

The Praecox Feeling and Empathic Incomprehensibility in Schizophrenia According to Merleau-Ponty's Description of Intercorporeity

Flávio Guimarães-Fernandes

Abstract

This article investigates the conditions of possibility for the *Praecox-Gefühl* (PF), the feeling of atmospheric strangeness experienced in the encounter with the schizophrenic patient, as described by Rümke. It aims to offer a phenomenological description of this experience of empathic incomprehensibility, taking as its basis the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, especially his work *Phenomenology of Perception*. The argument demonstrates how the experience of an "I" (corporeity) and of a "we" (intercorporeity) is founded upon a pre-reflective bodily intentionality, an "anonymous body" that anchors us in a world of shared significations. Through the analysis of clinical examples such as the phantom limb and anosognosia, and through the contrast between normal and pathological lived experience, the text reveals that health depends on a tacit harmony between the habitual body (past) and the actual body (present), and on an intercorporeal fusion with the other. It concludes that schizophrenia manifests as a double disharmony: a fracture in the intersubjective bridge that connects us to others and a fracture in the foundation that unites one's own mind to one's own body. PF is, therefore, the direct clinical apprehension of this double fracture. In this way, the study reaffirms PF not only as a diagnostic tool, but as a "guiding thread" that illuminates the invisible architecture of existence and points toward new avenues for understanding human consciousness.

Palavras-chave: Phenomenological Psychopathology; Schizophrenia; Merleau-Ponty; Corporeity; Intersubjectivity.

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O Praecox Feeling e a incompreensibilidade empática na esquizofrenia segundo a descrição da intercorporeidade em Merleau-Ponty

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Resumo

Este artigo investiga as condições de possibilidade do *Praecox-Gefühl* (PF), a sensação de estranhamento atmosférico experienciada no encontro com o paciente esquizofrênico, conforme descrita por Rümke. O objetivo é oferecer uma descrição fenomenológica para essa experiência de incompreensibilidade empática, utilizando como base a filosofia de Maurice Merleau-Ponty, especialmente sua obra *Fenomenologia da Percepção*. A argumentação demonstra como a experiência de um "eu" (corporeidade) e de um "nós" (intercorporeidade) se funda em uma intencionalidade corporal pré-reflexiva, um "corpo anônimo" que nos ancora em um mundo de significações compartilhadas. Através da análise de exemplos clínicos como o membro fantasma e a anosognosia, e do contraste entre a vivência normal e a patológica, o texto revela que a saúde depende de uma harmonia tácita entre o corpo habitual (passado) e o corpo atual (presente), e de uma fusão intercorporal com o outro. Conclui-se que a esquizofrenia se manifesta como uma dupla desarmonia: uma fratura na ponte intersubjetiva que nos conecta aos outros e uma fratura no alicerce que une a própria mente ao próprio corpo. O PF é, portanto, a apreensão clínica direta dessa dupla fratura. Dessa forma, o estudo reafirma o PF não apenas como uma ferramenta diagnóstica, mas como um "fio condutor" que ilumina a arquitetura invisível da existência e aponta novos caminhos para a compreensão da consciência humana.

Keywords: Psicopatologia Fenomenológica; Esquizofrenia; Merleau-Ponty; Corporeidade; Intersubjetividade.

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Introduction¹

Phenomenological psychopathology may be defined as the field of investigation that studies the conditions of possibility of human experience. Its method consists in a rigorous description that seeks to reveal the configuration of the fundamental structures of existence, namely: temporality, spatiality, corporeity, and intersubjectivity. Through the analysis of these structures, it becomes possible to understand the way in which a subject relates to the world and to others. It is on the basis of this architecture of experience that being-in-the-world can endow reality with significations, attributing an existential and hermeneutic meaning to its lived experience. (Stanghellini, 2010; Tamelini & Messas, 2017)

Among the objects of study of this approach, schizophrenic experience occupies a prominent place. Such importance is due, in part, to historical reasons, since no other psychiatric condition has attracted so much attention from psychopathologists. However, its fascination lies mainly in its profoundly enigmatic character and in its revealing potential regarding the nature of human subjectivity. The alterations in schizophrenia encompass an exceedingly broad spectrum of lived experience, including disturbances of the self, affectivity, thought, and the relation to common sense, as documented by Sass, Parnas, and Zahavi (Sass, Parnas, & Zahavi, 2011). This remarkable psychopathological richness makes schizophrenia a paradigmatic field of study, one that illuminates, in a privileged way, the foundations

¹ **Translator's Note:** This translation was carried out with the assistance of artificial intelligence, specifically ChatGPT, model GPT-5.5 Thinking, developed by OpenAI. The model belongs to the family of large language models and has advanced capabilities in natural language understanding and generation, with particular proficiency in academic, technical, and humanistic registers across multiple languages.

The translation was carried out from Brazilian Portuguese into English, following a section-by-section methodology, with systematic review of terminological consistency, preservation of the author's stylistic choices, and faithful maintenance of the conceptual vocabulary proper to phenomenological psychopathology, Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, and the clinical tradition concerning the *Praecox-Feeling*. The aim was neither to omit nor to add any ideas to the original text, while respecting, as far as possible, its argumentative organization, linguistic style, and conceptual density.

The quotations incorporated into the body of the text were translated from the version of the article provided for this activity, without independent consultation of the source texts, published translations, or alternative editions of the cited works.

The AI-assisted translation was initiated on May 22, 2026 and supervised by Fábio Luiz Socreppa da Fonseca and subsequently submitted to the author for review. The final version was approved by the author after his comments and revisions on June 5, 2026.

