

Are Artists Phenomenologists? Perspectives from Edith Landmann-Kalischer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty



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1 Introduction

Phenomenologists often appeal to artists as allies, as engaged in the phenomenological effort to return to the ‘things themselves’, albeit in their own way. This is perhaps nowhere more prominent than in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), in which he presents artists, like Cézanne, Proust, and Balzac, as engaged in the same phenomenological project that he is. Merleau-Ponty, indeed, emphasizes this point in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945):

Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne – through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state (PhP lxxxv).

In light of remarks like this, one may begin to wonder: are artists phenomenologists?¹

While Merleau-Ponty’s approach might seem to point toward an affirmative answer, if we look to an earlier figure in the phenomenological tradition, Edith Landmann-Kalischer (1877–1951), we find reason to answer in the negative.² In her article, “On Artistic Truth” [“Über künstlerische Wahrheit”] (1906),

¹As I understand this question, it is not a question of whether artists conceive of themselves as phenomenologists; surely some do, but most do not. Rather the question I am interested in is whether, from the outside, we can describe what artists do as a kind of phenomenology.

²Translations of Landmann-Kalischer are my own. Daniel Dahlstrom (as translator) and I (as editor) are preparing a translation of CV, OAT, and PV for publication in the Oxford New Histories of Philosophy series (Eds. Christia Mercer and Melvin Rogers).

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Landmann-Kalischer draws a sharp contrast between what artists do and what phenomenologists do.³ According to Landmann-Kalischer, whereas phenomenologists ‘translate’ our lived experience into ‘concepts’, artists find ways to make our lived experience sensibly present (OAT 495–6). In so doing, she claims that the artist accomplishes something unique:

Just as we would never see our own face [*Anlitz*] were it not for a mirror, so too we would never see our inner life opposite [*gegenüber*] us were it not for the mirror of art. *Only* art exhibits [*dar...stellt*] it to us. *Only* through art can we cognize it (OAT 463, *emph. added*).

No matter how careful the translations of the phenomenologist are it would seem they cannot make us see our lived experience in the way that artists can. From Landmann-Kalischer’s perspective, then, it would appear that artists are not phenomenologists.

Though the views of other phenomenologists no doubt bear on the question of whether artists are phenomenologists, in this paper I shall pursue the dialectic between the negative answer modeled by Landmann-Kalischer and the affirmative answer modeled by Merleau-Ponty. I do so, in part, in keeping with the aims of this volume: although Landmann-Kalischer’s phenomenology has been neglected, she is one of the ‘horizons of phenomenology’, which merits our attention moving forward. Moreover, she and Merleau-Ponty are among the most aesthetically sensitive phenomenologists, who devote a considerable body of work to issues in aesthetics.⁴

Finally, as I argue below, the comparison between the two reveals choice points where phenomenologists might converge and diverge in how they think about the relationship between artists and phenomenologists. Both Landmann-Kalischer and Merleau-Ponty maintain that artists and phenomenologists share the same subject-matter, *viz.*, lived experience. However, they come apart with respect to their conceptions of what phenomenologists are supposed to do. Landmann-Kalischer endorses a more scientific account of phenomenology, according to which a phenomenologist is a kind of psychologist who aims to analyze, classify, and determine the laws that govern lived experience. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty treats the phenomenologist as someone who is supposed to present lived experience in a way that evokes that experience in us. Given that presenting and evoking lived experience is precisely what he takes an artist to do, we find Merleau-Ponty embracing a more aesthetic conception of phenomenology, according to which there is not just

³As I make clear below, Landmann-Kalischer refers to phenomenologists as ‘psychologists’; hence, the contrast she explicitly draws in OAT is between artists and ‘psychologists’ (see 495–7).

⁴Landmann-Kalischer’s first pieces are dedicated to aesthetics (*Analysis of Aesthetic Contemplation* [*Analysis of ästhetischen Contemplation*], “On the Cognitive Value of Aesthetic Judgments,” and “On Artistic Truth”), as is her posthumously published work, *The Doctrine of the Beautiful* (1952). In addition to aesthetic themes running throughout the *Phenomenology* and *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty takes up aesthetic issues in the essays, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” “Metaphysics and the Novel,” “The Film and the New Psychology,” “Indirect Language and Voices of Silence,” and “Eye and Mind” (see Merleau-Ponty (1993)).

something of the phenomenologist in the artist, but something of the artist in the phenomenologist.

In the end, I will not defend one position over the other; rather, my aim is to show that in order to answer the question whether artists are phenomenologists, we must also answer the question, how should phenomenologists be?⁵ I proceed as follows. I begin in Sect. 2 with a discussion of Landmann-Kalischer's analysis of the difference between phenomenologists and artists in "On Artistic Truth". In Sect. 3 I turn to Merleau-Ponty's account of the continuity between artists and phenomenologists as he articulates it in the *Phenomenology* and his 1948 essays in *Sense and Non-Sense*, "Cézanne's Doubt," "Metaphysics and the Novel," and "The Film and the New Psychology." I conclude in Sect. 4 by pointing out that although Landmann-Kalischer and Merleau-Ponty agree that artists and phenomenologists share subject-matter, their answers to the question whether artists are phenomenologists come apart on account of a fundamental disagreement about how phenomenologists should be.

