

## Transparently Oneself

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**ABSTRACT:** Different points of Metzinger's position makes it a peculiar form of representationalism: (1) his distinction between intentional and phenomenal content, in relation to the internalism/externalism divide; (2) the notion of transparency defined at a phenomenal and not epistemic level, together with (3) the felt inwardness of experience. The distinction between reflexive and pre-reflexive phenomenal internality will allow me to reconsider Metzinger's theory of the self and to propose an alternative conception that I will describe both at an epistemic and a phenomenal level.

Representationalism is a widespread but also controversial position. For example, what would be the representational content of orgasm? Block (1995) answers that the phenomenal content of orgasm is not representational. On the contrary, Tye claims that "All states that are phenomenally conscious—all feelings and experiences—have intentional content" (1995, p. 93), orgasm included: "in this case, one undergoes sensory representations of certain physical changes in the genital region" (1995, p. 118). This opposition between Block and Tye provides a clear example of how unclear our phenomenal experiences can be. Even though orgasm is not an elusive feeling, both our

phenomenal description and conceptual analysis seem elusive enough to support opposite interpretations: representational vs. non-representational.

Moreover, representationalism itself is far from being a uniform position. Consider for example two philosophers. All things being equal, they share (let us assume) with many other human beings quite common phenomenal experiences (if not when enjoying orgasm, at least when seeing the red of a ripe tomato). Let us further imagine that, in the philosophy-of-mind toolbox, these two particular philosophers have both chosen "representationalism": they both defend the view that all conscious states are representational. Similar phenomenal experiences, similar conceptual kit, unsurprisingly, these two philosophers share some descriptions of phenomenal experience. However, these similarities are only superficial. Call these two philosophers TM and MT, for Thomas Metzinger and Michael Tye, respectively, and you get deeply different positions, one being the mirror opposite of the other. Thus, apparently similar ingredients (here representationalism) and a common recipe (the same leading question: what makes a representation a phenomenal representation?) can lead to bake not only different, but utterly opposite, i.e. incompatible philosophical positions. It thus seems worth considering more closely this opposition.

Metzinger explicitly presents his theory of phenomenal experience and phenomenal self as a representationalism:

Consciousness, the phenomenal self, and the first-person perspective are fascinating representational phenomena... I will offer a representationalist and functionalist analysis of what a consciously experienced first-person perspective is. (p. 1<sup>1</sup>)

But in fact, Metzinger's representationalism may seem so odd from a more classical representationalist perspective that some may wonder if it is a representationalism at all. Consider the following quote:

Like many other philosophers today, I assume that a representationalist analysis of conscious experience is promising because phenomenal states are a special subset of intentional states (see Dretske 1995; Lycan 1996; Tye 1995, 2000 for typical examples). (p. 111)

This description of representationalism makes clear that Metzinger offers a peculiar position, a non classical representationalism. Indeed, the classical representationalist equation is the following: phenomenal qualities = phenomenal content = intentional content = representational content. However, Metzinger does not equate phenomenal and intentional contents: in his view, phenomenal states are only "a special subset of intentional states". Importantly, this peculiarity is not enough in itself to disqualify Metzinger's position as a representationalism. Indeed, if intentional content is representational content, as both classical representationalists and Metzinger argue, then this special subset of intentional states that are phenomenal states is representational as well.

Metzinger's distinction between intentional and phenomenal contents thus does not threaten representationalism *per se*. However, it shapes Metzinger's position in a way that may seem unacceptable from the perspective of classical representationalism. In this paper, I will defend directly neither classical representationalism nor Metzinger's "odd representationalism". Indeed, to commit oneself to one or the other position presupposes to better understand Metzinger's position itself, and what makes it "odd". This is the task I intend to pursue in this paper, on the four following points.

My first part will underline that an important consequence of Metzinger's distinction between intentional and phenomenal contents is that he steps over the classical internalism/externalism divide. Indeed, he acknowledges a form of externalism for intentional content, while he defends internalism for phenomenal content. This view is clearly not possible for a classical representationalism which equates phenomenal and intentional contents. Interestingly, some of Metzinger's own arguments can be exploited to support externalism for phenomenal content, even though he argues explicitly against this view. This consideration will considerably weaken Metzinger's distinction between phenomenal and intentional content. However, Metzinger's position counts a number of other differences with classical representationalism.

My second part will discuss a notion that Metzinger shares with classical representationalists, but uses in a very peculiar way: transparency<sup>2</sup>. Metzingerian transparency not only remains consistent with representationalism but also underlines two points that are important to consider in a classical representationalist framework. First, transparency is a phenomenal notion and not an epistemic one. As such, it is thus inadequate to conclude anything at the epistemic level from phenomenal transparency, even though some representationalists do so. Second, Metzinger's description of transparency is closer to our phenomenal experience than classical representationalist description.

My third part will concern another aspect of phenomenal experience that Metzinger underlines. Transparency is essential to phenomenal experience but not necessary. Rather, phenomenal content can be described on a continuum between transparency and opacity. Opaque phenomenal content can be described as phenomenally internal: this is the felt inwardness of experience. But again, inwardness is a phenomenal notion and should not be confused with internality at an epistemic level. The specification of Metzingerian transparency (part 2) will allow me to complete my discussion of internalism for phenomenal content at an epistemic level (part 1) with a discussion of phenomenal internality (inwardness) at a phenomenal level of description (part 3). In fact, even if externalism for phenomenal content is correct at an epistemic level, it remains that at a phenomenal level, experience is felt as internal (inwardness). Metzinger's view has the advantage of taking this aspect of phenomenal experience into account. On this point, I will underline the distinction between two forms of phenomenal internality, reflexive and pre-reflexive. The former is a form of opacity, while the latter coincides with transparency. Metzinger considers briefly the relevance of this difference, but he disregards its importance in the framework of a theory of the self.

My fourth part will thus further exploit the previous considerations in relation to Metzinger's "central ontological claim": "no such things as selves exist in the world" (p.1). Again, the distinction between the epistemic and the phenomenal levels is highly

relevant to discuss this position. First, at an epistemic level, I will highlight that Metzinger's own arguments are more consistent with a revision rather than with the elimination of the notion of self. Second, at the phenomenal level, I will underline that Metzinger's description of the self as a phenomenal content disregards the specificity of pre-reflexive self-consciousness. Importantly, this conception of the self and self-consciousness departs from Metzinger's take-home message that "Nobody ever *was* or *had* a self" (p. 1) but, as he forcefully requires, it avoids "the error of phenomenal reification"<sup>3</sup>, since it never confuses the self with a mere mental object.

