



What Goes Without Saying: Husserl's Concept of Style

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Abstract

The idea of “style” emerges at several important points throughout Husserl's oeuvre: in the second part of the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, the lectures on intersubjectivity published in Husserliana XV, and in the analyses of transcendental character and intersubjectivity in the second book of the *Ideas*. This paper argues that the idea of style, often overlooked, is in fact central to understanding Husserl's conception of the person and intersubjective relations, its role in the latter captured in his odd turn of phrase, “intuitive flair.” Moreover, by showing the interdependence between the ideas of style and institution (*Stiftung*), I argue that institution also has a central role in Husserl's account of constitution and personhood. The relevance of the relation between institution and style goes beyond Husserlian phenomenology. In his late writings, Merleau-Ponty makes this relation the centerpiece of his attempts at an “indirect-ontology.” Thus the investigation of Husserl's concept of style that I carry out here becomes an important propaedeutic for the study of style that Merleau-Ponty calls for in his later work. In brief, the concept of style has an important role to play in any phenomenological account of personhood and intersubjective relations.

Keywords

style, institution, intersubjectivity, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty

Introduction

“What is it about me that you love?” my partner asks rhetorically. Awkwardly, I fumble through a short list of deeply unsatisfactory banalities, “I love . . . your smile, the way you laugh easily, seeing you walk from a distance.” With a slightly bemused look, she replies, “those are things you like about someone, what do you love?” This time with conviction in my voice I turn and say, “No, my darling, those are the emblems—the watermarks—of the temporal individuation of your transcendental ego in its habituality, and that is what I love!” Muttering something about where my phenomenological analyses might be better placed, she rolls her eyes and saunters off in precisely that mysterious

way that fills me with devotion. I make a mental note to rethink Husserl's role in my romantic life. Consider this a rather personal introduction to the phenomenological problem of "style."

The idea of style (*Stil*) emerges at several key points throughout Husserl's oeuvre. In the second part of the *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, he speaks of an abiding "empirical over-all style," the "habits" of things as they relate to one another and "behave similarly under typically similar circumstances" in the pre-scientific, intersubjective, quotidian surrounding-world of the "natural attitude."¹ In earlier texts, published in the lectures on intersubjectivity in *Husserliana XV*, he makes brief reference to a "general style" (*allgemein Stil*) that the constituting life of the ego has in relation to the world as constituted. It is a style that he says may relate to my memories but is not dependent upon them, and, most importantly, in virtue of which the "unity of a pre-given world-being always appears to me."² And correlative to the style of the ego, he speaks in these lectures of a general style of the world, which the ego always possesses as a general structure—a transcendental rendering of the "empirical allover style" that he mentions in the *Crisis*.

The idea of an egoic style appears most prominently in the analyses of personality and character in *Ideas II*.³ In these sections, Husserl asserts that an ego is a unitary person if (and only if) it possesses a "pervasive style" that holds sway over the way it forms judgments and associations, the way it values things aesthetically, and the manner in which metaphors, ideas, and phantasy can all be said to "surge up" from within a person. Style is a way of speaking phenomenologically about the character or personality of the transcendental ego—the ego as actively and passively constituting the world. It is also here, in the genetic account of transcendental personality of *Ideas II*, that Husserl

¹ Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. Walter Biemel, *Husserliana VI* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954), 28–29; hereafter cited in text as *Hua*, followed by volume and page. Translated by David Carr as *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 31.

² Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana XV. Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritter Teil. 1929–35*, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 118.

³ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, ed. Marly Biemel, *Husserliana IV* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), translated by R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer as *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989); hereafter cited textually as *Ideas II*, with German preceding English pagination.

introduces an interesting but often overlooked component of his phenomenology of intersubjectivity: what he rather mysteriously calls “intuitive flair” (*Ideas II*, 274/286).

But the slipperiness of the term *style*, its unclear status as a technical and operative concept or just a word used in passing in its mundane sense, means that it is hard to pin down conceptually. One author who made some effort to do so, or at least signaled towards such an endeavor, and who also makes much more explicit use of the term, is Merleau-Ponty. The idea of “style” comes to the fore at crucial points in the *Phenomenology of Perception*⁴ and on through his later work, where it becomes, I think, a centerpiece of his attempt to develop a new ontology of the perceived world. A working note from May 1959 shows the importance that Merleau-Ponty attached to the idea: “Everything comes down to this: form a theory of perception and of comprehension that shows that to comprehend is . . . to apprehend by co-existence, laterally, by the style, and thereby to attain at once the far-off reaches of this style and of this cultural apparatus.”⁵ Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, never provides a systematic or technical definition of the idea. This is in a sense fitting. As the citation above conveys, the idea of style—for both Merleau-Ponty and Husserl—is used to express what escapes precise determination but nonetheless makes comprehension possible.

In the first two parts of this essay, focusing on Husserl’s *Ideas II*, I will examine the development of the idea of style in relation to Husserl’s understanding of person, character, and constitution. In the third part, I will examine the relation between style and intersubjectivity—encapsulated in the phrase “intuitive flair.” My contention is twofold. First, that style functions as a presupposition for both personhood and even the possibility of constitution, and that it plays an important role in Husserl’s account of intersubjective relations. And second, that by pushing the idea of style to its limits, the Husserl of *Ideas II*, in a sense, points beyond the limits of his own philosophy of constitution and an absolute constituting ego.

In relation to intersubjectivity, Husserl notes the incongruence in the expression “intuitive flair,” acknowledging that “flair” “very often signifies just the opposite of intuition, i.e., insight, and is instead a presentiment, a

⁴ See, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1945), 209, 378, 381, 519; translated by Colin Smith as *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2003), 208, 382, 385, 529. Hereafter cited textually as PhP.

⁵ Maurice Merleau Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 242; translated by Alphonso Lingus as *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 188. Hereafter cited textually as VI.

pre-seeing without seeing, an obscure, specifically symbolic, often ungraspably empty premonition" (*Ideas II*, 274/286). At the same time he signals the importance of this idea to his account of intersubjectivity by prefacing his introduction of the term "intuitive flair" with a question:

What is happening when the character-type of a person suddenly lights up for us through some one or other of his glances, positions, or expressions; when we, so to speak, "gaze into an abyss;" when the "soul" of the person suddenly "opens itself up;" when we "fathom wondrous depths;" etc.? What sort of "understanding" is that? (*Ideas II*, 273/286)

Husserl's answer is precisely "intuitive flair," which should be understood in terms of the apperception of an individual egoic "style."

