ON REASON IN THE EMBODIED SUBJECT:
AN INTER-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO RESCUE THE MODERN SUBJECT
(A STUDY OF MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY AND PIERRE BOURDIEU)

by

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On Reason in the Embodied Subject: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Rescue the Modern Subject. (A Study of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu)

Thesis directed by Professor Myra Bookman.

ABSTRACT

This study draws on the theoretical parallels between Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu. It uses those parallels to demonstrate how placing embodiment at the center of their philosophies attempts to bridge the subject and object dichotomy. It also shows how embodied reason, through their formulation of embodied significance in lived experience with others, is extremely relevant in today’s social issues. One way in which their theories can be applied and where much research is needed is the reintegration of Iraq and Afghanistan Gulf War II veterans into civilian society. Through Merleau-Ponty’s concept of *phenomenal body* and Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, embodied reason can provide a more holistic approach to war veteran reintegration. This approach can be used to develop programs that not only account for the current focus on veteran mental/physical health, education, and employment as inter-related objectives, but also to provide analysis and long term support in readjusting to civilian community life beyond psychiatric disorders and economic support.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Myra Bookman
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my loving husband, George Antone, Jr., and our three inquisitive children Tucker Austin, Ellie Kate, and Anya Josephine.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of this study is to argue that the concepts of embodiment in the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu offer a more productive approach toward bridging the gap between various forms of dichotomy by anchoring subjectivity with objectivity and maintaining the possibility of reason. Since the Enlightenment, the problem of subjectivity has challenged how philosophy instates the role of reason as the single unifying force. This problem, introduced in the modern era, has led to the question of how reason in an autonomous subject can be common to others and how it can determine a systematic process that reveals the unity of experience.¹ The intent of this study is to determine whether embodiment can ground the autonomous subject in reason without stripping the subject of freedom, self-determination, and self-actualization, while showing that a viable notion of embodiment can sustain the notion of reason as a single unifying force.

The significance of this study is illustrated by applying Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu’s philosophical approaches to the reintegration of Iraq and Afghanistan Gulf War II veterans into civilian life. This modern issue is understudied and the majority of the current research focuses primarily on psychiatric and physical disability treatments, education, and employment as separate issues and therefore these services are used by only a fraction of Gulf War II veterans. As of July 2013, the United States population is

estimated to be approximately 316,668,567. According to the Veteran Population Projection Model 2011, developed by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, the current population of veterans is approximately 22 million. Of the roughly 14% of Americans that have served in the armed services from World War I to present, only a fraction are using veteran services provided by the U.S. Government. As of FY2008, only approximately 36% of veterans received VA benefits or services. Of that, only 32% (2.74 million) received services from more than one VA program. These statistics show a large population sector in American society that are entitled to, but are not receiving support for one reason or another. The significance of this data implies that the military service reintegration programs that support our services members as they are released from duty into the civilian sector do not account for the majority of veterans and it may be due to the disjointed emphasis on disability, education, and employment, without considering a holistic approach to the lived experience of conflict.

**Statement of the Research Study**

This chapter reviews the current state of the question, the research method and the literature review. This study discusses three features of modernity, broken into three chapters. These three features of modernity present three problems in subject-centered reason for traditional modern theory: the possibility of an autonomous subject, the possibility of the unity of experience amongst others, and the process by which reason is manifested. I examine each problem in turn by applying the centrality of embodiment
from the theories of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu to determine if embodiment corroborates as a solution to dualism and presents a viable form of reason.

In chapter two, I reference Immanuel Kant to briefly sketch out the problems of subject-centered reason. During the Enlightenment, the break from arbitrary authority produced the need for subject-centered reason and introduced the autonomous subject while still conforming to the ideas of pure consciousness. A critical starting point is the concept of the subject *in-it-self* and *for-it-self* and how the embodied subject is formulated and functions differently than pure consciousness. The chapter reviews Merleau-Ponty’s conception of how we first perceive the world to make sense of the world and the way in which subjectivity and reason is constructed from this origin. In response to this method of negating dualism, I present how Bourdieu’s theory supports and diverges from the ideas in his theory of practical reason. Both theorists rely on the centrality of embodiment for the subject and this dialogue shows the viability of grounding the embodied subject in reason, being careful not to reduce the subject to mere sensory perception and an objectified self.

Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu emphasize the centrality of embodiment in their philosophical theories, and is important to work through a subjectivity that comes to knowledge by placing certainty in lived experience (for Merleau-Ponty) and practice (for Bourdieu). From their notion of an autonomous subject, we can draw out how it can help Gulf War II veterans confront changes brought on by the experience of conflict, both traumatic and rewarding. The embodied autonomous subject may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the wellness of Gulf War II veterans by dealing with
both mental and physical changes such as the loss of a fellow service member or severe injury, as well as account for rewarding aspects of military life that may be absent in civilian life, such as unit cohesion and mission accomplishment.

In chapter three, I reference G. W. F. Hegel’s work to briefly sketch out the possibility of arriving at the unity of experience and how the subject becomes detached from reason and the existence of others in pure consciousness. The use of Hegel’s critique of Kant will better illustrate how the chasm between subjectivity and objectivity got bigger after Kant. A very brief summary of Hegel’s critique demonstrates how reason becomes detached from the subject. His work shows a transition from traditional theories use of reflection to deal with the isolation of the subject from the existence of others and objects within the world. In a similar fashion as chapter two, I show through the work of Merleau-Ponty on the experience of others and primacy of perception that the problem of others is resolved through embodiment and mere imminence in lived experience. Bourdieu expounds on these foundations of embodiment to not only demonstrate a unity of experience, but shows that the participating embodied subject manifests reason in activity through other participating embodied subjects. This resembles what Merleau-Ponty refers to as intersubjectivity through the phenomenal body.

The purpose of discussing the unity of experience through Merleau-Ponty’s embodied intersubjectivity and Bourdieu’s field theory is to bring to light the way in which meaning is constituted with others. The embodied approach to the unity of experience exposes the way in which experiencing war with other service members rapidly changes a person’s conception of normal life when returning to American
communities. The meaning constituted in shared embodied experience highlights the need for understanding veterans as a unique population sector of American society that crosses all identity boundaries, such as age, ethnicity, religion, gender, socio-economic status, education level, political affiliation, and even citizenship.\(^2\) Because Gulf War II veterans are comprised of such a diverse range of characteristics, their reintegration back into their communities affect all types of communities throughout American society. This continued example provides insight into how the unity of experience through Merleau-Ponty’s and Bourdieu’s embodied subject form meaning through a subjective lived experience that is particular to an individual, but also constitutes objective experience through others in similar contextual situations.

In chapter four, the problem of reason in the traditional subject is presented. In addition to arguing in the previous chapters that the subject can be grounded in lived experience in the objective world, I show how the centrality of embodiment must include the process of reason. I argue that embodiment is not only a better process to reason, but it is the only way to reason as it is embedded in life experiences and incarnate minds. This chapter elucidates the restitution of reason by the embodied subject and the premise that the perceived world presupposes all rationality. This is achieved through the proximity of our minds to not only the imminence of our presence in the world, but the human ability to incorporate the past and anticipate the future. One necessary difference in this argument will be the need to rely on not only the philosophical work of Merleau-

Ponty and Bourdieu, but the reliance of both thinkers on their work in psychology and
sociology, respectively. The integration of an interdisciplinary approach is critical to the
centrality of embodiment as a viable starting point for reason in the modern subject.
Because the goal of both theorists’ work is to bridge the subject and object dichotomy
and address the concerns of Husserl on the topic of modern science and philosophy, they
both begin with intersubjective approaches rather than building their theories in either
scientific facts or theory.

By working out Merleau-Ponty’s and Bourdieu’s embodied reason, this study not
only shows a different form of reason than the one derived in pure consciousness, it also
helps clarify how the ideal and the real are reconciled through embodiment. The
constitution of reason in embodiment further explicates how these complimentary
philosophies can be applied to current, real world issues. Reason constituted through
shared experience may enable a new approach to understanding the notion of wellness for
Gulf War II veterans and how shared experiences may form shared truths and how that
may allow for veteran programs to identify predictable, repeatable behaviors and
perceptions that manifest over time to better deal with them. Discussing embodied
reason is not limited to philosophical discourse within modernity, but also can enable
strategies for practical life. Gulf War II veterans provide an example where strategies are
needed and may be most applicable.

Throughout this study, several questions arise within the theoretical framework of
embodiment presented by Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu. The first question is whether the

use of embodiment transforms universal fixed truths to shared truths and does this form of truth satisfy the goal of reason in modernity? In the spirit of the Enlightenment, reason is the essential characteristic of the modern era. Similar to the way Kant intended to arrive at knowledge by empirical procedures and systematic theorizing from modern natural science without displacing philosophy, I extend the idea to embodiment as a viable starting point to knowledge that relies on a similar interdisciplinary approach.4 The second question is how are we to comprehend the bridge between the physical world and knowledge in our minds and is it justifiable in their work?

Another key area to map out in Merleau-Ponty’s and Bourdieu’s philosophies is how they ground subjectivity in objectivity while avoiding forms of dogmatism, positivism, objectivism, realism, or idealism. To be committed to the process set forth in the Enlightenment, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu must remain within the parameters set by Enlightenment principles, which is grounding knowledge in certainty. Does grounding reason in the incarnate threaten the enlightenment project of epistemic certitude? It is necessary to investigate how the use of the perceived world in both theorists escapes the problem of modernity or suggests what questions need to be addressed, to further their projects. The subsequent discussion only considers the relations between the levels of experience that both thinkers draw out and how they are tied to the perceptual.5 The scope of my research does not give full attention to details of how they work out other levels of experience, only attempts to understand the inter-

4 Ibid., 51.

workings with perception and embodiment. I concentrate on the philosophical mechanisms at work in their ideas of the incarnation of subjectivity or the incarnation of the mind. If this is a valid approach, then the concept of embodiment can further discussions of other levels of experience such as aesthetics, morality or ethics.

I chose to base my research on Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu for two reasons. First, they both use interdisciplinary approaches to develop their philosophy. By engaging other disciplines, their philosophies already demonstrate the significance of their application of embodiment in other sciences. In the same spirit, they are addressing the concern Edmund Husserl stated himself, “...the crisis of philosophy implies the crisis of all modern science...in respect to the total meaningfulness of its cultural life...”6 The second reason I have chosen Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu is that they produce optimistic theories in a very specific kind of existentialism and particular type of phenomenology that is centered in embodiment. In the same way that Merleau-Ponty stated that he “[pushes] Husserl further than he wished to go,”7 Bourdieu’s development of the concept of *habitus* and *fields* pushes the work of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception. Bourdieu is building upon the concept of perception, but also shows how his philosophy works to construct meaning and values among others. It is critical to identify if Bourdieu’s work complements not only the situatedness of experience through

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embodiment, but whether Bourdieu’s *habitus* complements Merleau-Ponty’s formation of knowledge as they both hinge on accumulation of experience and intersubjectivity.

This study shows that the shift from a philosophy of pure consciousness to an incarnated conscious mind becomes more a matter of style than a radical break from methods or objectives within traditional philosophy. Merleau-Ponty’s and Bourdieu’s claims of the centrality of embodiment function as counter-discourse within modernity, rather than a shift from modernism to a new era of thinking. Proposing the centrality of embodiment does not undo the progress of Enlightenment thought, but rather enhances our understanding of reason and the autonomous subject through Enlightenment principles.

**Current State of the Question**

A crisis of knowledge occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth century that is rooted in the methods and theories of science and philosophy. The crisis of knowledge began with Cartesian dualism, where the relationship of subjective and objective experience became the apex to the problem of understanding the mind and how we come to knowledge. This crisis has required a review of fundamentals within science and philosophy. The development of science and philosophy are drastically set on diverging paths in history, resulting in science being rooted in empirical procedures and philosophy rooted in subjective experience. The positivism of science has produced many advances in factual knowledge, but have neglected to, “question the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of human existence...[scientific], objective truth is exclusively a matter of
establishing what the world, the physical as well as the spiritual world, is in fact.”

Because “fact-minded science” intentionally ignores the subjective experience, the question of why we have human experience is left unasked. Edmund Husserl asserts that, “[positivism], in a manner of speaking, decapitates philosophy,” by ignoring the problems of reason in understanding all disciplines concerning knowledge. He goes on to observe that the “crisis in philosophy implies the crisis of all modern sciences ...in respect to the total meaningfulness of its cultural life, its total existenz.”

If one accepts the general purpose of philosophy is to generate meaning in our experience, then a significant underlying requirement of any philosophy is to construct a systematized theory of human experience that depends on both subjectivity and objectivity. Husserl goes on to observe that the same mistake made in science is made in philosophy stating that, “[all] of modern philosophy...is...a single struggle between two ideas of science: the idea of objectivistic philosophy on the ground of a pregiven world and the idea of philosophy on the ground of absolute, transcendental subjectivity...”

Husserl claims that the crisis is founded upon the body and mind being worked out separately. Thus the methodology we use to formulate reason in science and philosophy, with regard to knowledge, is synonymous with the project of meaning in our human experience and one should not be worked out without the other.

9 Ibid., 9.
10 Ibid., 12.
11 Ibid., 208.
The sketch of the problem is best illuminated by German idealism as a critique of subjectivism in modernity. Although the mind/body dualism began as early as the sixteenth century with Rene Descrates, the demand for the free, autonomous subject does not really become an issue in philosophy until the nineteenth and twentieth century, beginning with Kant and further problematized by Hegel. Adjacent to the desire for freedom that makes reason possible, the German idealists have also illustrated the problem between the two concepts (freedom and reason) and really question whether either has been achieved through the Enlightenment project. What becomes the broader question is how we relate as individuals to the social world while also maintaining our singular individuality. A systematic approach follows the fundamental method of inquiry in the Enlightenment tradition, but the use of phenomenology introduces a new method to deal with the problem. One of the components to getting at this crisis in modernity is the need to overcome the use of reflective experience as privileged over everyday experience. This is the point in the crisis where Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu may be most helpful. The use of phenomenological method, combined with the assertion that the mind is incarnate and cannot be separated from the body, may be the starting point that is needed to deal with the dualism.

The recognition of the subject and object dualism is a problem that is not limited to German idealists. The huge philosophic problem in modernity for many thinkers is that the Enlightenment did not bring about reason and the free autonomous subject. What came of the Enlightenment is a loss of individual self and some suggest that the body becomes a slave in the same way nature has become dominated in modernity. This
introduced a domination of subjects in new form. As Enlightenment broke from the authority of the church and arbitrary rulers, we fell to the rule of industry and capitalism and with that instrumentalization of subjects. We have not achieved an autonomous subject, but disguised our liberation and stripped humans of their ability to reason. We are slaves of a new sort. As suggested in the work of Karl Marx, the biggest result has been alienation and not autonomy.

When we are stripped of freedom, we are limited in our ability to have reason. Kant’s call for the “freedom to make public use of one’s reason in all matters” is revealing of how intertwined freedom is with our ability to think for ourselves in order to escape “self-incurred immaturity.”12 Along with our freedom and ability to reason we lose our meaning and significance. Our bodies become instruments of our minds or instruments of another through other forms of domination. We struggle to determine the significance of our existence in the world without turning to something other than our own will to answer it. Modernism has suggested through the works of Marx, Horkheimer, Adorno, and others, as we take on the technology, capitalism, and the shift of political paradigm of the age, we limit the creative, meaningful, singular individual. Not only is the possibility of singular experience isolated from its own meaning, individuals are alienated from the experience of others. This reflects the crisis of modernism in the discipline of philosophy.

