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Body Performance Analysis in Interactive Art Based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Views

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Abstract

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is a famous phenomenologist of the twentieth century. Being influenced by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty paid attention to sensory perception and the body topic by rejecting empirical and rational philosophical theories. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is around the subject that perception is a physical phenomenon, not a mental event. New artistic media provide an opportunity for audience engagement and experience, and since the experience is always body dependent, body is considered an integral part of the modern media. The purpose of this research is to understand the interaction of audience regarding interactive art effects, relying on Merleau-Ponty's views. The main research question: What are the commonalities of Merleau-Ponty's body performance theory in the process of perceiving artwork and interactive art elements? This research is fundamental in terms of purpose and descriptive-analytic in terms of nature with an adaptive approach and library research is used for information collecting. The research results showed that comparing Merleau-Ponty's views and the interactive art elements, there are commonalities such as sensory perception, audience acting, globalism (Gestalt), interconnectedness and pre-reflective perception. Based on these common features, the new art media, including interactive art, can be analyzed.

Keywords: Body, Interactive art, Modern art, Artwork, Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

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Introduction

The Dualism of Western philosophy between mind and body, which began with ancient Greece and philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, occupied a decisive shape in Descartes' philosophy and had a profound effect on the modern conception of the superiority of rational powers. Dualism believes that the mind has superiority over the body. Descartes's famous statement, "Cogito ergo sum" confirms this claim. Descartes declared that, in order to achieve the truth, there was essentially no need for physical senses, thereby separating the mind and body from one another. One of the concerns of the modern Western philosophy has been to break this dualism. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) is a famous phenomenologist of the twentieth century, influenced by the phenomenology of Husserl, transformed the transcendental path of phenomenology towards the existence phenomenology, and thus the sensory perception of the body and the world was centered around his philosophy. He views empirical and rationalist philosophical theories as incapable of understanding the relationship between man and the world. Because the basic premise of these theories is the existence of a static universe that is analyzed and evaluated by the subject, while in this way of confronting the world, the relationship between perceptive and perceived is neglected. The central thought of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is that the perception is physical phenomena, not mental events.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of art is tied to the phenomenological view of perception. In his opinion, the important issue in art is not the question of beauty, but the question of perception and expression. By focusing on art, Merleau-Ponty seeks to describe the artist's relationship with the objects and the world that he portrays.

The body is the center of perceptual experience in the aesthetic experience with Merleau-Ponty. For Merleau-Ponty, the perception and understanding of the artwork in its essence is as physical as it is. In the process of looking at an artwork, in addition to the visual interaction between the observer and the work, a sense of tactical interaction also arises. The most important point in the process of perceiving artwork by Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the fact that seeing is intertwined with physical presence and interaction with the atmosphere of the work.

Media in the postmodern era requires the viewers to confirm itself. Therefore, the inability to deal with them becomes more intense. New art trends and media provide many opportunities for the viewer - as an interactor - to provide an opportunity for exploration of the nature of experience, and since the experience is always dependent on the body, so body is considered as an integral part of the modern media. Modern media, which is one of the most important interactive arts, unlike classical media, creates an environment in which all the factors involved, such as the environment and others present in the environment, interact with each other as an organic body. In other words, not only the artistic object but also other people contribute to the creation of these acts. The emphasis on the participation of viewer or viewers in the creation of the artwork and its semantic plurality in this period is of unprecedented importance.

Method

This research is fundamental in terms of purpose and descriptive-analytic in terms of nature with an adaptive approach and library research is used for information collecting, and seeks to find the audience's interaction with artwork in interactive art relying on Merleau-Ponty's body Performance theory. In other words, this research seeks to achieve a philosophical vision for analyzing new arts such as interactive art. Therefore, finding the common aspects of Merleau-Ponty's views and interactive art is the main goal of the research. The sub-goal of this research is to seek if the interactive effects can be analyzed on the basis of common aspects obtained.

The research seeks to answer this question:

1. What are the similarities between Merleau-Ponty's theories about body functioning in the process of perception and the components of interactive art?

Importance and necessity of research:

In addition to recognizing the historical and social roots, the need to analyze such works based on philosophical perspectives also exists, regarding the expansion of new artistic media that interactive art is also one of its most important branches. The importance of this research is due to the fact that based on adaptation of Merleau-Ponty's views, the flow of interactive art, with the exception of two cases of research in Iran, which were general and with a philosophical approach, attention has been paid to the subject, no profound and meaningful study has been performed.

