IMAGINING BODIES WITH MERLEAU-PONTY

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ABSTRACT

The imagination plays a central role in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. In his earlier works, the imagination is shown to be the creative ability of the body to have a sense of space and motility in terms of which we are able to make sense of the world. In his later works, the view that the human body is a dynamic and creative process of realizing possibilities is extended to ontology; Being is shown to be a continual dissemination of meaning through the medium of 'flesh'. Thus Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, from start to finish, is a philosophy of the imagining body.

This thesis begins with a discussion of imagination theory in order to show that there are four kinds of imagining: (i) perceptual imagining, (ii) aesthetic imagining, (iii) fanciful imagining, and (iv) elemental imagining. It is shown how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the imagination covers each kind, and how his analysis is superior to those of many other philosophers. Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body is then examined in the light of contemporary research, with an emphasis on the nature of the body schema. The body is shown to be a creative medium for engaging with the world, and to be the basis for the four kinds of imagining. Thus the imagination theory of Merleau-

Ponty is a theory of the imagining body. Finally, the role of the imagining body in ontology is explored. It is shown that Being is itself dynamic and creative, and expresses itself through the medium of 'flesh'. The imagining of Being, however, finds its ultimate expression in the imagining body as it imagines itself in perception, aesthetic production, fanciful thinking and the interpretation of elemental images.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

To Elizabeth,
whose love and imagination
know no bounds.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used to refer to Merleau-Ponty's texts. Wherever possible, I have used the same abbreviations for both the original French texts and the standard English translations. References to Merleau-Ponty's French texts always end with an 'F'. All italics and quotation marks found in quotes throughout the thesis are from the original source unless otherwise indicated.

Works by Merleau-Ponty in English

AD *Adventures of the Dialectic.* Tr. Joseph Bien. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

CAL *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language.* Tr. Hugh Silverman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

HT *Humanism and Terror.* Tr. John O'Neill. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

IM "On Sartre's *Imagination.*" In *Texts and Dialogues: Maurice Merleau-Ponty.* Ed. Hugh Silverman and James Barry. Tr. Michael B. Smith. Humanities Press: New Jersey, 1992.

IPP *In Praise of Philosophy.* Tr. John Wild and James M. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963.

PP *Phenomenology of Perception.* Tr. Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.

PrP *The Primacy of Perception.* Tr. James M. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

POW *The Prose of the World.* Ed. Claude Lefort. Tr. John O'Neill. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

SNS   *Sense and Non-Sense.* Tr. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

S   *Signs.* Tr. Richard McCleary. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

SB   *The Structure of Behavior.* Tr. Alden L. Fisher. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.

TFL   *Themes From the Lectures at the College de France 1952-1960.* Tr. John O'Neill. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

VI   *The Visible and the Invisible.* Ed. Claude Lefort. Tr. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

Works by Merleau-Ponty in French

ADF   *Les aventures de la dialectique.* Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

RCF   *Maurice Merleau-Ponty a la Sorbonne: Résumé de ses cours établi par les étudiants et approuvé par lui-même. Bulletin de Psychologie* no. 236, vol. 18, no. 3-6 (November 1964); notes on courses delivered between 1949-51.

HTF   *Humanisme et Terreure.* Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

IMF   "L'Imagination," *Journal de Psychologie Normale et Pathologique* 33 nos. 9-10 (1936), pp. 756-61.

INF   "Un inédit de Merleau-Ponty," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* no. 4 (1962), pp. 401-9.

IPPF   *Eloge de la philosophie et autres essais.* Collection Idées. Paris: Gallimard, 1960 (first edition 1953).

EMF   *L'Oeil et l'esprit.* Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

PPF   *Phénoménologie de la perception.* Paris: Gallimard, 1945.

PrPF   *Le Primat de perception et ses conséquences philosophiques.* Grenoble: Cynara, 1989.

POWF *La Prose du monde*. Ed. Claude Lefort. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

ROF *Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant*. Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaire, 1967 (first edition 1951).

TFLF *Résumés de cours, Collège de France 1952-1960*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

SNSF *Sens et non-sens*. Paris: Nagel, 1966 (first edition 1948).

SF *Signes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

SBF *La structure du comportement*. 2nd. ed. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France (first edition 1942).

VIF *Le visible et l'invisible: suivi de notes de travail*. Ed. Claude Lefort. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A. Imaginative Embodiment

Every year on one of the hottest weekends of the summer, the small and quiet town of Dundas, Ontario, is transformed into a festival of sound and light. The usually quiet main street of shops and cafés becomes a stage for buskers who sing and dance, juggle balls, swallow knives, and perform various tricks with playing cards, bicycles, chains and torches. During these festivals, off in a quieter corner of the street, one can find a mime silently displaying her art. She is dressed in a simple black shirt and black leotards, her face is painted white with exaggerated make-up on her lips and around her eyes, and her hair is tied back into a pony-tail. As if enthralled by her own embodiment, she moves in sweeping gestures, creating the illusion of a wall or a tiger, magically changing her immediate surroundings into a palace with kings and queens, romantic encounters and executions, or into a jungle fraught with vicious animals and dense foliage. With simple gestures, as if by a secret inner-communication, the mime entrances the onlookers and brings them all into her world, leaving the sounds of the street behind.

