



Citation: Inishev, I., (2026). Postponing Identities: Slowed Perception, Layered Embodiment, and Lateral Politics. *Aisthesis* 21(5): 203-221. doi: 10.7413/2035-8466087

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Postponing Identities: Slowed Perception, Layered Embodiment, and Lateral Politics

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Abstract. This article examines how non-divisive identities are enacted through perceptual slowness, understood as a multilayered, embodied structural trait that counters the immediacy and frontality characteristic of contemporary perceptual and communicative regimes. It explores how different instances of slowed perception reshape processes of identification by foregrounding affectability, layered embodiment, and lateral relations that both precede and exceed symbolic or intentional mediation. Drawing on critical phenomenology, contemporary accounts of material and visual inflection, enactivist aesthetics, and recent theories of socially engaged perception and ambient rhetoric, I argue that hesitation, inflection, and viscosity exemplify perceptual attitudes that suspend reactive and potentially destructive behaviors – including certain forms of socio-political critique – and instead open indirect, compositional modes of relation. These attitudes postpone identification, expanding the experiential field and thereby resisting racializing perceptual forms and normative recognition while cultivating spaces of non-frontal engagement. I conceptualize these modes as a form of lateral aesthetics and politics: indirect, embodied, and purposefully affective strategies of counter-discrimination that unfold through delay, dwelling, and practices of apparent passivity, creating more plural and breathable spaces of identification.

Keywords. Perceptual slowness, layered embodiment, lateral politics, affectability, counter-discrimination.

1. Introduction

In this article, I discuss the social and political role of sensory experience in shaping, resisting, and ultimately transforming processes of identification. I propose understanding identification as a form of perceptual experience rather than as a predominantly – or even exclusively – logical or linguistic operation. Moreover, this notion of identification is not entirely homologous with the psychoanalytic one, since psychoanalysis conceives identification as part of unconscious processes and thus cannot be considered an experiential phenomenon. In this sense, perceptual identification occupies an intermediate level: a domain in relation to which the logical-linguistic and the primary unconscious orders constitute the upper and lower strata, respectively.

What makes this middle level particularly compelling is its belonging to the sphere of everyday experience. Identification is something we all do explicitly and regularly: looking at something or someone, judging critically or approvingly, discerning differences, including or excluding, breaking, using, touching, and cherishing. Identification of this kind is embedded in most of our actions, whether in reality, thought, or fantasy. These middle-level identifications continuously produce identities which – so is my thesis – inevitably possess a socio-political dimension¹.

Predominantly, identity appears as an over-semiotized symbolic form or an amalgamation of such forms, as in the case of so-called personal identity. Understood in this way, identity correlates with a particular mode of experience that I would have described as rapid, reactive, and low-resolution perception. This perceptual mode has its own temporal regime and spatial organization. Its most characteristic and socially consequential feature is momentary reactivity – a sliding along pre-determined trajectories outlined by what we might call the symbolic. The far-reaching social consequence of this condition is a contraction – or even suspension – of the actor's experiential field in favor of momentary satisfactions that are simultaneously libidinal and cognitive. In other words, every

- 1 Martin Seel's *aesthetics of appearing* is one of the most consistent, elaborated, and convincing attempts to articulate the special role played by aesthetic experience – an experience endowed with a privileged, if not exceptional, access to the singular experiential fields of the phenomenal world. The latter is construed as a middle-level reality situated between the world of physical matter and causality and that of thought and fantasy (Seel [2005]). Seel understands the *aesthetic* not as something related to the realm of art – that is, not in terms of a specific “content” – but as an experiential attitude that discloses everydayness as a semi-autonomous form of reality: at once exclusive and highly trivial. It belongs to the specific temporal texture of elementary, sensuous forms of life and nevertheless remains largely covered over by propositional knowledge. In this sense, his account anticipates the notion of slowed perception developed in this article: aesthetic appearing unfolds through delay, dwelling, and non-instrumental attention, disclosing the world laterally rather than frontally, as a field of coexistence rather than an object of recognition.

identification-of is at the same time – though to varying degrees depending on the context – an identification-with. Hence a further social consequence arises, one that affects not only the object of identification – what or who is perceptually identified – but also its subject. The damage, in this sense, is bilateral.

Importantly, this experiential mode, which somewhat paradoxically downplays its own experiential nature, characterizes both the production of entrenched identities – such as those created by the racializing gaze and reinforced by populist political discourse – and the forms of social criticism aimed at overcoming them. To put it more pointedly, the critical stance itself – inasmuch as it relies heavily on processes of identification – may inadvertently reproduce some of the very discriminatory effects it seeks to contest.

Additionally, this tendency – the tacit reinforcement of discriminatory policies by the perceptual attitude itself – is intensified by contemporary media environments, particularly platform and generative media. These systems demand and promote immediacy², reactivity, and frontality through algorithms specifically designed to sustain users' engagement. As a result, regardless of their political motivation – whether emancipatory or reactionary – social actors risk becoming trapped in recurrent cycles of epistemological, psychological, and political oppression.

