

Sensation in Merleau-Ponty and Husserl

JUNG Tae-Chang¹

Seoul National University

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to understand the relationship between Merleau-Ponty's criticism of classical concepts of sensation in PP and Husserl's concept of sensation in *Logische Untersuchungen* (*Logical Investigations*; "LU" hereafter). In LU, Husserl posits sensation (*Empfindung*) as non-intentional experience which is merely a psychological status lacking any reference to object. Whether this sensation in LU as non-intentional experience falls under Merleau-Ponty's criticism or not is the main topic of this paper. Moreover, LU is the first work of Husserl's static phenomenology, and the later works of static phenomenology, e.g. *Ideen I*, inherit the concept of sensation from LU without any essential amendment. Thus in this paper we can expect to understand the relationship between Merleau-Ponty's criticism in PP and Husserl's concept of sensation in static phenomenology, virtually.

We can say that there is a considerable conflict between Merleau-Ponty's criticism of classical concepts of sensation in PP and Husserl's concept of sensation in LU as non-intentional experience, even though they share phenomenological-psychological reduction which is one of prerequisites for phenomenology. In LU, one of the most important works in his static phenomenology, Husserl posits sensation as non-intentional, meaningless experience, which needs the operation of meaning-giving apperception in order to participate in intentional experience. This concept of sensation as non-intentional experience is inherited by *Ideen I*, which is also classified as an important work in Husserl's static phenomenology. In spite of its important function in analyses of static phenomenology, however, this concept of sensation has a critical defect that it neglects intentionality of lower level, one of which is the intentionality of sensation. Husserl's analyses in genetic phenomenology turn attention to this point and reveal the intentionality of sensation, e.g. in *Analyzen zur passiven Synthesis*, where sensation is investigated in the way of genetic phenomenology.

Merleau-Ponty in PP shares many points with Husserl's genetic phenomenology regarding sensation, and thus he is critical of Husserl's concept of sensation as meaningless hyle and apperception as meaning-giving act. In his criticism against sensation as impression, which shares many points with Husserl's sensation as non-intentional experience, Merleau-Ponty shows that his concept of sensation as the most

¹ jtaechang@gmail.com. Graduate student of Department of Philosophy in Seoul National University

rudimentary factual perception is based on intentionality and thus full of meaning. This concept of sensation as intentional, meaningful experience coincides with that of genetic phenomenology precisely.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of sensation in PP and Husserl's concept of sensation in LU shares some points, however, in that they both criticize the theories based on the "objective world" and goes into the actual experience of perception. It is because the two concepts are both the outcomes of phenomenological-psychological reduction, i.e. suspension of the validity of the objective world, which is one of the prerequisites of phenomenology.

I Introduction

In the Introduction of Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la perception*² (*Phenomenology of Perception*; "PP" hereafter), which is entitled "The Classical Prejudices and the Return to the Phenomena", Merleau-Ponty goes into detailed criticism of what he calls "classical analyses", especially regarding "sensation". Considered as constituting the bottom layer of perception in classical analyses, sensation is the foremost concept which Merleau-Ponty deconstructs in PP in order to develop his own concept of perception. He thinks that classical concepts of sensation bear "classical prejudices" and consequently distort perception itself. He says "Because they accepted it [sensation] readily, classical analyses missed the phenomenon of perception." (PP, p. 25)

Merleau-Ponty's criticism of classical concepts of sensation plays an important role in understanding the relationship between his phenomenology and Husserl's phenomenology. It is because the criticism manifests the very point of his breakaway from the "classical analyses" and the starting point of his phenomenology. If Husserl's sensation shares some characteristics with the "classical concepts", we can infer that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy differs from Husserl's fundamentally in those points. On the other hand, if Husserl's sensation has something common with Merleau-Ponty's point of view about perception, we can say in those points Merleau-Ponty and Husserl go in the same way.

The aim of this paper is to understand the relationship between Merleau-Ponty's criticism of classical concepts of sensation in PP and Husserl's concept of sensation in *Logische Untersuchungen* (*Logical Investigations*; "LU" hereafter).³ In LU, Husserl posits sensation (*Empfindung*) as non-intentional experience which is merely a psychological status lacking any reference to object. Whether this sensation in LU as non-intentional experience falls under Merleau-Ponty's criticism or not is the main topic of this paper. Moreover, LU is the first work of Husserl's static phenom-

2 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard, 1945 (2005 printing). Its English translation will be borrowed from Colin Smith's translation (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

3 E. Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen, Zweiter Band: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis. Erster Teil*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1984 (Hua XIX/1). Its English translation will be borrowed from J.N. Findlay's translation (E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, translated by J.N. Findlay, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970)

enology⁴, and the later works of static phenomenology, e.g. *Ideen I*, inherit the concept of sensation from LU without any essential amendment. Thus in this paper we can expect to understand the relationship between Merleau-Ponty's criticism in PP and Husserl's concept of sensation in static phenomenology, virtually.

To investigate the relationship, in section II Merleau-Ponty's criticism of classical concepts of sensation in PP (pp. 25–35) will be examined first. Then in section III, Husserl's concept of sensation in LU will be explicated by analyzing § 11~15 of *Investigation V* (pp. 384–410). In section IV, probably the most important part of this paper, the relationship between Merleau-Ponty's criticism and Husserl's concept of sensation in LU will be investigated. Finally in section V, we will come to the conclusion.

