PERCEIVING INDETERMINACY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
OF THE PERCEPTUAL RITE OF PASSAGE
FOR PREADOLESCENTS

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It is the fundamental insight of phenomenology that meaning is first and foremost - not something which we intellectually reflect on. It is not a product of the mind reworking raw, perceptual experiences. Rather meaning, and our connection to the world, are perceptual phenomena. Thus, to understand the ways in which children find meaning demands a turn toward perceptual experiences - how children see and feel. In this theoretical dissertation, I explore questions of perceptual experiences through a phenomenological framework that I refer to as the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP). The conceptual framework, which centers on attentiveness, labors to help us understand the ontology of perception for preadolescents and how meaning emerges through everyday encounters.
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My greatest affections are for those things that come back to fill the space they left behind. It is that presences that lives in the generosity I have experienced throughout the course of my doctoral studies. To my dissertation committee, words will never work to express my gratitude and appreciation of the encouragement, mentorship, and guidance you all have provided me. It has been something uniquely special. Shaun, my niece, you have always been an inspiration to me – much love and respect. I would like to acknowledge my sister, Anita “Neda” who has impacted my entire life in such profound ways – ways that she will never really know. She is the tread the binds me to my father and mother and my future self. Finally, thanks to the creator of all things for grace, mercy, and the beautiful.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As parents and educators, how do we learn to attentively listen to children make meaning of their experiences? How do we learn to understand how children discover themselves and the worlds they inhabit – the worlds that inhabit them? In this theoretical dissertation, I explore these questions through a phenomenological framework. I use phenomenology as a scientific method to gain insights into the perceptual lives of children and their experiences (Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014). It is the fundamental insight of phenomenology that meaning is first and foremost—not something which we intellectually reflect on. It is not a product of the mind reworking raw, perceptual experiences. Rather meaning, and our connection to the world, are perceptual phenomena. Thus, to understand the ways in which children find meaning demands a turn toward perceptual experiences—how children see and feel.

As children, we have perceptual experiences that we carry over into our adult lives. As Welsh states, “any understanding of the human condition requires understanding the child’s experience” (Welsh, 2013, p. xxii). As an adult, a person’s perceptions may change, but this change does not negate what came before. In this sense, it is relevant to this dissertation to reflect on my own childhood.

As a young boy growing up in the rural Sea Islands of South Carolina, I was surrounded by the warmth and love of family and friends. I particularly had a special connection with my father. He was a tall, dark, slender man who seemed like a superhero to me. I can recall countless times when I felt him protecting me and being concerned about my wellbeing. He had nicknames for all four of his children – mine was Stinkman. He instilled a strong sense of self in each one of us. I remember listening to him profess to me about life and how to make a good life
for myself and others. He was a human being with strong morals and ethics. When I think of my father, I am always drawn to the time he taught me how to tie my shoe.

I was only about a year old. I remember it like it was just yesterday - as if time paused. I’m still standing there in the middle of the kitchen with my back toward the old 70’s avocado green refrigerator and him kneeling in front of me patiently looping one string of my shoe lace around the other and then through the holes as he pulled each in different directions. It was like a magic trick. Then he guided me through the process. I was following the gestures I saw him make – trying to make my own magic. He was watching and encouraging each moment – “that’s it Stinkman.” Then, I pulled the two strings – one in one direction and the other string in the opposite direction. What I remember most about that moment was my father’s excitement as he called out to my mother -inviting her to come witness the results of my magic trick.

As an adult, I have often thought about that moment and wondered how well I actually tied my shoe. Did my father aggrandized the event as a source of encouragement? If that is what he did, it worked. I had a solid ten years of his love and encouragement. My father died of cancer on May 23, 1982, just a month before I graduated from elementary school. Nevertheless, the transformative experiences we shared together weaved their way into the sinews of my being. The love and care that I experienced from my father has fostered the attitude I employ in my own work with children as an artist, educator, and scholar. But perhaps more importantly, it serves as a point of departure for my interest in the unique features of a child’s perception. How is it that my father’s words and gestures created a space for my self-formation and my self-understanding? How did these simple experiences shape my bodily orientation toward things in the world?
Answering such questions is not an easy task. We live in, and are governed by, a history that has marginalized the experiences of children (Reynolds & Valerio, 2017). As a visual artist and art educator, I have spent nearly 20 years working directly with young children and families in underserved communities. In that time, I have witnessed many moments that have left me curious about how children negotiate their relationships with their environment and how those negotiations impact their sense of self in the world. I have come to understand that an important aspect of working alongside children requires a special kind of listening - listening first to what children are experiencing and the ways that they might be articulating those experiences – verbally and non-verbally.

Through Preservation LINK, Inc. (PLI), a community-based non-profit that I co-founded in 1999 along with my niece, Shaun Wilson, I have witnessed the importance of having what theorist Jill Bennett (2005) calls empathic vision (p. 21) – a way of seeing and feeling with others that engenders an emergent form of new understanding. For me, this vision has developed in conjunction with the lived-experiences of children, particularly children who have been a part of populations historically made to be marginal in society.

In my work, I have used various lens-based and visual art processes such as photography, video scripting, production, and post-production (editing), as well as collage and mixed-media methods as pathways to engender a child’s ability to be curious and imaginative through the arts. An important aspect of my work includes building community partnerships with museums, universities and colleges, schools, community centers, and corporate partners to extend this belief and to create a culture of participation. What has been, and remains vitally important, is that my work with children and families include the same kind of resolute care and love I
received during my formative years as a young child, particularly for our most vulnerable children.

Several months ago, I lead a visual literacy activity with a small group of preadolescents. The children were African-American students living in the same public housing community in a large urban city in the United States and attending the same public elementary school. There were two girls and three boys. The two girls, Ami (8 years of age) and Jaz (10 years of age) were in the second and fourth grade, respectively. The three boys, Saint, Christian, and Jah were all 11 years of age in the fifth-grade. The aim of the visual art activity was to provide the children with digital cameras and to create space/opportunities to walk around the shopping mall with them as they wondered about with their cameras in hand. The trips to the shopping mall occurred twice – once with the two girls and another time with the three boys. All of the children expressed excitement about their autonomy in moving around the mall with the cameras. However, there was one encounter that did not provoke a sense of excitement, but something else.

The anecdote below describes an event that took place during the second trip with the three boys. The encounter that occurred happened in the Gucci store. I highlight this experience because it provides some interesting intersections that informed the focus of this dissertation - questions of access and denial in the moment of perceptual experiences that continue to emerge from my work with Preservation LINK.

Gucci Gang: An Anecdote

I sat waiting on a bench situated in the main corridor of the shopping mall when the three boys, accompanied by one of the directors of the community center, entered and walked towards me. I saw them in the distance and watched them walk in my direction. As the director got close
enough to notice me, I got up from the bench and reached out to embrace her stretched out hand and warm smile. She immediately introduced the boys to me – all fifth-graders - Saint, Christian, and Jah. This was my second meeting with a group of urban African American preadolescents engaged in a visual literacy/photography project.

The boys were in a playful mode. Saint and Christian excitedly pointed and laugh with each other, appearing less attentive to what I was saying to them. Jah, on the other hand, watched me closely. His body was always turned directly towards me as his eyes attentively laid across my gestures and voice. I explained to them that we were going to hang out at the shopping mall for an hour or so to take pictures. When I mentioned that they would be able to take pictures of anything they wanted to, they all lit up. Jah, who was carefully examining his camera, quickly looked up at me in amazement. It was as if I had told him that he had won the lottery. I gave them some basic pointers on how to use the cameras (release button, preview button, etc.) and after a few moments of them taking selfies, they began to move about taking photographs of things throughout the shopping mall corridor.

Saint and Christian straightaway were drawn to the display window of a watch store. Each walked closer and closer to the display window -stopping to capture an image as they moved in. They landed on a large print advertisement of two women modeling watches and holding holiday gift boxes. The three boys all roamed around the mall -freely ebbing and flowing between objects, each other, and store employees. They laughed and played around as they took pictures of things and made selfies.

We were all walking along when all of a sudden, the boys saw the Gucci store. They all zeroed in on the store from a distance. Jah belted out, “there goes the Gucci stow [store]!” as they picked up their pace and headed directly towards and into the store. Just a couple of minutes
behind them, we (the adults) entered the store. Immediately, I noticed that their energy was different. They were no longer enthusiastic. Jah had already turned around headed out of the store. His gaze was pensive, confused even, as he peered up at us in a daze. In a saddened voice, he stated, “they kickin’ us out the stow.” I looked over at Saint and Christian. Saint stood still and held himself up in a more resistant stance, as if to say I don’t care about or like this store anymore. Christian did not seem to be as bothered as Jah and Saint. He casually continued to look around the store. What had happened inside of the Gucci “stow” all inside of just a couple of minutes? Why did the boys’ mood change from excitement to disappointment, anger, and confusion? Why and how did the event unfold the way it did when the store clerk told the boys that they could not take photos or be in the store without a parent?

During a conversation I had with the boys after the visual literacy project, I asked each of them about their experience in the Gucci store. Each one expressed a sense of anger. Saint said that the experience became “boring” when the clerk denied them access. He described the tone of the clerk’s voice through his own interpretations. When Saint mimicked how the clerk spoke to them, his voice became deep, stern and direct. His shoulders bowed forward with command. Then Saint stated, “his tone [store clerk] is what really got on my nerves.”

I was eager to learn about Jah’s experience in the mall and particularly in the Gucci store since he had seemed the most excited and the most disappointed. During our conversation, Jah was just as attentive as he was during our time in the mall – focused, listening carefully to each question that I asked. When I asked Jah about his experience in the Gucci store, he sat up taller and began to gesture with his hands about a rapper called Lil Pump who made a song called *Gucci Gang*. Jah continued telling me that the rapper “loves” Gucci and that Lil Pump had the word Gucci tattooed across his chest and even had a car painted like the Gucci brand. He said
that Lil Pump and his music is what got them “crunk” [excited] about going into the Gucci store. Jah’s excitement carried over as he began to talk about his own affections [love] for the store and the Gucci watches, backpacks, and “stuff.” Then in an instant, he sat back a bit in his seat as he expressed being “mad” when the clerk restricted their access to the store. When I asked why he felt mad, he looked me straight in the eyes and said, “They kicked us out. Wouldn’t you be mad if you got kicked out the Gucci stow?” (see Appendix A: transcription snippet of Jah’s interview about the Gucci store).

The experience that the boys and I had in the Gucci store left me wondering about rejection and belonging. What does it mean to be rejected or denied? What is the nature of the encounters that we have with/in the world and how do these encounters affect us? How does the seeing of the world originate in episodes of rejection and belonging, and how does this seeing, in some ways, challenge how society rejects and accepts individuals? In this sense, is there not a subversive power in seeing that complicates imposed binaries? In other words, how were the seeing practices of Jah and the other boys challenged and at the same time challenging what was possible for them, and others? Could we understand their orientation toward the Gucci brand inside the shopping mall and their fluid entrance into the store might have been a seeing, that in some respects, challenged/subverted a power structure associated with the brand? In the follow chapters, I endeavor to consider these kinds of questions about children and their experiences – questions about recognition, belonging, and value that emerge from our perceptual entanglement with the world.

If preadolescence reflects a developmental stage in which children begin to realize a sense of self and a sense of agency as being tethered to other things in the world (Erickson, 1963; Welsh, 2013), then how does the anecdote above help us think about a child’s understanding of
who they are and what they can become – what they have access to? There is much to be learned from the experiences of children when we learn to listen and consider their experience in empathetic ways. There is empathy for the individual children in my anecdote regarding their feelings and their reactions to the Gucci incident. This is a moment in which we can exhibit care for the wellbeing of children and help them reflect critically on their experiences. But empathy can lead even deeper. Listening carefully to the stories children tell about their experiences can reveal certain insights into perception and its workings. Here, empathy moves us to consider the ontological structures underlying personal narratives. Empathetic listening can therefore pose deep questions concerning the preconditions for having experiences of inclusion and exclusion, access and denial.

What is it about the ontological structures of seeing the world that shape children’s ideas of self? What are children seeing and, more importantly, what are they not seeing that makes them conceive, negotiate, and accept/deny ideas about selfhood? I have had many instances throughout the years of teaching photography to children that in some way or another mimic the experiences Jah, Saint, and Christian had in the Gucci store. These kinds of experiences encourage my commitment to art education and to the wellness of children and communities – these ideas always lead my intentions and actions. They serve as a continual curiosity about how children come to face themselves alongside a world of things. This connection to the wellness of children and communities is, therefore, wrapped up in the most basic kinds of questions concerning how things appear, how experience is meaningful, how seeing and hearing are oriented.
Employing New Theories to Understand Childhood Experiences

To begin to answer these questions, I turn to phenomenology as a key theoretical and methodological tool. Because phenomenology is concerned with how we experience the world from the first-person perspective, it is useful in theorizing the unique features of access and denial that preadolescents encounter. Phenomenology, according to Ahmed (2006), “emphasizes the importance of lived-experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (p. 2). In particular, I am interested in what Merleau-Ponty (1945) calls the primacy of perception - the pre-reflective, unconscious, pre-personal, and immemorial past that is the background that creates the grounding for all experiences to occur.

Perception is how we link into the world around us in meaningful ways, and as such, it is the preconscious way in which we are oriented. For Ahmed (2006), orientation is a basic phenomenological structure that indicates what we can and cannot do in the world—what we intuitively have and do not have access to.

Most phenomenologists focus on what it is like to already have an orientation, or what it is like to already have a perceptual grasp of the world. Martin Heidegger, in his seminal text Being and Time (1962), starts with an individual who is fully submerged in a world, already has an orientation, and thus the world is fully incorporated into his/her background practices. Importantly, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the young child’s phenomenological coming into the world. In his Sorbonne lectures from 1949-1952, Merleau-Ponty (2010) speaks at great length to correct misperceptions of the child in developmental psychology and to put forth a phenomenologically grounded understanding of child perception. Gallagher (2005) and Welsh (2013) follow-up on this with new insights that further develop and enrich Merleau-Ponty’s
original, child-centered phenomenology. While this literature is compelling, what I find lacking is an emphasis on the uniqueness of preadolescent perception.

In this dissertation, I am concerned with giving heightened specificity to preadolescent experiences—experiences like those of the kids I work with through Preservation LINK. It is my intuition that to ask the question “what it is like to be in the world as a preadolescent?” is to wonder about what it is like to be attentive to the phenomenon of appearances – the seen and the unseen – and what is it like to experience the indeterminate in new and unfamiliar ways?

As a way of approaching this specific form of perceptual orientation, I have conceptualized a phenomenological theory that I refer to as the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP), which labors to help us understand our attentiveness towards things in a given perceptual experience. The PRoP is a framework to consider ways in which meaning emerges from the encounters and interconnectedness that we have within the world. The structure of the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP), which I unfold in the chapters that follow, provides an ontological horizon to contemplate what it might be like to gain a perspective of difference and how the appearance of difference affects a child’s sense of self and their perspective of the world. Since the PRoP is a structure that captures both the emergence of self and the indeterminacies of a world teaming with differences, this dissertation posits three claims up front:

1. The PRoP is something we need to theorize because it is unique and cannot be conflated with children’s or adults’ phenomenology.

2. While unique to preadolescence, it is not divorced from adult perceptual grasping. Instead, I argue that the PRoP is a specifically acute and direct way to capture the indeterminate qualities of perception as such— the happenings that fall beyond our conscious awareness but are very much present and available for our attention.

3. In this sense, preadolescent perception is not simply a stage to be overcome or developed into adult perception. Instead, it offers the primary moment for thinking through perceptual problems of indeterminacy more generally.
Through an elaboration of the key structural features of the PRoP, I explore the following questions: (1) What might it be like to see the world as a preadolescent? (2) How is perception unique for this population but also how does this experience speak to perception in general? (3) How does the PRoP make possible new forms of attention and concentration, forms of access and denial? (4) How can a focus on the PRoP improve art and design education for preadolescents, especially in relation to the power of things to elicit attentiveness? And (5) How can art making encourage artists’ and art and design educators’ own attentiveness to the PRoP?