My aim is to propose an alternative mode of perception – *slowed perception* – characterized by high-resolution, lived temporality and layered embodiment, and to explore how it enables a form of lateral politics that perpetually performs what I call postponed identities. Slowed perception entails a shift from momentary reaction to attentive delay, from pinpointing recognition to receptive openness. It introduces a pervasive rhythm of experience that resists the compression of perception – and of the experiential field as a whole – imposed by contemporary media and political acceleration. Rather than offering a direct counter-image to speed, it reconfigures the relation between sensing, thinking, and acting, foregrounding hesitation and affectability as conditions for ethical and aesthetic engagement. Through this reorientation, perception itself becomes political: it opens indirect, non-frontal modes of relation capable of countering discrimination not by confrontation but through the cultivation of compositional, plural, and breathable spaces³.

2 Immediacy in this article is construed not as the absence of mediation but as a specific mode of mediality whose efficacy lies in its self-effacing operation. By functioning as a conduit – rather than a space – for perceptual attention and psychical energy, immediacy accelerates perception while rendering its own mediating role imperceptible.

3 The notion of slow, or high-definition, perception developed in this article is also influenced by the work of Tia DeNora. In *Making Sense of Reality: Culture and Perception in Everyday Life*, DeNora proposes a project of slow sociology whose primary aim is to explore «how our senses of reality take shape in daily life» (DeNora [2014]: 3). She understands *slow cognition* as a «form of attention to minutiae»: various perceptual micro-activities («artful practices»)

The argument unfolds in four parts. The first examines the link between perceptual frontality, reactivity, and discrimination, showing how fast experiential modes sustain both entrenched identities and forms of reactive critique. The second addresses long-term tendencies within a broader cultural transformation that I describe as the horizontalization of culture, in which hierarchical structures give way to immersive, surface-based forms of experience. The third turns to the notion of layered embodiment, analyzing how bodily and affective attunements – hesitation, inflection, and viscosity – constitute alternative modes of identification characterized by their unsurpassable performativity. The final part develops the implications of these perceptual attitudes as lateral aesthetics and politics, exploring how indirectness, care, and delay can ground an embodied counter-discrimination and an ethics of laterality.

2. Perception and culture: frontality, reactivity, discrimination

Beyond institutional and normative frameworks, every social configuration – and especially every concrete encounter – rests upon a perceptual regime: a tacit distribution of what can be seen, felt, and known, dependent on a dominant mode of perception (Rancière [2004]). In contemporary contexts, this regime is dominated by what may be called the frontal encounter: a perceptual and ethical structure that organizes experience around immediacy, exposure, and direct address. To perceive frontally is to face the world as a screen of already-legible appearances, as if relations must be uniformly available, explicit, and morally charged. Such frontality, though apparently spontaneous, is historically and technologically conditioned. It defines not only how the subject appears in the world but also how the world appears to the subject – flattened, intensified, and ready for reaction.

The epistemology of this encounter is one of contraction. Seeing becomes knowing, recognition becomes understanding, and affect becomes judgment. The interval that once separated perception from interpretation collapses into a single reflex. Reactivity replaces reflection; temporal depth is sacrificed to the instantaneity of moral response. Frontality thus sustains a specific ethics – one grounded in visibility and confrontation. It privileges the face-to-face and the verdict, preventing deviation from trajectories inscribed by the symbolic and

that lead to, or counteract, social phenomena which are politically and morally relevant at a level that allows them to be grasped conceptually. Unlike DeNora, however, I propose the notion of slow perception outside its primarily methodological use. For me, slow cognition designates a mode of experience that characterizes the very object of theoretical interest, not merely an epistemic access to it. In this sense, my concern is not only methodological but first and foremost theoretically and practically motivated.

displacing those slower, oblique relations or micro-performances that could allow for ambiguity or transformation. Experience becomes low-resolution: the world is apprehended not as a field of emerging relations but as a surface of categorical inscriptions.

The experiential field corresponding to fast, or low-resolution, perception is structured by a qualitative reduction of depth, density, and delay. *Resolution* here refers to the degree of differentiation that perception can sustain before collapsing into recognition or identification. In low-resolution perception, distinctions flatten: the world – both social and physical – is grasped through outlines and categories rather than through textures and transitions. Events unfold as instantaneous stimuli demanding immediate evaluative response. The interval between sensation and interpretation – the space in which reflection or empathy might arise – is eroded. Time becomes a plane where impressions succeed one another without accumulation; the present loses its thickness, turning into a chain of discrete moments. The subject of fast experience does not inhabit time but skims it, driven by the imperative to remain updated, responsive, and visible.