II Merleau-Ponty's criticism of the classical concepts of sensation

The main point of Merleau-Ponty's accusation against "classical analyses" is that they reconstructed perception on the basis of "objective world", whereas in reality perception is based on "pre-objective world". To understand his point, let us look into what "objective world" and "pre-objective world" are.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the "pre-objective world" is "the world as directly experienced" (*le monde vécu*; PP, p. 9) upon which "the whole universe of science", namely the "objective world", is constructed. It is the world "which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language." (PP, *Ibid*) This "pre-objective world" is "there" before any philosophical analysis and scientific explication. On the other hand, the "objective world" is "the whole universe of science" based on the "pre-objective world" as aforesaid. It is made up of independent objects which are context-free and fully determined in itself, whereas in the former things are dependent upon the context and not fully determined.⁵

Sensation is what the "classical analyses" uses as a "building-block",⁶ as a minimum unit or atom of perception, reconstructing perception on the basis of "objective world". In the process of the reconstruction, according to Merleau-Ponty, the 'classical analyses' distort sensation in two

⁴ About the distinction between Husserl's static phenomenology and genetic phenomenology, see pp. 17–24 of N. I. Lee's *Phänomenologie der Instinkte* (N. I. Lee, *Edmund Husserls Phänomenologie der Instinkte*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993).

⁵ With regard to this, Hadreas contrasts Merleau-Ponty's "objective world" with the "pre-objective world" in three points: First, while "objective world" is made up of independent objects which are context-free, in "pre-objective world" things are dependent upon the context that they appear in; Second, in "objective world" properties of objects are distinct and fully determined, whereas in "pre-objective world" each change in a part of the thing alters the significance of the whole; Third, the objective world is the sum of these determined objects, whereas aspects of things as well as expanses of the pre-objective world as a whole are taken to be "there" yet indeterminate. (P. J. Hadreas, *In Place of the Flawed Diamond*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1986, p. 50)

⁶ M. M. Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: a Guide and Commentary*, Macmillan, 1989, p. 32.

ways: one is to make it purely subjective, to treat it as an impression; the other is to make it purely objective, to treat it as a quality of fully determined object. Let us look into these two distortions.

The first distortion of sensation is to define it as “the way in which I am affected and the experiencing of a state of myself”. (PP, p. 25) For example, when we see a redness of an apple, the apple is not red in itself; the redness is not the property of the apple but the way in which we are affected or the state of ourselves. In this point of view sensation is reduced to an element of consciousness and thus completely absorbed in consciousness. As impression, sensation is now purely subjective, there is “no distance” between me and sensation, and “I feel precisely to the extent that I coincide with sensation.” (PP, p. 25) Therefore impression has no meaning, “it signifies nothing for me” (PP, Ibid), because in pure impression there is no distinction between the sensing and the sensed.

Merleau-Ponty’s main criticism against sensation as “impression” is simply that this notion corresponds to nothing in our experience. There is no “impression” which is purely subjective and “the most rudimentary *factual perceptions* that we are acquainted with, in creatures such as the ape or the hen, are based on relations and not on absolute terms.” (PP, Ibid) These “rudimentary factual perceptions” are already charged with meaning (*sens*) because the sum of meaningless elements cannot yield meaning, as the sum of zero is always zero.⁷ In addition, Impression cannot be “undifferentiated” and pure, because the simplest sense-datum has figure-background structure, as the Gestalt theory shows us. In other words, something perceptual is always in the middle of something else; it always forms part of a ‘field’. In conclusion, there is no pure, undifferentiated and meaningless impression in our actual perception. Therefore it has no place in the analysis of perception.

The second distortion of sensation is to make it reception of quality (*avoir des qualités*; PP, p. 26). In this point of view, “red or green are not sensations, but sense-data, and quality is not an element of consciousness, but a property of the object.” (PP, Ibid) Now red object is red in itself, redness is not the state of subject, like impression, but a property of the red object, i.e. quality, and sensation is not redness but the reception of redness. Since quality is the property of the object itself, it is purely objective.

According to Merleau-Ponty, there are two errors in regarding sensation as reception of quality: First, it makes perception out of things perceived (PP, p. 27); second, it thinks the meaning and the object, at the level of quality, are fully developed and determined (PP, Ibid). Contrary to impression, which makes sensation completely absorbed in consciousness, quality reduces sensation to perceived objects completely. These “perceived objects” are fully determined and therefore the world, which consists of these determined objects, is determined. The word “determined” here means the object and the world is fixed *in itself* (*en soi*) whether we perceive them or not. We perceive what is already there *in itself*, and the role of subject or consciousness is merely passive like a *receiver*. Compared with impression, quality just replaces one extreme with another, namely completely subjective and undifferentiated one with completely objective and determined one.⁸

Merleau-Ponty says, however, that the actual perception is undetermined by nature. To prove this, he examines the field of vision, seemingly the most determined sense among the five, and shows even the visual field has undetermined elements. According to him, we cannot limit the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, p. 33.

perimeter of visual field, because the region surrounding the field is “not easy to describe”, i.e. it is undetermined (PP, p. 27). Moreover, not only the surrounding region of the visual field, which we hardly uses, but the actual field of vision itself is essentially undetermined. He illustrates this point by Müller-Lyer’s illusion, an optical illusion in which two segments of the same length appear to have different lengths. He says it is because the field of vision has undetermined-ness as its essential character. In this sense, Müller-Lyer’s illusion is not actually an “illusion” or “deception”. If we define it as an “illusion” and say that in “true” perception the segments are of the same length, we are transposing perceived object to sensation and *reconstructing perception on the basis of the “objective world”*. In other words, we “substitute an artificial set-up for the original phenomenon, instead of revealing ‘normal sensation’” (PP, p. 31).