The modernity problem can simply be designated as the problem of “autonomy” or establishing the basis for a genuine self-determining or self-rule.¹³ Throughout the work of modern Western philosophy, both analytic and continental philosophers have attempted various ways to construct or dissect the autonomous self-conscious, and establish the means to unify experience with others. In this process, many modern theories have resulted in stripping the self and others of meaning altogether. This study attempts to show that the theories that remain within the internal workings of the mind limit the consciousness to atomism or isolation of the self. Although a small paragraph cannot do justice to sum up such dynamic, complex theories, I show how they have been too cautious and skeptical about our situatedness within the world.

Commitment to idealism and the foundations of the mind and body dichotomy set forth by Descrates has failed to fully engage the external world for fear that something would be lost in the project of reason. What Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu may offer is insight into the first real steps away from the idealism in the classical and the dogmatism in the modern. If the Enlightenment produced a revolution in science, then it should spark something revolutionary and progressive in the way we do philosophy. The idea of being a subject situated in the world is not a new idea. It is embedded in the inquiries of the ancients and moderns alike.¹⁴ If we adopt the methodology of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu where situatedness is applied, and discard the fear of beginning our

¹⁴ Ibid., 47.
philosophical inquiry with our embodied position in the world, what are the implications or what will be discovered about reason within the subject within the world?

The goal of embodiment is to deny the instrumentalization of the body by the mind as Horkheimer and Adorno provide in their critique of the Enlightenment. For embodiment is not reducible to the mind’s control of the body and its functions or the reduction of the mind to mere observable behaviors or perceptual experiences of the body, but the beginning of the formation of meaning and knowledge at each instance the mind and body are engaged within everyday experience. It is more than context or discursive formations laid out by post-moderns, but an interactivity or intersubjectivity that validates reason in our everyday activity. Embodiment not only challenges the relationship of the mind to the body as traditionally or classically accepted, but also challenges more contemporary ideas of reason embedded in language (and formation of meaning in language), where communication is not dissectible into parts of speech, but holistic in nature and function. This is where Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu can respond to point out that we cannot find the source of reason in the covert workings of the mind, but must begin with the perceptual. This study will produce a dialogue as a counter-discourse with other modern ideas of subject-centered reason in hope to get closer to a method that rectifies the problem of the modern subject.

In the process of making a theoretical argument for the embodied subject, the reintegration of Gulf War II veterans as a current social issue demonstrates how the philosophical discussion of pure consciousness and embodiment is relevant to an understudied social group. This example shows how embodiment can address the
changes imposed on individual self consciousness over very short periods is both the product of subjective and objective experience occurring simultaneously. The ability to address problems and treatment of Gulf War II veterans is not just a matter of helping transition from mental and physical changes after war, but must require a theoretical element that addresses the constitution of meaning and reason in the experience of those veterans returning from war. The effects of war are not just memories that are reflected upon through a lifetime, but should be seen as embodied lived experiences that affect on a long term scale both the lives of the veterans and the communities they return to. Within this study of embodied reason, this example calls for further analysis and research that could help design programs and treatment that are adaptable to the short and long term needs of Gulf War II veterans.

**Research Method**

The methodology is a comparative literature study that carefully examines the theories of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu in order to draw out where these thinkers conceptually parallel and differ. The research attempts to incorporate how Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu utilize the disciplines of psychology and sociology (respectively) with philosophy to lead them to create their specific kinds of practical philosophies that center on the body. Because Bourdieu was influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s work, it should be relatively easy to recognize how Bourdieu extends the concept of embodiment in his own theory and sociological research. Merleau-Ponty argues that a thinker’s work includes “an unthought-of-element which is wholly his own and yet opens on something
else.” By setting his work in dialogue with Merleau-Ponty, I show how Merleau-Ponty may have responded to Bourdieu’s ideas. Putting the two thinkers in dialogue I get at the structure and mechanisms in their respective philosophical ideas in order to reveal how they employ the principles of Enlightenment thought and edify the position of philosophy as the essential practice behind all science.

If philosophy’s intent is to answer questions about how we come to know the world and others, these two thinkers ground knowledge and consciousness in a different way by grounding the origin of knowledge in our embodied experience. This enables a type of consciousness rooted in fact, in the sense that our experiences can be gauged through empirical procedures and systematic theorizing. The significant move is that certainty can be extended to our perception in the world, where traditionally we could not rely on the certainty of our senses. The comparative research method shows how their philosophies validate the claim that the centrality of embodiment best gets at the project of rectifying the mind/body dichotomy within modern philosophical thought. It also gets at the crisis presented by Husserl, that we need to work out our sciences and philosophy both subjectively and objectively.

Philosophy prior to the introduction of embodiment has maintained the separatedness of the conscious mind. Philosophy embraced the Enlightenment, but perhaps not fully. It has maintained the unreliability of our perception in the modern era introduced by Rene Descrates. Even the philosophy of two great thinkers in the modern era, Kant and Hegel, maintained that the mind is detached from the body. This

\[15\] Ibid., 36.
dichotomy is also maintained in much of the work expressed in post-modern thought as the focus of language, literature and the arts through deconstruction. Many modern thinkers rely on reflection or representation within the mind to make sense and rectify our experience of others and the world. What this study produces is a viable argument that the body is not only a valid location to begin investigations of the mind, but is perhaps the only way in which we can really come to know and trust our existence in the world. The implication from the research is that the reliance of perception not only provides a pathway to knowledge and reason, but restores meaning and significance to life. Awareness of embodiment may offer the most efficient means to the self-determined or self-actualized life and the unity of experience among others. Embodiment can do this by transcending the notion of the supremacy of reflective experience over everyday experience.

**Literature Review**

In order to better formulate questions for the study of embodiment and investigate how embodiment might offer a more productive approach, I framed my research within the discussion of modernity by Husserl. This encourages my research to address many of the common problems of autonomy in prominent thinkers from the time subjectivity was introduced as a problem, to introductions of a new kind of subjectivity in late to post-modern thought. I used the *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* as the backdrop to Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu’s theories. Because they were both influenced and inspired by Husserl’s observations, this text allows me to
reflect upon the aspects of autonomy that most concerns each thinker. Husserl’s account of the crisis in European sciences parallels the problem of subject-centered reason as a philosophical problem. Along with the discussion of *Modernity as a Philosophical Problem* by Robert Pippin, the idea of embodiment comes into relief against theories of pure consciousness as a viable approach to bridging the gap between the subject and object dichotomy. Ideas of pure consciousness remain committed to traditional or classic methods. Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu make use of systematic inquiries of the mind and body relation through interdisciplinary analysis.

In addition to Husserl as a means to frame Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu’s work, the lectures written by Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity* provide an outline of how the problem of subject-centered reason has been dealt with by major philosophic thinkers since the Enlightenment. He walks through the problem of subject-centered reason identified by Hegel and how thinkers addressed the problem through dialectical models, critical theory, deconstruction, and his own theory of communicative action. This text is a nice summary of the general approaches used to address the modernity problem of autonomous individualism and forming a collective or unity of experience in philosophy. Habermas does not discuss the idea of embodiment by Merleau-Ponty or Bourdieu, but his idea of counter-discourses in modernity frames the current state of the debate from more conservative to radical approaches. In the same way Habermas proposes counter-discourses within Modernity, I show that the concept of embodiment is not necessarily new, but can be introduced in such a way to build sense certainty in perception. Likewise, attributes of the autonomous subject like self-
determination and self-actualization is embedded reason projected in subjective lived experience. The notion of a continuous modern discourse from Habermas is central to the way in which this study constructs the argument that Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu are not diverging or making a radical break from German idealists. The notion of a counter-discourse is intended to suggest that Merleau-Ponty’s and Bourdieu’s theories of embodiment extend existing theories to deal with the ideal and real in embodied experience.

From Bourdieu, I draw out the use of embodiment in his *Outline of the Theory of Practice* and *Logic of Practice*. What seems most critical is how embodiment is brought to some level of certainty in phenomenological experience. In these texts, Bourdieu revisits many of the concerns of Husserl and what Habermas sketches out historically in his lectures, which are concerns about the subject/object dichotomies and the knowledge brought out by their opposition. He works to show how our orientation within the world not only impact the choices we make in the social conditions that surround us, but there is more to the objectified world and its relation to our subjectivity. These texts dive into the presuppositions of theoretical reason and layout the theory of practical reason where the body takes on the centrality of our coming to knowledge. Bourdieu challenges intellectual certainty that does not rely on the establishment and maintenance of mutual acknowledgement in physical and social space that occur on conscious and unconscious levels, in the forms of reflection or representations. In other words, Bourdieu’s theory of practice is rooted in the imminence of our embodied self in the world and among others and attempts to avoid the isolation of the self in a conscious mind. In a lecture on
disinterestedness in *Practical Reason*, Bourdieu proposes that theory must re-examine what constitutes reason and how it is formed.

Likewise in the *Primacy of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty discusses the fundamental ideas of perception as the birthplace of knowledge and conscious development. He elaborates on how his idea of perception is not a reduction of knowledge to the sensible or sensation, but that the “experience of perception is...the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us.”\(^{16}\) This collection of publications provides the groundwork of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and begins to show how his type of phenomenology differs from Husserl and other earlier phenomenological approaches that attempt to deal with the problem of subject/object dichotomy in modern thought. The various articles in this collection adopt interdisciplinary approach to how philosophy can be grounded in the objective world without merging into other disciplines.

As Bourdieu applies the orientation of the body to sociology to build his theory of practice and action, Merleau-Ponty uses the science of psychology in the *Structure of Behavior* to build a bridge between the use of behavioral approaches and application of phenomenology on the subject/object dichotomy. Merleau-Ponty outlines the ways in which embodiment is not only central to grounding philosophy, but shows how the sciences can better develop theories that engage facts through our perceptual experiences in context with space and time relations. It shows how structure is built through our understanding of dialectical synthesis of external and internal workings and not just reducing knowledge to sensory stimuli. The key is that the body is more than an

instrument of the mind. The structure of consciousness is revealed through behavior or our experience of the world as well as derivative of those very same behaviors and experiences.

In the lecture on the *Experience of Others*, Merleau-Ponty sketches out the centrality of incarnate relationships with the world and how meaning and signification are dependent on the locality of the subject with objects and others. He focuses on the way in which we synthesize reality through communication beyond the use of language. The lecture provides an emphasis on the accumulation of experiences in order to derive meaning and significance. Knowledge is created through the process of phenomenological perceptual experience that we build intersubjective attitudes between conscious minds that creates knowledge. He utilizes interdisciplinary application of psychology to further illustrate his idea while maintaining the distinction between the use of scientific data and the grounds of his philosophy.

**Summary**

Overall, this study takes a careful look at the centrality of embodiment applied to the question of establishing a truly autonomous subject without cutting off the subject from an objectified world. It carefully walks through the problem of the isolation and instrumentalization of pure consciousness and how embodiment differs, then it addresses the challenge of unifying experience from one singular person to the next by embodied significance created intersubjectively. Finally, the study takes a close look at whether embodiment is successful at bridging dualisms through a reason synthesized by our
incarnate minds and the modes in which we engage the world. From these two influential thinkers, I build an argument for not only embodiment, but the interdisciplinary approach to a philosophical problem. The aspect most appealing about this study is Merleau-Ponty’s and Bourdieu’s commitment to reason in their theories and how reason is maintained in the spirit of Enlightenment thought while utilizing an interdisciplinary approach.

The work of Merleau-Ponty and Boudieu can be used to directly address the way in which we come to self consciousness and avoid the isolation of the individual through lived experience. There are numerous ways in which philosophers have approached the meaning of human experience, but what is most striking and immediate is the nature of meaning in the modern era. Not only has philosophy continued to pursue this quest, it has been deemed a crisis involving all sciences with regard to the significance of our activity. This crisis is somewhat reflected in many of the challenges faced by veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This philosophical study should illuminate how we might be able to come to terms with meaning by using a particular sector of American society to illustrate both the role of science and philosophy in context of a relevant issue and show how these theories of embodiment can begin to address how a seemingly small sector of society can impact the overall social structure it exists in. Embodied reason could open dialogue about how this particular set of wars impact the veteran as an autonomous subject and the social and personal relationships as experienced pre-war, during war, and post-war. What seems clear in the pursuit of meaning is the dependence on epistemology to uncover the secrets to our existence as
more than just parts of a whole or cogs in machine. How we come to know is just as vital
to answer the question of why we are.
CHAPTER II

SUBJECTIVITY

The certainty of ideas is not the foundation of the certainty of perception but is, rather, based on it—in that it is perceptual experience which gives us the passage from one moment to the next and thus realizes the unity of time. In this sense all consciousness is perceptual, even consciousness of ourselves.¹

Introduction

In the first chapter, I outlined how Husserl influenced Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu to dedicate their life’s work to bridge the gap between subjectivity and objectivity. This chapter presents how the two thinkers construct the first feature as an embodied autonomous subject and how an embodied subject is constituted by both subjectivity and objectivity. The chapter begins by briefly reviewing the traditional notions of subjectivity through the Kantian subject. It then outlines how Merleau-Ponty responds to the German Idealist with the concept of the phenomenal body and the primacy of perception and how perception understood holistically moves the traditional notion of pure consciousness from an isolated subject to an embodied subject immersed in and with others in lived experience. The chapter then discusses how the theory of embodiment in Bourdieu’s notion of habitus complements Merleau-Ponty and expands on his work to constitute the embodied autonomous subject in social structures. Finally, ¹

the chapter concludes by applying the two concepts of an embodied autonomous subject to Gulf War II veterans. This example proposes a way in which the concepts of embodiment can further research and treatment for a significant social sector in American society.

The Problem of the Autonomous Subject in Pure Consciousness

First, let us look at the foundations of modernity’s problem of the autonomous subject through Immanuel Kant’s work. We could begin by making the general claim, for brevity, that the same way Descrates doubted everything but his own thought, Kant called into question everything but our own cognition by distinguishing between \textit{\textbf{a priori}} and \textit{\textbf{a posteriori}} cognition. We only know to be certain of those cognitions that originate absolutely independent of our experience. Everything else exists based on faith. This limits and in a way isolates the subjective mind and Kant calls this pure reason.

The Kantian project presents us with the first insights of how modernity is problematized in the German tradition. As mentioned above, the German idealists were overwhelmingly concerned with autonomy of the subject. Kant is even more so concerned primarily with the solitary individual. For him, objectivity acts as a mere agent to mediate objects of knowledge through subjectivity. For Kant we do not experience representations of things in themselves, we bring the experience to the world to make it possible through our cognition. We describe an object by what we help constitute and not as a thing \textit{\textbf{in-itself}}. Autonomous subjectivity is best described by Kant as the possibility that humans can regulate and evaluate their own beliefs by rational self-
reflection. This self-reflection must remain free of interests, passions, traditions, prejudice, and enable humans to rule their own thoughts and actions. The challenge that Kant takes on is to establish a priori foundations for epistemic certainty in order to escape doubt or skepticism in modern philosophy, but what he does instead is perpetuate a dualism in his transcendental philosophy. As it is sketched out in the next chapter through Hegel, this form of subjectivity is not only insufficient, it creates the problem of the unity of experience with others and undermines the very maxim Kant rests pure reason on, that is “strict universality” in a priori judgments. The gap between the subject and object has to be overcome before we can uncover functional reason in the modern individual.

Kant avoids experience as the root of our reason and cognition, carrying on the tradition of Cartesian doubt. He places certainty in theoretical axioms where maxims can be rendered universally consistent with all possible actions of other agents. For Kant, reason is a faculty of the mind. Kant begins in the Critique of Pure Reason with the unexpected claim that all our knowledge begins with our experience.