Spatially, frontality privileges what faces the observer and marginalizes what appears obliquely or peripherally. The world is rendered as a screen, and relation is reduced to positioning. Such a geometry produces the subject as an eye meeting the world head-on rather than as a body situated within it. This configuration carries ethical weight: to perceive frontally is to confront, to evaluate, to judge. In this sense, the perceptual field is already moralized before any explicit judgment occurs.

Fast, low-resolution experience also depends on narrow, focused attention. The dominant senses are the distal ones – vision and hearing – while the proximal ones, such as touch or kinaesthetic awareness, are marginalized. Perception thus becomes observation: the world turns into a picture to be decoded rather than a milieu to be co-experienced⁴. This disembodied orientation entails a straightening of the perceptual trajectory. Instead of bending toward or being drawn into its object, perception moves linearly – from identification to judgment, from sign to meaning, from stimulus to conclusion. The perceptual act mirrors the logic of the statement: it aims at closure. This directional bias

4 It is important, at least, to mention the – still indirect – influence that contemporary philosophical and psychological theories of perception exert on the problematics of the social and cultural sciences. For example, the ecological approach to vision (Gibson [2014]) and enactivism (Noë [2012]) suggest an understanding of visual perception as multi-directed, dynamic, embodied, and embedded in material and social ecologies. In these theoretical models, «meaning» is not the sediment of an act of identification but a continuous enactment – a practically motivated «style of access» to the surrounding world. However, this highly differentiated micro-practical dimension of perceptual experience, uncovered by contemporary theories of perception, largely remains an undercurrent: an unconscious base or background of everyday experience, rather than a praxis to be performed or an attitude to be assumed.

supports the over-semiotization of experience, whereby meaning congeals into a petrified form, replacing mediation, and the world appears as a repository of pre-given signs, enveloped in a kind of «information-skin» (Marks [2024]: 101). The straight line of perception enforces an economy of visibility that excludes ambiguity, depth, and delay⁵.

Finally, this experiential configuration entails a distinctive affective economy. Acceleration, channeled by symbolically preformed environments, produces alternating waves of arousal and fatigue, fascination and indifference. Emotional intensity substitutes for genuine resonance; affect becomes a cue for orientation rather than a space of relation. The ethical danger lies not only in the loss of sensitivity but also in the automation of response. Fast perception privileges the reflex – *like, share, condemn* – over the slower movements through which responsibility might develop.

Together, these traits form the phenomenological infrastructure of contemporary discrimination. Perception becomes pre-formatted for judgment; difference appears primarily as contrast or threat. The injustice that follows is not only epistemic but also perceptual – it determines who or what can appear as a subject of experience. While Miranda Fricker has shown (Fricker [2007]) that epistemic injustice originates prior to discourse, I propose to complement her thesis with the corollary that the modalities of perception, in turn, pre-shape the very possibility of knowledge.

Contemporary media environments amplify this configuration by demanding permanent visibility and immediate responsiveness. The algorithmic rhythms of platform and generative media synchronize attention and affect, keeping subjects in a state of reactivity. Whether the response takes the form of outrage or empathy, it remains bound to the same economy of reactivity. The ethics of visibility thus merges with the politics of distraction⁶.

To interrupt this configuration requires not another frontal opposition but a shift in perceptual choreography, including its vector and tempo – a reorientation that restores experience as a non-transitory space of dwelling, as the deliberate cultivation of an interval in which the world might again be encountered obliquely or laterally rather than being enforced frontally.

5 «When I am interpellated by an interface, on my computer, my phone, a recipe book, and so forth, informational interfaces predesign my experience, in ways that are sometimes just convenient, sometimes make me dull and numb, sometimes actively misinform me and steal my perception, knowledge, and time» (Marks [2024]: 101).

6 In addition to their capacity to hold attention captive, contemporary media interfere with bodily and affective reactions by anticipating them or feeding them forward (Angerer [2017]; Hansen [2015]). Yet even under these qualitatively new media-historical conditions, slowed perception remains fully attuned to affect, precisely because it operates through a withdrawal from symbolic preemption.

3. Horizontalization of culture: from content to experience

The shift from low-resolution perception to the possibility of slowed and lateral experience cannot be understood in purely perceptual terms. It is embedded in a broader cultural transformation unfolding since the mid-twentieth century – a transformation that may be described as the *horizontalization of culture*. This term designates the gradual erosion of symbolic hierarchies that once organized cultural production around oppositions such as high and low, form and matter, meaning and appearance. What replaces these vertical structures is neither chaos nor mere relativism, but a reconfiguration of cultural space into a continuum of practices, surfaces, and affects. The horizontal, in this sense, is not simply flat; it involves a dialectic of extensity and intensity – a mode of cultural distribution that privileges contact, simultaneity, and co-presence over representation and transcendence.