Although there has been an interest given to perception in art education, there has not been much attention to perception from a phenomenological perspective. The significance of this research is its attention to the primordial aspects of the lived-experience - the qualities of being in the world that fall silent but remain ever-present and affective – for preadolescents. This is particularly important to early childhood studies in art education because historically, art education scholars interested in childhood studies have not given the first-person account of children’s experience its fair due – children have often been rendered as experientially incomplete in one way or another (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Thompson, 2017). Therefore, it becomes vitally important to find new ways of uncovering the aspects of our experiences that are seemingly silently or non-existent.

Researchers, teachers, and caregivers who are interested in the experiences of children, fundamentally, can only truly learn about how children experience the world through the ways in which they describe and articulate their own perceptual experiences (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017; Thompson, 2017; Schulte, 2015). What is critically important is an attention toward the spatial-temporal shift that occurs during preadolescence that promotes new ways of seeing and being in
the world. A phenomenological perspective on the PRoP provides an opportunity for us to take up a critical stance on how being in the world looks for preadolescents.

Chapter Summaries

In chapter 2, “Perception as a Gap in Art Education,” I set the stage to consider the importance of perception in the field of art education. There is a small, but growing body of work in art education focused on children and art from the vantage point of perception. Scholars use materialism as a means of researching material culture in art education; early childhood and encounters with materials (Bolin & Brandy, 2003, 2012; Duncum, 2001, 2004, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017). Others look to ideas of embodiment learning and collaboration (Carpenter & Tavin, 2010; Springgay & Freedman, 2007). However, much of this work is either focused on early childhood (approximately between the ages of 0-8 years of age) or adolescent/young adults (approximately between the ages of 12-19).

My dissertation puts attention on the preadolescent stage in childhood (approximately between the ages of 7-11 years of age), which is often not directly addressed in this literature. This developmental stage between early childhood and adolescent provides a significantly unique opportunity to investigate the emergence of meaning, orientation, and its indeterminate features. In this chapter, I use interdisciplinary scholarship in phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 2010; Simms, 2008; Welsh, 2013), and art education (Acuff, 2016; Kraehe, 2017; Kraehe & Lewis, 2017; Lewis, 2015; O’Donahue, 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017; Stokes, 2016; Thomas, 2017) to place attention on the ontological nature of perception for preadolescents as a way to conceive new spaces within contemporary early childhood art education.
In chapter 3, “A Phenomenological Orientation,” I turn to phenomenology of perception to consider it as an essential aspect of understanding how experiences occur from the first-person perspective. My aim in this chapter is not an attempt to historicize perception (as in the work of Crary (1999), nor is it to develop an exhaustive review of everything written on the subject of perceptual experiences. Rather, I focus on the well-established phenomenological understandings given to us by the lineage of continental philosophers such as Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1945), and van Manen (2014) to situate key ideas such as being-in-the-world, flesh, perception, indeterminacy, and attention that shape the framework for the PRoP. In particular, I look to the work of Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1968), in which the phenomenology of perception is an embodied experience that is a part of the visible and invisible relations that humans have with things in the world. The question of what it is like to be in the world has much to do with how representations appear and come into view. It is a matter of what Merleau-Ponty (1968) calls the flesh – the entanglement of things – humans and non-human things. An attention to how materials are encountered “become tangible reminders of the many told and silent stories that make up our lives” (Bolin & Blandy, 2012, p. 40). Our seeing is not so much about the things that appear, but the temporal work of the subject that renders things as seeable.

In chapter 4, “The Perceptional Rite of Passage Defined,” I define key phenomenological features of the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP). The PRoP is important because it provides an ontological framework in which to better understand how meaning emerges in the spaces between being and becoming for the preadolescent. As a means of illustrating the phenomenological structure of the PRoP, I consider what it might be like to be in the world as a preadolescent – a developmental stage that signifies a significant change in a child’s awareness of self and world (Erickson, 1963, 1968, 1998; Merleau-Ponty, 2010; Simms, 2008; Welsh,
I illustrate key phenomenological ideas of the PRoP by extending the phenomenological features that reflect on being-in-the-world for the unique developmental stage of preadolescence. For the preadolescent, consciousness of their relations with the world reveals a significant perceptual transition. Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) concept of the flesh works to illuminate just how intersectional things are with each other through encounters that share a kind of mutuality and reversibility. These two concepts, which are made possible through the flesh, further illuminate the dialogic nature of what it means to be worldly.

I also address the question of how phenomenologies of difference shape an understanding of the perceptual rite of passage for preadolescents, and the role race, class, and gender play in my understanding of its essential features. This is important because what is at stake for the child is a political one of value. The anxiety of the PRoP signals to the kind of dissonance that comes with the asymmetries of difference. As Erickson’s (1968) psychosocial theory alludes to, children find themselves discovering that the seeing that others have of them in concert with the seeing that they project for themselves can affirm/confirm feelings of access or feelings of marginalization and denial.

In the concluding chapter, “Implications for the PRoP in Art Education,” I offer pedagogical suggestions for employing the PRoP with pre-service populations that are interested in working in formal and informal educational spaces. I also use the PRoP to address fundamental questions such as:

1. What is the usefulness of the PRoP in helping pre-service educators develop curricula for/in/through the classroom?
2. How might the principles of the PRoP manifest in one’s studio practices and filter into their teaching practices in the classroom and into social practices of art?
3. What are the implications for using the PRoP as a critical sociopolitical theory?
CHAPTER 2
PERCEPTION AS A GAP IN ART EDUCATION

In this chapter, I address the problem of perception that exist in early childhood studies in art education in the United States. The term perception, which has historically held two different meanings, is at the center of the problem addressed here. On one hand, perception reflects how one might comprehend something cognitively, while on the other hand, the word reflects a way that one senses the world through the body (Crary, 1999). In art education, the word perception has mainly been understood in terms of the former – from a cognitive position (Efland, 1990). In other words, much of the research in art education has tended to use the word perception in terms of what one thinks (on a conscious level), rather than what one feels (on a pre-conscious level). This holds true for literature focused on early childhood art education as well.

The use of the word perception, as a cognitive approach in art education research, presents a couple of problems. First, it seeks to understand how a child knows (in terms of beliefs and propositional thoughts), which often takes on an outsider’s point of view – that of the researcher and not the first-person perspective of the child, which renders children in ways that situate them as experientially incomplete (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Thompson, 2017). This omission objectifies children and their experiences and in so doing, overlooks much about the lives that children live and lead on a more embodied, pre-conscious, pre-thematic level. As Thompson (2017) claims, “our [art education] scholarly literature does seem to take children . . . for granted, as if we know who [they] are” (p. 9).

The second problem with the cognitive approach to perception is that it undervalues the role the body plays in a child’s understanding and acquisition of knowledge. Children are not mere objects that adults can project their experiences and ideologies onto - children have their
own experiences that are lived through *being* in the world of flesh, entanglements, and orientations (Kraehe & Lewis, 2017). And still, there is a third problem plaguing early childhood art education: the void of scholarship that speaks to the young child’s perceptual shifts into preadolescent.

Scholarship in early childhood art education has neglected to focus on the preadolescent child. This gap is critically significant because the spatial-temporal shift that occurs for the young child as they move into preadolescence reveals new ways that the child begins to understand the world and themselves (Simms, 2008; Welsh, 2013). For the young child, the “body as lived” becomes a “body as visible and perceived” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 425). This means that as the young child moves into preadolescence, their understanding of the world as lived through the body becomes a point of conscious fascination and perhaps anxiety. Perception and its indeterminacy suddenly becomes a potential concern. For this reason, I argue that there needs to be a focus on the perceptual shift that occurs for the young child. We need a new kind of inquiry that seeks to understand what Merleau-Ponty (1945) calls the *primacy of perception* - the experiential insights of seeing the world from a pre-conscious, embodied, first-person perspective, which serves as the grounding for all experiences to appear.

In the following sections, I move through in three phases. First, I provide a brief historical overview of the term perception as a way to highlight the differences between a cognitive, Cartesian use of the word perception versus an embodied understanding of the word. Secondly, I highlight scholarly literature within the field of art education that either directly or indirectly addresses matters of perception or seeing through visual culture. Although some of the literature review comes from books and other journals in the field of education and art education, I focus mainly on literature from two primary peer-reviewed journals in the field of art
education: Studies in Art Education and Art Education. I also focus mainly on scholarship from 2000-2018. As a touchpoint for my interest in perception, I also highlight some earlier work in art education that shares my interest in perception.

The resulting literature review is specifically broad and eclectic. This eclecticism brings together authors and positions who would otherwise be separate. Yet, this is necessary when dealing with a topic such as perception, which often migrates across bodies of literature. The goal of this chapter is not to create an in-depth review of one particular approach to perception but rather to illustrate how perception appears—often indirectly—in various modern and postmodern educational discourses.

In the later part of this section, I focus on some of the latest scholarship concerned with experiences in art education. Much of this scholarship reflects on a cognitive approach to understanding the experiences of children and art. However, I include a body of literature within art education, although not necessarily focused on preadolescence, which offers useful insights for thinking about preadolescence perception from an embodied and sociocultural approach. I conclude by claiming that a focus needs to be on preadolescent perception from an ontological perspective in order to (a) create a systematic account of perception that (b) fills the gap currently in early childhood art education.

**Perception and What It Means to See**

The visual term *to see* is a somewhat allusive word. What exactly does it mean? What is it that comprises our capacity to have visual experiences? The answer to these questions have shifted over the centuries, but what has remained stable is the notion that seeing is dialogical (Foster, 1988; Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 1968). Until the nineteenth century, vision and the act of
seeing was understood as a biological occurrence that referred to the ocular ability of the eyes (Crary, 1999). This meant that the eye was thought to function like a camera. It was “an apparatus that guaranteed access to an objective truth about the world” (Crary, 1988, p. 31). This was the position of Descartes whose philosophical ideas omitted the subjective human experience from the phenomenon of seeing. Descartes’ term *Cartesian Theater* conjectured that “as the eyes move over a scene, the information on the retina is transmitted . . . onto an inner screen . . . [of] the mind’s eye” (Pylyshyn, 2003, p. 16). Descartes believed that one’s capacity to see was a matter of a direct relationship between one’s cognitive faculties and the visualization of the outside world, which was an affordance of ocular vision. Nineteenth century philosophers fundamentally shifted the Cartesian binary of mind and object towards an understanding of vision as a perceptual experience rooted in one’s lived experiences (Crary, 2000; Jay, 1988; Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

During the mid-nineteenth century, thinking about seeing shifted. The concept of vision was increasingly understood as a visual experience that represented one’s spatiotemporal relations with/in the world. In other words, one’s ability to see had become understood to involve the subject, (not just the eyes of the subject, but the body of the subject) and his or her bodily positionality in the world. This consideration of perception, as an embodied act, persisted into the twentieth and twenty-first century. For philosophers like Bergson (1988) and Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1968), spatiotemporality was a matter of the subject’s relations with the world. It was this emphasis on the body, according to Crary (1988), that “dislocated and repositioned [vision] onto a single immanent plane . . . . Subjective vision [was] found to be distinctly temporal, an unfolding of processes within the body” (p. 35). In this, seeing became a matter of perception - relations between subject-body and objects wrapped up within a meaningful world. In other
words, perception is the experience of what the body *does* with/in the world. The embodied concept of perceptual experience is what I focus on and endorse in this dissertation.

In the following sections, I highlight scholarship that have focused on the seeing practices of children in art education. As a touch point, I briefly discuss earlier literature in art education that does attempt to investigate the social implications of children and their experiences. I then pivot to contemporary literature that focuses more on the Cartesian point of view of perception, missing both the first-hand account of experience and the body’s role in how children see the world. Lastly, I focus on two bodies of contemporary scholarship concerning issues of relationality and social justice in art education that are useful in thinking through the perceptual gap in art education. For me, these two bodies of scholarship point toward and reconnect in surprising ways with some of the earlier concerns of the 1970s in art education that were attentive to art and experience as a way to address social, moral issues in society.

**A Quick Flashback on Children and Art in Art Education**

In the 1970s, there was a notable concern for perceptual understanding in art education that promoted humanistic education (McWhinnie, 1970). Scholars such as Eisner (1973), in an article entitled “Examining Some Myths in Art Education,” highlighted an interest in children’s perception where he makes an argument that children “see the world more clearly than adults” (p. 11). In this, he claims that young children have not yet developed an “analytical” view of seeing the world (p. 12). In other words, children are able to grasp an understanding and engage with the world in the *now* without having to make sense of it in the same ways that adults are conditioned to do. I agree with Eisner that children have a unique sense of “seeing the world” but the emphasis on “clarity” might also be problematic. Perhaps what is needed here is a more
nuanced understanding of “seeing,” one which recognizes that there is always already something indeterminate about seeing that is important not only for adults but also for children (and preadolescents in particular). Further, Eisner’s emphasis on perception fully embodies a cognitivist bias. He repeatedly emphasizes the role of perception in conscious thought, linking the two too closely together, and thus missing the complexity and relative autonomy of the body in perception.

Newman (1972), in his article “Aesthetic Perception and Human Understanding” in following the work of John Dewey (1934), suggests that art education take into account children’s aesthetic perception as one that helps to teach an understanding of recognition. With this, Newman (1972) calls attention to the value systems that children encounter through their perceptual/relational aspects of making art with others. His ideas are important ones that, in some ways, have made their way into newer ways of thinking about perception in art education – ideas about encounters with material which I elaborate later in this chapter. But this approach seems to remain rooted in a cognitive bias where the body’s entanglement of the world is quickly bypassed for or smoothly transitioned into conscious reflection. Such trends continue, focusing on children between 0-8 years of age and their cognitive development (over and against how perception itself is structured). In the next section, I highlight some of this work as a way to position my argument to expand the scope of young children to include perceptual aspects of the shift into preadolescents.

Perception in Early Childhood Art Education

The field of art education has always expressed an interest in perception, in one form or another (Haanstra, 1996). In this section, my aim is to highlight the need to expand the literature
on early childhood to include the young child’s perceptual shift into preadolescents. As a way of situating my argument, I concentrate on early childhood art education, which established itself as an affiliate interest group of the National Art Education Association in 2000 with a focus on art education for young children ages 0-8 years of age (McClure et al., 2017; Reynolds & Valerio, 2017).

Over the last 20 years, perception in early childhood art education has mainly been studied from the cognitive perspective (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; James & Prout, 1997; Stokrocki, 1990). In addition, contemporary literature about children and art in art education has largely focused on issues such as: adult interpretations of children’s art making and creativity (McClure, 2011, Pavlou, 2013), socio-cultural context in children’s art (Cummings, 2012; Ivashkevich, 2009), pedagogical perspectives of visual and material culture in children’s’ artmaking (Bolin & Brandy, 2003, 2012; Duncum, 2001, 2014; Tavin, 2003), embodiment in classroom learning (Springgay & Freedman, 2007) and issues of early childhood play (Gude, 2010; Ivashkevich, 2009; Schulte, 2015). Much of these studies do not take up a first-hand account of children’s experiences in the arts. Even when the studies are couched as using methods of participatory research, the findings still lean toward a researcher/observer perspective (Ivashkevich, 2009; Schulte, 2015; Stokrocki, 1990) that does not get at the pre-reflection awareness of participants. A method such as that would require a certain kind of self-reflection – one grounded in the core structures of phenomenology.

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1 To conduct programs of professional activities at state and national levels concerning appropriate art education practices for children from 0-8 years; to inform State Associations and NAEA of current issues and research relevant to the area of early childhood education; to provide leadership in art education for young children to early childhood professional organizations, museums and other organizations involved with programs for young children; to develop materials and provide information about appropriate art education practices for the early childhood years. [https://www.arteducators.org/community/articles/67-early-childhood-art-educators-ecae](https://www.arteducators.org/community/articles/67-early-childhood-art-educators-ecae)
However, art education has taken on new ways to consider perceptual experiences. Much of the scholarship centers on ways to break against a more modernist view of art, art-making, and education. Terms such as visual culture, embodied learning and pedagogy, material culture, social media and technology have all been brought into the foreground helping us to better understand the possibility of encounters. They have come into view, in many ways, as approaches to think about pedagogical ideas, curricula, and research methods interested in the relational aspects between childhood and art. They also serve to shape conversations about more diverse, multicultural, and inclusive pedagogy (Acuff, 2016; Gadsden, 2008, Kraehe, 2016, 2017). Below, I highlight some of these scholarly works – some taking up matters directly related to children, while others focus on broader audiences. I point I want to stress is a lack of focused attention on the pre-reflective experience of preadolescence.

