Phenomenological reduction as self-recognition:

An encounter between Merleau-Ponty and Utpaladeva

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**ABSTRACT**

This PhD submission aims at initiating a dialogue between two philosophers, Merleau-Ponty and Utpaladeva, who, within their respective philosophical traditions and through their unique itineraries, offer valuable insights on the constitution and the possibilities of human experience.

Through a parallel exploration of the main themes that traverse their philosophies, the reflective thesis attempts to follow the development of the thought that gave rise to the processes of self-recognition and the phenomenological reduction that are central to their systems. This cross-cultural encounter will allow the reader to approach each system from a new angle: look at self-recognition through the experience of the embodied subject and explore the phenomenological reduction through the transcendental dynamics of the self.

The joint exploration of the two systems will reveal unexpected relations between them that do not necessarily rely on terminological equivalences but on hermeneutical depth. This will offer the reader the opportunity to rethink the relations of consciousness and matter, body and mind and explore views on the nature of being that challenge all conceptual dichotomies. The aim is to show that both self-recognition and phenomenological reduction are not just theoretical accounts *on* experience but forms *of* experience. Understanding the performative value of the two processes will highlight the movement of transcendence that traverses our most ordinary experiences, a movement we tend to ignore despite being inscribed in it by the very fact of our embodiment.

*This thesis is entirely the original work of the author, and no part has been submitted in the same form for an award elsewhere.*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION 5

CHAPTER ONE: THE PRIMACY OF PERCEPTION 36

1.1.1 The return to the phenomenal

1.1.2 The primacy of perception

1.1.3 The argument from memory

1.2.1 *Gestalt*: the disclosure of the phenomenal field

1.2.2 *Seeing* or remembering?

1.3.1 The imperceptible knower

1.3.2 Evaluating the Cartesian cogito

1.3.3 The luminous self

1.3.4 The tacit cogito

CHAPTER TWO: EMBODIED AGENCY 79

2.1.1 *Vimarśa* -the luminous spark

2.1.2 A body-less absolute?

2.2.1 Towards a phenomenological outlook

2.2.2 *Spanda* as the imperceptible stir

2.2.3 Consciousness intentional

2.3.1 The case of geometrical drawing

2.3.2 Motor intentionality

2.3.3 The intentional nature of *vimarśa*

2.3.4 The body-subject

2.4.1 Reversibility

2.4.2 Reflection as reversibility

CHAPTER THREE - Towards a phenomenological cosmology 133

3.1.1 The dimensional sensible

3.1.2 The world as an interplay of reflections

3.2.1 The visible and the invisible

3.2.2 The cosmic reflection

3.3.1 *Vāk*, the world as speech

3.3.2 Body as speech

CHAPTER FOUR – THE ENCOUNTER OF THE OTHER 178

4.1.1 The idealistic impasse

4.1.2 Perceiving the other

4.1.3 Beneath the (inter-) personal

4.1.4 In flesh

4.2.1 Otherness in Utpala

CHAPTER FIVE – FROM THEORY TO PRAXIS 200

5.1.1 The disclosure of being

5.1.2 Recasting the reduction

5.1.3 Ascent on the spot (*ascension sur place*)

5.2.1 Reality in degrees: the states of consciousness

5.2.2 Self-recognition, what for?

5.2.3 The phenomenological logic of *vimarśa*

CHAPTER SIX – EMBODYING THE UNIVERSE. 230

5.1.1 Baring perception

5.1.2 The teleology of sensing

5.2.1 Breathing as being

5.2.2 The ‘bodying’ of the cosmic breath

5.2.3 Towards a phenomenological ontology of breathing

5.3.1 *Samāveśa*, the dialectics of immersion

5.3.2 The merging

5.3.3 An alchemic transformation

5.3.4 The alchemy of perception

5.4.1 The tactile dimension of vision

5.4.2 Cézanne’s gaze

5.5.1 Rediscovering the vision of origins

5.5.2 ‘Impersonating’ the infinite

5.5.3 Embodying the universe

CONCLUSION 276

BIBLIOGRAPHY 287

ABBREVIATIONS

**ĪPV** – *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī:* Utpala’s verses

**ĪPVI** – *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī*: Abhinava’s commentary

*Ahnikas* of  *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī* (seen in in-text citations)

**JÑ** - *Jñānadhikāra*

**KR** - *Kriyādhikāra*

**AG** -*Agamadhikāra*

**TS** – *Tattva Sangrahadhikāra*

**HYP-** *Haṭha Yoga Pradipika*

**RA** - *Rasārṇava*

**ŚD** *- Śivadrsṭi*

**SpaKā***- Spanda Kārikās*

**TĀ-***Tantrāloka*

**CD** - Cézanne’s doubt

**EM** - Eye and Mind

**PhP** - Phenomenology of Perception

**TFL -** Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France

**VI** - The Visible and the Invisible

**WN** - Working Notes

Introduction

Western philosophical thought is characterised by its reliance on a dichotomous view of reality resulting from the ‘historical’ distinction between essence and existence in finite things. The precise nature of the relation between essence and existence has been the subject of an ongoing debate among philosophers throughout the centuries. However, following recent scientific developments in the way reality is seen, the question that is posed is whether these notions at the two edges of the ontological spectrum represent reflections of reality itself or they are mere intellectual constructs.

Plato would see the essence as the perfect object of the intellect free from the imperfections of the sensible world-only the world of Ideas exists while the sensible world is illusory. According to his theory of Forms, there are some self-existing, changeless and intelligible entities, the ‘forms’ that are beyond the sensible world that is in constant change and owes its existence to its relationship to the forms. Aristotle, on the other hand, challenges the *reality* of this distinction by suggesting that essences do not exist in a separate realm but in the sensible beings of this world, where they enjoy a concrete mode of existence. In turn, reacting to Aristotle’s empiricism, Descartes renews the debate on the subject matter of essence. Aristotle believes that we intuit the essence of a triangle by studying the instances of all triangular objects in the real world and extracting the essence of triangles from them. Descartes, on the other hand, suggests that we intuit the essence of a triangle by relying on intellect alone and then refer to the world and look for instances that substantiate the ‘essence’ of a triangle. In doing so, Descartes draws from a distinction between essence and existence that has been supported by scholars such as Boethius and Avicenna and later by Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and Henry of Ghent among others. By Descartes’ time, it had become the paradigm that guided philosophical investigation in Western philosophy: any discourse that deemed itself to be philosophical would take it for granted. This dispute between Aristotle and Descartes puts at stake issues about the status of the created order and the nature of its knowability. In his Sixth Meditation, Descartes justifies his opposition to Aristotle. If we extract essences from the real world, how is it that we understand perfect triangles when there are none? Based on the assumption that the essential properties of a thing are the ones that we clearly and distinctly perceive, Descartes infers that bodies are essentially extended, since extension is clearly and distinctly perceived by the intellect prior to any empirical investigation.

We can say what something is prior to experiencing it in the real world. But is it possible to grasp intellectually the essence of an entity without ever actually encountering it? This question not only concerns the inexplicable relation between immaterial and material substances, but also the relation between reflective thought and the perceptual, non-reflective experience. If Descartes attempts to resolve the problems of philosophy by defending the primacy of the rational reflective subject (the *cogito*), this is to ensure that we obtain an undistorted and certain knowledge of the world, which, allegedly, cannot be obtained through the senses. Nevertheless, by doing so, the knowing subject finds itself outside the world, extracted form it with its relationship to the world -and to its own body- reduced to one of purely rational understanding. Merleau-Ponty points out (VI:47):

…the mind is what thinks, the world what is thought; one could conceive neither of encroachment of the one upon the other, nor of confusion of one with the other, nor of passage from one to the other, nor even of contact between them. Since they are related to one another as the bound to the binding or the *naturata* to the *naturans,* they are too perfectly coextensive for the one to ever be able to be preceded by the other, too irremediably distinct for the one ever to be able to envelop the other. Philosophy therefore impugns as meaningless every encroachment of the world upon the mind, or of the mind upon the world.

The implications of such a philosophical decision, Merleau-Ponty argues, are rather serious, as any evidence that comes from a direct apprehension of the external world through the senses is completely and systematically overlooked. In response, his philosophical project will be to rehabilitate the sensible and, thus, restore to reflection its original ties to it. In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty states (VI:36)

Hence the philosopher does not have to *consider as inexistent* what was seen or felt, and the vision or the feeling themselves, to replace them, according to the words of Descartes, with the "thought of seeing and of feeling," which for its part is considered unshakable only because it presumes nothing about what effectively is, only because it entrenches itself in the apparition to the thought of what is thought—from which it is indeed inexpugnable.

What is more, the systematic neglect of lived experience reveals a specific stance towards the body as the aspect of our being that is most *organically* related to lived experience. A devaluation of the body and its role in cognition is based on a clear distinction between the domains of spirit and matter, mind and body. This distinction is based on the belief that their respective natures are so greatly different that their substances cannot possibly interact in a causal way. Echoes of the Platonic soul-body divide are, here, evident: being an autonomous entity, the soul is distinguishable from the body and does not depend on it for its existence. Nevertheless, in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty argues that Descartes is mistaken in thinking that understanding is the sole work of a reflective mind since the perception of *time* and *space*, defining parameters of human experience, presuppose facticity (VI:46):

To tell the truth, it is not even certain that the reflection that proceeds by way of the essences can accomplish its propaedeutic task and fulfil its role of being a discipline of the understanding. For there is no guarantee that the whole of experience can be expressed in essential invariants, that certain beings—for example, the being of time—do not in principle elude this fixation and do not require from the start, if they are to be able to be thought by us, the consideration of the fact, the dimension of facticity… But if time should elude the reflection, space too would be involved in this secession, since time is bound to the present through all its fibers, and, through the present, to the simultaneous…

Therefore, in his exploration of perception, Merleau-Ponty is set to challenge the supposed contradiction between mind and body by arguing that this is not what Descartes had actually discovered. While constructing his phenomenological project as a response/objection to Descartes, Merleau-Ponty admits that many of the truths he is set to establish are already present, albeit in a latent mode, in Descartes himself. In other words, Merleau-Ponty credits Descartes for opening the way towards a joint consideration of body and mind and states that (VI:198) “a recovery or repetition of Descartes” is “the sole means of rendering to him *his* own truth, by thinking it once again, that is, starting from ourselves.” By demonstrating the distinction between mind and body but also their union or ‘conjunction’, Descartes discovers himself not as a pure mind but as a perceiving self. And this is despite his inability to harmonise his findings with his view of reality as governed by the distinction between essences and facts. In the *Second Meditation*, Descartes claims that he is nothing but a thinking thing or mind, a “thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions” (AT VII 28: CSM II 19). Since it is meaningless to attribute such modes to extended things like stones, it is only the mind that can enjoy them whilst shape, motion or quantity cannot be attributed to thinking entities lacking extension. Nevertheless, as pointed by Gassendi and Elizabeth, experience shows that the body and the mind work in unison, there is a “mind to body causation” that becomes quite evident in the case of voluntary bodily motion. If willing is a mode of the mind alone and motion one of the body alone, how can the pure non-extended mind bring about this extended effect? Apparently, there is no intelligible explanation of voluntary bodily movement because the only way that it can be explained is through the contact of the body and the mind. If a contact has to be made, it has to be made between two surfaces. However, in this case it is only the extended body that has surface as one of its modes (*Principles of Philosophy*part II, section 15), something that the mind being non-extended lacks. Hence, how can a non-extended mind come in contact with an extended body and make it move? The fact that body and mind interact in a causal manner challenges the view that they are mutually exclusive. Puzzled by his own realisation, Descartes admits that there must be a way to explain the “union” of the body and the soul that he has not yet been able to consider and that it is wrong to assume that simply because the body and the soul differ in their substance, they cannot interact with each other. In his response to Gassendi, Descartes states (AT VII 213: CSM II 275):

These questions presuppose amongst other things an explanation of the union between the soul and the body, which I have not yet dealt with at all. But I will say, for your benefit at least, that the whole problem contained in such questions arises simply from a supposition that is false and cannot in any way be proved, namely that, if the soul and the body are two substances whose nature is different, this prevents them from being able to act on each other.

Towards a phenomenological ontology

Merleau-Ponty argues that Descartes has unknowingly paved the way for thinking the body and the mind in a joint manner. But he soon realises that any philosophy that starts by taking their difference for granted will be, by definition, unable to ‘explain’ their ‘union’. Hence, for Merleau-Ponty, the biggest challenge to overcome is the presumed ontological disparity between the body and the mind – if the body and the mind are thought as having diametrically opposite textures, it will be impossible to resolve the existing tension between them. At the same time, it is a fact of experience that the nature of the body differs from that of the mind, making their relation a philosophical paradox. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty chooses to embrace this paradoxical relation of connection and difference and seeks to understand it anew and in terms of an ontological structure that can resolve the duality in Descartes’ thought. Merleau-Ponty will attempt to demonstrate that the essence does not reside in the realm of the ideal but is, on the contrary, embedded in the structures of the sensible world characterised by an imperceptible movement of self-differentiation. He states (VI:118):

No longer are there essences above us, like positive objects, offered to a spiritual eye; but there is an essence beneath us, a common nervure of the signifying and the signified, adherence in and reversibility of one another—as the visible things are the secret folds of our flesh, and yet our body is one of the visible things.

Announcing a phenomenological shift to the mind-body problem, Merleau-Ponty no more seeks to trace the body or consciousness back to the moment of their inception. Rather than referring them to a prior causality, he seeks to shed light to their interaction, their mutual implication. In this sense, his phenomenology can be seen as a descriptive project that aims at bringing into view the structure of what is immediately given (in experience). As such, it follows the structures of reflective experience and the ways in which the world is given in it. To comprehend is not to ‘extract’ oneself from the sensible simply because (VI:118) “in a philosophy that takes into consideration the operative world, functioning, present and coherent, as it is, the essence is not at all a stumbling block: it has its place there as an operative, functioning, essence.” In this scenario, the notion of subjectivity is transformed alongside that of the body. Merleau-Ponty talks about (VI:167) “the incarnate subjectivity of the human body”, which he refers to the *life-world (ibid*.) “which I continue to refer to the *Lebenswelt.”* *Lebenswelt* or the life-world, a concept popularised by Husserl, is the world as directly experienced in the lived experience of the present in contrast to the objective world of the science. This idea presumes that consciousness is already embedded in a world in which it operates, and meaning is not to be constructed in abstraction of its situatedness. Following from this, Merleau-Ponty intends to (VI:188) “form a theory of perception and of comprehension that shows that to comprehend is not to constitute in intellectual immanence, that to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence.” This project, moreover, (ibid.) “is not the imposition of an exterior point of view upon Descartes, of a *question* that is not his own upon his philosophy.” To be able to articulate such a theory, Merleau-Ponty needs to challenge the classical notion of reflection by reclaiming its sensible origins, which, he argues, are, nevertheless, observable in the reversibility of the body that touches but is also touched by what it touches: both touching and touched, my body is not exactly the same as touching and touched. The notion of the *flesh* as that (VI:259) “which is not the objective body, nor the body thought by the soul as its own (Descartes), which is the sensible in the twofold sense of what one senses and what senses,” allows us to think about the metamorphoses and encroachments of different dimensions without evading the paradoxicality of our experience. This relation of proximity and distance, adhesion and differentiation is characteristic not only of our embodiment but, more generally, of a texture that differentiates and forms an open relation to itself that is never one of fusion. Passing from a theory of perception to a theory of being, the reversibility of the touching and the touched, the deepening of touch and the thickness of the touchable are indicative of the *dimensionality* of Being. Therefore (VI:182), “th*e* reconquest of the *Lebenswelt* is the reconquest of a *dimension.”* A Being that is not flat and cannot be observed from above, that can only be understood from inside itself (*intra ontology*) and from a subject that (VI:46) “one would also have to describe in terms of facticity, and not in terms of essences, a subjectivity situated in space and in time.”

Towards a phenomenological cosmology

Despite moving away from the Cartesian dualism, Merleau-Ponty’s ontology has not entirely evaded its grip. Firstly, it remains an unfinished project and we will never know what would have been its completed version, whether or not Merleau-Ponty would have succeeded in articulating it with more clarity. The problem, here, is that Merleau-Ponty’s ontological project is formulated as a response to Descartes dualism but also to Husserl’s idealism and as such, one may argue, remains to a certain extent, indebted to them. But even if we accept that Merleau-Ponty has moved away from all dualistic presuppositions, the lack of concepts in Western philosophy for articulating his new ontology may reduce it to an attempt of reconciling the irreconcilable opposites. However, instead of trying to decipher Merleau-Ponty’s project from the presuppositions conditioning it at the first place, we propose displacing our analysis to an entirely different territory capable of providing an alternative platform for rethinking its main issues. This alternative territory is that of Indian philosophy and more specifically of the *pratyabhijñā* school of Kashmir Śaivism with its main representative, Utpaladeva. This new perspective can be valuable as it offers an alternative paradigm for rethinking the problem of essences and facts without succumbing to the divisions that have befallen the Western philosophical across the centuries. What makes Utpaladeva (900–950 CE) *a* worthy companion in this philosophical journey is what sets his seminal works *Īśvarapratyabhijñā karika* and *Īśvarapratyabhijñavimarśini* apart from those of his predecessors, that is, the shift in the way the nature of the self (*ātman*) is discussed. Utpala sees the ultimate reality as Śiva, which, R. Torella describes as (1994:xxix) "a single, dynamic subject that unifies and animates the discontinuity of reality and constitutes the substratum of every limited subject, as well as of every form and activity of everyday life.” Coming back to Merleau-Ponty, his greatest challenge has been to conceptualise the unity of body and mind without, however, compromising their difference. Utpala, on the other hand, describes the ultimate reality as our innermost self, as pure sentiency or consciousness that is not static luminosity (*prakāśa*) but light that reflects upon itself (*vimarśa*). He equates reflection (*vimarśa*) with the imperceptible motion, the pulsation or vibration (*spanda*) in the heart of the ultimate reality that sets in action the movement of manifestation. Starting from the presupposition that all beings have their origin in the light of consciousness and that nothing can exist outside it, Utpala resolves the knower-known dichotomy, by showing how the self is at once the knower, the known and the means of knowledge.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty shapes his thought as a reaction to both Idealism and Empiricism. Through his study of perception, he tries to demonstrate that consciousness is embedded in the structure of the sensible world. However, his early attempts to articulate the carnality of consciousness in the notion of the *body-subject* have been criticised by other philosophers such as R.Barbaras for evading the problem of consciousness and for hastily and unjustifiably assimilating consciousness to the body. Merleau-Ponty’s later focus on bodily reversibility leading to the concept of the *flesh* is a more organised attempt to show how bodily being is inextricably intertwined with conscious being in the structures of the body, the sensible world and language. As D.Abram notices (1996:66), the flesh is “the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of a spontaneous activity.” The idea of the *écart* representing the reversible dynamics of the flesh shows that the relation between the sentient and the sensible is never one of coincidence: being is structured around the articulation of identity and difference. Merleau-Ponty explains how the *double* nature of the body as both seeing and seen, proves that consciousness is in reality embodied (VI:250-251): “The flesh of the world is of the Being-seen, i.e. is a Being that is *eminently percipi,* and it is by it that we can understand the *percipere:* this perceived that we call my body applying itself to the rest of the perceived, i.e. treating itself as a perceived by itself and hence as a perceiving… It was meaningless to thus realize the consciousness before the consciousness.” The double belonging of the body becomes, hence, the centre of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and his major challenge to traditional ontology, which even scientists of his time failed to shake despite their findings. So mesmerised were they by its claims (VI:15):

But today, when the very rigor of its description obliges physics to recognize as ultimate physical beings in full right relations between the observer and the observed, determinations that have meaning only for a certain situation of the observer, it is the ontology of the Great Object correlative to it that figures as a prescientific preconception. Yet it isso natural that the physicist continues to think of himself as an Absolute Mind before the pure object and to count also as truths in themselves the very statements that express the interdependence of the whole of the observable with a situated and incarnate physicist.

Hence, in response to the (VI:10) “objectivist ontology which undermines itself and collapses under analysis,” Merleau-Ponty calls for a revision of the notions of classical ontology aiming to show that (VI:22)

the being-object and the being-subject conceived by opposition to it and relative to it do not form the alternative, that the perceived world is beneath or beyond this antinomy, that the failure of "objective" psychology is—conjointly with the failure of the "objectivist" physics—to be understood not as a victory of the "interior" over the "exterior" and of the "mental" over the "material," but as a call for the revision of our ontology, for the re-examination of the notions of "subject" and "object."

This revision starts by acknowledging the openness of the body to the world as a primary event (VI:127): “One forgets that our openness…that which makes it impossible for us to feign to not be, could not be formed in the order of the being-posited, since it is this openness precisely that teaches us that the beings-posited, whether true or false, are not nothing…” This observation, in turn, invites a new definition of perception in terms of *flesh* (VI:9): “the experience of my flesh as gangue of my perception has taught me that perception does not come to birth just anywhere, that it emerges in the recess of a body.” By showing how the body *as flesh* is reflected by the world *as flesh*, Merleau-Ponty attempts to bridge the Cartesian gap between subjectivity and materiality (VI:248-9)

That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world ( the felt *[senti]* at the same time the culmination of subjectivity and the culmination of materiality), they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping.

The idea of the body being of the “same flesh as the world” reveals that our bodily embeddedness in the world is indicative of a more profound situatedness (VI:88): “and just as we are invited to rediscover behind the vision, as immediate presence to being, the flesh of being and the flesh of the seer.” The being we are presented to or that is presented to us is not the inaccessible Being of the classical ontology (VI:127-128), “this frontal being before us.” Instead, it is a Being that surrounds us and to which we partake through the very life of our body (ibid.): “*we are within Being.*” In this new intra-ontological context, where being is known from within itself, the knowing subject is displaced on the side of the world. Merleau-Ponty states (VI:136):

When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible.

By contesting the very principle of the cleavage between subjectivity and objectivity, Merleau-Ponty attempts to (VI:16) “make the contact between the observer and the observed enter into the definition of the "real",” something that the scientists of his time had, according to him, failed to do. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty’s bold for his time ontological claims, are not without problems as he often assumes what he, precisely, needs to prove. This is not to say that he makes baseless assumptions - his thoughts are informed by the latest psychological and scientific discoveries of his time. However, the constantly asserted carnality of the subject and of the world seem to bypass the problem of consciousness while the double reference of the body remains, at least in terms of terminology employed, indebted to the duality it is meant to overcome. The thickness of the flesh is what ensures the communication between the seer and the visible and what proves their ontological affinity. Yet, it fluctuates between materiality and immateriality without a definite understanding of how it can embrace both. Where its thickness comes from? What gives way to the polarisation of experience? To respond to these questions, Merleau-Ponty appeals to the carnality of Being (VI:221): “What is it that *there is* at this level? There is the vertical or carnal universe and its polymorphic matrix.” Indeed, perception can show that being is best described as an intersection of dimensions rather than as a-dimensional. But what does this precisely mean? It is almost as Merleau-Ponty takes for granted what he is meant to demonstrate: how are we to understand the negativity that is inherent in being (VI:23): “all this is finally possible and means something only because *there is* Being, not Being in itself, identical to itself, in the night, but the Being that also contains its negation, its *percipi.”* Turning to Western philosophy seems almost futile since it is precisely from its precepts that Merleau-Ponty seeks to escape. Displacing Merleau-Ponty’s ontology, on the other hand, into an entirely new philosophical context that does not presuppose an idea of duality can help us appreciate his invaluable contributions to philosophy. Utpaladeva’s thought and philosophy of self-recognition with its strongly monistic orientation can offer such a context.

Utpala starts by asserting that a sentient principle, the self (*ātman*) is the common ontological ground of all that exists. The self is of the nature of consciousness (*cit*), which despite being one and undifferentiated, possesses, nevertheless, the infinite freedom (*svātantrya*) to become other than itself and assume any form at will. Utpala views the self not only in terms of a pure, static luminosity (*prakāśa*) but also as capable of self-reflection (*vimarśa*). By equating *vimarśa* with *spanda, Utpala* shows thatthe light of consciousness is not static but vibrates with inner life. The symbolism of light helps to grasp the inner relationship between things understood as integral parts of the absolute in static juxtaposition and mutual interpenetration. The symbolism of vibration *(spanda)* serves to represent the dynamic nature of consciousness, or as M. Dyzckowski notices (1989:63), “the active participation of the infinite in the finite as the process of its transformation into the finite and the reconversion of the finite into the infinite.” Utpala internalises the Śaivite myth of creation whereby Śiva (*prakāśa*) manifests the universe through His creative energy *Śakti* (*vimarśa*). The syntax of self-manifestation covers macro process by which the self ‘recognitively’ unfolds into experience, becomes *perceptual*. The movement of conscious energy, incandescent with the light of consciousness, generates cognitions that appear as manifestations *(abhāsa)* of consciousness within it. It is described as an expansion (*vikāsa*) of the light of consciousness in the process of which it discovers its own identity through cognizing its own self in a variety of self-reflections. These reflections taken together as a single whole constitute the inner light of the innate nature of all things *(svarupa-jyotis).* As aspects of the dynamic consciousness *(caitanya)* that is Śiva's freedom to act as agent of cognition, they are better conceptualised as phases of His vibration *(spanda).* Consciousness (*cit*) unfolds in words or layers (*tattvas*) from subtle to gross in a gradient process of self-concretisation. But this same syntax also covers micro processes by which the self is recognised *in* experience. The idea of ‘recognition’ (*pratyabhijnā*) applies to both emanation and reabsorption, both in a cosmogonic and a soteriological sense. Enlightenment is, thus, synonymous with the recognition of a fundamental reality. It is not the cognition of something that was not known before but the re-cognition (*pratyabhijñā*) of the original, innate awareness of the self in which all this universe, including ourselves, appear. Utpaladeva’s presupposition of a unitary but dynamic self provides an alternative paradigm for rethinking the notion of the *flesh*, which in Merleau-Ponty, is defined negatively (VI:139)

The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some "psychic" material … it is not a fact or a sum of facts "material" or "spiritual" …The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance.

In an attempti to define flesh in more positive terms, Merleau-Ponty describes it vaguely as (ibid.) “a *general thing,* midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.” Nevertheless, apprehending the ‘immaterial’ logic of the ‘flesh’ becomes all the more difficult because of its semantic affiliations to the materiality of the body and the lack of movement characterising this materiality. In turn, Utpala emphasises the procedural and dynamic nature of incarnation as consciousness manifests through the vibration of its creative energy (*spanda*), resulting in the ‘fleshing’ of the absolute. Manifestation is, thus, seen as an active process of self-differentiation that sheds light to the Merleau-Pontyan notion of the *écart.* Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes the intertwining of the transcendental and the empirical, emerging only via an *écart,* a divergence or separation.As such, it denotes a relation in which terms diverge only as chiasmatically intertwined with one another. For Merleau-Ponty, this translates the simultaneous union and separation of the subject and the object, the body and the world (VI:201): “The perceiving subject, as a tacit, silent *Being-at (Être-à),* which returns from the thing itself blindly identified, which is only a *separation (écart)* with respect to it.” Utpaladeva describes manifestation as an activity that takes place within the self and that, unlike Merleau-Ponty, does not traverse moments of an already specifiable trajectory but rather creates the context in which it stands as a gesture of spontaneous transcendence. Each *tattva* represents a phase in this movement during which the self embraces its otherness until it reaches the final stage of *māyā*, in which there is a clear separation between the subjective and objective poles of experience. Yet, because these two poles designate instances of a process (being as becoming), they are not already given in a fixed dimension but emerge in a self-differentiating simultaneity. Merleau-Ponty attempts to show that this separation is not a separation *from* but an adhesion *to* the self and the expression of an original transcendence. Nevertheless, it is in Utpaladeva that this thought can be pushed further as the self is of the nature of free consciousness, that is, inherently capable of assuming multiple forms. Closely linked to the idea of the *écart*, is the concept of the *vertica*l. Merleau-Ponty calls for (VI:178) “the rediscovery of vertical being” that is made of (ibid.) “a whole series of layers,” a being that (VI:172) “cuts across the plane of beings, it is transversal with respect to it.” The verticality of being comes as a response to the hunt for the essences showing that each level of existence is contained or presupposed in all others (VI:177)

The "wild" or "vertical" world. Show the intentional reference of Physics to Physis, of Physis to life, of life to the "psycho-physical"—a reference by which one nowise passes from the "exterior" to the "interior," since the reference is not a reduction and since each degree "surpassed" remains in fact presupposed.

However, to truly account for what V.M. Fóti calls (1998:40) “vertical genesis,” one needs to show how these different levels ensue from one another at the first place, instead of presupposing their interconnectedness. Merleau-Ponty is constantly preoccupied with the articulation of the chiasm between the visible and the invisible but the extent to which their relation can be thought independently of the dualism that conditions it, is under serious question (VI:224): “As the sensible structure can be understood only through its relation to the body, to the flesh—the invisible structure can be understood only through its relation to logos, to speech.” On the other hand, Utpala’s multidimensional self ‘cuts’ across various levels maintaining the continuity of the various stages of the total experience that are seemingly discontinuous (body, mind, world, etc.). This continuity is ensured through a view of manifestation as a genealogy of light and as appearance (*ābhāsa*). An appearance, however, that does not contest the real but is in itself the real: the sensible world is not a world of semblances against an absolute Being that maintains its authenticity and absolute authority by never being phenomenally manifest; the world, as a concretisation of consciousness (*cit*) is in itself the manifest form of the absolute. The *pratyabhijñā* view of manifestation *as appearan*ce helps bridge the gap between facts and essences. It also helps make sense of Merleau-Ponty’s equation of the world with Being and the interchangeable but hardly justifiable use he makes of these two terms. Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty’s use of metaphors of light serves to convey the exact same idea: that of an appearing world as a concrete expression of Being (VI:218): “Perception is not first a perception of *things,* but a perception of *elements* (water, air . . .) of *rays of the world,* of things which are dimensions, which are worlds, I slip on these "elements" and here I am in the *world,* I slip from the "subjective" to Being.”

Towards a phenomenological reading of *pratyabhijñā*

Our brief overview of the syntax of self-recognition shows how Utpaladeva attempts to bridge the notional gap between immaterial and material, singular and plural by reconceiving the self in dynamic terms and consciousness as an agent of its own becoming. Everything in this universe is a manifestation or a reflection (*ābhāsa*) of consciousness. The Sanskrit term *cit* or *saṃvid* for which (absolute, higher) ‘consciousness’ has been deemed the most appropriate translation in English (we may as well accept that it is an untranslatable term) does not refer to the mind or intellect (to which ‘consciousness’ in the Western context may be said to refer). On the contrary, Indian philosophy describes the essence of ultimate reality (*brahman*) in terms of ‘consciousness.’ *Cit* is the principle underlying all manifestation of which the ever-changing world is only an expression. However, Utpaladeva feels that to bridge the gap between consciousness as the *creator* and consciousness as the *created,* a further refinement of its essential nature is needed. Aware of the difficulty of conceiving reality in monistic terms and in an attempt to amalgamate the various approaches within Kashmir Śaivism, Utpaladeva puts forward a view of consciousness employing mainly a terminology of light that was absent from previous texts. He describes manifestation using an abundance of metaphors of light that aim to demonstrate how the self is contained in its manifestations, how fact and essence naturally converge. This view of manifestation as a genealogy of light makes us think that Utpala felt it was time for a more ‘phenomenological’ approach to the question of being and it is precisely this approach that makes him a suitable interlocutor for Merleau-Ponty.

The phenomenological configuration of being in terms of appearing is bound to have a transformative effect on the way the role and the nature of the body are viewed. Nevertheless, Utpala’s treatment of the body is somewhat ambiguous. In Indian philosophy governed by the ideal of renunciation or *saṃnyāsa*, a discourse on liberation is not necessarily expected to be inclusive of the physical body. Nevertheless, Utpaladeva is affiliated to the religious universe of the Tantras and embraces their esoteric tradition viewing the body as an hologram of the universe. Yet, from the first pages of his work ĪPV, the reader is warned that the body, just like the mind or the ego, is the creation of *māyā*, the illusory force of the unreal. Attachment to the body and mistaking it for being the subject, the ‘I’, is an obstacle to liberation. Many of Utpala’s verses seem to promote the ascetic ideal of withdrawal from the world and the body. At the same time, through his theory of manifestation, Utpala equates *māyā* with the creative energy of the self (*vimarśa*), showing that the self becomes embodied and connoting that the body -just like the world- is a manifestation of the absolute and, therefore, entirely real. Not only that, but the steps to self-recognition show that it is through the routes of our physical being that we have access to the divine. Utpaladeva conceives *pratyabhijñā* as the shortest, most direct path to liberation precisely because it implies an evolution that relies on consciousness alone. At the same time, a view of consciousness as *vimarśa* (as oppose to only *prakāśa*) entails embracing the energy aspect of consciousness (*spanda*) that has more ‘visibility’ on the physical level. What is more, Utpala describes the culminating stage of self-recognition, *samāveśa* asoccurring while living in the body. Moreover, his reference to the practice of breath control shows his detailed understanding of the complex tantric practices employing the routes of the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*) to lead the practitioner to enlightenment. Utpala’s seeming contempt of the physical can be seen as translating his disapproval of the unorthodox practices of Tantric Śaivism that use the body in often obscene ways. In comparison to the Kaula branch of Kashmir Śaivism, the pratyabhijñā school is much more refined and sophisticated and far more capable of abstract philosophical reflection. In regards to this, C. Wallis points out that (2007:269) “the lucidity and sophistication of its reasoning and interpretation of religious categories helped to elevate the Trika into the highest realm of philosophical discourse.” In conclusion, Utpala’s negative discourse on the body is strategic. Focusing on the body as a distinct ontological category would introduce a sort of dualism that would be entirely incompatible with the monistic nature of self-recognition: if everything is the self, how can we possibly talk separately about the body?

Reading Utpaladeva along Merleau-Ponty can broaden the reader’s perspective and help them discern that Utpala does not make a claim in favour of a transcendental consciousness, he does not dismiss embodiment. What he dismisses is, just like Merleau-Ponty, an objectified view of the body. We won’t find in ĪPV explicit mentions to our embodied experience of the world simply because this would introduce a notion of duality within its system. However, it is very important that we try to fill those gaps in Utpala’s thought and, hence, relate self-recognition to the experience of the contemporary reader by highlighting its embodied aspect. Reading Utpala along Merleau-Ponty will enable us to do so. This is because Merleau-Ponty takes the problems of perception and embodiment as starting points for deciphering the relationship between the objective and the experienced worlds. Merleau-Ponty will help ‘dilute’ Utpala’s monism and move towards a more body inclusive interpretation of his philosophy. The density of cosmic reflection read as *thickness of the flesh* - the self projecting all these forms within its very own being (VI:135):

It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. It is for the same reason that I am at the heart of the visible and that I am far from it: because it has thickness and is thereby naturally destined to be seen by a body.

Reading Utpaladeva along Merleau-Ponty will prevent the reader from apprehending self-recognition as a disembodied fusion with a transcendental absolute (VI:127): “Infinite distance or absolute proximity, negation or identification: our relationship with Being is ignored in the same way in both cases. In both cases, one misses it because one thinks one will ensure it more effectively by approaching the essence or the thing as closely as possible.” Instead, by highlighting (ibid.) “this thickness of flesh between us and the "hard core" of Being,” Merleau-Ponty encourages a positive view of the sensible: from an obstacle to the realisation of the ultimate reality, the veil of *māyā* that separates the monad from the self, it is transformed into a vibration, *spanda* that calls the monad to reunite with the self. Once this trade of ideas is achieved, it is Utpala who will push Merleau-Ponty’s thought on embodiment to its limits. What, after all, means to exist in a body? What are the limits of our embodiment? Paradoxically, Utpala’s ‘disembodied’ approach, will extend the notion of incarnation far beyond the limits of the human body. Reading Merleau-Ponty along Utpaladeva will help the idea of consciousness, too soon assimilated to the body, to find its place. As Merleau-Ponty himself has very well realised, there is but one being, one texture that differentiates itself, that manifests causing the distinction between essences and facts to collapse. Reading Utpala will show that the ability to manifest is a characteristic of the self, thus, providing the reader the the epistemic foundation Merleau-Ponty’s ontology needed. This way, Merleau-Ponty’s ontology will find in Utpala its most loyal ally, helping the reader unravel its mystery and appreciate its most unconventional, for its times, apprehension of being.

Authors & texts

This thesis takes the opportunity to bring into dialogue two philosophical traditions that are very distant in terms of space, time, affiliations. It is anticipated that as each philosopher shapes his thought within his own, unique context, his approach to common philosophical problems would rely on distinct premises. And yet, it is not against these divergencies but rather due to them that a joint reading is invited. The rationale behind this choice comes from none other than Merleau-Ponty, who welcomes the fusion of various philosophical ideas that all have in common a desire to apprehend Being (VI:198):

The history of philosophy as a *perception* of other philosophers, intentional encroachment upon them, a thought of one's own that does not kill them, either by overcoming them, or by copying them. Follow them in their problems but their problems are within the problem of Being, this they all profess, and hence we can, we must think them in this horizon.

Following on the steps of Husserl and Heidegger but departing significantly from them, Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) dedicates his entire life and work to the research for the modalities and meaning of human experience. His efforts to rehabilitate the sensible after centuries of ostracization have led to a whole new understanding of perception. When perception is seen as primary, then the world turns from inert and passive to dynamic and participatory. The observer is not a surveillant consciousness that looks at the world from above but an embodied subjectivity that participates in the world’s spectacle: we are part of the world and yet coextensive with it, we constitute the world and yet are constituted in it. On a similar note, Utpaladeva believes that knowledge of the self is acquired not by going beyond appearances but by attending closely to them because it is in the sensible that the traces of the absolute are most tangible. The universe is a reflection (*ābhāsa*) in the mirror of supreme consciousness (*samvid*) but in comparison to a mirror needing an external object to form a reflection, all images are projected by consciousness itself due to its *svātantrya*, infinite will and desire to create. Following from this, there are no distinctions between the absolute self and its manifestations. This is the central thesis of the *pratyabhijñā* system that developed between the ninth and the eleventh centuries in Kashmir, India by masters and their disciples who presented their syllogisms in form of treatises and mystical poetry. The founder of the *pratyabhijñā* school, Somānanda (875–925 CE), lays down the principles of his monistic view of the self in his seminal work *Śivadṛṣṭi.* Utpaladeva (900–950 CE), his son and disciple develops and refines his master’s work in his treatises *Īśvarapratyabhijñā karika* and *Īśvarapratyabhijñavimarśini* from where the name of the system derived.[[1]](#footnote-1) Utpala’s writings are predominantly soteriological, aiming at the articulation of the means and methods to liberation. But they are also profoundly philosophical advancing a sophisticated view of reality that is mainly articulated from the point of view of higher self. In doing so, Utpala does not contradict ordinary experience, something that Abhinava, in his commentary, of ĪPV does not cease to emphasise. Abhinava lived in Kashmir about the end of the tenth and beginning of eleventh centuries (924-1020 CE). As an exponent of the Kula school of Śaivism, his engagement with Utpala’s work is inscribed with his broader effort to popularise Kashmir Śaivism. Abhinava attempts to clarify the meaning of Utpala’s verses through the application of reason but also through his personal experience of religious practices. Like Utpala, he wishes to make the path of self-recognition accessible to all by showing that the means to liberation are internal to consciousness. With his emphasis on the energy aspect of consciousness (*vimarśa*), Abhinava’s commentary highlights the situated aspect of self-recognition and, thus, showcases its relatedness to ordinary experience.

Phenomenological reduction and self-recognition

Initiating a dialogue between Utpaladeva and Merleau-Ponty is incomplete without juxtaposing the syntax of their key processes: phenomenological reduction and self-recognition. One may wonder what phenomenological reduction could have in common with self-recognition, a path that is formulated to respond to specific soteriological demands. A brief detour can demonstrate the relevance of this dialogue. In Eugen Fink’s eyes, the first step to the formulation of the reduction is the philosopher’s wonder at the sight of the world’s sparkle. The phenomenological reduction, as John Cogan (2018) puts it, is

at once a description and prescription of a technique that allows one to voluntarily sustain the awakening force of astonishment so that conceptual cognition can be carried throughout intentional analysis, thus bringing the “knowing” of astonishment into our everyday experience.

Cogan seems to imply that the reduction has a transformative effect by the virtue of bringing an insightful perspective on the phenomena. It has, in this sense, similarities with meditative practices that require the withdrawal of the senses from external phenomena and their focus on the flow of subjective awareness underlying the perception of these phenomena. John Cogan further reinforces this idea by suggesting that the phenomenological reduction is (2018):

A species of meditation, requiring rigorous, persistent effort and is no mere mental exercise. It is a *species* of meditation because, unlike ordinary meditation, which involves only the mind, this more radical form requires the participation of the entire individual and initially brings about a radical transformation of the individual performing it similar to a religious conversion.

In fact, it is Husserl himself who first acknowledges the transformative power of the reduction, which he, most interestingly, compares to a religious conversion offering a perspective so radical that it becomes the standard for every other perspective (1970:137):

The total phenomenological attitude and the *epoché* belonging to it are destined in essence to effect…a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion, which then, however, over and above this, bears within itself the significance of the greatest existential transformation which is assigned as a task to mankind as such.

The phenomenological reduction is something that is performed in the sense of generating a sort of experience or knowledge that brings us to the origins of experience. This is an agenda that is similar to that of self-recognition in its quest of an ultimate reality from which everything else derives its being. What is more, both processes view this reality as the true self of the subject. John Cogan states (2018):

In the idiom of our own everyday parlance, we might phrase this inquiry as an exercise in determining who the “I” is whenever we say “I AM.” Indeed, the path that we naturally follow in seeking an answer to this question leads precisely to the kind of interrogation of the self by the self that Husserl and Fink both claim to be ingredient in the performance of the reduction.

It is often stated that Merleau-Ponty rejects the phenomenological reduction as J. Smith points out (2006:553), “if there is one thing upon which the majority of interpretations of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy agree, it is that he rejects the phenomenological reduction.” Yet, Merleau-Ponty sees a big part of his work as an effort to reformulate the phenomenological reduction, which he wouldn’t have undertaken if he had rejected it. Evidently, the confusion arises from Merleau-Ponty’s statement that a ‘complete’ reduction is impossible, which is often taken literally as the dismissal of the reductive process itself. Nevertheless, what Merleau-Ponty rejects is not reduction and its *epoché* as a methodological tool but reduction as the return to a transcendental consciousness (PhP:xi):‘‘for a long time … the reduction was presented as a return to a transcendental consciousness before which the world is spread out and completely transparent.’’ This is precisely what J.Smith (2006:553) observes when writing: “whist Merleau‐Ponty rejects what he saw as the transcendental idealist context in which Husserl presents the reduction, he nevertheless accepts the heart of it, the *epoché*, as a methodological principle.” As Merleau-Ponty sees it, the problem with Husserl’s view is that the (PhP:xi–xii) ‘‘logically consistent transcendent idealism rids the world of its opacity and its transcendence.’’ In his eyes, the *epoché* reveals the fundamental, pre-reflective relation between the subject and its world, a relation that cannot and should not remain unaccounted for. Hence, Merleau-Ponty’s comment on the impossibility of a complete reduction is not the rejection of the reduction itself but of the false completeness of the idealist move. This lack of completeness is because (PhP, pp. xiii–xiv) “we are in the world... our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux onto which we are trying to seize … there is no thought which embraces all our thought …” Following from this assertion, Merleau-Ponty undertakes to recast the phenomenological reductionin existential terms - a route already paved by Heidegger - since (ibid.) “far from being, as has been thought, a procedure of idealistic philosophy, phenomenological reduction belongs to existential philosophy.” His new ontology seeks to redefine the aim of the reduction as an experience of an ontological milieu, an experience that is never complete, precisely because the nature of this ontological milieu is to be never complete, to always evolve. For this reason, an experience of Being whose movement is never complete as it is always in the process of becoming is by definition incomplete (VI:178) “...the incompleteness of the reduction ... is not an obstacle to the reduction, it is the reduction itself.”

It is in this very same sense that self-recognition is never *complete*. This is because the self it seeks to disclose does not lie outside the movement of existence but is its very essence. Recognition is the merging with a movement that is always in the process of becoming and, thus, *incomplete*. If the stage of liberation is characterized by the experience of unity, this is not a flight from the sensible onto the transcendental but the transformation of the sensible and the recognition of its transcendence – the liberated one sees everything as part of themselves.

Outline of chapters

The thesis is organised in five chapters that draw from a parallel reading of Merleau-Ponty’s and Utpaladeva’s philosophical trajectories. The first chapter entitled *The primacy of perception* attempts to show how but also why an exploration of perception constitutes, for both thinkers, the starting point of their enquiry. Both philosophers assert that the exploration of perception reveals a pre-reflective ground that not only underlies all epistemological processes but also constitutes the source from which these processes emerge. Both Merleau-Ponty and Utpaladeva are eager to recover this primary field and feel compelled to engage in a debate with other philosophers who, in their objectivist or idealist views of the world, seem to systematically and inexcusably overlook. The second chapter entitled *Embodied agency* continues the exploration of perception by focusing on the role of the body. Utpaladeva explores perception not from an individual perspective but from a cosmic one that does not, however, contradict subjective experience. This voluntary ‘exclusion’ of the body from perception, while justified by the monistic nature of Utpala’s thought, may prove challenging for the contemporary reader. Yet, his is not an idealistic account the way Husserl’s is. Advancing a radically phenomenological view of the self, Utpala explains that the nature of the self is awareness but not in the mode of a static, pure luminosity. Utpala’s self has a double aspect: it is *prakāśa,* pure luminosity but also *vimarśa*, self-reflective awareness, *śiva* and *śakti*. As such, it is not an absolute in-itself; rather, it lends itself in experience by making itself perceptible. And while perceptibility may not be explained in terms of the body, it is, nonetheless, described as a ‘bodying’ forth of the self that subtends all subjective experience. In turn, Merleau-Ponty, breaking away from the idealist and empiricist traditions of Western philosophy looks at perception from the standpoint of the embodied subject. His analysis of the role of the body in perception allows us to go beyond the classical objectivist views of embodiment and reconceive the body in its double aspect as both sentient and sensible. Reading Utpala along Merleau-Ponty will show that *vimarśa* is not an intellection but an awareness embedded in the structures of our embodiment; reading Merleau-Ponty along Utpaladeva will offer the opportunity to reconsider the meaning and limits of bodily materiality. The third chapter entitled *The dialectics of the appearing* is inscribed within the line of argument presented in the first two chapters and constitutes an exploration of the relationship between the observer and what is commonly understood as “world”. Both philosophers disagree with the idea of a pre-constituted world and seek to apprehend what is exactly that *appears* in perception. In Merleau-Ponty, the first-person point of view on the world is never a view from somewhere else, because as a perceiver, I remain always defined by the situatedeness of *my* body. The body, through its openness, reveals the world’s spectacle and participates in it and it is through this participation that its ontological significance comes to light. On the other hand, Utpaladeva shows how consciousness manifests itself, unfolding in worlds of experience (*tattva*) till the final stage, the empirical world as we know it, where it takes the forms of subjects and objects of experience. This chapter focuses on the dialectics of appearance in terms of reflection and linguistic determination and aims at revealing the extent to which what we call “world”, discloses the mode of givenness of being. Chapter four, ‘The encounter with the other’, follows closely from chapter three in its exploration of the relationship of the perceiving subject with other perceivers appearing within a unique phenomenal field. This relation is situated on the level of the body and is for both Merleau-Ponty and Utpala, through its routes that the others are encountered through their behavior and gestures, expressions of their subjectivity in the world. The other is firstly perceived as a body, which is not objective but *lived* and marked by the same reversibility as my body. The encounter with the others happens by finding in their bodies a miraculous prolongation of our own intentions taking us outside our bodies and revealing the intra-space as an ontological continuum. Chapter five further explores the ontological configuration of the body, what makes it the locus for the encounter of the individual and the cosmic, the human and the divine. Mainly, it explores the rationale behind the processes discussed in Merleau-Ponty and Utpaladeva leading up to that encounter. An encounter that is needed for flourishing as monads and finding *eudaimonia*. Chapter six juxtaposes the culminating stages of the phenomenological reduction and the self-recognition. By redefining the meaning and role of embodiment as situatedness within a network of ongoing reflections, the two philosophers are called to shed light to an experience of Being that is out of the ordinary and yet very much announced within its structures.

**CHAPTER ONE - THE PRIMACY OF PERCEPTION**

Introduction

The study of perception constitutes a point of departure privileged by both Utpaladeva and Merleau-Ponty. The suitability of the perceptual setting for embarking on a philosophical journey is judged not only based on the sheer familiarity of the reader with it but mainly for constituting the entry point *par excellence* to the reality both philosophers seek to unveil. This exploration gives them the opportunity to challenge established notions about the nature of cognitive experience. More specifically, it enables them to challenge the idealist philosophies of their time and show that the quest for the essence behind the phenomena, for an unchanged field standing separate from existence, is a mere illusion. For Utpaladeva, it is a question of showing that the possibility of ordinary cognitions has its source in an eternal and unchanged substratum, which he calls the ‘self’ (*ātman*). Despite the apparent duality manifest in ordinary cognition, the self as the substratum of experience, reunites in itself all the instances of the cognitive event, that is, the knower, the known, and the means of knowledge; as such, it represents the unmistaken continuity between facts and essences. Faced with the long-standing dualism haunting Western philosophy since Plato, Merleau-Ponty chooses to depart from no other presuppositions than the ones offered by embodied perception itself. Following the routes of perception, he explores the dynamics of the phenomenal field and uncovers a pre-reflective cogito that brings to light an unexpected seer-seen continuum underlυινγ all experience. A joint exploration of the two philosophers aims to show that the essence of things is not beyond their apparent existence but very much embedded within its layers.

1.1.1 The return to the phenomenal

Identifying himself as belonging to the *pratyabhijñā* tradition of Kashmir Śaivism, Utpaladeva proposes a path that is meant to be accessible to everyone as opposed to the chosen few. His aim is not to merely convey a theoretical knowledge of the self. Having himself had the experience of the ultimate reality he attempts to describe, it is his duty towards humanity to lay down a practical path that will help everyone irrespective of creed, gender or caste, attain liberation in the simplest way possible. Utpala’s belief in the effectiveness of a direct approach that does not rely on rigorous discipline and complex physical practices draws from his profound understanding of the nature of the self. All Śaivite thinkers would agree that the self is *Śiva*, that is, the totality of reality as pure acting and perceiving consciousness. However, Utpaladeva views the self in substantially ontological terms as ‘own being’ (*svabhāva*) of every single thing; it is at once every living being’s identity as Śiva and as an individual soul (*jīva*). Following from this, to realise the ultimate reality, we do not need any external means since we can do so by the sole means of our own consciousness. This is further supported by Utpala’s radical, for his times, view of consciousness as both immanent and transcendental. Utpala makes a case for the self that defies the traditional model of a static, inert consciousness. Following the tantric model of the entwined couple of Śiva and His female energy Śakti, consciousness is characterised by a ceaseless activity derived from its power to assume any form at will. Hence, what appears in the phenomenal field is not but the expression of a self-manifesting consciousness. Self-realisation can be attained through the right knowledge of these phenomena. Here, Utpala departs from his predecessors who make no particular reference to the self-manifesting nature of consciousness and show no interest in the phenomenal character of the manifestation. Unlike them, he displays a keen interest in the process and modalities of the appearing making his approach distinctively phenomenological. On this, M. Dyczkowski remarks (1992:38):

*Pratyabhijñā* phenomenology is concerned with the phenomenon of consciousness as that which is directly presented (manifest appearance) and with how it is represented, that is, determinately conceived in such a way that the specific phenomenal consciousness character of each manifestation can be known and understood. For this to be possible, the perceiver like the object perceived, must be localised and finite without this affecting its transcendental universality, which includes within itself all manifestation.

A similar interest is, nonetheless, seen in Merleau-Ponty, who suggests that it is by observing and actively engaging with the flow of perceptual awareness that one can reach the heart of phenomenality. In the light of his claim, perceptual experience is not the preoccupation with an illusory world but the way to finding our centre (PhP:62):

Science and philosophy have for centuries been sustained by unquestioning faith in perception. Perception opens a window on to things. This means that it is directed, quasi-teleologically, towards a *truth in itself* in which the reason underlying all appearances is to be found.