Already in Raymond Williams's notion of *structures of feeling*, culture appears less as a repository of values than as a living configuration of sensibilities – a «practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity» that precedes its own conceptual articulation while already being meaningful in itself (Williams [1977]: 132). Williams thus anticipates the performative turn in cultural theory: culture is understood as an ongoing mediation between the social and the perceptual, rather than as a system of meanings to be decoded. Similarly, Lawrence Alloway's proposal of a «long front of culture» rejects the pyramid of high art and mass culture in favor of a continuous field of aesthetic experience (Alloway [1959]). Alloway's *front* is not a leveling but a broadening – an expanded field in which artistic and everyday practices share the same perceptual and material conditions. Value, in this context, emerges not from symbolic distinction but from intensity and participation, from the specific ways in which things appear, affect, and engage.

Later developments render this transformation more explicitly visual and material. David Joselit's reflections on flatness describe how modern and postmodern art – culminating in networked image culture – abandons transcendence and embraces the surface as a site of connection. For Joselit, flatness is characterized by relational density rather than superficiality: the image understood as a plane that gathers heterogeneous elements without subordinating them to a single perspective. Similarly, Chiara Bottici's notion of the *imaginal* emphasizes culture as a space of shared, performative images – neither mere representations nor autonomous symbols, but mediating forms that generate relations (Bottici [2014]). What these accounts share is an understanding of culture as a field rather than a form: something that happens *in the between*, where perception, materiality, and imagination intertwine.

Andreas Reckwitz situates this condition between two dominant tendencies of late modernity: hyperculture and cultural essentialism (Reckwitz [2021]).

Hyperculture describes the proliferation and recombination of symbolic forms within a global economy of signs – an endless circulation of innovation and remix, in which meaning becomes fluid yet self-referential. Cultural essentialism, by contrast, seeks to restore stable identities and rooted traditions as a reaction to this volatility. Despite their opposition, both remain caught within the symbolic: one multiplies meanings, the other freezes them, yet neither escapes the logic of over-semiotization that structures culture as a realm of representations.

To complement – and, to some extent, overcome – this polarity, I propose a third formation: *hypoculture*. Whereas hyperculture operates through symbolic excess and cultural essentialism through symbolic restoration, hypoculture arises through attenuation – a loosening of representational density that allows material and affective dimensions to come forward. This attenuation does not entail loss but modulation: a relaxation of symbolic tightness that opens space for the sensuous, the unfinished, and the relational. In hypoculture, meaning no longer precedes experience but unfolds from it; culture becomes a horizontalized material–affective infrastructure that sustains such unfolding. It is no longer the source of meaning but a protective coating and enabling milieu for collective forms of sensing and doing – an envelope and optional resource rather than a normative horizon of the meaningful.

Far from signaling decline, this hypocultural turn provides the experiential ground for re-embodied perception and lateral politics. By downplaying the dominance of the symbolic and foregrounding the performative, horizontalization enables slower, plural, and layered forms of engagement – non-frontal, embodied practices of care and relation that unfold within shared experiential fields rather than above or beyond them. The horizontal field thus invites coexistence rather than confrontation, attunement rather than decoding. It creates the very milieu in which slowed perception can operate: a culture that no longer demands interpretation as mastery but allows hesitation, affectability, and dwelling to function as modes of understanding.

4. *Layered embodiment: affective and material attunements*

The trap of the symbolic – or of the frontal, or the normative – is extraordinarily strong. We cannot simply decree that experience must become slow, since any such imperative would already reproduce the logic of frontality: the logic of the symbolic itself. Every attempt to command slowness undermines it. The task, instead, is to trace how slowness occurs – to explore where and through which perceptual dispositions the continuous acceleration of low-resolution experience is interrupted. Slowing cannot be instituted as an activist stance or moral injunction (it would be a contradiction in terms); it arises as an event within perception

itself, as something that befalls rather than is willed. What must therefore be examined are the specific modes through which perception is slowed, displaced, or thickened. I focus on three such phenomena – hesitation, inflection, and viscosity – each exemplifying a distinct way in which the perceptual field folds back upon itself, reintroducing delay, mediality, and care into the act of sensing.

If the previous section described horizontalization as the cultural precondition for re-embodied experience, the present one turns to the corporeal micro-dynamics through which such re-embodiment takes shape. *Layered embodiment* denotes the stratification of affective, material, and cognitive processes that constitute perception as an event rather than a function. It figures the body not as a transparent medium of cognition but as a multilayered field of attunement, in which world and self co-constitute one another through tactile, rhythmic, and affective exchanges. Within this layered field, slowness is not inertia but differential mediation – the body's capacity to suspend momentary reactivity and open a space not yet striated by pre-ordered symbolic trajectories.