Background Research

Books and articles on the subject of interactive art, as well as the views and opinions of Merleau-Ponty, have been written; but, apart from a few instances, the indicators of this new artistic medium have not been adapted to Merleau-Ponty's philosophical point of view.

In her article "Merleau-Ponty, Neuroaesthetics and Embodiment: Theorizing Performance and Technology", Susan Broadhurst (2012) examines two different approaches: the first approach Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings are about intimacy and its close and effective relationship with the art of execution. The second approach is about the biological function of the brain and its relation to awareness that this narrative describes the function of the brain in dealing with artworks, called "neurotic aesthetics." The author considers the goal of "neurotic aesthetics" to provide a biological understanding of the aesthetic experience.

The article "The Philosophic Concepts of Merleau-Ponty: A Bedouin for the Analysis of Interactive Art, A Look at the Effectiveness of the *Field*" by Safa Sebt, Zahra Rahbarnia and Mehdi Khabazi Konari (2016), which is the closest paper written on the subject of this research, the authors focus on the descriptions of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in seeking the relationship of the audience with an interactive event. For this purpose, while describing the theory of Merleau-Ponty, a case study was carried out on an interactive work called "Field" that was performed by Amir Temple. In this paper, authors specifically analyze the relationship between audience and performer in interactive performance and, by studying a case study, examine the importance of the actors' and audience's embodiment in the course of the performance event. According to the writers of this article, interactive art, given its increasing expansion in the world of art, needs to have deep and strong philosophical foundations.

Faezeh Rezvani's Master's thesis, "Investigating the Concept of Humor in the Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and the Art of Performance with the Case Study of Valie Export" (2016), is based on the body relying on Merleau-Ponty's views on the body and subject's existence. A case study of this research is the Austrian artist's Valie Export. In this research, the researcher has also analyzed the works of this artist with a feminist look. The research also attempted to analyze the art of performance with the aid of philosophical approaches. According to the author, the main purpose of this study is this issue, because its vacancy is felt in the field of performance studies. Where, due to interdisciplinarity and broadness, this field has been the source of many scholars of social, anthropological, feminine, theater studies, and so on.

In one another article: "Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to the relationship between art and body", Mohammad Asghari (2016), by using the phenomenal approach of Merleau-Ponty, has been working on the development of art, especially the explanation and interpretation of painting art, relying on the works of Cezanne. In the conclusion, the writer notes that philosophers, thinkers and art professionals in

the relation between art and body, consider art as subjective, while Merleau-Ponty has a completely different path and establishes a strong link between art and body in his work.

The difference between this research and the examples mentioned is in the nature of dealing with this field. As stated above, the main goals of the research are to demonstrate a philosophical approach to analyze interactive works and performance art. For this purpose, it was observed that the discussion was more focused on embodiment of perception, and specifically other concepts of his thinking were less addressed. In this research, it is intended to extract the components of Merleau-Ponty's thoughts and adapt it to the components of interactive art, in detail.

Theoretical Foundations: General Concepts in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was one of the most fascinating and innovative philosophers of the twentieth century. Under the influence of Husserl's phenomenology, he transformed the transcendental path of Husserlian phenomenology towards the phenomenon of existence, and thus the sensory perception and the body-world issue was centered on his philosophy.

Valuing the mind and humiliation of the body and emotions is rooted in the philosophical tradition of the West. From ancient Greece and philosophers such as Socrates and Plato, to modern philosophers like Descartes, they all believed that real knowledge should be independent of physical perceptions and emotions because emotional experiences distort the nature of truth. For Descartes, the pursuit of truth does not require physical sensation, thus distinguishing the mind and body from one another, and transforming them into two distinct and disparate elements. Descartes believed that human mind and wisdom excelled on the human emotions and physical desires, and the only way to recognize the truth is to rely on a subjective mindless body because the physical senses are misleading (Sayyad & Gil Amir Rood, 2016: 2). Descartes says: "I have to cleanse my mind from all physical matter ... at least I must look at them as null and incorrect matter." (Descartes, 1996: 68)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the foundations of modernity are criticized in all fields. Merleau-Ponty is one of the philosophers who, by designing new relationships between "awareness and body", "subject and the world", question the former order and method. Like Husserl, he criticizes Descartes and, within his philosophy, shows that although the two disciplines of empiricism and rationalism are distinctive at first, the difficulties of both rise from one root (Basiri, 2014: 47).