These two misunderstandings of sensation, namely impression and reception of quality, are equally based on the prejudice of the “objective world”. Sensation as purely subjective impression also presupposes the above-mentioned “objective world”. In the viewpoint of impression, “the object itself” which constitutes “the world itself” is beyond our perception and in comparison with “the world taken in itself” (*le monde pris en soi*; PP, p. 28) sensation, which constitutes the bottom layer of perception, is purely subjective. For example, in Kant “the thing itself” (*Ding an sich*) cannot be perceived and the world of “the thing itself” is beyond our perception. It is on this presupposition that Kant restricted our realm of perception to the world of phenomena. Without the objective, the subjective cannot exist. On the other hand, quality is the property of “the object itself”, and purely objective, but situation is the same. As we already examined in the above, quality also distorts actual experiences of perception and sensation in favor of the “objective world”. The only difference is that the perceived object which substitutes for actual perception is considered as subjective in impression, while it is considered as objective in quality.

As we investigated above, when the “objective world” contradicts the actual perception, “classical analyses” willingly sacrifice the latter for the former, because they think the “objective world” is determined *in itself*, whereas perception is only the process of receiving that determined world. But the determined object and the “objective world” by which empiricism tried to define sensation is the very lately developed object of scientific consciousness (PP, p. 28). Since undetermined-ness is the essential character of perception, we must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon (PP, *Ibid*).

Now Merleau-Ponty criticizes the concept of the “objective world” directly, on which sensation as impression or reception of quality is based. In order to do this, he attacks “constancy hypothesis” of physiology first, which he thinks is the theoretical ground of the “objective world”. The “objective world” being given, constancy hypothesis assumes that the “objective world” passes on to the sense-organs messages which must be registered, then deciphered in such a way as to reproduce in us the original text; hence we have in principle a point-by-point correspondence and constant connection between the stimulus and the elementary perception (PP, p. 30). But constancy hypothesis contradicts the actual experience of perception, as the two misunderstandings of sensation do. To explicate this point, Merleau-Ponty takes three examples, one of which is that “the addition of auxiliary lines makes two figures unequal which are objectively equal.” The “objective world” being fully determined, the two figures would be also fully determined, so the addition of lines would not change them. But the actual perception shows us the opposite. How can this happen, unless the

two figures are not fully determined and *dependent upon the context that they appear in?* According to Merleau-Ponty, the law of constancy cannot avail itself against the testimony of consciousness, of any crucial experience in which it is not already implied, and whenever we believe that we are establishing it, it is always presupposed (PP, p. 31) It is just a hypothesis, which does not match with the actual experience of perception, and at least with regard to perception it is reasonable to say that we cannot reconstruct perception on the basis of the hypothesis.

Merleau-Ponty reaches a conclusion that the classical notion of sensation was not a concept originated from reflection⁹, but a late product of thought directed towards objects, the last element in the representation of the world, the furthest removed from its original source, and therefore the most unclear (PP, p. 33). The “objective world” is the final constitution of intentionality, so the actual perception cannot be reconstructed right from it. If we wish to understand sense experience, it is the “pre-objective world” that we have to investigate (PP, p. 35).

III Husserl's concept of sensation in *Logische Untersuchungen*

In *Investigation V* in *Logische Untersuchungen* (“LU” hereafter), Husserl commences on his analysis of intentionality by classifying three kinds of consciousness:¹⁰ 1) Consciousness as the entire psychic experiences in the unified stream of consciousness; 2) Consciousness as the inner awareness of one's own psychic experience; 3) Consciousness as a comprehensive designation for 'mental acts', or 'intentional experiences', of all sorts. The first kind of consciousness embraces all kinds of psychic experience and the third designates conscious as “intentional experience”. Therefore the third one is included in the first as a class of psychic experience.

But there is one more class of experience which constitutes the whole psychic experience with the third kind of consciousness. Non-intentional experience is this fundamental class of psychic experience. Intentional experiences¹¹, the other fundamental class, have reference to object. For example, “In perception something is perceived, in imagination, something imagined, in a statement something stated, in love something loved, in hate hated, in desire desired etc.” (LU, p. 380) This “reference to object” is *intentionality*. On the other hand, non-intentional experiences lack reference to object, i.e. intentionality. These non-intentional experiences constitute the substructure of intentional experiences, i.e. it is only on the basis of non-intentional experiences that intentional experiences come into being. It is because non-intentional experiences are immanent contents (immanent Inhalte) of act, namely intentional experience. They constitute act, but are neither themselves intended nor the objects presented in the act (LU, p. 387).

In LU, sensation (Empfindung) belongs to non-intentional experiences and it is a *reell* content

⁹ The “reflection” mentioned here is the reflection in general, including the second-order reflection of science.