There is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part


bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience? As far as time is concerned, then, no cognition in us precedes experience, and with experience every cognition begins.\textsuperscript{4}

However, Kant goes on to say, “...although all our cognition commences with experience, yet it does not on that account all arise from experience.” This is where Kant builds his transcendental knowledge on the basis of \textit{a priori} cognitions or “cognitions independent of all experience.” All other cognitions that originate in experience are called \textit{a posteriori}. Kant has made an assertion to further his project to revolutionize metaphysics in transcendentalism. Traditional metaphysics has perpetuated the grounding of reason in pure consciousness. It has been a method of searching for absolute knowledge without interacting with empirical knowledge. Kant is the first to present this problem in his \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}. Traditionally, metaphysics assumed that “all cognitions must conform to the objects.”\textsuperscript{5} As Kant creates a new philosophy, he flips this assumption where, “objects must conform to our cognition.”\textsuperscript{6} He then begins to establish a foundation for metaphysics and science based on pure consciousness. He writes:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{4} Ibid., Sec. 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{5} Ibid., Preface, Bxvi.
  \item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
...the objects, or what is the same thing, the experience in which alone they can be cognized (as given objects) conforms to those concepts, in which case I immediately see an easier way of the difficulty, since experience itself is a kind of cognition requiring the understanding, whose rule I have to presuppose in myself before any object is given to me, hence *a priori*, to which all objects of experience must therefore necessarily conform, and with which they must agree.\(^7\)

Kant furthers his claim to *a priori* cognition in that “those occur absolutely independently of all experience.”\(^8\) In his introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he goes on to claim that we know *a priori* judgements because they can be thought in “strictly universality...,”\(^9\) where one consciousness can conceive that all other minds would find it to be true as well. He reserves experience for the concept of *a posteriori* cognition, but cautions that empirical universality is validity that only holds to be true in most cases.\(^10\) In order for Kant’s *a priori* cognitions to work, they require some inherent knowledge of universality with others. This becomes problematic because we cannot be sure that others exist in and of themselves, because experience of others relies on mere appearance or representations of the mind.

For Kant, reason can only be certain of *a priori* cognitions, that is, cognition that is apart from all experience. In his article, *What is Enlightenment?* Kant claims that

\(^7\) Ibid., Preface, Bxvii.

\(^8\) Ibid., Introduction, B3.

\(^9\) Ibid., Introduction, B4.

\(^10\) Ibid.
freedom is required in order to exercise the faculty of reason. If we are limited by certainty in only \textit{a priori} cognitions, then we can neither employ reason nor freedom, for all other judgments \textit{a posteriori}, perpetuate the modes of skepticism that Kant sets out to defeat. What this leaves is a cognitive subject guided by only the appearance of the world and no certainty of the world. This leaves the subject in insolation. Instead of a liberated autonomous self, we find subjectivity more in the form of an isolated or atomized self, without real connection beyond the mind. Although Kant is not the only modern philosopher, his transcendental philosophy has strongly influenced western philosophy and explicates the very problem modernist face when dealing with the subject and object dualism in the form of pure consciousness and bodily experience.

This leads us to the following questions: How does the embodied subject differ from the Kantian subject? Does the embodied subject represent the autonomous subject the Enlightenment set out to create? The discussion turns to the work of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu to respond to the approach of pure consciousness. In order to answer these two questions, these thinkers show that the principal difference is not a separation of the mind from the objective world, where representations and symbols are formed through categories of the mind. Rather, we interpret and communicate by representations and symbols \textit{in} our world and \textit{amongst} our world through lived experience. This begins with the embodied subject that places lived experience over reflected experience.

Keep in mind that Merleau-Ponty’s and Bourdieu’s theories are French philosophical responses to a very German idealistic tradition. It is essential to make a mental note of this distinction. This methodology of comparison suggests that Merleau-
Ponty and Bourdieu pose a counter argument to an ongoing modern discourse rather than suggest a paradigm shift in philosophical work. Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu are not intending to radicalize previous traditional theory, but continue the discourse by introducing a new element to try to deal with the isolation of subjectivity. They both do this by placing embodiment at the center of their philosophies rather than excluding it from cognition in the way Kant presents.

Foundations for the Embodied Autonomous Subject: Merleau-Ponty

This section shows how Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu use embodiment to bridge the gap of subjectivity and objectivity without negating either. Both thinkers intend to bring together subjectivity and objectivity in such a way as to preserve the intellectual value of each term, but to stress that understanding each in turn is not to be confused with distinguishing each as separate or opposed. Another important aspect of this discussion is to understand that Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu are not identical in their approach of embodiment and in some ways differ greatly. What is essential to comprehend is how the centrality of the embodied subject makes subjectivity and objectivity interdependent, while maintaining reason as the key mechanism in both theorists’ work. Let us begin the discussion with Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty sets the foundation for embodiment through his work on the primacy of perception. His counter-argument to Kant is not that Kant is wrong, but that he is only dealing with one aspect of our coming to knowledge. Kant distinguishes our innate knowledge from our empirical knowledge, and Merleau-Ponty understands that
this is where he introduces a philosophical problem of autonomy in modernity. Merleau-Ponty understands how Kant did not see the need to prove that others exist and therefore did not see the need of others to constitute what is true for every consciousness. If the mind is not connected to the body in any way then it has no content or is not situated in time. If the self is not limited by incarnation or situatedness in time then it is not an issue to find what is true in one consciousness can be true for all consciousness. Therefore, Kant is safe in saying that what one subject understands to be true can be inferred as universal. When limited strictly to philosophy, it is fine to construct purified subjects and objects. Because Merleau-Ponty is taking an interdisciplinary approach in order to rectify the problem of science and philosophy being worked out separately, it becomes problematic when we begin to look at the actuality of the natural world, and in his case psychology, that the process of representation through reflection becomes a problem.

Merleau-Ponty tries to rectify this dichotomy in order to rectify the Husserlian problem of the sciences. In the process he is also tries to restore meaning to natural science and philosophy. He does so by incorporating our experience through embodiment. The first thing he tackles is the perception of objects in general. Then he proposes the principles of structure that perception functions in and introduces orders of signification that make up meaning with the experience of others. He moves from transcendental metaphysics into the primacy of perception, and his principles of structure and orders of signification that works through his idea of the autonomous embodied subject.
First, Merleau-Ponty sees metaphysics as the “...constantly experienced moment, the moment when an existence becomes aware of itself, grasps itself, and expresses its own meaning.”  

This means that nature and reason are not problems to be worked out separately (and not problems at all), but a melding of our real experiences that is comprised by a plurality that makes up metaphysics, incorporating the spontaneity of dualisms created by traditional philosophy. Metaphysics, or what is traditionally accepted as metaphysical, is understood to be the science of first causes or things unchanged. For Merleau-Ponty, metaphysics is captured in the phenomenon of expression through the perceiving subject. Merleau-Ponty sets out with not only the thesis of the primacy of perception in his phenomenology of perception, he begins with the similar claim Kant immediately abandons in his work, that is, all knowledge begins with our experiences. Merleau-Ponty claims that it is our perception that enables us to experience truth and that truth “shows through and envelops us rather than being held and circumscribed by our mind.” He asserts, “The perceiving subject is not this absolute


12 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, Part Three, paragraph 449. In the Part Three of the Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty explains that the phenomenon of expression is how our thoughts are tied to the world. It is through our body and the bodies of others that thoughts transcend themselves through language and gestures. It is through communication that thoughts can be brought into existence from our consciousness and intention mingled with other’s intentions to form signification within cultural or social structures.

13 Ibid., 6.
thinker; rather, it functions according to a natal pact between body and the world, between ourselves and our body.”\textsuperscript{14}

At this point we adopt how Merleau-Ponty presents our perception as much more complex than we first thought. Through the work of psychology, Merleau-Ponty is able to demonstrate that perception has proved to be more than a basic cause and effect between stimulus and response. What was once thought of as being a simple process of the body reacting to certain stimuli from the world, perception has proven to be a much more involved process of the body engaging with the world in our present perceptual experiences, our past perceptual experiences, and the anticipation of new perceptual experiences. Merleau-Ponty identifies much of these observations in his work, \textit{The Structure of Behavior}. What he finds is that many of the tests and experiments of natural science in psychology, physics, and physiology suggest that there are extremely complex mechanisms at work in the most simple of human perceptual tasks. What Merleau-Ponty wants to prove is that the idea of perception must be extended to capture a “perceptual synthesis” that occurs when a human subject is presented with any form of stimuli. What is at work in the process of understanding perception is not controlled by the ideal of our consciousness nor is it a process of physical triggers from the external world on our nervous system sending direct signals to certain areas of our brain. \textit{The Structure of Behavior} examines psychological, physical, and physiological experiments that fail to account for perception as more than cause and effect. He challenges the long standing notion that stimuli affect our sensory fields where you, “pull strings which command the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
Merleau-Ponty first examines reflex behavior and Pavlov’s reflexology to determine that responses are more than mechanistic and the systems that natural sciences identify do not function as closed circuits. He suggests a dialectical relationship of the subject and object through perception. Through his work on behavior, Merleau-Ponty concludes that the structure we find in behavior mimics the structure of nature. As we act in the world we not only envelop the meaning and significance of it, we assign it. This “perceptual synthesis” of our experience is what enables the bridge between what was once an isolated consciousness and the body’s presence in the physical world. Not only has Merleau-Ponty suggested a possible bridge between subject and object dualism, he also presents the beginning of bridging the gap between natural science and philosophy.

By studying perception from a psychologist’s point of view Merleau-Ponty reveals that the “perceived world is not a sum of objects...” (in the sense in which the sciences use this world), that our relation to the world is not that of a thinker to an object of thought, and finally that the unity of the perceived thing, as perceived by several consciousnesses, is not comparable to the unity of a proposition [theorem], as understood by several thinkers, any more than perceived existence is comparable to ideal existence.”

This responds almost directly to Kant’s idea of theorem-based philosophy. Merleau-Ponty is asserting that our perception is not a stagnant given to be taken up by the conscious mind, but perception is an activity where “[matter] is pregnant with its

\[16\] Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy of Perception*, 12.
form.” He means that our perception and the world are in constant interactivity and reason is a process and not a faculty. Unlike natural experimental science or the traditional methodology of philosophy, we can only find reason through the structure of “matter, life, and mind” and do so through an interdisciplinary approach. Merleau-Ponty is referring specifically to matter in physics, life in physiology, and mind in psychology. Because he analyzes behavior as not a series of “nows” to be juxtaposed through objective space and time, we cannot found our knowledge in the same manner of “the decisive moment of learning.” This means that we have to consider not only the immediate experience of knowing, but must factor all previous knowledge on a continuum. This leads him to assert that we have to found our reason as a process that is discoverable in our activity that contains “immanent intelligibility.” What we come to know is not a moment in time to be considered at that moment or reflected upon as a moment in time, but that knowledge is in the immanence of the activity that flows and is constantly being altered from what we understand as one moment to the next.

One cannot discern animal behavior something like a first layer of reactions which would correspond to the physical and chemical properties of the world and to which an acquired significance would be subsequently be attached by the transference of reflexogenic powers. In an organism, experience is not the recording and fixation of certain actually accomplished movements: it builds up

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17 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 130.
aptitudes, that is, the general power of responding to situations of a certain type by means of varied reactions which have nothing in common but the meaning. Reactions are not therefore a sequence of events; they carry with themselves an immanent intelligibility. Situation and reaction are linked internally by their common participation in a structure in which the mode of activity proper to the organism is expressed.\textsuperscript{20}

To oversimplify this idea of reason, Merleau-Ponty is merging the certainty of structures and laws we accept in physics and mathematics with the meaning and signification philosophy is intended to point out for us. He is responding directly to the crisis in science and philosophy that Husserl lays out. At the same time Merleau-Ponty is working out this crisis, he is building the foundations of this notion of the phenomenology of perception. What becomes most central to this form of reason is the embodied subject who can perceive. For Merleau-Ponty, “perception is not an event in nature.”\textsuperscript{21} Perception is the activity by which a subject has and imposes signification. The perception of the living body is the “phenomenal body” where we create a unity of internal and external systems through our intelligible activity.

The organism is also distinguished from the systems of modern physics because, in physics, unities of indivisible behavior remain opaque givens, while in biology they become the means of a new type of intellection: the particularities of an

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\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 145.
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individual organism are more and more closely connected with its capacity for action; the structure of the body in man is the expression of character. The unity of physical systems is a unity of correlation, that of organisms a unity of signification.\textsuperscript{22}

To make his point more clear, we can turn back to the common philosophical analogy of a cube as Merleau-Ponty does so in his work. In traditional philosophy, the argument is made that we can only verify part of a cube as present before us in the world. We consider this object as not actually existing because we cannot rely on our visual fields to verify the side of the cube that we do not see. Traditional philosophy wants to take up the non-visual sides of the cube as representations in the mind following the process that Kant introduces in pure consciousness. Although we do not see them at this given moment from this given angle, we can impose upon the object the other sides through representation. In this sense, we do not actually perceive the cube. This returns us to principles in Kant’s work that suggests that the cube does not exist, but is only an uncertain appearance in the world. The cube is a representation or \textit{a posteriori} cognition that proves certain most of the time. What Merleau-Ponty will say is that the cube does exist and we can prove it by reaching out and touching it or by changing our visual angle to perceive the other sides of it. The primacy of perception in the embodied subject can act upon the object and verify its existence- something that cannot be done in the world by pure consciousness.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 156.
In this analogy, Merleau-Ponty pushes this contradiction of immanence and transcendence. Our perception allows us to take up the immediacy of a given object and work out our relation to formulate a transcendental notion of it. He denies the object as possible through pure intellectual analysis. He pushes for a practical synthesis of the object via the perception of the object. This form of perception is not reducible to a single moment. There is not direct sign of the signified given. The sign, signifier, and signified cannot be decomposed as separate in a perception. This is what Merleau-Ponty means by “pregnant with its form.” The given object is synthesized in the constant transition of perceptual data. Nothing occurs in an isolated moment in a controlled space, but is “real” through “the infinite sum of indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which is it given exhaustively.” In order to accept Merleau-Ponty’s notion of perception, we have to deny all traditional notions of perception as finite. This is done by denying the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity. This dualism is retracted at the very onset of understanding the embodied subject. This returns us to the reason as a process that demands the perception of the phenomenal body. It is only through our acquired aptitude that is built in experience that meaning is inferred on the cube as a cube. It is not a distinct moment that our minds applied the concept of


24 Merleau-Ponty is using the language of Ferdinand de Saussure to explain that the sign, in this example a cube, cannot be dissected into the signified or symbol that points to the signified or meaning that it represents. The physical cube that is before us in not pointing to a transcendental form of cube or notion of a cube in our mind. We perceive the cube because we have experienced it, learned by seeing other objects that we call cubes and because we can act upon this object and move about it, we can verify through perception that it is a cube.

25 Ibid.
cube on an object in the world, for the three sides are merely an appearance of an object that may or may not meet the criterion of a cube. It is only through our phenomenal experience that the cube is verified as real and is done through a perceptual synthesis of what is experienced, the ability to act on it, and the ability to express meaning by it.

This concept of perception is not without paradox and Merleau-Ponty recognizes it as such. This concept of perception inherently contains the contradiction of immanence and transcendence. The perceived object cannot be perceived as what is not immanently given and at the same time it transcends by always containing more than what is given. This makes the whole more than the sum of parts. For Merleau-Ponty, the perceived requires the presence and absence, both are synthesized by the perceiving embodied subject. This does not negate the project of perception in the embodied subject, but reflects the very principle that Merleau-Ponty wants to emphasize. Our reason is a process in our activity that expresses signification in the world and it cannot be dissected into subjective and objective components. The perceptual synthesis is the way we arrive at reason. The embodied subject is the only way in which we take up perception that can enable reason. The principal contradiction of immanence and transcendence is another way in which Merleau-Ponty is trying capture how the real and ideal are interwoven into a non-opposing relation. His thesis of perception as embodied subjects is attempting to bring together rationality and the absolute with the intent to preserve both. In his lecture on the Primacy of Perception, he refers directly to Kant’s thinking that, “...we can only think of the world because we have already experienced it; it is through this experience
that we have the idea of being, and it is through this experience that the words ‘rational’ and ‘real’ receive a meaning simultaneously.’

