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ARTICLE

THE KANTIAN ROOTS OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S ACCOUNT OF PATHOLOGY

Samantha Matherne

One of the more striking aspects of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) is his use of psychological case studies in pathology. For Merleau-Ponty, a philosophical interpretation of phenomena like aphasia and psychic blindness promises to shed light not just on the nature of pathology, but on the nature of human existence more generally. In this paper, I show that although Merleau-Ponty is surely a pioneer in this use of pathology, his work is deeply indebted to an earlier philosophical study of pathology offered by the German Neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1929). More specifically, I argue that Merleau-Ponty, in fact, follows Cassirer in placing Kant's notion of the productive imagination at the centre of his account of pathology and the features of existence it illuminates. Recognizing the debt Merleau-Ponty's account of pathology has to the Kantian tradition not only acts as a corrective to more recent interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's views of pathology (Dreyfus, Romdenh-Romluc), but also recommends we resist the prevailing tendency to treat Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as anti-Kantian. Instead, my interpretation seeks to restore Merleau-Ponty's place within the Kantian tradition.

KEYWORDS: Cassirer; Kant; Merleau-Ponty; imagination; pathology

INTRODUCTION

One of the more striking aspects of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) is his use of psychological case studies in pathology.¹ For Merleau-Ponty, a philosophical interpretation of phenomena like aphasia and psychic blindness promises to shed light not just on the nature

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¹Citations to *Phénoménologie de la perception* (PhP) will be to the English/French pagination.

of pathology, but on the nature of human existence more generally.² Yet although Merleau-Ponty is surely a pioneer in this use of pathology, in this paper I show his work is deeply indebted to an earlier philosophical study of pathology offered by the German Neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1929).³ More specifically, I argue that Merleau-Ponty, in fact, follows Cassirer in placing Kant's notion of the *productive imagination* at the centre of his account of pathology and the features of existence it illuminates.

Recognizing Merleau-Ponty's debt to Cassirer and the Kantian tradition in this regard is crucial for two reasons. In the first place, it recommends we revise the prevailing way of interpreting Merleau-Ponty's use of pathology. Though the details of their views diverge, influential commentators like Hubert Dreyfus and Komarine Romdenh-Romluc agree insofar as they take Merleau-Ponty to use pathology primarily to teach us about *bodily action and movement*.⁴ Even if this line of interpretation, which I shall label the 'motor-centric' interpretation, captures aspects of Merleau-Ponty's account, I show that it has too narrow a focus and leads us to neglect Merleau-Ponty's more fundamental aims with pathology, viz., elucidating what makes it possible for us to engage with the world in a wide variety of ways, as much through movement and perception, as through thought and emotion. I claim this is ultimately why Merleau-Ponty is drawn to the Kantian account of the productive imagination, a capacity that underwrites the different ways we engage with the world through 'sensitivity' and 'understanding'.

However, there may be a reason that those writing about Merleau-Ponty's pathology have overlooked its Kantian features, viz., the prevailing tendency to interpret Merleau-Ponty as *anti-Kantian*. Throughout the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty mounts criticism against a certain form of idealism that he labels 'intellectualism'. At times, he raises objections to Kant in this vein,⁵ and, for this reason, many have come to identify the arch-intellectualist for Merleau-Ponty as none other than Kant (see e.g. Matthews, *Merleau-Ponty*, 31 and Rockmore, *Kant and Phenomenology*, Chapter 6). As a result, there is a consensus among interpreters of both Kant and Merleau-Ponty that

²Though Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the 'phantom limb' phenomena has garnered quite a bit of attention (see Gallagher, 'Body Schema and Intentionality' and Carman, 'Between Empiricism and Intellectualism', 98–102), in this paper I shall focus, instead, on the pathologies related to aphasia, agnosia, and apraxia, which are the subject of the chapters titled 'The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity', 'The Body as a Sexed Being', and 'The Body as Expression, and Speech'.

³Citations to *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Dritter Teil* (PSFv3) will be to the English/German pagination.

⁴See Dreyfus, 'Reply to Romdenh-Romluc', Romdenh-Romluc, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Power', *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, as well as Kelly, 'Grasping at Straws', Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*.

⁵See e.g. Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Kant's view of consciousness (PhP, xx/9, 317/358).

we should regard their philosophies as competing alternatives.⁶ Yet in this paper I offer reasons for why we should correct this view. Although there are no doubt aspects of Kant's philosophy that Merleau-Ponty rejects, Merleau-Ponty is also a subtle and sympathetic reader of Kant. Indeed, there are features of Kant's philosophy that Merleau-Ponty regards as proto-phenomenological and he endeavours to preserve and develop them within his phenomenological framework. In what follows, I highlight one such aspect of Kant's philosophy: the productive imagination. As we shall find, in virtue of his sensitive reading of Kant and Cassirer with respect to the productive imagination, rather than rejecting this feature of the Kantian account, Merleau-Ponty in fact gives it a central place within his account of pathology and, indeed, human existence. This, in turn, suggests a revised reading of Merleau-Ponty's relationship to the Kantian tradition is in order.

In order to expose the Kantian and Neo-Kantian roots of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of pathology, I begin with a discussion of Cassirer's interpretation of pathology (§2). I next turn to Merleau-Ponty's assessment of Cassirer's approach (§3). I then present Merleau-Ponty's own account of pathology, emphasizing the advantages my 'imagination-centric' interpretation has over the motor-centric interpretation and the advantages Merleau-Ponty takes his account to have over Cassirer's. I conclude by arguing that appreciating this Kantian aspect of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy points towards the need to re-conceive Merleau-Ponty's relationship to the Kantian tradition (§5).

CASSIRER'S DIAGNOSIS OF PATHOLOGY: THE REPRESENTATION FUNCTION

In the early decades of the twentieth century, more and more attention was paid in psychology to problems in pathology. Psychologists, such as Head, Gelb, and Goldstein, conducted extensive research and published case studies on patients suffering from three interrelated types of disorders: aphasia, agnosia, and apraxia.⁷ Whereas aphasia relates to disorders affecting speech, e.g. being unable to name the colour of a swatch placed before you ('colour amnesia'), agnosia relates to disorders affecting one's

⁶We find this notably in the Dreyfus–McDowell debates: Dreyfus, 'Overcoming the Myth of the Mental'; McDowell, 'What Myth?', 'Response to Dreyfus'. In the literature on Kant, we find this in Waxman, *Kant's Model of the Mind*, 18, 195, 212fn40; Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, 204, 271, 395; and Melnick, *Kant's Theory of the Self*, 126–30. In addition to Matthews and Rockmore, further examples in the literature on Merleau-Ponty are Carman, 'Sensation, Judgment, and the Phenomenal Field', 59, *Merleau-Ponty*, 12, 'Between Empiricism and Intellectualism', 47; and Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, 20, 54.

⁷They were also both familiar with the work of Marie, van Woerkom, Benary, and Liepmann.

capacities for recognition, e.g. psychic blindness, and for thought, e.g. being unable to perform basic arithmetic or understand analogies and metaphors. Meanwhile apraxia relates to disorders affecting one's capacity for action and movement: while a patient may be able to perform a 'concrete action' in response to an actual task, e.g. sewing a wallet at work, she may be unable to perform an 'abstract action' in response to a merely imagined or possible scenario, e.g. mimicking the act of sewing a wallet in a psychologist's office.