How is it that the mime, so simple in dress and appearance, can communicate so clearly and 'audibly' to her

audience? The observer can tell instantly what the mime is experiencing--he feels her fear and senses the approaching tiger, he shares her lust for power or her disdain for the criminal. There seems to be, in each of us, a unique language of the body on which the mime skillfully plays like the keys of a piano. By stretching her body as she pulls down on the imagined rope, she makes us feel as if we are climbing the rope towards the sky. By moving her hands to the left while her abdomen moves to the right, she causes us to feel her imaginary movement along a wall. The mime is aware of a number of gestures that bear an immediate sense for us, and by using these gestures she is able to tell a story without making a sound.[1]

The mime is perhaps the most skilled at the art of creative gesture and embodiment. But the art of embodiment can be found in every person. There is not a single word spoken without a background of embodiment. Every statement occurs on the backdrop of a blush, a flush of anger or jealousy, or a relentless look of disinterest and formality.[2]

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[1]   For a good introduction to mime, see Maravene Sheppard Loeschke, *All About Mime* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1982).

[2]   We notice the importance of gesture for ordinary discourse in situations where this level of communication is no longer possible, such as when we talk on the phone. Unable to reinforce our statements with gesture, we distort and exaggerate our voice, tone, and even the content of our statements in order to ensure that communication is achieved. The telephone reduces the communicative experience to sound, causing us to draw from this medium much more than usual. A similar 'hypersensibility' is developed by people lacking one of the main senses, such as a blind person with an acute sense of smell or sound, or a deaf person with an acute sense of sight in lipreading.

Many philosophers have called attention to the role of embodiment in establishing perlocutionary meaning that can often contradict the literal meaning of a statement. It seems that from birth we are submerged in an ocean of silent meanings that we use to relate to others and to the world.

Children seem to be especially attuned to the silent mediation of the body. As children, we experience the world as a mixture of magic and reality, of work and play. This is no doubt due to the fact that children are in the process of learning a number of bodily habits that adults have already learned and use without explicit thought or effort. The child lives in a world that is new at every turn, and she learns quickly to adjust her body in response to her environment.

The mature adult, by contrast, often leaves behind her childhood 'wonder' concerning the body to focus on more immediate concerns: school, work, relationships, et cetera. The body's magic falls into the background, operating at a tacit level that is more or less ignored and forgotten.

We are surprised, then, when we see the mime turning our mundane embodiment into a work of art. We are led into the mime's story by the way that the she makes us feel our bodies in relation to gravity and the spatial and temporal environment. Not only does the mime make use of bodily language in order to convey a story or an image, but she also invites us to re-explore our own bodies and the limits of embodied experience.

The philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty is a philosophy of embodiment. At a time when consciousness was being lauded as the source for all meaning, Merleau-Ponty explored the possibility that consciousness is itself informed by the body. At the root of conscious experience is an embodied life that consciousness does not create. Not only does the body impose certain limits on our projects, but the body already influences how consciousness is able to perceive and think about reality in such a way as to create these projects. From his earlier writing on perceptual experience to the later ontology of flesh and vision, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is a celebration of the body.

By imagining bodies with Merleau-Ponty, we are invited to consider the art of mime as a general art that we all perform, whether explicitly or tacitly, well or badly, and as a basic structure of every manner of human existence. Through the movements and gestures of the mime, we begin to see the truth and the beauty of our own embodiment. The body is the basis for philosophy and it grounds the possibility of thinking, speaking, and freedom. Philosophy begins in wonder, and it takes root in mime.

B. Overview

There are numerous essays and texts describing Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body. Many of these texts were published in the 1960s following Merleau-Ponty's untimely

death in 1961. Around this time, Merleau-Ponty was of
interest to scholars primarily as a phenomenologist following
in the footsteps of Edmund Husserl or as a proponent of the
existentialism that he developed with Jean-Paul Sartre. Most
of the secondary literature from this period tends to
interpret Merleau-Ponty in terms of his existentialism and
phenomenology.[3]

In the wane of a philosophy of consciousness and the
rise of postmodern philosophy, many contemporary philosophers
have found a new significance in Merleau-Ponty's writings. It
has been discovered that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy contains
ideas that parallel or surpass many of the prophets of
postmodernity: the need to decenter the thinking subject as
the source of truth, the essential mediation of the world by
means of symbolic structures, the need to consider underlying
forces that influence our understanding of reality, and the
need to reconsider the nature of the body and its relation to
thought and human freedom.[4]

It is in the wake of this interest in Merleau-Ponty's
philosophy that I propose to reconsider his philosophy of the

[3]   See, for instance, John Bannan, *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*
(New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967); Mary Rose Barral, *Merleau-Ponty: The Role of the Body-Subject in Interpersonal Relations*
(Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965); Remi Kwant, *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne
University Press, 1963); Richard Zaner, *The Problem of Embodiment* (The
Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).
[4]   Some good examples are Gary Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981); Martin Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and
Renaud Barbaras, *Le tournant de l'expérience* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1998).

body. In particular, I wish to disclose the body as a creative medium for engaging with the world. This requires not only an examination of his philosophy of embodiment, but a study of his theory of imagination. Since Merleau-Ponty wrote very little about the imagination,[5] this task is made doubly hermeneutical, as the theory of imagination to be found in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy must be assembled out of the many references to the imagination scattered throughout his works. It is my intention to show that within his theory of embodiment and his later ontology of the flesh there is a unique theory of the imagination in terms of creative embodiment and the flesh of the world.