2 Landmann-Kalischer: Artists are Not Phenomenologists

In order to explore Landmann-Kalischer's negative answer to the question whether artists are phenomenologists, I begin with a discussion of her approach to phenomenology, before turning to her account of artists. And because her work is still relatively unfamiliar, I will spend more time situating her account of phenomenology and art than I will when I turn to Merleau-Ponty.

2.1 Landmann-Kalischer's Phenomenology

Landmann-Kalischer began developing her philosophy in the early days of the phenomenological movement, prior to the ascendancy of Edmund Husserl and his school. She published her doctoral thesis, *Analysis of Aesthetic Contemplation* [*Analysis of ästhetischen Contemplation*] in 1902, just on the heels of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900–01). And her next major pieces, "On the Cognitive Value of Aesthetic Judgments" ["*Über den Erkenntniswert ästhetischer Urteile*"] and "On Artistic Truth," appeared in 1905 and 1906, respectively, a year before Husserl's lectures on the "Idea of Phenomenology." Though she engages with Husserl, e.g., in "Philosophy of Values" ["*Philosophie der Werte*"] (1910) and *The Transcendence of Cognizing* [*Die Transcendenz des Erkennens*] (1923),⁶ her

⁵I am indebted to Becca Rothfeld for helping me formulate and think through this question.

⁶She briefly engages with Husserl's distinction between 'ideal' and 'real' sciences in the *Investigations* in PV: 74–6, but his views in the *Investigations* and *Ideas* serve as a major foil for her in *The Transcendence of Cognizing*.

conception of phenomenology is not framed by Husserl's formulation of it. Instead, her conception of phenomenology emerges in the period in which 'phenomenology' has not yet stabilized as the primary label for this movement, and terms like 'psychology' and 'descriptive psychology' are more common. Indeed, in her early writings, we find few references to 'phenomenology' by name, and many references to 'psychology' and 'descriptive psychology'.⁷

One helpful way of situating Landmann-Kalischer is alongside the disparate group of thinkers who take their cue from Franz Brentano, including Alexius Meinong,⁸ Carl Stumpf, Christian von Ehrenfels, Anton Marty, and Kasimir Twardowski.⁹ In spite of their many differences, what Landmann-Kalischer shares with these thinkers is a basic Brentanian conception of the subject-matter and method of phenomenology.¹⁰

As Brentano's description of phenomenology as the "science of mental phenomena" suggests, the Brentanians align the subject-matter of phenomenology with 'mental phenomena' (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* 19). However, since, *per* Brentano, mental phenomena are defined in terms of 'intentionality', i.e., directedness towards objects, phenomenology requires the investigation of both the subjective and objective sides of mental phenomena. So understood, the Brentanians do not think of the subject-matter of phenomenology in purely subjective terms; they take it to be a complex of the subjective- and objective- sides of mental phenomena.

In keeping with this conception of the subject-matter of phenomenology, Landmann-Kalischer claims that the 'task' of phenomenology is to "to uncover psychic reality" and "subjective phenomena" (OAT 495).¹¹ That is to say,

⁷See, e.g., PV 63, where she describes a "purely phenomenological treatment" as a "science of thinking and acting."

⁸Landmann-Kalischer and Meinong had an extended correspondence and he credits her with influencing his theory of value. For example, in "On Emotional Presentation" ["*Über emotionale Präsentation*"] (1917), he says, "I myself owe to the essay "*Über den Erkenntniswert ästhetischer Urteile*," despite initial fundamental reservations, substantial stimulations for the conceptions which are now, in the present writing, developed in some more detail" (pp. 415–416, quotation in Reicher-Marek (2017): 82)). See also his claim in "For Psychology and against Psychologism in General Value Theory" ["*Für die Psychologie und gegen den Psychologismus in der allgemeinen Werttheorie*"] (1912), where he asserts, "Landmann-Kalischer's remarks on the 'cognitional value' of the feeling, which appear to me today, contrary to my first impression, as far as their main idea is concerned, to be the most important thing that has been put forward so far for the justification of the position which is to be sketched here" (p. 278, translation in Reicher-Marek (2017): 82)).

⁹Rollinger (1999) refers to this group as 'Brentanists' and (2008) as 'Austrian phenomenology', and Ferran (2014) calls it the '*Brentanoschule*'. For a discussion of the relationship between Landmann-Kalischer's value theory and that of Brentano and Meinong, see Ferran (2014). For a discussion of the relationship between her aesthetic theory and that of Brentano, Meinong, and von Ehrenfels, see Reicher (2016), Reicher-Marek (2017).

¹⁰This is not to say that they all identify as phenomenologists; rather I am using 'phenomenology' here to refer to Brentano's conception of philosophy.

