

THE BORDERLANDS OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE

**THE BORDERLANDS OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE:
AN INTERROGATION OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S
CONCEPTION OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY**

By

RASHMI PANDYA, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Rashmi Pandya B.A. (University of Regina)

SUPERVISOR: Professor B. Sassen

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the philosophical problem of the universal and the particular and its application to identity and difference, specifically in relation to cultural identity. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy mediates between the extremes of a modernist view that seeks to subsume all difference in identity and a postmodern perspective that only validates our essential differences. Neither position offers a viable option for ethical relations or action.

While the conclusion reached in the present work affirms the superiority of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological view of difference and identity over either a modernist or a postmodernist perspective, initially Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity is criticized. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty makes the claim that we can only ever live in one linguistic/social and cultural world. This claim does not account for the experience of immigrants, which attests to a borderland *between* worlds. In fact this claim *seems* to suggest that cultural worlds are to be viewed as hermetic localities.

However, if Merleau-Ponty's earlier works are read in relation to the ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible*, the problems of subjectivism in his earlier works may be resolved. The notions of Flesh and Reversibility illustrate that Merleau-Ponty viewed identities as creative enterprises and by extension the intersubjective (i.e cultural and social) world as one that is constantly re-creating boundary limits. This thesis explores the hermeneutical implications of the notions of Flesh and Reversibility in relation to cultural identity through the use of personal narrative. Identities are posited as imaginary identities and cultures are shown to be mutually implicated with each other.

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List of Abbreviations for Merleau-Ponty's Texts

- CAL** *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*. James M. Edie, ed. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1985.
- CD** "Cezanne's Doubt." In *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Galen A. Johnson, ed. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993. 59-75.
- EM** "Eye and Mind." In *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Galen A. Johnson, ed. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993. 121-149.
- ILVS** "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence." In *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Galen A. Johnson, ed. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993. 76-120.
- IPP** *In Praise of Philosophy*. James M. Edie and John Wild, trans. Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- PhP** *Phenomenology of Perception*. Colin Smith, trans. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989.
- PrP** *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*. James M. Edie, ed. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1989.
- SNS** *Sense and Nonsense*. Herbert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, trans. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- S** *Signs*. Richard C. McCleary, trans. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1998.
- SB** *The Structure of Behaviour*. Alden L. Fisher, trans. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.
- VI** *The Visible and the Invisible*. Alphonso Lingis, trans. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1997.

Introduction

The Borderlands

An old photograph in a cheap frame hangs on a wall of the room where I work. It's a picture dating from 1946 of a house into which, at the time of its taking, I had not yet been born. The house is rather peculiar--a three-storeyed gabled affair with tiled roofs and round towers in two corners, each wearing a pointy tiled hat. 'The past is a foreign country', goes the famous opening sentence of L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, 'they do things differently there.' But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.

Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands"

When I first migrated to Canada in 1969 from Kenya, it was my present that was foreign, a place where 'they' did things differently. Yet, some thirty odd years after that initial sensation of alienation, of peculiarity, I am finally at home. The questions that motivate this thesis are first, how do we define ourselves as at 'home'? Second, in moving from one cultural and social space to another is there a choice of one world over another, or is there rather a new world that is created in-between cultures and social worlds? Essentially, both questions are centered on identity and the various ways we understand ourselves as individuals and as part of a larger community, a world.

Today, perhaps more than ever before, the questions around identity are abundant and increasingly complicated. Who am I? Am I definable by my nation and all it represents and signifies? Or, am I defined by an alien culture, (an)other

nation, which I left behind years ago? What is a nation today, other than the social, cultural, ideological and contingently historical? Is the nation a 'world' unto itself? Are identities and so cultures tied to specific 'places'? These questions are inspired by my own personal experiences as an immigrant and by my philosophical commitment to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. More specifically, the above questions are motivated by what could be a critical problem with Merleau-Ponty's claims about intersubjective identity formation in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, which seem to tie identity to a particularized notion of 'world'.

Merleau-Ponty argues that we are born into *particular* social, cultural and historical worlds and that these 'worlds' to a large extent determine not only what but also how we know. By arguing for the primacy of perception and privileging the body as a condition for knowledge, Merleau-Ponty also argues for a perspectival notion of truth. Having posited a situated notion of truth, Merleau-Ponty continues in later works to defend his conception of the conditions under which we come to know--these conditions involve the particular world we find ourselves within. The social, cultural and historical situation we find ourselves in to some extent determines *what* we know and *who* we are. This thesis will deal with a specific claim Merleau-Ponty makes in relation to language and identity in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and reinforces in later works. Merleau-Ponty states that:

[T]he full meaning of a language is never translatable into another. We may speak several languages, but one of them always remains the one in which we live. In order completely to assimilate a language, it would be necessary to make the *world*, which it expresses one's own, and *one never does belong to two worlds at once* (PhP, 187, emphasis mine).

Is Merleau-Ponty right to suggest that one world dominates my perspective?¹ This claim is actually much more serious than stating that we occupy one cultural and social horizon *at a time*; the implications are that one cultural world dominates who we are and how we understand others, the world and ourselves. This perspective seems to indicate that unique cultural localities are to be understood as distinct and separate entities. This may seriously undermine the consistency of Merleau-Ponty's project as a totality. The implications of such a view could suggest that given differing cultural views, there are no grounds to adjudicate various claims about the world, others and ourselves.² While in particular cultural worlds commonalities may exist, there seems to be a solipsism rooted in the interaction between worlds. As Merleau-

¹ In a footnote to this claim, Merleau-Ponty cites the case of T. E. Lawrence (PhP, 187-188). Lawrence suggests in his biography that despite his linguistic and social adjustments to Arabic culture he never felt at home in the Arab world (PhP, 187-188). What is left out in Merleau-Ponty's assessment of Lawrence's feeling of alienation is that he felt no more at 'home' in England after leaving Arabia. My objection is that this 'oversight' is crucial since in Lawrence's case his assimilation of an 'Arab' world obviously effected his feeling at home in England. "In my case the effort for these years to live in the dress of the Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me" (PhP, 187). Unfortunately for Lawrence, the choices he had seemed to be limited to one world or the other. I would suggest that the choice I (and many like myself) have made is quite different, since the choice was not merely between the world I left and the new world I arrived in, but rather a third choice for something unique between these two worlds; a borderland, partly imagined but none-the-less instituted into my self-understanding. My *look* is then a synthesis of both worlds, neither of which can remain what it was.

Ponty aptly notes, even our gestures are unique to the world we find ourselves within. Anger is expressed by a smile in the Japanese context, while in the Western context, anger is expressed by a reddening of the face and stamping of the feet or hissing of words (PhP, 189). How is it that the Japanese individual and the Western individual could ever understand each other if this is the case? The problem here is that they could *not*. My own experiences lead me to believe that the claim that one world dominates my perspective, is at best, spurious. The question of which self I most truly inhabit and which world inhabits me is not as easy to answer as Merleau-Ponty seems to imply.

The reality may be that rather than *choosing* one cultural world, I actually create a space *between* worlds. In my own experiences, this 'space' of *in between* is not a fixed place but a re-creative space where I re-make my self. Merleau-Ponty is right to say that the horizon or background within which re-creation occurs is to a certain extent determinate, but this determinate horizon is itself infused throughout with difference. The African plateau of Kisumu and the endless prairie landscape both infect my horizon, as does the cultural diversity inherent in either of these places. Salman Rushdie aptly expresses my

² While Chapter Two of the present thesis will deal with the role of language in identity formation, I think it vital to explain what I find so objectionable in Merleau-Ponty's assessment of the tie between a language and the world it expresses. If it is true that in moving to Canada and making English my first language I essentially made Canada home, it is just as true that Gujarati as my second language opens another world to me. My problem with Merleau-Ponty's formulation of what occurs is that as far as who I am goes, I do not embody two completely different worlds, otherwise like Lawrence I would be caught between parallel worlds unable to be at home in either. There is, in my experience at least, a 'leaking' of 'worlds', neither remains *a* world, consequently, neither language remains quite what it was in my usage.

understanding of the transition and in fact the *translation* from one world to another.

The word translation comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something is lost in translation; I cling obstinately, to the notion that something is also gained (Rushdie, 1991, 17).

I too, cling obstinately to the hope that in having being borne across continents something valuable was gained. This hope is that the individual I am today, in this present, embodies not so much the collision of two vastly different cultural worlds, but rather the translation of two worlds into something unique between the world I left and the alien world I entered in 1969. It is the hope that 'home' is an expression of both the worlds that are so intrinsic to *who I am*.

Who am I?

My first memory is rocking back and forth in a cloth cradle tied to the door jams--of course I could not have known it was a door or that I was in a cloth cradle then--but still I recall clearly the feel of swinging back and forth and the comfort this induced in me.

My next memories are filled with the warmth of African summers, the sweet smell of dung fires and the shrieking of my siblings and cousins, the feel of a stolen mango and the muted colours of an arid landscape. Muted, because through the heat, I recall that no colour vibrated with its original hues, instead like seventies movies, the colours all took on a subdued texture. My body was a part of that aridness and not distinct from the mango, the breeze, the warmth.

My first memory of pain: I am lying beside an enormous anthill, fascinated by the activity of the colony. Huge wine coloured ants swarming around and over me, I am mesmerized because the contrast of the ants against the dry dirt, which is almost the colour of turmeric, reminds me of one of my mother's saris. I am not a threat until I decide to eat some dirt (a habit of mine in childhood), instantly I am in agony, my tongue on fire with an indescribable burning. I have obviously eaten

more than dirt. I remember clearly the feeling of betrayal at something I could not articulate then, the synesthesia of self and world had just begun to unravel.

My last memory of Africa is the feel of my new birthday dress, a crinoline that scratched at my knees and collar, and a sense of foreboding as my mother explained we were leaving for a foreign land soon. I was just beginning to realize the world around me was separate from the world within. It felt like falling in a dream.

I do not remember the aeroplane but clearly recall my sheer terror of the cold in England--no central heating and my first experience of snow--cold, wet and squishy unlike the warm monsoon rains which I would run about in barefooted. I did not like the boots, the coat, the scarf, and felt constrained and tied down. My body abandoned me and I a big girl of five could not control my bladder, the cold seemed to make it rebel against any control my mind tried to enforce. I was sad, because everything I knew that was comforting centred on warmth and this new place seemed so cold. My mind still dealt in fantasies of home, while my body, an alien thing, inflicted me with all sorts of embarrassments.

Landing at the Saskatoon airport in November 1969, before it was large enough to have landing portals--the door opens--I stand at the door and am struck with terror, I am facing a wild howling whiteness that cuts through my inadequate English coat, a biting at my face with invisible teeth. I cannot move and my father with my younger brother in his arms pushes me forward. I am convinced for the next two years that I am being punished, if I am very good we will return to Kisumu, which I daydream about constantly. I know instinctively to say nothing of my fear or the fact that I have completely lost control of my bladder. I feel trapped since it is too cold to play outside My family of seven shares a tiny room in my uncle's home, my world has shrunk and for the first time I feel trapped by my own body.

These vignettes of my childhood are representative of my first memories.

Like all memories, they are filled in with the retrospective knowledge of the adult looking back. Merleau-Ponty claims that the body is the condition of all knowledge in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Consciousness in his view is not distinct from my body rather the body is the condition for conscious thought and so action. In this view, the above vignettes are a reflective look back at the initial

recognition of the distinction of self and body--a distinction that is made *only* in reflection. It is the initial recognition of self as self-consciousness. In a very real way I took the cold prairie landscape within me, and since then have not been able to view myself as separate from those initial memories. But, the above also illustrates that this was not a process that occurred spontaneously or that ever fully integrated with my initial memories of Kenya. In one view, I lost a certain modality of being in moving to Canada, not just in the way I approached my physical surroundings but in the way I adapted to the social and cultural world that is Canada. And yet, the above does not indicate a choice of the world I knew, over the new one I was thrown into, but rather two worlds, one that lived only in my memories and one that I lived within and still viewed as foreign--alien. This alienation is no longer the way I approach my home.

The notion that I inhabit two worlds, even if one is only a memory, does not adequately explain how I view myself now. Claims that suggest we choose one world do not express my experience of being both an African East-Indian and a Canadian. How I see myself is much more complex than a conscious choice of one way of being. It is an assimilation of two modes of being--two worldviews. Neither of these views is static and neither view on its own can explain my feeling at home. I do not choose either this world or that world but have made a home between these worlds. I still fear the cold, but can enjoy the snow, I still eat dal and dream of stolen mangoes, but I also enjoy the colours of autumn and the smell of mandarins in December, and these are all integrated into *one* self. While there

may not be *one* self, I do not war with various notions of who I am. This is not to say that at one time I did not do so, and will not do so again, but that the *kind* of choices I make are not the ones Merleau-Ponty in his early and mid corpus suggests *between* cultural/social worlds. My English is affected by Gujarati and Swahili, just as my Gujarati is affected by English and Swahili. While it is true that I think predominately in English, my English is infected and I think enriched by untranslatable words from both Gujarati and Swahili. The integration that I have achieved between worlds is not a simple one, and is in many ways a self-creation--an imagined world.

This thesis intends to explore the issue of identity formation in relation to divergent social and cultural backgrounds. I will argue that it is indeed possible to inhabit more than one cultural space, and that there is an imagined world that is created in the interstices of divergent cultures and traditions. This imagined world is the translation of one culture into another. In my case this is the translation of an African East-Indian world into a Canadian prairie context. Merleau-Ponty claims that while we may be able to appropriate various languages and so gain insight into various worlds, we only ever inhabit *one* world at a time (PhP, 187). This is problematic since it does not adequately explain the emigrant experience, an experience that suggests that it is possible to create a space, a locality that is neither 'this' nor 'that' world but something new in between worlds. I will

explore what such an in between world would look and feel like from a perspective that lies metaphorically on the 'borderlands' between worlds.³

I will defend the claim that Merleau-Ponty's works can accommodate a thesis of hybridity between worlds despite his claim in the *Phenomenology* that one world dominates our perspectives. Given the ontology of "Eye and Mind" and *The Visible and the Invisible* and the reversibility thesis expressed there, the later Merleau-Ponty would have been able to foresee a world where identities were not bounded by strict notions of tradition and culture. I have appropriated anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's notion of imaginary identities to illustrate the possibilities of identities as self-creations capable of encompassing various cultural perspectives (Appadurai, 1996, 33). My arguments shall lead to the conclusion that given the erosion of tradition in a postmodern age, *all* identities are imaginary identities to a certain extent. Appadurai maintains that in a technological age traditions have begun to melt into one another. The lines of demarcation between worlds are no longer clear, and yet, distinctions between cultural worldviews remain.⁴ What we are experiencing is not merely the erosion

³ I think a case can be made that today all societies are experiencing a move to the borderlands. While I will not explore this (de)centering here, as the aims of the present work preclude an in-depth discussion of the movement of culture in a global environment, I think the effects of new information technologies are redefining how we understand 'culture'. My own experiences of living and working in South Korea for three years have suggested to me that no language or culture is free from outside influences, while this is certainly a generalization, I think a case can be made that it is a generalization with some validity.

⁴ Appadurai points out that imagined worlds are both sites of resistance and sites of subjugation in our global environment (Appadurai, 1996, 27-47) Imagined worlds can be understood as sites of resistance insofar as they resist the homogenization of difference. These imagined 'worlds' are sites of subjugation insofar as they create a nostalgia for a world that does

of tradition as we have known it but the rise of new hybrid cultures teeming with difference. This need not lead to irreconcilable differences but an area of commonality, a space that allows for identity in difference. While traditional Western philosophy has depicted identity in terms of a Eurocentric perspective, I would suggest that along with the notion of tradition as static and immutable, this conception is evolving to a perspective encompassing world views outside of the Western paradigm.⁵ Despite the problems of factionalism this entails, this is also a hope for the future. A future where one dominant worldview has no place and where difference need not imply conflict.

The explicit aim of this thesis is to save Merleau-Ponty from an interpretation that could see his formulation of how identities arise as illegitimate

not exist: this nostalgia is also a glorifying of heterogeneity--a glorification which fuels political battles for homelands that have questionable historical legitimacy. This thesis will focus on the ways in which imagined identities can provide resistance to a homogenization of difference. I will also suggest that it is only in light of an *ideal* of universality that this resistance does not disintegrate into intolerance and violence.

⁵ I would argue that a patriarchal Western attitude towards 'cultures' other than European is still prevalent today, though in our politically correct age, this attitude is often disguised as a Liberalism/humanism of one sort or another. I recall clearly the unease with which in public school I was forced to compare Dick and Jane's ideal lives with that of Sambo, of course most of my school-mates associated me with little Sambo since that was all that they knew of Africa. While today the world is not depicted in such a polarized fashion, I wonder if my eight year old nephew has a much better view of the world; 'Harry Potter' may have replaced Dick and Jane, but Harry's world is no less a stereo-typical Western European world. As Merleau-Ponty acknowledges in his essay "The Yogi and the Proletarian," "Western humanism is a *humanism in intention*: a few are the guardians of the treasure of Western culture; the others obey... Western humanism subordinates factual humanity to a certain idea of man and to the institutions which support this idea...and that in the end it has nothing in common with *humanism in extension*, which admits that there is in each man--not insofar as he is an organism endowed with such and such distinctive characteristics but insofar as he is an existence capable of determining himself and situating himself in the world--a power more precious than his products...Western humanism in its own eyes is the love of humanity, but for others it is only the customs and the institutions of a group of men, their password and their battle cry"(PrP, 228). I would agree with Kerry Whiteside that Merleau-Ponty's political views radically changed over the years, while the above

and dangerous. The implicit aim of this thesis is to problematize the views of identity and culture prevalent today.⁶ Anthropologists have taken a hermeneutical turn in how they approach the notion of culture. And, by doing so, they have accepted that any discussion of identity in relation to culture can only occur in the context of alterity and ipseity. There is no way to narrate the rise of identities in cultures without to some extent fictionalizing the account. Any narrative involving (an)other culture, or for that matter our culture, always affects what it tries to objectively describe.

The larger issues involved in dealing with identity and culture are in how we understand difference and identity and the *values* we instil in our interpretations of worlds. In the final analysis, any theory that deals with identities in relation to the cultures they arise out of, is also a political theory involved with power relations. The disastrous effects of nationalism(s) that provoke a sense of belonging that appeals to a natural superiority of specific peoples is all too prevalent today. We may want to question how such views arise. While philosophy in its postmodern turn has advocated a respect for difference, in very real ways this respect may engender the very biases it claims to eradicate. I

essay represents Merleau-Ponty's views in his Marxist period, this perspective gave way to a "new liberalism" that could represent a humanism in intention *and* in extension (Whiteside, 1991, 378).

⁶ While this could well be a dissertation topic as it is a complex issue, I think Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology already suggests that indeed the 'concepts' of 'culture' and 'identity' are more problems to be solved and questions to be asked, than terms to be defined. The present work only *implicitly* aims to point to the *kind* of questions culture and identity may raise today, it in no way presumes to provide any solutions or make any conclusive claims.

would suggest that an organic metaphor of culture, as well as identity, allows for cultural diversity while emphasizing that cultures are not impermeable entities, but rather like semi-permeable membranes that interact and effect one another. Identities on an organic model are both unique entities and intersubjective entities. Intersubjectivity is no longer viable as occurring in the boundaries of one world or culture but rather within the interaction between various worlds.

This thesis will proceed in three chapters, each involving subsections. Chapter One will fill in the background of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, concentrating on the relation of body and consciousness. The implications of the resulting 'embodiment' will illustrate that while we all share structures of perception, *how* we perceive is infiltrated through and through by the world we inhabit. Who we are is intrinsically tied to the world in which we find ourselves. Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of the relationship between consciousness and the body is tied to his critique of Western philosophy and the dualism that is a necessary consequence of the Cartesian cogito. However, in trying to overcome this dualistic view of the world and so of self, Merleau-Ponty appears to fall into a transcendental subjectivism similar to Husserl's. In his formulation of incarnate consciousness, Merleau-Ponty is already committed to an inherent subjectivism that necessarily leads him to conclude that we are tied to specific worlds. The problem here is that while throughout the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty argues for the correlation of consciousness and body, self and world, and in communication, self and other, his attempts to formulate an epistemology that is

consistent with this 'systematic' view are not totally successful. Chapter One will explain how the epistemological position of the *Phenomenology of Perception* leads Merleau-Ponty to an inherent solipsism rooted in lived experience and this leads to a notion of distinct cultural worlds.

Chapter Two will unfold Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity and how identity is always derived in a shared world. I will demonstrate that this view could lead to an aporia, essentially to a notion of 'worlds' that are unique individual localities. However, this view of hermetic communities (worlds) can only ever become an actuality if all dialogue is silenced. The larger issues of what specific intersubjective communities consist of, and the problems inherent in such 'sites' of identity formation, will be explored through my own experiences which suggest that communities, like individuals, can only ever remain in their differences if they are unwilling to open themselves to the other. I will suggest that cultures as made up of the linguistic and historical understanding a people have of themselves, are carried forward through expression; as such, the role of language in identity formation will be vital. The relation of language and history to culture will be explored to illustrate that while Merleau-Ponty argues for sedimentation of both language and history, he does not endorse a view that sees any sedimentation as absolute. Expression ensures creative transformations. I will suggest that what culture expresses today, is no longer merely *a world* or the history and traditions of *a people* but something much more complicated. Culture and identity will be explored through the notion of 'style'. Style is the unique way

in which individuals express their world. Style as expression is a transcending of particular 'sites' of identity and, as such, reveals an opening of the individual towards others. Whether these others are members of one's own community or a 'foreign' community, style as a transmission of a 'manner' of being-in-the-world assures that worlds, like individuals, can communicate with each other, despite, and in fact, *because of their differences*.

Chapter Three will explicate the notions of Flesh and reversibility from Merleau-Ponty's later ontology to show that while we may indeed inhabit unique worlds, these worlds, like our selves, are creations that are constantly re-creating themselves. The organic nature of both Flesh and reversibility illustrate that the later Merleau-Ponty did not envision identities as bounded to specific cultures or societies. While there is a solipsism rooted in Merleau-Ponty's relation of self to other and of one culture to another, it is in the crossing of boundaries and borders that humankind moves towards Truth and Being. As Homi Bhabha aptly notes, the space of identity is shifting to the 'borderlands', no culture inhabits a space of pure alterity, precisely because no such space exists (Bhabha, 1994). The notion of solidified traditions that carry on a past without remainder is seriously undermined by history as advent. Traditions and the cultures they represent are re-created in the flow *between* cultures, as well as in the internal flux of time within cultures. This thesis will conclude by suggesting that in a global world these re-creations lead to a new conception of world. While this new conception of what a

world constitutes today is not without problems, I think it may resolve some of the aporias of identity and difference.

Chapter One: Truth Introduction

The issue of who I am or who anyone is has characterized the philosophical problem of the universal and the particular in this century. Who I am becomes a problem to the extent that I relate myself to others, and in Merleau-Ponty's conception of self, I can never get to who I am *without* others. Precisely *because* Merleau-Ponty seeks some sort of universal principle for identities, what he would refer to as a 'presumptive universal', the notion of otherness becomes a problem that has to resort to a theory of distinctive worlds (PrP, 31).⁶ There is no getting around the kind of choice Merleau-Ponty makes in suggesting we only ever live in one world. However, I do think there is a problem in his formulation of that choice in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. In the *Phenomenology* as well as in *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, Merleau-Ponty is clear that we are instituted into an intersubjective community (or world) and that any self-identity we arrive at is pre-supposed by the *particular* intersubjective world within which we achieve selfhood. This is a problem because he does not want to relinquish particularity but assimilate it into a notion of one world. My argument

⁷ Throughout his works, Merleau-Ponty argues against absolutism of any kind and I think he would view a philosophy that defended unsubstantiated notions of universality as absolutist. The implications of a "presumptive universal" are to suggest that while we may never achieve universality, the hope of universal principles motivates our actions (PrP, 31). In the final analysis, some form of universality is necessary if we are to live morally *with* others. A "presumptive universal" would then be an ideal of universality that motivates our dealings with each other as individuals and as communities (worlds).

is that in my experience there is no 'one world', at least not in the sense of a distinct cultural/social/linguistic world that predominates my perspective. If the vignettes from the introduction of this thesis illustrate a transition from one world to another, they also illustrate that this transition is an on-going process. It is true that in growing up in Canada my perspective on basic characteristics of my Hindu/Brahmin/African/Indian culture changed but what these changed from and into, is not reducible to a reductionist or nationalistic version of Canadianism (whatever that may be). During my teen years, I may well have rejected the stereotyped feminine roles that my Indian culture advocated but I did not slip into an easy world of western feminism in doing so. I may well support a politics of individual rights, but I would not do so without criticizing the assumptions of such a politics to be hierarchically better than the culture of my parents. My notions of family and obligation are not derived from a Western paradigm, but from a cultural perspective that I can never out grow or throw off as easily as I did the notions of arranged marriages and my role as child bearer and house keeper.

There is in Merleau-Ponty's work an inherent tension between the immanent world and the opacity of the transcendent. The world as immutable is always at odds with the world as created and creative. This tension is not an inconsistency with Merleau-Ponty's position but is what makes his phenomenology so relevant in a world where traditional categories are no longer reliable. If it is possible for me to communicate outside of my direct social and cultural contexts, it may well be that those contexts themselves are ever in flux,

re-constituting what boundaries are and will be. It may be that what a world constitutes today is no longer definable by a *specific* linguistic, social or cultural horizon. Hermeneuts have long known that when we speak of histories and traditions, we are in a very real sense talking about narratives: narratives that are not immune to fictionalization. Identities may well be formed in specific contexts but these contexts are now understood as teeming with difference. We no longer take notions such as tradition or history as rarefied actualities but rather as creative possibilities.

There is an inherent tension between identity and difference that cannot be solved by privileging difference or advocating a universalism (or 'norm') that we would all fit into neatly. It is between the idea of particular cultural worlds and the common aims and aspirations of humanity as united that identities arise. This in-between world is unique to each of us, and yet, is infiltrated through and through with the common threads of not only the world we inhabit but also the worlds we cannot help but be influenced by. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Being is always a becoming and, as such, any questions about identity cannot be answered once and for all. As Merleau-Ponty says in the *Phenomenology*, "...I know myself only in my inherence in time and in the world, that is, I know myself only in ambiguity" (PhP, 345). This Chapter will explore what this 'inherence' in time and the world amounts to and why it can only offer up an ambiguous notion of self.