Readers are advised to consider that, although every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and fidelity to the original text, AI-assisted translations may present limitations in grasping expressions that are highly context-dependent, stylistic nuances, or culturally situated meanings. Any questions regarding the translation may be addressed to the supervisor.

of human experience, both in its pathological modality and in the so-called normal one.

Although there are controversies regarding the legitimacy of directly applying philosophy to other fields, the history of classical and contemporary phenomenological psychopathology not only attests to the viability but also to the fecundity of this practice. (Portugal & Holanda, 2021) This interlocution between philosophy and psychopathology is a two-way path that was initiated by philosophy itself. This is attested in the case of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (MP) in his main work, *Phenomenology of Perception (PhP)*, from 1945 (Merleau-Ponty, 2011). Throughout the entire book, the author extensively resorts to clinical examples from the neurology and psychiatry of his time in order to ground his descriptions of perceptual experience and corporeity within pathology and its comparison with normality.

In this article, the path taken is the inverse of Merleau-Ponty's. Starting from his philosophy, especially from *PhP*, the aim is to describe the intercorporeal experience that takes place in any human encounter and, from there, to clarify how, in the encounter with the schizophrenic patient, there occurs what has conventionally been called in phenomenological psychopathology the *Praecox-Gefühl* (PF).

This movement functions as a kind of “casting out nines”: on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy allows us to describe phenomenologically the conditions of possibility that ground the experience of PF; on the other hand, the clinical experience of PF attests to the relevance and accuracy of Merleau-Ponty's descriptions.

This term, *Praecox-Gefühl*, was first coined by the Dutch psychiatrist Henricus Cornelius Rümke (1893–1967) in a classic article from 1941 (Rumke & Neeleman, 1990). Rümke defined PF as a feeling of strangeness experienced by the clinician in the first minutes of the encounter with a schizophrenic patient. This strangeness is less an observable symptom derived from an objective analysis of the patient than a kind of passive and almost indescribable intuition, which manifests as a peculiar atmosphere permeating the encounter. The attentive clinician experiences this atmosphere in his or her own body, in a tacit manner. Even before any verbal exchange, the professional feels a subtle alteration in the patient's bodily posture, facial expression, tone of voice, and general attitude. Taken individually, these

alterations would be of little significance, but as a whole they present themselves pre-reflectively to the clinician, revealing to him or her that the relation with the patient takes place in a different way.

In fact, if we are to be more rigorous from a psychopathological point of view, we could say that the patient's mode of relation with the clinician takes place in an "incomprehensible" manner. This incomprehension may be understood as a fundamental inaccessibility to the empathic understanding of the patient, however much one may know his or her personal and psychopathological history (Gozé et al., 2019). Thus, in Rümke's words, the *Praecox-Gefühl* may be described as follows:

Even after a brief examination of the mental state, it becomes clear to the psychiatrist that his empathy fails. It is not only the patient's affect with which one cannot empathize; it is impossible to establish contact with his personality as a whole. One perceives acutely that this is caused by 'something' in the patient; the 'directedness' toward other people and the environment is disturbed. In a somewhat pathetic manner, one could say: 'the schizophrenic is outside the human community.' This lack of interchange with people is not merely an affective disturbance; what is affected is that which determines the relation between people, and this cannot be exhaustively described by the conventional mental state examination, which, after all, deals with patients who are observed in isolation. (Rumke & Neeleman, 1990)

In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy offers a path for analyzing this lived experience. On the basis of the project of *PhP*, we may understand "that" which Rümke identified as an alteration in the intersubjective relation, and which led him to conclude that the "schizophrenic is outside the human community." To this end, it is first necessary to apprehend what is meant by "human community" and what this "being outside" signifies.

Thus, the course of this article will be carried out in four stages. The first is to present the basic concepts of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology as the indispensable theoretical foundation for understanding how Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought develops from a critical dialogue with his master. Then, it will be demonstrated how the experience of the "I" rests upon a phenomenological bodily dimension and, therefore, a pre-reflective one. Next, it will be described how intersubjectivity emerges from this singular corporeity and spreads into the collective, allowing for the emergence of the "human community" described by Rümke. Finally, it will be analyzed how, in the encounter with the schizophrenic patient, the rupture of this intercorporeal fabric manifests as the atmospheric experience of the *praecox feeling*.

Phenomenological Foundations: The Dialogue with Husserl

The originality of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought in *PhP* is fully revealed in the dialogue he establishes with his master, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Therefore, before entering into the analysis of intercorporeity, it is indispensable to revisit some basic concepts of Husserlian phenomenology. This path is not a mere detour, but the construction of the foundation upon which Merleau-Ponty's argument is erected and from which, at crucial moments, he distances himself. Clarity regarding these fundamental points will allow for a sharper and deeper understanding of the Merleau-Pontian contribution.

Edmund Husserl's phenomenological project arises from the recognition of a crisis in Western thought. The origin of this crisis lies in the historical polarization between two models of knowledge: the objectivism of the positive sciences and the subjectivism of the human sciences. The fundamental error of both, according to Husserl, is to conceive the subject-world relation on the basis of the dichotomy between an "interiority" (consciousness) and an "exteriority" (the world). From this split, two dead ends emerge: either one postulates an object in-itself, wholly independent of consciousness, as the natural sciences do; or one denies the reality of the object, reducing it to a mere subjective content, as in the case of psychologism.