¹¹In this passage, she refers to this as the task of psychology, but here she has in mind the task of descriptive psychology, which is tantamount to the task of phenomenology (as I discuss shortly).

phenomenology investigates the domain of consciousness and the various types of mental phenomena in it, including perception, memory, feelings, judgments, volitions, etc. However, Landmann-Kalischer insists that ‘uncovering’ psychic reality is not just a matter of attending to the subjective-side of lived experience; it requires attending to its objective-side as well:

in every lived experience we distinguish a subjective and an objective side. Sensing, representing, feeling, willing are a psychic, subjective lived experience; the sensed, represented, felt, and willed are objective.... Act and content [*Akt und Inhalt*] can be distinguished in every psychic lived experience (PV 35).¹²

She investigates the relationship between the subjective- and objective- sides of lived experience at length in the *Transcendence of Cognizing*, where she describes this relationship both in her preferred terms of ‘transcendence’, but also in Brentano’s terms of ‘intentionality’ (8). In a Brentanian spirit, Landmann-Kalischer thus conceives of the subject-matter of phenomenology as the complex of the subjective- and objective-sides of lived experience, and the relation of transcendence or intentionality between the two.

Meanwhile, regarding method, the Brentanians follows Brentano in conceiving of phenomenology as a *science* of mental phenomena. More specifically, they regard phenomenology as a kind of natural science, which studies mental phenomena ‘from an empirical standpoint’. For this reason, they endorse Brentano’s claim that, “the true method of philosophy is none other than that of natural science” (*Über die Zukunft* 137, my transl.).

More specifically, Brentano and his followers align phenomenology with ‘descriptive psychology’ (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* 29, fn1). Unlike ‘genetic’ psychology, which aims at giving a causal explanation of mental phenomena, ‘descriptive’ psychology aims at describing phenomena as they are given in ‘lived experience’ [*Erlebnis*] (*Descriptive Psychology* 31). With this description, the phenomenologist aims to notice, analyze, and classify these phenomena, and to determine the general laws that govern them (see *Descriptive Psychology* 31–32).

However, for some Brentanians, descriptive psychology is best suited to clarify the subjective-side of lived experience, and, as such, it needs to be supplemented by an investigation of the objective-side of lived experience. Twardowski’s account of the content-object [*Inhalt-Gegenstand*] distinction and Meinong’s ‘object theory’ [*Gegenstandstheorie*] are attempts in this vein.¹³

Landmann-Kalischer’s approach to the phenomenological method follows along these lines. In general, she eschews any metaphysical program, in favor of an

¹²“*Empfinden, Vorstellen, Fühlen, Wollen ist ein psychisches, subjectives Erlebnis, das Empfundene, Vorgestellte, Gefühlte, Gewollte ist ein Objektives.... Akt und Inhalt läßt sich... an jedem psychischen Erlebnis unterscheiden.*”

¹³See Twardowski’s *On the Content and Object of Presentations* (1894/1977) and Meinong’s “On Objects of Higher Order and Their Relationship to Internal Perception” (1899/1978) and “The Theory of Objects” (1904/1960).

empirically-based method, modeled on natural science.¹⁴ And in order to investigate the subjective-side of lived experience, she deploys descriptive psychology.¹⁵ As she presents it, descriptive psychology takes as its starting point the ‘facts’ pertaining to lived experience, and aims to ‘describe’ this “factual state of things [*tatsächlichen Stand der Dinge*]” (PV 32, 68–9; CV 304).¹⁶ And by means of this description the phenomenologist “analyzes the complexes of consciousness, classifies their elements, and establishes the lawful relations between them” (OAT 495). For example, if we were to pursue descriptive psychology with respect to aesthetic experience, we would begin with a lived experience of a particular work of art. We would then “describe and analyze” that lived experience in order to uncover what is ‘typical’ of aesthetic phenomena, e.g., having a feeling of pleasure and making an aesthetic judgment about the beauty of a work of art (CV 285).

However, according to Landmann-Kalischer, in order to do justice to the subject-matter of phenomenology, we need to also investigate the objects that we relate to through mental phenomena. For this reason, she claims that in addition to descriptive psychology, we need “objective sciences” that investigate the relevant phenomena, e.g., we need a science of the true for logical phenomena, a science of the good for ethical phenomena, and a science of the beautiful for aesthetic phenomena (PV 62–3). This said, she nevertheless claims that descriptive psychology is a ‘presupposition’ of these “objective sciences” (PV 62–3). That is to say, these objective sciences are to take as their starting point our lived experience of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and their task is to elucidate the objects and law-governed relations among those objects that those mental phenomena relate to. For her part, Landmann-Kalischer develops a kind of realist account of the true, the good, and the beautiful, according to which they are neither reducible to something wholly subjective, nor are they something wholly independent of human beings. Instead, she argues that the true, the good, and the beautiful are analogous to secondary qualities, like colors: they are parts of the world that are nevertheless essentially related to subjects.¹⁷

¹⁴Her criticism of idealist metaphysics is a running theme in PV (see, e.g., 58–9) and in the *Transcendence of Cognizing*, where she criticizes Husserl specifically.