This leads us into understanding how Merleau-Ponty moves from synthesizing the real and ideal to understand how he builds an autonomous subject without contradicting lived experience. The embodied autonomous subject is constituted by the double function of the body. The first function is through “sensory fields” and the organization of the body that models itself on the natural structural aspects of the world and the second function is “the active body capable of gestures, of expressions, and finally of language, [that] turns back on the world to signify it.” He means that we have a certain degree of regulated functions as incarnated beings and we manifest the very structures found in nature and these functions are explored through natural sciences.

The second function is the capability of humans to express themselves upon the world as solitary individuals and this is the function is dealt with by philosophy. It is this function that Merleau-Ponty is working with when he emphasizes the phenomenology of perception. There is a relation between the subject, the body, and the world that makes up our reason through a bodily situation. We not only embody a sensory function that processes sensory stimuli from the experience in the world, we are autonomous subjects by way of our point of view on the world in our particular physical and historical situation, but it is our sensory function that brings us to understand our point of view in the world. The key is that both functions are interdependent in building our knowledge of the world. It is beyond the instrumentalization of the body because we have affective


27 Ibid., 7.
movements through our expression in the world. This simple, yet complex theory of embodiment neither presumes that we are not in the traditional metaphysics of our cognitions conforming to objects in the world, nor does it presume the Kantian reversal that the objects in the world conform to our cognitions. What occurs is our bodily movement in the world, as embodied subjects, affect and shape our perception of things. Instead of indivisible “givens” present in the world for us to digest by “remote consciousness” our central perspective of the body expands our perception to envelop the world as “inexhaustible systems which we recognize through certain style of development...” Merleau-Ponty is claiming that our perception is the only way in which we make sense of the world that is forever changing. The adaptability of perception allows knowledge to form through a “universal style shared in by all perceptual beings.” Merleau-Ponty hinges much of this theory of embodiment on expressive gestures or communication that includes, but is not exclusive to language.

So where is the autonomous subject in this theory? In the process of melding the subject and object, we must differentiate the autonomous subject by corporeal existence and not by the mind’s reflection of the world. The embodied subject is autonomous in two forms. The first is the undeniable existence as one being in a particular, singular space as a physical presence in the world. This bodily position enables a subjective point of view as well as a historical narrative that is independent from all other embodied subjects. The other form of autonomy in the embodied subject is the subjective ability to

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28 Ibid., 5.
29 Ibid., 6.
30 Ibid.
act on the world as an independent agent in the world. Although knowledge and
communication with others bring to light meaning in the world, they also preserve the
autonomous subject, as well as transform it. Merleau-Ponty states:

It seems to be that knowledge and the communication with others which it
presupposes not only are original formations with respect to the perceptual life but
also they preserve and continue our perceptual life even while transforming it.
Knowledge and communication sublimate rather than suppress our incarnation,
and the characteristic operation of the mind is in the movement by which we
recapture our corporeal existence and use it to symbolize instead of merely to
coexist.\textsuperscript{31}

There is a very significant move made by this claim, that is, we are not fixed entities or
essences. What we come to know is not isolated in a pure consciousness, where others
and objects may or may not really exist beyond appearances. We come to know because
we share perceptual experience through shared meaning and signification in the
phenomenon of expression. It is through our activity with others that we build upon the
meaning that is formulated in our embodied consciousness. This occurs from real lived
experience that incorporates past, present and future as well as incorporates
communication as expression in language and gestures that convey not only our cognitive

\begin{footnote}{Ibid., 7.}
\end{footnote}
notions, but require the notions of others to sublimate meaning. Merleau-Ponty’s theory is engaging the real and ideal simultaneously.

The next step is to see how Bourdieu builds on these foundations and extends the primacy of perception and phenomenal body into the material and social world. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodiment influenced the work of Bourdieu, but Bourdieu emphasizes corporeality in a stronger application through social structures. Although Bourdieu denies the amplitude Merleau-Ponty places on phenomenology in his theory of practice, it still contains many characteristics of the function of perception that Merleau-Ponty asserts in psychology and philosophy. We could say that Bourdieu understands phenomenal perception as a component to resolving the subject and object dualism.

The Embodied Subject in the Social World: Bourdieu

Bourdieu is responding to the very same problems presented by Husserl that Merleau-Ponty does. He intends to develop embodiment so that it brings together the diverging tracts of natural science and philosophy. He begins with the same interdisciplinary approach that Merleau-Ponty does, but his work explicitly intends to transcend the subject and object dualism through sociology and anthropology. Although Bourdieu was influenced by some of the work of Merleau-Ponty’s application of perception and phenomenology, he expands the idea of embodiment to include the methodologies of structuralism and materialism. As stated previously, Bourdieu does not place as much of an emphasis on phenomenology because he intends to build his theory of practice on the social structures that we take part in and help to construct. His focus
shifts from the roots of the theory of embodiment, where Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the very moments we begin to perceive, to how embodiment is woven into our doing and being through our interactivity. He is more direct in applying his notion of structures present in individuals and others as well as incorporating the symbolic structures through materialism. His theory of practice becomes the merging of internalized structures with objectified structures with the intent to maintain the intellectual integrity of both. He presumes that everything we know about the world is established and developed by individual acts of perception; however, this knowledge is in relation with and not detachable from the social and material world. The idea of the embodied autonomous subject emerges first in his notion of *habitus*. Bourdieu’s *habitus* complements Merleau-Ponty’s two functions of the body in his phenomenal body and builds on the idea of the phenomenon of expression through the relation of *habitus* and *fields*.

The best place to begin to understand Bourdieu’s notion of subjectivity as embodied is to grasp the notion of *habitus*. The notion of *habitus* is central to Bourdieu’s theory of practice, but cannot be fully appreciated without understanding Bourdieu’s concept of *field* that is taken up in the next chapter as the form of objectivity in his theory. In order to appreciate the enigmatic definition of *habitus*, one has to first deny all previous presuppositions of subjectivity in the same way we have to deny all presuppositions of subjectivity to understand Merlea-Ponty’s primacy of perception. *Habitus* is comprised as internal and external forces that synchronize “with the specific logic of the organism.”

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past, present, and anticipated experiences, but also takes on collective practices and histories. It is a way of integrating what Bourdieu calls the “structured structures and the structuring structures of dispositions.” To oversimplify this definition, Bourdieu means that “structured structures” are regularities that are developed over time through personal and collective histories that make past experiences actively present in our dispositions through perception, thought, and action. In the same way, “structuring structures” are the dispositions that are being created in current and anticipated experiences. Bourdieu refers to both as structures because they are not random, but organized or systematic according to the organism in forming or sublimating new perceptions, thoughts, and actions. This sounds very similar to Merleau-Ponty’s conception of perceptual synthesis, where perception is not a storage of data triggering responses to stimulus. The structure we find in behavior reflects the structures of nature and we envelop meaning and significance in our activity as we create it. In Merleau-Ponty’s *Structure of Behavior*, he similarly claims that it is the success and failures of past, present, and future experience that make up the meaning or signification of our activity. What emerges in Bourdieu’s *habitus* is similar to the way in which Merleau-Ponty arrives at perception as a means to synthesize our experience with past, present, and future activity as phenomenal bodies. Bourdieu achieves *habitus* by not only incorporating perception, but takes embodiment further by stating it has the infinite capacity to “continuously [define] and [redefine] in the dialectic between objectifying intention and the already objectified intention.”

33 Ibid., 55.
Habitus is “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and...forgotten as history, [and] is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product.”  

What Bourdieu does differently and more aggressively than Merleau-Ponty is make embodiment the very reason we act (or practice) in our particular way in particular social and material situations. Perception is important for Bourdieu, but functions with materialism to build the embodied subject. It not only relies on intersubjectivity and accounting for the interchange between one person and the next, but is built into the material world around us. The objectified and objectifying intentions are present through material objects and convey meaning through others in as much a way as others express shared meaning with us. Embodiment is not only based in the phenomenal, but habitus is the always transforming underlying principles that generate our activity through others and objects.

One issue that can be claimed in this idea of habitus within his theory of practice is that the subject is not autonomous because it is not acting without influence of internal or external stimuli. Similar to Merleau-Ponty, the embodied subject achieves a different kind of autonomy than what Kant proposed. Kant was focused on the autonomous subject as completely uninfluenced by others and things. This definition may work in his transcendental philosophy, but because Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu both want to unify the real and ideal, they first engage the real to work out their theories of the ideal and its place with experience. Therefore, Bourdieu’s embodied autonomous subject is manifested though the singular disposition of the embodied subject in habitus. Merleau-

34 Ibid., 56.
Ponty’s idea of the double function to the body becomes helpful in understanding what Bourdieu means by *habitus*. We not only take up the function of sensory perception, but function as situated bodies that can act upon the sensory function. We are not limited by the influence or meaning that is created with others, but our meaning is enhanced by the dispositions we adopt through our own history incorporated with the structure of us as human organisms. Within our bodily experience we bring together intentionality of ourselves, others and objects in the material world to come to shared meaning. This is all achieved with past experience and anticipated experiences adding to our understanding.

What Bourdieu does with the notion of *habitus* is take the meaning and signification that Merleau-Ponty suggests through our perception and extends it to our very dispositions. It is critical to understand that the dispositions that Bourdieu has in mind are more than the angle at which we perceive our experience. Dispositions are not just positionality, but the truly incarnated subject. Not only do we develop dispositions in the world through our perception in the world, dispositions are made of the actual corporeal bodies we are in the world. *Habitus* forms not only our perspective, but is “durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions.”35 The subject is autonomous because it acts according to its positionality and its own signification within its world and within the world. Freedom is not reflexive or dictated by a mechanistic will, but unique and particular to the *habitus* of the individual. That is the embodied history that enables the individual to act on its own accord within the immediate present that is both subjectively and objectively constituted. It is the

embodied significance that allows for the autonomy of the subject. For Bourdieu, *habitus* is not just the behavior that we practice, the mechanized response of past situations, the dimension of language or body image, and is not reducible to socio-economic structures. It is “the body...constantly mingled with all the knowledge it reproduces...”36 He asserts,

This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within the world. ...The habitus is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects ‘without inertia’ in rationalist theories.37

This conception of subjectivity draws on the double function of the body that is drawn out of Merleau-Ponty’s use of the perceptual body. Bourdieu’s *habitus* fuses the natural organized structure of the body with the body’s ability to actively create meaning. Merleau-Ponty’s influence is apparent in Bourdieu’s work, and Bourdieu aggressively integrates material and social aspects with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception.


37 Ibid., 56.
As directly stated previously, the possibility of the autonomous subject though embodiment only takes up one side of the dualism. It is the fact that the objective exists that makes either possible. That is to say, the embodied subject is null without the objective component to its form. If we return to the analogy of the cube we can clarify this relation for Bourdieu. The subject who perceives the cube requires that the subject experienced a cube or something like a cube and has done so with others to bring about the meaning of the cube as a cube. It requires the knowledge of its qualities as well as the experience of those qualities of six sides, with all right angles, sides of equal length and so on. Not only are those qualities necessary, but so is the knowledge of geometry and the purpose of a cube in geometry for understanding shapes. The purpose of shapes itself gains its meaning with other subjects. The subjective and objective are intermingled in our knowledge of a cube. We do not just project a definition on an object, but need the structural context to understand it. It is not just consciousness’ constituting an object. It is also the subject that makes the objective possible. In other words, the object is both already present in the world and is chosen by the subject who gives it meaning.

This is where Bourdieu inserts his notion of fields as a relational component to habitus. We gain our deep-seated dispositions and our embodied knowledge only by interacting within a host of social structures, or fields. In the same way the structure of behavior is in a sense the structure of nature in Merleau-Ponty’s theory, Bourdieu applies the same principle in his notion of habitus. That is, the “structures characterizing a determinate class of conditions of existence produce the structures of habitus, which in their turn are the basis of the perception and appreciation of all subsequent
There is an interrelationship between past experiences and present experiences in the *habitus* that results in the current state of practice. One key aspect is that *habitus* is not calculated as probabilities in science or mathematics, nor is it comparable to the notions of stimulus and response covered earlier. Bourdieu takes on embodiment as the imminence in the world through which the world imposes its imminence. There is not a determined history, but an orientation that arises from one’s *habitus* and *field*. This intends to prevent the subject from being reduced to an automaton of the social world in the same way Merleau-Ponty intends to avoid the subject from being reduced to an automaton of sensory stimuli. There is a level of autonomy in the embodied subject because there is a singularity to all individuals by way of their position and trajectory in the social world. Bourdieu refers to the term of expression or personal style of one’s practice. Although it individualizes the subject, one is still contained within an organized system or structure that sets the parameters of practices, but does not limit their actions or practices.

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment...produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principle of the generation and structuring practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an
express mastery of operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of orchestrating action of a conductor.  

For both thinkers, the function of reason is a process that is dependent on the interactivity of the subjective and objective as integrated experience. Reason is not locked away in the recesses of the pure consciousness, nor is it unattainable in the objective world history. Reason is the process by which we are imminent and mobile as incarnated minds. It is also the mechanism that restores meaning and signification to our activity. It is both textured and contextual. For Bourdieu, the body is not a mimic or representation of the past through his concept of *habitus*, but is enacting the past. The knowledge of the body gained through experience is not stored and recalled, but knowledge is the body. The mind and its contents are incarnate. There is no disconnect from reason and its process.

**Embodyed Autonomous Subject: Gulf War II Veterans**

The concepts of embodiment presented provide a way to go beyond the use of self-reflection that has led many modern thinkers to isolated subjects or ones that result in meaningless experience. The subject of pure consciousness is susceptible to the instrumentalization of the body by the mind. It leads many to question the significance of their individual lives. This is never more observable than the changes veterans face when

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returning from conflict. What Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu can offer is a way to not only restore meaning in our activity as individuals, but also come to relate our experience with others. The embodied autonomous subject goes beyond the notions and confines of the ideal. The embodied subject tries to bring together the subjective and objective in experience without setting one in opposition to the other. As Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu convey in their work, this strategy of bridging the gap is an attempt to comprise our understanding of given experiences at both factual and theoretical, rather than provide a mere reflection of experiences as memories or representations. This method of understanding shows how conflict for Gulf War II veterans can be viewed as embedded in their dispositions and that these dispositions are not isolated aspects of a self, but are an integral part of all others that they come in contact with, as well as objects in the world around them.

The embodied subject of Merleau-Ponty offers the phenomenon of expression in intersubjectivity. This idea can be applied to veterans to allow them to reformulate the truths of their activities. An example of this could be a veteran’s experience of trash in the road. In a veteran’s experience prior to conflict, the trash in the road meant nothing more than litter on a highway. During the Iraq war, trash or debris on the road indicated the possibility of a roadside bomb and therefore required not only the action of avoiding the trash as a possible concealed explosive device, it called for an entire response team to remove the trash and possible explosive. If it was a bomb and it exploded, it not only added to the service member’s lived experience at the time it happened, including possible casualties, or threat of harm, but suggested it could be a bomb every time after.
If we continue to play out the scenario, engineers may be called in to patch the crater or pothole created by the blast, but also the road repair itself becomes a possible location for emplacing another device. The engineers fixing the road may be set up for an ambush as they move in to make the repair. The repair cannot just be left to dry, because of the possibility of emplacing another device, so security has to be maintained on the location. This type of situated experience can play out with even more dynamic actions as friendly forces and enemy forces countering each other’s responses.