In the first case, that of the positive sciences, the world is seen as a faithful reflection of nature, a repository of "truths in themselves" that the empirical method seeks to unveil. Science, therefore, seeks to reveal the exact laws that govern the natural world, believing that these laws form a universal mathematics capable of deciphering nature's relations of cause and effect. This mathematical conception of the real, however, is an idealization that extends to everything, including human existence and subjectivity. Within this logic, consciousness itself ceases to be a phenomenon apart and comes to be understood through the same universal laws that govern the material world, being seen as a mere product of biological and causal processes. In this way, the same mathematical and causal order ultimately comes to define both the objective and the subjective world, treating them as products of one and the same nature. (Husserl, 2012, pp. 233–34)

The direct consequence of this view is that the scientific attitude seeks, in principle, to eliminate everything that is subjective. Knowledge must be ordered by a

mathematical logic in which “it is possible to approach, through ever new and better hypothetical approximations, always justifying oneself by means of the confirmation of experience” (Husserl, 2012, p. 102). Within this logic, the subjective is “put out of play,” and the scientist assumes the posture of an “anonymous” and neutral observer before nature. His task is reduced to looking at the world in a purely objective way in order to analyze the “truth in itself” that it contains (Husserl, 2012, p. 245). It is precisely upon this belief in neutrality that the thesis is founded according to which science can dispense with a subject. After all, if the researcher merely observes the mathematical laws that present themselves to him, the results of an experiment cannot depend on who performs it, which grants the study a status of objectivity and validity.

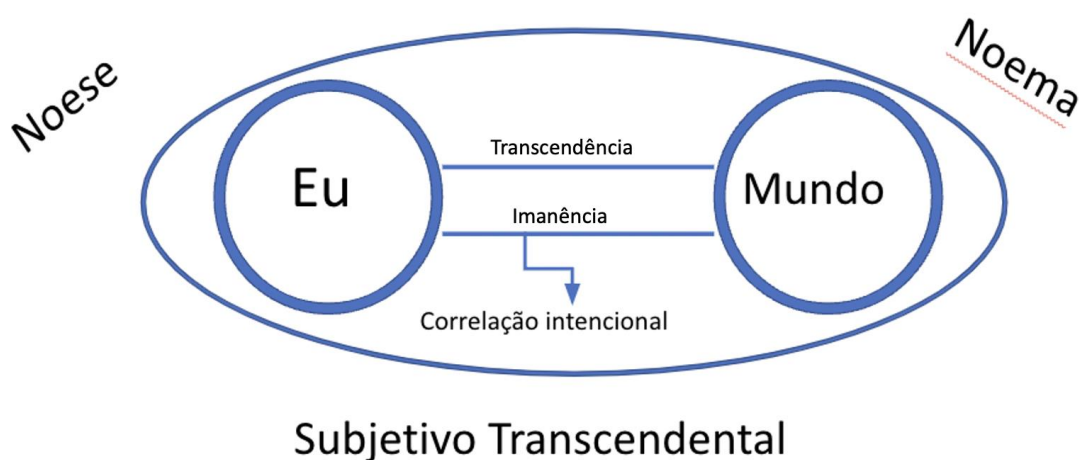
Subjectivism, in turn, completely reverses the logic of objectivism. Here, the meaning of being is a subjective creation, and this construction is so fundamental that the very validity of the objective world depends entirely on the consciousness that lives through it. In this conception, even the scientific world is a secondary structure, a “higher-level configuration” that can only emerge from a pre-scientific experience, founded upon a radical questioning carried out by the subject. It is subjectivity, ultimately, that generates and validates all the contents of the world, whether scientific or not. Therefore, any objective truth requires a subjective logos, a reason that gives it meaning and makes it comprehensible. The primacy of subjectivity is thus affirmed: what comes first is not the world with its objects, but a “pre-giving consciousness of meaning,” which actively rationalizes it and constitutes it as objective (Husserl, 2012, p. 55).

The crucial point of subjectivism is that this meaning-generating subjectivity is deeply rooted in a human and historical world. From this, science ceases to be seen as universal knowledge and comes to be understood in its relativity, for it belongs to the broader field of human experience. The scientific world, in this sense, is always relative to a subjectivity that interprets it from within a historically determined frame of reference: that of causality, which derives from the Greek philosophical tradition within the European context. Objective science, therefore, is not the discovery of an absolute truth, but rather a historically dated mode of representing the world, incapable of corresponding to the “thing in itself.” The “truth” it produces is valid only within the researcher’s cultural universe; thus science is, in itself, a form of culture: “Natural science is a culture, but it belongs only to the cultural world of the humanity

that has elaborated this culture, and within which possible paths are present for individuals to re-understand this culture” (Husserl, 2012, pp. 246–47).

In order to overcome the polarization between objectivism and subjectivism, Husserlian phenomenology proposes a third path. The aim is not to choose between “interiority” and “exteriority,” but rather to “recover authentic objectivity within transcendental subjectivity itself.” The method for achieving this is the phenomenological *epoché*: an exercise of suspending our natural attitude toward the world in order to observe how experience in fact takes place. In carrying out the *epoché*, the first finding is that consciousness is not a closed box, but an openness that is always already directed toward the world. Husserl gives the name intentionality to this fundamental and correlational relation. (Sacrini, 2016; Tourinho, 2009)

This intentional structure has a double movement: on the one hand, immanence, the object shows itself to consciousness from itself; on the other, transcendence, consciousness endows this same object with meaning. It is crucial to note that, in this relation, the object does not lose its alterity, that is, its difference. It reveals itself in and for a consciousness, but it is never fully confused with it. In Husserl’s terms, what is found is “...an objective exteriority within pure interiority,” in order to unite the scientific objective with the metaphysical subjective. It is this correlation that finally secures knowledge, uniting the perception of an object that shows itself with the attribution of meaning that the subject confers upon it. (Sacrini, 2016; Tourinho, 2009)



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This graphic representation suggests what has been described above. There is an intentional correlation between the pole of the “I” (*noesis*) and the pole of the “world” (*noema*). It is in the intentional correlation that the world presents itself to a subject who signifies it. This relation is understood as the subjective in phenomenology, though in its reduced version, as shown in this schema. This whole is called the transcendental subjective. In this relation, the intuited object is recognized through a meaningful givenness in which, at the same time, the object presents itself to consciousness from what it is, in a relation of immanence, and consciousness gives this same object a meaning, in a relation of transcendence.