¹⁵For a sense of Landmann-Kalischer’s account of different mental phenomena, see Part 3 of “On Artistic Truth” (463–94), where she discusses various types of mental phenomena that most directly relate to art, including sense impressions, gestalts, perceptions (Section 1), representations of memory (Section 2), representations of fantasy (Section 3), representations of the probable and necessary, and complex representations (Section 4), and feelings (Section 5). In Part II of “Philosophy of Values” (34–52) she develops a ‘psychology of the emotional sphere [*emotionalen Sphären*]’, in which she distinguishes between ‘pure feelings’ [*Gefühle*] and ‘affects’ [*Affekten*] (Section 2). And in “On the Cognitive Value” she develops an account of the aesthetic judgments and judgments of the senses, i.e., judgments about sensory qualities.

¹⁶She is, however, critical of Brentano’s reliance on ‘inner perception’ (see PV 72–73). She objects that inner perception can only make us aware of a narrow set of mental phenomena, that outer perception can be as certain as inner perception, and that when Brentano relies on inner perception as evidence of the correctness of judgment, his view is circular because he treats correctness of judgment as the criterion of evidence.

¹⁷She develops the secondary quality analogy with respect to the beautiful in CV (for discussion see Reicher (2016), Reicher-Marek (2017), Matherne (2020)). She then expands this to an account of the good and the true in PV (see Part 2, Section III.2 and 3) (for discussion see Ferran (2014)), and this culminates in her defense of realism against idealism in *Transcendence of Cognizing*.

In step with Brentanian phenomenology, Landmann-Kalischer thus understands the subject-matter of phenomenology in terms of the complex of the subjective- and objective- sides of mental phenomena. And she construes the phenomenological method along scientific lines, as something that is best executed via a pairing of descriptive psychology, which studies the subjective-side, and objective sciences, which study the objective-side.

2.2 *Landmann-Kalischer on the Asymmetry Between Artists and Phenomenologists*

With this picture of Landmann-Kalischer's phenomenology in place, I can now turn to why she answers the question of whether artists are phenomenologists in the negative. To this end, I begin with a few brief remarks about her overarching cognitivist account of art, before addressing why she regards what the artist does as different from what the phenomenologist does.

In "On Artistic Truth," Landmann-Kalischer defends a cognitive analysis of the relationship between art and truth, according to which art conveys truth and we gain knowledge by engaging with art. More specifically, as I mentioned in the introduction, Landmann-Kalischer argues that art conveys a distinctive kind of truth, viz., truth that pertains to 'psychic reality' or 'subjective phenomena'. To this end, she claims that, "Art does not give us objective reality [*Wirklichkeit*], instead it is the mirror and exhibition [*Darstellung*] of the psychic world" (OAT 463). So understood, art's primary task is to exhibit to us subjective phenomena, like our lived experience of sense impressions, perceptions, memories, fantasies, feelings, etc. That said, Landmann-Kalischer notes that art can sometimes give us something from objective reality, but this is contingent:

Artistic truth... *can* in certain circumstances also be something objective; it *can* reach the being of objects [*Wesens des Gegenstandes*], it *can* uncover [*entdecken*] a hitherto unknown side of it. For aesthetics, however, this is only a contingent coincidence.... [T]he coincidence of artistic and objective truth is only an isolated case, and this is not enough to determine the concept of it (OAT 476–7).

What is essential to art, according to Landmann-Kalischer, is that it mirrors or exhibits subjective phenomena.

Landmann-Kalischer moreover maintains that the truth of art hinges on its ability to correctly exhibit this psychic reality: "Art... is true to the extent that it is a faithful exhibition [*getreue Darstellung*] of the psychic world" (OAT 463). To this end, she claims that the truth of art, like all truth, requires 'agreement' [*Übereinstimmung*] (OAT 459). But in the case of art, the agreement is between the work of art and psychic reality. More precisely, she claims that the agreement is between the 'content' [*Inhalt*] of the work of art, "what it says, narrates [*erzählt*], shows [*zeigt*], or

expresses [*ausdrückt*],” and subjective phenomena (OAT 459). For example, consider the following passage from Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets* (2009):

Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a color. Suppose I were to speak this as though it were a confession; suppose I shredded my napkin as we spoke. *It began slowly. An appreciation, affinity. Then, one day, it became more serious* (§1).

From Landmann-Kalischer’s perspective, the truth of this passage turns on the agreement between what it says about the lived experience of blue and that lived experience. And because Nelson’s words are faithful to this lived experience, *Bluets* expresses a truth about that lived experience, and this is why we can gain knowledge through it.

It is in this cognitivist framework that Landmann-Kalischer situates her account of artists. She conceives of an artist as someone who conveys truths about psychic reality through an artistic medium. However, given that the truths the artist conveys are ones that pertain to psychic reality, we might wonder: why shouldn’t we think of the artist as engaged in the same project as the phenomenologist?

According to Landmann-Kalischer, it is, indeed, the case that the artist and phenomenologist are concerned with the same subject matter, viz., psychic reality and subjective phenomena. And this is why they both take as their point of departure our lived experience. However, Landmann-Kalischer argues that artists and phenomenologists nevertheless diverge with respect to the methods they deploy.