Husserl's development of the idea of style, and particularly "intuitive flair," also provides important clues toward a better understanding of Merleau-Ponty's later ontological writings. There is not space here to fully work out this relation, but the interrogation of the idea of style in Husserl's *Ideas II* serves as a propaedeutic to the study of style that Merleau-Ponty calls for in *The Visible and the Invisible*. There are also points where turning to Merleau-Ponty helps to elucidate Husserl's own analysis of style, particularly with regard to the relation between style and the idea of institution (*Stiftung*).⁶ I will argue that this relation is already very much at work in Husserl's thought and is imperative to understanding the relation between style, personhood, character, and intersubjectivity.

As a final introductory remark, let me say what I think to be the central aspect of the concept of style for Husserl: Style is another way of speaking about the singularity of the ego in its constituting activity, its temporal individuation, and the manifestation of that individuation to ourselves and to others. But it is also a way of speaking of the relation between singularity and generality. Husserl, at times, uses the term *style* as a correlate to the terms *type* and *character*. To call someone or something a type is obviously to generalize, while when we speak of someone's character it is usually in reference to an idiosyncratic nexus of experience, conviction, and opinion that can change over time but also abides by certain patterns of development. Yet, we tend to describe character in general terms, which we associate with types. This speaks to the interplay of individuation and generality in the formation of the style of the constituting ego (and the apperception of another's style via

⁶ *Stiftung* is variably translated in any number of ways: institution, foundation, establishment, and instauration. I will use the term institution throughout.

“intuitive flair”). Husserl points to this interplay in *Ideas II*: “each man has a general type, determinate in manifold ways and each particular man has his particular individual type” (*Ideas II*, 278/290). The formation of a style of life, in the interplay between individuation and generalization, occurs according to the specific structure of institution, to which we must now turn our attention.

1. Institution and Style

The relation between institution and style is left implicit by Husserl. It is however made explicit many times over by Merleau-Ponty. We find variations of the phrase “style is instituted” repeated throughout his later work, and he attributes his understanding of the term to Husserl.⁷ Husserl’s use of the term is more enigmatic and certainly more restricted than Merleau-Ponty’s. But, he is clear that the idea of personal style as articulated in *Ideas II* can largely be understood through the notion of sedimented *habitus* (*Ideas II* 277/290). *Habitus*, as consisting of long-lasting opinions or convictions that orient the position-taking and sense-bestowing activity of the ego without having to be explicitly articulated, coincides with “institutions” in the sense that Husserl uses the term (*Ideas II*, 113/120).

What is an institution phenomenologically speaking? For Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, an institution is an actual sense development that opens a horizon of other potential future sense developments, which can be said to have a form of latent existence in the horizon of the first development. We must take sense or meaning in a very broad manner here, understanding it to include all behavioral attributes. Thus an institution always has an actual and a potential dimension. The horizon of potentiality can be wider or more narrowly limited, depending on the character and history of the institution—the horizon from which it was itself actualized. When a potentiality within the

⁷ See, for example, “[E]ach institution is a symbolic system that the subject takes over and incorporates as a *style* of functioning, as a global configuration without having any need to conceive it at all” (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la Philosophie, Leçon inaugurale faite au Collège de France, Le jeudi 15 janvier 1953* [Paris: Gallimard, 1953], 65; translated by J. Wild and J.M. Edie as *In Praise of Philosophy* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963], 55–56; and “Push Husserl: *Stiftung* is not enveloping thought . . . but the positing of a *style*” (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours sur L’origine de la géométrie de Husserl, suivi de Recherches sur la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty*, ed. R. Barbaras, [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998], 30; translated by L. Lawlor and B. Bergo as *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002], 26). Hereafter cited textually as *HLP*, with French preceding English pagination.

horizon is actualized, meaning for Husserl, manifest for the ego, it refers back to the original institution, which facilitated it. Thus, there is a referral-back (*zurückgewiesen*) across phenomenological duration from what Husserl calls the re-institution (*Nachstiftung*) to the primal or originary institution (*Urstiftung*). The *referral-back* re-awakens the original institution, thereby re-instituting it. This transforms the initial or original institution (*Urstiftung*) into a re-institution (*Nachstiftung*).

The referral-back most often occurs on the level of what Husserl calls passive-synthesis, which is not passive in the sense of receptivity but in the sense of not present-to-consciousness. Simply put, we are not consciously aware of it happening. This process of re-institution takes place in what Husserl calls the “background that is prior to all comportment and is instead presupposed by all comportment” (*Ideas II*, 279/291). It is also important to note that institution is not one of the many forms of synthesis that Husserl describes but, rather, as Husserl writes: “every act, ‘carried out for the first time’ becomes an [*Urstiftung*]” (*Ideas II*, 311/324). The specific example of *habitus* as institution that Husserl provides in *Ideas II* is a grudge (*Ideas II*, 113/120). He describes the process by which a conviction is formed and remains passively-active, i.e., operative but not present-to-consciousness, in other meaning forming acts that refer back to the original judgment through various syntheses of association. The original judgment does not have to be relived or re-presented in order for it to be operative in this way; rather it resides in the background of passivity that is presupposed by all comportment and hence all judgment. What is also important is that the back-referral to the grudge *qua* originary sense-structure (*Urstiftung*) does not leave it unchanged; every re-institution of an original sense structure also transforms it. I will return to this in a moment.

Husserl also puts the idea of institution to work in his account of intersubjectivity in the famous fifth Cartesian Meditation. He points to the self-perception of our own body-object (*Körper*) as a lived-body (*Leib*) as a primal institution (*Urstiftung*) of the sense of the lived-body. The primal-institution of the sense of my lived-body, resulting from my own self-perception, simultaneously opens a horizon of potential sense-development that, upon the perception of the body-object (*Körper*) of an other, facilitates the transfer of sense from the institution of my own lived-body to the perceived body-object of the other; thus allowing me to perceive it as a lived-body. In sum, the apperception of the body of the other as a lived-body resides in a latent form within the virtual horizon of potential future developments that accompanies the initial primal-institution of my own lived-body.

Husserl makes it clear that what he calls the “analogizing apperception,” which facilitates the transfer of sense from my own *Leib* to the *Körper-Leib* of the other, is accomplished on the basis of institution: “Every apperception in which we apprehend at a glance, objects given beforehand . . . points back to an [*Urstiftung*], in which an object with a *similar* sense became constituted for the first time.”⁸ In this analysis of intersubjectivity, Husserl explains that institution, as a form of sense bestowal, is what makes the synthesis of object “pairing” and the subsequent creation of object “types” possible—in this case the pairing of my lived-body with another and subsequently the general type “lived-bodies.” Moreover, it is the creation of object types or object styles that allows the world to appear as familiar to us, even in the perception of empirically novel objects and situations.