¹⁰ E. Husserl, *Hua XIX/1*, p. 356.

¹¹ In LU, “intentional experience” (intentionales Erlebnis) and “act” (Akt) are identical, i.e. “intentional experience” = “act”. Husserl defines act as intentional experience in the introduction of *Investigation V* (LU, p.325) Therefore, if the word “act” is used in this paper, we can think it as “intentional experience”.

of act.¹² As aforesaid, sensation as non-intentional experience constitutes the substructure of act but are neither itself intended nor the object in the act. Husserl says, “I do not see color-sensation but colored things, I do not hear tone-sensations but the singer’s song etc.” (LU, Ibid) The color-sensation and the tone-sensation are *reell* contents which constitute the act of seeing and the act of hearing, and the “colored things” and “the singer’s song” are the intentional objects, i.e. the objects of act, which are not sensations. In another page of LU, he says more clearly: “the existence of a content in consciousness in the sense in which a sensation so exists, without being itself made a perceptual object (Wahrnehmungsobjekt) ... (the rest omitted)” (LU, p. 395) From this quotation we can see clearly that sensation is a content in consciousness, i.e. a *reell* content, and it is not an object of perception.

If sensation is the content in consciousness, which is a *reell* make-up (Bestand) of act, *how* does it constitute act? Regarding the constitution of act, Husserl makes observations of ‘consciousness of identity’, i.e. a claim to apprehend identity (LU, p. 397). Sensation changes every time, yet we perceive one and the same object, e.g. a box, whether it may be turned and tilted (LU, p. 396). On the other hand, we can perceive different objects on the basis of the same sensation. For example, chopsticks are just two wooden sticks for a person who does not know what chopsticks are. After learning how to use them, however, he or she perceives the two wooden sticks as chopsticks. In this case, the sensation of the objects is the same, but on the basis of the same sensation the object changes completely. Now, in the first case, what makes us perceive the same object on the basis of different sensations? In the second case, what makes us perceive different objects on the basis of the same sensation? There must be something identical in the first case and something different in the second case.

To explicate the constitution of act, Husserl introduces *Apprehension-Content Scheme* (*Auffassung-Inhalt Schema*).¹³ According to the scheme, intentional experience is constituted when sensation as *content* goes through the process of interpretation, i.e. *apprehension*. In the two cases of the former paragraph, it is apprehension which makes us perceive the same object on the basis of different sensations and different objects on the basis of the same sensation. In addition, since sensation as *content* lacks intentionality as non-intentional experience, it is apprehension which makes intentional experience intentional.

According to Husserl, these two elements, namely apprehension and content, make up “the full concrete act of perception”.¹⁴ They are two *reell* moments of act, which are *experienced*, but not *perceived*. The object, on the other hand, is *perceived* but not *experienced*. In this context, a passage

12 “*reell*” is a technical term of Husserl, which means “in consciousness”. Husserl’s another technical term “transcendental” means the opposite, i.e. “transcending consciousness”. For example, the object is transcendental in Husserl, because it is not *reell*, i.e. not in consciousness, but transcending consciousness; Husserl’s intentionality is also transcendental, because in intentional experience the transcendental object, not *reell* sensation, is intended.

13 For more details about the scheme, see pp. 394–401 of LU.

14 “I find nothing more evident than the distinction here apparent between contents and acts, between perceptual contents in the sense of presentative sensations, and perceptual acts in the sense of interpretative intentions overlaid with various additional characters. Such intentions, united with the sensations they interpret, make up the full concrete act of perception.” (LU, p. 397)

from Lu reads as follows:

Sensations, and the acts ‘apprehending’ or apperceiving them, are alike experienced, *but they do not appear as objects*: they are not seen, heard or *perceived* by any sense. *Objects* on the other hand, appear and are perceived, but they are not *experienced*. (LU, p. 399)

To understand this passage, we have to apprehend the meaning of “experience” (Erlebnis) precisely. In LU, Husserl’s “experience” is not just an “experience” we understand in general use of the word, but a technical term. *Experience* in LU means “*reell* part of consciousness” (as a noun), and “constitute consciousness in a *reell* way” (as a verb) (LU, p. 400). It has also the original meaning of “experience”. Meanwhile, the “consciousness” here is the first kind of consciousness, namely “consciousness as the entire psychic experiences in the unified stream of consciousness” (LU, p. 356). Consciousness as the entire psychic experiences is undoubtedly constituted by experiences.

In this sense, that sensation and apprehension are *experienced* means that the two moments of act are *reell*, i.e. in consciousness; the object is not *experienced*, i.e. not a *reell* part of consciousness, because it is transcendental, i.e. transcending consciousness. On the other hand, sensation and apprehension, the *reell* moments of act, are not “seen, heard or *perceived* by any sense”, because intentional object is always transcendental. Therefore when we focus on the “sensation”, especially in a philosophical reflection, it is not Husserl’s sensation itself that we perceive, because *the “sensation” is perceived and thus a transcendental object*, whereas *Husserl’s sensation is reell and cannot be perceived at all*. The “sensation” in a philosophical reflection is a transformation of Husserl’s sensation. In Husserl’s point of view, once sensation is perceived, it is not the sensation itself but an intention to the sensation, even if it has the same name “sensation”

It is in this context that Husserl makes a distinction between sensation (Empfindung) and feeling (Gefühl). The essential difference between the two is that the former is non-intentional experience and the latter is intentional experience. Feeling as an act is constituted by underlying sensation and apperception, according to *Apprehension-Content Scheme*.