There is surprisingly little written about Merleau-Ponty's theory of the imagination. Though he is mentioned in many general studies (such as Richard Kearney's *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern*[6]), there are very few books or articles devoted exclusively to him. Two exceptions are Richard McCleary's *Imagination's Body* [7] and Glen Mazis's *"La Chair et L'imaginaire*: The Developing Role of Imagination in

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[5]   The only study by Merleau-Ponty devoted exclusively to the imagination is a rather favorable review of Sartre's earliest work on the imagination (called simply *L'imagination*) which appeared as "L'imagination," *Journal de Psychologie normale et Pathologique* 33 (1936), pp. 756-61; it is translated into English by Michael B. Smith as "On Sartre's *Imagination*" in *Texts and Dialogues: Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Hugh Silverman and James Barry (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992).
[6]   Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), Chapter Five.
[7]   Richard McCleary, *Imagination's Body* (Washington: University Press of America, 1986).

Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy."[8] But both of these works are limited in a number of ways. McCleary focuses on the role of the imagination in education, and provides little discussion of the details of Merleau-Ponty's theory. Mazis's article is based on what I shall be arguing is a misreading of Merleau-Ponty. He claims that Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* contains an imagination theory similar to that of Jean-Paul Sartre, in which the imagination is radically separate from perception. It is only in Merleau-Ponty's later works, especially in *The Visible and the Invisible*, that Mazis finds a unique theory of imagination that is at the heart of perception.[9]

My thesis suggests an alternative reading of Merleau-Ponty. I argue that there is a consistent philosophy of the imagination to be found throughout Merleau-Ponty's entire career. This theory of the imagination begins in *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, with the description of the body as a creative medium for existence. Rather than separating the imagination from perception, as Mazis interprets him, Merleau-Ponty places the imagination at the heart of perception and all other modes of human existence. The imagination appears in Merleau-Ponty's

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[8] Glen Mazis, "*La Chair et L'imaginaire*: The Developing Role of Imagination in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy," *Philosophy Today* 32 (1988), pp. 30-42; see also Françoise Dastur, "Perceptual Faith and the Invisible," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 25 (1994), p. 47.

[9] This point and my rebuttal are discussed at length in Chapter Three, Section D.

earlier works as the creative aspect of the body. Merleau-Ponty focuses on the body schema as a sense of unity for the body and its active engagements with the world. The development of the body schema is shown to involve a dialectic between the use of acquired habits and abilities and the creative renewal of those habits in the light of novel scenarios. The imagination is the creative pole of this dialectic, allowing the body to transcend its physiological drives and to turn its environment (*Umwelt*) into a world for human action (*Welt*).[10]

Throughout much of his career, Merleau-Ponty explores the role of creative embodiment in the acquisition of language, in social and political engagements, and in the creation of works of art. Whether one is creating a sculpture or attempting to affect the course of history, one is surrounded by a world that cannot be completely understood or controlled. In all of these encounters, one is limited by the body which always conceals a part of the environment. But the body is also one's access to these spheres of human life, providing a background and a means for engaging with reality. Thus throughout these works, Merleau-Ponty remembers the role of the imagining body.

Most significant to our study of the imagining body is Merleau-Ponty's latest work, *The Visible and the Invisible*.

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[10]   John Russon, "Embodiment and Responsibility: Merleau-Ponty and the Ontology of Nature," *Man and World* 27 (1994), p. 298.

This project was cut short by his death in 1961, but thanks to the editorial work of Claude Lefort we have today the working draft and additional notes to this work in progress. Within these pages can be found a novel ontology based on what Merleau-Ponty calls "flesh" (*la chair*, VI 133/VIF 175). Rather than separating subjectivity from objectivity, Merleau-Ponty claims that everything is made of the same flesh, and that subjectivity is only a fold or a tuft in this elemental substance. Flesh is not a kind of atom or *Urstoff*; rather, it establishes the various differentiations of Being and the reversibilities that make up our experience of the world. By means of his ontology of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty further decenters the philosophy of consciousness from the philosophy of the imagining body to the imaginative differentiation of Being in the form of flesh. The imagining body is grounded in a deeper sense of imagining, the imagining of Being as it creatively divides itself, constituting the world with all of its levels of meaning.

I have attempted to capture the imagining body and its relation to flesh in the pages that follow. The second chapter involves a brief discussion of imagination theory in the writings of selected philosophers. I argue that the imagination cannot be reduced to any particular function or aspect of existence, and that it is better to approach the imagination by means of a genealogy. I proceed to provide a brief genealogy of the imagination by focusing on its role in

Modern philosophy and Romanticism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics and postmodernism.