The centrality of the structure of institution to constitution does not apply only to the “analogizing apperception” of the other ego or to the “position-taking intentionality” of *habitus* and opinion formation. By demonstrating that institution is central to what Husserl, in *Ideas II*, calls “mere consciousness of objects” we can also begin to thematize the relation between institution and style and, hence, between institution and character. As Husserl states: “Subjectivity manifests its individual character in its way of being conscious of objects as well as in its way of taking positions” (*Ideas II*, 278/291). Husserl distinguishes being conscious of an object as an object of attention and as it is “for-itself,” i.e. as it stands out, is delimited and apperceived, but not attended to. In both cases, the instituted style or character of the ego *qua* unitary person is essential to the constituting act. We not only take positions on objects in habitual manners but the attending to an object that is the presupposition for taking a position also displays a subjective “peculiarity” corresponding to the unitary style of the ego. This manifests itself in what pulls the attention of the subject, how shifts in attention are modulated, and so forth (*ibid.*).

But the individuated style of the ego also plays a role in the more primordial layer of object constitution “prior to the turning of attention and the taking of a specific position regarding it” (*ibid.*). In relation to the constitution of objects “for themselves,” Husserl writes: “[W]e are *referred back* to the constitution in consciousness of previous objects, to previous acts of attention, and perhaps to previous position taking; we are *referred back* to the data of sensation, to the

⁸) Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. S. Strasser, Husserliana I (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 141; translated by Dorion Cairns as *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 111.

references back and forth which depend on them, etc. Ultimately we arrive at the ‘obscure’ and ‘hidden’ representations and representational complexes” (ibid., emphasis added). Thus all three layers of object constitution mentioned here, position-taking, attending to, and object-background, are relative to the unitary instituted style of the ego.

In all these uses of the idea of institution—habit formation, intersubjectivity, the constitution of the lifeworld as a familiar world, and the constitution of objects in the three senses above: position-taking, attention, and primordial background object constitution—each subsequent actualization of potential meaning entails a passive *referencing back* (*zurückgewiesen*) to the original, facilitating meaning structure or primal institution. This reinstitutes the *original* horizon of potential sense. One upshot of this is that there is no first or original meaning that is acquired in either a subjective or intersubjective sense (for example, when we speak of the constitution of cultural forms like geometry or a school of painting). It is impossible to pinpoint the sense-bestowing event with which a personal or intersubjective tradition begins; or even with which the constitution of an object originates—phenomenologically speaking, there is not one.⁹ All primal institutions (*Urstiftungen*) are also re-institutions (*Nachstiftungen*), and all constitution involves a reference back to the background of sedimented institutions.

However, the *referral-back* never involves a simple one-to-one correspondence between the present intentional act and the institution residing in the institutional background, which the present act presupposes. The referral-back from the *Nachstiftung* to the *Urstiftung* (call it U_1) also entails a further back-referral to a prior *Urstiftung* (call it U_2) for which U_1 was and still remains a *Nachstiftung*. Through the passive back-referral, what we can call *institutional histories* are established: vast networks of horizons of potential and actualized meanings, which, in their interaction, through the structure of institution, continuously open up yet newer horizons of potential sense development.¹⁰

Nor is it the case that in the back-referral from *Nachstiftung* to *Urstiftung* (U_1) to *Urstiftung* (U_2), the *Urstiftungen* remain unchanged. They are themselves re-instituted such that their contact with the *Nachstiftung*, or with the present, leaves them non-identical to what they once were. There is thus a vitality or activity in the passivity of the institutional history. Although, as far

⁹ By personal tradition, I simply mean, the sedimented habits of the ego’s constituting activity.

¹⁰ Husserl also speaks of hidden “webs of motivation” that are to be found in habit, “historical nexuses, which may light up in a flash” and “‘obscure,’ ‘hidden,’ representations and representational complexes” (*Ideas* II, 224–25/235–236; 273/286; 279/291).

as he is concerned, Husserl is clear that the affection that sets an institutional history in motion always has its origin in the present. The stimulation of the institutional background from the present facilitates not only the “activity” of the background, in terms of the re-vitalization of vast complexes of institutional pathways, but also the on-going exponential growth of this background, beyond merely the retention of the phenomenological present as it slips back into the just-past and further, less active, modifications of the past, before settling into the sedimentation of what Husserl calls the unconscious dead-zone of deep-retention. It is a growth, however, not of an actual past—of past *Erlebnisse*—but of a latent or virtual horizon that serves as the background to all constitution. Thus a phenomenological distinction must be made between an actual and a virtual past, both of which are continuously being referred-back to in the ego’s constituting activity, and continuously expanding.

While in no way predetermining the future development, or more precisely, institution, of sense, these institutional histories or pathways give it a certain formal inclination, corresponding to the total *style of life of the ego*—a concept which now encompasses all of the ego’s sense-bestowing or constituting activities. This inclination is at once *instituted*, that is, it is the result of the structure of institution—of the particular institutional pathways at work—and it manifests itself in the potential horizons that are opened with each new institution; and *instituting* in that it gives form to the institutional horizon, limiting it in its scope, or pushing it in a certain direction. It is this developmental inclination, instituted in the constant movement of sense from past to present, and present to past, that Husserl calls an individual “style of life.”

Husserl’s logic of institution implies that a very large portion of the subject’s past life, retained in the depths of the institutional background, is at any moment in what we can call affective contact with the present. The sense of the present moment is, in large part, instituted by and within continuously developing institutional pathways, for which the present functions as a sort of affective vortex or engine: a continuous restarting of this institutional motor of sense.

Yet, the idea of institution also brings into question the priority of a discrete now or present in the constituting activity of the subject, and with this the idea of the actively constituting subject itself. In its place we seem to find something akin to the simultaneity of phenomenological past and present or the constant upsurge of the past into the present, and with this a subject, whose constituting activities are inscribed in or emerge out of an instituted style of life. These are certainly the conclusions that Merleau-Ponty, drew from the theory of institution in his 1954-55 *Collège de France* courses, *Institution and*

Passivity, where he told his students: “there is an instituted and an instituting subject, but inseparably, and not a constituting subject.”¹¹

The structure of institution also lets us coax the idea of the idea of a *past that has never been present* out of Husserl’s own thought. These *new* horizons that emerge in the modification of the institutional background through the constant process of back-referral belong, in a sense, to past institutions that were once present but now reside in the institutional background of the phenomenological past. But the new horizons of potentiality—created by re-institution—have themselves never been present in the way that the institutions that they emerge out of once were. These instituted horizons belong originally to the past. Yet, they can play an important role in the institution of the present.

