LiBRI. Linguistic and Literary Broad Research and Innovation
Volume 1, Issue 2, 2010

THE RELATION OF MERLEAU-PONTY AND BLANCHOT TO DERRIDA

Chung Chin-Yi
National University of Singapore

Abstract
In this paper I examine the negative phenomenologies of Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot. Negative phenomenologies repress difference as the transcendental and the empirical are repetitions of the same through iterability. I argue that a negative phenomenology or a reversal of phenomenology repeats it rather than managing to escape from it. This is because it still proceeds within its metaphysical vocabulary and ontological structure. Thus, Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot, in inverting and reversing phenomenology, only repeat it by borrowing entirely from its metaphysical vocabulary and structure. Derrida's phenomenology in place, is a meta-phenomenology in discovering the origin of phenomenology as difference, or the difference between philosophy and non-philosophy, transcendental and empirical. Derrida discovers the condition of possibility for phenomenology as quasi-transcendental, or the interval between the transcendental and empirical which conditions phenomenology in its entirety. The transcendental and empirical are paradoxically identical and non-identical because the difference translates into sameness.
Keywords: Merleau-Ponty, Blanchot, Derrida, Transcendental, Empirical

In this paper I will be examining the negative phenomenologies of Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot. I will argue that their reversals of phenomenology repeat its metaphysical structure rather than managing to escape from it. In place, Derrida discovers the quasi-transcendental, or that which is neither transcendental nor empirical but the interval between these, as the condition of possibility for phenomenology. Derrida thus inscribes phenomenology in a more powerful form through discovering the quasi-transcendental as its condition of possibility as the quasi-transcendental upholds the possibility of the transcendental-empirical distinction as well as the impossibility of their separation. Merleau-Ponty occupies a mid-point between idealism and empiricism, emphasizing instead the intertwining of mind and body as he believes perception is embodied – there is no perception that does not interact sensually with the body. Merleau-Ponty highlights this condition in *Phenomenology of Perception* by using instances of unusual perception by those afflicted by war injuries or pathologies. These instances of distorted perception highlight the inextricably sensual nature of

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

perception- perception depends on bodily conditions and if these are subject to some sort of affliction- as in the case of Schneider and schizophrenics, perception also is affected by these bodily or psychiatric afflictions.

1. The relation of Merleau-Ponty to Derrida

However, Merleau-Ponty is to be distinguished from Derrida in that his phenomenology is a phenomenology of embodiment and explores the intertwining of mind and body rather than transcendental-empirical mediation. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is interested in the embodied and situated character of perception and experience, while Derrida is interested in the meta-conditions that enable metaphysical production in phenomenology. While Merleau-Ponty's *ecart* bears some resemblance to Derrida's *difference* as these are the points of interaction between transcendental and empirical, mind and body, it is to be distinguished as Merleau-Ponty is more interested in the intersection of mind and body and the interaction between them, rather than the phenomenon of repetition Derrida is interested in that enables metaphysical production. Derrida argues that all presentation is representation, while Merleau-Ponty is interested in the intertwining of mind and body and the interaction between them rather than the meta-conditions that enable phenomenology.

Merleau-Ponty uses numerous examples of disturbed perception in those suffering from physical and mental afflictions to demonstrate that perception is inextricable from physical, physiognomic conditions. One instance of this is phantom limbs or those who continue to feel the presence of limbs that have been amputated. This example would illustrate the inadequacies of empiricism as the phenomenon of phantom limbs demonstrate that psychology and memory is a factor in the experience of sensation, thus showing us the intertwining of mind and body. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 98-99) Merleau-Ponty argues that the relation between mind and body is not one of causality but an existential relation which intertwines mind and body situated as being in the world. The phantom limb is an existential condition of being afflicted by the memory and emotion of the lost limb, thus bringing about the bodily sensation of the lost limb, demonstrating the inextricable interaction between mind and body. Therefore Merleau- Ponty shows us that perception is an existential condition of being-in- the-world and that mind and body interact in significant ways to produce the sensation of a lost limb through recollection and memory. Merleau-Ponty further discusses the disturbances of perception in a wounded soldier Schneider whose vision, mental-processing functions, and sexual function have been impaired due to a bullet injury at the back of his head. Reading from Merleau-Ponty:

