the horizon of the figure it fixes, it is because both express each other.

From this it follows that expression is not the property of anything or anyone. After all, it is not contained in a continent, but is the Gestalt form of the experience, now understood as a Brute Being, which unfolds to the extent that its component parts are differentiated and that, for that very reason, they maintain it as a relative - merely negative - background of comparability.

Considering the genealogical use of the notion of expression, in contrast to the form to read Leibniz proposed by Husserl (who argued that transcendent bodies shared the same intentional immanence), Merleau-Ponty discover "carnality" as a new ontological matrix, insofar as it not only descriptively links beings, but also establishes an "unintentional" kinship between them, specifically their internal differentiation as an "ontological organ" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 160). It does not follow that this was the path chosen by Merleau-Ponty, as can be read in the different and divergent interpretations of the essays, and working notes in which Merleau-Ponty announces and rehearses what his new ontological project should be.

However, if I concentrate on the notes on Leibniz, if I give value to the fact that in them the theme of expression has become the protagonist, if I connect them with all the transformations through which the notion of expression passed throughout Merleau-Ponty's work, it appears to me as a figure that, in the reinterpretation of Leibniz from the genealogical model (developed from criticisms to Saussure, Husserl and Politzer), Merleau-Ponty understands a way of considering Being not as a principle or foundation, nor as an immanence in

the same field as pragmatic or transcendental correlations, but as the effect of a production. This is precisely the system of differentiations that is beginning to be acknowledged not only for signifiers, but for bodies in a general way, as if among them we could recognize "a universal means of expression" (1968, p. 13), since "perception is already expression" (1968, p. 14). It is a way of thinking about Being without making it immanent either to nature or to the spirit, which changes the way Merleau-Ponty (1968) proposes his ontological themes:

> By studying linguistic symbolism, considering not only an expressive world but also a speaking world, we will be able to definitively fix the philosophical meaning of the previous analyses, that is, the relationship between "natural" expression and the expression of culture. We can then decide whether the dialectic of expression means that a spirit is already present in nature or that nature is immanent in our spirit, or rather seek a third philosophy beyond this dilemma. (Merleau-Ponty , 1968, pp. 20-21)

The theory of expression – after a long journey between the concrete, the phenomenological and the structural – has become in Merleau-Ponty's texts a third way, in which differentiation starts to be understood as the production's process of Being. Or then, expression (as an implication in differentiation) is the genealogy of something, in this case, of Being as unfolding or doubling of bodies already from perception (and not only from the advent of the symbolic, as Politzer thought). Expression is the process of carnality's formation – and not the actualization of a presumed carnality, as claimed by Barbaras in his reading. When he says that expressivity is the "imminence of the whole in the parts", as if this imminent whole was established as Being from the "infinite conversion of silence into word and of the word into silence" (Barbaras, 1993, p. 80), or as if the imminent Being were that which would sustain expressiveness, Barbaras approaches the idea of an internal principle that Merleau-Ponty specifically tried to denounce in Leibniz's account.

6. Conclusion

When it comes to understanding, in Merleau-Ponty's late texts, the continuities and discontinuities in the way he used the notion of expression, I do not believe that notes on Leibniz's expression theory are more important than the notes that deal with Husserl, Descartes, Claude Simon, Bergson, Heidegger, Sartre and Psychoanalysis. Nor do I believe that Merleau-Ponty's notes on Leibniz help us understand, better than the others notes, the first four "texts" that make up *Le visible et l'invisible*, namely, *L'interrogation philosophique, Réflexion et interrogation, Interrogation et dialectique, Interrogation et Intuition*. However, they take on special prominence when reading the fifth of those texts, where, for

various reasons and according to several commentators, like Barbaras (1991, p. 224), Carbone (1993, p. 93), Dastur (1992, p. 45), Decriem-Franksen (1993, p. 135), Garelli (1992, p. 81), Kelkel (1993, p. 196), Masuda (1993, p. 242), Tilliette (1993, p. 381), it is supposed that Merleau-Ponty tested the terminology of his new ontological project. In this fifth text – *L'entrelacs – le chiasme* -, the notion of expression gains prominence. More than that, it is employed in another way, to the extent that it no longer claims a continent to which it would belong. Quite the contrary, the notion of expression is presented as a dynamic of differentiation called interweaving or chiasm. And it is the notes on Leibniz that clarify how the dynamics of interweaving or chiasm are related to the notion of expression.