## 1. Phenomenal experience in(s) and out(s): the epistemic level of description.

Metzinger makes a crucial distinction between *intentional* and *phenomenal* content. While classical representationalism uses only one name, intentional content, whether the represented object exists or not, Metzinger uses two. More specifically, in his terminology, the content is intentional when it depends on the existence of the represented object, while it is phenomenal when it does not depend on the existence of the represented object. Consider your experience when holding a book in your hands:

The *intentional* content of the relevant states in your head depends on the fact of this book actually existing, and of the relevant state being a reliable instrument for gaining knowledge in general. ...The *phenomenal* content of your currently active book representation is what stays the same, no matter if the book exists or not (p. 173).

Following this distinction, Metzinger defends externalism for intentional content and internalism for phenomenal content. This position surely sounds odd to representationalist's ears. To clarify it, let me first make a terminological point. Externalist and internalist representationalisms can be defined as follows:

Externalist representationalism is the thesis that microphysical duplicates can differ with respect to the relevant representational contents of some of their internal states. On this view, differently situated duplicates or duplicates with different histories can differ phenomenally. Internalist representationalism denies this. According to the internalist, microphysical duplicates must be alike with respect to the appropriate representational contents of their internal states (Tye 2003, p. 167).<sup>4</sup>

In Metzinger's terminology, physical internality means that the instruments of representation are internal in a spatial sense, being within the brain. In addition, functional internality means that "the content of mental representations is the content of *internal* states because the causal properties making it available for conscious experience are only realized by a single person and by physical properties, which are mostly internally exemplified, realized within the body of this person" (p.15, cf. also p.267). To summarize<sup>5</sup>, in Metzinger's view, a phenomenal representation is a *physically* internal

representation that "rests on a transient change in the functional properties of the system" (p.21), thereby being a *functionally* internal event:

Phenomenal representation is that variant of intentional representation in which the content properties (i.e. is the *phenomenal* content properties) of mental states are completely determined by the spatially internal and synchronous properties of the respective organism, because they supervene on a critical subset of these states. If all properties of my central nervous system are fixed, the contents of my subjective experience are fixed as well (p. 112).

However, this description is insufficient to pin down Metzinger's view in its specificity. Indeed, he also acknowledges some form of externalism in that mental representations "utilize resources that are *physically* external for their concrete realization": "the actual 'vehicle' of representation, does not necessarily have its boundaries at our skin" (p. 21). This externalism is not merely physical, but also functional: "a system may *functionally* expand well across its physical boundaries, for example, by transiently establishing sensorimotor loops" (p. 274, my emphasis). This externalism, however, does not concern phenomenal states but only intentional states. The latter can be better described as involving "active externalism" (Clark and Chalmers 1998):

The domain of those properties determining the intentional content of mental states, seems to "pulsate" across the physical boundaries of the system, seems to pulsate into extradermal reality. Describing the intentional content generated by real life, situated, embodied agents may simply make it necessary to analyze another space of possible states, for example, the space of causal interactions generated by sensorimotor loops or the behavioural space of the system in general (p. 112).

I wish to make two points on the basis of these considerations. The first is that it now appears clearly that Metzinger's internalism is not a "pure" internalism since he acknowledges physical and functional externalism at least for intentional content. The second point concerns phenomenal content: internalism for phenomenal content is threatened in different respects.

Let me first make again a terminological point. What I call here "internalism for phenomenal content" is physical and functional internalism for phenomenal experience. It concerns the epistemic level of description of phenomenal experience, and whether or not it is fully reducible to internal brain states. It is not what Metzinger describes as phenomenal internality, that is, the felt inwardness of phenomenal experience. Metzinger argues in favour of both internalism for phenomenal content and phenomenal internality. I will discuss first his internalism for phenomenal content and come back to his description of inwardness later on (part 3).

According to Metzinger, phenomenal content is internal in that it is "solely determined by internal properties of the nervous system" (p. 173). From an epistemological perspective, representation "*always* is a simulation": "at no point in time

[phenomenal states] establish a direct and immediate contact with the world around us" (p. 59). Moreover, from a phenomenological perspective, "this fact is systematically suppressed" (p. 59). As a consequence, "a brain in a vat could possess states subjectively representing object colors as immediately and directly given" (p. 170).

This position is highly controversial.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Metzinger himself gives us some clue to better understand what, *in his own framework*, would be a difference between oneself and one's brain in a vat: representations are not identical with simulation and this questions his internalist account of phenomenal content. Let us consider the following quote:

If this representational carrier is a good and reliable functioning instrument for generating knowledge about the external world, then, by its very transparency, it permits you to directly, as it were, look "through it" right onto the book. ... If your current perception, unnoticed by you, actually is a hallucination, then, as it were, you, as a system as a whole, are no longer looking "through" the state in your head onto the world, but only at the representational vehicle itself—without *this* fact itself being globally available to you. (p. 173).

This quote describes at a *phenomenal* level the absence of distinction between perception and hallucination: their difference remains "unnoticed by you". On the other hand, it also underlines an important *functional* difference between representation and simulation. In (veridical) representation, the representational carrier hides itself and reveals the world outside. In hallucination, the situation is different. You do not look anymore *through* but *to* the representational vehicle. In other terms, representational content and vehicle are different in representation while they are not in simulation. In fact, Metzinger seems close to make this point in the following way:

Phenomenal representations are those for which we are not able to discover the difference between representational content and representation carrier on the level of subjective experience itself (p. 174).

However, my point is importantly different. In this sentence, Metzinger describes *phenomenal* states at the phenomenal level while I consider specifically simulation as a subset of phenomenal states and consider them at an *epistemic* level of description. The common point between representation and simulation would be that the representational vehicle is not *phenomenally* experienced as such. But while you "look" at the world in the case of a representation, you "look" at the representation itself in the case of a simulation. This difference between representation and simulation is also stated by Metzinger as follows:

Phenomenal experience during the waking state is an *online* hallucination. This hallucination is *online* because the autonomous activity of the system is permanently being modulated by the information flow from the sensory organs; it is

an hallucination because it depicts a possible reality as an actual reality. Phenomenal experience during the dream state, however, is just a complex *offline* hallucination (p. 51).