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

> We notice that Schneider's motor disturbances are associated with large scale deficiency of knowledge gained by visual means. We are therefore tempted to regard psychological blindness as a distinctive variety of pure tactile behaviour, and since consciousness of bodily space and abstract movement, which has potential space in view, are almost totally absent, we are inclined to conclude that the sense of touch alone give us no experience of objective space. We shall then say that touch by itself is not of a kind to provide a background to movement, that is to say, to set out in form of the moving subject his departure and arrival points in strict simultaneity. The patient tries to provide for himself a "kinaesthetic background" by means of precatory movements, and he is successful in this "marking" the position of his body at the outset and in launching into the movement, yet this kinesthetic background is precarious, and could not possibly equal the visual background in constantly relating motion to its points of departure and arrival throughout the movement's duration. It is thrown out of gear by the movement itself and needs to be restored after each phase of the movement. That is why, as we might put it, Schneider's abstract movements have lost their melodic flow, why they are made up fragments, placed end to end, and why they often "run off the rails" on that way. The practical field which Schneider lacks is no other than the visual field. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 133-134)

Merleau-Ponty notes that because of Schneider's visual impairment, Schneider has lost his sense of space and his abstract movements have lost their flow. Touch alone is insufficient to give Scheider a sense of objective space. Here we note that due to the physical impairment of Schneider- his lost of sight, perception is affected- he has lost his sense of objective space which results in awkward movements which have lost their melodic flow. Perception is thus inextricably linked with the condition of the body, and where sight is impaired other senses of perception such as objective space are impaired as well. Reading further on Schneider:

> The relationship between matter and form is called in phenomenological terminology a relationship of *Fundierung*: the symbolic function rests on the visual as a ground; not that vision is its cause, but because it is that gift of nature which Mind was called upon to make use of beyond all hope, to which it was to give a fundamentally new meaning, yet which was needed, not only to incarnate, but in order to be at all. Form integrates within itself the content until the latter finally appears as a mere mode of form itself, and the historical stages leading up to thought as a ruse of Reason disguised as Nature. But conversely, even in its intellectual

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

> sublimation, content remains in the nature of a radical contingency, the initial establishment or foundation of knowledge and action, the first laying hold of being or value, whose concrete richness will never be finally exhausted by knowledge and action, and whose spontaneous method they will ceaselessly apply. The dialectic of form and content is what we have to restore, or rather, since "reciprocal action" is as yet only a compromise with casual thought, and a contradictory principle, we have to describe the circumstances under which this contradiction is conceivable, which means existence, the perceptual re-ordering of fact and hazard by a reason non-existent before and without those circumstances. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:145-147)

Again Merleau-Ponty highlights the relation between matter and form as being one of interaction and reciprocal action rather than causality as traditional transcendental phenomenologies would have had it. Form is intertwined with content and inseparable from it, just as mind is nothing outside body. It remains however a contingent relation, a foundation of knowledge and action which will never be exhausted by knowledge and action. Form is inextricable and inseparable from content, involved in a reciprocal relation, as mind is intertwined with body. Derrida however would not suggest the intertwinement or inextricability of mind and body in order to collapse it into a corporeality or a radical empiricism like Merleau-Ponty but emphasize that the transcendental and empirical are separated by nothing, or difference. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on intertwining and corporeality is a collapse into empirical idealism when Derrida demonstrates that such an empirical idealism is no different from transcendental idealism, as the transcendental is nothing outside the empirical and nothing separates the transcendental and empirical. Transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion. The transcendental and empirical are simultaneously identical and non-identical as their difference translates into a sameness or a non-distinction.