Merleau-Ponty's position seems to defend two opposing views. On the one hand, terms such as 'culture' are creations, and on the other hand, if there is

any sense in which to talk about an intersubjective basis for identity, such terms (i.e. culture, ideology, gender, nation, etc.), have to have sedimented meanings--they cannot be terms in *perpetual flux*.⁸ How to reconcile a position that claims that individual identities arise out of specific cultural and social worlds, but also claims that terms such as tradition, culture and self are continually re-constituted, re-created? The problem may be that the kinds of questions we ask lead to dichotomies that are irreconcilable. It may be helpful to review how Merleau-Ponty understood the project of phenomenology and so the teleology of philosophy. Parts One and Two of this Chapter will outline Merleau-Ponty's critique of traditional philosophy and his vision of phenomenology.

Part One: Philosophy Beyond Dualism

Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, illustrates that the dualities of self/other, world/self, subject/object, and the positions that these dualities arise out of, are intrinsically flawed. If philosophy is to get beyond the limitations inherent in dualistic philosophy, it needs to get beyond Cartesian reflection; philosophy requires a 'radical reflection'. This radical reflection requires philosophy to get beyond its own prejudices and back to the 'lived world'. It requires philosophy to step back and describe how the world, others and

⁸ In "Merleau-Ponty Alive," G.B Madison states that: "The subject or the self may be a creation, but it is not a creation *ex nihilo*. It is as Merleau-Ponty might say, 'a creation that is at the same time an adequation, the only way to obtain an adequation'" (Madison, 1993, 25). I would agree with Madison that identity is self-created and at the same time an 'adequation' in the sense that identities are always intersubjectively grounded. My disagreement with Merleau-Ponty is then not so much that there is a fairly stable intersubjective grounding of identity but rather in his incomplete formulation of this grounding in his early work.

self are given to us in experience. The paradoxical implications of such a philosophy arise only in relation to the prejudices inherent in the tradition's approach to philosophical issues. Merleau-Ponty takes as a starting point how the world is given to us in experience. Essence and existence are reconstituted as correlated.⁹ Traditional philosophy, whether in the empiricist or rationalist veins, tends to take a stance that privileges essence. While philosophy in its existential incarnations tries to return to existence as the ground of meaning, it does so by privileging an individualist agenda that discounts any intersubjective basis of identity. Merleau-Ponty, by arguing for a correlation of essence and existence and by claiming that truth is only possible as situated truth, radically shifts the questions appropriate to philosophy and so the answers we can hope to achieve. By shifting the focus of philosophy to the lived world, Merleau-Ponty overcomes the paradoxes inherent in an either/or approach. If phenomenology cannot provide us with absolutes, it is because our finitude precludes the possibility of our ever reaching the ends of knowledge. However, the claim that metanarratives of any kind are intrinsically flawed, a claim Merleau-Ponty would implicitly support, need not be disheartening, since there is a world of possibility that *is* accessible to us as finite beings.

In the "Preface" to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes the phenomenological project as returning to the subject as a condition

⁹ This correlation of essence and existence is an existentializing of essence. Essence is derived from our existential reality.

of the world. This is not meant to enclose reality in the subjective realm, it is a return to perception as the ground of knowledge. The goal Merleau-Ponty attempts to reach in this work is the elimination of the polarities of the subjective and objective--*as polarities*. He proposes that it is in between these extremes that meaning emerges. Phenomenology will perform the 'eidectic reduction', thus returning to our pre-objectifying experience of the world as a basis of truth. "Operative Intentionality" illustrates that we find ourselves already situated in a world, it is the context out of which truth(s) emerge and meaning unfolds. There is an intentional arc that projects about each of us, the past, a future, a human setting, a physical, ideological and moral situation; it is by situating ourselves in *all* these ways that we take a stance in the world and express an intentionality towards the world (PhP, 133). This intentionality is 'operative intentionality'.

It is a question of recognizing consciousness itself as a project of the world, meant for a world which it neither embraces nor possesses, but towards which it is perpetually directed--and the world as this pre-objective individual whose imperious unity decrees what knowledge shall take as its goal (PhP, xxvii-xviii).

Intentionality lays the structures of perceptual experience. These structures provide a basis for a refined objectivity that offers up truth, but a provisional truth that requires an involvement "in an ongoing task of approximation and adjustment of perception towards more adequate knowledge" (Whiteside, 1986, 141). The relationship of the subject to her world is one that is correlative; the world as

much as the subject, is a necessary condition of any knowledge. "Truth does not 'inhabit' only 'the inner man', or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (PhP, xi).

Phenomenology as such, is the task of bringing truth into being. "The real has to be described, not constructed or formed"(PhP, x). Radical reflection is defined as a reflection that grasps meaning and truth as expressive. Philosophy as radical reflection is a taking up of the task of truth, as such it "duplicate(s) itself infinitely, being as Husserl says, a dialogue or infinite meditation, and, insofar as it remains faithful to its intention, never knowing where it is going" (PhP, xxi). Merleau-Ponty argues for a position that places philosophy back in the experienced world; it is a position that acknowledges its own limitations. However, there are some fundamental problems with the position. As G.B.Madison notes, while Merleau-Ponty criticizes the idealism of Husserl, he is led to make claims that seem to lead to a subjectivism similar to Husserl's (Madison, 1981, 32). It is this subjectivism that I understand to be the underlying motivation for Merleau-Ponty's assessment of worlds.¹⁰ In the Parts Two to Four

¹⁰ While this chapter will criticize Merleau-Ponty for this assessment of worlds, I think Merleau-Ponty was attempting to preserve particularity (difference) without resorting to universal claims about humanity in the *Phenomenology*. Merleau-Ponty's position moves away from the privileging of particularity over universal claims in later works, which illustrate that these terms are mutually inclusive. The claim that identities are formed in particular worlds and that these worlds are not immutable localities but rather self-transforming and re-constituting, is only paradoxical from a perspective that seeks to absolutize what and how identities are and will be. If on the one hand we can talk about cultures as stable and to a certain extent determined, it is only because 'cultures' are never solidified, they are rather like organic entities that while adhering to a definite form are forever in flux and transition. In fact, the organic metaphor best describes how traditions can carry forward the past, but only by transforming the past into something meaningful in the present. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology adheres to both a existential and hermeneutical

of the present Chapter, I will illustrate that Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of both consciousness and body leads to an inherent subjectivism in his earlier works. I will suggest that Merleau-Ponty's disagreements with the philosophical tradition are partly responsible for the 'subjective' residues in his early work. In one sense, the problem is that the earlier work may not fully eradicate the dualism of traditional philosophy. This 'subjectivism' will be explored in the following to show that in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the reformulation of consciousness as incarnate consciousness does not sufficiently defend Merleau-Ponty against charges of idealism or realism. However, despite the problems in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, his later work does clarify the ambiguity of the earlier work.¹¹

Part Two: Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Traditional Philosophy

stance; his phenomenology is existential insofar as it concerns itself with how we are in the world and hermeneutical insofar as it understands that our expressions of how we are, are themselves creations. If we are to talk about the impact of culture on how we are as individuals and as societies, we cannot do so without realising that cultures are *our* creations. Worlds interact with each other and influence transformations that re-configure boundary limits. Because of this, identities are always created in determinate contexts and are also always exceeding the contexts that formed them. Every identity, every self, is in very concrete ways a self-creation. While Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology* may claim that we only ever live in one world, what a world amounts to is always a self-transforming expression.

¹¹ In *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty* as well as in "Did Merleau-Ponty have a Theory of Perception?," G. B. Madison points out that in the *Phenomenology of Perception* at least, the relation of self to other or self to world retains a 'bad ambiguity'. There is an inherent opacity or ambiguity that clings to our understanding of the thing or the other. In effect while Merleau-Ponty claims that the primacy of perception deals with the residues of Cartesian subjectivism, his own position has to acknowledge that it too relegates truth to our subjective ideas. Merleau-Ponty does not overcome this problem till his last work, posthumously published as *The Visible and the Invisible*. Also see Marvin Farber's "Persuasive Subjectivism" for a similar criticism with quite a different conclusion. Farber argues that Merleau-Ponty never gets beyond an essentially rationalist subjectivism, essentially a Husserlian 'transcendental subjectivism' (Farber, 1965).

In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty provides a critique of Descartes and in doing so, also critiques the Cartesian heritage of empiricism and intellectualism that colours the philosophical tradition after Descartes. Merleau-Ponty accesses the method of doubt that leads to Descartes' cogito and demonstrates that this method cannot give us the clear and distinct ideas Descartes claims it can. Descartes creates a duality of mind and body, world and self that the tradition appropriates. This 'appropriation' inherits the problems evident in Descartes' epistemology. By illustrating that the Cartesian cogito presupposes an 'I' that precedes the 'cogito ergo sum', Merleau-Ponty is able to point out the flaws inherent in Descartes' formulation of 'clear and distinct ideas'. The argument illustrates that Descartes' cogito is preceded by an 'I' that is always receding; there is no transparent subject that is the cogito, so the basis of indisputable truths discovered by such a subject is also put into doubt. Any positions that accept Descartes' formulation of the cogito as a starting point are then subject to the aporias inherent in his epistemology.

An in-depth analysis of the empiricist and intellectualist positions that arise out of Descartes' philosophy illustrate that both alter how we actually perceive and experience the world. Both positions abstract away from our actual experiences and in doing so, construct a world that no human actually perceives (PhP, 215-216). By returning to the world as lived, Merleau-Ponty is not claiming that we ever fully retrieve the pre-reflective experience of the world, but that by a

‘radical reflection’ we become aware of an ambiguous but none-the-less *there* foundation of reflection.

It is true that we discover the unreflected. But the unreflected we go back to is not that which is *prior* to philosophy or *prior* to reflection. It is the unreflected which is understood and conquered *by* reflection (PhP, 19, emphasis added).

Merleau-Ponty’s position takes a radical step way from the tradition by claiming that what we know *is* what we perceive. Perception becomes essential for all knowledge and the body as that which allows for perception becomes the condition for *any* knowledge. However, this is not a resort to a materialist position or any other reductionism that accepts a mind/body distinction. Consciousness is not subsumed *in* the body (though neither the body nor consciousness exist separately) but is situated *by* the body. The claim is that without the body, consciousness could not act, and so in Merleau-Ponty’s estimation, could not *know* anything. If consciousness acts, whether in thinking or in appropriating a world of things and others, it is because the body opens onto a world of things and others, because it is *like* them an object that is, however, also a subject. The Cartesian cogito as eternal immanence, is in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, tempered by a cogito or consciousness that is *both* immanent and transcendent.

Merleau-Ponty’s position can be understood in one sense as a reply to Husserl’s call “zu den Sachen selbst” (back to the things themselves). M.C Dillon illustrates that Merleau-Pont’s position tries to mediate between a philosophy of transcendence and a philosophy of immanence (Dillon, 1997). What is at stake in

the *Phenomenology of Perception* is a view of truth that the tradition has tried in vain to defend. Merleau-Ponty reconstitutes truth as an incremental process, which can never achieve the Cartesian certainty but still allows for adjudication between various truth claims. While Merleau-Ponty's position is not without philosophical problems, since it suggests that we never get to the ipseity of the other, the world, or of ourselves, it approaches the problem of what we can know from a unique standpoint--one that offers a perspective of truth that is tied to a lived world.¹² It is in the movement between transcendence and immanence that human beings experience their world and come to know at all. As G.B. Madison points out, the relation of world and self is not mutually exclusive but rather one of correlation or 'circularity' (Madison, 1981, 22-45). It is a relation that is circular and so a 'system' similar to Hegel's sense of system, a system in which each moment mutually implicates the other moments. If transcendence is tied to immanence (the alterity of world, self, and others is tied to the transparency of the world, self and others), in such a way that perception occurs between the opacity of the unknowable (the in-itself of alterity), and a world which is transparent in pre-reflective experience, it may be because consciousness is tied to a world *through* a body. Consciousness viewed as anchored to a certain perspective--to a body--cannot be either the pure transcendence or pure immanence, which intellectualism and empiricism claim.

¹² In "Did Merleau-Ponty have a Theory of Perception?," Madison illustrates that 'perception' in Merleau-Ponty's view cannot be what traditional philosophy has understood by perception but rather as the relation *between* subject and object (Madison, 1992, 83-95).

This primordial world that is re-discovered by the reflection of the philosopher is never given to us once and for all. What the philosopher discovers is that the reflected world like the personal self are informed by a primordial world and a pre-personal self¹³ (PhP, 215). In “The Child’s Relations to Others”, Merleau-Ponty is clear that before we ever arrive at a conception of ourselves as personal selves, we identify *with* others (PrP, 96-155). The distinction of self and other is only belatedly actualized by the child and only in conjunction with a recognition of the child’s body as separate from that of other’s bodies (PrP, 115-120). Initially, it is in the spatiality and motility of the child’s own body and the relations of the child *with* others that consciousness emerges. As Merleau-Ponty aptly notes, there is initially a ‘system’ of self and other that precedes the rise of the ‘super-ego’ or conscious self (PrP, 118). The child cannot actively synthesize various ‘sensations’ because the child only belatedly is conscious of a world of things and others as distinct and separate from herself. Initially, the child is aware of herself only in relation to this world of others and things.

It is this pre-personal relation of the child to her world that motivates Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the primacy of perception. If the child becomes a personal self, it is first through a relation with the world through her body. This pre-personal self offers a generalized perspective of self, other and the world, just

¹³ Perception involves a generality of the world and self, a background out which we perceive. See Part Two, Chapter One of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, “The World as Perceived” for an in-depth discussion of the primordial world and the pre-personal self. (PhP, 203-242).

as primordial perception offers a generalized world which consciousness takes up and endows with meaning. However, this primacy of perception is not a return to sensation in an empiricist fashion, since perception is never given to us in experience as 'pure sensation' but always in the context of a figure/background structure.¹⁴ Intentionality is a basis for any perceptual act, because any perception is already an act that focuses on the particular. Any perceptual act involves a figure/background structure that 'focuses' one's gaze, in this sense any perception is 'intentional'. The point is that any focusing on particular things or people requires a background that is generalized and ambiguous from which one aims one's perception to particular things or people or even to the self.¹⁵ The child does not synthesize various perceptions (i.e. sensations), because this implies structures

¹⁴ All sensation is as Merleau-Ponty says of vision "...a thought subordinated to a certain field...[t]o say that I have a visual field is to say that by reason of my position I have access to and an opening upon a system of beings, visible beings, that these are at the disposal of my gaze by virtue of a kind of primordial contract and through a gift of nature, with no effort made on my part; from which it follows that vision is prepersonal. And it follows at the same time that it is always limited, that around what I am looking at at a given moment is spread a horizon of things that are not seen, or which are even invisible" (PhP, 216-217).

¹⁵ The point here is that one does not consciously synthesize various sensations into coherent 'wholes' through judgements, associations or attention, but that the body is that power of synchronization within an "existential environment" that allows things to be for me, to mean for me in conjunction with all of my sensible faculties. I do not need to synthesize the visual, auditory or tactile sensations of an object, the object is given to me with the variety of meanings it holds, never completely, but still never as merely bits of color or sound or touch (PhP, 211). I cannot look at an apple without thinking of the parts of the apple I do not see, (the apple's inside, the back or top), or without thinking of how an apple smells and tastes, unless of course I have never experienced an apple before, but even then I would still think of it as something organic, something possibly edible. I never think of objects in terms of isolated sensations. While there is a visual prejudice inherent in Merleau-Ponty's primacy of perception, I think that we can extend his notion of perception to a larger field than that of sight. Oliver Sacks shows in various case studies, specifically in his essay "To See and Not See," that even the non-visual perception of the blind requires an intentionality (whether of objects, individuals, or the self) that relies on the figure/background structures of perception (Sacks, 1995, 108-152).

of consciousness that the child only belatedly develops, and only develops to the extent that she becomes aware of her relation to her own body. The first indications of the world and others as distinct from the self are realized by the child in relation to her recognition of herself as other (i.e. in the mirror stage of development) (PrP, pp.125-141).

Merleau-Ponty claims that there is a pre-logic that informs the world. If we perceive things and others, as well as ourselves, it is not that we consciously synthesize various perceptions into coherent wholes, but that the world is already coherent and our perception of this world shares in the structures of this meaningful world. The body, as my 'point of view', is then responsible for this structure of perception that is never pure sensation, since it is always tied to an intentionality that synthesizes various 'sensations' and perspectives (real and virtual), to offer a world that is always already 'meaningful'. Even before any notion of self as an individual, this intentionality towards self, other and world, is already 'there' as a generalized intentionality in the pre-personal self of the child.

Merleau-Ponty reformulates the relationship between consciousness and the body by returning to pre-reflective experience. As stated above, this return to pre-reflective experience requires a special type of reflection—'radical reflection'. Radical reflection is a reflection that describes how humans experience the world, others and themselves without objectifying. In order to get to radical reflection, the prejudices inherent in traditional philosophy must be overcome; the phenomenologist must purge herself of dualistic thinking.

However, the phenomenologist must also be aware that she cannot step outside of dualistic thinking altogether, even radical reflection requires an acknowledgement of the basic terms of philosophical inquiry--subjects and objects. The advantage of reflecting 'radically' is that it requires an awareness that the distinction of subject and object is to some extent reversible. This reversibility is illustrated by one's relationship with one's body, which can be treated as an object like other objects but is never *just* an object. I can touch myself and in that act be aware of myself as a sensible 'other', and also as one who *experiences* touching. Things in the world offer themselves to me not only as in-itselfes that I belatedly *know* (whether in an intellectualist account of consciousness as a constituting agent *of* a world or an empiricist account of consciousness as constituted *by* a world), but rather as similar to my body, as things that *respond* to my gaze and my touch. The world for its part elicits from me a response.

While it is true that a certain solipsism is inherent in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, since the world, others and even myself retain an opacity that allows for the objectification of the world and others, and also self-objectification, this is only possible from a *reflective* stance. A perspective that offers up an objectified world of others or of ourselves is only possible retrospectively. In order for me to posit a world of otherness, initially, I have to start out from a stance of the world and others as *with* me. Just as the child comes to distinguish herself from the world and others as *with* her, belatedly, through a recognition of herself as 'other', any reflective act presupposes a non-objectifying stance from

which ‘otherness is abstractly *conceived*. Descartes can only initiate his method of doubt by distancing himself from his warm fire and the comfort of his winter dressing gown. The intellectualist and empiricist positions that follow Descartes begin their projects by a similar distancing and eventual denial of the ‘lived world’. Both intellectualist and empiricist positions end up offering abstract accounts of a world that no human actually experiences or perceives. However, Merleau-Ponty’s disagreements with traditional philosophy are not merely methodological difficulties but a difference of epistemological possibility--essentially this is a difference of teleology.¹⁶

Merleau-Ponty’s aim is not to discredit the philosophical tradition, but to illustrate that any project that starts out with assumptions based on a subject/object dualism are destined to offer one-sided perspectives. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty attempts to rectify the problems with either empiricist or rationalist accounts, by showing not only that their accounts of the world, others and self are wrong, but also how each view is partially right. As Madison notes in *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, this leads to an aporia that is not resolved till Merleau-Ponty’s last work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Madison, 1981, 26-36).

¹⁶ While the term ‘teleology’ has traditionally been characterized as referring to positions that defend a metaphysical standpoint in philosophy, it can also imply a direction or aim of a philosophy metaphysical in nature or not. It is in this sense of a definite direction, a notion of the ‘good life’, that I would suggest that Merleau-Ponty’s works can be understood as unfolding a distinct ‘teleology’.

Merleau-Ponty has to acknowledge, at least in his earlier work, that the other, the world and even the self are relegated to a somewhat subjectivist account, thus the solipsism that is inherent in his epistemological account. It is this subjectivism that leads to his claim that we only ever live in one cultural world. However, since the structures that condition perception are to some extent determinate, what this subjectivism amounts to need not lead only to a 'bad ambiguity'. The primacy of perception and its grounding in a new vision of our relationship to our bodies is responsible for both a 'bad ambiguity' and, more positively, for the possibility of an ontology that illustrates that the kind of subjectivism that this leads to, is exactly why the world and others *cannot* be hermetically sealed objects, but rather the carnal obverse of the subject. Parts Three and Four of the present Chapter will explore the relationship of body and consciousness to illustrate that Merleau-Ponty does not fully overcome the problems of subjectivism in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Part Three: The Body and the Primacy of Perception

By making the body the condition of any epistemological claims, Merleau-Ponty radically alters the way that the philosophical tradition has theorized both the body and consciousness. The body in Merleau-Ponty's account is our situatedness--the point of departure for all experience and so all knowledge. By illustrating that the body is not so much in space, as the condition for all spatial relations, Merleau-Ponty shows that the body cannot be an object like all other objects, but rather is a subject. If consciousness 'throws' itself into the

world of things and others, it is because the body gives it a perspective unto a world of things and others. This point requires illustration. My body provides me with a perspective from which to understand spatial relations. If I have relations such as up and down or 'here' and 'there', it is because my body, unlike an object *for* consciousness, is the nexus *from which* consciousness projects itself into a world. The body is the stance from which consciousness finds itself as relatively situated to spatial relations such as here or there. Understood as an object, the body would require a consciousness that is then the subject, to animate the object body from a position that could not *be* anywhere. If the body situates consciousness, it is because its relation to consciousness is as Madison claims, a mutually inclusive one--a system of consciousness and body (Madison, 1981). I may be able to abstractly conceive of consciousness as distinct from my body and so treat my body as an object but I can only ever do so in reflection. In my everyday actions and projects, my body is that which allows me to posit a world of others and things. Consciousness in this view is not a hermetically sealed self that constitutes a world exterior to itself, but a self that re-discovers itself in being through a body and in an already there world.

Cartesianism cannot account for my hold on the world because it treats the body as an object. If I act and if I am capable of reflecting, even abstracting from my lived world, it is because first, my body opens unto a world that it appropriates *through action*. As Merleau-Ponty aptly notes, my body is "*a spaciality of situation*" (Ph.P, 100). While both intellectualism and empiricism

claim an objective space, Merleau-Ponty shows that we can only ever arrive at an idea of objective space in reflection. In our everyday experiences (the basis of the tradition's notions of objective space), space is what I live through and within. Geometrical explanations of a flattened plane consisting of points and variations of size and shape do not explain the world I live and move through, though they do offer a way in which I can understand space *reflectively*. If I have a perspective of space that allows me to understand that an object seen from a distance becomes smaller or the object at close quarters is larger, this is because first, my body opens to me the meaning of distance and nearness. It is not that the objective space of intellectualism or empiricism is wrong, but that if in my everyday activities space were an idea that had an objective 'reality' outside of my embodied self, one that I had to think my way through, I would not be able to spontaneously 'appropriate' the world, but rather would move around like an automaton--*thinking* through each movement. Movement itself would become a problem if we accepted the notion of objective space as the only space possible.¹⁷

¹⁷ "If we want to take the phenomenon of movement seriously, we shall need to conceive a world which is not made up only of things, but which has in it also pure transitions. The something in transit which we have to recognize as necessary to the constitution of a change is to be defined only in terms of the particular manner of its 'passing'. For example, the bird which flies across my garden is, during the time that it is moving, merely a greyish power of flight and generally speaking, we shall see that things are defined primarily in terms of their 'behaviour' and not in terms of their static 'properties'. It is not I who recognize, in each of the points and instants passed through, the same bird defined by explicit characteristics, it is the bird in flight which constitutes the unity of its movement, which changes its place, it is this flurry of plumage still here, which is already there in a kind of ubiquity, like the comet with its tail.... The lived present holds a past and a future within its thickness. The phenomenon of movement merely displays spatial and temporal implications in a more striking way. **We know of movement and a moving entity without being in any way aware of objective positions, as we know of an object at a distance and of its true size without any interpretation, and as we know every moment the**

Before I can ever think objective space, my body must open me to a space I *live* through.¹⁸ Simply put, without a body there would not be 'experience', and without experience, there could not be knowledge of any kind. Objective space is preceded by a lived space.

What perspective could a consciousness unhinged from a body possibly provide? Any attempts to express a bodiless perspective are already infiltrated with relations that could only apply *to* a body. Mechanistic views of the body assume just such a perspective. It is certainly true that at times I forget my body and in fact in most of my activities this 'forgetfulness' is necessary for my accomplishing anything at all.¹⁹ However, this forgetting is not a leaving the body

place of an event in the thickness of our past without any express recollection" (PhP, 275, emphasis mine).

¹⁸ In trying to illustrate how it is that lived space differs from the objective space of traditional philosophy a personal example came to mind. I had the opportunity a few years ago to travel in India one of the first things I noticed was that people moved to a different rhythm than they did in Canada. Initially, I could not imitate this rhythm and so caused pile-ups on busy sidewalks; people (and the occasional cow) had to move around me in order to get by. Now part of the problem was that as long as I actually tried to think of the rhythm I could not move along with the crowds but instead caused jam-ups, as soon as I started to 'forget' that this was a different place and not home, as soon my feelings of insecurity and 'peculiarity' disappeared, I found I had mastered the rhythm of Indian walking. If space were as intellectualism and empiricism claimed and my body another object to move about I think I would never have been able to master the Indian 'style' of walking. My 'success' in India was only possible once I stopped trying to *think* about my movements and actually started to *feel* the rhythm through my body. While it is true to a certain extent that I had to 'learn' the Indian rhythm this did not occur by learning the steps and momentum of Indian walking but rather by letting my body be carried away by the Indian 'style', by appropriating that style *as my own*. It is not that the *idea* of 'objective' space is wrong so much as that objective space is not the space I move through and within, and in fact, objective space is only possible in-so-far as it is preceded by lived space.