The third chapter provides an analysis of Merleau-Ponty's own theory of imagination, and demonstrates how it accounts for many different kinds of imagining. Perception, for instance, is shown to involve not absolute shades of colour or clearly defined objects, but a number of sensuous dimensions that open and close upon one another and that are discerned with the help of the imagination. As a product of the imagination, the aesthetic object is a "sensible par excellence," displaying the dimensional character of sensation in exemplars that are carved out of marble or traced upon a canvas. Fanciful thinking is shown to be interrelated with perception, acting as an extreme case of free thought while remaining bound in some ways to perception. Finally, the imagination is explored in its relation to elemental images, such as the profound images of poetry and dreams, in order to illustrate the manner in which these images, far from being mere subjective creations, ground us within a world that already imagines itself into being.

The fourth explores in detail Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment, beginning with the traditional theories to which Merleau-Ponty was responding. The phenomenal body is described in terms of a body schema that is neither a psychological construct nor an instinctual mechanism, but an

open medium for engaging with the world. I relate Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the body schema to current studies in cognitive science and psychology.

In chapter five, I apply my findings concerning the body schema in chapter four to the question of the imagination. I begin by showing how the body can be conceived as an imaginative medium, and then apply the imagining body to the various forms of imagining developed in Chapter Three. The imagining body is shown to be essential for each of the areas discussed in chapter three: perception, aesthetic production, fanciful thinking and the interpretation of elemental images.

Finally, in Chapter Six, the concept of flesh is shown to contain an additional form of imagining on the part of Being itself as it differentiates itself into the world of sense. We will discover in what ways it makes sense to talk about an imagination of Being, and how this imagining grounds the imagining of the human body. It is not only the body, but Being itself, which opens itself onto a future of perpetual renewal and creative development. To imagine bodies with Merleau-Ponty, we inevitably find ourselves imagining Being.

CHAPTER TWO: GENEALOGY OF IMAGINING

A. Introduction

In order to develop a philosophy on the basis of the imagining body, it is imperative that we first understand what is to be meant by the term 'imagination'. It is difficult to determine what exactly is meant by the imagination. In ordinary language, it is used to refer to many different things. The most obvious use of the word is to refer to mental imaging, such as is found in daydreams and fanciful thinking. It applies not only to those dreams and images that we create voluntarily, but to the experience of many elemental images that seem to bear a meaning of their own, conditioning the affective response of the dreamer. Thus the imagination is often attributed not only to fanciful thinking, but also to the profound images that are experienced in dreams and expressed in poetry.

But the list does not stop there. We often attribute the imagination to acts of artistic creation. Artists, at times, have been seen as creative geniuses who present novel ideas in a variety of media, including paint, sound, and the built environment. And at times it is even attributed to ordinary experiences, such as when a person performs a particular action in a unique way. It has even been argued (as we will see shortly) that the imagination is essential to every act

of perception, however ordinary and simple. The imagination suggests a number of different phenomena that the philosopher is at pains to enumerate and describe.

Peter Strawson describes the imagination as having three functions: mental imaging, invention and false belief. He claims that any theory that focuses on only one of these functions is too narrow.[11] But it is not sufficient simply to enumerate these functions; one must also consider whether these functions contradict each other. Mary Warnock shows that there is a tension, for example, between the imagination as an aid to perception and as an aid to the creation of novel meaning. She writes:

> We use imagination in our ordinary perception of the world ... So imagination is necessary ... to enable us to recognize things in the world as familiar, to take for granted features of the world which we need to take for granted and rely on, if we are to go about our ordinary business; but it is also necessary if we are to see the world as significant of something unfamiliar, if we are ever to treat the objects of perception as symbolizing or suggesting things other than themselves.[12]

How is it, asks Warnock, that the same imagination which facilitates mundane perception can also be the source for novel forms? Thus we have the problem not only of containing a variety of senses in the same definition, but of reconciling what seem to be incompatible meanings.

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[11]   Peter Strawson, "Imagination and Perception," *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 45 and 64.

[12]   Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), p. 10.

Along with Richard Kearney, I reject the search for a complete definition of the imagination. There is no single function of the imagination that can be used to make sense of its other meanings and functions. But this does not mean that we are left with no meaning at all. To refuse to admit that there is a definitive ground for truth need not suggest that we are left with a total flux or a groundless concept. Kearney's suggestion is that the different meanings of the imagination can be understood to bear what Wittgenstein described as "family resemblances" in which there is no single meaning connecting the members of the group though there are many similarities that overlap one another.[13] My brother might have my mother's chin, and I my father's, yet we might both have the eyes of a distant grandparent. Taken as a whole, a stranger is quick to recognize the family resemblance I bear to my brother even though he may be at a loss to point out specific family characteristics. In a similar way, we can find family resemblances among the different functions of the imagination. By searching for similarities and sifting through contradictions, we can start to develop a general theory of the imagination.

The following sections involve a brief genealogy of the imagination. I have decided to limit my study to only a few key figures in order to focus on some of the common themes

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[13] Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, p. 15; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), Para. 67. See also VI 110-11/VIF 149.

that keep reappearing in the philosophy of the imagination.[14] These themes are that the imagination plays an essential role (i) in perception, (ii) in the production and appreciation of aesthetic objects, (iii) in fanciful thinking, and (iv) in the interpretation of elemental images.