Schneider's impaired vision affects his perception of mental space and practical space, so the embodied nature of Schneider's perception causes his damaged vision to distort his perception of space as well. From this we see that perception is embodied and contingent upon the function and status of the body, mind and body interact to produce perception which is in Schneider's case distorted because of his afflicted vision. Reading further on Schneider:

> If we want to observe what underlies the 'symbolic function' itself, we must first of all realize that even intelligence is not reconcilable with intellectualism. What impairs thought in Schneider's case is not that he is incapable of perceiving concrete data as specimens of a

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

> unique eidos, or of subsuming them under some category, but on the contrary, that he can relate them only by quite explicit subsumption. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:147-148)

Merleau-Ponty argues against intellectualist accounts of perception as well as in the above example by arguing that living thought does not exist in subsuming under categories as Schneider is unable to apprehend the analogy between them as sense organs until he relates it to language. In this case the senses do not categorize according to the object's function as the intellectualist account of perception would have it, Schneider's damaged cognition makes him unable to draw an analogy between eye and ear until he relates it not through sense and perception or judgement but through the processes of language. Hence as we have seen above in earlier examples, Merleau-Ponty finds both intellectualist and empiricist accounts of knowledge inadequate as perception is rather the intertwining and interaction of mind and body, in this case the mediating capacity for language, which enables perception rather than solely either intellectualist or empiricist accounts of knowledge. Merleau-Ponty elaborates further on Schneider's deficiencies. Merleau-Ponty documents the range of Schneider's disturbances in perception as a result of his injury- he is blind to numbers or does not understand their significance, only performing counting and sums as rituals and habit that have no meaning to him. He is sexually dysfunctional. He only goes out on the spur of habit and errand rather than any intentional desire. He is incapable of forming political or religious views. He has to will his body to move and plan his speeches in advance. He cannot act or imagine a situation outside reality and thus is 'tied' to reality. The "intentional arc" which brings together the unity of the senses and intelligence, or sensibility and motility, has gone limp in illness as Schneider's sensual- intellectual processing is disturbed, for instance he no longer has any sense of time. All the above demonstrate that mind is inextricably linked to body and hence when one suffers from a physical or physiognomic affliction such as Schneider's, there will be disturbances in sense perception as well. Perception is embodied as Schneider's case all too painfully illustrates.

Merleau-Ponty highlights the intertwining of mind and body and their inextricability, and hence emphasizes corporeal situatedness of mind in body. However this corporeal situatedness translates into empiricism which does not differ from idealism upon close examination, as the transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on corporeality and situated modes of knowing commits phenomenology to an empirical basis, which suppresses aporia and difference. This is because the transcendental is nothing outside the empirical, just as the empirical is just the repeated trace of the transcendental. Nothing separates the transcendental

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

and empirical as transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion. The difference between the transcendental and empirical translates into a paradoxical sameness as the transcendental and empirical are simultaneously identical and non-identical, similar and different. The quasi-transcendental inscribes this opposition as a simultaneous sameness because nothing separates the transcendental and empirical. The quasi-transcendental is both the grounds of possibility and impossibility of the distinction between the transcendental and empirical, lending to phenomenology an aspect of heterogeneity and undecidability, because truth translates as aporia and that which is neither transcendental nor empirical. This is the quasi-transcendental, the limit, spacing and trace between the transcendental and empirical which allows the thinking of both and allows metaphysics to function. It is the quasi-transcendental or the written mark, functioning as if it was transcendental, which enables metaphysics as it is the conditionality of transcendental-empirical differentiation as well as the condition of impossibility for designating an exclusive sphere of idealism or expressive signs, or empirical signs in converse. The quasi-transcendental relates the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity and non-identity. The necessity for the quasi-transcendental to distinguish the transcendental and empirical makes it impossible to separate transcendental and empirical as each separation depends on the other term for the distinction to be upheld. If there were no transcendental, then it would be impossible to distinguish, as Merleau-Ponty does, a pure empirical situatedness and idealism from it. The transcendental thus inhabits the empirical even as it is separated from it through the written mark or quasi-transcendental. Merleau-Ponty thus requires the transcendental to exclude it from his corporeality and radical empiricism. Empirical only exists in relation to transcendental through iterability and difference. Merleau-Ponty thus needs to acknowledge the quasi-transcendental as a condition of possibility for his phenomenology to inscribe it more powerfully. Merleau-Ponty excludes from his phenomenology that which is necessary to thinking it as the transcendental needs to exist in order for the distinction between the empirical to be upheld. Thus Merleau-Ponty needs to acknowledge that his empirical does not exist outside its relation to the transcendental through iterability and difference.