The idea of a *past that has never been present*, takes us to the limits of phenomenological analysis. To understand how it is that institutional pathways or histories that constitute this “past” appear to consciousness, that is, how it is that they are actualized, we must look precisely to the idea of style. Institutional histories and pathways are actualized and are manifest in a dynamic and ever-changing “*style* of life.” In terms of the subjective analysis that I am pursuing here, this is perhaps most apparent in those moments where our own style appears as something foreign to our active intentional lives, driving us to do or say things that we did not actively mean or intend, and giving us the sense that we are not quite sure who is speaking when we open our mouths. As something that appears to us in this way, the style of our lives transcends the subject as *actively* (in the sense of present-to-consciousness) constituting, attending to, and position-taking, and as such may often even be more recognizable to others than to ourselves.

Husserl was aware of some of the implications raised by his analyses in *Ideas II*. He argues that following the distinction made between position-taking, attentive, and background constitution in relation to the individual character of the ego, a further distinction must be made between the “Ego-subject as a habitual individual way of self-comportment and the individual character to be found in the interweaving of the backgrounds” (*Ideas II*, 279/291). There is a sort of split in the unity of the egoic style into foreground and background characters, though the two “characters” obviously remain irrevocably

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L’Institution, la Passivité: Notes de cours au Collège de France* (1954–55), ed. D. Darmaillacq, C. Lefort, and S. Menase (Paris: Belin, 2003), 35; translated by Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey as *Institution and Passivity. Course Notes from the Collège de France 1954–55* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 6. Hereafter cited textually as *IP*, with French preceding English pagination.

intertwined. The latter background character of the “interweaving of backgrounds” is linked to the latent pathways, developmental tendencies, and horizons, which I introduced above, and which all conscious activity presupposes. We can call this an institutional unconscious. Husserl writes of this background style: “In a certain sense, there is, in the obscure depths, a root soil” (*Ideas II*, 279/292). Marc Richir has pointed out that for Merleau-Ponty, this “properly phenomenological ‘unconscious’”—the “‘sensible multiplicities’ borrowed from passive synthesis”—“is the transcendental condition of the possibility of the *experience* of objects and things.”¹² The full implications of the idea of style in its relation to institution in Husserl’s *Ideas II* demonstrate, I think, that same conclusion.

The importance of the passivity of the re-institution of previously developed, i.e. sedimented, sense as a fundamental element to the notion of style cannot be overstated here. The expression of a style of life, not only as a transcendental constituting tendency, the egoic tendency towards constitution in and of the world in such and such a manner that Husserl refers to in *Husserliana XV* and *Ideas II*, but also empirically as a particular way of writing, or of walking, or just the way a person smiles, can be seen as a contraction of time; the movement of a personal institutional history. If each step of that institutional history had to be actively re-enacted in order for a sentence to be written a certain way, or a pen twirled out of habit, then our entire experience of style would be lost, and with it, Husserl writes, what it means to be a human person (*Hua XV*: 118). Passivity offers the explanation of what saying that “style goes without saying” means. Style dilates itself into the world in a single expression that carries within it an entire history, thus making comprehension and communication possible. As Marc Richir notes: “This originary ‘desynch’ of presence in relation to itself is *already language*, according to certain texts published in the *Husserliana* (Bd. XIII, XIV, XV). By means of it, I understand the mimics, gestures, or manifestations of others’ ‘humours’ [*Stimmungen*], without having learned them.”¹³

¹² Marc Richir, “*Communauté, société et histoire*” in *Merleau-Ponty, phénoménologie et expériences*, eds. M. Richir and E. Tassin (Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Million, 1992), 10; translated as “Community, Society, and History,” in *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy, Transforming the Tradition*, ed. Bernard Flynn, Wayne J. Froman, and Robert Vallier (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), 64.

¹³ Richir, “*Communauté, société et histoire*,” 8/62.

2. General and Individual Style

But the problem of style is not limited to the individual style of the ego. When Husserl introduces style, in relation to type and character in *Ideas II*, he immediately splits the problem into two: general and individual style (*Ideas II*, 270/282). In both instances, it oscillates around notions of type and motivation. Style, understood transcendently, pertains to the typical ways, in both a general and an individual sense, that an ego (or egos) is motivated in its constituting activity and habitually comports itself.

The most general style of egoic comportment relates to a typical range of behavior and motivation having to do simply with the ego's belonging to a body (*Ideas II*, 270/282). Husserl calls this the "universal typicality of corporality" and relates it to the general style of being a "human subject" (*Ideas II*, 270–272/282–284). However, a caveat must be added here: the most general style of *human egoic* comportment relates to a range of behavior and motivation having to do with the ego belonging to a typical sort of body, a *human body*. But, we need not set this as the outer limit of a common general style of life, an instituted and instituting style of life that we (humans) share with other beings in a general sense. We may, for example, share even more general styles of motivation and comportment with certain animals that do not have the universal typicality of specifically human corporality, but rather have in common with us a more general style of corporeality. Thus the idea of general egoic style seems to take us necessarily beyond the sphere of the specifically human ego.

In his lecture notes on two of Husserl's late texts, "Origin of Geometry" and "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth, Does Not Move," Merleau-Ponty argues that should humans venture into space and encounter other thinking alien beings, the very fact that we would recognize them as thinking beings means that we could communicate with them and that, on the basis of this communication, we could bring them—phenomenologically speaking—into the *Sprachgemeinschaft* of humanity.¹⁴ Moreover, as we have seen from the analyses in *Ideas II*, all of the ego's constituting activity, and thus all thought, is *institutional*; moreover, all thought is thus subject to, or oriented within, a style of life. What does this mean for our communication with sentient alien life forms? Communication, in this model, proceeds first on the basis of a corporeal expressivity that is communicable, understandable to others. As Merleau-Ponty,

¹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes des cours au collège de France 1958–1959 et 1960–1961*, ed. Stéphanie Ménasé (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 45. Hereafter cited textually as *NC*, followed by page.

following Husserl, puts it, “I can understand other bodies, and in this way I can put my experience in relation to theirs” (*HLP*, 87/71). But the understanding of other bodies presupposes the sharing of what Marc Richir called the “original desynch of presence,” which is already language. This desynch of presence is explained *via* the account of institution and style that I have given here: it is the expressiveness of an institutional history in the appearance of a style. So in order to communicate with aliens we would have to share the characteristic of having a consciousness that is institutional. In order to recognize these aliens as thinking beings we would have to share a general style of corporeality with them that was not so absolutely different from our own as to be incommunicable, incommunicable meaning here that we would not recognize them as thinking or expressive creatures and, hence, as institutional. The conclusion that this inevitably leads to is that the general style of thinking beings, in the broadest sense, is the structure of institution.