Despite being indebted to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty departs significantly from his ideas striving to reposition the perceiver in the heart of the cognitive experience. Since phenomenology is the study of essences, Husserl is accused of extracting them from their original context (PhP:vii):

Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity’.

Militating for a more existential, Heideggerian approach to the reductive process, Merleau-Ponty states (PhP, preface: xvi): “far from being, as has been thought, a procedure of idealistic philosophy, phenomenological reduction belongs to existential philosophy: Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’ appears only against the background of the phenomenological reduction.” Similarly, his critique of Descartes and Kant aspires to show that ‘extracting’ the subject from its experience of the world in view of tracing in it the conditions of the possibility of this same experience, is an unpardonable philosophical mistake (PhP:56-57):

A complete reform of understanding is called for if we are to translate phenomena accurately; and that to this end the objective thinking of classical logic and philosophy will have to be questioned, the categories of the world laid aside, the alleged self-evidence of realism placed in doubt, in the Cartesian sense, and a true ‘phenomenological reduction’ undertaken.

These first intersections allow us to see that both Utpaladeva and Merleau-Ponty embrace phenomenality and initiate their respective discourses with the formulation of a critical epistemology. It remains to see how they pursue their lines of enquiry and what the implications of their respective pursuits can possibly be.

1.1.2 The primacy of perception

*Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī* begins with the formulation of a critical epistemology that draws on an analysis of ordinary cognitive experience. Utpaladeva’s thought grows out of a concern with explaining the nature of the self. Gaining an insight into the nature of reality, it is meant to lead the reader to the gradual recognition of the powers of the self as they manifest in ordinary experience. The epistemological section of the treatise (*jñānādhikāra*) provides the methodological essentials for the pursuit of a rather practical goal. Utpaladeva announces his aim to outline a path to self-realisation that is not only simple but equally accessible to all, irrespective of their ‘aptitude’ for spiritual life. Abhinavagupta, in his commentary, specifies that this path is destined to ‘all people of slow understanding’.

To begin with, Utpaladeva opens his enquiry by questioning what perception is and what makes it possible. Seeking to establish the existence of the self by providing a proof that is deemed consistent with the rules of philosophical logic, Utpaladeva hosts an imaginary debate with the Indian Buddhist tradition and, more particularly, with its principal representatives: Dignāga (ca.480–540) and Dharmakīrti (ca. seventh century). This is a proof that Utpala aspires to universal intelligibility, which, as D.P. Lawrence points out (1999:38), “is necessary to the system’s simultaneously philosophical and soteriological method.” Buddhists are specifically chosen as opponents since refuting their line of argument will help Utpala establish his beyond any reasonable doubt. The Buddhist philosophers are known for having developed a systematic theory of knowledge with an epistemological project focusing on the idea that perception as a direct mode of cognitive awareness, can serve as ground of evidence for knowledge. Dignāga’s and his successor Dharmakīrti’s epistemological claims draw from Abhidharma literature and revolve, amongst others, around the specific nature of awareness that captures what is like to perceive. In accordance with the principle of momentariness, this awareness is only artificially distinguishable from its object, meaning that what we experience is only a series of momentary cognitions. Abhinava explains the Buddhist doctrine of momentariness in the following words (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 1-2 :20/ Vol.1 p.86):[[2]](#footnote-2)

*ityādirūpeṇa jñānānyeva prakāśante bhinnakāntāni bhinnaviṣayāṇi bhinnakārāṇi ca / tatra nīlasya prakāśaḥ svalakṣaṇābhāsaṃ jñānam svam anyānanuyāyi svarūpasaṃkocabhāji*

It is as it follows:

Cognitions alone shine, associated with different times, objects and forms, such as indeterminate cognitions of jar, determinate cognitions of it, recognition of it, remembrance of it and imagination of it. Indeterminate knowledge of “blue” is that in which the characteristics of the objects of knowledge are cognised as common to nothing else.

According to Dignāga, the object of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) is *svalakṣaṇa;* the object of a cognition that is free of all conceptual constructions (*kalpanāpodha*) (M. Hattori, 1986:79 n.1.14). Its main characteristic, as D.P. Lawrence notices, is that (1999:11) “it is not known in any sort of qualificative *seeing as.”* The first part of the compound, *sva,* means ‘self’ while the second, *lakṣaṇa,* means “defining characteristic” and indicates place, time, and form. Abhinava explains that (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 1-2:20) “‘*sva*’ means not applicable to others, i.e., self-confined. “*Lakṣaṇa”* consists of limitations of time, space and form.” These cognitions could be described as spatio-temporal individuals and unique occurrences that, necessarily, occupy a certain location in space and time, in contrast to a merely imagined object (Yoshimizu, 2004:19), meaning that all we really know is a flux of unique particulars. Although this looks like a very shallow take on perception, C. Coseru explains that Dignāga (2008:535) “shows an honest appreciation of the first-personal stance.” In fact, Dignāga stating (*Pramāṇa-samuccaya* I.11ab) “that cognition has two aspects is [known] from the difference between the cognition of the object and the cognition of that [cognition],” suggests that there is an inextricable connectedness between cognition’s intentional content and its mode of presentation. This is further illustrated in Coseru own words (2008:535):

Dignāga identifies a certain state of cognitive awareness that, while lacking in any conceptual discrimination, is nonetheless inherently reflexive, as the best type of evidential ground there is. Veridical perceptions are thus constitutively self-intimating: that is, they disclose both the objective and subjective aspects of cognitive apprehension.

In the light of Coseru’s clarifications, Dignāga’s account of the mental states does not discredit the subjective character of the experience. Instead, it shows that perceptual awareness is a kind of self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*) that is integral to every cognition validating it, so that one knows that one knows. As Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad aptly explains (2007:56), “the apprehension of cognition is intrinsic to its occurrence in that the cognition takes itself as its own content and requires no second order cognition for an apprehension of its occurrence.” Nevertheless, Buddhists understand this awareness to be transient with each experience rather than a characteristic or activity of an enduring subject (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 1-2,21/ Vol.1 pp. 90-91):

*ahaṃpratītir eva tāvat na ātmā, tasyā api vikalparūpatvāt asthairyācca / etatpratītipratyayo*’*pi nāsti anyaḥ śarīrādeḥ, bhavannapi vā vedyapakṣapatitaḥ syāt ---- iti / tathāpi saṃvitsaṃvedyavyatiriktasya ātmano na siddhiḥ ---- ityetat apiśabdena dyotitam / evaṃ nāsti ātmā saṃvitsaṃvedyatryatirikto dṛśyasya tasyānupalabdheḥ ---- iti*

The I-consciousness itself is not the self, because it is a determinate cognition and it is transitory in its nature. There is nothing different from body etc. which is referred to by this “I-consciousness”. And even if there be, it would be objective in its nature. Thus, no self, different from the cognition and the object hereof, is established...Therefore there is no self, different from the cognition and its object, because it is not experienced as it should be.

Despite their intentional constitution, mental events do not arise from the synergy of attentiveness and object. In fact, the issue with the Buddhist view of self-awareness is its inability to rightfully ‘illuminate’ the cognitions. Coseru explains that the act of seeing (2008:535) “requires that there be objects that are seen (under the right conditions of luminescence), but self-awareness, especially for a Buddhist who is committed to the no-self doctrine, lacks such anchorage.” At this point, Abhinava makes an important contribution to the debate by pointing out that the Buddhist refutation of the self is owed to a misconception of the self’s essential nature. He goes on to explain that Buddhists deny the existence of an eternal self on the mere presupposition that the self is never perceived as such (eternal) (ĪPV JÑ.I,19). Utpaladeva voices their view (ĪPV JÑ.II,1-2:19-20/ Vol. 1 p.85):

*nanu svalakṣaṇābhāsaṃ jñānamekaṃ paraṃ punaḥ ।*

*sābhilāpaṃ vikalpākhyaṃ bahudhā nāpi tad dvayam ।।*

*nityasya kasyacid draṣṭustasyātrānavabhāsataḥ ।*

*ahaṃpratītirapyesā śarīrādyavasāyinī* ।।

The objector says – “Indeterminate cognition has no variety. But the determinate cognition, which admits of linguistic expression, is of many kinds. Neither belongs to an eternal experiencer, because none such is experienced. The I-consciousness has reference only to the body, etc.

Buddhists deny the idea of a self-shining substratum because of the belief that both determinate and indeterminate cognitions are self-shining and are, thus, unrelated to any cogniser other than themselves (ĪPVI JÑ.II,1-2:21). In this, they disagree with Utpaladeva who thinks that a continuous, eternal self that is sentient and self-luminous is the sole cogniser. For the Buddhist philosophers, this cannot be the case because if it were, then the self would have to be known as such in experience - if a self-shining substratum exists, why is it not directly perceptible? Abhinava objects by saying that even if such a perception were actually possible, it would be in the form of a determined cognition. However, the self is beyond all determinate cognition. What is commonly understood as ‘self-awareness’, that is, the certainty of a reflective and discursive “I” that makes its presence felt as “I know, I am certain, I remember this” (*ahaṃ vedmi, niścinomi, smarāmi idam)* (ĪPVI JÑ.II,1-2:21), belongs to the realm of objectivity and, as such, cannot constitute the substratum of any experience. While this can be puzzling for the Western thinker for whom “I-awareness” is the necessary trait of the thinking subject, Śaivite cosmology sees not only the body but also the mind as mere products of nature. Even then, the self, by being at once transcendent and immanent, eternal and temporal, makes itself perceptible through its manifestations. Against the Buddhist view, Utpala concludes that everything we perceive is, in fact, a proof for the existence of an all-luminous self whose presence can be witnessed in all cognitions as their very own substratum. This way, Utpala’s strategic argument renders the Buddhist argument on the non-perceptibility of the self simply meaningless.

1.1.3 The argument from memory

The dialogue with the Buddhists opponents is inscribed within Utpaladeva’s initiative to develop a philosophical discourse that is accessible to a non-specialist audience. Hence, his systematic analysis of ordinary cognitive processes, such as perception and memory, with which everyone is familiar. From a Buddhist perspective, memory as a conscious experience that is similar to perception, displays an instantaneous feature: its phenomenal continuity can be explained through an inbuilt mechanism that continuously integrates past knowledge into constantly emerging moments of awareness. Buddhists claim that a certain memory occurs because a past experience has left a residual trace (*saṃskāra*) that, when awakened by an external factor, brings a past experience into the present awareness. Since the continuity of experience is ensured by constantly integrating traces of past experience into newly emerging moments of awareness, there is absolutely no need for assuming the existence of a continuous self (IPV JÑ.II, 6:24/ Vol.1 p.99):

*tato bhinneṣu dharmeṣu tatsvarūpāviśeṣataḥ* ।

*saṃskārātsmṛitisiddhau syātsmartā draṣṭeva kalpitaḥ* ।।

Though the residual traces be admitted to be different from self, yet, there being no change in the essential nature of self (due to residual traces), remembrance has to be admitted to be due to residual traces. Hence the separate rememberer is a mere supposition just like the doer.

Utpaladeva concedes that the content of memory is determined by the latent impressions of a past experience. However, he also objects that these impressions alone suffice to account for the experience since they themselves would require a supportive matrix. Abhinava further explains (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 5:24): “but the substratum of the latent impression has to be stated. For, the residual trace is a quality and, therefore, needs a substratum. That substratum itself is the self (*ātmā*)” (*nanu tasmaiva saṃskārasya āśrayo vaktavyaḥ, sa hi guṇatvād āśrayamapekṣate, ya āśrayaḥ sa ātmā syāt*). Abhinava concludes to the failure of the Buddhist position to account for the subjective synthesis in memory (*anusaṃdhāna*) and the same is expressed by Utpaladeva (ĪPV JÑ.III,1:32/ Vol.1 p.124):

*satyaṃ kiṃtu smṛtijñānaṃ pūrvānubhavasaṃskṛteḥ* ।

*jātam apyātmaniṣṭhaṃ tannādyānubhavavedakam* ।।

True, but the knowledge, called remembrance, though it arises out of the residual trace of the former experience, yet, being self-confined, it cannot make the former experience known.

Abhinava’s introductory commentary on this verse makes use of analogies of light that encourage the visualization of an otherwise abstract epistemic reality. As such, it helps pointing out the inadequacy of the Buddhist view of memory (*ibid*.) “though remembrance may be admitted to be due to residual trace, yet it cannot illumine the former direct cognition, because luminosity of every cognition is self-confined” (*jñānasya svasaṃvedanarūpatayā anubhavasya smṛtau aprakāśatvaṃ darśitaṃ saṃskārajatve’pi.)* As mentioned before, Buddhists believe that awareness is integral to every cognition, meaning that every cognition is self-luminous. In a stroke of genius, Utpaladeva turns their argument against them. Agreeing that remembrance is self-luminous as it manifests its object -a particular memory - he also observes that its luminosity, despite explaining how we remember, is limited to the illumination of the associated memory and, as such, remains restricted to itself (*ātmanistha*). Since self-awareness remains limited to each individual cognition, the cognitions in themselves do not belong to a continuous consciousness and, therefore, lack connection between them. Precisely because these cognitions are self-confined and lack the power to illuminate each other and, thus, relate to one another, it is impossible for them to realize the synthesis that is necessary for the phenomenon of memory. In Abhinava’s view, the Buddhist argument from self-luminosity, defies the very definition of ‘self-illumination’ since it is the power not to just reveal itself (as a confined cognition does) but to equally make other cognitions manifest. Utpaladeva argues that the Buddhist view implies the lack of connection between various cognitions and thus contradicts the very possibility of practical experience. He says (ĪPV JÑ.III, 6:36/ Vol.1 p.136):

*evamanyonyabhinnānāmaparasparavedinām* ।

*jñānānāmanusaṃdhānajanmā naśyejjanasthitiḥ* ।।

Thus, all human transactions, which originate from unification of various kinds of cognitions, which mutually differ and cannot become one another’s object, will come to an end.

Memory is indispensable for all sorts of cognitive experience. Utpala’s analysis makes a strong case for the existence of an experiencer that persists even after the experience itself has fainted away, an experiencer that is not, however, the empirical subject but the eternal and permanent self (ĪPV JÑ.II, 3:22/ Vol.1 pp.93-94):

*sarvo vyavahāraḥ kriyamāṇo dṛṣṭaḥ ityasau svarūpeṇa anapahnavanīyā satī anubhavasya nāśe kiṃcit avinaṣṭam āvedayati / tadeva ca anubhavakartṛ ---- anubhavitṛrūpam, ātmā anubhāvako nityaḥ.*

All wordly transactions depend on memory. Its being cannot, therefore, be denied. It is, therefore, indicative of the existence of something after the destruction of experience. And that something is the experiencer, the essential nature of which is to experience. That is the permanent experiencing self. This is the whole basis of the proof of the self.

This debate offers Utpaladeva the opportunity to establish in a logical way that the origin of all cognitive activity is to be found in the sentient principle (*saṃvid)*, which is an ‘agentive’ I-consciousness, able to synthesize memories: “The basic freedom of a vibrant, dynamic, agentive I-consciousness is the freedom to add to or subtract from an earlier experience at the time of recollection.” (A.Chakrabarti 2018:295). Furthermore, A.Chakrabarti’s insightful translation of Abhinava’s commentary (2019:228) shows with more clarity how the experience of remembrance reveals the existence of a unified reality (ĪPVI JÑ. VII.2-5):

Only if the external and internal objects such as blue and pleasure etc., carried forth by the mouths of the rivers of separate episodes of awareness, all flow and rest in one single great ocean of consciousness which calls itself “I.” Can they, then, be mutually synthesized and related to each other? Otherwise, how can unconscious material things, or discrete awareness-episodes of them, which remain spatio-temporally limited and insulated inside their own existence, get mutually connected by themselves, because … if the earlier flash of awareness and the later flash of remembering were simply two events separated from one another then there never would be any recall. Hence through memory one unified Knower-Reality is proved.

In conclusion, Utpala affirms that the self is this self-aware subjectivity that epistemically grounds every cognition so that “one is aware that one is aware.” Profiting from the insufficiency of the Buddhist presupposition to establish the self-illuminative nature of cognitions, Utpaladeva makes his case for the self (ĪPV JÑ.IV, 4:45/ Vol.1 p.167):

*naiva hyanubhavo bhāti smṛtau pūrvo’rthavat pṛthak* ।

*prāg anvabūvam aham ityātmārohaṇabhāsanāt* ।।

It is not so. For, the former experience does not shine separately in remembrance as ‘this’, like an object. But it shines as ‘I experienced before’, because the experience shines only because of its resting on the subject.

In his commentary, Abhinava summarises the logic behind Utpaladeva’s response to the Buddhist argument where it is stressed that perception and memory are possible only on the basis of a unitary self (ĪPVI JÑ. III, 7:37/ Vol.1 p.139-140):

*saṃvit tāvat prakāśate iti tāvat na kecit apahnuvate* । *sā tu saṃvit yadi svātmamātraviśrāntā arthasya sā kathaṃ prakāśaḥ? sa hi arthadharma eva tathā syāt; tataśca arthaprakāśaḥ tāvatyeva paryavasita iti galito grāhyagrāhakabhāvaḥ/ ato’rthaprakāśarūpaṃ saṃvidam icchāta balādeva artho’pi tadrūpāntargata eva aṅgīkartavyaḥ*

Of course, nobody denies that the self (*saṃvid*) shines. But if that self be self-confined (be resting within itself), how can it make the object shine (manifest)? But if the objects also be admitted to be essentially self-shining, then, they also being self-confined, the distinction between the perceiver and the perceived will be lost. Therefore, the Buddhists also, desiring to represent *saṃvid* (*vijñāna*) to be the illuminator of the object, have to admit that the object also is included within *saṃvid* itself. But if that manifester of the object be changing every moment (as the Buddhists hold) the remembrance will not be possible. Therefore, *saṃvid* is only one, and as such it includes the whole of the objective world within itself.

1.2.1 Gestalt: the disclosure of the phenomenal field

In *Jñānadhikāra*, Utpaladeva structures his discussion on a series of well-founded arguments that draw from ordinary cognitive processes. Perception and memory are processes we are all familiar with. Yet, viewing them from an a-subjective perspective may lead to the conclusion that these verses contain a series of abstract metaphysical statements having nothing to do with personal experience. It is, as the Buddhist claim, indeed, difficult to accept the existence of a substratum of experience that does not offer itself to perception. As attempts to disclose a pre-reflective ground that is the originating source of cognition, Merleau-Ponty’s accounts of perception and memory constitute, in this case, a valuable point of reference. Given that Merleau-Ponty’s exploration is guided by the latest research in perception taking place in his time, it will be of interest to see how, despite an obvious difference of contexts, he is led to similar conclusions as Utpaladeva.

To begin with, Merleau-Ponty considers perception as the basis of all types of human knowledge. At the same time, he feels compelled to acknowledge that (PhP:67) “nothing is more difficult than to know precisely what we see.” Wishing to (PhP, preface x): “return to the world that precedes knowledge” and aligning with the Gestalt psychologists, Merleau-Ponty criticizes the constancy hypothesis attesting that perception consists of either sensation or judgment. Against empiricism, Merleau-Ponty contends that perception is not a one-to-one correspondence between sensory stimulus and perceptual content (PhP:265): “the constancy hypothesis, which allows to each stimulus one sensation and one only, is progressively less verifiable as natural perception is approached.” While a sensation is supposed to be caused by a sensory stimulus, what we experience in perception is not a series of sensations but a coherent *world.* Moreover, Merleau-Ponty criticizes the intellectualist view of perception that sees perception as a rational judgment. Although intellectualists acknowledge that there is a world and perception is not just a brute confrontation with sense data, they also claim that it is thought or judgment that provide perception with its content. For Merleau-Ponty, however, perception is nowhere close to an act of pure intellection (PhP:54): “here the criticism of the constancy hypothesis reveals that perception is not an act of understanding.” What Merleau-Ponty draws from his critique of both intellectualism and empiricism is that (PhP:3) “traditional analyses miss the phenomenon of perception.” Objecting to the way these philosophers approach perception as a phenomenon that needs to be rationally ‘explained’, Merleau-Ponty points at the fact that if we want to understand perception, we need to keep in mind that perception is an embodied process, and it is precisely because it is embodied that needs to be lived to be understood. Merleau-Ponty wants his philosophical project to be one (PhP:54) “where the philosopher is no longer trying to explain perception, but to coincide with and understand the perceptual process”. Following the Gestalt psychologists, Merleau-Ponty thinks that perception is a complex phenomenon and needs to be understood as such; a closer look at perception reveals (PhP:184) “that no layer of sensory data can be identified as immediately dependent on sense organs: the smallest sensory datum is never presented in any other way than integrated into a configuration and already ‘patterned’.” Merleau-Ponty asserts the priority of the whole to its parts (PhP:9-10): “the apprehension of a quality, just as that of size, is bound up with a whole perceptual context.” This view of a perceptual ‘totality’ puts into question the idea of perception as cognition of a ready-made world, a sum of fragmentary impressions or representations. Instead, (PhP:54) “the return to perceptual experience, in so far as it is a consequential and radical reform” shows that (PhP, preface xii) “perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them.” Hence, in place of an objectivized world that is easily possessed by a mind capable of representation, Merleau-Ponty invites us to see the world as (PhP, preface xii) “the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions” and even more as a field open to self-differentiation (PhP:4): “the perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a ‘field’. A really homogeneous area offering nothing to be cannot be given to anyperception.”

Since the initial pages of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty inscribes his rejection of the constancy hypothesis and the philosophical interrogation following from it, within a series of reductions that are parts of a broader reductionist gesture (PhP:54): “the attack on the constancy hypothesis carried to its logical conclusion assumes the value of a genuine ‘phenomenological reduction’.” His critique of the idealist and empiricist paradigms of perception is Merleau-Ponty’s own way of ‘bracketing’ the world (PhP:62):

The criticism of the constancy hypothesis and more generally the reduction of the idea of ‘the world’ opened up a phenomenal field, which now has to be more accurately circumscribed.

The ‘field’ in question is not to be understood as a real *topos* that comes in a way or another to replace the reality of the external world but in purely epistemological terms as the “unity of perceived objects.”More specifically, in his *Structure of Behaviour,* Merleau-Ponty states (1984:143):

That in the final analysis form cannot be defined in terms of reality but in terms of knowledge, not a thing of the physical world but as a perceived whole, is explicitly recognized by Koehler when he writes that the order in a form ‘rests’ (…) on the fact that each local event, one could almost say ‘dynamically knows’ others*.* It is not an accident that, in order to express this presence of each moment to the other, Koehler comes up with the term ‘knowledge’. A unity of this type can be found only in an object of knowledge (...) This unity is the unity of perceived objects.

It is evident from the above that instead of being a reiteration of Husserl’s idealistic move, Merleau-Ponty’s ‘return to perceptual experience’ (PhP:54), is an existential, Heideggerian recasting of a reduction that is deemed (*ibid*.) “consequential and radical.” What makes his version of the classical reduction ‘existential’ is its new focus on (*ibid*.) “the rediscovery of a direct experience.” Within a radically phenomenological context that aims at laying bare the phenomena (PhP:67), “it is the very notion of the immediate which is transformed” since (*ibid*.) “no longer the impression, the object which is one with the subject, but the meaning, the structure, the spontaneous arrangement of parts.” And it is precisely this “spontaneous arrangement of parts” in perception that makes the distinction between form (whole) and matter (parts) seem rather arbitrary. On this, M.C. Dillon (1971:440) states: “Merleau-Ponty's point is that form and matter are inseparable, as inseparable as parts and whole in a Gestalt-contexture.” This pre-reflective unity, which the Gestalt psychologists understood as (T.Craman, 2009:631), “the *non*conceptual or *pre*logical coherence of perceptual experience,” is the most defining feature of the phenomenal field. But the coherence in question is not an accomplished unity, a perfect adequation of form and content. More specifically, according to the law of *prägnanz,* one ofthe several Gestalt principles of perception, perception is pregnant with its form. For Merleau-Ponty, this means that the perception of the whole (on the background of which the perceptual data organize themselves), is prior to its parts (the perceptual data). Therefore (PhP:340), “we must recognize (...) as anterior to any subsuming of content under form, the symbolical ‘pregnancy’ of form in content.” This ‘priority’ of the content over the form does not introduce a hierarchy or succession of any sort. Instead (PhP:147), “the notion of symbolic pregnancy” refers to a mode of appearing, an emergence of phenomenality that reveals (*ibid*.) “the absolute simultaneity of matter and form.” As such, it needs to be read within the context of an intentional analysis: what we encounter in perception are not just appearances beneath which there is a Being awaiting to be brought to light. What is, instead, encountered in perception is an *appearing* world, a whole in the process of its manifestation. Merleau-Ponty writes (PhP:70):

But although the Gestalt may be expressible in terms of some internal law, this law must not be considered as a model on which the phenomena of structure are built up. Their appearance is not the external unfolding of a pre-existing reason. It is not becausethe ‘form’ produces a certain state of equilibrium, solving a problem of maximum coherence and, in the Kantian sense, making a world possible, that it enjoys a privileged place in our perception; it is the very appearance of the world and not the condition of its possibility; it is the birth of a norm and is not realized according to a norm; it is the identity of the external and the internal and not the projection of the internal in the external.

1.2.2 *Seeing* or remembering?

Within the context of a thorough critique of the established theories of perception, in this case empiricism, Merleau-Ponty proceeds to question the role of memory in perception. More precisely, he questions what seems to be a commonly shared understanding of perception as memory since (PhP:22) “people go on saying that ‘to perceive is to remember’.” In an inquisitive mode, he refers to the proofreader’s illusion commonly explained as follows (*ibid*.): “it is shown that in the reading of a book the speed of the eye leaves gaps in the retinal impressions, therefore the sense-data must be filled out by a projection of memories.” Merleau-Ponty rejects this view of perception in terms of memory and, instead, suggests that (PhP:22) “the *de facto* past is not imported into present perception by a mechanism of association but arrayed in present consciousness itself.” Recalling the autochthonous organization of the phenomenal field, he notices that the patterning of data cannot be the work of mere recollection. It can only be the outcome of an operation that reflects the directedness of perception (PhP: 22):

... The illusion of the proofreader cannot be understood as the fusion of a few elements truthfully read off with memories merging indistinguishably with them. How could the evocation of memories come about unless guided by the look of the strictly visible data, and if it is thus guided, what use is it then, since the word already has its structure or its features before taking anything from the store-house of memory?

Essentially, what Merleau-Ponty suggests, here, is that perceptual offers a firsthand, direct access to the appearing object (as patterning of data) (PhP:22):

Before any contribution by memory, what is seen must at the present moment so organize itself as to present a picture to me in which I can recognise my former experiences. Thus, the appeal to memory presupposes what it is supposed to explain; the patterning of data, the imposition of meaning on a chaos of sense data.

It is further explained that the patterning of data is not the result of a projection of memories, a mere *recollection,* but an instantaneous and active *recognition* (PhP:23):*“*nowhere then does it work from past to present, and the ‘projection of memories’ is nothing but a bad metaphor hiding a deeper, *ready-made recognition.*” This is a recognition of shape and form in the immediacy of the present that (*ibid*.) “cannot result from the recollection of memories but must precede it.” Merleau-Ponty describes this instance of recognition in terms of *seeing*, which is the active arrangement of that which appears in perception. What is more, it is an activity that occurs in the *actual present* of the experience (*ibid*.):

To perceive is not to experience a host of impressions accompanied by memories capable of clinching them; it is *to see*, standing forth from a cluster of data, an immanent significance without which no appeal to memory is possible. To remember is not to bring into the focus of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past; it is to thrust deeply into the horizon of the past and take apart step by step the interlocked perspectives until the experiences which it epitomizes are as if relived in their temporal setting. To perceive is not to remember.

Moreover, the activity of *seeing* presupposes a seer who is actively engaged in the act of perception as this unfolds in real time and as it forms through the structures of their embodiment. This means that the consciousness for which the *gestalt* exists is not a remote, intellectual consciousness but an active, perceptual consciousness (PhP:25):

Like all empiricist theories, this one describes only blind processes which could never be the equivalent of knowledge, because there is, in this mass of sensations and memories, *nobody who sees*, nobody who can appreciate the falling into line of datum and recollection, and, on the other hand, no solid object protected by a meaning against the teeming horde of memories. We must then discard this postulate, which obscures the whole question.

Having explored Utpala’s and Merleau-Ponty’s analyses of perception and memory, we are now in a position to assert that the notions of *totality* and *connectedness* seem to constitute the common kernel of their accounts. Utpaladeva’s debate against Buddhists aims at showing how perception is not the result of a series of episodic cognitions even if these are acknowledged to be self-intimate (*svasaṃvedana*). Utpala suggests that perception is possible because there is an underlying and ever present self-luminous ground that provides a connecting link to all episodic cognitions; this is the self. And it is only by accepting the existence of a permanent self that the interrelation of cognitions can be justified. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, through his critique of the constancy hypothesis, formulates the concept of the phenomenal field that constitutes the substratum of all cognitions. Both philosophers bring to light an original ground (the self/the phenomenal field) from which all cognitions are seen to arise, a field that is not the result of appearances but the *reason* for them. What is more, both philosophers imply that an access to this primary ontological milieu is granted not in the recesses of a transcendental consciousness but in the immediacy of experience that philosophy has conveniently chosen to ignore. In advocating the directedness of experience, they both seek to uncover the workings of an awareness ‘in’ the present, that is, perception as actually *lived* and not as reduced to the thought of it. Finally, both thinkers seem to suggest that the substratum of all experience is endowed with a sort of ultimate causal power that is not limited to bringing the said ‘phenomena’ into being.

1.3.1 The imperceptible knower

In the first part of this chapter, we saw how Utpaladeva and Merleau-Ponty challenge views of perception originating within their respective philosophical traditions. These views are judged not only inadequate but gravely misleading due to the fact that they overlook the instrumental role of perception in disclosing a ground of experience that is primary to all cognitive processes. This, they both believe, results from an inadequate understanding of the constituents of the knowledge relationship and, more specifically, of the identity and the role of the seer within this relationship. Following their critique, the two thinkers are ready to articulate their own respective theses on the nature of the perceptive/cognitive experience and the role in it of the knowing subject. These are theses that are meant to stir a lot of reflection.

To begin with, Utpaladeva starts by declaring that what we refer to as the ‘knowing subject’ is not a given person. It is not the individual knower, as we may commonly think, but the selfshining amidst its manifestations.. This view of *the self as seer* is first made popular in the Upaniṣads where it expresses the idea of an innermost principle of awareness is indistinguishable from the first principle of the universe. According to this early view, the knower of ordinary cognitions is not the embodied subject, the one who physically *sees*. In *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upaniṣad (I.4.7), we read: “perception and the like have for their object only the particular form (the apparent self) that It takes owing to Its being the support of Its limiting adjunct (mind).” Other passages from *śruti* reveal that “one cannot see the seer of sight” (III. iv. 2)” and that it is “is thy soul, that is within all” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upaniṣad 3.4). For Utpaladeva, proving that the embodied self is not the ultimate seer is instrumental in establishing that ‘sentiency’ belongs to the substratum of our existence, that is, the self and only by association to its manifestations, that is the body, the mind and the intellect. On this, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upaniṣad states (*ibid*.):

'Through what, O Maitreyi, should one know the knower?' (II.iv.14; IV.v.IS) and 'It is never known, but is the Knower' (III.viii.II). show that the consciousness in question is not of the Self, but that such perceptions as that one is happy or miserable, concern only the reflection of the Self in limiting adjuncts like the intellect, for in the perrception, 'I am this,' the subject is metaphorically spoken of as co-ordinate with the object (body). Besides, any other self is refuted by the statement. 'There is no other witness but This' (III. viii. II). Happiness or misery, being related to parts of the body, are attributes of the object.

Within the context of Utpala’s debate with Buddhists, the central prerequisite for unifying the episodic cognitions is that the self is endowed with sentiency, that is, possesses inherently the power to ‘cognize’. On a more practical level, this means that what qualifies the self as the substratum of all experience is its capacity or power to illuminate the objects of cognition and make them appear, manifest. To establish this idea beyond all logical doubt, Utpala argues against the Sāṃkhya philosophers who, contrary to him, claim that the self is insentient and

cognition is a property of the intellect or *buddhi* (ĪPVI JÑ.I,1:12/ Vol.1 p.55):

*sāṃkhyo'pi viṣayāvabhāsanarūpaṃ jñānaṃ buddhidharmamicchan ātmānaṃ vastuto jaḍameva upaiti ; na ca jaḍātmā svātmanyapi durlabhaprakāśasvātantryaleśaḥ kiṃcit sādhayituṃ niṣeddhuṃ vā prabhaviṣṇuḥ pāṣāṇa iva*

Sāṃkhya, also, in holding the cognition (*jñāna*) the nature of which is to illumine objects, to be a quality of the *buddhi*, really declares the self to be insentient. And an insentient self, which can hardly shine itself independently, cannot, like a stone, prove or disprove anything.

For the Sāṃkhya philosophers, *buddhi* is one of the twenty-five *tattva* or cosmic elements. It stands for the principle of reflective discrimination through the activity of which all things are known, classified or understood. In the account of experience as described in the *Sāṃkhya Kārikās*, the sense organs present their objects to *buddhi* that is thereby modified. *Buddhi* is described as ‘*adhyavasyaḥ’* that, translated into English, means ‘determination’ or ‘ascertainment’. It is a kind of matrix for mental states, but not just a container; it is characterised by what may be called intentionality or objectivity. Mental states are referred by it to something other than themselves - either perceived objects in the outside world or actions in the world. Despite these characteristics, *buddhi* is seen as a modification of material nature or *prakṛti* and, thus, insentient or unconscious, *acetana*. This is a view that may, understandably, surprise the Western thinker, who is used to apprehending consciousness in terms of the mind. However, as L.Biernacki explains (2014:770): “what a contemporary Western scientist might understand as “mind”, “awareness” or “consciousness”, is, to the contrary, from an Indian perspective relegated to the level of mere materiality.” For the Sāṃkhya thinkers, the perceptual objects are only seen and the feelings only experienced by the *puruṣa*, the individual soul viewed as a passive witness. Nevertheless, if *buddh*i belongs to the created universe, *Sāṃkhya* claims*,* then it is untenable to claim that (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 8a:26) “*buddhi* is capable of receiving reflection” because of its constitutional clarity (the predominance of *sattva*) or that it “assumes the form of external object.” Abhinava explains why (ĪPVI JÑ. II, 8a:26/ Vol.1 p.107):

*sukhaduḥkhamoha rūpatayā bhogyatvāt jaḍam iti darpaṇavat aprakāśam / na ca bhogyasya aprakāśasya*

*tadviruddhabhoktṛtārūpaprakāśātmakasvabhāvasaṃbhavo yuktyanupātī iti tadvilakṣaṇena bhoktrā bhavitavyam / sa ca prakāśaḥ ----ityetāvatsvabhāvaḥ , svabhāvāntaraṃ hi aprakāśarūpaṃ bhogyaṃ kathaṃ bhoktuḥ svabhāvatayā saṃbhāvyeta*

Both *prakṛti* and *buddhi* are insentient because *sattva* etc. (the qualities or *guṇa* constituting them), being essentially of the nature of pleasure, pain and ignorance are in themselves objects of experience. An experiencer, therefore, who is different from *buddhi*, has to be admitted, because it does not stand to reason to admit *buddhi*, which is an object of experience and, therefore, without luminosity, to be an experiencer, which is its opposite and is characterized by self-luminosity. For, how can the objectivity, which is of an opposite nature and lacks self-luminosity, be possibly supposed to be the essential nature of the experiencer.

Amongst the three modes of existence(*guṇa*), *sattva* as the quality of serenity, goodness, and peacefulness is the purest - the other two being *rajas* (passion, activity) and *tamas* (chaos, darkness). As the purest of the three, *sattva* is drawn to knowledge, which allows the Sāṃkhyas to argue that *buddhi,* thanks to the predominance of *sattva* in it, receives the reflection of the self-luminous self (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 8a:26/ Vol.1 pp.108-109):

*Prakāśapratibimbaparigrahamahimopanataprakāśāveśabuddhi-tattvāveśitapratibimbakanīlādyarthaparyantasaṃkrānteḥ prakāśāveśasya arthaḥ prakāśate iti siddho vyavahāraḥ / tadevaṃ jñānaṃ jaḍabuddhitattvāvyatirekāt jaḍamapi citpratibimbayogāt viṣayasya prakāśaḥ ---- iti*

The experiencer, however, is different from the reflection, the thing that casts it and the *buddhi tattva*, on which it is cast, and is unrelated to them. How can he then illumine the object? Therefore, (it has to be admitted that) *buddhi* itslef, because of its crystalline purity, receives the reflection of the self-luminous self also. Thus, the objects become manifest to self-luminous subject (reflected in *buddhi*) when he comes in touch with external object, which also is reflected on the *buddhi tattva*, on which his own luminosity is reflected, because it (*buddhi*) is capable of receiving the reflection of subjective luminosity.

Utpaladeva argues that if this were the case, it would be also necessary to acknowledge that *buddhi* is in itself sentient (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 8b:27): “thus, the *buddhi* shall have to be admitted to be sentient. For, in that which is insentient there cannot be the capacity of making others manifest” (*ajaḍā saivaṃ jāḍye nārthaprakāśatā*). With the help of a powerful metaphor, Abhinava steps in to demonstrate the hollowness of the Sāṃkhyan theory of reflection (ĪPVI JÑ.II,8b:27/ Vol.1 pp.109-110):

*caitanyapratibimbayoge yadi tāvat tatpratibimbakamapi mukhyaṃ prakāśarūpameva na bhavati, tenāpi na kiṃcit kṛtaṃ syāt, na hi pratibimbatavahnipuñja ādarśo dāhyaṃ dahet / atha mukhyaprakāśarūpameva tatpratibimbakam, tat tarhi buddheravyatiriktam iti mukhyaprakāśarūpaiva buddhirjātāiti / yato viruddhadharmādhyāsāt bhīrubhiḥ etat kalpitam / sa eva punaḥ jājvalyamānaṃ nijam ojo jṛmbhayati, tataśca sā buddhireva cinmayī syāt, kiṃ puruṣeṇa*

If, in consequence of the contact with the reflection of the sentient, that, on which the self-luminous subject is reflected, does not itself become sentient, the reflection will serve no purpose. For the mirror on which the heap of fire is reflected, cannot burn anything. But if you say that, on which reflection falls, becomes essentially the same as the original luminosity.

This way, Abhinava turns the opponents’ argument against them and manages to show that Utpala’s theory of reflection has been formulated precisely to avoid conferring sentiency to the intellect. If this theory held true, then we would also have to admit that *buddhi* is sentient (ibid.) “for, in that which is insentient there cannot be the capacity of making others manifest.” Being a modification of *prakṛti* and one of the three inward sense organs - the other two being the ego (*ahaṃkāra*) and the mind (*manas*) – it is not possible for *buddhi* to be endowed with sentiency. What is more, Abhinava argues, even if we accept that *buddhi -* which, let us not forget, is a modification of nature – is sentient, then we will also have to accept that it is eternal. But if we accepted that *buddhi* as a creation of nature is sentient, then what we call ‘sentient’ could not be eternal (because *buddhi* is not). This, in turn, would lead to the conclusion that there is no eternal self with the power to cognize (because its power as a *seer* is derived from its permanence over time) and, hence, the self’s reflection of its power on *buddhi* would be impossible (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 8b:27-28/Vol.1 pp.109-110). This way, Abhinava manages to subvert the Sāmkhyan argument and establish that the self is the only sentient knower, the only *seer* on account of its all-luminosity; it does not receive its light from any source other than itself. Abhinava concludes the debate by stating (*ibid*.): “Therefore *jñāna* alone is. Its essential nature is to make the objects manifest” (*yasya jñānaṃ nāma śaktiḥ syāt iti jñānamātrameva asti*).

1.3.2 Evaluating the Cartesian cogito

Utpala’s critique of the *Sāṃkhya* view is essentially an attack to a resolutely dualist view of reality. The *Sāṃkhya Kārikās* maintain the spirit-matter division by distinguishing between many selves (*puruṣa*) whose essence is pure consciousness and matter (*prakṛti*) that is constituted of the three *guṇas* (qualities). This leads to a view of the self as a passive witness *(sākṣin)* and as a non-agent (*akartā*) that evidently opposes Utpala’s depiction of the selfas a dynamic compound of light and energy, *śiva* (pure consciousness) and *śakti* (creative energy). Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty’s first step towards recasting the phenomenological reduction is his rejection of all dualistic frameworks of experience, first and foremost Descartes’. In his *Second Meditation*, Descartes shows how everything that appears to us should be understood in the mode of thinking; although there can be no certainty about the fact that we perceive, we can, nonetheless, be certain of the *thought* that we perceive. In other words, we cannot be sure whether we perceive or not but we can be sure that we think we perceive. Merleau-Ponty finds in Descartes’ apprehension of the *cogito* a certainty of existence and of thought that turns perception from an essentially lived experience to a lifeless representation. Linda Williams notices that (1990:104) “this model of perception has the self creating the perception, which it then projects out to the world,” thereby, dissimulating the lived aspect of the perceptual experience. In his *Replies to the Sixth Set of Objections*, Descartes claims that there is an internal awareness of thought and existence within us that is prior to the reflective judgement of the cogito. Merleau-Ponty finding Descartes’ repression of the actual perceptual momentum quite distressing and rather unnatural, states (PhP:432):

To revert with Descartes from things to thought about things is to take one of two courses: it is either to reduce experience to a collection of psychological events, of which the *I* is merely the overall name or the hypothetical cause, in which case it is not clear how my existence is more certain than that of any thing, since it is no longer immediate, save at a fleeting instant; or else it is to recognize as anterior to events a field and a system of thoughts which is subject neither to time nor to any other limitation, a mode of existence owing nothing to the event and which is existence as consciousness, spiritual act which grasps at a distance and compresses into itself everything at which it aims, an ‘I think’ which is, by itself and without any adjunct, an ‘I am’.

As far as Merleau-Ponty is concerned, the main issue with the Cartesian model of perception is that it dissimulates the very act of ‘seeing’. In L.Williams’ words (1990:104):

If perception is whatever the self thinks it is, then "seeing" and "'thought of seeing" are identical in meaning. Any distinction Descartes hopes to make by his shift is lost when "seeing" and "thought of seeing" mean the same thing, as they do in this model of perception.

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that the certainty of self-knowledge is in the thoughts we have about things and suggests that the only certainty the perceiving subject has comes from its direct contact with the world. The contradictory nature of Descartes’ argumentation is brought forth when finding itself weighed not against the atemporal, reflective cogito but the pre-reflective experience that emerges within the phenomenal field (PhP:430):

It is, in short, in so far as I do not merely encounter the tree, am not simply confronted with it, but discover in this existent before me a certain nature, *the notion of which I actively evolve*.

Perception is described in Merleau-Ponty as participation in the constitution of meaning of what is seen. It is a process of *re-cognition* arising from the subject’s embodied encounter with the things and not from the constitution of these things in the mind. This view of perception as embodied unveils a power of knowing that is co-extensive with the power of existing (PhP:430):

The fact that I am capable of recognizing it is attributable to my actual contact with the thing, which awakens within me a primordial knowledge of all things, and to my finite and determinate perceptions’ being partial manifestations of a power of knowing which is coextensive with the world and unfolds it in its full extent and depth.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty is yet to formulate the notion of the “power of knowing which is coextensive with the world” and to analyse its ontological bearings. Despite this, he advocates the existential rootedness of self-awareness (PhP:432):

At the root of all our experiences and all our reflections, we find, then, a being which *immediately recognizes itself*, because it is its knowledge both of itself and of all things, and which knows its own existence, not by observation and as a given fact, nor by inference from any idea of itself, but through direct contact with that existence. *Self-consciousness is the very being of mind in action*. The act whereby I am conscious of something must itself be apprehended at the very moment at which it is carried out, otherwise it would collapse. Therefore, it is inconceivable that it should be triggered off or brought about by anything whatsoever; it must be *causa sui*.

In what concerns the ways in which Utpaladeva’s critique of Sāṃkhya and Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Descartes may enrich each other, one can start by observing that they both oppose quite strongly dualist views of perception. These are views that attribute perception to an intellect that is cut off the ground on which perception takes place. From a methodological point of view, the two thinkers, choose not to just oppose their opponents but turn their arguments against them by showing their internal contradictions and then using these same arguments in their favor. Utpala shows that if *buddhi* is the seer then ithas to be eternal. However, as a product of nature, it is not, which makes the self the only possible seer. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, shows that self-awareness is not the attribute of a distant mind but “the very being of mind in action*.*”

1.3.3 The luminous self

While Merleau-Ponty’s strives to articulate a notion of awareness that is free from all conceptual dichotomies, he continues, nonetheless, to employ intellectualist terms (i.e., “self-consciousness is the very being of mind in action”). As a result, the same formulations that aim at harmonizing the opposites seem to paradoxically perpetuate them. Abhinava’s critique of Sāṃkhya, on the other hand, leaves us with a reformed view of cognition: “therefore *jñāna* alone is” (ĪPVI JÑ.II, 8:27). In his concept of awareness as ‘luminosity’ pointing to the continuous flow of awareness free from all conceptual divides, D.P. Lawrence notices the influence of Advaita Vedānta that (1999:45):

developed one of the important themes of the Upaniṣads into their classic doctrine of self-luminosity (*svaprakāśatva*). According to this doctrine, the Self knows itself in an atemporal awareness that lacks the subject-object dichotomy and conceptualisation (*vikalpa*) inherent in the normal operations of the means of cognition.

*Jñāna* as the very essence of cognition is self-luminous (*prakāśa*), “a ‘bare subjective awareness’ that validates each cognition, so that one knows that one knows” (D.P.Lawrence,1998:200). In Ram-Prasad’s words (2001:4): “The occurrence of cognition (*jñāna*) is registering by the subject of what it is undergoing; it is a “continuous stream of cognition” (*dhārāvāvahikajñānam*).” The standard metaphor for consciousness is “luminosity” (*prakāśata*) and Torella (2002:xxiii) describes *prakāśa* as “the motionless cognitive light that constitutes the basic fabric, the founding structure of reality, of the ‘given’ .” The idea of self-luminosity reveals the interdependence of the objects of perception with the awareness that reveals them since no objects are experienced outside its realm. This means that luminosity is not simply ‘subjectivity’ but subjectivity and objectivity at once. This epistemic claim is informed by the idea that the phenomenal ground from which all cognitions arise is a self-manifesting consciousness. It is this consciousness that manifests at once as the subject, the means and the object of cognition. In this sense, even if there is perception of external objects, cognition is possible only on the assumption that these are *internal* to and draw their existence from the self (ĪPVI JÑ.V,1:55/ Vol.1 p.196):

*vartamānāvabhāsānāṃ bhāvānāmavabhāsanam* ।

*antaḥsthitavatāmeva ghaṭate bahirātmanā* ।।

The external shining (as separate from the perceiver of the objects, which are directly perceptible), can be logically possible only on the supposition of their being present within (the self).

An object of knowledge, although *syntactically* separate from the knowing subject, remains intertwined with it since both the known object and the knowing subject are manifestations of a single luminosity. Abhinava explains (ĪPVI JÑ.V, 3:58/ Vol.1 p.208):

*evamātmanyasatkalpāḥ prakāśasyaiva santyamī* ।

*jaḍāḥ* *prakāśa evāsti svātmanaḥ*  *svaparātmabhiḥ* ।।

Thus, these insentient objects are as good as non-existent in themselves. They are manifestations of the light of the self, which alone shines both as the subject and the object.

Although Utpala asserts axiomatically the non-dual nature of awareness, he is able to account for the epistemic distance without falling into contradictions. He does so by tracing the origin of the perceived within the all-luminous realm of consciousness (ĪPVI JÑ.V, 1:55/ Vol.1 p.196-197):

*vartamānatvena sphuṭatayā avābhasanam idamityevamākāraṃ yeṣāṃ teṣām*

*yadetat“bahirātmanā”*

*kalpitamāyīyaśūnyādiśarīrānta pramātṛpṛthagbhāvena*

*hetunā ‘bhinnānām tato māyāpramātuḥ* *vicchinnānām ‘avabhāsanam’ tat*

*paramārthapramātari śuddhacinmaye ‘āntaḥsthitavatām’ tena saha ekātmyam*

*anujjhitavatām* *eva ‘ghaṭate’ pramāṇena upapadyate tena anujjhitasaṃvidabhedasya bhāvasya kalpitaramātrapekṣayā*

*bhedena prakāśanaṃ* *bhagavato jñānaśaktirityuktam bhavati*

The shining of objects - which are directly, clearly cognised as “this”, as separate from the individual subject, because of their having been separated from the individual subjects, beginning with *śūnya* and ending with body, which are creations of *māyā*, is logically possible only if they be admitted to be within the true subject, who is essentially pure self-luminosity; i.e. if they still retain their essential identity with the universal subject. Hence, it follows that the Supreme Lord’s power of knowledge consists in manifesting the object, which still *retains its identity with the Universal subject*, as separate from the created limited subject.

Abhinavagupta (ĪPVI JÑ.V,11:70) explains that what constitutes the sentiency of consciousness is not just the power to *connect with* the objects of cognition or to *fall and* *reflect on* the external objects as if they were distinct from it. It lies mainly in its power to manifest them as objects of perception within a monistic albeit relational framework. Every instance of perception is also an instance of manifestation with the light of consciousness shining forth to make the object(s) manifest in the perceptual field. Most importantly, manifestation would not be possible if objective awareness were different form its subjective counterpart. Abhinava explains this monistic paradox (ĪPVI JÑ.V, 11:70/ Vol.1 p.241-242):

*ātha āvabhaso yato*’rthasya *saṃbandhī,* tato na ja*ḍaḥ* tarhi *saṃbandhamātreṇa mṛt āpi gaṭasya iti ajaḍā syāt । atha na āpi tu svasaṃbandhamātram api tu āvabhaso’rthasya prakāśaḥ, tarhi arthātmanā* sa prakāśa iti samāpatitam *।* na ca anyātmanā anyasya prakāśa upapann*aḥ* *।*

But if it were to be said that the light is sentient; because it is connected with object; (the reply is that if mere relation with something be sufficient to call a thing sentient) why then not call clay also sentient because of its connection with the jar? But if it is not only connection with the objects that constitutes sentiency but also making them manifest, then it follows that the light of consciousness is manifest as object. For, it is not reasonable to hold that one who is essentially different from the other is the manifester of it.

For Abhinavagupta, the proof for the existence of a sentient self lies not in casting its luminosity on the objects of experience and thus making them visible - this would make the self a separate entity and the objects of cognition external to it. He attempts to explain that in every act of perception, in every instance that an object enters the perceptual field, it is the self that has made itself manifest in order to make the object manifest (ĪPVI JÑ.III, 2:33/ Vol.1 p.127):

*satyapi bāhye taaccharīrasaṃkrāntaṃ na prakāśanaṃ jñānasya rūpaṃ bhavitumarhati, paraprakāśanātmakanijarūpaprakāśanam eva hi svaprakāśatvaṃ jñānasya bhaṇyate* *।*

Even if there be external objects, still the luminosity (of *jñāna*), as falling or reflected on the forms of external objects, cannot be rightly maintained to be the essential nature of cognition (*jñāna*). For, self-luminosity of cognition consists in making itself so manifest as to make others also manifest (and not casting its light on another and shining in another).

It is precisely in this ability of awareness to illuminate various objects and make them manifest that Abhinavagupta finds the proof for its unitary nature (ĪPVI JÑ.V,11:70/ Vol.1 p.241):

*iha avabhāsasya prakāśasya, anavabhāsasya ca aprakāśasya ghaṭādeḥ*

*parasparaparihāreṇa dvayoḥ svātmani cet vyavasthānam, tat ghaṭapaṭayoḥ*

*iva idam ajaḍam idam jaḍam iti durupapādaṃ vailakṣaṇyam*

Here if both the light of consciousness or *prakāśa*, and what is different from it, i.e. not-self-manifest, e.g. jar, etc. exist in mutual isolation and rests within themselves, it would be impossible to point one out as sentient as distinct from the other, which is insentient, as in the case of jar and cloth independently of the light of consciousness.