Visual and Material Culture

Visual culture in art education has become one of the last terms to reflect on the way we see and understand the world. At its most basic level, Henderson (1999) defines visual culture as “what it is to see and what there is to see” (p. 26). Mirzoeff’s (1999) approach concerns itself with postmodern life studied through its “genealogy, definitions, and functions” (p. 5). In other words, visual culture is interested in ways of reflecting the sociopolitical complexities and artifacts that originate from history and culture. Mirzoeff (1999) extends his thinking of visual culture as,

[Visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology [that refers to] any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil paint to television and the Internet. (p. 3)
This idea of visual culture, as one that involves mediation through technology, is one that Duncum (2001) finds faltering. He argues that a definition of visual culture that is reliant on technologies confines its possibilities. According to Duncum (2001), one should also consider visual culture as a way of seeing “real life directly [which is] a matter of seeing through a veil of mediat[ed] images” (p. 105).

A turn towards visual culture, as it reflects on everyday things, allows for the opportunity to consider how the things we experience factor into our seeing of the world. When refracted through the field of visual arts education, the term visual culture turns one’s attention away from the confines of traditional art history and aesthetics (as a form of critique) and places popular mass media artifacts (objects) as valuable foci for study (Barrett, 2015; Duncum, 2001/2014; Elkins, 2003). A visual culture approach in art education takes seriously things that historically have not found their primary purpose inside formal institutional spaces such as classrooms, museums, and galleries.

Therefore, visual culture attempts to flatten out the class and cultural distinctions between high and low art (Duncum, 2001). Visual and popular mass media culture such as cinema, billboards, advertisements, fashion, and communication design are “significantly visual and constitutive of attitudes, beliefs, and values” (Duncum, 2001, p. 104). The broadening of what can and should be looked at and considered in visual arts education provides ample opportunities for children and educators to reflect on new sites such as malls, parks, supermarkets, as well as a plethora of other everyday spaces such as neighborhoods - all to be understood as meaningful places for perceptual experiences.

In addition to visual culture, material culture, according to Bolin & Blandy (2012), also represent the everyday “items we collect in our homes, carry with us in backpacks, purses, and
pockets, and stow on shelves in the back of closets . . . delineat[ing] the entire array of objects in our world” (p. 40). They also posit that material culture objects “become tangible reminders of the many told and silent stories that make up our lives” (p. 40). In essence, the materiality of visual culture is entangled with the experience of seeing. It is a type of “biosocial” relations with the world (Schlereth, 1985, p. 5). This is to say that our perceptual experiences - our seeing - becomes enmeshed, in one way or another with the things around us. The spatial giveness of visual and material culture (the sculptural/dimensional things that are seen) establishes the structure of visibility. Mitchell (2002) urges us to consider this point about our relational disposition in the following passage:

A dialectical concept of visual [and material] culture cannot rest content with a definition of its object as the social construction of the visual field [our seeing], but must insist on exploring the chiastic reversal of this proposition . . . . It is not just that we see the way we do because we are social animals, but also that our social arrangements [our world] take the forms they do because we are seeing [perceiving] animals. (p. 171)

This passage serves as an important portal to emphasize the inner workings of perception. The chiastic reversal helps us to think in terms of the mutuality involved in our encounter with things. In this sense, visual culture discourses are to be praised for their emphasis on the entanglement of perception with a wide array of cultural things, images, and events. And yet, a shift to visual culture has also underplayed the need for an ontological reflection on perception as such—on the fundamental structure of perceptual experience and how it is lived by preadolescents in particular.

Embodiment and Encounters

Scholars such as Springgay & Freeman (2007) have addressed issues of embodied perception. In her book *Body Knowledge and Curriculum*, Springgay (2008) set out to conduct
research with secondary students to better understand body knowledge in visual art and culture. Her work examined ways in which the entanglements of the body and material produced knowledge at the secondary level. In the text, she argues for educational spaces that focus attention on the relationality of bodies and material. Springgay’s work lays out some important points that support perception, however her research addresses a homogenous group of Anglo adolescents, which in some ways still leave wide holes in the notion of relationality and embodiment, particular in the context of sociopolitical undertakings.

A similar interest is taken up by Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw (2017) in her book, *Encounters with Materials in Early Childhood Education*. Although her population differs from Springgay’s population, in that her focus is on early childhood and not adolescents, she is also interested in the entangled relations between young children and material. Her focus is on how materials work to orientate young children’s engagement. In some ways, like Jane Bennett (2010) in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Pacini-Ketchabaw (2017) looks to material such as paper, clay, blocks, and paint to examine the ways that materials do the work of encouraging and orientating the enactments of young children. What I like most about this work is the focus on the material environment and how it calls to our attention and our enactments. This is an important perspective for research that is concerned about encounters and the emergence of meaning that happens through and, in part, because of the body’s perceptual rites and responses.

In similar fashion to Pacini-Ketchabaw (2017), Sakr (2017) finds an interest in young children and their engagements with material. She looks at the “destruction” practices of five-year olds in the context of traditional mark making on paper and on electron surface such as a whiteboard. For her, destruction represents ways that children spontaneously, “undo or ruin the
products of activity” that reflect on the re/creative process. In this, the work sets out to understand the affective possibilities of destructions – possibilities that place affect as a bodily capacity in action with environments and material (Massumi, 2015). Deconstruction plays a role in how we might better understand children’s experiences and projections about creativity.

Encounters with material reflect an important understanding of how children experience the world. What kinds of gestures occur when children encounter different spaces and material can help illuminate how students find ways to be curious and learn. The examples above reflect the aim of my research agenda for preadolescents, in that it is interested in understanding the potential of encounters with a wide diversity of things through perceptual grasping. It also presents the potential to investigate environments and community spaces that have been historically marginalized in one way or another. How do objects/material call out to children, particularly preadolescents, in places of blight and economic trauma?

In a contemporary, global world where our interactions are so infused with the electronic devise we carry around with us, it is necessary to understand technology as encountered. Ivashkevich & Shoppell, (2013) took a more tech-centered approach to investigate how preadolescents engaged with digital video making as a form of play. They found that the act of creating videos reshaped old narrative and familiar themes, which offered “a more embodied and engaging path to developing critical understanding of the new media” (p.19). They witnessed the children adopt performative roles that operated to queer and create counter-narrative of classic, more familiar narratives. Ivashkevich & Shoppell’s, (2013) work provides important insights for how perceptual experiences can and do allow for old ideas to take on new understandings – new narratives. It highlights an important intervention that speaks directly to the perceptual rights that students have in renewing and self-actualizing their experiences through the arts.
Within contemporary art education, scholars are turning to perception and aesthetics to make available new ways of seeing. In similar ways to Ivashkevich & Shoppell (2013), Lewis (2015) offers us an opportunity to disrupt the familiar in ways that “affect our perceptual attunement to new varieties of presence that become possible through corporeal (dis/re)orientation of ...bodies.” (p. 61). He speaks directly to the ways that perception can disrupt, leaving systems of immunization (which attempt to seal off the body from difference and contamination) inoperable. In other words, his work serves as intervention to oppressive systems that labor to orientate our bodies in what Ahmed (2006) calls a straight line. His work situates the body front and center in this logic of disruption and redistribution of the possible. The politics of the flesh become a way of reshaping what can be seen and touched.

In another work, O’Donoghue (2015), does not seek to think about how one might go beyond what is potential, but to understand potentiality itself. He states that, “a turn to experience in art education opens the world to us as a place full of curiosity and possibility, where questions that do not make much sense are worth asking, not for their efficacy but for the places that they may take us” (p. 111). The notion of potentiality, as an openness that perceptual experiences provide, is an important tread that runs throughout all of these articles. This is concurrent with the theoretical aims of the PRoP. It is the possibility, ideally, that is present in all situations and for all children that the theory is interested in. However, we know that this is not always the case, which makes it even more critically important to understand the primacy of experience to address issues of justice and equity.
Social Justice and Equity in Art Education

Contemporary scholarship attending to issues of social justice, multiculturalism, and equity play a vital role in art education (Acuff, 2016; Dewhurst, 2011; Gerber, 2004; Keifer-Boyd, 2017; Kraehe, 2016, 2017; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). It is these issues that have inculcated themselves into the fabric of our everyday living that is central to the political nature of perceptual experiences. These issues are the ones that work explicitly and implicitly – above and below the surface. This topic serves as a pivotal aspect of the PRoP’s aim to understand perception at its ontological level. The PRoP serves as a theoretical way to address both the surface and below the surface aspects of marginalization, oppression, and subjective ways that systems labor in our lives.

In her article “Letting All Lives Speak: Inequality in Art Education and Baumgartent’s Felix Aestheticus,” Stokes (2016), directly addresses aesthetic perception and highlights the works of Merleau-Ponty and Ranciere in an effort to theorize an aesthetic approach to address equity issues in low socioeconomic population through art education. Although this literature does not address preadolescence specially, it does focus on all children -highlighting the centrality of questions pertaining to the perceptual. The concept of the Felix Aestheticus reflects on the individual who has developed sensitivity to the creative possibilities present in the materiality of experience. She states that,

The fully realized Felix Aestheticus perceives how one’s experience of the sensory world may develop into a unique artistic vision . . . [it] is the varied capacity to feel experience and communicate a distinct expression through a variety of materiality; this common capacity may flourish or be unrealized. (p.140)

What is at stake in this article is the potentiality for all students, which is a point that cannot be overstated. It reflects on an essential political characteristic of perception and the rights of all students.
In Kraehe’s (2017) article, “Arts Equity: A Praxis-Oriented Tale,” she lays out the case for her multidimensional arts equity theory aimed at bringing meaning to the everyday sociopolitical uncertainties that artist and art educators face. She puts forth valuable ideas about the power of memory and histories as she outlines six categories of her arts equity framework. I want to highlight three statements from Kraehe (2017) that I find particularly useful for thinking through a phenomenology lens:

1. Equity is grounded in a notion of justice that perceives the present as always in relationship with the past and some imagined future.
2. They [equity-minded teachers] are conscious of their roles as agents in this history who will either collaborate with the past or intercede to alter its course. And,
3. Equity-minded teachers try to understand and reckon with the ethical entanglements historical injustices impose on the present. (p. 269)

Although Kraehe (2017) does not directly cite phenomenologies of perception, these points are useful for articulating the political dimensions of perception. At the same time, a phenomenological turn toward the ontology of perception could help Kraehe anchor social justice more firmly within the perceptual realm—an anchoring that is most important to art education because its value is an orientation towards the emergence of a happening.

In conclusion, perception is a consistent, though under theorized concern in a host of art education theories. More often than not, it has been subjected to a cognitive bias, which underplays the importance of thinking through perception on its own terms. I have attempted to give a brief overview of this perceptual problematic, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of various discourses. As I see it, we can take certain elements from the authors discussed above to start to form a basis for a broader theory of perception grounded in phenomenology. In particular, I would like to highlight the following: (a) a need for a humanistic theory of perception that (b) recognizes perceptual entanglements with visual culture broadly and (c) works toward a social justice agenda. What is missing, and what could inform all these theories,
is a phenomenology of how perceptual experience is lived from the perspective of the first person. It is to this project that I now turn my attention.
CHAPTER 3
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

In this chapter, I turn to phenomenology of perception to consider it as an essential aspect of understanding how experiences occur for the first-person perspective, thus liberating perception from the cognitive bias. My aim in this chapter is not an attempt to historicize perception, nor is it to develop an exhaustive review of everything written on the subject of perceptual experiences. Rather, I focus on the well-established phenomenological understandings given to us by the lineage of continental philosophers (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 1968; van Manen, 2014), to situate key ideas such as being-in-the-world, flesh, perception, indeterminacy, and attention that shape the framework for the PRoP. In particular, I look to the work of Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1968), in which the phenomenology of perception is a preconscious bodily entanglement with the world.

A critically important aspect of phenomenological methods is that they allow for an approach “to be attentive to the primordialities of meaning as we encounter and live with things and others in our lived-through experiences and everyday existence” (van Manen, 2014, p. 28). Such primordial forms of meaning and basic experiential structures are often invisible to our daily lives. The movement back toward the primordialities of our everyday existence lies reflection, which is a matter of consciousness awareness. The present of our everydayness is an experience that can only be captured after it has occurred, through refection. This is not to say that the present is not part of consciousness, because it certainly is intuitively aware, but not a consciousness that is aware of itself. The present becomes conscious of itself through reflection, and reflection can only make attempts to (but can never) capture the experience of the present. Therefore, phenomenology assumes that “subjective experience [perceptual experience] unfolds
below the threshold of consciousness” (Petitmengin, 2006, p. 230). In this, Petitmengin is suggesting that there is something of value to be discovered about one’s perceptual experiences that might be revealed through the use of phenomenological methods in educational research. Phenomenology as Merleau-Ponty (1945) argues in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is a kind of “radical reflection” (p. 251) which can excavate the preconscious dimension of perception and make it available to the conscious self. Because I am interested in the perceptual lives of preadolescents, this notion of radical reflection is essential for developing a theory of the PRoP. In what follows, I will outline exactly what phenomenology as radical reflection brings to my emergent theory.

**Phenomenology in Educational Research**

The orientation towards phenomenology in contemporary educational research holds an important though somewhat marginal position (von Bonsdorff, 2009). To understand the experience of seeing the world, of being in relations with the world, requires a scientific method of research that is able to apprehend the pre-reflective, pathic aspects of the lived-experience – the experience that occurs prior to one’s reflection or recollections of experiences. Phenomenology becomes a useful approach to understanding the invisible dimensions of everydayness, since as a research method, phenomenology requires “a careful, reflexive, contemplative examination of how it is the BE in the world” (Vagle, 2014, p. 21). The relations and encounters that we have with the world are complex and dynamic and phenomenology in educational research lend a unique and critical approach to understand contemporary and traditional ways of learning. There is a fundamental structure to lived, perceptual experience which phenomenology can help to unpack.
Fundamental Aspects of Phenomenology of Perception

In this section, I talk about the essential features of phenomenology of perception. I first discuss perception as a form of seeing by drawing from the literature in the fields of philosophy and arts education. This body of literature will establish an understanding of what it is like to see; that is, what it is like to have things appear to be seen. I ebb and flow between the term seeing, being in the world, and perception. Seeing is a way by which we come to know and understand the world around us. Seeing is not a mere act of vision, but rather a perceptual experience that reflect on how we find ourselves through our encounters with things - the visual and material world, as well as with other humans. Understanding how appearances occur provides a pathway for understanding how one is in relations with things.

Next, I examine the phenomenological nature by which human beings are entangled with the flesh of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Entanglement refers to the ways that subjects and objects experience and shape possibilities for each other. Lastly, I turn to intentionality and attentiveness. I lay out some key ideas about how things appear to be seen.

Aspects of Space and Times in Perception

As far back as Aristotle, philosophers have attended to curiosities of whether or not space and time could be objectively situated outside of one’s capacity to perceive (Mitchell & Hansen, 2010). In this section, I take up two positions. The first is that spatiality (objects/things/visual and material culture) is constituted by the perceptual experiences of the subject. According to Merleau-Ponty (1945), “our perception ends in objects, and the object once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it which we have had or could have” (p. 77). In short, perception is always about something or oriented toward something. The second position, which
is an idea tethered to the first, is that time is to be considered ontological in that time *is* the subject – the experience of time that *is* lived. In taking this position, I draw from the phenomenological work of Merleau-Ponty (1945) who proclaims that “we must understand time as the subject and the subject as time” (p. 490). This shift in vision – what it is like to see (experience) the world, recasts seeing as a perceptual phenomenon in which space and time are neither inside (purely subjective) nor outside (as objective facts) but rather parts of the world in which we live. In other words, all perceptions are spatial and temporal, and thus bound up with the world.