4.1. *Hesitation – The perceptual suspension*

Alia Al-Saji's project of a critical phenomenology of hesitation offers a compelling account of slowed experiential forms and their ethical and political implications (Al-Saji [2014]). In the vein of Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Ahmed [2014]), Al-Saji explores the meaning-making potential of affectively and temporally complex experiences – those that unfold through delay rather than immediacy. Hesitation, often coded in activist or frontal cultures as weakness or indecision, is rearticulated as a productive stance. Rather than merely postponing action, hesitation suspends habitual, reactive responses of body and consciousness within over-semiotized communicative environments. It opens what Tia DeNora describes as a «zero-hour of artful practices where culture and action are conjoined» (DeNora [2014]: 82): an interstitial moment of withdrawal from established channels of perception and relation, enabling a reconfiguration of engagements with the «virtually real» of the world (DeNora [2014]: 123).

In Al-Saji's terms, hesitation is not a failure to act but a receptive delay – a momentary arrest in which perception refrains from completion and holds itself open to the other. It interrupts automatic recognition, lingering prior to interpretation and allowing affectability to emerge before intention takes hold. Hesitation reveals perception's temporal depth, transforming the instant into duration. In this way, it becomes both perceptual and ethical: vulnerability is reinstated as a resource, and sensitivity returns where reactivity has taken hold.

Crucially, hesitation is also a counter-movement to racializing vision. By pausing the momentum of recognition, perception can encounter the other out-

side pre-inscribed grids of visibility. Ethically, this pause reclaims the interval as receptivity; politically, it makes non-reactive relation possible. To hesitate, then, is to resist epistemic closure – to practice a perceptual ethics grounded in care and openness rather than judgment and mastery.

Yet hesitation cannot sustain openness on its own. Left unaccompanied, it risks collapsing into paralysis. What follows, therefore, is a second movement – a spatial modulation that allows perception not only to pause but also to turn. The next modality, inflection, describes this turning: the way perception bends, follows, and is shaped by material surfaces.

4.2. *Inflection – The material turning*

If hesitation suspends perception in time, inflection bends it in space. The notion, drawn from Michael Podro's reflections on pictorial inflection (Podro [1987], [1998]), designates a phenomenon in which the relation between an image and its material support alters the very mode of seeing. Within analytic-philosophical image theory, pictorial inflection refers to the interplay between a depicted object or scene and its material vehicle: the organization of surface, pigment, texture, or design through which visibility is structured.

Inflection offers a paradigmatic instance of perceptual slowing. Materiality intercepts the straightforward trajectory of a discrete perceptual act, contaminating its apparent clarity and shifting its movement from a perpendicular strike to a lateral glide along the surface. In doing so, it transforms frontal encounter into lateral dwelling. This is not an intentional choice but a structural effect enacted by the resistance and density of the material field. The pictorial medium, far from a transparent conduit, exerts counter-agency: it bends perception, introduces delay, and generates a tactile mode of attention⁷.

Podro captures the entanglement of materiality and imagination when he observes that «in neither painting nor ornament can we see where the real ends and the imaginary begins, because there is no such boundary inside appearance» (Podro [1998]: 17). The material and the imaginal are thus interwoven within a shared experiential field; perception moves within their interpenetration, and appearance acquires depth: the visible thickens, meaning becomes processual.

This dynamic is not confined to art. The proliferation of images in cinema, digital media, and interfaces extends inflection into ordinary perception. The more mediated our environments become, the more perceptually dense they grow; and the greater this medial density, the greater the potential for slowing. The acceleration of imagery thus engenders its own counter-movement:

7 For a more detailed discussion of tactile, or haptic, perception, see, for example, Laura Marks's work on video imagery (Marks [2002]).

intensified medial awareness that renders perception self-reflexive, tactile, and dwelling. The space we then inhabit is neither purely inner nor purely outer but simultaneously meaningful and experiential, accessible from both first – and third-person perspectives.

Pictorial perception therefore involves two intertwined movements: an initial frontal approach toward the object or scene, followed by – and often accompanied by – a withdrawal into the lateral dimension structured by the surface. The first establishes contact; the second sustains relation. Together they enact a rhythm that escapes both the closure of identificatory recognition and the antagonism of direct confrontation.

Seen from this angle, inflection carries political as well as aesthetic significance. The lateral withdrawal it enables constitutes a micro-politics of perception: an indirect resistance to frontal dynamics of exposure, accusation, or display⁸. It transforms attention into care and composition. Where hesitation opens a temporal interval, inflection introduces a spatial one. Yet for delay and curvature to endure, they require a medium dense enough to resist immediacy. That sustaining density is provided by viscosity.

4.3. *Viscosity – The affective medium*

If hesitation opens time and inflection curves space, viscosity gives both substance: material and affective density anchoring slowness against the pull of immediacy. Viscosity names the texture of relational persistence – the shared thickness in which perception clings and resists separation.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes the viscous as an ambiguous state between solid and liquid, simultaneously alluring and oppressive. To touch something viscous, he writes, is to discover that distance cannot be maintained: the substance clings (Sartre [2021]: 789). This ambiguity discloses a truth of perception – its inescapable embodiment and entanglement in what it senses. To perceive is always, in part, to adhere.