At the same time, the very possibility of the existence of another knower outside one’s own awareness is refuted since “the objective aspect of consciousness is not essentially different from the subjective” (ĪPVI JÑ.V,4-5:62). D.P. Lawrence explains that (1999:26) “the argument is based on the analytical fact that we can only be aware of that of which we are aware. For this reason, it is held to be impossible for there to be an object outside of awareness. An object is nothing but the awareness of it.” Since there is nothing external to consciousness, an object is nothing more than an occurrence within the vast field of awareness. Abhinava concludes (ĪPVI JÑ.I, Introduction, p.3): “In this world whatever enters into consciousness is a mere manifestation of the self.” Whereas Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that there is an *écart* between the perceiver and the perceived, he also believes that cognition is possible simply because the subject and the object are made of the same ontological texture (PhP: 435-436): "perception and the perceived have the same existential modality." While Utpaladeva sets off on his philosophical journey relying on the idea that the self is the ground of all phenomenal experience, Merleau-Ponty strives to reach the source of all perceptual processes. At the same time that his analysis of perception leads him to intuit the unity of the perceiver and the perceived restricted as he is by the categories of Western thought, Merleau-Ponty admits that he is yet to discover the *milieu* permitting the thought of their synchronous genesis (PhP: 225):

The unity of either the subject or the object is not a real unity, but a presumptive unity on the horizon of experience. We must rediscover, as anterior to the ideas of subject and object, the fact of my subjectivity and the nascent object, that primordial layer at which both things and ideas come into being.

1.3.4 The tacit cogito

The critique of the Cartesian cogito aims at showing how perceptual experience takes place in an unreflective modality. Merleau-Ponty’s effort to escape from the grip of thought is inscribed within his attempt to highlight the directedness of experience that is only conceivable in the absence of an intellectual mediation. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty proposes a revised reading of the cogito, this time as the ground of the unreflective, the *irréflechi*. He suggests that (PhP:215) “every perception takes place in an atmosphere of generality and is presented to us anonymously.” M.Dilon sees in this claim to anonymity an effort to liberate the cogito from the grips of the reflective ‘I’ in view of restoring to it its spontaneity (1988:400):

The point is that the "I" which emerges only with reflection is absent from perceptual engagement in the world rendering that experience anonymous or general: the phenomenon presences itself to anyone who would witness it. This is consciousness at the foundational level. Other modes of consciousness - reflection, deliberation, predication, hallucination, dreaming, etc. - are founded upon it.

In this context, the cogito’s certainty is no more derived from a reduction of perception to the thought of it. Instead, it springs from the sheer act of existing. Merleau-Ponty calls this new cogito "tacit" or "mute": it is a non-discursive, self-reflective, thoroughly intimate awareness that is unmediated by thought or speech (PhP:469): "behind the spoken cogito, the one which is converted into discourse ... there lies a tacit cogito, myself experienced by myself.'' As for the reasons that led him to revise the classical concept of the cogito, Merleau-Ponty says that (PhP:223): “the essential insight is not found among the words themselves, but to what they allude". Moreover (*ibid.),* “it is not because I think I am that I am certain of my existence; on the contrary, the certainty I enjoy concerning my thoughts stems from their genuine existence.'' By introducing the idea of the *tacit* cogito, Merleau-Ponty focuses on uncovering the awareness that is in action in the immediacy of the perceptual event. The problem with Descartes, as Merleau-Ponty sees it, is not exactly the distinction he makes between the act and the thought of it, between ‘I see an ashtray’ and ‘I think I see an ashtray’. Rather, it is the certainty he attributes to the thought of seeing over the actual *seeing*. L.Williams notes (1990:109):

For Merleau-Ponty, the actual act is primary and the thought of the act derivative, dependent upon the act itself: existing is prior to any thought about existence. When Merleau-Ponty shifts the certainty of the Cogito to the tacit Cogito, rather than the Cartesian expressed Cogito, Descartes' major problems with his Cogito disappear.

The *tacit* cogito, nevertheless, seems to defy the very notion of self-awareness traditionally attributed to the thinking subject; it is, indeed, quite difficult to think of a conscious subject that is not aware of itself. But what Merleau-Ponty tries to avoid, here, is not so much the idea of consciousness itself as the attribution of a constituting agency to it. This is not without some serious drawbacks that Merleau-Ponty seems to, nonetheless, acknowledge (PhP: 471):

Such formulations may appear puzzling: if ultimate subjectivity cannot think of itself the moment it exists, how can it ever do so? How can that which does not think take to doing so? And is not subjectivity made to amount to a thing or a force, which produces its effects without being capable of knowing it? We do not mean that the primordial I completely overlooks itself. If it did, it would indeed be a thing, and nothing could cause it subsequently to become consciousness. We have merely withheld from it objective thought, a positing consciousness of the world and of itself. What do we mean by this? Either these words mean nothing at all, or else they mean that we refrain from assuming an explicit consciousness, which duplicates and sustains the confused grasp of primary subjectivity upon itself and upon its world.

The conceptual impasses ensuing from the idea of the *tacit* cogito will constitute the driving force behind the notion of reversibility as this is developed in *The Visible and the Invisible*. It needs to be acknowledged that it is through his critique of Descartes and his subsequent reconceptualization of the cogito that Merleau-Ponty paves the way towards unveiling a pre-reflective dimension of experience. Utpaladeva, on his part, sees the self as a mass of undifferentiated light: “to shine” is to bea self-revealing luminosity that is primary to any form of determination related to the use of language. Abhinava distinguishes between the determinate awareness of the individuated self and the pre-personal or pre-reflective awareness of the infinite self. I. Kuznetsova notices (2012:348): “… it is *ātman* that is responsible for pre-reflective proprioceptive awareness and for cross-modal perception or synchronic coordination of inputs from different senses.” As the activity of “shining” belongs to the self, ultimately, it is only the self that can be referred to as the ‘subject’. And yet, the ‘subjectiveness’ of the self is understood more effectively in terms of a *process* rather than of a posited entity. L.Biernacki explains in more detail (2014:777):

Despite the use of the term *ātman*, Abhinavagupta carefully avoids reifying consciousness into a soul or self, no doubt, influenced by earlier Buddhist thinkers, preferring instead verbal nouns, like “prakāśamānatayā”, indicating a state or process of shining, and “*ahaṃbhāva*, “the feeling of I” rather than a substantive entity. Even with *ātman,* which already occurs in the Spanda Kārikā that he quotes, he himself prefers the abstractive form, *ātmatā*, indicating a state or condition of self, rather than an entity.

Utpaladeva’s attempt to reach an understanding of “*prakāśamānatayā*”, the “process of shining” is analogous to Merleau-Ponty’s effort to relocate the cogito back into existence. To a certain extent, Utpala’s displacement of the seat of subjectivity from the mind or the body to the self, corresponds to Merleau-Ponty’s transposition of the cogito to the realm of the pre-reflective preceding all identification with either the body or the mind. R. Lanigan helps us to advance this correspondence a bit further (1991:149): “the pre-reflective cogito is the awareness that is destroyed in the knowledge of “myself” that then leads to the knowing of “myself as psyche”. It is the existence prior to the primordiality of corporeal awareness.” In both cases, the place sought lies in the heart of existence, the center from where all that is, emanates.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Utpaladeva’s and Merleau-Ponty’s engagement with other thinkers of their times in an effort to reach a new understanding of what constitutes the substratum of all cognitive experience. This effort has been inspired by the belief that a close mapping of the empirical territory can demonstrate that the seemingly dissociated instances of the subjective and objective poles of experience are not, in fact, dissociated. The benefit of such a discovery will not just lie in the challenge of idealist and empiricist philosophies. It will lie in the uncovering of a unitary realm of experience from where all experience springs, one that gives rise to the polymorphic matrix of the perceptual. This quest is bound to challenge the presupposition that the knower is a transcendental, dispassionate consciousness that surveys the world from above. Clearly, the study of perception in both Utpaladeva and Merleau-Ponty is an attempt to escape this timeless myth. Interestingly, both thinkers attempt to demonstrate that the real subject of perception is not a well circumscribed ‘I’ placed most favorably in front of an objective reality, but an a-subjective activity of ‘knowing’ emerging within a pre-reflective *milieu*. For Utpala, this milieu corresponds to the self that reunites in itself all the instances of the cognitive relationship, the knower the known and the means of knowledge. In Merleau-Ponty, it is the *tacit cogito,* a pre-reflective unity preceding all determination. One may wonder whether the two philosophers have a somewhat similar impact. In his effort to establish the existence of an eternal self, Utpala follows a centuries-old philosophical tradition that does offer, amongst others, a view of the self in these exact terms. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, formulates the idea of the *tacit* cogito as a response to the Cartesian cogito. In this, as Renaud Barbaras suggests and as Merleau-Ponty will later acknowledge, he remains, to a considerable extent, indebted to the duality he seeks to overcome – it is still question of a ‘cogito’ albeit tacit. Nevertheless, a joint reading of Utpala and Merleau-Ponty challenges all idealist perspectives by revealing a pre-reflective milieu that challenges our fragmentary view of reality and the classical division between facts and essences. But, in what way do the self or the tacit cogito point at a pre-reflective unity? In what way, to be more specific, is this type of ‘unity’ different from the *in-itself* totality of a transcendental consciousness? Is it only different by its presupposed topology as being ‘underlying’, instead of being ‘above’?

What, first and foremost, differentiates the role of the self in perception from that of a passive witness is its illuminating *activity*: Utpala refers to the self in procedural terms, as an illuminator in the *process of shining,* and not as a static light deprived of reflection. Similarly, despite its limitations, the *tacit* cogito is not an undercover cogito but an *activity* that reveals the *kinesthetic* origins of perception. In both cases, it seems that the pre-reflective points directly to the somatic. Following this lead, the next chapter will attempt to show how perception is best understood when described in bodily terms: between the body *forgotten* and the body *lived* there is a whole new world of correspondences that awaits to be discovered.

CHAPTER TWO-EMBODIED AGENCY

Introduction

Utpala’s criticism of Sāṃkhya allows him to assert the primacy of the self as the sole ground of all cognitive activity. Yet, this assertion may seem to lead to the same solipsist impasses that transcendental philosophies have led in the past, simply because a concept of consciousness formulated solely in terms of pure luminosity would fail to account for the diversity that characterizes experience. It is only when the self is specifically understood in its *freedom* to illuminatethat this primacy seems to be rightfully reclaimed. For many Indian philosophers, the idea of liberation as the *telos* of all spiritual practices relies on the view of a *body-less*,beyond alldiversified activity, self. Utpaladeva, nevertheless, describes the self as inherently dynamic and as endowed with a creative agency, a freedom to act or as M.Dyczkowski explains: (1987:77) “the dynamic *(spanda)* character of absolute consciousness is its freedom to assume any form at will through the active diversification of awareness *(vimarśa)* in time and space, when it is directed at, and assumes the form of, the object of awareness.” Consciousness is capable of self-differentiation, which is not a challenge to its unity but an assertion of it. Similarly, the notion of the ‘pre-reflective’ challenges the way perception is viewed as it recovers the directedness of experiences that goes with the absence of intellectual mediation. Merleau-Ponty explores the phenomenal space inaugurated by the tacit cogito as a space created and sustained by the routes of embodiment, the very fact of perceiving oneself as being ‘in body’. In his eyes, the “I know” is a natural consequence of the “I have a body”. The pages that follow will explore how Utpala and Merleau-Ponty are led to acknowledge the bodily origins of perception and how, when read together, make a most favorable case for embodied cognition.

2.1.1 *Vimarśa* as *svātantrya -*the freedom of consciousness

The notion of a sentient self that makes itself perceptible reveals a kind of reflectivity that the notion of *prakāśa* as pure luminosity does not get across on its own. It is what distances Utpala’s concept of the self from that of a passive witness in Sāṃkhya. It is also what explains how the light of consciousness, which is without diversity in itself, is the source of the diversity surrounding us. Dismissing an idea of the self as a static substance, Utpala presents it as pure dynamism: the self is the absolute freedom (*svātantrya*) that constitutes the essence of consciousness. *Svātantrya* refers to the idea of autonomy, the idea of existing or acting by itself without the need of an external prompt. But more than the lack of an external influence it signifies a power that no one can obstruct.

Utpaladeva is aware of the problem of origination that has haunted the Indian philosophers throughout the centuries and attempts to resolve it by adopting a radically phenomenological approach to consciousness. He, thus, describes it by employing a vocabulary of light that is nowhere apparent in the writings of his predecessors (ĪPVI JÑ.I,4:16/ Vol.1 p.71):

*ahaṃ jānāmi, mayā jñataṃ jñāsyate ca – ityevaṃ*

*svaprakāśāhaṃparāmarśapariniṣṭhitameva idaṃ jñanaṃ nāma,*

*kiṃ tatra anyat vicāryate, tadaprakāśe hi viśvam*

*andhatamasaṃ syāt, tadapi vā na syāt*

All the three forms of cognition “(i) I know (ii) I knew, (iii) I shall know, shine on the background of self-luminous consciousness only. For if the self were not shining, the whole world would be nothing but mass of darkness, or it would not be even that.

Utpala describes consciousness as having a double aspect: the stability and continuity of consciousness, denoted by the Sanskrit term *prakāśa,* is inseparable from its capacity to assume a variety of forms and to recognise itself in these forms, *vimarśa.* Abhinava explains (ĪPVI JÑ.I, 4:16-17/ Vol.1 pp.72-73):

*tatra ca jānāmi ityantaḥsaṃrambhayogo’*pi bhāti, yena śuklādergu*ṇāt atyantajaḍāt jānāmi iti vapuḥ citsvabhāvatām abhyeti; sa ca saṃrambho**vimarśaḥ kriyāśaktirbhavati* ।

In the cognitive experience such as “I know” there is consciousness (not only of self-luminous self but) of association with a stir (*spanda*) also. It is because of this stir that self is admitted to be of sentient nature, as distinct from the qualities such as white etc., which are extremely insentient. This stir is technically called “*vimarśa*”. It is the power of action.

These verses show that Utpala views consciousness as endowed with a special type of activity, a sort of movement or stir (*spanda*). Not to be perceived as a ‘real’ movement between two spots, a change in space, but as a kind of *phenomenal* and, thus, subtle, *imperceptible* vibration. This vibration, *spanda,* is precisely what makes the self sentient. Torella describes *prakāśa* as (2002, p,.xxiii) "the motionless cognitive light that constitutes the basic fabric, the founding structure of reality, of the 'given’." The concept of *vimarśa* is often linked to the faculty of reason, which can be seen in its translation as “reflective awareness.” However, by *vimarśa,* Utpala is not referring to an ‘intellectual’ representation but to an *actual* reflective detour of ‘light’ on its own surface - a sort of reflection, a doubling that makes consciousness aware of itself. Torella describes *vimarśa* (and its cognates such as *parāmarśa, pratyavamarśa, āmarśa,* etc.) as (2002, p. xxiii) “the spark that causes this luminous structure to pulsate by introducing self-awareness, dynamism, freedom of intervention, of self-assertion.” *Vimarśa* as self-reflective awareness points at the fact that the experience of perception is not passive: cognitions, unlike images reflected on a mirror, do not passively reflect their objects but involve an active “act of realisation” (I.Ratié, 2016:10). I.Ratié further explains (2016:10): “Thus when perceiving a patch of blue, consciousness grasps itself as perceiving the blue, and it does so by *expressing* itself in various forms: “I,” “this,” “I see this,” “this is a patch of blue,” “I see this patch of blue,” and so on.” It is interesting to see how Utpaladeva blends the *prakāśa* and *vimarśa* arguments and how he justifies the inherence of the power of action in a mass of luminous awareness wedding, thus, movement and light. For consciousness to be at once movement and light, it means that it is capable of seeing itself. Indeed, its mode of being is based off a recognitive structure that is possible due to the reflectivity of *vimarśa.* This ability of consciousness to see or recognize itself is, as M.Dyczkwoski states, (1987:20) “the intuitive capacity of consciousness to grasp its own nature.” This phenomenal ‘grasp’ is, in itself, an act of knowledge: consciousness being able to reflect on itself points at its inherent freedom to “appear” to itself, and to get to know itself in specific, determinate forms. Arindam Chakrabarti describes *vimarśa* as the (2018:295) “self-conscious, self-articulating aspect of consciousness that makes it free.” Consciousness is free to orchestrate its own becoming through determining itself as the subjects and objects of experience. On this, Abhinavagupta states (ĪPVI JÑ. I, 3:14/ Vol.1 pp.61-62):

*iha tāvat bhāvarāśiryathā vimṛśyate tathā asti, astitvasya*

*prakāśaṃ śaraṇīkurvataḥ prakāśaprāṇitadeśīyaṃ vimarśam* *āśritya samunmeṣāt*

It is to be admitted that the multiplicity of the objects of the world is as it is determinately apprehended; because the being, which depends on the light of consciousness shines on the basis of determinate cognition, which refers to objects of experience.

2.1.2 A body-less absolute?

In highlighting consciousness as *vimarśa,* Utpala’s approach becomes distinctively phenomenological. The fact that appearance precedes knowledge or rather makes it possible implies that consciousness requires embodiment: “the key idea about the conditions of consciousness”, as Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad says, (2001:381) “comes down to this; consciousness requires embodiment. There is simply no functioning of consciousness without body.” Indeed, embodiment appears to be a necessary condition for all acts of cognition. R.K.Sharma says (2011:3):

Thus, whenever a proof for the existence of the self is sought in (the testimony provided by) experience, it is to the features of consciousness that an appeal is made, for experience is nothing but embodied consciousness. What this comes to is that though the testimony of consciousness is invoked in support of the non-material entity (called self), the conditions or the context in which it is said to be available is a physical one, namely embodiment.

Yet, as Abhinava acknowledges, there seems to exist a fundamental contradiction between the claim to a singular, ultimate, universal consciousness and the fragmentary nature of embodied experience (ĪPV. I, 3:14): “the whole of this vast universe can be divided into (i) insentient and (ii) sentient…Of these also, the insentient, as objects of determinate cognition, have no independent being.” In this context, the body as *object* of cognition is said to belong to the realm of the ‘insentient’ as opposed to the self that is the ‘sentient subject’ (ĪPVI JÑ.I, 3:15/ Vol.1 pp.65-66) :

*ye tu anye jaḍebhyo jīvanta – iti nāma prasiddhaḥ teṣāmapi śarīraprāṇapuryaṣṭakaśūnyākārāḥ tāvat jaḍā eva iti teṣāmapi kimucyate* ।

*ata eva ghaṭaśarīraprāṇasukhatadabhāvarūpaṃ sat yallagnaṃ bhāti tadeva jīvarūpabhūtaṃ satyam;*

As regards those which are known to be sentient as distinct from the insentients, their bodies, vital airs, group of eight (*puryaṣṭaka*) and nihility (*śūnya*) are insentient. Therefore, we cannot attribute powers of knowledge and action to them. Hence only that, on the background of which alone the so-called existing things, such as jar, body, vital air and pleasure and their not-being shine, is sentient and true.

These verses seem to place the body in a diametrically opposite position to the experiencing subject reinstating an unsettling dualism in the heart of the cognitive experience. In this, it does not differ from the objectified view of the body that Merleau-Ponty inherits from classical philosophy. Yet, we have seen that Utpala does not advocate a formless or *body-less* view of the self. On the contrary, he suggests a rather phenomenological approach that is absent from his master, Somānanda. This great master who lived (AD 900-950) and wrote in Kashmir, was the founder of the *pratyabhijñā* school. He is Utpaladeva’s teacher and the initiator of a tradition of scriptural exegesis that came down to Abhinavagupta through Utpala and Lakṣmanagupta (AD 950-1000). Somānanda believes that the only thing that exists is consciousness simply because the absence of consciousness could never be experienced (SpKā:12–13). Consciousness is said to belong to the inner being, who is Śiva himself (SpKā:6). Somānanda argues for an entirely disembodied form of consciousness as *amūrta* (immaterial or disembodied) and Śiva is possessed of an immateriality *(amūrtatva*) that extends to the totality of existing entities. The concept of *amūrtatva* first appears in his criticism of grammarian Bhartṛhari’s description of the divine. In his comment on the *maṅgala* verse of Bhartṛhari’s *Śabdadhātusamīkṣā*, Somānanda states (quoted by J.Nemec, 2018:3):

*dikkālādyanavacchinnānantacinmātramūrtaye*

*svānubhūtyekamānāya namaḥ śāntāya tejase*.

Homage to the one whose form is pure, endless consciousness, which

is not limited by space, time, etc., to the one of whom the only means

of knowledge is one’s own experience, the one who is peaceful, to (the

one in the form of) energy.

Although, as J. Nemec (*ibid.:*4) observes, the *maṅgala* is clearlydevotional, Somānanda chooses to criticize it on philosophical grounds in order to prepare the ground for the articulation of his own thesis by stating:

svānubhūtir vartamānakālenāsya vibhāvyate.

ŚD 2.75. evaṃ kālānavacchedaḥ katham asyodito hi taiḥ

anantasyānubhūtiḥ kā paricchedaṃ vinātmanaḥ.

ŚD 2.76. anante ’vagamaḥ kutra tejastve śāntatā katham

asarvagapramāṇaṃ hi mūrtir no lakṣyate citaḥ.

The experience one has of it appears in the present. Thus, how can

they say that it is not limited by time? What experience can there be of

the endless [Brahman] without its being divided? Where is there

understanding in an endless entity? If it is energy, then how can it be

peaceful? After all, consciousness does not appear as having a limited

measure or as a material form.

Despite his belief in Śiva as *formless* consciousness, Somānanda challenges Bhartṛhari’s concept of the unity of the monistic divine and the associated idea of its transcendental existence beyond space and time. What is more, it is Somānanda, who first suggests that consciousness is both transcendental and immanent, a view that will inspire Utpala’s later articulation of the self in its double aspect as *prakāśa-vimarśa*. As J.Nemec (2018) observes, Somānanda’s view on the nature of consciousness differs from Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika’s. He openly criticises the ontological distinctions this latter makes between substance (*dravya*) and action (*karman*), both of which are categories of real being (*padārtha*s). It is in order “to fuse the natures of substance (*dravya*) and action (*karman*) as they were understood by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*”* that Somānanda conceives Śiva as eternal (*nitya*) and formless (*amūrta*), but also – which is a clear departure from the Sāṃkhya thesis of the self as a passive witness – as a volitional agent who is at the same time active and ubiquitous (Nemec:2018). In the beginning of the sixth chapter of *Śivadṛṣṭi*, Somānanda writes:

atha śakteḥ śaktimato na bhedo dravyakarmavat |sthāpito dravyato bhinnā kriyā no na ca nāsti sā | | 6.1. | |evaṃ tathā śaktimataḥ śaktasya samavasthitā | jagadvicitratā śaive na punar darśanāntare | | 6.2. | |

Now, no [ontological] distinction is established [in our view] between the power and the possessor of the power just as [we make no such distinction] between substance (dravya) and action (karman). Action (kriyā) is simply not different from substance (dravyatas), nor is it the case that [action] does not exist. And, in this way, the variegation of the world is fully established for the empowered possessor of power in Śaivism [alone], but not in any other philosophical system.

This idea rests on the notion that all action necessarily involves agency: nothing is accomplished and nothing appears in the absence of an agent who chooses to engage in some activity; action stems from the will or desire (*icchā)* to accomplish the act in question. Nonetheless, Somānanda adopts a strictly monistic stance and shows no intention of differentiating Śiva from the perceptible universe that He creates. There is no difference between the concepts of “I-ness” (*ahantā*) of phenomena closely associated with Śiva and the apparently external “that-ness” (*idantā*) of the entities manifested in the universe. Equally, no movement in the functioning of Śiva’s will, a movement capable of bringing a real transformation of some entity. In Somānanda’s own words (ŚD: *5.5ab*):

*icchāvantaḥ sarva eva vyāpakāś ca samastakāḥ.*

*amūrtāś ca tathā sarve sarve jñānakriyātmakāḥ.*

Absolutely everything is possessed of will and pervades everything

else. And everything is thus devoid of material form (*amūrta*);

everything consists of cognition and action.

J.Nemec explains that for Somānanda, who is steady in his concept of a formless absolute, this means that (J.Nemec 2018:8) “everything is possessed of will and everything mutually penetrates everything else. That is, everything is devoid of material form, is *amūrta*, and consists merely in Śiva’s powers of will, cognition, and action.” For Somānanda, Śiva’s ubiquity consists in behaving (*ibid*.) “in precisely the same manner everywhere and always, whether as creator of the universe, a monadic agent, or—astonishingly—as the humble water-pot itself.”

2.2.1 Towards a phenomenological outlook

Conforming to his master’s monistic outlook, Utpala views all objects as resting within the self, challenging, thus, a naïve view of real, material entities existing outside of consciousness independently of the agent’s capacity to cognize them (ĪPV JÑ.VII, 14:110/ Vol.1 p.389):

*itthamatyarthabhinnārthāvabhāsasvacite vibhau ।*

samalo vimalo vāpi vyavahāro'nubhūyate ।।

Thus, experience shows that all transactions, whether pure or impure, depend upon the omnipresent Lord, in whom all the objective manifestations, so very different from one another, are reflected.

Notwithstanding, Utpaladeva is inclined to put more emphasis on the manifested aspect of consciousness and accounts for it with the help of almost realistic categories (*padārthas*) that are absent from Somānada’s writings. His choice of a more ‘phenomenological’ orientation seems aligned with his general aim of making the path of self-recognition more accessible to ordinary people and for this, more translatable in terms of ordinary experience. Appealing to experience, Utpaladeva following from Bhartṛhari, suggests that spatial form (*mūrti*) and time (*kāla*) could be manifested in the phenomenal universe. This is unlike Somānanda who sees the formlessness (*amūrtatva*) of “Śiva-as-consciousness” (J.Nemec:2017) to be a universal quality of all reality. He writes (ĪPK 2.1.5):

*mūrtivaicitryato deśakramam ābhāsayaty asau*| *kriyāvaicitryanirbhāsāt kālakramam apīśvaraḥ*| |

Through the variety of physical forms he causes spatial succession to appear; through the manifestation of the variety of actions the Lord also causes temporal succession to appear (R.Torella’s translation)

In what concerns the treatment of materiality, Utpaladeva and Somānanda employ different strategies for explaining the appearance of material manifestations that seem to be distinct. Utpaladeva, like Somānanda, identifies Śiva with the *ātman* and both with consciousness and sees this divine agent as the primary, indeed the only entity in existence, the one from which all others are derived and on which they all rest. Nevertheless, as J.Nemec (2017:46) suggests, Utpaladeva incorporates realist categories (*padārthas*)into his system although he takes care to place them in a subordinated position (*ibid*.):

*kriyāsaṃbandhasāmānyadravyadikkālabuddhayaḥ* /

*satyāḥ sthairyopayogābhyām ekānekāśrayā matāḥ*

The ideas of action, relation, universal, substance, space and time, which are

based on unity and multiplicity, are to be considered real (*satyāḥ*), because of

their permanence and efficacy (*sthairyopayogābhyām*) (R.Torella’s translation).

J.Nemec, further, suggests that if the *padārthas* are explicitly incorporated into the ĪPK and the ĪPV, they must have some real ontological standing in Utpaladeva’s system even if they are comprehensible only in the context of his idealistic philosophy. He also notices (2017:25) that Utpala follows Bhartṛhari in incorporating materiality into his ontology by explicitly discussing the existence of *mūrti*, that, apparently, are physical entities. In ĪPK (2.1.5), he writes:

mūrtivaicitryato deśakramam ābhāsayaty asau

kriyāvaicitryanirbāsāt kālakramam apīśvaraḥ

Through the variety of physical forms he causes spatial succession to appear;

through the manifestation of the variety of actions the Lord also causes

temporal successions to appear” (R.Torella’s translation).

Since the “variety of physical forms” (R.Torella’s translation of *mūrtivaicitrya*) serves as a means for manifesting differences in spatial location, they of necessity appear in a form real enough to validate the existence of spatial extension. There is a distinction to be made between worldly (*laukikī*) action, on the one hand, and the “eternal (*śāśvatī*) action” of the Lord, on the other. In ĪPK (2.1.2), he writes:

*sakramatvaṃ ca laukikyāḥ kriyāyāḥ kālaśaktitaḥ*

*ghaṭate na tu śāśvatyāḥ prābhavyāḥ syāt prabhor iva*

Succession pertains to ordinary action, which is dependent on the power of

Time; it is not, however, admissible for divine eternal action, as it is not for

the Lord (R.Torella’s translation ).

Presumably, Utpaladeva does not intend to suggest that the objects of cognition exist as they are conceived by the naïve realist: fully real, material entities that exist outside of consciousness, entirely independently of the agent’s capacity to cognize them. He understands them to be the very contents of consciousness and, as such, deriving their ‘reality’ from it. If the appearance of multiplicity is deemed as ‘unreal’, it is not because all physical entities are illusory but because their ‘reality’ can only be apprehended if understood as ensuing from consciousness in its movement of manifestation. The ‘limitations’ posed by embodiment are, in other words, a structural element of the appearing (ĪPV JÑ. I,3:15/ Vol.1 p.66):

*tasya ca āpāte yadyapi bahutvaṃ bhāti tathāpi tat*

*jaḍātmakavedyaśarīrādyupādheḥ* । *tatastat apāramārthikam …*

And although apparently it appears to be multiple, yet its multiplicity is due to the limiting conditions, constituted by body, etc., which are essentially insentient. Hence its multiplicity is unreal…

2.2.2 *Spanda* – the imperceptible stir

The self being endowed with an inherent dynamism, manifests itself by voluntarily imposing limitations to its infinite power. Prior to Utpaladeva, the Spanda philosophers referred to a mysterious vibration as the origin of *life*. To show that consciousness is infused with life, that its light is not that of a lifeless mirror, Abhinavagupta equatesthis older concept of *spanda,* which he borrows from earlier masters such as Vasugupta and Kallata, with that of *vimarśa* that was not part of these early writers’ vocabulary. This way, he hopes to bridge the gap between a consciousness that is directly presented in perception with consciousness as the substratum of all that exists. Utpaladeva seems to elegantly reconcile the semantics of movement with those of light. The term *spanda* deriving from the Sanskrit root *spand* (throbbing, vibration, tremor, motion) signifies “to move a little” (*kiṃcit calana*) and has connotations of a slight movement. Nonetheless, this is not a movement in a geographical space but the spark of an imperceptible vibration that appears to animate from the inside the light of consciousness. This becomes evident in Abhinava’s definition of *spanda* that we findin hisTantrāloka (TĀ 4.181b:186):

The nature of such consciousness is its capacity for self-referral, and because of that, there always arises a spontaneous sound (*dhvani*) which is termed the supreme, the great Heart. The self-consciousness in the Heart in which the entire universe without remainder is dissolved, present at the beginning and at the end of perception of objects, is called in the authoritative texts the vibration (*spanda*), and more precisely the universal vibration (*sāmānya-spanda*), and its nature is an overflowing in the Self. For that vibration, which is a slight motion of a special kind, a unique vibrating light, is the wave of the ocean of consciousness, without which there is no consciousness at all. For the character of the ocean is that it is sometimes filled with waves and sometimes waveless. This consciousness is the essence of all. The insentient universe has consciousness as its essence, because its very foundation is dependent on that, and its essence is the great Heart.

The association of *vimarśa* with *spanda* shows that consciousness as light is not inert since “this supratemporal activity characterises it most specifically; devoid of it, it would be no better than an inert physical phenomenon” (M.Dyzkowski, 1987:60). E. Fürlinger describes this activity as a (2009:7) “motionless motion” echoing Abhinava’s description of it as the “imperceptible eternal stir” (*sphurattā*) (ĪPV JÑ.V,14:74). It is the pulse or throbbing that makes consciousness sentient. It is not, as M. Dyczkowski, explains (1987:60):

a physical movement, not a psychological activity (like pleasure) and not even a movement of energy (*prāṇa*), such as hunger and thirst, but being the subtle vibration which is the source and foundation of all these.

By associating *spanda* with *vimarśa*, Utpala equates the ontological and epistemological levels of his discourse showing that *spanda* is a motion that is inherent in a consciousness that has the freedom to relish its own creativity. He offers, thus, a sophisticated solution to the problematic distinction between consciousness and matter, making no concessions and accepting no dualist presuppositions of any sort (ĪPVI JÑ.V,14:74/ Vol.1 p.256-257):

*spandanañca kiñciccalanam, eṣaiva ca kiñcidrūpatā yat ācalamapi*

*calamābhasate iti, prakāśasvarūpaṃ hi manāgapi nātiricyate,*

*iva iti tat acalameva ābhāsabhedayuktamiva ca bhāti* ।

Now, *spanda* means slight motion, and here slightness lies in its appearing to vibrate while it actually does not: because though the essential nature of the light of consciousness is not to change at all, yet it appears to be changing as it were, having as it were variety of manifestations.

Here, Utpala preoccupies himself with the phenomenon of consciousness as it appears to us and how it is represented so that we are able to understand the specific phenomenal character of each manifestation. *Spanda* represents the very rhythm of perception in consonance with which the perceived object appears and disappears. M. Dyczkowski analyses *spanda* as *sphurattā*, a term used by Utpala himself to denote its activity (1992:37):

The variegated, evanescent nature of phenomena is the radiance of the light of consciousness. This is *sphurattā*. The pulse of perception which marks the rhythm of manifestation is the ‘sparkling’ or ‘scintillating pulse’ (which is what the word *sphurattā* literally means) of the light of consciousness.

Following from this, the only way to account for the appearing of objectivity is to accept that consciousness itself creates it spontaneously. Consciousness possesses the freedom to be the agent of its own manifestation since it is without a second and perfectly free (ĪPV.V,15-16 :76): “It is by means of mere will (*sankalpah icchārūpah*) that He creates...” On a cosmic level, although Śiva’s is motionless, He appears to manifest on different levels (*tattva*) due to His incessant activity. These levels are not but crystallizations of His transcendental motion or *spanda* (ĪPVI AG.I, 3:192/ Vol.II pp.221-222):

*suddho'yaṃ spandaḥ*

*parameśvarasyācalasyāpyaprarūḍharūpāntarāpattilakṣaṇaḥ*

*kiṃciccalanātmatayā sphuradrūpatvāt* ।

Therefore, it is pure *Spanda* i.e. the *Sadāśiva* category is nothing but the pure activity of the Lord. It is nothing but the assumption of another obscure form by the Lord, who is motionless; because He manifests Himself in a form, marked by slight motion.

The notion of *spanda* is central in the economy of self-recognition as it explains how there is diversity in unity. On this, Kṣemarāja states (Śivastotravali p.1-2, transl. M. Dyczkowski, 1992:14):

This suggests that the Lord has the power to do the impossible *(atidurghatakaritva)* in so far as he manifests the diversity of the waking and other states while remaining undivided therein. Thus, He manifests Himself in the form of diversity *(bheda),* unity *(abheda)* and as both together by manifesting His own nature as the Supreme *(para),* Inferior *(apara)* and Middling *(parapara)* powers. Thus, it is the Lord Himself Who appears as the absolute *Trika* principle *(anuttarasadardhatattva).*

In this sense, consciousness and consciousness only is the sole cause of both the object and its reflection (ĪPV JÑ.V,15-16:76/ Vol.1 p.267): “it is that He manifests Himself as objects of knowledge. The object has no separate existence: for in that case, because of His having to look up to them for help, His freedom would be lost” (*ātmānamata evāyaṃ jñeyīkuryātpṛthaksthiti jñeyaṃ na tu tadaunmukhyāt khaṇḍyetāsya svatantratā*). Utpaladeva repeatedly highlights that there is no other cause of manifestation external to the self, no separate reality to account for the multiplicity of manifestations (ĪPV JÑ.V,14: 74/ Vol.1 p.255):

*sā sphurattā mahāsattā deśakālāviśeṣiṇī ।*

*saiṣā sāratayā proktā hṛdayaṃ parameṣthinaḥ । ।*

It is the imperceptible eternal stir (*sphurattā*). It is the absolute being i.e. perfectly free in respect of all acts of being. It is beyond the limitations of time and place. This, being the essence of all, is spoken of as the resting place of the Highest Lord.

Nonetheless, the idea of the objectivation of the self continues to pose some logical difficulties. Abhinava questions (ĪPVI JÑ.V,15-16:77/Vol.1 p.268):“how can there be this very possibility that he manifest Himself as object?” (*nanu eṣaiva kutaḥ saṃbhāvanā, ātmānaṃ jñeyīkaroti iti?).*

2.2.3 Consciousness intentional

In a context of self-manifestation, the intentional directedness towards the object is explained in terms that free the subject from the need to belong to a certain world. In other words, the proof for the function of intentionality in relation to the empirical subject, unlike what happens in Merleau-Ponty, is not to be found in its insertion in the world. Rather, it is because the self is the agent of its own becoming that finds itself embedded in a world. Hence, the idea of intentionality in Utpaladeva has a very different modality than its Western counterpart. As the self-referential mode of awareness, intentionality belongs to the self. Abhinava explains that cognition would be impossible if the subject did not inherently align with its object (ĪPVI JÑ.V,14:74/ Vol.1 p.256):

*tasmāt mama sphurati iti ko’*rtha*ḥ,* madīya*ṃ* sphura*ṇaṃ spandanam*

*āviṣṭam iti ।*

Therefore, what is the meaning of “jar is manifest to me?”. It means jar has entered my self-consciousness or *sphuraṇa* (Sanskrit synonym for which is “*spandana*”) the *seeming* vibration.

The idea behind this is that if the intentness on the object were different from the subject, the subject would have to be considered subordinate to or dependent on the object. This hypothesis would defy the very idea of *svātantrya* or the self’s freedom, which is, according to Utpala, its main characteristic. Quoting the scriptures, Abhinava says (ĪPVI JÑ.V,14:75/ Vol.1 p.262):

*sāram iti yat atucchaṃ* *rūpaṃ* *tat iyameva vimarśaśaktiḥ, grāhyagrāhakāṇāṃ yat prakāśātmakaṃ rūpaṃ tasyāpi aprakāśa-* *vailakṣaṇyākṣepikā iyameva*

*Sāram* (essence) i.e. that which is the most important aspect of *saṃvid*, is the power of free consciousness. It is also responsible for distinction of subject from object, both of which are essentially light (of consciousness)

If the self is entirely free (and it is only on account of this freedom that the self *can* create, otherwise it would exhaust itself in its creations and its freedom would be lost, its dependance on the objects of perception is impossible (ĪPV JÑ.V, 15-16:76/ Vol.1 p.267):

*ātmānamata evāyam jñeyīkuryātpṛthaksthiti ।*

*jñeyaṃ na tu taḍaunmukhyātkharaḍayetāsya । ।*

*svātantryāmuktamātmānaṃ svātantryādadvayātmanaḥ ।*

*prabhurīśādisaṃkalpairnirmāya vyavahārayet । ।*

Therefore, it is that He manifests Himself as objects of knowledge. The objects have no separate existence: for, in that case, because of His having to look up to them for help, His freedom would be lost.

As the self is without a second and is perfectly free, so by means of mere will (*saṅkalpaḥ icchārūpaḥ*) He creates Īśa etc.. Who are full of power of freedom and makes them objects of meditation etc. in ordinary life.

Abhinava explains this peculiar form of intentionality that is characteristic of consciousness in proper ontological terms: if the object of knowledge were *eidetically* different from the knowing subject, which is non-different from the self, then the self’s intentional grip on the object would be impossible. The rationale behind this view of consciousness as intentional lies with the presupposition that all objects of knowledge are not but manifestations of the self, something that Utpala has already established through the notion of *spanda*. Abhinava explains (ĪPVI JÑ.V, 14:77/ Vol.1 p.269):

*abhyuccayayuktimapi āha, yadi vyatiriktaṃ jñeyaṃ syāt tat jñātṛrūpasya*

*ātmano yat etat jñeyaviṣayam aunmukhyaṃ svasaṃvedanasiddhaṃ dṛśyate tat na asya syāt, tena vyatiriktaviṣayaunmukhyena anyādhinatvaṃ pāratantryam asya āniyate* । *pāratantryaṃ ca svātantryasya viruddham* ।

If the object of knowledge be separate or different from the universal subject, the intentness of the subjects on object, of which we know from our own experience, will not be possible; because that intentness on the object, which is different form it, means His (Subject’s) dependence upon the latter. And dependence is quite opposite of freedom. Freedom lies in not seeking external help; and that is the chief characteristic of the Self. Therefore, if Self be seeking the help of another, it would cease to be the Self.

Earlier, we saw how by conceiving the self as a volitional agent, Somānanda wished to fuse the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika categories of substance (*dravya*) and action (*karman*). In Utpaladeva, the self’s volition (*icchā*) as both *vimarśa* and *spanda* brings these two categories together and shows how consciousness at once generates forms within itself and is aware of them. M. Dyczkowski explains (1987:71):

Awareness serves to relate objectivity with subjectivity in such a way that the object ultimately comes to rest in the self-awareness of the subject. In reality, reflective awareness is always awareness of I (*ahaṃvimarśa*); it never objectivises even when, in the form of the awareness of 'this' (*idaṃvimarśa*), it reflects upon the object. The experience we have of things existing outside consciousness is due to a lack of self-awareness. The awareness of the object is never 'out there'; it is registered and known within the subject. All forms of awareness come to rest in the subject.

However, the very notion of intentionality would be devoid of meaning in the absence of a certain epistemic distance. And it is still not clear how this distance is conceivable within the context of self-manifestation. In his commentary, Abhinava seems to anticipate the bewilderment in the reader’s mind and goes on to ascertain that although the self is free and beyond space and time, it is, at the same time, in touch with space and time (ĪPVI JÑ.V,14:75/ Vol.1 p.258-261):

*sattā ca bhavanakartṛtā sarvakriyāsu svātantryam ।*

sā ca svapu*ṣpādikamapi vyāpnoti iti mahatī,*

*deśakālau nīlādivat saiva sṛjati iti tābhyāṃ viśeṣaṇīyā na*

*bhavati, yat kila yena tulyakakṣyatayā bhāti tat tasya viśeṣaṇam*

*kaṭaka iva caitrasya* ।

na ca deśakśakālau vimarśena tulya*kakṣyau* bhāta*ḥ tayoḥ idantayā*

*tasya ca ahantayā parkaso tulyakatdyatvānupapatteḥ ।* eva*ṃ*  deśakālāsparśat *vibhutvaṃ nityatvaṃ* *ca*, *sakaladeśakālasparśo’pi*

*tannirmāṇayogāt iti tato’pi vyāpakatvanityatve ।* taduktam:

'mahāsatta mahādevī *viśvajīvanamucyate*’ *।* *iti ।*

The word ‘Sattā’ means the essential nature of the agent in the act of being, i.e., freedom in all actions. It is great, because it pervades even the sky-flower. It is not limited by time or space: for, it is the creator. The reason is that only that which shines at the same level can serve as an attribute, as bangles do in the case of Caitra. But time and space do not shine at the same level with free consciousness (*vimarśa*). The former shines as “this” but the latter shines as “I”. Thus, it is above time and space; it is therefore, all-pervading and eternal. But it is also in touch with all times and places because it is their creator. For this reason, also, it is called omnipresent and eternal.

2.3.1 The case of geometrical drawing

The mode of activity that characterizes *vimarśa*, far from excluding the event of our situadeness in the world and, thus, of our embodiment, justifies both on the ground of an inherent intentionality. This can be understood as a primordial *reflectivity* belonging to the self, an inherent dynamism that brings about the phenomenal variety we perceive. Against the epistemologies that begin by assuming the existence of an objective world and then seek to justify how this world is constituted for a subjective consciousness, Merleau-Ponty suggests that if there is cognitive activity, it is precisely because we have a body that is situated in the world (PhP:502): “not indeed that the world is constituted by consciousness, but on the contrary that consciousness always finds itself already at work in the world.” He begins by suggesting that there is hardly any need for negotiating whether perception is embodied or not, for the presence and instrumentality of the body in cognition is simply undeniable (PhP:230): “the problem of the world, and, to begin with, that of one’s own body, consists in the fact that it is all there.” In this sense, the fact of embodiment is a primary event; not an instrument of perception, a medium for consciousness but an essential condition, a *sine qua non* of perception (PhP:452):

True reflection presents me to myself not as an idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical with my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it: I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but on the contrary, *by being this body and this situation, and through them, all the rest.*

Merleau-Ponty’s discussion on the *tacit cogito* as pre-reflective awareness reveals that we do not experience our relation to the world and its spatial elements as a relation to an objective space. More specifically, his analysis of the case of geometrical drawing that takes place towards the end of the *Phenomenology* is meant to show that we experience the world not as an external to us space but as a series of layers of a *phenomenal spatiality* that we actively inhabit. This redefinition of spatiality enables Merleau-Ponty to reintroduce the cogito within existence, where it belongs (PhP:449):

The *cogito* is the recognition of this fundamental fact. In the proposition: ‘I think, I am’, the two assertions are to be equated with each other, otherwise there would be no *cogito*. Nevertheless, we must be clear about the meaning of this equivalence: it is not the ‘I am’ which is pre-eminently contained in the ‘I think’, not my existence which is brought down to the consciousness which I have of it, but conversely the ‘I think,’ which is re-integrated into the transcending process of the ‘I am’, and consciousness into existence.

Following the redefinition of the cogito, the weight of knowledge is displaced from the transcendental subject to the side of the world (PhP:449): “it is indeed true, as has been said, that to know is to know that one knows, not because this second order of knowing guarantees knowledge itself, but the reverse.” The main argument, here, is that our embodiment invites to our perceptual experience an *a priori* structure presenting itself to us in consciousness as experience of a sensible world in space and time, a world that is seemingly independent of us. Following from this, it is not a transcendental intellect but our very own ‘bodily’ intentionality that brings meaning into our experience. In this way, Merleau-Ponty shows, in response to Descartes, that all certainty about seeing is to be sought not in the act of thinking but in the act of seeing (PhP:449):

All inner perception is inadequate because I am not an object that can be perceived, because I make my reality and find myself only in the act. ‘I doubt’: there is no way of silencing all doubt concerning this proposition other than by actually doubting, involving oneself in the experience of doubting, and thus bringing this doubt into existence as the certainty of doubting. To doubt is always to doubt something, even if one ‘doubts everything’.

To substantiate his claims, Merleau-Ponty undertakes the analysis of geometrical drawing, in this case, a triangle. He attempts to show that geometrical drawing focusing on the arrangement of lines has the form of a *gestalt* that corresponds to the essence of the triangle (PhP:448): “if I consider the triangle itself as it is drawn on the paper, on the blackboard or in the imagination, with its physiognomy, the concrete arrangement of its lines, in short its *Gestalt*. Is not precisely this the essence or the idea of a triangle?”. Merleau-Ponty goes on to explain that we wouldn’t be able to experience the ‘truth’ (PhP:448) “if we thought *vi formae*, and if formal relations were not first presented to us crystallized in some particular thing.” This can be seen in the experience of drawing where (PhP:449) “there is no definition of a triangle which includes in advance the properties subsequently to be demonstrated and the intermediate steps leading to that demonstration.” The triangle I am working on is a perceptible (or imaginary triangle) (*ibid*.), “one which is at least potentially situated in my perceptual field orientated in relation to ‘up’ and ‘down’, ‘right’ and ‘left’... implied in my general grip upon the world.” Therefore, what is grasped in the act of perception (or imagination) is not an abstract mental idea but the (PhP:449) “concrete essence of the triangle, which is not a collection of objective ‘characteristics’, but the formula of an attitude, a certain modality of my hold on the world, a structure, in short.” Merleau-Ponty sees the perceptual process not as a pure ideation but as an active, bodily exploration of the possibilities of the triangle (*ibid*.): “as a configuration and as the pole towards which my movements are directed.” Hence, perception is not the return to an eternal idea but a creative and dynamic process that consists in deploying the motor abilities of the body (PhP:450):

Just as the localization of objects in space, according to Kant himself, is not merely a mental operation, but one which utilizes the body’s motility, movement conferring sensations at the particular point on its trajectory at which those sensations are produced, so the geometer, who, generally speaking, studies the objective laws of location, knows the relationships with which he is concerned only by describing them, at least potentially, with his body. The subject of geometry is a *motor subject*.

For Merleau-Ponty, each of our experiences passes on an already acquired spatiality that is viewed as the condition for the self-awareness of the embodied subject. In fact, the spatial form of self-awareness is originally determined as the sense of the givenness of one's own body. In a fictitious encounter, Merleau-Ponty would argue that not only there is cognition because the self appears, but there is cognition because the *self appears as embodied*. In the realm of a purely transcendental, aspatial and intemporal self, no cognition is ever possible. Therefore, it is not really an option to ignore the embodied rootedness of cognition. Utpaladeva would reinforce this view by arguing that self-consciousness is determined as a sense of givenness of one's own body precisely because consciousness manifests in a bodily form and there is neither spatiality nor embodiment without this originating *praxis*.

2.3.2 Motor intentionality

Merleau-Ponty is eager to demonstrate the crucial role that bodily motion plays in perception. The case of geometrical drawing aside, he gathers evidence from pathological cases such as Schneider’s but also from studying the gestural body in ordinary, habitual actions. This exploration of the body’s motility in perception reveals an original form of intentionality expressing itself in the body’s motor projects towards the world (PhP:450):

This means in the first place that our body is not an object, nor is its movement a mere change of place in objective space, otherwise the problem would be merely shifted, and the movement of one’s own body would shed no light on the problem of the location of things, since it would be itself nothing but a thing. There must be, as Kant conceded, a ‘*motion, which generates space’* which is *our intentional motion*, distinct from ‘motion in space’, which is that of things and of our passive body. But there is more to be said: if motion is productive of space, we must rule out the possibility that *the body’s motility is a mere ‘instrument’[[3]](#footnote-3) for the constituting consciousness.*

Geometrical thinking makes the spatiality of our body visible by showing that our spatial being in-the-world is provided by a pre-personal motility affecting the construction of spatial levels. Merleau-Ponty understands it as a primary form of intentionality. On this, Jackson says (2018:764): “at first blush, motor intentionality is a bodily consciousness of something or other, a mobile directedness or orientation of the subject towards something.” However, for Merleau-Ponty, motor intentionality is more than that: not only the body finds itself in a space where it reaches things by virtue of its motility, but the body’s motility turns space into what we commonly call, the objective world (PhP:142):

For us to be able to conceive space, it is in the first place necessary that we should have been thrust into it by our body, and that it should have provided us with the first model of those transpositions, equivalent and identifications which make space into an objective system and allow our experience to be one of objects, opening out on an ‘in itself’. Our first experience found us already at work in a world, rooted in this pre-personal subject.

Merleau-Ponty suggests that we must understand motricity as an original intentionality because intentionality is not an act of positing the object; it is *directedness towards.* Renaud Barbaras explains this further by stating that (2013:88) “intentionality could not accomplish what it does if it did not have a dimension of motricity, in short, aiming is also movement. It surpasses a common displacement – it is secretly on the side of intentionality.” If we examine the body’s ordinary activity in the world or its particular performing skills, we will notice that it possesses a kind of knowledge, a *praktognosia* that is primary and cannot be decomposed further into more primary concepts. As embodied beings, we do not need to seek a correlated object if we are to think, act or live in the world. Our objects are already present within the world as pre-given, meaningful cores towards which we are already directed by living in this same world. All things considered, the body’s motility is itself an original intentionality (PhP:450): “The body’s motion can play a part in the perception of the world only if it is itself an original intentionality, a manner of relating itself to the distinct object of knowledge.” For Merleau-Ponty, this means that ‘my’ body is the *locus* from which my awareness of myself and of the world around me operates (PhP:501):

Moreover, it is essential to me not only to have a body, but to have *this* body. It is not only the notion of the body which, through that of the present, is necessarily linked to that of the *for-itself*; the actual existence of my body is indispensable to that of my ‘consciousness’. In the last analysis, in so far as I know that the *for-itself* is the culmination of a body, this can be only through the experience of my one body and one *for-itself*, or through the experience of my presence in the world.

Following in Husserl’s footsteps, Merleau-Ponty calls the intentionality that is revealed in the body’s motricity, ‘operative’ (preface, xx):

Husserl distinguishes between intentionality of act, which is that of our judgements and of those occasions when we voluntarily take up a position—the only intentionality discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*—and operative intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*), or that which produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life, being apparent in our desires, our evaluations and in the landscape we see, more clearly than in objective knowledge, and furnishing the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language.

