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ARTICLE

How to Conduct Research in Macrophenomenology: Methodological Issues

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Abstract

Macrophenomenology is an emerging field that requires clearer methodological foundations for examining social phenomena that exceed individual perspectives and cannot be fully constituted from a single analytical standpoint. The aim of this paper is to outline some basic methodological guidelines for research in macrophenomenology. The study employs a theoretically oriented qualitative design combining philosophical inquiry, textual analysis, and secondary-data interpretation. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Luc Marion, it conceptualizes macrophenomena as global and saturated phenomena and examines three cases as methodological models: Merleau-Ponty's readings of Stendhal and Durkheim, and contemporary public-opinion research on inflation in Argentina. The analysis shows that macrophenomena cannot be grasped through a panoramic perspective or reduced to either subjective experience or externally objectified social facts. Instead, they involve relations of verticality, reversibility, and non-coincidence between micro- and macro-level strata of social experience. These findings provide methodological principles for approaching phenomena whose meanings exceed any single horizon of analysis. The discussion further suggests that this framework may be relevant for the study of religious phenomena, particularly when lived experience, collective practices, symbolic meanings, and institutional dimensions intersect without being reducible to one another. The paper contributes to the methodological development of macrophenomenology while opening further possibilities for its application to complex social and religious phenomena.
Keywords: Macrophenomenon; Saturated Phenomenon; Reversibility; Verticality; Intertwining

Macrophenomenology merupakan bidang yang sedang berkembang dan memerlukan landasan metodologis yang lebih jelas untuk mengkaji fenomena sosial yang melampaui perspektif individual dan tidak dapat sepenuhnya dikonstruksi dari satu sudut pandang analitis. Tujuan artikel ini adalah merumuskan beberapa pedoman metodologis dasar untuk penelitian dalam macrophenomenology. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif berorientasi teoretis yang memadukan telaah filosofis, analisis tekstual, dan interpretasi data sekunder. Dengan merujuk pada Maurice Merleau-Ponty dan Jean-Luc Marion, artikel ini mengonseptualisasikan macrophenomena sebagai fenomena global dan jenuh, serta mengkaji tiga kasus sebagai model metodologis: pembacaan Merleau-Ponty terhadap Stendhal dan Durkheim, serta penelitian kontemporer mengenai opini publik tentang inflasi di Argentina. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa macrophenomena tidak dapat dipahami melalui perspektif panoramik maupun direduksi hanya pada pengalaman subjektif atau fakta sosial yang diobjektifikasi secara eksternal. Sebaliknya, macrophenomena melibatkan relasi vertikalitas, reversibilitas, dan ketidakberimpitan antara lapisan mikro dan makro dalam pengalaman sosial. Temuan ini menawarkan prinsip-prinsip metodologis untuk memahami fenomena yang maknanya melampaui satu horizon analisis. Pembahasan lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa kerangka ini juga relevan untuk mengkaji fenomena keagamaan, khususnya ketika pengalaman hidup, praktik kolektif, makna simbolik, dan dimensi institusional saling berkelindan tanpa dapat direduksi satu sama lain. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan metodologis macrophenomenology sekaligus membuka kemungkinan penerapannya pada fenomena sosial dan keagamaan yang kompleks.

A. INTRODUCTION

Macrophenomena are the central object of phenomenological sociology because they concern dimensions of social reality that cannot be adequately reduced to subjective meaning, intersubjectivity, or face-to-face relationships. These dimensions remain important, but macrophenomena become particularly relevant when the aim is to grasp the social in its broader and more complex configurations. They refer to phenomena whose meaning emerges through relations among different scales, perspectives, and strata of experience rather than from isolated individual experiences alone.

This perspective may also prove relevant for approaching religious phenomena. Religious experience certainly involves subjective meanings, beliefs, practices, and interpersonal relations, yet its social significance may exceed what can be constituted from an individual perspective or fully objectified as a social fact. Rituals, collective experiences, sacred symbols, and experiences interpreted as revelation may involve meanings that unfold across individual, collective, historical, and symbolic strata. In this sense, the religious provides an important field in which the relation between micro- and macrophenomenal dimensions can be philosophically reconsidered.