Again, Metzinger focuses on similarities between offline<sup>7</sup> and online hallucinations, i.e. both are hallucinations: "*both* forms of phenomenal content are generated by precisely the same mechanism" (p. 484). But as we just seen, this claim disregards at least one difference: the representational carrier represents itself in the case of a simulation while it represents something else than itself (the world) in the case of a representation. Despite Metzinger's explicit claims to the contrary, there is thus no doubt that, within his own account, there is a difference between representation and simulation at a *functional* level. Thus representational phenomenal experiences are not adequately described as simulational, and this moves us one step away from internalism.

Now, Metzinger could still argue that this functional difference between representation and simulation would only be relevant for intentional content and not for phenomenal content. But is it right to assume that representing the world and representing the representational vehicle leads to the same phenomenal experience? Metzinger thinks it is.

Another view, however, is suggested by his own report of the Ganzfeld effect (pp.100-4): It has been shown (Hochberg et al, 1951) that "a complete disappearance of color vision can actually be obtained by a homogeneous visual stimulation, that is, by a Ganzfeld stimulation" (p. 101). Metzinger draws three philosophical lessons from this case, which can be read as giving some support to the difference between veridical and illusory phenomenal experience. More relevant for the point at stake here is the following remark:

...it is interesting to note how a single blink can restore the conscious sensation of color and brightness for a fraction of a second... The conscious phenomenology of color desaturating differs for different stimuli and classes of phenomenal presentata. ... If we want a phenomenologically plausible theory of conscious experience, all these data will eventually have to function as conceptual constraints (p. 104).

Ganzfeld stimulation shows how easy it is to disrupt our normal *phenomenal* experience by disrupting our intentional relation to the world. In other terms, it shows how far we get from our normal *phenomenal* experience if we artificially cut brain "internal activities" from normal body and world constraints: a little single blink or transient stimulation introduce dramatic differences at the *phenomenal* level.

The point is thus here simply the following. Metzinger presents data (Ganzfeld stimulation) suggesting that the absence of intentional content leads to a dramatic modification of phenomenal content. Thus, even if Metzinger were right to differentiate intentional and phenomenal content, it would remain that phenomenal content depends on intentional content. Second, Metzinger acknowledges a form of externalism for intentional content. On the basis of these two premises (1) dependence of phenomenal

content on intentional content and (2) externalism for intentional content, Metzinger should acknowledge a form of externalism for phenomenal experience, at least indirectly.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, even if Metzinger were right in claiming that there are *some* perspectives under which all phenomenal content is hallucinatory content (p. 250), and that there are *some* forms<sup>9</sup> of phenomenal experiences that could be experienced by a brain in a vat (namely simulation and hallucination where the representational content is nothing over and above the representational instrument), it would remain that normal non-hallucinatory phenomenal experience cannot be adequately described in an internalist context. Pace Metzinger, phenomenal content is not "solely determined by internal properties of the nervous system" (p. 173). Even if we agree that a brain in a vat would be able to enjoy phenomenal experience, it would remain that it would not enjoy the same type of phenomenal content as a brain in a body in the world<sup>10</sup>. Body and world do not only provide, through sensory information, some modulation of internal activities that could as well function in autonomy.<sup>11</sup> Rather, the crucial point here is that purely internal activities are fundamentally different from embodied and embedded internal activities. Embodiment and embeddedness are not secondary and accessory. They condition, determine, shape what is described here as internal activity. "Internal" thus becomes only a spatial description of "brain" activities. But this description is far too reductive in that it artificially considers only part of what such activities are. A firing neuron may be localized within the brain, but what interests Metzinger as most philosophers of mind, is not where this piece of furniture of the mind is, but what it does and how. Metzinger and representationalists argue that what is relevant to a theory of consciousness is that neurons somehow allow to represent the world. But how much of a representation of the world would a brain get if isolated in a vat, cut off from the body and from active interaction with the outside world? Ganzfeld's answer is: "none". In Metzinger's own terms: "The idea is that ordinary phenomenal experience continuously emerges from an interplay between "top-down" and "bottom-up" processes" (p. 246).

I guess an internalist would still wish to reply that a blink or transient stimulation are not relevant in themselves, but only in so far as they lead to different brain internal activities. This point is obvious. Flutter your eyelashes as often as you wish, if for some reason this has no consequence at the level of brain activation, then you cannot expect these blinks to modulate neither intentional content nor phenomenal experience. But to acknowledge that brain activity is necessary, and even to acknowledge that brain activity plays the leading role, does not allow one to reduce phenomenal experience to internal activities. Isolate brain from body, and you will obviously get no phenomenal experience in the body. As well, it is obvious that if we were able to reproduce within a brain-in-a-vat exactly all the conditions and consequences of embodiment and embeddedness of a real brain, we would get the conditions and consequences of phenomenal experience, even though a virtual one. The plausibility of such a possibility is of course (empirically) questionable, but in any case it would rely on real embodiment and embeddedness being copied and reproduced. In other terms, we would just have another form of embodiment and embeddedness.

To conclude, Metzinger's distinction between intentional and phenomenal contents makes him step over the classical internalism/externalism divide. However, as



we just saw, the fact that phenomenal content crucially depends on intentional content implies that externalism for intentional content leads to externalism for phenomenal content. If we follow this discussion, Metzinger's distinction between intentional and phenomenal content appears as purely terminological. Indeed, consider again how he describes the respective specificity of intentional and phenomenal contents:

The *intentional* content of the relevant states in your head depends on the fact of this book actually existing, and of the relevant state being a reliable instrument for gaining knowledge in general. ...The *phenomenal* content of your currently active book representation is what stays the same, no matter if the book exists or not (p. 173).

As we just saw, the *phenomenal* content does depend on the intentional content, and thus, on the fact of the represented object actually existing<sup>7</sup>. This consideration thus empties Metzinger's point, and makes his position sound less odd to representationalist's ears.

