



## Is There a Phenomenological Concept of Matter?

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In *Le matérialisme rationnel* (Paris, PUF, 2021[1953]), Gaston Bachelard strictly distinguishes between scientific materialism and the materialism of the imagination. Indeed, the matter described by the sciences is different from the one that imagination can touch; this latter being closer to an elemental matter. If we consider the distinctions between science, art and philosophy proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (see *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Paris, Minuit, 1991), we could say, that if science understands matter through functions and prospects, then imagination – especially if it is poetic – has to deal with “percepts” and “affects” of matter. The matter of science is different than the matter of art, so be it. The question for us is, however, whether there is anything like a matter of philosophy. And in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, this means questioning the possibility of a concept of matter. Can we have, alongside functions, affects, or percepts of matter, a philosophical *concept* of it? And if so, could this concept be genuinely phenomenological, or shall phenomenology fail to grasp materiality without giving up the *a priori* of correlation? Parallely to the recent developments of so-called “new materialism”, we can also observe, within the contemporary phenomenological debates, the signs of a material turn (for a recent example see the contributions in P-J. Renaudie, V. Spaak [eds.], *Phénoménologies de la matière*, Paris, CNRS, 2021).

If we stick to the tradition, a phenomenological notion of matter should be related to a possible description of phenomena. Such a concept should be won through the application of phenomenological methodologies such as the transcendental *epoché* and reduction. And indeed, we can find in Edmund Husserl such a phenomenological notion of matter under the title of the *hylé*. This latter, as we know, is not the matter described by science, is not something that would exist independently of consciousness, but makes up the very fabric of lived experience. In more technical terms it is not *real* as are the objects of the natural world, but in the best case only *reell* as a moment of consciousness. Edmund Husserl's later manuscripts have pushed this idea further by describing an *Urhylé* at the most basal dimension of temporalization. However, these manuscripts remain equivocal on the status of this primal phenomenological matter. If we look at later developments of phenomenology, we can observe a tendency to address the genuine materiality of the physis, e.g. in Martin Heidegger's reflection on the *Earth* (*Erde*) in his essay on the origin of the work of art or in Eugen Fink's cosmological phenomenology. But one can also think of phenomenological analyses of the materiality of the lived body or the organic body (e.g. in Michel Henry's reading of Maine de Biran) or this peculiar materiality of the flesh of the world, which

we can find in the late Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Recent developments on the links between classical German idealism and contemporary phenomenology also permit for a more speculative approach to materiality within transcendental phenomenology. Furthermore, in its more critical function, phenomenology can also contribute to a discourse on materiality in the context of analyses of historicity, sociological processes, and institutions. The aim of this volume – far from trying to reduce the meaning of materiality to one of its dimensions – is to explore the variety of notions of matter in phenomenology. The contributions of this issue explore materiality in frameworks inspired by phenomenology, but also in discussion with other disciplines.

Paula Lorelle, drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* questions the materiality of the body beyond the traditional distinction of the *Leib* and the *Körper*. She shows how already for the authors of German idealism such as Fichte, Schelling or Hegel the lived body tends to be reduced to a mere property of the ego. Accepting the paradigm of the body in German idealism, phenomenology repeats the same gesture. The danger, however, is that conceiving the body as a property leads to the disappearance of the materiality and the alterity of the flesh, which cannot be simply reduced to a *Körper* among the others. Indeed, Paula Lorelle argues with Beauvoir, the body is first and foremost a sensed or lived materiality (*une matérialité sentie ou vécue*) that appears in its alienation. Analyzing Beauvoir's descriptions of the menstrual cycle, Paula Lorelle proposes a phenomenological material approach to the feminine body that also allows for a critical reassessment of the limits of traditional phenomenological accounts of the lived body.

Ángel Alvarado Cabellos proposes a reinterpretation of Michel Henry's material phenomenology focusing on the excess or the transgression of enjoyment (or joy, *la jouissance*). He argues that the adjective "material" in Henry does not in fact simply refer to a purely hyletic dimension; rather – and at first sight paradoxically – it refers to a pure form of phenomenality. As known, Henry proposes to find the essence of manifestation in auto-affection. By mobilizing the notion of transpassibility (proposed originally by Henri Maldiney), Ángel Alvarado Cabellos questions the very immanence of affectivity by laying out its radical contingency. In order to account for the "density" of phenomenalization, auto-affection cannot be understood as a mere affective tautology – where the self affirms nothing but itself – but has to surpass itself, revealing its radical contingency as dependent on an original contagion through contact.

