



The anonymous temporality of animal life: Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze on the passive syntheses of the organic

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Abstract

I argue that Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze both offer accounts of passivity capable of paving the way for a philosophy of time constitution operating outside the structure of human consciousness. Taking, as a point of departure, the fundamental role that temporalization plays in phenomenology as the universal grounding of givenness, I argue that both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze offer similar and complementary accounts of “lower levels” of time constitution: they both think through the articulation of a non-anthropomorphic “here and now” that precedes the articulation of a fully-fledged consciousness. I then argue that this passive time constitution, which precedes any human faculty of thought, is *de facto* open, beyond the “here and now,” to multiple degrees of virtual memory or “pure past.” Such considerations subvert and complexify the common views that equate the animal’s capacity of retention with its capacity to be open to a world. Finally, I suggest that these syntheses of temporalization are not teleologically oriented, that is, their deployment in organic systems of higher complexity is neither their culmination, nor their final stage. The organic syntheses can be made to resurface. For the human subject, this results in the disorganization of thought and the reshaping of sense-making faculties.

Keywords Phenomenology · Deleuze · Merleau-ponty · Time · Animality · Ontology · Passivity · Biology · Emergence · Semiotics · Habitus · Behavioral psychology · Transcendental philosophy

1 Introduction

Husserl’s account of temporality, partly systematized in his lectures on time-consciousness given around 1905–1910, inaugurated a set of new ontological and epistemological problems, as they revealed the irreducible interwovenness of time,

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