¹⁹ Habits are one way in which I transplant myself into objects or things, in a sense incorporating them into my body schema. For example in the above example (footnote 18) part of the problem with learning the Indian rhythm of walking was that walking in a Western way was so ingrained in my bodily understanding of *walking* that the new rhythm threw me off, in a sense I had to acquire a different understanding of space as well as of movement in order to master the

behind but rather the very condition for acting in the world. It is because I do not treat my body as an object that I must drag along in my projects, and because the world of things and others in my projects open to me through my body, that I am capable of acting. The problem with both the intellectualist and the empiricist accounts of the relation of the body and consciousness is that they assume a subject that could not be anywhere or do anything (rationalism), since in a sense, they do away with all exteriority, or they do away with the subject altogether (empiricism). Merleau-Ponty mediates between these extremes. Using cases of pathological illness, Merleau-Ponty shows that intellectualist and empiricist accounts of consciousness/body are similar not to the normal subjects hold on the world but to the pathological limitations of the ill.²⁰

The body for the normal subject is not a mechanism to be used but a certain *style* of being in the world.²¹ My body offers me a peculiar hold on the world, one that is unique. If I understand my world, it is because I see with *these* eyes and move about in *this* particular way. As Iris Marion Young points out, my body colours my perspective and does so in a way that is never secondary to my

Indian rhythm. (See Merleau-Ponty's discussion on habit in *The Phenomenology*, Chapter Three, 142-146.)

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty uses the case of Schneider, a victim of 'psychic blindness', to show that body and consciousness have a relationship that cannot be explained by either empiricism or intellectualism. Schneider's problem is that the world is for him a fully determinate world, the realm of possibility is absent for Schneider. The relationship of the subject to her world in either empiricist or intellectualist accounts mirror Schneider's world--a ready-made world that is wholly objectified (PhP, 102-136). The 'normal' subject has the possibilities the world offers, precisely because her body is not an object to be manipulated by her, but her access to the world, a world that consciousness is always motivated towards.

conscious thoughts and acts (Young, 1989). My body is that meaningful core that effects how I experience the world and so how I know the world and myself. If I navigate through the world in a way that is unique to me, this is because in my movements and gestures I am expressive not merely of a certain body image but of a certain modality of being-in-the-world. This 'style' is instituted before I even develop a sense of self as distinct from a world of things and others. In fact, my relation to my self is one that is permeated through and through by the world I am born into and this body that gives me a perspective onto that world. However, Merleau-Ponty cannot be said to endorse any kind of materialist position because while the body may give me an opening onto the world it cannot do so without consciousness that motivates it towards the world of things and others. Before turning to the intersubjective grounds of identity in Merleau-Ponty, I will outline his reformulation of the Cartesian cogito. The tacit cogito, as an essentially temporal being, will clarify Merleau-Ponty's epistemological position and set the stage for his views on language and history, which will be explored in Chapter Two.

Part Four: The Tacit Cogito, Time, Intersubjectivity and Truth

Merleau-Ponty lays the ontological ground of Being and the epistemological ground of knowledge through his being-in-the-world as being is time. This temporal being, as the tacit cogito is the ground of the epistemic act.

²¹ The notion of 'style' is a key concept in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. I shall offer a definition of style' in Chapter Two.

The epistemic act is that thrust into a world that beckons the incarnate cogito and calls for it to situate itself and take a stance in the world. This tacit cogito is Merleau-Ponty's solution to the problems inherent in Descartes' formulation of the cogito. The Cartesian cogito is reflective, because of this it never reaches itself. It cannot answer the question of who says "I think, therefore I am". The reflective cogito can never reach its own originating thought. The tacit cogito that carries us into the world and at the same moment evades us, is time. Not in the traditional sense of time, as a linear unfolding of moments but as a movement that includes a free inter-play of past, present and future. The tacit cogito is that which underlies existence, its nature is both immanent as in the present moment and transcendent in that it is also always a movement of past and future. This tacit cogito is discovered under the reflective cogito; it is *between* these two modes of being that perception occurs.

To sum by, we are restoring to the cogito a temporal thickness. If there is not endless doubt, and if 'I think', it is because I plunge on into provisional thoughts and, by deeds, overcome time's discontinuity (PhP, 398).

Merleau-Ponty makes the point that in a very real sense I can never reach myself, my own subjectivity always transcends the *I*, I can grasp. My body offers me a certain perspective on the world, it manifests a behaviour towards the world-
-an involvement with the world that opens a range of possibilities (PhP, 352). The other is also this behaviour towards a world and because of this our perspectives can merge. However, while our perspectives are similar, there is a very real sense

in which the other remains for me hidden; I cannot know that I re-capture her experience rather than assuming that she experiences what I do. There is a solipsism rooted in lived experience. I cannot reach the ipseity of another. However, Merleau-Ponty points out that even in denying the other I presuppose otherness. The structure of consciousness, as constituted by incarnate consciousness, puts me firmly in a social world. Reflection may give me objects and others as sealed in-itself, but first, experience must give me a world of others that cannot be completely sealed from me, since it is *through* them that I constitute self. Denial of the other is only possible insofar as I acknowledge the other first.

Each existence finally transcends the others only when it remains inactive and rests upon its natural difference. Even that universal meditation which cuts the philosopher off from his nation, his friendships, his prejudices, his empirical being, the world in short, and which seems to leave him in complete isolation, is in reality an act, the spoken word, and consequently dialogue. Solipsism would be strictly true only of someone who managed to be tacitly aware of his existence without being or doing anything, which is impossible, since existing is being in and of the world. The philosopher cannot fail to draw others with him into his reflective retreat, because in the uncertainty of the world, he has for ever learned to treat them as consorts, and because all his knowledge is built on this datum of opinion. Transcendental subjectivity is a revealed subjectivity, revealed to itself and others, and is for that reason an intersubjectivity (PhP, 361).

It is not just others in an intersubjective world that are required for self-understanding or self-consciousness but the world as well. The tacit cogito is in one sense the intentionality that motivates an individual towards a world. If the

distinction of subject as the creator of a world over the world as object disappears, it is not because the world is purely a subjective world, but that the relation between the subject and her world is a mutually dependent one. The conditions of arriving at self-consciousness require both the tacit cogito as the movement of consciousness towards the world *and* an already there world. As we have seen in the discussion of spaciality above, action is possible because I transcend the reflective cogito. The tacit cogito as time is always a movement towards the world, a transcendence rooted in the immanent. Just as others are more for me than in-itself, the world is more for me than mere objects because I am able to transcend myself (the I that is reflective) by being an 'I can'. The tacit cogito then underlies the reflective Self. What allows the world to be for me at all is the opacity or 'secret in-visibility' of the tacit cogito.²² If on one side of visibility lies Being as all that is (the primordial world of generality), on this side of the subject, lies the tacit cogito that allows Being to be at all.

Consciousness is thus radically re-theorized in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty follows the methodological doubt of Descartes and discovers that the Cartesian "I think" is only discovered if proceeded by an "I can" (PhP, 382-383). As shown above, Descartes can only arrive at his "I think, therefore I am" by abstracting from his experiences as an *embodied knower*. It is only by abstracting away from the lived world that Descartes is able to posit a translucent cogito. The Cartesian cogito that claims self-evident truths can only do

²² This (in)visibility of the tacit cogito will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.

so if it transcends itself and is transparent to itself. The 'I' that thinks must know itself through and through.

If the 'cogito' reveals to me a new mode of existence owing nothing to time, and I discover myself as the universal constituent of all being accessible to me, and as a transcendental field with no hidden corners and no outside, it is not enough to say that my mind, "when it is the form of all the objects of sense... is the God of Spinoza," for the distinction of form and matter can no longer be given any ultimate value, therefore it is not clear how the mind, reflecting on itself could find in the last analysis any meaning in the notion of receptivity, or think of itself in any valid way of undergoing modification: for if it is the mind itself which thinks of itself as affected, it does not think of itself as thus, since it affirms its activity afresh simultaneously while appearing to restrict it: insofar, on the other hand as it is the mind which places itself in the world, it is not there, and the self-positing is an illusion. It must then be said, with no qualification, that my mind is God (PhP, 372).

By recreating the cogito from an 'I think' to an 'I can', Merleau-Ponty posits self not as an *objectively* known entity but as a becoming. Consciousness finds itself in doing, in reaching out to its world *through* its body.

The tacit cogito is then the cogito that always evades my grasp; it is the condition of the 'I think' without ever being clearly known in-itself. It is the background that allows horizons, situations and contexts to exist for me, to have meaning for me. The tacit cogito is also time in the sense that it presents to me myself and behind me an intentional arc that motivates me to the horizon of the world. The tacit cogito always evades our grasp, like the pre-reflective world, it is the background out of which the reflective self arises; as such, there cannot be any

conclusive definitions of the tacit cogito.²³ This opacity leads to a view of truth as contingent, while sedimentation is a way in which I can situate myself in the world by making the world 'for me', I can never achieve the Cartesian self-evident truth(s), the ideas which I wholly possess. Madison is correct to say that Merleau-Ponty does not adequately deal with the subjective element of his position, but trying to find where the subject abides would be impossible if we did not look in a shared world of meaning (which Madison acknowledges) (Madison, 1981, 35-36). If we agree with Dillon, as I do, that a suspension of categories or a completely pre-categorical perspective is unlikely, then the subject here cannot be the transparent Cartesian cogito. We are always born into a world of presupposition, a world of sedimented meaning and it is this world that gives the world or self (Dillon, 1977, 386-387).

Conclusion

Subjectivity is always limited by the context in which it arises. Marvin Farber's criticism that in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology*, the existence of the world depends on a consciousness that 'creates' the world, is false (Farber, 1965, 533). The relation of world and self, as one of correlation, implies that the world founds the self, just as consciousness expresses the world and so itself. In Merleau-Ponty's view, my relation to the world and others is grounded by the tacit

²³ There is a generality that pervades the tacit cogito, this anonymous Being could be understood as a generalized 'One', similar to a Hegelian 'World Spirit'. If this reading of the tacit cogito is viable then the notion of the tacit cogito as time becomes clear, the tacit cogito is not only the individual's march through time but humanities. This relation will be further explored in Chapter Three.

cogito, this cogito is circumvented by the body that opens it to a world and by its temporal 'essence' that allows it to unite its past in its present and to create its future. However, the tacit cogito as this movement is never fully known. The philosopher may discover under the reflective self an ever receding ground of subjectivity but she can never clearly articulate what this 'ground' is. As such, there is an opacity of the thing, of others and of myself, which I can never completely overcome. Finitude sets the limits of what I can know but where these limits begin and end is shrouded in opacity as well. Truth is thus a process as opposed to an objective property of reality. As Dillon points out in "A Phenomenological Conception of Truth", it is the ideal of objectivity that motivates this process or task, as an ideal, truth is always a beyond that I attempt to articulate by placing it in the lived world of doing (Dillon, 1977, 386-387). If I come to an understanding of who I am it is not because I discover that I am Descartes' cogito, but because by appropriating the world of things I create a dialogical relationship between the world and myself. This dialogue of self and world is actualized through my *acting* in the world. Because I am perpetually motivated towards a world that cannot remain the traditions 'in itself', I can come to know who it is that *I* am.

Self-discovery is in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology founded on my relations with a world of things and others. This relationship is one of

expression.²⁴ Expressing myself is then a way of expressing my world and the world is always the particular context I am born into. My relationship with others is like my relationship with the world, a dialectical one. However, this relationship is not without problems, since I can distance myself from this world of 'otherness', thereby refusing to communicate and express the world. I can no more know the other fully than I can know myself. The reflective attitude is one of the possibilities of existence and, as such, I can always distance myself from the world, others and even from myself, as in cases of mental illness. There is an inherent solipsism rooted in lived experience that Merleau-Ponty must acknowledge.

However, as suggested throughout the present chapter, self is founded on the intersubjective world one is born into--the context in which I come to self-understanding is then hemmed in by a boundary of a *particular* field. While this notion of the intersubjective basis of identity circumvents how I define myself, there is still the problem of actually distinguishing between my world and an other's world in cases of incommensurability. In the following, I will use Merleau-Ponty's discussion of hallucinations to parallel the relation he draws between the intersubjective world we are born into and how this world conditions what we take to be truth. The problem with this notion of situated truth is that it could possibly lead to a lack of grounds for adjudication between varying claims

²⁴ There is a sense in which expressivity and freedom are synonymous in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Chapter Two will draw out the implications of this relation of expression and freedom.

about the world and so reality. In one sense, *all* claims about 'reality' are valid in Merleau-Ponty's reformation of 'perception' in the *Phenomenology*.

The problem with this conception of truth and so reality is that the basis of self, as essentially intersubjective, could limit how I express myself by limiting the choices open to me. (Who I am is contextualized by the particular time I am born into--by the social, linguistic and historical setting of that time and place.) Certainly, Merleau-Ponty draws this conclusion when he claims that one world dominates my perspective in the *Phenomenology* (PhP, 187). In his discussion on hallucinations, Merleau-Ponty attempts to differentiate the experience of 'illusions' from 'real' perceptions (PhP, 334-345). I think this discussion of the distinction of 'real' perceptions and illusionary perceptions relies on Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity. Essentially, the distinction is based on 'norms'. What is real is what a given society, at a given moment in history, understands to be true and so real. In the final analysis, Merleau-Ponty's re-constituting of perception has to admit that given a situation where an individual refused to acknowledge that her illusion was not 'real', like the normal subject's perceptions, both the illusion and the real perception would share the same modality of Being. Now if we apply this to our perceptions of worlds, something Merleau-Ponty does not do, could we not argue that given two incommensurable worldviews, both would have to be acknowledged as valid?

This incommensurability only becomes a problem when two worlds come into contact. In my own case, this was the African Indian world and the Canadian

world. Merleau-Ponty implies that in a situation where two different perspectives face the individual, only one world can be dominant. He also implies that the patient with hallucinations has to acknowledge that one of her perceptions, the one other people do not see, has to be *recognized* as illusionary. But this is exactly what does not occur in the cases of hallucinations that Merleau-Ponty refers to in the *Phenomenology*. While the patient suffering from hallucinations distinguishes her illusions from other perceptions that are similar, she does so without ever admitting that what *she* experiences is *not* real (PhP, 339). If we extended the discussion of hallucinations to that of worlds, the same problem arises; given two incommensurable views of *the* world, there would be no conclusive way to show that these worlds were in any way the *same* world. On an individual level this could imply that the world I live within and the world my friend inhabits are two separate worlds. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the expressive nature of language overcomes this problem of incommensurability. Yet, if I come into contact with a language not my own, as I did when I first moved to Canada, what would ever induce me to take up an other's language and so perspective? Why does the patient suffering from hallucinations feel a need to overcome her 'illusions' in *favour* of the majority's 'real' experiences? The problem here is that Merleau-Ponty implies that what happens in situations of incommensurability is the choice of one view *over* the other. The implication is that just as the patient has to choose to give up her illusion because it does not harmonize with the perspective of others, I supposedly gave up the world I knew for one that offered no comfort,

that, initially at least, was a world of terror and fear. My question here is why would I have made such a choice and my objection is that that is not what my experience tells me happened. Given two distinct views on the world both would be valid and Merleau-Ponty could not provide us with the basis of adjudicating differences in perspectives. Now this only becomes a problem for Merleau-Ponty so long as there is not a human world in his phenomenology that supersedes any distinct 'localities'. It is only a problem as long as communication is not possible. It may be of value then to re-examine Merleau-Ponty's claims about the relation of language to a particular world in the *Phenomenology*, it may bring to light why the notion that one world dominates our perspective could undermine Merleau-Ponty's position altogether.

This chapter has illustrated that Merleau-Ponty attempts a reformulation of subjectivity, and so, objectivity, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. This reformulation is at times "fuzzy", as Madison notes (Madison, 1981, 35). I think this is due to an incomplete notion of intersubjectivity. I think in trying to save his position from an interpretation that could view his theorization of subjectivity as a radical subjectivism, Merleau-Ponty ends up defending a claim of *specific* worlds. His perspective on the role of language, freedom and the nature of history in identity formation, the basis of intersubjectivity, will be outlined in Chapter Two. Chapter Two will illustrate that while the *Phenomenology of Perception* may endorse a view of 'particular' worlds, this was not a position Merleau-Ponty was satisfied with. I will explore the intersubjective basis of identity through Merleau-

Ponty's notion of style, and illustrate that the notion of 'culture' that arises out of Merleau-Ponty's views on language and history could be problematic.

Chapter Two: Style Introduction

Man is a historical idea and not a natural species. In other words, there is in human existence no unconditional possession, and yet no fortuitous attribute. Human existence will force us to revise our usual notion of necessity and contingency, because it is the transformation of contingency into necessity by the act of taking in hand. All that we are, we are on the basis of a *de facto* situation which we appropriate to ourselves and which we ceaselessly transform by a sort of *escape* which is never unconditioned freedom (PhP, 171).

The notion of style as it appears in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language* expresses the unity of difference and identity.²⁵ Style may be understood as intersubjectivity, expression, history and freedom in this chapter. The individual's style is also the style of a cultural and historical epoch. I have a certain way of approaching the world that is unique to me but this is tempered by the style of my historical and cultural setting. Each individual is instituted into an intersubjective community that originally provides a basis for identity, and similarly each community is united by a common history, a world that manifests and maintains its identity through expression. I will illustrate how style gives us access to the world of others and things, and does so by intertwining categories such as inside and outside or self and others. In

²⁵ "[T]he notion of style intervenes: because the style of my gestures and the gestures of others is the same, this amounts to the fact that what is true for me is also true for others. 'Style' is not a concept, an idea: it is a 'manner' that I apprehend and then imitate, even if I am unable...to define it" (CAL, 43).

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Being can be understood as a process of becoming. As illustrated in Chapter One, Being is a becoming because the nature of the incarnate consciousness is a movement and synergy of self, others and the world. The *expression* of this movement is the style that is both the unique individual expression and the united expression of others and the world. Style is synonymous with who and how we are and how we approach Truth and Being. Freedom and expression are the ways in which this style as the correlate of individual and community is manifest. Any identity is preceded by a world that informs it and eventually gives rise to unique individuals. However, as I will argue in the following, worlds are also created in turn by the individuals that make up intersubjective communities. While we all *escape* particular communities and thereby realize our freedom, we only ever do so within a *given* situation, finally, *because of a particular situation*. However, how this 'situation' is remembered, how a situation is taken up as part of a personal history, is crucial to who we become. History is as much the history of individuals, as it is the grand scheme of all human memory; it is the bringing of our past into the present, in light of a future not yet made. In light of this view of history, truth is a responsibility and never an objective property of reality. How we understand our history effects what we take to be truth, and so how we live as individuals and within our particular communities.

Escape

I do not remember *learning* English. I started kindergarten approximately one month after arriving in Canada and in my memory at least, English was just *there*. What I do remember is that my family had moved into a world of chaos, my uncle's modest house contained eleven children and five adults and unlike Africa where we lived with three times as many children and adults, this *space* seemed *so* small. While English may have appeared out of nowhere, my adjustment to prairie winters was not so sudden. I remember clearly the feeling of injustice when my kindergarten teacher would not let me go to the bathroom before I answered a simple math question. I knew addition and subtraction at a level beyond my years because in Kisumu in pre-kindergarten if you could not answer the teacher's questions you were placed above a vat of hot milk until you could answer the question, *correctly*. In retaliation, and because I still had not mastered bladder control in cold climates, I peed on the entire class, for some reason the classroom slanted downwards. This was my first victory in Canada. It was a victory of defiance.

For the next five years my family moved at an average of once a year, I developed a speech impediment, became pigeon toed to the detriment of anyone near me, developed near-sightedness that went unnoticed for three years and disappeared into a silent world within myself. Other than my siblings, I made no friendships; recesses were painful stretches of time that dragged on for eternities. After school it was the same everyday, I watched as boys, big and small, beat my brother, my sister and I would pick him up and carry him home humiliated and full of rage. We spoke only Gujarati at home as if in protest to this harsh world of violence and injustice.

Public school was generally a time of assaults to my dignity, I was nicknamed 'Sambo', often the teachers were even more ignorant than my fellow students. One teacher pointedly told the class, staring at me to make her point, that the problems with over-population in India stemmed from a lack of control *and* intelligence on the part of Indians; I knew she was wrong but did not have the words to tell her so. I further idealized my memories of Kisumu and my four siblings and I begged my mother for stories from Indian mythology, which became in our minds much more than stories, in those stories we found heroes who were 'like' us. We developed an identity that differentiated 'us' from 'them'; 'them' became in our minds 'Canadians'. Our understanding of being African East-Indians was radically recreated to compensate for this alien world where we were not at 'home'. And yet, at some point, we all rejected this view of 'us' and 'them'.

Every time someone walked into my house, there I was, ready to serve, tea-
maiden. I was constantly reminded that this was good training; someday I would make a good Indian wife due to all this subservience. After all had I not already begun to learn that it was infinitely wiser to accept my role than to reject it in

favour of a Western ideal of individualism? Look what it had got me so far, cold, bitterness and generally a taste for freedom that I had never had before. I still remember that I felt so lost at that time--I had lost a world--but found nothing to replace it with. There was nothing worth keeping, nothing worth giving up in favour of new chains, even if those chains promised so much freedom. At that time I realized something important, neither world I knew could offer me a world I actually wanted to live within, I consciously gave up both.

I do not remember exactly when the shift occurred and in fact it may not have occurred at a specific time but slowly over the years. However, at some point the critical eye of distrust towards 'Canadians' shifted and became instead a gaze of suspicion towards the stereotypes of Indian-ness. The Indian community I grew up within had insulated itself from all outside influence, in an attempt to preserve its distinctness it actually propagated a stereotypical view on what it was to be Indian--a view that had no *real* foundations. This insularity led to a narrow-mindedness and worse to a set of unspoken 'principles' that I found it impossible to live up to. Now all the injustice I initially attributed to 'Canadians' became equally the injustice of 'Indians'. Neither stereotype was acceptable and I rejected both; I found a home between the two. I developed a 'style' that incorporated my understanding of the 'best' in either world.

In *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, Merleau-Ponty makes a case for the relation of identity and difference by showing that children move from a perspective of otherness to one of self-identity. Consciousness of others precedes consciousness of self. The child identifies with others, before the recognition of his own individuality. "In effect, the self and others are entities that the child dissociates only belatedly. He starts out in terms of a total identification with others" (CAL, 36).

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty makes the same case for adults relating to each other. We are not the Sartrean 'for ourselves' as much as *with* others. The Cartesian models of objects and others as *for* consciousness are rejected as secondary functions. Reflections on things or other people as other

than myself are preceded by the experience of others and things as *with* me. There is a common modality to the being of things, others and myself and I, as incarnate consciousness, appropriate the world as a shared world of meaning. As shown above, Merleau-Ponty illustrates that in my lived experience it is the possibilities open to me as a member of an intersubjective community that allows me to understand others and to express myself. While the notion of reversibility is only used in later works, the idea of it is already present in Merleau-Ponty's early work. Language is one of the expressive ways in which we come to recognize another's style. Language as gesture and speech opens the other's *way* of Being. However, Merleau-Ponty also wants to show that language is the expression of unique world-views. Every language is a unique way of 'singing the world' (CAL, 76/ PhP, 187). There is in Merleau-Ponty's formulation of language, as a means of expression of *a* world, a truth that cannot be denied. And yet, my experience tells me that what happened when English became my first language was not the choice of one world over another, but rather the creation of a new world between the linguistic and so cultural confines of either English or Gujarati. I learned to sing the world in a way that was unique to me *but this world was also a shared world*. "Language is an act of transcending. One cannot consider it simply as a container for thought; it is necessary to see language as an instrument for conquest of self by contact with others" (CAL, 63).

This chapter will explore the above interpretation of style with the aim of unfolding Merleau-Ponty's views on intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity, as a

relationship of the individual to her world, will involve the various ways in which a community can be understood to express itself; it will involve the variety of ways that we as human beings situate ourselves in a world that is always already there. World(s) as already there, reflect the institutions that define a community's self understanding, but also the possibilities open to any particular world to move beyond its institutions and to re-define itself. It is the individuals that make up a community, that initially at least, differentiate themselves from their community--so that the community at large changes--becomes more than it was.

Part One: Language, Intersubjectivity and Truth

Language is [a] cultural acquisition; and although it owes its existence to speaking subjects alone, it precedes them all, such that each and every subject becomes a speaking and thinking subject, not by constituting language, but by taking it up. To speak is thus to live in a reason or a logos which exists, not as a thing or an idea, but as the permanent and sedimented trace of subjectivities. Thus in the first instance language transcends me because it belongs to others just as much--or just as little--as it belongs to me. But language's transcendence is also vertical: it transcends the members of a linguistic community taken all together; it is a phenomenon which has its own history (Madison, 1981, 122).

In his essay "Language, Thought, and Truth," Paul K. Jacobson points out that Merleau-Ponty "tries to unfold how language, institution, history, and intersubjectivity mutually implicate each other and require a comprehensive treatment"(Jacobson, 1979, 145). Language will then clarify Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity. I will suggest that Merleau-Ponty's view that one world dominates our perspectives undergoes an alteration in his writings dealing

with expression. Worlds are still the unique expressions of specific intersubjective communities, but the song that we all sing shares in a common aim, which is "the co-existence of men within a culture and, beyond it, within a single history" (PrP, 9). The tension between a human world that we all share and particular intersubjective communities is never fully abolished in Merleau-Ponty's works. However, the relation between individual and community or one cultural world and another is no longer portrayed as one of polarity or incommensurability.²⁶ If there is any sense in which to talk about a human world, it is because despite our differences, we all tend towards dialogue--towards communication. Our every action is in a sense an expression of our humanity and no matter how different those expressions are, or how reactionary, they all seem to lead towards what Merleau-Ponty calls an 'equilibrium'.²⁷ "All human acts and all human creations

²⁶ I have argued in Chapter One that there is a 'residue' of dualistic thought that clings to Merleau-Ponty's position in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and because of this he makes the claim that while we can learn other languages and customs, we only ever live in one world. I think that the subjectivism that lingers at the end of the *Phenomenology* is partly responsible for the above claim. In order to get beyond this problem Merleau-Ponty tries to illustrate that we all derive our sense of self in an intersubjective world, intersubjectivity is meant to overcome an inherent solipsism that clings to Merleau-Ponty's position. Yet, Merleau-Ponty does not want to do away with the notion of particularity either, whether of the individual or of distinct communities, this leads to the notion of unique cultural worlds and this in turn leads right back to the original problem of solipsism, which now translates to incommensurability. Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of language through a phenomenological analysis never quite overcomes his initial aim of refuting once and for all the notion of a universal grammar or a wholly explicit language, partially because of the ambiguous relationship of thought and language. Merleau-Ponty wants to replace any notions of a universal language with an 'open-ness' of language. In "On the Phenomenology of Language," he tries to illustrate that languages can change and even 'leak' into one another: this is obviously a position that differs in some respects from the position in the *Phenomenology* that claims one language dominates who we are (S, 87, 92). While the position is never clearly articulated, I think his phenomenological approach to language, as expression is promising.