Spatiality: Things that Take Up Space

First, let me begin by situating key terms used throughout this text that speak to the idea of *things*. By *spatiality* I am referring to things that take up physical space (Mitchell & Hansen, 2010). But more than merely taking up empty space, they also take up existentially meaningful space as well. For Heidegger, in *Being and Time (1962)*, space is not simply something that can be measured, but is rather full of significance and is fundamentally connected to our sense of meaning in the world. Thus, nearness and farness are not predicated solely on objective closeness or proximity. Rather, a person can be nearer to a loved one who is millions of miles away than to the stranger sitting right next to him/her. Thus, the things in our lives are defined both in terms of their physical extension in measurable space but also by how they appear in relation to our lives. In general, this is what the term *world* refers to – it points to all objects and things that are in relations of significance with the subject. However, the words *objects* and *things* indicate a slight, but significant philosophical difference from one another.
The term *object* is what “stands opposite or against [the subject]” (Simms, 2008, p. 82) as an inanimate object. Objects are “the quality of things that are created by us as perceiver. The objecthood of an object is internal to us, constituted through the reference and relevance, through its name and use” (Thing, n.d.). It could be said that objects in the world are determinate since they reflect those things that are perceived and identified by the subject. One can think here of a scientist objectively observing the behavior of children. This kind of detached perceptive objectifies the situation through its presumed detachment.

On the other hand, *things* have the potential to be indeterminate in that they represent a broader array of possibilities than objects do. What is most important here is that the “ambiguity the word thing carries [is] a notion of the unmediated, the world that is without a code, beyond the perceiving subject and the representations that are created by the subject around [or about] the thing” (Thing, n.d.). Things cannot be objectified, cannot be fully present to be grasped or analytically observed. There is thus something invisible about things as they withdraw from our grasp. Therefore, things can refer to many kinds of phenomena which often elude objectification. In sum, throughout this text, I use several words to address the spatiality of perception: objects, things, visual and material culture, and world.

*Spatiality and Place-Making*

Space is both composed of things and objects. They are situated in space and it is there that we make sense of belongings and of place. From a phenomenological approach, the subject brings forth a world that appears as experience. This idea, the relationship of subject, space and place, is elaborated on by Malpas (1999) in his claim that:

[T]he structures of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place. The connection of subjectivity with place indicates . . . the need to view subjectivity as tied to
agency and embodied spatiality, and therefore as constituted in relation to a structure that extends beyond the subject to encompass a world of objects, events and persons. . . . There is no 'appearance' at all within the space of pure extension, but only within the differentiated and unitary structure of place. (p. 35)

In this, we can understand the ideas of place-making as one that is entangled in a relation of differences and sameness as they come into view - place is shaped by these kinds of tension. Space in itself does not yield the making of place, but instead, the things that appear for us as something that needs to be situated, contextualized – placed.

For Heidegger (as cited in Trigg, 2012, p. 86), place is an indication of moving space around or a reorientation of space in that it gives way for appearances to first be admitted and then for it to be giving a belonging. This process of making room or clearing away a space is the making of place. In addition, as Trigg (2012) states, “Along with space and place, time and place form another dovetailing pair. . . . [I]t is only through materializing itself in place that the felt experience of time gains its powers” (p. 7). This passage alludes to spatiotemporal aspects of seeing and the relations between things and subjects (things that appear in place rather than objects which appear without place). Our seeing is not so much about the things that appear, but the temporal work of the subject that renders things as seeable. In the next section, I illuminate this structure of visibility, which is the subject’s temporality.

Temporal

Just as space is more than mere objective coordinates that can be measured, time is more than mere clock time. For Heidegger, in Being and Time (1927), clock time is an abstraction. More primordial is the temporality of lived experience. What is most important to understand about the phenomenological underpinnings of lived temporality is that time is experience and that the subject is time. Instead of distinct moments that separate past, present, and future, lived
time envelopes all three. For the artist who is lost in his or her work, the past (in the form of habits) light up future possibilities, but these possibilities arrive in the present. Thus past-present-future arrive together as a whole that cannot be easily separated out. The past and the future are not absent, but fully present in the present. In other words, our seeing the world is a matter of our perceiving temporal presence. The overlapping dimensions of time are what Merleau-Ponty (1945) presents for us in the passage below:

> In my present, if I grasp it while it is still living and with all that it implies, there is an ek-stase [ecstasies] towards the future and towards the past which reveals the dimensions of time not as conflicting, but as inseparable: to be now is to be from always and forever. (p. 491)

In short, lived temporality is always holistic. Perception *plunges* us into the future, but only through our past habits (past orientations).

**Perceptual Intentionality**

As already hinted, perception is always already wrapped up in spatiality, temporality, things and places. As such, it is within the world. Indeed, perception is always already intentionally directed at the world (Husserl, 1954, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Intentionality is central ontological feature of phenomenology that directly relates to ideas of the pre-reflective and the indeterminacy of perceptual experience.

The concept of intentionality has a long philosophical history (Ahmed, 2006; Brentano, 1874/2014; Husserl, 1954/1970, Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Here I focus on the concept of operative intentionality that is held by Merleau-Ponty (1945). Operative intentionality is an abstraction of Husserl’s (1954) two-tiered approach to intentionality: the “intentionality of act” and the “operative intentionality” (p. 104). Husserl’s two concepts of intentionality signals a difference in consciousness. The intentionality of act is the intentionality of “judgings and other voluntary
undertaken positings,” while operative intentionality is “that which produces the natural and anti-predicative unity of the world and our life” (Reuter, 1999, p. 70).

Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) focus on the operative intentionality and not on the intentionality of act points directly to his interest in the pre-reflective, pre-conscious experiences that is the subject. He states that operative intentionality is “apparent in our desires, our evaluations and the landscape we see . . . [more than] in objective knowledge” (p. xx). In this, he is arguing that operative intentionality, in its concern for the pre-reflective present, reveals more about our perceptual experiences and ourselves than does reflective understandings or objective knowledge.

Operative intentionality is “the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language” (p. xx). In other words, when we are experiencing the now, we are not able to express the experience in any analytical manner. The moment we do so we have moved from the now into a consciousness of the past, a contemplative, reflective stance of the experience, which allows us to describe, identify, and objectify features of our past. Reflection removes us, to some degree, out of the operativeness of our pre-reflective experience – it pulls us away from the living presence of the now (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; van Manen, 2014).

The now represents our being in time. This is not just a matter of accounting for time spent as when one says, “I’m waiting until 4pm to make a conference call,” but rather time in an ontological sense - time that accounts for itself in the experience. Merleau-Ponty (1945), illuminates this idea when he states:

It is of the essence of time to be not only actual time, or time which flows, but also time which is aware of itself, for the explosion or dehiscence [opening] of the present toward the future is the archetype of the relationship of self to self, and its tracing out an interiority. (p. 495)
The traces of the subject’s interiority, which is to say, the traces of the subject’s past that finds its way into the subject’s present, is a critical concept of operative intentionality and my conceptualization of the perceptual rite of passage (as discussed in the next chapter). This is not a case of one’s conscious memories and histories hanging on to the consciousness of the present as in a recollection of one thing or another - although that certainly does happen. But instead, as Husserl (2008) claims, the present contains “trails of retention” (p. 52). For Husserl, these retentions are representative of the things from the past that hang within the present, unconsciously. What is important to discern about time, as it is articulated here, is that it is a past that is unaware of itself in its inseparability with the ek-stase [ecstasies] of time. This is what Husserl means when he says that the present contains *trails of retention* – it reflects the idea that there are aspects of our past that carry forward into our present, of which we are unaware of. They are in some ways concealed in the present. Without retentions, there would be no intuitive sense linking what happens now with what just happened or what happened yesterday or the day before. Conscious remembering (as the intentionality of the act) can only happen if this more basic, preconscious form of retention exists in our perceptions of the world. Stated differently, without perceptual retention, there would be nothing to remember. This is also Merleau-Ponty’s (1961) claim when he states, “It is indeed the past that adheres to the present [but] not the *consciousness* of the past that adheres to the *consciousness* of the present” (p. 244). It is this relationship of the past and the present that creates the most basic sense of continuity of the self. It is also this relationship that opens the subject up to the future – to the possibilities of what is in the present moment. Merleau-Ponty (1945) states, “No one of time’s dimensions can be deduced from the rest. But the present . . . enjoys privilege because it is the zone of which being, and consciousness coincide” (p. 492). This idea is what I mean when I say that time lays over itself in
the present moment – the now—it folds the past into the present and the present into the future. And this complex folding of temporal dimensions happens in perception itself and how our bodies are anchored in the world and the things of the world. It is not something that the mind adds to perception at a later date. Instead, perception is fully immersed in time.

The idea of one’s past and future coalescing in the present moment is an idea central to this study’s question. As I will explore more in the following chapter, the investigation of what it is like to see the world as a preadolescent is not so much about how preadolescents know the world, but how preadolescents come to perceive and understand the world on the level of preconscious, perceptual grasping. Marratto (2012) asserts that,

Perceptual experience is inherently temporal. The subject of perception is situated (spatially and temporally) by means of the manner in which experience anticipates its own future unfolding and retains its past accomplishment both in the temporal thickness of the perceptual field and in the form of ‘habits’ carried forward from past experience. (p. 113)

Perceptual experiences are about the relations that subjects have with things in a world and how those experiences occur as an unfolding of time: past, present, and future. The unfolding that occurs within the present moment is a pre-reflective, operative intentionality. In this, the concept of time is located, and accounted for, as the experience of the subject. This is what Merleau-Ponty (1945) means when he says, “time as the subject and the subject as time” (p. 490).

Our spatiotemporality is a matter of our being in relations with the world. It is “the body-subject’s concrete, spatial and pre-reflective directedness towards the lived world. The pre-reflective moving body [that] is in itself intentional . . . . an attitude or posture towards objects as they appear in the world” (Reuter, 1999, p. 72). What we gain through the concept of operative intentionality is that seeing the world is not only a matter of being in the now, but also a being in
relations with the world in ways that make things potential and possible. For Merleau-Ponty (1968) this relation is called the “flesh” (p. 133), which speaks to how the subject and object are entangled in a relationship of mutuality and reversibility.

Being-in-the-World

Being in the world is not what one sees, but how one comes to experience situations through the sentient and sensorial nature of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1961). Being in the world is an essential feature of phenomenology. It is through the body that we have a towardness to the world—that we are able to embody and enact our intentionality. Merleau-Ponty (2004) states that,

It is our ‘bodily’ intentionality which brings the possibility of meaning into our experience by ensuring that its content, the things presented in experience, are surrounded with references to the past and future, to other places and other things, to human possibilities and situations. (p. 9)

It is our body that sees, that senses through its being alongside the world. The relations between things, according to Merleau-Ponty (1968), is a situation in which being in the world with things is an “inexhaustible depth” (p. 143) in that we are impartial to seeing that is not our own - that is the seeing of the other. This concept is what he calls the flesh of experience (p. 146). Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) concept of the flesh provides great insights on how subjects and things are in relations with one another. The flesh is, as Merleau-Ponty (1968) claims,

[T]he coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things . . . . this magical relation, this pack between them and me according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched, form a close bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself. (p. 146)
What he is also expressing is the connection we have with things through the indeterminacy involved in seeing and the thrust of our pre-conscious operative intentionality. He is emphasizing the relations that perceiving bodies have with things in the world—as the two are mutually constitutive and determining. Our seeing is a kind of wrapping around and touching of the visible, and the invisible. What is available in Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the flesh is that everything that is unknown and unaware of during our seeing the world is what makes it an “inexhaustible depth” (p. 143). Things that are in relations - subjects and worlds - offer aspects of themselves to the other, while also concealing aspects for themselves. In short, the flesh of being-in-the-world is equal parts appearing and withdrawing, granting access and denying access. This depth is therefore inexhaustible.

This kind of visible, invisible relation with things reflects on the nature of our seeing. Seeing the world is a circular, fluid phenomena that puts us in touch with the world. Perceptually, there is no space between seeing and being seen, it is all a part of the same skin, so to speak. Dewey (1934) expresses a similar idea in his description of experience. He claims that “things happen, but they are neither definitely included nor decisively excluded; we drift. We yield according to external pressure or evade and compromise. There are beginnings and cessations, but no genuine initiations and conclusions” (p. 41). The worldly dialectic of seeing and being seen, of the visible and invisible consists of two important factors: mutuality and reversibility. These two concepts, which is made possible through the flesh of our being-in-the-world, further illuminate the dialogic nature of what it means to see.

Mutuality

Perception has a mutual, reciprocated structure. The subject and the world “rely on
mutuality to establish direct contact between self and other within a given sense modality” (Strwarska, 2006, p. 23). In other words, seeing is an intersecting kind of communication. Mutuality speaks to the idea of things being together and how that togetherness is primordial. It is not that there are first subject and objects that stand over and against one another. Instead, we have the flesh out of which subjects and objects emerge. Again, think of the artist at work. In the moment of painting, there is no clear distinction between subject and object, instead there is only a sense of mutuality as each enfolds the other. But when the artist stands back and thinks about the painting as a painting, then reflection (intentionality as act) produces a subject/object split. In the state of mutuality, not only is the subject seeing the world, but the world is also in view of the subject and the subject’s seeing. As Strwarska (2006) states, “touching the other and being touched by [the other] can be interpreted along the lines of attending to the other and being the focus of the other’s attention” (p. 23). The subject and the object are each experienced by the other. The subject and the world are in relations with one another, and there is a reciprocity in the givenness and shaping of each that becomes a part of the experience. The experience of seeing and being seen is not only mutual, but it is also circular in nature.

Reversibility

The circularity involved in seeing can also be understood as a process of reversibility. Reversibility is the social engagement that things have with one another; how they attend to each other’s presence. This is not an opaque process, and neither is it accomplished without mutuality (Merleau-Ponty, 1968; Strwarska, 2006). Reversibility lays in the background of experience as a preconscious, transparent affair that is brought forth through the articulations of experience. In
other words, reversibility is, in part, what the other (the seer and the seen) ontologically identifies for the other. For Marratto (2012),

The subject is situated because it allows its situation to appear as a meaningful context, a field of presence. Thus, the subject encounters its own possibilities and history as the meaning of that situation; it encounters itself in a situation’s horizons of futurity and pastness. (p. 113)

Reversibility could be understood as gestures that unfold and reveal themselves in the relations of subjects and the world. The social engagement involved in seeing, the results of the reversibility of the flesh, works to bring about meaningful situations, in which the subject is able to maintain a presence. In other words, it is the seeing that provides possibilities for the subject. Merleau-Ponty (1968) states that,

[I]t is not I who sees, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal. What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the visible and the tangible, is . . . an intercorporeal being, a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present. (pp. 142-143)

Stated differently, reversibility is the far-reaching possibilities found in the structure of our operative intentionality – the unconscious past and unconscious present – our imaginative capacity that hurls itself toward the potential of a future. Perception is made possible because of the “anonymous visibility” which is neither inside nor outside us but is part of the structure of the flesh of the world. For Merleau-Ponty (1968) the reversibility of the flesh,

[D]oes not mean that there [is] a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we may say that the things pass into us, as well as we into the things. (p. 123)

This is what Bryson (1988) refers to in the statement below about what the world (things in the world, situations, and events) gives to us that enables us to see:
Everything I see is orchestrated with a cultural production of seeing that exists independently of my life and outside it: my individual discoveries, the findings of my eye [and body] as it probes through the world, come to unfold in terms not of my [own] making. (pp. 91-92)

This is not to suggest a lack of one’s agency, but more of an idea that when we see, we do so because there are things around that are potentially seeable. Seeing the world is a matter of being in a world of things - things that show themselves in one way or another within the flesh.