In the 1920s, Cassirer became familiar with this research and came to regard it as a source of philosophical insight.⁸ This culminates in a lengthy chapter in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* titled, 'Toward a Pathology of the Symbolic Consciousness'. As the title of the chapter suggests, Cassirer thinks pathology can teach us something about 'symbolic consciousness' and, in particular, he thinks it reveals something about what he calls the 'function of representation' [*Darstellungsfunktion*].

The Representation Function

For our purposes, one of the most salient features of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is his claim that our consciousness is structured in such a way that we cannot have perceptual experiences that are devoid of meaning.⁹ Targeting sense-data views, Cassirer takes issue with the claim that perception involves the interpretation or mental processing of meaningless sense data: 'We can never completely separate the sensory as such, as some naked "raw material" of sensation, from the whole complex of meaning relationships' ('Problem of the Symbol', 416; see also PSFv3, 14–5/18). Though Cassirer allows for the possibility that after the fact we can distinguish matter and meaning (form) *in reflection, in experience*, he claims, they form an 'indivisible unity' ('Problem', 416).¹⁰

In order to explain what in our consciousness provides for such pervasive meaningful perception, Cassirer introduces the notion of a 'symbolic function'. He characterizes a symbolic function as a structure of consciousness that allows us to experience the world in 'symbolic' form: it allows us to perceive the objects present to us as *symbols* of some meaning. Cassirer defines a symbol as 'the different way [sensory matter] appears and how it signifies and refers, according to the perspective of meaning under which it comes,' where

⁸For a discussion of Cassirer and pathology, see Krois, 'Philosophical Anthropology'.

⁹For a broader discussion of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, see Krois, *Cassirer*, Bayer, *Cassirer's Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, Luft, 'Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms', Barash, *The Symbolic Construction of Reality*, Friedman, 'Ernst Cassirer', Verene, *The Origins of the Philosophy*.

¹⁰As he puts it in PSFv3, 'From the standpoint of phenomenological inquiry there is no more a "matter in itself" than a "form in itself"; there are only total experiences [*Gesamterlebnisse*] which can be compared from the standpoint of matter and form' (199/230).

the ‘perspective of meaning’ that determines what the object symbolizes is a symbolic function of consciousness (‘Problem’, 416). He identifies three such ‘symbolic functions’: the expressive function [*Ausdrucksfunktion*], the representation function [*Darstellungsfunktion*], and the signification function [*Bedeutungsfunktion*]. He claims each function involves a unique ‘perspective of meaning’, which allows us to perceive things as symbolic in a distinctive way. The expressive function allows us to see other persons, animate objects, and even inanimate objects as expressing subjective states, e.g. seeing someone’s gesture as angry or a dog’s face as puzzled. Meanwhile, the signification function is what enables us to take things to be a symbol of ‘pure relations’, such as mathematical relations or logical relations, e.g. seeing a wavy line as a symbol of the Sine function (PSFv3, 200/231–3).

In between the expressive and signification functions lies the representation function. According to Cassirer, the representation function allows us to understand what is present here and now as a *sign* of a meaning that is not only not present, but also could be encountered in another situation:

[with the representation function] the content first gains the imprint of a new universal form without losing its material ‘particularity’ ... it has become a sign which enables us to *recognize* [*wiederzuerkennen*] it again when it appears ... for only then does it become possible to find again in the simple, as it were, punctual ‘here’ and ‘now’ of present experience a ‘not-here’ and a ‘not-now’.

(PSFv3, 114/133; see also PSFv3, 235/273)

For example, through the representation function, I am able to see this apple as a ‘sign’ of the concept ‘red’, where this concept is neither wholly located in, nor exhausted by this apple. Otherwise put, for Cassirer, the representation function is what allows us to see objects as bearers of properties.

According to Cassirer, however, the representation function does not make just *one* meaning available to us; it saturates the object we experience with several *possible* meanings, meanings we could take the object to signify if we varied our point of view. For example, though I may be focused right now on the redness of the apple, I could vary my point of view and take the apple to signify the concept ‘apple’, ‘round’, or ‘Fuji’. As Cassirer makes this point, when we are guided by the representation function, the objects we experience are surrounded by a ‘vector of meaning’ [*Sinn-Vektor*], where this vector includes not only the actual, but also possible meanings the object could signify (PSFv3 222/258). When explaining how the representation function works, Cassirer makes what may seem like a surprising claim for a Neo-Kantian: representation does not occur *discursively*, i.e. it does not occur through a judgement in which we subsume sense data under a concept.¹¹ As Cassirer puts it, we ‘are not dealing with bare

¹¹Though there may be alternative views of discursivity, for Cassirer and Merleau-Ponty discursivity involves the act of mentally processing sense data through concepts in a judgement.

perceptive data, on which some sort of apperceptive acts are later grafted, through which they are interpreted, judged, transformed' (PSFv3, 202/234). In contrast to this discursive picture, Cassirer argues that the representation function proceeds through a particular *non-discursive* mode of perception that he calls 'symbolically pregnant perception' [*symbolisch pragnanten Wahrnehmung*] (PSFv3, 240/279). In interpreting the notion of 'symbolic pregnancy' [*symbolische Pragnanz*], we should bear in mind that the term 'Pragnanz' is without a precise English equivalent. This term stems, on the one hand, from the verb 'pragen', which means 'to shape' or 'to mint' and is often translated as 'conciseness' or 'succinctness'. This is the sense of the term that the Gestalt psychologists, like Wertheimer and Koehler, appeal to in their account of the 'laws of *Pragnanz*', which govern how we perceptually organize the world. On the other hand, 'Pragnanz' also has etymological roots in the Latin 'praegnans', which carries both the connotation of 'expecting a child' and 'being full'. As we see in the following definition, Cassirer's use of 'Pragnanz' relates both to how we perceptually organize the world and find it full of meaning:¹²

By symbolic pregnancy we mean the way in which a perception as a sensory experience contains at the same time a certain nonintuitive meaning [*'Sinn'*] which it immediately and concretely represents ... It is this ideal interwovenness, this relatedness of the single perceptive phenomenon, given here and now, to a characteristic total meaning [*Sinn-Ganzes*] that the term 'pregnance' is meant to designate.¹³

(PSFv3, 202/234)

What Cassirer has in mind, then, is the way in which an object's 'total meaning' is present through its perceptual organization:

it is the perception itself which by virtue of its own immanent organization, takes on a kind of spiritual articulation – which, being ordered in itself, also belongs to a determinate order of meaning [*Sinnfugung*].

(PSFv3, 202/234)

When we perceive an object in this way, Cassirer suggests we perceive it as a 'meaningful whole' [*Sinnnganzen*] in which 'every particular aspect is always related to a comprehensive context [*Zusammenhang*],' i.e. a vector of meaning (PSFv3, 238/277). However, although we perceive the object as

¹²Krois, *Cassirer*, 52–3 suggests that Cassirer was influenced by the Gestalt psychologists, whereas Freudenthal, 'The Missing Core of Cassirer's Philosophy', 211 points out that Cassirer explicitly connects his use of 'Pragnanz' to Leibniz's notion of 'praegnans futuri', i.e., that 'the now is filled and saturated with a future' (PSFv3, 202).