Morton extends this insight to the ecological scale. In his theory of hyper-objects (Morton [2013]), viscosity marks the impossibility of detachment from vast, sticky networks – climate, capital, digital infrastructures – that envelop us. We cannot step outside them; they adhere to our thinking and being. Viscosity

8 The notion of indirect resistance requires clarification. It may seem at odds with the article's anti-activist orientation, insofar as resistance is typically associated with purposeful and sustained political action. In this context, however, resistance is understood not as an intentional stance but as a material and perceptual phenomenon – closer to physical friction or viscosity than to organized opposition. It designates a mode of slowing, thickening, or impeding movement within perceptual and relational fields, rather than a strategy of confrontation or intervention.

becomes an ethics of implication: perception unfolds within entangled material systems rather than above them.

Ahmed translates stickiness into the social field: affects adhere to words and bodies, shaping orientations of empathy and aversion, belonging and exclusion (Ahmed [2014]). Viscosity thus describes how feeling holds the social together, underwriting both discrimination and solidarity.

Ambient rhetoric likewise foregrounds the meaning-generating capacities of sensuous experience in which viscosity plays a substantial role (Rickert [2013]; McNely [2019]). Here viscosity functions as the medium through which meaning reverberates environmentally: rhetoric is not only an exchange of signs but a field of atmospheric resonance, in which discourse remains attached to affective and material environments.

Rosa's concept of resonance deepens this understanding (Rosa [2019]). Resonance requires unavailability (*Unverfügbarkeit*): the world must not be fully transparent or instrumentalized. Viscosity – though not Rosa's term – names precisely this resistance: the density that keeps relation open and prevents the world from surrendering entirely to comprehension or control. To perceive viscously is to dwell within unavailability, to remain with what resists mastery. Such perception lingers; it endures rather than consumes. In this sense, viscosity transforms perception into care: an ethics of remaining within the world's density.

Where hesitation opens a temporal interval and inflection introduces a spatial curve, viscosity provides the depth that binds both into a continuous field – thick, relational, and unavailable. Through viscosity, slowness becomes an ethics of coexistence: not the refusal to move, but the capacity to remain.

4.4 *Structural traits of slowed perception*

To understand what distinguishes slowed or high-resolution perception, we must resist defining it merely as the negation of speed. Slowness is not a deficit of movement but a different structuration of perception – a mode of experience in which time, space, and sense regain thickness, building layers of embodiment. Where fast perception reduces experience to a network of channels, slowed perception unfolds it into a non-directional, intensive space with depth, rhythm, and relational complexity. Its structural traits can be described as follows.

1. *Expanded field of attention.* Rather than narrowing focus toward an object or goal, slowed perception distributes attention across a field. It is less the concentration of the gaze than its dispersion – a sensitivity to gradients, transitions, and peripheral presences. Such perception does not scan for information but inhabits a milieu, moving within folds and textures, allowing co-presences and overlaps. Attention becomes plural and dynamic – less a spotlight than an atmosphere – registering multiplicity without reducing it to figure and ground.

2. *Curved or oblique spatial orientation.* Slowed perception breaks with the geometry of frontal encounter. Its relation to the world is oblique, curved, lateral, and enveloping rather than direct and oppositional. Curvature introduces coexistence and partiality: things are encountered sidewise, never in full exposure, always within shared space. The world is met halfway; it wraps, leaks, resonates. Lateral geometry yields not a loss of clarity but a gain in relational density.

3. *Temporal thickness and rhythmic duration.* Slowed perception unfolds in layers and rhythms. Instead of moving from instant to instant, it sustains an internal duration – a coexistence of temporalities within a single act of sensing. Past impressions remain active; anticipation and recollection interweave. This thickness allows for hesitation, delay, and dwelling – forms of time that cultivate rather than consume. Perception acquires rhythm and phrasing; it becomes temporal composition rather than sequence. In contrast to low-resolution perception, it is non-transitory: it does not dissolve into subsequent experiences guided and consumed by the pre-given symbolic. It remains in and by itself, like an atmospheric envelope – like music.

4. *Mediality foregrounded.* Slowed perception experiences itself as mediated. Every act of seeing, hearing, or touching passes through a medium – light, air, texture, rhythm – that conditions the encounter. Rather than erasing mediation through rapid tension-resolution, slowed perception foregrounds it. The medium ceases to be a neutral conduit and becomes a participant in the event (Latour [2005]: 39). The subject becomes aware of bodily mediation – breathing, posture, vibration. Perception turns reflexive without becoming reflective: it feels itself as passage and transformation.

5. *Multi-sensorial density.* While fast perception privileges distal senses, slowed perception reintegrates proximal and cross-modal senses: touch, proprioception, smell, hearing, balance. The senses cease to operate hierarchically and instead form a synesthetic field in which each modality modulates the others. Perception becomes dense; one does not merely see the world but feels oneself within its textures. The body becomes the site of a perceptual ecology – a resonant surface among others.