Now, one may wish to push externalism one step further and argue not only for physical and functional externality of phenomenal experience, but also for *phenomenal* externality of phenomenal experience. Again, let me make a terminological point here. Internalism and externalism know two levels of description, epistemological and phenomenal. At the epistemological level of description, the question is whether phenomenal experience can be adequately described as physically and functionally internal, i.e. whether or not it relies solely on internal brain processes. This is the question we just tackled in this first part. At the phenomenal level of description, the question now concerns the felt appearance of our phenomenal experience: is phenomenal experience better described as phenomenally internal, i.e. as involving some felt inwardness? Or is phenomenal experience better described as phenomenally external, according to which we are not aware of our experience as such but only of the world outside?

Again, Metzinger's position on this question is at odds with classical representationalism. This opposition can be better understood thanks to some clarification of Metzinger's use of the notion of transparency. I thus now turn to this point (part 2) and will then consider phenomenal internalism on this basis (part 3)

## **2. Phenomenal transparency: the revealing-hidden window**

Experience is interestingly like a window, you don't look at it, but through it. Most famously: "When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous" (Moore 1903, p. 25). Metzinger argues that "transparency certainly is one of the (if not the) most important constraints if we want to achieve a theoretical understanding of what phenomenal experience really is" (p. 163). Interestingly, even if we restrict ourselves to representationalist conceptions of phenomenal experiences, this can be understood in two contrastive ways.

First, it can be argued that transparency *reveals* the representational nature of phenomenal experience. The argument simply goes as follows:

Shift your gaze inward and try to become aware of your experience itself, inside you, apart from its objects. Try to focus your attention on some intrinsic feature of the experience that distinguishes it from other experiences, something other than what it is an experience of. The task seems impossible (Tye, 1995, p. 30).

Generalizing, introspection of your perceptual experiences seems to reveal only aspects of *what* you experience, further aspects of the scenes, as represented. Why? The answer, I suggest, is that your perceptual experiences have no *introspectible* features over and above those implicated in their intentional contents. So the phenomenal character of such experiences ... is identical with, or contained within, their intentional contents (Tye 1995, p. 136; reported in BNO, p. 165, note 14).

In other terms, look as hard as you can at your experience, and all you will get is representational content. No non-representational properties of phenomenal states are introspectively accessible and this suggests that phenomenal experience "really is" a representation.

Metzinger, however, exploits phenomenal transparency in a very different manner. While Tye exploits transparency as *revealing* what is behind the window (i.e. what one's experience is an experience of), Metzinger considers transparency as *hiding* the window itself:

Transparency is a form of darkness. With regard to the phenomenology of visual experience transparency means that we are not able to see something, because it is transparent. We don't see the window but only the bird flying by. Phenomenal transparency in general, however, means that something particular is not accessible to subjective experience, namely, the representational character of the contents of conscious experience (p. 169).

In other terms, looking at your experience, you will normally not "see" its representational character. Phenomenal experience "really is" a representation, but this fact is not itself accessible through introspection.

Despite their use of the same metaphor of the window, TM's and MT's descriptions of transparency are utterly opposite: either transparency reveals at a phenomenal level the representational nature of experience or it hides it, but it certainly can't be both.

A way to weaken the tension between Tye's and Metzinger's uses of the notion of transparency may be to consider more closely what, in phenomenal experience, is said to be hidden and what is said to be revealed. Following Tye, the transparency of phenomenal experience reveals its representational nature, because it reveals only its representational content. In Metzinger's framework, "phenomenal transparency in general... means that something particular is not accessible to subjective experience, namely, the representational character of the contents of conscious experience" (p. 169). More specifically, "the instruments of representation themselves cannot be represented as

such anymore" (p.169). Thus, phenomenal experience would be like a revealing-hidden window: it reveals representational content and hides instruments of representation. But this is not enough to reconcile TM' and MT's views of transparency, for at least two reasons<sup>12</sup>.

First, Metzinger insists on the fact that transparency "is not an epistemological notion, but a phenomenological concept" (p. 166). As such, it describes the felt appearance of our phenomenal experience. That transparency is a phenomenological concept implies that unconscious representations are neither transparent nor opaque: only phenomenal representations can be considered on the continuum between transparency and opacity. Importantly for the point at stake here, phenomenal transparency does not allow one to characterise phenomenal experience at an epistemic level: phenomenal experience is experienced as transparent but this does not allow one to conclude that this phenomenal appearance is veridical, and reveals that the real nature of experience is to be representational. This restriction concerns in general any argument relying on introspection. The latter concerns only (and partially) the felt appearance of phenomenal experience, and is compatible with different conceptions of the real nature of experience. The classical representationalist argument relying on the transparency of experience "reifies" a phenomenological report (experience *introspectively gives* nothing else but representational content) to draw a conclusion at an epistemic level (experience *is* nothing else but representational content). Throughout his book, Metzinger forcefully argues against this "typical phenomenal fallacy".

Second, at the phenomenal level itself, classical representationalism provides a description of transparency that is not accurate. Specifically, when Metzinger uses the notion of transparency, he points to the fact that "we do not experience the reality surrounding us as the content of a representational process... We simply experience it as *the world in which we live our lives*" (p.169). This is what Metzinger calls "immediacy":

What is inaccessible to conscious experience is the simple fact of this experience taking place in a *medium*. Therefore, transparency of phenomenal content leads to a further characteristic of conscious experience, namely, the subjective impression of immediacy (pp. 169-70).

Thus, an important fact about our phenomenal experience is that "transparency creates the illusion of naïve realism: the inability to recognize a self-generated representation *as* a representation" (p.292). Thereby, even if, as Tye would argue, we were only aware of the representational content of our phenomenal experience, it would remain that we are not aware of this content *as* representational. One could argue that experiencing a content under a given aspect is, by definition, experiencing a content as representational. But the point here is that the representational format remains phenomenally hidden.