Recent methodological scholarship has increasingly sought to translate phenomenology from a philosophical orientation into a more explicit framework for qualitative inquiry. Across this literature, phenomenological research is understood as requiring sustained attention to lived experience while maintaining coherence between its philosophical assumptions and practical decisions concerning research questions, data generation, researcher positioning, and analysis. Rather than reducing experience to conventional coding or abstract categories, phenomenological inquiry emphasizes openness to how phenomena are given, reflexive engagement with pre-understanding, and analytical

procedures capable of preserving the complexity of lived experience (van Manen 2017; Sundler et al. 2019; Frechette et al. 2020). Related methodological debates in the study of religion have extended this concern by connecting phenomenological inquiry with empirical and sociological perspectives and by emphasizing the embodied, affective, social, historical, and cultural dimensions through which religious experience becomes meaningful (Völker 2022; Zembylas 2023). Despite these advances, existing methodological discussions remain largely oriented toward lived experience, interpretive procedures, and particular dimensions of religious experience, while giving less attention to how phenomenology can methodologically address phenomena constituted across interconnected micro- and macro-level strata. This unresolved problem provides the point of starting point for the present study, which aims to outline basic methodological guidelines for research in macrophenomenology.

The study of macrophenomena raises particular methodological questions because, in phenomenology, the question of "what is it" a phenomenon cannot be separated from the question "how is it given to us." Indeed, according to Heidegger "[t]he expression 'phenomenology' signifies primarily a concept of method. It does not characterize the what of the objects of philosophical research in terms of their content, but the how of such research." (Heidegger 2010: 28). Consequently, research on macrophenomena must pay particular attention to the modes through which such phenomena become accessible to experience.

This methodological problem becomes especially important when phenomena exceed the capacity of a single perspective to constitute them completely. Such a possibility opens macrophenomenology to Jean-Luc Marion's account of saturated phenomena, in which phenomenality may exceed the conceptual and intentional conditions through which a subject attempts to grasp what appears. This framework is particularly suggestive

for religious phenomena, where what is given may resist exhaustive conceptualization without thereby becoming irrational or methodologically inaccessible.

Our focus will therefore remain on the methodological aspects of macrophenomenology. Since this philosophically informed methodology requires a theoretical foundation, the following section first outlines the concept of macrophenomenon through its global character and its possible relation to saturated phenomenality. This theoretical clarification will subsequently provide the basis for considering different methodological strategies for approaching macrophenomena.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, theoretically oriented research design that combines philosophical inquiry, textual analysis, and secondary-data interpretation. This design is appropriate because the study does not seek to test causal hypotheses, but to clarify methodological principles for investigating macrophenomena and to examine how these principles operate across different forms and levels of social experience. More specifically, the research addresses not only what macrophenomena are, but also how they become accessible to inquiry and how micro- and macro-level strata of experience can be methodologically related.

Data were collected through the purposive selection of philosophical, sociological, literary, and secondary empirical materials based on their conceptual and methodological relevance to macrophenomenology. The primary philosophical sources include works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work on nature, institution, perception, verticality, reversibility, and the relation between micro- and macrophenomenal strata, along with Jean-Luc Marion's account of saturated phenomena. The study also draws on Merleau-Ponty's reading

of Stendhal's The Charterhouse of Parma and Durkheim's Suicide as paradigmatic cases, as well as contemporary secondary empirical materials on public perceptions of inflation and rising prices in Argentina, including qualitative findings from Trespuntozero and quantitative survey data reported from La Sastrería and Trespuntozero. These materials were selected purposively because they illuminate different characteristics and methodological problems of macrophenomena, rather than as part of a systematic literature review. The Argentina materials are therefore treated as secondary empirical data and not as an independent representative study conducted by the present research.