Appearances

How and when things show themselves is another essential feature of phenomenology. Things appear because some aspect of their existence comes into contact with our perceiving body - things that are a part of the mutuality and reversibility of our seeing. But where do things come out of? How do they appear? While it might appear that the perceiver is purely receptive and thus not an active agent in the act of perceiving—which is reliant on an anonymous visibility in the flesh—this is not the case. Appearances are achievements. According to Noë, (2004),

To explore appearance is thus to explore the environment, the world. The discovery of how things are, from how they appear, is to discover an order or pattern in their appearances. The process of perceiving, of finding out how things are, is a process of meeting the world; it is an activity of skillful exploration. (p. 164)

In this, Noë (2004) is elaborating on Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) idea of the flesh and the mutuality and reversibility involved in our being in the world but is highlighting the active role of the perceiver in achieving a look. The operative words in the passage above are, to discover an order or pattern in the appearances of things. To understand what it is like to see the world we must give ourselves to the idea that the things that appear for us – the things available to witness - in one way or another, do so because our seeing draws them out of a background of other things. It is not a conjuring up of things, necessarily, but it is our being in the world (being
worldly) and our capacity not only to perceive, but to perceive attentively. This is the skillful exploration that Noë (2004) refers to in the passage above. Such skillful exploration comes about through habit and becomes part of the body’s intelligence. For instance, we know intuitively that when we see the topside of a table that there is also a bottom. We know this because over time we have come to see bottoms as available to appear with tops (and vice versa). This is the natural outcome of seeing tops of things and then bending over to check to see their bottoms. As such, perception carries within itself the achievements of long stages of habituation (the past) within the body itself. Critically, without certain habituated experiences that have become part of the flesh, certain kinds of appearing cannot happen or that they would take great effort to achieve.

Appearances thus have two dimensions: a background and a foreground. The background is the implicit, invisible, withdrawing flesh that enables anything at all to appear while the foreground is composed of objects, things, and places that are situated within this flesh.

*Foreground and Background*

Although, the background might at first seem unimportant, it is in part what allows us to see. The “partiality of perception is not only about what is not in view, but also what is around [or near], which we can describe as the background” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 37). Things that happen in the background, that is to say, things that present themselves as background, present themselves secondarily, even if at all. One becomes conscious of things, in part, because things hide their own backgrounds. According to Ahmed (2006), “a background is what explains the conditions of emergence or an arrival of something as the things that it appears to be in the
present” (p. 38). Appearances are events in which things seem to come out from the background into the foreground to grab our attention.

What this means is that even the invisible and things that are visible but not focused on, play a perceptual role in the perception of an event, scene and so on. The things that present themselves as background come to us – close to the surface of our seeing - as a “dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality” (Husserl, 1969, p. 102). The invisible is indeed perceived, however, only as an indeterminate since it cannot be readily discriminated or factually described. Merleau-Ponty (1945) gives us this description of the invisible as background:

The canonical kind of indeterminate visual presence is the visual presence of the background against which a figure appears. The background, insofar as it is experienced as a background is visually present to a subject even though it makes no determinate contribution to his experience . . . the indeterminacy of the background consists in its playing a normative rather than a descriptive role in visual experience. (p. 4)

The use of the word normative in the passage above is an important concept in how the invisible plays a background role. Norms reflect on, in part, our implicit knowledge and habitual practices. We could think of it as a part of the workings of our intentionality, in that norms, as a background, reside in the unconscious past that lays over our unconscious present. It is what we have come to expect or presume of the world around us – it is a part of our familiarity of the given world. “When we perceive things, we are constantly sensitive not only to what we perceive but also, and essentially, to how well our experience measures up to our perceptual needs and desires” (Kelly, 2005, p. 97). Another way to understand this idea is to say that one’s point of view (for example socio-political situatedness) creates a way of seeing the invisible, not as a factual appearance, but as a perceived one. “We do not see a determinate object behind the figure, we see a point of view of the figure, a point of view that solicits us to take it up [which] is
the experience of a tension around a norm” (Kelly, 2005, p. 97). In this case, we come to perceive things that appear because of a tension between what we know and what we have, or do not have, for consideration.

The value of the background (no matter if it is visible or invisible) and all its normalizing subtleties is that it provides for a kind of space in which things can stand out from other things – so things can be attended to. Another aspect of the background of appearances is also conceptualize through the things that we barely recognize. Those things that we see, but not fully attend to; things that quickly fall out of sight.

Bare Recognition and Stereotypes

Lastly, the achievement of perceptually grasping something always has the danger of becoming a kind of frozen stereotype. A large part of our seeing falls into what Dewey (1934) illustrates as a bare recognition (p. 54). To recognize is to limit one’s experience and hold it hostage to an incomplete, even essentialized, stereotypical representation. Dewey (1934) states that:

Recognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely. In recognition there is a beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of a full perception of the thing recognized. It is arrested at the point where it will serve some other purpose, as we recognized a man on the street in order to greet or to avoid him, not so as to see him for the sake of seeing what is there. (p. 54)

Dewey’s concept of recognition could be understood as a type of backgrounding, since, for Dewey (1934), “Recognition is too easy to arouse vivid consciousness. There is not enough resistance between new and old to secure consciousness of the experience that is had” (p. 55). In other words, in the experience of seeing the everyday, the familiar does not afford the kinds of looking that allows something to show itself. A bare recognition of things does not provide
enough time and attention toward the thing so that it can fully present itself. This can perhaps occur, at least in part, because of the subject’s familiarity with the thing. For example, a child that walks the same route to school every day might not recognize that the old woman on her porch is in distress, the child only recognizes that the old women is on her porch, as she is every morning, and therefore may only be recognized as such – and not in her mode of distress. Seeing, as a bare recognition is seeing just enough (long enough) – as in the happening of a glance or a gaze – to only pass over the thing as something familiar. It is then quickly relegated to the background of the experience.

Familiarity can seem to have a dulling effect on how things appear. Ahmed (2006) suggests that the appearance of things do not just appear in the way a rabbit might just appear from the magician’s hat. But that the “arrival takes time, and the time that it takes shapes what it is that arrives” (p. 40). It is the attention of one’s looking that gives way to the potential for things to reveal themselves (Gurley, 2016; Thompson, 2017). As in the example of the child not recognizing the distressed women sitting on her porch in his routine walk to school. Not only is the familiar partial to the background, but I would argue that recognition (or misrecognition in any case) can easily lead to objectification.

In summary, the importance of looking - of paying attention - is critical to the question of what it is like to see, be in, and perceive the world. To see the world is to experience the world in its presence and its givenness (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 1946; van Manen, 2014). Although children see the world differently from the ways adults do, we should not be careless to consider the child’s point of view as deficient (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Simms, 2008). What is more accurate and fruitful is to understand that the child’s perceptual experiences are merely organized differently than adults. Preadolescence is a critical time in which the child’s relations with the
world undergoes a significant perceptual shift. In the next section, I continue to explore Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) concepts of *operative intentionality* and *flesh* as I extend their structural features to gain some insights on what it might be like to see the world as a preadolescent.
CHAPTER 4

THE PERCEPTUAL RITE OF PASSAGE DEFINED

In the previous chapter, I outlined key phenomenological concepts of being-in-the-world that involve grounding aspects of perceptual experiences. In this chapter, I build up these phenomenological concepts to frame the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP).

Ontological Features of the PRoP

The structure of the PRoP focuses on two core phenomenology concepts: space and time. These two concepts (space and time) operate at the ontological level of the PRoP. They reflect the generalizable features of experience.

Space (Spatiality)

Space is understood to be both the extension of things and the world in which things can dwell. We can think of space as a type of pre-reflective existence where bodies locate themselves and other things in relations of significance. In other words, it is spatiality that we identify things as things; it is where place is established. Trigg (2017) states that space is, “defined by a multiplicity of affective and sensorial components, all of which sculpt the felt texture and shape of any given place” (p. xxix). Space and its inhabitants, histories, habits, and moods are what the body extends into – what it comes to embody. This extension is not done passively. The comportment of things is pushed forward through the features of time.

Time (Temporality)

Time, as outlined in the previous chapter, is our dealings with the past, present, and
future. Temporality is our lived-experience that operates in the pre-reflective dimension of the present. And remember, the present (the now) is always a composite of our memories renewing themselves as they pass through the present. Merleau-Ponty (1968) states that,

> The present is a surpassing not only in the sense in which it is something new, and hence not immediately perceived as a recognizable object, but also, in the sense in which it is an event that only comes to have its meaning post-factually. (p. 215)

The essential idea that one needs to know about time is that it is a function of our intentionality – our *skillfully enactment*, as Alva Noë (2004) puts it, toward things in their appearing for us.

Ontic Features of the PRoP

From the relational aspects of space and time, which *is* our experience, emerge two phenomenological concepts: proximity/nearness and mutuality that work to shape the ontic aspects of experience. Ontic is basically the things in our experience that have specific names, meanings – that can be represented as such and such a thing. For the PRoP, ontic features expand out of our entanglement with things – our being in the world – in particular ways based on our particular, lived experience. The ontic features of the PRoP can be identified in three categories: un/mis/recognition, un/mis/belonging, and value/importance.

To help illustrate the *structuring* features of the PRoP, I turn my attention to the preadolescent child. It is here that we can begin to understand the significance of the coming to be – the liminal space of transition between being and becoming. The transitional spaces of the PRoP are fraught with uncertainties and vulnerability (Ahmed, 2006; Massumi, 2015; Trigg, 2012, 2017). It is a place of anxiety that labors to push us forward. It is at these moments of crisis that we can be affected in certain ways – ways that influence and orientate our attentions in one direction or another.
In the last section of this chapter, I will attend to these affective ways of the PRoP in terms of the sociocultural/political context that is a part of phenomenologies of difference – differences of race, gender and the like. What is explored is the possibility of being attentive to difference at the ontological level and how the PRoP can help us understand the distinctions between different than, and different from in its political possibilities.

The PRoP is a way to illustrate the specific usefulness of the theoretical framework in understanding the acute ways that we perceive the world that are first and foremost experienced in preadolescence. While adult perception becomes stereotyped (as discussed previously), turning to preadolescent PRoP can reveal the unstable nature of perception as such—all aspects of perception that do not merely disappear in adult perception, but rather fall into the background, unnoticed. In short, it is my hypothesis that the PRoP enables us to capture something unique about preadolescence, but that this uniqueness is not to simply be overcome throughout development. Instead, the PRoP actually places into the foreground of experience something that is firmly in the background of adult perceptual experience, returning us (adults) to the primacy of the indeterminacy of un/mis/recognition, un/mis/belonging, and value/importance.

Rite of Passages?

What is a rite of passage and why do I associate perception with it? Rite of passage is a term readily used in the field of sociology and anthropology, which relates to various events, traditions, and rituals that range the span of human life (Grimes, 2000; van Gennep, 1960). Events such as the ritualized second line parades in New Orleans that celebrate those who have died or Quinceañeras in the Latinx culture that honor a young girl’s 15th birthday are all rites of
passage that signify some social, cultural transition. Cultural studies scholar, Ronald L. Grimes (2000) in his book, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, claims that “commemorative rites . . . recreate our connections to the natural world and the course of human history” (p. 3). What is important about rites is that they reflect the moments and occasions that bind us to the past and the future. Fundamentally, rites of passages reflect the transitions that expand our horizons and move us from one place or position to another. The more general term speaks to culture and societal milieu, but what does it mean to move from one place or position to another from a perceptual level?

The PRoP represents an endeavor to addresses the ontological aspects of the rites of passage that occur in our everyday encounters. It is about relations and the affective nature of our being in the world, alongside things, people, practices, and traditions. In other words, the PRoP goes beyond the traditional ideas of rites of transition that celebrate and ritualize customs to focus on the micro transitions. The PRoP is a phenomenological theory of attentiveness on the micro level of perceptual grasping. It is a way of attending to *the coming to be* and *coming into view* that occur for us at every turn. It looks at the ontological nature of our everyday perceptual experiences and the relational aspects of our encounters with/in the world. Put in other terms, the PRoP is a way for us to critically understand and investigate the things that lie familiar in the face of our everyday comings and goings that ground and keep us connected in each passing moment – particularly those things that go unnoticed.

What is important to understand about perceptual aspects of the PRoP is that it reflects the deep entanglements that we have with/in the world. The term the PRoP places our bodies and the bodies of things (situations, events, and the like) center stage of all occurrences. Rites are enactments of the body. It is with our bodies that we perform - bodies are our pathway to *rites*
and *rights*. From a phenomenological perspective, *perceptual rites* are what bodies do; how bodies gesture – they push and pull us toward and away from things. As theorist Alva Noë (2004) suggests, perception is a kind of haptic event of the body – of bodies and things – that move in skillful ways. What we gain from perceptual rites is the means by which we orientate and are orientated through the relational aspects of our worldliness.

Perceptual rites are spaces full of anxiety. One really never knows what will happen from one moment to the next. Referring again to cultural studies, Grimes (2000) claims that “We *undergo* passages, but we *enact* rites. Life passages are rough, fraught with spiritual potholes, even mortal dangers. Some passage we know are coming; others happen upon us” (p. 5). An essential aspect of the PRoP is caught up in the “happening upon us.” It is the indeterminacy of our perceptual experiences – those passages of time that lie across us in the background, being unnoticed, that is the focus of the PRoP. There is an interesting ambiguity here. Rites form us, and in this sense, the subject is passive, a product of the rite. But at the same time, the rite is an achievement of the subject and his or her power to endure the dynamism of becoming. This ambiguity—yielding to a rite that forms a self while also achieving this new form—is the source of the anxiety of rites.

What I am arguing with the PRoP is that perceptual rites, from a phenomenological perspective, reflect the movements and motions - gestures - real, fictional, or imagined - that enable pathways for our memories and our remembering that continually carry us forth. Childhood, particularly the preadolescent stage of childhood (between ages 7-11 years of age), provides a unique opportunity for us to think through the perceptual transitions that occur within the PRoP. In the next section, I explore the anxiousness of the PRoP.
What Does Anxiety Have to Do with the PRoP?

Anxiety holds a central importance within phenomenology and philosophy (Heidegger, 1962; Kierkegaard, 1981; Merleau-Ponty, 1945, Trigg, 2017). Anxiety, unlike any other mode of being, is understood as fundamental to our being in the world. As Trigg (2017) highlights in his book, *Topophobia: A Phenomenology of Anxiety*, in accordance with a Heideggerian point of view,

[W]e find that anxiety presents itself as an ‘original mood’, original because anxiety confronts us with the fact that ‘they are beings – and not nothing’. This appeal to the contingency of being provides anxiety with its ontological structure, going so far as to reveal ‘being as a whole’. (p. xxxi)

The passage above is essential to my project. In this section, I will highlight the ontological structure of anxiety that labors to disclose and act in transformative ways as a means of contextualizing the PRoP for preadolescence.

A central statement about our existence is that we are always in a mood. Moods are basic states of attunement, which work to situate our attitude and concerns (Heidegger, 2008; Magrini, 2006; Trigg, 2017). According to Elpidorou & Freeman (2015),

Heidegger holds that our capacity to have moods is *constitutive* of human existence. We are who we are, according to Heidegger, not only because we are rational, social, or practical beings, but also because we are affective, and specifically, *mooded* beings; that is, beings who experience moods . . . . [I]t is because we are mooded that the world is disclosed to us and that we find ourselves amidst worldly projects and social situations that already matter to us and that emotionally affect us. (p. 661)

Our feeling life is an essential part of being in relations with things that work to orientate our bodies and our sensibilities (Ahmed, 2006; Dewey, 1934; Simms, 2008). Moods create the preconditions for our emotional relations to things.

From a phenomenological perspective, the “first-person approach to emotions is guided by, rooted in, and engaged with our experience in the world, where the felt quality of emotions
provides important insights into the meaningfulness of human experiences” (Elpidorou & Freeman, 2014, p. 507). So, we can say that being human is to be involved in an ever-present flow of moods and emotions that anchor us in the past while also laboring to push us into the future. We are thrown into moods (and thus inherit them from the past), but moods also open up possibilities for feeling certain ways toward certain things (thus opening up to the future).