In phenomenology, Landmann-Kalischer claims that the method of descriptive psychology involves ‘translation’:

As with every science, psychology translates something intuitively given... into concepts. It analyzes the complexes of consciousness, classifies their elements, and establishes the lawful relations between them (OAT 495).

By translating an intuitively given experience into concepts, Landmann-Kalischer claims that we ‘elevate’ that experience into something more generic, which can be analyzed, classified, and lawfully determined (OAT 496). For example, if a phenomenologist were to investigate their lived experience of the beauty of the opening lines of *Bluets*, they might notice that it is, first of all, an aesthetic type of experience. They might then analyze the aesthetic experience into its ‘elements’, e.g., an aesthetic feeling and an aesthetic judgment¹⁸; classify it as an experience of the beautiful in contrast to that of the sublime; and attempt to identify certain lawful relations that govern this experience, e.g., lawful relations that obtain between the elements internal to the experience (e.g., between representations and feelings of pleasure) or between certain stimuli and the experience.¹⁹

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Analyse der ästhetischen Contemplation* and CV for Landmann-Kalischer’s analysis of the elements of aesthetic experience.

¹⁹ Landmann-Kalischer takes these lawful relations between objects and aesthetic experiences to be what psychological aesthetics ultimately reaches for, but she notes that it has not yet developed to this stage (see CV 296, 321; PV 80–1).

By means of this method, Landmann-Kalischer claims that the phenomenologist seeks to ascertain general truths that pertain to different classes of mental phenomena and the lawful relations that govern them. These truths are, in turn, the sort that systematically cohere in an ‘interconnected’ way in a scientific body of knowledge about mental phenomena (OAT 497). And it is this sort of science, with its systematically connected truths, that the phenomenologist hopes to establish.

The method Landmann-Kalischer attributes to the artist is distinct in kind. Instead of translating what we are intuitively given into concepts, she claims that the artist endeavors to remain on the intuitive plane:

Art makes what is given to inner perception accessible to another organ.... it makes perceptible to the eye and the ear what was only present to ‘inner sense’.... [I]t makes the content of an abstract representation sensibly present, it gives feelings an audible or colorful gestalt.... Art creates agreement by creating a counter-image [*Gegenbild*] of the psychically given that leaves it as it is (OAT 496).

Here, Landmann-Kalischer argues that the artist proceeds by way of creating a ‘counter-image’ of our lived experience, which leaves that experience ‘as it is’. That is to say, the artist endeavors to create something that sensibly exhibits our lived experience in a way that remains faithful to that lived experience. Consider, for example, Fahrelnissa Zeid’s painting *Resolved Problems* (1948). From Landmann-Kalischer’s point of view, we can regard this painting as Zeid’s attempt to create a ‘counter-image’ of the lived experience of flying in a plane, an experience in which, “The world is upside down. A whole city could be held in your hand: the world seen from above” (*Fahrelnissa Zeid* 17).²⁰ This said, while the language of ‘counter-images’ might seem to suggest something accessible to the outer senses, Landmann-Kalischer conceives of ‘counter-images’ in capacious enough terms to be able to include literary works of art as well. For example, we can treat the following phrase in *The Last Samurai* (2000) as Helen DeWitt’s ‘counter-image’ for a lived experience of revelation: “after 30 h or so enlightenment came not in an hour of gold but an hour of lead” (20). So regardless of whether the artist uses colors, sounds, and textures, or words, concepts, and metaphors, on Landmann-Kalischer’s view, their works of art will count as ‘counter-images’ as long as they mirror lived experience to us, in a way that makes it present to us.

Insofar as artists aim at producing ‘counter-images’ that mirror lived experience in a faithful way, Landmann-Kalischer claims that their method is geared not towards generic, systematically connected truths, but toward “individual truths” that pertain to specific lived experiences (OAT 497). As I noted earlier, on her view, artistic truth involves agreement between a work of art and a specific kind of lived experience. And, for Landmann-Kalischer, the truths the artist is after are the truths that reflect specific lived experiences, e.g., a falling in love with blue, a seeing the world upside down from a plane, or a leaden enlightenment. In this regard,

²⁰In this context, Zeid says, “I did not ‘intend’ to become an abstract painter; I was a person working very conventionally with forms and values. But flying by plane transformed me” (*Fahrelnissa Zeid* 17).

Landmann-Kalischer claims that a work of art is supposed to serve like “a press for fruit”: through it, the artist ‘compresses’ and ‘crystallizes’ the ‘individuality’ of a lived experience (OAT 502–3). The artist thus uses their method in order to create a particular work of art, that agrees with a lived experience, in all its specificity, and conveys an individual truth about it.

It is in this spirit that Landmann-Kalischer asserts that, “The claim that art discloses its own truth [*eine eigene Wahrheit*] contains another claim, that *only through art* can this truth be mediated” (OAT 502). What she means is that art is uniquely positioned to present individual truths to us because its method turns on creating counter-images that mirror specific lived experiences. And it is for this reason that she claims, as we saw at the outset, that,

Just as we would never see our own face [*Anlitz*] were it not for a mirror, so too we would never see our inner life opposite [*gegenüber*] us were it not for the mirror of art. *Only* art exhibits [*dar...stellt*] it to us. *Only* through art can we cognize it (OAT 463, *emph. added*).