The data were analyzed through comparative conceptual interpretation conducted in three stages. First, the philosophical texts were examined to identify the defining characteristics of macrophenomena and the analytical concepts of globality, saturation, verticality, intertwining, and reversibility. Second, these concepts were applied comparatively to three cases: Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Stendhal, the Durkheim's sociological analysis of suicide, and contemporary perceptions of inflation and rising prices in Argentina. Each case was examined to determine how different phenomenological strata become accessible, how the limits of particular perspectives emerge, and how micro and macro-level forms of experience and knowledge relate without reducing one to the other. Third, the findings across the three cases were compared to identify recurring methodological principles, particularly the limits of panoramic representation and the relations of verticality, reversibility, and non-coincidence among different strata. Through this procedure, the cases function as methodological models rather than as equivalent empirical datasets.

Theoretical Framework

To my knowledge, Merleau-Ponty was the first to use the word "macrophenomenon." He did so in the third course on Nature he taught at the Collège de France, where he mentions five exemplary macrophenomena: myth, the phenomenal body, language, suicide, and the living being. Myth is "a structural macrophenomenon" that best indicates the relation between humanity and animality (Merleau-Ponty 2003). The phenomenal body is a macrophenomenon, unlike the objective body, which is a microphenomenon; this comparison is only possible if we set aside the notions of body-object and spirit, of In-itself and For-itself, to think their Intertwining (Merleau-Ponty 2003). Language is a macrophenomenon because it has an architectonic and a "*quasi-natural life in the indivision of meaning and signifier.*" (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 227). Suicide is a macrophenomenon since it is a "*statistical fact […] not linked vertically to the psychological plane.*" (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 263). And living beings are "*configurations of macrophenomena*" emerging from the level of the "*hard nucleus*" of being, whose macro properties cannot be deduced from its micro properties (Merleau-Ponty 2003).

What do all these macrophenomena have in common? We may say that they are global phenomena. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this with the case of life and evolution, where assuming a "global statistical approach" discloses "the collectivity of life" as an "architectonic of the sand dunes." (Merleau-Ponty 2003). As individual grains, sand displays quite different behaviors than considered as a dune, a unique, global structure. The same happens, for instance, with a sandbank: while the individual grains of sand move "according to the speed of the water in contact with the ground," on "the scale of the sandbank-year" its displacement "is random and there is a dominance of geographical factors" (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 264). It follows that, considered globally as parts of a whole, phenomena display different features and behaviors than when considered as

individual elements not integrated into a global structure. In this perspective, macrophenomena are holistic phenomena, not isolated, individual ones, nor an aggregate of them.

Merleau-Ponty brilliantly expresses this by claiming that macrophenomena have an architectonic of their own. For instance, when referring to myth, he points out that "it is not a series of fragmentary events, it is a structural macrophenomenon." (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 214) Also, some macrophenomena (such as suicide in the Durkheimian tradition) are statistical entities. For instance, perceived things are the correlate of sensible Nature as "statistical, macrophenomenal being" endowed with an architectonic of their own (Merleau-Ponty 2003). After all, it is a matter of scale (Merleau-Ponty 1968).

In this perspective, macrophenomena are large-scale phenomena; however, they are not more nor less real than microphenomena: "*The macrophenomenon and the microphenomenon are not two more or less enlarged projections of a real in itself behind them: the macrophenomena of evolution are not less real, the microphenomena not more real. There is no hierarchy between them.*" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 226-227).

Thus, macrophenomena are large-scale views—they are "*eminently perceived*" beings, "*image*." (Merleau-Ponty 2003). Also microphenomena are views: they both are views "at different scales" that find their reality in "their common inner framework *(membrure),* their nucleus, and not something behind them*:* behind them, there are only other 'views' still conceived according to the in itself-projection schema. The real is between them, this side of them." (Merleau-Ponty 1968). Summing up, macrophenomena are large-scale, global views interconnected in the inner framework of being with microphenomena in Intertwining (*Ineinander*[1]) relations.

[1] This German word drawn from Husserl means 'intertwining' and is increasingly adopted by Merleau-Ponty to describe the ontological structure of the flesh. He characterizes it as a chiasm or as a relationship of enveloping/enveloped (Landes 2013).