Since the basic premise of empirical and rationalist philosophical theories is the existence of a static universe that is analyzed and evaluated by the subject, and in this way of confronting the world, the relationship between perceptive and perceived is neglected, Merleau-Ponty considered this type of philosophical thought to be ineffective, and, consequently, raised the question of the perception embodiment. Embodiment of perception requires a fresh look at the senses, as the mediator of the outside world and the subject of experience. In a nutshell, it can be said that the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty is based on the description of the world's perception of which the subject is intertwined by its physical being. The subject's comprehension of phenomena does not come from its own wisdom, but the subject by virtue of being in the world has a prior understanding of the world. In this way, the subject takes on a tangible relationship to the world and, in the meanwhile, is subjected to intention. But this tangible relationship is not based on understanding, but is due to the nature, movement and embodiment of the subject (Sebti et al., 2016: 45).

This view of Merleau-Ponty has had many effects on various areas, one of the most important of which is contemporary art.

Art and Perception from the Viewpoint of Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty's main views are expressed in three articles, *Cézanne's Doubt* (1945), *Indirect Language the Voices of Silence* (1952), and *Eye and Mind* (1960). The art form that Merleau-Ponty has been most concerned with is painting, and it is often confronted with literature. Of course, Merleau-Ponty also wrote "New Film and Psychology" for cinema under the influence of Gestalt's Psychology. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the relationship between sensory perception and painting and the relationship between literature and painting in the famous book "The Phenomenology of Perception".

Merleau-Ponty examines art with a phenomenological approach. In his article, "The phenomenological approach of Merleau-Ponty to the relationship between the art and body," Mohammad Asghari writes quoted from Merleau-Ponty in the book "Phenomenology of Perception": "Artwork is the same as the object of my sensory perception. Its nature must be seen and heard and one should not attempt to define and analyze it." (Asghari, 2016: 3).

The phenomenology from Merleau-Ponty's perspective is a philosophical manner. Its purpose is "to draw the assumptions that we have made in the ordinary way about ourselves and the world for scientific and practical purposes and return to the world, as we directly experience it in pre-reflective perception" (Matthius, 1387: 197). From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, the description of the world in this way of perception is not only the achievement of modern philosophy, but also of modern art.

For Merleau-Ponty, the world of perception is not only the world of natural objects, but the world of paintings, music tracks, books, films and all that the Germans call the "world of culture." In the meantime, the artist's work is describing such a world in a phenomenological manner (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 94).

From Merleau-Ponty's point of view, perception is not a certainty limited to receiving sensory stimuli, not by physical organs, but by an intimate experience. This situation challenges the concept of the distinction of the subject within and the outer object, and rejects the notion of sustainable subjectivity and the defined boundaries of the subject with another world (Broadhurst, 2012: 227).

Merleau-Ponty's main focus on art is on visual arts, especially modern painting. The modern painting considered by Merleau-Ponty, is a painting of the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century and works by artists such as Cezanne, Grace and Picasso. These painters do not represent what we see in nature. The most important difference between classical painting and modern painting is that classical painting has a realistic approach to the world, and its content is real matter. Hence, humans, animals, and other things are represented. As a result, classical painting is considered the non-personalized painting of the universe, as science describes. While the content of modern paintings is often abstract and non-realistic. The classic painting essentially represents the world as it is, but the modern painting describes the world as it should or should not be. According to Merleau-Ponty, modern artists are looking to go beyond these realistic views. As far as in modern art, scientific perspective is often not concerned, objects and colors are different from what they are and the form and arrangement of objects seems to be distorted.

In "The World of Perceptions", Merleau-Ponty points out that first of all and literally, every artwork is a creation of the artist. The painter, whether classical or modern, creates a painting by placing colors on the canvas. According to Merleau-Ponty, this is not imitating the world, but it's the world itself (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 94). As the artwork audiences, as long as we are aesthetically confronted with the artwork, we do not care for its similarity with reality, but our attention is drawn to the coherence of the artist's universe, its sufficiency, attractiveness and such qualities (Matthias, 2008: 199).

According to Merleau-Ponty in modern art, the category of "perception" takes a deeper meaning and is defined as a way to achieve the truth. Because our relationship with the world is not through thinking about it, but rather takes shape through "being in the universe". Therefore, modern art can be regarded as

"realistic" more fundamentally. In fact, modern painting invites us to return to ourselves (Matthius, 1387: 201).