2.3.3 The intentional nature of *vimarśa*

Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of *operative intentionality* as that which “produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life”, offers a platform for exploring Utpaladeva’s concept of *vimarśa* as *icchā*. Literally, *icchā* means ‘desire’ and stands for the primary will or the divine intent due to which everything comes into being and remains unified into a coherent whole. The *śāstras* affirm that the creation of the world owes itself to the Lord’s desire (*icchā*) while for Utpaladeva *icchā śakti* is one of the self’s powers, namely the power of intentionality – (the other two being *jñāna śakti* - power of knowledge and *kriyā śakti* - power of action.) In ĪPV, *icchā* is another name for *vimarśa* and, hence, for *spanda;* it is the pulsation of consciousness in the process of manifestation. Nevertheless, the main characteristic of this subtle vibration always at work is that is imperceptible. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty suggests that *operative intentionality* is always active irrespective of us noticing it (PhP:499): “we found beneath the intentionality of acts, or thetic intentionality, another kind which is the condition of the former’s possibility: namely an operative intentionality already at work before any positing or any judgment, a *Logos* of the aesthetic world.” While Utpaladeva calls *spanda* the ‘imperceptible stir’, Merleau‐Ponty maintains that (PhP:159, footnote 94) “it is difficult to bring pure motor intentionality to light, for it hides behind the objective world that it contributes to constituting.” To that, T.Craman adds (2008:101): “our own tacitly abiding bodily understanding, which is so basic and so familiar that we are normally unaware of it, [which is] so inconspicuous and so transparent to our ordinary perceptual sense of ourselves as to be invisible.” This absence of perceptibility is exploited differently in the two philosophers. Since Utpaladeva conceives intentionality as a power that is inherent in the self, he explains manifestation by appealing to the (imperceptible) action of *vimarśa*. This way, he develops a theory of intentionality as *logos*, a life force that penetrates and animates all structures and forms of existence from the lowest to the highest. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty’s unveils an intentionality that despite being hidden from conscious thought, is *felt* at the level of bodily motility. One may argue that Merleau-Ponty’s concept, limited as it is to bodily intentionality, is incomparable to *vimarśa* that covers the totality of existence. And yet, by showing its workings on the somatic level, Merleau-Ponty seeks a type of intentionality that is deeply rooted in the totality of existence. His reference to Husserl’s contribution to the concept of intentionality reinforces this idea (PhP:140, footnote 54):

In our opinion Husserl’s originality lies beyond the notion of intentionality; it is to be found in the elaboration of this notion and in the discovery, beneath the intentionality of representations, of a deeper intentionality, which others have called existence.

To witness with Merleau-Ponty that motor intentionality is anchored in the body, encourages, in turn, the consideration of the somatic rootedness of *vimarśa.* In one of his notes to the translation of *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, Jaideva Singh (2006:47) criticises Prof. Leidecker’s translation of *vimarśa* as ‘reason’. He disagrees with such an interpretation explaining that (*ibid*.) “it is not reason which brings about this world, nor is it absolute and free will.” Indeed, the Sanskrit etymology of the term *vimarśa* indicates its ‘carnal’ affiliation. Deriving from the root *mṛś-* (to touch), it is linked to the sense of touch that is ranked highest of all perceptions in categories of reality (*tattva*) (TĀ 11.29a-34a) and is equated with the highest level of creative energy of *śakti*. With reference to Gupta (1988:35), M. Skora acknowledges that (2007:425) “consciousness for Abhinavagupta can never be reduced to pure thinking.” She further remarks that although *vimarśa* is a type of ‘knowing’, it is different from disembodied cognition or a purely metaphysical representation (*ibid*.), “even as a type of “knowing” it must be one that includes the body; in other words, *vimarśa* is a process of bodily knowing.” Gupta shows that Abhinavagupta understood awareness as a type of touching precisely for the purpose of recovering the body in his understanding of consciousness (1963: 39): “related to the notion of *vipra* is that of *spanda*, or “vibration”, a central notion in Abhinavagupta’s lifeworld, and one that I would suggest is also best understood as tactile, kinaesthetic, and synaesthetic.” To the ĪPV reader, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of motor intentionality offers a base for rethinking *vimarśa*’s internality to the body and its motor circuits, not as a disembodied reflection but a subtle, imperceptible yet *felt* energy. Understanding *vimarśa* on the level of the body helps, in turn, to develop a better understanding of the much-contested idea of the *body-subject* in Merleau-Ponty, a term he coins to account for the primacy of bodily intentionality.

2.3.4 The body-subject

To be a subject for Merleau-Ponty, as Dastur remarks, does not mean to give a meaning to the objects of the world, but (2008:29) “to open oneself to the world through one’s own body and to be in the world in a non-objective manner.” In Merleau-Ponty’s own words (PhP:452):

True reflection presents me to myself not as an idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical with my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it: I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and through them, all the rest.

Merleau-Ponty has some significant reasons to want to ‘subjectivize’ the body. Firstly, without body there is no experience. S. Gallagher & D. Zanhavi (2021)[[4]](#footnote-4) remark that “the claim is not simply that the perceiver/actor is objectively embodied, but that the body is in some fashion *experientially present* in the perception or action.” Secondly, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of perception shows that the subject’s experience is inextricably linked to the fact of its in-carnation (PhP:475): “if the subject is in a situation, even if he is no more than a possibility of situations, this is because *he forces his ipseity into reality* only by actually being a body, and entering the world through that body.” The self-conscious subject, in order to be, needs to come into being *in* the world and *as* an embodied subjectivity. Chakravarthi, Ram-Prasad argues that phenomenology (2018:103), “from examining how things do appear,” attempts “to conclude how things must do so, in such a way as to bridge the gap between the subject and the occurrence of objects in its phenomenal field.” Merleau-Ponty leaves no room for thinking the subject in abstract disembodied terms (*ibid*.), “the body as that bridge, for while it appears as an object of experience, it is also the mode of subjective presence in the world.” Here, embodiment is seen not as a contingency but as a necessity for *being* (PhP:475):

In so far as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world. The ontological world and body which we find at the core of the subject are not the world or body as idea, but on the one hand the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp, and on the other the body itself *as a knowing-body*.

Merleau-Ponty recognises that the personal awareness of existing cannot be dissociated from the subject’s embodiment in the world. Yet, it appears as if the idea of the *body-subject* relies on an unjustified and hasty assimilation of consciousness to the body. Dillon states that (1988:102) “consciousness in the Phenomenology is a term seeking its own dissolution.” It is as if, all of a sudden, the body is called to bear a double burden: that of consciousness and that of itself. Merleau-Ponty’s attempt to demonstrate that the perceptual unity reveals a spirit-matter continuum is threatened by the categories of thought to which it is still attributable. Despite the fact that the lived body is declared to be a *knowing* body, a body endowed with sentience, it is unclear how consciousness comes to embed itself in the core of bodily structures. As the shift from the objective to the phenomenal more or less assumes what is meant to demonstrate, R. Barbaras argues that Merleau-Ponty leads us to an original experience by means of categories that have not been adequately thematized. He writes (2004:5):

With the word “body”, a new concept of experience seems to be announced, a new concept, which makes no recourse to the notion of consciousness, or rather, a new concept which brings forward another definition of the subject. Nevertheless, this “potentiality” and this “having” of the world are not thought through to the end, with the result that Merleau-Ponty slides back toward a realist conception, a conception implied by his recourse to psychology that always grasps the body in a movement of objectification, implicitly. Then, the body is considered by means of the duality of the organic and the psychic.

Therefore, while, at first, the body seems to designate an original mode of existence that is beyond facticity and ideality, it soon appears to be divided by means of the subject-object opposition; it appears as the still mysterious place where the subject-object relation is tied together (PhP:135), ‘The lived body is to be understood as someone’s lived relationship to the world. It is an ambiguous unity, both subject and object, both mind and body, intertwined, understood in terms of levels, or planes of signification rather than mutually exclusive categories of being.” In the end, Merleau-Ponty describes the body across the symmetrical exclusion of the two terms of the opposition, as neither the subject nor the object but as the mediation of the subject and the object (PhP:167), “the body as mediator of the world,” mediator for a consciousness that is only “the being-toward-the-thing through the intermediary of the body.” The issue, here, is that this mediation is not thought all the way through, precisely because it is thought as ‘mediation’ and this is precisely what R.Barbaras points out (2004: 7-8):

Merleau-Ponty oscillates therefore between a unitary conception of the body and a dualistic vision, which turns the body into a “means” of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty never reaches the point of conceiving the identity and the difference of consciousness and its body together; in other words, he never reaches the point of describing positively the fact that the body belongs neither to the domain of the object nor to that of the subject.

Evidently, the problem with the idea of a ‘sentient’ body is that in Western thought beginning with Plato, the ‘sentient’ being and the ‘bodily’ belong to diametrically opposite categories. R. Keat recognises the double and ambiguous nature of a body that is not only merely a ‘body’ but also a subject and of a subject that is not just a ‘subject’ but also a body (2004: 8):

…For Merleau-Ponty, the concept of the body-subject involves not only the claim that the body is a ‘subject’, in the sense that many of the properties traditionally ascribed to the human subject are properly applied to ‘it’; but also, conversely, that the human subject is a ‘body’, in that if we adopt the view that ‘the world’ is somehow constituted as an object by and for the subject, we must recognize also that this subject is itself a (certain kind of) body.

Merleau-Ponty was aware of the limitations of his newly found concept. Nevertheless, we cannot and should not dismiss its originality that can be brought to light through a comparison with the tantric practices of visualization. Although these practices receive no or little mention in ĪPV, they are, nevertheless, intimately related to the monistic cosmogony that ĪPV borrows from the Tantras. S.Timalsina (2012) suggests that tantric visualizations focusing on the body do not simply construct certain beliefs but (2012:57) “allow one to re-map one’s mental space by altering what has already been construed.” This was precisely Merleau-Ponty’s intention when he came up with the idea of the body-subject. Furtherome, Timalsina explains how the Tantras aim at transforming the Sāṃkhyan paradigm of a world governed by the binomial logic of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* that are metaphorically related to two genders, masculine and feminine (spirit and matter) by employing imageries of the body that articulate a view of liberation as (*ibid*.) “mingling (*sāmarasya*) of the binaries.” In this context, the body is seen as “a fusion of two polarities” that implies synchronicity: the subject is not prior, the body does not follow, there is a fusion of ‘opposites’. It is precisely this synchronicity, this fusion and not a questionable imbalance of power that the concept of the body-subject was meant to introduce. Merleau-Ponty is eager to overcome the conceptual limitations of his concept and looks for explicit evidence in the phenomenal body that will reveal its double nature as a sentient-sensible. This leads him to the revision of the notion of reversibility in *The Visible and the Invisible*, a concept that is already present, albeit in a very basic form, in the *Phenomenology*.

2.4.1 Reversibility

*We do need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body*. (PhP:239)

The study of perception in relation to bodily motricity leads Merleau-Ponty to the apprehension of the body’s inextricable relationship with the phenomenal field (PhP:106): “the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us,” since (PhP:66) “the presence and absence of external objects are only variations within a field of primordial presence.” Merleau-Ponty contends that (PhP:66) “this phenomenal field is not an ‘inner world’, the ‘phenomenon’ is not a ‘state of consciousness’, or a ‘mental fact’, and the experience of phenomena is not an act of introspection or an intuition in Bergson’s sense.” But if the mode of being of the phenomenal field defies the hold of interiority in a symmetric way it should (PhP:66) “destroy the prejudice of the exterior.” Given the body’s role in perception, the idea that (PhP:230) “there are two senses, and two only, of the word ‘exist’: one exists as a thing or else one exists as a consciousness,” or that (*ibid*.) “the object is an object through and through, and consciousness a consciousness through and through” seem somewhat irrelevant. Merleau-Ponty conceives the field beyond the interiority of consciousness and the externality of the object as a (PhP:106) “perceptual domain” where the lived, phenomenal body is also the *knowing body.* Interestingly, Husserl was the first to identify signs of sentiency in the *sensible* and notice a certain reversal of roles between the sensing and the sensed, the two poles of the perceptual relation. In section 36 of *Ideas II* (152) “Constitution of the Body as bearer of localised sensations”, he says:

The physical thing becomes animate. Or, more precisely, it remains what it was (the event does not enrich it), but an exploratory power comes to rest upon or dwell in it. Thus, I touch myself touching; my body accomplishes “a sort of reflection.” In it, through it, there is not just the unidirectional relationship of the one who perceives to what he perceives. The relationship is reversed, the touched hand becomes the touching hand, and I am obliged to say that the sense of touch here is diffused into the body—that the body is a “perceiving thing” [Ideen II, 119: “Empfindendes Ding”], a ‘subject-object’ [Ideen II, 124: “Das subjective Objekt”].

This ordinary example of the hands reveals the body’s constitution in a twofold manner: as a sensed object, a physical thing and as a sensing subject that feels. When both the passivity of the touched with the activity of the touching are combined, Husserl suggests, the body is not enriched as an object but, instead, “it becomes *Body*, it senses” (ibid.153, original emphasis). What makes the reflexive touch different from any other tactile experience is that it reveals the body not as a constituted thing but as alived-body (*leib*). The lived-body, says T. Craman, (2008:25) “is necessarily ambiguous, since it is both material and self-conscious” (*le corps propre* literally means one’s own body). Merleau-Ponty argues that it is via this double belonging of the body that one experiences embodiment (VI:209): “the interpellation of the sensing and the sensed is at the origin of an experience of incarnation that is self-ruling.” In other words, the overlapping perceiving-perceived coincides with one’s awareness of one’s own embodiment (*ibid*.):

And we shall render explicit the cohesion of the obverse and the reverse of my body which is responsible for the fact that my body— which is visible, tangible like a thing— *acquires this view upon itself, this contact with itself*, where it doubles itself up, *unifies itself*, in such a way that the objective body and the phenomenal body turn about one another or encroach upon one another.

An exploration of the structure of reversibility shows that the touching and the touched are not, in fact, the reverse of one another. If compared with the two sides of a coin where the reversal takes place by means of an external operation, the reflective touch initiates a sort of internal movement that reverses from the touching to the touched. The body touches and is being touched; the relations between the hands are reversed, crossed and the sense of touch is diffused into the body. This ability, according to Merleau-Ponty, is (VI:121-122) “a sort of reflection” that is different from the reflection of pure consciousness since it refuses to close upon itself hermetically (*ibid*.): “what we propose here, and oppose to the search for the essence, is not the return to the immediate, the coincidence, the effective fusion with the existent...” We can never simultaneously touch our right hand while it is also touching an object of the world (VI:147-8):

My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; *the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realisation*, and one of the two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over into the rank of the touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted, or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch it.

The discovery of this double reference is what makes a body *living* but also *lived* (PhP:210): “the *animate* body has the remarkable characteristic of being at the same time subject and object of sensation.” The idea of the reversibility as the mode of being of the phenomenal body replaces that of the body-subject in a way that aspires to resolve all conceptual antinomies by simply exceeding them. This is not to say that the underlying unity of the touching-touched produces an absolute identity simply because the relation between the two sides is never one of absolute coincidence (VI:123): “the touching hand does not coincide with the touched hand; there is already a de-centering.” It is (*ibid*.) "a sort of dehiscence [that] opens my body in two." A perfect coincidence, a complete reversion of roles would lead to a pure, transparent subjectivity and, therefore, to a bodiless subject. As R. Barbaras observes, the experience one has of his/her own body simply (2004:154) “prohibits this apprehension from being carried away beyond its incarnation and completing itself as a pure consciousness.”

2.4.2 Reflection and reversibility

To fully appreciate the development of the notion of reversibility in Merleau-Ponty we need to examine it in the context of his critique of the classical model of reflection. The body touches and is being touched; the relations between the hands are reversed, crossed and the sense of touch is diffused into the body. This ability, according to Merleau-Ponty, is “a sort of reflection” that differs, however, from the reflection of pure consciousness in not closing upon itself hermetically (VI:121-122): “what we propose here, and oppose to the search for the essence, is not the return to the immediate, the coincidence, the effective fusion with the existent...” In this unexplored milieu that reversibility discloses, there arises a sort of reflective awareness that is, as J.Reynolds says, (2004:13) “predicated on our body’s reversible differentiation with itself”. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty expresses his dissatisfaction with analytic reflection for its failure to account for the continuity between the inner and the outer aspects of the lived experience. He remarks that traditional reflection (VI:31) “liberates us from the false problems posed by bastard and unthinkable experiences, it also accounts for them through the simple transposition of the incarnate subject into a transcendental subject and of the reality of the world into an ideality.” In this sense (VI:32), “it is true in what it denies, that is, the exterior relation between a world in itself and myself.” However, since (*ibid*.) “the secret of the world we are seeking must necessarily be contained in my contact with it,” it is doubtful that the passage to ideality suffices, on its own, to explain the co-origination of the subject and the world of experience. Hence, Merleau-Ponty asks whether reflection (*ibid*.) “conceives properly the natal bond between me who perceives and what I perceive.” To challenge the long-standing association of reflection with the faculty of reason, Merleau-Ponty undertakes a review of Descartes’ idea of the natural judgment (PhP:48), “perhaps we have not yet understood the real function of judgment in perception.” In his Second Meditation, Descartes analyses a ball of wax aiming to show that, like any other object, it can be known solely through our intellect. The ball of wax is chosen as an example because of its distinct sensuous properties such as colour, texture, smell, etc. This variety in the sensible can easily lead us to believe that our knowledge of the ball of wax comes through our senses. Nonetheless, as the wax is brought closer to a fire and gets heated, all these properties do change. This, nevertheless, does not influence our ability to recognize that this piece of wax is the same as the one that was analysed a little earlier. This means that none of the wax’s properties is what the wax actually in itself is and that if we wish to know the wax's true nature, we will need to consider it in isolation from these properties. Its essential nature, being immutable, is to be known neither through our senses - since it lies beyond all sensible qualities - nor through our imagination. Descartes concludes (Meditations on First Philosophy II, p.12):

But finally here I am, having insensibly reverted to the point I desired, for, since it is now manifest to me that even bodies are not properly speaking known by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the understanding only, and since they are not known from the fact that they are seen or touched, but only because they are understood, I see clearly that there is nothing which is easier for me to know than my mind.

Merleau-Ponty revisits Descartes’ argument and points out that by ‘natural judgement’, Descartes thinks of a meaning for the perceived (PhP:48-49), “which is not prior to the perception itself and which seems to emanate from it.” Reflection does not operate in the realm of pure reason because it is never cut off the ground from which phenomenality arises, it is not an intuition (*inspectio*) of the mind as Descartes thought (PhP:49),“reflection never lifts itself out of any situation, nor does the analysis of perception do away with the fact of perception...” Merleau-Ponty argues that Descartes’ analysis of the piece of wax does not show a reason that lies behind and beyond (PhP:47) “the phenomenon of perception, and the world born in perception,” but on the contrary, a reason that (PhP:48) “is rooted in nature; the ‘inspection of the mind’ would then be, not the concept gravitating towards nature, but nature rising to the concept.” The key to Merleau-Ponty’s paradigm shift lies in the assumption that if perception is a judgment, it is, however, not aware of how it has been formed. Descartes himself confides (Meditations on First Philosophy VI, p.27): “I had learned from nature all the other judgments, which I formed regarding the objects of my senses, since I remarked that these judgments were formed in me before I had the leisure to weigh and consider any reasons which might oblige me to make them.” For Merleau-Ponty, this means that the perceived object is given to our perception in its totality and unity in a pre-reflective way, that is, before we even become aware of any law governing it. On this, S.Gallagher and D.Zahavi state (2021): [[5]](#footnote-5)

I begin to examine my perceptual experience, I will recognize it as *my* perceptual experience only because I have been pre-reflectively aware of it, as I have been living through it. Thus, phenomenology maintains, the access that reflective self-consciousness has to first-order phenomenal experience is routed through pre-reflective consciousness, for if we were not pre-reflectively aware of our experience, our reflection on it would never be motivated. When I do reflect, I reflect on something with which I am already experientially familiar.

Descartes fails to capitalize on his discovery because in his quest for absolute certainty, he realizes that he could not trust his senses (Meditations on First Philosophy VI, p.27):

But afterwards many experiences little by little destroyed all the faith which I had rested in my senses; for I from time to time observed that those towers which from afar appeared to me to be round, more closely observed seemed square … I found error in judgments founded on the external senses.

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty cannot trust analytic reflection that tries to comprehend the natal bond with the perceived by undoing the bond with it only to redo it by means of an ideal constitution. This is because such *fabrication* excludes the givenness of the perceived and the instance of genesis of the phenomenal since (VI:34) “in order to constitute the world, it is necessary to have a notion of the world as preconstituted.” Nonetheless, (*ibid*.) “an intrusion of the world in myself”, the unity achieved in ideality is not true as it fails to consider the reality of the world in terms of its presence and meaning *for* the perceiving subject itself. Therefore, if idealism restores our thought back into immanence, it is to bring us back to a center of things from which we have been decentered at the first place. And if it announces the world as our birthplace, it is (VI:33) “only because first we as minds are the cradle of the world.” Following his critique of Descartes, Merleau-Ponty seeks to uncover within the layers of corporeity, the traces of an original awareness and show that (VI:20) “the being-object can no longer be being itself: “objective” and “subjective” are recognized as two orders hastily constructed within a total experience, whose context must be restored in all clarity.”

Merleau-Ponty is convinced that the sensible exhibits a unique kind of sentiency that no philosophy of consciousness has been able to account for. The closest he has been to detecting explicit signs of somatic awareness is in his study of double sensations. However, as he conceives this phenomenon in terms of *alternation* and *oscillation,* his thought is withheld within a conceptual context of disparateness. Therefore, in *The Visible and the Invisible* his biggest challenge will be to explain the relationship between the sensing and the sensed in a way as to enables himself to articulate sensibility and sentiency together, “to define a category of relation that restores to the sensible its intelligibility of which Descartes had deprived it” (I.Thomas-Fogiel, 2014)[[6]](#footnote-6). Merleau-Ponty confesses that this is quite a challenge (VI:137): “it is a problem— and we will not avoid it— to determine how the sensible sentient can also be thought.” But if he can prove that the body is endowed with a primary intentionality, an “aboutness” that originates within structures that were previously attributed to consciousness, then the subject’s inherence in the world can be totally justified in terms of bodily embeddedness.

Hence, that which in the *Phenomenology* *of Perception* was described in terms ofalternation*,* is described in *The Visible and the Invisible* as a continuum between the realm of the inner (sensing) and that of the external (sensed) (VI:137): “this can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from *within*, is *also* accessible from *without*, itself tangible, for my other hand.” The revised version of the phenomenon of double sensations allows alternation to evolve into *reversibility* despite the fact that the essential aspects of the description remain the same. Nevertheless, from (PhP:93): “the body tries... to touch itself while being touched and initiates *a kind of* *reversible reflection*", to: it is a (VI:9) “reflection of the body upon itself”, reversibility is progressively internalised. Merleau-Ponty recognises reversibility as the dominant structure of embodiment showing that the experience of sensing does not uncover the traces of a subjectivity that adds itself to the physical body but of a sensibility that articulates itself in a reversible mode. The body, Merleau-Ponty says, (PhP:106) “catches itself from the outside engaged in a cognitive process; it tries to touch itself while being touched, and initiates ‘a kind of reflection’ that is sufficient to distinguish it from objects.”

It so happens that when referring to Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility thesis, we often use the terms *reflexivity* and *reflection* interchangeably. Merleau-Ponty, writing in French, employs the word “réflexion” that in English translates as *reflection* and not as reflexivity, which is the French for *réflexivité.* Etymologically speaking, *reflection* is a noun that originates from Latin, a derivative of the verb *reflectere* meaning “to bend back, to turn away”*.[[7]](#footnote-7)* Its association to the visible light is obvious as it refers to surfaces throwing back light or heat. Merleau-Ponty alludes to reflection as something that the body exercises (VI:9) “*upon* itself”. This “upon” reinforces the idea that, for Merleau-Ponty, the passage from the idealistic to the phenomenological register banks on the use of the Latin term *reflectere* (as reflection of light *upon* a surface). The transformation of the logistics of this term are significant because they show that awareness is not a passive intellectual reflection but the dynamic activity of an embodied self: it is the ‘view’ that the body acquires of itself, showing that we are not just embodied beings but embodied beings aware of being in our body and “in the way of our body”.

We notice in Merleau-Ponty’s transformation of the concept of reflection an intriguing imagery of light that evokes Utpaladeva’s description of *vimarśa* as the self-referential power of consciousness. The ability of consciousness to reflect back upon itself, to make a retour to itself is what makes consciousness aware of itself. But what does this precisely mean? Reading *vimarśa* along the lines of *reflection as reversibility* (and the convertibility of spirit and matter entailed by it) challenges the interpretation of *vimarśa* in terms of reason. It becomes all the more evident that by associating *vimarśa* to *spanda*, Utpala highlights the self-reflective, reversible activity of consciousness (M. Dyzkowski, 1984:24), “the inner universal vibration of consciousness as its pure perceptivity *(upalabdhṛtā*)which constitutes equally its cognizing subjectivity *(jñatṛtva)* and agency *(kartṛtva).”* Utpala invites the reader to recognise the chiasmic relationship between the subjective and agential aspects of consciousness and view the (ibid.)“outer recurrence of reality through its manifest forms” as an expression of the self’s inner freedom and inherent power. At the same time, reading reversibility in terms of *vimarśa*, introduces a flexibility that reading it in the context of the body as seer-seen lacks, precisely because it is framed in terms of the body. Through the lens of *vimarśa* as the activity of the self, we are in a better position to view the appearing being as a result of a continuous enlace of an inside and an outside, which are parts of the same movement.

Through the activity of *spanda*, consciousness becomes aware of itself and upon taking this view upon itself, it becomes existence, *it becomes flesh.* It is only by being able to consider the corporeal bearings of *vimarśa* and envisage embodiment as the a priori of conscious experience (rather than the other way round) that Utpala’s line of argument acquires the relevance needed for a contemporary audience; a reading that bypasses the *fleshed* nature of consciousness throws us back to the impasses of dualistic philosophies, which is exactly what Utpala strives to avoid. But this works both ways. Despite Merleau-Ponty’s effort to introduce a whole new conception of the body, its double nature remains ambiguous because “he never reaches the point of describing positively the fact that the body belongs neither to the domain of the object nor to that of the subject”. The challenge of conceiving the identity and the difference of consciousness and body together is met when apprehended in terms of *vimarsa* as *spanda*: since consciousness is not a mental state but vibrating *energy*, it is essentially not different from the body, which in turn, is non-different from consciousness.

Conclusion

A further analysis of perception in both Utpaladeva and Merleau-Ponty has helped us make a case for the role of our embodiment.

Merleau-Ponty’s notion of motor intentionality offers a base for rethinking *vimarśa*’s inherence to the routes of our body which contrasts with a biased reading of the term as ‘reason’. From the transcendental activity of a body-less consciousness, *vimarśa* becomes a subtle, imperceptible, yet kinesthetically *felt* energy on the level of the body. In exchange, the idea of *spanda*, as vibrating activity, supports a movement that is based on a reading of the motor intentionality in Merleau-Ponty that emphasizes the phenomenal nature of this ‘movement’. These are significant developments given that the philosophical notions we are dealing with have been established and communicated in a certain form throughout the centuries. Merleau-Ponty’s questioning of the nature of reflection and his reclamation of its sensible origins is a telling example of this. And this is where the value of this melding of ideas can be truly appreciated. Jumping from intellectual reflection to *bodily* reversibility as a model for understanding reflection can be easily contested. After reclaiming the somatic affiliations of *vimarśa,* we are in a better position to acknowledge that reflection initiates a phenomenal *spatiality* that the intellect, in its transparency, is unable to account for. Starting from the idea of *spanda* asintertwining of the inner and outer aspects of a single motion, places reflection outside

the binomial logic that surrounds it in Merleau-Ponty at the same time that reveals its ontological dimensions. Conversely, exploring

*vimarśa* in terms of reversibility broadens our understanding of the structure of the self’s appearing. This is precisely what is going to constitute the focus of the following chapter:

the double reference of our body is indicative of its openness to the experience of a world. This openness is realised within a network of reflections that puts under serious question the idea of the complete “world” of the physical sciences, a world standing apart from the body and in front of a consciousness.

CHAPTER THREE – Towards a phenomenological cosmology

Introduction

Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of bodily intentionality shows that the body reveals a certain dimensionality that can be explored only by studying the body’s relationship to the world. It is characterised by a chiasm between its active and passive aspects, a hand touching and a hand touched, a body seeing, and a body seen that opens it up to the world. The body’s double reference reveals its simultaneous belonging to the order of the sentient and that of the sensible. In Merleau-Ponty’s eyes, the impossibility of a complete reversibility, the *écart,* is not an expression of separation but one of differentiation. The chiastic relation between the body and the world inaugurates a new way of conceiving Being, not as a closed totality we need to observe from afar but as a Being that surrounds us, a *vertical* or *wild* Being to which we partake by virtue of our embodiment. In his attempt to formulate a new ontology, Merleau-Ponty is faced with significant challenges coming from fundamental distinctions within Western Philosophy, namely the categories of sentient and sensible that are historically considered not only distinct but diametrically opposite. If the categories of Western philosophical thought are not quite favourable to Merleau-Ponty’s ontological project, Utpala’s view of cosmic creation offers an alternative paradigm for exploring its premises - the universe comes into existence as the result of a progressive differentiation that is due to the infinite freedom of cosmic consciousness, its playful desire. Creation relies on a genealogy of light, a series of successive reflections, consciousness manifesting by assuming a *reversible* relationship with itself, by becoming the other. This reversibility reveals the chiastic structure of an appearing being that remains one in its otherness. The same is echoed in Merleau-Ponty who describes reversibility as the *free* expression of a limitless being (VI:215): “By reason of this mediation through reversal, this chiasm, there is not simply a for-Oneself for-the-Other antithesis, there is Being as containing all that, first as sensible Being and then as Being without restriction.”

3.1.1. The dimensional sensible

To further demonstrate that reflection does not originate in a transcendental field and a *wordless* subject, Merleau-Ponty undertakes a close examination of our subjective experience of the world. He starts by challenging our reliance on perceptual faith, that is, faith in an objective world existing somewhere out there, independent of our perception of it (VI:160): “This something to which we are present and which is present to us is, one is tempted to say, “the things”— and everyone knows, apparently, what must be understood by that.” He suggests that we need to question our relationship to the world we claim we know too well (VI:4): “What Saint Augustine said of time—that it is perfectly familiar to each, but that none of us can explain it to the others— must be said of the world.” Relying on perceptual faith, far from apprehending the mystery of the world, renders it even more incomprehensible (VI:3):

But what is strange about this faith is that if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this we, what *seeing* is, and what *thing* or *world* is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions.

Merleau-Ponty concludes that the question of the world’s presence ultimately comes down to the question of *what is that is presented to us* (VI:160): “our first truth—which prejudges nothing and cannot be contested— will be that there is presence, that “something” is there, and that “someone” is there. Before coming to the “someone,” let us ask first what the “something" is.” Having (VI:27) “lost the illusion of the absolute view from above,” Merleau-Ponty turns to the body’s inherence to the world as this is revealed by its double reference to the subjective and objective orders (VI:137):

We say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the “object" and to the order of the “subject" reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders.

While drifting away from the bionomical logic of perception, what was earlier seen as a weakness (hands do not suffice for touch*),* becomes a strength: hands do not suffice for touch because the body is in its entirety an integral part of the field towards which it opens. This does not mean that (VI:123): “there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it” since the movement of reversibility is never complete (*ibid*.): “the touching hand does not coincide with the touched hand.” Had it been complete, it would lead to a pure and transparent subjectivity, a bodiless subject; it is precisely because a complete reversibility fails that there is, for us, a world. “Because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two” (VI:*123*), because there is a spread, an *écart,* between the hand touching and the hand touched, a constitutive thickness (VI:110): “I am not yet the pure spectator I will become through the act of ideation; I am *a field of experience.*” The *écart* does not denote an absolute separation but a differentiation or modulation of a primal topological space (WN:216-217): “Consider the right, the left: these are not simply contents within a relational spatiality (i.e. *positive*)*:* they are not *parts* of space (Kant's reasoning is valid here: the whole is primary), they are total parts, cuts in an encompassing, topological space.” The right and the left are only (WN:270): “*differentiations* of one sole and *massive* adhesion to Being which is the flesh.” The flesh(*la chair*), as Gault states (2017:2), “is the structure of the advent of sentient and sensible beings in and through their own, simultaneous operations of intertwining and individuation.” And this is precisely why (VI:147) “we must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit— for then it would be the union of contradictories—but we must think it, as we said, as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being.” Merleau-Ponty’s thematization of the *écart* calls for a revision of the very notion of the sensible (WN:214): “But also what is this *there is* of the sensible world, of nature?” Transcendental philosophies view the sensible as a pure passage from the sign to the signified, from the particular to the universal (ibid.),“from the order of opaque qualia to the order of limpid ideality.” But if in an idealist context the sensible is the clothing of the invisible, Merleau-Ponty argues that for a true phenomenology, the sensible should be viewed as the manifestation of an invisible latency (ibid.): “the visible thing is not this passage; its coherence is a cohesion, and it makes visible and not only comprehensible a depth of latent being.” Merleau-Ponty’s answer to the phenomenological quest for bridging the gap between the phenomenon and the essence lies not in the ‘transcendence’ of the sensible but in viewing transcendence as a mode of being of the sensible, as its constitutional dimensionality. A. Lingis explains (VI:xlii-xliii):

To seriously show how the sensible thing exists between the absolute opacity of the sensuous quale and the absolute transparency of the essence, between the particular and the universal, it would be necessary to show a *sensible matter* which, in its very manner of occupying space and time, presides over space and time. It would be necessary to show *a sense that is sensuous and a sensible matter that transcends itself, that is dimensional.* (my italics)

The exploration of the sensible uncovers a movement of appearing that challenges pre-established views on the world and of being. The world becomes the manifested ground of a Being that appears without exhausting itself in this appearance (VI:214): “The sensible is precisely that medium in which there can be being without it having to be posited; the sensible appearance of the sensible, the silent persuasion of the sensible is Being’s unique way of manifesting itself without becoming positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent.” Merleau-Ponty further supports his reading of the sensible in terms of appearing based on his development of the notion of the flesh as a (VI:139) “sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.” This is not reference to a posited cohesion between things but to the emergence of this cohesion (VI:140): “not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to location and to the now. Much more: the inauguration of the where and the when, the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word: facticity, what makes the fact be a fact.” Merleau-Ponty insists on a reading of flesh in procedural terms, not as what binds the things together but as what brings them to visibility, as the *appearing* itself (*ibid*.), the “flesh is *this whole cycle* and not only the inherence in a spatiotemporally individuated this.*”* In this radically phenomenological context, the flesh is (VI:194): “beyond the “point of view of the object” and the “point of view of the subject,” a common nucleus,” a continuous outpouring of existence (ibid.): “the “winding” (*serpentement*), being as a winding (what I called “modulation of the being in the world).”

Merleau-Ponty states rather explicitly his ontological agenda in the following words (WN:253): “What I want to do is *restore the world as a meaning of Being* absolutely different from the "represented," that is, as the vertical Being which none of the "representations" exhaust and which all "reach," the wild Being.” Idealist philosophies deny the possibility of knowing the existence of any *thing* independently of the human mind. The ontological implications of idealism are that the existence of things depends on the human mind placing the mind at the origin of the phenomena. On the other hand, empiricism holds matter to be the principal substance in nature implying that from an ontological perspective, all that exists is ultimately physical. Either one perpetuates a view of the world divided by the separation of facts and essences, to which Merleau-Ponty objects: there is (WN:268): “no need to add to the multiplicity of spatio-temporal atoms a transversal dimension of essences.” In the place of this fragmentary view, Merleau-Ponty, attributes to the world an ontological status, disclosing it as a meaning of being, which is (WN:268) “vertical and not *horizontal.”* He states (WN:253):

What I want to do is restore the world as a meaning of Being absolutely different from the "represented," that is, as the vertical Being which none of the "representations" exhaust and which all "reach," the wild Being.

The interchangeable use of the terms “world” and “Being” reveal an entirely new concept of being according to which “being in the world” is “being within Being,” a Being that is not distant and at the limits of my experience but around me, traversing me. Being is not a certain, yet unknown totality, which must be discovered and thematized, but an inexhaustible dimension of possibilities involved in all our perception, expression, and thinking. Merleau-Ponty says (VI:114-115):

Being no longer being *before me,* but surrounding me and in a sense traversing me, and my vision of Being not forming itself from elsewhere, but from the midst of Being—the alleged facts, the spatio-temporal individuals, are from the first mounted on the axes, the pivots, the dimensions, the generality of my body, and the ideas are therefore already encrusted in its joints.

The world/being reversibility can be further elucidated with reference to the idea of a self-

manifesting reality that is both immanent and transcendent. Here, the world follows a vertical logic.

Structurally, the *vertical* Being it is not the flat being /world of the natural sciences. It

reveals an intersection of dimensions cutting across each other and rendering the supposed hierarchy between microcosm and macrocosm utterly meaningless (WN:226-7):

The content of my perception, microphenomenon, and the large-scale view of the enveloping phenomena are not two projections of the In itself: Being is their common inner framework. Each field is a dimensionality and Being is dimensionality itself.

The verticality reveals existence as a series of successive layers inclusive of one another and containing the conditions of each other’s possibility (WN:268): “what there is, is a whole architecture, a whole complex of phenomena “in tiers,” a whole series of “levels of being,” which are differentiated by the coiling up of the visible and the universal over a certain visible wherein it is redoubled and inscribed.” What we call “reality” is not found behind the phenomena but in the way these appear. The ‘particular’ and the ‘universal’ are only scales on a single ‘projections’ (WN:226):

The macrophenomenon and the microphenomenon are not two more or less enlarged projections of a real in itself *behind them:* the macrophenomena of evolution are not less real, the microphenomena *not more* real. There is no hierarchy between them.

3.2.1. The world as an interplay of reflections

In the mode of the vertical, the world is transformed from a place of passage from facts to essences to the locus of an ongoing genesis of phenomenality (WN:226):

It is a going beyond the ontology of the In itself—and expresses this overcoming in terms of the in itself--Scale: a *projective* notion: one imagines a being in itself marked on a map in itself, where it appears transposed according to a given ratio of sizes, so that the representations on different scales are different "visual pictures" of the same in itself--One goes one step further in suppressing the *model In itself:* there is no longer anything but representations on different scales.

Merleau-Ponty explains that these ‘projections’ are not static ‘representations’ of a distant Being that would lead us back to a philosophy of reflection. Instead, they are ways in which the vertical being expresses its *freedom* to manifest and make itself perceptible. Therefore, we should not seek a reality behind reality; the real is in whatever offers itself to vision in the here and now (*ibid*.):

It is a question of understanding that the "views" at different scales are not projections upon corporeities—screens of an inaccessible In itself, that they and their lateral implication in one another are the reality, exactly: that the reality is their common inner framework *(membrure),* their nucleus, and not something *behind them:* behind them, there are only other "views" still conceived according to the in itself-projection schema. The real is *between them,* this side of them.

Given the historical distinction between sensibility and ideality, Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of the vertical in terms of a network of relations is rather challenging. Yet, it seems of great significance to him: describing the appearing of the world in terms of *projection,* he wishes to show that the perceptual views are not mere representation but dynamic intersections that create the fabric of the ‘real’. Yet, the historical description of the world as ‘representation’ may interfere with the philosophical meaning of ‘projection’ in this context, mainly because at this stage, there is not a detailed ontology that can explain the mechanism within being initiating this movement- the concept of flesh struggles between being a cohesive texture and an activity that brings this texture into being.

Interestingly, in his ĪPV, Utpaladeva offers a rather detailed analysis of manifestation *as* reflection. Given its strong monistic context, his analysis extends Merleau-Ponty’s thought and overcomes the conceptual obstacles that may prevent the reader from acknowledging the importance of his discovery. If Merleau-Ponty challenges perceptual faith, Utpaladeva rejects the idea of an objective world existing prior to our perception of it. After showing that the self is the sole knower, Utpala sets off to demonstrate how his arguments on the nature of perception not only explain how we know but also how everything *exists*. Abhinava affirms that (ĪPVI AG.I, intro:189): “in this connection it has to be noted that the objects of the world, characterised by sentiency or insentience, are simply manifestations.” This does not mean that the world is an illusion, it means that everything exists as it appears; consciousness is endowed with the freedom *(svātantrya)* to do what seems, logically impossible, that is, be at once motionless and yet full of activity. Based on analogies of light, Abhinava states (IPVI. I, pp. 208-9, translation M. Dyczkowski, 1989 :81):

By Vibration' *{spandana}* [we mean] subtle movement. It is subtle [in the sense that] although it moves not, it manifests as motion. The light of consciousness is not at all separate [from manifestation] yet it appears to be so. Thus, that which is immobile, associated with the variety of manifestation, manifestation [as movement].

While motion implies the existence of at least two separate entities between which it takes place, Utpala agrees with Merleau-Ponty that there is no objective world defined by a spatiality in which different entities are seen to persist. Even though the activity of consciousness is not set in space (or time), it is the source of all sequentially definable spatial and temporal manifestations *(desakrama* and *kalakramabhasa).* This explains that the ‘reality’ we experience can be contemplated from two different levels: lower/sensible and higher/universal. While at the lower *(apara)* level we experience a sequence *(krama)* of events—as changing positions in space and transitions in time-, from the highest *(para)* level of consciousness reality is experienced as a single, unchanging *(akrama)* whole. This view supports Merleau-Ponty’s non-hierarchical view of reality. Seeing micro and macrophenomena as “views” that do not follow a hierarchical order presupposes that there is no pure being (essences) followed by projections (phenomena) – there are *only* projections. This is successfully explained through the imagery of the mirror that Utpala, not unlike his predecessors, uses to convey a view of reality as reflection of the absolute (ĪPVI KR. IV,10:174):

*cetano hi svātmadarpaṇe bhāvān pratibimbavadābhāsayati iti siddhāntaḥ*

The sentient Lord manifests the objective world like reflection in the mirror of His self.

and (ĪPV. JÑ VII, 14, 110/ Vol.1 p. 389):

*itthamatyarthabhinnāthārvabhāsasvacite vibhau ।*

*samalo vimalo vāpi vyavaharo’nubhūyate । ।*

Thus, experience shows that all transactions, whether pure or impure, depend upon the omnipresent Lord, in whom all the objective manifestations, so very different from one another, are reflected.

The concept of mirroring draws from the idea of interiority (*antaratva*) that is a key idea in Utpala’s metaphysics: everything is internal *(antararthavada)* toconsciousness, which is the abode of the universe sustaining all things within its all-pervasive nature.Utpala argues that we can only account for the fact that things appear if there is an essential identity between consciousness and the object perceived. He suggests that if illumination were separated from its object, then the object would coincide with the undivided (*abhinna*) light. But this same claim can be read in reverse: if, for instance, the potter’s desire to create did not specifically intend to manifest the said “jar” in relation to a particular *ābhāsa,* then it could very well result in the creation of a cloth or of any other object. The world is not an ideation because cconsciousness is essentially active. Full of the vibration of its own energy engaged in the act of perception, consciousness manifests itself externally as its own object (ĪPVI TS.I, 2:220/Vol.2 p.282):

*tatraivaṃ svātmani maheśvare sthite tasminneva prakāśarūpe svātmadarpaṇe*

*tenaiva parameśvareṇa svātantryāt tāvatsṛṣṭaḥ*

The Highest Lord, resting within his own self, in the very luminous mirror of His self, creates (manifest) within Himself by means of power of perfect freedom, the objective (aspect of the) world, which is limited in its nature.

Thus, something is manifest when the primordial will *(svātantrya/vimarśa*) is active and there is a projection of consciousness towards the exterior (I.Kuznetsova 2012:347). I.Kuznetsova remarks that (2012:347) “externality is required for *ābhāsas* to be causally efficient.” This also means that if the manifested objects are endowed with a certain intentionality, this is not originally their own. Their “causal efficiency” (*arthakriyā*) is derived from the self (ĪPV KR.III. 12,156/ Vol. 2. p.120):

*arthakriyāpi sahajā nārthānāmīśvarecchayā ।*

*niyatā sā hi tenāsyā nākriyāto’nyatā bhavet । ।*

The causal efficacy of the objects is not naturally their own. It is fixed by the will of the Lord.

In her analysis of Utpala’s theory of reflection, I.Kuznetsova (2012:347) explains that all objects of experience are combinations of *ābhāsas*, manifestations which are particularized through mutual delimitation and through conjunction with the limiting factors of space and time. This particularization of manifestations is synonymous with the process of ‘externalization’ that was discussed earlier. In Abhinava’s own words (ĪPVI JÑ.V,7:65-66/Vol.1 p.228):

*yat saṃvit eva abhyupagatasvātantryā apratīghātalakṣaṇāt*

*icchāviśeṣavaśāt saṃvido’nadhikātmatāyā anapāyāt*

*antaḥsthitameva sat bhāvajātam idamityevaṃ prāṇabuddhidehādeḥ vitīrṇakriyanmātrasaṃvidrūpāt bāhyatvena ābhāsayati iti,*

*tat iha viśvarūpābhāsavaicitrye cidātmana eva svātantryaṃ kiṃ na abhyupagamyate svasaṃvedanasiddham, kimiti hetvantaraparyeṣaṇāprayāsena khidyate ।*

Therefore, it is possible that the universal consciousness (*saṃvid*), whose power of freedom is acknowledged, by virtue of its peculiar will, the chief characteristic of which is freedom from obstruction, manifests these objects of the world, which are present within as one with it, objectively as this, i.e., as external to vital air, intellect and body, to which limited power of consciousness is given.

I. Kuznetsova (2012:347) explains that the self’s intentionality endows each *ābhāsa* with its own causal efficiency and, thus, each object has the causal efficiencies of its constituent *ābhāsas* plus a unified causal efficiency as a part of an integrated whole. In *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā,* Utpala states (II.3.6):

Things possess a determinate causal efficiency depending on the variety of the manifestations *(ābhāsabhedād)* they are composed of; and, on the contrary, [they have a different] one based on their appearing as unitary realities owing to a common substratum.

By the same logic, it is only on the condition that these manifestations derive their luminosity from a common substratum that their differentiation is possible (ĪPV JÑ.VII. 3,100/Vol.1 p.358):

*deśakālakramajuṣāmarthānāṃ svasamāpinām ।*

*sakṛdābhāsa*sādhyo'sāvavanyathā *kaḥ samanvayaḥ । ।*

How can otherwise mutual connection of the objects, which are related to different temporal and spatial orders and are self-confined, be possible? For, it (connection) depends upon their shining simultaneously.

Utpala concludes that if there were no mutual delimitation, then the world of name and form (*nāmarūpa*), as we know it, would not be possible. Utpala states (ĪPV JÑ.VII. 2,100 /Vol.1 p. 355):

*tattadvibhinnasaṃvittimukhairekapramātari ।*

pratiti*ṣṭhatsu bhāveṣu jñāteyamupapadyate* । ।

The mutual connection of the objects is possible, if they have their being (facing one another) in the subject, through (the channels of) various definite cognitions.

Utpala’s monism becomes all the more apparent in his view of manifestation as a knowledge praxis (*jñāna*) (ĪPV.KR.I, 8:125/Vol 2, p.24):

*kintu nirmaṇaśaktiḥ sā’pyevaṃ viduṣa īśituḥ ।*

*tathāvijñātṛvijñeyabhedo yadavabhāsyate । ।*

But to manifest the variety of subjects and objects with their characteristic limitations, is the creative power of the Lord who *knows* them as such.

Utpala’s view of manifestation flows uninterruptedly from his account of cognition as he sees no difference between objects of knowledge and objects of the world. The continuity between epistemological and ontological arguments becomes all the more evident when juxtaposing two sets of verses from *jñāna* and *kriyādhikāra,* respectively (ĪPV JÑ.V,15:76/Vol.1 p.267):

*ātmānam ata evāyaṃ jñeyīkuryāt* *pṛthaksthiti ।*

jñeyaṃ na tu tadaunmukhyāt*khaṇḍyetāsyasvatantratā* । ।

Therefore, it is that He manifests Himself as objects of knowledge. The object has no separate existence: for, in that case, because of His having to look up to them for help, His freedom would be lost.

and (ĪPV KR.IV, 1:166/ Vol. 2, p. 152) :

*eṣa cānantaśaktitvādevamābhāsayatyamūn ।*

*bhāvānicchāvaśādeṣā kriyā nirmātṛatāsya sā । ।*

And the Lord, being of unlimited power, makes the objects manifest through His power of will. It is this power of action in which His creativeness consists.

Utpaladeva asserts that action is the characteristic of the subject but of a subject in possession of the power of knowledge, suggesting that the powers of knowledge and action are inseparable (ĪPVI AG.I, 1:190/ Vol. 2. p. 215-216): “therefore, the powers of knowledge and action are not separate knowledge is enlivened by *vimarśa* and action is nothing else than *vimarśa*” (*tasmādaviyuktaṃ jñānaṃ kriyā ca । jñānaṃ vimarśānuprāṇitam, vimarśa eva ca kriyeti* । *na ca jñānaśaktivihīnasya kriyāyogaḥ iti* ।). Yet, committed as he is to the refinement of classical models of causation, Utpaladeva wishes to demonstrate that, essentially, manifestation is a re-cognitive exercise. The elegance of Utpala’s argument comes to light as Abhinava explores its implications: the manifested universe is the ideation of the universal self according to which, the self appears as it re-cognises itself in determinate forms. Utpala’s insistence on a cognitive interpretation of cosmic manifestation aims at avoiding any misunderstanding on the nature of this manifestation; it is not a separation, a fragmentation of Being but an affirmation of a primordial unity that appears in *multiplicity*. Cosmic awareness reflects upon itself and manifests as it becomes an object of perception to itself (ĪPV KR.II, 2:129/ Vol. 2, p. 36):

*tatraikamāntaraṃ tattvaṃ tadevendriyavedyatām ।*

sa*ṃprāpyānekatāṃ yāti deśakālasvabhāvataḥ । ।*

The introvert reality is a unity. The same, being unified with the manifestation of time, space and essential nature, appears as multiplicity, when it becomes the object of sense-perception.

The notion of externality translates the perceptual, self-recognitive logic of manifestation: there is a world insofar as consciousness is perceptible and as the self re-cognises itself in determinate forms. The said ‘perceptibility’ figures as a double reference that delineates the logistic of the self’s sovereignty and supreme agency: the dialectic relation of an inside, which is the self’s identity with itself and an outside, the differentiated, *playful* expression of this same identity (ĪPVI AG.I. 1,190/ Vol.2, p. 214):

*evamantarbahirvṛttiḥ kriyā kālakramānugā ।*

mātureva tadanyonyāviyukte jñānakarmaṇī *। ।*

Thus, because action is nothing more than the free consciousness, manifesting itself both *internally and externally*, in accordance with the temporal order; therefore, action really belongs to the Subject. Hence the powers of knowledge and action are mutually inseparable.

The mechanism that Utpala detects in the heart of cosmic manifestation and informs the appearance of the world follows the same logic as Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility (WN:264):

By studying the 2 leaves we ought to find the structure of being.

Start from this: there is not identity, nor non-identity, or non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another.

5.2.4 The visible and the invisible

Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the vertical Being is articulated as an interplay of reflections, that is, an articulation of the *visible* with the *invisible*. In the context of our new understanding of Being as “levels of being”, the divide between the visible and the invisible calls automatically for a thoughtful reconsideration (VI:227-228):

A certain relation between the visible and the invisible, where the invisible is not only non-visible (what has been or will be seen and is not seen, or what is seen by an other than me, not by me), but where its absence counts in the world (it is “behind” the visible, imminent or eminent visibility, it is *Urprasentiert* precisely as *Nichturprasentierbar,* as another dimension) where the lacuna that marks its place is one of the points of passage of the “world”.

In the context of a phenomenological ontology (ontology of an appearing, vertical Being) that admits the transformation of a number of classical philosophical notions, perception as an operation that relies on the dichotomy of the visible and the invisible is deemed most inadequate to describe the subject’s relationship to the world (VI:158):

We exclude the term perception to the whole extent that it already implies a cutting up of what is lived into discontinuous acts, or a reference to “things” whose status is not specified, or simply an opposition between the visible and the invisible.