To intensify the example, the service member repeats this given experience over time on a daily basis. Not only is it an object in the world assigned a new meaning in context to the situatedness, but the object is given meaning through the bomb emplacer. To make the scenario more complicated, the person emplacing the roadside bomb could be a seemingly friendly local that the service member has encountered on routine patrols that does this act for money to support a family, could be a person who is fighting directly for the cause with the passion to kill and destroy forces, or could be a child who may not comprehend the magnitude of the consequences but places the bomb because he was asked to do so. This type of situation varies in many ways, but each detail of the scenario is important to understanding the situatedness of this particular social structure. This is an example of a situation in which meaning has changed through the given social structures as intersubjective experiences of the service member with others in the environment. What can be suggested by this example is that the mind and body absorb the experience and the embodied consciousness takes in the past, and the present, while anticipating the future. When the service member sees trash in the road, he/she uses the
knowledge of the experience to mitigate the threat in the future. This forms reason in the embodied experience. When returning from conflict, that lived experience is still embodied in the subject. Although the environment changes and the chance of encountering trash on an American road that is concealing an explosive device is remote, the subject not only reflects on the previous experiences, but may respond with behaviors that have become habit-like over time. The embodied activity could be swerving to avoid the trash, or changing lanes, to a fear of driving, or having the urge to call in the location of the trash, and so on.

This example captures the point that seemingly simple experiences can play a significant factor in reintegration back into American communities. What can be applied is Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “immanent intelligibility” in the service members’ activity, where they might know that the threat of a bomb is not likely, but build aptitudes in the participation of a dynamically different social structure that determines a temporary shared truth. The previous experiences constitute the need to avoid objects in roadways, until their new experiences help reformulate the truths built on their experience back in American civilian social structures. This is a very simple example that is easily overcome by most, but it highlights how embodiment can help us understand that lived experience is part of our coming to knowledge.

The benefit of using the theories of embodiment suggests that the subject, in this case veterans, is not fixed in what is truth in their perception and what is truth on transcendental levels. Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu are attempting to bridge the subjective with the objective, the real and the ideal. In both theories it is the ability of the
subjects to move through their experiences with others to determine meaning. We could apply the double function of the body to this scenario, where the body acts based on sensory fields and learns to react to certain similar stimuli, like the trash in the road, but the second function of the body is that it is capable of gestures, language, and constituting meaning with other bodies. It is the second function that really gets at the autonomous subject and the ability to overcome contradictions. The temporality of the body allows veterans to distinguish their experience in a particular place and time as part of a personal historical narrative, but more important, the veteran is capable of acting as an independent agent who is free to assign meaning beyond experiences in combat. It is in the embodied autonomous subject that empowers the veteran to move beyond being a cog in a machine or being defined by the battle, the mission, the war, or the politics that sent them there.

Bourdieu’s theory of the embodied subject complements the theory of Merleau-Ponty by going further in his idea of dispositions in *habitus*, where we have the infinite capacity to define and redefine ourselves. There is the imminence in the embodied subject that removes the veteran from being an automaton of past experience and is able to set his/her own trajectory in the present. As Bourdieu states, the idea of embodiment is not enacting the past, but living through it. The current reintegration process focuses primarily on medical, mental and physical disabilities and the federal government has programs in place to help veterans further their education and employment, but these programs focus on the factual or functional aspects of reintegration. What needs to be fostered in the reintegration process is how these veterans shift from one social structure...
to the next and make those transitions in meaning within their environments. More research is suggested on developing how this is accomplished. One possible way is through the 144 existing veteran support organizations already recognized by the U.S. Government.
CHAPTER III

UNITY OF EXPERIENCE

The Possibility of the Unity of Experience

As stated in the previous chapter, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu deal with subjectivity through embodiment, but still need to show that the embodied subject can bridge objectivity in reason. We see how the embodied subject employs reason as a process, but this analysis is not complete until we can establish how reason unifies experience. It becomes clear from the problems that arise in Kant’s pure reason and pure consciousness that universality can only be attained by taking part in some form of objective reality. It is necessary to be able to verify reason by checking it against the objective world. This chapter discusses the second feature of modernity, the possibility of the unity of experience with others. It begins by using Hegel’s critique of Kant to explain how the overemphasis of subjectivity in Kant limits the authority of reason for the modern individual. After referencing Hegel to briefly establish the key aspects of the problem of the unity of experience in Kant and some general remarks on Hegel’s approach, I argue that the embodied subject of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu move from Hegel’s approach by adding the concept of embodiment that bridges the gap between the subjective and objective, integrating them so that reason is the unifying force and the way we produce meaning in our activity and extract meaning from that activity in the world. The embodied subject draws on the findings of Hegel, but applies it in a much different strategy. Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu’s use embodiment in their theories to unify
experience and formulate reason as a process that can be applied to many contemporary issues. Their embodied approach to the unity of experience is applied in the continued example of embodied reason can provide a more holistic approach to the reintegration of Gulf War II veterans back into American communities.

**Subjectivism and Unity of Experience in Pure Consciousness: Hegel’s Critique**

Kant’s pure consciousness sets the mind in isolation from others. In order to rectify this problem in Kant’s transcendental subject, Hegel first proposes that it is in the absolute that we derive reason, subject, and consciousness. He does so by addressing these three objectives in his preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹ First, Hegel situates reason as the unifying force in modernity by asserting it as Absolute Spirit. Second, he agrees that subjectivity is central to the modern individual, but not without relation to the objective world that we exist in. Lastly, Hegel finds a similar use of reflection as the method of self-grounding, but it has to be applied to consciousness and it is through self-consciousness that we establish the existence of others.

From the previous chapter we have seen the initial rejection of experienced based knowledge as demonstrated by Kant. This is because Kant is working in the realm of transcendental idealism. As Kant tries to rid modernism of the skepticism problem, he unintentionally recreates it in a new form. Hegel would say that the transcendental subject established by Kant does not go far enough to establish a higher order of nature.

Hegel can be seen as reformulating Kant’s criterion. Kant proposes that to act freely is to act rightly and the only way to know we are acting rightly is to act according to the will of all or universally and we do this through his theorem-based philosophy. Reason is the thing that will help us determine that right action, but for Hegel it is only through time that we find reason and only as we move with the logic of history. Hegel reacts to Kant’s subjectivism by turning to the world. Within his phenomenology, Hegel places reason outside the self and in the world as Absolute Spirit. He claims that there is absolute knowledge in the form of Absolute Spirit that is continuously moving toward self-consciousness and is self-determining over time, with “reason’s knowledge of its own requirements.”\(^2\) Hegel turns to the world through a dialectic of subject/object, mind/body to negate the dualism that ultimately leads to Absolute Spirit’s knowledge of itself, and in order to do this his philosophy finds that, “what is, is rational.”\(^3\) Put another way, the world is consciousness and it is rational through the logic of history. Hegel proposes that we think of human subjectivity as collective, progressive and historically self-determined. This is the point where Hegel shifts from a logical philosophical outlook to the dialectical one.

Where Kant is considered a critical idealist, Hegel reconstructs much of his project into absolute idealism. Both are trying to make nature and realism a part of subjectivism, but Hegel attempts to derive the transcendental subject from its place in nature rather than independent from nature. Hegel’s critique of Kant allows us to see the

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\(^3\) Ibid.
shortcomings of Kant’s work and introduces a new trajectory in German idealism that attempts to solve the subject and object dichotomy. What Hegel does is provide insight into the discourse of the dualism to better grasp how philosophers in modern thought are trying to integrate more of human experience into the subject, but many are reserved in how much they are willing to compromise the dichotomy. Hegel puts the dichotomy to work in his phenomenology. He uses the opposition to build his dialectic of consciousness that leads to absolute knowledge. Hegel illustrates how modernism tries to maintain the epistemic process by working within the parameters of the subject and object dichotomy. Hegel starts by deriving the subject from nature, rather than the subject building nature from the inside out. This approach is rooted in his notion of the Absolute Spirit, where he builds the process of reconciling the self and the world through absolute consciousness.

Phenomenology is applied by Hegel as understanding Spirit as our process of coming to knowledge and being able to test that knowledge against experience. He turns toward experience for the project of epistemic certainty, instead of excluding it the way Kant does. What results for Hegel is “a systematic account of the successive patterns of consciousness generated by these phenomenological experiences, ultimately culminating in absolute knowing.” Hegel plants the seeds of experience by engaging with the natural world first, but does so without committing to experience in the way the concept of embodiment does for Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu. Hegel is still working within the

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confines of pure consciousness, whereas Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu work through the mind as embodied and not just a reflection of experience. Hegel’s phenomenology is the process of coming to understand science and philosophy through stages of consciousness that begin with sense certainty and perception in nature and end in absolute knowledge. Hegel is incorporating idealism and materialism in his project. Although he is drawing more from experience, his philosophy is still working within the realm of pure consciousness and its development in an absolute consciousness in world history.

What Hegel attempts to do is start from nature to derive our consciousness to bridge the gap, but does so by first making his own grand assumption, Absolute Spirit. Hegel says we cannot come to knowledge without being in the world. The only way we can unify our experience is by reason itself, so we cannot isolate reason in the self. Hegel projects reason in the history of the world and says it is all of human history that brings about reason. For Hegel, unification was the focus of his project and he puts reason at the center of it. He found this a necessary move because Kant’s construction of reason is not sufficient in bringing together the goal of reason as the ultimate authority in the modern age. The Enlightenment intended not only to empower the subject, but guide the subject by the principle of reason. It is this principle that must shine through in the subject. Reason for Hegel is purposive activity and it is the power of the subject to move
through reason to extract the notion of being-for-itself.\textsuperscript{5} His absolute idealism tries to relocate reason from the internal structures of the mind to an external historical narrative. As a result, consciousness is not just in the subject, but in everything.

In his preface to the \textit{Phenomenology}, Hegel makes an interesting move to relocate reason in the world. He initiates this move by stating that substance and subject are one in the same.\textsuperscript{6} He takes this one step further and finds that thought is also substance.\textsuperscript{7} By making everything thinking or a part of consciousness, the whole of the world is consciousness. The first critique Hegel makes of Kant’s subject-centered reason is that the other or object is not only necessary, but is already present. The effort to prove the \textit{thing-in-itself} is not necessary because the act of positing the object and the criterion for knowing that object is verified in the process of knowing through consciousness.

Hegel finds that Kant built a philosophy that rests authority in reason by circumventing traditional metaphysics, but not without the major problem of the \textit{thing-in-}

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\textsuperscript{5} G.W.F. Hegel, \textit{Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit}, Section 53. He states, “The movement of a being that immediately is, consists partly in becoming an other than itself, and thus becoming its own immanent content; partly in taking back into itself this unfolding [of its content] or this existence of it, i.e. in making \textit{itself} into a moment, and simplifying itself into something determinate.” He means that to be \textit{for-itself} is to take up the self-consciousness as a singular being and this is done so through expressing itself outwardly in the world.


\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., Preface, Paragraph 54, 55. “The subsistence or substance of anything that exists is its self-identity; for a failure of self-identity would be its dissolution. Self-identity, however, is pure abstraction; but this is \textit{thinking}.”
Hegel claims that the object does not have to conform to consciousness and that Kant’s reversal of metaphysics is not necessary either. There is no need to prove that a thing is in-itself. The only necessary project is to establish the for-itself. The only way to prove that anything is for-itself is the path of reflection. The world is thought and thought has structure and structure can be applied to the world. The history of the world is rational for Hegel.

Even though Hegel claims that substance is subject he still maintains the opposition of the particular and the universal and tries to work out this opposition through the dialectic that leads to sublimating into the Absolute. He requires the reflection of the other in oneself in order to even establish the existence of the self as for-itself. It is the very need of the other conscious mind that allows the existence of others in the first place. By asserting this necessity, Hegel is able to bridge one consciousness with another, but not without struggle. What is also necessary for Hegel is the negation of the other for progress in consciousness and this principle is carried out throughout his work. Even in the progress toward Absolute Spirit it is necessary to have struggle or opposition

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8 Ibid., Introduction, Paragraph 82. Referring to a thing-in-itself, Hegel states, “...Just what might be involved in these determinations is of no further concern to us here. Since our object is phenomenal knowledge, its determinations too will at first be taken directly as they present themselves; and they do present themselves very much as we have already apprehended them.”

9 Ibid., Introduction, paragraph 79. Hegel avoids discussing the relation between ourselves and cognition in paragraph 73. He assumes we cannot separate ourselves from our thoughts because our cognition is part of the Absolute, but it is through other consciousness that he emphasizes a path of despair in the pursuit of truth and he states the need for, “a determinate negation...and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself.” Hegel brings out this need for negation or opposition as he puts one consciousness up against another in order to distinguish itself from the other.
to call for overcoming. It is in this very process that reason is formed in Hegel’s phenomenology.

In order to find unity of self through consciousness, a consciousness must find the reflection of itself in otherness, even within itself. It is the principle of self-reflection that allows subjectivity to stand as the grounding agent of the Enlightenment project, meanwhile the objective serves as the material that can bring about this self-grounding. Hegel still maintains the subject/object dualism, but he works through a continuous dialectic to demonstrate how we move through consciousness in both the self and the consciousness of the world. This movement or purposive activity for Hegel is the systematic process that will ultimately lead to absolute knowledge. The main point is that the dualism still exists in his theory of pure consciousness as one consciousness needs another consciousness in order to distinguish itself as singular or being for-itself, and reflection is the way consciousness can come to know itself through the continuous opposition of another.

Along with shifting all of Kant’s work, Hegel also makes a change to the definition of subjectivity. For Hegel, self-determination of the subject is the realization of oneself within the larger whole that is the history of a collectively self-determining subject.\textsuperscript{10} The previous chapter discusses how Kant defines the autonomous individual by being completely uninfluenced by anything in one’s judgements and that the faculty of reason is the only compass that guides the subject. Hegel changes subjectivity to be the self-determining and self-actualizing through a collective history.

Hegel and Kant are still working with reflection as the bridge between what we experience in the world and what is understood in our consciousness.\footnote{Hegel, G. W. F., \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford, 1979.), in \textit{The Hegel Reader}, ed. Stephen Hughes, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998.), Preface, Paragraph 21. Hegel maintains that, “Reason is, therefore, misunderstood when reflection is excluded from the True, and is not grasped as a positive moment of the Absolute. It is reflection that make the True a result, but it is equally reflection that overcomes the antithesis between the process of its becoming and the result, for this becoming is also simple, and therefore not different from the form of the True which shows itself as simple in its result; the process of becoming is rather just this return to simplicity.”} For Hegel it becomes even more complex to move from the reason of the Absolute Spirit, or the pure consciousness of all of human history, where the dialectic comes to an end, and derive the subject from this collective consciousness. In his effort to move from the positivity of pre-modern thinking and in his critique of Kant’s dogmatism, Hegel finds that we have to reach higher for an absolute idealism. Hegel presents us with a teleology in his historical narrative. In a way, Hegel’s reason has taken the place of fate because the dialectic is an inevitable process that is moving toward the Absolute. Although Hegel’s philosophy establishes the modern subject through the self-grounding self reflection, it does so by removing the power philosophy may have gained in modernity. Philosophy no longer is needed to find meaning in us because time or reason in history will dictate our paths to the ideal. The purpose of using Hegel’s critique of Kant is that he presents that reason cannot reside in subjectivity alone and that we have to find a way to incorporate experience as a path of developing knowledge. Although he creates an elaborate philosophy to account for both, he still commits to pure consciousness and reflection as the primary bridge in his dialectic. Reflection in consciousness still relies heavily on
subjectivity and in a way Hegel is merely projecting Kant’s form of pure consciousness on the world. This approach is inefficient in really bridging the dualism, because reflection still acts as a medium between subjectivity and objectivity.