The observer or audience may experience conflicts facing an artwork, which can lead to emotional and physical reactions, and this is something that has been dealt with less in the history of art. But in Merleau-Ponty's views, body is the center of perceived experience in aesthetic experience. He believes that perception and understanding of the artwork is also physical as much as it is mental. In the process of encountering an artwork, in addition to the visual interaction between the observer and the work, a sense of tactical interaction also arises (Sayyad & Gil Amir Rood, 2016: 5). According to Merleau-Ponty, "seeing and moving are also inherently tied together, so that in visually appealing phenomena it is always a sign of a moving movement" (Carman, 2011: 269). He also believes that the light, the color and the depth of the work of art, mean that they create a physical echo in the body of the audience. He refers to the physical aspects of painting, and as the most prominent example of physical perception, he introduces Cezanne's paintings (Sayyad & Gil Amir Rood, 2016: 5).

In the article "Cezanne's Doubt," in the analysis of Paul Cézanne's paintings, Merleau-Ponty points out that the appearance of the universe is important for Cézanne, but this not because of the apparent shape of certain forms that the observer views. Rather, Cezanne tries to draw up a process in which the landscapes and other objects of experience are exposed to sensory perception and embodiment. He does not represent the world image as it is, but presents an image of the world in a pre-reflective form in the receptor stimuli. In Cezanne's paintings, what is important for Merleau-Ponty is that Cezanne portrays our relationship with the universe as an intimate human relationship with the imperfect view of the universe. And that our experience of the world, there is not the experience of definite objects, experience of passive sensory perception of the organs, or a reception by the mind, but this relation is our physical and perceptual exposure to the world (Glimore, 2012: 466-455).

In the words of Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne intuitively and aesthetically understood what Gestalt's psychology later expressed in terms of theory, that is, the point of view of life, or that of our perception, is not of a geometric or imaginative kind. One reason is that visual representation eliminates the size stability that is at the heart of real perception" (Carman, 2011: 267). Referring to sensory perception in the works of Cezanne, Merleau-Ponty regards it as an arena that, in addition to displaying and presenting an object, also shows how we see, just as an object appears in the presence of our eyes (Gholami, 2013: 53).

In his comments, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the fundamental role of body and physical organs in the development of art and artwork, and like Heidegger, believes that human means being in the world, but this being is in the form of a bodied subject. In other words, man is a bodied subject, not just a mindset different from the material world that Descartes posed. According to Merleau-Ponty, man observes and is being observed at the same time. So the body and the world are intertwined, and this contrasts the possibility of the emergence of art. The artist brings his body to the world to alter the world in his painting. The artist opens through the world by means of the body. Seeing is not an internal matter, but entirely external and dependent on our body. So art originates from our live physical interaction with the world. But we must note that Merleau-Ponty does not only conceive of the body as the origin of art, but believes that art and other sciences are the result of the living dialectics between the body and the soul (Asghari, 2016: 4).

"The completed artwork is not a work that exists as an object, but a work that reaches its viewer and invites him to come to the state which it created" (Carman, 2011: 271). It reveals the universal artwork for the audience, which is why we feel ourselves unified with it. In dealing with a painting, we are not observers, but we are visually participating in it. In other

words, we do not see it, but we see through it. Therefore, artwork is never complete, because self-perception never ends (Carman, 2011: 271). Merleau-Ponty believes that the audience, in the face of the artwork, is able to enter the perception of those things that are depicted in the art, and this happens through the sympathetic implications of the spectator with the work (Sayyad, Amirrood, 2016: 6).

As previously said, Merleau-Ponty poses the question of the embodiment of perception. The perception embodiment requires a new look for the senses. This view of Merleau-Ponty has had many implications in various areas of thought, and consequently the context of contemporary art has evolved, which has led to a change in the meaning of classical media.

Merleau-Ponty speaks of senses as part of the process of perception, and given that perception always provides a whole or obscure gestalt of the object, mainly affects the interconnection of the senses. He does not distinguish the senses, and points out that senses are inextricably linked and translate each other (Basiri, 2014: 47).

Media in modernism emphasizes the interaction of the senses with some object qualities. For example, painting has a direct relation with vision and a statue with touch. In modernism, it is thought that what is understood by the touch is not perceptible with vision, and this is the point of difference between the meaning of media in modernism and the theory of interconnectedness of the senses.

In the post-1960s art, with the centrality of the body, and changing the meaning of media, relations have changed. Arts such as painting and sculpture are raised not by their classical definitions but by the media that aspires the embodied experience from the audience. The new media creates a hospital in which all factors involved in an artistic process interact with the organic body, in other words, not only the artistic object but the body of other people is involved in the arousing of these acts (Basiri, 2014: 50- 49).