²⁷ The notion of an 'equilibrium' is referred to throughout *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, as well as other works, while it is never clearly defined it can be understood in its scientific sense as a condition of stability, a tendency towards a state of

constitute a single drama, and in this sense we are all saved or lost together. Our life is essentially universal" (PrP, 10).

We are paradoxically initiated into this 'universal' life through our particular intersubjective communities, through the *specific* linguistic community into which we are born. However, by changing the focus of traditional philosophies of language from *la langue* to *la parole*, concepts appropriated from Saussure, Merleau-Ponty returns language to a lived world within which language *speaks*. Arguing against the 'universal grammar' of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty shows that it is not so much the structure of languages that define particular languages but the use of language in any particular linguistic community.

It will be a question not of a system of forms of signification clearly articulated in terms of one another--not a structure of linguistic ideas built according to a strict plan--but of a cohesive whole of convergent linguistic gestures, each of which will be defined *less by a signification than by a use value* (S, 87, emphasis mine).

In fact, language is initially taken up by the child as a certain style of expressing the intersubjective world the child is born into (CAL). This privileging of *la parole* is based on Merleau-Ponty's disagreements with the philosophical tradition's conceptions of language, specifically, the relationship of thought and speech. In both the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Consciousness and the*

maximum stability. I think in Merleau-Ponty's usage equilibrium takes on teleological implications--human beings are geared towards optimum ends--however, these are not ends knowable except in retrospect. There is an idealism that is reflected in the notion of equilibrium in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, but given the choice of a philosophy that attempts to remain optimistic in light of the human condition and one that sinks into a nihilistic cynicism, I would choose optimism any day.

Acquisition of Language, Merleau-Ponty defends a gestural theory of speech. Like gestures, speech is the embodiment of an intention, just as my gesture of anger *is* the anger I feel, my speech is not a representation of my thoughts but the thoughts 'embodied'. In the above works, Merleau-Ponty is trying to illustrate that unlike the empiricist and intellectualist views of speech that make it a third person process, speech 'like' gesture indicates how the speaking subject transcends herself in the act of expression that is speech. I will elaborate this new gestural theory in the following.

Throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the dualities of traditional philosophy must be overcome if we are to understand how it is that human beings experience and know their world. In trying to overcome the abstractions of traditional philosophy, Merleau-Ponty shows that the relationship of consciousness and body cannot be as either empiricism or intellectualism have claimed. Chapter Six of Part One of the *Phenomenology*, tries to illustrate that body is the nexus of speech (PhP, 174-199). By arguing for a gestural theory of speech, Merleau-Ponty is able to illustrate that gesture and speech both are natural and conventional, each arises from biological being and each also arises from a certain style of being-in-the-world. The philosophical dilemma here is that traditional philosophy, in its intellectualist incarnations, has abstractly conceived of a consciousness that is pure 'thought', whether of itself or of a world and others. Consciousness viewed in this way oversees the movements of an object body and, as shown in Chapter One, this leads to irresolvable

problems. The gestural theory of speech thus allows Merleau-Ponty to posit a theory of language that arises from our incarnate consciousness of the world and others. My understanding of my world is informed by my particular hold on the world. And my hold on the world is as dependent on this body that gives me a perspective unto a world, as it is in a consciousness that is able to transcend towards the world--to give *my* world a meaning. Words in this theory are a blending of sound and meaning. As Merleau-Ponty notes in *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, the child in the initial stages of language acquisition learns to speak a language by first learning the 'style' of a particular language, the unique melody that every language embodies (CAL, 76-77).²⁸ This style owes its existence to the intersubjective world that a language persists within. Just as the gestures that are used in various cultural worlds are unique to the particular hold people have on their bodies, languages also embody a unique expression of a world.

Speech is comparable to a gesture because what it is
charged with expressing will be in the same relation to it

²⁸ When I first moved to South Korea in 1995, I was taken aback by the harshness of Hangul, the Korean language. Initially Hangul only presented itself to me as sounds that were not in any way harmonious, I heard a discordant stringing together of sounds. Try as I might, I could not imitate the rhythm of Hangul and so speak Hangul, as long as I heard it as 'harsh' and unrhythmic. What is interesting is that I could read Hangul and so get around Seoul with little problem, but I could not *communicate* with Koreans. By my second year in Korea there was a reversal in what I heard, suddenly Hangul seemed full of soft sounds, the melody of the language became apparent, and I could now try to *speak* the language. I think there is a similarity of my experience with Hangul and the initial institution of language in the child, the underlying harmony of a particular language initiates the child into a speaking world and eventually the meanings this world holds. This initial institution into language cannot be reduced to a grasping of the structure of a particular language, since this is exactly what the child does not yet have. It is rather the unique way of incorporating the rhythm and texture of a language, in short, it is learning to understand how a language *sounds*, as long as one does not master the peculiarity of the language, one cannot *speak* a language with any kind of proficiency.

as the goal is to the gesture which intends it, and our remarks about the functioning of the signifying apparatus will already involve a certain theory of the significations expressed by speech. My corporeal intending of the objects of my surroundings is implicit and presupposes no thematization or 'representation' of my body or milieu. Signification arouses speech as the world arouses my body--by a mute presence which awakens my intentions without deploying itself before them (S, 89).

The relationship of thought and speech illustrates how it is that words are not secondary to thought but the embodiment of thought--just as the body is the nexus from which consciousness throws itself towards a world.

The relation of thought and speech is not as the empiricists and the intellectualists have claimed--neither tradition gives words meaning. In authentic speech, the word is the thought expressed. The tradition has taken second order speech--speech about speech--and tried to treat it as if it were authentic speech. Either the word is an empty shell that thought or categories fill in or the word is a representation of thought. Merleau-Ponty argues that if this were true, if language were secondary to thought in the casual schema, then how would I ever know what it is I am thinking?

A thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconscious, which means that it would not exist even for itself (PhP, 177).

Words are vehicles of meaning and, through speech, it is not just words as signifiers that I express but a certain style of being. In speech my thoughts are taken up by a listener. If this were not the case, then how could she ever respond?

In understanding others, the problem is always indeterminate, because only the solution will bring the data to light as convergent, only the central theme of a philosophy, once understood, endows the philosopher's writings with the value of adequate signs. There is then, a taking up of others' thought through speech, a reflection in others, an ability to think *according to others* which enriches our own thoughts. Here the meaning of words must be finally induced by the words themselves, or more exactly, their conceptual meaning must be formed by a kind of deduction from a gestural meaning, which is immanent in speech. And as in a foreign country, I begin to understand the meaning of words through their place in a context of action, and by taking part in a communal life--in the same way an as yet imperfectly understood piece of philosophical writing discloses to me at least a certain 'style'- either a Spinozist, critical or phenomenological one--which is the first draft of its meaning (PhP, 179).

In communication with others speech is the embodiment and the expression of thought.

There is an analogy between the relationship of thought and expression and the relationship of consciousness and the body; thought and expression are "simultaneously constituted" (PhP, 181). "Language bears the meaning of thought as a footprint signifies the movement and effort of a body" (ILVS, 82). Our bodies express themselves through gestures that are recognizable by others in our cultural setting, but gestures are never reducible to explicit signs. Gestures are the expression of our feelings, even though they are never fully explicit, just as our words carry meanings that are not fully explicit in themselves, but still carry forward what we intend to *say*. Unlike "logical language" that "has the relative advantage of being exact", living language has an opacity that allows it to express

meanings that are contextual (CAL, 62). Even the silence between words can change the meaning of my expression (ILVS, 82). Words are diacritical, since they signify as much by the relation between words, as they do by the silence of what is not said (S, 88). The 'system' of language is never fully sedimented, because of the expressive nature of any language; language always tries to say more than what individual words signify (S, 89).

Indeed, in language conceived of as a diacritical structure, there are cracks, gaps, or weak zones which prevent it from being perfectly clear for the speaking subjects and which make for difficulties in communication (Madison, 1981, 123).

Language also always expresses much more than representations or correspondences of thought to the thinking subject, the world or others. By privileging speech or *la parole* over the structures of any specific language, Merleau-Ponty illustrates that the expressive function of language always transcends the purely structural aspects of a language. All language is dialogue, even the inner language of my private thoughts (S, 97). This conversation that is language may be hemmed in by the particularity of the language at hand, but then, I always have the possibility of learning different languages and so learning to sing the world in various ways.²⁹ Even within the confines of a single language, it

²⁹ While in the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty suggests that we cannot live in two cultural/linguistic worlds at once, in "On the Phenomenology of Language," he states that there is an "oblique passage" from one language to another (S, 87). However, even here, different languages are only "contingently comparable". just as two individuals, once we know them, may have similarities but remain unique (S, 87). I think that this notion of a passage--oblique or not--is promising in relation to my own transition from one linguistic world into another and shall return to it below.

is the changes instituted by speaking subjects that insure that a language will always be able to express the world it is meant to signify. A language that does not retain the ability to transform itself through use cannot stand the test of time and eventually finds itself forgotten (S, 88).

Language is not as fixed as some language theorists have maintained-- language is expressive--and because of this it has an indeterminacy that underlies it. While Merleau-Ponty stresses the indeterminacy of language, he also points out that there is a sedimentation of meaning in language; language will be both determinate and indeterminate (PhP, 190-194). The indeterminacy of language is why language is not a correspondence of words to thoughts but the expression of a certain style of Being. Jacobson points out that the later writings of Merleau-Ponty relate truth and language, in fact, language becomes a vehicle of truth (Jacobson, 1979, 164). These later writings also stress that while language is susceptible to sedimentation, it is only 'relatively motivated' in that it is open to new situations. "Language is then both accidental and rational, fortuitous and planned; a realm in which, through the operation of this blind logic, accidents are transformed into reasons, and conscious meanings are able to emerge" (Jacobson, 1979, 160-161). This blind logic is similar to the pre-logic of the perceptual world in that it has a transparency, and yet, is at the same time transcendent in its expression. Truth as timeless adequation between thought and reality becomes impossible under this understanding, because truth is always situated (Jacobson, 1979, 162). Words are constitutive of meaning and this meaning emerges not

from some static signification that a word holds but in the relations between words, the silence between words and, most importantly, the *use* of words by speakers.

The structure of language is subject to Jacobson's 'blind logic' and contains a certain opacity, but it is this opacity that creates a background of possibility for ever clearer expressions. New meanings arise because the relation of thought and words is at times spontaneous and indeterminate. If this were not true, than language would not be expressive of meaning. Truth is always going to be situated truth and always truth that will be taken up in new contexts. "It is in this way that our present continues the past and can fulfil its promises" (Jacobson, 1979, 163). In language, as within history, there "is [only] a chiasma, an intertwining of movement, sight and touch, a narcissism of seeing visibility, the reversibility of inside and outside, the formative milieu of subject and object; it is the 'barbaric Principle,' prior to all objectivity--termed 'flesh'" (Smith, 1996, 198). This 'movement' will be the expression of difference and identity and so 'narcissistic' *and* generalized.

The individual expression that is unique to me can only arise out of the background of an intersubjective world that first gives me my thought. However, this background is never given once and for all, it retains a generality that allows for particularity, and indeed calls for individual expressions--without ever revealing itself completely. The notion that we can discover a universal language that is the ground of all language, throughout the ages, is the hope for a

resolution that can never come. As long as we take up a given language and, in using it, transform it into something new, language will always escape any attempts to define it in terms of an unchanging structure. Merleau-Ponty suggests that as long we speak, we will always re-create language, we will always sing the world in our own unique ways. And, if it is true that even in my inner thoughts I am 'speaking', which is to say that even my inner thoughts are a dialogue, then all language is an act of re-creation.

The 'oblique passage' from one language to another illustrates that this movement, as a momentum of expression, opens the possibility that we may be able to incorporate various worlds in our notion of self (S, 87). While Merleau-Ponty never takes the further step towards a vision of worlds that can and do 'leak' into one another, the possibility for it is already evident in his phenomenology of language.

Speech, as distinguished from language, is that moment when the significative intention (still silent and wholly in act) proves itself capable of incorporating itself into my culture and the culture of others--of shaping me and others by transforming the meaning of cultural instruments. It becomes "available" in turn because in retrospect it gives us the illusion that it was contained in the already available significations, whereas by a sort of *ruse* it epoused them only in order to infuse them with a new life (S, 92).

In light of the above, we, the inheritors of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, can understand that the new life that is infused *between* languages and cultures may radically alter the notion of 'culture' as a distinct

entity. Like individuals, cultures are a unique blending of various influences. And, like individuals that reflect the ability to retain identity, while at the same time through expressions of freedom re-creating themselves, cultures too absorb differences, only to re-affirm their uniqueness. We may well all start out in one world but nothing prevents our absorbing various worlds into ourselves. Unlike T.E. Lawrence we need not view the intersection of two cultures as a battleground in which both sides are lost (PhP, 187). While my initial entry into the Canadian world did indeed resemble a battle, I like to optimistically think that the blending of both a Western culture and an Indian one has made me a better person. I achieved a "conquest of self by contact with others" because I was willing to risk my self. I chose not to reject either world and so in one sense, lost both (CAL, 63). In a very real sense, the kinds of choices we make in our lives affects who we are, and in turn, who we are affects our world.

Situatedness imposes its limits on who we are and how we interact with our world, yet, in "Cezanne's Doubt", Merleau-Ponty claims that we are able to transcend (to a certain degree) the limitations of our lives because we are free. Freedom, however, is always a limited freedom for Merleau-Ponty. What this 'bounded' freedom amounts to ties in directly with the perspectivalness of history. If we overcome our limitations, it will be because we express ourselves in various ways and because the unity of Being is laced throughout by our differences--by our unique style of approaching the world. However, the unique style of each of us is informed by the style of our historical and cultural epoch. Our freedom is

tied to the intersubjective world within which we take it up and any choice is, in a sense, an expression of that world and so of ourselves. In the following, I will discuss Merleau-Ponty's conception of limited freedom.

**Part Two: Freedom
Freedom, Intentionality, and the Limitations of Finitude**

Merleau-Ponty, like Hegel before him, views freedom as defining what it is to be human. However, Merleau-Ponty's perspective on freedom differs in some significant ways from the Hegelian notion of freedom and from the position of absolute freedom of Merleau-Ponty's constant interlocutor, J.P. Sartre. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* freedom is described as a limited freedom, limited by our situatedness. This view of freedom could be problematic (PhP, 434-456). Freedom understood as conditioned by the social and historical situation an individual is born into could reduce acts of free choice to conditioned acts. Freedom would be abolished in this situation, since expressions of freedom would be determined by the situation of the subject. With Michel Foucault, we, the inheritors of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, could ask what a conditioned freedom would amount to? If identity is determined by the societal institutions that prevail in any given time, in what sense can we claim that we are free? The fact that the Chapter on freedom follows that of the temporality of subjectivity in the *Phenomenology of Perception* is, I think, telling. By tying the essence of subjectivity as temporal, to that of the subject as expressive (i.e. free), Merleau-Ponty is able to move beyond the Foucaultian dilemma of conditioned

subjectivity.³⁰ However, while I will suggest in the following that Merleau-Ponty's relation of freedom and expression overcomes the above suggestion of a conditioned freedom, I will also illustrate that an incomplete notion of intersubjectivity creates problems that are not resolved for this notion of freedom, until the ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty's grounding of identity in an intersubjective world is a problem insofar as he then has to defend how it is that an individual can be said to free herself from the tethers of this world. If the choices we are given are hemmed in by a world that is always already there, and in fact, gives rise to our individual sense of self, then our choices are already conditioned and not free. The problem here is that an individual is said to be free when she is capable of transcending the particularity of her own situation, but as Merleau-Ponty argues throughout his works, we never do transcend the world we live within completely. Existence is always situated. And yet, Merleau-Ponty also claims that it is our *nature* to transcend our situation, perhaps even ourselves. We transcend ourselves insofar as any act of freedom is an act of expression. The particularity of any individual may be rooted in intersubjective structures of the life-world, but even worlds are individuals that

³⁰ I would argue that this is also a step beyond a Hegelian notion of freedom, which claims that we are trapped in our historical moment. For Hegel we cannot gain the distance necessary to view ourselves with objectivity. While Merleau-Ponty also claims that we are always instituted into a certain perspective, he also tries to account for the possibility of a critical stance to our own situation. I think that an idea of an ideal of objectivity that motivates us in our present in light of the past and in the hope of a future is prevalent in Merleau-Ponty's notion of history. This 'ideal of objectivity' will be discussed below.

transcend *their* situatedness through expression. If for Merleau-Ponty freedom defines what it is to be human, this is insofar as freedom as expression is creative.

Freedom is one of the themes that runs throughout my existence; I am an *I think* because I situate myself in a world where I can be an *I can*. It is in acting that I move beyond the limitations of my freedom. If the world were an indiscriminate mass waiting to be endowed with meaning, and my freedom absolute, what would ever cause me to choose?³¹ Choice implies not limitless choice but choice within the limits of my being--my finitude. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty shows that existence is the taking up of a situation. Through discussions on sexuality and historical materialism, the indeterminacy of existence is exposed. Existence, as that by which meaning is endowed, is transcendent. This concept of existence shares in a radical contingency and a radical necessity (Jacobson, 1979, 169-171). This paradoxical nature of existence exposes the paradox of perception. My body is a synthesis which is creative of meaning. The body creates an intentional arc in which meanings arise, and just as consciousness is transcendent in its projects, as it throws itself through the medium of the body into a situation, existence is determinate in context--but also always contains themes as yet unrealized. In "Cezanne's Doubt" Merleau-Ponty illustrates that our lives are never reducible to explanations of the events of our lives but also includes the possibilities that any

³¹ I am referring here to the Sartrean concept of absolute freedom.

life holds, whether one realizes those possibilities or not. Leonardo's existence understood only in relation to his childhood memories of loss and abandonment or Cezanne's life viewed only in relation to his turbulent mental life, would be to transpose one thematic postulate on lives that were too rich to be explained so simply (CD, 59-75). Yet, we cannot ignore the circumstances of either artist's lives, since "[we] never get away from our life. We never see our ideas or freedom face to face" (CD, 75). It is only when my freedom is threatened or I desire what I do not have that freedom emerges as that towards which I throw myself.

Thus it is true both that the life of an author can teach us nothing and that--if we know how to interpret it--we can find everything in it, since it opens onto his work. Just as we may observe the movements of an unknown animal without understanding the law that inhabits and controls them, so Cezanne's observers did not divine the transmutations he imposed on events and experiences; they were blind to his significance, to that glow from out of nowhere which surrounded him from time to time. But he himself was never at the center of himself: nine days out of ten all he saw around him was the wretchedness of his empirical life and his unsuccessful attempts, the debris of an unknown celebration. Yet it was in the world that he had to realise his freedom, with colours upon a canvas. It was from the approval of others that he had to await the proof of his worth. That is why he questioned the picture emerging beneath his hand, why he hung on the glances other people directed toward his canvas. That is why he never finished working (CD, 75).

Freedom becomes a theme in our lives within the background of our finitude--death is the last horizon. It is this recognition of our limitations within the context of our lives, our being towards death, and so our being towards life--

our very existence--that motivates consciousness to transcend itself. Faced with our finitude, we have the choice to live towards Being as opposed to accepting the absolutes institutionalized by canons of Truth. But, as we will see with history, it is also these institutions that make up our world--that elicit from us an *act* of freedom.

If freedom is to have room in which to move, if it is to be describable as freedom, there must be something to hold it away from its objectives, it must have a field which means that there must be for it special possibilities, or realities which tend to cling to being (PhP, 438).

While it is true that freedom is limited by the world we find ourselves within, and by the individual limitations of each person in our world, we are said to be free insofar as we take up the challenge that these limitations impose.

Taken concretely, freedom is always a meeting of inner and outer...and it shrinks without ever disappearing altogether in direct proportion to the lessening of the *tolerance* allowed by the bodily and institutional data of our lives (PhP, 454).

Merleau-Ponty mediates between notions of absolute freedom and completely conditioned freedom by illustrating that both render freedom meaningless (PhP, 453). If my freedom is absolute, then there is no sense in choosing one course of action over another, and so the concept of absolute freedom lapses into the absurd. On the other hand, if my freedom is wholly conditioned by my circumstances, then in reality I have no choice and so no freedom, I am wholly determined. Merleau-Ponty adheres to a perspective of freedom that illustrates that freedom becomes an issue in our lives, first, through

other people and the world, and second, because subjectivity as temporal is a melding of past, present and future. Subjectivity, like history, is a motivated momentum. This momentum that characterizes subjectivity is constantly re-constituting itself and so rendering itself as meaningful. Other people force us to take a stance and assert our individuality, not just in opposition to others, but in an attempt to win the recognition of others through expression, which is already an act of freedom. Yet, this recognition that we seek is always motivated by our self-understanding. This self-understanding is founded on the intersubjective structures of the world we are born into and the tacit cogito which offers us a vision of ourselves as a continuity of past, present and future (PhP, 452-453). If we express ourselves and so validate our freedom, it is because we have a stable notion of who we are. This sense of self is derived from our past experiences and present situation, but most importantly, by our hopes for the future. These hopes are foreshadowed by an intentionality that infuses all of our projects. In this sense, our choices are conditioned by the historical and social milieu within which our existence arises, but also always transcends any particular epoch by aiming for possibilities not yet realized.³²

To be free in Merleau-Ponty's sense is to be limited and to always aim to overcome these limitations. This 'overcoming' is not the Sartrean notion of

³² While it is certainly true that most of us rarely step outside of our own time and place, I think the choices we make do effect, if not our *world*, at least our situation. While few of us instigate change on global scales, I would argue that every choice has its own resonance, every life its impact, in this sense we all transcend our own limitations by the choices we make or choose *not* to make.

overcoming the gaze of others by objectifying the other with my gaze, but rather is grounded in the reciprocity between my freedom and an other's freedom, neither of which can be won in isolation.³³ If for Merleau-Ponty, who I am is dependent on the intersubjective community that initially gives rise to my sense of self, then I can never really be free, except insofar as my freedom respects the freedom of others, since my freedom always originates in a world of others. While it is true that I can objectify an other or in turn be objectified by an other, I can only ever do so in an attempt to win the recognition of the other, just as she attempts to win my recognition. Like the figure/background structure of perception, freedom also has a field within which it operates. Any choice is always limited by the field in which it occurs but "like the perceptual field, this one has no traceable boundaries" (PhP, 454).

The idea of situation rules out absolute freedom at the source of our commitments, and equally, indeed, at their terminus. No commitment, even in the Hegelian State,

³³ Sartre in "No Exit" illustrates that other people are an objectifying gaze, which we each try to overcome by objectifying others in turn, essentially other people are hell. This is not a view that Merleau-Ponty would support. While Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that this is one of the ways in which human beings *can* relate to each other, I think he would view it as an insincere mode of recognition, a mode of behavior that is secondary to a tacit recognition of the other as a fellow subjectivity. "If the subject made a constant and at all times peculiar choice of himself, one might wonder why his experience always ties up with itself and presents him with objects and definite historical phases, why we have a general notion of time valid through all times, and why finally the experience of each one of us links up with that of others. But it is the question itself which must be questioned: for what is given, is not one fragment of time followed by another, one individual flux, then another; it is the taking up of each subjectivity by itself, and of subjectivities by each other in the generality of a single nature, the cohesion of an intersubjective life and a world. The present mediates between the For Oneself and the For Others, between individuality and generality. True reflection presents me to myself not as an idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical to my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it: I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but, on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and through them all the rest" (PhP, 452).

can make me leave behind all differences and free me for anything. This universality itself, from the mere fact of its being experienced, would stand out as a particularity against the world's background, for existence both generalizes and particularizes everything at which it aims, and cannot ever be complete (PhP, 455).

Freedom is then limited by the field in which it becomes an issue for us but is also always exceeding its own limits. When I first arrived in Canada this world was one that threatened my freedom; there was a lack of tolerance in Canada that directly affected my freedom. And yet, this lack of tolerance was instrumental in eliciting from me an act of freedom, one that would in turn change my understanding of who I was and how I would view my world. The vignettes with which I began this chapter illustrate that the worlds I felt caught between provided me with the impetus to choose *neither*--this itself was a choice for something new. Freedom is then limited by the situation in which it arises, but also always contains the possibilities for transcending those limitations through re-creation. I chose to find a 'place' of tolerance between the African-Indian world and the Canadian world, and this choice was a transcending of either of these 'places'. However, as Merleau-Ponty rightly acknowledges, my choices were not limitless, I had to choose within the boundaries of the two worlds that I knew. Merleau-Ponty suggests that given the choices I had, I could only chose *one* of these worlds. Like T.E. Lawrence, who, caught between the Arabic world and the Western world, faced with madness or resignation, chose *one* world, I too, should have opted for *one* of the worlds I knew (PhP, 187). Given Merleau-Ponty's

notion of intersubjectivity as the expression of a specific linguistic, social and historical world, the conclusion that I should have opted for one of the worlds I knew is understandable. Yet, there is an inconsistency with the creative possibilities Merleau-Ponty envisions any particular world capable of and the circumscription of 'worlds' as determinate horizons. If freedom is understood as both limited to a certain field and always transcending this field in its expressions, then it seems that worlds would never remain determinate, since any overreaching of the boundaries of a world, would, in turn, radically change that world. I think this is a problem that Merleau-Ponty never quite overcomes. However, his perspective on history goes a long way towards trying to resolve the problem. This problem is as old as philosophy itself--it is the problem of how to reconcile the universal and the particular without privileging one at the expense of the other.