If it is so, how can we distinguish founding (underlying) sensation and the founded act, namely feeling? According to Husserl, every sensory feeling, e.g. the pain of burning oneself and of being burnt (sich Brennen und Gebranntwerden), is no doubt after a fashion referred to an object, i.e. it is intentional experience (LU, p. 403) If the pain is a feeling, where is the underlying sensation? Suppose you have a paper cut. You would perceive the sharp tingling pain immediately; the pain is an intentional experience, because it is intended and thus perceived. But the pain is not the whole sensation. At the same time you hear some sounds by your ears, you see some visual things by your eyes, you feel some tactile sensations by the entire skin, you smell some scents by your nose, and you even feel some taste by your mouth. At the moment of pain, *these other sensations are experienced, but not perceived*. They constitute consciousness in a certain way, they are *reell* parts of consciousness, but surely they are not intended. After intending the pain of paper cut, you would probably concentrate your attention on your work you were doing, e.g. reading. Then the pain of paper cut is gone, i.e. not intended and thus not perceived, even though actually the pain has not disappeared completely. It is constantly experienced in a certain way; now the unintended pain belongs to background-consciousness, as the other unintended sensations do. Meanwhile, the in-

tended sensation plays the role of the content in apprehension-content scheme and constitutes the act with apprehension. The intended sensation and the correlative apprehension change constantly and constitute “the unified stream of consciousness”.

To understand the concept of Husserl’s sensation, we can imagine a theater in which external lights are completely blocked. But the theater has a spotlight. We can perceive clearly wherever the spotlight sheds light on; the other places are dark, indeterminate and unseen, when we concentrate on the lighted spot. Then the dark change of scenery occurs, the light is turned off, and the whole theater submerges into darkness. This dark field is Husserl’s field of sensation, which cannot be intended or perceived; but it can be the object of the spotlight, namely apprehension, and make up the spotlighted scene, namely intentional experience.

What if we do not concentrate on the lighted spot, but on the unlighted darkness? In the actual theater this can happen, but in Husserl’s intentional experiences this cannot happen. It is because sensation as non-intentional experience is experienced in a way it can never be presented in consciousness. In other words, *we can never intend non-intentional experience*, because in that case it would become intentional experience. In the above-mentioned example, while we are focusing on the pain, the other sensations submerge into darkness. It is only by philosophical reflection that we get to know these non-intentional experiences are in consciousness. The most frequently ignored sensations like the tactile sensation in the buttocks while sitting on a chair is revealed almost only by philosophical analysis. When we intend the sensation of pressure, it constitutes an intentional experience with the apprehension, and when we concentrate on other sensations, it returns to its former state, i.e. non-intentional experience. The sensation itself is the same, at least Husserl posits like that, whether it constitutes intentional experience or submerges into darkness.

In this sense, Husserl’s sensation has passivity. It can be a part of intentional experience and therefore a part of active consciousness, but it cannot be an active consciousness by itself. As aforementioned, sensations “are not seen, heard or *perceived* by any sense.” On the other hand, all kinds of active psychic experiences like perception, judgment, feeling, willing, loving, hating etc. belong to intentional experiences.

IV Relationship between Merleau-Ponty’s Criticism and Husserl’s Sensation

Until now, we have examined Merleau-Ponty’s criticism against classical concepts of sensation and Husserl’s sensation in LU separately. Now let us investigate the relationship between Merleau-Ponty’s criticism and Husserl’s sensation in LU.

In Merleau-Ponty’s criticism, it is the concept of “objective world” that plays the essential role in the two misunderstandings about sensation, namely impression and reception of quality. Impression and quality are equally based on this “objective world” and share almost all basic assumptions about sensation. They equally presuppose the “objective world”, the world in itself, which is completely determined regardless of the subject, and reconstruct the actual experience of perception on the basis of perceived object. They use sensation as a “building-block” of the reconstruction. The only difference between impression and quality is that the former regards sensation completely subjective, while the latter makes it completely objective.

Now a question arises: Can we find the same assumptions in Husserl's sensation in LU? Or, more specifically, is the "objective world" presupposed in LU? Or does Husserl reconstruct sensation on the basis of perceived object?

The answer is undoubtedly no, because the suspension (or, as Husserl calls, "Epoké") of the validity of the "objective world" is the most fundamental presupposition of phenomenology. Hence there can be no disagreement between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl regarding this point, and in *Investigation V* we can find evidence that Husserl suspends the validity of the "objective world" in his investigations of intentional experience and non-intentional experience, including sensation.