The reason for this exclusion is the lack of continuity that perception entails. Within the context of (WN:238) “the gradient: not linear being, but structured being,” the invisible becomes the “secret counterpart” of the visible, that which permeates and sustains it (VI:215):

(...) but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework *(membrure),* and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it, it is the *Nichturprâsentierbar* which is presented to me as such within the world— one cannot see it there and every effort to *see it there* makes it disappear, but it is in the line of the visible, it is its virtual focus, it is inscribed within it (in filigree).

More specifically, Being sustains itself through a certain ‘negativity’ (VI:229): “the invisible is *there* without being an *object,* it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask. And the “visibles” themselves, in the last analysis, they too are only centered on a nucleus of absence.” Nevertheless, this negativity that is characteristic of the invisible, Merleau-Ponty argues, does not, in any way, translate Sartre’s concept of ‘nothingness’. On the contrary, it designates the force of visibility (visibility as force) that makes the dimensionality of being possible (WN:228):

It is this negative that makes possible the *vertical* world, the union of the incompossibles, the being in transcendence, and the topological space and the time in joints and members, in dis-junction and dis-membering — and the possible as a claimant of existence (of which “past” and “future” are but partial expressions)— and the male-female relation (the two pieces of wood that children see fitting together of themselves, irresistibly, because each is the *possible of the other*)— and the “divergence,” and the totality above the divergencies— and the thought-unthought relation (Heidegger)— and the relation of *Kopulation* where two intentions have *one sole Erfiillung.*

In an effort to take his distances from existentialist philosophy that conceives phenomenality in a mode of absence, Merleau-Ponty keeps asserting that the invisible is not ‘nothing’. Reading Merleau-Ponty along Utpaladeva reinforces a ‘positive’ reading of the dialectics visible-invisible. Utpala’s theory of causation explains how an invisible self makes itself visible through the self-differentiating activity of its own creative energy. Similarly, the concept of negativity in Merleau-Ponty denotes an activity of self-differentiation that is internal to Being. In his entry of January, 1960 entitled “The Invisible, the negative, vertical Being,” Merleau-Ponty explains how the invisible grants Being its verticality by providing the ontological depth on which dimensionality is conceivable(VI:236):

... seek in the perceived world nuclei of meaning which are invisible, but which simply are not invisible in the sense of the absolute negation (or of the absolute positivity of the “intelligible world"), but in the sense of the *other dimensionality,* as depth hollows itself out behind height and breadth, as time hollows itself out behind space------The other dimensionality grafts itself onto the preceding ones starting from a *zero of* depth for example. But this too is contained in Being as universal dimensionality.

If Merleau-Ponty nuances his concept of the negativity that characterizes the invisible as to differentiate it from Sartre’s, it is because he sees in it the very possibility of the visible. Nevertheless, the fact that he defines this negativity negatively, that is, by saying what it isn’t, reveals an inner struggle to conceive the appearing as the articulation of a certain visibility with a supposed invisibility. In Utpaladeva, manifestation as self-differentiation is equally perceived in negative terms. By exploring it, we hope to find a new paradigm for thinking the relation between the visible and the invisible in Merleau-Ponty. To begin with, Utpala argues that in the sphere of pure consciousness negation has no place as all the objects partake in the pure and luminous self. Abhinava states (ĪPVI JÑ.VI, 3:88-89/ Vol.1 p.309):

*iha pramātā nāma pramāṇādatiriktaḥ pramāsu svatantraḥ*

*saṃyojanaviyojanāviyōjanādyādhānavaśāt kartā darśitaḥ, tasya ca*

*pramāturantaḥ sarvāthāvabhāsaḥ, cinmātraśarīro’pi*

*tatsāmānādhikaraṇyavṛttirapi darpaṇanagaranyāyenāsti*

*ityapi uktam*।

According to this system, the subject is different from means of cognition. He is perfectly free in the sphere of cognitions. He is a free agent, because he is responsible for unification and differentiation of cognitions. This has been proved. And all the objects shine within that subject. These objects are essentially of the nature of pure consciousness only, and shine as one with the subject, exactly in the manner in which a city shines in a mirror. This also has been stated.

At the same time, Abhinava is fully aware that the idea of a perfect internality of the objects to the self is not useful in understanding practical life, which is characterised by exteriority and multiplicity. He goes on to explain that the self, through its creative power, manifests the universe as we know it. Manifestation is seen as an *advent to visibility* insofar as it results from a process of differentiation that accounts for the rise of the phenomena through a diacritical process that *vimarśa* as *vāk* exemplifies. From a standpoint of manifestation as a genealogy of light, this process of differentiation is ‘negative’ insofar as an object shining forth entails the negation of all other things that could shine in its place (ĪPVI JÑ.VI, 3:89/ Vol.1 p.309-310):

*evaṃ ca tatpratibhāṃ ghaṭābhāsam, atatpratibhāṃ ca aghaṭābhāsaṃ*

*pramātā bhajate-sevate tāvat, tadavikalpadaśāyāṃ citsvabhāvo’sau*

*ghaṭaḥ cidvadeva viśvaśarīraḥ pūrṇaḥ, na ca tena kaścidvyavahāraḥ,*

*tat māyāvyāpāramullāsayanpūrṇamapi khaṇḍayāti bhāvam,*

*tenāghaṭasyatmanaḥ paṭādeścāpohanam kriyate niṣedhanarūpam,*

*tadeva vyapohanamāśritya tasya ghaṭasya niścayanamucyate*

*‘ghaṭa eva’ iti, evārthasya saṃbhāvyamānāparavastuniṣedharūpatvāt,*

*eṣa eva paritaśchedāttakṣaṇakalpāt, paricchedaḥ, hīti*

Thus, both the images of “this” i.e. “jar” and of “not-this” are present within the subject. Therefore, in the state of indeterminacy, jar is one with pure consciousness and, like the latter, it is omniform and perfect. Hence it can be of no use in practical life. Therefore, the Subject, while manifesting the activity of *māyā*, *splits* the perfect being i.e. manifests it as determined. Through that (manifestation of activity of *māyā*) he differentiates jar from not-jar, self and cloth etc. The differentiationconsists in negation. And we speak of certainty about the jar “this is jar and nothing else” on the basis of that very differentiation only, the chief characteristic of which is *negation.* For, the meaning of the word “eva” is the negation of all other things, which can possibly exist (at that place).

Negation as the *modus operandi* of a self-manifesting consciousness has no place in pure consciousness where there is no determinacy. It is conceivable only in relation to the visible, ‘embodied’ universe (ĪPVI JÑ.VI, 4-5:89/Vol.1 313-314):

*ahamityavamarśo dvidhā-śuddho māyīyaśca, tatra śuddho yaḥ saṃvinmātre viśvābhinne viśvacchāyācchuritācchātmani vā* । *aśuddhastu vedyarūpe* śarīrādau। *tatra śuddhe’haṃpratyavamarśe* *pratiyogī na kaścidapohitavyaḥ saṃbhavati ghaṭāderapi prakāśasāratvenāpratiyogitvenānapohyatvāt, ityapohyābhāve kathaṃ tatra vikalparūpatā। aśuddhastu vedyarūpe śarīrādau anyasmād dehāderghaṭādeśca vyavacchedena bhavan vikalpa eva – iti vākyārthaḥ*।

The I-consciousness is of two kinds, one is pure and the other is due to *māyā.* Pure is that which rests on pure *saṃvid* which is non-different from the universe, or on that pure self, in which the whole universe is reflected. Impure is that which rests on body etc. which are objective. Thus, in relation to pure self-consciousness there is nothing of opposite nature possible, which has to be *negated*. Thus, there being nothing to be differentiated from the self, there is no possibility of determinacy in pure self-consciousness. But the impure self-consciousness, - which rests on body etc., which are of the nature of an object, and exist separately from other bodies and jars, etc., - it is undoubtedly a determinacy.

Opting for a more phenomenological approach that would ease the opposition between *pure* and *impure* consciousness, Abhinava describes manifestation as the interplay of the visible and the invisible. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, having inherited a view of negativity as nothingness, strives to show that negativity is an ontological phenomenon that denotes the mode of appearing of being. In his effort to articulate the relation between the visible and the invisible as a single movement of appearing, he lacks the mechanism that sets this movement in motion, which in Utpala. is detected in the self’s power of action (*kriyā śakti*). It is its internality to the self that allows Utpala to account for the interplay of light in terms of a single movement. Abhinava shows how the (invisible) pure light of the self is not absent but recedes in the background while its (visible) determined forms come forth. Utpala allows us to fully appreciate the significance of Merleau-Ponty’s statement that the invisible is “the silver lining” of the visible: it is solely on the ground of an infinite and vibrant luminosity that individual manifestations are propelled to shine forth (*ibid*.)

*akṣarārthastu-cittattvaṃ prakāśamātrarūpaṃ a hitvā sadapyapahastanayā apradhānīkṛtya bhinne dehādāvahameva dehādiḥ nīlādau prameye pramātā-ityabhimanena ‘yo’haṃ sthūlaḥ’ ityādi vimarśaḥ sa vikalpa eva, na tu śuddhaṃ pratyavamarśamātram*

Principle of consciousness means that which is of the nature of pure-light. ‘Giving up’ means that through it is still there, yet having thrown into the background through the influence of *māyā*. In the differentiated means ‘in the body etc.’. That determinate consciousness “I who am fat” which is due to the wrong notion that I who am body, I am the perceiver of the external objects blue etc. is really determinacy (*vikalpa*). It is not pure self-consciousness.

Following from this, we are in a better position to appreciate Merleau-Ponty’s review of the idea of negation as endowed with a performative value (WN:228): “it is this negative that makes possible the *vertical* world, the union of the incompossibles, the being in transcendence…” It is, nevertheless, only when negation is seen as an operation that is internal to Being that it can be seen not as lack of existence but, on the contrary, as a necessary operation for its advent. It is only then that we can really claim that the invisibility of the visible is (VI:233) “the solution of the problem of the "relations between the soul and the body."

3.2.2 The cosmic reflection

As long as the universe is a ‘projection’ within which everything has the status of a ‘created’ object, manifestation can be seen as a process of cosmic embodiment, as the *fleshing* of the absolute. ‘Pratyabhijñā’ translating as ‘recognition’, applies to both the processes of emanation and reabsorption, both in the cosmogonical as well as the soteriological sense. In the creative phase, the all-expanding motion (*spanda*) of cosmic illumination brings into play different levels or planes of existence (*tattva*) that make up the reality as a structured whole. Within the logic of manifestation as a knowledge praxis and as self-recognition, these planes are nothing but different stages of self-apperception that come to being due to the determinate grasp of consciousness on itself, a *contact in thickness*. While Merleau-Ponty describes reality in terms of surfaces (my body/the world) reflecting on one another, Utpala explains manifestation as reflection-in-One, a process of experiencing out of one reality, one sole plane of existence or *tattva* (ĪPV TS.I,14:228/ Vol. 2, p 306):

*sarvathā tvantarālīnānantatattvaughanirbharaḥ ।*

*śivaḥ cidānandaghanaḥ paramākṣaravigrahaḥ*  ।।

Śiva is ever full of the mass of the endless tattvas, which rest in or have their being in Him. He is pure consciousness and bliss (*cidānandaghana*). He is perfectly changeless.

and

(ĪPVI AG.I,2:190/ Vol.2, p.217):

*yadyapyekameva śivatattvaṃ* *tathāpi tadīyameva* *svātaṃtryaṃ svātmani* *svarūpabhedaṃ tāvatpratibimbakalpatayā darśayati* ।

*svarūpavaicitryameva* *deśakālakramaḥ*

Although there is only one *Śiva-tattva*, yet its own power of freedom shows in itself *multifarious forms*, like reflections. And succession of time and place is nothing else than variety of forms: and temporal succession is the variety of forms involved in action.

Bringing together the descriptions of *Śiva-tattva* in Utpala and the *wild* or *brute* Being in Merleau-Ponty aspires to transform our apprehension of reality from a closed totality to a dynamic, all evolving whole of which we are parts (VI:187): “from philosophy to the absolute, to the transcendental field, to the wild and "vertical" being is by *definition* progressive, incomplete.” This ‘incompleteness’, as a specific philosophical theme, translates a view of being that *preserves its freedom* by being always in a process of becoming that is never complete (VI:178): “There will therefore be a whole series of layers of wild being.” Utpala describes being in terms of an unfolding of a sentient principle (*cit, samvid*) into existence through a self-recognitive process: the self makes itself perceptible by appearing as subjects and objects of experience. From a Western perspective, the intellect and the ego are seen as features of the empirical subject. In Utpala’s context, however, they are objectified expressions of an infinite consciousness. The intellect (*buddhi*), the ego (*ahaṃkāra*) and the body constitute the subjectivity of the individual subjects and, hence, play the role of the ‘subjects’ for the ‘objects’ [of cognition]. In Abhinava’s words (ĪPVI TS.I,2:220/Vol. 2 p. 282-283):

*tāvatsṛṣṭiḥ saṃkocapuraḥsara idaṃbhāgaḥ, tanmadhye yadetad* *buddhiprāṇādeharūpamidantayā vedyaṃtadbuddhyādibhinnasya vedyasya prāhakatayā samucitam idaṃbhāvābhibhavā grabhaviṣṇutvāt kṛtakenāpūrṇenāhaṃbhāvena parāmarśena bhāsamānaṃ cakāsti ‘ahaṃ devadatto’haṃ caitra’ iti* ।।

The creation of objective world is preceded by self-concretisation. In the midst of this creation there are the objects, such as *prāṇa*, *buddhi* and the body etc. They are the objects and are to be referred to as “this”. But they are fit to be subjects in relation to objects, which are separate from them. Therefore, as they cannot completely cast off objectivity, so they shine as illumined with unreal and imperfect self-consciousness, as “I am Devadatta” or “I am Caitra”.

In this scenario, consciousness becomes perceptual through the *activity/movement* of *spanda,* where movement implies embodiment (WN:257): “the movement is *carnal--It* is in the carnal that there is a relation between the Movement and its "self".” Utpala sees in the ‘movements’ of expansion and contraction the expressions of the freedom of consciousness (*vimarśa śakti*), together constituting the cosmic reflection or the macro*cosmic body*. In his own ontological exploration, Merleau-Ponty notices a similar interplay of reflections revealing the intimate analogies between the micro and macro levels of existence (VI:178):

How to describe that Being? … *T h e* reflection that qualifies them as subjects of vision is that same dense reflection that makes me touch myself touching, i.e. that *the same* in me be seen and seer: I do not even see myself seeing, but *by encroachment* I complete my visible body, I prolong my being-seen beyond my being-visible for myself. And it is for my flesh, my body of vision, that there can be the cube itself which closes the circuit and completes my own being-seen. It is hence finally the massive unity of Being as the encompassing of myself and of the cube, it is the wild, non-refined, "vertical" Being that makes there be a cube.

For Utpala, the universe is the bodying forth of the absolute, the incarnation of the eternal. A primordial, cosmogonic status is ascribed to the very realisation Utpala aims to communicate reconciling, thus, the epistemological and ontological levels of his analysis. Here is how Swami Lakshmanjoo[[8]](#footnote-8) describes the cosmos as Śiva’s body containing all the 36 tattvas:

On the path of the thirty-six elements, only one universal subjective body is traveling in each element.... When he travels in the element of earth, he becomes earth and loses his subjectivity of self. When he travels in the element of air, he becomes air and loses his subjectivity of self. And this is the case with all of the thirty-six elements. They are actually only *one universal subjective body*.

The idea of the cosmos as the body of the absolute is not new in Utpala. The Śaivite philosophers prior to him describe the creation of the world as the embodiment of a single principle. They begin their description of cosmic manifestation from the five *śuddha* (pure) tattvas, the first two of which are the *Śiva* and *Śakti* *Tattvas*. Utpaladeva seems to deviate from this model, which is in itself an expansion of the Sāṃkhyan model of the 26 tattvas: he discusses Śiva and Śakti as separate *tattvas* and as powers of the self (ĪPVI AG.I,1:190/ Vol. 2, p. 214):

*evamantarbahirvṛttiḥ kriyā kālakramānugā ।*

mātureva tadanyonyāviyukte jñānakarma*ṇī* । ।

Thus, because action is nothing more than the free consciousness, manifesting itself both internally and externally, in accordance with the temporal order; therefore, *action really belongs to the subject*. Hence the *powers of knowledge and action are mutually inseparable*.

Yet, Abhinavagupta stresses the primacy of Śiva Tattva supposed to initiate, through the power of action or *śakti,* the intricate process of cosmic reflection. This way, he qualifies manifestation as a predominantly cognitive process (ĪPVI AG.I,1:190/ Vol.2 p.216):

*tadetadaviyuktajñānakriyārūpaṃ kriyādvāreṇa*

sakalatattvarāśigatasṛṣṭisaṃhāraśatapratibimbasahiṣṇu

yat tadupadeśabhāvanādiṣu

*tathābhāsamānamanābhāsamapi vastutaḥ śivatattvamityuktaṃ bhavati* ।।

And as no association with action is possible for one that is without the power of knowledge, of that category is called ‘*Śiva*’, which is characterized by powers of knowledge and action in union, which, through the power of action, is capable of bearing the reflection of the innumerable creations and destructions of the entire mass of tattvas and which though it appears in meditation and instruction as mere appearance or *ābhāsa*, is not of the nature of *ābhāsa*.

What highlights the *cognitive* nature of cosmic manifestation is that the hierarchy of the different planes (*tattva*) is not based on the notion of temporal or spatial difference but on a *gradual shift in awareness*. In reality, there is no real ‘separation’ - the *tattvas* are only expressions of a divine intent (ĪPVI AG.I,3:192): “in reality all these so called categories are the powers of the Highest Lord.” Abhinava asks (ĪPVI AG.I,1:190/ Vol.2 pp.216-217):

*nanyevaṃbhutaṃ śivatattvaṃ cet tarhi tato’natiricyamānamidaṃ viśvamiti kimanyat tattvaṃ syāt ।* ekacittattvaviś*ṛ*āntau ca tattvānā*ṃ* katha*ṃ* kramo bhavet, deśakālābhedāt*?*

But if such be the category, called ‘*Śiva*’, and the universe be non-different from it, what other categories then can there be? And if all the categories rest on one principle of pure consciousness, how can there be any succession thereof; because there is no temporal or spatial difference among them?

More specifically, in the absence of temporal or spatial difference, what makes manifestation possible is the self-initiated differentiation of consciousness marked by the increasing shift from the awareness of “I” (*aham*) to the awareness of “this” (*idam*). This can be seen as the initiation of epistemic distance that Merleau-Ponty calls a ‘fissure’ within Being, an ‘original dehiscence’ or *écart*. Utpala’s cosmogony can be seen as a detailed account of how the Merleau-Pontyan *écart* comes into existence. The first stage in this self-determining process is *Sadāśiva Tattva* followed by *Īśvara Tattva* (ĪPVI AG.I. 2, 190-91/ Vol. 2 p. 217):

*kiṃtvāntaradaśodrekātsādākhyaṃ tattvamāditaḥ ।*

*bahirbhāvaparatve* tu, parata*ḥ pārameśvaram* । ।

But at first there comes into being the category called *Sadāśiva*, because of the rise of the internal aspect, i.e., the power of knowledge to prominence: and then there comes into existence *Parameśvara Tattva* when the external aspect comes into predominance.

Abhinava (*ibid*.) explains that in this category, consciousness of being arises for the first time and, in this sense, it is characterised by the ‘concretisation’ of *cit*. It is here that there appear the first traces of *visibilit*y due to the crystallization of consciousness (ĪPVI AG.I. 2,191/ Vol. 2 p. 217):

*yadyapyekameva śivatattvaṃ tathāpi tadīyameva svātaṃtryaṃ*

*svātman isvarūpabhedaṃ tāvatpratibimbakalpatayā darśayati*।

*svarūpavaicitryameva deśakālakramaḥ*। *mūrtikriyāvaicitryamayo hi asau* ।

Although there is only one *Śiva Tattva*, yet its own power of freedom shows in itself multifarious forms, like reflections. And succession of time and place is nothing else than variety of forms, because spatial succession is simply variety of forms: and temporal succession is the variety of forms involved in action.

It is further explained that the rise of the cosmic reflection corresponds to the emergence of being (ĪPVI AG.I. 2,191/ Vol.2 pp. 217-218):

*tataścāntarī jñānarūpā yā daśā tasyā* *udṛekābhāsane* ‘*sādākhyam*’ *sadākhyāyāṃ bhavam* । *yataḥ prabhṛti saditi prakhyā* ।

Therefore, because of the rise of internal aspect, i.e., the power of knowledge to prominence there arises that *tattva* which is known as *Sādākhya*, because of its having its being in *Sādākhya*. And *Sādākhya* is so called because here the consciousness of "being" arises for the first time.

However, as J. Singh explains, (2006:10) “the experience of this stage is ‘I am this’ but the this is only a hazy experience (*asphuta*) the predominant side is still ‘I’. The universe is experienced as an indistinct something in the depth of consciousness (*nimeṣa*).” Abhinava explains (ĪPVI AG.I.2,191/ Vol.2 pp.219-220):

*tataśca śuddhacaitanyavargo yo mantramaheśvarākhyaḥ, tasya prathamasṛṣṭāvasmākamantaḥkaraṇaikavedyamiva* *dhyāmalaprāyamunmīlitamātracitrakalpaṃ yadbhāvacakram, tathā saṃhāre ca dhvaṃsonmukhatayā tathābhūtameva cakāsti pratibimbaprāyatayā, tasya caitanyavargasya tādṛśi bhāvarāśau tathāprathanaṃ nāma* y*accidviśeṣatvaṃ tatsadāśivatattvam।*

*mantreśvarādirūpasya* *tu caitanyarāśeḥ sphuṭī- bhūtamasmadvahiṣkaraṇasaraṇisaṃprāptabhāvavargapratimaṃ viśvaṃ pratibimbakalpatayā bhāti, tasya tu tat tathāprathanamīśvaratattvam* ।

*Sadāśiva* category is the concretisation of "*cit*"(consciousness). It consists in the "this-consciousness" of the mass of objects on the part of sentient beings, who are pure consciousness and who are technically called *Mantramaheśvara*. This mass of objects shines like a reflection on them. It is very dim like that which shines as the object of inner sense only in the new creation, (the first descent from the state of "free-consciousness" or *savimarśa-caitanya).* It is like an extremely dim outline of a picture. It may also be compared to the mass of objects, when it is on the verge of complete annihilation at the time of dissolution of the universe, and, therefore, is extremely dim (vague). But to the sentient beings, who are technically called '*Mantreśvara*' the universe, which has attained a stage of clarity, similar to that of the objects of our external cognition, shines almost as a reflection.

The next stage of cosmic manifestation is where the “this” aspect (*idam*) of the total experience becomes a bit more apparent, more defined (*sphuta*). The category of *Īśvara Tattva* represents an opening up (*unmeṣa*) to externality that corresponds to the awareness: 'this (universe) is me' (*idam-aham*) where the 'this' consciousness overpowers the ‘I’ consciousness and unfolds externally full of the creative power of action (*kriya śakti*). This, progressively, results to a clearer manifestation of an independent reality that is still experienced as one with the cosmic consciousness but is no longer fully merged with it (ĪPVI AG.I,3:193/Vol.2, p.224): “But when in the clear consciousness of “this” aspect the I-consciousness merges, the former being substratum, it is called the state of *Īśvara* and the consciousness can be expressed as “this-I”(*‘idamaham’ iti tu idamityaṃśe sphuṭībhūte’dhikaraṇe yadāhamaṃśavimarśaṃ niṣiñcati tadeśvaratā, - iti vibhāgaḥ* ।।). The attainment of clarity or translucence (of manifestation) is described as an opening up (*unmeṣa*): the universe shines as Śiva acquires an all the more perceptible form (*sakala*) and becomes more concrete (*mūrta*). Once both the subjective and the objective aspects share an equal status in the two-fold awareness, *Sadvidyā Tattva* emerges (ĪPVI AG.I, 3:193/Vol.2, p.223): “At this state the “I” and the “this” are at the same level, like the pans of an evenly held beam of balance. Such is the form of consciousness at the level of the categories, called *Sadāśiva* and *Īśvara*” *(‘ahamidam’iti) samadhṛtatulāpuṭanyāyena yo vimarśaḥ sa saḍāśivanātha īśvarabhaṭṭārake ca*). Abhinava makes, here, an important distinction between the *aham-idam* polarization in *Śuddhavidyā* (pure knowledge) and the same in the realm of empirical subjectivity (ĪPVI AG.I,3:193/Vol.2, pp.223-224):

*ye ete ‘aham’ iti ‘idam’ iti dhiyau tayormāyāpramātari*

*pṛthagadhikaraṇatvam ‘aham’ iti grāhake ‘idam’ iti ca grāhye,*

*tannirāsenaikasminnevādhikaraṇe yatsaṃgamanaṃ saṃbandharūpaṃ prathanaṃ tat satī śuddhā vidyā, aśuddhavidyāto māyāpramātṛgatāyā anyaiva* ।

These two forms of consciousness, ‘I’ and ‘this’, in the case of the limited subject rest separately on the subject and the object respectively. Therefore, *sadvidyā* (or pure knowledge) is characterised by the elimination of separateness of the bases and the union of these i.e. the consciousness of the subjective aspect as ‘I’ and that of the objective as “this” in one resting place (cit). This is different from *aśuddha vidyā*, associated with the limited subject.

This experience is intermediate between *para* or the higher and *apara*, the lower stages of manifestation, where perception of difference is prevalent. And while the difference between *aham* and *idam* is sufficiently developed, there is no obscuration of the subject: the ‘I’ and the ‘this’ sides of the experience are equally balanced (*samadhṛtatulāpuṭanyāyena*). *Kriyā śakti* is predominant. The experience here is described as diversity-in-unity (*bhedābhedavimarśanātmaka*) since although ‘this’ is clearly distinguished from ‘I’, it remains a part of it. Utpala states (ĪPV AG.I, 4:193/Vol. 2, p.225):

*idaṃbhāvopapannānāṃ vedyabhūmimupeyuṣām ।*

bhāvān*āṃ* bodhasāratvādyathāvastvavalokanāt । ।

(This is called *śuddha vidyā*) because in it the things, which have descended to the level of objectivity to knowledge and, therefore, are conceived as ‘this”, are essentially of the nature of I-consciousness; and because they are conceived as they really are.

To designate the intermediate state (*bhedābheda*), “differentiation” is more suitable than “division” because it does not entail duality; it connotes a process that is internal to consciousness as opposed to the projection of an already differentiated content outwards (M. Dyzkowski, 1987:159). It is at this intermediary point that unity may be overwhelmed by diversity but also where a contact with the self from the point of multiplicity can be established making it a juncture where the potentiality of both liberation and alienation are most affirmed.

From this level, we move forward or downward from the realm of duality in unity to that of a multiplicity increasingly abstracted from unity. It is the realm of difference and distinction, *bheda*. It ranges over twenty-nine *tattvas* or degrees of projection with the highest being *māyā*, or more exactly, *mahāmāyā*. Here, we enter the domain of *bheda* or difference, or at least its emergence (the latter being associated with *mahāmāyā,* and the former with *māyā).* This is the level of *maximal objectification* and thereby diversified exteriorisation of *śakti*. It is the realm of multiplicity and complete fragmentation where the underlying unity of consciousness becomes most difficult to perceive and realise.

From the stage of *Māyā Tattva* onwards, the growing differentiation of *aham* and *idam* gives rise to the *impure order* (*aśuddha*) in which the absolute nature of the self is veiled. This equates to the complete contraction (*saṅkoca*) and limitation of pure consciousness. Up to *Sadvidyā* the experience was universal; the 'this meant 'all this' - the total universe. But in *Māyā Tattva*, 'this' means merely 'this' and it is distinct from everything else. The term *māyā* is derived from the root '*mā*', to measure out: it is that which makes experience measurable and limited by severing the ties between 'this' and 'I'. Their relative "balance" is broken as the scales are tilted on the side of objectification; the emphasis is on the perception of difference. Utpala’s account of tattva evolution demonstrates how all manifested entities derive from a single source. From a soteriological point of view, it is an attempt to map reality and our relation with it. It confirms that the visible does not exist in itself (against a hidden invisible), which the phenomenological enquiry attempts tenaciously to establish (WN:258): “Start from an analysis of the total philosophical error which is to think that the visible is an *objective* presence (or the idea of this presence) (visual picture) this entails the idea of the *quale* as in itself. Show that the *quale* is always a certain type of *latency.*” At the same time, this cosmogony helps to also understand why as embodied beings we perceive the world, with which - as Merleau-Ponty suggests - we essentially share the same texture, as an *objective* presence. The journey of consciousness along the different tattvas is a progressive veiling of its original unity with the final stage being pictured as one of forgetfulness, where *māyā* draws a veil (*āvaraṇa*) on the self due to which the self *forgets* its real nature resulting in the perception of duality (ĪPV AG.I,7:196/Vol.2 p.231): “and the power, which is responsible for the obscuration, is called māyā” (*tirodhānakarī māyābhidhā punaḥ*). Here, as Utpala explains, consciousness is simply apprehended and treated as a mere object and the domain of insentience that lies on the outer edges of consciousness has clouded, as it were, the light of consciousness. From the point of view of the empirical subject, *māyā* conceals the real nature of the self and establishes the perception of an ‘objective’ world as separate from it (ĪPV AG.I, 7:196/ Vol.2 p. 232):

*māyāśaktiḥ punaracidrūpe śūnyādau pramātṛtābhimānaṃ prarūḍhaṃ dadhatī bhāvānapi cinmayān bhedenābhimānayantī sarvathaiva svarūpaṃ tirodhatte āvṛṇute vimohinī sā*

But the power of obscuration, the *māyā*, causes *the wrong notion of being a subject* to develop fully in *śūnya* etc., which are insentient: it also causes the *wrong notion of the objects,* which are in reality non-different from *cit*, as different from it (*cit*). Thus, it obscures the essential nature of subject and object in every way; because its nature is to delude.

3.3.1 Vāk, the world as speech

The cognitive nature of manifestation is, moreover, emphasized by its description in linguistic terms: it is the conscious activity (*citikriyā*) of the “I” that generates the universe in the mode of a self-determining activity, *kriyā śakti* that is apprehended in terms of speech (*vāk*). In recognizing the linguistic nature of *vimarśa*, Utpaladeva develops a highly creative view of manifestation that bears the influence of middle fifth-century philosopher of language, Bhartṛhari. Bhartṛhari interpretes the nature of the cosmic self as the supreme speech (*para vāk*), the absolute word (*śabdabrahman*). This impersonal principle contains language and reality in a unity and emanates into the universe of separated words and objects through a process of linguistic determination. Espousing Bhartṛhari’s view of the world of experience as inherently linguistic, Utpaladeva accentuates the procedural aspect of being. Abhinava states (ĪPVI JÑ.V,14:76/ Vol.1 p. 265):

*tatrabhavadbhartṛhariṇāpi:-*

‘*na so*’*sti pratyayo loke yaḥ śabdānugamāḍṛte* ।

*anuviddhvamiva jñānaṃ sarvaṃ śabdena gamyate।।*

The same has been asserted by glorious Bhartṛhari also: There is no such cognition as it is not accompanied by speech. All experiences at the time when we have them, are as it were penetrated by speech.

Furthermore, (*ibid*.):

vāgrūpatā cedutkrāmedavaodhasya śāsvatī *।*

na prakāśā*ḥ prakaśeta sā hi pratyavamarśinī* ।।'

If the eternal identity of thought and speech were to come to an end, cognition would not be cognition, because it is that identity which brings determinancy into cognition.

In Utpaladeva’s context of Śiva's self-recognition (*ahaṃpratyavamarśa)*, *vāk* translates the determining activity of *vimarśa* and embodies the dialectic relation of internality and externality informing existence. Abhinava quotes Bhartṛhari saying(ĪPVI JÑ.V,14:76/ Vol.1 p. 265):

*iti* । *saiṣā saṃsāriṇāṃ saṃjñā bahirantaśca vartate* ।

*yadutkrāntau visaṃjño’yam ḍṛśyate kāṣṭhakṛḍyavat* । ।

“This speech, as presented above, is the consciousness of the transmigrating being. It is both internal and external. In the absence of it a transmigrating being is seen unconscious like wood and wall.” And so on.

If the characteristic of the cosmic self is to be self-conscious - *prakāśa* but also *vimarśa* - *vāk* translates the ability of consciousness to assume objectivity and determine itself in various forms (ĪPV JÑ.V,13:73/ Vol.1 p. 250):

*citiḥ pratyavamarśātmā parā vāksvarasoditā* ।

*svātantryametanmukhyaṃ tadaiśvaryaṃ paramātmanaḥ*।।

Self-consciousness is the very self of sentiency.

It is *para* speech, (*vāk*) which ever shines independently.

It is the freedom (*svātantrya*). It is the supreme power of the transcendental self.

The linguistic rendering of manifestation emphasises the creative freedom of consciousness as seen in the movement from the recognition of the unified "I" to the recognitions of apparently separate objects as "this," or, more fully, as "this is that". Within the logic of manifestation as reflection, *vāk* instantiates the projective activity of the self’s power in terms of linguistic determination (ĪPV JÑ.V,18:80/ Vol.1 p 281-282):

*tayā bhinnaṃ, yat saṃvedyaṃ pramātuśca anyonyataśca, māyāśaktyā*

*bhinnena pramātuḥ anyonyato vedyācca karaṇavargeṇa yat saṃvedyaṃ sa eva gocaro viśrāntipadaṃ yasyāḥ tādṛśī satī, ‘saiva’ pratyavamarśātmā citiḥ parāvāgrūpā jñānam iti, saṃkalpa iti, adhyavasāya iti ca ucyate, ādigrahaṇāt saṃśayaḥ smṛtiḥ ityādi* ।

That very universal consciousness, whose essential nature is self-consciousness, and which is nothing else than the transcendental speech, having the objects, - which are separated from the subject and one another by the power of *māyā*, and which are to be known through senses, which also are separated from the subject, each other and sense-objects by the same power of *māyā*, -as its places of rest, is called perception, imagination and ascertainment.

Equating *vimarśa* with *vāk* allows Utpaladeva to highlight the dynamic nature of consciousness and reinforces the idea that essence and appearance are, essentially, one. At first sight, the impression may be given that Utpala’s intention driven by his monistic heritage is to obliterate all idea of difference (ĪPV JÑ.V, 20:84/ Vol.1 p.294):

*ghaṭo’yamityadhyavasā nāmarūpātirekiṇo ।*

pareśaśaktirātmeva bhāsate na tvidantayā । ।

the determinancy, (*adhyavasā*) which is expressed as “this is jar”, is the power of the Highest Lord, beyond name and form. It always shines as (one with Him) “I” and never as “this”.

However, since manifestation as self-recognition implies that the self recognises itself in the forms it assumes, the manifested object is ultimately of the same nature as the self (ĪPVI JÑ.V,19:82/ Vol.1 p.288-289): “according to this system, however, the object also is essentially of the nature of transcendental speech, because it is essentially of the nature of free consciousness (*vimarśamāyā*)” (*atra tu darśane viṣayasyāpi vimarśamayatvāt abhilāpamayatvameva vastutaḥ*). This, ultimately, shows that a view of the phenomena as resting within consciousness is compatible with the idea of difference since difference rests upon unity and externality on internality as *vimarśa* upon *prakāśa* (ĪPVI JÑ.V, 20:84-85/Vol.1 p. 294-295):

*kena etat uktam ghaṭa iti yaḥ sthūlaḥ śabdaḥ sa prakāśajīvitasvabhāvo vimarśa iti।* so'pi hi sthūla*ḥ śabdo’rthavat sa pṛthagbhūta*

*prathambhuta eva bhāti ।* tau nāmarūpa*lakṣaṇau*

*śabdārthau ekarūpatayā ‘so’yam’ ityevaṃrūpatvena parāmṛśantī adhyavasā yā sā parameśvaraśaktiḥ vimarśarūpā ātmavadeva ahamityanavacchinnatvena bhāti, na tu kadācit idantayā vicchinnatvena bhāti, vichinnatvena avabhāse parapratiṣṭhatvāt*

*punarvimarśāntareṇa bhāvyam tatrāpi evam iti anavasthāto nīlasya prakāśanameva na syāt pratiṣṭhālābhābhāvāt । tasmāt sarva eva vimarśaḥ prakāśāt avicchinna eva iti ।*

Who said that the gross audible indicatory sound is identical with reflective consciousness (*vimarśa*), which is the very life of the light of consciousness? That gross sound also shines separately as other objects. (Our view about this *vimarśa* is that) determinacy, which determinately cognises words and objects, characterised by name and form as non-different, as, “that is this” is the power of the Highest Lord, called “*vimarśa*”. It always shines as unlimited “I” and never as limited “this”. For if it were to shine as limited being dependent upon another, there will arise the necessity of another and that being supposed to shine as limited, there will be required still another. Thus, it will lead to argumentum-ad-infinitum. Therefore, the external objects, being without anything to rest upon, would not shine at all. Therefore, no *vimarśa* is separate from *prakāśa*.

3.3.2 Body as speech

By stressing the linguistic nature of *vimarśa,* Utpala reinforces the non-dual nature of manifestation. On a similar note, Merleau-Ponty suggests that by understanding the phenomenon of speech, the traditional philosophical dichotomies between essence and appearance perpetuating a false idea of Being as transcendental can be overcome. In a chapter of his *Phenomenology of Perception,* entitled “The Body as Expression and Speech”, Merleau-Ponty explores the role of speech acts in the bodily and perceptual constitution of the lived-world. His exploration is moved by the belief that (PhP:204) “there is in us, embodied beings, a function of speech that conditions us.” His criticism of both the empiricist the intellectualist approaches to language predicates his own view (PhP: 227):

In trying to describe the phenomenon of speech and the specific act of meaning, we shall have the opportunity to leave behind us, once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy.

For a behaviorist, words are a response caused by a stimulus and, therefore, they have causes but they do not have meanings. For an intellectualist, language is an envelope of thought something that is added on to thought to make inner ideas communicable. This conception of language presupposes a subject, but this is a ‘thinking’ not a ‘speaking’ subject. However, speech does not simply transmit thought; it *accomplishes* or *completes* it. Merleau-Ponty argues that it does not suffice to say that speech indicates thought (PhP:182) “as smoke betrays fire”; this would have been the case only if thought and word were external to one another. But thought and word are intertwined - there is an eternal identity of thought and speech, as Bhartṛhari would say. This means that the denomination of objects does not follow upon recognition, it is in itself a determining activity with a recognitive function that is inextricably linked to bodily intentionality (PhP:206):

When I fix my eyes on an object in the half-light, and say: ‘It is a brush’, there is not in my mind the concept of a brush, under which I subsume the object, and which moreover is linked by frequent association with the word ‘brush’, but the word bears the meaning, and, by imposing it on the object, *I am conscious of reaching that object*.

Language works at the same level as the pre-reflective intentionality of the body. What is more, the nature of somatic intentionality is inherently linguistic, which is why speech is not the clothing of thought but its body (PhP:209):

To realise this, we must turn back to the phenomenon of speech and put into question the usual accounts which immobilize thought and speech and make anything other than external relations between them inconceivable. We must recognize first of all that thought, in the speaking subject, is not a representation, that is, that it does not expressly posit objects or relations. The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought.

Since we do not visualize the word in order to know and pronounce it, the linguistic articulation appears to be innate to the modulations or possibilities of the bodily being: by speaking I do not represent the world, I enact it (PhP:210): “what I communicate with primarily is not ‘representations’ or thought, but a speaking subject, with a certain style of being and with the ‘world’ at which he directs his aim.” Seen thus, language is understood on the level of intentional analysis and is an instrument of action and not of thought (PhP:213): “…. is not a process of thinking on my part, but a synchronizing change of my own existence, a transformation of my being.” Merleau-Ponty’s concept of language presented thus, highlights the kinaesthetic nature of awareness. Following in Saussure’s footsteps, Merleau-Ponty views language as a diacritical, relative and oppositional system of elements that are not absolute carriers of meaning but ‘divergencies’ (*écarts*). These enable us to establish a system of linguistic signs endowed with meaning by means of being opposable to other linguistic signs of the same category. Seen thus, language is structured on the reversibility that characterises the flesh (VI:144-5):

As there is a reflexivity of the touch, of sight, and of the touch-vision system, there is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo. This new reversibility and the emergence of the flesh as expression are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence.'

Similarly, Matilal explains that speech relies on the reversible relation between *vimarśa* and *prakāśa* (1990:7):

If *prakāśa* is the flood of light, *vimarśa* is what makes the object distinguishable and distinct…The so-called pre-linguistic grasp of the object cannot have my firm grip unless the object is sufficiently distinguished, and if it is sufficiently distinguished, *vimarśa* has already set in, and a *śabdabhāvanā* is implicit. A pure *prakāśa* without *vimarśa* is impossible in this theory…. Perception without conception is blind and conception without perception is mute.

Conclusion

The tattva cosmogony describing manifestation as the bodying forth of the universe shows how cosmic consciousness asserts its freedom by assuming a body (the universe). The universe as the macrocosmic body bears the same reflective/reversible structure as the microcosmic lived body in Merleau-Ponty. Utpala shows how Being breaks up and how this fragmentation is not a real separation but an adhesion to itself, an expression of its unity/identity. With this, he supports Merleau-Ponty’s ontology that proposes a new concept of Being building upon the idea of the *écart* as an original mode of dehiscence. If this dehiscence originates within Being, if it is its way of asserting itself, then it is commonly shared by the sensible world, the body, language, thought. The linguistic interpretation of the world’s appearance reinforces this procedural view of being that renders the distinctions between phenomena and essences rather meaningless. If Merleau-Ponty observes the *écart* in the body, Utpala makes it the pivot of cosmic embodiment showing how it infuses and structures all manifestations, from the subtlest to the grossest. The problem with all this is that the world is explored from an individual point of view, as it appears to me, as I relate to it through the structures of my body. But, how is it possible to reconcile two apparently contradictory statements – i.e. one according to which the world appears to everyone, therefore, objectively, and another according to which the world appears to me via the personalized situatedness of my embodiment? This question brings forth the problem of the existence and perception of the other. Will the perception of otherness challenge a unified account of reality that both Merleau-Ponty and Utpala attempt to articulate? In the following chapter we will explore how the two philosophers approach the problem of the other and what the implications are for their ontological quests.

CHAPTER FOUR – The encounter of the Other

Introduction

An understanding of the world in terms of appearance aspires to bridge the gap between phenomena and essences and promote a view of Being that is not distant but encompasses and traverses us through the routes of our body. Nevertheless, an understanding of the world in terms of appearance presents unavoidably the problem of the other. Under what conditions a world that appears to me, appears in the same way to others? Or, how is it possible to reconcile two apparently contradictory statements – i.e. one according to which the world appears to everyone, therefore, objectively, and another according to which the world appears to me via the situatedness of my embodiment? Despite showing that consciousness is necessarily embodied, there is still the question of other subjects. For both philosophers, the ‘other’ constitutes a philosophical paradox challenging their efforts to formulate a new concept of being. Grasping ‘consciousness’ in the mode of the other and by extension both ‘I’ and the ‘other’ in the mode of the ‘one’, is being able to put into words the mystery of this chiasm that marks the phenomenal field and permeates our experience of the world. This chapter will attempt to show how the two thinkers place intersubjectivity within a view of being as a network of reflections. In Merleau-Ponty’s own words (VI:83):

as a problem of initiation to a symbolics and a typicality of the others of which the *being for itself* and the *being for the other* are reflective variants and not the essential forms.

4.1.1 The idealistic impasse

Merleau-Ponty criticizes Husserl for avoiding the real issue here, the fact that there is a world and we are in this world with our bodies (PhP xii) “... the phenomenological reduction is idealistic, in the sense that there is here a transcendental idealism which treats the world as an indivisible unity of value shared by Peter and Paul, in which their perspectives blend”. Apparently, Merleau-Ponty suggests, Husserl was able to explain intersubjective communication without taking into consideration the framework of relations within the world itself (ibid.):

‘Peter’s consciousness’ and ‘Paul’s consciousness’ are in communication, the perception of the world ‘by Peter’ is not Peter’s doing any more than its perception ‘by Paul’ is Paul’s doing; in each case it is the doing of pre-personal forms of consciousness, whose communication raises no problem, since it is demanded by the very definition of consciousness, meaning or truth(...) In so far as I am a consciousness, that is, in so far as something has meaning for me, I am neither here nor there, neither Peter nor Paul; I am in no way distinguishable from an ‘other’ consciousness, since we are immediately in touch with the world and since the world is, by definition, unique, being the system in which all truths cohere.

The problem, here, is that (ibid.) “a logically consistent transcendental idealism rids the world of its opacity and its transcendence,” and that is why “for Husserl (...) it is well known that there is a problem of other people, and the *alter ego* is a paradox.” Merleau-Ponty criticises scientific and objective representations of the world and the body for which (PhP: 406), “the existence of other people is a difficulty and an outrage” and explains why in such views the mere conception of the other constitutes a contradiction (PhP:407):

There is thus no place for other people and a plurality of consciousnesses in objective thought. In so far as I constitute the world, I cannot conceive another consciousness, for it too would have to constitute the world and, at least as

regards this other view of the world, I should not be the constituting agent.

Moreover, the fact that the world appears to each one of us and this is a world that we all share entails that we also to appear to each other. There is, therefore, a need to conceive a certain visibility and a certain ‘exteriority’ that a world constituted from the transcendental ego does not really allow (ibid.):

If the other is truly for himself alone, beyond his being for me, and if we are for each other and not both for God, we must necessarily have *some appearance for each other*. He must and I must have an outer appearance, and there must be, besides the perspective of the For Oneself—my view of myself and the other’s of himself—a perspective of For Others—my view of others and theirs of me. Of course, these two perspectives, in each one of us, cannot be simply juxtaposed, *for in that case it is not I that the other would see, nor he that I should see*. I must *be the exterior* that I present to others, and the body of the other must be the other himself. This paradox and the dialectic of the Ego and the Alter are possible only provided that the Ego and the Alter Ego are defined by their situation and are not freed from all inherence.

This is precisely because we do not fall outside time (ibid.), “philosophy does not culminate in a return to the self, and that I discover by reflection not only my presence to myself, but also the possibility of an ‘outside spectator’.” The problem with the cogito is that it ignores the fact of my incarnation and reduces me to a thought of myself (ibid.): “the *Cogito* depreciated the perception of others, teaching me as it did that the I is accessible only to itself, since it defined *me* as the thought which I have of myself, and which clearly I am alone in having, at least in this ultimate sense.” In a passage that reminds us of Utpaladeva, Merleau-Ponty shows that awareness is necessarily reflective - I am not only aware of my existence but of myself being aware of it. The fact that awareness is reflective proves that it is incarnated because it is only the thickness of the flesh that allows for reflection unlike the transparency of consciousness, on the other hand, that does not. Merleau-Ponty goes on to argue that it is only because awareness is reflective and, hence, incarnated that the perception of others is at all possible (ibid.) :

For the ‘other’ to be more than an empty word, it is necessary that my existence should never be reduced to my bare awareness of existing, but that it should take in also the awareness that *one* may have of it, and thus include my incarnation in some nature and the possibility, at least, of a historical situation.

4.1.2 Perceiving the other

The nature of the ‘exteriority’ that the perception of others implies is, nevertheless, a complex phenomenon and in the *Phenomenology*, well before the final formulation of the notion of flesh in the *Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty is faced with the paradox (PhP: 406):

Yet the analysis of the perception of others runs up against a difficulty in principle raised by the cultural world, since *it is called upon to solve the paradox of a consciousness seen from the outside*, of a thought which has its abode in the external world, and which, therefore, is *already subjectless and anonymous* compared with mine.

However, as Merleau-Ponty reminds us, the experience we have of our body shows that is not in the world as an object that relates to it following a functional relationship established by science, neither is the communicative structure of the body-world relationship ranged over by a constituting consciousness. As shown in previous chapters, we have the world through the agency of our body and this, on its own, suffices to resolve the above mentioned paradox (PhP:206):“what we have said about the body provides the beginning of a solution to this problem.” Hence, it is only by viewing our inherence to the world through our body that the perception of others becomes possible, which, in turn, reinforces the idea that consciousness is embodied (PhP :408-9):

We must conceive the perspectives and the point of view as our insertion into the world-as-an-individual, and perception, no longer as a constitution of the true object, but as our inherence in things... If I experience this inhering of my consciousness in its body and its world, the perception of other people and the plurality of consciousnesses no longer present any difficulty.

It is as embodied perceivers that we can discover the other through elements of their behaviour and through the expression of his subjectivity in the world. Nevertheless, we need to clarify what we mean by the terms ‘body’ and ‘consciousness’. Firstly, our body as well as that of others is not a *vehicle* of or a medium for consciousness. Secondly, consciousness is no longer a constituting consciousness, a pure being-for-itself, but a perceptual consciousness (PhP:409): “for only thus can another appear at the top of his phenomenal body, and be endowed with a sort of ‘locality’.” By ‘perceptual’, Merleau-Ponty does not refer to the ability of simply observing the external manifestations of other people’s behaviour or comparing/identifying their expressions with our own. In other words, this sort of perception is not inference since (ibid.) “the perception of others is anterior to, and the condition of such observations, the observations do not constitute the perception.” What Merleau-Ponty wishes to highlight is that one’s own corporeality is on its own the comprehending power of other people’s corporeality. The recognition of otherness takes place through a prolongation of the body’s intentional structures (PhP:354), “a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions.” F.Dastur explains that (2008: 28) “there is an “intentional transfer” or “pairing” between one’s own body and another person’s body. This is neither a logical operation, nor an inference, nor a reasoning by analogy; it is a “vital operation.” Merleau-Ponty observes that the perception of others is paradoxical only for adults. A child has no awareness of themselves or of others as private subjectivities: a fifteen-month-old baby is able to immediately understand the intersubjective significance of a behaviour, so that it can reproduce it without needing to reason by analogy (PhP:352): “it perceives its intentions in my body, and my body with its own, and thereby my intentions in its own body.”[[9]](#footnote-9) For Meirav Almog (2016:296), it is question of “a simultaneous *carnal* realization of “selfhood” and “otherness” that occurs in the fulguration of primal sensation, of the two hands touching and being touched by each other.” Interestingly, the relation between myself and another is mapped on the pattern of bodily reversibility, as a reversible relation between two bodies (PHP: 412):

I experience my own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behaviour and a certain world, and I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world; now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world. Henceforth, as the parts of my body together compromise a system, so my body and the other’s are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously.

4.1.3 Beneath the (inter-) personal

The discussion on the perception of others ultimately leads to the vision of an a-subjective phenomenal field in which, myself and others, by the very fact of our embodiment, inhere. Meirav Almog explains that according to Merleau-Ponty(2016:296), “every human being belongs primordially to an anonymous, pre-personal sphere that stems from one’s carnal existence.” For F. Dastur it is this belonging that is the very condition of intersubjectivity (2008: 31):

Because the world belongs to a body, i.e. to a pre-personal subject, it becomes possible for it to belong at the same time to other subjects: the ego and the world no longer constitute a closed sphere, because it is not me as a personal subject who sees the world, but a pre-personal and anonymous subject, so that the other can also see the same world and also participate in the pre-personal subjectivity that we both are through our bodies.

Existence as an anonymous generality, Meirav Almog says (2016:296), “establishes an innate complex (*complexe inné*) that forms the infrastructure of human existence.” An idea that is expressed already in Merleau-Ponty saying (PhP: 86): “My organism—as a pre-personal adhesion to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence— plays the role of an innate complex beneath the level of my personal life.” Merleau-Ponty defines this realm as a primaeval generality that precedes any thematic differentiations – hence, individuation does not precede intersubjective life. In *The Philosopher and his shadow,* he says (1964:174): “the constitution of others does not come after that of the body; others and my body are born together from the original ecstasy.”

At this point, realising that instead of offering a solution to the problem of the alterity of the other, he might have oversimplified it, Merleau-Ponty raises an objection to himself: if the pre-personal anonymity embraces both the person perceiving and the person perceived, what is the use of discussing the experience of the other? (PhP:414):

But is it indeed other people that we arrive at in this way? What we do in effect is to iron out the I and the Thou in an experience shared by a plurality, thus introducing the impersonal into the heart of subjectivity and eliminating the individuality of perspectives. But have we not, in this general confusion, done away with the alter Ego as well as the Ego?