Part Three: History as Advent

The limitations of freedom are central to Merleau-Ponty's idea of history and historical truth. There is a contingency, an indeterminateness, to history and our understanding of history. History as objective and factual becomes a problem for Merleau-Ponty; within his system as given thus far, it seems that history would be subject to the same situatedness as truth. This recasts our understanding of history, since the understanding we have of any period in time will always be affected by our horizon and the themes that fill it. History takes on a perspectival nature. While one generation may view certain historical events within themes

relevant to their epoch, another generation may take history to mean something different. There is then the danger of historical knowledge being relative. Merleau-Ponty makes such a claim by revising our conceptions of truth. If truth is always a questing as opposed to an absolute then can there be an objective history? I think that the answer to the preceding question depends on how we understand objectivity. If we understand objectivity in the traditional sense, as capable of arriving at unquestionable truth, then Merleau-Ponty would say that objective history is highly unlikely. However, it is just this notion of objectivity that leaves all subjectivity behind that Merleau-Ponty spends his entire life as a philosopher deconstructing. There is no objectivity without subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty sees the historian's role as that of opening up a dialogue with the past, it is one subjectivity facing another and through communication deriving a meaning for historical events (SNS, 91-92). In "The Philosopher and Sociology," Merleau-Ponty argues against the kind of attitude that would view historical 'facts' as incontestable (S, 98-113). He illustrates that 'facts' are meaningless without our interpretation of those facts and any interpretation already involves the perspective from which the scientist, anthropologist, sociologist, historian *or* philosopher begins her inquiry. The events in any period of history can tell us nothing on their own; it is only by interpreting these facts in order to derive the meaning of the past that the past speaks to us today. However, the historian is not free to put a purely subjective interpretation on the past, not if she is attempting to be true to the documents and events that inspire her research in the first place. In

"The Metaphysical in Man," Merleau-Ponty is clear that while an ideal of objectivity may motivate our search for truth, whether historical truth or any other kind, we will never achieve objectivity in-itself. There is a "radical subjectivity" that is involved in any search for truth (SNS, 93).

[T]he sciences of man--not to mention the others--have made it evident that all knowledge of man by man, far from being pure contemplation, is the taking up by each, *as best he can*, of the acts of others, reactivating from ambiguous signs an experience which is not his own, appropriating a structure (e.g., the *a priori* of the species, the sublinguistic schema or spirit of a civilization) of which he forms no distinct concept but which he puts together as an experienced pianist deciphers an unknown piece of music: without himself grasping the motives of each gesture or each operation, without being able to bring to the surface of consciousness all the sediment of knowledge which he is using at the moment. Here we no longer have the positing of an object, but rather, we have communication with a way of being. The universality of knowledge is no longer guaranteed in each of us by that stronghold of absolute consciousness in which the Kantian "I think"--although linked to a certain spatio-temporal perspective--was assured *a priori* of being identical to every other "I think". The germ of universality or the "natural light" without which there could be no knowledge is to be found ahead of us, in the thing where our perception places us, in the dialogue into which our experience of other people throws us by means of a movement not all of whose sources are known to us. Metaphysics begins from the moment when, ceasing to live in the evidence of the object--whether it is the sensory object or the object of science--we apperceive the radical subjectivity of all our experience as inseparable from its truth value (SNS, 93).

This "radical subjectivity" is not pure consciousness because for Merleau-Ponty there is no such thing as pure consciousness. This was illustrated in Chapter

One, where we saw that subjectivity is dependent on a world of things and others; self-consciousness arises in a world of things and others, *because of this world*. The objects of history are not closed realms that we can never recover, as long as we undertake to view them as cultural artifacts of a *way of life*--a certain style of being-in-the-world. According to Merleau-Ponty, we may recover the past, but only by re-creating it in our present. Just as sedimentation occurs in language, it also occurs in history but a historical moment is only truly understood if it is brought into our present. History is meaningful because it can be brought into the context of our lives. Our understanding of history is always motivated by our situation, and our situation is made up of the societal institutions that make up our world. "The presence of the individual in the institution, and of the institution in the individual is evident [as] in the case of linguistic change"(IPP, 55). Like the institution of language, which a linguistic community continues by adapting it to new expressions, *without having themselves created it*, history is never something behind us that we can reveal through the events and facts of history. History is as much infused throughout our present as it is in the past and its momentum always aims at a future not yet made.

The first cave drawing founded a tradition only because it had received one--that of perception. The quasi-eternity of art is of a piece with the quasi-eternity of incarnate existence; as in the use of our bodies and our senses, insofar as they involve us in the world, we have the means of understanding our cultural gesticulation insofar as it involves us in history (ILVS, 197).

History is meaningful for Merleau-Ponty as long as we understand that historical truth does not give us the *facts* of the past but a certain style of inhabiting and experiencing the world. History opens a dialogue with other ways of thinking and doing; it reveals other subjectivities and their meanings and intentions.³⁴ However, just as other people retain an opacity that I can never completely uncover, so too does the historical subject. What history can offer us is then an understanding of Being in all its difference and plurality. It can help us to understand ourselves. There is a teleology or logic of history that underlies Merleau-Ponty's account. History is represented as a progression to a higher state of equilibrium of the human species. As noted earlier, the notion of equilibrium is critical in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. I would argue that Merleau-Ponty may hope for a progression towards a higher form of rationality in human relations, as did Hegel, but that his view of the contingency of history acknowledges that this is in no way guaranteed.³⁵ The notion of advent is both a

³⁴ See Kerry Whiteside for a discussion and critique of how intentions are transmitted through the artifacts of history in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Whiteside, 1986, 145).

³⁵ In "Merleau-Ponty and the Truth of History," Clyde Pax argues that Merleau-Ponty's view of history and historical truth is motivated by an implicit affirmation of man (Pax, 1973, 276). "It seems clear that Merleau-Ponty is indicating that the affirmation of man must be taken as a morally binding goal in political and historical action in all possible future situations; if he is not, his affirmation of freedom is not universal but truncated as certainly, if not as immediately, as is the freedom of Sartre's *pour-soi*" (Pax, 1973, 276). I agree with Pax that there is a universal notion of freedom that underlies Merleau-Ponty's notion of historical truth. However, Merleau-Ponty never explicitly states his hopes for this morally founded truth in history and its implications for human freedom, partly because the future is not something we can determine, the possibility for a future of chaos is as possible as one in which the world is filled with peace. How we relate to the past thus becomes crucial to how we act in the future. What we take from history, what we view as historical truth is then a responsibility that we cannot forfeit or refuse, for even refusing to choose is an act of freedom--a choice.

promise for the future and a recognition that we can never have a vantage point of that future that would allow us to predict its outcome.

The notion of advent assures that history, while certainly perspectival, also always carries sedimented meaning as well. As Johnson points out, advent is to be understood as “a promise of events” (Johnson, 1996, 24). This promise of events assures us that while the facts of history will not change, the meaning of history will always be subject to contextualization. If anything remains consistent in our world, it will be our perceptual capabilities. These will insure the only eternity open to human-beings, since perception--primordial perception--will always open us to Being on the hither side of vision and the root of perception, the tacit cogito, on this side of perception.

Once again relying on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty introduces the term *Stiftung* to speak of a creative formation or establishment of a cultural meaning that continues, after its appearance, to have the value of opening up a field for further investigations. An original meaning formation (*Urstiftung*) is sedimented and reactivated in a tradition of retrieval (*Nachstiftung*), in the way, for example that Matisse was nourished by thirty-seven years of living with Cezanne’s oil study entitled *Three Bathers*, which he reports “sustained him spiritually in the critical moments of his career as an artist” (Johnson, 1996, 24).

In the works preceding *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty claims that our clearest access to Being and Truth is to be found in the artwork and specifically in visual works of art. This is a return to the primacy of perception that initiates Merleau-Ponty's philosophical investigations, but a return that is now clearly articulated; it is also a transition to the ontology of *The Visible*

distinction of subject as the creator of a world over the world as object disappears, it is not because the world is purely a subjective world, but that the relation between the subject and her world is a mutually dependent one. The conditions of arriving at self-consciousness require both the tacit cogito as the movement of consciousness towards the world *and* an already there world. As we have seen in the discussion of spaciality above, action is possible because I transcend the reflective cogito. The tacit cogito as time is always a movement towards the world, a transcendence rooted in the immanent. Just as others are more for me than in-itself, the world is more for me than mere objects because I am able to transcend myself (the I that is reflective) by being an 'I can'. The tacit cogito then underlies the reflective Self. What allows the world to be for me at all is the opacity or 'secret in-visibility' of the tacit cogito.²² If on one side of visibility lies Being as all that is (the primordial world of generality), on this side of the subject, lies the tacit cogito that allows Being to be at all.

Consciousness is thus radically re-theorized in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty follows the methodological doubt of Descartes and discovers that the Cartesian "I think" is only discovered if preceded by an "I can" (PhP, 382-383). As shown above, Descartes can only arrive at his "I think, therefore I am" by abstracting from his experiences as an *embodied knower*. It is only by abstracting away from the lived world that Descartes is able to posit a translucent cogito. The Cartesian cogito that claims self-evident truths can only do

²² This (in)visibility of the tacit cogito will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.

so if it transcends itself and is transparent to itself. The 'I' that thinks must know itself through and through.

If the 'cogito' reveals to me a new mode of existence owing nothing to time, and I discover myself as the universal constituent of all being accessible to me, and as a transcendental field with no hidden corners and no outside, it is not enough to say that my mind, "when it is the form of all the objects of sense... is the God of Spinoza," for the distinction of form and matter can no longer be given any ultimate value, therefore it is not clear how the mind, reflecting on itself could find in the last analysis any meaning in the notion of receptivity, or think of itself in any valid way of undergoing modification: for if it is the mind itself which thinks of itself as affected, it does not think of itself as thus, since it affirms its activity afresh simultaneously while appearing to restrict it: insofar, on the other hand as it is the mind which places itself in the world, it is not there, and the self-positing is an illusion. It must then be said, with no qualification, that my mind is God (PhP, 372).

By recreating the cogito from an 'I think' to an 'I can', Merleau-Ponty posits self not as an *objectively* known entity but as a becoming. Consciousness finds itself in doing, in reaching out to its world *through* its body.

The tacit cogito is then the cogito that always evades my grasp; it is the condition of the 'I think' without ever being clearly known in-itself. It is the background that allows horizons, situations and contexts to exist for me, to have meaning for me. The tacit cogito is also time in the sense that it presents to me myself and behind me an intentional arc that motivates me to the horizon of the world. The tacit cogito always evades our grasp, like the pre-reflective world, it is the background out of which the reflective self arises; as such, there cannot be any

conclusive definitions of the tacit cogito.²³ This opacity leads to a view of truth as contingent, while sedimentation is a way in which I can situate myself in the world by making the world 'for me', I can never achieve the Cartesian self-evident truth(s), the ideas which I wholly possess. Madison is correct to say that Merleau-Ponty does not adequately deal with the subjective element of his position, but trying to find where the subject abides would be impossible if we did not look in a shared world of meaning (which Madison acknowledges) (Madison, 1981, 35-36). If we agree with Dillon, as I do, that a suspension of categories or a completely pre-categorical perspective is unlikely, then the subject here cannot be the transparent Cartesian cogito. We are always born into a world of presupposition, a world of sedimented meaning and it this world that gives the world or self (Dillon, 1977, 386-387).

Conclusion

Subjectivity is always limited by the context in which it arises. Marvin Farber's criticism that in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology*, the existence of the world depends on a consciousness that 'creates' the world, is false (Farber, 1965, 533). The relation of world and self, as one of correlation, implies that the world founds the self, just as consciousness expresses the world and so itself. In Merleau-Ponty's view, my relation to the world and others is grounded by the tacit

²³ There is a generality that pervades the tacit cogito, this anonymous Being could be understood as a generalized 'One', similar to a Hegelian 'World Spirit'. If this reading of the tacit cogito is viable then the notion of the tacit cogito as time becomes clear, the tacit cogito is not only the individual's march through time but humanities. This relation will be further explored in Chapter Three.

cogito, this cogito is circumvented by the body that opens it to a world and by its temporal 'essence' that allows it to unite its past in its present and to create its future. However, the tacit cogito as this movement is never fully known. The philosopher may discover under the reflective self an ever receding ground of subjectivity but she can never clearly articulate what this 'ground' is. As such, there is an opacity of the thing, of others and of myself, which I can never completely overcome. Finitude sets the limits of what I can know but where these limits begin and end is shrouded in opacity as well. Truth is thus a process as opposed to an objective property of reality. As Dillon points out in "A Phenomenological Conception of Truth", it is the ideal of objectivity that motivates this process or task, as an ideal, truth is always a beyond that I attempt to articulate by placing it in the lived world of doing (Dillon, 1977, 386-387). If I come to an understanding of who I am it is not because I discover that I am Descartes' cogito, but because by appropriating the world of things I create a dialogical relationship between the world and myself. This dialogue of self and world is actualized through my *acting* in the world. Because I am perpetually motivated towards a world that cannot remain the traditions 'in itself', I can come to know who it is that *I* am.

Self-discovery is in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology founded on my relations with a world of things and others. This relationship is one of

expression.²⁴ Expressing myself is then a way of expressing my world and the world is always the particular context I am born into. My relationship with others is like my relationship with the world, a dialectical one. However, this relationship is not without problems, since I can distance myself from this world of 'otherness', thereby refusing to communicate and express the world. I can no more know the other fully than I can know myself. The reflective attitude is one of the possibilities of existence and, as such, I can always distance myself from the world, others and even from myself, as in cases of mental illness. There is an inherent solipsism rooted in lived experience that Merleau-Ponty must acknowledge.

However, as suggested throughout the present chapter, self is founded on the intersubjective world one is born into--the context in which I come to self-understanding is then hemmed in by a boundary of a *particular* field. While this notion of the intersubjective basis of identity circumvents how I define myself, there is still the problem of actually distinguishing between my world and an other's world in cases of incommensurability. In the following, I will use Merleau-Ponty's discussion of hallucinations to parallel the relation he draws between the intersubjective world we are born into and how this world conditions what we take to be truth. The problem with this notion of situated truth is that it could possibly lead to a lack of grounds for adjudication between varying claims

²⁴ There is a sense in which expressivity and freedom are synonymous in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Chapter Two will draw out the implications of this relation of expression and freedom.

about the world and so reality. In one sense, *all* claims about 'reality' are valid in Merleau-Ponty's reformation of 'perception' in the *Phenomenology*.

The problem with this conception of truth and so reality is that the basis of self, as essentially intersubjective, could limit how I express myself by limiting the choices open to me. (Who I am is contextualized by the particular time I am born into--by the social, linguistic and historical setting of that time and place.) Certainly, Merleau-Ponty draws this conclusion when he claims that one world dominates my perspective in the *Phenomenology* (PhP, 187). In his discussion on hallucinations, Merleau-Ponty attempts to differentiate the experience of 'illusions' from 'real' perceptions (PhP, 334-345). I think this discussion of the distinction of 'real' perceptions and illusionary perceptions relies on Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity. Essentially, the distinction is based on 'norms'. What is real is what a given society, at a given moment in history, understands to be true and so real. In the final analysis, Merleau-Ponty's re-constituting of perception has to admit that given a situation where an individual refused to acknowledge that her illusion was not 'real', like the normal subject's perceptions, both the illusion and the real perception would share the same modality of Being. Now if we apply this to our perceptions of worlds, something Merleau-Ponty does not do, could we not argue that given two incommensurable worldviews, both would have to be acknowledged as valid?

This incommensurability only becomes a problem when two worlds come into contact. In my own case, this was the African Indian world and the Canadian

world. Merleau-Ponty implies that in a situation where two different perspectives face the individual, only one world can be dominant. He also implies that the patient with hallucinations has to acknowledge that one of her perceptions, the one other people do not see, has to be *recognized* as illusionary. But this is exactly what does not occur in the cases of hallucinations that Merleau-Ponty refers to in the *Phenomenology*. While the patient suffering from hallucinations distinguishes her illusions from other perceptions that are similar, she does so without ever admitting that what *she* experiences is *not* real (PhP, 339). If we extended the discussion of hallucinations to that of worlds, the same problem arises; given two incommensurable views of *the* world, there would be no conclusive way to show that these worlds were in any way the *same* world. On an individual level this could imply that the world I live within and the world my friend inhabits are two separate worlds. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the expressive nature of language overcomes this problem of incommensurability. Yet, if I come into contact with a language not my own, as I did when I first moved to Canada, what would ever induce me to take up an other's language and so perspective? Why does the patient suffering from hallucinations feel a need to overcome her 'illusions' in *favour* of the majority's 'real' experiences? The problem here is that Merleau-Ponty implies that what happens in situations of incommensurability is the choice of one view *over* the other. The implication is that just as the patient has to choose to give up her illusion because it does not harmonize with the perspective of others, I supposedly gave up the world I knew for one that offered no comfort,

that, initially at least, was a world of terror and fear. My question here is why would I have made such a choice and my objection is that that is not what my experience tells me happened. Given two distinct views on the world both would be valid and Merleau-Ponty could not provide us with the basis of adjudicating differences in perspectives. Now this only becomes a problem for Merleau-Ponty so long as there is not a human world in his phenomenology that supersedes any distinct 'localities'. It is only a problem as long as communication is not possible. It may be of value then to re-examine Merleau-Ponty's claims about the relation of language to a particular world in the *Phenomenology*, it may bring to light why the notion that one world dominates our perspective could undermine Merleau-Ponty's position altogether.

This chapter has illustrated that Merleau-Ponty attempts a reformulation of subjectivity, and so, objectivity, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. This reformulation is at times "fuzzy", as Madison notes (Madison, 1981, 35). I think this is due to an incomplete notion of intersubjectivity. I think in trying to save his position from an interpretation that could view his theorization of subjectivity as a radical subjectivism, Merleau-Ponty ends up defending a claim of *specific* worlds. His perspective on the role of language, freedom and the nature of history in identity formation, the basis of intersubjectivity, will be outlined in Chapter Two. Chapter Two will illustrate that while the *Phenomenology of Perception* may endorse a view of 'particular' worlds, this was not a position Merleau-Ponty was satisfied with. I will explore the intersubjective basis of identity through Merleau-

Ponty's notion of style, and illustrate that the notion of 'culture' that arises out of Merleau-Ponty's views on language and history could be problematic.

Chapter Two: Style Introduction

Man is a historical idea and not a natural species. In other words, there is in human existence no unconditional possession, and yet no fortuitous attribute. Human existence will force us to revise our usual notion of necessity and contingency, because it is the transformation of contingency into necessity by the act of taking in hand. All that we are, we are on the basis of a *de facto* situation which we appropriate to ourselves and which we ceaselessly transform by a sort of *escape* which is never unconditioned freedom (PhP, 171).

The notion of style as it appears in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language* expresses the unity of difference and identity.²⁵ Style may be understood as intersubjectivity, expression, history and freedom in this chapter. The individual's style is also the style of a cultural and historical epoch. I have a certain way of approaching the world that is unique to me but this is tempered by the style of my historical and cultural setting. Each individual is instituted into an intersubjective community that originally provides a basis for identity, and similarly each community is united by a common history, a world that manifests and maintains its identity through expression. I will illustrate how style gives us access to the world of others and things, and does so by intertwining categories such as inside and outside or self and others. In

²⁵ "[T]he notion of style intervenes: because the style of my gestures and the gestures of others is the same, this amounts to the fact that what is true for me is also true for others. 'Style' is not a concept, an idea: it is a 'manner' that I apprehend and then imitate, even if I am unable...to define it" (CAL, 43).

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Being can be understood as a process of becoming. As illustrated in Chapter One, Being is a becoming because the nature of the incarnate consciousness is a movement and synergy of self, others and the world. The *expression* of this movement is the style that is both the unique individual expression and the united expression of others and the world. Style is synonymous with who and how we are and how we approach Truth and Being. Freedom and expression are the ways in which this style as the correlate of individual and community is manifest. Any identity is preceded by a world that informs it and eventually gives rise to unique individuals. However, as I will argue in the following, worlds are also created in turn by the individuals that make up intersubjective communities. While we all *escape* particular communities and thereby realize our freedom, we only ever do so within a *given* situation, finally, *because of a particular situation*. However, how this 'situation' is remembered, how a situation is taken up as part of a personal history, is crucial to who we become. History is as much the history of individuals, as it is the grand scheme of all human memory; it is the bringing of our past into the present, in light of a future not yet made. In light of this view of history, truth is a responsibility and never an objective property of reality. How we understand our history effects what we take to be truth, and so how we live as individuals and within our particular communities.

Escape

I do not remember *learning* English. I started kindergarten approximately one month after arriving in Canada and in my memory at least, English was just *there*. What I do remember is that my family had moved into a world of chaos, my uncle's modest house contained eleven children and five adults and unlike Africa where we lived with three times as many children and adults, this *space* seemed *so* small. While English may have appeared out of nowhere, my adjustment to prairie winters was not so sudden. I remember clearly the feeling of injustice when my kindergarten teacher would not let me go to the bathroom before I answered a simple math question. I knew addition and subtraction at a level beyond my years because in Kisumu in pre-kindergarten if you could not answer the teacher's questions you were placed above a vat of hot milk until you could answer the question, *correctly*. In retaliation, and because I still had not mastered bladder control in cold climates, I peed on the entire class, for some reason the classroom slanted downwards. This was my first victory in Canada. It was a victory of defiance.

For the next five years my family moved at an average of once a year, I developed a speech impediment, became pigeon toed to the detriment of anyone near me, developed near-sightedness that went unnoticed for three years and disappeared into a silent world within myself. Other than my siblings, I made no friendships; recesses were painful stretches of time that dragged on for eternities. After school it was the same everyday, I watched as boys, big and small, beat my brother, my sister and I would pick him up and carry him home humiliated and full of rage. We spoke only Gujarati at home as if in protest to this harsh world of violence and injustice.

Public school was generally a time of assaults to my dignity, I was nicknamed 'Sambo', often the teachers were even more ignorant than my fellow students. One teacher pointedly told the class, staring at me to make her point, that the problems with over-population in India stemmed from a lack of control *and* intelligence on the part of Indians; I knew she was wrong but did not have the words to tell her so. I further idealized my memories of Kisumu and my four siblings and I begged my mother for stories from Indian mythology, which became in our minds much more than stories, in those stories we found heroes who were 'like' us. We developed an identity that differentiated 'us' from 'them'; 'them' became in our minds 'Canadians'. Our understanding of being African East-Indians was radically recreated to compensate for this alien world where we were not at 'home'. And yet, at some point, we all rejected this view of 'us' and 'them'.

Every time someone walked into my house, there I was, ready to serve, tea-
maiden. I was constantly reminded that this was good training; someday I would make a good Indian wife due to all this subservience. After all had I not already begun to learn that it was infinitely wiser to accept my role than to reject it in

favour of a Western ideal of individualism? Look what it had got me so far, cold, bitterness and generally a taste for freedom that I had never had before. I still remember that I felt so lost at that time--I had lost a world--but found nothing to replace it with. There was nothing worth keeping, nothing worth giving up in favour of new chains, even if those chains promised so much freedom. At that time I realized something important, neither world I knew could offer me a world I actually wanted to live within, I consciously gave up both.

I do not remember exactly when the shift occurred and in fact it may not have occurred at a specific time but slowly over the years. However, at some point the critical eye of distrust towards 'Canadians' shifted and became instead a gaze of suspicion towards the stereotypes of Indian-ness. The Indian community I grew up within had insulated itself from all outside influence, in an attempt to preserve its distinctness it actually propagated a stereotypical view on what it was to be Indian--a view that had no *real* foundations. This insularity led to a narrow-mindedness and worse to a set of unspoken 'principles' that I found it impossible to live up to. Now all the injustice I initially attributed to 'Canadians' became equally the injustice of 'Indians'. Neither stereotype was acceptable and I rejected both; I found a home between the two. I developed a 'style' that incorporated my understanding of the 'best' in either world.

In *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, Merleau-Ponty makes a case for the relation of identity and difference by showing that children move from a perspective of otherness to one of self-identity. Consciousness of others precedes consciousness of self. The child identifies with others, before the recognition of his own individuality. "In effect, the self and others are entities that the child dissociates only belatedly. He starts out in terms of a total identification with others" (CAL, 36).

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty makes the same case for adults relating to each other. We are not the Sartrean 'for ourselves' as much as *with* others. The Cartesian models of objects and others as *for* consciousness are rejected as secondary functions. Reflections on things or other people as other

than myself are preceded by the experience of others and things as *with* me. There is a common modality to the being of things, others and myself and I, as incarnate consciousness, appropriate the world as a shared world of meaning. As shown above, Merleau-Ponty illustrates that in my lived experience it is the possibilities open to me as a member of an intersubjective community that allows me to understand others and to express myself. While the notion of reversibility is only used in later works, the idea of it is already present in Merleau-Ponty's early work. Language is one of the expressive ways in which we come to recognize another's style. Language as gesture and speech opens the other's *way* of Being. However, Merleau-Ponty also wants to show that language is the expression of unique world-views. Every language is a unique way of 'singing the world' (CAL, 76/ PhP, 187). There is in Merleau-Ponty's formulation of language, as a means of expression of *a* world, a truth that cannot be denied. And yet, my experience tells me that what happened when English became my first language was not the choice of one world over another, but rather the creation of a new world between the linguistic and so cultural confines of either English or Gujarati. I learned to sing the world in a way that was unique to me *but this world was also a shared world*. "Language is an act of transcending. One cannot consider it simply as a container for thought; it is necessary to see language as an instrument for conquest of self by contact with others" (CAL, 63).

This chapter will explore the above interpretation of style with the aim of unfolding Merleau-Ponty's views on intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity, as a

relationship of the individual to her world, will involve the various ways in which a community can be understood to express itself; it will involve the variety of ways that we as human beings situate ourselves in a world that is always already there. World(s) as already there, reflect the institutions that define a community's self understanding, but also the possibilities open to any particular world to move beyond its institutions and to re-define itself. It is the individuals that make up a community, that initially at least, differentiate themselves from their community--so that the community at large changes--becomes more than it was.

Part One: Language, Intersubjectivity and Truth

Language is [a] cultural acquisition; and although it owes its existence to speaking subjects alone, it precedes them all, such that each and every subject becomes a speaking and thinking subject, not by constituting language, but by taking it up. To speak is thus to live in a reason or a logos which exists, not as a thing or an idea, but as the permanent and sedimented trace of subjectivities. Thus in the first instance language transcends me because it belongs to others just as much--or just as little--as it belongs to me. But language's transcendence is also vertical: it transcends the members of a linguistic community taken all together; it is a phenomenon which has its own history (Madison, 1981, 122).