To summarize, Metzingerian transparency seems promising in the framework of a theory of phenomenal experience since it provides an accurate description at the phenomenal level<sup>13</sup> and clearly differentiates it from the epistemic level of description. This position is at odds with classical representationalism, but remains anyway consistent with a representationalist account of phenomenal experience. Indeed, Metzinger's

position has the advantage of linking his phenomenologically reliable (or rather introspectively reliable) description of transparency to an explanation of how transparency shapes our phenomenal experience. Not only, at a phenomenal level, transparency does not reveal introspectively representational contents as representational, but also, at an epistemological level, it explains why the representational nature of our phenomenal experience remains introspectively hidden. In this respect, transparency even seems to be a "magical" concept. Whatever your conception of the nature of experience, you can hide it behind phenomenal transparency, and thereby get an introspectively plausible description of phenomenal experience. For example, even if you agree with Block that orgasm does not feel representational, you can reach the conclusion that it is nonetheless representational. In fact, Metzinger predicts that orgasm, like any other phenomenal experience, does not appear introspectively as representational. The "but-this-is-not-how-it-feels-like" objection has no relevance here, since transparency always saves appearances.

The other side of the coin has to be considered as well. As I just said, Metzingerian transparency is a magical notion, but as such it is compatible with different conceptions of the nature of experience: defining transparency as a hiding property says nothing on what it hides. In other terms, Metzingerian transparency is compatible with representationalism but it can also be exploited in a non-representationalist conception of phenomenal experience. I will not pursue this line of inquiry here. Let me rather remain at a phenomenal level of description and consider more closely the question concerning phenomenal internality/externality that I let open above: is phenomenal experience better described as phenomenally internal, i.e. as involving some felt inwardness? Or is phenomenal experience better described as phenomenally external, according to which we are not aware of our experience as such but only of the world outside?

### **3. Phenomenal experience in(s) and out(s): the phenomenal level of description**

An important aspect to consider for a fine-grained description of phenomenal experience and, as it will become clear in a moment (part 4), for an accurate theory of the self, is that "phenomenal transparency is not a necessary condition for conscious experience in general: Phenomenally opaque states do exist" (p.163). What will interest me here is that opacity brings with it what Metzinger names "phenomenal internality":

Phenomenal internality is the consciously experienced quality of "inwardness" accompanying bodily sensations, like a pleasant feeling of warmth, emotional states, like pleasure and sympathy; and cognitive contents, like a thought about Descartes's philosophical argument for dualism. All these forms of mental content are subjectively experienced as *inner* events (p. 267).

Conversely, Tye argues not only in favour of epistemological externalism<sup>4</sup> but also in favour of phenomenal externalism:

In turning one's mind inward to attend to the experience, one seems to end up scrutinizing external features or properties (Tye 1995, p. 136).

Accordingly, Tye denounces as an illusion the impression that introspection allows us to experience our experience: "We are not aware of our experiences via introspection at all" (Tye 2003, p.22). We can only experience our experience indirectly, as a form of displaced perception:

... you are now aware that there is a sheet of glass in the room by being aware of qualities apparently possessed by nonglass surfaces before you. Visual experiences are like such sheets of glass. ... Introspection ... is significantly like displaced perception or secondary seeing-that ... I am not aware or conscious of the experience itself. I am aware of something other than the experience - the surfaces apparently outside and their apparent qualities (Tye 2003, pp. 23-4).

If we try to focus on our experiences, we "see" right through them *to the world outside* (Tye 2003, p. 24, my emphasis).<sup>14</sup>

At first glance, this position may seem to join Metzinger's description of phenomenal experience on two points: immediacy: "a certain information appears in the conscious mind in a seemingly instantaneous and unmediated way" (p. 92); and naïve realism: "We do not experience the reality surrounding us as the content of a representational process. ... We simply experience it as *the world in which we live our lives*" (p. 169). But again, Metzinger exploits these notions in a very different way. Tye exploits immediacy as *revealing* what experience really is (according to his view): a representation of the world outside whose content we *rightfully* experience as in the world outside. On the contrary, Metzinger considers immediacy as a phenomenal illusion, *hiding* what experience really is: a phenomenally transparent representation whose content we *illusorily* experience as in the world outside. As already underlined above:

From an epistemological perspective, we see that our phenomenal states at no point in time establish a direct and immediate contact with the world for us... However, on the level of phenomenal representation ..., this fact is systematically suppressed (p. 59).

In Metzinger's view, then, due to transparency, we are caught up in the illusion that we reach the world outside, while, in reality, the only thing we get is representational content<sup>15</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, thus, TM and MT disagreement about transparency ricochets off their understanding of others aspects of phenomenal experience, here, immediacy. And again, it's got to be either one or the other: is the immediacy of our experience illusory or veridical? Answering this question implies that we get a more fine-grained description of

our phenomenal experience itself: is phenomenal experience better captured as phenomenally internal or external?

A first point to underline is that both transparency and inwardness have been described as crucial for an accurate account of phenomenal experience, but these two aspects may seem to contradict each other. Inwardness implies that experience is experienced. But this contradicts Tye's understanding of transparency as the impossibility to access introspectively one's experience as such (Kind 2003). It is coherent, however, with a metzingerian transparency, since the latter is supposed to hide the representational nature of experience, by hiding the representation instruments, without necessarily hiding the experience as such at a phenomenal level: the experience can be experienced even if its representational format remains phenomenally hidden. If inwardness describes accurately our phenomenal experience, Metzinger's understanding of transparency thus seems more promising.

Apart from feeding our virtual debate between TM and MT, the consideration of the tension between transparency and inwardness raises an issue that is considered as crucial for any consideration of the self and self-consciousness. It concerns the distinction between two types of consciousness and self-consciousness. On the one hand, the transparency/opacity continuum is an aspect of reflexive consciousness, i.e. consciousness where one's gaze is turned inward. On this continuum, inwardness is a form of opacity of phenomenal experience. On the other hand, another form of inwardness can be described as an aspect of pre-reflexive self-consciousness. The following quotes make this distinction particularly clear:

What makes [mental representations] *transparent* is the *attentional* unavailability of earlier processing for *introspection* (p. 165, my emphasis).<sup>16</sup>

Particularly from a phenomenological perspective, internality is a highly salient, global feature of the contents of conscious self-awareness. These contents are continuously accompanied by the phenomenal quality of *internality in a "pre-reflexive" manner*, that is, permanently and independently of all cognitive operations (p. 15, my emphasis).

Thus, to reconcile transparency and inwardness is in fact quite easy: transparency means that experience is not itself an object of phenomenal experience, but the experience is nonetheless experienced as phenomenally internal at a pre-reflexive level. *Transparency does not mean invisibility.*

We see here that even if one agrees with Metzinger that phenomenal experience is immediate and naïvely realist, and with Tye that we look through our experience to the world, it remains that it is not phenomenally correct to reduce phenomenal experience to its content described as "the world outside". This consideration casts doubt on phenomenal externalism and thus deprives externalist representationalism from one of its arguments. In addition, it has important consequences on the conception of the self and self-consciousness. I thus now turn to a description and discussion of Metzinger's conception of the self.