6. *Performative and enactive character.* Slowed perception is not representational but performative. It does not merely decode signs; it co-creates sense through its own activity. To perceive slowly is to participate in the ongoing formation of reality – to enact rather than interpret. The perceptual act becomes co-composition, where knowing and being are inseparable from doing.

7. *Ethical openness.* Finally, slowed perception entails an ethical reorientation. By suspending judgment, it opens the perceptual field to coexistence, ambiguity, and care. The other is not confronted but accompanied; difference is not fixed but allowed to resonate. Ethics here relates less to rigid norms than to

performative stances, driven by internal motivations rather than external imperatives. These motivations are predominantly bodily anchored. The body should be understood not only centripetally but also eccentrically, centrifugally – or more precisely as a dynamic balance between the two. Breathing exemplifies this balance: inhalation and exhalation. Ultimately, what counts as ethically «correct» is neither statement nor action measured against a predetermined horizon, but a structure of feeling that renders the overall atmosphere – comprising all that is thinkable and feasible – breathable.

Taken together, these traits describe a perceptual mode in which experience regains depth, relationality, and ethical potential. In contrast to the reactive immediacy of frontal encounter, slowed perception enables layered embodiment – an ecology in which to perceive is already to participate. It is within this ecology that lateral politics can emerge: an indirect, embodied, and affective practice of counter-discrimination grounded in the texture of experience itself.

5. Lateral aesthetics and/as politics: indirection, care, and counter-discrimination

While the previous section traced the micro-ethics of perception, the present one considers how these embodied modalities unfold into collective and political forms of experience capable of resisting the perceptual grammar of domination described earlier. I propose to call these performative experiential forms lateral, or indirect, politics. Lateral politics designates a field of relation that resists both vertical hierarchies and the aggressions of the frontal encounter. It operates not through negation or overthrow but through re-composition – by redistributing attention, care, and affect within the shared texture of the sensible. To act laterally is to engage from the side: to create relations obliquely rather than confrontationally, and to sustain transformation through persistence rather than rupture.

In this sense, the aesthetic and the political are not distinct registers but reciprocal operations. I therefore propose a notion of lateral aesthetics that – precisely because of its laterality – is fundamentally social. Lateral aesthetics emerges where aesthetic orientation and political care coincide: in gestures that transform how we perceive rather than what we believe.

5.1. Lateral politics: the ethics of the sideways gesture

Lateral politics unfolds through indirect, sideways, and non-frontal modes of resistance. Its gestures are oblique rather than oppositional: they alter the organization of experience without appealing to confrontation or control. Whereas frontal politics is defined by immediacy, exposure, and direct address, lateral

politics operates in the interstices of perception, where attention can shift before meaning hardens into judgment.

To act laterally is to resist the compulsion to face, react, or decide prematurely. It reclaims the interval between perception and recognition not as indecision but as responsive potential. Within this interval, perception ceases to mirror existing structures of power and begins to recompose them. What is at stake is not merely a new political stance but a transformation of the sensory fabric that sustains social reality.

Lateral politics is thus *compositional* rather than *oppositional*. Instead of frontality's forceful linearity – address, verdict, counter-verdict – it privileges curvature, delay, and adjacency. Its mode of action is redistribution rather than reversal: a reallocation of care, attention, and affect across the shared field of the sensible.

5.2. *From hesitation, inflection, and viscosity to lateral agency*

The micro-ethics of slowed perception – hesitation, inflection, and viscosity – constitute the sensory groundwork of political laterality. Each modifies the perceptual tempo underlying relations of power, enacting a politics in miniature.

Hesitation introduces a vital pause into the reflexive loop of identification. By suspending the immediate coupling of perception and response, it opens a temporal interval in which alternatives can emerge. This delay is not passive withdrawal but active receptivity – an embodied resistance to the synchronization of perception with algorithmic, normative, or moral imperatives. By preserving ambiguity, hesitation creates the conditions for responsibility.

Inflection transforms the spatial axis of relation. In contrast to the frontal gaze that seeks transparency and mastery, inflection bends perception into a lateral, sliding mode in which vision approaches touch. Materiality intercepts perception's line of force, redirecting it from perpendicular confrontation toward parallel dwelling. Inflection thus enacts a politics of adjacency: engagement without capture, presence without appropriation.

Viscosity adds material and affective thickness to this field. Against the clean separations of fast perception, viscosity holds subjects and environments together in slow, continuous contact. As Morton shows, viscosity characterizes our entanglement within hyperobjects (Morton [2013]: 32); as Ahmed reminds us, affects themselves are viscous, «sticking» to bodies and signs (Ahmed [2014]: 60). Through viscosity, laterality acquires endurance: hesitation and inflection persist not as isolated gestures but as modes of ongoing relational maintenance.