Macrophenomena as saturated phenomena

Merleau-Ponty's foundation of macrophenomenology in his courses on Nature aligns with the groundbreaking notions of his late philosophy, especially with his reflections on institution in the two preceding courses. There, he sets against each other the phenomenology of consciousness and the philosophy of *Stiftung* (or institution), claiming that an instituting is the opposite to constituting: "*To constitute […] is nearly the opposite of to institute: the instituted makes sense without me, the constituted makes sense only for me and for the 'me' of this instant. Constitution [means] continuous institution, i.e., never done.*" (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 8)

Lefort (2010) explains that, by contrasting the problematic of institution with that of constitution, Merleau-Ponty "*rejects, along with the idea of a constituting consciousness, that of a world in which nothing would be discovered that had not been constituted by its operations. Understood in its double sense, institution presupposes a non-coincidence between the institutor and the instituted*" (2010: xi). Accordingly:

> The sense is deposited (it is no longer merely in me as consciousness, it is not re-created or constituted at the time of the recovery). But not as an object left behind, as a simple remainder or as something that survives, as a residue. [It is deposited] as something to continue, to complete without it being the case that this sequel is determined (Merleau-Ponty 2010: 9).

Seen this way, the concept of Institution discloses a salient feature of macrophenomena: they are far from being strictly objects of consciousness. Thus, constitutive phenomenology falls short to account for them. Instead of being though as fully constituted, they should be addressed as what Marion calls "saturated phenomena,"

> In the sense that in opposition to poor or common phenomena (for which the fulfilling intuition always manages to enter a concept that embraces and contains it), its intuition far exceeds the breadth of any possible concept; and in the sense that, far from lacking significance (of rationality), they require more than one, even an indefinite number, according to an endless hermeneutic. Saturated phenomena then demand

> a never-finished work of rationality, which is disconcerted by excess and not by lack (Marion 2005: 12).

Marion's remarks concerning saturated phenomena certainly apply to macrophenomena. Also in their case, intuition exceeds every possible concept or, in other words, "surpasses the concept." (Marion 2005) This excess can be appreciated in the impossibility of constituting its object, which also becomes incapable of being looked at, without thereby ceasing to appear.

Indeed, one of the consequences of the saturation of the phenomenon is that the Ego experiences the disagreement between a phenomenon and "the subjective conditions of its experience," which makes it impossible for him to "constitute an object." (Marion 2005) However, this failure to objectify in no way implies that absolutely nothing appears here; in contrast, intuitive saturation, precisely inasmuch as it makes it unattainable, unsustainable and absolute (unconditioned), is imposed as an exceptional phenomenon by excess, not by default (Marion 2005). Thus, "*the saturated phenomenon refuses to let itself be seen as an object*", although not by default but, on the contrary, "*because it appears with a multiple and indescribable excess that nullifies any effort of constitution.*" (Marion 2005: 37) In this sense, the saturated phenomenon is "not objectifiable," and this is not because it escapes objectivity but,

> More essentially, objectuality (a property and status of the object, as opposed and abandoned to the gaze of a subject); the saturated phenomenon contradicts the subjective conditions of experience precisely in the fact that it does not allow itself to be constituted as an object. In other words, although exemplary visible, however, it does not allow itself to be looked at. The saturated phenomenon occurs insofar as it is, according to the modality, incapable of being looked at (Marion 2005: 37).

Now, if saturated phenomena are incapable of being looked at by an I (Marion 2005: 35ff.), then they must impose themselves to sight "*with such an excess of intuition, that they can no longer be reduced to the conditions of*

experience (to objectuality), therefore to the Self that fixes them." (Marion 2005: 38). The excess and saturation of this kind of phenomena is fundamental in the field of macrophenomenology. Saturated phenomena pose interesting methodological challenges, some of which I intend to address in the next section. They might serve as models of possible research strategies.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The preceding theoretical statements provide solid bases for a methodological discussion. My aim is to offer three possible research strategies for addressing macrophenomena in fieldwork. I will do that not through speculation but following different examples which I will propose as plausible models of research in macrophenomenology. They are not the only valid designs, but they are outstanding examples of how to proceed.