Giacóia synthesizes phenomenology as “the analysis of the intentional lived experiences of consciousness in order to perceive how the meaning of phenomena, and of the global phenomenon that is the world, is produced therein” (Jr., 2013). Thus, the phenomenological attitude has its fulcrum in the fundamental concept of intentionality. As described, intentionality may be understood as a passive synthesis of consciousness, in which every consciousness corresponds to an object intended or aimed at by it. The condition of possibility for a consciousness to apprehend an object does not arise solely from the action of a purely thinking consciousness, as in subjectivism, nor from the factual object in itself, as in positivism, but rather from a relation between consciousness and world in which both are co-constituted. (Sacrini, 2016; Tourinho, 2009)

With the foundations of Husserl’s phenomenology established, we may now move on to Merleau-Ponty’s decisive contribution: describing how intentionality operates not from a pure consciousness, but from one’s own body, from corporeity. This shift in focus offers the key to understanding how the biological and the cultural intertwine, overcoming the classical metaphysical separation between spirit and matter. It is precisely this perspective that provides us with a logical path for explaining clinical phenomena such as “PF” in the encounter with schizophrenic patients. For it is in this pathology that a mode of being-in-the-world is presented in which a radical disharmony between mind and body is experienced.

The Body as the Foundation of Consciousness

Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, adopts Husserl’s same “third path,” but he does so in a singular way: by confronting the weaknesses of objectivism and subjectivism through paradoxes of lived experience. His argument becomes particularly powerful when he analyzes two clinical cases with diametrically opposed symptoms: phantom limb syndrome and anosognosia. In the first case, a patient continues to feel an arm that has been physically lost; in the second, a patient

ignores the existence of his arm, even though it remains physiologically intact.

The difficulty for objectivism, well summarized by Neves (2018), lies in its conception of the body as a set of *partes extra partes*. In this view, subjectivity is the result of cerebral interconnections, and the perception of a limb is the direct effect of objective stimuli in the nervous system. Pathological cases, however, directly contradict this logic. If representation depended on physical stimulus, the phantom limb should cease with amputation, and the limb ignored in anosognosia should force its presence upon consciousness. Merleau-Ponty uses this contradiction to argue that bodily consciousness cannot be understood as a simple effect of nervous processes, for this would annul the very possibility of these experiences. (Neves, 2018, p. 80)

Classical psychology, in its attempt to explain these syndromes, resorts to the patient's personal history. The symptom would be the expression of an unconscious repression: the representation of the limb would be linked to the refusal or acceptance of traumatic affects. Merleau-Ponty, however, sees in this explanation a Cartesian trap. Even when one speaks of the "unconscious," the existence of a sovereign *cogito* is still presupposed, an agent "I" that authorizes or censors the representations of its own body, as if it could simply refuse to accept the reality of an amputation.

This explanation, however, faces two insurmountable contradictions. First, psychology cannot explain why, independently of the patient's will, the phantom limb disappears if the corresponding nerves are severed, a clinical fact that Merleau-Ponty uses as an example. Second, the very idea of an "I" that deals with affects irredeemably binds it to a physiology, since affects are, in their essence, bodily. In both cases, psychology attempts to explain the body according to the logic of a separate mind. As Merleau-Ponty concludes, both in the objectivist view and in the psychological one, "we do not leave the categories of the objective world, in which there is no middle term between presence and absence" (Neves, 2018, p. 81; Fuchs & Koch, 2014).

If physiological and psychological explanations prove insufficient, the phenomenological tradition requires a new approach in order to account for both clinical cases. The solution does not lie in the poles of ontic experience, that is, the body-object of physiology or the mind-agent of psychology, but in carrying out a phenomenological reduction. It is necessary, metaphorically, to take a step back in

order to broaden the field of vision. Instead of analyzing the patient as a split object, phenomenology investigates the very conditions of possibility of experience, revealing the ontological field in which psyche and soma meet. It is at this more fundamental level that a precise description of these clinical events may emerge.

Following in Husserl's footsteps, Merleau-Ponty carries out his own *epoché*, but directs it toward the body. In doing so, he observes that intentionality, this structure that connects us to the world, operates in a specific and primordial way: through the body. He therefore describes it as a bodily intentionality. In order to ground his thesis, Merleau-Ponty turns to a scientific experiment with an insect, seeking to reveal the logic of the body at a pre-reflective level. The experiment is simple, but its results are revealing: with one leg held fast, the insect remains motionless, unable to perform a given action. However, if this same leg is amputated, the organism globally restructures itself and begins to move again in order to execute the task. (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, p. 117).