The artist enables us to ‘see’ our lived experience because she ‘mirrors’ that experience for us, in a way that exhibits it and makes it present.

So, why does Landmann-Kalischer deny that artists are phenomenologists? Although they both take lived experience as their starting point and ultimately want to disclose some kind of truth about mental phenomena, they use different methods to this end. In keeping with Brentano, Landmann-Kalischer conceives of the phenomenologist as someone who is engaged in a scientific endeavor in which they use description to translate lived experience into something more general, which can be analyzed, classified, and lawfully-determined. And through this process the phenomenologist seeks to develop a scientific body of knowledge, a set of interconnected truths about mental phenomena. By contrast, the artist endeavors to remain with our lived experience and create a ‘counter-image’ for a specific lived experience, which sensibly presents that lived experience to us, as in a mirror. And through these efforts, the artist seeks to create a particular work of art that brings to light an individual truth about a specific lived experience. So even though the artist and phenomenologist are interested in the same subject-matter, Landmann-Kalischer thinks that their methods commit them to fundamentally different projects.

3 Merleau-Ponty: Artists are Phenomenologists

As we now shift away from Landmann-Kalischer toward Merleau-Ponty, we not only shift toward an affirmative answer to the question of whether artists are phenomenologists, but also to a much later period in phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty is writing well after both Husserl and Heidegger’s seminal works in phenomenology, publishing the *Phenomenology of Perception* in 1945. As should be expected, his underlying conception of phenomenology departs in significant ways from Landmann-Kalischer’s. After looking at his approach to phenomenology, I then take up his phenomenological characterization of artists and, by implication, his aesthetic characterization of phenomenologists.

3.1 Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

Merleau-Ponty presents his phenomenology as an effort to blend together commitments from both Husserl and Heidegger. Indeed, he opens the Preface of the *Phenomenology of Perception* with the question, "What is phenomenology," and he offers a unified answer, which builds on an account of the subject-matter and method of phenomenology that, he contends, is in the spirit of both Husserl and Heidegger.

Regarding the subject-matter of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty claims that, "The task of radical reflection... consists paradoxically in recovering the unreflective experience of the world" (PhP 251). The 'unreflective experience' that he has in mind is, what Husserl calls, our 'still-mute' experience of the world (PhP lxxix). That is to say, as a phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty is interested in the lived experience of the world that we have not yet formulated to ourselves reflectively in thought. As he makes this point in "Metaphysics and the Novel" essay,

a phenomenological or existential philosophy assigns itself the task, not of explaining the world or of recovering its "conditions of possibility," but rather of formulating an experience of the world, a contact with the world which precedes all thought *about* the world (MN 27–8).

As the reference to 'existential' philosophy makes clear here, Merleau-Ponty identifies the still-mute experience of the world with the sort of experience that Heidegger seeks to elucidate in his 'existential analytic' in *Being and Time* (1927), i.e., the unreflective experience each of us has of being thrown into the world (PhP lviii).

Merleau-Ponty, in turn, frames the method the phenomenologist uses to investigate this subject-matter in terms of 'phenomenological description' and the 'phenomenological reduction'. According to Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenologist endeavors not to "explain or analyze" lived experience in causal terms, but to 'describe' it (PhP lxxi). And with this description, Merleau-Ponty claims that the phenomenologist must not "substitute a reconstruction" for experience, but "adhere to" it (PhP lxxiii).

However, unlike the Brentanian gloss of phenomenological description that Landmann-Kalischer endorses, Merleau-Ponty situates his account of description within the context of Husserl's phenomenological reduction.²¹ Merleau-Ponty articulates the phenomenological reduction as follows:

Because we are through and through related to the world, the only way for us to catch sight of ourselves is by suspending this movement... or again, to put it out of play.... This is... because... the presuppositions of everything thought... are "taken for granted" and they pass by unnoticed, and because we must abstain from them for a moment in order to awaken them and to make them appear.... Reflection does not withdraw from the world...; rather, it steps back in order to see transcendence spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connects us to the world in order to make them appear (PhP lxxvii).

²¹I return below to the topic of how Landmann-Kalischer's conception of phenomenological description differs from Merleau-Ponty's.

I want to highlight two functions that Merleau-Ponty attributes to the phenomenological reduction in this passage. The first is what I shall call the ‘arresting function’ of the reduction. Ordinarily, our lived experience is caught up with the world: how we experience something is bound up with what we are experiencing. In order to disentangle that lived experience from everything it is caught up in, Merleau-Ponty claims that we need the reduction to ‘arrest’ that experience. Through the reduction, the ‘intentional threads’ that connect our experience to the world are ‘loosened’ and this allows us to seize upon our experience.

The second function is what I shall call the ‘appearing function’. According to Merleau-Ponty, in addition to arresting our lived experience, the reduction is supposed to make that experience show up to us. As he puts it later in the Preface,

The relation to the world, such as it tirelessly announces itself within us, is not something that analysis might clarify: philosophy can simply *place it before our eyes* and *invite us to take notice* (PhP lxxxii, my emph.).