Hegel has presented a few things to consider. The first is how we come to unify our experience, whether subjectively in our consciousness or objectively in the world. The second is how we define subjectivity. The third is where reason ends up as a result. Hegel shows that the conflict between the material world and the ideal remains the predominant issue for how reason emerges and how consciousness is proven. Although Kant and Hegel both provide their own philosophy of idealism that establishes a subjective and objective world, neither really explain how we are to comprehend either as real because the focus of their projects remain in idealism. On the one hand, Kant provides us with a solid construction of the subject, but so solid that the subject is contained in its own existence. As a result, the pure reason that the subject has does not function with objectivity. On the other hand, Hegel provides a theory of the objective world where absolute idealism forms reason, but not without sacrificing the autonomy of the subject to a mere role in a teleology. How might Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu further bridge this dichotomy through the development of embodiment?

Unity of Experience Among Embodied Subjects: Merleau-Ponty

If we return to the *Structure of Behavior*, we can better understand the foundations of the embodied subject and how the embodied subject takes on the subject and object dualism to create the unity of experience. The purpose of providing a critique
of behavior is not only to show how natural science cannot make claims without philosophy and vis-a-versa, it also serves as a way for Merleau-Ponty to draw out the dichotomy between the real and ideal to rectify them. What he discovers through his critique is that materialism focuses on the mechanical functions of the body, and the external order of nature. Put into philosophical terms, it is entirely concerned with the \textit{in-itself} of the object, whereas, idealism drives to understand the reflective principles and internal order of the subject, or the \textit{for-itself}. From behavior, and what Merleau-Ponty eventually comes to call phenomenal perception in later work, we derive neither the material or the ideal as such, but need to focus on the structure as not an object or a consciousness. The mistake made in both natural science and philosophy is that both try to put one side of the dualism in the other, similar to the way Kant and Hegel demonstrate in their philosophies. Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of perception attempts to show how we need to shift our focus to the origin of reason itself and that is the perceptual body. The concept of the perceptual body does not employ either the \textit{in-itself} or the \textit{for-itself}, but employs perceptual consciousness. This returns the discussion to Merleau-Ponty’s examination of matter, life, and mind as three orders of signification operating within “forms”\footnote{Joseph J. Kockelmans, “On the Function of Psychology in Merleau-Ponty’s Early Works.” in \textit{Merleau-Ponty and Psychology: Studies in Existential Psychology and Psychiatry}, ed. Keith Hoeller. Reprinted by permission of the Publisher in 2010., 124. Merleau-Ponty chooses the term \textit{form} derived from Gestalt psychology to try to prevent assigning any orders of signification to external and internal conditions.} of behavior and what later becomes forms of phenomenal perception in his \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}. 
If we return to the idea that the study of behavior reveals that human activity, both physical and mental, is not reducible to stimulus and response and that our activity contains within it “immanent intelligibility,” we can work out a better conception of what Merleau-Ponty means by putting embodiment at the center of his philosophy. We can also begin to get closer to how the gap between the subject and object fades from view and what makes the unity of experience possible. The first step to reduce the gap is to understand that Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea of substance and applies the idea of structure in its place. He states, “[the] theory of form is aware of the consequences which a purely structural conception entails and seeks to expand into a philosophy of form which would be substituted for the philosophy of substances.”

He derives his thesis of structure from Gestalt theory and it works to rescue the body from being reduced to sensory perception as well as to rescue the body from functioning as an instrument of the mind. These structures are differentiated as three forms of signification: 1) matter in the physical, 2) life of the organism, and 3) mental structure of the mind. Merleau-Ponty claims that structure asserts that:

Physical nature in man is not subordinated to a vital principle, the organism does not conspire to actualize an idea, and the mental is not a motor principle in the body; but what we call nature is already consciousness of nature, what we call life is already consciousness of life and what we call mental is still an object vis-a-vis consciousness.

13 Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behavior, 132.
14 Ibid., 184.
Merleau-Ponty breaks down matter, life, and mind into “forms” that operate in differing ways within their own structures. First, he examines matter as the physical. He finds that the laws of matter are only valid in relation to the structure of the physical world. One example of this follows:

The law of falling bodies is true and will remain so only if the speed of the rotation of the earth does not increase with time; on the contrary hypothesis, the centrifugal force could compensate for and then go beyond that of gravity. Thus the law of falling bodies expresses the constitution of a field of relatively stable forces in the neighborhood of the earth and will remain valid only as long as the cosmological structure of which it is founded endures.  

Merleau-Ponty goes on to argue in other examples that the laws in natural science are never verified independently, but make up a system of complementary laws within a structure in that “field.” This results in the structure and the laws of matter becoming dialectical. He extends this notion of structure to incorporate the principle of perception. Although the physical can exist alone, it is perception that assigns signification to it. He goes on to say, “...form is not a physical reality, but an object of perception; without it physical science would have no meaning. Moreover, since it is constructed with respect to it and in order to coordinate it.”

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15 Ibid., 138.
16 Ibid., 143.
Merleau-Ponty argues the same principle of form in life or vital organisms (to include humans). Vitalism is defined as not only the organism and its sensory and motor abilities, the regulation of temperature, blood pressure, and so on, but encompasses the very environment that the organism is subject to function within. The physiological structure of the organisms is adaptable to various environmental variables and can be disrupted by catastrophic events, but the behavioral response is not necessarily predictable as mechanistic. He differentiates between matter and the organism by way of the organism’s ability to function according to norms of behavior within a given structure, where inorganic structures can be expressed by laws. In vitalism, the purpose is not to say there are laws at work or that we can reduce organisms to biological or chemical reactions to stimulus. What occurs in organisms is much more complex than the nonorganic physical object. It is more dependent on the relation or dialectic of the milieu. He means that the organism’s activity in a given space and time is particular to the milieu of stimulus as well as the current state of the organism itself. We develop norms of behavior rather than laws, based on the predictability of patterns or specific capacity of reaction in similar situations of the same organism. These norms of behavior are incomplete. In addition to being able to make some predictions of behavior, it is not without applying signification or coordination of organisms by meaning.\footnote{Ibid., 155-156.} The phenomenal body moves because of signification in a structure and not mechanistically. An example used by Merleau-Ponty is that of sexual characteristics. What is deemed male or female characteristic goes beyond the biological and chemical nature of the
organism and is made through perception of meaning in the organism and system of organisms. In addition, the organism not only functions at the present state, but takes on the prior states to constitute its current disposition.

Merleau-Ponty breaks down mental structure differently then physical and vital structures. Within the mental structure occurs a dialectic between consciousness and everything. The function of that dialectic is neither laws nor signification, but intention. Intention according to Merleau-Ponty, is not consciousness that makes judgments as a spectator, intention is driven in the activity of consciousness as the phenomenal body. Intention manifests through communication, gestures, and attitudes that coordinate meaning, and intention is also driven by perception within structure with others and objects. Perception serves to direct and grasp intention all within a higher order of dialectic. Simply stated, consciousness has different forms. Its intentions are sometimes made clearly known and sometimes its intentions are lived rather than known.\(^{18}\) It is intentions that create meaning in actions. An example would be the intentional differences in the practice of wearing clothes. The dialectic between consciousness and, in this case, the behavior of getting dressed or types of clothes determines the difference between being naked, being clothed, being adorned and so on. We might consider a person who wears professional attire to mean someone in a suit and tie, clean cut and styled hair, and this may seem appropriate for someone intending to conduct himself or herself in the occupation of a business person, government official, sales representative, or speaker, but in reality it may not fit the professional attire of an emergency room

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 172-173.
doctor, construction worker, sailor, or farmer. It also does not account for the person who might dress in what is perceived as professional attire, when that person may just prefer or is accustomed to the dress for comfort or cleanliness. Perception with consciousness enables these meanings to emerge for us whether we take mental note of it or not. By putting on an article of clothing, we are doing more than dressing for warmth, style or prestige; we do so with intention that is intermingled with perception of others as well as ourselves.

What Merleau-Ponty draws from working out matter, life, and mind as orders of signification is that everything has perceptual structure and builds the unity of experience through meaning. These orders of signification are made through the phenomenon of perception and are both internally and externally conditioned. These orders of signification are not linked or layered, but are bound together in the living unity of experience as differing only in their structures. By using structure in this way, Merleau-Ponty is able to claim that consciousness is experienced not through the body, but is inherent in the body. It is the history and the dialectical stages it passes through in the signification of each field that no longer separates the body from the mind. It is the immediate phenomenon of perception that enables our activity and the unity of experience as subjects and our experience with others. The body and mind are both incarnate and constitute consciousness.

In Merelau-Ponty’s ideas in his lecture, *The Experience of Others*, we can see how he applies these findings to the subject’s encounters with objects and others. If we

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return to the analogy of the cube, where classical analysis would have us perceive the object as one who judges and one that is judged, the existence of the cube hinges on the mind’s ability to reflect upon the visual perception of the cube and reconstitute it according to an intellectual construction of it. Mereleau-Ponty says that perception does not happen as reflection within the self. Merleau-Ponty states:

In leaving behind both the absolute empiricist and the purely reflexive conceptions, what appears is the problem of an incarnate mind with which one can enter into contact. The problem of other people can be considered as a mirror image of the problem of self. The problem of other people is also connected with the problem of the world. As just indicated, the problem of other people does not arise in just any case or any situation. The same holds for the world.20

Perception rejects the need to use reflection as a medium between us and the world. It is the orders of signification that help us constitute the world and others around us. We incorporate the differing structures through our embodiment to experience the world. Merleau-Ponty uses the analogy of a man standing at the end of a road to draw out that it is the coordination of meaning that helps us take into account internal and external horizons and these horizons are a part of an indefinite series of complementary perceptions that we can perceive by changing our position to perceive it. We do not perceive the man to be only inches tall or the distance to be short, but we incorporate past

experience of physical depth and distance, as well as experience of a man as not typically inches tall. The changing of positions accounts for past encounters as well as present ones. In the same way the account of the cube is a synthesis of all possible perceptions, so is the synthesis of the dimensions of the man at the end of the road. The perceived object is taken as a system of experiences. It is the indefinite perspectives that allow the subject to perceive the certain perspective that is taken up. As a result, Merleau-Ponty is able to move that the thing we perceive is “structured entirely by our incarnate relationship with the world.”

The possibility of the unity of experience is dependent on the intersubjectivity between embodied subjects. Although much of this lecture refers to Gestalt psychology as evidence of other people, Mereleau-Ponty goes further to distinguish experiencing people as different than experiencing objects. This lecture applies his notion of orders of signification to show differing perceptual domains and how we develop signification in various ways according to his application of structure.

The world has meaning [signification] only because it has direction. Every localization in the world presupposes my locality. In a sense, an object of perception continuously speaks to us of ourselves. As incarnated subjects, we are expressed by the object. It is already in front of us as an other, thereby helping us to understand how there might be perception of other people.

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21 Ibid., 37.
22 Ibid., 37.
This is the basis of perception, but Merleau-Ponty builds on this to find that perception of another person is not the same as perception of an object. As previously stated, it is though the norms of behavior in vital organisms that produce signification with the intentionality of the mind that we form meaning and understanding with others. When we experience other people, we do so using differing degrees of the order of signification. Not only are the laws of the physical at work, but so is signification in norms of behavior and the intentions between humans. It involves the co-existence and the assessment of certain intentions of the other person and ourself.\textsuperscript{23} For Merleau-Ponty the perception of other is not the objectification of the other, but a co-operation. Intersubjectivity is more than recognition. Meaning is invoked in thought. It is not the simple transference of meaning from one to the next, but a orientation of thought expressed and communicated.\textsuperscript{24}

Because he is working with direct embodied contact and not just the intellectual construction of the other, Merleau-Ponty is able to propose human intersubjectivity as a relation of co-existence where we are immersed in the content of meaning in the intentions of human activity. He says that it “depends heavily upon our pre-established relations with others to this particular perception.”\textsuperscript{25} This returns to his notion of the order of signification of the mind that operates in terms of intention, keeping in mind that this order of signification in perception does not function exclusively from that of our physical or vital existence. He returns us to his notion of “form” for clarification.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., Preface, 26.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., Preface, 30.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 40.
When Merleau-Ponty integrates the orders of signification of matter, life, and mind he is giving a structural account of how our perception of others emerges. Through various examples of experiments on expressions, he shows that the deciphering of interactions with others is determined by more than linguistic communication. It is through the very acquisition of “habit-like” reactions that we acquire a style of response according to a type of situation given. It is necessary to take a closer look at “habit” for Merleau-Ponty. Habit is not the mechanical functions given in a set of conditions, but is flexible as an “aptitude for responding to a particular type of situation with a particular form of solution. Thus habit is an operation both bodily and spiritual. It is an *existential operation.*”

It is the incorporation of the situation, the voice, the expressions, the language, and the totality of the given experience with that of former experiences, that we are able to give meaning to the interactivity with the other. It is through the embodiment of the subject and the embodiment of the other subject that we are to decipher the meaning of the experience. In the same way he asserts that the Saussurean sign, signifier, signified cannot be dissected into parts, neither can be the very intentions of communication between incarnated beings. The very act of co-existence is an intermingling of intentions from ourselves with that of our environment, to include the very intention of the other. What is implied is a structure of movements between bodies that is both visual and tactile perceptions that “link between the other person’s body and my own...as if my body and the body of the other person together formed a system.”

\[26\] Ibid., 52.

\[27\] Ibid.
together the real and the ideal, but is using perception of the embodied subject to illustrate that they are interwoven in consciousness and the world.

**Structuralism and Materialism Applied in Embodiment: Bourdieu**

As Bourdieu draws from some of these concepts it is clear to see that his use of *habitus* employs the findings of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical psychology. It takes on the same characteristics of structure and existence of the embodied subject, but applies these principles in his philosophy of practice in sociology. What he does is extend these principles into structures he calls *fields* that work in his notion of *habitus* in a similar fashion as Merleau-Ponty’s forms or orders of signification. They both use embodiment to further the project of bridging subjectivity and objectivity. This section discusses how Bourdieu’s application of embodiment complements Merleau-Ponty’s ideas and can help understand how we not only embody our own activity, but also the activity of others.

Bourdieu’s concept of “*fields*” is just as enigmatic as his notion of *habitus*. If we reflect upon the discussion of Merleau-Ponty on matter, life, and mind, we can begin to clarify the nature of Bourdieu’s use of *habitus* and *fields*. It employs a similar type of structuralism that is not hierarchical, but implements differentiation between forms of signification. Merleau-Ponty’s work sets the foundations of Bourdieu’s theory of practice, even though Bourdieu rejects phenomenology as the primary methodology applied within his theory. He relies heavily on structuralism and materialism, but as we can see they both differ in the degree that they stress structuralism and materialism in their work. Merleau-Ponty would likely respond to Bourdieu’s rejection of
phenomenology as including it in his notion of field and habitus, but not committing to it as the exclusive methodology in his theory. Bourdieu’s work as a sociologist emphasizes the influence of materialism from Karl Marx, but is supported by the influence of Merleau-Ponty’s foundations of perception in the embodied subject.