This difference in behavior, the philosopher argues, reveals that the body is irreducible both to pure mechanism, physiology, and to conscious representation, psychology. The physiological stimuli of the world are not neutral; they acquire meaning only as a function of the practical projects of an organism in its "optimal relation" with the environment. In other words, the insect's locomotion depends on an external stimulus acquiring an attractive meaning. With the leg held fast, the body's relation to the world is one of impossibility; the stimulus cannot acquire the practical meaning of being "reachable" and, therefore, no action is initiated. With the leg amputated, the body reconfigures itself, the optimal relation with the world is reestablished, and the same stimulus comes to have a meaning that directs the body to launch itself once again into its task. For Merleau-Ponty, it becomes clear that even at the animal level, stimuli act only when they are situated and endowed with a vital meaning by the body. (Neves, 2018, p. 82)

In the same way that he refutes physiological determinism, Merleau-Ponty dismisses a purely psychic explanation. The insect does not remain motionless because of a "decision" or lack of will, but because, with the leg held fast, there is no vital project to be carried out. The philosopher argues that, if the insect had a clear consciousness of its goal, it would try to adapt itself to each obstacle. However, it does not do so. Immobility occurs because the body's "current of activity" toward the

world encounters a real blockage: a leg that, while still belonging to the body, is prevented from moving. The insect's "consciousness," therefore, is not a separate thought, but something that emerges directly from the factual state of its organism in relation to the environment. In this case, the lived experience of a body whose locomotion is interrupted. (Neves, 2018, p. 82)

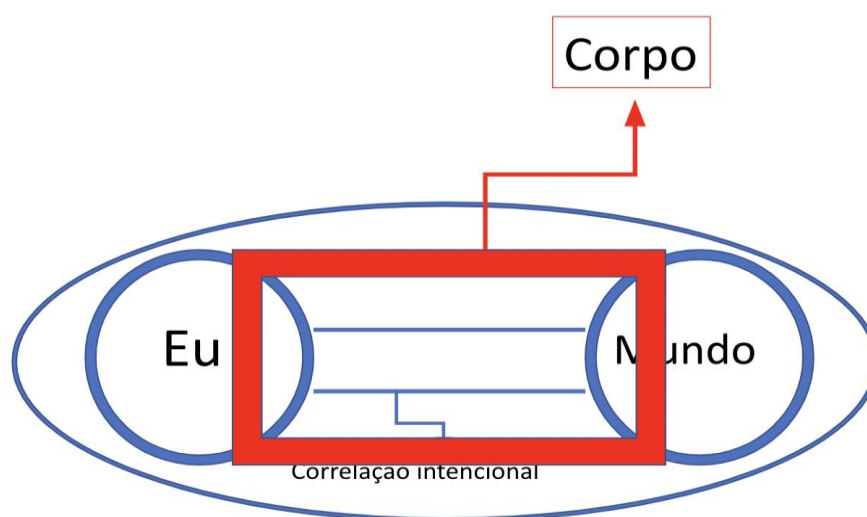
What the philosopher seeks to describe, therefore, is that bodily intentionality is a fundamental fact of life. From the most basic structure of an insect to the most complex structure of a human being, it is enough for there to be a body for a relation of signification with the world to be established. This body is always engaged in a practical directedness, in an intentionality that operates prior to any thought. However, this signification is not generic; it is produced according to the "style" of each body. Each organism has its own way of intending, its singular corporeity, which shapes a unique perceptual experience. At the same time, this experience shares a common basis with other members of the same species, which Merleau-Ponty calls the "a priori of the species." (Neves, 2018, p. 118)

This bodily "a priori," therefore, is a form of spontaneous intentionality that endows the world with practical significations, pre-constituting existence itself before any reflection. Reflective consciousness, upon awakening, already finds itself supported by this layer of pre-accomplished meanings. The handling of an object in the kitchen perfectly illustrates this process. No act of thought is necessary in order to know what to do with a stove; the body, in the act of cooking, already understands it in its function. This understanding, however, is not limited to immediate sensory perception or to its sheer manipulability; rather, it is from this fundamental basis that experience unfolds. Thus, the stove is perceived in its primary function of heating, and this bodily function already connects it to an entire network of meanings: to food, to hunger, to the socialization of a dinner, or to the creativity of a new recipe. These multiple significations are not concluded by reason; they emerge beforehand from our bodily immersion in the world. Merleau-Ponty synthesizes this fundamental openness: "It is by a gift of nature and without any effort on my part that the body primordially opens me to the field of transcendences." (Neves, 2018, p. 86)

We thus arrive at the notion of an "incarnate" consciousness, whose experience of the world is always mediated by a corporeity that grounds it. It is the body that simultaneously opens us to the world and fills it with prior significations.

This bodily existence has two poles that mutually imply one another: the body and the world, irredeemably linked. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty insists that the phenomenon of incarnation should not be thought of as the union of two opposites, “neither a spirit that becomes matter, nor a matter that becomes spirit.” Rather, it is a matter of recognizing that a bodily intentionality precedes consciousness and already situates us in a world endowed with meaning. It is this primordial condition of always already being in a world already signified by our body that Merleau-Ponty calls being-in-the-world. (Neves, 2018, p. 83)

In sum, it is one’s own body, with its corporeity, that establishes the primordial relation with reality and gives shape to our “being-in-the-world.” It possesses a pre-reflective property, a “passive synthesis” in Husserlian terms, which functions as the basis of all perception. And it is here that Merleau-Ponty distances himself from his master. For him, transcendental subjectivity is not a pure consciousness in which *noesis* and *noema* operate as abstract poles. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, transcendence, the attribution of meaning, emerges concretely from immanence, from sensory perception, for it is the body itself that carries out this passage. The body ceases to be an object in the world and becomes our point of view upon it.



Subjetivo Transcendental

In the representation above, there are no longer two abstract poles of the *noema* and the noematic. What now occurs is a bodily passive synthesis that irredeemably links the “I” and the “world,” as in the representation of the red rectangle, but without the “I” being exactly confused with the world, which is denoted by the remaining portions of the circles of the “I” and the “world” outside the rectangle. Intentionality is identified with corporeity, and it is the very field of the transcendental subjective, that is, the field of the pre-reflective.