Investigating intentional experiences in *Investigation V*, Husserl deconstructs Brentano's theory of intentional inexistence (LU, p. 384) and the image-theory (LU, p. 436) before everything, which presuppose the "objective world". These two theories are equally based on representationalism "which thinks it has sufficiently explained the fact of presentation - fully present in each act - by saying that: "Outside the thing itself is there (or is at times there); in consciousness there is an image which does duty for it." (LU, p. 436) This "thing itself" is what Merleau-Ponty calls "the perceived object" (l'object perçu; PP, p. 29), which is fully determined, and with which the "classical analyses" reconstruct the actual experience of perception and thus distort it. In this sense, representationalism is one of the theories which Merleau-Ponty calls "classical prejudice", because it also distorts the actual experience of perception by presupposing the "objective world", i.e. makes what we perceive merely an image of the "thing itself" by presupposing the "thing itself" which constitutes the "world itself" or "le monde pris en soi" (PP, p. 28). It is only "in favor of the object perceived" (PP, p. 26) that in representationalism what we perceive becomes merely an image, a *reell* representative of the object itself.¹⁵ Developing his own concept of intentional experiences in *Investigation V*, in §11 Husserl first deconstructs Brentano's theory of intentional inexistence, which posits the thing itself and makes what we perceive merely an image of it, i.e. intentional inexistence and thus belongs to what Merleau-Ponty calls "classical prejudices" (LU, pp. 384–389). Then in *Appendix to §11 and §20* of *Investigation V*, after completing his theory of intentional experiences, Husserl goes into detailed criticism of image-theory in general, confutes it by pointing out its internal inconsistency and redefines the concept of intentionality on the basis of the criticism (LU, pp. 436–440).

Inferring from above, we can witness the same type of philosophical process in Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la perception* and Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* in that they equally criticize the theories based on the "objective world" and goes into the actual experience of perception. This philosophical process, i.e. suspension of validity of the "objective world", is what Husserl later calls *phenomenological-psychological reduction* in his *Krisis*.¹⁶ This reduction is such a fundamental process

¹⁵ In this sense, impression and quality in PP belong to the "image" in representationalism. They are both a *reell* representative of the thing itself. The only difference between them is that the former is considered as subjective, whereas the latter as objective.

¹⁶ "Thus, in order to attain the pure and actual subject matter of the required "descriptive psychology", a fully consciously practiced method is required which I call the *phenomenological-psychological reduction*" (E. Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänologische Philosophie*, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954, p. 239; see also p. 247 for more details). The higher level of reduction, i.e. *transcendental reduction*, which is needed to reveal the world-constituting transcendental subjectivity, is also common to both philosophers; Merleau-Ponty, for example, thematizes

of phenomenology that no phenomenology can be a phenomenology without it. In this sense, what we examined in PP and LU in the above is the common process of suspending the validity of the “objective world”, i.e. phenomenological-psychological reduction, which constitutes the basis of phenomenological investigations. Although Husserl’s suspension of the validity of the “objective world” in LU is not as clear as Merleau-Ponty’s in PP, Husserl says “a purely phenomenological manner is a manner which cuts out all relation to empirically real existence.” (LU, p. 357)

The “constancy hypothesis”, which Merleau-Ponty thinks is the theoretical ground of the “objective world”, and the concepts of sensation as reception of quality are also denied in LU. In the *Apprehension-Content* in LU, two or more objects can be perceived on the basis of the same sensation, because in the scheme the object is determined not only by sensation but also by apprehension. In other words, the alteration of apprehension changes the perceived object. But it is not possible if the world and the object are fully determined in themselves, as the constancy hypothesis and the theory of quality presuppose. In the constancy hypothesis and the theory of quality, the object is fully determined in itself and therefore the subject plays the completely passive role in perception, i.e. the role of transmitter and receiver of quality. There is no apprehension, the active role of the subject in perception, in the constancy hypothesis and the theory of quality; if two or more objects are perceived on the basis of the same sensation, one of them is based on the quality of the thing itself and the other objects are just deceptions. But Husserl says “the same contents should serve to ground perceptions of different objects.” (LU, p. 395) He does not say that one of the objects is true and the others are wrong; he says that they are all objects. It is because in *Apprehension-Content* Scheme the constitution, which is explicitly thematized in *Ideen I*, is already being alluded to in the form of apprehension. If the subject is to be a constituting subject, and the *Apprehension-Content* Scheme is to work, the object could not be fully determined, because in that case there is nothing left for subject to apprehend or constitute.

In the above we have seen that there is no conflict between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl in that they both suspend the validity of “objective world” and reject its consequences, namely the constancy hypothesis and the sensation as reception of quality. Now we have to examine the relationship between Merleau-Ponty’s criticism and Husserl’s sensation regarding one more point, i.e. sensation as impression.

As we have already seen, in PP impression is defined as “the way in which I am affected and the experiencing of a state of myself” (PP, p. 25). As a state of the subject, impression is an element of consciousness and thus purely subjective. Therefore impression has no meaning, “it signifies nothing for me” (PP, Ibid), because in pure impression there is no distinction between the sensing and the sensed. For example when we see a redness of an apple, the apple is not red in itself; the redness is not the property of the apple but the way in which we are affected or the state of ourselves. This redness as an impression is an element of consciousness and has no meaning as long as it is a pure impression.

transcendental reduction in PP, saying “At the same time the phenomenal field becomes a transcendental field... This new ‘reduction’ would then recognize only one true subject, the thinking Ego. This move from *naturata* to *naturans*, from constituted to constituting, would complete the discovery of positing reality begun by psychology... Such is the ordinary perspective of a transcendental philosophy, and also, to all appearances at least, the programme of a transcendental phenomenology.” (PP, p. 87)

Impression described in PP coincides with Husserl's sensation as non-intentional experience in many points: First, Husserl's sensation is a *reell* part of consciousness as experience, like impression is an element of consciousness; second, since impression is purely subjective, it has no reference to object, i.e. intentionality, like Husserl's sensation as non-intentional experience has no intentionality; third, Husserl's sensation also has no meaning, because it is "not seen, heard or *perceived* by any sense" (LU, p. 399). In other words, Husserl's sensation itself is imperceptible, and it is only through the process of interpretation, i.e. apprehension, that Husserl's sensation becomes an element of intentional experience. In the *Apprehension-Content Scheme*, the bearer of intentionality and meaning is apprehension, and sensation plays merely the role of matter.