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty claims that the reason we use description is in order to place lived experience before our eyes:

Phenomenological or existential philosophy is largely an expression of surprise at this inherence of the self in the world and in others, a description of this paradox and permeation, and attempt to make us *see* the bond between subject and world, between subject and others, rather than to *explain it* as the classical philosophies did (FN 58).

On Merleau-Ponty’s view, then, phenomenological description and reduction are means through which we ‘arrest’ our lived experience and ‘make it appear’, in a way that remains ‘faithful’ to that experience (PhP lxxx, 60).

3.2 Merleau-Ponty on the Symmetry Between Artists and Phenomenologists

If we now look at Merleau-Ponty’s characterization of what artists do, we find him articulating their efforts in the same terms he uses for the phenomenologist. To this end, he treats our ‘still-mute’ experience of the world as the subject-matter of art, and he claims that the artist endeavors to arrest that lived experience and make it appear. This is evident both in Merleau-Ponty’s general descriptions of art and in his discussion of specific artistic media.

Beginning with his general claims about art, in “Cézanne’s Doubt” he asserts,

The artist is the one who arrests the spectacle in which most men take part without really seeing it and who makes it visible to the most “human” among them (CD 18).

For Merleau-Ponty, the ‘spectacle’ that we take part in without noticing is our unreflective lived experience. And here, he attributes the arresting and appearing functions to the work of the artist, claiming that through art, the artist seizes upon that lived experience and makes it ‘visible’ for us.

Meanwhile, in his analysis of artists working in different media, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the ways in which these artists arrest and make appear different aspects of our lived experience. For example, in his discussion of novels, he claims,

The work of a great novelist always rests on two or three philosophical ideas.... [F]or Proust, the way the past is involved in the present and the presence of times gone by. The function of the novelist is not to state these ideas thematically but to make them exist for us in the way that things exist. Stendhal's role is not to hold forth on subjectivity; it is enough that he make it present (MN 26).

Here, Merleau-Ponty indicates that Proust arrests and makes appear our experience of the idea of the past, whereas Stendahl does this for our idea of subjectivity.

Meanwhile, about film, Merleau-Ponty asserts,

This is why the movies can be so gripping in their presentation of man: they do not give us his *thoughts*, as novels have done for so long, but his conduct or behavior. They directly present to us that special way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people, which we can see in the sign language of gesture and gaze and which clearly defines each person we know.... For the movies... dizziness, pleasure, grief, love, and hate are ways of behaving (FNP 58).

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the way in which directors can arrest and make appear our 'conduct or behavior'. Consider, for example, the scene in *If Beale Street Could Talk* in which Tish and Fonny first see their loft together. From Merleau-Ponty's point of view, although in the novel (1974), James Baldwin is able to give us an idea of their excitement and love in this moment, in the film (2018) Barry Jenkins is able to show this to us in their behavior, e.g., in Fonny's dynamic movements and gestures as he envisions the space and in Tish's luminous stillness as she comes to share this vision.

Finally, with regard to painting, Merleau-Ponty maintains,

The painter recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things. Only one emotion is possible for this painter – the feeling of strangeness – and only one lyricism—that of the continual rebirth of existence (CD 17–8).

Here, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the way in which painters are able to arrest and make appear our perceptual encounters with the world. In a painting like Cézanne's *Apples* (1878–9), Merleau-Ponty claims that Cézanne is able to “remain faithful to the phenomena... of perspective,” because he captures the way in which,

perspectival distortions... contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes (CD 14-15).

Given this understanding of what artists do, it should not be surprising that Merleau-Ponty aligns artists with phenomenologists in the passage we considered in the introduction:

Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne – through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state (PhP lxxxv).

Developing this thought at more length in his analysis of the relationship between literature and philosophy, Merleau-Ponty says (here I fill out a quote cited above),

Everything changes when a phenomenologist or existential philosophy assigns itself the task, not of explaining the world or of recovering its “conditions of possibility,” but rather of formulating an experience of the world, a contact with the world which precedes all thought *about* the world.... From now on the tasks of literature and philosophy can no longer be separated (MN 27–8).

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty claims that once we appreciate that phenomenology endeavors to “giv[e] voice to the experience of the world,” then we should recognize that this effort is of a piece with the novelist. However, as we have seen, this is not a point he confines to the relationship between phenomenologists and novelists, but one he extends to phenomenologists and artists, more generally.

So far, I have concentrated on the ways in which artists are engaged in the same effort to arrest and make our lived experience appear that phenomenologists engage in; but what about description on Merleau-Ponty’s view? Is there reason to think that artists deploy something like phenomenological description? In light of Landmann-Kalischer’s treatment of description, we might think that the answer is no: whereas the descriptions of the phenomenologist translate lived experience into generic terms, the artist’s modes of expression leave that experience ‘as it is’. However, if we take a closer look at Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of description, we find him characterizing it, and employing it, in a fashion that is more akin to Landmann-Kalischer’s artist than her phenomenologist.