#### 4. Transparently oneself

According to Metzinger, the self is nothing else than the phenomenal content of a transparent self-representation. You are "no one" thus means that "what in philosophy of mind is called the "phenomenal self" and what in scientific or folk-psychological contexts frequently is simply referred to as "the self" is the content of a *phenomenally transparent self-model*" (p. 331):

Whenever we speak about "the subject" or "the self" (committing the "error of phenomenological reification"), we are talking about the content of the *phenomenal self*. This is the content of an ongoing self representational *process* (p. 268).

In the remainder of this paper, I will discuss Metzinger's description of the self on the four following points: (1) I agree with the Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity (SMT) that the self is not a substance; (2) I agree with SMT that self-consciousness is deceptive in that it does not identify the self as it really is. The self is not the intentional object we (may) phenomenally experience when we turn our look inward; (3) I disagree with SMT and argue that the self cannot be reduced to a phenomenal illusion; (4) I disagree with SMT and argue that the self is not only the content of a transparent self-representation.

(1) First, to claim that the self does not exist presupposes a definition of the self. Metzinger's rejected definition of the self is "a special variant of the phenomenological fallacy<sup>3</sup> related to self-consciousness: describing the contents of phenomenal self-representation as literal properties of an internal and nonphysical object – namely, the *subject*" (p. 271). Metzinger intends to both reject and explain the source of the "deeply entrenched" Cartesian intuition according to which the "experience of being a subject and a rational individual can never be naturalized or reductively explained" (p. 2). He also wants to demystify the "classical philosophical ideal of self-knowledge" (p. 623, cf. also p. 337). But is the Cartesian intuition still "deeply entrenched" and is self-knowledge still the "classical philosophical ideal"? If not, as a constantly increasing body of research argues, Metzinger's fight would turned out to be as relevant as tilting at windmills.

But of course, this is not the focus of the Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity (SMT). SMT makes other specific claims on the self that are far from trivial, so far in fact, that they are also highly controversial. Metzinger claims (2) that the self is not equivalent to what is given in self-consciousness: the content of phenomenal experience is illusory: we took it to be the self, ourselves, while it is merely the content of self-representational processes. As such, this claim supports different interpretations.

A first interpretation is the one favoured by SMT: there is *less* to the self than what is given in self-consciousness. As transparency hides the representational nature of phenomenal experience, self-consciousness gives the self as existing while it is not.<sup>17</sup>

The second interpretation of the claim that self-consciousness is deceptive is that there is *more* to the self than what is given in self-consciousness. In turn, this interpretation can be split in two claims, since "there is more" at two levels, which correspond respectively to my points (3) and (4) above. Let us begin with the discussion

of point (3): the self cannot be reduced to a phenomenal illusion. First, consider again Metzinger's claim:

No such things as selves exist in the world; all that exists are conscious systems operating under transparent self-models (p. 397).

I take the two parts of this sentence to be in tension with each other: to claim that there exist conscious systems operating under transparent self-models means that there exist selves, and that this notion has to be redefined rather than eliminated. In other words, Metzinger should be a revisionist about the self rather than an eliminativist. Indeed, if the notion of self is not fossilized into a Cartesian straitjacket, there is no reason to refuse a redefinition of the self. Quite the contrary, there are reasons to pursue actively such a redefinition of a concept formerly defined in a misleading way.

In fact, it's got to be either one or the other of the two following positions. First possibility, we choose to legitimize (at least minimally) what Metzinger calls "analytic scholasticism" which consists in a "dangerous tendency toward arrogant armchair theorizing, at the same time ignoring first-person phenomenological as well as third-person empirical constraints in the formation of one's basic conceptual tools" (p.3). In such a case, the self is what analytic scholasticism claims it to be, but either it exists or not. In any case, the reference remains predefined by analytic scholasticism. Second possibility, we radically change strategy and perspective, and integrate first- and third-person constraints *from the very beginning* of our consideration of the self and self-consciousness. In this latter case, we soon realize that the notion of self remains highly relevant from both a first- and a third-person perspective.

First, from a first-person perspective, the term "self" corresponds to our phenomenology: this is how we experience ourselves. Metzinger obviously agrees with this uncontroversial point and with the fact that a consistent theory of the self must account for this phenomenal experience of selfhood.<sup>18</sup> In a folk-psychological perspective, the self is "what one is": how one experiences oneself from a phenomenal perspective, and what/who one takes oneself to be, from an epistemic perspective. Metzinger argues that "what one is" is nothing over and above a "conscious system operating under transparent self-models". On this basis, Metzinger chooses to eliminate the self and redefine "what one is" as a particular system. But the reverse strategy seems more constructive: eliminate neither "what one is" nor "the self" but redefine it as a particular system.

Second, from a third-person perspective, I have briefly stated above that to claim that there exist conscious systems operating under transparent self-models *means* that there exist selves. In other terms, the self *is notably* the conscious system operating under transparent self-models. The self is *not only* such a system, but at least at a given level, it *is* this system *itself*, by contrast with being "caused" or "generated" by such a system. This calls for further explanations: Why would it be legitimate to use the term "self" rather than the term "system"? Notably because the notion of self is much more specific than the notion of system. Indeed, not any system is a self. The self is a special subset of systems. The term "self" allows one to refer to some specific properties that make some



systems "selves". The crucial question thus becomes: what are these specific properties? Here is not the place to develop the answer to this question in any details, but let me give some clues about how it might be developed. It can be shown (Legrand 2004) that a single definition of the self can meet the constraints imposed by different philosophical perspectives and remain coherent in a naturalistic framework. Specifically, following such a basic definition, the self is a dynamic system constituted by a network of production of its own interacting components, in constant relation with the non-self. Such a self-constitution implies a network of processes producing components that continuously regenerate the very network from which they issue<sup>19</sup>. This definition of the self is not circular since it does not presuppose a self as a conductor of its own constitution. This position is not dualist either, since it does not conceive the self and its properties as detached from each other, as if selfhood could emerge from a presupposed self. This self-constitution can thus be said to be "selfless" if the conception of the self is restricted to a substantial view, but it remains that this self-constitution constitutes a self as a non-elementary unity in dynamical interrelation with the non-self. I see no non-doctrinal reasons to refuse to call this particular self-constitutive network a self. On the contrary, there are reasons to use this term: this core definition of the self allows one to understand "what I am" at four articulated levels: the basically biological level, the sensori-motor integration, the cognitive encounter with the world, and the more elaborated reflexive abilities.<sup>20</sup>

Following the definition just sketched, the self *is* a particular kind of system, and the conscious system operating under transparent self-models is (potentially) only one of these systems. Moreover, it is also important to understand that the view presented here does not reduce the self to systems described in a third-person perspective. This leads me to my point (4): the self is not only the content of a transparent self-representation.