The edges of the body and of the world, therefore, are open units in constant

synchrony. This reaffirms the phenomenological maxim that there is no subject without world, nor world without subject. Merleau-Ponty's great contribution, however, is to show that this primordial directedness is not carried out by a conscious "I," but by a body that he describes as anonymous. This ontological and pre-reflective experience is the basis upon which the "I" discovers itself. In order to have consciousness of itself, the "I" must always refer back to this anonymous bodily existence that precedes it.

It is this anonymous existence that carries history: not only personal experiences, but also those of others, those of the collective world to which we always already belong. Returning to the culinary example, our body knows what a stove is because it has seen one before, but the web of meanings linked to the stove rests upon a cultural history that precedes us, made up of other "I"s who thought about it, used it, and created recipes with it. Therefore, the bodily anonymity in which the "I" is incarnated opens us to the world in a paradoxical way: it is common to all, since we are human beings inhabiting the same cultural legacy, and at the same time particular, since our body carries its own lived history.

Merleau-Ponty's argument reveals that corporeity is an ambiguous experience, lived in an anonymous body. Our existence in it is intermittent: at times we perceive ourselves as anonymous, linked to a habitual past; at other times as actual, present, and engaged in a task. Thus, there dwells in the body a constant dialectic between absence and presence.

Absence manifests itself in the repertoire of possibilities that our body carries. Returning to the stove, its multiple significations, cooking, experimenting, socializing, are not all active in consciousness at every moment. They exist as latent potentialities, inscribed in our body through habit and through the cultural history we share with others. They are "absent" from consciousness precisely because they are the habitual basis of our openness to the world.

Presence, in turn, emerges in the act. When someone launches himself into the task of preparing a meal, these potentialities become individualized and actualized. At that moment, the subject is present to himself and to the stove, conscious of his action. Here the final paradox emerges: he is master of himself, free to carry out the task and even to innovate, for example, by trying a new recipe for guests. At the same time, he is servant to his body, for he needs it not only as a tool,

but as his existential support, as the very condition of his freedom. In this specific act, among the countless possible significations of a stove, these were the ones, experimentation and socialization, for example, that became present.

Individual life, therefore, never transcends the body; on the contrary, it is secretly nourished by it. This dialectic between absence and presence may be understood in temporal terms: our experience rests upon a habitual body, which opens us to a general world of possibilities inherited from the past, and at the same time acts through an actual body, in which an “I” engages in a present task.

However, this distinction is purely theoretical in everyday experience, where the integration between past and present, habit and act, is lived as an undivided unity. It is only in pathology that this hidden structure fractures and reveals itself. In illness, a “presentification” of the body occurs: its processes, normally silent, emerge and dominate consciousness, “as one sees in illness, where the events of the body become the events of the daily round” (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, p. 126).

Merleau-Ponty, therefore, uses pathology to reveal the fundamental ambiguity of the body. Illness exposes a cleavage in bodily temporality, which in health is lived as whole. This fracture reveals two components: the habitual body, linked to the past, and the actual body, linked to the present. The habitual body is the repository of our habits: perceptual, historical, and meaningful incorporations that open a horizon of practical activities. It is this body that operates before reflection, as in the gastronomic example, and for this reason it may be considered an anonymous body, one that dispenses with an “I.”

It is this bodily anonymity that Merleau-Ponty raises to the status of an “a priori of the species.” It constitutes a mode of general openness to the world, a horizon of possibilities that is, at once, human, historical, and cultural; to the point that one may say that our nature is cultural. This anonymous body operates as the ground of existence, the sketch upon which every experience is drawn. And just as there is no figure without a ground, the experience of the “I” is irredeemably incorporated into it. The “I,” the figure, is not entirely confused with its body, the ground, but it can also never renounce it:

(...) the pre-personal adhesion to the general form of the world, as anonymous and general existence, plays, beneath my personal life, the role of an innate complex. It does not exist as an inert thing, but also sketches out the movement of existence. It may even occur that, in danger, my human situation effaces my biological situation, that my body throws itself without reserve into action. But these moments can only be moments, and most of the time personal existence

represses the organism, without being able either to go beyond it or to renounce itself — neither to reduce it to itself nor to reduce itself to it. (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, p. 125)

The question that then arises is: why does “personal existence repress the organism”? What is the meaning of this functioning? For Merleau-Ponty, the answer lies in the need for a distance between the “I” and the operations of the body. If every action occupied the center of our consciousness, reflection would be impossible. Imagine having to think about each step while walking on the beach. How, then, would it be possible to have the experience of reflecting clearly on life while walking?

What the body does, intelligently, is to relegate the practical field of experience to the periphery of existence, treating it as a habitual generality. It assumes the foundational work so that consciousness may concern itself with the world, instead of concerning itself with the body itself. It is this “repression” that frees us to think. Thus, Merleau-Ponty concludes:

it is by renouncing a part of his spontaneity, by engaging himself in the world through stable organs and pre-established circuits, that man can acquire the mental and practical space which, in principle, will free him from his surrounding milieu and make him see it. (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, p. 129)

Upon returning to the clinical examples, Merleau-Ponty dismantles the classical explanations. For physiology, anosognosia is an “absence” of representation and the phantom limb an “excess”; for psychology, they are, respectively, a “forgetting” and a “recollection” of the “I.” The problem, the philosopher points out, is that this all-or-nothing logic does not correspond to experience. He argues that “the anosognosic does not simply ignore the paralyzed limb: he can only turn away from the deficiency because he knows where he would run the risk of encountering it.” (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, p. 120)

This observation is crucial. In order for the patient to be able simultaneously to “know” and “not know” his arm, in order for him actively to avoid confronting his paralysis, there must exist a pre-conscious knowing, a bodily knowledge that serves as the foundation for the operations of the “I.” The patient’s ambiguous experience thus reveals the existence of this pre-reflective field that classical views ignore.