“Moods are essential in our existence because they are the modes of being through which the world is disclosed to, affects, and can matter to us” (Freeman, 2014, p. 462). In other words, we are always in a mood, whether it be happy, afraid, loving, sad and so forth, and those moods hold relevance for how the world appears for us.

The mood of anxiety holds a unique position in that it serves a core function in our perceiving presence (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Trigg, 2017). It is a core mood of being in the world that in many ways cannot be extracted from our existence. The mode of being that is anxious is fundamentally intertwined with our towardness to the world and the ways that the world appears for and hides from us. What is essentially important to understand is that it reflects a breakdown within perception that provokes a dilemma for how meaning emerges (Magrini, 2006). In the dilemma or crisis of anxiety, “the pre-given meaning of things in their everyday context slips away, including that of our own selves” and in the slippage of things, the “subject ‘hovers’ above and beyond their personal existence” (Trigg, 2017, p. xxxi).

What this reveal is that being present is outside of the self. In other words, we lose our familiarity with the world in some way in that it becomes strange. For Heidegger, this strangeness is considered to be a feeling that is “‘ill-at-home’ in the world” (Trigg, 2017, p. xxxi).

Anxiety is not an entity within the world (Heidegger, 1962, p. 231). In other words,
anxiety has no object in which it is directed towards. It is instead, a sort of displacement between being and becoming. This is what makes anxiousness an ontological feature of existence. This is what Heidegger means when he states, “What oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it the summation of everything present-at-hand; it is rather the possibility of the read-to-hand in general; that is to say, it is the world itself” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 231). The ontological mood of anxiety is caught in a space that is contingent and uncertain, but uncertainty is not about a thing, instead it is about the potential that the present presents in its unfolding.

Although, in general terms, one might equate anxiety with fear, anxiety is a mood that is different from fear. When we think about being fearful, it is directed at something. We might be afraid of the dark or of spiders. Fear has an object in mind, literally. On the other hand, anxiety holds a different position as a mood. It does not have an object in mind. We can think of anxiety as being one with perception itself, in that, it is both determinate (we feel its presences), and yet indeterminate (we don’t yet know what it is). What I mean by that is anxiety’s influence on us is that it is not easily placed, if it is able to be placed at all. And for this reason, anxiety is thought of as a structuring feature of being. This is an important aspect of the PRoP, in that, anxiety signals to a liminality that is contingent and uncertain without having an object in mind to ground it. This uncertain marks a point of perceptual transition that labors to grasp onto meaning, and in some ways, stabilize itself. While anxiety is, for most phenomenology, a general mood attached to perception, my argument is that this only comes to the surface in preadolescence. Thus, to theorize mood, one must locate it at a particular stage of development and transition.

A Turn towards the PRoP in Preadolescent Perception

I begin this section by providing a general overview of early childhood, highlighting the
ways in which children perceive the world before preadolescence. Then, I unpack the perceptual transition that children undergo during preadolescence -using phenomenological aspects of childhood experience that considers both developmental psychology and philosophies of perception. (Merleau-Ponty, 1949, 1952; Simms, 2008; Welsh, 2013).

Early Childhood and Being in the World

The moment a child enters the world, she or he learns to make sense of her or his encounters (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Simms, 2008). But young children do not experience the world as adults do. The young child works within a perceptual framework where things find themselves near, rather than distant, in relations to their own bodies. This is not a matter of measurable space (distance), but a matter of perception. Phenomenologically speaking, the way that young children experience the world is considered to be a syncretic sociability (Merleau-Ponty, 2010; Welsh, 2013). This suggests that the world is “a kind of precommunication, an anonymous collective . . . a kind of group existence” (p. 248). It is a state of being in which there is no distinction between the child’s ego and the ego of the things in the child’s world (Merleau-Ponty; 2010, Welsh, 2013). For the young child, the world is a world in which all things, human and non-human, have access to possibility and potential in the everydayness of experience (Welsh, 2013). For the young child, there is only one world and they are a part of it as much as it is a part of them.

During early childhood, children see the world as the world appears for them “directly and without the filter of reflection and conceptual thought” (Simms, 2008, p. 69). This is what Straus (1966, 1980) claims as the pathic moment of perception for a young child. It is the “immediately present, sensually vivid, still preconceptual communication [young children] have
with appearances” (p.12). This is not a matter of a cognitive process, but instead a natural, vernacular disposition that allows the world to give itself freely in the present. The pathic is a being touched by a thing. Things in the world show themselves to a young child as instantaneous appearances that reach out to the child (Simms, 2008). Children experience a world that is present in “the place where body and world entwine . . . . Things have meaning because their gestures become possibilities for the child’s body and provide new horizons for her [or his] being in the world” (Simms, 2008, p. 79). This is the young child’s way of seeing the world.

Preadolescent and Being in the World

During the preadolescent years, seeing shifts toward an experience that is contingent on things that find themselves more distance from the child than in their earlier pathic entanglement with the world. For Straus (1966, 1980), this newly forming perceptual change in the way that preadolescents see is “gnostic” (p. 69). In this, things encountered in the world require reflection. The world is no longer near and ready at hand, but it has gained some type of perceptual distance. For the child, seeing the world represents a reaching towards things that have to be thought of. The practice of looking at, and being involved and entangled with the world, for the preadolescent, is not a matter of how “the [child] begin[s] to recognize others as other consciousnesses” but instead, how “the [child] learn[s] to differentiate himself and others as separate beings within a sphere of experience that lacks this differentiation?” (Dillon 1997, p. 121). In other words, the preadolescent child has the new task of making sense of things as being different from other things, not necessarily the consciousness of other things, but the appearance of other things.
You could say that preadolescent children, for the first time, begin to see the world how adults have become accustomed to seeing the world. They become concerned with the appearances of things in ways that compel them to want to gain knowledge and understanding of them, control, even (Simms, 2008; Welsh, 2013). For the child, the “body as lived” becomes a “body as visible and perceived” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 425). This metamorphosis reveals to the child that they are a thing along with other things. According to Welsh (2013), it signals a “sense of capable of being seen” that is not founded upon a prior, more infantile, sense of self. Selfhood is a creation out of a nascent, transitive experience” (p. 69). In this, the preadolescent passes through a phase beyond their pathetic sensibilities into an existence where the labor of seeing and being seen requires contemplation and the use of language.

The relationship between the pre-consciousness of perceptual experiences and the words that the preadolescent might find to describe seeing the world, as Berger’s (1972) statement expresses, can never really capture the lived experience itself.

Seeing comes before words. The child [perceives] and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. (p. 7)

The unsettled relationship between what we see and what we know runs parallel to the difference of being and being conscious of - that experience that evades us each time we try to put words to it. In the next section, I put this unsettling phenomenon into context by defining the phenomenological framework of the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP). This perceptual reorganization that occurs during preadolescence is at the core of the structure of the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP).
Key Structural Features of the PRoP

The theoretical framework of the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP) aims to understand not how we think, but instead, as Vagle (2014) states, to “contemplate and theorize the various ways things manifest and appear in and through our being in the world” (p. 22). In this section, I address two core features of the perceptual rite of passage - temporality and embodiment as a means of addressing the emergence of self and the indeterminacies that ground perception.

Temporality and Its Keeping of Time

The PRoP represents a unique and distinctive structuring of time for the child. There is a perceptual tension between children’s understanding of the world as lived experience and their perceptual turn towards being conscious of their lived-experience, which brings about a consciousness of temporal limits and constraints (Merleau-Ponty, 2010; Simms, 2008; Welsh, 2013). In other words, a world that was once fully accessible becomes contingently accessible and rote with a need to know and know of. I propose that this tension, this new understanding of attentiveness, for the preadolescent, is a new temporal phenomenon that is critically important for us to consider because as Schuback (2006) claims, “attention is not primarily a focus on something, but a perspective from turning points, where the in-between of relationships can be experienced . . . [it] shows itself as alertness for the coming to be” (p. 133). The coming to be is a central idea of the PRoP. And it is during the developmental stage of preadolescence that we can begin to witness this alertness as children gain a perceptual distance from their once primal speculative nature (Welsh, 2013). In other words, the preadolescent understanding of the world is traversing across time and affecting the possibilities of things that appear.
The child’s seeing practices of the world is a matter of perceiving presence as a spatiotemporal happening. It grounds the claim that time, experience, and the subject are unitary in perceiving presence. Merleau-Ponty (1945) states that perceiving presence is an action and affection, “towards the future and towards the past which reveals the dimensions of time not as conflicting, but as inseparable: to be now is to be from always and forever” (p. 491). This is an interesting idea, to be from always and forever. What exactly is meant by to be from and what is the always and the forever?

We can simply look at this temporality as the time we live with now. It is “time which is aware of itself, for the . . . dehiscence [opening] of the present toward the future . . . of the relationship of self to self, and its traces of an interiority” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 495). The traces of the subject’s interiority, which is to say, the traces of the subject’s past that finds its way into the subject’s present, is a critical concept of temporality for preadolescents since it works to shift how the child sees the world, and more importantly, its significance lies in the idea that interiority is a new realization for the preadolescent. The moments a young child begins to look away from her/himself, and toward others and other things to reflect on their being in the world, signifies the critical interior shift in perceptive for the child. Another way to conceive of temporality and the idea of from always and forever existing in the present can be considered as, “every expecting of something expects it from a present, and every retaining of something retains it for a present” (Turetzky, 1988, p. 8).

The temporal shift of perception, for the preadolescent, is new because it pulls the child away from it pathic nature of engaging the world and now towards a more reflective, contemplative way of understanding (Merleau-Ponty, 2010; Welsh, 2013). As Marratto (2012) puts it, this is a time when, “experience anticipates its own future unfolding, and retains its past
accomplishment both in the temporal thickness of the perceptual field and in the form of habits carried forward from past experience” (p. 113). Essentially, time is a confluence of three rivers – the past, present, and future. Every ending is a beginning and every beginning is an ending – is a beginning. The three dimensions of time flow alongside each other, inside each other, influencing and informing each other and our actions in the world.

Embodiment and Its Rites

Embodiment reflects on our temporal nature when the demands of differences are recognized. Being in the world is not so much a matter of what one sees, but how one comes to experience situations through the sentient and sensorial body (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). It is through the flesh that we have rites/rights in the world—that we are able to embody and enact our experiences. For preadolescents, recognition is a central concept of the PRoP that signals to the concepts of seeing and being seen; recognizing and being recognized. The PRoP marks a point of an “unsettling” of a former way of being in the world. This is all a matter of the perceptual shift that the preadolescent stage represents – the pulling away from the pre-reflective and attending more to the contemplative.

This unsettling has much to do with proximity and near in the way that it creates a level of tension and anxiety. The tension, according to Ahmed (2006), brings about a distance posed as a threat -and threats work to (re)orientate bodies. Here, I want to suggest that it is imperative to consider the idea of orientation – the turning towards a thing - as a way to think about the role proximity plays in the PRoP for preadolescents. The temporal shift that preadolescents experience is a sort of reorientation. As Ahmed (2006) states, “Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as, who and
what we direct our energy and attention toward (p. 3). If we believe Ahmed’s concept of orientation then the things that are ready at hand, near to the child would influence their understanding of what things are available for them to access.

The anecdote in the introduction comes to mind. What was it about the Gucci brand that allowed Jah to feel as though he had access to it? He expressed a strong fondness for the Gucci brand through his experience with rap music and the artist Lil Pump – talking about ways that Lil Pump and he “loved” Gucci. Within Jah’s everyday urban environment, the Gucci brand was embedded alongside a cultural familiarity – hip/hop and rap culture. But in a different context, what was once reachable was denied. Objects such as the Gucci brand and all its retail and marketing items presented a different kind of history in the shopping mall. What was it like for Jah and the other boys to experience the Gucci brand under this different context? How, if anything, did the freeness of their rite/right to engage the store shaped their sense of self? As Trigg (2012) states,

Being “touched by the past” brings us into a region of memory and temporality that elicits the moment personal identity is marked in either an affirmative or a disruptive manner by the experience of memory itself. Coupled with this exposure to the formation of identity, the inclusion of “touch” reinforces the bind between temporality and materiality. Being “touched by the past,” sets in place the centrality of place itself. (p. xviii).

In this case, place is the realization of a positionality; of a relationship between things and place. For the boys, the tension that occurred between what was at hand outside the mall and what was out of hand inside the mall registered as a moment of inheritance. According to Ahmed (2006),

[W]hen we inherit, we also inherit the proximity of certain objects, as that which is available to us, as given with the family home. These objects are not only material: they may be values, capital, aspirations, projects, and styles. Insofar as we inherit that which is near enough to be available at home, we also inherit orientations, that is, we inherit the
nearness of certain objects more than others, which means we inherit ways of inhabiting and extending into space.” (p. 86)

This idea is vitally important for Jah, Saint, and Christian’s experience at the Gucci Store, in that it helps to illuminate how perception is teaching them. For the preadolescent, this contingent entanglement signifies a distinctive time to consider the affective nature of being (re)orientated. For the preadolescent the political nature of affect signal to the formation of a subjectivity – the child’s awareness of self that emerges first from the awareness of self and others – an intersubjectivity.

According to Welsh (2013), the reorganization of the child’s “perceptual experience goes hand-in-hand with the insertion into an intersubjective, symbolic human world” (p. 68). For the preadolescent, intersubjectivity reflects on a new way of seeing the world in which,

I [the child] require something to induce me to take a step back from myself and to think of how I might appear to others. Then I can, conceptually if not experientially, think of myself as one of many visible things in the world. (Welsh, 2013, p. 60)

This pulling away from experience is full of possibilities, however, being embodied in a symbolic world can, and often is, riddled with inconsistencies, vulnerabilities, and falsehood. Merleau-Ponty (1964) states that,

In perceiving the other, my body and his are coupled, resulting in a sort of action, which pairs them. This conduct, which I am able only to see, I live somehow from a distance. I make it mine; I recover it or comprehend it. Reciprocally, I know that the gestures I make myself can be the objects of another’s intention. (p. 118)

The intersubjective experiences that preadolescents have are reliant on their relations. It is this mutual and reciprocal nature of being in the world with things – being worldly - that can and do make impressions on a child’s sense of self.

The affective nature of our encounters gains some specific utility when placed in the context of social science. In the follow section, I briefly turn to Erikson’s (1963, 1968, 1998)
theory of psychosocial development as a way to further conceptualize the phenomenological conjectures about being in the world.

A Brief Turn to Erikson’s Theory of Preadolescent Development

Erick Erikson was a German-American developmental psychologist whose work in the field of human development yielded broader understanding about human life. In particular, his work on identity crisis where is laid out a theory that placed the developmental tension/crisis at the center of every stage of life (Erikson, 1968). His work is highlighted here as a way to situation the developmental concerns of the preadolescent child.

Erikson’s theory claims that within each stage of a human development there is the potential for a psychosocial crisis. For the preadolescent, the crisis is one of “industry verses inferiority” (Ericson 1998, p. 50). This dichotomy for preadolescents reflect a time in which the child’s seeing the world is under the influence of their need to be realized as capable; as having worth and value in the world. According to Erikson (1998), “the child must learn to win approval, recognition, and a feeling of success by producing things and doing the job well” (p. 51). Recognition is the operative word. It is this word that gestures toward seeing and being seen; recognizing and being recognized. This is all a matter of the perceptual shift that preadolescents experience and the pulling away from the now of the lived-experience towards contemplative reflections.

Erikson (1968) signals to a critical characteristic of preadolescence and the PRoP when his states that it is, “the capacity to learn how to be, with skill, what one is in the process of becoming” (p. 180). The child’s worldliness – their relations with things (human and non-human) – during preadolescence finds the child’s world as being one that is potentially affirming
and encouraging, however, the crisis that exist at this juncture, is that the child can also be disparaged, misrecognized, marginalized, and dismissed as not being of value. Preadolescents find themselves engaged with a world that provides “a sense of competence and achievement in minds and bodies and in relation to their peers and the world around them” (Knight, 2014, p. 210). And at the same time, there is the potential for the child to experience inferiority, which could “impeded or interfered with” their sense of worth (Knight, 2014, p. 210). An essential aspect of the PRoP is appearance, which is tethered to the concept of attentiveness. How things appear for us and what things appear for us are concepts that can potentially manifest varied understandings of recognition, belonging, and value. In the follow section, I address the arrival of difference as a means to broaden the general understand of the term to include an ontological perspective.