Similarly, if we can engage in forms of empathy with animals, we are then already entering into proto-linguistic communicative relations with them on the basis of the expressive unities of their bodies, i.e., their styles as manifest. It is not only that this communication proceeds by way of institution, as is the case with all empathy, but also that we can, at the least, say that the animal being we are communicating with, in its interaction with the world and its expressiveness, appears to us as an institutional style of life, if not a necessarily conscious or thinking life. This brings into question the boundaries of thinking or conscious life and suggests that both thought and consciousness emerge within a more general style of life or field of institution.

Returning to the more limited scope of the general style of human corporeality: in its most general sense, the general style of the human ego can be described via the general structures of comportment deriving from affection and motivation proper to an ego as belonging to a human body. In a particular sense, each ego is then individuated within this general style as having certain persistent motivational and affective attributes that constitute the personal style of that individual ego. Put another way, all individual (human) styles, must be situated within the scope of a general human egoic style. Husserl provides an example to illustrate this distinction and continuum between general and individual style: A corporal movement such as reaching for a glass of water when thirsty must be considered a manifestation of general style. It has nothing to do with the individual character of the person, as the impulse to drink when thirsty is driven by a general human motivation necessarily related to our corporeality. This is an example of human style in its most unindividuated form. We could of course object that the context and manner in which an

embodied subject carries out this action has everything to do with the particular egoic style of that subject. This does not invalidate Husserl's example; it merely illustrates that all comportment manifests both general and particular aspects of style. And moreover, that general style is only manifest through individual styles. Husserl continues with his example by noting that if this embodied ego then turns and gives up her glass to another who is in more serious need, this must be considered a manifestation of a more individuated style that is specific to the motivations and typical comportment of that particular ego, even if it is the first time that the subject in question has felt compelled to actually give up her glass of water (*Ideas II*, 270/282).

Individual style, taken in this active sense, is the ego's movement of individuation from a more general to a particular style of being. But this individuation occurs within the scope of a general style—in our case being human; thus we are always dealing with a question of *style* and *style(s)*. The individual style of life of a human ego falls within the scope of the general corporeal style common to all human beings (*Ideas II*, 270/283). We must understand the idea of a general style as implicated in a constant movement of individuation. Thus, the idea of general human style or styles is also subject to a sliding scale of generalization and individuation. The general human corporeal style individuates itself into, for example, gendered corporeal styles or, to use Husserl's example, general styles pertaining to the stages of life: infancy, childhood, puberty, adulthood (*Ideas II*, 270/283); although we must be careful in both of these examples not to essentialize or establish fixed boundaries of these individuations of the most general human style.

This picture of dynamic styles is however immediately complicated. Husserl remarks that particular cases of how an ego is motivated, such as the example of the person who gives water to another, are “*built up*, in conformity with its *essence*” (*Ideas II*, 270/282, emphasis added). Style, seemingly, then becomes subject to both an eidetic and a genetic analysis. It is what is “built up” or developed, the manifestation of its own development, and the essence to which the development conforms. But, if we consider style as the essence of the person, insofar as our motivational nexuses conform to it, we must acknowledge—as Husserl readily does—that this style changes over time. Genetic analysis of our character, i.e., of our patterns of affection, motivation, and action, reveals a transcendental style to which the development of our character conforms, but it also reveals that this style itself is subject to development. As an essence, it is dynamic and in a special way auto- or self-affective. Because style is instituted, it is constantly in the process of reforming itself by referring-back to its own developmental history in such a manner that its history is continuously acting

upon it in new ways. At the same time, its history is retroactively transformed in its own development. And yet, an individual style retains its identity precisely on the basis of this continuous back-referral, because it refers back to an idiosyncratic pathway of development unique to that ego. For example, Husserl points out that the style of a person varies greatly from childhood to adulthood, but, as we are still dealing with the unity of an individual ego, the style also necessarily remains the same. Insofar as I am the same person as I was when I was a child, my ego possesses the same pervasive unitary style, even though that style may have drastically changed.

Insofar as there is change or development in a style, these changes themselves occur within and according to both a general and an individual style. For instance, the transformations of puberty occur according to a general corporeal style of human development; whereas, on an individual level, how the individual character changes according to or within the scope of this general development also occurs according to a certain typicality of the individual's style of life, keeping in mind that typicality does not mean here that it is readily apparent. Husserl writes: "If motivations arise which do operate in the sense of transforming the 'character,' there nevertheless prevails a typicality in the succession of the phases of life: the typicality of the ages of life" (*Ideas II*, 272/284). To be clear, we can speak of a general corporeal style in which the processes of puberty would be part of an institutional history. This general style is then individuated along the lines of a certain typicality of the individual's style of life, and a more generalized typicality of how puberty (generally) manifests itself. In his own lectures on puberty and institution, Merleau-Ponty's counters Husserl's erring on the side of generality, by insisting that the social or corporeal "tracks" of puberty are nothing without elaboration within an individual style of life and body, but he adds that this elaboration must be understood as a "resumption" of the general. We can clarify this by saying that what is resumed is the constant movement of individuation from general to individual styles. For his part, Merleau-Ponty quickly clarifies that there are not fixed institutional "tracks" in human life, but only the elaboration of "inherent possibilities"—the creation of a future by way of the continuous referral-back to and deepening of the past (*IP*, 57/22). Thus, from the point of view of the individual ego, general typicality, which is intertwined—in the individual ego—with the individual style of life in a relation of instituting-instituted, is always stylized or individuated to greater and lesser degrees. The ego and, in the case of puberty, particularly the body, can be thought of as participating in many different "levels" of style simultaneously. The embodied ego, undergoing the transformations of puberty, will stylize along general corporeal pathways,

less general cultural ones, and a particular or singular egoic institutional history, all of which are manifest in what we call the individual style of the person. The pervasive unity of a style throughout the continuous development of a style of life must be attributed to the continuity of the institutional pathways or histories along which a style individuates.