The genealogy sketched out here will begin with the Modern era of Western philosophy and its culmination in Romanticism. Next will come psychoanalysis and phenomenology, both of which played an essential role in the formation of Merleau-Ponty's ideas. Finally, the imagination found in philosophical hermeneutics and postmodern thought will be considered.

B. Modern Philosophy and Romanticism

Modern philosophy is generally understood to involve European philosophy from the seventeenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. During this time, many philosophers sought an apodeictic ground for knowledge that would find in philosophy the firm foundation that would subsequently be attributed to the physical sciences.

Within this tradition, the imagination was seen primarily as an aid to epistemology, especially in the area

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[14] Two important influences on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the imagination that are *not* covered, for instance, are G.W.F. Hegel and Henri Bergson. Both were essential in the development from Modern philosophy to phenomenology. I have decided, for the sake of brevity, to focus merely on Modern philosophy and phenomenology, and not the period of transition between them.

of perception. It is the imagination that allegedly allows for the synthesis of sensible experience into a unified and meaningful whole. Only after sense experience is prepared or shaped by the imagination can the sensible world be experienced in a meaningful way.

David Hume, for example, saw the imagination as an important aid to perception. He claimed that the impressions of sensation are copied in the mind to form images of memory or imagination, so that an image is essentially a faint version of an impression. He writes: "[T]hose perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions* .... By *ideas* I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning .... Impressions and ideas differ only in their strength and vivacity."[15] For Hume, the lack of an essential difference between images and impressions meant that there is no apodeictic knowledge concerning reality. All knowledge, he claimed, is based on associations made between impressions and ideas by means of the imagination. It is the imagination, and not a predetermined order of reality, that makes possible the illusion of a unified world of experience (80).

Despite the fact that it frequently "changes its ideas" (10), the imagination is also capable of establishing meaningful (albeit fictional) associations among impressions

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[15]   David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), pp. 1 and 19; see also p. 8.

on the basis of which the individual subject can live 'as if' in a world of certainty. This functioning of the imagination, however, follows a logic that is hidden from clear reflection, which itself emerges from "unknown causes" (7). The imagination is ultimately a mystery of human psychology that acts as an "associating quality" and a "gentle force" (10) on the mind. In spite of the absence of absolute truths the thinking subject is able to turn these associations into a coherent picture of reality and a sense of community.

Immanuel Kant's reading of Hume led him to turn Hume's defeat into a triumph. Rather than leaving the project of Modernity ship-wrecked on a psychological mystery, Kant changed it into the very ground of apodeictic knowledge. Transcendental subjectivity, as opposed to empirical subjectivity, became the focus of Kant's inquiry as the contributor of the objectivity of objects. Thus his claim to having inaugurated a Copernican revolution by basing the objectivity of reality on the subjectivity of the transcendental subject. [16]

Central to Kant's transcendental philosophy is the transcendental imagination. Unlike the empirical imagination, which combines known perceptions under empirical concepts, the transcendental imagination is the source of objective

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[16] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. J.M.D. Meiklejohn (Rutland, Vermont: Everyman's Library, 1991), p. 14. For a good discussion concerning Kant's theory of imagination, see Rudolf Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

knowledge. He explains that while the faculty of sensation provides the content for knowledge and the faculty of understanding provides the concepts, it is the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) that forges the form for each. The imagination provides an a priori form for experience by producing schemata that prepare the sensible manifold for cognition. A transcendental schema is not a 'weak impression' but "a rule for the determination of our intuition" (119) and thus is not subject to the uncertainties of psychological powers. Though the actual workings of the imagination remain, for Kant, an utter mystery, the form for experience and cognition that it produces is apodeictic.

The transcendental imagination obtains a unique role in the contemplation of aesthetic objects. Kant claimed that the imagination finds, within a harmonious form, an opportunity to work freely over the sensible manifold without the restriction of concepts. The imagination discovers in the aesthetic object a "purposiveness without purpose"[17] which allows it to engage in a free-play that is not bound by concepts.

Romanticism involved the demise of the Modern subject with the influences of history, emotion and art on the thinking subject. This demise, however, was not the result of Skepticism but of having overinflated the power of

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[17] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, tr. J.M. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), Book 1, Section 10.

transcendental subjectivity. In particular, Samuel Taylor
Coleridge emulated the transcendental imagination as the
imitation of God's act of creation, an expression of our free
control over nature and of the artist's unlimited power to
express. The imagination at work in perception, for instance,
is considered to be "a repetition in the finite mind of the
eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[18] Rather than
having the imagination mimic a static order of reality pre-
ordained by God, Coleridge identified the imagination with
God's creativity. The individual Kantian subject who formed
the possibility for objective knowledge is inflated into a
creative genius who mimics the acts of the Divine Creator.

From Hume to Coleridge the imagination had emerged from
the depths of empirical psychology and risen to the heights
of divine creation. For all three philosophers, the
imagination played a central role in perception as well as in
the production and appreciation of aesthetic forms. There was
also, in Hume's theory, a concern for the image's ability to
deviate from ordinary logic and create illusions. It is this
concern that became prominent in the next stage of the
genealogy when the powers of transcendental subjectivity came
to be plagued by the powers of the unconscious.

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[18]   Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. I, ed. J.
Shaw-cross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), p. 202.