The Point of Arrival within PRoP

This section leads us into what I consider to be at the heart of this project – a critical understanding of what the PRoP means in context with real world sociopolitical issues such as race, class, gender, ability and the like. In order to set the background of this section, I first want to reiterate the term perceptual experience from the vantage point of an enactment or rite, which is not a passive practice. According to theorist Alva Noë (2004), perception is our embodied experience that allows us to act and respond with/in the world. He claims that perception is an achievement that comes from a skillful activity (p.bb). Ahmed, (2004) also argues that perceptual experiences and their “arrival [what appears] takes time, and the time that it takes shapes what it is that arrives” (p. 40). With this, we can consider the perceptual rite of passage (PRoP) as its
own *achieving* enactment. In other words, the PRoP reflects the *arrival* that occurs through every encounter that we have.

The PRoP is the structuring of a political happening – a happening of attentiveness and the work that ensues in our orientations towards one thing or another. And, all forms of encounters, because of the ontological nature of difference, are political. We can understand this as a kind of constant *seeking to* locate the affections of an authentic self – both for ourselves and possibly, hopefully, in/for others as well.2 In this section, I place my attention on the sociopolitical context of difference and the PRoP as a means of thinking through phenomenologies of difference and to promote the potentiality that exist in all relational encounters.

**Phenomenologies of Difference – A Politics of Perception**

The PRoP signals an opportunity to think about difference as an ontological occurrence as well as differences that are understood in shaping values and judgements that influence the freedoms that perception allows each of us. In the lines that follow, I will parse out some important distinctions between difference as ontological (different than), which is what the PRoP encourages, and pedagogies of difference (different from), which tends to sets in motion a hierarchal power dynamic of difference.

Phenomenology is a field of study that seeks to explore what it means to exist (van Manen, 2014). In this, phenomenology is interested in the lived experience of the everyday happenings that fill our lives with meaning. A significant aspect of phenomenology is found in

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2 Heidegger (1962) in *Being and Time* refers to this unique and special moment in Dasein’s existence, when there is clarity about the self, as the moment of vision. In conjunction with this moment of clear vision, Heidegger uses the concept of resoluteness to capture what it means for Dasein to heed this call of conscience and act accordingly and consistently, over time.
our perceptual experiences – how we, in our bodily comportments, move along in a temporal manner in relations with/in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, Noë, 2006). What perception gives way to is balance or imbalance of seeing and not seeing; knowing and not knowing. It is for these reasons that we are able to exist in our modes of meaning-making. In other words, perception and the structures of perception provide pathways for us to have experiences whereby meaning can and does emerge. What kinds of meaning emerge and from what perspectives are the questions at hand.

Although many have questioned the role of phenomenology as a way of understanding lived experience in general (Fanon, 2008; Lee, 2014; Mahendran, 2007), it is my argument that it is phenomenology that allows us to understand the emergence of meaning in ways that can provide critical methods to contextualize various sociocultural/political vantage points. In that, I want to speak of the PRoP in terms of the asymmetries of difference as an ontological endeavor and also as a sociocultural/political - ontic endeavor.

Our bodies stand at the center of any debate about how and what different people perceive. It is this idea of how the body is entangled with/in and alongside the world that gives way to phenomenologies concerned with issues of race, gender, abilities, and so forth. In this document, because I believe that people, all people, are made marginal in some way are other, I use the term marginalism (to indicate issues of race, gender, etc.) not as a technique to blend matters of sociocultural/political differences (as in race and colorblindness), but to engender a collective efficacy – a sort of solidarity in addressing systems that work to oppress and subjugate bodies from their embodied/perceptual pursuits toward freedoms of the possible and potential. This is what is at stake for the PRoP: the idea that somewhere in the tensions of moving from
one state of being to another, we are not only able to enact our perceptual rites, but also our rights as embodied figures in the world.

As phenomenologist Emily Lee (2014) says in her book, *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, “embodiment inherently conditions thinking” (p. 3). Therefore, it is imperative that we look to our perceiving body not only as a means of conscious awareness, but also as a practice of protest, disruption, counter-narrative, and intervention as a politics. Simply stated, a rite, from the point of view of the PRoP, is a perceptual structuring. It is a structuring that informs and is informed by the preconditions that forge their way into the conscious presence of our everyday comings and goings. A perceptual rite, like the things that work to orientate us, have a certain generalizable structure. But because such rites are worldly, they also extend themselves to us as rights. What this means is that perceptual rites have a political dimension that in turn creates opportunities to self-actualize in intervening ways.

Certain bodies have access to certain kinds of perceptual experiences and not others. Certain bodies have access and other are denied access. Thus, not all bodies are afforded experiences of the rite equally. The ontological rite is lived as a political right (or lack thereof). It is in this slippage between rite/right that phenomenologies of difference become important to consider for any theory of PRoP.

This slippage between rites and rights is located in the tensions between self, body, and world. It is really a matter of the anxiousness that provokes differences. Although all bodies have the structure of perceptual rites – they are bodies that enact and motion forward from a temporal perspective, not all bodies are the same and therefore require/demand that the particularities of certain bodies be given specific attention. This becomes the enactment of rights. We can think
about rights in terms of how different bodies enact their rites in ways that speak to their particular lived-experience.

As a way to future unpack how difference from a general, ontological stance becomes difference from a propositional stance (pedagogies of difference), I want to place some attention on the *immemorial past* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). I believe it will help us to consider the habits and histories that affect our seeing the world as different, in the ontic sense – in a manner that supports the idea that we are always culturally and historically situated – in the sense of perception as a *right*.

To shed some light on this idea, I turn to a passage of length, which, in its entirety, is necessary. One key importance of this passage is that it helps to further establish an understanding of how implicitness occurs as a driving force in our everyday living, working to establish racial or gender differences. In quoting Merleau-Ponty (1968), phenomenologist Al-Saji (2007) gives us a definition of the past that is immemorial:

*Time before time* hence coexists with phenomenal time as flow, just as depth coexists with and provides the structural condition for things to be things, or as a background coexists with the figure that it puts in relief. In this sense, *time before time* inscribes a structure of coexistence, whereby the past that has never been present forms the ground for the existence and passage of the present. (p. 188)

In this first half of the quote, immemorial past is one *that has never been present*. This is slightly different from the unconscious past, in that, the unconscious past reflects a binary of the present. The unconscious/pre-reflective past is in direct relations with the present. They in some way mirror each other – as a visible and invisible. However, the immemorial past and present creates a chiasm that is imbalanced and asymmetrical. Al-Saji, continues by stating that:

Crucially, the chiasm institutes an irreversibility. The relation of past and present is asymmetrical, since one of the terms appears to forever preexist the other. But it is also a reversibility since there is preexistence of the past in general only in connection with the present. Moreover, the present continues to pass, to incorporate itself into and transform
the past, as the past continues to coexist with and insinuate itself into the present. *Simultaneity* is, then, one with the irreversible passage that defines time. (Al-Saji, 2007, p. 188).

The second half of this quote presents interesting implications for what is possible and potential during the PRoP. The idea that the immemorial past is irreversible, a preexistence of the present, is curious. Can the immemorial past and its eclipse of the present be considered as memories and histories that come back to the present as objectifications of sociocultural/political norms? Does the indeterminacy of the immemorial past, in some way, work to facilitate a sociocultural/political continuum in its preexistence and insinuations? And still, if this is the case, how are the demands of *difference* – our attentiveness - considered in the context of the immemorial past? In other words, what becomes of *difference* in the face of things *that have ever been present*; things that live indeterminately alongside our pre-consciousness?

Before I entertain these questions, I want to highlight the second central aspect of the PRoP – embodiment – the enactments of a body being and becoming. What is the politics of perception for the PRoP? First, it involves the emergence of the potential recognition of difference, which is ever-present, and secondly, it reflects the demands of difference in its efforts to gain perspective, value – a sense of self, really. In other words, circles must be identified as circles as oppose to squares or the color red as opposed to the color green. And then each has to be recognized as having some level of difference over the other. Essentially, the PRoP reflects a time in which seeing the world is under the influence of the demands of time, in that, we are becoming consciously embodied and embedded in a world that calls out to be named. The political life is one in which (indeterminate) things become (determinate) *somethings*. In our making meaning of difference, we imbue things with value and definitions; we name them as a means of knowing and re/presenting them.
What is it like to traverse across time – to catch a hold of different? What is it like to ebb and flow between being and becoming? What is it like to come to know? These are all questions of relations. Our whole existence is a perceptual rite of passage—which is first amplified by the preadolescent experience of things becoming things and things becoming a self against a background of accessibility and inaccessibility. It is our constant public, social-self embedded in motions and movements – discerning our towardness as a way to face our next future moment. As things in the world, our fate is always giving way to this future. And fate is always contingent.

Difference, I suggest, should be placed as the ontological horizon since it is a fundamental aspect of our temporality. To say that the PRoP represents a politics is to highlight the manifestation and appearances of the indeterminacy of the past that comes back to fill the space it left behind. This irreducible past that has never been present creates difference as a part of our experience as a sentient and sensorial being. As Irigaray (2008) claims, recognition creates two worlds in that our seeing is always a seeing of difference.

Van Leeawen (2012) says of Irigarary’s work,

That is, if the appearance of alterity is contemporaneous with the very disclosure of sense, then alterity is always already inscribed in the sense of the world without thereby annulling it as radically other to this horizon of sense. Her claim, then, is that the appearance of alterity is coextensive with the disclosure of a horizon of sense that, in virtue of the persistence of alterity, remains fundamentally open or equivocal. (van Leeawen, p. 478)

Alterity and how it appears is what provides a perceptual horizon. In other works, all of what we see and why things are able to appear as things to see is because of difference; because of alterities. It is indeed the notion that we see difference, which gives us the figures on that we can make discernments. This is apart from what we chose to name things that we discern. What is fundamental is that we first understand experiences as a tension/distancing of alterities.
This means that we live in an ever-present uncertainty in our motions towards the world; and the world towards us. The encounters that we experience are ambiguous, defining, contentious, dynamic, diverse, complex and vulnerable. But in the mist of all its uncertainties – good, bad, or indifferent – our encounters remain potential. Massumi (2015), states that,

There is always a sort of vagueness surrounding the situation, an uncertainty about where you might be able to go and what you might be able to do once you exit that particular context. This uncertainty can actually be empowering – once you realize that it gives you a margin of maneuverability and you focus on that, rather than on projecting success or failure. It gives you the feeling that there is always an opening to experiment, to try and see. This brings a sense potential to the situation. (pp. 2-3)

In this passage, we find our abilities to disrupt, to intervene, to self-actualize. A phenomenological perspective of difference provides an opportunity for us to take up a critical stance on seeing the world. The kind of looking that occurs during preadolescence is important to understand because looking, to some degree, reflects this on the political nature that the passage describes – the maneuverability that is available within every encounter that presents a point of view – an attitude to be unveiled.

Encounters are events of affect and according Massumi (2015), affect is a way of talking about that “margin of maneuverability” (p. 3). Affects are what occurs in the transitional, liminal space of the PRoP. It represents the potential that every uncertainty has as its character. What it might be like to experience the world as a preadolescent is really a question about what it is like to begin to be attentive to the appearing of difference as different—as extracted from the flow of childhood. For the preadolescent, this traversing across the latency of perception, along with the understanding of difference and value, creates a perceptual politics for the child. It is no longer a matter of being with gestural bodies, but now being with gestural bodies that represent and reflect something other than the thing that was previously attended to. Gestures become things that are symbolic and are imbued with histories and values of associations; of non/belongings.
The PRoP marks a critically important time in our lives to understand issues of difference and the politics that it engenders. The child’s need to make meaning of difference and to be realized as capable; as having worth and value in the world, ushers in a perceptual politics that remains throughout the rest of our lives. This new way of seeing and recognizing signals to a different way of being embodied, in that, the world and its histories come in to view. In understanding the world through a perceptual consciousness of difference, preadolescents are also understanding the values that are placed on difference, and in turn values placed on themselves. The preadolescent comes to be consciously embodied in a historical world, as a historical being (Trigg, 2012; Welsh, 2013).

The question of what it like is to see the world; to be in the world is a question about the making of histories and the memories that labor to fashion our experiences. The relational aspects of being embodied - the encounters that is perception - moves us. They push us forward and outward. They made things always potential. Although, the general sentiment about potentiality is typical thought of as “good” - productive, promising. A more useful account of the word might be to consider its uncertainties - the indeterminacies of potentiality.

The PRoP, as a method of understanding attentiveness, presents important opportunities in the field of art education. In the next section, I will explore the possible implications of thinking through the PRoP framework in context to: What is the usefulness of the PRoP in helping pre-service educators develop curricula for/in/through the classroom? How might the principles of the PRoP manifest in one’s studio practices and filter into their teaching practices in the classroom and into social practices of art? And what are the implications for using the PRoP as a critical sociopolitical theory?
The Gucci Gang Revisited: An Illustration of the PRoP

In the introduction to this dissertation, I retold an anecdote concerning four preadolescents in a shopping mall who were denied entrance to a Gucci store. This short anecdote illustrates the important features of the PRoP in the following ways. First, the kids where perceptually drawn into the store. Their perceptual orientation, which was anchored in their past experiences and familiarity with Gucci from popular music, pulled them toward the store. Unknown to them, this passage into the store transgressed certain social norms based on race, class, and perhaps gender. Their right to enact the perceptual rite was denied. Their recognition of the Gucci bag as part of their inherited identity was suddenly revealed to be a misrecognition. Thus, a disequilibrium between their perceptual access and their bodily access came into view as a point of reflection and perplexity. The mood of the experience shifted from one of experiential excitement to anxiety over identity and access. And with this shift in mood, certain questions could be thematized by drawing them out of the experience. Who am I? Where do I belong? What do I have a right to access? These all became salient features of the experience. PRoP therefore presents the first opportunity to see how the self is constituted through anxiety over itself, how the self becomes a question for itself in relation to the world it is embedded in.

But importantly, there is also a promise that emerges from the anecdote as well. As stated, the denied access to the store was in some ways a refusal of their bodily rights to have access. However, the potential that is always present in experience – in the passing through the present – is that perception is always transgressing social norms. When Jah and the boys went into the Gucci store, they were, even though they did not realize it, enacting a right of refusal—a refusal of how the world is structured. The world that presents the Gucci brand as a proximal/
accessible object also presented itself as accessible in the high-end shopping mall. It was not until the store clerk intervened in their arrival and their dwelling in the store that their rite came into contradiction with their right to access. In other words, the PRoP speaks to a misrecognition on two levels: (a) misrecognizing where certain bodies are allowed to go but also (b) misrecognizing those implicit rules that speak to another world where bodies can move and orient themselves beyond such restrictions.

In conclusion, it is the structuring features of the PRoP that can potentially help us to understand and intervene in the institutional arranges that work to govern and oppress/deny our bodies its full set of rites/rights. The PRoP has critically important implications for early childhood in education since the ontology of experience is not currently being taken up in critical and nuanced ways. It is in the young children that we can better understand the ontology of our perceptual experiences in ways that can serve to apprehend issues of equity at its roots. In the last chapter, I turn back to my last twenty years of working with historically marginalized youth to highlight issues of access, denial, and the rights that perception makes available.
CHAPTER 5
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROP IN ART EDUCATION

In my dissertation, I have outlined a phenomenological theory of perception and how this phenomenology is experienced by preadolescents. The perceptual rite of passage (PRoP) is an endeavor to help us better understand what it is like to pay attention to the potentialities of our everyday perceptual experiences. This project has helped fill in three critical gaps in the research literature. First, as explained previously, research has failed to take into account the pivotal role of preadolescent perception. The preadolescent experience has disappeared. What is now needed is a return to preadolescence within early childhood art education. The theoretical framework that I have offered provides meaningful methods of understanding the perceptual shift that occurs during early childhood. This shift not only marks a critical developmental time for the child, but it also signals to broader pedagogical implication of how art educators can be more responsive to the needs of children as they begin to make meaning of the world.