To that aim, fortunately we can rely on Merleau-Ponty's perspicuous comments. I will draw inspiration from two examples he provides in his third course on Nature and then will add another one from current research in public opinion which, in my view, synthesizes important features from the two previous cases and takes our methodological discussion one step further.

The first example comes from Merleau-Ponty's remarks on Stendhal's masterpiece *The Charterhouse of Parma*, the second one is taken from his comments on Durkheim's *Suicide,* and the third one is inspired in contemporary research in public opinion in Argentina. Taken together, these three examples reveal different, though complementary, methodological ways to access macro-phenomena.

1. A paradigmatic account of saturated phenomena in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Stendhal

While referring to macrophenomena in his third course on Nature, Merleau-Ponty uses Fabrice in The Charterhouse of Parma to illustrate the "scalar structure of the real" in the differentiation of "temporal spatial levels" between the micro and the macro, and thus distinguishes the personal perspective from the historical perspective. From this famous scene, he concludes that different phenomenological strata exist and that their complementarity prevents us from focusing simultaneously on the micro and the macro (Merleau-Ponty 2003).

This impediment works in a similar way to saturated phenomena, since it produces a kind of impossibility of constituting its object, which then becomes incapable of being looked at. As said, saturated phenomena refuse to let themselves be seen as objects because they appear with an excess that nullifies any effort of constitution. And this is exactly what happens to Fabrice: he cannot constitute the event he is living. He does not see the Battle of Waterloo but only experiences a kind of bedazzlement. During that battle, and in European history at the time, much more was going on than Fabrice experienced firsthand, much of which had consequences for his own life even though he was unaware of them.

The description of this famous scene and its phenomenological consequences is best appreciated in a previous comment by Merleau-Ponty, whose interest in Stendhal did not spring in his last years. Already in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he commented on this very scene in terms that could be enlightening for our purpose. There, he posses the problem of the existential modality of the social:

> The question is always how I can be open to phenomena which transcend me, and which nevertheless exist only to the extent that I take them up and live them; how the presence to myself *(Urpräsenz)* which establishes my own limits and conditions every alien presence is at the same time depresentation *(Entgegenwärtigung)* and throws me outside myself (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 323).

Even thou the terms used here still belong to the phenomenology of consciousness akin to the early Merleau-Ponty (existence, transcendence, etcetera), his stance on this specific issue is already aligned with his late philosophy which gives raise to macrophenommenology (mostly, the idea that this kind of phenomena are not one-sided but complex articulations of strata). This perspective also resonates with Durkheim's conception of social facts as external to individuals. While Merleau-Ponty's notion of being "thrown outside oneself" refers to the subject's embodied openness to a world that exceeds individual consciousness, Durkheim's notion of exteriority concerns the existence of social realities beyond individual will and consciousness. Despite their different theoretical foundations, both perspectives challenge the assumption that social experience can be understood solely through individual subjectivity.

Among the many similarities one might find between these two different comments on *The Charterhouse of Parma*, the major one is that in both cases Merleau-Ponty makes it clear that the social is not an object of representation. The idea expressed in *Nature* that macrophenomena are not views is already present in *Phenomenology of Perception*:

> Primarily the social does not exist as a third person object. It is the mistake of the investigator, the 'great man' and the historian to try to treat it as an object. Fabrice would have liked to see the Battle of Waterloo as one sees a landscape, but found nothing but confused episodes. Does the Emperor really see it on his map? It reduces itself in his eyes to a general plan by no means free from gaps; why is this regiment not making headway; why don't the reserves come up? (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 322).

According to Merleau-Ponty, the social is not an object that could be grasped entirely. In the words used in his late works, it is not a plainly constituted object. For Fabrice, as well as for the Emperor, the Battle of Waterloo is not a landscape but a set of confused episodes—a bedazzlement, one may say in line with our previous remarks. This kind

of overall view is rather an illusion of the social scientist. In Merleau-Ponty's words, it is only a historian's representation:

> The historian who is not engaged in the battle and who sees it from all angles, who brings together a mass of evidence, and who knows what the result was, thinks he has grasped it in its essential truth. But what he gives us is no more than a representation; he does not bring before us the battle itself since the issue was, at the time, contingent, and is no longer so when the historian recounts it (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 322).