C. Psychoanalysis

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the Modern confidence in the individual subject and the Romantic praise for the creative genius began to wane. No longer content to rely on the auspices of waking consciousness, intellectuals began to take heed of the hidden sources of the unconscious that foil the quest for apodeictic knowledge. They started to think of the imagination not merely as a psychological mystery, but as an epistemological menace. The ability of the imagination to present reality as other than it is, rather than enriching perception, became seen as a potential mask for unconscious desires that threatened the unity and harmony sought by Modern philosophers.[19]

Amongst the obvious examples of psychoanalysts and critics of reason--Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Karl Jung[20]--is Jacques Lacan, whose seminal essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,"[21] proved to be of great interest to Merleau-Ponty. Lacan argued that the development of the

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[19] See, for instance, Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, ed. J. Strachey, tr. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1963), p. 17.

[20] J.M. Cocking provides a brief history of the imagination which gives special attention to the stage of psychoanalysis. He concludes, however, that the imagination must not be seen as essentially concealing but as a neutral faculty that is capable of disclosure as well as concealment. *Imagination: A Study in the History of Ideas* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 281.

[21] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in *Écrits*, ed. and tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977).

ego is based on the illusory functioning of the imagination. This is seen especially in the case of the mirror image. At the age of six months, a child ceases being merely amused by his mirror image and comes to identify with it. "We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*," says Lacan, "in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (ibid., p. 2). By identifying with the image, the child is enabled to become aware of himself as seen by others, and ultimately to prepare himself for social existence. But the externalization of self characteristic of the mirror stage also establishes a division within the self that the child never manages to overcome. Lacan writes:

> The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation --and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic--and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (Ibid., p. 4)

By identifying with the image in the mirror, the subject comes to witness his subjectivity in external form. But in the process of this identification there is a split between the new spectral identity and the immediacy of the will--a split that the subject will never overcome. It is on the basis of this split, and the subject's living by virtue of

such fantasies, that neurosis is made possible (ibid., p. 6-7).

Psychoanalysis, however, need not be so pessimistic about the human condition, nor need it be restricted to an analysis of the various ways that the unconscious masks the underlying drives of the human soul. A more positive diagnosis was provided by Gaston Bachelard. He claimed that along with the possibility of concealment, the images emerging from the unconscious can also provide the source for novel meanings.[22] He argued that there are essentially two sides to an encounter with an image from the unconscious. On the side of the image, there is not an absolute sense content or mental picture, but a salient quality that strikes the soul and causes it to reverberate--what Jocelyn Lebrun describes as "the inverse of a concept."[23] Bachelard explains that the poetic image "is the dynamism of the sonorous life itself which by engulfing and appropriating everything it finds in its path, fills the slice of space, or better, the slice of the world that it assigns itself by its movement, making it reverberate, breathing into it its own life."[24] On the side of the subject, the reverberations of the image motivate the subject to respond to the image in an affective

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[22] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, tr. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. xi.
[23] Jocelyn Lebrun, "Pour une phénoménologie de l'imagination poétique," *Archives de Philosophie* 51 (1988), p. 199; Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. xv.
[24] Bachelard, ibid., p. xiii.

way, so that the archetypal image establishes a particular meaning that the subject articulates and expresses in works of art. Bachelard writes: "After the original reverberation, we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past. But the image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface" (ibid., p. xix). The imagination, then, assumes a psychological or 'material' function as a response to archetypal images (such as the image of water, earth, air and fire). These images bear a psychological significance that can be articulated in art and poetry. The philosophy of the imagination, according to Bachelard, must appeal to this material basis if it is not to become a mere imagination of the surface (what he calls the formal imagination).[25]

With the rise of psychoanalysis came a rise in interest in the effects of the unconscious on human existence. While Freud and Lacan stressed the ability of the imagination to conceal the truth about the unconscious and to create a schism in self-identity, Bachelard focused on the role that unconscious images can play in artistic creation and poetry.

D. Phenomenology

Another direction of philosophy that began with the demise of the Modern subject is phenomenology. This movement

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[25]   Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, ed. and tr. Colette Gaudin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 37.

has precedents in Medieval philosophy and the philosophy of Franz Brentano, but was especially developed by Edmund Husserl. While traditional philosophy has tended to base knowledge on the relation between ideas in the mind and an assumed order of reality, phenomenology focuses attention on the relationship between consciousness and 'phenomena' (or the way that things appear). To understand how we know about objects, we must focus on how we intend their meaning.[26]

An important step in a phenomenological study is what Husserl called the reduction of practical concerns and metaphysical assumptions (the 'natural attitude') to the way that things appear to consciousness. The reduction implies not a doubt concerning the existence of the world, but an emphasis on its meaning for consciousness. By discarding a concern for the 'existence' of the thing, phenomenology is able to concentrate on how things appear as meaningful. Husserl explains: "We do not abandon the natural thesis we have adopted, we make no change in our conviction, ... we set it as it were 'out of action', we 'disconnect it', 'bracket it'" (98). The goal of phenomenology is to achieve a "pure description" (160) of phenomena, untainted by theories and unwarranted assumptions about reality.