When trying to approach the mystery of the appearance of the other, we often ignore that we never quite perceive others in themselves. Perceiving somebody’s grief and anger as these are expressed through his body gestures and facial expressions is to perceive *his external conduct* as it manifests in his body, without having recourse to his ‘inner’ experience of suffering or anger. Any analysis of it for extraction of genuine meaning is made based solely on personal experience. “But then”, Merleau-Ponty notices (ibid.): “the behaviour of another, and even his words, are not that other. The grief and the anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed.” Even when, two people, working through their respective situations, may contribute in producing a common situation in which they can communicate, it is from its own perspective that each individual projects a “common” world. “But this interworld”, Merleau-Ponty argues (PhP:415),: “is still a project of mine, and it would be hypocritical to pretend that I seek the welfare of another as if it were mine, since this very attachment to another’s interest still has its source in me.” This leads to the acknowledgement that (PhP:358) “there is here a solipsism rooted in living experience and quite insurmountable,” meaning that the problem of the other cannot be explained by appealing to bodily intentionality and that, eventually, the Cartesian cogito cannot be denied (PhP: 418): “the generality of the body will never make it clear how the indeclinable I can estrange itself in favour of another, since this generality is exactly compensated by the other generality of my inalienable subjectivity.” Acknowledging the impossibility of limiting solipsism through external means, Merleau-Ponty turns inwards (PhP:417): “what if I could recognize only one Ego and become a universal subject, no more a finite self, an impartial spectator before whom the other and myself, each as an empirical being, are on a footing of equality, without my enjoying any particular privilege?” The question, here, is whether this consciousness, before which everything is an object, can be said to be myself. Merleau-Ponty denies it on the grounds that (PhP:417-18) “my self is arrayed before me like any other thing, and my consciousness constitutes it and is not enclosed within it, so that it can without difficulty constitute other (my)selves.” Could it, then, be God since in God there is consciousness of others as of myself and love of others as myself? This is denied, as well (ibid.): “but the subjectivity that we have run up against does not admit of being called God.” If reflection reveals to me myself as an infinite subject, I should be able to recognise myself as an infinite consciousness but this is not the case. God is placed outside the empirical realm by the very fact that we, human beings, “tend” towards God as to a being beyond this realm (ibid.): “the act of reflection and love leading to God places the God sought outside the realm of possibility.” Merleau-Ponty confesses his inability to explain the strange situation we find ourselves in (ibid.): “consciousnesses present themselves with the absurdity of a multiple solipsism, such is the situation which has to be understood.” Nevertheless, coexistence, Merleau-Ponty argues, is a fact of experience and (ibid.) “since we live through this situation, there must be some way of making it explicit.” Since other people do exist for us, solitude and communication cannot be mutually exclusive but two ‘moments’ of one phenomenon. If solitude signifies the universality of the subject and communication a challenge to this universality, these two can be reconciled by recognising that (PhP:419) “the central phenomenon, at the root of both my subjectivity and my transcendence towards others, consists in *my being given to myself.*” In other words, returning to his point of departure, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the paradox of the other is resolved by the very fact that I find myself inserted in the world, that is, I am already by the fact of my embodiment in an interpersonal situation (ibid.): “I am given to myself, which means that this situation is never hidden from me....My freedom, the fundamental power which I enjoy of being the subject of all my experiences, is not distinct from my insertion into the world.” This is the human fate, which was (ibid.) “sealed the moment my transcendental field was thrown open, when I was born as vision and knowledge, when I was thrown into the world” so that “solipsism would be strictly true only of someone who managed to be tacitly aware of his existence without being or doing anything, which is impossible, since existing is being in and of the world.”

4.1.4 In flesh

Finding a way to articulate the perception of the other is, for Merleau-Ponty not only a philosophical challenge, but most importantly, his way towards resolving the problem of consciousness. By conjugating ‘I’ into the plural, we will be able to show that consciousness is not limited to the self-awareness of a specific individual. As individuals we are aware of our selfhood by partaking in an a-subjective, general field of awareness that is beyond the I-you division (PhP:406):

But this is precisely the question: how can the word ‘I’ be put into the plural, how can a general idea of the *I* be formed, how can I speak of an *I* other than my own, how can I know that there are other *I*’s, how can consciousness which, by its nature, and as self-knowledge, is in the mode of the *I*, be grasped in the mode of Thou, and through this, in the world of the ‘One’?

In his attempt to universalise consciousness, Merleau-Ponty comes very close to Utpaladeva, particularly when he suggests that our relation with the social world is pre-given, in the sense that we are in contact with it by the mere fact of existing. He urges us to view the world (PhP:421) “not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence: I may well turn away from it, but not cease to be situated relatively to it.” Merleau-Ponty concludes that transcendental subjectivity is not transparent to itself because it is given or revealed both to itself and to the other (PhP:419): “transcendental subjectivity is a revealed subjectivity, revealed to itself and to others, and is for that reason an intersubjectivity.” The failure of a complete closure, the openness towards the other is what makes subjectivity an intersubjectivity just as the incompleteness of the reversibility of the touching hands makes the body the archetype of the sensible. My relation with others is mapped on the same *écart*, the same divergence that characterises bodily reversibility, which is not an absolute separation (not two) but the sign of our common belonging (one), (VI:234):

Just as we rediscover the field of the sensible world as interior-exterior (cf. at the start: as global adhesion to the infinity of motor indexes and motivations, as my belongingness to this *Welt),* so also it is necessary to rediscover as the reality of the inter-human world and of history *a surface of separation between me and the other which is also the place of our union*, the unique *Erfüllung* of his life and my life. It is to this surface of separation and of union that the existentials of my personal history proceed, it is the geometrical locus of the projections and introjections, it is the invisible hinge upon which my life and the life of the others turn to rock into one another, the inner framework of intersubjectivity.

The discussion on the other brings Merleau-Ponty closer to Utpaladeva on one more account. While ‘embodiment’ signifies individuation, (we become ourselves through our unique, individual body), the me-other chiasm shows that embodiment is, in reality, a shared experience insofar as our body is part of a common *body-world;* insofar as it is the micro reflection of a macro body in which all bodies, in their respective differences, co-function as one (VI:215):

But, like the chiasm of the eyes, this one is also what makes us belong to the same world — a world which is not projective, but forms its unity across incompossibilities such as that of *my* world and the world of the other------By reason of this mediation through reversal, this chiasm, there is not simply a for-Oneself for-the-Other antithesis, there is Being as containing all that, first as sensible Being and then as Being without restriction------Chiasm, instead of the For the Other: that means that there is not only a me-other rivalry, but a co-functioning. We function as one unique body.

However, Merleau-Ponty’s ‘radical’ formulations on otherness as an expression of an ‘intracorporeal being,’ of ‘being intracorporeally’ have been the object of various critiques. Françoise Dastur criticizes Merleau-Ponty’s thesis for overlooking fundamental differences that are, nevertheless, constitutive of human experience (2008:41):

It is true that Merleau-Ponty does not pretend that we can really understand others, since we do not have access to their living experiences, but nevertheless the discovery that we share the same corporeality can be understood as the negation of the difference between me and others. Merleau-Ponty’s solution to the problem of the other could therefore appear as a too radical solution because it eliminates the terms of the problem itself, namely the experienced duality between me and the other.

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On similar lines, Luce Irigaray criticises Merleau-Ponty for remaining (2004: 398) “thoroughly interlaced with the others with whom he forms ‘a single actual Being’” and, thus, “despite his efforts,” he “falls back into a lack of differentiation with respect to these others. . .” Nevertheless, if the perception of the other in the *Phenomenology* posed the problem of annihilation since perceiving another would mean eclipsing from myself, following the chiastic pattern, the perception of the other comes not as an absence but as an accrued presence. The redoubling of the sensible, this ‘coupling of the bodies’, as Merleau-Ponty poetically describes it, shows how reconceiving the world (and being) in a procedural way, that is, as an *activity*, it allows to account for a shared corporeality that encompasses rather than discards plurality (VI:233):

The sensibility of the others is “the other side” of their aesthesiological body. And I can surmise this other side, *nichturprasentierbar,* through the articulation of the other’s body on *my sensible,* an articulation that does not empty me, that is not a hemorrhage of my “consciousness,” but on the contrary redoubles me with an *alter ego.* The other is born in the body (of the other) by an overhanging of that body, its investment in a *Verhalten,* its interior transformation which I witness. The coupling of the bodies, that is, *the adjustment of their intentions* to *one sole Erfüllung[[10]](#footnote-10),* to one sole wall they run into from two sides, is latent in the consideration of one sole sensible world, open to participation by all, which is given to each.

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4.2.1 Otherness in Patyabhijna

In the ĪPV, Utpaladeva describes all phenomena, including all empirical subjects, as limited aspects of a single consciousness, *śiva*, that pervades the entire universe. For Utpaladeva, liberation from bondage is the subject’s recognition of its identity with the universal consciousness. However, if Utpala’s thought ultimately singles all existence to one subject and if, ultimately, there is no difference between myself and another, how are we to explain the presence of others? This question is, in fact, like the one posed by Merleau-Ponty to idealist philosophers. At first sight, Utpala’s position regarding otherness seems to be one of mere denial (ĪPVI. JÑ. I, 4:17):

bhāti ca yat tadeva ahamityasya vapuḥ iti parajñānamapi svātmaivaḥ; paratvaṃ kevalam upādherdehādeḥ, sa cāpi vicārito yāvat na anya iti viśvaḥ pramātṛarvargaḥ paramārthata ekaḥ pramātā sa eva ca asti।

The otherness is due to the limiting conditions of it. And if we proceed to think rationally, we discover that the limiting condition itself is non-different from self. Hence, from the philosophical point of view, all the subjects are One. That One alone is.

However, Utpala does not simply ignore the problem of other people’s existence by claiming uniformity since he acknowledges the need to explain an important phenomenon of the empirical world *(vyavahāra*). Instead, he acknowledges that the awareness we have of the existence of numerous other selves has to be accounted for. Interestingly, Utpala claims that there is a direct relation between the existence of these selves and the acknowledgement of a single consciousness. In the fifth chapter of ĪPV, Abhinavagupta criticises Dharmakīrti’s philosophy for its inability to account for the experience of otherness, that, besides, is one of his stepping-stones to his denial of the self. In Dharmakīrti’s Santānāntarasiddhi, the Buddhists explain that the awareness of others occurs through inference, something that Utpala refutes by stating that this awareness is not just a perception (*pratyaksa*) nor even an inference (*anumāna*) but a ‘guess’ (*ūha*). It is a guess that he attributes to the perceiver’s powers of knowledge (*jñāna śakti* ) and action (*kriyā śakti* ) (ĪPV.I,4:16):

*tatra jñānaṃ svataḥ siddhaṃ kriyā kāyaāśritā satī ।*

parairapyupalak*ṣyeta tayānyajñānamūhyate* ।।

Of these the power of knowledge (*jñāna*) is established by itself; and so also is (the power of) action (*kriyā*). The latter when associated with a particular body, is perceptible to other limited perceivers. From that the presence of (the power of) knowledge in others is guessed (*ūhyate*).

Following from this verse, our awareness of the existence of others is a natural extension of our general faculty of awareness, of the very fact of being able to have a cognitive experience. Abhinava explains (ĪPVI. I, 4:16-17):

*tatra ca jānāmi ityantaḥsaṃrabhayogo ‘pi bhāti’, yena śuklāderguṇāt atyantajaḍāt jānāmi --- iti--- vapuḥ citsvabhāvatām abhyetiḥ; sa ca saṃrambho vimarśaḥ kriyāśaktirbhavati .... prāṇapuryaṣṭakakrameṇa śarīsamapi saṃcaramāṇā spandanarūpā satī vyāpārātmikā māthāpade ‘pi pramāṇasya pratyakṣāderviṣayaḥ/*

In the cognitive experience such as “I know” there is consciousness (not only of self-luminous self but) of association with a stir (*spanda*) also. It is because of this stir that self is admitted to be of sentient nature, as distinct from the qualities such as white etc., which are extremely insentient. This stir is technically called *vimarśa.* It is the power of action...That very internal power of action, because of its inherent power, enters into body, through vital air and the ‘group of eight’, and being of stirring nature in itself, becomes directly perceptible as physical action in the sphere of *māyā*.

On this, I. Ratié notices that (2007:353) “our freedom to act in the phenomenal world is nothing but an expression, albeit at an inferior ontological level, of consciousness’s freedom.” Our awareness of others passes through our perception of their activity and “perceptible action is nothing but an inferior form of *vimarśa*, consciousness’s dynamism.” We cannot perceive other people’s pure subjectivity as subjectivity is precisely that which escapes any effort to be objectified, that which cannot be understood as an object. Abhinava says (ĪPVI.I,4:16):

*sā ca paraśarīrādisāhityena avagatā svaṃ svabhāvaṃ jñātmakamavagamayati, na ca jñānam idantathā bhāti, idantā hi ajñānatvam, na ca anyadvastu anyena vapuṣā bhātaṃ bhātaṃ bhavet, tat jñānaṃ bhātyeva param, bhāti cay at tadeva ahamityasya vapuḥ iti parajñānamapi svātmaivaḥ*

That physical action, when seen in another person’s body, logically makes us guess (the presence of) the power of knowledge *(jñāna*) which is its essential nature. And the light of consciousness (*jñāna*) does not shine as “this”. For, “thisness” is negation of knowledge (*ajñāna*). And a thing that is cognized in the form of something else cannot be said to be truly cognized. But the fact that the light of consciousness shines, cannot be denied.

Certainly, when witnessing bodily action, we can sense the existence of a being that transcends objectivity thanks to our natural ability to recognise consciousness behind the variety of its manifestations. I. Ratié says (2007: 350):

To experience action in the world is to recognise a unity within a multiplicity, to perceive the ‘‘extension’’ (*vaitatya* ) of an individual through a multiplicity of places, times and forms. Because we recognize in them the characteristic of the only kind of entity that can bear both unity and multiplicity without being annulled by contradiction: a consciousness.

The empirical world is nothing else but a reflection of consciousness, not in its pure form, but contracted into a comprehensive grasp. However, as freedom (*svātantrya*) to take any form is the essence of consciousness, the objective forms we perceive are mere reflections that do not affect its unity. I.Ratié says (2007:83): “to perceive action is to perceive the coexistence of unity and multiplicity; and only consciousness has enough plasticity to bear multiplicity while remaining one.” Wishing to explain the exact nature of this awareness of otherness, Abhinavagupta stresses that Utpaladeva uses ‘‘guessed’’ over ‘‘inferred’’ because the type of knowledge Utpala refers to, is not an intellectual one (ĪPVI.JÑ.I,4:17):

*ūhyate ityanena jñānena jñānasya prameyatvaṃ na nirvahati ---- iti darśayati, anyathā hi anumīyate --- iti brūyāt ।*

The word ‘is guessed’ (*ūhyate*) indicates that the power of knowledge is not an object of any means of right knowledge. Otherwise, he would have used the word “is inferred” (*anumīyate*).

Further, Abhinavagupta’s comments on the nature of this rather mysterious type of knowing (“guess”) bringing to light an important, for our understanding, clarification (ĪPVI, JÑ:101)

With the [verbal form] ‘‘is guessed’’ (*ūhyate*) [is expressed] the fact that the consciousness of others is not merely the object of an inference (*anumeya*); this is why [Utpaladeva, in his kārikās, Vrtti and Tikā] says ‘‘guess’’ (*ūhana*), ‘‘conjecture’’ (*tarkana*), ‘‘assumption’’ (s*ambhāvana* ). In this [awareness of the others], there is also, in part (*amse*), an activity of the senses, and therefore, a ‘‘guess’’ (*ūha*) [also] implies a direct perception (*sāksātkāra*).

According to Abhinavagupta, if Utpaladeva avoids saying that other people’s consciousness is inferred, it is because he does not believe that consciousness can become an object of knowledge (*prameya*) because it is self-established. When we are aware of the existence of someone else we do not apprehend their existence as that of a mere object. This does not amount at saying that other people’s consciousness should be seen as the unperceived cause of a perceived effect (action) that is distinct from it, neither as an entity that is rationally and necessarily inferred without having any perceptual contact with it. The point that Utpala wishes to make is that the action that is perceived here and now is not different from another person’s consciousness. They are inscribed within a single continuum because “action” as a manifestation of *vimarśa* is nothing but a particular “objectified” state of consciousness. Abhinavagupta has chosen to present this discussion as a debate against the Buddhists in order to prove that this “guess” is not the inferred outcome of an intellectual process but a spontaneous realisation resulting from the activity of our senses during an act of direct perception (ĪPVI. JÑ.IV, 5:48):

*pramātrīkṛtaparadehaprāṇādisamavabhāsasaṃskārāt tu tanniṣṭhām idantām eva prakāśabhāge’pi manyamāna idaṃ parajñānam iti abhimanyate*

*avigalitasvaparavibhāgo yogī । prāptaprakarṣastu sarvam ātmatvena paśyan*

*svasṛṣṭameva svaparavibhāgaṃ manyate iti jñānasya na yogijñānena prakāśyatā ।*

Thus a yogin, in whom the consciousness of distinction of himself from others persists, because of the continuity of the impression of ‘thisness’ associated with the body and vital air etc. of another person, which he formerly looked upon as a subject (*pramātā*), attributes the objectivity of the body etc., to the pure subjective aspect ‘aham’ and, therefore, erroneously thinks that knowledge to be the knowledge of another. But a Yogin, who has risen above the idea of duality, seeing all as one with himself, realizes that the duality is his own creation.

Moreover, our ‘‘guess’’ of others’ existence does not reveal something new. It just makes clearer a knowledge that was already present, by eliminating all false notions superimposed on it. Following the Utpala’s theory of perception, according to which all objects of perception and the act of perception in itself, ultimately “rest” in consciousness and are one with it (ĪPV.IV, 4:46),“both the object and the perception rest on the self”, we perceive others because we share the same reality or have the same ‘‘nature’’ as them. Abhinava says (ĪPVI, I.4:17):

*na ca anyadvastu anyena vapuṣā bhātaṃ bhātaṃ bhavet, tat jñānaṃ bhātyeva param, bhāti ca yat tadeva ahamityasya vapuḥ iti parajñānamapi svātmaivaḥ*

And that which shines is the essential nature of the subject. Hence the light of consciousness, which is associated with another person at the empirical level, is non-different from the light of consciousness of the cognizing subject.

This realisation comes when we understand that the experience of otherness and the difference this entails is enabled by *māyā*, which, ultimately, is an intrinsic power of the self. It is a unique self that shines as multiple selves and all knowledge is ultimately knowledge of one knower. Through his dialectic on the other, Utpala aims at showing the identity of the individual and the cosmic selves.

**Conclusion**

Looking at my body and another’s as solid masses places me within an objective universe governed by the experience of difference. The special mention to the experience of otherness in both Merleau-Ponty and Utpaladeva, however, invites a new, radically phenomenological way of looking at the body as *carnal* *intentionality,* an idea we have already explored in chapter two through the concepts of *operative* intentionality in Merleau-Ponty and that of *spanda* in Utpaladeva. The experience of the other reinforces this ‘fluid’ view of the body that is malleable, capable of expansion and contraction, of participating in the world as a *communion of flesh* (VI:233):

The coupling of the bodies, that is, *the adjustment of their intentions* to *one sole Erfüllung[[11]](#footnote-11),* to one sole wall they run into from two sides, is latent in the consideration of one sole sensible world, open to participation by all, which is given to each.

Following Merleau-Ponty’s program of reclaiming the ontological significance of the body that has been since long overlooked in Western philosophy, the study of otherness is meant to show that we are not becoming self-aware ‘monads’ by virtue of abiding in a transcendental subjectivity. Instead, it is by sharing a common world, an intracorporeal space with other bodies that we acquire the sense of ‘I’ – it is hence by virtue of our embodiment that we become self-aware. Utpaladeva makes the same point by suggesting that it is not through an intellectual inference that we know that others exist but through direct perception that occurs when bodily intentionalities align and when there is recognition of the vibration or *spanda* working in other bodies. Bodies as masses of energy within a field of energy, where difference is only a variation in frequency and speed. More than anything else, the experience of otherness brings out not only the unity of the ontological realm -the self or brute Being- but also our bodily inherence in it. Both Merleau-Ponty and Utpaladeva attempt to establish a new relation to the self/Being that will automatically entail a new understanding of ourselves, as to reclaim a legacy that has been lost after centuries of Intellectualist thought. Both thinkers aim at disclosing the infinite possibilities that are opened to us by reclaiming awareness of our embeddedness in the self/Being, The following chapter will examine the way in which Utpaladeva and Merleau-Ponty conceive this disclosure and the role it plays in their respective philosophical projects.

**CHAPTER FIVE –** From theory to praxis

Introduction

Both Merleau-Ponty and Utpala dedicate a great part of their work to demonstrating that our understanding of perception is erroneous and that we have, historically, missed its ontological significance. Their focus on the phenomenality of the perceptual experience, reveals a new meaning for subjectivity. Both thinkers seem to suggest that as embodied subjects, we are no more in an antagonistic relation with the world because the world is not a collection of objects but a manifestation of being, an *appearing*.

Both thinkers acknowledge that our reading of the perceptual experience misses its ontological significance, the fact that the world is the expression of being that is not a limited totality but an infinite realm of ever emerging possibilities. For Merleau-Ponty, this is due to culture, we have historically learnt to read space as three dimensional, for Utpala, it is due to an operation that is internal to the self concealing its infinite luminosity as it unfolds in experience. Both philosophers will agree that we are not normally *taught* to recognise the vertical being or the self. For both thinkers, there is a kind of urgency in recovering this domain as the lack of recognition limits our freedom, a freedom that comes with the experience of unity. In the pages that follow, we will explore the rationale behind two *acts -* the *phenomenological reduction* in Merleau-Ponty and *self-recognition* in Utpala. We will attempt to see the way in which these processes, in their respective contexts, aim at restoring perception’s link to the sensible and revealing the *limitless agency* of being and the experience of freedom that comes with this realisation. In practice. We are tempted to say that the practical aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s and Utpala’s philosophies have been mostly overlooked. Due to this, their discourse seem no different to other discourses that describe experience in purely theoretical terms. Nevertheless, for Utpala and Merleau-Ponty alike, their journey is meaningful insofar as it embraces the lived dimension of experience. Hence the importance of focusing on the practical aspect of their philosophies and of identifying the processes they propose to their readers.

5.1.1 The disclosure of being

Merleau-Ponty’s title on his WN entry dated January, 1960 reads as follows (WN:229): “Perception--Movement--Primordial unity of the sensible field--Transcendence synonym of incarnation--Endo-ontology--Soul and body--Qualitative integration and differentiation.” Transcendence as incarnation seems to presuppose a second equation: perception as movement (WN :231) “by principle…every perception is movement.” As the examination of geometrical drawing in the second chapter has shown, this ‘movement’ does not refer to a real change in a topological space, it is not an actual displacement. Maintaining the focus on the phenomenality of experience, an object is no more a concrete thing among other things but a projection of being within a diacritical system: the world is not a collection of objects but a relational system of equivalences and a network of intersections, *dimensionality*. Merleau-Ponty writes (WN:229):

Fundamental: it is absolutely *artificial* to recompose the phenomenon as geometrical optics does, to construct it on the basis of the angular displacement on the retina of images corresponding to *such* or *such* a point. I am ignorant of this geometry, and what is given to me phenomenally is not a set of *displacements* or *non- displacements* of this kind, it is the *difference* between what takes place at one distance and at another distance, it is the integral of those differences; the "points" that the optico-geometric analysis *gives* itself are, phenomenally, not points, but very small structures, monads, *metaphysical* points or transcendences. How name this system of differentiation of *Vertinderung* and *Unvertinderung?* In fact, to designate it thus, to describe it thus, is already to substitute for it its "projection" on a space for objective analysis. To tell the truth, movements, rests, distances, apparent sizes, etc., are only different indexes of refraction of the transparent medium that separates me from the *things themselves,* different expressions of that coherent distention across which Being shows itself and conceals itself.

On the same lines, A. Lingis explains that (xlviii) “the sensible thing is not in space, but, like a direction, is at work across space, presides over a system of oppositional relationships. It is not inserted in a pre-existing locus of space; it organizes a space of planes and fields about itself.” Following form this, perception is characterised by a certain *polymorphism* that the study of the *gestalt* unveils (WN:207): “since the *Gestalt* arises from polymorphism, this situates us entirely outside of the philosophy of the subject and the object.” Merleau-Ponty goes on to suggest that the body itself is a *gestalt* (VI:205):

And who experiences it? A mind that would grasp it as an idea or a signification? No. It is a body--In what sense? My body *is* a *Gestalt* and it is co-present in every *Gestalt.* It is a *Gestalt;* it also, and eminently, is a heavy signification, it is flesh; the system it constitutes is ordered about a central hinge or a pivot which is openness to . . . , a bound and not a free possibility--And at the same time it is a component of every *Gestalt.* The flesh of the *Gestalt* (…) is what responds to its inertia, to its insertion in a "world"…

As seen in the third chapter, Utpala views reality as a whole that is structured on the graded hierarchy of metaphysical principles *(taratamya)* corresponding to planes of existence (*tattva*). The lowest planes up to the level of *māyā* are marked by the experience of division *(bheda)* between subjects and objects and is reality perceived as a collection of single, unrelated units. Although Utpala does not state that dualism is an incorrect view of reality, he contends that it corresponds to only one of its levels since the empirical world is only a phase (*vibhaga)* of the ultimate reality. What both thinkers seem to suggest, is that the fact of our embodiment does not reveal that we are separated from Being/the self. On the contrary, it reveals our inherence within a boundless ontological realm, the nature of which, however, we seem to ignore. An objectivist view of the world, Utpala explains, is maintained by the subject’s identification with the physical body, the ego, the intellect. Utpala argues that one needs to look at the world as a single but polymorphic reality. By considering the various categories of existence *(padartha*) that appear in their outer form to be distinct from one another as actually different from one another, we overlook the fact that in their essential nature, they are all aspects of a unified field. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty criticises the Euclidian, three-dimensional conception of space that has, nevertheless, remained over 2,000 years the most compelling way of modelling our experience of the world (WN:210), “The Euclidean space is the model for perspectival being, it is a space without transcendence, positive, a network of straight lines, parallel among themselves or perpendicular according to the three dimensions, which sustains all the possible situation.” Merleau-Ponty attributes our current perspective on perception on the influence of culture (WN:212): “I say that the Renaissance perspective is a cultural fact, that perception itself is polymorphic and that if it becomes Euclidean, this is because it allows itself to be oriented by the system.” Against a separatist view of the world and of being, Merleau-Ponty invites us to see perception as revealing an (WN:207) “empirical pregnancy” that “consists in defining each perceived being by a structure or a system of equivalencies about which it is disposed.” The Euclidean view misses the dimensionality of our experience of the lived world (WN:182): “the reconquest of the *Lebenswelt* is the reconquest of a *dimension.*”Merleau-Ponty is aware of the strong hold of the classical view of perception (WN:212-213)

My position in the problem of the "return to the immediate" to be defined: the perceptual in the sense of the non-projective, vertical world—is always given with sense experience *(le sentir),* with the phenomenal, with the silent transcendence. And yet someone like Piaget ignores this absolutely, has totally converted his perception into a cultural-Euclidean perception.

Faced with this active repression of transcendence that reigns not only philosophical thought but the natural and human sciences alike, Merleau-Ponty wonders (ibid.): “What right have I therefore to call immediate this original that can be forgotten to such an extent?” Following from this, Merleau-Ponty tries to find ways to restore to perception its phenomenality and make us aware of the dimension of experience it discloses (WN:212): “Whence the question: how can one return from this perception fashioned by culture to the "brute" or "wild" perception? What does the informing consist in? By what act does one undo it (return to the phenomenal, to the "vertical" world, to lived experience)?” Like Merleau-Ponty, Utpala voices the need for a ‘return’ to an original dimension of experience that has, throughout the centuries, been systematically overlooked. It remains to be seen, how and by what means, Merleau-Ponty and Utpala propose to reconquer this primordial realm of experience that philosophical thought has consigned to oblivion.

5.1.2 Recasting the reduction

It seems that well before Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology has planned meticulously this return. For Husserl, the phenomenological reduction is an act of return in the sense of offering access to the conditions of possibility of experience within the realm of the transcendental subject. However, in Merleau-Ponty’s eyes, Husserl’s return to the transcendental seems to only multiply the problems already posed in perception by silencing the bodily aspect of the experience and by severing the organic ties with the sensible that can only give this experience meaning. Let’s not forget that for Merleau-Ponty (WN:214) “there is no intelligible world, *there is* the sensible world.” Against this arbitrary move towards the transcendental subject, Merleau-Ponty voices his preference for a more ‘situated’ reduction in the manner of Heidegger: the reductive move should be a shift *in* the existential, a displacement of the conditions of the possibility of experience in the sensible (VI:114):

Fact and essence can no longer be distinguished, not because, mixed up in our experience, they in their purity would be inaccessible and would subsist as limit-ideas beyond our experience, but because — Being no longer being *before me,* but surrounding me and in a sense traversing me, and my vision of Being not forming itself from elsewhere, but from the midst of Being— the alleged facts, the spatio-temporal individuals, are from the first mounted on the axes, the pivots, the dimensions, the generality of my body, and the ideas are therefore already encrusted in its joints.

The revision of the classical model of the phenomenological reduction aims at the recovery of this ontological milieu that is already present in experience but that ordinary reflection misses. For the purposes of this recovery, the passage to immanence is replaced by the passage to (WN:178) “the transcendental field, to the wild and “vertical” being,” a being that is (*ibid*.) “*by definition* progressive, incomplete,” a unity by transgression, a relational field that never closes upon itself. The reduction is itself the discovery of the vertical world (WN:233) “in what follows (...), what is at issue is to operate the reduction, that is, for me, to disclose little by little— and more and more — the “wild” or “vertical” world.” If Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea of a complete reduction it is not because he considers the reduction impossible. A *complete* reduction is impossible, yes, but this lack of completion has a very precise philosophical meaning (WN:173): “this is to be understood not as an imperfection (...) but as a philosophical theme:the incompleteness of the reduction (...) is not an obstacle to the reduction, it is the reduction *itself*, the rediscovery of vertical being.” Our current understanding of experience constructs the object in conformity with its ideal of measurement without, however, tracing “the involvement in the real of the subject of knowledge” (A. Lingis, PhP:xxiv). It is precisely this involvement that the new reduction is meant to bring to light. The influence of the scientific advancements of his time is evident in Merleau-Ponty’s revised reduction, particularly that of Einstein’s theory of relativity and of the latest studies on perception. In an WN entry dated August, 1959, Merleau-Ponty writes (WN:200) “that the modern theory of perception is a phenomenology (...) and discloses brute being, the “vertical” world.” This “modern” theory of perception is not, however, a move forward, but a move backwards involving return to an original realm from where experience originates (VI:212):

Whence the question: how can one return from this perception fashioned by culture to the “brute” or “wild” perception? What does the informing consist in? By what act does one undo it (return to the phenomenal, to the “vertical” world, to lived experience)?

Merleau-Ponty attributes the failure of the classical model of the phenomenological reduction to the fact that it defeats its purpose by overlooking the reality of the perceptual experience and by failing to show how the perceptual momentum articulates the transcendence traversing the sensible (WN:213):

With life, natural perception (with the savage mind) is perpetually given to us the wherewithal to set up the universe of immanence. And yet, this universe tends of itself to become autonomous, realizes of itself a repression of transcendence. The key is in this idea that perception qua wild perception is of itself ignorance of itself, imperception, tends of itself to see itself as an act and to forget itself as latent intentionality, as being at.

This dubious ‘repression of transcendence’ owes itself to the reflective movement that conceals perception by initiating a ‘hasty’ withdrawal from experience (VI :37):

Having therefore learned through perceptual experience what it is to “see well” the thing, that to do so one must and one can approach it, and that the new data thus acquired are determinations of the same thing, we transfer this certitude to the interior, we resort to the fiction of a “little man in the man,” and in this way we come to think that to reflect on perception is, the perceived thing and the perception remaining what they were, to disclose the true subject that inhabits and has always inhabited them.

By ‘extracting’ perception from its lived dimension, both the subject’s involvement in experience as well as the its natural openness upon the world are ignored (*ibid*.):

But in fact, I should say that there was there a thing perceived and an openness upon this thing which the reflection has neutralized and transformed into perception-reflected-on and thing-perceived-within-a-perception-reflected-on. And that the functioning of reflection, like the functioning of the exploring body, makes use of powers obscure to me, spans the cycle of duration that separates the brute perception from the reflective examination, and during this time maintains the permanence of the perceived and the permanence of the perception under the gaze of the mind only because my mental inspection and my attitudes of mind prolong the “I can” of my sensorial and corporeal exploration.

The “brute” or “wild” perception differs from its classical counterpart by repositioning the subject where it belongs, in the relational field. The one having the experience is the one for whom the world is. For Merleau-Ponty (WN:173):

Husserl’s error is to have described the interlocking starting from a P*rasensfeld* considered as without thickness, as immanent consciousness: it is transcendent consciousness, it is being at a distance, it is the double ground of my life of consciousness.

It is because consciousness is not transparent, it is given along the structures of the sensible that the return to subjectivity is to be sought within these same structures and not away from them (VI:212-213): “my position in the problem of the “return to the immediate” to be defined: the perceptual in the sense of the non-projective, vertical world— is always given with sense experience (*le sentir),* with the phenomenal, with the silent transcendence.” The revised version of the reduction takes perception in the present, that is, illuminates the ontological milieu that underlies and infuses it (WN: 230): “absolute primacy of the World and of Being for a “vertical” philosophy which really *takes perception in the present.”* This is the new version of Husserl’s “return to the immediate”. The shift that the reduction operates consists in viewing perception not just as openness to the world but as openness to Being, it is a (WN:270) “concrete ontology”. Merleau-Ponty seems to not only suggest that there is an ontological milieu underlying all perceptual activity but that as perceptual beings and due to our body’s embeddedness in the world, we are already within Being. And it is our call to recover its experience.

5.1.3 Ascent on the spot (*ascension sur place*)

Merleau-Ponty’s rationale is similar to Utpala’s; in both cases the experiencing subject needs to awaken to a reality it entirely ignores (VI:272): “it is this whole field of the “vertical” that has to be awakened.” Perception shows that ultimately all causality belongs to the vertical being, what science calls ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are only articulations of the same pre-reflective milieu (VI:226):“This *truth* of science, far from making a philosophy useless, is founded and guaranteed only by a relation of transcendence with Being, an inherence of the subject and the object of science in a preobjective Being.” Merleau-Ponty concedes that his own version of the reduction calls for a new mode of awareness that is capable of revealing the truth of the vertical. In the classical model, the revelation of the ‘nuclei of being’ was entrusted to intellectual reflection, in the light of which it was seen as an act of recovery. We have seen, however, that in Merleau-Ponty (VI:246) “reflexivity must be understood by the body,” and that (VI:204) “every reflection is after the model of the reflection of the hand touching by the hand touched, open generality, a prolongation of the body's reserve [volant]).”

Linking reflection to bodily reversibility may have seemed somewhat hasty and probably unjustified. Nonetheless, it is rooted in a genuine understanding of the structures of embodiment. The body, Merleau-Ponty notices (PhP:106), “catches itself from the outside engaged in a cognitive process; it tries to touch itself while being touched, and initiates ‘a kind of reflection’ that is sufficient to distinguish it from objects.” The pre-reflective life of the body is the milieu of a more ‘real’ reflection than the abstract realm of pure intellection, a reflection taking place in the present of the experience (and not after the experience) (VI:204): “... reflection is not an identification with oneself (thought of seeing or of feeling) but non-difference with self = silent or blind identification.” This sensibilisation of reflection draws on the idea that the body bears a “resemblance” to the world.In a WN entry (WN:270-271) entitled “The body in the world. The specular image—resemblance,” Merleau-Ponty suggests that our lived experience of the world reveals the “resemblance between the thing and the thing-seen.” This resemblance reveals that perception is a dynamic reflection between surfaces (my body, the world) that precedes and lends its structure to intellectual reflection (WN: 270-271):

My body in the visible. This does not simply mean: it is a particle of the visible, there there is the visible and here (as variant of the there) is my body. No. It is *surrounded* by the visible. This does not take place on a plane of which it would be an inlay, it is really surrounded, circumvented. This means: it sees itself, it is a visible—but it sees itself seeing, my look which finds it *there* knows that it is here, at its own side--Thus the body *stands* before the world and the world upright before it, and between them there is a relation that is one of embrace. And between these two vertical beings, there is not a frontier, but a contact surface-- The flesh = this fact that my body is passive-active (visible-seeing), mass in itself *and* gesture-- The flesh of the world = its *Horizonthaftigkeit* (interior and exterior horizon) surrounding the thin pellicle of the strict visible between these two horizons-- The flesh = the fact that the visible that I am is seer (look) or, what amounts to the same thing, has an *inside,* plus the fact that the exterior visible is also *seen,* i.e., has a prolongation, in the enclosure of my body, which is part of its being. The specular image, memory, resemblance: fundamental structures (resemblance between the thing and the thing-seen). For they are structures that are immediately derived from the body-world relation--the reflections resemble the reflected = the vision commences in the things, certain things or couples of things call for vision--Show that our whole expression and conceptualization of the mind is derived from these structures: for example, *reflection.*

The issue, as Merleau-Ponty sees it, is that the experiencing subject, unaware of the ‘mirroring’ between surfaces (body-world) that makes perception possible, moves too quickly from its original encounter with the object to the formulation of a mental image of it. In doing so, the original movement that initiates the contact with the world is lost. The role of the phenomenological reduction should, then, be to retrieve this contact, to reclaim the awareness of this movement. In the place of intellectual reflection concealing the instance of the original contact, Merleau-Ponty proposes the ‘hyper-reflexion’ (*sur-réflexion*). This refers to a perceptual awareness that does not reside on any object but abides on its own streaming: it is the “perception of the essence of perception.” Not awareness of the object but awareness of awareness. This hyper-awareness offers the perceiver a direct contact with the flesh of the world (WN:267): “it is a question of finding in the present, the flesh of the world (and not in the past) an "ever new" and "always the same”.” In this new, radically phenomenological context, there is no more question of ‘ascending’ from the sensible to the transcendental, from the experience to the conditions of its possibility. What takes place is an intensification or a heightening (*ascent*) of the experience of the sensible (VI:204):

To found the latter on the former, and the *de facto* perception on the essence of perception such as it appears to reflection, is to forget the reflection itself as a distinct act of recovery. In other words, we are catching sight of the necessity of another operation besides the conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of *hyper-reflection* (*sur-réflexion*) that would also take itself and the changes it introduces into the spectacle into account. It accordingly would not lose sight of the brute thing and the brute perception and would not finally efface them, would not cut the organic bonds between the perception and the thing perceived with a hypothesis of inexistence.

With the notion of ‘hyper-reflexion’ (*sur-réflexion*), Merleau-Ponty displaces the reflective process within the sensible (WN:230):

And the perception of this perception (the phenomenological “reflection”) is the inventory of this originating departure whose documents we carry in ourselves, of this *Ineinander* that awakens to itself, it is the usage of the *immerudeder* which is the sensible, the carnal itself (for every reflection is after the model of the reflection of the hand touching by the hand touched, open generality, a prolongation of the body's reserve *[volant]),* hence reflection is not an identification with oneself (thought of seeing or of feeling) but non-difference with self = silent or blind identification.

Reflection as bodily reversibility follows closely the movement traversing the realm of the sensible*.* By deepening the awareness of bodily reversibility, one progressively regain contact with the appearing world (*ibid*.):

If therefore the reflection is not to presume upon what it finds and condemn itself to putting into the things what it will then pretend to find in them, it must suspend the faith in the world only so as to *see it,* only so as to read in it the route it has followed in becoming a world for us; it must seek in the world itself the secret of our perceptual bond with it.

In what regards the phenomenological reduction, it is, hence, no more question of going from the phenomenon to the conditions of its possibility (WN:233): “it is necessary then on the way to form the theory of this “reflection” that I practice; it is not a going back up to the “conditions of possibility.” Here, the traditional idea of reflection falls apart because the phenomenological field accepts no divisions: as seen earlier, micro and macro are seamless undulations on a common intentional fabric, differentiated expressions of a dimensional Being (WN:227):

It is even my perception that presents to me in a spectacle the reference of lateral transcendence from the “appearances” to the essence as a nucleus of (verbal) *Wesen* ------The cognitions at a > or < scale (microphysical-macrophenomena) are a determination in dotted lines (...) of *nuclei of being* whose actuality perception alone gives me, and which can be conceived only by derivation from its inner framework.

Therefore, perception should be seen as an unmediated contact with Being (VI:65): “we said that philosophy needs a contact with being prior to reflection, a contact which makes reflection itself possible.” The withdrawal to a transcendental subjectivity is replaced by an ‘ascent on the spot’(WN:177). Following the verticality of Being, a being appearing across various levels, this ascent is an intentional movement across levels of being - not from an outside to an inside - but *across* the psycho-physical continuum to which we are already, by virtue of our embodiment, inscribed (WN:177):

In what follows (Physics and Physis—Animality—the human body as psycho-physical), what is at issue is to operate the reduction, that is, for me, to disclose little by little—and more and more—the "wild" or "vertical" world. Show the intentional reference of Physics to Physis, of Physis to life, of life to the "psycho-physical"—a reference by which one nowise passes from the "exterior" to the "interior," since the reference is not a reduction and since each degree "surpassed" remains in fact presupposed. It is necessary then on the way to form the theory of this "reflection" that I practice; it is not a going back up to the "conditions of possibility"--And this is why it is a question of an ascent on the spot *(ascension sur place).*

4.2.1 Reality in degrees: the states of consciousness

Understanding existence in vertical terms allows Merleau-Ponty to place experience within the broader network of a relational Being. However, its implications on the level of subjective experience are still to be considered. Utpaladeva, on the other hand, borrowing an ancient concept from the Upaniṣads, shows how subjective experience translates the fluidity of being and links the macro experience of the universal self with the micro experience of the embodied subject. In their own exploration of the structure of experience and of how reality can be or should be perceived, the authors of the early Upaniṣads developed the theory of the three states or *avasthātraya* explaining how the experience of reality comes in layers that contain each other’s possibility. According to this view, human consciousness, far from being an all-abiding awareness defying change, passes through three states: waking, dream and deep sleep. This means that all experience or even the lack of it is contingent upon a state of awareness in which the subject finds itself. Therefore, the experience of the world is contingent upon the waking state (*jagrat*), which in itself entails the experience of externality through the senses. Hence, the empirical world is a contingent reality bound by time and space that exists inasmuch as it subsists in our consciousness. Utpaladeva describes it thus (ĪPV AG. II 17, 213/ Vol.2 p.266):

And the wakeful state of the subjects is that in which the creation (the object) is common to all subjects, has stability and is external inasmuch as it is the object of all senses.

*sarvākṣagocaratvena yā tu bāhyatayā sthirā* |

*sṛṣṭiḥ sādhāraṇī sarvapramātṝṇāṃ sa jāgaraḥ* ||

Following the waking state comes the dream state in which the senses cease to function and consequently the empirical world, as we know it, eclipses. Instead, the mind revives impressions acquired in the waking state and shapes them into the likeness of the waking. However, in the dream state (*svapna)* the mind does not doubt the reality of the illusory vision it itself creates (ĪPV AG.II 16-7, 213/ Vol.2 p.266):

*manomātrapathe'*pya*kṣaviṣayatvena vibhramāt ।*

*spaṣṭātrabhāsā bhāvānāṃ* s*ṛṣṭiḥ svapnapadaṃ matam ॥*

The state of dreaming is that in which the objects though they are objects to mind (*manas*) only, yet they are so created that they shine as clearly as they do when they are related to external senses. It is an illusion.

The next state is that of deep sleep where there is no function of the mind or the senses and, hence, no perception of reality. It is characterised by the complete absence of self-awareness (ĪPV AG. II 16-7, 211/ Vol 2 p.260):

*tāvanmātrasthitau proktaṃ sauṣuptaṃ pralayopamam* ।

*savedyamapavedyaṃ ca māyāmalayutāyutam* ।।

Thus, deep sleep consists in the rest of self-consciousness in *śūnya* or *prāṇa*. It is like the state of dissolution. It is of two kinds (i) that in which the objective consciousness persists and (ii) that in which there is no objective consciousness. In the former the subject has the impurity of *māyā* but in the latter he is free from it.

It is important to note that there is an essential difference between the first two states, waking and dreaming, and the third state of deep sleep. While in the first two states the awareness of subjectivity (*ahaṃkāra*) persists, during deep sleep where there is no more perception of the subject-object distinction, it eclipses. The fourth state called *turīya* is not properly a state but pure non-dual awareness underlying and transcending the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. In it, there is no awareness of being a separate subject; there is only pure being in which awareness is still present (unlike deep sleep). However, in the absence of a self-referential ‘I’, experience is no more accompanied by the thoughts describing it.

From a subjective point of view, exploring consciousness from the state we are most familiar with, the waking state, seems most reasonable. However, Utpaladeva approaches consciousness starting from what is not really a state - the fourth (*turīya*). This reversal is not pointless but aims at highlighting the primacy of non-dual awareness over the three alternating states of awareness involving the experience of duality. By initiating his account of the states from *turīya*, Utpala shows that these are internal to it and that all dualistic experience ultimately resides in unity. The theory of the states translates two different but concomitant levels of reality. The first is the point of view of the individual consciousness, according to which, these levels are different stages of experience the conscious subject has of itself, perceptions of different levels of ‘reality’. The second is the point of view of the universal self according to which, these are different stages of the bursting forth of consciousness, that is, manifestation of different levels of ‘reality’. For Utpaladeva, the distinction between the individual and the cosmic is only apparent. As non-dual consciousness bursts forth manifesting itself, it becomes perceptual consciousness. Nevertheless, non-dual awareness permeates dual awareness because it is ultimately the former that shines forth *as* the latter and constitutes, at all times, its background.

5.2.2 Self-recognition, what for?

Merleau-Ponty’s reformulation of the phenomenological reduction comes as a response to a view that fails to acknowledge the ontological bearings of perception. Utpala offers a similar response: if the reduction is meant to awaken the experiencer to the vertical being, self-recognition is meant to awaken them to the ‘reality within reality’, *turīya*. Reading phenomenological reduction alongside self-recognition provides an extended paradigm based on a detailed cosmogony. Reading self-recognition along phenomenological reduction helps emphasise its phenomenological bearings. Read together, they open up dimensions of experience that go often unnoticed. For Utpala, self-recognition is about reclaiming an original state of freedom: we believe ourselves to be the agents of our actions when the self is the sole agent. I. Ratié (2016:18) states:

However, individuals only lack agency inasmuch as they mistake their self for some inert object such as their body, and liberation is not bestowed upon them by some distant God on whose will they would entirely depend, since they *are* God: far from being the gift of a transcendent Other, grace is yet another manifestation of the freedom belonging to any conscious subject.

As a concept, ‘self-recognition’ was initially introduced by Somānanda, Utpala’s teacher, who sought to establish an essential unity underlying two consequent perceptions in view of proving the existence of a conscious self. However, in Somānanda's work, 'recognition' appears only once and does not have the specific technical connotations it later acquires in Utpaladeva. It is Utpaladeva who extends the recognitive faculty to every common act of determinate perception and establishes recognition as “the intuitive capacity of consciousness to grasp its own nature” (Dyczkwoski, 1992:20). For the individuated monad on the plane of *māyā,* the process leading to self-recognition involves alignment with the non-differentiated stream of awareness that subtends all cognitions. It is the experience the monad has of its innermost nature, the core of its subjectivity and the conditions of possibility of all experience. As such, self-recognition does not involve a change of some sort, becoming something or someone we are not. Instead, it is the recovery of what we already know, what already is. But, if self-recognition is not a change, then, what is it for? Abhinava questions (ĪPVI TS.I,16:230/ Vol.2 p. 312):

*nanu yadyātamākhyaṃ vastu tadeva tarhi tasya pratyabhijñānāpratyabhijñānayoraviśeṣaḥ, na hi bījamapratyabhijñātaṃ sati sahakārisākalye nāṅkuraṃ janayati, tat ka ātmapratyabhijñāne nirbandhaḥ ?*

But if the essential nature of the self is ever the same, there would be no difference in it (i.e., in its causal efficiency) in the case of either its recognition or non-recognition. For, a seed, though it may not be recognized, yet, if all the contributory causes are present, it does produce the sprout. Why then is there so much insistence on self-recognition?

Abhinava makes, here, an important distinction between external and internal causality suggesting that external causality has no relation to recognition while internal causality does (*ibid*.):

*dvividhārthakriyāsti, bāhyā cāṅkurādikā, pramātṛviśrānticamatkārasārā ca prītyādirūpā । tatrādyā satyaṃ pratyabhijñānaṃ nāpekṣate, dvitīyā tu tadapekṣate eva ।*

The causal efficiency is of two types: (1) *external*, such as the production of sprout, and (ii) *internal*, such as causing pleasure etc., which is essentially nothing else than the *self-consciousness*, the rest of the subject on itself. The former undoubtedly does not depend upon recognition; *but the latter does*.

This distinction is rather intriguing: external causation refers to the causal relations in the phenomenal world, the sequence of events in time and space. It is ‘external’ in relation to the experiencing subject because it refers to its relation to the external world. Internal causation refers to the subject’s awareness of and response to these events and, as such, is ‘internal’ to the subject. In his commentary on an earlier verse, Abhinava explains the paradox of subjective experience and takes it as the starting point for justifying the pursuit of self-recognition (ĪPVI TS.I,4:221/ Vol.2 p. 286):

*viśvarūpasya bhagavataḥ svarūpabhūta eva viśvatra yaḥ prakāśō yaśca vimarśaḥ,* *tāvajjñānakriye svarūpadvayaparāmarśāparityāgenaiva tu yadvibhinnatayāpi vimarśanaṃ svarūpaparāmarśa eva viśrāntam 'ahamidamitisadāśiveśvaraparamārthaṃ sā bhagavato māyāśaktih, tā etāstisraḥ śaktayo bhagavati naisargikyo*’*sṛṣṭāḥ* ।

All consciousness and freedom, that is in the universe is identical with the Lord, who Himself is the universe. And the consciousness (*prakāśa*) and freedom (*vimarśa*) are powers of knowledge and action respectively. *Māyā* is the Lord’s power, which is responsible for the consciousness “I this”, which is the ultimate reality of *Sadāśiva* and *Īśvara*, which are characterized by the consciousness of separate objectivity as resting on the self-consciousness. In these two states, the consciousness of *prakāśa* and *vimarśa* as the essential nature of the self, still persists.

Here, Abhinava explains that all causality in the universe belongs to the self and even the rising ofobjective awareness should be seen as an expression of its power. Even in those states where there is awareness of the object as separate from the subject, the unitary awareness of the self is active. But if as perceivers, we are only too familiar with our own stream of awareness, what is the point of even discussing self-recognition? (*ibid*.): “but it may be asked “where do you find that the causal efficiency, which is essentially the rest on the subject, is not seen without recognition and is co-incidental with recognition?” Here, Utpaladeva takes the opportunity to explain the paradox of human consciousness by evoking a scene from everyday life (ĪPV TS.I,17: 230/ Vol.2 p.313):

*taistairapyupayācitairupanatastanvyāḥ sthito’ pyantike*

*kānto lokasamāna evamaparijñāto na rantuṃ yathā ।*

*lokasyaiṣa tathānavekṣitaguṇaḥ svātmāpi viśveśvaro*

*naivālaṃ nijavaibhavāya tadiyaṃ tatpratyabhijñoditā ॥*

Just as an object of love, who has been brought to the presence of a slim lady by various entreaties, cannot give her any pleasure, though he may stand before her, so long as he is not recognized and, therefore, not distinguished from common man; so the self of all, which is the Lord of the world, cannot manifest its true glory so long as its essential nature is not recognized.