Merleau-Ponty, while emphasizing inextricability of mind and body, lapses into privileging corporeality and empirical situatedness of mind in body. Such a move suppresses the quasi-transcendental and iterability as the true condition of possibility of metaphysics. As transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion, an empirical idealism like Merleau-Ponty's repeats rather than diverges from metaphysics. Transcendental and empirical are repetitions, rather than antithetical to each other. The transcendental and

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

empirical only exist in relation to each other through difference and iterability. The quasi-transcendental, which is the limit, spacing and trace which upholds metaphysics and allows metaphysics to function, is the true condition of metaphysics as the transcendental has to exist only in and through the empirical. An empirical idealism like Merleau-Ponty's thus suppresses aporia and difference, and fails to acknowledge that it borrows entirely from the ontological structure and vocabulary of metaphysics, hence repeating metaphysics rather than truly departing or diverging from it.

So, Merleau-Ponty, in emphasizing corporeality and embodiment, lapses into empiricism, which is essentially the same as idealism as the difference between the transcendental and empirical translates into a non-difference or sameness. The empirical is not conceivable outside the dynamic relation of iterability and difference which relates the transcendental and empirical. Truth is not to be situated as either transcendental or empirical, because such a move suppresses aporia and difference. Truth translates rather as that which is neither transcendental nor empirical, or the quasi-transcendental, the limit, spacing and trace which allows the thinking of both.

The empirical idealism of Merleau-Ponty thus reinscribes metaphysics by instituting a distinction which collapses through the movement of the trace and difference, which designates the a priori distinction between the transcendental and empirical as a repetition of the same. The transcendental does not exist outside the empirical, just as the empirical is the repeated trace of the transcendental through iterability. Merleau-Ponty does not differ from Husserl as transcendental and empirical are repetitions of the same through iterability. Derrida thus democratizes phenomenology in showing that Merleau-Ponty does not differ essentially from Husserl despite seeking to reverse phenomenology.

In this section I have examined Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment. Merleau-Ponty argues that mind and body are intertwined and interact to produce sensation and critiques the limitations of both intellectualist and empiricist modes of knowledge. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is a function of one's existential being in the world and one's embodied state. This shift towards an emphasis on corporeality and being-in-the-world Derrida would find a form of non-philosophy in its emphasis on body and intersubjectivity in place of being and thus, as argued earlier, a repetition rather than a reversal of metaphysics and philosophy. Derrida locates the condition of phenomenology and philosophy as the quasi-transcendental or the difference between philosophy and non-philosophy, thus performing meta-phenomenology rather than inverting or negating phenomenology as Levinas, Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty do. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on corporeality marks his philosophy as a radical

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

empiricism or non-philosophy, while Derrida would take pains to suggest radical empiricism is essentially the same as transcendental idealism, and the difference between them is nothing. This is because the transcendental exists only through the empirical in the dynamic relation of iterability, the transcendental is nothing outside the empirical, just as the empirical is the repeated trace of the transcendental and does not exist outside of it. As transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion, truth is neither transcendental nor empirical, but quasi-transcendental, the spacing between the transcendental and empirical which enables the thinking of both. The impossibility of the distinction between Merleau-Ponty's corporeal phenomenology and Husserl's transcendental idealism is its own possibility as transcendental and empirical are the same, separated by a difference which is not a difference, difference. The aporia between the transcendental and empirical enables the thinking of both as difference and iterability determine the distinction between the transcendental and empirical as a non-distinction. In place of a negative phenomenology for Merleau-Ponty, Derrida thus performs a meta-phenomenology in discovering the conditions of possibility for phenomenology to be difference, the quasi-transcendental and iterability. Derrida thus inscribes phenomenology more powerfully as it is made reflexive of its own conditions of possibility that enable its production and functioning.