The concept of sensation as non-intentional experience is held not only in LU, but also in *Ideen I*, where Husserl makes the role of sensation as "matter" or "hyle" more explicit by calling it "sensual hyle" (Sensuelle ὕλη) as the intentional correlative of "intentional form" (intentionale μορφή), i.e. apprehension in LU.¹⁷ This "sensual hyle" is also called "sensual experiences" ("sensuelle" Erlebnisse), "sensation-contents" (Empfindungsinhalte), "sensuous data" (Sinnliche Data) in *Ideen I* (pp. 192–193). All these expressions refer to sensation as non-intentional experience, "*the sensuous, which has in itself nothing pertaining to intentionality.*" (*Ideen I*, p. 192) Apperception is, on the other hand, "animating" ("beseelende") or "meaning-giving" (sinngibende) stratum "by which precisely the concrete intentional experience arises from the sensuous." (*Ideen I*, Ibid) As we can see, the *Apprehension-Content Scheme* in LU is adopted in *Ideen I*, and consequently the concept of sensation in *Ideen I* is also the same with that in LU. It is non-intentional, *reell* experience which has no meaning. Thus it is not much unreasonable to posit this concept of sensation as non-intentional experience as the concept of sensation in Husserl's static phenomenology, since the two main works of static phenomenology, i.e. LU and *Ideen I*, share the same concept of sensation.

But this concept of sensation as non-intentional experience has many problems. Above all, sensation as non-intentional experience can be regarded as playing the role of Brentano's intentional inexistence or image in image-theory, which Husserl criticized as representationalism in LU, developing his own concept of intentionality. If intentional experiences arise only from interpretation of non-intentional sensation which is immanent in consciousness, this sensation can be accused of playing the role of intentional inexistence or image, which is also immanent in consciousness and mediates between consciousness locked in itself and "the thing itself" through the process of interpretation.

The reason Husserl posits sensation as non-intentional experience in LU was to avoid this unfavorable conclusion originally. He wanted to deconstruct Brentano's immanent intentionality and develop his own transcendental intentionality by making sensation, the immanent moment of consciousness, non-intentional. In Brentano's view, we can intend only the immanent moment of consciousness, i.e. intentional inexistence, and his intentionality is thus an immanent one and his consciousness is locked in itself, intending only the immanent moment in itself. By making sensation non-intentional, on the other hand, Husserl removes intentional inexistence in his concept

¹⁷ E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie. 1. Halbband. Text der 1–3. Auflage*, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 191.

of intentionality and develops his own transcendental intentionality, by which consciousness has relation to transcendental objects from the beginning.

But that “sensation is non-intentional” has two meanings. First, it means that sensation is not intended by itself, as Husserl says “I do not see color-sensation but colored things, I do not hear tone-sensations but the singer’s song etc.” (LU, p. 387) This is what Husserl originally intended. It has, however, the second meaning that sensation has no relation to object, i.e. no intentionality. But “if consciousness is always consciousness of something, isn’t sensation also sensation of something?”¹⁸ Asserting the first meaning of the sentence, Husserl seems to approve the second meaning tacitly. Since sensation in LU is imperceptible, it is clear that the sensation as such cannot have intentionality in the level of “clear and distinct” consciousness. But does it mean that sensation as such lacks intentionality? Isn’t it possible that there is another level of intentionality, i.e. that of sensation as such?¹⁹

These questions about the intentionality of sensation manifest one of the points of transition from static to genetic phenomenology.²⁰ In Husserl’s *Analysen zur passive Synthesis*, where sensation is investigated in the way of genetic phenomenology, he notices the intentionality of sensation, saying “Where the object is concerned, we can also characterize affection as the awakening of an intention toward it [i.e. the object].”²¹ Its intentionality being acknowledged, sensation in genetic phenomenology is no longer non-intentional, of course. Now it belongs to intentional experience, it is no longer purely subjective because of intentionality, and has a meaning from the beginning, because it is no longer a meaningless hyle of intentional experience which has to be “animated” by apperception but an intentional experience by itself.

Merleau-Ponty’s criticism against impression has much in common with this viewpoint of Husserl’s genetic phenomenology. As we have already examined, Merleau-Ponty says in PP “The most rudimentary *factual perceptions* that we are acquainted with, in creatures such as the ape or the hen, are based on relations and not on absolute terms.” (PP, p. 25) “The most rudimentary *factual perceptions*” Merleau-Ponty mentions here are not the “clear and distinct” perceptions, like intentional experiences in LU, but “non-intentional experiences” in LU like sensations or affections in *Analysen zur passive Synthesis*.²² According to Merleau-Ponty, these most rudimentary percep-

18 This was a question from a participant in OPO (Organization of Phenomenological Organizations) which was held in Hong Kong in 2008, after a presentation of a paper about Husserl’s concept of sensation in static phenomenology.