We perceive the world as a whole that is external and separate from us and (ĪPVI TS.I,17:231/ Vol.2 p.314) “under such circumstances, the perception of the object, though it actually takes place, does not give any satisfaction to the heart (*saṃpannamapi priyatamāvalokanaṃ na hṛdayaṃ* *pūrṇīkaroti).* Abhinava explains that this feeling of separateness is false because, in reality, empirical awareness ultimately rests in the self. As perceivers, we experience the world as a field that is being constantly swayed by the energetic forces or qualities of nature (*guṇa*) (ĪPVI TS.I,4:221/ Vol.2 p.286):

svarūpā*parijñān*e tu bhinneṣu bhāve*ṣu jñānaṃ kriyā, śuddhaṃeva bhinnatvaṃ*   *prakāśavimarśaśūnyam, - iti paśoḥ prakāśaḥ prakāśāprakāśāvaprakāśaśca iti krameṇa sukhaduḥkha mohalakṣaṇāni prakāśakriyāniyamaśīlāni sattvarajas. tamāṃsi ।।*

But when there is ignorance of the essential nature of the self and cognition and action refer to objects, which (are recognised to be) separate (from the self) and there is consciousness of the separate objects as devoid of both *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*, then arise *sattva, rajas* and *tamas,* which are characterised by pleasure, pain and absence of both (*moha*) and the functions of which are knowledge, action and restriction (*niyama*) respectively.

5.2.3 The phenomenological logic of *vimarśa*

On an individual level, self-recognition comes with the awareness that “consciousness is not a passive witness (*sākṣin*)but is full of the conscious activity *(citikriy*ā)” (Dyczkowski,1987:45). What we call ‘self’ is the dense mass of (our) consciousness; in reality we are this perceiving and acting subjectivity, the universal ‘I’ consciousness. Abhinava states (ĪPVI KR.III, 17:163/ Vol.2 p. 143):

*samanantaraślokadvayotkasvarūpe pramātari bhagavati īśvaratvādinā uktenaiva pūrṇatādinā vyavahāro yaḥ khalu ‘aham’ iti bhāti sa pūrṇaḥ vibhuḥ svatantro nityaḥ, -ityevamādirūpaḥ taṃ prakāśakena pratyabhijñārūpeṇa vyavahārasādhanaparārthanumānātmanā śāstreṇa taṃ vyavahāraṃ pravartayatāṃ tatsamarthācaraṇam kriyate*

The idea, that what shines as “I” is perfect, omnipresent, omnipotent and eternal being, i.e., the idea that the “I” is identical with the Lord, the Subject, the Lustrous, as presented in the preceding two verses, - was not in practice before, because of ignorance. This *sāstra* makes people fit to live this idea in practice by bringing to light His powers of knowledge, will and action by means of treatise on *pratyabhijñā,* which is a collection of inferential proofs to justify the idea in practice.

An idea of self-realisation as the recognition of our identity with the transcendental subject can very easily be interpreted in purely idealist, Husserlian terms. Yet, the rationale that informs self-recognition is the same behind Merleau-Ponty’s reduction; in both cases, the universal subject is neither remote nor a-sensible. If it is called ‘transcendental’ this is not because it transcends the sensible but because it exceeds itself in the sensible just like Merleau-Ponty’s wild Being overflows into visibility. Realisation is the recognition of the self’s inherent transcendence, of its powers working in ordinary experience. These powers are usually ignored as awareness is directed towards the objects of perception. In re-focusing our attention on the stream of consciousness that subtends cognition, instead of the object of cognition, we become aware of this imperceptible movement of transcendence (*spanda*) making perception possible at the first place. Abhinava says (ĪPVI TS.I, 17: 230/ Vol.2 p.314):

*yadā nāyakaguṇasaṃśravaṇapravṛddhānurāgā kāminī taddarśanameva paramupādeyamākāṅkṣantī ……. dūtīsaṃpreṣaṇāni …….*

*tadupayācitavaśāt aśaṅkitameva savidhavartini priyatame'valokite taistaiṛ*

*……. viśeṣaiḥ parāmarśapadavīmagacchadbhirjanasādhāraṇatāmāpādite ।*

Suppose the passion of love is aroused in a young lady by mere hearing of the excellence of a hero and that she intensely desiring to see him and send messages, the hero unexpectedly comes in response to these messages and stands before her. But she is not able to apprehend clearly his distinctive qualities and to her he is just an ordinary man. Under such circumstances, the perception of the object, though it actually takes place, does not give any satisfaction to the heart. Similarly, though the Lord of the Universe is ever shining within as the very self, yet His shining does not make the heart full (of *ānanda*); because the self is not realized to be transcendental... But when she distinctly cognizes those excellences in him ... her heart immediately blooms fully like a wonderful bud. And in consequence of repeated enjoyment of union, she experiences the rest of the heart in other forms also.

Utpala acknowledges that although the nature of the self is discovered at a higher level of consciousness, nonetheless, it presents itself to us directly in the specific form in which we perceive things. He further suggests that the real appears in the moment of immediate perception (*sākṣātkāra*), otherwise there would be no way in which we could penetrate from the level of appearing to that of its source. In fact, no ontological distinction can be drawn between the absolute and its manifestations since both are an appearing (*abhāsa*), the latter of diversity and the former, of the subtle light of consciousness. Utpala’s view of a self-manifesting reality provides an alternative that is beyond the notional challenges of the fact-essence dichotomy. What may, however, pose a challenge, to envisaging the existential aspect of self-recognition is the apprehension of the idea of *vimarśa* in Utpaladeva. We have seen that the phenomenalisation of reflection was the key gesture that allowed the revision of the reduction in Merleau-Ponty. This revision would not have been possible without reclaiming the sensible ties of reflection, without asserting reflection as *a* form of experience insofar as (WN:249) “the quasi "reflective" redoubling, the reflexivity of the body” is openness to a world, (*ibid*.) “it is not an act, it is a being at *(être à*)*.*The issue with the idea of *vimarśa* in Utpala, as M. Skora (2007) sees it, is that *vimarśa* has been mainly understood in disembodied terms and most English translations highlighting itsintellectual origins. More specifically, *vimarśa* is described as “reflective judgement” (Dyzckowski,1992:372) and “reflective awareness” (M.Dyczkowski,1987:233). It is, also, referred to as “reflective awareness of consciousness” (S.A. Baretta, 2003:20) and as “reflective self-awareness” (G. Marchiano & R.Milani 2001:126). What all these translations have in common is that, despite defining *vimarśa* as the self-referential /reflective aspect of consciousness, they miss the fact that this awareness is not transparent but implies, to use Merleau-Ponty’s words, “the *thickness* that is contact of self with self.” Utpala explains that the vibration of consciousness (*vimarśa/spanda*) generates the universe through a process of uniting and dividing the elements contained within it in an undifferentiated state. Furthermore, M.Dyzckowski states that *vimarśa* operates in four ways: (1989:109) “(1) it negates its true nature and (2) identifies with something else, (3) merges both into one and (4) denies both once they have been merged together.” These four functions correspond to three levels of reflective awareness (ibid):

1. The awareness of the separation: by ‘negating’ its true nature, consciousness, through its power of awareness, freely identifies with the psychophysical organism resulting “in the emergence of seemingly individual loci of consciousness distinct from the object and from each other” (ibid.).
2. The holding together and of the union of the manifestations of consciousness: “through the same power of awareness, subject and object are held together and different objects related to one another in a single field of consciousness during the act of cognition.” (ibid.)
3. The merging of the individual subject and object, together with all diversity, in the reflective awareness the light of consciousness has of its nature as the universal subject. (ibid.)

M.Dyzckowski clarifies that these three levels of awareness correspond to the appearing of consciousness as this takes place in a three-fold way (ibid.):

*Division (Bheda)* corresponding to the awareness of separation between objects.

*Awareness of unity-in-difference (bhedabheda)* represented by the means of knowledge which serves as a link between the unity *(abheda)* of the subject and the diversity *(bheda)* of the object.

*Awareness of the undivided unity (abheda)* of all things as the pure subject.

All perceived forms are ‘crystallisations’ of the appearing of consciousness at the level of *bheda.* However, the freedom of consciousness is never exhausted in its forms. As M. Dyzckowski suggests, the (ibid.) “three levels are held together in the fullness *(purnata)* of consciousness as the wave of vibration *(spanda)* of awareness moves down from unity to diversity in the process of descent *(avarohakrama)* and from the lower contracted level of diversity in the process of ascent *(arohakrama)* to the expanded state of unity.” This is a movement across different levels of being just like, for the individual perceiver, self-recognition involves an ‘ascent’ through various planes (*tattva*), moving from the state of diversity to the state of unity and the recognition of this fundamental unity as one’s own nature.

This movement can be understood 'vertically' as a movement from the absolute down to its manifestation, following the emanation (*sṛṣṭi*) *or* withdrawal *(samhara)* of diversity. But it can also be understood 'horizontally' as the movement of awareness towards and away from the object during perception. This is possible, Utpaladeva explains, as (ĪPV TS.I,11:226/ Vol.2 p.300) “by giving up the determinate activity and concentrating (on “I am this”) gradually the state of Īśvara is reached” (*vikalpahānenaikāgryātkrameṇeśvaratāpadam*). In his commentary of the verse, Abhinava says (ĪPV TS.I,11:226/Vol. 2 p.301):

*so’yaṃ sargo yadā vikalpahānakrameṇa tasminnirvikalpakaparigṛhīta eva spaṣṭā’bhertha ekāgratvamavalambya ‘ahamidam’ ityaiśvaryaparāmarśapadaṃ bhavati tadā antarlakṣyabahirdṛṣṭinimeṣonmeṣaparihāradiśā ‘krameṇa’ abhyāsatāratamyena paśoḥ paśutvaṃ pratihantīśvaratvaṃ ca darśayati* ।

When, through a slow and gradual process of giving up determinacy through concentration on the clearly manifest object, which is only indeterminately grasped; this creation is referred to as “I am this”, as in the experience at the level of *Īśvara*; then it slowly destroys the limited nature of *Paśu* and makes the divine nature manifest, according as the practice of concentration develops as a result of following the instruction: “The eyes, which are directed to the external, should be free from winking and opening and the true object of meditation should be within.”

This way, Utpala views perception as a paradigm for cosmogenesis and as a means for realising the unity of the sensible world. It is “through concentration on the clearly manifest object” that the giving up of determinacy and the realization of oneness with the ultimate reality are attained. On the other hand, by suggesting a supplementary operation called ‘hyper-reflection’ *(sur-reflexion)*, Merleau-Ponty attempts to substitute the idealist ascension to the conditions of possibility of experience with an “ascent on the spot” (*ascension sur place*). Like Utpaladeva suggesting that the perception of diversity and the perception of unity are aspects of one and the same perceptual movement, Merleau-Ponty does not segregate the ideal from the sensible, reflection from direct perception (VI:35):

The remarks we made concerning reflection were nowise intended to disqualify it for the profit of the unreflected or the immediate (which we know only through reflection). It is a question not of putting the perceptual faith in place of reflection, but on the contrary of taking into account the total situation, which involves reference from the one to the other. What is given is not a massive and opaque world, or a universe of adequate thought; it is a reflection which turns back over the density of the world in order to clarify it, but which, coming second, reflects back to it only its own light.

*Hyper-reflection*, according to Merleau-Ponty, is a supplementary operation (not one replacing reflection) that tries to become aware of the whole movement to and from the object. In the light of Utpala’s cosmogenesis but also in the light of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology, it can be understood as the awareness of the movement of awareness across different levels. Referring to *hyper-reflection,* Merleau-Ponty says (VI:38), “It accordingly would not lose sight of the brute thing and the brute perception and would not finally efface them, would not cut the organic bonds between the perception and the thing perceived with a hypothesis of inexistence.” Furthermore, the demand that reflection should not ignore its ties to the sensible or dismiss the sensible as less real or illusory, reinforces a phenomenological reading of *vimarśa.* Self-recognition is not the identification with a detached consciousness and as A.Lingis says (VI:li), “we no longer need an ideal unity, intuited by and finally constituted by the mind, in order to account for the unity of sense that the sensible thing embodies.” It is the recognition that consciousness pulsates with life, s*panda,* which accounts for the transcendence *traversing* the structures of the sensible world (ibid.):”it would set itself the task of thinking about them, of reflecting on the transcendence of the world as transcendence…it must suspend the faith in the world only so as to *see it,* only so as to read in it the route it has followed in becoming a world for us; it must seek in the world itself the secret of our perceptual bond with it.”

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how, following a reductionist process, Utpala and Merleau-Ponty introduce a radically new concept of perception as the experience of a primary ontological field to which we connect through the routes of our body. The reversibility that is manifest in the body and in the whole of the sensible allows Merleau-Ponty to reclaim the sensible origins of reflection and challenge once and for all, the idealist version of the phenomenological reduction. It also encourages a phenomenological reading of *vimarśa* and reveals the recognition’s ties to the sensible and restore to *vimarśa* its carnal affiliations. Self-recognition can be, henceforward, viewed as a *situated* practice that takes place in the present of the experience, *in* the body and *in* the world and not in our withdrawal from them. In that, it agrees with Utpala’s agenda to formulate a simple path that relies on awareness only. On the other hand, the idea of cosmogenesis in Utpala offering a layered view of being that helps to make sense of Merleau-Ponty’s *hyper-reflection* as a movement of awareness across a scale. Both processes ‘use’ the reflexivity that is inherent in the sensible to pave the *practical* realisation of the ultimate reality manifesting as this same reflexivity. Having analysed the rationale behind the two ‘acts’ of reduction and self-recognition, the following chapter will be exploring the mechanisms informing their respective processes and guarantee their performativity. Following from that, it will explore descriptions of the culminative stage of the two processes as unique experiences of an ultimate *immersion,* the meaning of which world religions and philosophies throughout the centuries have eagerly sought to disclose.

CHAPTER SIX – EMBODYING THE UNIVERSE

Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis has the challenging task but also the privilege to analyse and juxtapose the two paths of phenomenological reduction and self-recognition. It will undertake this task in the belief that these ‘acts’ constitute the culminating points of these two philosophies by testing the limits of their theoretical convictions. Utpala’s and Merleau-Ponty’s considerations, so far, have aimed at relieving the key stakeholders of experience from the burden of centuries old empirical and idealist presuppositions. In their respective ways, they have both adopted a reductionist process that has led to radically new ways of making meaning of the world around us. Despite the difference in their contexts, the two processes are both meant to lead to the experience of a reality that is prior to all other experiences of the real (historic, cultural, etc.). Making links between phenomenological reduction and self-recognition can lead to a better understanding of what that reality feels or is like. Can that be a disembodied reality?

If the Cartesian worldview subsumes reflection under the category of the mind, reducing the body to a reified corporeality, its lived experience shows that it is not a static object but a vessel of flowing energy (*vimarśa*). The practices leading to self-recognition view the human body as a microcosm through which the vital energy of the cosmos circulates. Self-recognition culminates in an experience that can be best described as an ‘embodiment of the universe’, a union that does not preclude multiplicity but requires it. Nurtured all our lives by the Cartesian divide, it will seem difficult to align with such a worldview. It is one thing to look at it as a cultural thing and another to embrace embodiment as a live stream of energy beyond all materiality, different and yet identical to consciousness. If the phenomenological reduction is the experience of the vertical Being, we are, here, invited to explore how this experience feels like and what it tells us about embodiment. Reading phenomenological reduction in the light of self-recognition will offer some valuable insights in the nature of being, the world, life.

5.1.1 Baring perception

Merleau-Ponty’s enquiry on the nature of perception has led to the discovery of a primary realm, an ontological field that seem to by prior to all cognitive processes. In recognisingbeing (VI:217) "always further on”, as the mode of being of the visible, Merleau-Ponty invokes the immanent logic that is at work in this field. Being is not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals but a topography unfolding by differentiation (WN:218): “perception is not first perception of *things,* but perception of *elements* . . . ,of *rays of the world*, things which are dimensions, which are worlds . . . ” Equally, perception is a lived contact with the world, which (WN:252) “results from the fact that the world, Being, are polymorphism, mystery and nowise a layer of flat entities or of the in itself.” Merleau-Ponty uses the terms ‘world’ and ‘Being’ interchangeably (WN:254): “World or Being”: if Being is invisible and the world is visible, then Being is not the invisible behind the visible but the invisible *of* the visible (world). This “of” translates the articulation of infinitude and facticity that is not one of mutual exclusion but one of inherent reversibility (WN:251):

World and Being: their relation is that of the visible with the invisible (latency) the invisible is not another visible ("possible" in the logical sense) a positive only *absent.* It is *Verborgenheit* by principle i.e. invisible *of the visible, Offenheit* of the *Umwelt* and not *Unendlichkeit--Unendlickeit* is at bottom the *in itself,* the *object-----For* me the infinity of Being that one can speak of is *operative,* militant finitude: the openness of the *Umwelt--I* am against finitude in the empirical sense, a factual existence that *has limits,* and this is why I am for metaphysics. But it lies no more in infinity than in the factual finitude.

In this configuration, our contact with the world translates a direct contact with being, sensoriality being not just about the perception of a particular yellow but about my body’s openness towards the dimensionality of being (WN:218):

Now this particularity of the color, of the yellow, and this universality are not a contradiction, are together sensoriality itself: it is by the same virtue that the color, the yellow, at the same time gives itself as a certain being and as a dimension, the expression of every possible being.

Merleau-Ponty suggests that this openness is, essentially, carnal (VI:83): “every relation between me and Being” is a “carnal relation, with the flesh of the world.” More specifically, ‘carnal’ means ‘reversible’ (WN:254): “hence no sense in saying: the touched-touching junction is made by Thought or Consciousness: Thought or Consciousness is *Offenheit* of a corporeity to . . . World or Being.”

5.1.2 The teleology of sensing

In the introductory verse to *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśini,* Utpala states the aim of his work (ĪPV JÑ.I, 1:1/ Vol.1 p.18):

*kathaṃcidāsādya maheśvarasya*

*dāsyaṃ janasyāpyupakāramicchan ।*

samastasa*ṃpatsamavāptihetuṃ*

*tatpratyabhijñāmupapādayāmi । ।*

Having somehow realised my identity with the supreme and wishing to render service to humanity, I am establishing ‘self-recognition’ which is a means of attaining all that is of value.

Abhinavagupta comments on this verse by gently nuancing its implications for the reader and goes on to propose an alternative reading based on a grammatical analysis of the compound *samasta*. Abhinavagupta explains how taking ‘*samasta*’ as a genitive rather than an attributive compound changes the intended meaning and conveys a different interpretation of self-recognition. While the first and more obvious reading of the verse in which the compound *samasta* is viewed as a genitive compound, refers to the *aim* of self-recognition, the second and less obvious one refers to the *means* for its attainment (ĪPV JÑ.I, 1:6/ Vol.1 p. 34-35):

*itievaṃ ṣaṣṭhamāsena prayojanamuktam,*

*bahuvrīhiṇā tu upāyaḥ sūcyate ‘samastasya’ bhāvābhāvarūpasya bahyābhyantarasya nīlasukhādeḥ yā ‘saṃpat’* *saṃpattiḥ siddhiḥ tathātvaprakāśaḥ, tasyāḥ samyak ‘avāptiḥ’ vimarśarūḍhiḥ, saiva ‘hetuḥ’ yasyāṃ tatpratyabhijnāyām, tathā*

*hi-sphutatarabhāsamānanīlasukhādipramānveṣaṇadvāreṇaiva*

*pāramārthika pramātṛlābha iha upadiśyate*

Thus, by taking ‘*samasta*’ etc., as a genitive compound, the purpose has been

stated: but, by taking it as an attributive compound, the means is indicated:

“That recognition of the Ultimate, in which (*yasyām*) the clear consciousness (*samavāpti*) of the essential nature (*sampat*) of the external and internal objects, both existing and non-existing, such as ‘blue’ and pleasure’ etc. (*samasta*) is the cause (*hetu*).” Indeed, it is taught in this system that the attainment of the true self is possible only through an investigation of the ultimate source of the knowledge of ‘blue’ and ‘pleasure’ etc. that so distinctly affect the consciousness.

Abhinava announces a significant shift in the way the world is viewed: unlike other philosophers who see the world as a source of bondage, his suggestion is that liberation is attained through knowledge of the world (ĪPV JÑ.I, 1:6Vol. 1 p. 40-41):

*tathā hi-samastasaṃpallakṣaṇo vyākhyāto yo’rthaḥ pūrvaṃ*

*puṇyapāpādau saṃsāramūlakāraṇe hetuḥ, sa eva pratyabhijñāyate anayā-iti karaṇavyutpattyā upāyaḥ iha lokottaramārgaṃ prati nirṇītaḥ iti atidurghaṭakāritvalakṣaṇamaiśvaryam ‘mārgo nava’ iti śāstrānte nirūpayiśyamāṇaṃ sūcayatā upāyaḥ darśitaḥ abhidheyatvena* ।

By dissolving the compound as an instrumental attributive, the means to a spiritual path has been determined. The objective world, (represented by ‘blue’ ‘pleasure’ etc.) constitutes the entire possession and is at first the cause of sin and merit etc., the root cause sin and merit etc., the root cause of transmigration. But in this *śāstra* the same is made to be recognised as the sure means to spiritual path. Thus, the author who, at the end of the work, refers to his power of accomplishing what is difficult by the words "New Path" (4.1.16), has indicated that the statement of means is the subject-matter of the work.

Abhinava’s alternative reading of *samasta* aims at transforming the way we view perception. Perceptual awareness manifesting in the ordinary determinate cognitions of ‘blue’ and pleasure’ is not only instrumental in the cognition of phenomena but in self-recognition, as well. Determinate cognitions such as blue become the means by which the self is recognised as the ultimate source of these cognitions (*ibid*.): “the ultimate end of all objective consciousness, ‘this’ is its merging in the self.” Abhinava’s commentary encourages a reductive look at the world that becomes the ‘portal’ for the experience of a subtler reality.

5.2.1 Breathing as being

Liberation is often understood as a movement away from the experience of the world, a turn inwards in the quest of an ineffable unity. Yet, in his introductory verse, Utpala shows no willingness to withdraw from experience because it is in it that the powers of action and knowledge become manifest to the perceiver. We are not normally aware of these powers as all our attention is directed outwards, towards the external world. However, if it is possible to become aware of this invisible, subtler layer of being, it means that there is within us a connective link that can activate this alignment. In Indian philosophy, this link is called *prāṇa* and connects the different layers of our being allowing the movement of awareness between states of consciousness that correspond to these layers. Despite being one, *prāṇa* has multiple manifestations - from the physical breath to the energy of consciousness itself. A Sanskrit term, ‘*prāṇa*’, combines the syllables pra and an - 'an' meaning ‘movement’ and 'pra' being a prefix meaning ‘constant’. It translates a ‘constant motion’ that Abhinava views as the most primary expression of *vimarśa*, the creative pulsation of consciousness (*spanda*).

On the different *tattva* or planes of existence (lower or higher), *prāṇa* manifests as the life force. As a result, the whole of the universe is a manifestation of *prāṇa* (ĪPVI AG.II, 20:216/ Vol 2 p. 271): “*prāṇa* means the ‘being’(*sthiti*) of the sentient principle (*cidrūpa*) as *prāṇa* and *apāna*, the characteristic of life” (*'prāṇa’ iti prāṇāpānarūpā jīvanasvabhāvā yeyaṃ cidrūpasya sthitiḥ*). Hence, although Utpala describes consciousness as the innermost, invisible reality, he equally understands it as the physical reality of the empirical universe. Earlier, it was seen that in Utpaladeva’s syntax of manifestation as self-recognition, consciousness transforms itself by concealing its true nature and keeps on exteriorizing till its movement comes to an end at the level of *māyā*. Abhinavagupta explains how in its gradual ‘descent’, consciousness *transforms* itself into vital energy (*prāṇaśakti*) while at the embodied state consciousness has fully unfolded itself into *prāṇa*. In fact, the whole of the manifested universe, being an embodiment of divine intentionality, consists of *prāṇa* (ĪPVI. AG. II 18:218/ Vol.2 p.277): “the universe, consisting of the thirty-six tattvas is nothing more than the Lord’s powers of *prāṇa*” (*ṣaṭtriṃśadātmakaṃ viśvaṃ śambhoḥ prāṇādiśaktayaḥ*). To understand how this same energy operates on an individual level, we will refer to the idea of a ‘layered embodiment’ as described in *Taittirīya* Upaniṣad. Here, existence is said to be constituted of five layers or *kośas,* the five sheaths or layers of subjective existence ranging from the densest realm of the physical body to the subtlest realm of infinite joy. Among them, *prāṇamaya kośa* is the sphere of life energies that mediates between the physical body on one side, and the three sheaths of the mind (outer mind, intelligence, and inner mind) on the other.  For the embodied subject, breathing is the main form of the activity of *prāṇa* (ĪPV AG.II, 19:215/ Vol. 2 p. 271): “in the states of both, waking and dream, the principle of life (*prāna*) manifests itself primarily in inhaling and exhaling” (*prāṇāpānamayaḥ prāṇaḥ pratyekam suptajāgratoḥ).* However, *prāṇa* does not govern solely the physiological body, which is not but a hologram of the cosmic universe. Abhinavagupta explains how, on a cosmic level, the self is a body of *prāṇa* whose energy flow is maintained through the movement of inhalation/exhalation (ĪPVI. AG. II 20:218/Vol.2 p.277): “The highest Lord, whose body is the whole universe, appears as the powers of exhaling and inhaling in the sakalas.... He is all this because He is *prāṇa, apana, udāna, samāna and vyāna*.” (*bhagavataśca viśvaśarīrasya prāṇāpānasamānodanavyānarūpataiva sakalagatollāsapraveśa*).It is through an analysis of *vimarśa* as *prāṇa* that Utpala manages to link the point of view of the higher self with that of the lower self and show how the most primary ‘embodiment’ preceding all other embodiments is that of the cosmic subject.

5.2.2 The ‘bodying’ of the cosmic breath

Utpala’s analysis of *prāṇa* as life force and as the essence of consciousness shows not only that to exist at all, we must breathe air but that existence itself is this very activity of breathing. As seen, Utpala maintains this idea on both the cosmic and the individual levels. Not only the whole of the manifested universe consists of *prāṇa* but what is invisible to us, that is, consciousness, becomes visible through the activity of *prāṇa* (ĪPVI AG.II,20:218): “the highest Lord, whose body is the whole universe, appears as the powers of exhaling and inhaling in the *sakalas*....”. In a narrative of manifestation as the ‘evolution’ of a single sentient principle (*cidrūpa*), *prāṇa* as the very ‘being’(*sthiti*) of this principle is described as the universal motion (*sāmānyaparispanda*), the inner pulsation of a limitless field of awareness.

It may be assumed that linking *prāṇa* to the self would lead to one more instance of affirming Utpala’s unwavering monism and perhaps overshadowing embodied experience. Nonetheless, despite his monistic orientation or rather precisely due to it, Utpala is able to advance a view of incarnation that is entirely compatible with an idea of existence being nothing but consciousness. It is through his analysis of the origins of *prāṇa* that Utpala manages to equate *māyā* with *vimarśa* and demonstrate how on the physical plane, consciousness assumes the form of embodied subjectivity (ĪPVI. AG II. 13-15: 212/ Vol. 2 p. 263):

*yadi vendriyaśaktīnāmeva yāntarī sādhāraṇaprāṇanātmikā prāṇaśabdavācyā prāṇādimārutaviśeṣapreraṇāmayī saiva ‘aham’ ityadhiśayānā jīvanam, tadā prāṇa eva jīvaḥ ।*

Or if the self-consciousness be resting on that inner power of the power of senses which, functioning as principle of life in general, is responsible for working of *prāṇa,* etc. and is called *prāṇa*, thenitself *prāṇa* is *jīva*.

Utpala’s analysis of the origins and manifestations of *prāṇa* reveals a direct link between consciousness and life force as this manifests on the level of the senses. It is what makes the body not just a *seat of* or a *vehicle for* awareness but awareness itself (ĪPVI AG.II,19-20:216/Vol.2 p.272 ):

*sā* *tāvatsāmānyaparispandarūpā dehaprāṇāderacetanasya cetanā yamānatāsaṃpādanātmikā ahamitisvātantryāropasārā satī vikalpaparāmarśamayī saiva* *prāṇāpānādiviśeṣātmanā pañcarūpatāṃ bhajate* ।

It brings sentiency *to* the insentient body etc. When because of "freedom" (*svātantrya*) self is superimposed on it, it is determinately apprehended as "I". This very 'being' of *cit*, manifesting itself in the particular forms of movement such as those of vital air (*prāṇa*), etc., assumes five different forms.

Utpala’s bold thesis relies on a dynamic concept of consciousness that would be of immense interest to Merleau-Ponty who struggles to articulate the necessary ‘transubstantiations’ that should accompany the verticality of Being. While affirming the idea of Being as ‘being in indivision’, he is still to analyse the intersections and operative transcendencies that make it a viable concept.

5.2.3 Towards a phenomenological ontology of breathing

Utpala’s efforts to establish the link between breath and existence makes us question the way we view our engagement with a very basic activity, so fundamental and intense that we never question it: breathing. In his reading of Merleau-Ponty, Petri Berndston (2018) attempts to transform a prevalent pattern of thinking about what should constitute the point of departure for the phenomenological enquiry. He, thus, suggests that we should change our notion of what is primary and shift from perception to breathing, that is, from viewing existence as perceptual to acknowledging its respiratory essence. His formulation of a phenomenological ontology of breathing is welcome because it allows us to observe how the ontological dimensions of breathing, present in Utpaladeva, could be translated from a phenomenological perspective. P.Berndston starts by questioning (2018:55):

In this sense it can be said that breathing is a fundamental and “indispensable” condition “to be at all—to exist in any way,” that is, a fundamental and absolutely necessary requirement for and of being. This raises the following important question: how are we to understand the essential connection between “we breathe air” and “to be at all—to exist in any way,” that is, the intertwining between breathing and existence, breathing and being?

P. Berndston’s way of making sense of the scarce references to breathing found in Merleau-Ponty is helpful in providing a phenomenological perspective to the concept of *praṇa* in Utpaladeva. Relying on the idea that for Merleau-Ponty the lived body is already a *respiratory body,* P.Berndston translates the (2018:21) “respiratory body’s openness to the sphere of air” as (*ibid*.) “our first and most primordial relation to the world and to Being.” This openness as fundamentally openness to Being or “openness Being”, as he says, is (2018:35) “our first way of being-in- the-world, and as such it means that, in the first place before anything else, we are always already respiration within the atmosphere of open air or the universal dimensionality of air.” P.Berndston’s point of departure is Merleau-Ponty’s description of the process of falling asleep. This process occurs through a progressive withdrawal from the “awakened world” and the return to the sources of all practical relations (sense perception, theoretical thinking, etc.). He points out that this withdrawal (*ibid*.) “takes place within the explicit atmosphere of breathing, as the one who tries to fall asleep “calls forth sleep” by imitating the slow and deep breathing of the sleeper.” As such, it reveals that the conditions of possibility of all “other relations with the world” are in the world of respiration (*ibid*.): “this primordial, respiratory world is the source or the root of the theoretical, practical, social and perceptual worlds.” Based on this, he suggests that (*ibid*.) “this respiratory rootedness could be called the primacy of breathing.” In other words, our relation to Being, is better seen as respiratory rather than perceptual. Based on the following passage from the *Eye and Mind*[[12]](#footnote-12): “What is called ‘inspiration’ should be taken literally: there is really and truly inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being”, P.Berndtson advocates the primacy of the respiratory body, which amounts at the fact that (2018:27) “breathing is our body’s first openness to Being.” Furthermore, he states that (2018:260) “we ourselves always already are bodily openness as respiratory openness within Being where there is in the first place [principally] really and truly inspiration and expiration of Being.” Inspired by Bachelard, Irigaray and Kleinberg-Levin, P.Berndston further interprets “Being” in an aerial manner as “the open and free air”, “the aerial world” or “the clearing of air”, which encourages to reconsider our relation to space as traditionally thought in a similar manner as the reduction of consciousness to *prāṇa* (and of *prāṇa* to consciousness) in Utpala. By showing how this space is made of *prāṇa*, of a primordial form of energy, Utpala collapses the barriers between the body and the world, the individual and the universal. Everything in the universe is energy vibrating (*spanda*) at a certain level (*tattva*) or a certain frequency, which makes the enclosed space of the individual body a homology of the spaceless infinity of the cosmic body. Merleau-Ponty talks of space as ‘sentient flesh’ and of the body as (Morley, 2001:77): “a mass of consciously occupied flesh.” This shows his intense preoccupation with transforming at once the solidity of matter and the immateriality of consciousness, with finding a way of conceiving them jointly, as an immaterial materiality or a material immateriality in the name of ‘flesh’. We are, however, puzzled and perhaps not sure whether to read these ambiguous formulations in a metaphorical or literal way. Utpala’s analysis of *prāṇa,* on the other hand, allows to overcome the problem of interiority and exteriority that defines human embodiment. P. Berndston’s interpretation of Being in aerial terms aims precisely at freeing the phenomenal space from all restrictions, allowing us to visualise the expansion of the phenomenal body beyond the confines of imaginary divisions (2008:36):

This respiratory access is really and truly an open access in which there are no restrictions between us and the atmosphere of air. This means that we are not excluded from the open air. The air is itself openness as it is experientially limitless, boundless and without outlines in comparison to the limits, boundaries and outlines of things.

At the same time, his “ontologico-respiratory-aerial reformulation of the Heideggerian-Merleau-Pontian ontological statement” invites us to reconsider the distinctively ontological dimension of the activity of breathing air. This dimension is quite evident in Utpaladeva, who formulates his thesis of self-recognition as an immersion in the cosmic “air” as the universal *prāṇa.*

5.3.1 *Samāveśa*, the dialectics of immersion

Perhaps, the most intriguing aspect of Utpala’s thesis of self-recognition is that enlightenment is not visualized as the attainment of a new state. Self-recognition is, precisely, the recovery of this *lost* awareness of the self, this forgotten state of unity in which we reside without knowing it. On both the individual and the cosmic planes, self-recognition is described as a movement of return, of emersion from the state of objectivity (ĪPVI AG.I, 11-12: 209 /Vol.2 p.257 ):

iti hi idantaivāntarnītāha*ṃ*bhāvā *saṃsāriṇāṃ parisphurati | seyaṃ jāgratsvapnasuṣuptarūpā saṃsārāvasthā* |

In all these instances it is the “thisness”, the objectivity of the transmigratory beings, in which the subjectivity (*ahantā*) is merged, that shines. The transmigratory state, consisting of the states of waking, sleep and deep sleep, is nothing but this (objectivity in which the subjectivity is *merged*).

In all these states, *turīya* is always present although the subject remains unaware of it insofar as it identifies itself with the limited aspects of its selfhood. The experience of unity arises as the empirical awareness progressively casts away this identification (ĪPVI AG.II,11-12:209/Vol. 2 p. 257) :

*yadā tūktagurūpadeśādidiśā tenaivāhaṃbhāvena*

*svātantryātmanā vyāpakatvanityatvādidharmaparāmarśamātmani vidadhatā* *tataḥ śūnyādeḥ prameyādunmajjyevāsyate tadā turyātītãvasthā*

But that state in which the same principle of free consciousness or self-consciousness, because of the instruction of a teacher or any other similar reason, shines, in its full freedom, *emerging as it were out of the objective* *śūnya* etc., and there is full consciousness of the presence of qualities of omnipresence and eternality etc. within, - is called ‘beyond the fourth’ *turiyātita*.

The movement of emersion from objectivity is, at the same time, a movement of immersion (*samāveśa*) into subjectivity, into the principle of awareness (*cit*). This takes place as the subject re-discovers and gains awareness of the live stream of awareness that subtends its experiences. This movement of immersion (*samāveśa*) is defined thus (ĪPV AG. II,11-12: 208-209/ Vol. 2 p. 256):

*kalodbalitam etac ca cittattvaṃ kartṛtāmayam* |

*acidrūpasya śūnyāder mitaṃ guṇatayā sthitam* ||

And this "free-consciousness" (cittattva),-in which the power of action predominates (*kartṛtāmayam*) and which is revived by the power of kala and constitutes the subjective aspect of *śūnya* etc., which are in reality devoid of sentiency, -is limited, i.e. is of the nature of an object, because it occupies a subordinate position (i.e. " I " element is subordinate to "this" element)."

*mukhyatvaṃ kartṛtāyāśca bodhasya ca cidātmanaḥ* |

*śūnyādau tadguṇe jñānaṃ tatsamāveśalakṣaṇam* ||

Now *jñāna* (true knowledge,) which is the most essential characteristic of liberation, (entering into the Reality) consists in the equal predominance of both "consciousness" (*bedha*) and "freedom." (*Kartṛtā*) and consequent subordinate position of *śūnya* etc. to that which is sentient in its nature(*cit*).

Abhinava presents *samāveśa* as the ultimate goal of all contemplative practices and as the vision of the self in its true nature, untainted by the differentiated projections of its various manifestations. His citation of the Bhagavad Gītā aims to show that the view of liberation as articulated in the *śāstras* is quite similar to Utpaladeva’s (ĪPVI AG.II,11-12:209/ Vol.2 p. 258):

*yatha gītam ‘mayyāveśya mano ye māṃ’ ‘athāveśayituṃ cittaṃ’*

For instance, Gītā says: “Those who by making their minds (*manas*) enter into me”

and “But if you are not able to make your mind enter into Me”.

However, the theistic tone of the Gītā coupled with the idea of immersion as “entry into the Lord”, challenges our understanding of the nature of this ultimate experience. Emersion from objectivity equals its opposite, that is, immersion into subjectivity. Liberation is characterised by the complete dispossession of the subject since the ordinary landmarks through which this later affirms its identity (association with the physical body, etc.), cease to operate. Nonetheless, the ‘entry into the Lord’ can be easily understood as portraying the subject’s complete absorption into the divine following its liberation *from* the body. Abhinava is not unaware of the possibility of this reading and, for this reason, mindfully asserts that the liberated one continues to live *in* the body*.* Hence, the liberation Utpala has in mind is not the freedom from mundane existence but a freedom that comes with knowing that the origins of this same existence are to be traced in the self (ĪPVI AG II, 11-12 : 210/Vol.2 p. 258-259): :

*yat punaḥ kartṛtāyā mukhyatvaṃ tannāntarīyakaśca śūnyāderguṇabhāvaḥ, tasmiścāpyacidṛūpe guṇībhūte ‘svātantryasyāpyabodhatā’ iti malavyāpārasyāpahastanāt cito yaḥ paro’pyātmabhāgo bodhalakṣaṇo malena nyakkṛto’bhūt tasyāpi adhunonmagnatvena mukhyatvam* । *yacca tat kartṛtāyā ‘mukhyatvam’ unmagnatā, idameva* *jñānamajñānātmakamalapratipakṣatvāt; tadetanmukhyatvaṃ samāveśasya* *lakṣaṇaṃ yena dehasthito’pi ‘patiḥ’ iti ‘muktaḥ’ iti śāśtreṣūktaḥ* ।।

The merging (*samāveśa*) is characterised not only by the predominance of free-consciousness (*kartṛtā*) and consequent reduction of *śūnya* etc. to subordinate position; but also by the equal prominence of another aspect of *cit*, the "pure consciousness" (*bodha*), which was before obscured by *mala*. For, the *mala*, "the loss of power of knowledge to freedom" has now ceased to function. And such predominance of free-consciousness is called 'knowledge' (*jñāna*), because of its being the opposite of the impurity, called ignorance. This is the chief characteristic feature of *samāveśa*; because, on account of this, a subject, though associated with body, is yet Lord. Accordingly, in the *śāstras* such a subject is called liberated (*mukta*).

What is more, *samāveśa* has meaning only in an embodied context, simply because the very action of ‘entering’ requires a certain distance as well as a designated vehicle (ĪPVI AG. II.11-12:210/Vol.2 p.258):

*dehapāte tu paramśvara evaikarasaḥ, - iti kaḥ kutra kathaṃ samāviśet*  *।*

But after the fall of the body, the highest Lord alone remains, and, therefore, there can be no talk of ‘*samāveśa*’. For, who can enter where and how?

This does seem like a paradox: we would think that casting away objectivity would entail casting away bodily existence since the state of objectivity is concomitant of embodiment. However, if we accept this to be the case, then we will also have to admit a view of the body as entirely different from consciousness, which would contradict Utpaladeva since the whole idea of self-recognition relies on the assumption that there is nothing external to the self. One may, then, wonder, how Utpaladeva manages to articulate a view of liberation as freedom from objectivity but not as freedom *from* the body.

5.3.2 The merging

On the individual plane, the flux that forms the basis of life in the form of constant momentary changes in the body and mind is a manifestation of *prāṇa.* This being the case, there is no question of preventing it from flowing or controlling its outward flow. What is, however, possible is to redirect its course to bring about specific transformations in the body and the mind. Although, yogic texts mention that through breath control supernatural powers (*siddhis*), knowledge of past and future, etc., can be acquired, in the context of spiritual realisation, the aim will be to realign the energy flowing in the subtle body with its cosmic counterpart.And since *prāṇa* manifests as breath, it is by controlling the movement of inhalation/exhalation that this alignment can occur. A brief analysis of the anatomy of the subtle body can help us understand this better. The classical texts on *hatha yoga* tell usthat the subtle body is traversed by energy channels known as *nāḍī.* In classical yoga, the main energy channels across the spinal cord are *iḍā, piṅgalā* and *suṣumṇā*. *Iḍā* *nādī* represents the mental energy, *piṅgalā* the vital energy and *suṣumṇā* stands for the union of these two, it is the flow of spiritual awareness. The polarity *iḍā/piṅgalā* that features in the subtle body is at the base of the twofold nature of the body as active and passive, sensing and sensed. The totality of *nāḍī* makes the energy field known as *prāṇamaya kośa.* When the vital, solar qualities of *piṅgalā* are balanced with the lunar qualities of *iḍā* then energy flows in *suṣumṇā.* Following its awakening, *kuṇḍalinī*, the dormant energy at the bottom of the spinal cord travels to the higher energy centers (*chakras*), which results in the awakening of higher consciousness. According to *prāṇa vidyā* (the science of *prāṇa*), vital energy does not normally flow in the central channel (*suṣumṇā*) due to the impurities of the other two *nāḍīs* (HYP II.4: 52): “the breath does not pass through the middle channel (*suṣumṇā*), owing to the impurities of the *nāḍīs*” (*malākulāsu nāḍīṣu māruto naiva madhyagaḥ*). But when, through the regular practice of *prāṇāyāma* these are purified, then *prāṇa* is free to flow upwards towards the higher centers of consciousness (HYP.II, 5:53): “when the whole system of *nāḍī* which is full of impurities, is cleaned, then the yogī becomes able to control the *prāṇa*” (*śuddhameti yadā sarvaṃ nāḍīcakraṃ malākulam tadaiva jāyate yogī prāṇasaṃgrahaṇe* *kṣamaḥ*). When the flow of energy is balanced and redirected towards the ‘centre’, then all perception of difference faints away. The yogī is able to move across all states of consciousness that correspond to his/her perception of duality and attain the state of non-dual awareness or *turīya* (ĪPV AG.II.20:216/ Vol.2 p. 271):

*madhyordhvagāmyudānākhyasturyago hutabhuṅmayaḥ* ।

In the state of *turīya,* it (*prāṇa*) moves up through the mid-passage (*suṣumṇā*). As such it is called *Udāna*. Here the dissolution of the objective world starts.

Following the dissolution of the objective world, there dawns the experience of uninterrupted unity. Abhinava states (*ibid*., 217-18/Vol.2 p.275):

*yadā tu sā prāṇanāvṛttirvāmadakṣiṇamārgau khilībhāvayantī madhyarūpeṇordhvena pravahati, tadā tatpravahaṇaṃ* *sakalasya bhedasyābhedasāratādānalakṣaṇaṃ*

*vilāpanamāśyānasyeva sarpiṣo vidadhatī ।*

But when the activity of the principle of life abandons the left and right passages, follows the upward central path, then that movement brings about melting away of all duality like that of congealed ghee and produces a state that is characterized by unity.

We are now in a position to further evaluate the extent to which Utpaladeva’s concept of liberation does not imply freedom *from* the body but freedom *in* the body. *Samāveśa* is not the emersion *from* the body and the merging *into* a bodiless absolute. On the same token, if liberation is an embodied process, it certainly defies all ideas of materiality that are associated with the body. According to the *tattva* evolution, consciousness ‘descends’ into matter, unfolding itself from subtle to gross: the process leading to *samāveśa* is a movement of involution, an ascent from gross to subtle (ĪPVI JÑ.VI, 4-5:91/ Vol.1 p.322): “these subjects constitute the various levels in the gradual spiritual ascent of yogīs” (*amī eva bhūmikāviśeṣā uttarottaramārohatāṃ yogināṃ*). As such, it requires the synthesis of various levels initiated through the harnessing of the vital energy animating the fibres of the physical body. If the source from where *prāṇa* flows is the non-realm of *turīya* as the ground of undifferentiated reality, then the practices that involve its control aim at redirecting it towards it. M. Dyzckowski states that (1992:196) “at this level all the powers of consciousness fuse and both phases are manifest as part of one reality.” Utpala describes this process in purely respiratory terms as a movement of *prāṇa* upwards and through *suṣumṇā.* Abhinava comments (ĪPVI AG. II, 20:217): *“*but when the activity of the principle of life abandons the left and right passages, follows the upward central path, then that movement brings about melting away of all duality like that of the congealed ghee and produces a state that is characterised by unity.”This same movement inscribes the practitioner’s body to the body of the universe: the life force operating at the microcosmic level is aligned or reunited with the life force operating at the universal level. What is interesting in the passages referring to *samāveśa* is that the self is referred to as the totality of *tattva*, the worlds or layers that constitute the universe: “the *paramaśiva*, who is essentially the whole universe.” In the state of non-dual awareness, there is realization that everything that exists is the divine. The following verses show that for Utpaladeva the most primary embodiment is that of Śiva while individual embodiment is only a corollary of it. Abhinavagupta states (ĪPVI AG. II,20: 218/ Vol.2 p.275):

*yadā tu sā prāṇanāvṛttirvāmadakṣiṇamārgau khilībhāvayantī madhyarūpeṇordhvena pravahati, tadā tatpravahaṇaṃ sakalasya bhedasyābhedasāratādānalakṣaṇaṃ vilāpanamāśyānasyeva sarpiṣo vidadhatī udānavṛttirvijñānākalādārabhya*

*sadāśivāntam, sā ca turyātmikā daśā* ।

But when the duality completely disappears, the activity of the principle of life (*prāṇanāvṛtti*) assumes the form of *vyāna* inasmuch as it operates in the body, consisting of the entire mass of the categories, elements and worlds, which constitute the entire sphere of objectivity, This is the ‘*turīyatita*’ state. This befits the *paramaśiva*, who is essentially the whole universe.

5.3.3 An alchemic transformation

If Utpala’s discourse on liberation does not imply a withdrawal *from* the physical, it accounts, nonetheless, for its transformation. Utpala describes *samāveśa* not only as a rising up across planes but as a real transformation, a conversion of the lower planes into higher ones. His sophisticated thesis of self-recognition as union-transformation relies on the internalisation of tantric practices that use the body and its senses as vehicles to liberation. In his attempt to purify the tantric path from antinomian and transgressive ideas, Utpala maintains its central idea of transubstantiation of the physical as a means for realising transcendental subjectivity (David Gray, 2016:11). Within the context of self-recognition as a *knowledge praxis* (*jñāna*), Utpala reformulates this idea of union-transformation as a conversion of physical awareness into self-awareness (ĪPV AG. II,11-12:209/ Vol.2 p.257-258):

*yadāpi parāmṛṣṭatathābhūtavaibhavādinityaiśvarya*

*saṃbhedanaivāhaṃbhāvena śūnyādidehadhātvantaṃ siddharasayōgena vidhyate, tadāsyāṃ turyadaśāyāṃ tadapi prameyatāmujjhatīva*

But that state, - in which all, from *śūnya* to body, etc. are converted (into self) by self-consciousness, which has the consciousness of possession of the above described glory of omnipotence and eternality etc. as a metal is (converted into gold) by the alchemical process, - is called the “fourth” (*turīya*) state. In this, body, etc., give up, as it were, their objective nature. Both these states of liberation in the very lifetime, are known as “*samāveśa*” in the *śāstras*. In all these, well entering (into reality) is the only important thing.

More specifically, Abhinavagupta conceives this process of transformation in terms of conversion, an idea he borrows from the transubstantiating practices of the *rasa siddhas*. These are the alchemists of medieval India whose theories are summarised in an aphorism from the seminal text *Rasārṇava* (*RA*17.165a) “*yathā lohe tathā dehe*, “as in metal, so in the body.” David G.White explores the concept of *vedhana* or “penetration” as a key concept in our attempt to (1996:493) “penetrate the plays of correspondences proper to Siddha alchemy and to navigate the labyrinthine internal landscapes of the subtle body.” According to D.G. White, the noun *vedha* can be traced back to *vidh*, the weak form of the Vedic root *vyadh* meaning “pierce”. As such, it emerges in the medical literature, where it means “puncturing, wounding, a wound” and retains this meaning of piercing or penetration throughout the medieval traditions. D.G. White also explains that (1996:494-5) “vernacular Middle Indo-Aryan forms

of these terms introduce a *ba/va*alternation that generate such terms as *bedha*and

*bedhana*. These are, in turn, conflated, particularly in hathayogic sources, with the

 terms *bheda*and *bhedana*, nominalisations of the Sanskrit root *bhid*, “split, cleave, pi-erce”.” Both in Hindu alchemy and *haṭha yoga*, the term designates (*ibid*.:495) “an active agent” that (*ibid*.) “penetrates and thereby fundamentally transforms its passive counterpart.” Here, we are interested in the use of the term in Hindu alchemy that is concerned with (*ibid*.) “the progressive envelopment by—and absorption of a given metal or mineral—into mercury.” This process involves several stages of transformation or *saṃskāra* with *vedha[na]*being the seventeenth and penultimate one (1996:495):

At this point, a threshold of critical mass and energy is reached, which automatically triggers vedha[na], the “piercing” or transmutation of said metal by mercury, such that the mercury-metal amalgam is immediately transformed into silver or gold. Mercury that is capable of transmuting base metals into noble silver or gold may thereafter be taken internally. This is the eighteenth and final *saṃskāra*, known as *śarīra yoga*, “body Work” or “transubstantiation.” In this final operation, the alchemist will generally hold in his mouth a solid “pill” (*guṭikā*) of mercury, which will gradually penetrate his body and so

transmute it into an immortal golden, diamond, or perfected body.

D.G. White goes on to clarify that (1996:497) “the term *śarīra yoga*for the application of perfected, tested mercury to the body” is not accidental since the complementarity of alchemy and hatha yoga is repeatedly highlighted in the textual tradition. In support, he (1996:497) evokes the statement in the opening of  *RA*(1.18b): “Mercury and breath [control] are known as the Work in two parts” (*rasaśca pavanaśceti karmayogo dvidhā mataḥ*). For Abhinava, this would suggest that the human body does not need any external aids and has everything in itself for its transformation to take place naturally and spontaneously. Through the harnessing of *prāṇa,* thehuman body can be transformed into a divine body, more precisely into the *golden,* all luminous, perfected body of the Universe (ĪPV AG.II,11-12:209/ Vol. 2 p. 258):

*seyaṃ dvayyapi jīvanmuktāvasthā ‘samāveśa’ ityuktā śāstre* ।

s*amyagāveśanameva hi tatra tatra pradhānam, tatsiddhaye tūpadeśāntarāṇi* ।।

And entering into Him (*samāveśa*) is the only fruition of all the well-known five reverential acts, such as offering of prayer, bowing to, worship of and concentration and *samãdhi* on the Highest Lord, the essential part of which is the identification of such aspects of the limited subject as body etc. (with the Lord).