To reiterate the statement made in the first chapter, Bourdieu takes Merleau-Ponty a bit further than he would have gone himself, but Merleau-Ponty would not have disagreed entirely with Bourdieu’s application of embodiment. Bourdieu implements a similar type of structure in his idea of fields. As he examines social space it includes not only the location of the object within a situated historical time and space, but takes into account the relationship with the embodied subject’s interest and knowledge from previous experiences to generate knowledge about the current experience. Bourdieu’s use of fields draws on the impression of the word to conjure up the definition with multiple dimensions. He means to draw on three specific conceptions or metaphors. The first is like a battle field or area of land with particular intention to stir the idea of field of knowledge. The second is the idea of a gaming field, where strategies are exercised in knowledge. The last idea of field resembles the concept of force field or the notion of forces at work in physics.28

By describing field in this way, it helps to understand that he intends to bring together the conditions of the experienced social space, with the accepted customs or rules of the social space, and the strongest controlling forces active in a social space or what he considers fields of power. This broad definition is intended to account for the

plasticity of field in regards to its borders, customs, and forces of power relative to the subject and the adaptability to both respond and make changes to a given environment. This adaptability is interwoven with the subject’s habitus. The notion of habitus and field operate in a similar way to Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the experience of others. It is the intentionality of perception that constitutes meaning between the co-operation of incarnated subjects within the context or situation that it occurs that invokes meaning and action intersubjectively. Even though Bourdieu does not emphasize intersubjectivity as such, his theory of practice implies the necessity of it in his notion of habitus and field. It is not necessary to go in to the various levels of experience of fields, such as art, education, or literature to understand its principal operations. It is the implementation of structure that is constituted by the coexistence of embodied subjects. In the same way Bourdieu extends habitus to include the material environment, he extends the notion of field. Not only does it include the social interaction between subjects, but takes on the whole signification of the material world. It is within a scope of time and space that we bring together habitus and field to make reason possible. Consciousness is derived from both structures at varying degrees at different times. This becomes the form of reason in our practice of everyday life experiences.

As discussed previously, embodiment through habitus is in the very disposition of our bodies. We also embody the structures of the fields that we practice in. Bourdieu stresses the complexity of the multiplicity of fields as not decomposable into clear distinguished types or specific objective conditions in the same way Merelau-Ponty rejects the ability to decompose the world into clear areas of matter, life, and mind. Our
subjectivity and objectivity are taken up in the structures we constitute in embodiment.

Bourdieu explains:

The Habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the *habitus*. It follows that these practices cannot be directly deduced either from the objective conditions, defined as the instantaneous sum of the stimuli which may appear to have directly triggered them, or from the conditions which produced the durable principle of their production. These practices can be accounted for only by relating the objective structure defining the social conditions in which the *habitus* is operating, that is, the conjuncture which, short of radical transformation, represents a particular state of this structure.\(^{29}\)

It is the embodied dispositions of *habitus* that are endowed with “...the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world, in other words ...the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from the expression, individual or collective, improvised or programmed, of similar or identical

experiences. When Bourdieu discusses interpersonal relations it is never to be thought of as the transference from one individual to another, but as the interactions from their present and past social structures that are tied into corporality at all times. It is from the dispositions of the *habitus* that objective positions are brought together as the unification of experiences of *fields* that make up any seemingly singular event between the self and the other.

In a sense, Hegel has the right idea in the logic of history, but emphasizes the idealism of the Absolute so much that it removes the spontaneity of the subject by imposing a world trajectory. Embodiment in Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu returns to reason as a process, but in the nature of the subject, and only through the embodied signification created in interactivity and intersubjectivity. This captures elements of both Kant’s and Hegel’s definitions of autonomy as particular to individuality, and adopts the affective self-determining and self-actualizing self. It is in the *fields* that the subject appropriates the orders of the collective into the dispositions of the human organism. The objective structures are created by us through signification in the same way Merleau-Ponty explains, and the nature of our subjectivity is orchestrated through the reinforcement of regularities of behavior. This is not to conclude that subject and object or *habitus* and *field* are circular, but suggests that the intricacy of the structures both reinforce and change according to our movement. The plasticity of internal and external structures varies with the diversity of the subjects and their objective conditions, both past and present.
In the philosophies of both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, it is the appropriating by the world of a body that enables us to appropriate the world. For Merleau-Ponty it is perception that initiates forms of signification to give rise to the process of reason and only though the orders of unification made and derived in the structure of nature and structure of self through nature. For Bourdieu it is more than perception, but the whole of our social space, including the material world, that we unify experience through practice. Both depend on the embodied subject to take on subjectivity and objectivity simultaneously. Where Merleau-Ponty applies the norms of behavior in vital organisms as predictable patterns that are never complete, Bourdieu develops his concept of regularities, or the behaviors that are regular in their repeatability, according to similar objective conditions, that are never complete because the embodied subject always has his/her own *habitus* that is brought to the situation.

Unlike Kant and Hegel, who use reflection in consciousness to mediate the subject with the world, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu both thrust consciousness in the world through the embodied subject. We no longer are limited by an ideal consciousness that instrumentalizes the body and the objective world according to an ideal form of reason. Reason is already situated as both ideal and real through incarnated minds. It is this move that not only mediates the subject and object dualism, but it gets rid of the dualism altogether. Because the mind is not ever distinguished from the body, there is never a need to bring the two together. The intellectual conceptions of subjectivity and objectivity are at work in terms of dialectic in the embodied subject. The dialectics used
by both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu sublimate the symbolic structures with the material structures that we collectively produce.

**Embodied Unity of Experience: Gulf War II Veterans**

The value of the unity of experience in these theories is the way in which the subject is not isolated, but is interdependent on others to build knowledge. The focus on the perceptual body and perceptual consciousness allows the subject to be a part of internal and external conditions. The benefit of this approach can be applied to Gulf War II veterans in terms of how social structures work to coordinate the activity and meaning among groups of people. This element is a beneficial perspective in understanding these particular veterans and also a way for these veterans to understand themselves. The unity of experience that arises from the works of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu supports the very idea of community that is needed as veterans return from conflict and also how these veterans and communities change over time.

Several ideas emerge from Merleau-Ponty that can benefit Gulf War II veterans and their communities. Adjusting to life after conflict is not just the responsibility of the veterans to reintegrate in their lives before conflict; communities are just as responsible for that reintegration process. What we can draw from the ideas of a unity of experience is that the collective meaning that is constituted by bodies acting with other bodies is a collective effort. Merleau-Ponty refers to the coordination of organisms to continuously produce meaning through new orientations of thought that are expressed and communicated with others. Bourdieu directly speaks of social structures that function in
this way as fields that incorporate the habitus of the participants within it. Based on the way embodiment works out the unity of experience in these two theories, the implication is that social structures and the subjects that occupy them are not fixed essences. This means that there is a constant fluctuation of the structures and the individuals who occupy them.

This becomes a valuable perspective when discussing veterans returning from conflict both in the short and long term. Veterans never return to the same social structures that they left because there are not only subtle changes occurring during their absences, but when they reintegrate into those communities, they alter them with their own embodied experiences. What we can take away from Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu is that communities and the individuals take on these changes whether they are aware of it or not. Because there exists a multiplicity of fields in any given community and veterans are made up of such diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, education, occupation specialty, and so on, the diverse experiences of each of these characteristics throughout time in military service, and exposure to cultural conflict in war, results in many ways that these can manifest in day-to-day life.

To focus the application of embodiment on the unity of experience, we can look at the role the military social structure plays on individual service members. A large population of returning Gulf War II veterans are young and many typically joined the military between 18 and 22 years of age. These young service members often went from home into an environment where most often their basic needs are provided for them.
They receive housing, food, clothes, medical care, legal services, education benefits, childcare, spouse support groups, recreational resources, cost of moves are covered and more. When in a deployed environment, the military cares for all their basic needs so that they can focus on the immediate mission. When these veterans return from conflict and attempt to reintegrate into civilian communities, some suffer in their ability to manage the basic needs in their lives as they rapidly transition from the military social structures that cared for them to civilian life where they are responsible for their own care. The multiplicity of roles that are filled by one community can be a challenge as they may not be available, or even acknowledged in the other. What this shows is the need for reintegration to include ways for veterans to receive training or support in learning basic life skills.

This example can be flipped to also account for veterans as not burdensome, but as an asset to the societies for which they return. Veterans bring back skills to their communities that have been developed through training and execution in wartime environments, including leadership of large organizations, management of personnel, responsibility for large amounts of equipment, financial planning, emergency medical training, and the ability to handle stress in crisis situations, to name a few. Veterans face the challenges of deriving a sense of purpose and the need to feel useful, particularly if they return to positions with less responsibility than they had during deployment in conflict. In this case, we need to address how to help communities to take advantage of their skills and provide greater sense of purpose for these veterans.
Both these examples show how one person can impact a community with the combination of their lived experiences. Recognizing how the individual impacts and integrates into social structure can make the veterans’ quality of life better after returning as well as stimulating communities to which they are returning to be more actively involved in their reintegration. The way the theories of embodiment deal with unity of experience as the co-operation of the subjects in it can bring about new ideas on the reintegration of veterans through community involvement. This type of integration can be developed in any area of community life, such as volunteer work, membership in social organizations, increased employment opportunities, or increased education and training geared toward transitioning their military skills and aptitudes into civilian society.
CHAPTER IV
EMBODIED REASON

The world is not what I think but what I live; I am open to the world, I
unquestionably communicate with it, but I do not possess it, it is inexhaustible.

Phenomenology of Perception, Preface, p. lxxxi

Reason Manifested In Modernity

The embodied subject of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu offers a more productive
approach toward bridging the gap between the subject and object dualism. The intent of
this study is to determine if the embodied subject addresses the concerns of modernity by
discussing three features of the enlightenment: the autonomous subject, the unity of
experience, and how reason is manifested. Chapter one explained the historical
significance of bridging the dualism in the modern era by summarizing the problems that
the dualism creates in both natural science and philosophy. The general crisis identified
by Husserl is that science and philosophy are worked out separately through history in the
search for knowledge and truth. Husserl finds that philosophy aims at becoming the
authority on the mind’s absolute autonomy without objective influence and science aims
to build knowledge on facts while excluding subjectivity. In a response to this crisis,
Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu introduce the centrality of embodiment as counter-discourse
in the modern philosophical debate.
Chapter two addressed how the embodied subject attains the goal of the autonomous subject through the work of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu. The autonomous subject shifts from the ideas of pure consciousness in the philosophy of Kant to the embodied subject of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu where consciousness is the body as much as it is the mind.

Chapter three addressed how the embodied subject resolves the unity of experience with others and the world through the imminence of lived experience. Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu counter the German idealists tradition by introducing the notion of the incarnated mind that is already present and active with other incarnated minds to build meaning intersubjectively.

This final chapter addresses whether the embodied subject produces a viable starting point for reason in the modern subject. It examines how the embodied subject comes to reason differently than the pure consciousness of the German idealists and provides a look at how embodied reason changes the notions of truth and meaning. This chapter summarizes how the shift from a philosophy of pure consciousness to an incarnated consciousness is more a matter of style than a radical break from methods and objectives in traditional philosophy. Merleau-Ponty’s and Bourdieu’s theories of centrality of embodiment do not undo the progress of the Enlightenment, but enhance our understanding of knowledge through the very principles of Enlightenment thought. The problems in modern natural science and philosophy are best dealt with through interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate the facticity of science and meaning generated in philosophy.
Reason in the Embodied Subject: Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu

In most modern theories, reason has been forced to be taken up either internally or externally to conform to the subject and object dualism. For example, Kant places reason internally in the individual where it is developed in the cognitive realm. Reason is isolated and not common except through absolute truths in maxims Kant creates for his forms of cognition and intuition. For Hegel, reason is external in history as a grand narrative in the whole of human consciousness. Reason is beyond our control and in the world as human history on a trajectory of its own. Unlike the German idealists, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu determine that reason is neither internal or external, but intersubjectively constituted through embodiment. For the embodied subject, reason is among us as well as our experiences in the world. We are actively participating in its creation at the same time it is regulating our behavior and responses to our experiences. Reason moves from static internal or external locations to a more dynamic place in the process of existence. Reason is not a possession, but an activity. As Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu intentionally deal with overcoming the dualism, reason changes in concept, but still functions to guide the autonomous subject.

For the embodied subject, reason is not an object or faculty that is contained in internal or external conditions, but is a dynamic process that incorporates the meaning generated in human interactivity. Merleau-Ponty presents this concept of reason in the diacritical value of expressive gestures. The intersubjectivity of humans constitutes a symbolic system capable of re-describing an infinite number of situations.¹ It is through

expressive gestures that communication between subjects arouse meaning.\textsuperscript{2} As we perceive the world and others and generate meaning, we place our perceptions as the “presupposed foundation of all rationality.”\textsuperscript{3} If we return to the primacy of perception in the embodied subject we return to the notion of immediate presence. Merleau-Ponty says that perception does not equal truth, but that perception equals presences.\textsuperscript{4} It is through our immediate experience through embodiment that we are able to perceive and acquire meaning with others. As covered in the previous chapter on the unity of experience, it is our embodied intersubjectivity that allows for the forms of signification to arouse meaning. Reason is the process that takes up these meanings in combination with the structures of our perceived world and our intellect. Because Merleau-Ponty understands time in the most fluid sense, reason cannot be static as a thing, but takes up the capacity for perceived truth in one moment to the next. Merleau-Ponty challenges traditional philosophy by making a way for the ideal and real to merge. He does so by maintaining the idea that there is no end in mind, but reason is open to truth based upon the immediate contact we have with others in a situated place and time. He states in the \textit{Primacy of Perception},

\begin{quote}
Just as the perception of a thing opens me up to being, by realizing the paradoxical synthesis of an infinity of perceptual aspects, in the same way the perception of the other founds morality by realizing the paradox of an \textit{alter ego},
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 14.
of a common situation, by placing my perspectives and my incommunicable solitude in the visual field of another and of all others.\textsuperscript{5}

Merleau-Ponty establishes the process of reason in the primacy of perception by anchoring what is practical and rational in the embodied intersubjectivity in which we participate. We recognize reason as rational because we can turn to meaning and the structure of behavior that we experience. It also rests in the fact that we can perceive others in the same system of meaning and structure. Embodiment allows for the ideal truth to be revealed in perceptual truth.

Stated another way, embodiment always returns Merleau-Ponty’s theory to temporality and in doing so reiterates the importance he places on the “real” as “...given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views...”\textsuperscript{6} where a perception cannot be decomposed. The generalized difference in ideal truth and perceived truth is the ideal truths manifest in our intellect, but perceived truths founded upon common perception that is shared in the experience with others. What Merleau-Ponty proposes is that perceived truths are on the same continuum as our experience. He founds this on the idea that our thoughts at one moment will always vary to the next moment in the same way our perception is different from one moment to the next because we have experience that we did not have previously. It is from this that Merleau-Ponty asserts that our

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 15.
thoughts and perceptions have temporality in common with past and future horizons.  

Truth from our intellect is worked out the same way we work out our perception and is continuously open to something. It is the orientation of our thinking through our embodiment that allows for our errors to be transformed to truth.

Merleau-Ponty concludes in his preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* that reason is not a faculty of the mind or located in the world as history, but is actualization of reason through our experience. It is not necessarily the accumulation of knowledge, but knowledge embedded in life or existence. It is where existence meets essence. It is the culmination of rationality in a continuum. We do not discover knowledge in the world as natural science seeks the facticity of truth, nor are there truths awaiting discovery by philosophy. Merleau-Ponty understands *being-in-the-world* as a process where our meaning and signification creates reason in our activity. The world is already present and it is our activity that not only makes meaning for us and between us, it is from this process that reason emerges. It is not fixed or finite. It is never complete and changes according to our situatedness in the world. This means that reason is embodied in us and in the world. We clarify our knowledge through lived experience. Because of

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7 Ibid., 21-22. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this point through Descrates *cogito*. Descrates founds truth in the cogito in two ways. The first is the grasping of the thing itself that thinks and then as the thing that has a thought of objects. In both ways, Descrates limits truth to the instant that these thoughts occur and he cannot go beyond these truths as the only truths until he introduces the act of doubting. Merleau-Ponty focuses on the act of doubting as the third meaning to *cogito*, and that is it is a thought in action. Unlike Descrates uses of the *cogito* as an essence of something, the act of doubting is a verifiable experience.