¹³For further discussion of symbolic pregnancy, see Rosengren, 'Radical Imagination and Symbolic Pregnancy', Verene, *The Origins of the Philosophy*, 53–5.

full of meaning, Cassirer insists that we are not guided by a discursive act, which gives us a *mediate* grasp of what we perceive; instead, we *immediately see* the object as meaningful: ‘it is ... a life “in” meaning [*Sinn*]. It is not only subsequently received into this sphere but is, one might say, born into it’ (PSFv3, 202, translation modified/234).

Though this analysis of the non-discursive nature of the representation function and pregnant perception may at first seem un-Kantian, Cassirer, in fact, takes himself to be making a very Kantian claim. In particular, Cassirer takes himself to be developing Kant’s theory of the ‘productive imagination’, which it will be useful to briefly sketch.¹⁴ In the first *Critique*, Kant offers the following generic definition of the imagination: ‘*Imagination* is the faculty for representing an object **even without its presence** in intuition’ (B151).¹⁵ Oftentimes, this faculty will be exercised in a ‘reproductive’ way, e.g. when we form a representation of an object we have previously intuited; however, Kant argues that our imaginations are also capable of a *productive* exercise, in which we spontaneously produce representations without the object being present (see B152). The transcendental activities of the productive imagination, in turn, play an important role in Kant’s analysis of experience, for he argues that experience is possible only if the productive imagination mediates between two other cognitive capacities: sensibility, i.e. our capacity for being affected by the world, and understanding, i.e. our capacity for thinking about the world (see A124).¹⁶ This, in turn, shapes our perceptual experience; hence Kant’s claim that, ‘the imagination is a necessary ingredient in perception itself’ (A120fn).

Cassirer interprets Kant’s claims about the productive imagination as follows:

[the productive imagination as] ‘ingredient of perception’ in the strict sense can never be a factor which is simply added to the given sensation ... to reinterpret it by judgment ... Here we have no such subsequent completion but an act of original formation [*Formung*] ... The meaning [*Sinn*] [of the intuition] is to be understood neither as a secondary and conceptual [*sekundär-begriffliche*] nor as an associative addition: rather, it is the simple meaning [*Sinn*] of the original intuition itself.

(PSFv3, 134/155–6)

Here, Cassirer emphasizes that, for Kant, the productive imagination is a capacity that, without recourse to discursive thought, enables us to

¹⁴References to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the section number and A and B pagination of the first and second editions. All other references are to the volume and page of *Kants gesammelte Schriften*.

¹⁵See also *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* 7:154: ‘the power of imagination ... is the faculty of ... intuition even *without* the presence of an object’.

¹⁶Kant also allows for the productive imagination to be exercised empirically in image formation (A141/B181), mathematically in geometrical construction (A164/B205), and aesthetically in judgements of taste and genius.

immediately perceive objects as meaningful wholes.¹⁷ And it is this idea that Cassirer seeks to develop in his own account of the representation function and pregnant perception.

However, Cassirer has another reason to align the representation function with the productive imagination, viz., the tight connection he sees between our productive imagination and ability to ‘see’ possibilities. As we saw above, for Kant, the imagination is our capacity ‘for representing an object **even without its presence** in intuition’. This means that the imagination is not as directly confined to what is given here and now as is sensibility. Of course, the reproductive imagination only has a limited distance from sensibility; however, the productive imagination has more freedom in this regard, as it is able to spontaneously produce representations. This is another theme Cassirer picks up on, as he interprets the productive imagination as the ‘ability to interchange present and nonpresent, the real and the possible’ (PSFv3, 271/315). Once again, Cassirer takes this to be the capacity that underwrites pregnant perception, for in this type of perception, we are never stuck in just one way of looking at an object; rather, we can engage in ‘free play’ and vary our point of view so different meanings emerge (PSFv3, 271/315).¹⁸ Indeed, it is through this free play of our imagination, we are attuned to the vector of meaning that informs the object of pregnant perception.

The Representation Function and Pathology

As noted previously, on Cassirer’s view, the representation function is what malfunctions in pathological experience. Cassirer argues that in pathology, a patient’s productive imagination is compromised, her capacity for pregnant perception diminishes, and the vectors of meaning ‘disintegrate’ (PSFv3, 222/257). Cassirer is clear that this does *not* amount to a total loss of these capacities or the destruction of all vectors of meaning, ‘for that would mean the extinction of sensory consciousness itself’; rather his claim is that in pathology, the patient’s perception is more restricted, it ‘moves within narrower limits, in smaller and more restricted circles than in the case of normal perception’ (PSFv3, 222/257).

More specifically, Cassirer claims that pathological patients become oriented primarily towards meanings that are connected to what is ‘immediately perceived and desired’ (PSFv3, 277/322). To make this point, Cassirer compares the behaviour of a pathological patient to the ‘merely purposive behaviour within the biological sphere’ (PSFv3, 276/321).¹⁹ He claims

¹⁷It is a matter of debate whether Kant himself thinks perception can occur through sensibility and imagination alone, without the influence of the understanding, see e.g. Ginsborg, ‘Was Kant a Nonconceptualist?’, Allais, ‘Kant, Non-Conceptual Content’.

¹⁸The notion of ‘free play’ is drawn from the third *Critique*.

¹⁹This is a gloss on Gelb and Goldstein’s claim that pathological behaviour is ‘closer to life’ (PSFv3, 226/262, 275/320).

that animal perception is driven by the animal's needs and goals and this leads the animal to focus on what is immediately present and practically relevant (PSFv3, 276/321). To be sure, Cassirer does not want to say a pathological patient is just like an animal; instead, he uses this comparison to elucidate the narrow circles of the patient's perception.

This diminishing of pregnant perception and the vectors of meaning manifests itself variously in the different pathologies Cassirer considers. In his discussion of aphasia, Cassirer argues that a patient's inability to name items stems from his inability to engage in pregnant perception. In colour amnesia, for example, Cassirer suggests that the patient is unable to name a coloured swatch because he no longer sees this swatch as a sign of the relevant colour-species. Instead, the patient is focused exclusively on the immediate features of the swatch, e.g. its particular brightness and tone (PSFv3, 225–7/261–3).

Meanwhile in perceptual agnosia, e.g. psychic blindness, Cassirer argues that patients can no longer engage in a more basic form of pregnant perception: the patient cannot even perceive aspects of an object as 'signs' of a particular object. For example, the patient cannot immediately grasp spatial features as features of an object (PSFv3, 239–40/278). Instead, Cassirer claims, he can identify an object only by resorting to discursive thought (PSFv3, 239–40/279). Describing his own encounter with an agnosiac, Cassirer notes that, at first, the patient sees only 'a long black line with something wide on top' and that 'the thing on top is transparent and has four bars', and then draws the inference that the object is, therefore, a lamppost (PSFv3, 241fn/279fn).