19 Already in *Ideen I*, Husserl raises these questions, saying “Whether everywhere and necessarily such sensuous experiences in the stream of experiences bear some “animating apperception” or other (with all the characteristics which this, in turn, demands and makes possible), whether, as we also say, they always have *intentional functions*, is not to be decided here.” (*Ideen I*, p. 192)

20 See pp. 97–110 of N. I. Lee’s *Phänomenologie der Instinkte* for more details.

21 E. Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918–1926*, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966, p. 151.

22 That Merleau-Ponty’s perception embraces both Husserl’s intentional and non-intentional experience in LU is made clear by his following comment in PP: “My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colors, noises and fleeting tactile sensations which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet which I nevertheless immediately ‘place’ in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams.” (PP, p. 10) “Sensations which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived

tions are based on “relations”, i.e. relations to objects, i.e. intentionality. Thus we can infer that both Merleau-Ponty in PP and Husserl in genetic phenomenology agree that the most rudimentary factual perceptions, including sensation, are based on relations to object, i.e. intentionality.

In addition, Merleau-Ponty also points out that “this elementary perception is therefore already charged with *meaning*.” (PP, p. 26) For him, sensation is not a meaningless ‘hyle’ which has to be ‘animated’ (beseelen) by meaning-giving apperception, but an active experience which is filled with meanings from the beginning. He makes this point more explicit in his analysis of “the phenomenal field”.²³

Taking these points into consideration, we can easily infer that Merleau-Ponty will not accept the notion of sensation in LU and *Ideen I* which is devoid of intentionality and meaning, even though by means of phenomenological-psychological reduction it is not based on the “objective world”. Perhaps he will not accept the notion of apperception either, because his sensation is already filled with meaning and does not need any additional “meaning-giving” (sinngabend) act.

In fact, in his preface (*Avant-propos*) of PP, though he does not mention Husserl directly, Merleau-Ponty criticizes Husserl’s concept of sensation as meaningless hyle and apperception as meaning-giving act, saying “We are to understand, then, that it is the apprehension of a certain *hylé*, as indicating a phenomenon of a higher degree, the *Sinngebung*, or active meaning-giving operation which may be said to define consciousness...(the rest omitted)” (PP, p. 11) This comment is a reproaching one, because it is referred to as a kind of erroneous philosophical standpoint during Merleau-Ponty’s condemnation against the wrong type of phenomenological reduction. The expressions used in this reproaching comment, like “*hylé*”, “*Sinngebung*”, “meaning-giving” and “apprehension”, are originally Husserl’s, especially in *Ideen I*, as we have already examined. Thus we can interpret this comment as Merleau-Ponty’s accusation against the concept of sensation in Husserl’s static phenomenology, although he does not mention Husserl directly.

V Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that there is a considerable conflict between Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of classical concepts of sensation in PP and Husserl’s concept of sensation in LU as non-intentional experience, even though they share phenomenological-psychological reduction which is one of prerequisites for phenomenology. In LU, one of the most important works in his static phenomenology, Husserl posits sensation as non-intentional, meaningless experience, which needs the operation of meaning-giving apperception in order to participate in intentional experience. This

world” are non-intentional experiences in LU, while “clearly perceived world” belongs to intentional experience in LU.

23 “It points to an experience in which we are given not ‘dead’ qualities’ but active ones. A wooden wheel placed on the ground is not, *for sight*, the same thing as a wheel bearing a load. A body at rest because no force is being exerted upon it is again for sight not the same thing as a body in which opposing forces are in equilibrium. The light of a candle changes its appearance for a child when, after a burn, it stops attracting the child’s hand and becomes literally repulsive. The vision is already inhabited by a significance which gives it a function in the spectacle of the world and in our experience... Sensation invests the quality with vital value, grasping it first in its meaning for us...(the rest omitted)” (PP, p. 78)

concept of sensation as non-intentional experience is inherited by *Ideen I*, which is also classified as an important work in Husserl's static phenomenology. In spite of its important function in analyses of static phenomenology, however, this concept of sensation has a critical defect that it neglects intentionality of lower level, one of which is the intentionality of sensation. Husserl's analyses in genetic phenomenology turn attention to this point and reveal the intentionality of sensation, e.g. in *Analyzen zur passiven Synthesis*, where sensation is investigated in the way of genetic phenomenology.

As we have already investigated, Merleau-Ponty in PP shares many points with Husserl's genetic phenomenology regarding sensation, and thus he is critical of Husserl's concept of sensation as meaningless hyle and apperception as meaning-giving act. In his criticism against sensation as impression, which shares many points with Husserl's sensation as non-intentional experience, Merleau-Ponty shows that his concept of sensation as the most rudimentary factual perception is based on intentionality and thus full of meaning. This concept of sensation as intentional, meaningful experience coincides with that of genetic phenomenology precisely.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of sensation in PP and Husserl's concept of sensation in LU shares some points, however, in that they both criticize the theories based on the "objective world" and goes into the actual experience of perception. It is because the two concepts are both the outcomes of phenomenological-psychological reduction, i.e. suspension of the validity of the objective world, which is one of the prerequisites of phenomenology.