In contrast with historian's representation of the battle, there is a "true Waterloo," which "resides neither in what Fabrice, nor the Emperor, nor the historian sees, it is not a determinable object, it is what *comes about* on the fringes of all perspectives, and on which they are all erected." (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 322). Once again, we can find in Merleau-Ponty's comments an implicit allusion to saturated phenomena; and, more interestingly, a reference to the role played by the scientist in the establishment of a marcrophenomenon. This opens the door to our second example, taken from the history of sociology.

2. Suicide as The Paradigmatic Macrophenomenon in Classical Sociology

As seen in section B.1, Merleau-Ponty mentions five exemplary macrophenomena across different sciences, the only sociological one being suicide. Drawing inspiration on Durkheim, he describes it as a statistical fact not linked vertically to the psychological plane. This means that, in order to address it properly, we must

> Overcome psychological motivations; we do not need to wait for the achievement of psychology in order to do sociology. 'The statistical fact of suicide is not linked vertically to the psychological plane'. There are 'phenomenological strata.' There is a complementarity that forbids the simultaneous fixing on the micro and the macro (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 263).

Accordingly, macrophenomena are not simply opposed to microphenomena; instead, they involve complex relationships. Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty remarks that their complementarity does not allow us to address both aspects at oce. Presumably, this is also why macrophenomena are not global views since they are not given from a panoramic perspective (as mentioned in the previous section regarding Stendhal's novel). Also worth noting is that Merleau-Ponty describes the complementarity of the sociological and the psychological planes of suicide as "vertical," which means that it involves multiple layers.

Generally speaking, the vertical is not comprised in the horizontal, i.e., in the horizons of its intelligibility. The horizontal is a closed sphere of meaning in which even novelty is explained by preexisting structures. It is described as horizontal because each new event contributes another occurrence that can be understood and explained within an established framework of intelligibility. The vertical, instead, stems from a different context, introducing an unexpected meaning that bursts in. One may say, in a way, that verticality is a kind of saturated phenomenon inasmuch as it exceeds its horizon.

Verticality also concerns the articulation of strata. It links the linear horizontal order to lower and higher orders as in the case of founding relationships (*Fundierung*), for instance. For our problem at hand, verticality means that, as regards suicide, the psychological plane is open to the transcendence of the sociological plane. The complementarity of the different strata of macrophenomena (in our case, of the individual and social planes of suicide) does not refer to the objective and causal order nor to the emergence of more complex forms from less complex ones, as the "philosophy of the horizontal" does, but to the "invasion" of the vertical dimension into the horizontal order in a "nondualist fashion." (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 250-251)

Complementarity also implies reversibility, which is one of the features of macrophenomena. However, this fundamental notion "must be recognized as in principle possible but as never in fact completed, since a *coincidence* between the two poles would negate the spacing or *écart* by which Being appears as the invisible of every visible." (Landes 2013, 198) Reversibility *"is neither disjunction nor coincidence/identity because it always miscarries at the last moment […] thereby opening up a crack for contingency […]; the unity-in-difference, the chiasm."* (Landes 2013, 354)

Let's now retrieve the example of suicide in the light of these specifications provided by Merleau-Ponty. Three main features must be highlighted here: its fragmentary, reversible, and vertical nature.

First, it is not possible to address at once the psychological and sociological motivations of suicide. One must choose either one or the other. This necessarily leaves the other side (the reverse) unattended. This makes it impossible for the individuals involved to have a global view of a macrophenomenon, because it is not given in an overall, panoramic perspective. For them, macrophenomena are fragmentary events.

Second, suicide, as a macrophenomenon, involves the reversibility of the psychological and the sociological planes as a possibility, as feasible in principle but "never in fact completed" or achieved. Reversibility is a "unity-in-difference" that opens up "a crack for contingency". In this case, one must say that there is neither a complete "disjunction" nor a full "coincidence" between the psychological and the sociological aspects of suicide.