However, for Cassirer, the inability to 'see' in terms of possibilities does not just beset our perceptions; it undermines our ability to *think* as well, and hence results in cognitive agnosia. In order to perform basic arithmetic, Cassirer suggests we must be able to regard the numbers in different possible ways, e.g. in order to do the equation $7 - 5 = 2$, we must regard 7 as a 'relative zero' and count five steps backwards (PSFv3, 250/291, 255–6/296–8). The patient, however, can only regard the number 7 as the seventh number in the ordinary number sequence, not as a possible 0. Likewise, in metaphorical thinking, we must be able to regard words or phrases as having both a literal and a figurative meaning; but for the patient, language is only literal and applicable to actual situations (PSFv3, 254–9/295–300). For example, a patient will be unable to say 'It is bad, rainy weather today' if it is a sunny day (PSFv3, 254/295). Cassirer attributes these issues to a problem with the patient's productive imagination: he is anchored in the actual, closed off from the possible:

[the patient] can form a sentence when he has solid support in something given, immediately experienced; without this support he is rudderless – he cannot venture out on the high seas of thought, which is a thought not only

of realities but also of possibilities. Hence he can express only what is actual and present, not what is merely imagined or possible.

(PSFv3, 257/298–9)

Finally, we find a variation on this same theme in Cassirer's analysis of apraxia; however, in these cases, it is his own body that the patient is unable to 'see' in terms of possibilities. While a patient is able to engage in 'concrete movements' called for by the actual task he is engaged in, e.g. hammering in a workshop, he cannot engage in 'abstract movements', which are relevant to a non-actual situation, e.g. mimicking hammering. On Cassirer's analysis, this is because the latter movements require the patient to be able to 'see' his body as capable of bearing on a merely possible or imagined situation; yet this is barred from the patient insofar as he is unable to spontaneously bring about those movements by projecting an imaginary scenario before himself (PSFv3, 271/315). As a consequence, the patient's actions have become 'fused' to particular concrete tasks and he is limited to concrete movement (PSFv3, 271/315).

Summarizing his view, Cassirer remarks,

Even though the [patient] can still apprehend and in general correctly handle what is 'real', concretely present, momentarily necessary, he lacks the spiritual view in the distance [*geistige Fernblick*], the vision [*Sicht*] of what is not before his eyes, of the merely possible.

(PSFv3, 277, translation modified/322)

This ultimately diminishes the 'amplitude' of a patient's experience, altering her *entire* way of relating to the world through perception and thought, language and action (PSFv3, 222/257).

MERLEAU-PONTY ON CASSIRER'S DIAGNOSIS

Sixteen years later in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty takes up pathology from within a phenomenological framework. Though I shall argue that Merleau-Ponty takes over the core of Cassirer's analysis of pathology, one might initially worry that Merleau-Ponty would have rejected it out of hand insofar as it turns on the function of *representation*. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty criticizes several representational accounts of pathology: as he says in no uncertain terms with respect to apraxia, 'The history of apraxia would show how the description of Praxis is almost always contaminated and, in the end, rendered impossible by the notion of representation' (PhP, 525 fn99/172 fn2). In what follows, however, I show that Merleau-Ponty's criticisms here are levied against *traditional discursive* accounts

of representation, not against what he recognizes as Cassirer's distinctive non-discursive account of representation.

According to Merleau-Ponty, a traditional account treats representations as what are involved in judgements in which we subsume raw sense data under a concept (see PhP, 123/152, 129/160). Thus, the 'representation function' is a discursive capacity, i.e. a capacity we have for judging that the sense data are representative of the concept.²⁰ On such an account, pathological disorders amount to discursive disorders, i.e. problems with making judgements. Though Merleau-Ponty criticizes such representational accounts, he also acknowledges that this is not the type of account that Cassirer gives. This emerges in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Cassirer's views about symbolic pregnance and the productive imagination.²¹

Merleau-Ponty was so struck by Cassirer's account of symbolic pregnance, he takes it over as his preferred way of characterizing the relationship between matter and form. We get a glimpse of this in Merleau-Ponty's summary remarks about the *Phenomenology* in 'The Primacy of Perception' (1946),

we cannot apply the classical distinction of form and matter to perception, nor can we conceive the perceiving subject as consciousness which 'interprets', 'deciphers', or 'orders' a sensible matter according to an ideal law which it possesses. Matter is 'pregnant' [*prégnante*] with form.

(PrP, 12; see also PhP, 154/189)

Making this point with an explicit citation to Cassirer in the *Phenomenology*, he suggests that the correct account of perception will emulate Cassirer's: 'we must acknowledge the symbolic "pregnance" [*prégnance*] of form in content as prior to the subsumption of content under form' (PhP, 304/344). Given that Merleau-Ponty is here wielding Cassirer's account against traditional representational accounts of perception, we have good reason to think Merleau-Ponty set Cassirer's account apart.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty is sensitive to the fact that rather than emphasizing judgement, Cassirer emphasizes the productive imagination. This is important because, more generally, Kant's notion of the productive imagination stands in Merleau-Ponty's good favour, as something proto-phenomenological. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty thinks that the phenomenological analysis of intentionality has its roots in Kant's account of the productive imagination

²⁰A "representative function" ... consists in treating the sensory givens as representatives of each other and, when taken together, as representative of an "eidós" (PhP, 123/153).

²¹Though I will not pursue this further, Merleau-Ponty also distinguishes Cassirer's account from traditional representational accounts insofar as Cassirer acknowledges that representation is not the *only* way we have of relating to the world; we can relate to it through mythical and expressive attitudes as well (PhP, 303–4/343–4).

(PhP, xxxi/17–18). Recall that, for Kant, in order for experience to be possible, the productive imagination must mediate between sensibility and understanding. To this end, Kant rather suggestively claims that our ability to make judgements depends on the imagination's 'hidden art [*Kunst*] in the depths of the human soul' (A141/B180). Merleau-Ponty interprets this claim as follows:

the hidden art of the imagination must condition the categorial activity; it is no longer merely aesthetic judgment that rests upon this hidden art, but also knowledge [*connaissance*], and this art also grounds the unity of consciousness.

(PhP, xxxi/18)

This idea, however, is one he regards as a precursor to the idea found in Heidegger and the later Husserl that the intentionality of any *particular* act, e.g. *this* judgement, is grounded in a deeper intentionality, 'operative intentionality', that lies beneath and unifies every act (PhP, xxxii/18).²² To be sure, Merleau-Ponty wants to distance 'operative intentionality' from Kant's conception of the productive imagination as a mental capacity;²³ however, he takes the kernel of Kant's account to be worth developing.

Indeed, we see him highlight what is fruitful in the notion of the productive imagination in his discussion of Cassirer's treatment of pathology. Merleau-Ponty quotes Cassirer's discussion of the disintegration of the vectors of meaning at length (PhP, 197–8/233, citing PSFv3, 222/257). He cites this passage, in particular, because he thinks it reveals Cassirer's sensitivity to the productive imagination as the real root of pathology:

Such is the disorder of 'thought' that is discovered at the basis of [color] amnesia. It clearly has to do less with judgment than with the milieu of experience in which judgment is born, less with spontaneity than with the holds of this spontaneity upon the perceptible world and our power to imagine [*figurer*] any intention whatever in the world. In Kantian terms, it affects less the understanding than the productive imagination.

