

Floriana Ferro

Introduction

During the XX century, phenomenology has tried to face the challenges of the contemporary world. Taking inspiration from Edmund Husserl, especially for what concerns his new foundation of the transcendental and his attitude towards hard and human sciences, several philosophers, among which it is worth mentioning José Ortega y Gasset and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, have reflected on the problem of perception in their own original and distinguishable manner. The two mentioned authors have opened the way to a new approach on perception, discussing especially our being embodied and our experience of the surrounding world. This approach was developed by authors like Gilbert Simondon and, more recently, Sven Arvidson and Byung-Chul Han.

The authors of this section are focused on these philosophers, applying their concepts to the digital era and discussing their attitude towards the issues of the contemporary world. Phenomenology, especially during the last two or three decades, has been considering as a matter of urgency the problem of interaction between perception, which usually takes place in the analog world, and the digital dimensions where humans find themselves immersed (social networks, augmented and virtual reality, etc.). The digital era poses a challenge to phenomenology, a challenge regarding digital objects, the conditions of their existence, and their interaction with human subjects. The challenge has increasingly become more interesting with the creation of digital objects which are not only perceived, but even interacting with other objects: *smart objects*. Phenomenology of perception shall deal with artificial intelligence and *internet of things*, where the digital object is not isolated, but connected to a network of relations. It remodulates the expressive possibilities of humans, which are enhanced by the eventuality of integrating our body with digital parts: it opens the possibility of hybridization, referring to the posthuman question.

The latter issue is discussed by Floriana Ferro, who finds, in Merleau-Ponty's later works, a tendency to overcome anthropocentrism and the dualism between subject and object still sustained in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Ferro individuates what she calls a "posthuman turn" in

the thought of Merleau-Ponty, which is evident in the idea of flesh, well developed in *The Visible and the Invisible*. The world and other beings are not seen from an egological and human perspective anymore, but from an “extended first person”. Human body shares with other bodies a common element, the “flesh of the world”. According to Ferro, the later Merleau-Ponty leads the reader towards flat ontology and posthumanism, opposing human perspective as a privileged one and opening a new way to conceive digital dimensions, especially the possibility of hybridization between the two.

Even Andrea Zoppis takes inspiration from Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body, comparing it with Simondon’s philosophy of technique, facing the proliferation of technological devices in our daily lives and the consequent crisis of our ability to understand the world and the relations with the others. The studies of Mauro Carbone on the screens are particularly considered, especially for what concerns the link between corporeality and digital experience, modulations and re-articulations of sensibility and desire. The pervasivity of the digital is thus seen through the perspective of our embodied subjectivity, along with the relation between perceptual experience of screens and analog dimension.

Cristiano Vidali, instead, approaches the phenomenological relation to the digital dimension on the side of attention. He particularly investigates the cognitive consequences of the digital on this phenomenon, taking inspiration from Husserl’s and Arvidson’s studies on attention as such and their possible application to digital devices. Vidali suggests a way to consider the defined phenomenological framework, interpreting two well-known experimental findings on digitized attention in assiduous media users and outlining a qualitative modification of such empirical approaches.

Giulia Gobbi faces the problem of hypercommunication, due to the diffusion of digital devices and social networks, which seems to neglect the complex dynamics of “speaking bodies”. Taking inspiration from Ortega y Gasset and Byung-Chul Han, Gobbi theorizes a body-ego totally immersed in the circumstances of its life and externalizing itself through gestures and expressions. The latter needs to be re-discovered and re-interpreted, especially after the pandemic situation, which has imposed a wider physical distance, a communication without community and without rites. Gobbi points out the importance of a phenomenological reflection on contemporary challenges, a reflection which does not deny the advances of digital technologies, but includes them in a critical framework.

The latter assumption is valid also for the other contributions to this section, using phenomenology as a perspective which starts from the living experience of our being immersed in a hybrid world and, through a gesture of authentic *epoché*, reflects on a critical and thoughtful answer.