Interactive art as one of the most popular and most appealing modern art media, like classical art such as painting and sculpture, is no longer an object against observation and judgment, but an open, unfinished event that is unpredictable and subject to mutual action from artist and audience. The audience, the artist, and the artwork before each kind of rational relationship, have a predecessor relationship with one another, and they are passively affected and actively influenced simultaneously. Therefore, in the process of an interactive artwork, the presence of the audience is necessary. In interactive art, every action of a subject requires another presence. At the same time as the interactive art and its artist are exposed to the perception of the audience, the audience is also exposed to their perception (Sebti et al., 2016: 49-48).

Interactive art

Providing a clear definition in the more traditional media of art, including painting, sculpture or even film, can be said to be easily feasible, and each art critic has at least an overall idea of it. But the art of the twentieth century challenged the general concepts of traditional art in seeking to provide a new definition of the artist's relationship with the artwork and the artwork with the audience. In the new art, the artist was not the only creator of the work, and the artwork did not seem as an unfinished text.

Technological advancements were one of the important factors for objectifying the mentality and thoughts of the artists, and the media was the channel through which the artistic text emerged. But in addition to using modern technology and media, the new art emphasizes

audience and their mentality (Rahbarnia & Kheiri, 2013: 94). The audience in traditional art has always been seen with an obsessive, objective and subjective role, and in fact had a passive deal with the artwork. But with the advent of technology, the audience needs and the artist were also overshadowed. Now, there was a need for a mutual interaction between the artist and the audience, in which both the artist and the audience would participate actively in the process of constructing and producing the meaning of the artwork. Prior to this, the audience was always absent from the artwork either directly or indirectly, and there was always a gap between the creator of the artwork and the audience. Conversely, the 20th-century audience tends to collaborate in artistic production (Rahbarnia & Masdari, 2015: 227).

Firstly, at this stage, a definition of collaborative-interactive arts and the type of contact of the audience with the artwork should be presented in order to pave the way forward in the study.

The lexical meaning of interaction is a kind of trade and communication that forms the basis of modern communication. Interaction and mutual connection are one of the most fundamental foundations of human survival in societies. One of the most used interactions in the world today is human interaction with the computer. Computer systems allow the user to control the computer in real time with the information that appears on the screen. As soon as the user's instructions are represented by the computer, they interact. Therefore, the use of computers in the production of artwork necessitates the introduction of a new definition of aesthetics, which arose during the past decades of aesthetic revolution that Adorno called "shock" (Rahbarnia & Masdari, 2015: 226-227).

Let's return to the special definition of collaborative-interactive arts that even artists and researchers in this artistic realm face challenges. One of the reasons for this confusion may also be the short historical record of this kind of art. Erfan Ghaderi and Mohsen Marasy (2014) in an article entitled "Research in defining a variety of interactive arts" have tried to present a specific definition of any kind through the categorization of different types of interactive art. This research also cites that definition in this paper.

The authors use the term "interactive computer art" in part of this article, quoted by David Saltz. In terms of David Saltz's view, interactive art is fundamentally a computer art. In another section, Frank Popper's view is raised. According to Popper: "Although the interaction between sensory and rational elements, as well as the idea of engagement and interaction between the artist and the public in several countries, is characteristic of other branches of electronic art (and especially in computer art), but it finds its most peculiar expression in the communication arts". Here we see that Popper speaks of the purest expression of interaction that his purpose is to interact with people who are distant from one another which forms through a communication tool such as satellite, telematic systems and internet (Ghaderi & Marasy, 2014: 200).

In general, one can say that an artwork can be called collaborative-interactive if the audience can change the presentation of the artwork. Dominic Lopez describes the artwork presentation as follows: "The presentation of the artwork is what we encounter when facing the work. For example, a presentation of a painting is the same as the two-dimensional canvas, or in the case of music, the sequence of sounds being heard, or in a novel, a series of sentences narrating a story" (Lopes, 2010: 4). Therefore, when it comes to presentation transformation, it is intended that the audience can interfere, for example, with the color or composition of the painting, or alter the author's suggested sequence in a literary piece.

So here is one of the fundamental differences of collaborative-interactive works with non-collaborative-interactive ones, which is the ability to change the presentation of artwork that in the traditional art media, the audience deals merely with the mental interpretation of the work. But another point is that this change of presentation makes the audience aware of the artwork. To put it more precisely, if the audience of such works takes some distance from the work - a problem that we see in the traditional art media –and faces the work in a passive way, he will not benefit. The engagement of the audience in artwork results in producing meaning.