What Husserl says with regard to both the development and non-rigidity of the notion of style is that what we can know about a person, if we really know their style, is not exactly how they will react in a given situation. Rather, our expectations based on style “are not plain and clear”; they have “an apperceptive horizon of indeterminate determinability within an intentional framework that circumscribes [the expectation]” (*Ideas II*, 271/283). If we could always divine the precise words or reactions of another ego based on an apperception of its style, then, Husserl writes, “we say that the man is a stereotype” (*Ideas II*, 270–71/283). In such cases the structure of institution is somehow stifled such that it no longer generates new horizons of sense but only repeats old ones. Such a person, whose words and actions we could entirely predict, would not be a “person” (in the phenomenological sense being described here) at all, but an automaton of some sort. The latent aspect of their style, which I explained in terms of the movement of institution, would be absent. The question then becomes what orients (in a non-fixed manner) or structures these horizons in such a manner that we do not fall back again upon a static notion of character or personality. The answer is again style, or more precisely, the ongoing development of the ego’s style in the movement of institution as it incorporates new institutions into its “root soil.” In emphasizing the ongoing formation of the person in experience, Husserl gives ample attention to both the fact that style is a dynamic structure of horizontal potentiality and the role played by passive synthesis in the development of style: “Everything a person lives through enlarges the framework of his pre-giveness, [and] can affect the Ego and motivate actions... even without memory, it determines the future content of lived experience according to the laws of the new formation of apperception and association” (*Ideas II*, 272/283).

3. Style and Intersubjectivity: “Intuitive Flair”

It is in relation to intersubjectivity that the idea of style takes on its full significance in terms of the possible apperception of the style of another ego. As already noted, Husserl establishes the general corporeal style of the ego as a presupposition of empathy. In order for the lived-body (*Leib*) of the other ego

to be apperceived as such on the basis of the perception of its physical body (*Körper*), I must perceive the other body as having the same general style as my own. While the outer limits of this generality, in relation to the possibility of empathy (with nonhuman animals or aliens for example), remain undetermined, we can say that the degree to which I am able to empathize with another being correlates directly to the similarity of our styles.

Thus empathy and the perception of general style are not in a relation of founded-founding but rather are co-foundational. Empathy presupposes a general style that I share with others, but the general style presupposes the potential of the ego to apperceive sharing its general style with others: phenomenologically speaking, style must be communicable. The degree of communicability corresponds to the degree of generality (or particularity) shared with the other. Empathy presupposes the experience of a shared style as the most primordial intersubjective relation and, as Richir argues, the most primordial form of language. The other side of this coin is that the general (human) bodily style entails a stylistic predisposition towards empathy. It is part of our general (human) corporeal style to empathize with others.

The most important upshot of sharing degrees of general styles with others—we will stick to human others here—is that we are then able, in empathy, to apperceive not just the general but also the individuated styles of others. In this way we are able to apprehend style in a manner similar to the apprehension of what Husserl calls “higher-order objects,” wherein what is apprehended and retained is not only the object as a synthetic unity but also the synthetic relations between parts forming the unity. The best analogy, in this regard, would be to cultural objects or cultural traditions, insofar as personal style is itself something like a personal or egoic tradition. To the extent that we can, in a certain sense, apperceive a cultural tradition in its artifacts, particularly our own tradition, as it is the one we are most familiar with, we can apperceive the styles of other egos in their behaviors and expressions. Style, even on the level of the individual ego, could in this sense be understood as a cultural or ideal object. This is true both in the sense that it is instituted historically, and in the sense, as mentioned before with regard to the example of puberty, that the style of the individual is always intertwined with more general levels of style, including what we would call cultural styles on many levels. For example, a family could be understood phenomenologically in terms of a style or certain institutional tendencies or pathways of sense development relating to its members and their interactions (*Ideas II*, 228–29/240). As Merleau-Ponty argues in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in obvious reference to Husserl’s theory of empathy, the first cultural object is the body of the other (*PhP*, 401/406).

How does the style of another become manifest for the ego? Husserl writes: “We capture the development of a person if we reconstruct the course of his life and make it intuitive in such a way that the entirety of his development as a man becomes comprehensible in an experiential way, especially with regard to his manner of letting himself be motivated as a subject” (*Ideas II*, 272/285). I think that we can understand the phrasing “capture the development” to be nearly synonymous with what I am aiming at with the idea of the apperception of style. To “reconstruct the course of a life” in this sense would be to apperceive all of the instituted horizontal networks and their relations of affinity in re-institution (*Nachstiftung*) that form the totality of our motivational nexuses. Moreover, Husserl says, I must try to enact a shift such that I posit the motivational nexuses that I perceive as if they were my own, and accordingly I must, in imagination, follow them through. In short, I must try to take on the individual style of the other. Given the degree to which passive synthesis—operative within the “root soil” of our institutional unconsciousnesses and hidden from consciousness’ awareness of its own activity—is implicated in the formation of a personal style, this bringing to light of our institutional history and style in its entirety is clearly impossible even with regard to our own lives, never mind those of others. Husserl readily acknowledges as much, pointing out that there are always unsolved and unsolvable remainders. More so than the *de facto* unsolved, it is the *de jure* unsolvable that is significant. To apperceive this total development would be something like unrestricted access to the totality of institutional nexuses that make up the unitary style of an ego. But, even then, the development itself—one’s total intentional (passive and active) life history—would not in itself be identical to one’s style. Yet, having access to a life-history in its totality, as such, *would* allow us to comprehend—by examining networks of institution and association or putting ourselves, imaginatively, into those networks—how the style itself is instituted, and hence allow us to form expectations. That is why we should be careful to note that Husserl says we could capture the “development”—the total institutional and hence motivational life-history of the subject up to a certain point—of the person. To capture the development in full might (in theory) provide the clearest indication of the style of the person. But a sort of apperceptive jump must then be made from the developmental history to the style *qua* essence of the person that is both the result of that history and exerts a force upon it. In a sense, this is similar to Husserl’s account of empathy in the *Cartesian Meditations*. Our apperception of the other’s egoic style in its development and its essence is *de jure* unfulfillable, as it is always mediated through our perception of the other’s lived-body and the verbal and behavioral signs exhibited by that

body. Where the example of style differs from the analogizing apperception of the other ego is that, whereas in the case of the analogizing apperception of the lived-body of the other ego, one has a continuously fulfilled apperception of one's own lived-body, even the apperception of one's own style is—in no small part due to the on-going activity of passive synthesis within the “root soil” or “background”—unfulfillable in the same sense as the ego of the other, which remains inaccessible without the mediation of the “apperceptive transfer.”