As we saw above, Merleau-Ponty insists that through description we are supposed to ‘adhere’ to our experience in a way that remains ‘faithful’ to it. However, more than this, Merleau-Ponty treats description as something that is supposed to *evoke* lived experience in us. As we saw him make this point in his characterization of the reduction, phenomenological description is supposed to ‘awaken’ in us what we take for granted (PhP lxxvii, see also lxxii, 34, 213). Making this point about the phenomenological description of perception, he claims,

The fundamental philosophical act would thus be to return to the lived world...; it would be to awaken perception and to thwart the ruse by which perception allowed itself to be forgotten (PhP 57).

For Merleau-Ponty, then, the phenomenologist is supposed to ‘awaken’ or evoke in us the lived experiences described.

True to this conception of description, in the *Phenomenology* we find Merleau-Ponty offering his own descriptions in an evocative style. Consider, for example, his description of being aware of the spatiality of one’s body:

If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it with both hands, only my hands are accentuated and my whole body trails behind them like a comet’s tail. I am not unaware of the location of my shoulders or my waist; rather, this awareness is enveloped in my awareness of my hands and my entire stance is read, so to speak, in how my hands lean upon the desk (PhP 102).

In his description of this lived experience, Merleau-Ponty uses images and metaphors that make this experience vivid for us. Indeed, much like DeWitt’s description

of enlightenment that comes in the hour of lead, Merleau-Ponty's description is meant to elicit a response from us, a response in which the experience resonates. And this is by no means an isolated moment in the *Phenomenology*; throughout the text we find Merleau-Ponty using description to evoke and awaken experiences in us. For example, describing grief, he says,

When I am overcome with grief and wholly absorbed in my sorrow, my gaze already wanders out before me, it quietly takes interest in some bright object, it resumes its autonomous existence (PhP 86).

Or about illusory love, he writes,

in false or illusory love I am willingly united with the loved person; she really was, for a time, the mediator of my relations with the world. When I said: "I love her," I was not "interpreting"; and my life really was engaged in a form that, like a melody, demanded a certain continuation (PhP 397).

In these, and other passages like them, Merleau-Ponty uses description to evoke lived experiences in us.

What these considerations about Merleau-Ponty's evocative conception of description reveals is that he not only recognizes a phenomenological strand in what artists do, but also an aesthetic strand in what phenomenologists do. Like the artist, the phenomenologist pursues the reduction and utilizes description in the effort to make lived experience palpable to us. For Merleau-Ponty, then, the affirmative claim that artists are phenomenologists is bound up with an aesthetic conception of phenomenology, as an endeavor to express, exhibit, and evoke our still-mute experience.

4 Conclusion

Over the course of this paper, I have laid out two answers to the question, whether artists are phenomenologists: a negative answer modeled on Landmann-Kalischer's views and a positive answer modeled on Merleau-Ponty's. In spite of their disagreement, one thing that they both agree on is that phenomenologists and artists share a subject-matter: they are both interested in elucidating our lived experience. However, the reason that they ultimately diverge is on account of different conceptions of how a phenomenologist should be. For Landmann-Kalischer, phenomenologists should be engaged in a kind of scientific endeavor, in which they use description to translate lived experience into something more general, which we can analyze, classify, and lawfully determine. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty thinks that a phenomenologist should be engaged in an effort to arrest our lived experience and to make that experience appear to us. And though he thinks we use description to this end, instead of translation, he conceives of description as something that involves a kind of evocation, a presentation of lived experience that awakens it in us. Given Landmann-Kalischer's more scientific and Merleau-Ponty's more aesthetic conception of how a phenomenologist should be, we can see why Landmann-Kalischer regards the

artist's attempts to mirror our lived experience as an endeavor that is distinct from phenomenology – and why this mirroring is precisely the sort that Merleau-Ponty strives for. In the end, in lieu of an answer to the question whether artists are phenomenologists, with this dialectic I hope to have brought out the need to also attend to the question of how a phenomenologist should be.²²

References

Abbreviations of Merleau-Ponty's Works

- PhP *Phenomenology of Perception*. Transl. D. Landes. London: Routledge, 2012.
 CD "Cézanne's Doubt." In *Sense and Non-Sense*. Transl. H. Dreyfus and P.A. Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
 MN "Metaphysics and the Novel." In *Sense and Non-Sense*. Transl. H. Dreyfus and P.A. Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
 FN "The Film and the New Psychology." In *Sense and Non-Sense*. Transl. H. Dreyfus and P.A. Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

Abbreviations of Landmann-Kalischer's Works

- CV "On the Cognitive Value of Aesthetic Judgments: A Comparison Between Sense and Value Judgments," translated from "Über den Erkenntniswert ästhetischer Urteile: Ein Vergleich zwischen Sinnes- und Werturteilen." *Archiv für die Gesamte Psychologie*, 1905, 263–328.
 OAT "On Artistic Truth," translated from "Über künstlerische Wahrheit." In Max Dessoir (Ed.), *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*. Stuttgart: Enke, 1906, 457–505.
 PV "Philosophy of Values," translated from "Philosophie der Werte." *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* 18, 1910, 1–93.

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