8 Ibid., 21.

perception and incarnation, reason is both in the subjective and objective through the mind’s practical synthesis of our existence in the world. He claims that “what is true of perception is also true in the order of our intellect and general our experience same fundamental structure, same synthesis of transition as perceptual experience.”

By incorporating space and time, therefore making once transcendental notions immediate and present, we move from the total ideal to the real, where we can make “sense” of ourselves and the objects in the world. The need to make our minds and objects conform to one another is not necessary.

In a similar fashion, Bourdieu does not see reason as a transcendental object to be discovered. It is also in our activity. It is through our “doing.” He also denies the ends in mind or the future as a future, but uses the breakdown of future by Husserl to clarify his point. Husserl distinguishes future into project and pretension. Project is a possible distant happening that may or may not happen. Pretension is the future that is almost present. Bourdieu uses this distinction of future to account for the transcendental value of the quasi-present in pretension. It is the pre-perceptive anticipation of pretension and the practical induction of previous experience that contribute to our habitus and field that allow us to embody not only our own body, but our body as it incorporates the immanent structures of a world or particular sector of the world as a field.

What happens is that reason is not the conscious motivator of our activity, but activity itself is the reason or

10 Ibid., 19.


12 Ibid., 80-81.
rationality in our movement. Because the incarnate mind and the incarnate body are what enable knowledge to manifest, it is also within the incarnate that we come to reason. It is the meaning and signification we incorporate as a collective that orients us logically for that space and time. It is structured according to the internal and external through *habitus* and *fields*.

As we examine the work of Bourdieu, we take note that embodiment is the way in which the symbolic structures are developed and reinforced in our interactions with others through social practices. It is important to distinguish the notion of repeated attempts or trial and error in the structured versus the unstructured notion of subject interaction. Because there is a structure to the social activity (to include language) between subjects, we are able to master the given practices systematically as well as reinforce those practices through repeatability.\(^{13}\) This supports the argument that the idea of the embodied subject can vary in what constitutes reason in a given time and space, but cannot be reduced to mere relativity. The reason that is taking place in the intersubjective activity of embodied subjects falls within the given systematic social structure. This leads Bourdieu to find that the “...dialectical relationship between the body and the space structured according to mythico-ritual oppositions...one finds...the em-bodying of the structures of the world.”\(^{14}\) He means that it is the dialectic of the body with the world that allows us to make meaning as well as constitute a reason within the practice that the body adopts in its given social structure. The process of reason is the working through the body, the given experience, and the symbolic space that both occur

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 88.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 89.
in. It is reason unfolding through the dialectic of the subject and object by way of embodied significance. If we look at Merleau-Ponty’s definition of dialectic we can better understand the immediate activity emphasized by both theorists:

[Dialectic is]...not the idea of a reciprocal action, nor that of the solitary of opposites and of their sublation. Dialectic is not development which starts itself again, nor the crossgrowth of a quality that establishes as a new order a change which until then had been quantitative- these are consequences or aspects of the dialectic. They enlighten only when one grasps them in our experience, at the junction of a subject, of being, and of other subjects: between those opposites, in that reciprocal action, in that relationship between an inside and an outside, between the elements of that constellation, in that becoming, which not only becomes but becomes for itself, there is room, without contradiction and without magic, for relationships with double meanings, for reversals, for opposites and inseparable truths, for sublimations, for a perpetual genesis, for a plurality of levels or orders.15

15 Maurice, Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures in the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973.), 203-204. He continues to describe the dialectic for the embodied subject. “There is dialectic only in that type of being in which a junction of subjects occurs, being which is not only a spectacle that each subject presents to itself for its own benefit but which is rather their common residence, the place of their exchange and of their reciprocal interpretation... It is a thought which does not constitute the whole but which is situated in it. It has a past and a future which are not its own simple negation; it is incomplete so long as it does not pass into other perspectives and into the perspectives of others.”
Dialectic is the ongoing, incomplete process of overcoming the contradiction and not the product of overcoming. They mean to emphasize the activity and not what the dialectic produces. In both theorists’ works the body is the point at which the dialectic occurs to formulate reason. It is within the creation and practice of signification that the subject and object are perpetually entwined. For Merleau-Ponty, it is at the very moment of perception that we begin to come to knowledge. For Bourdieu, it is in practice that reason manifests and is only done so through the existence of the body to verify the ideal with the experience of the real. Reason manifests through our activity in our history as we create it.

**Embodied Reason: Gulf War II Veterans**

The significance of this study is to explore the counter-argument of the centrality of embodiment and how that philosophical argument can contribute to the understanding of ourselves, both as singular individuals and as collective social bodies. This is never more apparent than in the way Gulf War II veterans need to come to understand themselves as not just who they were prior to conflict or who they were during conflict. The key is understanding that their experiences through rapidly changing social structures can be used to better understand themselves and those around them. These social structures range from civilian life prior to their military service, military service prior to deployment to war, actual realities of war and their roles in it, to their return home to confront civilian life again in social communities that may not understand the depth of their lived experiences and how it changed their perceptions of others and things. This
study establishes the general foundations for the embodied subject as it fits within the parameters of Enlightenment thought, but it also leads science and philosophy into a reciprocal envelopment of our understanding.

What should be taken away from this study is that the notions of the ideal and real are equally important to understanding human activity. We do not just need reason as justification for our actions, but reason as a guiding principle embedded in our coming to knowledge. If we can apply this idea of combining the real and the ideal through embodiment of lived experience, more comprehensive approaches can be developed to help Gulf War II veterans understand their personal experiences as meaningful. They must first understand that the reason and knowledge they acquired from pre-war to post-war life are not only within the context of their activity in both as their personal history, but that their experiences should not be set against pure ideals. The meaning of their experience is carried in their embodied dispositions and should not be viewed strictly as a lived reality. The reintegration process can build on these ideas present in embodied reason, and the primary lesson is that the reason constituted from their lived experience in war is generated from the meaning of their shared experience with others. Those previous experiences should not necessarily be purely reflective in nature, but are in fact a part of how they perceive the world. It is from these perceptions that truths can be derived and shared with others who have or have not experienced similar things.

Reintegration programs for returning veterans need to extend beyond the treatment of mental disorders and physical injury and account for the lived experience of pre-war and post-war changes for veterans. The reintegration process must account for
more than the facticity of learning to live with the traumatic experience of war, but also
incorporate the rewarding aspects of service and the major changes from military life to
civilian life. These changes need to be viewed in the context of their activity and not
against the ideal that may or may not represent their lived reality.

It is through the concept of embodiment that the scientist and the philosopher can
begin the analysis of knowledge and embodiment is what can enable modern discourse to
turn back to experience for certainty and the foundations of reason. Likewise, it is the
same concept of embodiment that can help the reintegration of Gulf War II veterans to
understand that their experiences in life before conflict and their experiences after
conflict are all part of their own knowledge of who they are and there is no need to put
one in opposition to the other. Both need to been seen and worked out as knowledge built
on different horizons. Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu both bring together knowledge and
practice, or theory and practice by trying to bridge the gap between the subject and object
dualism. Through their work on embodiment we are able to re-examine our knowledge,
but with a more powerful tool- the process of coming to reason through our own
significance. Gulf War II veteran reintegration can take these notions and apply them so
that veterans understand that they do not have to conform to their previous ideals of life
before conflict and they do not need to settle in the experience of war as the new normal
or an ongoing reality. Reason built as a process can help us understand how lived
experience can open our understanding of our own meaning in the world- we are not
isolated individuals. We gain this meaning through the open-ended creation of
knowledge through shared experiences. It is the shared experiences that can help
reconcile internal and external conflicts that arise in life in the military and combat and life in civilian communities.

**Conclusion**

This study set out to determine if the embodied subject could bridge the gap between subjectivity and objectivity. It produced a viable starting place for reason to manifest in the embodied subject, while grasping how the embodied autonomous subject comes to embody knowledge with others and the world. The life’s work of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu focuses on how to resolve the crisis of modern science and philosophy presented by Husserl and in doing so, their ideas can be used to confront current issues that perpetuate the divide between science as purely fact and philosophy as purely dealing with truth. It is through their interdisciplinary approaches that they develop the centrality of embodiment as a solution to bridge the gap between the subjective and objective. It is also through their interdisciplinary approach that we can begin to develop programs that consider the mind and the body as interdependent. The study reveals that our knowledge of ourselves and the world is not to be thought of as contained in the mind as a distinct part of ourselves. Our knowledge is the manifested in the incarnated consciousness through embodiment. The very notion of understanding or knowing has to break through the boundaries of the mind as a singular entity and encompass the notion of activity and doing as a function of embodied subjects. Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu contribute to this way of understanding and enable a more comprehensive approach when their theories are examined together.
Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception brings forth understanding to the world by providing a lens to first see the world. With our experience we are able to relate to others’ experience to reach intersubjectivity. Merleau-Ponty finds that it is “essential to never cut sociological inquiry off from our experiences of social subjects ([to include] not only what we have experienced ourselves but also the behavior we perceive through [others]).”

When the sociologist reflects within himself to comprehend facts against an imaginary variation, he practices philosophy. The philosopher cannot define truths by solely reflecting within because the world as a whole is an inherent object to finding truth. He must first see positive knowledge of the world and see the way others and himself interpret the world to find a universal truth. When he deals not only with his mind’s eye of the world, but embraces intersubjectivity, “ideal forms” will be revealed. The sociologist and the philosopher must recognize that they are situated in the world and apply phenomenological method to attain understanding. In Merleau-Ponty’s critique of natural science he critiques from the position of perceptual experience itself. This allows him to find that perceptual experience in consciousness’ inherence in the organism that is realized in various ways and levels of experience. This makes his notion of structure neither empirical nor transcendental, but immediate. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological positivism is “grounding the possible in the real.”

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Bourdieu applies his philosophy of embodiment to social sciences and challenges the same notions of facticity in the observed-observer relation. Both theorists engage the idea that science cannot completely rely on objectivity to understand human activity any more than philosophy can rely on subjectivity to reveal truth and meaning. Bourdieu begins the introduction to the *Logic of Practice* by stating that, “[of] all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism.”\(^{18}\) He suggests that the only way to understand our coming to knowledge is to fully recognize that there are “presuppositions inherent in the position of the ‘objective’ observer who, seeking to interpret practices, tends to bring into the object the principles of his relation to the object.”\(^{19}\) Bourdieu calls for theoretical analysis of any type to analyze the “theorist’s subjective relation to the social world and the objective relation presupposed by this subjective relation.”\(^{20}\)

Bourdieu brings together theory and practice as modes of knowledge where epistemological and sociological are analyzed equally to acquire understanding.\(^{21}\)

Whether in science or philosophy, embodiment helps us acknowledge that we not only put ourselves “...in the place of those whose actions has been decisive, [reconstituting] the horizon of their decisions...”\(^{22}\) but we know the context of their actions as much as we

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19 Ibid., 27.

20 Ibid., 29.

21 Ibid., Introduction, 25-27.

already know their consequences through knowledge as history. Merleau-Ponty frames it by saying that “[knowledge] and practice confront the same infinity of historical reality, but they respond to it in opposite ways: knowledge, by multiplying views, confronts it though conclusions that are provisional, open, and justifiable (that is to say, conditional), while practice confronts it through decisions which are absolute, partial, and not subject to justification.”

It turns out that through embodiment, knowledge is not cumulative any more than it is already set to be discovered in the world. Knowledge is our reason working out meaning and signification. It is applicable to how we assign value as well as how we enact values. If embodiment proves anything, it proves that our knowledge is not static. The key to understanding Merleau-Ponty’s project is to accept that “self-expression is not simply personal, it is also interpersonal.” Perception is communication between “I” and “Others.” Not only is it a present exchange, but also includes human relations prior to any particular perception. We decide our rational symbolic world. Legitimacy is grounded in our reason. Representations are not a product of the mind, but the incarnate mind bending to wrap around a higher order of thinking in the meaning and significance we assign to the incarnate self in the world with other incarnate selves. Rather than language being the medium to connect symbolic to material, it is our embodied selves that makes that bridge. The embodied subject is that very bridge and the incarnate mind

23 Ibid., 10.

cannot be separate from the body as it lives. It is where we create and function within mutual understanding, it is where we coordinate our actions and where we are socialized so that we can take part of a collectively constructed system.

This comparative research study focused on the theoretical structures of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu’s philosophies that both center on embodiment. This research found that embodiment is a viable starting point for reason and conforms to three features of the Enlightenment. More importantly, this comparative research study revealed that this theoretical approach reconstitutes reason as an open-ended process of human development. It does not call for revolutionary change that makes permanent the change of ideology or practice, but establishes the possibility of change in social relations within our lived situation. Embodiment utilizes our human character to transform nature and social relationships and it is not that of subject and object in capital or economic basis, but turns to social and cultural relations. This study may suggest in the bigger scope of science and philosophy that our pursuit of knowledge among our existence and the existence of others requires us to take a closer look at our homogeneity and our diversity. It shows that how we are the same and how we differ can enhance or limit our abilities to reason as we adopt new strategies of co-operation.

The study applied the theoretical approaches of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu to the reintegration of Gulf War II veterans to demonstrate how their theories are relevant to current issues in our society. It is the very subject and object dichotomy that founds the current way in which reintegration of Gulf War II veterans is structured. The current focus is on the disability of veterans through mental and physical evaluations. Current
programs are designed to focus on these disabilities to help those veterans become more functional in their lives, but the programs neglect to account for the embodiment of the experiences of Gulf War II veterans as a whole. The current reintegration process fails to account for three aspects of military life that are lost after these service members separate from military service, 1) identity, 2) community, and 3) purpose. If we apply the concepts of embodiment presented by Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu to Gulf War II veterans we can match the discussion on the theory of the embodied autonomous subject, the unity of experience and reason to those three key aspects of military service.

The embodied autonomous subject can be matched to the loss of identity to begin to help those veterans see themselves as active bodies capable of changing their perceptions by understanding the changes in their situatedness in the world. They become active in the practice of their lives, rather than see themselves as limited as isolated or atomized individuals. The theoretical application of the unity of experience can help account for how these veterans reorient their sense of community from conflict to postwar civilian reintegration through new shared experiences. It is the camaraderie and sense of unit from military service that can be reconstructed in civilian society through the idea that the unity of experience through embodiment creates meaning in our lives with others. It is the combination of these two aspects to restore purpose for Gulf War II veterans in the same way embodiment brings about reason in the modern embodied subject. Truths are constituted by the social structures we take part in. It is through the continuous process of reason that the truths can change as our lived experiences change. By helping transform their sense of identity, their place in
community and provide purpose through embodiment, the reintegration process can better account for their total experience of combat and not just the mental and physical changes that may have occurred.

The theories of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu capture the very problem with current reintegration approaches. The focus is on their experience as reflective creates a disconnect by separating the mind from the body. The very goal should be reorienting these veterans through reintegration in society as embodied subjects who can actively change their shared truths of combat through new shared experiences. This kind of reorienting takes in consideration the embodied experience of combat as experience that is built into their very dispositions.

By focusing on the body in these theories, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu shift the philosophical strategy to resolve the subject and object dichotomy from our mind and the material world to the very social relations that make up meaning in our world. All knowledge is shared knowledge both in its becoming and in its existence. Reason is the process that we all engage intersubjectively to make meaning and understand ourselves and the world by it. Embodiment is applied in order to show how we use everyday experiences as fact through historical context and anticipation of the future while enveloping a valuation of human interactivity through the process- the point at which reason is glorified as a process of human interactivity and not as transcendental. Truth is then recognized in the structure of the process of human agency in the present, but through that of our history and our future.
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