(PhP, 198/233)

Here, we see Merleau-Ponty applaud Cassirer for analysing the problems of pathology not in the discursive terms of judgement, but rather in terms of the productive imagination. In fact, as we shall see in what follows,

²²Merleau-Ponty claims he has in mind Heidegger's views of 'transcendence' in *Being and Time* and Husserl's views in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (see PhP, 441/480, 453/492).

²³Kant describes the imagination as a 'faculty of the soul' (A94), a 'function of the soul' (A78/B103) and as involving 'actions of the mind' (A102).

Merleau-Ponty preserves the idea that pathology affects our spontaneous ability to ‘imagine’ [*figurer*] our intentions in the world in his own account. In which case, far from rejecting Cassirer’s account of pathology, then, Merleau-Ponty is drawn to it as a non-discursive alternative to traditional representational accounts.

This being said, we must acknowledge that Merleau-Ponty does not think Cassirer’s view is without fault. In an important footnote, Merleau-Ponty suggests that there is a fundamental tension in Cassirer’s account: while he regards Cassirer’s theory of symbolic pregnance as a ‘phenomenological and even existential’ analysis, he worries that Cassirer’s analysis of the representation function ultimately involves ‘the return to the self of an eternal consciousness’, hence a ‘return to intellectualism’ (PhP, 521–2 fn 67/162 fn2). It is, in particular, Cassirer’s disregard for the body in relation to the representation function that gives Merleau-Ponty pause. Though Cassirer may have offered a non-discursive account of representation, by Merleau-Ponty’s lights, Cassirer did not go so far as to acknowledge the *bodily foundation* of the representation function. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, ‘intellectualism’s error’ is to make the representation function ‘depend on itself, [and] to separate it from ... [our] direct presence in the world’, i.e. through our bodies (PhP, 126/157).

According to Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is not something that is exclusively intellectual; rather, he argues that, ‘Consciousness is being toward the thing through the intermediary of the body’ (PhP, 140/173). Though we can be intentionally directed towards the world through our thoughts, he maintains that we can also be directed towards the world through our bodies; hence, he urges that we must recognize ‘the body itself as a ... “motor intentionality”’ (PhP, 113/141).²⁴ Indeed, insofar as we are always directed towards the world through our bodies, he describes motor intentionality as ‘original intentionality’ (see PhP, 139–140/171–3). By Merleau-Ponty’s lights, then, Cassirer’s account of the representation function, although an advance over discursive accounts, nevertheless fails to address the bodily ground of consciousness (see PhP, 126–7/157–8). As he puts it, for a patient suffering a brain injury, it would be ‘absurd to think that the shrapnel collided with symbolic consciousness. Rather, his Spirit is affected through vision’ (PhP, 127/158). However, this does not lead him to reject Cassirer all together; rather, just as with symbolic pregnance, Merleau-Ponty appropriates those aspects of Cassirer’s account he thinks are phenomenologically viable, while leaving the rest aside.

²⁴For a more thorough discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s account of motor intentionality, see Kelkel, ‘Merleau-Ponty et le problème de l’intentionnalité corporelle’, Kelly, ‘Grasping at Straws’, Saint Aubert, *Le scénario cartésien*, Jensen, ‘Motor Intentionality and the Case of Schneider’. I return to this topic below.

MERLEAU-PONTY'S DIAGNOSIS OF PATHOLOGY: THE FUNCTION OF PROJECTION

We are now in a position to examine Merleau-Ponty's positive account of pathology and what, I argue, are its Kantian roots. In what follows, I show that Merleau-Ponty follows Cassirer in offering what I shall call an 'imagination-centric' account of pathology. Though the imagination does not take shape in the representation function, we find Merleau-Ponty gives it new shape in his account of the 'function of projection', which is at the heart of his analysis of pathology.

The Motor-Centric Interpretations

My imagination-centric interpretation differs from what I have labelled the 'motor-centric' interpretation that currently dominates the literature. On this latter interpretation, Merleau-Ponty uses his account of pathology primarily to elucidate bodily movement and action. What inclines commentators more generally towards this type of interpretation is the fact that the topic of the body and its movements dominates Merleau-Ponty's treatment of pathology in Part One of the *Phenomenology*. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty sets up his discussion of pathology by focusing on apraxia, i.e. the pathology associated with movement (see PhP, 105–12/132–40) and he uses this discussion to draw out some of his central philosophical theses about the body, e.g. the 'motor intentionality' of our bodies and the 'body schema' (see PhP, 112–3/140–1, 100–3/127–31).

There are two competing varieties of the motor-centric interpretation presently on offer. First, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's claims that we have a 'pre-reflective' or 'pre-logical' experience of the world, there is the *unreflective* motor-centric interpretation according to which Merleau-Ponty intends for pathology to clarify how we unreflectively relate to the world through our bodily actions and movements (see PhP, 241/279, 311/351, 349/311, 547fn3/357 and Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 28, 81 Dreyfus, 'Overcoming the Myth of the Mental', 47–8; Kelly, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Body'). Commentators like Dreyfus, Sean Kelly, and Taylor Carman²⁵ have defended this position, maintaining that Merleau-Ponty uses pathology to highlight features of 'absorbed coping', i.e. our bodily way of dealing with the world that occurs without the intervention of thought or reflection.²⁶ Challenging

²⁵Dreyfus, Kelly, and Carman are, in part, drawn to this interpretation because they see it as connected to Heidegger's notion of 'understanding' as 'know-how' (BT ¶31). See Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 224.

²⁶See Dreyfus, 'Reply to Romdenh-Romluc'. More specifically, he argues that the study of pathology illuminates the flexibility involved in normal absorbed coping, i.e. our ability to be summoned to new tasks (63, 64, 69). Kelly, 'Grasping at Straws' emphasizes that apraxia reveals something important about two different ways we have of engaging with the world, through 'grasping' movements and 'pointing movements'. Meanwhile, Carman, *Merleau-Ponty* claims that Merleau-Ponty's discussion of pathology reveals the non-cognitive intelligence of our bodies (111, 113).

this line of thought, Romdenh-Romluc has put forth a *reflective* variety of the motor-centric interpretation, according to which Merleau-Ponty uses pathology to explain an important kind of bodily action, viz., action guided by thought ('Merleau-Ponty and the Power to Reckon with the Possible', *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, 93–102). On her account, the textual evidence suggests that Merleau-Ponty uses pathology not just to highlight our unreflective capacities, but also to elucidate a particular reflective capacity, viz., 'the power to reckon with the possible' (PhP, 112/139).²⁷ On her gloss, the power to reckon with the possible is 'the power to access – and so use – motor skills that are relevant to merely possible tasks and environments', where 'merely possible' refers to the tasks or environments I represent in thought ('Merleau-Ponty and the Power to Reckon with the Possible', *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, 94).²⁸ Though her account is still oriented towards explaining bodily action, her view is unique insofar as she allows for reflection to play a pivotal role in guiding that action.²⁹

In what follows, I show that the motor-centric interpretation's exclusive emphasis on what pathology teaches us about bodily action, whether this be guided by thought or not, is misplaced. To be sure, Merleau-Ponty devotes a great deal of attention to the relationship between pathology and bodily action; however, this constitutes but one aspect of his overall project. As the imagination-centric interpretation reveals, Merleau-Ponty has a more fundamental aim, viz., highlighting something like the productive imagination, which he calls the 'function of projection', which brings unity to the *various* ways we deal with the world through action, perception, emotion, thought, etc.