The phenomenological explanation for the phantom limb, therefore, is that “to have a phantom arm is to remain open to all the actions of which only the arm is capable; it is to preserve the practical field that one had before the mutilation.” The phantom does not arise because the patient “does not know” that he has lost the

limb, but because his habitual body, guarantor of the actual body, continues to present a world that requires that arm in order to be operated upon. The bodily structure of the past, a generality that insists on presenting itself, continues to solicit actions that the actual body can no longer fulfill.

It is this same logic that explains why the severing of the nerves of the stump makes the phantom disappear. For Merleau-Ponty, this intervention does not cut off a “representation,” but interrupts the sensorimotor circuit that keeps the limb “in the circuit of existence.” This circuit is a relatively autonomous existence within our being-in-the-world. In it, the subject and the body mutually found one another: the subject gives an existential meaning to the stimuli of the circuit, while at the same time being founded by them. Without the stimuli from the stump, the circuit comes undone, and the “practical field” of the arm ceases to be sustained. (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, p. 122)

It is the habitual body, therefore, that “puts the arm into play or takes it out of play,” and not a deliberate decision on the part of the patient. The two clinical cases reveal the two faces of this dynamic, born from a trauma that has not yet been fully incorporated.

In the case of anosognosia, a trauma leads to an “affective crystallization.” The traumatic experience refuses to become past; it is not incorporated as a habit that operates in the background of existence. On the contrary, it remains as a present that stubbornly persists without the recognition of the “I.” The patient remains trapped in this situation, which Merleau-Ponty describes as the very essence of emotion: “To be emotional is to find oneself engaged in a situation that one cannot face and that nevertheless one does not want to abandon.” (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, p. 127) Since the body cannot “digest” the paralysis, it removes it from the scene, absenting the arm from the subject’s experience.

In the phantom limb, the opposite movement occurs, but for the same reason. The trauma of amputation has also not been fully incarnated; it has not become habit. The habitual body, still projected into a world that solicits an arm in order to be handled, refuses to accept the new condition. Just as in the anosognosic patient the deficiency does not become past, here the past bodily integrity stubbornly insists on becoming present. The body presents an arm that does not exist because the accident has not yet become the new silent background of existence.

To conclude this analysis, it is fundamental to understand pathology not as a

total separation between mind and body, but as a disharmony. Pathological experience is, by nature, fluid and partial: depending on the context, the patient may appear more integrated and with fewer symptoms, whereas in other situations the symptom manifests itself in an exacerbated form.

The case of anosognosia is a particularly elucidating example of a conversion-like experience. As has already been demonstrated elsewhere, mind-body harmony reveals itself as an irredeemable connection carried out by affects (Guimarães-Fernandes & Bosoni, 2023, p. 704). In anosognosia, we see the collapse of this harmony: what occurs is a traumatic affective crystallization in one's own body. An affect linked to a trauma "freezes" in the body, preventing the experience from becoming past and from being integrated as a habit.

This crystallization produces a double phenomenon, with two symptoms that are, in fact, the two sides of the same coin.

1. The first and most evident symptom is physical conversion itself. The body carries out a movement of withdrawing the arm from the existence of a subject. With it, an entire universe of significations is erased: the world of manageable objects, of embraces, and of handshakes. The arm ceases to be an available potency for action.
2. The second symptom is the reverse of the first and is classically called *la belle indifférence* — the beautiful indifference. It refers to the remarkable calm and indifference that the patient demonstrates in relation to such a significant loss. The key to understanding this is that trauma does not remove only the function of the arm; it also removes the affect corresponding to this loss from the sphere of consciousness. The painful meaning of the paralysis is not presented to the "I." Consequently, for the individual who carries it, immobility is an affectively neutral experience (Guimarães-Fernandes & Bosoni, 2023, pp. 707–9).

It is only by understanding this double movement, the withdrawal of the arm from the practical world and the simultaneous withdrawal of suffering from the conscious world, that we can apprehend the paradoxical truth of the patient's experience. He lives in a split in which one part of his being, the anonymous body, knows of the deficiency and avoids it, while another part, the "I," is spared the affect of this same deficiency, allowing for ignorance. It is this condition that Merleau-Ponty masterfully summarizes: "the patient knows of his loss precisely insofar as he ignores it, and he ignores it precisely insofar as he knows it." (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, p. 122)

The Human World and Schizophrenia

Having understood how the corporeality of the “I” operates, we now move on to the intercorporeity of the “we.” The aim is to describe, phenomenologically, intersubjective experience and its root in the body. Merleau-Ponty offers us a key to this in the simple act of reflecting: every actual thought, he argues, already finds an older thought that precedes it, a “trace” upon which it relies. As we have seen, this trace is not purely intellectual; it is perceptual, meaningful, and historical, left by our bodily intentionality.

The decisive step is to universalize this structure. If my body operates in this way, and if this functioning is an “a priori of the species,” then other bodies operate in the same manner. Each subject leaves behind a trace, and these traces, because they belong to bodies of the same species in the same world, are compatible and interconnected openings. It is the overlapping and intertwining of these bodily traces that form a human world, which is, by definition, a social world.

When I perceive the other, I do not see him as an object to be observed, nor as a consciousness locked within itself. The experience is much more intimate: the perception of the other occurs as an extension of his world into mine. My body and his touch one another at a pre-reflective level. My perspective “slips” into the other’s; the horizons exceed one another, and the limits become porous. I feel that the other’s body is capable of the same potentialities as mine, that it opens itself to the same familiar world.