Second, such experience must be theorized in relation to phenomenology, and its ability to pinpoint perceptual structures underlying and supporting experience. An essential aspect of phenomenology is its posture toward the political. In their book, *Phenomenology and the Political*, Gurley & Pfeifer (2016) state that phenomenology:

[S]ets out to gain insight into existence by way of a description of experience that does not depend upon presuppositions about the meaning of experience or particular experiences. The belief is that, come what may, particular meaning emerges from and is not constitutive in advance of lived experience. In employing [phenomenology], we can avoid the trap of imbuing experience with preconceived meanings that ultimately obscure the truth of experience itself. (p. x)

Let me be clear, the above passage is nuanced and can be debated as such, however, what is important to discern within the passage is its commitment to the lived-experience. Although, it can be easily read as omitting any sociohistorical/cultural context within experience, in actuality
it is allowing room for that context to be lived out in the present moments of experience, which provides an insight that potentially is richer than any preconceived assumptions about the emergence of experience. The passage actually makes space for histories to be lived out and understood as they are renewed in the potential of lived-experience. This is what the PRoP brings to art education that is currently missing.

Third, emphasizing the perceptual helps us overcome the cognitive bias which all too quickly bypasses the body and its constitutive role in producing meaning. In total, the dissertation addresses these gaps by providing a rigorous outline of preadolescent perception, its structure and its ontic manifestations in the form of the PRoP. Perhaps most importantly, this project has concluded with a suggestion that the rite of perceptual passage be turned into a right through art education practice. Working through the phenomenological structures of perception has thus let outward toward political implications for art educators to consider. In this sense, there is perhaps a fourth gap that has been filled as well: a gap that separates social justice from ontological structures underlying perceptual experience. Through the PRoP, social justice education can find its anchoring point in the body, and more precisely in the ambiguities and anxieties of the rite of passage through which difference is experienced, ambiguities confronted, and the promises of indeterminacy opened up. Following up on this final point, this conclusion will briefly touch upon the following questions: If perception is a skillful activity of achievement like Noë, (2004) claims, then how can an understanding of perception impact art education? And if the PRoP reflects on the role of the body as a primary site of meaning, then how do we, as artist and art educators, use perception as a guide to impact our learning and creative practices? How can art education advocate for the rite of perception to become a RIGHT, meaning how can it ensure that all students have access to the kinds of perceptual experiences necessary to come to
grips with the world and transform it? How can art education take up the political possibilities of preadolescent perceptual transgressions and see them as promises rather than mere observations or deficits?

In this chapter, I provide implications for art education. I have attempted to think through the framework of the PRoP as a way to consider, not only what it is like to be in the world, but also, what it means to *come into a knowing of* the world, and self through encounters with materials. As such, I put the PRoP into practical terms to highlight how the perceptual shift that occurs during preadolescence can provide new pedagogical and scholarly possibilities for how childhood is lived, understood, and realized in schools, communities, museums and other formal and informal space where meaning is important.

A Culture of Participation

Student bodies in classrooms are no doubt becoming increasingly more diverse (Acuff, 2016). I see this in my own teaching practice in higher education and in community settings. In actuality, what this diversity means is that classrooms are represented by a larger swath of students from different cultural backgrounds, sexual and gendered orientations, religious and spiritual beliefs and ideologies, as well as a range of capacities for cognitive, behavioral, and abilities engagement. The operative words, here, are variety and diversity. I want to first make a clear distinction between the two words and then recommend a new way of thinking about the pedagogical and curricular approach that needs to be considered when involved with a variety of different students in the classroom.

First, it is required that we shift our understanding of the word diversity. In most common instances, it is known as a way of referring to the gathering a people with varied situation and
identity differences (cultural, class, and the like). However, difference understood in this way is really only a representation of a variety of people. So often, if not always, when we say diversity, we are really referring to the multiplicities and dynamics of a group of individuals. Multiplicity is important to acknowledge. It serves as a sort of hospitable gesture that should be a part of any gathering space. But all of this does not represent the word diversity.

Diversity is not just variety; it actually reflects a mode of operation- a practice of sincerity and respect of each other’s culture, class, and the potential in each person’s emergent experiences. In other words, diversity and inclusion do not represent multiplicity; they represent how multiplicity is experienced. The PRoP provides us with critical ways to understand the structures and operations of experience and being with difference – both on the ontological and ontic levels. We can look to the theory to grasp an understanding of how the body is a site of knowing and that knowing is a public affair of relations with space and the things that occupy spaces.

Here, I want to call for a culture of embodied participation focused on the implicit dimensions of experience—participation that functions to experience difference from its ontological perspective – difference as different than not different from. The distinction harkens back to the offering of the ontological versus the ontic. Different than reflects a more general way of understanding one thing from other, however, different from sets the stage for a power dynamic to emerge, in that, it tends to speak more the judgement of value. What the PRoP encourages is an approach that works to mitigate our inclinations to subjugate others as a means of securing power and pleasures for ourselves. Identities are not claimed alone. We share a public. A public is a shared space; a space of occupants and encounters. And we learn through
our encounters and through our practices of being public. At the heart of the PRoP is a push to account for the lived-experience that is shared as an equity issue.

Equity in education, in its broadest terms, is education that takes place everywhere and not just in classrooms, museums, and communities center, but also in the street and other transitive spaces (Kraehe, 2017). As critical education theorist, Antonia Darder (2017) explains,

[B]odies are living maps of power and identity, which offer meaningful information and powerful insights into the tensions, struggles, anxieties, and ambiguities, as well as aspirations and dreams, particularly, of youth whose cultural, class, gendered, and sexual differences yearn and seek expression within the classroom or on the streets. (pp. v-vii)

Perception is both a reflection of our bodies in motion and the kinds of choices we make or not make with/through our bodies. The PRoP is concerned with the rites of the uncertain and the rights of the potential. The perceptual rite/rights of the PRoP have real-world implications for social justice pedagogy in art and design education that address the political aspects of seeing the world for preadolescent children and adults whose memories lead back to childhood and forward into the open possibilities of a contingent future.

Teachers need to cultivate a critical phenomenological attitude in order to help transform rites into rights. A phenomenological attitude is an attitude that is mindful of Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) *primacy of perception* or Jill Bennett’s (2005) *empathic vision*. In simple terms, a phenomenological attitude is one that allows for the experiences of being with difference to emerge without assumptions or presuppositions. It is an attitude of caring attentiveness towards the other that is also a reflection of the caring attentiveness you have for yourself. We are not really able to give what we do not own, so it is important to cultivate this attitude during pre-service training. To be more specific, as I have developed throughout this dissertation, care and attention ought to be given to the experience of anxiety as an ambivalent mood defining the PRoP. Anxiety can be paralyzing as it indicates a breakdown of meaning. But it can also open
the individual up to the possibilities for a new world, for new orientations, for new perceptual relationships with the world. As such, there is a promise that anxiety contains, and for this reason, it should not be repressed but rather embraced as a constitutive aspect of a rite of perceptual passage. Art teachers in particular can play a vital role in helping students recognize the possibilities in the PRoP for redefining themselves and their relationships with others, things, and the world at large. As such, the PRoP can help ground social justice art education in indeterminacy and ambiguity of perception itself, anchoring it firmly in the body and its (dis)orientations and (mis)recognitions. To conclude, I will now turn to my own experiences to illustrate how this might be achieved.

PRoP and Informal Learning Spaces

The perceptual rite of passage is a theory that reflects my community-based art education practice over the last 20 years. The PRoP comes to life in many of the experiences I have had working with students who have participated in Preservation LINK art programs. A few years ago, I was leading a visual literacy workshop with a group of preadolescent fourth graders. The objective was to learn how to use a digital camera to document aspects of the environment through photography and to learn how to discuss ideas about images. As part of the lesson, students were asked to find a partner and work to capture three photographs of different objects inside the classroom. In addition, each student was asked to take a portrait photograph of her or his partner. This was a workshop not so much about how to take good photographs, but rather about the practice of looking. It was about helping the students and me to understand how children pay attention to the world around them.
Once the students got their cameras and began the project, the room became busy with students buzzing around from one area to the next attempting to find something interesting to photograph. Many of the children seemed much more interested in taking photos of themselves rather than objects in the classroom. As we neared the end of the assignment, I asked a couple of girls if they had each taken all the pictures they needed. One student immediately said, “Yes, but Tia doesn’t want me to take her picture!” Without hesitation, Tia interrupted and exclaimed, “No, no! You not taking my picture, I’m ugly!” In that instance, her words, “I’m ugly!” hit me like a ton of bricks.

Tia was someone who had previously stuck out to me. She was a beautiful little brown skinned girl who was energetic, astute, and engaged in the lessons from the time I first entered the classroom. I could tell by her ease in the classroom and communication with the teacher that she was probably that way most of the time. When she referred to herself as ugly, I knew that it was a moment to pass by without critical attention. In that moment, for me, what made its way into the foreground was my need to encourage a counter-narrative to whatever discourse that was holding Tia hostage. In order to do that, I needed to approach the situation from an empathic position and not one that forced any ideas on her. I wondered about her world and how she perceived it, but I did not impose any of those thoughts onto her. I simply explained to the girls why the portraits were necessary for me to match the photographs with the photographer when I returned with the prints. I did not want to engage in a conversation about value or self-identity. I believed it was more important for me to shift the narrative by placing her refusal into a context of participation and not value. Tia did pose for her portrait, and in some way, I hope that the experience was a positive one that made her feel differently about herself (see figure D for her

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3 Tia is a pseudo name.
portrait). The goal here was to work through perception itself rather than through beliefs she might hold about herself. This reorients the work of social justice away from cognitive bias toward the ambiguities and promises of perception as such—perception which always carries within itself something new and different to be seen. Through the portraiture process, Tia can potentially come to see something different in herself beyond the stereotype of “ugly.” And this seeing can reorient her toward a new relationship between self and body and body and world. Of course, this meant that Tia had to face certain anxieties about her portrait, but such anxiety, as I have argued above, is an important part of the rite of perceptual passage. The goal of the exercise was, simply put, to transform the anxiety of the rite of passage into a right to define her own perceptual style beyond negative or hurtful stereotypes. In this sense, social justice becomes perceptual justice, or a justice which functions first and foremost by effecting a shift in how difference appears.

Students who have been made marginal by historical systems of oppression are most vulnerable (Darder, 2017; Kraehe, 2017), and thus most in need of an art education dedicated to turning a rite into a right. It becomes imperative that we are attentive to the kinds of experiences that are available for students and how they navigate through those experiences, even if they induce anxiety over self and world. What the PRoP provides for educational spaces is the idea that perceptual experiences are experiences fraught with anxiety, but it is that anxiousness that makes possibilities available for the body to enact in meaningful, skillful, intentional ways. It is the right of the body imagine its own possibilities. As Trigg’s (2012) argues, “the tension between creative renewal and epistemological certainty is a problem peculiar to the interplay between memory and imagination. The interplay precludes the autonomy of memory and renders the imagination the guiding agent” (p. 67). If we consider imagination to be our guide, then we
should seek to understand it, not as a force, but as a pedagogical means of participation – an openness that works to encourages our work in education. This releases us up to the material and the imaginary, the object and the virtual, the physical and the fantastical.

Conclusion

I suggest that educators adopt this simple philosophy when it comes to issues of learning and teaching: that perception is ambiguous, and this ambiguity is the fulcrum of experience. This means that learning emerges as a result of our perceptual rites/rights and that they are ever-present, never private, and always full of context and potential. In that, the structural elements of the PRoP become essential in both the pre-service and post-pre-service experience. It also helps the studio, community, and museum educator realize pedagogical practices that can become realized when engaging k-12 populations.

Perhaps I can recommend what perceptual rights might be:

1) The right to explore the ambiguities of perception together, with others, and without predefined judgment.

2) The right to one’s anxiety. Instead of repressing anxiety, it ought to be embraced as a constitutive part of one’s perceptual experience of self and world. Only by proclaiming it as a right can the promise of rights to challenge how the world is perceptually divided and bodies oriented be proclaimed.

3) The right to the time and space needed to be attentive to perceptual experience. Such time and space are often restricted to others with certain privileges, certain bodies, and certain histories. This needs to become more inclusive.

4) The right to develop a perceptual style of one’s own. Heidegger would refer to this style as “authenticity” (2008).

It is my goal that art education can come to embody these rights and in turn help preadolescents see the ambiguities of their own seeing as containing promises rather than mere deficits.
APPENDIX A

SNIPPET OF JAH’S INTERVIEW ABOUT THE GUCCI STORE
Researcher: How was it taking pictures in the mall?

Jah: Fun, excited.

Researcher: It was fun and exciting. What was fun and exciting about it? Give me some details.

Jah: Cause we get to...you said we gonna lead and ya’ll was gonna follow us wherever we go. And we said, okay. The reason it was so fun taking pictures and stuff was because I never have used a camera like that, a picture thing like that. And the reason it’s fun taking pictures because you get the sit on stuff and you get to play with stuff. And plus, you get to print the pictures and post them up and stuff.

Researcher: So, you guys went into several stores: the furniture store...what else?

Jah: Gucci stow! (store)

Researcher: Yah, tell me about the Gucci store, because you guys went ahead of us. Tell me how that was for you?

Jah: It’s like a store that this boy named Lil Pump had rapper about. He raped about the Gucci Gang, and that’s the Gucci store. He loves Gucci! He got a tattooed on his chest that got Gucci sign on there. And Gucci, they got Gucci backpacks, Gucci watches, Gucci shoes, Gucci pants, Gucci shoes boxes, Gucci almost everything. [Repeat and Consumption] And Gucci is the favorite; the best place I would go to get a backpack or a watch.

Researcher: The Gucci store?! And who sings this song?

Jah: Lil Pump (thought he said Lil Punk)

Researcher: And what’s the name of the song?

Jah: Gucci Gang.

Researcher: Gucci Gang. This a rapper? I have to Google him, I don’t know him. You say he got a tattoo?

Jah: Tattoo on his shirt and it’s got Gucci...No! Tattoo on his chest and it’s got Gucci. And he love Gucci. I think on his car had Gucci color, I don’t know I forgot.

Researcher: So, what was it like being in that store, then?

Jah: That song got everybody chunk, so they want to go to that store so they can buy stuff and stuff. And I was mad because they said we had to get out because we had actually walked in there without a grown up.
Researcher: You said you got mad because you did what?

Jah: We had to walk out of there with no grown up. We had to get out because we didn’t walk in there with a grown up. And we was like too loud.

Researcher: And how do you know that?

Jah: We went like, Ohhh! This the Gucci store and stuff, ya’ll! And that was too loud and then they had said ya’ll gotta come in here with a parent. And then we said okay. And then I said there go one right there. And then he said I think, we got to get out.

Researcher: And you said you got mad, why?

Jah: Cause they kicked us out the Gucci store. Wouldn’t you be mad if they kicked you out the Gucci store?!

Researcher: Yes, I’d be mad if they kicked me out the Gucci Store. I don’t know that they kicked you out though.

Jah: They had told us to get out.

Researcher: Did you guys have anyone else kick you out of any other store?

Jah: No

Researcher: So, how did that compare to the rest of your time in the mall?

Jah: Ah, it was like better. They let us sit on stuff, touch stuff, play with stuff, and talk to us and stuff. But I like . . . the favorite place I went in . . . there were two stores, three, three! – Gucci store, iPhone store, and the shoe store.
APPENDIX B

PRoP STRUCTURAL DIAGRAM
**PRoP**
Perceptual Rite of Passage

**Ontological**
Space and Time

**Intentionality**

**World**

**Ontic**
Belonging/Recognition/Value

Relational space: Proximity and Mutuality
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