To better understand what this means, we need to come back to the distinction between reflexive consciousness of the self and pre-reflexive self-consciousness. In the sense I use these terms here, "reflexive consciousness of the self" means that the self is taken as the object of consciousness. By contrast, "pre-reflexive self-consciousness" means that the self is not taken as the object of consciousness. At this level, the self is the subject of consciousness, experienced as the subjectivity of consciousness. The following example may help to clarify this distinction: admittedly, there is a phenomenal difference between seeing an object as being blurry and blurrily seeing a nonblurry object. In the first case, one has a consciousness of a blurry object as blurry; in the second case, one has a non-observational consciousness of blurriness that accompanies the consciousness of a nonblurry object. Whether or not one wishes to accommodate this distinction in purely intentional terms (as representationalists do), it remains that at a *phenomenal* level, "blurriness" is an object of one's experience in the first case, while it is not in the second case.<sup>21</sup>

These considerations allow one to better understand in what sense the self is not the object given by introspective consciousness of the self. Metzinger concludes from this that the self does not exist as such, but is merely a phenomenal (representational, simulational, illusory) content of a transparent self-representation. Quite the contrary, I conclude here that the self is not adequately described as a *content*. The self is not what is

given by consciousness of the self, but the pre-reflexive subjective structure of phenomenal experience.

Again, transparency is not invisibility. The self is transparent in the sense that one looks through oneself to the world. But this does not mean that the self is invisible. As above, the metaphor of the window is quite accurate here: Let us ask armchair philosophers (because only they can ignore this housewifely evidence) to do a little experiment. Look at a landscape through a *real* window. Then open the window and look again. Don't you see any difference? An ideal window, imagined in the clear mind of an armchair philosopher may be so transparent that it is invisible. On the contrary, a *real* window, in the real world, is transparent but not invisible. The self as well: it shapes one's consciousness at a pre-reflexive level, whatever its object (the self-as-object or an object of the 'outside' world). The self can thus be compared to a real hidden-revealing window in several respects: it is not invisible but transparent in that it reveals the world by hiding itself. An important difference is worth mentioning: while you can open the window to look directly at the landscape, you can only experience the world through yourself. In other terms, pre-reflexive self-consciousness is fundamental, in the sense that it is the foundation of any other form of consciousness. Interestingly, Metzinger himself notes this point:

There seems to be a primitive and pre-reflexive form of phenomenal self-consciousness underlying all higher-order and conceptually mediated forms of self-consciousness (p. 158).

In fact, a number of philosophies which disagree with each other on many other fundamental points, and which notably disagree on the nature of the self and self-consciousness, nevertheless agree on the distinction between reflexive consciousness of the self and pre-reflexive self-consciousness.<sup>22</sup> To take only one example from analytic philosophy of mind, consider the following quotes from Perry (1998)

Agent-relative knowledge is knowledge from the perspective of a particular agent. For example, "There is an apple" or "that is a toaster" (p. 83).

In this case, our knowledge concerns ourselves but need not involve an explicit representation of ourselves (p. 87).

...agent-relative knowledge ... is self-knowledge, in that it embodies knowledge of the relations things stand in to the agent; the thoughts are true because of facts about the agent (p. 87).

The notion of agent-relative knowledge expresses in another way and another context (the context of essential indexicality) what I describe here as the consciousness of an apple or a toaster which involves pre-reflexive self-consciousness.<sup>23</sup>

From a classical representationalist perspective, the distinction between reflexive and pre-reflexive consciousness may sound even odder than Metzinger's distinction between intentional and phenomenal content. Indeed, it is incompatible with the classical representationalist equation: phenomenal qualities = phenomenal content = intentional content = representational content, since it implies that phenomenal qualities are not reducible to phenomenal content. However, I do not take the view I present here as being an argument against representationalism. Indeed, phenomenal qualities could still be explainable in terms of representation since, as I describe it here, pre-reflexive consciousness is always linked to consciousness of content under a given aspect.

On the other hand, how does this view of self-consciousness as irreducible to the content of consciousness of the self cohere with Metzinger's Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity? Obviously, it departs from his definition of the self as the content of self-representation. More interesting in the present framework is the following view:

Full-blown conscious experience is more than the existence of a conscious self, and it is much more than the mere presence of the world. It results from the dynamic interplay between this self and the world, in a lived, embodied present (p. 417).

This claim is fully compatible with the view defended here which could even be summarized by a paraphrase of this quote as follows: "Full-blown conscious experience notably involves the existence of a conscious self, and the presence of the world. Consciousness of objects of the world, reflexive consciousness of the self, as well as pre-reflexive self-consciousness result from the dynamic interplay between this self and the world, in a lived, embodied present".

However, such a de-contextualized similarity should not lead us to iron out major differences. "Full-blown conscious experience" as described by Metzinger is generated by what he calls the PMIR: the Phenomenal Model of the Intentionality Relation. He gives some examples of this class of phenomenal states (p. 411), and interestingly all these examples begin by "I am someone ..." (e.g. "I am someone, who is currently visually attending to the color of the book in my hands"). Such a description, if considered specifically, implies taking oneself as an object of attention. On the contrary, and as underlined by Perry, agent-relative knowledge "can be expressed by a simple sentence containing a demonstrative for a place or object, and without any term referring to the speaker" (Perry 1998, p. 83). The experience expressed by "this book is greenish" does not involve the self as its object, but only the greenish book as seen from "here". It is nonetheless a certain form of self-consciousness, specifically, a self-relative consciousness.