In his essay "Language, Thought, and Truth," Paul K. Jacobson points out that Merleau-Ponty "tries to unfold how language, institution, history, and intersubjectivity mutually implicate each other and require a comprehensive treatment"(Jacobson, 1979, 145). Language will then clarify Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity. I will suggest that Merleau-Ponty's view that one world dominates our perspectives undergoes an alteration in his writings dealing

with expression. Worlds are still the unique expressions of specific intersubjective communities, but the song that we all sing shares in a common aim, which is "the co-existence of men within a culture and, beyond it, within a single history" (PrP, 9). The tension between a human world that we all share and particular intersubjective communities is never fully abolished in Merleau-Ponty's works. However, the relation between individual and community or one cultural world and another is no longer portrayed as one of polarity or incommensurability.²⁶ If there is any sense in which to talk about a human world, it is because despite our differences, we all tend towards dialogue--towards communication. Our every action is in a sense an expression of our humanity and no matter how different those expressions are, or how reactionary, they all seem to lead towards what Merleau-Ponty calls an 'equilibrium'.²⁷ "All human acts and all human creations

²⁶ I have argued in Chapter One that there is a 'residue' of dualistic thought that clings to Merleau-Ponty's position in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and because of this he makes the claim that while we can learn other languages and customs, we only ever live in one world. I think that the subjectivism that lingers at the end of the *Phenomenology* is partly responsible for the above claim. In order to get beyond this problem Merleau-Ponty tries to illustrate that we all derive our sense of self in an intersubjective world, intersubjectivity is meant to overcome an inherent solipsism that clings to Merleau-Ponty's position. Yet, Merleau-Ponty does not want to do away with the notion of particularity either, whether of the individual or of distinct communities, this leads to the notion of unique cultural worlds and this in turn leads right back to the original problem of solipsism, which now translates to incommensurability. Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of language through a phenomenological analysis never quite overcomes his initial aim of refuting once and for all the notion of a universal grammar or a wholly explicit language, partially because of the ambiguous relationship of thought and language. Merleau-Ponty wants to replace any notions of a universal language with an 'open-ness' of language. In "On the Phenomenology of Language," he tries to illustrate that languages can change and even 'leak' into one another: this is obviously a position that differs in some respects from the position in the *Phenomenology* that claims one language dominates who we are (S, 87, 92). While the position is never clearly articulated, I think his phenomenological approach to language, as expression is promising.

²⁷ The notion of an 'equilibrium' is referred to throughout *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, as well as other works, while it is never clearly defined it can be understood in its scientific sense as a condition of stability, a tendency towards a state of

constitute a single drama, and in this sense we are all saved or lost together. Our life is essentially universal" (PrP, 10).

We are paradoxically initiated into this 'universal' life through our particular intersubjective communities, through the *specific* linguistic community into which we are born. However, by changing the focus of traditional philosophies of language from *la langue* to *la parole*, concepts appropriated from Saussure, Merleau-Ponty returns language to a lived world within which language *speaks*. Arguing against the 'universal grammar' of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty shows that it is not so much the structure of languages that define particular languages but the use of language in any particular linguistic community.

It will be a question not of a system of forms of signification clearly articulated in terms of one another--not a structure of linguistic ideas built according to a strict plan--but of a cohesive whole of convergent linguistic gestures, each of which will be defined *less by a signification than by a use value* (S, 87, emphasis mine).

In fact, language is initially taken up by the child as a certain style of expressing the intersubjective world the child is born into (CAL). This privileging of *la parole* is based on Merleau-Ponty's disagreements with the philosophical tradition's conceptions of language, specifically, the relationship of thought and speech. In both the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Consciousness and the*

maximum stability. I think in Merleau-Ponty's usage equilibrium takes on teleological implications--human beings are geared towards optimum ends--however, these are not ends knowable except in retrospect. There is an idealism that is reflected in the notion of equilibrium in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, but given the choice of a philosophy that attempts to remain optimistic in light of the human condition and one that sinks into a nihilistic cynicism, I would choose optimism any day.

Acquisition of Language, Merleau-Ponty defends a gestural theory of speech. Like gestures, speech is the embodiment of an intention, just as my gesture of anger *is* the anger I feel, my speech is not a representation of my thoughts but the thoughts 'embodied'. In the above works, Merleau-Ponty is trying to illustrate that unlike the empiricist and intellectualist views of speech that make it a third person process, speech 'like' gesture indicates how the speaking subject transcends herself in the act of expression that is speech. I will elaborate this new gestural theory in the following.

Throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the dualities of traditional philosophy must be overcome if we are to understand how it is that human beings experience and know their world. In trying to overcome the abstractions of traditional philosophy, Merleau-Ponty shows that the relationship of consciousness and body cannot be as either empiricism or intellectualism have claimed. Chapter Six of Part One of the *Phenomenology*, tries to illustrate that body is the nexus of speech (PhP, 174-199). By arguing for a gestural theory of speech, Merleau-Ponty is able to illustrate that gesture and speech both are natural and conventional, each arises from biological being and each also arises from a certain style of being-in-the-world. The philosophical dilemma here is that traditional philosophy, in its intellectualist incarnations, has abstractly conceived of a consciousness that is pure 'thought', whether of itself or of a world and others. Consciousness viewed in this way oversees the movements of an object body and, as shown in Chapter One, this leads to irresolvable

problems. The gestural theory of speech thus allows Merleau-Ponty to posit a theory of language that arises from our incarnate consciousness of the world and others. My understanding of my world is informed by my particular hold on the world. And my hold on the world is as dependent on this body that gives me a perspective unto a world, as it is in a consciousness that is able to transcend towards the world--to give *my* world a meaning. Words in this theory are a blending of sound and meaning. As Merleau-Ponty notes in *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, the child in the initial stages of language acquisition learns to speak a language by first learning the 'style' of a particular language, the unique melody that every language embodies (CAL, 76-77).²⁸ This style owes its existence to the intersubjective world that a language persists within. Just as the gestures that are used in various cultural worlds are unique to the particular hold people have on their bodies, languages also embody a unique expression of a world.

Speech is comparable to a gesture because what it is
charged with expressing will be in the same relation to it

²⁸ When I first moved to South Korea in 1995, I was taken aback by the harshness of Hangul, the Korean language. Initially Hangul only presented itself to me as sounds that were not in any way harmonious, I heard a discordant stringing together of sounds. Try as I might, I could not imitate the rhythm of Hangul and so speak Hangul, as long as I heard it as 'harsh' and unrhythmic. What is interesting is that I could read Hangul and so get around Seoul with little problem, but I could not *communicate* with Koreans. By my second year in Korea there was a reversal in what I heard, suddenly Hangul seemed full of soft sounds, the melody of the language became apparent, and I could now try to *speak* the language. I think there is a similarity of my experience with Hangul and the initial institution of language in the child, the underlying harmony of a particular language initiates the child into a speaking world and eventually the meanings this world holds. This initial institution into language cannot be reduced to a grasping of the structure of a particular language, since this is exactly what the child does not yet have. It is rather the unique way of incorporating the rhythm and texture of a language, in short, it is learning to understand how a language *sounds*, as long as one does not master the peculiarity of the language, one cannot *speak* a language with any kind of proficiency.

as the goal is to the gesture which intends it, and our remarks about the functioning of the signifying apparatus will already involve a certain theory of the significations expressed by speech. My corporeal intending of the objects of my surroundings is implicit and presupposes no thematization or 'representation' of my body or milieu. Signification arouses speech as the world arouses my body--by a mute presence which awakens my intentions without deploying itself before them (S, 89).

The relationship of thought and speech illustrates how it is that words are not secondary to thought but the embodiment of thought--just as the body is the nexus from which consciousness throws itself towards a world.

The relation of thought and speech is not as the empiricists and the intellectualists have claimed--neither tradition gives words meaning. In authentic speech, the word is the thought expressed. The tradition has taken second order speech--speech about speech--and tried to treat it as if it were authentic speech. Either the word is an empty shell that thought or categories fill in or the word is a representation of thought. Merleau-Ponty argues that if this were true, if language were secondary to thought in the casual schema, then how would I ever know what it is I am thinking?

A thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconscious, which means that it would not exist even for itself (PhP, 177).

Words are vehicles of meaning and, through speech, it is not just words as signifiers that I express but a certain style of being. In speech my thoughts are taken up by a listener. If this were not the case, then how could she ever respond?

In understanding others, the problem is always indeterminate, because only the solution will bring the data to light as convergent, only the central theme of a philosophy, once understood, endows the philosopher's writings with the value of adequate signs. There is then, a taking up of others' thought through speech, a reflection in others, an ability to think *according to others* which enriches our own thoughts. Here the meaning of words must be finally induced by the words themselves, or more exactly, their conceptual meaning must be formed by a kind of deduction from a gestural meaning, which is immanent in speech. And as in a foreign country, I begin to understand the meaning of words through their place in a context of action, and by taking part in a communal life--in the same way an as yet imperfectly understood piece of philosophical writing discloses to me at least a certain 'style'- either a Spinozist, critical or phenomenological one--which is the first draft of its meaning (PhP, 179).

In communication with others speech is the embodiment and the expression of thought.

There is an analogy between the relationship of thought and expression and the relationship of consciousness and the body; thought and expression are "simultaneously constituted" (PhP, 181). "Language bears the meaning of thought as a footprint signifies the movement and effort of a body" (ILVS, 82). Our bodies express themselves through gestures that are recognizable by others in our cultural setting, but gestures are never reducible to explicit signs. Gestures are the expression of our feelings, even though they are never fully explicit, just as our words carry meanings that are not fully explicit in themselves, but still carry forward what we intend to *say*. Unlike "logical language" that "has the relative advantage of being exact", living language has an opacity that allows it to express

meanings that are contextual (CAL, 62). Even the silence between words can change the meaning of my expression (ILVS, 82). Words are diacritical, since they signify as much by the relation between words, as they do by the silence of what is not said (S, 88). The 'system' of language is never fully sedimented, because of the expressive nature of any language; language always tries to say more than what individual words signify (S, 89).

Indeed, in language conceived of as a diacritical structure, there are cracks, gaps, or weak zones which prevent it from being perfectly clear for the speaking subjects and which make for difficulties in communication (Madison, 1981, 123).

Language also always expresses much more than representations or correspondences of thought to the thinking subject, the world or others. By privileging speech or *la parole* over the structures of any specific language, Merleau-Ponty illustrates that the expressive function of language always transcends the purely structural aspects of a language. All language is dialogue, even the inner language of my private thoughts (S, 97). This conversation that is language may be hemmed in by the particularity of the language at hand, but then, I always have the possibility of learning different languages and so learning to sing the world in various ways.²⁹ Even within the confines of a single language, it

²⁹ While in the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty suggests that we cannot live in two cultural/linguistic worlds at once, in "On the Phenomenology of Language," he states that there is an "oblique passage" from one language to another (S, 87). However, even here, different languages are only "contingently comparable", just as two individuals, once we know them, may have similarities but remain unique (S, 87). I think that this notion of a passage--oblique or not--is promising in relation to my own transition from one linguistic world into another and shall return to it below.

is the changes instituted by speaking subjects that insure that a language will always be able to express the world it is meant to signify. A language that does not retain the ability to transform itself through use cannot stand the test of time and eventually finds itself forgotten (S, 88).

Language is not as fixed as some language theorists have maintained-- language is expressive--and because of this it has an indeterminacy that underlies it. While Merleau-Ponty stresses the indeterminacy of language, he also points out that there is a sedimentation of meaning in language; language will be both determinate and indeterminate (PhP, 190-194). The indeterminacy of language is why language is not a correspondence of words to thoughts but the expression of a certain style of Being. Jacobson points out that the later writings of Merleau-Ponty relate truth and language, in fact, language becomes a vehicle of truth (Jacobson, 1979, 164). These later writings also stress that while language is susceptible to sedimentation, it is only 'relatively motivated' in that it is open to new situations. "Language is then both accidental and rational, fortuitous and planned; a realm in which, through the operation of this blind logic, accidents are transformed into reasons, and conscious meanings are able to emerge" (Jacobson, 1979, 160-161). This blind logic is similar to the pre-logic of the perceptual world in that it has a transparency, and yet, is at the same time transcendent in its expression. Truth as timeless adequation between thought and reality becomes impossible under this understanding, because truth is always situated (Jacobson, 1979, 162). Words are constitutive of meaning and this meaning emerges not

from some static signification that a word holds but in the relations between words, the silence between words and, most importantly, the *use* of words by speakers.

The structure of language is subject to Jacobson's 'blind logic' and contains a certain opacity, but it is this opacity that creates a background of possibility for ever clearer expressions. New meanings arise because the relation of thought and words is at times spontaneous and indeterminate. If this were not true, than language would not be expressive of meaning. Truth is always going to be situated truth and always truth that will be taken up in new contexts. "It is in this way that our present continues the past and can fulfil its promises" (Jacobson, 1979, 163). In language, as within history, there "is [only] a chiasma, an intertwining of movement, sight and touch, a narcissism of seeing visibility, the reversibility of inside and outside, the formative milieu of subject and object; it is the 'barbaric Principle,' prior to all objectivity--termed 'flesh'" (Smith, 1996, 198). This 'movement' will be the expression of difference and identity and so 'narcissistic' *and* generalized.

The individual expression that is unique to me can only arise out of the background of an intersubjective world that first gives me my thought. However, this background is never given once and for all, it retains a generality that allows for particularity, and indeed calls for individual expressions--without ever revealing itself completely. The notion that we can discover a universal language that is the ground of all language, throughout the ages, is the hope for a

resolution that can never come. As long as we take up a given language and, in using it, transform it into something new, language will always escape any attempts to define it in terms of an unchanging structure. Merleau-Ponty suggests that as long we speak, we will always re-create language, we will always sing the world in our own unique ways. And, if it is true that even in my inner thoughts I am 'speaking', which is to say that even my inner thoughts are a dialogue, then all language is an act of re-creation.

The 'oblique passage' from one language to another illustrates that this movement, as a momentum of expression, opens the possibility that we may be able to incorporate various worlds in our notion of self (S, 87). While Merleau-Ponty never takes the further step towards a vision of worlds that can and do 'leak' into one another, the possibility for it is already evident in his phenomenology of language.

Speech, as distinguished from language, is that moment when the significative intention (still silent and wholly in act) proves itself capable of incorporating itself into my culture and the culture of others--of shaping me and others by transforming the meaning of cultural instruments. It becomes "available" in turn because in retrospect it gives us the illusion that it was contained in the already available significations, whereas by a sort of *ruse* it epoused them only in order to infuse them with a new life (S, 92).

In light of the above, we, the inheritors of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, can understand that the new life that is infused *between* languages and cultures may radically alter the notion of 'culture' as a distinct

entity. Like individuals, cultures are a unique blending of various influences. And, like individuals that reflect the ability to retain identity, while at the same time through expressions of freedom re-creating themselves, cultures too absorb differences, only to re-affirm their uniqueness. We may well all start out in one world but nothing prevents our absorbing various worlds into ourselves. Unlike T.E. Lawrence we need not view the intersection of two cultures as a battleground in which both sides are lost (PhP, 187). While my initial entry into the Canadian world did indeed resemble a battle, I like to optimistically think that the blending of both a Western culture and an Indian one has made me a better person. I achieved a "conquest of self by contact with others" because I was willing to risk my self. I chose not to reject either world and so in one sense, lost both (CAL, 63). In a very real sense, the kinds of choices we make in our lives affects who we are, and in turn, who we are affects our world.

Situatedness imposes its limits on who we are and how we interact with our world, yet, in "Cezanne's Doubt", Merleau-Ponty claims that we are able to transcend (to a certain degree) the limitations of our lives because we are free. Freedom, however, is always a limited freedom for Merleau-Ponty. What this 'bounded' freedom amounts to ties in directly with the perspectivalness of history. If we overcome our limitations, it will be because we express ourselves in various ways and because the unity of Being is laced throughout by our differences--by our unique style of approaching the world. However, the unique style of each of us is informed by the style of our historical and cultural epoch. Our freedom is

tied to the intersubjective world within which we take it up and any choice is, in a sense, an expression of that world and so of ourselves. In the following, I will discuss Merleau-Ponty's conception of limited freedom.

**Part Two: Freedom
Freedom, Intentionality, and the Limitations of Finitude**

Merleau-Ponty, like Hegel before him, views freedom as defining what it is to be human. However, Merleau-Ponty's perspective on freedom differs in some significant ways from the Hegelian notion of freedom and from the position of absolute freedom of Merleau-Ponty's constant interlocutor, J.P. Sartre. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* freedom is described as a limited freedom, limited by our situatedness. This view of freedom could be problematic (PhP, 434-456). Freedom understood as conditioned by the social and historical situation an individual is born into could reduce acts of free choice to conditioned acts. Freedom would be abolished in this situation, since expressions of freedom would be determined by the situation of the subject. With Michel Foucault, we, the inheritors of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, could ask what a conditioned freedom would amount to? If identity is determined by the societal institutions that prevail in any given time, in what sense can we claim that we are free? The fact that the Chapter on freedom follows that of the temporality of subjectivity in the *Phenomenology of Perception* is, I think, telling. By tying the essence of subjectivity as temporal, to that of the subject as expressive (i.e. free), Merleau-Ponty is able to move beyond the Foucaultian dilemma of conditioned

subjectivity.³⁰ However, while I will suggest in the following that Merleau-Ponty's relation of freedom and expression overcomes the above suggestion of a conditioned freedom, I will also illustrate that an incomplete notion of intersubjectivity creates problems that are not resolved for this notion of freedom, until the ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty's grounding of identity in an intersubjective world is a problem insofar as he then has to defend how it is that an individual can be said to free herself from the tethers of this world. If the choices we are given are hemmed in by a world that is always already there, and in fact, gives rise to our individual sense of self, then our choices are already conditioned and not free. The problem here is that an individual is said to be free when she is capable of transcending the particularity of her own situation, but as Merleau-Ponty argues throughout his works, we never do transcend the world we live within completely. Existence is always situated. And yet, Merleau-Ponty also claims that it is our *nature* to transcend our situation, perhaps even ourselves. We transcend ourselves insofar as any act of freedom is an act of expression. The particularity of any individual may be rooted in intersubjective structures of the life-world, but even worlds are individuals that

³⁰ I would argue that this is also a step beyond a Hegelian notion of freedom, which claims that we are trapped in our historical moment. For Hegel we cannot gain the distance necessary to view ourselves with objectivity. While Merleau-Ponty also claims that we are always instituted into a certain perspective, he also tries to account for the possibility of a critical stance to our own situation. I think that an idea of an ideal of objectivity that motivates us in our present in light of the past and in the hope of a future is prevalent in Merleau-Ponty's notion of history. This 'ideal of objectivity' will be discussed below.

transcend *their* situatedness through expression. If for Merleau-Ponty freedom defines what it is to be human, this is insofar as freedom as expression is creative.

Freedom is one of the themes that runs throughout my existence; I am an *I think* because I situate myself in a world where I can be an *I can*. It is in acting that I move beyond the limitations of my freedom. If the world were an indiscriminate mass waiting to be endowed with meaning, and my freedom absolute, what would ever cause me to choose?³¹ Choice implies not limitless choice but choice within the limits of my being--my finitude. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty shows that existence is the taking up of a situation. Through discussions on sexuality and historical materialism, the indeterminacy of existence is exposed. Existence, as that by which meaning is endowed, is transcendent. This concept of existence shares in a radical contingency and a radical necessity (Jacobson, 1979, 169-171). This paradoxical nature of existence exposes the paradox of perception. My body is a synthesis which is creative of meaning. The body creates an intentional arc in which meanings arise, and just as consciousness is transcendent in its projects, as it throws itself through the medium of the body into a situation, existence is determinate in context--but also always contains themes as yet unrealized. In "Cezanne's Doubt" Merleau-Ponty illustrates that our lives are never reducible to explanations of the events of our lives but also includes the possibilities that any

³¹ I am referring here to the Sartrean concept of absolute freedom.

life holds, whether one realizes those possibilities or not. Leonardo's existence understood only in relation to his childhood memories of loss and abandonment or Cezanne's life viewed only in relation to his turbulent mental life, would be to transpose one thematic postulate on lives that were too rich to be explained so simply (CD, 59-75). Yet, we cannot ignore the circumstances of either artist's lives, since "[we] never get away from our life. We never see our ideas or freedom face to face" (CD, 75). It is only when my freedom is threatened or I desire what I do not have that freedom emerges as that towards which I throw myself.

Thus it is true both that the life of an author can teach us nothing and that--if we know how to interpret it--we can find everything in it, since it opens onto his work. Just as we may observe the movements of an unknown animal without understanding the law that inhabits and controls them, so Cezanne's observers did not divine the transmutations he imposed on events and experiences; they were blind to his significance, to that glow from out of nowhere which surrounded him from time to time. But he himself was never at the center of himself: nine days out of ten all he saw around him was the wretchedness of his empirical life and his unsuccessful attempts, the debris of an unknown celebration. Yet it was in the world that he had to realise his freedom, with colours upon a canvas. It was from the approval of others that he had to await the proof of his worth. That is why he questioned the picture emerging beneath his hand, why he hung on the glances other people directed toward his canvas. That is why he never finished working (CD, 75).

Freedom becomes a theme in our lives within the background of our finitude--death is the last horizon. It is this recognition of our limitations within the context of our lives, our being towards death, and so our being towards life--

our very existence--that motivates consciousness to transcend itself. Faced with our finitude, we have the choice to live towards Being as opposed to accepting the absolutes institutionalized by canons of Truth. But, as we will see with history, it is also these institutions that make up our world--that elicit from us an *act* of freedom.

If freedom is to have room in which to move, if it is to be describable as freedom, there must be something to hold it away from its objectives, it must have a field which means that there must be for it special possibilities, or realities which tend to cling to being (PhP, 438).

While it is true that freedom is limited by the world we find ourselves within, and by the individual limitations of each person in our world, we are said to be free insofar as we take up the challenge that these limitations impose.

Taken concretely, freedom is always a meeting of inner and outer...and it shrinks without ever disappearing altogether in direct proportion to the lessening of the *tolerance* allowed by the bodily and institutional data of our lives (PhP, 454).

Merleau-Ponty mediates between notions of absolute freedom and completely conditioned freedom by illustrating that both render freedom meaningless (PhP, 453). If my freedom is absolute, then there is no sense in choosing one course of action over another, and so the concept of absolute freedom lapses into the absurd. On the other hand, if my freedom is wholly conditioned by my circumstances, then in reality I have no choice and so no freedom, I am wholly determined. Merleau-Ponty adheres to a perspective of freedom that illustrates that freedom becomes an issue in our lives, first, through

other people and the world, and second, because subjectivity as temporal is a melding of past, present and future. Subjectivity, like history, is a motivated momentum. This momentum that characterizes subjectivity is constantly re-constituting itself and so rendering itself as meaningful. Other people force us to take a stance and assert our individuality, not just in opposition to others, but in an attempt to win the recognition of others through expression, which is already an act of freedom. Yet, this recognition that we seek is always motivated by our self-understanding. This self-understanding is founded on the intersubjective structures of the world we are born into and the tacit cogito which offers us a vision of ourselves as a continuity of past, present and future (PhP, 452-453). If we express ourselves and so validate our freedom, it is because we have a stable notion of who we are. This sense of self is derived from our past experiences and present situation, but most importantly, by our hopes for the future. These hopes are foreshadowed by an intentionality that infuses all of our projects. In this sense, our choices are conditioned by the historical and social milieu within which our existence arises, but also always transcends any particular epoch by aiming for possibilities not yet realized.³²

To be free in Merleau-Ponty's sense is to be limited and to always aim to overcome these limitations. This 'overcoming' is not the Sartrean notion of

³² While it is certainly true that most of us rarely step outside of our own time and place, I think the choices we make do effect, if not our *world*, at least our situation. While few of us instigate change on global scales, I would argue that every choice has its own resonance, every life its impact, in this sense we all transcend our own limitations by the choices we make or choose *not* to make.

overcoming the gaze of others by objectifying the other with my gaze, but rather is grounded in the reciprocity between my freedom and an other's freedom, neither of which can be won in isolation.³³ If for Merleau-Ponty, who I am is dependent on the intersubjective community that initially gives rise to my sense of self, then I can never really be free, except insofar as my freedom respects the freedom of others, since my freedom always originates in a world of others. While it is true that I can objectify an other or in turn be objectified by an other, I can only ever do so in an attempt to win the recognition of the other, just as she attempts to win my recognition. Like the figure/background structure of perception, freedom also has a field within which it operates. Any choice is always limited by the field in which it occurs but "like the perceptual field, this one has no traceable boundaries" (PhP, 454).

The idea of situation rules out absolute freedom at the source of our commitments, and equally, indeed, at their terminus. No commitment, even in the Hegelian State,

³³ Sartre in "No Exit" illustrates that other people are an objectifying gaze, which we each try to overcome by objectifying others in turn, essentially other people are hell. This is not a view that Merleau-Ponty would support. While Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that this is one of the ways in which human beings *can* relate to each other, I think he would view it as an insincere mode of recognition, a mode of behavior that is secondary to a tacit recognition of the other as a fellow subjectivity. "If the subject made a constant and at all times peculiar choice of himself, one might wonder why his experience always ties up with itself and presents him with objects and definite historical phases, why we have a general notion of time valid through all times, and why finally the experience of each one of us links up with that of others. But it is the question itself which must be questioned: for what is given, is not one fragment of time followed by another, one individual flux, then another; it is the taking up of each subjectivity by itself, and of subjectivities by each other in the generality of a single nature, the cohesion of an intersubjective life and a world. The present mediates between the For Oneself and the For Others, between individuality and generality. True reflection presents me to myself not as an idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical to my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it: I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but, on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and through them all the rest" (PhP, 452).

can make me leave behind all differences and free me for anything. This universality itself, from the mere fact of its being experienced, would stand out as a particularity against the world's background, for existence both generalizes and particularizes everything at which it aims, and cannot ever be complete (PhP, 455).

Freedom is then limited by the field in which it becomes an issue for us but is also always exceeding its own limits. When I first arrived in Canada this world was one that threatened my freedom; there was a lack of tolerance in Canada that directly affected my freedom. And yet, this lack of tolerance was instrumental in eliciting from me an act of freedom, one that would in turn change my understanding of who I was and how I would view my world. The vignettes with which I began this chapter illustrate that the worlds I felt caught between provided me with the impetus to choose *neither*--this itself was a choice for something new. Freedom is then limited by the situation in which it arises, but also always contains the possibilities for transcending those limitations through re-creation. I chose to find a 'place' of tolerance between the African-Indian world and the Canadian world, and this choice was a transcending of either of these 'places'. However, as Merleau-Ponty rightly acknowledges, my choices were not limitless, I had to choose within the boundaries of the two worlds that I knew. Merleau-Ponty suggests that given the choices I had, I could only chose *one* of these worlds. Like T.E. Lawrence, who, caught between the Arabic world and the Western world, faced with madness or resignation, chose *one* world, I too, should have opted for *one* of the worlds I knew (PhP, 187). Given Merleau-Ponty's

notion of intersubjectivity as the expression of a specific linguistic, social and historical world, the conclusion that I should have opted for one of the worlds I knew is understandable. Yet, there is an inconsistency with the creative possibilities Merleau-Ponty envisions any particular world capable of and the circumscription of 'worlds' as determinate horizons. If freedom is understood as both limited to a certain field and always transcending this field in its expressions, then it seems that worlds would never remain determinate, since any overreaching of the boundaries of a world, would, in turn, radically change that world. I think this is a problem that Merleau-Ponty never quite overcomes. However, his perspective on history goes a long way towards trying to resolve the problem. This problem is as old as philosophy itself--it is the problem of how to reconcile the universal and the particular without privileging one at the expense of the other.