In addition, as style is instituted in the development of the life-history of the person, it is constantly undergoing change, along with the life history, not only in relation to the accumulation of past-horizons but also in relation to horizons of expectation and the continuous transformation of the phenomenological—institutional—past as it is unceasingly drawn into affective contact with the present. Only upon the ceasing of all forms of active and passive associative synthesis, i.e., only upon the death of the subject, would a static apperception of style be even theoretically possible.

Yet, this does not preclude the possibility of having an apperception of either the style of the other or of our own style. It only rules out that these apperceptions could be fulfilled through the intuition of direct evidence and makes it that, to some extent, our perception of another's style is possible *via* a process of abstraction. Husserl explains how this is possible:

I enter into relationships with various Ego-subjects and come to know the typical moments of their givenness, of their actions etc., and I *apprehend the latter according to these types*, but it is not as though I first had the types *in abstracto* (just as I do not have *in abstracto* the type, tree when I apprehend a tree as a tree); instead, the type becomes pronounced and gets impressed upon us in multiple experiences, and it determines an apperceptive form and then a layer in actual apprehension that can be abstracted out. (*Ideas II*, 273/285)

What this implies is that we are able to abstract out certain static types from a dynamic whole. These abstractions provide a *typical* indication of how the ego-subject will be motivated, affected, and how it will react. Certain patterns of affection and association are pre-given in these abstractions and allow us to form expectations of the subject based upon them. It is only insofar as the subject is a unity, that its experiential life-history holds a certain instituted (or institutional) coherence, that we can ascribe a certain abstract style or type to others or to ourselves.

The apperception of another's style, as analogizing in the same manner as empathy, and as itself a form of empathy, is thus in part based on my own

self-apperception of my own patterns of affection and association, i.e., “my habitual modes of behavior and motivation” (*Ideas II*, 273/285). This self-understanding is also what allows me to educate myself about the motivational nexuses of others. This education is a process whereby I sensitize my empathic capacities such that I am able to represent the motivational nexuses of the other as not only directly analogous, but also, distinct from my own. As the analogizing apperception enters higher forms of generalization (the other-ego is motivated through similar general motivational structures, i.e., affection and association, though perhaps through different historically individuated motivational nexuses), we are able to have more particular or individuated apperceptions of the other’s style. The empathic apperception of another style follows a sort of curve, along the curvatures and contours of institutional history, from my own particularity to a greater generality and to the particularity of the other. As Merleau-Ponty writes in his lectures on institution: “The triumph of universality consists precisely in making me capable of understanding differences” (*IP* 46/14). We are able to educate our empathic abilities by learning to share the other’s situation: “I secure these motivations by placing myself in his situation, his level of education, his development as a youth. . . . I must not only empathize with his thinking, his feeling, his action, but I must also *follow* him in them. . . there lies an inner co-living of motivating factors” (*Ideas II*, 275/287). Husserl emphasizes the word “follow” here and this is important: “following” the other in his thinking means an imaginary mapping out of institutional nexuses of affinity, affection, and association, tracing the relations between instituted horizons in the experience of the other—keeping in mind that there will always be “unsolvable” remainders and intuitive unfulfillment in our apperception of the other’s style.

And yet, despite these limitations in our perception of another’s style, Husserl insists that it is possible to have a *flash* of the style of another person that surges through in their idiosyncratic movements, expressions, etc. What sort of understanding is it when these fleeting vagaries, as Husserl says, open up the motivational life—or “soul”—of the other for us to fathom in its wondrous depth? What is the mode of understanding by which we may apprehend the style of another? “Intuitive flair” is Husserl’s answer to this, which he quickly adds should not be confused with an actual intuition, describing it as “an obscure, specifically symbolic, often ungraspably empty, premonition. The actual nexus is then but a goal grasped in anticipation, an empty intention, one which is so determined, however that we follow the tendency, with its determinate direction, and in fulfillment of it can acquire a chain of actual intuitions” (*Ideas II*, 274/286). The actual motivational nexuses that we have the

presentiment of are thus given in the glance or expression in their most empty form. The *presentation* offers an indication or direction to be pursued in the empathic construction of the intentional nexuses of the other. This promise of intuition given in the *presentiment* can never in fact be fulfilled with regard to the other (or with ourselves except perhaps partially in reflection and analysis), only appresented in an incomplete manner.

“Intuitive flair” would be the perceptual givenness of another’s style mediated through the expressiveness of the body. More precisely it is the apperceptive givenness of the unitary style of the ego *qua* institution as a horizon with a history of development and an orientation towards a certain future or towards certain forms of future comportment. This seems the proper Husserlian understanding of “intuitive flair”: a mediated relation to the other that preserves her alterity while revealing her soul *qua* style. And yet Husserl himself, with the language he uses—looking into the soul—suggests something more.

By way of conclusion, we can again turn to Merleau-Ponty to help flesh out the idea of “intuitive flair” and also provide an indication of how the Husserlian analyses of institution and style can help guide us into the labyrinth of Merleau-Ponty’s late ontology. In his course notes on Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry,” Merleau-Ponty explains intersubjectivity in the following manner: “Just as the only way to remember an idea is to begin the ideation over,” in other words, to trace the institutional pathways of its development, “the only way of yielding to intersubjective thought is to retrace the trace, to think anew by operating through an activity an exact coincidence with a passivity” (*HLP*, 67/56). This seems very similar to what Husserl says about “intuitive flair.” Yet, true to form, Merleau-Ponty considered himself to be pushing the Husserlian meditation further than Husserl himself was willing to go. He writes: “Doesn’t [Husserl’s] own analysis really obligate to consider constituting subjectivity as an eminent case of idealisation”—in other words an institution? (*HLP*, 92/76).¹⁵ We apperceive the other, in their style, as we would an ideal object, because, as fully institutional, this is in fact what constituting subjectivity is, and this is how it truly appears to us. I do not think that the reading of the concepts of institution and style in *Ideas II* that I have presented here suggest anything otherwise. If we take Husserl’s own account of institution and style seriously,

¹⁵ See also, “consciousness must appear as an institution” (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature, Notes, Cours du Collège de France*, ed. Dominique Séglaard [Paris: Seuil, 1995], 220; translated by Robert Vallier as *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003], 167). Hereafter cited textually as *N*, with French preceding English pagination.

we see that the analysis of the constituting subject as instituting and instituted in fact leads us beyond the phenomenological analysis of the subject as actively and passively constituting, and towards the analysis of a style of life in its reciprocal movements of individuation and generalization. We leave the sphere of absolute constituting subjectivity for that of the analysis of life as the movement of institution, or of style.