2. Blanchot's phenomenology of suffering in *Writing of the Disaster*

Blanchot was an enigmatic and influential French literary theorist whose friendship with Emanuel Levinas decisively influenced Blanchot's notion of suffering and trauma, particularly post-war trauma following the Holocaust captured in Blanchot's *Writing of the Disaster*. Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* is an endless conversation with Levinas in which the philosopher's terms of art (for example "responsibility") are inscribed in writing as though from an unknown language which we speak counter to our heart and to life, unjustifiably. (Blanchot, 1995:47) Levinas defines responsibility as responsibility for the Other, which Blanchot takes up as an encumberment and a weighty burden considering the demands the Other exerts on the self, particularly considering the relation of assymetrical power and suffering at the hands of the dominating Nazis. Like Levinas, Blanchot's concern with Otherness and alterity derives from a Jewish idiom. Though Blanchot reverses Levinas' notion of responsibility as encumberment, defining the self as 'hostage' in relation to the Other, the concern is the same: a Jewish reaction to the horror of the holocaust and an ethics that is elaborated in a Jewish idiom as a reaction to the Other as hostile and murderous. Blanchot's concern with "the disaster" derives wholly from the horrors of Jewish torture at the hands of the Nazis during the holocaust.

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

In *Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot describes the worker's position as one of subjection and passivity, and total subsumption in the role, of total oppression and control by the Other. One is made hostage to the Other, who dominates, alienates, and effaces one's subjectivity, crushing the self out of existence. In his dialogue with Levinas, Blanchot posits that the very act of predicating Self and Other involves a certain violence in reducing the Other to an aspect of the Same and that the relationship between Self and Other is one of a constant struggle for supremacy and power, with the Other holding one hostage. Blanchot's theory of resistance to this Other who encumbers and enslaves is the call to active resistance:

> " I must answer for the persecution that opens me to the longest patience and which is in me the anonymous passion, not only by taking it upon myself, regardless of my own consent; I must also answer it with refusal, resistance and combat. I must come back to knowledge, I must return (if possible -- for it may be that there is no return) to the I that knows and knows it is exposed, not to the Other but to the adverse I, to egotistical Omnipotence, to murderous will" (Blanchot, 1995:20)

This is a transcendence of the dialectic of self and Other to enter the space of the neuter- the space outside language and this space exists in writing, or literature.

This resistance is a call for the active reclamation of free will and agency, a reclaiming back of the ego that has been demolished by the Other as it were. The Other crushes and effaces the self out of existence with his demands and the imposition on his will over the self's own, and in Blanchot's context is hostile because he imposes his asymmetrical relation of power upon one, trapping one in a master-slave dialectic.

According to Blanchot, rather than remaining a subject, one should overcome the role one is designated in the master-slave dialectic by refusing to be reduced to the role of the subservient, of acknowledging the irreducibility of bread as bread. In the relation of master and servant, bread becomes a symbol of the worker's need and the master's provision for the servant thus concretizing his relationship of mastery and power. By acknowledging the irreducibility of bread as bread, one transcends the master-servant relationship by refusing to recognize himself simply in the position of subject or worker, bread being an item that is not reducible to the worker's need, but free of the role designated by the dominator, this act of resistance by refusing to acknowledge one's role in the dialectic comes in the form of testimony and survival speech. Blanchot's response to the crushing self-alienation that results from one's responsibility to the Other is thus a call to the transcendence of one's role in the master-slave dialectic. The master

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

slave dialectic is the asymmetrical relation of bondage one finds oneself in when placed in a relationship of Levinisan responsibility to the Other, and it is transcended through escaping the language of the dominator in testimony and survival speech. In raising the Other to absolute however, Blanchot reverses and repeats metaphysics. The transcendental does not exist outside the empirical but in a dynamic relation of iterability or repetition with a difference. Blanchot's raising of Other to absolute repeats metaphysics, as elevating the Other over the Same reinscribes metaphysical distinctions, when no distinction actually exists as the transcendental and empirical are essentially the same. The trace relates the transcendental and empirical in a difference which is not a difference but a sameness. Nothing separates the transcendental and empirical. Blanchot requires the exclusion of the self as absolute in order to establish the Other as absolute. Blanchot thus paradoxically requires the transcendental self which he expels from his philosophy to establish his empiricism and Other-directed philosophy. Truth is thus neither transcendental nor empirical, but quasi-transcendental as the empirical absolute of Blanchot cannot function without the transcendental which he needs to expel in order to establish his philosophy. The empirical idealism of Blanchot in his emphasis on Other as absolute can only exist in relation to the transcendental which he needs to exclude in order to establish his philosophy. The thinking of Blanchot's empirical thus paradoxically requires the thinking of the transcendental as its point of exclusion in order for the distinction to be upheld.