Part Three: History as Advent

The limitations of freedom are central to Merleau-Ponty's idea of history and historical truth. There is a contingency, an indeterminateness, to history and our understanding of history. History as objective and factual becomes a problem for Merleau-Ponty; within his system as given thus far, it seems that history would be subject to the same situatedness as truth. This recasts our understanding of history, since the understanding we have of any period in time will always be affected by our horizon and the themes that fill it. History takes on a perspectival nature. While one generation may view certain historical events within themes

relevant to their epoch, another generation may take history to mean something different. There is then the danger of historical knowledge being relative. Merleau-Ponty makes such a claim by revising our conceptions of truth. If truth is always a questing as opposed to an absolute then can there be an objective history? I think that the answer to the preceding question depends on how we understand objectivity. If we understand objectivity in the traditional sense, as capable of arriving at unquestionable truth, then Merleau-Ponty would say that objective history is highly unlikely. However, it is just this notion of objectivity that leaves all subjectivity behind that Merleau-Ponty spends his entire life as a philosopher deconstructing. There is no objectivity without subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty sees the historian's role as that of opening up a dialogue with the past, it is one subjectivity facing another and through communication deriving a meaning for historical events (SNS, 91-92). In "The Philosopher and Sociology," Merleau-Ponty argues against the kind of attitude that would view historical 'facts' as incontestable (S, 98-113). He illustrates that 'facts' are meaningless without our interpretation of those facts and any interpretation already involves the perspective from which the scientist, anthropologist, sociologist, historian *or* philosopher begins her inquiry. The events in any period of history can tell us nothing on their own; it is only by interpreting these facts in order to derive the meaning of the past that the past speaks to us today. However, the historian is not free to put a purely subjective interpretation on the past, not if she is attempting to be true to the documents and events that inspire her research in the first place. In

"The Metaphysical in Man," Merleau-Ponty is clear that while an ideal of objectivity may motivate our search for truth, whether historical truth or any other kind, we will never achieve objectivity in-itself. There is a "radical subjectivity" that is involved in any search for truth (SNS, 93).

[T]he sciences of man--not to mention the others--have made it evident that all knowledge of man by man, far from being pure contemplation, is the taking up by each, *as best he can*, of the acts of others, reactivating from ambiguous signs an experience which is not his own, appropriating a structure (e.g., the *a priori* of the species, the sublinguistic schema or spirit of a civilization) of which he forms no distinct concept but which he puts together as an experienced pianist deciphers an unknown piece of music: without himself grasping the motives of each gesture or each operation, without being able to bring to the surface of consciousness all the sediment of knowledge which he is using at the moment. Here we no longer have the positing of an object, but rather, we have communication with a way of being. The universality of knowledge is no longer guaranteed in each of us by that stronghold of absolute consciousness in which the Kantian "I think"--although linked to a certain spatio-temporal perspective--was assured *a priori* of being identical to every other "I think". The germ of universality or the "natural light" without which there could be no knowledge is to be found ahead of us, in the thing where our perception places us, in the dialogue into which our experience of other people throws us by means of a movement not all of whose sources are known to us. Metaphysics begins from the moment when, ceasing to live in the evidence of the object--whether it is the sensory object or the object of science--we apperceive the radical subjectivity of all our experience as inseparable from its truth value (SNS, 93).

This "radical subjectivity" is not pure consciousness because for Merleau-Ponty there is no such thing as pure consciousness. This was illustrated in Chapter

One, where we saw that subjectivity is dependent on a world of things and others; self-consciousness arises in a world of things and others, *because of this world*. The objects of history are not closed realms that we can never recover, as long as we undertake to view them as cultural artifacts of a *way of life*--a certain style of being-in-the-world. According to Merleau-Ponty, we may recover the past, but only by re-creating it in our present. Just as sedimentation occurs in language, it also occurs in history but a historical moment is only truly understood if it is brought into our present. History is meaningful because it can be brought into the context of our lives. Our understanding of history is always motivated by our situation, and our situation is made up of the societal institutions that make up our world. "The presence of the individual in the institution, and of the institution in the individual is evident [as] in the case of linguistic change"(IPP, 55). Like the institution of language, which a linguistic community continues by adapting it to new expressions, *without having themselves created it*, history is never something behind us that we can reveal through the events and facts of history. History is as much infused throughout our present as it is in the past and its momentum always aims at a future not yet made.

The first cave drawing founded a tradition only because it had received one--that of perception. The quasi-eternity of art is of a piece with the quasi-eternity of incarnate existence; as in the use of our bodies and our senses, insofar as they involve us in the world, we have the means of understanding our cultural gesticulation insofar as it involves us in history (ILVS, 197).

History is meaningful for Merleau-Ponty as long as we understand that historical truth does not give us the *facts* of the past but a certain style of inhabiting and experiencing the world. History opens a dialogue with other ways of thinking and doing; it reveals other subjectivities and their meanings and intentions.³⁴ However, just as other people retain an opacity that I can never completely uncover, so too does the historical subject. What history can offer us is then an understanding of Being in all its difference and plurality. It can help us to understand ourselves. There is a teleology or logic of history that underlies Merleau-Ponty's account. History is represented as a progression to a higher state of equilibrium of the human species. As noted earlier, the notion of equilibrium is critical in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. I would argue that Merleau-Ponty may hope for a progression towards a higher form of rationality in human relations, as did Hegel, but that his view of the contingency of history acknowledges that this is in no way guaranteed.³⁵ The notion of advent is both a

³⁴ See Kerry Whiteside for a discussion and critique of how intentions are transmitted through the artifacts of history in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Whiteside, 1986, 145).

³⁵ In "Merleau-Ponty and the Truth of History," Clyde Pax argues that Merleau-Ponty's view of history and historical truth is motivated by an implicit affirmation of man (Pax, 1973, 276). "It seems clear that Merleau-Ponty is indicating that the affirmation of man must be taken as a morally binding goal in political and historical action in all possible future situations; if he is not, his affirmation of freedom is not universal but truncated as certainly, if not as immediately, as is the freedom of Sartre's *pour-soi*" (Pax, 1973, 276). I agree with Pax that there is a universal notion of freedom that underlies Merleau-Ponty's notion of historical truth. However, Merleau-Ponty never explicitly states his hopes for this morally founded truth in history and its implications for human freedom, partly because the future is not something we can determine, the possibility for a future of chaos is as possible as one in which the world is filled with peace. How we relate to the past thus becomes crucial to how we act in the future. What we take from history, what we view as historical truth is then a responsibility that we cannot forfeit or refuse, for even refusing to choose is an act of freedom--a choice.

promise for the future and a recognition that we can never have a vantage point of that future that would allow us to predict its outcome.

The notion of advent assures that history, while certainly perspectival, also always carries sedimented meaning as well. As Johnson points out, advent is to be understood as “a promise of events” (Johnson, 1996, 24). This promise of events assures us that while the facts of history will not change, the meaning of history will always be subject to contextualization. If anything remains consistent in our world, it will be our perceptual capabilities. These will insure the only eternity open to human-beings, since perception--primordial perception--will always open us to Being on the hither side of vision and the root of perception, the tacit cogito, on this side of perception.

Once again relying on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty introduces the term *Stiftung* to speak of a creative formation or establishment of a cultural meaning that continues, after its appearance, to have the value of opening up a field for further investigations. An original meaning formation (*Urstiftung*) is sedimented and reactivated in a tradition of retrieval (*Nachstiftung*), in the way, for example that Matisse was nourished by thirty-seven years of living with Cezanne’s oil study entitled *Three Bathers*, which he reports “sustained him spiritually in the critical moments of his career as an artist”(Johnson, 1996, 24).

In the works preceding *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty claims that our clearest access to Being and Truth is to be found in the artwork and specifically in visual works of art. This is a return to the primacy of perception that initiates Merleau-Ponty's philosophical investigations, but a return that is now clearly articulated; it is also a transition to the ontology of *The Visible*

and the Invisible. The problems that remain in the *Phenomenology of Perception* are taken up again, this time with a clearer understanding of the relation of the subject and object of perception. I would suggest that this relation also signifies that of the universal and the particular at a different level of analysis--that of human relationships. The reciprocity that Merleau-Ponty tries to illustrate exists between human beings in the *Phenomenology*, still retains subjective residues, and this leads to an acknowledgement that we can never really know the other, whether this be the other as an individual or as a cultural community. While the analysis of the interdependence of human beings goes a long way towards illustrating that objectification of the other is an insincere mode of communication, and essentially self-deceiving as well, it is not until the later ontology that the nature of reciprocity is flushed and *fleshed* out. Chapter Three will explore the possibilities that I think the notions of Flesh and reversibility offer in terms of my own concerns of identity and culture. However, in concluding the present chapter, I would like to discuss the relation of the work of art to Truth and Being. I think this relationship is crucial in terms of the significance of *The Visible and the Invisible* to my thesis that worlds, like individuals, are not hermetically sealed entities. The relationship that Merleau-Ponty draws between the artwork and the observer reflects the relationship of one individual to another and, I think, of one world towards another.

Concluding Comments

The artwork expresses a certain style of being-in the-world, and by doing so provides a mirror for our own subjectivity. It is because any human creation speaks of the common grounds of our existence that the artwork does not merely transmit the 'other' but speaks to us about ourselves. The dialogical relation that is manifest in our experience of a work of art reflects the relationship between ourselves and others and ourselves and the world. This is why the other, whether as an individual or an other world, is always accessible to me. Worlds cannot be viewed as hermetic localities if each world reflects all the others, but it is important to remember that our differences initiate this 'reflection'.

Merleau-Ponty claims that the artwork--specifically paintings--offer us a privileged access to Being. I state in my thesis argument that Being is a becoming in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and I think that this point needs elucidation. Throughout this work, I have argued that phenomenology as characterized in Merleau-Ponty's work argues for the primacy of perception; only through perception is access to Truth or Being possible. The artwork is able to allow us to 'see' primordial experience in a way that we never have it in the lived world. The artwork can do this, not because it offers us a correspondence or representation with reality, but because it captures the artist's perspective. The Being that is revealed is then the unique style of the artist--her way of seeing and incorporating the world into Flesh.³⁶ However, we are also given access to Being as a generality; in the hollows of the work we see what in our daily lives we forget, we

see the background of all that is invisible--in-the-visible. This invisibility is two-fold: first, we are given access to the horizon that allows anything or anyone to be at all, but only indirectly. Second, by losing ourselves in an other's expression, we are given ourselves in a way that we normally do not have ourselves. Just as the painter loses herself in the act of painting, we lose ourselves in the act of experiencing the painting. This leaving ourselves behind is, paradoxically, a finding ourselves as well. In a conversation with another we have the mute meanings of the silences between words, as well as what is explicitly said. We see the hollows of ourselves reflected in the other. We are given the hidden dimensions of ourselves in the expression of the painter. As Merleau-Ponty says in "Eye and Mind," "man is a mirror for man" (EM, 130).

Expression is our way of opening the world to possibilities and the artist is able to capture this 'opening up' without being aware that she has communicated her Being along with the work. This Being is the truth of her intersubjective, cultural and historical world, it is a style that, while unique, shares in the nature of the world on the other side of self. As we have seen, to be human is to be in a world that precedes individuality but this world is also only ever meaningful *for* an individual. If the world of things are not the Cartesian objects, which I can never truly know, it is because my body gives me access to things as objects similar to itself. Being, like truth, can only be understood relationally, and in this sense Being is a kind of absolute--an absolute teeming with difference. While the

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The nature of Flesh will be explored in Chapter Three of the present work.

artwork can give us a fleeting glimpse of Being, it is also a call back to the genesis of all things, which we reaffirm in every perceptual act. As an act, perception can only ever give us incomplete visions of Truth and Being. The philosopher's role is to call humanity out of the sterility of operational thought to show us that human beings are always works in process that require ever new expressions and recreations.

[Because if] creations are not permanent acquisitions, it is not just that like all things, they pass away: it is also that they have almost their entire lives before them (EM, 149).

If like paintings, human beings are creations as well, they are creations of a shared world of others, as well as self-creations. Merleau-Ponty's metaphysics offers a humanity lost in a nihilistic post-modern factionalism the hope of unity in difference, and while the position is not without its problems, I think it is a position that is viable.³⁷ Being as becoming can only hope to achieve clearer perspectives of Truth. It is humankind's willingness to choose--to exercise its freedom--not despite its limitations but *because* of them that creates new possibilities. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology allows us to reassess our past and to hope for a better future. Whether Merleau-Ponty gives sufficient grounds for how this relationship or dialogue of self and other or even self and the thing is

³⁷ There is the problem of whether an artwork gives us more of an access to Being than other expressions, which I have not explored. However given the way Merleau-Ponty characterizes language and I think music can be understood as a kind of language, the primordial perception of either can only be discovered by reflection, while painting offers a non-reflective access to Being and Truth. I do not completely agree with this privileging of the visual artwork and think that there may be an inconsistency with Merleau-Ponty's formulation of language as

achieved will be pivotal in accessing the merit of his position. Chapter Three will illustrate that the notions of Flesh and reversibility clarify Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity. Identity and culture are not merely limit barriers to who we are but promises for a future that need not be characterized by the incommensurability of differences. Chapter Three will explore Merleau-Ponty's ontology with the hope of resolving some of the difficulties encountered in Merleau-Ponty's epistemological position.

expressive and his relegating it to a secondary *reflective* mode of communication. However, the aims of the present work preclude an in-depth discussion of this problem.

Chapter Three: Interrogation, Reciprocity and Flesh Introduction

One may be born with the potential for a prodigious memory, but one is not born with a disposition to recollect; this comes only with changes and separations in life--separations from people, from places, from events and situations, especially if they have been of great significance, have been deeply hated or loved. It is, thus, discontinuities, the great discontinuities in life, that we seek to bridge, or reconcile, or integrate, by recollection and, beyond this, by myth and art. Discontinuity and nostalgia are most profound if, in growing up, we leave or lose the place where we were born and spent our childhood, if we become expatriates or exiles, if the place, or the life, we were brought up in is changed beyond recognition or destroyed. All of us, finally, are exiles from the past (Sacks, 1995, 169).

The Visible and The Invisible contends that it is at the intersection of plurality and unity that perception occurs and, subsequently, knowledge and identity are forged (VI, 132).³⁸ If there is to be identity, there must be difference (VI, 115). Our recollections are in a sense the junctures at which we are confronted with difference in our personal lives; how we respond in such moments of discontinuity is crucial to our understanding of ourselves and so of our world. My own experience tells me that the world I entered in 1969 may well

³⁸ In Chapter Three, "Interrogation and Intuition" of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty argues against 'essences' and against a coincidence of subject and object. He suggests that in experience the subject and object do not *coincide*, rather, it is in the differences between things (and other selves) that the relation of subject and object, as if in relief, one to the other, is to be understood (VI, 114). See the discussion of this relation of Flesh in Part One of the present Chapter.

have been an alien one in which my autonomy was threatened, at least at first, but this world could not have been completely alien, otherwise, I could never have taken up *its* significance. There had to be a common human ground that allowed for the transition from one world to another without necessitating the choice of one or the other. I think this 'common' ground is the same as that between one individual and another, whether they hail from foreign lands or are partners in a shared community. It is a desire not to overcome otherness but, through communication and expression, to think according to an other and, by doing so, to understand ourselves with more clarity.³⁹ Like works of art, others offer us an access to a unique way of being, a certain style of being; others call us to situate ourselves in new ways and, in heeding this call, we re-create ourselves. My battles with two traditions did not leave me bitter, precisely because I did not choose one *over* the other. I think the distinction is an important one, many of my friends, like T. E. Lawrence, did choose one tradition and, I think, in doing so, lost the possibility of ever finding a place to call 'home'.⁴⁰

³⁹ By overcoming, I mean something close to Plato's notion of *pleonektein* (Plato, 1992, 362c, 38). My understanding of *pleonektein* is that it is the desire to outdo others for one's own benefit. I think Merleau-Ponty's notion of intertwining is meant to signify a relationship with others that is not the desire to outdo or overcome otherness but a desire to think and do according to others. This concept will resurface in Part Three of the present Chapter.

⁴⁰ The dogmatism to preserve a 'culture' can also lead to the annihilation of culture if we do not take into account that cultures--worlds--are never static. The kind of choice I am referring to here is fuelled by the kind of dogmatism that attempts to preserve what in reality no longer exists--a recollection of a place that long ago ceased to 'exist' other than as a nostalgic memory. Growing up in Canada with other immigrants has given me ample opportunity to witness how such choices can manifest an unease and paranoia. Too often this kind of a choice leads to a re-creation of a homeland that does not resemble the reality of a place at all. When I first went to India as an adult, I was shocked by how different it was compared to what I expected. My expectations were based on what the Indian community here in Canada (particularly the Indian community I was raised

My re-vision of a place between two worlds is analogous to how Merleau-Ponty relates our experience of the artwork, that is, when we truly open ourselves to *its* expression. Just as the artwork transmits *its* significance, worlds too have to be engaged to understand *their* significance. However, I would also suggest that we can never leave our past behind in approaching new worlds *or* artworks; if the artwork has something unique to offer us, it is insofar as we appropriate *its* significance and appropriation is never an objective disinterested engagement. Engagement, whether with a world or with an artwork, requires an opening of ourselves to otherness, *without* losing ourselves completely. Cultural 'icons' like artworks open us to other ways of being-in-the-world but only if we *choose* to see *according to* those 'icons'.⁴¹ Like the cave paintings at Lascaux, cultural artifacts are not only things, concepts or ideas but *ways* of inhabiting the world (EM, 126).

The choices we make resonate not only through our own lives but also through the communities we live within and on a grander scale the human world at large.⁴² Truth is a responsibility precisely because it is always a chosen truth.

within in Saskatchewan) had presented as a vision of India. Surprisingly the 'real' India was much more open to change than the 'little' India here.

⁴¹ The point here is that we can also 'choose' to objectify what we 'see', just as we can objectify others and their unique 'worlds'. We can dogmatically refuse to acknowledge the significance that a particular artwork or culture presents, despite what is before us, or to see it purely in terms of our own beliefs and values without taking into account that these too are 'individuals' with their own value. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty illustrates why such a perspective, in this case, historical materialism, deforms what it attempts to analyze (PhP, 171-173).

⁴² One need not look far to see the effects of the kinds of choices I am referring to above. Too often these types of choices are used to justify an isolationist mentality that breeds violence and subjugation.

How we decide to understand our world, and so ourselves, may be an individual choice but it is a choice that effects those around us. And, as I will argue in the following, we cannot choose to understand our world in *any* way we choose. Our world has its own boundaries and it is these limits within which our existences derive their unique meaning. Subjectivity is always anchored--to a world and to a time.

I have argued throughout this thesis that there is a residue of subjectivity that adheres to Merleau-Ponty's epistemological position. I would like to clarify why this is a problem and, by doing so, present the new notion of subjectivity that Merleau-Ponty introduces in *The Visible and the Invisible*. The problem with Merleau-Ponty's position is not that it makes the subject a condition for others or a world, but that this relationship between the subject, others and the world retains a 'bad ambiguity'. This ambiguity is 'bad' because it retains residues of the dualisms that characterize traditional philosophy. I have illustrated that Merleau-Ponty was trying to formulate a position that moved beyond the tradition's dualistic perspective. Merleau-Ponty attempted to mediate between the subject and object of perception, thereby illustrating that there was a crossing or intersection between the traditional dichotomy of subject and object in our experiences. Subsequently, in the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty claims that all other dualities that follow from a polarizing of subject and object are abstractions from our actual experiences. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, what is at stake is not just a new theorization of perception but a re-constituting of our

relationship *with* others and the world. If the relationship between the subject of perception and the object of perception is really one of correlation, then both terms in the process are radically re-defined. However, this aim of clarifying the correlation of subject and object is not actualized by the end of the *Phenomenology*. Merleau-Ponty spends the rest of his life returning to perception to better illustrate what this correlation *means* for philosophy--for human existence. This chapter will illustrate that the return to perception in the ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible* is meant to illustrate not just a new vision of our relationship with things, but also how this perceptual reciprocity between things and the self reflects the reciprocity at the heart of human relationships.

My thesis statement that identities are instituted not just in the confines of *a* world but quite often in the intersection *between* worlds, requires that there be reciprocity not just between individuals but between worlds. I think the ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible* provides the basis for just such a notion of global reciprocity. The notion of Flesh as that relation that exists between the subject and the object of perception and, between self and the other, illustrates that there is a reversibility of sentient and sensible and of self and other in communication. In the following, I will argue that this reversibility pertains not just to individuals in a shared community but universally between all human beings. While in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly make such a claim, I think we can read between the lines of what is written. We can, in the silence of what is not said, read an *ideal* of the universal reciprocity of human relations.

Part One: The Reversibility of the Flesh

The notion of Flesh as it unfolds and enfolds in "Eye and Mind" and *The Visible and the Invisible*, may be understood as cohesion of self and thing, self and other. Flesh is the relation between subject and the world. It is that reversible relation that allows the subject to incorporate the world into her self-understanding. Flesh is not the *ideas* we form of the world but our actual *contact* with the sensible world. As such, Flesh is found in the re-turn to our experience of the primordial world.⁴³ Merleau-Ponty illustrates that this relation is not one between a sentient subject and the object as an in-itself other. Incorporating the world into our Flesh is our experience of things-in-the-world as always overflowing our objective and so reflective descriptions of that experience. In our experience, we are only ever given partial perceptions, whether of things or others; the thing or the other always overflows any vision we have of them (EM, 143).

This relationship is, in one sense, analogous to our relationship with our own bodies. I can touch myself and be *simultaneously* the touched and she who is

⁴³ In Chapter Four of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that language as speech can also be thought of as "an almost carnal existence of the idea," in short, as Flesh (VI, 155). However, this 'carnal idea' is only briefly mentioned. I think that given what Merleau-Ponty has to say about language elsewhere and in his working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, the possibility of language (as *the* source of human expression) containing the same reversibility as Flesh is essential. In Part Three of this Chapter I will return to the possibilities of the reversibility of language and suggest that part of the problem with Merleau-Ponty's circumscription of worlds is that he initially (in his earlier works), relegates language to a reflective mode of communication. I will present a hypothesis that this limiting of language is detrimental to Merleau-Ponty's position. First, this view is in contradiction to the gestural theory of speech. Second, languages need not be viewed as the limit barriers of 'a' world since there is between languages a 'leaking', a reversibility. And finally, I will suggest that in our relations with each other what we are given may well overflow the limits of any particular linguistic system; it is this overflowing that opens up worlds--whether individual worlds or cultural worlds.

touching. In my experience of the sensible other, I am aware of being touched by the thing and of being one who is touching the thing (VI, 133).

The enigma derives from the fact that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. It is a self, not by trans-parency, like thought, which never thinks anything except by assimilating it, constituting it, transforming it into thought--but a self by confusion, narcissism, inherence of the see-er in the seen, the toucher in the touched, the feeler in the felt--a self then, that is caught up in things, having a front and a back, a past and a future....(EM, 124).

This point requires illustration.

There is a fan that swirls cool air around me as I sit and type this page, at any given moment I am not sure if this swirling air is touching me or if it is I that reach out and touch this coolness. It is true that I am not physically reaching out to the cool air around me, but rather am absorbed in the task at hand, trying to reflectively re-construct whether I am touched or touching, and trying to think of the right words with which to write this sensation. In a sense, the cool air does not *touch* me as I touch things or others, yet, I *am* caressed by the cool air and, in turn, am the one *who* caresses; the relation here is a reciprocal one. However, it could be objected that my relation to the thing is unlike the swirling of the fan or a gust of wind. Surely, the thing cannot be said to touch me as I can touch it? The desk does not come alive and caress *my leg*, which is pressed against it; after all it is an inanimate object and cannot 'touch'. Yet, even here *I* can feel the solidity of

my desk or *I* can reverse this relation and feel the desk 'touch' me. In both cases, it is of course *my* subjective experience I am describing. The cool air and the desk are indifferent to whether they touch or are touched. If it is this reciprocal relation, which, while subjective, is the mediation between myself and the world--*is Flesh*--the question of how this could apply to another subjectivity still requires an answer. Other's experiences seem to still be, *for me, their private experiences* and, more problematic, unlike the desk or the cool air from my fan, other people have their own sense of whether they touch or are touched.

Merleau-Ponty uses the handshake to illustrate that in physical contact with an other a similar relation applies (VI, 142). I am aware of my friend's touching me while I shake her hand, as I am aware of her hand as something *I* touch; my friend for her part also shares this experience of touching/touched. But, the real problem here is how we know that this relationship is a reciprocal one? Perhaps my friend feels something totally different than I feel and, in fact, it is likely that the roughness of my hands feel quite different from the smooth and slightly clammy feel of her hands. Our experiences of the same act are completely different. Yet, Merleau-Ponty would still argue that I can feel the smoothness of her hands and, unfortunately, the clamminess as well, because I, like my friend, have a body that can feel roughness, or clamminess, or smoothness. Our handshake, while a subjective experience unique to each of us, crosses over into the other's experience (VI, 193). Like my desk that I can feel touching me, while I touch it, my friend's hand is the smoothness that emphasizes the roughness of my

own hands. It is the *differences* in our mutual touching in the handshake, which awakens my body and hers to the experience of *being* touched. Flesh, is paradoxically the disjuncture at which difference and identity meet. Without any difference, I would experience nothingness, and without this body that opens unto a world of difference, I would not understand my own experiences, which at every turn present me with what is not mine, *as my own*.