The Function of Projection

Throughout the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is a mistake to think of the human subject as somehow isolated from the external world; rather, drawing on Heidegger, he claims each of us is an embodied

²⁷Cassirer also alludes to it on PSFv3 243/283: 'Orientation in this space [the space of possibility] presupposes an ability of consciousness to actualize these possibilities freely and reckon [*zu rechnen*] with them in advance, in an intuitive and intellectual anticipation.'

²⁸She gives examples of performing kick-boxing moves against an imagined assailant (*Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, 97), and mimicking martial arts moves in a fight scene against an 'imagined' alien ('Merleau-Ponty and the Power to Reckon with the Possible', 51).

²⁹To her account, Dreyfus, 'Reply to Romdenh-Romluc' objects that Merleau-Ponty cannot address how thought guides bodily action because Merleau-Ponty has 'nothing to say' about how abstract thought is possible (67). This, I think, goes too far. While it may be true that giving a fully developed account of abstract thought is not Merleau-Ponty's aim in the *Phenomenology*, as will emerge below, Merleau-Ponty recognizes that we are human beings who have both bodies and minds, and that any proper account of the phenomenology of our perception must take into account how our bodily engagement with the world is shaped by our cognitive lives, and vice versa.

‘being-in-the-world’, i.e. we are essentially bound up with the world around us (PhP, lxxvii/13). Our experience, then, is not the result of something wholly ‘inside’ interacting with something wholly ‘outside’; it is determined by a more ‘organic’ relationship between us and the world (PhP, 154/189). According to Merleau-Ponty, this means, in part, that we do not experience the world as something entirely alien; rather, it is full of what J. J. Gibson called ‘affordances’, i.e. ‘invitations’ or ‘summons’ to act in certain ways (PhP, 331/373).³⁰ However, our experience is not merely a matter of being sensitive to the world’s invitations, for in that case, there would be but a one-sided between us and the world. Instead, as we shall see in what follows, Merleau-Ponty urges that the way the world summons us is, in turn, shaped by our own intentions, e.g. I see a coffee cup as something ‘to pick up’ because I need to wake up. This is a fundamental feature of human existence and it is what Merleau-Ponty endeavours to elucidate with his account of the function of projection.

Merleau-Ponty defines the function of projection as,

[the] power of marking out borders and directions in the given world, of establishing lines of force, of arranging perspectives, of organizing the given world according to the projects of the moment, and of constructing upon the geographical surroundings a milieu of behavior and a system of significations that express, on the outside, the internal activity of the subject... the normal person’s projects polarize the world.

(PhP, 115/143)

As he makes this point later, ‘for the normal person, the subject’s intentions are immediately reflected in the perceptual field: they polarize it, put their stamp on it, or finally, effortlessly give birth there to a wave of significations’ (PhP, 133/164–5). Now, this characterization of projection has seemed worrisome to some insofar as it appears to appeal to a view of the subject that Merleau-Ponty rejects (see Saint Aubert, *Le scénario cartésien*, 137, Dreyfus, ‘Reply to Romdenh-Romluc’, 62–4); however, as we see in the following passage, Merleau-Ponty does not think that there is a *de facto* tension between the idea that the subject is inseparable from the world and that she projects it:

The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject who is nothing but a project of the world; and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world that it itself projects. The subject is being-in-the-world and the world remains ‘subjective’.³¹

(PhP, 454/493)

³⁰For a discussion of this point, see Dreyfus, ‘Reply to Romdenh-Romluc’.

³¹Merleau-Ponty cites Heidegger here (BT, 418/366). It is perhaps also worth mentioning that the idea of projection plays a pivotal role in Heidegger’s account of understanding in ¶31 of BT.

Far from distancing himself from the notion of projection, Merleau-Ponty, in fact, puts it at the core of subjectivity. In which case, his account of the function of projection plays a crucial role in elucidating the type of subjects we are.

In order to clarify what sorts of intentions are at stake in projection, Merleau-Ponty introduces the notion of the ‘intentional arc’ (PhP, 137/169–70, 160/194).³² He describes the intentional arc as follows:

the life of consciousness – epistemic life, the life of desire, or perceptual life – is underpinned by an ‘intentional arc’ that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships.³³

(PhP, 137/169–70)

This passage reveals that Merleau-Ponty is not concerned with how we project the world solely in light of one type of intention, e.g. those related to bodily movement; he is interested in how we project the world in light of a rich variety of intentions. Likewise, Merleau-Ponty does not privilege intentions that are explicit or reflective; there can also be implicit intentions that we project the world in light of that fall on this arc. The intentional arc, then, involves a spectrum of intentions, which are all underwritten by the same ‘core function’, i.e. the function of projection.³⁴

³²Insofar as I take the notion of the intentional arc to be one Merleau-Ponty commits himself to, I agree with Kelkel, ‘Merleau-Ponty et le problème de l’intentionnalité corporelle’ and disagree with Saint Aubert, *Le scénario cartésien* who argues that the discussion of the intentional arc is a ‘confused attempt’ [*tentative confuse*] that is ‘immediately aborted’ [*ausstößt avortée*] (138fn, my transl.).

³³Merleau-Ponty borrows the term ‘intentional arc’ (*‘intentionale Bogen’* in German) from the literature on schizophrenia, specifically from Fischer ‘Raum-Zeit-Struktur und Denkstörung in der Schizophrenie’, who takes it from its original source, Beringer, ‘Denkstörung und Sprache bei Schizophrenen’. According to Beringer, schizophrenia does not affect a *particular* operation of thought, but rather a ‘much more general ... underlying function, which impinges on the unity of the formal structure of thought’ (191, my transl.). Ordinarily, he argues, we can think about how something present is connected to other possibilities and he labels this pattern of connection ‘the range [*Spannweite*] of the intentional arc’ (190, my transl.). In schizophrenia, however, he claims that there is a ‘relaxation’ [*Lockerung*] of the intentional arc, such that the patient is no longer able to consider these connections (193, my transl.). Fischer further develops this thought by arguing that the ‘relaxation of the intentional arc’ affects not only thought, but also how a patient organizes space and time (250, 255). As Merleau-Ponty describes Fischer’s point, pathology involves a ‘more general disturbance’ that affects ‘a deeper life of consciousness beneath “perception”’ (PhP, 295/334).