Disaster is all-consuming and overwhelms one like a blanket force. Disaster is an encounter in which one suffers trauma and is victimized, in Blanchot's context it is particularly acute in encountering the Other. The Disaster for Blanchot is the situation in which one is relegated to a position of passivity and victimization in encountering the Other. Disaster effaces subjectivity and leads one to suffer in the Oppression of the other. Blanchot's account of suffering is demonstrated through his readings of the disaster and suffering of the afflicted in the aftermath. Active forgetting is the conscious effort made to expel traumatic experience from memory, which one, according to Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, is doomed to repeat.

As Blanchot puts it:

> If forgetfulness precedes memory or perhaps founds it, it or has no connection with it at all, then to forget is not simply weakness, a failing, an absence or void (the starting point of recollection but a starting which, like an anticipatory shade, would obscure remembrance in its very possibility, restoring the memorable to its fragility and memory to the loss of memory. No, forgetfulness would be not emptiness, but neither negative nor positive: the passive demand that it neither welcomes nor withdraws the past, but,

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

> designating there what has never taken place (just as it indicates in the yet to come that which will never be able to find its place in any present, refers us to nonhistorical forms of time, to the other of all tenses, to their eternal or eternally provisional indecision, bereft of destiny, without presence (Blanchot, 1995:85)

Alterity is the space beyond experience that is brought about by forgetfulness; it is the step beyond experience in the effort to transcend suffering. "The disaster ruins everything," writes Blanchot. Disaster is a phantom that has destroyed and yet its marks of destruction are invisible, leaving suffering and trauma in its wake.

What should be observed here is that the disaster here cannot be considered apart from its writing. Disaster is only confronted through the act of memory when one inscribes it in writing. Writing delimits the event and brings it into consciousness as something to be worked through. Trauma is a missed event, and it is only in writing, as it were, that one confronts the disaster. Writing bears witness to the disaster, circumscribes it and delimits it to an place in memory to be worked through. It is a call to active forgetting, to consciously move beyond the disaster through working through it in writing. One could say then, that the only place left to the disaster, the only place it is to be "seen", would be the space of literature, the space of the imaginary. For Blanchot however, such an imaginary space is not deprived of reality but contains an excess of the real. Writing is a visceral experience in which, through the repetition of the event, its ultimate reality is confronted and worked through. Testimony occupies this space of literature, which is the step outside dominatory language. As we have previously seen in this work, Blanchot's acknowledgement of the irreducibility of bread as bread, one steps outside the language of the dominator in the act of testimony and survival speech, thus escaping the violence of dominatory language.

To transcend the disaster is to escape the language of the dominator through escaping the bounds of thought that exert the asymmetric power-relation of the dominator. Through testimony and survival speech, one escapes ordinary language into the space of literature and the space of writing, where the Other's power is transcended. One must note however from Derrida's viewpoint, that this overcoming of the Other, far from escaping the Other, is a repetition of it as the transcendental and empirical are the same time, nothing separates the transcendental and the empirical. Self and Other are the same, because the trace that relates Self to Other erases the difference between the two and institutes the difference between Self and Other as a difference which is paradoxically not a difference, but a sameness. Blanchot requires the expulsion of the absolute Self from his philosophy in order to establish it as an empiricism, hence Blanchot paradoxically lands his philosophy in an aporia by defining Other without Self as Other only exists

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

in relation to Self. Blanchot's empirical Other can only exist in relation to the transcendent Self, hence Blanchot needs to acknowledge the quasi-transcendental, which enables transcendental empirical distinction and the impossibility of their separation as the transcendental is simultaneously the empirical. Blanchot's empiricism can only stand as a distinction upheld by excluding the transcendental, hence it requires that which his philosophy negates paradoxically.