Returning again to Husserl's ground and to the question of "intuitive flair," it is another, less obvious source, which, I think, is even more helpful to understanding this paradoxical idea: Merleau-Ponty's earlier lectures on the concept of Nature. In these lectures Merleau-Ponty provides an idea of how—in what manner of manifestation—style appears with this "yielding" to intersubjective thought. What he argues is that *between* the microscopic facts of an organism's life (in this case, the acts of the other, the glance, the smile, the laugh) the "global reality" (their total style of life) is delineated. It appears in "*filigree*," like a "watermark" (*N*, 268–69/207). In fact, the task that Merleau-Ponty sets in the introduction to his final courses on the concept of Nature is to comprehend the emergence out of nature, i.e. the institution, of humanity *qua* a general style of life—in filigree, i.e., as a watermark. The task of the life sciences, in Merleau-Ponty's opinion, could not be responsibly taken up without careful attention to and analysis of this "watermark," in its formation, development, and appearance. Science, in other words, requires "intuitive flair." This applies as much to the sciences of life as it does to the science of the subject in its constituting activity that Husserl was devoted to. Or, put otherwise, the science of subjectivity, in its discovery and characterization of "intuitive flair," provides an important conceptual tool for the study of nature, which is, in Husserl's view, built upon it.

It is perhaps surprising that these two courses that I have referred to, which deal with the two seemingly distinct ontological dimensions of being, *nature* and historical *ideality*, both return to the same ideas of style and institution as their central concepts. It should not be; Merleau-Ponty conceived his final project as trying to understand the intertwining of "φύσις, λόγος, and history" (*N*, 269/199; *NC*, 37). The analysis of institution and style that I have developed here, on the basis of Husserl's more limited account in *Ideas II*, shows us a way into this relation that would form the centerpiece of Merleau-Ponty's late thought. What Merleau-Ponty himself indicates but does not elaborate in his course notes is that the concepts of institution and style show the way into the problem that Husserl had bracketed out, the relation between the "realist-causal order" and the "idealist-constituting order" (*HLP*, 92/76). In fact, the problem is even more complex. In the analysis of idealization in the *Crisis of*

the European Sciences that I referred to at the very beginning of this paper, Husserl shows how ideal objects emerge out of our *praxis* (first practical, then idealized and technicized) in the natural world, with its “*empirical all over style*,” and its corresponding natural attitude. The analysis that Husserl presents in the opening sections of the *Crisis* and refines in the “Origin of Geometry” relies upon the idea of institution, and yet the style of the world remains for Husserl the correlate of the activity of the ego. Merleau-Ponty wishes to push this question further by asking how it is that ideality—including now the subject itself, or consciousness—emerges out of a nature that is ontologically prior to consciousness and subjectivity, and within which the latter two must be understood as institutions. This raises the incredibly difficult question of what it means to attempt a phenomenology of Nature, in other words a phenomenology that must take into account relations between “realist-causal order” and the “idealist-constituting order.” Merleau-Ponty is insistent that his philosophy of Nature remains phenomenological; the object of study is Nature as it is perceived. But, at the same time this phenomenology of Nature must trace the back-referencing (*zurückgewiesen*) of the subject’s own activity to a point ontologically prior to the subject’s emergence. This seems to require that the tracing of the institutional pathways that make up a style lead the phenomenologist into the realist-causal order—a field of life—in which consciousness emerges as an institution.

It is Husserl’s theory of institution and style that provides the means to think the relation between what Merleau-Ponty frequently refers to as the two leaves of being: Nature and ideality or thought. In his tri-partite schema of ‘φύσις, λόγος, and history,’ ideality, or thought, falls on the side of history. As Merleau-Ponty argues, and as I think is supported by Husserl’s emphasis on the relation between institution, style, and constitution in *Ideas II*, for both phenomenologists all thought and thus all ideality is historical (*HLP*, 29/26). Institution thus takes on something akin to a Neoplatonic sense as the λόγος that mediates between nature (φύσις) and the always historical thought or mind. The reading of Husserl’s account of institution in *Ideas II* that I have provided here emphasized that all thought is in a continuous double movement of stylized forward-orientation and back-referencing (*zurückgewiesen*) and that this back-referencing leads all thought back into the “root soil” of the institutional unconscious. The shift that Merleau-Ponty seemingly wants to carry out is that the phenomenological investigation that is the thematization of this back-referencing does not terminate in the sedimented passivities of the institutional unconscious, thought still only in terms of constituting subjectivity, but rather that this tracing of the back-referencing, an activity which

starts with an “intuitive flair,” leads back into a Nature out of which consciousness emerges. Style is the manifestation of this λόγος in its movement and, importantly, the manifestation of its historical orientation as well as its own continuous reformulation of that orientation as it refers-back upon itself in its development. The general field of institution in its style and continuous stylization is the field of Nature in and out of which a field of life and eventually consciousness are instituted. The manifestation of style in the “intuitive flair”, and the phenomenologist’s alertness to this manifestation, in either a Husserlian sense, relating strictly to intersubjective relations, or a Merleau-Pontian one, which seems to extend to relations in a general field of life and even nature, becomes the first step of a phenomenology of the subject and of nature, and most importantly of their intertwining, that grounds the sciences in that original Husserlian sense. It also is the first step into an ontology that endeavors to understand and thematize those two leaves of being, nature and ideality, both in their interrelation and interdependence and *from within* their interrelation and interdependence.

This is the idea of “intuitive flair” transposed onto the ontological level: the appearance in filigree—like a watermark upon matter itself, in this case the expressive matter of the body—of the development of sense, including the very sense that comprises the essence of the person, her character. It is Husserl’s analyses of personhood and style, as related to institution, in *Ideas II* that show the way into these unfinished ontological considerations of Merleau-Ponty’s late thought and beyond the limits of phenomenology as conceived by Husserl himself. Simply put, the clarification and development of Husserl’s analyses in *Ideas II*—and in particular the concepts of “institution,” “style,” and “intuitive flair”—in part on the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s own development of these ideas, opens the door to a philosophy of institution and style that goes beyond what Husserl had envisioned for these concepts and also remained latent or unsaid in Merleau-Ponty’s own work.