5.3.4 The alchemy of perception

While *samāveśa* is a continuous experience, it is not attained all of a sudden. Utpala talks of shorter periods of immersion that the practitioner experiences while in a state of meditation, which tend to become more frequent and longer in duration as concentration becomes more intense due to systematic practice. If the seed of self-recognitionis to be found in ordinary experience, this is because every perception draws its momentum from the luminosity of the self. In a way, every perception involves a movement of immersion (*samāveśa*) because the perception of a particular *ābhāsa* always involves an actualisation of its causal efficiency, which is possible through a direct contact with the luminous field of the self. On similar grounds that Merleau-Ponty talks about the ontological function of the ‘yellow’, its aptitude to represent the totality of which it is only an instantiation (WN:217-8):

Sensoriality: for example, a colour yellow; it surpasses itself of itself: as soon as it becomes the colour of the illumination the dominant colour of the field it ceases to be such or such a colour, it has therefore of itself an ontological function it becomes apt to represent all things…With one sole movement it imposes itself as particular and ceases to be visible as particular. The “World” is this whole where each “part,” when one takes it for itself, suddenly opens unlimited dimensions-becomes a *total part.* Now this particularity of the colour, of the yellow, and this universality are not a *contradiction,* are *together* sensoriality itself: it is by the same virtue that the colour, the yellow, at the same time gives itself as a *certain* being and as a *dimension,* the expression of *every possible being.*

In Merleau-Ponty, too, perception, as the continuous overlapping of the body and the world, involves an analogous *transubstantiation* (WN:248): "this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world*, reflects*it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world . . . .**[**T]hey are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping." What is more, the painter’s experience reveals a similar account of *expansion, a* *world becoming* experience of the body (EM, 353): “The painter takes his body with him,” says Valéry. And indeed, we cannot see how a Mind could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings.” The same is true for all perceptions since (VI: 136) “the body unites us directly with the things by its own ontogenesis.” This is possible because (EM: 354) “things are an annex or prolongation of my body; they are incrusted in its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the very stuff of the body.” Ultimately, an analysis of perception in Merleau-Ponty shows that as embodied subjects, we are always *immersed* in the world (*ibid*.):

These reversals, these antinomies, are different ways of saying that vision is caught or is made in the middle of things, where something visible undertakes to see, becomes visible for itself and through the vision of all things, where the indivision of the sensing and the sensed persists, like the original fluid within the crystal.

5.4.1 The tactile dimension of vision

“The world of perception encroaches upon that of movement (which also is seen) and inversely movement has [eyes?].” (WN:224)

Merleau-Ponty dismisses a representational view of the world (WN:273): “this analysis of vision is to be completely reconsidered (it presupposes what is in question: the thing itself).” This is because what turns ordinary perception into a *praxis* is, precisely, the metamorphosis of vision (*ibid*.): “it does not *see* that the vision is tele-vision, transcendence, crystallization of the impossible.” More precisely, this is a metamorphosis of the body into a force of seeing (VI:146):

This concentration of the visibles about one of them, or *this bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things,* which makes a vibration of my skin become the sleek and the rough... *makes me follow with my eyes* the movements and the contours of the things themselves, this magical relation, this pact between them and me according to which *I lend them my body* in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched ...

J.Patočka (1995: 66, 72, 75) presents an analogous view of embodiment as a "seeing force". This ‘conversion’ does not simply show that perception is (1988a:6) "accompanied by movements” but turns perception into a movement. The movement in question is not physical in the sense of inducing a change in spatial position. It is intentional, or rather, it is intentionality *as* movement (Signs:22): “the world and Being hold together only in movement; it is only in this way that all things can be together. Philosophy is a reminding of this being.” The transformation of perception into movement is realised by disclosing the tactile dimension of vision, that is, the chiasmic relation between vision and touch (VI:139): “every experience of the visible has always been given to me within the context of *the movements of the look*, the visible spectacle belongs to the touch neither more nor less than do the “tactile qualities”.” Here, the difference between the subject and the world is assumed by the motility of the body as a ‘force of seeing’. The carnalisation of vision presupposes its ‘tactile’ extrapolation (*VI*:131):

What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them— but something to which we could not be closer than *by palpating it with our look*, things we could not dream of seeing “all naked” because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh.

In his descriptions of the notion of the flesh drawing upon the chiasmic relationship of touch and vision, Merleau-Ponty relies on the exact same analogy to which Husserl objected. In his *Ideas* (II:156), Husserl cautions that the analogy between vision and touch is devoid of phenomenological rigor. Against Husserl’s view on the matter, Merleau-Ponty stresses the necessity to take this analogy seriously (VI:134):

We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence.

Yet, to analyze the tangible dimension of the look solely in terms of a synergy of the senses, to reduce the phenomenon of their intertwining to a “doctrine of synesthesia”, as M. Dillon does, is tomiss its ultimate significance. The approximation between vision and touch depends on the proportion of movement, motor activity and mobility found in vision. It is only touch that comprises a motor activity that is properly its own. This turns it into something other than simply a sense, more and other than simply the locus of passive sensation (J. Derrida, 2005:142). Hence, in its association with touch, vision becomes dimensional, it becomes a (VI:134) “palpation with the look.” It is this tactilisation of vision that enables Merleau-Ponty to advance a view of corporacy as *force of seeing*.

Interestingly enough, forming part of Utpaladeva’s phenomenological vocabulary of ‘light’, vision and touch have a central role in his narratives of perception and manifestation. Vision represents pure awareness, *prakāśa* (*śiva)* while touch stands for reflective awareness, *vimarśa* (*śakti).* Consciousness consists in the intertwining of *śiva* as light and *śakti* as touch. Prior to Utpaladeva, the Spanda philosophers described consciousness as the embrace of the divine couple. In his commentary on *Svacchanda Tantra*, Abhinavagupta’s disciple, Kṣemarāja, states: “She emits a deep roar, because [while it is the Light of Being (*prakāśa*) that is predominant in Bhairava] in her it is [that Light’s power of] Touching (*vimarśa*)” (trans., Sanderson 1995: 69). Here, it is not the case of two activities that are being placed side by side. M.Skora suggests that (2007:9) “Abhinavagupta shows us that light and touch interrelate dynamically, forming a seamless whole.” In his *Parātriṃśikā-vivaraṇa*, Abhinavagupta writes: “Śakti would not even think (*āmarśayet*) [of herself ] as different from Śiva.” With these words, it is a very specific concept of being that is articulated: Śiva as *prakāsa* -pure light - is motionless without *vimarśa* - touch. If the light remained without touch, it would be completely inert and, thus, incapable of reflection. Conversely, touch allows Śiva to be fully alive (Padoux 1990b: 77-8), to know itself. As “scintillating light” or “illuminating touch”, light and touch are intertwined which makes consciousness dynamic and capable of self-manifestation. Gonda (1969:19) notices that for the Vedic seers who meditated on this deeper reality, vision was precisely understood as touching. A significant point of Gonda’s analysis is that the *ṛṣis* were essentially “the vibrant ones” (*vipra*) (cf. Gonda 1963: 36-9), enlightenment being at once tactile and kinaesthetic. Gonda’s argument opposes all attempts to formulate consciousness in terms of a static, intellectual awareness. The intertwining of light and touch represents the dynamic tactile awareness of being, which, for Abhinavagupta, is the highest form of awareness. These references to Utpala and his broader context of the Tantras, allow us to view Merleau-Ponty’s tactilisation of vision as an attempt to articulate a unified concept of consciousness and matter. He will call it flesh as *visibility*, or simply *visibility* (VI:137-8) “sometimes wandering and sometimes reassembled.”

5.4.2 Cézanne’s gaze

The phenomenological reduction is, after all, a discovery: “I discover”, Merleau-Ponty says, (EM:189) “vision not as a "thinking about seeing" to use Descartes expression, but as a gaze at grips with a visible world…” Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological reduction transforms perception from a relationship with the world to a relation with Being. But how to define this relationship? It can be understood as a (EM:127) “particularly strong kind of reversibility” that is experienced by artists, more specifically, by painters. What sets the painter apart is his/her “gift of the visible”, which as C. Quinn notices, is (2009:22) “earned by their continued exercise of their incarnated vision.” In *Cézanne’s doubt,* Merleau-Ponty describes how in his later years, Cézanne, following the steps of the Impressionists (CD:10), “conceived painting not as the incarnation of imagined scenes, the projection of dreams outward, but as the exact study of appearances: less a work of the studio than a working from nature.” While initially aligned with the Impressionists and their effort to capture the way in which objects appear in instantaneous perception as they (CD:11) “strike our eyes and attack or senses,” Cézanne eventually distinguished himself from them. Although the Impressionists’ juxtaposition of colours and their breaking down of the local tones offer a true impression (CD:12), “at the same time, depicting the atmosphere and breaking up the tones submerges the object and causes it to lose its proper weight.” Blurring the contours and losing the object from sight is not what Cézanne hopes for. In his use of warm colours and black, he desperately seeks (CD: 12) “the object behind the atmosphere.” For Cézanne, as seen by Merleau-Ponty, (*ibid*.):

The object is no longer covered by reflections and lost in its relationships to the atmosphere and to other objects: it seems subtly illuminated from within, light emanates from it, and the result is an impression of solidity and material substance.

What distinguishes Cézanne’s gaze is his attention to the (*ibid*.) “spontaneous organization of things we perceive” versus the instituted, organized gaze of ideas and sciences. In his effort to understand (CD:18) “what interior force holds the world together and causes the proliferation of visible forms,” the painter moves away from all constituted ideas about the nature of the visible. By making a very specific use of vision, they maintain an uninterrupted focus that attunes them to the flow of the emerging order (CD:14), “the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things.” This is only possible if the painter withdraws their awareness from the spontaneous arrangement of objects in perception (CD:14): “I stop the spontaneous movement in which they pile up in perception and in which they tend toward the geometric perspective.” In exchange, they seek depth as the dimension against which everything appears (*ibid*.):

If one paints the shape of an apple with a continuous line, while the contour is rather the ideal limit toward which the sides of the apple recede in depth. Not indicate any shape would be to deprive the objects of their identity. To trace just a single outline sacrifices depth – that is, the dimension in which the thing is presented not as spread our before us but as an inexhaustible reality full of reserves. That is why Cézanne follows the swelling of the object in modulated colors and indicates several outlines in blue. Rebounding among these, one’s glance captures a shape that emerges from among them all, just as it does in perception.

If Merleau-Ponty evokes Cézanne’s experience, it is because he feels that the painter’s experience translates his own ontological project in the best way possible. This project consists in demonstrating that everything is interconnected and that even a fragment such as yellow reflects the unity of the whole. The role of the reduction is to lead us to an experience of reality that is beyond everything we know. Nevertheless, this ‘state’ is not reached by an ultimate gesture of transcendence, an ‘extraction’ from the sensible but, on the contrary, by deepening one’s ties with the sensible. It is precisely this commitment to the sensible that Merleau-Ponty sees in Cézanne (CD:15):

His painting was paradoxical: he was pursuing reality without giving up the sensuous surface, with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature, without following the contours, with no outline to enclose the color, with no perspectival or pictorial arrangement. This is what Bernard called Cezanne’s suicide: *aiming for reality* while denying himself the means to attain it.

Merleau-Ponty notices in Cézanne’s approach a systematic practice of ‘withdrawal’ not *from* experiencebut *within* experience. The idea of ‘withdrawal’ not to be taken literally; to be understood as an active detachment from a fragmentary view of experience. The apprehension of the body as a seeing force leads to the experience of an emerging totality (*ibid*.):

It is Cezanne’s genius that when the overall composition of the picture is seen globally, perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes.

5.5.1 Rediscovering the vision of origins

The analysis of the painter’s gaze ultimately reveals that the spatiality of the world is not an objective whole but a totality of lines of force or *vibrations* (CD:15): “the spatial structure *vibrates* as it is formed.”The reductionist gaze caught in the ‘movement’ of the appearing aims at reaching its source. The idea of space as a vibrating whole was an emerging concept in Physics at Merleau-Ponty’s time. It finds a parallel in the concept of *spanda* as an ontological interpretation of *śakti* denoting the agency or free activity of the luminous field (*kartṛtva, svātantrya*) (D.P. Lawrence: 1999). In his quest for depth, Cézanne tries to capture the continuous emergence of phenomenality upon an undifferentiated, pre-reflective ground since (WN:214) “the only thing finally that is seen in the full sense is the totality wherein the sensibles are cut out.” In reality, Merleau-Ponty shows this to be a ‘common’ fact of perception (WN:213-4): “I describe perception as a diacritical, relative, oppositional system—the primordial space as topological (that is, cut out in a total voluminosity which surrounds me, in which I am, which is behind me as well as before me…).” The painter, unlike an ordinary person, has a unique relation with the visible. The artistic process reveals a spontaneous and direct preoccupation with Being (WN:211):

… To paint, to sketch, is not to produce something from nothing, that the drawing, the touch of the brush, and the visible work are but the trace of a total movement of Speech, which goes unto Being as a whole, and that this movement contains the expression with lines as well as the expression with colours, my expression as well as that of the other painters. We dream of systems of equivalencies, and indeed they do function. But their logic, like the logic of a phonematic system, is summed up in one sole tuft, in one sole gamut, they are all animated with one sole movement, they each and all are one sole vortex, one sole contraction of Being. What is needed is to make explicit this horizonal totality which is not a *synthesis -* Wild perception---The Immediate.

The task of phenomenology, like the painter’s quest, amounts at the discovery of a ‘vision’ that is not the thought of the world but the direct contact with the world. Thought of seeing: this is a direct reference to Descartes who, in his quest for the subject of vision, imposes a reflective move inwards (WN:210):

Descartes (*Dioptrics)*: *who* will see the image painted in the eyes or in the brain? Therefore, finally a *thought* of this image is needed------Descartes already sees that we always put a little man in man, that our objectifying view of our own body always obliges us to seek *still further inside* that *seeing man* we thought we had under our eyes.

To move from a thought of seeing to *seeing*, one needs to overcome the objectivist look (WN:253): “the disclosure of this world, of this Being, remains a dead letter as long as we do not uproot "objective philosophy" (Husserl).” One needs to have a direct encounter contact with the world, an encounter that the radical notion of *seeing* is meant to express. As a whole body vision, as the intertwining of vision and touch, this *seeing* is (*ibid*.): “the primordial vision that one must indeed come to” and which (*ibid*.) “cannot be the thought of seeing.” To achieve this, there is only one solution (WN:203): “recapture the child, the alter ego, the unreflected within myself by a lateral, pre-analytic participation, which is perception, *ueberschreiten* by definition, intentional transgression.” *Coming to vision* is, basically, reaching the center (CD:15): “the lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the contribution of the senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start as the centre from which these contributions radiate.” The center: vision does not belong to a specific seer. Rather, it is the spontaneous disclosure of the phenomenal field occurring each time something appears in my horizon. It is the very radiance that animates and constitutes this field (PhP:378): “Those appearances which are not yet firmly fixed intercommunicate, run into each other, and all radiate from a central *Würfelhaftigkeit* which is the mystical link between them.” In this line of argument, the subject is no more the author of transcendence but its witness (WN:208):

To rediscover man finally face to face with the world *itself,* to rediscover the pre-intentional present— is *to rediscover that vision of the origins*, *which sees itself within us*, as poetry rediscovers what articulates itself within us, unbeknown to us.

While contemplating the landscape of Aix-en-Provence, Cézanne, more than pursuing the task of painting, seeks to understand the mystery of an all-encompassing visibility (CD:19): “I am oriented toward the intelligence of the *Pater Omnipotens.*” Commenting on Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty says (*ibid*.): “He was, in any case, oriented toward the idea or the project of an infinite Logos.” Transposing Merleau-Ponty’s analysis on the relation between vision and experience of Being to Utpala’s context, it is fair to say that this “vision of the origins,” the *Logos* to which Merleau-Ponty refers as the basis of all entities in relation and of all relations, is not the physical act of seeing but what Arindam Chakrabarti calls (2005:30) “a unifying or synthesising consciousness.” This differs from the restricted awareness of a given subject (*ibid*.)

And this unifying consciousness has to take the form of a self-ascription which feels itself to be a single “I”. But this is not just the knower-ego (*māyā-pramātā*), one among other possible egos. but an all-encompassing I-awareness, in the light of which everything else is illuminated.

To exemplify his point, A.Chakrabarti quotes Abhinavagupta’s citation of

*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* in his commentary of ĪPVI JÑ.1-3: “After His shining, everything shines, It is by His light that all this is lit.” He then remarks that these verses reiterate the idea repeatedly evoked by Utpaladeva that all objects of perceptions derive their limited light from the infinite luminosity of the self and exist as they partake in its light. A.Chakrabarti shows that in ordinary perception, the subject’s activity of knowing or perceiving different objects is analogous to the self’s creative activity of manifesting these same objects in the sense that they both obey a self-recognitive, self-determining structure – it is precisely the equation of these two levels of discourse that allows Utpaladeva to talk about manifestation in terms of knowledge. In this context, the perceived objects are inscribed within the activity of a knowing/self-manifesting subject. Hence, if we follow the route that these same objects followed to become ‘objects’ we will be led back to their source, the centre from which all illuminations emerge but also where they vanish. This centre is an all-encompassing awareness. A.Chakrabarti (2005:30) observes that in citing the verses of *Kaṭha Upaniṣad,* Abhinava’s real objective is the analysis of the grammatical structure of the Vedic expression “*taṁ bhāntam* (Him keeping-shining)”. Abhinava focuses on the recognitive structure of the sensible and the way in which following the route particular *ābhāsas* have taken to form themselves, connects us back to the source of their origin. With reference to Abhinava’s commentary in ĪPVI (vol. 1, pp. 350-56), A. Chakrabarti states (2005:30):

Depending upon the constantly spontaneously independently effulgent Self-consciousness (*sartṛ* suffix dignifies perpetually shining), by mimicking (…) as it were, the agentive aspect of ‘making’ or ‘creating’ present in that Self, individual selves establish the relation of knower-and-known with objects which they then call ‘this,’ and then again ‘this,’ in an imposed temporal order. But if we start from the side of these -by themselves unconnected - objects, we cannot stop the analysis until we make these objects all “turn towards” and “rest in” (*ābhimukhyena viśrāntiṃ bhajante*), be objects of and for that great unifying ocean of sentience or self-awareness. That ocean *saṃvit -mahāsamudra* is the metaphysical end-point where all this beings, both external such as blue colour or a blue substance, and internal such as a feeling of joy or pain, merge like so many rushing rivers meeting in an ocean.

The “vision of the origins” to which Merleau-Ponty refers, the primordial Logos, is none other than this ‘ocean of sentience’.

5.5.2 ‘Impersonating’ the infinite

Earlier, we have referred to phenomenological reduction and self-recognition as active processes (rather than theoretical approaches) meant to lead to the disclosure of a primary field of awareness/being (VI:129):

These questions call not for the exhibiting of something said which would put an end to them, but for the disclosure of a Being that is not posited because it has no need to be, because it is silently behind all our affirmations, negations, and even behind all formulated questions…

However, asserting the performativity of these processes comes with the responsibility of defining where this performativity, precisely, lies. If we assume that for both philosophers, knowledge of Being/the self is not a theoretical task but a *praxis,* not an intellectual representation but an active participation, then we will certainly need to explain how this is precisely the case. Let us start by observing that the end goal of both self-recognition and phenomenological reduction is the direct access to the realities they attempt to disclose – the self/ the vertical Being. Merleau-Ponty envisages his new ontology as an attempt to map Being, (WN:165): “outline of ontology projected as an ontology of brute Being— and of logos. In this sense it is an existential reduction we are talking about: describe the wild Being in order to access it directly in experience (WN:253): “What I want to do is restore the world as a meaning of Being absolutely different from the "represented," that is, as the vertical Being which none of the "representations" exhaust and which all "reach," the wild Being.” Utpala, on the other hand, understands this access in a soteriological way; his verses are a guide to a contemplative practice that leads to an experience of ‘union’ with the self: one *becomes* himself *Śiva*. It is a process leading not only to a completely different *view* of existence but to a completely different *form* of existence.

In Merleau-Ponty, nonetheless, the very idea of *union* is forbidding because, to him, it alludes to the reduction of the world to the transparency of consciousness. A “union” of the subject and the world would not affirm the ontological status of the world but, on the contrary, the suppression of its transcendence (VI, Editor’s preface: xxix) “experience is not something one could coincide with, because it bears a transcendence, since already, in itself, it is differentiation, articulation, structuration.” It is this impossibility of a complete reversibility that gives the phenomenological reduction its existential turn. Nevertheless, the experience of union that is central to self-recognition is not a mere ‘coincidence’, since it does not involve the suppression of difference. Similarly to Merleau-Ponty, Utpala acknowledges that the experience of the world is structured upon a movement of transcendence. If for Merleau-Ponty (WN:195) “the *Gestalt* is already transcendence” and (*ibid*.) “we have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, i.e., as transcendence,” the theory of *abhāsa* shows how in perceiving ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’, we are in touch with the differentiated expressions of a universal self. In this sense, self-recognition is nowhere less ‘existential’ than the reduction even if it is described as ‘identification’ (ĪPV TS.I,12: 227/ Vol.2 p.303) :

*sarvo mamāyaṃ vibhava ityevaṃ parijānataḥ ।*

*viśvātmano vikalpānāṃ prasare*'*pi maheśatā ॥*

He, who has realized his identity with the universe and knows that all that is manifest is simply his glory, is the Highest Lord even when the determinate cognitions are still arising.

This is because liberation does not erase the perception of difference. Differentiated perceptions still persist although the liberated one perceives them as expressions of divine intentionality (ĪPVI, *ibid*.): “... even this determinate creation is nothing but my own glory, known as the power of freedom.” Self-recognition is not a union in the sense of a mere fusion of opposites but the realisation that (WN:225) “transcendence is identity within difference.” It can be, furthermore, viewed as an act of *mimicking* or *impersonating* the infinite. In his formulation of self-recognition, Lawrence observes that Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta replicate (2013:93) “in terms of *śāstraic* philosophy the mythico-ritual modus operandi of the disclosure of Śiva’s Śakti (*śaktyāviṣkaraṇa*).” For Utpala, liberation is the subject’s identification with Śiva including adoption of His roles (ĪPV TS.I,16:229/ Vol.2 p.309):

*iti prakaṭito mayā sughaṭa eṣa mārgo navo*

*mahāgurubhirucyatesma śivadṛṣṭiśāstre yathā* ।

*tadatra nidadhatpadaṃ bhuvanakartṛtāmātmano*

*vibhāvya śivatāmayīmaniśamāviśansiddhyati* ।।

Thus, this new path has been shown to me exactly as it was given in the Śiva, *Dṛṣṭi Śāstra* written by the teacher. Therefore, a person putting his feet on this, after realising himself to be the Creator of the universe, becomes *siddha* when he enters into unbroken identity with the state of *Śiva*.

Further, D.P. Lawrence states that Utpaladeva (2009:629):

explains the primary modus operandi of his argumentation for this recognition in accordance with the monistic Saiva mythico-ritual pattern … as the ‘‘revealing of *Śakti*’’ (*śaktyāviskarana*). Pure Wisdom (*śuddhavidyā*). is the awareness of oneself as the Sakti-possessing emanator of the universe, as may be typically expressed ‘‘I am this’’ (‘‘this’’ designating the universe). Utpaladeva, thus, endeavors to demonstrate that, because this universe is my emanation through *Śakti* (I am this), therefore I am Śiva.

‘Impersonation’ in this context would mean that the subject *becomes* itself Śiva insofar as it now experiences everything from the very center of its existence, the innermost self. From this position, the subject becomes the possessor of the powers of the self, they are now recognised as the subject’s own powers. Utpala’s gnoseological appropriation of the tantric rituals is, here, evident. These rituals traditionally “incorporate *Śakti* into the essence of the God *Śiva* as his integral power and consort, through whom he emanates and controls the world” (Lawrence, 2009:629). As such, they emulate the basic mythic structure leading the aspirant to the realisation of their identity with Śiva as the possessor and enjoyer of *śakti*. According to Lawrence (*ibid*.:631): “Siva’s emanatory self-recognition, ‘‘I’’/‘‘I am Siva,’’ is disclosed as the inner reality of the recognition of the objective ‘‘this.’’ Through pointing out the necessity and ubiquity of Siva’s self-recognition/Sakti, Utpaladeva’s philosophy leads the student to full participation in it.”

5.5.3 Embodying the universe

Merleau-Ponty suggests that all perceptual experience is marked by a certain ‘passivity’ that we fail to notice (WN:221): “philosophy has never spoken— I do not say of *passivity:* we are not effect - but I would say of the passivity of our activity.” The phenomenological reduction is characterised by the displacement of the conditions of the possibility of experience (WN:221): “it is not I who makes myself think any more than it is I who makes my heartbeat.” However paradoxical these statements may sound, they aim at asserting the primacy of Being over the world or the experiencing subject; they are (WN:220) “a way of expressing and noting an event of the order of brute or wild being which, ontologically, is primary.” The world or the subject are not but instances of this hollow that Being initiates within itself: the only ‘real’ experiencer is Being (WN: 221): “I am not even the author of that hollow that forms within me.” For the individual subject, this can be understood as reaching a state where the conceptual dichotomies have ceased to operate and there is the experience of an uninterrupted flow of awareness. At this stage, the ‘externality’ of the world is recognised as a part of the broader movement of the appearing and not as a posited externality (WN:227): “And what replaces the antagonistic and solidary reflective movement (the immanence of the "idealists") is the fold or hollow of Being having by principle an *outside,* the architectonics of the configurations.” As the ‘I’ awareness sustained by the classical Cartesian divide ceases to operate, there comes the realisation that it is not the subject that initiates the spectacle of the world (WN:264):

Start from this: there is not identity, nor non-identity, or non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another------

My “central” nothingness is like the point of the stroboscopic spiral, which is *who knows where,* which is "nobody”.

The the erasure of a separate awareness of ‘I’, of being an ‘observer’ against an external world seems to be necessary for the reduction to take place. But, once again, it is not a question of coincidence with the world around us: in this experience of unity (“one is buried in the world”), the awareness of distinctions does remain (*écart*) (WN:201):

The perceiving subject, as a tacit, silent *Being-at (Etre-à),* which returns from the thing itself blindly identified, which is only a *separation (écart)* with respect to it— the *self* of perception as “nobody,” in the sense of Ulysses, as the anonymous one buried in the world, and that has not yet traced its path.

It is this absorption or immersion of subjective awareness that Utpala describes as *samāveśa.* If we wish to find in Merleau-Ponty a more ‘eloquent’ description of the reduction, we should

look at his account of the artist’s ‘rapture’. This is presented as a state of *fascination*, of looking at the world in absolute awe. It involves a loss of all sense of individuality that is accompanied by the feeling that all actions, words and thoughts come from a source that is outside oneself (EM:6):

The painter lives in fascination. The actions most proper to him—those gestures, those tracings of which he alone is capable and which will be revelations to others because they do not lack what he lacks—to him they seem to emanate from the things themselves, like figures emanating from the constellations.

A very similar idea is found in Utpaladeva’s self-recognition, which is said to take place only after the identification with the limited ego, the objectified body, etc. progressively ceases to operate. This allows to trace the origin of all experience, action, emotion to the innermost self (ĪPVI JÑ.I,1:3-4/ Vol.1 p.25):

*yatra tu śuddhasvātmarūpaprathātmakānuttaraśaktiśālini-rargalasvātmaprakāśa eva māyīyaprathāntaravyavadhānavandhyo nibandhanam, tatra tasyaiva bhagavataḥ kāraṇatvam*

Where, however, the unlimited light of self, possessed of all-transcending power, which is nothing but the essential nature of the pure self, is the cause, and there is no intervention of the limited self, a manifestation of *māyā*, there the causality is conceived to be that of the Supreme.

Utpala argues that it is only when the experience of duality that is sustained by the feeling of I’ as separate from ‘this’ faints away (as a result of breathing practices, contemplation, etc.) and when all actions are recognised as having their origin in the self that *there is* experience of oneness. A further enquiry into the aesthetic experience in Merleau-Ponty shows how it is formulated in bodily terms, as incarnated vision following from the notion of *flesh as visibility.* If the blurring of distinctions in Utpala results from the recognition of the self as the sole cause of all activity, in Merleau-Ponty it does from a displacement of awareness on the side of the world (WN:139):

I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity— which is the second and more profound sense of the narcissism: not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen.

This displacement marking the highest point of intensity of the painter’s engagement with the visible is experienced to such an extent that it brings a switch of roles – it is not the painter who penetrates the forest with their look but the forest that looks at them and penetrates them. André Marchand’s account, as told by Merleau-Ponty, evokes a state of complete possession, which echoes that of *samāveśa,* also described by Utpala as ‘immersion or penetration *by’* (EM:6):

Inevitably the roles between the painter and the visible switch. That is why so many painters have said that things look at them. As André Marchand says, after Klee: "In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me.... I was there, listening.... I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it.... I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out. "

With this displacement of awareness on the side of the world, perception becomes ‘imperception’. We no more feel the world, the world feels itself in us (CD:17): “the landscape thinks itself in me”, he said, and “I am its consciousness.” With this, the limits of our embodiment are equally displaced. If at this state, Merleau-Ponty argues, the artist feels inspired, this is to be taken literally. The identification with the ‘body’ of the world is also identification with the ‘body’ of a respiratory being: experience of oneness is *breathing within being* (EM:6):

We speak of "inspiration," and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between who sees and who is seen, who paints and what is painted.

Paradoxically, this erasure of the limits of one’s subjectivity and perhaps of one’s embodiment (insofar as the body is in Merleau-Ponty the locus of the sense of ‘I’) is not synonymous with their annihilation but with their expansion beyond all limits. Cézanne practices (EM, 166–67/27–28) “a magic theory of vision”, such that things pass into his interiority, or his spirit *merges with things.”* As such it is the experience of the boundless freedom that characterises the vertical mode of being. Interestingly, the disclosure of *śakti* in the context of self-recognition comes with a similar blurring of bodily landmarks that leads to a merging with things to the extent that one experiences the whole universe *in* themselves. Abhinava states (ĪPVI AG.II, 3:204/ Vol.2 p.247):

*yaśvāsau muktaḥ sa bhāvān svāṅgavadabhimanyamānaḥ pramimīte iti sa teṣāṃ svāmī svarūpaparamārthasamarpaṇācca pālakaḥ iti patirūpa* *diṣṭaḥśāstre ।*

He who is liberated apprehends the objects *as constituents of himself*, and therefore, because he imparts to them the reality, which is his own chief characteristic, and so maintains them, he is called protector (*pati*) in the scriptures.

Described as the liberation from false identification with the limited subjectivity, body, intellect, etc., and union with a higher consciousness, self-recognition can be easily mistaken for a disembodied knowledge/awareness of the self/ ultimate reality. This can be reinforced by descriptions of *samāveśa* as identification with the Lord, Śiva, the higher Subject. However, this is not exactly how Utpala talks about it. We do not ‘enter’ the ultimate reality by shedding our bodily gown. Given that *samāveśa* involves the infinite expansion of the subtle body, self-recognition can be described more successfully in terms that are inclusive of embodiment. From a logical point of view, if Utpala describes the world as Śiva’s body then becoming one with Śiva is not establishing oneself in the realm of essences (the idealist perspective) but possessing the cosmos as one’s own body. Seen thus, *samāveśa* pushes the limits of embodiment to the limits of the cosmos and brings about the ultimate reflection/reversibility between the flesh of my body and the flesh of the world (ĪPVI AG.II, 3:204/ Vol. 2 p.247):

*śarīrādyapi viśvamapi ca saṃvedanamevābhimanyamāno’ta eva cideva ghanā anyācidrūpavyāmiśraṇaśūnyā yasya rūpam, sa punarjanmabandhavirahāt dehe’pi sthite ‘mukta’ iti vyapadeśayogyaḥ* ।

Who considers body and also the rest of the world as non-different from *saṃvid* and consequently who is one with *cit*, unmixed with anything different from it, is called liberated, because he is free from the bondage of rebirth even if *his body still exists*.

*Śiva* permeates the whole of creation and comprises in His being the totality of existing things. Becoming *Śiva* symbolises the union of the individual body with the cosmic body, the embodiment of the universe that results in the experience of all things in the world as parts of oneself. One loses oneself to find themselves in everything (ĪPV TS.I,13:227/Vol.2 p.305):

*meyaṃ*  *sādhāraṇaṃ muktaḥ svātmābhedena manyate ।*

*maheśvaro yathā baddhaḥ punaratyantabhedavat ॥*

The liberated, looks upon *the common object of perception as one with himself*, as does the Great Lord; but the bound sees it as altogether different from himself.

Understood in these terms, self-recognition translates the experience of the absolute freedom of consciousness (*svātantrya*). Becoming the Lord means reaching that state of experiences this kind of infinite freedom. Merleau-Ponty’s reduction is a recognitive process insofar as in it, the unity of the particular and the universal is recognised and the limits of subjectivity and embodiment are displaced on the side of the world. This is a movement that only a view of being as free to act, in the sense of being the cause of its own becoming can support.Interestingly, in both Merleau-Ponty’s and Utpala’s accounts, the ‘universal’ does not transcend experience but subtends it, just as *turīya* subtends all other states of consciousness. And this is precisely what points at the unfathomable freedom of being (WN:218): "the veritable movement toward the universal. The universal is not above, it is beneath (Claudel), it is not before, but *behind* us------atonal music = the equivalent of the philosophy of *Being in indivision.*”

Conclusion

Having reached the end of this thesis, we can retrospectively argue that its main task has been to follow (VI:187) “the passage from philosophy to the absolute, to the transcendental field, to the wild and "vertical" being”. This passage is at the epicentre of both Merleau-Ponty’s and Utpala’s philosophies. Both thinkers seem concerned by centuries long assumptions about the nature of being, assumptions that seem, nevertheless, to be challenged when tested in ordinary experience. The myth of a totalitarian being that resides well beyond the limits of my world places me, the observer in the position of a surveillant consciousness. But is this who I am? Merleau-Ponty states (VI:6-7):

Here, we must presuppose nothing—neither the naïve idea of being in itself, therefore, nor the correlative idea of a being of representation, of a being for the consciousness, of a being for man: these, along with the being of the world, are all notions that we have to rethink with regard to our experience of the world. We have to reformulate the sceptical arguments outside of every ontological preconception and reformulate them precisely so as to know what world-being, thing-being, imaginary being, and conscious being are.

Merleau-Ponty and Utpaladeva share a common point of departure: all ontological presuppositions have to be rethought with regard to our experience of the world, the perception of the ‘blue’ and the yellow’, as Utpala says: what does this experience say about who perceives, what is that is perceived, how perception takes place. It is the decision to depart from the sensible that defines from a very early stage the future direction of their respective journeys and, to a considerable extent, initiates a common dialogical space. In the pages to follow, we will attempt to evaluate the extent to which this space and the exchanges that took place in it within the context of this thesis, have contributed to further our understanding of the two philosophical systems in ways that reading them separately would have not probably allowed.

Merleau-Ponty focuses on the problems of perception and embodiment as a starting point for clarifying the relation between the mind and the body, the objective and lived world. Starting from concepts that stand opposite each other, he perceives his task as one that would bridge the gap between them. As early as the *Structure of Behaviour*, Merleau-Ponty undertakes to shed light to the relations between consciousness and nature and suggests that matter, life, and mind are increasingly integrative levels of gestalt structure, ontologically continuous but structurally discontinuous. In the last chapter, he questions how to reconcile the perspective of consciousness as “universal milieu” (transcendental consciousness) with consciousness as “enrooted in the subordinated dialectics”, that is, as a *gestalt* (perceptual consciousness). From his early writings, we can see that the conceptual tools Merleau-Ponty inherits from classical philosophy do not particularly facilitate the reconciliation of the antinomies of dualistic thought. As readers, we may find ourselves wanting to push Merleau-Ponty’s formulations little further, relieve him from his debt to Descartes or Husserl, for instance. One way to do this, would be to look at other philosophers in the West only to realise that these share the same dualistic presuppositions that would drive us back exactly where we started. Another way would be to look at a completely different philosophical tradition starting from entirely different presuppositions. And that is what this thesis attempted to do. On its way, Utpala’s thought became a measure for what can be philosophically achievable within Merleau-Ponty’s ontological thought. In return, Merleau-Ponty offered a contemporary, phenomenological perspective to Utpaladeva helping us to appreciate the depth and breadth of his potential contributions to world philosophy.

**The question of knowing**

In his attempt to challenge the classical distinction between facts and essences, Merleau-Ponty

is convinced that the interrogation of perception, the status of the knower and the activity of knowing will yield him the answers. To challenge the Cartesian divide, he knows that he will need to demonstrate that the perceiver is not the transcendental subject and perceiving is not the construction of representations of the world in one’s mind. His analysis of the *gestalt* as a meaningful whole of figure against ground shows that perception takes place within the contextual whole of the perceived world. The discovery of the “phenomenal field”, that is, the world as it appears directly to perception, revealed sensing as the direct communication with the world, a communication that is often overlooked over what it communicates. This exploration has uncovered the “historical thickness” of perception operating beneath the level of reflective consciousness as well as unexpected affinities between the observer and the observed placing them within an epistemological continuum. Merleau-Ponty also knows that a cogito that operates on a discursive level will perpetuate the divisions so this continuum can only be accessible by a pre-reflective *cogito*. However, this new cogito has its own limitations precisely because it is framed in terms of a cogito and it is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty later distances himself from it. On his side, Utpala knows that to challenge the Buddhist and Samkhya views, he needs to demonstrate the existence of an equally pre-reflective and a-subjective knower, which he identifies in the concept of the self (*ātman*) described as the witness (*sākṣin*) in all acts of cognition, also described in the [Śivapurāṇa chapter 2.1.4](https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/shiva-purana-english/d/doc225972.html) as “the pure being in the form of Śiva” (where Śiva stands for consciousness). The self is better described as light shining in everything and making cognition possible. It is said to be shining as the knower, the known and the means of knowledge, providing the measure for a concept that unifies in itself all the instances of the perceptual relationship. As such, it is a concept that reinforces the idea of the epistemic continuity between the perceiver and the perceived that Merleau-Ponty seeks without falling into the impasses of the Cartesian thought.

Moving forward, we observed that the kinaesthetic origins of the pre-reflective cogito offered Merleau-Ponty insights on the centrality of embodiment to knowing and subjectivity. While the body provides the background for the experience of any given object, it is also experienced in ways that set it apart from all other things: it is a steady part of the perceptual field and relates directly with the world, inhabiting space through its intentional structures. It is the body’s pre-cognitive relationship with the world that organises the content of our perception in a meaningful way. Merleau-Ponty’s discovery of motor intentionality (intentionality as *movement*) reveals the anonymous subjectivity of the body as an “I can” rather than an “I think”. With the kinaesthetic sense of its own movements given directly, the body assumes the role of an agent in perception that remains co-extensive with what it perceives. Traditionally, intentionality refers to the power of mental states to represent, to be about things and properties. It is a feature of thoughts and words with reference to things. Reconceiving intentionality as movement in the phenomenal space sustained by the *body schema* is meant to demonstrate the homogeneity of the phenomenal field by challenging not only the classical idea of intentionality but also the solidity of the body. Utpaladeva offers Merleau-Ponty a model of intentionality that presupposes and proves the homogeneity of the phenomenal field based on the idea that the *aboutness* of consciousness reveals its infinite freedom: if the object were truly independent of consciousness, intentionality would be inexplicable because if consciousness were turned towards an object other than itself, it would depend on it for its cognition. However, a consciousness that is not free cannot be conscious because it would not be capable of turning towards the other. Utpala explains the aboutness of consciousness in terms of an intentional movement (*vimarśa*) within consciousness that creates this aboutness. Embodiment is a corollary of this movement and not the cause of it. Utpala allows us to situate the intentional movement on a pre-reflective field, which is beyond or rather beneath the limits of our embodiment while permeating its structures. This way, he does not attribute intentionality directly to the body but shows how the body is endowed with an intentionality by virtue of its inherence in the self/being. Moreover, on account of the intentional movement being produced by virtue of a carnal adherence to being, it can be better understood in bodily terms. Conversely. Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis of intentionality as expressed through the motricity of bodily being helps us to focus on the phenomenological and carnal aspect of *vimarśa,* which is very much welcome as it is not always evident in Utpala.

**The question of the body**

Utpala’s intense preoccupation with demonstrating that everything has its being within consciousness seems to bypass the perceptual life of the body. This impression is reinforced by frequent contestations of its reality whereby it is presented as the result of *māyā*, where *māyā* is understood as an illusory power that obscures the light of the self and limits its powers. However, viewing the body this way is as if the dualism that Utpala has so meticulously worked to overcome is reinstated in the heart of the absolute. Moreover, it goes against Utpala’s affiliation to the tantric tradition and his description of *sāmāveśa* as a process mediated through the senses and involving their transformation. Read along Merleau-Ponty’s distinction between the objective and the lived body as a prerequisite for formulating a genuine phenomenological discourse, Utpala’s ‘negative’ discourse on the body seems like a deliberate gesture that aims at denouncing an objectivised view of the body *but not a lived view*. Yet, the contemporary reader, familiar with the phenomenological movement and largely appreciative of an explicitly embodied view on cognition, may find the idea of self-realisation from the self alone very demanding. Abhinava trying to constantly demonstrate the relevance of Utpala’s arguments to ordinary experience, seems to be aware of this. Reading Utpala in the light of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment changes the way we read Utpala. If Utpala focuses on *vimarśa* it is because he wishes to highlight the incarnate aspect of consciousness even if this is not expressed in these exact terms. The introduction of the term ‘body’ would introduce a *stasis* in the eternal becoming of a conscious self and limit its freedom which is its principal characteristic. Nevertheless, Utpala himself shows that he admits the carnality of the self when stating that *māyā* is not an external force imposed on the self but internal to it as its own creative activity (*vimarśa*). In fact, Utpala’s monism is the only way to talk about embodiment in non-dualist terms by apprehending its internality to the process of appearing preventing, thus, the objectification of the body (in front of an appearing consciousness). Nevertheless, this is not always obvious particularly because there is a history of exegesis that presents *vimarśa* in purely intellectual terms. If *vimarśa* is read in terms of intellectual reflection and the universe as the self’s *ideation,* we risk restraining ourselves within a narrow interpretation of manifestation that overlooks its embodied aspect. If Utpala describes creation in terms of ‘ideation’, this is not just an idea in God’s head; Utpala refers to the process of yogic ideation whereby the yogi creates or brings to life things out of his creative power (*śakti*).But these things are not simple ideas, they are real. Thus, by referring to creation as an act of ideation, Utpala highlights the fact that the universe is brought into being by an act of creative will.

Merleau-Ponty’s reading of reversibility in terms of carnal reflection and our reading of *vimarśa* in terms of reversibility encourage the recognition of the kinaesthetic aspect of *vimarśa,* which Utpala has already pointed at by equating *vimarśa* to *spanda.* It seems that this juxtaposition of concepts aids both philosophers to overcome certain limitations that may be either inherent to the way specific concepts have been conveyed or to the way these same concepts are perceived by the contemporary reader, or even both.

Merleau-Ponty uncovers the reflective mechanism that animates the sensible and shows the inextricable intertwining of the sensible and the sentient. However, his thought is still influenced by the antinomies of the *flesh* (flesh of the body, flesh of the world). In Merleau-Ponty’s ontology, reversibility becomes the mode of articulation of the vertical being, and yet as a concept it remains somewhat indebted to the body/the sensible, which it is precisely meant to explain. Reading reversibility as *vimarśa* allows us to view it as an activity that disentangles it from the sensible, strictly speaking, while at the same time showing that its workings manifest in the mode of the sensible. Utpala’s emphasis on the self’s freedom enables us to see how the appearing self never really becomes an object, despite embracing objectivity since it assumes deliberately the form of objects and never exhausts itself in them. By equating *māyā* to *vimarśa,* Utpala demonstrates how embodiment forms part of the ‘concealing’ of the absolute, how it forms part of its cosmic play (*līla*).

**The ontological question**

Merleau-Ponty shows how our ignorance of the sensible origins of reflection perpetuate an idealist view of the world and of being (VI:201): “it is said that the thought of seeing and of feeling sustains this vision and this feeling, the world and Being will only be an ideate.” What the extraction of the image of the world from its original context and its conversion into an idea miss is the direct experience of the world’s appearing. It is feared that (ibid.) “the vertical or wild Being will never be able to be rediscovered” since (ibid.) “the teleology of the "natural light" is converted into ideality.” Merleau-Ponty’s new ontology views being as polymorphic, as both identity and difference, contact and divergence, union and separation (VI:221): “What is it that *there is* at this level? There is the vertical or carnal universe and its polymorphic matrix.” Once reflection is apprehended as reversibility, reversibility itself gains a ‘world’ status as reflection between surfaces (justifying a non-hierarchical view of Being with macro and micro processes seen as projections upon scales). Being described in terms of projection resolves the issue of dualist presupposition: everything is projection upon different scales. But what does this exactly mean? Since Merleau-Ponty did not have the opportunity to further develop his ontological project, we are left with formulations that seem at once intriguing and alien. What the notion of the ‘vertical’ is meant to convey is being as dimensional, hence, the analogies of light and the terminology of ‘projection’ as an inauguration of space (VI:227): “Being encompassing-encompassed, of a vertical, dimensional Being, dimensionality.” Still unclear, however, what this exactly mean. If the ‘vertical’ is a response to a view of being as flat, as already deployed, we would like to know more about the internal mechanism and structure of this ‘deployment’.

Utpala describes manifestation in terms of a progressive self-differentiation of a single principle (*cit, samvid*) offering a detailed and complex account of *being as appearing*. The *tattva* cosmology is a narrative that Utpala inherits from the Sāṃkhya philosophers. He, nevertheless, transforms it by highlighting the role of the self-differentiating activity of *vimarśa,* leading to a view of being in terms of a series of successive reflections within consciousness - manifestation as a *genealogy of light* (*ābhāsavāda*). In a certain way, Utpala’s account fulfils all the pre-requisites of the said verticality by replacing (VI:223): “the notions of concept, idea, mind, representation with the notions of *dimensions,* articulation, level, hinges, pivots, configuration.” It is this phenomenological adaptation of the classical account of creation that makes it a suitable point of reference for Merleau-Ponty who strives to explain this proliferation of light through the notion of the *fold/hollow* (VI:227) “the fold or hollow of Being having by principle an *outside,* the architectonics of the configurations.” It is with reference to the self’s freedom to appear without resulting in an actual separation that we can understand the *écart* as proximity and distance, contact and divergence and reflection not as separation from but as adherence to self. The negativity (VI:228) “that makes possible the *vertical* world,” a concept that Merleau-Ponty borrows from Sartre, seeks to do away with its connotations of ‘lack’ of existence (VI:227): “a certain relation between the visible and the invisible, where the invisible is not only non-visible.” The invisibility of the visible in Merleau-Ponty remains an ambiguous concept until its encounter with the idea of the self that manifests by negating itself into a self-projected otherness. Reading dimensionality/verticality/negativity in the context of the *pratyabhijñā* theory of appearance highlights their internality to being and helps, thus, overcome the duality that haunts them. It is only on these terms that we are allowed to say that the vertical is (VI:233) “the solution of the problem of the "relations between the soul and the body." The benefit of juxtaposing the two narratives is double: on the one hand, reading the *tattva* cosmogony along the thesis of the vertical being opens up to the possibility of a phenomenological interpretation that would not have been in the same way possible by reading Utpala on his own. On the other, the mythological narrative of a “historic” creation acquires a phenomenological significance that helps push our thought further by announcing a web of living relations, fields of intersection on which our embodiments/subjectivities are integrated/projected. The benefit of this reading is that it shows how as monads, we are already inscribed within a movement of transcendence (VI:227): if “each field is a dimensionality and Being is dimensionality itself,” then it (Being/the self) is (ibid), “accessible indeed by my perception.” When Merleau-Ponty describes his ontology as intra-ontology, he refers to this same inscription (VI:227): “a world seen within inherence in this world.” But how does he justify the view of (VI:227) “a Being encompassing-encompassed” or for this matter, “a world seen within inherence in this world,” other than via the double reference of the body? Does this not presuppose what it precisely needs to explain? The theory of reflection (*ābhāsavada*) is in its own right an intra-ontology insofar as it explains how manifestation is self-recognition (both in its phase of emanation and in its phase of return) and how consciousness becomes perceptual by manifesting as the subjects and objects of cognition. Ultimately, this juxtaposition of the two narratives hopes to challenge established views on the nature of being and of reality, in general. Is reality a closed in itself totality which, we as observers, perceive from the outside? Or is it a network of dimensions that cut across each other giving rise to a constant emergence of phenomenality? Both philosophers seem to be closer to the second view, a view that integrates the perceiver into the perceptual field.

**A question of recognition**

In the two philosophies, self-recognition and phenomenological reduction are processes that are, in their respective ways, both meant to lead to a direct and unmediated knowledge of reality. Both philosophers seem to think that as knowers, we are unaware of our internality to the field we give ourselves the task of exploring. The process leading to the realisation of the self or the vertical being is, hence, a process of reconnecting, of going back to the origins. This, in both cases, is accompanied by a redirection of the flow of awareness, which is not a withdrawal from the sensible but a heightening of the experience of the sensible. This challenges a possible view of self-recognition as the realisation of a disembodied reality, which certainly clashes with Utpala’s description of *samāveśa* as taking place while living in the body and by harnessing its energies. Reading *samāveśa* through the lens of the reduction highlights its ties to the sensible and allows us to explore its possible implications on our view of embodiment. On the other hand, the issue one may have with Merleau-Ponty’s account of the reduction is the lack of a systematic narrative that brings together all its instances (rationale, means, end). This becomes an issue that may undermine the performative value of the process, which, on the contrary, is emphasised when read alongside Utpaladeva’s self-recognition. Having said that, the performative value of self-recognition can be itself missed simply because as a path and unlike many other spiritual paths, does not prescribe any specific methods or disciplines. A parallel reconstruction of the two processes helps to better apprehend the possibilities of human experience (and thus justify the need for the reduction/recognition). It also helps to recognise the dimensionality of bodily being, introduce a view of the body *as dimensionality* and challenge the classical view of embodiment that is ignorant of the interconnectedness of the flesh. Finally, the knowledge that the reality unveiled as a result of the reduction/recognition is always present in sensory experience brings a transformative effect to the way this same experience and the role of the senses in the perception of reality are viewed. Attending closely to the phenomena reveals our inherence in the world and our inherence in being.

The rehabilitation of the sensible leads to a more inclusive and democratic (because non-hierarchical) view of reality as an undivided whole. Making justice to this view is Merleau-Ponty’s passage from the VI declaring the ‘incompleteness’ of the reduction, chosen to mark the end of this philosophical journey and the return to where it all started (VI:146):

We find in Me Once again, the flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously, *as* tangible it descends among them, *as* touching it dominates them all and draws this relation- ship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass. This concentration of the visibles about one of them, or this bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things, which makes a vibration of my skin become the sleek and the rough, makes me *follow with my eyes* the movements and the contours of the things themselves, this magical relation, this pact between them and me according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible.

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1. For the English translation of *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī,* this thesis relies on Kanti Chandra Pandey’s version published in 1998 by Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Varanasi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Sanskrit translation in English: ĪPVI, *Jñānadhikāra*, *āhnika* II, verses 1-2, page 20 /Original in Sanskrit in Vol.1, p.86) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lachièze-Rey, *Réflexions sur l’activité spirituelle constituante*, p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. S.Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, "Phenomenological Approaches to Self-

   Consciousness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Spring 2021 Edition),

   Edward N. Zalta (ed.). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gallagher, Shaun and Dan Zahavi, "Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness", *The*

   *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ### Thomas-Fogiel, Isabelle (2014). *Merleau-Ponty : De la perspective au chiasme, la rigueur épistémique d’une analogie*. Chiasmi Internationali, 13.

   <http://www.isabellethomasfogiel.com/2014/04/merleau-ponty-de-la-perspective-au.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Late 14c., *reflexion*, in reference to surfaces throwing back light or heat, from Late Latin *reflexionem* (nominative *reflexio*) “a reflection,” literally a bending back,” noun of action from past participle stem of Latin *reflectere* “to bend back, bend backwards, turn away,” from re- “back” (see re-)+flectere “to bend”(see flexible). Of the mind, from 1670s. Meaning “remark made after turning back one’s thought on some subject” is from 1640s. Spelling with –*ct*- recorded from late 14c., established 18c., by influence of the verb. (Source : reflection (n.) Online Etymology Dictionary <https://www.etymonline.com/word/reflection> (accessed on 31/01/18). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Laksmnajoo Academy. 5 states of the subjective *body.http://www.lakshmanjooacademy.org/5-*

   *subjective-states-in-kashmir-shaivism-part-1*/(accessed, 23/06/2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Merleau-Ponty refers to Piaget who mentions that when a child reaches the age of 12, he achieves the cogito and thus develops a proper rationalist thought. At this stage, it has been observed that he differentiates his point of view from that of others and constructs an objective judgment. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ‘fulfillment’ (Cambridge online dictionary) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. ‘fulfillment’ (Cambridge online dictionary) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *L'Oeil et l'esprit,* pp. 31-32. (trans. P.Berndston) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)