Blanchot writes of the Other:

> In the relation of myself to the Other, the Other exceeds my grasp, The Other, the Separate, the Most-High which escapes my power- the powerless, therefore; the stranger, dispossessed. But, in the relation of the Other to me, everything seems to reverse itself the distant becomes the close-by, this proximity becomes the obsession that afflicts me, that weighs fown upon me, that separates me from myself- as if separation (which measured the transcendence from me to the Other)- did its work within me, dis-identifying me, abandoning me to passivity, leaving me without any initiative and bereft of the present. And then, the other becomes rather the Overlord, indeed the Persecutor, he who overwhelms, encumbers, undoes me, he who puts me in his debt no less than he attacks me by making me answer for his crumes, by charging me with measureless responsibility which cannot be mine since it extends all the way to 'substitution," So it is that, from this point of view, the relation of the Other to me would tend to appear as sadomasochistic, if it did not cause us to fall prematurely out of the world- the one region where 'normal' and 'anomaly' have meaning. (Blanchot, 1995:19)

In the above passage Blanchot raises the Other to absolute, as the persecutor and oppressor of the self which leaves the self encumbered, overwhelmed and bereft of identity. In reversing the relation to self and Other and raising the Other as absolute however, Blanchot reinscribes metaphysics as a negative. The Other as absolute is no different from the self as absolute. Blanchot thus reinscribes phenomenology as the oppression of the Other as absolute, but does not manage to escape metaphysics as the Other is merely a substitute for the self as absolute, reversing the relation merely reinscribes metaphysics as a negative, which is no different from the positive. The Other as oppressor, overlord and persecutor thus inscribes metaphysics as a negative rather than managing to overcome metaphysics as the Other is inscribed as absolute in place of the self. Blanchot's radical empiricism is no different from transcendental idealism as transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion. Blanchot inverts metaphysics only to repeat it. Radical empiricism, or an Other-directed phenomenology, does not differ essentially from transcendental idealism, as transcendental-empirical difference is an

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

illusion. The transcendental is nothing outside the empirical, just as the empirical is but the repeated trace of the transcendental. Transcendental and empirical only exist in relation to each other in difference and iterability. Hence, an inversion of metaphysics does not escape it as it borrows entirely from its ontological structure and vocabulary. Blanchot's Other-directed phenomenology inscribes metaphysics as a negative, which is no different from the positive since transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion. It is the quasi-transcendental or the written mark, functioning as if it was transcendental, which enables metaphysics as it is the conditionality of transcendental-empirical differentiation as well as the condition of impossibility for designating an exclusive sphere of idealism or expressive signs, or empirical signs in converse. The quasi-transcendental relates the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity and non-identity. The necessity for the quasi-transcendental to distinguish the transcendental and empirical makes it impossible to separate transcendental and empirical as each separation depends on the other term for the distinction to be upheld. If there were no transcendental, then it would be impossible to distinguish, as Blanchot does, a pure empirical idealism from it. The transcendental thus inhabits the empirical even as it is separated from it through the written mark or quasi-transcendental. Blanchot requires the transcendental and absolute self to distinguish it from his radical empiricism and emphasis on Other-directed phenomenology. Empirical only exists in relation to transcendental through iterability and difference. Blanchot thus paradoxically excludes that which is necessary to thinking his phenomenology as his empiricism can only exist in relation to the transcendental through iterability and difference.

Blanchot's phenomenology thus builds largely on Levinas' but is more concerned with a theory of suffering at the hands of the Other who takes one hostage and is an encumberment to one in terms of the responsibility the Other demands on one. Blanchot's neuter is to be distinguished from Derrida's quasi-transcendental in that Blanchot's neuter is a space of moral ambivalence, while Derrida's quasi-transcendental is the enabling condition of metaphysics as difference. Blanchot is thus more concerned with morality and an ethics of responsibility, not unlike Levinas, while Derrida is concerned with a meta-phenomenology and the conditions of possibility of phenomenology. Difference, or nothing, separates the transcendental and the empirical. As argued previously, the transcendental is nothing outside the empirical as repetitions of the same, or iterability. Self cannot exist without a relation to Other just as the Other exists only in relation to self, Blanchot's raising of the Other to absolute in his phenomenology is but a reversal of metaphysics which repeats it rather than escaping it. Blanchot's inversion of the self-Other relation in which the Other

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

is raised to an absolute totality repeats metaphysics by merely inverting its structure. Blanchot's radicical empiricism of Other as absolute repeats metaphysics as the transcendental and empirical are the same through iterability, nothing separates the transcendental and empirical, hence Blanchot reverses metaphysics only to repeat it. The impossibility of the distinction between the transcendental and empicial is its site of possibility, as Blanchot's empirical Otherness is no different from Husserl's transcendental idealism as difference between transcendental and empirical separates nothing. A reversal of metaphysics repeats it and hence affirms metaphysics.

3. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the negative phenomenologies of Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot. Negative phenomenologies repress difference as the transcendental and the empirical are repetitions of the same through iterability. I would argue that a negative phenomenology or a reversal of phenomenology repeats it rather than managing to escape it. This is because it still proceeds within its metaphysical vocabulary and ontological structure. Thus, Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot, in inverting and reversing phenomenology, only repeat it by borrowing entirely from its metaphysical vocabulary and structure. Derrida's phenomenology in place, is a meta-phenomenology in discovering the origin of phenomenology as difference, or the difference between philosophy and non-philosophy, transcendental and empirical. Derrida discovers the condition of possibility for phenomenology as the quasi-transcendental, or the interval between the transcendental and empirical which conditions phenomenology in its entirety. The transcendental and empirical are paradoxically identical and non-identical because the difference translates into sameness. The trace, which distinguishes the transcendental and empirical, translates into a difference which is paradoxically not a difference but a sameness. As this paper has argued, the transcendental and empirical distinction is an illusion. The impossibility of the distinction between the transcendental and empirical is its own possibility as transcendental and empirical are the same. It is the aporia between the transcendental and empirical which enables the thinking of both as transcendental is nothing outside the empirical through difference and iterability. The empirical idealisms of Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot thus reinscribe metaphysics by instituting a distinction which collapses through the movement of the trace and difference, which designates a priori distinction between the transcendental and empirical as a repetition of the same. The transcendental does not exist outside the empirical, just as the empirical is the repeated trace of the transcendental through iterability. Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot thus do not differ from Husserl as

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)

transcendental and empirical are repetitions of the same through iterability. Derrida thus democratizes phenomenology in showing that Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot do not differ essentially from Husserl despite seeking to reverse phenomenology. It is the quasi-transcendental or the written mark, functioning as if it was transcendental, which enables metaphysics as it is the conditionality of transcendental-empirical differentiation as well as the condition of impossibility for designating an exclusive sphrere of idealism or expressive signs, or empirical signs in converse. The quasi-transcendental relates the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity and non-identity. The necessity for the quasi-transcendental to distinguish the transcendental and empirical makes it impossible to separate transcendental and empirical as each separation depends on the other term for the distinction to be upheld. If there were no transcendental, then it would be impossible to distinguish, as Blanchot and Merleau-Ponty do, a pure empirical situatedness and idealism from it. The transcendental thus inhabits the empirical even as it is separated from it through the written mark or quasi-transcendental. Transcendental and empirical exist only in and through each other through a dynamic relation of iterability, repetition with a difference and difference. Merleau-Ponty and Blanchot require the transcendental to exclude it from their radical empiricisms. They thus need to acknowledge that their empiricisms can only exist in relation to the transcendental that they need to exclude from their philosophies in order to define their empiricisms. Truth is then localizable to neither transcendental nor empirical as these exist only in dynamic relation to each other through difference and iterability, but is situated in the paradoxical space between as quasi-transcendental, the limit between the transcendental and empirical that allows the thinking of both. Derrida thus inscribes phenomenology in a more powerful form through his discovery of the quasi-transcendental as its condition of possibility as it would be impossible to distinguish the transcendental and empirical without it and phenomenology would not function without the quasi-transcendental as the transcendental is simultaneously the empirical, coming into being only through iterability. Derrida thus brings phenomenology to terms with its own condition of possibility through his positing of the quasi-transcendental.

References

Blanchot, Maurice. 1995. *The Writing of the Disaster*. University of Nebraska Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. **1962**. *Phenomenology of perception*. Translated from the French by Colin Smith. London , Routledge & K. Paul ; New York: The Humanities Press.

BDD-A28885 © 2010 EduSoft Publishing
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.115 (2026-11-16 22:10:27 UTC)