At this moment, our openings merge into a common generality. What occurs is what Merleau-Ponty calls a “miraculous prolongation” between my intentions and his, as if my body and the other’s formed a single system. The anonymous existence of my body, this trace that precedes me, becomes a space inhabited by both of us simultaneously. The world is then revealed not as my world or his world, but as a fundamentally intershared terrain. (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, pp. 472–474)

This bodily interconnection is not static, but is actualized at every moment in a hermeneutic relation with others. Emotions are the clearest example: when speaking with someone who is sad, we feel a sadness in our own body; if someone addresses us with anger, this intention is perceived bodily and endowed with a signification of threat or violence.

This recognition is pre-reflective. We do not need to think or search through our memories in order to understand the other's anger; we understand it directly because our own body knows this potentiality. Emotions such as suffering or anger are simply variations of our mode of being-in-the-world, generalities that belong to the common field our bodies share. However, although this meaningful field is broadly shared, experience is never identical. Upon this common basis, each "I" will lend a personal and unique signification to the same situation.

Our relation with culture and history operates in the same way. Bodily intentionality does not invent the world, but finds it already "in-formed" by the significations that other bodies have deposited there. The interpersonal connection is, therefore, primordial: our body is born into a world already inhabited by other behaviors, with which it intertwines from the very beginning. It has the property of absorbing this network of meanings that is given to us beforehand.

Any task that an "I" performs is, thus, a particularity, a modality of intention that stands out from an infinite background of other possibilities offered by culture. Experience, therefore, can never be solipsistic. We are irredeemably anchored in an intersubjective generality, in a network of shared intentions that we can understand empathically. The other's behavior is comprehensible to us because his body and ours drink from the same cultural source. (Merleau-Ponty, 2011, pp. 479–80)

It is at this point that schizophrenia establishes itself as a problem. The empathic incomprehensibility that defines it may be seen as the collapse of intercorporeity. The "miraculous prolongation" that connects the intention of one body to that of another is extinguished. The fusion of bodily generalities becomes impossible. Before the patient, the experience of empathy breaks down: one cannot feel what he feels, nor share in his delusional reality.

With the loss of anchoring in a common world, the patient's lived experience becomes particular and self-referential. Objects change their meaning; the news on television speaks directly to him. It is this fracture in intersubjectivity that provokes the atmospheric strangeness of Rümke's PF. The feeling of empathic incomprehensibility is the perception that bodies no longer vibrate at the same frequency; there is a fundamental disharmony. Affects, intentions, and shared meanings no longer find resonance. Schizophrenia, in its essence, allows us to observe the unfolding of a solipsistic lived experience, of which autism is the most

visible symptom.

However, the schizophrenic fracture is not limited to the loss of intersubjective connectivity. The very integrity of the experience of the “I” is damaged, revealing a profound internal disharmony. The disharmony that the patient lives with the external world is, in its essence, the reflection of a disharmony that he lives within himself, a fracture that manifests itself along all axes of existence. (Henriksen & Parnas, 2019)

1. The fracture of affect: First, the “I” becomes a stranger to its own emotions. It can no longer interpret its affects, living them in their raw and incomprehensible state, as manifested in the phenomenon of delusional mood. The affective basis that colors and gives meaning to experience becomes, itself, a source of strangeness.
2. The porosity of boundaries: Next, the boundaries that separate the internal from the external become porous. The fundamental distinction between the self and the non-self, guaranteed by an integrated body, wavers. Bodily expressions and intimate thoughts are felt as if they came from outside, giving rise to auditory hallucinations and experiences of bodily influence, described as first-rank symptoms.
3. The loss of the common world: Consequently, in the absence of a secure intersubjective “ground” and of reliable bodily boundaries, the relation with reality is altered. Objects lose their neutrality and come to have an intentionality of their own, almost always self-referential. Criticism regarding one’s own behavior fades away, for there are no longer stable references, internal or external, to anchor judgment.
4. The dissolution of identity: Finally, this fragmentation reaches the very axis of identity: the experience of biographical continuity. The “I,” which understands itself through a narrative that unites past, present, and future, comes undone. Personality is radically modified, and existence crystallizes in an eternal present, unanchored from personal history and from the projection of a future.

It may thus be concluded that the experience of schizophrenic being-in-the-world is a double disharmony, a fracture that occurs along two fundamental axes. It is, on the one hand, a fracture in the bridge that connects us intersubjectively to others. And it is, on the other hand, a fracture in the foundation that unites one’s own mind to one’s own body. Here, therefore, we have fulfilled our phenomenological “casting out nines.” Schizophrenia reveals itself as the paradigmatic case that, by contrast, illuminates the nature of integrated experience, showing that it is, at its basis, inseparably bodily and intersubjective. It is by witnessing the fracture of this structure in pathology that we can finally understand its silent operation in health.

Conclusion

This article began from a fundamental question: how can we understand the experience of atmospheric strangeness in contact with the schizophrenic patient, Rümke's *Praecox-Gefühl* (PF)? The path toward an answer was traced through the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose analysis of corporeity allowed us to examine in detail the structures of our being-in-the-world through the comparison between normal and schizophrenic lived experience.

This approach revealed that integrated experience depends upon a bodily and intersubjective basis, and that schizophrenia manifests as the fracture of this very basis. Therefore, PF is not an unfathomable mystery, but the clinical apprehension of this intercorporeal fracture. We thus attest to the accuracy of the philosopher's thought and to the conditions of possibility for the phenomenon. More than a mere diagnostic sign, PF is confirmed as a guiding thread that leads us back to the potentialities of the body, opening new fields of investigation for science and for a deeper understanding of human consciousness in its multiple facets.

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