Third, reversibility is not to be taken in a "dualist fashion" but as an intertwining of different level strata, different than objective and causal relations. It is rather an "invasion" or "burstering" of one order into another. As in any macrophenomena, the components intertwined are the horizontal order (which is a closed sphere of meaning capable of explaining from within all things, even novelty) and the vertical order

(which, steming from a different context, introduces unexpected meaning, and links the horizontal order to lower and higher orders). Regarding suicide, this means that it cannot be explained solely from the psychological nor from the sociological aspects, neither by a causal relation among them, i.e. individual factors do not explain the sociological factors and vice versa. Instead, one order burst into de other; for instance, anomie as a social fact introduces new meanings that exceed the individual's understanding and motivations regarding suicide.

3. Raising prices as a macrophenomenon: a case study in public opinion

So far, the cases provided consisted in secondary data analysis by Merleau-Ponty, based on Stendhal's novel and on Durkheim's book on suicide. Let's see now how macrophenomenology works in real life analysis. In the following I will apply macrophenomenolgy to the analysis of inflation in Argentina. This has been historically a big issue. The country usually has higher inflation rates than other countries in the region and one of the highest rates in the world. In a way, Argentinians got used to live and survive in high inflation contexts. In such circumstances, suspicions that the government is lying about inflation have frequently been raised. However, recently, something new has come up: the idea that the evolution of prices is disentangled from inflation processes, as if they were two different phenomena—which, of course, is very strange, and to the eyes of the economists, is a contradiction in terms since inflation is, precisely, a general increase in prices.

Doing qualitative research with focus groups, the consulting group Trespuntozero found that Argentinians are experiencing prices variations as something different than inflation. They are not just claiming that official statistics are inaccurate or that the government is lying about it (which are historical claims) but that something odd is happening. Some people say that "inflation is falling, but prices are rising day by day,"

(Trespuntozero 2024) and this happens to be uncomprehensible: "*Inflation is going down, but prices are going up more than inflation, I don't know how to explain that.*" (Trespuntozero 2025).

Far from being a marginal opinion, this became a prevalent representation (Durkheim might call it a collective representation). A recent poll showed that 3 out of 4 Argentinians agree that prices are rising more than inflation. (La Sastrería and Trespuntozero, 2025).

Table 1.

Agreement with the statement:"Prices are rising more than inflation"

Argentina. May 2025[2]

AGREEMENT	TOTAL	Gender		Age			Education level			Location	
		M	W	18-29	30-49	50+	Primary	Secondary	Postsecondary	Buenos Aires Area	Provinces
Strongly agree + Agree	74.5	72.5	76.5	68.8	77.3	75.9	73.3	74.3	75.6	74.5	74.4
Disagree + Strongly disagree	20.4	23.3	17.6	23.1	20.8	19.6	20.7	19.2	22.0	20.1	20.6
Do not respond	5.1	4.2	5.9	11.1	2.0	4.6	5.9	6.5	2.4	5.3	5.0

Source: La Sastrería and Trespuntozero, 2025.

The issue hit the national media, where this statement was repeatedly quoted and Trespuntozero's CEO, Shila Vilker, was interviewed as regards this finding (just to mention a few sources, see Liotti 2024; Navarro 2025; Alonso 2025; Rosso 2025). So far pure, simple data. Let's now compare different analysis perspectives. What might mainstream sociology argue? How would classical phenomenology proceed? Does macrophenomenology have something else to say? Does it make a difference?

On the one hand, mainstream sociologists would probably argue that inflation is what the official statistics, academic researchers, and

[2] Technical sheet: Harvest date: May 12-15, 2025. Scope: National. Sampling design: Weighted data by sex, age, and education level. Universe: Population aged 16 or older living in private households with internet access from a home PC or smartphone. Confidence: 95%. Sampling error: +2.4%. Sample size: 1,600 cases. Collection instrument: Semi-structured questionnaire. Survey technique: CAWI.

consulting groups measure. The claim might be that inflation is a general rise in prices that only scientific and technical research can objectively measure. So, in the last analysis, inflation is something the social sciences know best. Commonsense representations about it would presumably be inaccurate and distorted. So, the mainstream sociologist might tend to proceed as "the historian" in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of *The Charterhouse of Parma*, aiming to bring together "a mas of evidence" and determine its object "in its essential truth." From this perspective, there would be an objective truth about the evolution of prices, which ultimately equates to what we call inflation in statistical analysis.