³⁴I agree with Kelkel, ‘Merleau-Ponty et le problème de l’intentionnalité corporelle’ who argues that the intentionality underwriting the intentional arc is ‘motor intentionality’. However, it is important to recognize that motor intentionality is not simply a matter of intending to move our bodies in a certain way; rather, it is a more *generic* form of intentionality that characterizes our conscious orientation towards the world through our bodies, whether we are engaging in bodily movement, ethical deliberation, reflective contemplation, etc.

It is in this regard that the function of projection with its intentional arc begins to betray its Kantian roots.³⁵ Recall that, for Kant, the productive imagination is responsible for mediating between two seemingly distinct capacities: sensibility and understanding. As we saw above, on Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, this means that the imagination 'grounds the unity of consciousness', i.e. it unifies how we relate to the world in these different ways (PhP, xxxi/18).³⁶ Merleau-Ponty, however, treats the intentional arc in a similar way, claiming that it 'creates the unity of the senses, the unity of the senses with intelligence, and the unity of sensitivity and motricity' (PhP, 137/169–70). Like Kant before him, then, he takes there to be a special function (of imagination, of projection) that grounds the divergent ways we have of relating to the world and gives unity to the different facets of our existence.

However, Merleau-Ponty has a further reason for linking the productive imagination to the function of projection: like Cassirer before him, Merleau-Ponty takes the function of projection to open us up to *possibilities*. In Merleau-Ponty's words, our existence is not 'enclosed in the actual'; in addition to being 'mobilized by real situations ... [we can] be situated in the virtual' (PhP, 111/139). Merleau-Ponty claims that there are always 'motor, perceptual and even intellectual possibilities' open to us and the function of projection gives us the freedom to divert ourselves into these different possibilities (PhP, 158/193). Merleau-Ponty, however, recognizes this as a Kantian idea, for as we saw in his discussion of Cassirer, he associates Kant's notion of the productive imagination with the 'spontaneity' involved in our hold on the world and the 'power to imagine [*figurer*] any

³⁵Of course, it is not only Kant who influences Merleau-Ponty's conception of the function of projection and the intentional arc. As we saw above, Merleau-Ponty thinks of Kant's theory of the imagination as a precursor to the phenomenological conception of intentionality at work in Heidegger's discussion of 'transcendence' and Husserl's discussion of 'operative intentionality'. Although we cannot pursue this further here, Merleau-Ponty is particularly influenced by the connection Heidegger and Husserl draw between intentionality and temporality. As becomes clear in the 'Temporality' chapter, Merleau-Ponty ultimately thinks of transcendence or operative intentionality in temporal terms (PhP, 441/480). Drawing particularly on Husserl's *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, Merleau-Ponty argues that since the operative intentionality that underwrites all of our intentions is essentially temporal, our intentions will have a complex temporal structure that determines and unifies them. More specifically, he follows Husserl in claiming that every present intention is a 'retention', i.e. it preserves (or projects) the past, and a 'protention', i.e. it anticipates (or projects) the future (PhP, 439/478). This, in turn, means that temporality is something that unites together our past, present, and future intentions: time, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, is a 'network [*réseau*] of intentionalities' (PhP, 440/479). For Merleau-Ponty, then, beyond the Kantian account of the imagination, the phenomenological account of temporality is needed to clarify the temporal nature of the function of projection and the intentional arc.

³⁶Merleau-Ponty's interpretation seems to have been influenced by Heidegger's claim in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* that the imagination is the 'common root' of sensibility and understanding. As Heinrich, 'On the Unity of Subjectivity' argues, this is a contentious interpretation of Kant.

intention whatever in the world' (PhP, 198/233, my emphasis). To be sure, Merleau-Ponty does not want to retain any intellectualistic connotations of the productive imagination from Kant; nevertheless, his function of projection preserves the unifying, projective, and spontaneous features he associates with the productive imagination.

Although this way of presenting the function of projection may seem like what Romdenh-Romluc has in mind in her discussion of the power to reckon with the possible, there is an important difference between our accounts: I take 'reckoning with the possible' to be more pervasive than Romdenh-Romluc does. Romdenh-Romluc gives what we could call a practical reading of the power to reckon with the possible: it explains a subset of practical actions, which involve the exercise of our motor skills in response to a merely possible environment represented in thought. My reading, however, is broader than this practical reading for I interpret the 'possible' we reckon with to include the wide variety of intentions falling on the intentional arc. That is to say, I take us to be reckoning with the possible not just when we engage in practical activities, but when we take up *any* intention on the arc, whether it be more practically oriented or not.

The Function of Projection and Pathology

Turning now to Merleau-Ponty's account of pathology, we find that he, like Cassirer before him, identifies his version of the Kantian productive imagination, viz., the function of projection, as the root of pathological disorders. On his view, in pathological experience, the function of projection no longer works properly and the intentional arc 'goes limp' (PhP, 137/170). Echoing Cassirer, Merleau-Ponty claims pathological patients can no longer project the world in light of multiple intentions; rather, their experience becomes 'enclosed in the actual' (PhP, 111/139). Insofar as Merleau-Ponty offers us an analysis of pathology in terms of the function of projection, he provides what we might call a 'holistic' analysis, i.e. he endeavours to elucidate what has gone wrong in a patient's life *as a whole*, not just what besets her ability to move her body.

To be sure, Merleau-Ponty devotes a good deal of attention to explaining what goes wrong in apraxia and this is what the motor-centric interpretations tend to focus on. In normal experience, Merleau-Ponty suggests a person,

does not have his body available merely as implicated in a concrete milieu, he is not merely situated in relation to tasks set by his trade. ... Rather, in addition he possesses his body as the correlate of pure stimuli stripped of all practical signification; he is open to verbal and fictional situations that he can choose for himself or that a researcher might suggest.

(PhP, 111/139)

The patient, by contrast, is confined to the actual, barred from ‘verbal and fictional situations’. Shy of being able to freely put herself in these latter situations, the patient can only engage in concrete movements, relevant to ‘the actual’, i.e. what is immediately present to her or relevant to a particular task (see PhP, 106–9/133–7).

Still, it is important to see that Merleau-Ponty’s account of apraxia is but one moment of his overall analysis of pathology. Indeed, he sees the problem underlying apraxia as manifesting in other pathological disorders as well. Beginning with aphasia, he argues that in an experience like colour amnesia, if a doctor asks the patient to group the ‘red’ samples together, he cannot do so because he cannot organize the world in light of that task. He cannot see the samples as possibly having meaning related to the word ‘red’ or to the doctor’s request; instead, each sample is inert and remains ‘confined within its individual existence’ (PhP, 197/232). Likewise in perceptual agnosia, Merleau-Ponty claims a patient cannot immediately recognize an object upon a doctor’s request because the request, ‘tell me what object that is’, is an empty one: it does not signal to the patient a task he could undertake and organize the world in light of PhP, 110/137.