In the division by the authors of this paper, there is a difference between collaborative art and interactive art. In their view: "collaborative art is an art that 1- the audience of the artworks is able to alter or change the display of the work. 2- Understands the meaning and concept of the work due to this change of display. 3- This change in the display of the work takes place without intermediary mediation of the computer." (Ghaderi & Marasy, 2014: 206). But in interactive art, there is a difference: "Interactive art is a kind of art that 1- Its audience can change the display of the artwork. 2- Due to the interaction, full perception of the work depends on interacting with it and changing the display of the artwork. 3- Involvement of audiences with the art piece is carried out physically and actively and with computer-based mediation." (Ghaderi & Marasy, 2014: 222).

With this description, somewhat a specific definition of collaborative-interactive art and its features were presented, and the difference between such art with traditional art media is mentioned. Then, the topic of collaborative-interactive art was dealt with in more detail, and these two domains were separated. The main focus of this research is, as its title suggests, interactive arts.

Michael Rush, in the book "New Media in the Art of the Twentieth Century", sees the "Rotary Glass" of Marcel Duchamp as an archetype of collaborative-interactive art. According to Rush: "When Duchamp suggested that artwork is observer-dependent in completing the concept, he never knew that by the end of this century some artwork such as interactive films would literally be affiliated with the audience; not only to complete it, but also to start and present the work (Rush, 2010: 149). But the media introduced today as interactive art, expanded more than the 1960s for political reasons (Mesbah & Rahbarnia, 2011: 5)

The invention of interactive-based computers in the 1990s was one of the key factors in the formation of interactive art. In this way, the audience and the machine were able to converse much more easily and produce artwork (Muller, 2006: 195-207). Contrary to traditional forms of art, where the engagement of the audience was merely a mental event, this interaction now enables search, creation, and collaboration in the artwork, a practice far beyond mental activity (Paul, 2003: 67).

One thing to note here is that in the process of creating an artwork, the artist becomes a contributor, which means breaking the traditional position of the author-artist. But the original idea is still at the discretion of the artist and he is the one who maintains his position as the beginner (Rahbarnia & Kheiri, 2013: 94). In general, it can be said that in modern art, the artist is no longer an isolated genius, nor a transcendent subject, but an embodied subject among other bodies that share conflicts and initiate a process that creativity is a common trait among them, not just the artist (Rezvani, 2016: 40).

In concluding this section, one can point to the most important factor in understanding the interactive art, which is the experience of real bodies and real space. The audience of an interactive work communicate with the artwork through physical senses, not just the sensory transference of perception by seeing and hearing (Rezvani, 2016: 36). Audiences do not respond only to the artist's physical movements, but also react to the behavior of other viewers (Rezvani, 2016: 38), which will be discussed in more detail further on.

Common Concepts in Merleau-Ponty's views and Interactive Art

Sensory Perception: Perception Embodiment

Sensory perception in a simple sense is the recognition of objects with the help of sensory organs that most philosophers before the Merleau-Ponty perceive this perception as passive and accepting sense data. But Merleau-Ponty's view of sensory perception, in contrast to the empiricist and rationalist philosophers, is that: 1) Sensory perception is not passive, but active. 2) Sensory perception is the only path to our direct relationship with the world. 3) Sensory perception is interconnected with our physical action and is not separate from the body (Asghari, 2016: 3).

Therefore, sensation is the first stage of our relationship with the world, and it is totally dependent on the body. For Merleau-Ponty, sensory perception is the elementary level of awareness. Seyyed Hamid Talebzadeh quotes Merleau-Ponty in his book *Precedence of Perceptions*: "My body is the seat or rather the actuality of the expression, in which the visual and auditory experiences are one in another, and their expression value is the basis of the descriptive unity of the documentary world; Through which verbal expression and intellectual meaning occur. My body not only gives meaning to natural objects, but also to cultural objects, that is, words." (Talebzadeh, 2006: 66).

The central thought of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is based on the principle that perception is an embodied or physical phenomenon, not a mental event that occurs at the end of a chain of physical causes and effects, as Descartes imagined. The body does not perceive the mind. Merleau-Ponty describes perception as "being in the universe" following Heidegger (Carman, 2011: 48).

Merleau-Ponty puts forward the theory of conjunction of senses, and believes in the unity and blend of human senses in which the sense of sight and other senses are not separate from each other. Consequently, perception does not consist of a set of senses of sight, hearing, tactility, etc., rather one perceives with all its being.

In the "phenomenology of perception," Merleau-Ponty points out that perception is not merely an act of cognition, but an incarnate person who can perceive by seeing, moving and placing his body in relation to things (Merleau-ponty, 1962: 80).