Apart from this example, the crucial difference between the view presented here and Metzinger's SMT appears sharply when we unpack the contraction PMIR: Phenomenal Model of Intentionality Relation. In the view I present here, the self (as system) is not purely phenomenal and it (as subject) is not reducible to the intentional content of consciousness. This position thus hardly fits with Metzinger's model but, interestingly, it nonetheless meets his requirement against the so-called "phenomenological fallacy" since it does not reify the self as an internal object refractory

to any kind of naturalization. Paradoxically, thus, I define here a self at two complementary levels (as system and as subject), but in Metzinger's particular sense, this self could be said to be "no one". At least, this paradox brings with it a simple lesson that leads me to avoid concluding this paper by reducing its content to a shining take-home message: I hope the present discussion has at least shown how such a marketing process can do a disservice to the real scope of a position by hiding its subtleties rather than revealing its strength.

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### **Notes**

1. All page numbers without any further specification refer to Metzinger (2003) *Being No One*.
2. For another reading of the notion of transparency, see Livet's commentary of BNO, in Psyche, this symposium.
3. The "phenomenological fallacy" or "error of phenomenological reification" is defined as an "unnoticed transition from a mental process to an individual, from an innocent sequence of events to an indivisible mental object" (pp.22-3)
4. Note that Tye describes his position as follows: "the externalism of my position is qualified, since I doubt very much whether it is possible for creatures as sophisticated in their psychology and behaviour as human beings to be phenomenally different and yet nonetheless also be molecular duplicates. If there were phenomenal differences in such creatures, it seems to me that those differences would show up in narrow functional differences and those differences would be incompatible with molecular identity. ... Still, I am inclined to think that with very simple creatures without the capacity to introspect and limited in their behavioural responses, there could be molecular duplicates who differed phenomenally. And for this reason, I am an externalist" (2003, pp.174-5). For a discussion of microphysical duplicates in the framework of Metzinger's self-model theory, see Imma's commentary of BNO, in Psyche, this symposium.
5. Metzinger also defines phenomenal internalism, an issue to which I return later.
6. For a discussion of Metzinger's view on the brain-in-vat's subjective experience, see Gallagher's commentary of BNO, in Psyche, this symposium.
7. An example of "offline hallucination" is dream state (p.51). Consider also p.52 "In our present context, a fruitful way of looking at the human brain, therefore, is as a system which, even in the ordinary waking states, constantly hallucinates at the world, as a system that constantly lets its internal autonomous simulational dynamics collide with the ongoing flow of sensory input, vigorously dreaming at the world and there by generating the content of phenomenal experience". On the use and role of dream and lucid dream in the self-model theory, see Hobson's commentary of BNO in Psyche, this symposium.

8. It could still be argued that intentional content could be simulated, but this point would disregard the fact that, again, Metzinger himself agrees on some form of externalism for intentional content.

9. Note that even such a weakened version of internalism depends at least "genetically" on the body and world (see below). Note also that Metzinger defends a much stronger version of internalism. E.g. "A brain in a vat...could at any time generate the full-blown phenomenal content of a conscious self-representatum" (p.272).

10. In fact, Gantzfeld stimulation suggests that a brain-in-a-vat would not even enjoy the same hallucination as a brain-in-a-body-in-the-world. However, it remains possible that some other type of hallucination does not depend on intentional content.

11. This is Metzinger's option: "An overall picture emerges of the conscious model of reality essentially being an internal construct, which is only perturbed by external events forcing it to settle into ever-new stable states" (p.142).

12. An additional reason is that Metzinger clearly distinguishes his view from the classical vehicle-content distinction. The latter, he says, "contains subtle residues of Cartesian dualism in that it always tempts us to reify the vehicle and the content, by conceiving of them as distinct, independent entities" (p.166). "Any philosophical theory of mind treating vehicle and content as anything more than two strongly interrelated aspects of one and the same phenomenon simply deprives itself of much of its explanatory power, if not of its realism and epistemological rationality" (p.4).

13. Note that this claim concerns here only transparency. It does not imply that Metzinger's position is consistent with phenomenology on other issues. This question is addressed in Zahavi's commentary of BNO in Psyche, this symposium. For a discussion of Metzinger's way to fix the explanatory data, see Weisberg's commentary of BNO, in Psyche, this symposium.

14. Note that there is no incoherence between this quote and the description of Tye's view of transparency as revealing the representational content of phenomenal experience. As noted above, what is phenomenologically transparent in Tye's view is the experience itself, introspection revealing only representational content. This content can be analysed as representational, though it is experienced as "the world outside".

15. Note that there is no incoherence here with the description of Metzinger's view of transparency as hiding the representational instruments of phenomenal experience. As noted above, what is phenomenologically transparent in Metzinger's view is the "medium" in which the experience takes place. Epistemically, we thus get only representational content, but phenomenologically, we do not experience it as such.

16. Metzinger defines four forms of introspection. Here this term refers to "introspection<sub>1</sub>" which leads to represent "certain aspects of an internal system state, the intentional content of which is constituted by a part of the world depicted *as external*"; and to "introspection<sub>3</sub>" which implies to "direct attention toward certain aspects of an internal system state, the intentional content of which is being constituted by a part of the world depicted as internal" (p36).

17. Note that following his own principles, Metzinger could have defended the idea that transparency hides the representational nature of the self, the only reality of the self being

representational. And indeed, much of his arguments argue in this sense. But this contrasts sharply with his take-home message: No such things as selves exist in the world.

18. More on the phenomenal experience of the self below.

19. Note that following such a definition, the self is not necessarily conscious. I turn to the self as a conscious subject of phenomenal experience below.

20. For a different account of the self as a particular kind of system, see. Ghin's commentary of BNO, in Psyche, this symposium.

21. Admittedly, the blurriness of one's experience of a non-blurry object can become an object of consciousness in case one attend to it (directly or by displaced perception), but this is not the case I am considering here.

22. They obviously interpret and exploit it in their own philosophical framework.

23. See also Wittgenstein's distinction between I-as-object and I-as-subject (1958) and Shoemaker's description of identification-free self-consciousness (1968, 1996). For an account of the self in the perspective of phenomenology that coheres with the view presented here, see Zahavi's commentary of BNO in Psyche, this symposium.

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