Husserl found a prominent role for the imagination in phenomenological analysis. The imagination can be used to

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[26] Husserl, *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, tr. W.R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier, 1962), pp. 134-5 and 152-3.

explore all of the possible meanings of an object and synthesize them into a single essence. The imagination is particularly helpful because it does not concern itself with the question of the thing's 'existence' (for example, whether the thing is 'real' or 'irreal'), but neutralizes such concerns so that one can focus on the phenomenon itself. The various "perspective variations" of a given perceptual object, for instance, can be synthesized into an "intentional unity."[27] Thus the imagination resumes a prominent role in phenomenological analysis, but rather than dealing with actual mental images or representations of reality, it is concerned with modes of consciousness and intended meanings.

Edward Casey's voluminous study on the imagination departs from Husserl's analysis.[28] He adopts Husserl's claim that the imagination must not be thought of exclusively in terms of the type of image or object involved but with respect to the entire structure of consciousness and the meaning of phenomena.[29] But Casey focuses less on the role of

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[27]   Ibid., pp. 118 and 119. This does not mean, however, that the imagination synthesizes distinct images or that every aspect of an object must be included in order to arrive at an intuition of the essence. See p. 181.

[28]   Edward Casey, *Imagining; A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

[29]   In this way, Casey's work could be seen as similar to that of Gilbert Ryle who claims that the imagination must be understood in terms of the activity of the imaginer and not in terms of the object involved. But while Ryle focuses on the activity of the mind involved in imagining, Casey and Husserl consider the entire structure of consciousness and intended meaning. See Chapter Eight in *The Concept of Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949).

the imagination in neutralizing the natural attitude and more on its role as a form of fanciful thinking.

Casey lists a number of essential characteristics of the imagination. First, imagination is completely spontaneous. The imaginer can imagine freely without any restrictions and is unable to fail in her activity. Thus the imagination is claimed to be unlike perceptual experience, in which the objects are opaque and appear with hidden sides and aspects. The imaginer is limited only by logical impossibilities, and by the need to develop the imagination by means of education.[30] Second, imagination is self-contained. Imagined images and situations are discontinuous with each other and with perceptual experience, and appear upon a flat background that conceals nothing about them. Unlike perceptual objects, the image is given completely and cannot be explored or made more determinate by further inquiry (like a perceptual object). Casey argues that "being strictly depthless, an imagined object possesses no sides or surfaces other than those which it expressly proffers within a given imaginative presentation" (ibid., 92). Third, imagination is self-evident, as there is no way to 'perfect' an image in the way that one improves one's understanding of a perceptual object (94-97). Fourth, the imagination also involves a "different spatial and temporal system" (107) for the presentation,

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[30] Casey, *Imagining*, pp. 68, 73-5, 82, 83-6, 77.

which consistently contains a degree of indeterminacy. Fifth, the imagination is the faculty of exploring possibilities. "Imagining," says Casey, "is entertaining oneself with what is *purely possible*" (119) rather than with possibilities that are to be applied to experience in the future. The imagination is ultimately an expression of the ability of consciousness to transcend the world of actuality and to embrace the loftiest possibilities.

Perhaps the most radical example of a phenomenology of the imagination is Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'imaginaire*.[31] Sartre declared the essential nature of imagination as a negation of reality. The image is not a thing but an action performed by consciousness: "an image is a *certain type of consciousness*. An image is an act, not some thing. An image is a consciousness *of* some thing."[32] The object of the imagination, as well, is reduced to being a mode of consciousness: "it does not exist in *fact*, it exists as *image*" (ibid., p. 3). Sartre inaugurates what Alan White calls the "death of the image"[33] as a mental content and concentrates on the image as an act of consciousness. To see the imagination as a mental

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[31]   Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948); translated as *The Psychology of the Imagination* (New York: Citadel Press, 1965). See also Sartre's earlier *L'imagination* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1936); translated by Forrest Williams as *Imagination* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972). The earlier work provides Sartre's criticisms of other authors, while the later work presents his own views.

[32]   Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination*, p. 146.

[33]   Alan White uses this phrase to refer to the imagination theory of Sartre, Ryle and others in *The Language of Imagination* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), Section B.

content is to perform what Sartre called the "illusion of immanence;"[34] we must rather understand the image as an act of consciousness.

What makes Sartre's phenomenology particularly radical, however, is the extent to which it identifies the imagination with consciousness and freedom. All other modes of consciousness, such as thought and perception, are restricted by the way that reality presents itself to consciousness. One cannot alter one's perception at will, for example, but must see a perceptual object within a particular perspective. The imagination negates such restrictions to establish a world of its own making. The imaginer makes the object of a perception subject to her own desire, by negating the original structures of perceptual consciousness and creating by fiat her own fanciful world. Merleau-Ponty comments on this aspect of Sartre's theory: "The imaginary," he writes, is for Sartre a "negation of negation, *an order in which nihilation is applied to itself*" (VI 266/VIF 320). Perceptual consciousness is a negation of reality's opaqueness and transcendence in the sense that it imposes a meaning onto experience. The imagination, by contrast, negates the negation of perceptual consciousness by creating its own meaning and its own world of objects. Imagination, then, is the ultimate expression of consciousness as a total negation of reality. Sartre writes:

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[34]   Sartre, ibid., p. 5.