With these explanations, the role of perception embodiment or sensory perception in interactive art is evident. In interactive art, the presence of the audience is essential in the process of creating the artwork. It is the audience that plays a role in shaping the meaning of art piece by its own physical reactions. The interaction between audience and the artist and the work of art itself completes the interactive work, and all of these relations are made through the physical senses of the whole body. The body and the flesh of the audience and artist are exposed to each other's perception.

Acting Audience

To Merleau-Ponty, not only perception is not a passive capacity in dealing with the world, but also it is an act of creativity and activism, and the creativity of perception is a type of activity that is related to corporality. He believes that we are not perceived as objects that are located against the objects, but percept as embodied entities in the world and from the world (Carman, 2011: 49).

Merleau-Ponty introduces perception in two sides, which include passive and active status. The subject simultaneously represents the recipient. Expression is basically a mutual action and the path of interaction between us (Sabti et al., 2016: 48).

According to Merleau-Ponty, when a work of art is created by the artist, it is no longer an object among the objects and the work being finished, but it is an art piece that invites the audience to participate. Unlike

classical media, modern artistic media provide an opportunity to interact with all the agents involved in the work. In the contemporary era, the media needs to be reviewed for its approval. New art trends and media provide many opportunities for the viewer to engage in what provides an opportunity for exploration of the nature of experience. And since the experience is always dependent on the body, then the body is considered an integral part of the new artistic media (Basiri, 2014: 49).

Gestalt's Holism

One of the important and influential factors in the mentality of Merleau-Ponty was Gestalt's psychology. The theorists of this school argued that: "The sensory experience, by virtue of its intelligible or rationalized form or gestalt, has a holistic and dynamic nature. They claimed that experience does not accumulate in a fragmentary manner, such as the mere accumulation or integration of fragments dissipative of the sensory input, but instead is based on meaningful congregations or coherent large chunks that explain to it does not tolerate more analytical description to the constituent components" (Carman, 2011: 39).

Merleau-Ponty believes that the object is a whole or a set of attributes, and none of its traits can be completely separated from another. This combination of attributes is by no means inferred, but is evident in the object itself. In fact, the object is a collection of these traits and aspects. If the object did not have this shape and touch, it would not have this color. In other words, the object has a voice or a single tone that resonates in all its features with all their diversity. Consequently, in the object, there is a kind of consciousness and empathy, which links each of its attributes to another (Piravi-vank, 2010: 108-107).

The bonding of the senses and their inseparability in perception makes us understand the general constituents rather than the qualities, and because qualities are not given to us in each individual perception, we cannot distinguish between the different senses. That is why Cezanne says: You should be able to paint the smell of the trees (Basiri, 2014: 48). That is why, in modern art media, when faced with a multimedia art structure, its various qualities - sound, image, layout, lighting, and so on - are not considered as separated and apart; but rather percept the collection as a single artistic object. In fact, we are faced with a single artwork, not a work that consists of sound, image, light, and other things.

Interconnectedness: Common World

According to Merleau-Ponty, the universe is not an object for observing and recognizing the subject and limited in reason and understanding of the subject. But the embodied object is in the midst of the world. Embodiment and corporality include two simultaneous levels of the subject, which both passively receive and actively express the feeling (Broadhurst, 2012: 228).

One of the important points in the process of perceiving the work of art, from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty, is recognizing that seeing is intertwined with the presence and physical interaction with the atmosphere of the work. This theory means being in the world as a fluctuation and fluidity between oneself and others, and proposes a physical relationship between the subject and the body of the world (Sayyad & Amir Rood, 2016: 5).

The subjective role of the audience in perceiving the work of art through embodiment and corporality is the cause of its physical tension with the world and others. This means that my body and others are exposed to each other's intention and movement before the thought process. The body plays both as a viewer and as an object that can be seen. My body can see and be seen at the same time. Receives by another while receiving. My body as a sensory receptor is only part of the world complemented by another complementary vision. Therefore, neither I, nor the other has a definite and unchangeable identity, because they are constantly changing in nature.

Merleau-Ponty points out with emphasis that: "The body and the world should be seen as intertwined ligaments in a "flesh", which not like a state and reaction (let alone stimulus and response). But as a kind of "intersection", a kind of "backwardness" or in the "complexity" of the strands in a single woven" (Carman, 2011: 123).

Merleau-Ponty believes that we are necessarily experiencing subjects and other people who share the world like ourselves. We are consciousness, not just awareness of the world but also consciousness of other subjects (Matthius, 2007: 171).