If we return to the intersubjective basis of identity in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, we see that even here, identity is grounded within difference. My subjectivity is founded on the differences between myself and things, and my self and others. Subjectivity here cannot be the Cartesian notion of a subject in *opposition* to an object or the subject as creator of a world and others. Without 'otherness' there could not be subjectivity or self. However, does this position escape the initial criticisms of solipsism or incommensurability, which I suggest haunts the *Phenomenology*? And what are we to make of a subjectivity that is defined in terms of what it is not? Does Merleau-Ponty's ontology offer any positive descriptions of the subject? I would argue that this adherence in difference that reflects who we are is defined as both positive and negative; as the *this* that we know ourselves to be but only reflectively *and* by our differences with what we are not. The following will unfold this paradoxical doubling of the self, this re-turn or re-constitution of self that is Self.

Part Two: Visibility and the (In)Visibility of the Tacit Cogito

Throughout "Eye and Mind" and *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty alludes to a mysterious visibility/invisibility of Being. This visibility can be understood as the figure in the figure/background structure of perception (as outlined in Chapter One). On this reading, visibility encompasses all the things we encounter in the world. (In)visibility is the correlate of visibility and the condition of all that is *for us*--invisibility corresponds to the background in the figure/background structure. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty refers to this (in)visibility as a hollow in Being or as an absence that allows us to 'see' the presence of 'what is' (VI, 180/191). Invisibility, as hollow or absence, can be understood as that which overflows our limited perception, and as that which initiates our perception in the first place. The in-visibility here is the horizon of the world that we never fully retrieve and the tacit cogito that is our medium of response to the world's beckoning. The tacit cogito is the momentum that carries us towards the world. Both cases of (in)visibility are the *conditions* of visibility without either being clearly definable in-itself.

Being, as this double relation of absence and presence, is the plenum that is paradoxically suffused by difference. In one sense, Being is an ultimate subjectivity, the self that is not identity, in no one time and no one place but, is all identity, all time, all place, with no beginning and no end (VI, 185). Yet, this would seem to make Being into a monad, or the One of the ancient's One and Many, and Being as irreducible, is definitely not anything *we* can concretely know

or say, at least not conclusively.⁴⁴ Still, we *experience* Being. This Being that we can know, in our limited ways, is re-cognized in the relation between the visible and the (in)visible. This relationship is founded on separation, disjunction and difference (VI, 187). However, a *meaningful* world cannot rest on difference and so there must be *for us* a unity to all this disunity and discordance. This unity between all we do not 'see' and the visible is the Flesh. Flesh, as the relation that pertains to self/other and self/thing illustrates that all identity is conditioned by the differences that characterize Being (VI, 191). "Self presence is presence to a differentiated world..." (VI, 191). While I can stubbornly adhere to my difference, my identity as *opposed* to all otherness, I can only ever truly be an isolated subjectivity if I do nothing and am nowhere--which would mean that I would not exist--not even for myself.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty has already illustrated that even our own self-consciousness relies on a foundation that is irretrievable, except insofar as I act in the world. (See Chapter Two for a discussion of the tacit cogito.) The tacit cogito that underlies my reflective experiences is, as a movement of self towards the world, always a beyond that my reflective thoughts try to re-capture. I never do 'see' Being in all its variety, if for no other reason than that my life is finite and I certainly can never see beyond it. I also never re-trace my own subjectivity to the tacit cogito that evades me as soon

⁴⁴ I think that Being is certainly partially expressible, but we can never say 'this' is Being with any kind of definitiveness.

as I search it out (VI, 192). The tacit cogito, as invisibility, is known by its divergence ("ecart") from my reflective self, which in trying to articulate 'what it is', looks back to its roots in the tacit cogito (VI, 192). The in-the-visible that opens an endless horizon to me is never visible in-itself but always is reflected and so presupposed in my experiences. This correlation of the visible/invisible is what Merleau-Ponty refers to as 'wild Being' or as 'vertical history' in *The Visible and the Invisible*.⁴⁵ Vertical history can be understood as humanities' interrogations of Being. In this reading, our access to Being is through our perceptions and through our attempts at *saying* what Being *is*, and anything we can have to say about Being is then taken up into vertical history--this relationship is a circular one.⁴⁶ While Merleau-Ponty grounds our knowledge of Being in the primacy of perception, it is only in our reflective retreats into being, albeit a hyper-reflective retreat, that Being is revealed. Even the silent re-turn to our

⁴⁵ While Merleau-ponty never explicitly equates these terms I think his analysis of vertical history, which by implication is philosophy as interrogation, is the unfolding of wild Being and so is wild Being (VI, 186). See also Merleau-Ponty's comments on the progressive incompleteness of vertical being which seem to mirror what he says about the unfolding of history in various other works (VI, 178).

⁴⁶ In Part Three of the present chapter, I will explore this circular relationship between perception and expression, though indirectly. I would argue that we cannot explicitly express this relationship and that is why *The Visible and the Invisible* uses such metaphorical language. The problem between experience and expression is, I think, the problem of how to *say* the particular in language that is always universal. How do we express our uniqueness, without generalizing our experience, without relating our experience to others? In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty tries to illustrate that the subjective is rooted in, or established in, the universal, all our expressions are universal in this sense. However, while all expression is universal, every expression is also a unique rendition of the universal. Like the parable of the seven blind men and the elephant, each man touching a different part of the elephant and assuming that 'this is elephant', we each have a unique take on what reality is and each in its limited way is true. But none of these partial views gives us *the* elephant. However, if we put all of these views together we can derive a pretty good idea of what an elephant is. Our expressions are in this way universal but, paradoxically particular, because only ever partial.

perceptual access to the primordial world "will not be the contrary of language" (VI, 179).

But, as *The Visible and the Invisible* illustrates, this language that is not the contrary to silence, is a language of metaphor, we may be able to say Being (partially), but only ever indirectly.⁴⁷ Vertical Being is then a process as well as the concrete things and others that make up our world. As such, our access to Being is limited. However, if we view Being as a vertical history with no tangible beginning and no predictable end, then the advent of *this* history promises a world to be discovered and re-created, it offers a challenge and a responsibility.

The paradoxical relation of self to self and self to other, reflected in our ambiguous and indirect relation to Being, is characterized by encroachment and separation in *The Visible and the Invisible*. Part three of this Chapter will explore the possibilities that the notion of Flesh offers in terms of our relations with others and will put forward the hypothesis that this relation between individuals mirrors that of cultural worlds. In order to illustrate how the relationship between self and the thing, and self and the other is an intertwining, which is paradoxically both a separating from the other and a doubling of the other in our own subjective experiences, I will double back on my own presuppositions in this work. What I propose is similar to the reflective reflections Madison undertakes in "Flesh as Otherness", which, in my case, is to return to my interpretation of Merleau-Ponty, my text (Madison, 1990, 27). If I question Merleau-Ponty, this is because I

question myself. The intentionality that drives my thought is always in need of articulation, not just for others but for myself.

Part Three Soliloquy: The Intertwining

Merleau-Ponty defends the claim that self is always instituted in an intersubjective world. I have presented various objections to why this claim could be a problem in relation to other intersubjective communities--other worlds. However, if we read Merleau-Ponty backwards and go from the ontological position as laid out in *The Visible and the Invisible* to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, we find that it already contains traces of the ontological project. We find a thought struggling to defend a view of reality that respects the Other in all its manifestations of difference.⁴⁸ One of the questions that Merleau-Ponty asked of himself is how do we preserve the particularity, the peculiarity of the world, without sacrificing universal principles, even if only as ideals? We find Merleau-Ponty the philosopher, mirrored in his thoughts, reflected in these pages. What we find is a man interrogating his world, as we through him, interrogate our world. Now, how is it that I, who come from a world (or rather worlds) so different from Merleau-Ponty's world, a time so removed from his, have any connection to this

⁴⁷ In "Did Merleau-Ponty have a Theory of Perception?," Madison notes that even in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, this metaphorical language is evident (Madison, 1992, 90-91).

⁴⁸ The Other here is not just other people but nature as other as well. See "Merleau-Ponty and Deep Ecology" by Monika Langer, for an interesting discussion of the inter-relatedness of culture and nature (Langer, 1990, 115-129). Langer argues that Merleau-Ponty's ontology offers a perspective of nature as other, but given the reversibility thesis, nature is the other that is intrinsic to self realization.

thought--to this subjectivity? I think that this question is similar to the question that initiated this thesis: how is it that worlds can come into contact without an incommensurability of views, especially if they are worlds that share so few lines of intersection? I think the answer is already within these pages, though as yet, it is only indirectly spoken--a mere trace of a solution.

I return to the question--how can I know Merleau-Ponty's thoughts (imperfectly but still...), even at times find myself within those thoughts, thinking according to Merleau-Ponty? Initially, I have some of the historical prerequisite information to understand what Merleau-Ponty is reacting against in philosophy, but still, his language is new to me and at first I feel like I will never be at home in his words. Then suddenly one day, I understand a small section of the text and, after that, *his* significance comes *alive*--the text *speaks* to me. At first, I only listen, I am still unsure of myself in this world that seems so peculiar but paradoxically so familiar. The familiarity arises initially because this thought seems to mirror so many of my own convictions, convictions that I am unable to articulate. Merleau-Ponty gives a voice to what had remained silent in my world. One day, I realize that I am silent no longer, a conversation begins. I start to question this thought that at first seemed so foreign, then so much a mirror of my thoughts, I find myself questioning *its* truth. The conversation turns upon itself and asks of me, "who are you"? And I in turn ask Merleau-Ponty the same question. These questions arise because of a difference of opinion--perhaps, a difference in experiences. But of course, I was initially reading Merleau-Ponty

because his thought reflected many of my own convictions, so it was not just difference that brought us together. Once the conversation begins, I am no longer the same and reciprocally, the text, which at first seemed written in an alien tongue beyond my grasp, has been changed as well, though, admittedly, only *for me*. This conversation too is Flesh, Merleau-Ponty's and mine. Though his responses come from other interlocutors, they still speak with his voice (as do I). As long as I continue the conversation our differences can be reconciled. But if I should find that his voice no longer speaks to me, or if I should stop up my ears and no longer let it speak, or perhaps, just wander off in indifference, then the conversation is over and we return to silence. Incommensurability between us may occur, if I find that Merleau-Ponty cannot answer my objections, if Merleau-Ponty insists that my experience is invalid, since one world, one language, dominates who I am. Incommensurability can only occur if one of us disregards the other's perspective and objectifies the other's difference. But Merleau-Ponty's thought does not end at the *Phenomenology* and, if I respect his thought, as he attempted to respect my difference, then this need not be the end of the conversation.⁴⁹ As long as our mutual interrogation continues there is still something to be said.

This conversation with Merleau-Ponty is an interpretation of his text, an interpretation of the traces of a subjectivity. In order for this to be a good

⁴⁹ Even if the *Phenomenology* were the only work Merleau-Ponty had ever written, we could still take up the inconsistencies of his project and attempt to reconcile his position, only if we never question the work again, can it pass into oblivion and say no more.

interpretation, it should be true to the text. I am led to turn *my text*, this questioning of Merleau-Ponty, back upon myself. Am I true to the text? A doubt sets in--perhaps my thesis is based on a misunderstanding? It could be objected that Merleau-Ponty does not say that I cannot *know* other worlds, maybe even *think* according to other worlds, but that one world, one language, dominates my thinking. Perhaps in my desire to understand the text I have imposed an interpretation that was not Merleau-Ponty's but my own creation. And what does this imply about my access to Merleau-Ponty's world--is this a world *I* have created? No, this cannot be the case, because Merleau-Ponty admits that my only access to others and the world is a subjective perspective and the subjective is always intersubjectively established. Without his difference, the text, I would not have my subjective interpretation, so even if my perspective on his work is wrong--it is not purely *my* construct. However, if I can misunderstand and consequently misinterpret Merleau-Ponty, how can I be sure of any of my thoughts, my experiences, when they all could possibly lead to similar errors? But is this what is said, what is written, what is meant?

Perhaps I can still have access to Merleau-Ponty's thought, although through translation and in our differences. I feel that I know this thought--though admittedly I am only beginning to understand *its* import. I think that if this world were truly other, then I could never take up *its* significance, I, in fact, would have nothing to say to Merleau-Ponty. I think that while in some cases it *may* be true that one world dominates our perspectives, this is not the case with my thinking--

with who I am. And Merleau-Ponty does say that it is our experiences and perceptions that give us any knowledge we have. I am just not sure--the only recourse is to double back to the beginning.

We re-turn to the beginning and start again. Who am I? Perhaps we could come up with a definition of what it is to be Canadian that encompasses my double-sided self? We could come up with a definition that keeps me in one world, while accounting for the residues from my early life. But would this solve the problem, or merely pose other problems that then needed solving? In his ontology, Merleau-Ponty claims that we have access to the world of things and others through a separation between things and others, because of the difference *between*. He also claims that I have myself in the same way, through a constant backward glance at what I can never re-discover completely. I know myself because of this difference and I know the world and others because of difference. But this difference is itself a reflectivity, a re-turn, since in experience, I do not notice this difference, but rather, a relation *of* and *between*. In my everyday life I do not question whether I know myself, the things around me, or the other people that intersect my life, I take it for granted that I have these--*I know them*. And while it is true that this knowing is naïve, there is a truth lurking in that immediate experience that no amount of analysis can definitively overcome. Merleau-Ponty returns to this experience and finds that this immediacy does not need to be overcome. If there is *a* Truth, then it is that our experiences are our only access to ourselves, others and the world.

The problem then becomes what to do with this perceptual truth, how to theorize what seems, at least in a causal schema, to come before any articulation? How to say what *seems* to be before thought, before any words? And, more to the point, can I actually re-turn to a place or time without articulation, without language? The problem that I initially set out to investigate, Merleau-Ponty's view that one world, one language, dominates our perspectives is now re-configured as a problem of whether we can articulate a world at all. If our reflective attempts to do so always re-create *that* world, then in what sense do we have our world, our selves?⁵⁰ The real problem may be that Merleau-Ponty in his earlier writings underestimates the power of language. I think that by suggesting that language is a secondary mode of communication, a reflective mode of communication (as opposed to our immediate access to the perceptual world or the world of the artwork), Merleau-Ponty is forced into a notion of 'worlds' that are distinct linguistic and cultural communities. It is as if faced with a notion of a universal language (i.e Husserl's notion of a universal language) and the larger implications involved in such an endeavor, Merleau-Ponty becomes the champion of particularity--difference.⁵¹ But it is not just in opposition to Husserl that the notion of one world is formulated. As his notion of history illustrates, Merleau-

⁵⁰ The problem here is that every new articulation or expression re-creates the world and we can never revive the initial experience of that world. The world we reflect on is always a remove away from the world we are attempting to articulate.

⁵¹ I think Merleau-Ponty would see the motivation of a universal language as being similar to the motivation of positivism in science and philosophy, both of which he criticizes so vehemently.

Ponty wants to preserve difference without resorting to universals that arise out of enlightenment thought and the hierarchical models of rationality that these positions uphold. Instead of a linear progression of rationality towards an ultimate goal of perfection (or in Hegel's terms, an actualized rationality), Merleau-Ponty champions a vertical movement of history that is *not* hierarchically structured. The ideals of the enlightenment are upheld, but now an attempt is made to vanquish the prejudices that were inherent in enlightenment thought. In Chapter Two, I outline the general contours of a history that is never complete, which is always re-constituted in the context of the present. This bringing of history into the present moves beyond any notions of a linear unfolding of events and assures that who we are today is partially due to our doubling back into the past. This doubling back to the past is always a motivated momentum towards a better future. Before continuing my re-turn or doubling, I think it prudent to explore what I understand to be a contradiction between the gestural theory of language and Merleau-Ponty's claims that language, unlike the artwork or perception, can only ever offer us a reflective perspective.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty lays out the implications of a gestural theory of speech (essentially this is a gestural theory of language). But in the 'aesthetic'⁵² writings he implies that language, unlike the immediate experience of perception and the expression of the artwork, can only

⁵² I am referring specifically to "Eye and Mind" and "Cezanne's Doubt".

ever give us a reflective experience of the other. I think that there is a contradiction between the theory of language as speech and the notion that it is only ever reflective. It is true that language can be reflective; certainly, when I first read Merleau-Ponty, I read his work reflectively. But, I also did not fully understand it until I stopped trying to make out the implications of each word, and instead tried to understand its style. Once I suspended my reflections and actually tried to understand the text's import, I was no longer treating the text as text, but rather, lost myself in its unique expression. I do not think I could have understood the text if I did not allow myself to get lost in its meaning. If it remained for me purely other, then how could I ever have understood what it had to say? While it could be argued that my reading is a purely subjective reading, which would be partially true, I could not have had an interpretation at all, if first, I did not take up the text. My reading of the text was already an encounter with a thought, a certain style of thinking and doing (i.e. writing). If I engaged the text, this thought, it was because it first engaged me; its difference beckoned me to leave myself and to think in a way that I had not thought before. What the text gives me is similar to what Merleau-Ponty implies the artwork gives us--Flesh--the traces of a subjectivity. And, as Madison notes: "The flesh is the trace of the other, the inscription of the other, in the subject's own selfhood--in its very flesh, What 'flesh' 'means' is that *the subject is for itself an other*" (Madison, 1990, 31). While we now have the text and the artwork as expressions of otherness which we can appropriate and so know, this does not eradicate the doubt that lingers in relation

to individual thinkers and their worlds. How does this reciprocity of self and other translate in relation to worlds, if we start with the assumption that worlds like individuals are unique localities--distinct worlds?

The real issue here, once we grant that worlds are distinct, becomes how do we return to the common areas of intersection between worlds? If we acknowledge that worlds are unique localities, what is to stop us from taking the notion of difference to its logical outcome--individuals too, are, each to each--different. What stops difference from becoming incompatibility? Perhaps Merleau-Ponty makes the claim that one world dominates our perspectives because he does not, cannot, know *my* experience, but in this reading *neither can anyone else*. While in my own community there may be some similarities, even here there are differences that cannot be surmounted. In the following I will use a personal example to examine the possibilities for reciprocity in difference--I will try to remove myself from the tangle of my private world and re-turn to a shared world.

My cousin and I are the same age and we grew up together, in Kenya and here in Canada. But her experiences were quite different from mine and, subsequently, so were her choices. While I chose to live *between* two worlds, she chose 'one' world *over* another. I think that her choice betrayed a view of an essential incompatibility between worlds and by implication, between

individuals.⁵³ My cousin and I were both raised in a similar situation, speaking two languages and in the same historical moment and in the same 'place', in fact, for a large part of our childhood, in the same house. However, she chose to see this place as two worlds and I, well, I could not decide initially, and finally decided against either. Other than our common experiences there is very little that unites us today. We are back to a position that acknowledges an inherent solipsism in lived experience, even within the *same* intersubjective world. Perhaps this indicates that we cannot know the other, except by overcoming otherness, by objectifying the other. But is this what my own experience illustrates?

It is true that there is between my cousin and I a tacit argument that, while silent, invades all our dealings with each other, but we are not opposed to each other because of our choices, we are just different. Even the argument between us that is never spoken unites us, it is a joint decision to differ. Only if she or I disown the ties that bind us can we be incompatible--incommensurable. As long as we communicate and express our differences, even tacitly, we can never be complete strangers to each other. While I disagree with the choices she has made and she disagrees with my choices, we still share a common past and I am sure we

⁵³ I realize that this statement sounds very harsh and, in fact, betrays my own prejudices, my own perspective. However, I think my position can be defended. There is something insincere in living in one world, while denying the value of other worlds. I think the kind of choice I refer to in the case of my cousin, can only assert its own predominance, by claiming a superiority for itself; this betrays an attitude that claims 'this' world is better than 'that' one. The implication in such choices is often, though not always, that the chosen world is better--more worthy. My cousin feels as adamantly that my choice was wrong because she thinks that in not choosing my Indian heritage, I was rejecting that heritage. I think that we need not limit our choices to one world or another, in fact, I think an argument can be made that none of us has a distinct world today. We

will share a future. This is because we try to *understand* each other's perspective, even if we choose to disagree. Similarly, as long as I question Merleau-Ponty, I can know his thinking, *his vision*. Incommensurability is only possible if we choose not to hear, not to speak--if we desire not to understand--but to *overcome*.⁵⁴

Merleau-Ponty's claim is not merely false *for me*, it is meaningless, *unless I respond to it*, unless I take up *its* challenge. Even in our differences, because of our differences, we all are mutually implicated--*intertwined*--in existence. While we can choose to reject this relationship, we can only do so in bad faith, by choosing to live *despite* others and this, inadvertently, is choosing to live against ourselves. It is choosing to live against ourselves because in denying the other's expressions meaning, our own expressions lose their meaning; it is to admit that all expression is a monologue that is not heard by anyone, perhaps, not even ourselves.

Concluding Comments: Flesh as the Ethical Other

The only way to objectify our differences is to choose to do so, and the notion that we must, when confronted with two traditions, two cultures, choose one, is already a choice to objectify the other culture. It is in the final analysis to

are all influenced by other worlds, even if only in small ways. Certainly my cousin's life here in Canada cannot remove itself from this non-Indian context or fail to be effected by it.

⁵⁴ In Chapter Two of *The Politics of Postmodernity*, Madison points out that understanding and application are mutually implicated in Gadamer's hermeneutics (Madison, 2001, 46). I think if we view application as tied to our understanding of each other and of different worlds, then the problems of incommensurability can be significantly reduced.

refuse to see, to hear and to speak. I do not think that politically this option open to all of us to refuse the other or overcome the other, is acceptable. In relation to my thesis, I think there is insincerity in assuming that any one culture can define us once and for all.⁵⁵ Once we have come into contact with an other culture to see it as something alien is, in fact, to refuse the significance of the other and in turn to be blind to our own world. We only limit ourselves by limiting others. Because this world always implicates us in what is other, in fact, as Merleau-Ponty so vividly illustrates with the notion of Flesh, who we are is reflected in how we see others. If there is an intertwining, a chiasm, of and between self and other, then difference need not imply incommensurability. Difference is only incommensurable if we chose to see the other only in terms of our own values, which is, in effect, not to see others as they are for themselves. It is between our own views and the views of others--in a borderland between the two different perspectives--that reciprocity is possible. Reciprocity is not coincidence, but rather a form of communication, a dialogue that listens and speaks, and dialogue requires equal participants if it is not to disintegrate into monologue.

The larger implications in assuming that one culture defines us as individuals, is that this view may lead to the kind of political choices that glorify difference at the expense of all universal values. I agree that there certainly is a uniqueness of individuals and cultures and, as Merleau-Ponty illustrates, this

⁵⁵ My thesis starts out with the perspective of the immigrant and thus always involves more than one world.

difference is a necessary component to our own self-understanding. However, I think that historically difference has been implicated in a hierarchical valuation (i.e. an attitude that represents a view of "this culture is more 'advanced' than that one"). This perspective requires that difference refers to hermetic worlds, it assumes an absolute difference. We can only judge another society as inferior if we refuse to see *its* significance, just as we can only ever subjugate an other if we choose to understand the other only in terms of our own values. Throughout his life as a philosopher, Merleau-Ponty tries to reconcile our essential differences with universal ideals, his "presumptive universal" (PrP, 31). What is at stake in the interrogation that represents Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, his philosophy, is the value we afford to others, the respect and dignity we either chose to give or to withhold from the other. G. B. Madison, in a lecture to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre at McMaster University, points out the ways a glorification of difference can be used as a political ploy to undermine the essential rights we all are entitled to as fellow human beings.⁵⁶ Asserting our essential differences as reasonable cause to undercut the freedom that should be allotted to each of us, no matter in which world or at what time is, I think, just plain wrong. However, as Madison notes, trying to enforce a universal notion of human rights that disregards our differences, is just as wrong (Madison, 1999, 22). Madison's point here is that universal values have to be adapted to different

⁵⁶ This commemorative lecture, given at McMaster University in 1999, is unpublished. I would like to thank Dr. Madison for allowing me to use it in this work.

cultures--different worlds. As I state earlier in this work, truth is a choice. How we chose to understand our differences will be reflected in the respect we give others, and in turn the respect we are given by others.

If we chose to view 'worlds' as distinct localities, which may well transform themselves within their own boundary limits but not in relation to other worlds, we essentially circumscribe our world to a 'space' that in reality has no validity. This view has no validity because the only way a world could remain distinct is if it in no way interacted with other worlds. If it remained silent and chose not to hear or see the difference that surrounded it--or it chose to objectify the other. Culture is then never an isolated occurrence; any culture or tradition owes its debt to all the various influences that have given it its unique flavour. However, our expressions of culture are our distinct ways of 'singing our world' and our song is always unique to each of us, as individuals and as worlds. Identities may well be intersubjectively instituted but, as the reversibility thesis illustrates, this 'foundation' is never static. If we have identity, it is because we are continually confronted with difference. Even our moments of self questioning are based on this relation of reconciling difference: who we are, as opposed to who we would like to be or who we thought we were. Our lives are a process that always implicates otherness. How we choose to imagine our world will determine whether we choose to view others with reciprocity or, in spite of ourselves, to overcome otherness and deny our own difference. We can only objectify the other, or subjugate the other, by first denying our adherence in otherness. And this

is in the final analysis, to live a lie. As Merleau-Ponty illustrates, who I am is dependent on how I view all the others I share this life with, I certainly can choose to live in my own private world but this already betrays an acknowledgement that my world intersects all the others. I have to actively disengage myself *from* otherness in order to claim my own private world. While it is true that my world is subjective, this subjectivity that I am, is firmly anchored in a world of otherness that paradoxically gives rise to my unique perspective: subjectivity is intersubjectivity.

Merleau-Ponty, like Plato before him, adheres to the dictum "know thyself" and like Plato before him, Merleau-Ponty realizes that I can no more know myself completely than I can know the other. This opacity that surrounds our lives and holds us back from our selves is also a hope that we will keep asking the question; our interrogation is not futile, if we understand that it never ceases--not even in death. Who am I? My hope is that this is a question that can never be answered definitively. My hope is that I will always be open to the Other that calls on me to question, what in my everyday life, I take for granted. Because I know that as long as I really listen, really try to 'see', the other will always offer me a new perspective, a new way of thinking and living the world. And as long the question that I am, remains a question waiting to be answered, there will always be something more for me to say, something left to be done. "No question goes toward Being: if only by virtue of its being as a question, it has already

frequented Being, it is returning to it" (VI, 120). Who am I? That is a question that can never be answered once and for all.

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