Delia Popa investigates the material dimension of sense formation (*Sinnbildung*) in general by taking a specific example: gestures. Indeed, if there is a genuinely phenomenological concept of materiality, it must be related to the very object of phenomenology which, according to the tradition Delia Popa takes

up, is the sense in the making. From this perspective, Delia Popa starts by analyzing the material dimension of the sense (*Sinn*) of intentional acts in Husserl, which she contrasts with Michel Henry's project of material phenomenology. However, doubting the possibility of grasping the material concreteness of experience in a dimension of pure immanence, she proposes to turn to a specific mode of appearing of materiality: the way materiality functions in imagination. By mobilizing the Finkian notion of derepresentation (*Entgegenwärtigung*), Delia Popa argues that the materiality of imagination can be understood as a specific excess, opening horizons of absence: possible worlds, the past, the future. It is ultimately at the level of the entanglement of temporalization and imagination that the materiality of sense formation becomes describable, and the materiality of gestures offers a perfect example.

Pietro Braga explores a paradoxical notion of materiality by drawing on the analyses of Jacques Lacan's first seminars. Instead of situating the question of materiality in the Imaginary or the Symbolic, Pietro Braga argues with Lacan that one must think a connivance between matter and the Real through the common notion of resistance. However, as the *khôra* in Plato, the Real can only be addressed by a "bastard reasoning" (Plat. *Tim.* 52b) since it is indeterminate and undefined and shies away from any signifier. Pietro Braga shows how this understanding of materiality through the psychoanalytic notion of the Real can be contrasted with Aristotle's understanding of the *hylé* that, precisely, does not resist the form but binds in coalescence with it. The contrast between the Lacanian and the Aristotelian notions of matter permits us to question the pathic and dynamic dimension of materiality and to show the originality of the psychoanalytic understanding of matter that Pietro Braga proposes to grasp through the analyses of the notion of the *objet a*.

Philip Flock takes a genuinely aesthetic approach to materiality by proposing a phenomenological analysis of Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Materiality here is grasped through the notion of affectivity. By drawing on Marc Richir's phenomenology of an archaic register of affectivity where selfhood arises, Philip Flock shows how cinema can offer a glimpse of this originary dimension of a wild region of life and affectivity. To do this, the paper thematizes the relation between reality and simulacrum and mobilizes the idea of aesthetic experience as an exchange of glances (*Kreuzung der Blicke, échange des regards*). In the exchange between the spectator's and the movie's "glances" the spectator is transported, beyond the narrative, to the zone of affectivity. Indeed, as Philip Flock reminds us, Tarkovsky was against a symbolic interpretation of his movies: the zone is not a "symbol", it is "just the zone": a non-positional field of affectivity, an infinitely phenomenizing life, before the institution of culture.

Paul Slama's essay offers yet another perspective on materiality by exploring the constitution of values and the social dimensions of experience, grounding

it in the phenomenological tradition and contrasting it with a classical sociological approach. This task is achieved through a meticulous (re)construction of a dialogue between Max Scheler and Max Weber on the history of capitalism. After the analyses of what he identifies as a psycho-theology in the Weberian description of protestant ethics, Paul Slama first focuses on Scheler's reading of Weber by adopting the perspective of a phenomenological psychology. He shows how the notion of historic intentionality allows for a genuinely phenomenological interpretation of the processes described by Weber. This crossed reading thematizes materiality from several perspectives: beyond the Schelerian idea of a constitution of values inspired by the Husserlian invention of material *a priori*, Paul Slama shows how materiality is always already at least entangled with or even produced by historical processes of institution and idealization, arguing that, *in fine*, "the *proté hylé* itself is a product of history".

The different phenomenological perspectives presented in this issue invite the reader to re-evaluate traditional antinomies, be it that of matter and idea, of *Leib* and *Körper*, of the real and the imaginary, or others. The idea of materiality being related to a certain kind of excess seems to be a common thread in more papers. Is this excess to be situated in affectivity? Can it be phenomenalized in and through imagination or art? Or is it inscribed in the very depth of our bodily existence, perhaps even in our gestures? Is this excess to be understood as a resistance, as something that cannot be properly exhausted by mineness or by signifiers? And how is it transformed or even produced by historical and social processes? These are some of the questions that the contributions of this issue raise and propose to answer from a phenomenological perspective. The core-problem of materiality however is far from being the only topic of these analyses. Indeed, the concept of matter functions here also as an operative concept, allowing the authors to address issues like history, cinema, psychoanalysis, gestures, the contingency of the self, or the feminine body. Perhaps this operative aspect of the concept of matter also reveals insights into how materiality itself operates at several levels and dimensions of phenomenalization.