This point is very much emphasized in modern artistic media. In other words, the emphasis is on both the physical (personal) and the inter-physical (inter-personal) sight. In this two-way interaction, we open up the possibilities of ourselves to one another, and the other also puts itself on us (Basiri, 2014: 50). In simple words, in the modern art media, including interactive art, the audience, in addition to the perception that influences the work and interaction with the artist, has a perceptual experience of the actions and activities of other audiences. And, basically, the perception of the audience is dependent each other's activities, and this is the point that Merleau-Ponty mentions as the "common world" and its interconnectedness. Merleau-Ponty's subject matter is not independent of others' actions and is always subject to the will of others. The foundation of this common world is also embodiment.

Pre-reflective perception

"Phenomenology is an attempt to escape the theoretical structures, science and philosophy by which we seek to acquire intellectual control over our experience, and return to a simple description of our pre-reflective conflict with the world, which implies theoretical construct of them" (Matthias, 1387: 42).

Merleau-Ponty believes that our physical condition in perception makes our understanding and reception of the world pre-reflective and pre-conscious. Before we become conscious, we are the body which understands and perceives the world (Sabti et al., 2016: 46). Simply put, before we understand the world by mind, we see its effects objectively and tangibly and in a physical manner. Therefore, the theory of perception is physical, not mental. This form of perception is shaped not by our individual senses, but by physical states, combined with our senses, before thinking about it.

According to Merleau-Ponty, Cezanne was an artist who challenged traditional criteria and gave the world a fresh look. From this perspective, Merleau-Ponty saw Cezanne in line with his findings and views. In other words: "Prior to the pre-conceptualization of a perception based on science and experience, is Cezanne's first genius, that is, he first changes his kind of sight." (Gholami, 2013: 53).

As previously said, Merleau-Ponty believes that our way of understanding is blended with embodiment and our being in the world, simultaneously and with other phenomena. This kind of reception is not an inner, subjective, and perceptual object in contrast to the outside world, but rather the physical form of the subject, before any thought and reasoning with the world. An interactive global interplay between the audience, the artist and the effect that understanding these from each other is a pre-requisite.

In an interactive work, when the audience enters the world, before any thought of the work, it first tries to establish a physical connection with it, and have a pre-reflective perception according to Merleau-Ponty.

Comparative table:

	Components of Merleau-Ponty's views	Interactive art	Description
1	Sensory perception: perception embodiment	✓	In an interactive work, unless the audience is physically interacting with the work, it cannot understand the meaning of it. Therefore, according to Merleau-Ponty's theory, perception is an embodied issue not mental.
2	Audience acting	✓	New art media call the audience for active involvement in artwork. The audience is not passive against the work with mere mental action, but must be actively and physically involved in creating the piece.
3	Hollism (Gestalt)	✓	Since interactive art is a multimedia art, the audience, when faced with the work, does not see its different media, such as sound, image, light, color, performer, etc., and they all appear as a single collection, which is the interactive work.
4	Interconnectedness: Common World	✓	In an interactive artwork, not only the work affects the audience, but also the audiences' actions affect each other. According to Merleau-Ponty's theory, this influence of the audience on each other, is the common world.
5	Pre-reflective perception	✓	The interactive art's audience, when it comes to dealing with an artwork, establishes a physical connection with the work before thinking about the works concepts. In fact, before any thought, he tries to engage in various aspects of the work and engage with it, and the reason for this, according to Merleau-Ponty, is nothing but the audience's embodiment.

Conclusion

Merleau-Ponty, in his phenomenological view of art, attempted to replace existential phenomenology with transcendental phenomenology. Hence, the main issue in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty is the problem of the body and the world. In his view, empirical and rationalist philosophical theories were not enough to understand the relationship between man and the world because the initial assumption of these theories

is the existence of a static universe that is analyzed and evaluated by the subject, while in this confrontation manner the interaction between the subject and the object is not taken into account.

In the new artistic media, audience is not a passive subject to the work of art, but must be actively involved in order to create and give meaning to it. With Merleau-Ponty, center of cognitive experience is the aesthetic experience of the body. He believes that the perception and understanding of the work of art, is also physical in its essence as much as it is subjective. In an interactive artwork, the most important factor in understanding the work is the experience of real bodies and real environment.

As it was investigated, there are common components between Merleau-Ponty's views and the characteristics of an interactive work such as sensory perception, audience, holism (Gestalt), interconnectedness and pre-reflective perception. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty's views on physical perception and in terms of interactive art components, it can be concluded that modern art media and contemporary art practices, including interactive art, can be analyzed.

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