Together, these perceptual gestures form a politics of attenuation: a deliberate weakening of the reactive, over-semiotized structures of perception that sustain

discrimination. They reintroduce delay, mediality, and thickness where immediacy and frontality have monopolized the experiential field.

5.3. The political stakes: countering racializing perception and epistemic injustice

Lateral politics intervenes not at the level of explicit ideology or discourse but within the sensory infrastructure of the social. Discriminatory perception begins with the collapse of the interval: the instantaneous reduction of the other to a type, the translation of visibility into identity. The racializing gaze operates through speed – it classifies before it perceives. Epistemic injustice (Fricker [2007]) thus originates not only in language or reason but already in the pre-discursive organization of the visible.

By restoring temporal and spatial depth to perception, lateral politics disrupts these mechanisms of automatic classification. Hesitation prevents the gaze from closing too quickly; inflection decenters the self as the primary locus of meaning; viscosity sustains relation long enough for complexity to emerge, resisting the hardening of perception into stereotype.

Through these micro-transformations, lateral perception enables postponed identities: forms of being that remain in process, unfinalized and plural. Postponement here is neither indecision nor refusal but an ethical suspension – a resistance to letting the symbolic congeal the experiential. To postpone identity is to keep it breathable, allowing difference to unfold in coexistence rather than confrontation.

Lateral politics thus resists both discriminatory and reactive perception. It does not demand recognition but alters the sensory and temporal conditions under which recognition becomes compulsory. Its effect is not reconciliation but redistribution – a shift in how social reality is sensed and shared.

5.4. Lateral social aesthetics as embodied counter-discrimination

The aesthetic dimension of lateral politics lies in its capacity to organize shared experience through sensibility rather than representation. Lateral social aesthetics names this embodied redistribution of attention and care.

Here, the aesthetics of care becomes instructive (Saito [2022]; Mihai [2022]; Donovan [2016]). For Saito, aesthetic practice permeates ordinary acts of living – caring, maintaining, and coexisting. Aesthetics and care converge as practices of attunement to the singular and the interdependent. Lateral aesthetics extends this insight by relocating aesthetic experience from ornament or expression to ethical mediation: a sensuous practice of coexistence grounded in responsiveness and shared space.

Kathleen Stewart's notion of tactile composition clarifies how such relations are continuously «enworlded» through small affective gestures (Stewart [2014]). Stewart describes social life as a network of «charged atmospheres», in which attention and intensity circulate without fixed origin or closure (Stewart [2011]: 445). Laura Marks's concept of the fold further illuminates laterality as a negotiation of proximity and distance that sustains relation without erasure (Marks [2024]). Jane Bennett's account of influx and efflux provides an affective model for this practice: vitality emerges through oscillation rather than mastery (Bennett [2020]).

In sum, lateral social aesthetics enacts embodied counter-discrimination: a redistribution of perceptual capacities that resists the closure of identity and the violence of channeled immediacy. Political agency here is redefined as a practice of sustained, sensory relation.

5.5. *Coda: the ethics of the lateral gesture*

Lateral politics does not seek to conquer or to reveal, but to keep open. Its gesture is neither heroic nor reactive. By moving sideways – by hesitating, inflecting, and lingering – it transforms the conditions of the sensible without reproducing the violence of frontality.

To act laterally is thus to enact care as resistance: to practice perception as ethics and delay as politics. Through these gestures, perception becomes a site of counter-discrimination, and aesthetics emerges as the very medium of political transformation.

The lateral gesture neither turns away from the world nor confronts it head-on. It touches it – slowly, obliquely, and with care.

6. *Conclusion – The aesthetics and ethics of laterality*

This article has traced a movement from reactive, low-resolution regimes of frontality to slowed, layered, and lateral modes of perception capable of sustaining alternative ethical and political imaginaries. Whereas frontal perception condenses experience into momentary reaction and confrontation, slowed perception unfolds through thickness and delay, allowing the perceptual field to become resonant rather than directive. Through hesitation, inflection, and viscosity, perception loosens its attachment to instant identification and recognition and reorients toward modes of coexistence that are neither oppositional nor indifferent, but compositional.

The horizontalization of culture provides the milieu for this reconfiguration. As hierarchies dissolve into networks of experiential continuity, culture increasingly functions as a surface of shared sensibility, where meaning emerges through

interaction rather than being given through representation. Within such a milieu, lateral aesthetics names a practice of care that proceeds through receptivity and dwelling rather than assertion or control. It sustains relations by keeping them open – by allowing the world to act through us before we act upon it.

In this sense, the aesthetic is not an ornament of politics but its perceptual infrastructure. To perceive laterally is already to resist the automatisms of reactivity; it is to inhabit the delay in which the world may appear otherwise. Lateral politics thus operates as an embodied form of counter-discrimination, grounded in resonance, permeability, and compositional coexistence. Its promise lies not in overcoming division, but in cultivating the in-between: those breathable intervals through which plural, postponed identities continually take shape.

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