On the other hand, classical phenomenologists might hold to the first-person perspective and argue that "real inflation" is the inflation lived. From this angle, people's representations about the rise of prices would be the right ones, and inflation rates provided by academic and official statistics would be abstract, false representations. This presupposes, in line with the philosophy of consciousness, that one can properly grasp an object. Briefly, it takes for granted that the rise in prices can properly be constituted as a phenomenon for the I who experience it. However, something odd happens. First-person experience contradicts this view, since that which is given is lived as unexplainable, bewildering. As in any saturated phenomena, the rise in prices is impossible to look at straightforwardly. People notice something they cannot understand but which they doubtless receive as a given. So, it would be the classic phenomenologist (not the person interviewed) who claims that the ultimate truth about inflation lies in the ordinary experience of prices. People are not so confident in their own constitutive capacities as regards this phenomenon, which they live as saturated (if I may say).

Macrophenomenology, instead, does not abide with one-sided perspectives. It refuses to choose sides. Moreover, it states that choosing one side makes it impossible to also choose the other because they cannot

be simultaneously fixed. Thus, the "truth" about the rise in prices does not lie unilaterally on the "objective" measures provided by inflation rates, nor on the subjective experience of consumers. It does not refuse any of them, either. Nor it does construct a "total" truth by adding both perspectives. "The real" (in Merleau-Ponty's wording) does not lie in lived inflation nor in measured inflation nor in addition of both, but "in between" them. The truth about prices (to quote again from Merleau-Ponty 2005, 322) "is not a determinable object, it is what *comes about* on the fringes of all perspectives, and on which are all erected." The macrophenomenon of rising prices is given in the saturation of both the horizon of the ego who looks at it and the horizon of the scientist who measures it. It exceeds both horizons, which are intertwined in vertical and reversible relations of non-coincidence.

D. CONCLUSION

This study shows that macrophenomena cannot be adequately grasped through a single panoramic perspective or reduced either to subjective experience or to externally objectified social facts. Across the three methodological cases examined, macrophenomena emerge through relations among different phenomenological strata that remain interconnected without fully coinciding. The analysis identifies verticality and reversibility as central methodological principles for understanding these relations, while saturation indicates the limits of any single perspective in exhaustively constituting the phenomenon. Taken together, these findings provide basic methodological guidelines for examining how micro- and macro-level strata of social experience intersect without reducing one to the other.

Methodologically, macrophenomenology offers a sociological perspective that moves beyond treating micro and macro as separate or hierarchically ordered levels of social reality. Instead, it directs attention to

how subjective experience, collective meanings, social representations, and objectified forms of knowledge emerge through relations across different strata. This perspective is also conceptually relevant to the study of religious phenomena, where lived experience, collective practices, symbolic meanings, and institutional dimensions may intersect without being reducible to a single analytical horizon. Marion's account of saturated phenomena is particularly useful here for recognizing that the excess of a phenomenon over a particular perspective does not make it analytically inaccessible, but requires attention to multiple and non-coinciding modes of givenness.

The study contributes primarily by clarifying a methodological orientation rather than providing a fully operational empirical research protocol. Its main limitation is therefore that the proposed principles are developed through selected philosophical, sociological, and secondary empirical materials, while their application to other social domains, including religious phenomena, has not been empirically demonstrated here. Further research should operationalize verticality, reversibility, saturation, and relations among phenomenological strata through more specific procedures of data collection and analysis, and test their analytical usefulness across diverse empirical settings. Research on religious phenomena may provide a particularly productive field for such development by examining how individual experience, collective ritual, symbolic representation, institutional authority, and broader social structures intersect across micro- and macro-level strata.

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