Merleau-Ponty goes on to suggest that these issues with the function of projection are also expressed in *intellectual* disorders, disorders that tend to be neglected by the motor-centric interpretation. For example, Merleau-Ponty claims that if a patient is not able to use or understand a metaphor, this is because he is not able to project different possible ways a word could have meaning. A patient cannot, for example, understand the metaphor ‘the chair leg’ because he does not take the word ‘leg’ to include a possible reference to chairs (PhP, 129/160–1). Likewise, in disorders affecting a patient’s ability to engage in mathematical thought, Merleau-Ponty claims he is unable to project the number in multiple ways; he is confined to seeing the number only as occupying a fixed place in the number sequence (PhP, 135/167). Or, in geometrical disorders, Merleau-Ponty suggests that if a patient cannot make a square from four isosceles triangles, this is because he cannot project those triangles in terms of an ‘imaginary meaning’, i.e. as possible constituents of a square (PhP, 133/165).

However, though Merleau-Ponty is concerned, in part, with explaining how each *particular* disorder manifests the same problem, it is crucial to recognize that the centrepiece of his analysis is his explanation of why pathology manifests *holistically*, i.e. why linguistic, perceptual, motor, and cognitive disorders go hand in hand. According to Merleau-Ponty, when a patient’s intentional arc ‘goes limp’, this reverberates across her experience as she is ‘confined to the actual’ in everything she does, perceives, thinks, and feels.

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the holistic effect of pathology most in his discussion of one of Gelb and Goldstein’s patients, ‘Schneider’, who suffered a brain injury from a shell splinter. One of the results of Schneider’s injury is his inability to both initiate sexual contact, and, if he stumbles into such a

situation, bring the act to completion. Merleau-Ponty analyses this situation as follows,

The patient has lost the power of projecting before himself a sexual world, of putting himself into an erotic situation, or, once the situation is under way, of sustaining it or of following it through to satisfaction ... the tactile stimuli themselves ... have, so to speak, ceased speaking to his body ... because the patient has ceased posing to his surrounding that silent and permanent question that defines normal sexuality.

(PhP, 159/193–4)

However, Merleau-Ponty goes on to point out that Schneider's sexual problems are accompanied by a wide range of other problems: he can no longer place himself,

within an affective or ideological situation ... Faces are neither pleasant nor unpleasant ... The sun and the rain are neither joyful nor sad ... the world is affectively neutral ... He would like to be able to think about politics or religion, but he never even tries.

(PhP, 159–60/194)

According to Merleau-Ponty, Schneider suffers from this *suite* of problems because the intentional arc of his life has given way: the multiple possible intentions normally available have become levelled down. This leads Merleau-Ponty to claim that Schneider's case reveals,

the vital roots of perception, motricity, and representation, by grounding all of these 'processes' upon an 'intentional arc' that weakens for the patient and that for the normal subject gives experience its degree of vitality and fecundity.

(PhP, 160/195)

This, then, is the lesson Merleau-Ponty draws from pathology: it elucidates not one facet of our lives, but the unity of our lives as a whole.

Merleau-Ponty's Advance of the Productive Imagination

So far, I have emphasized that rather than being motor-centric, Merleau-Ponty's account of pathology, like Cassirer's before him, is imagination-centric. This interpretation makes better sense of not only Merleau-Ponty's claim that pathology is traceable back to the function of projection and intentional arc, but also his emphasis on the holistic effect of pathology. However, even if the imagination-centric interpretation is right and points towards the Kantian roots of Merleau-Ponty's account of pathology, Merleau-Ponty does

not simply appropriate the productive imagination as it is presented in Kant or in Cassirer; for, unlike his predecessors, he explicitly takes up the *embodied* nature of the productive imagination.

Regardless of whether Kant or Cassirer ultimately thought the productive imagination has an important relationship to us as embodied human beings, this is not a feature of their account either chooses to emphasize.³⁷ By contrast, Merleau-Ponty highlights the bodily nature of the productive imagination in the three following ways. To begin, Merleau-Ponty maintains that our productive imagination can be exercised through our bodies without the involvement of the intellect. For example, Merleau-Ponty suggests that even if I have not reflectively formed an intention to pick something up, if I reach towards it with my hand, this movement will involve the intentionality of my body (PhP, 140/172). In which case, rather than characterizing the productive imagination as a mental capacity, he treats it as one that can manifest through the body alone.³⁸ Second, insofar as Merleau-Ponty defines consciousness as being towards the world through our bodies, then any conscious act will somehow involve motor intentionality. This is not to say that every conscious act will involve an intention to move my body in a particular way; rather, his idea is that whether we are engaged in bodily movement, reflective thought, or some other conscious activity, we are directed towards the world through our bodies.³⁹ This, in turn, means that for Merleau-Ponty the intellectual exercise of our productive imaginations depends on our embodiment and what he calls motor intentionality. Third, however, Merleau-Ponty also acknowledges that there is a *reciprocal* relationship between our bodily dealings with the world and our more reflective engagement with it:

there is no single movement in a living body that is an absolute accident with regard to psychical intentions and no single psychical act that has not found at least its germ or its general outline in physiological dispositions.

(PhP, 90/117–8)

Thus, there appears to be a dynamic relation between the different ways we have of projecting, whether they be more or less oriented towards our embodied or cognitive existence. Indeed, this is what should be expected insofar

³⁷To be clear, this is not to say that Kant or Cassirer could not accommodate views of embodiment in this regard, rather the point is that they did not, as Merleau-Ponty did, see it as something necessary to address.

³⁸As Merleau-Ponty puts it, our lives involve ‘this back-and-forth of existence that sometimes allows itself to exist as a body and sometimes carries itself into personal acts’ (PhP, 90/117).

³⁹On this point, I agree with Saint Aubert’s, *Le scénario cartésien* suggestion that Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of motor intentionality is part of his effort to elucidate the most fundamental intentionality of our existence, i.e. the intentionality at stake in the intentional arc, function of projection, and ‘operative intentionality’. As noted above, however, this means that motor intentionality cannot be narrowly exhausted by intentions to move our bodies.

as Merleau-Ponty treats these facets of our existence as unified expressions of one and the same projective function.

CONCLUSION: MERLEAU-PONTY AND THE KANTIAN TRADITION

In this paper, I have tried to show that there is considerable insight to be gained into Merleau-Ponty's philosophical use of pathology if we acknowledge the ways in which he was influenced by Cassirer's Kantian account of pathology. While some have been tempted to read Merleau-Ponty's account of pathology as teaching us lessons about our *motor* lives, I have shown that he is making a deeper point about our lives as embodied human beings who organize the world in light of intentions. This is why, I claimed, Merleau-Ponty is drawn to Cassirer's analysis of pathology in terms of the productive imagination. For, on Cassirer's gloss, Kant's productive imagination is a non-discursive capacity that not only underwrites our various ways of relating to the world, but also opens us up to different possible ways of projecting the world. Merleau-Ponty understands his own function of projection and intentional arc in these terms and this leads him to offer an imagination-centric account of pathology.

However, this fruitful line of interpretation will only go forward if we reverse the trend to read Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as pitted against Kant's. As our discussion has revealed, rather than reject the Kantian tradition all together, Merleau-Ponty levies criticisms against what he disagrees with and embraces what he takes to be promising. Our understanding of Merleau-Ponty's relationship to Kant should take into account these nuances. The present analysis of the role the productive imagination plays in Merleau-Ponty's account of pathology has been one step in this direction; however, much work remains to be done to expose the Kantian themes in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, indeed phenomenology, more generally.

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