However, these notes are not sufficient to clarify why and how the notion of expression came to be used as a *Gestalthaft*, that is, as a formal operator, which would supposedly assure to Merleau-Ponty (1982, pp. 127-128) a new way of linking the sensible world and language, without having to resort to the philosophical instruments of reflection and intuition inherited especially from phenomenology. For this reason, I had to rescue, from the first works, the way in which the notion of expression was modulated, how it came to be presented based on a re-reading of Politzer based on Husserl, as well as how it was transformed through a re-reading of Husserl from Saussure.

This rescue allowed me to characterize expression as the very movement of differentiation established between bodies, which would also give them a provisional and ambiguous connection, to which different names could be attributed: communication, dialogue, even Being Brute. Furthermore, it was possible for me to glimpse in what sense, once used to describe Being, the notion of expression carries a different ontology, to the extent that Being (which we are trying to express) is not an origin that would impose itself on bodies, especially signs, or an intentional property that would imminently reside in them, as if expressive bodies were "the way of being of Being", as Barbaras (1993, p. 80) proposes. The Being described from the notion of expression (as genealogical differentiation) is no longer understood as an *arché*, nor as the genesis of beings, but rather as something that also has a genesis, which is the differentiation between that which always presents itself partially - or, sexually - in relation to another event from which it is distinguished and, therefore, to which it is linked. Here is another way of reading the phrase, according to which "*l'Être est ce qui exige de nous création pour que nous en ayons l'expérience*" (1964a, p. 251), which I propose to translate as "Being is what creation requires of us in order to have experience of it", but adding "of it as creation", once the French partitive "*en*" requires us to have a "modal complement", which is precisely the genealogical element that I attempted demonstrate in this article.

However, if it is true that in this journey, we can see Merleau-Ponty's effort to think about meaning (and, by extension, Being) from another point of view, which he himself called genealogical; it is not enough to prove that the intentional perspective has disappeared, especially in the last ontological

formulation. For, when Merleau-Ponty returns to elementary experiences, in which bodies are not distinguished from the events in which they are involved, as is supposedly often the case with "seeing, speaking, even thinking (with certain reservations, since as soon as we distinguish thought from speaking we are absolutely already in the order of reflection)"; he does not renounce the subjective format implicit in the figure of a "seeing gaze" or a "speaking speaker". That is, the seer, as well as the speaker, continue to be points of convergence between different dimensions of carnality. According to one of the most quoted excerpts in the research literature on Merleau-Ponty's late work (1964a, p. 182), insofar as he admits that "my body as a visible thing is contained in the great spectacle", as soon as he admits that there is a "seeing body" that "subtends this visible body and everything visible", with "the insertion and reciprocal interweaving of one in the other", to the point that we can say that the two are like "two circles, or two vortices, or two concentric spheres when I live naively and, as I wonder, slightly decentering in each other"; Merleau-Ponty leads one to think that the anonymity of decentering could still be clairvoyant, which means that, in that place of intersection, there could be a kind of vision that one does not know, a thoughtless or unconscious power of seeing. It is as if, although one had built the possibility of describing phenomena from another point of view, which is the expressiveness that they share to the extent that they participate in the same system of differentiation, which is carnality, Merleau-Ponty continued to demand a witness who would inhabit this system from within, even though in a decentered way, as a "self and no self at the same time" (Silva, 2019, p. 304), or as a "universality being an individual" (Ballabio, 2018, p. 112), which is a way of reestablishing in a micro proportion that which Leibniz—through his ontotheology—claimed from a macro proportion. But this is already a topic for another article and does not invalidate what Merleau-Ponty has given us as his "shadow", namely, a research matrix that allows us to search in all phenomena (understood as a fields of implications in the processes of differentiation) a protolanguage called expression.

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