"Consciousness is act, and everything that exists in consciousness exists enacted ... Either spontaneity is activity through and through, and consequently transparent to itself, or there is no such thing."[35] The imagination for Sartre is the ultimate expression of human existence as consciousness and as freedom to negate reality.[36]

In the philosophy of Sartre, the imagination loses its mimetic function and becomes identified with human freedom. He stresses the imagination as a mode of human existence that negates reality and allows for the creation of personal meaning. The latter is obtained at the expense of the role of the imagination as a creator of images as well as its role in perception. Culminating in the philosophy of Sartre, the phenomenological imagination develops from the neutralization of the natural attitude to the negation of reality and the expression of freedom.

E. Hermeneutics and Postmodernism

From the tradition of phenomenology emerged a new concern for the mediation of experience. No longer concerned for the individual thinking subject, nor for attaining some

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[35]   Ibid., pp. 31 and 110.

[36]   For a more comprehensive exposition of Sartre's views concerning consciousness and reality, see *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1956), pp. 3-32. Sartre develops his more famous concept of nothingness out of his earlier interest in the imagination. For a good analysis of this progression, see Anthony Manser, *Sartre: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

sense of immediate intuition of reality, many philosophers influenced by Husserl, Sartre and others began to focus on the role of language in the interpretation of reality. This change in focus was no doubt influenced by Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, where he claimed that the analysis of human existence "is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word where it designates this business of interpreting."[37] The individual thinker, in other words, is always in a process of interpreting his being in terms of language and the world around him. With Heidegger, transcendental phenomenology gives way to hermeneutic phenomenology.[38]

Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology was further developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. While Gadamer played a crucial role in establishing hermeneutics as a distinct philosophical discipline and wrote extensively on its relation to aesthetics and history, Ricoeur applied hermeneutics first to psychoanalysis and language and later to social and political thought. Both saw language and history as essential media for the understanding of self and

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[37] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962), p. 62 (H 37).

[38] The history of hermeneutics, however, goes well beyond Heidegger. For a good account of the history of hermeneutics, see Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, tr. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

world. In Gadamer's famous words, *"Being that can be understood is language."*[39]

What is unique about Ricoeur's hermeneutics is the extent to which he develops a philosophy of the imagination. Ricoeur claims that the imagination should not be thought of in terms of a mental faculty that manipulates images, but as the ability of human beings to forge their experiences into meaningful narratives that can be preserved and shared with others. The primary material for the imagination, then, is not mental images but linguistic structures. Our images, in other words, are spoken before they are seen.[40] Echoing Gadamer's phrase, Gary Madison explains this idea by saying, *"Being that can be imagined is language."*[41]

This position is seen in Ricoeur's critique of Sartre. He argues that Sartre does not see the difference between the function of the imagination in representing a real object when it is absent and in producing a new narrative that reflects nothing 'real' or 'pre-existing' at all.[42] When an author writes a novel, he is not referring to a real situation in an 'imaginative' way but is creating a new world

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[39]   Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd. Revised Edition, tr. Joel Weinsheimer (New York: Continuum, 1997), p. 474.

[40]   Paul Ricoeur, "Imagination in Discourse and Action" in *From Text to Action*, tr. Kathleen Blamey and John Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 171.

[41]   Gary Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 183.

[42]   Ricoeur, "Sartre and Ryle on the Imagination" in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schlipp, tr. R. Bradley Deford (La Salle: Open Court, 1981), pp. 169-73.

that did not pre-exist the novel. A theory of the imagination must take into account its ability to create new meanings within the medium of language and not simply focus on its ability to negate reality.[43]

The forging of new meanings is made possible by means of metaphor. This literary device, long regarded by linguists as a mere ornamentation of language, is for Ricoeur the generator of novel meaning. The metaphor allows for the clashing of two disparate semantic fields so that a new interpretation of a given situation is made possible. The metaphor 'man is a wolf', for instance, forces one to think the two terms, originally held apart, as if they were the same.[44] This double-take on the meaning of the words, that they *are* and *are not* the same, causes one to think about each term in a new way. In this case, one comes to see the wild nature of man that is brought out by a comparison to the wolf. Without the metaphor, 'man is a wolf', one would never

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[43]   Thomas Busch provides a good commentary on the relation between Sartre and Ricoeur in "Sartre and Ricoeur on Imagination," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 70 (1997), pp. 507-18. He agrees with Ricoeur that Sartre's earlier writings suggest a theory of the imagination that does not take into account the role of the imagination in producing narratives. But Busch observes that Sartre started to change his view concerning the role of language as a medium for expression, and that throughout his career Sartre saw the imagination as useful in the creation of positive social relations. He writes: "Ricoeur's critique of Sartre's views on imagination neglects the positive place imagination comes to occupy in authentic life for Sartre" (516). See also pp. 510-13.

[44]   Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and tr. John Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 169-70 and 190.

have been able to articulate this meaning.[45] A metaphor, then, is not merely a comparison of two fixed meanings but the development of a novel meaning within the medium of language.

The power of metaphor is essentially the productive power of the imagination. "The imagination," writes Ricoeur, "is this competence, this capacity for producing new logical kinds by means of predicative assimilation and for producing them in spite of ... and thanks to ... the initial difference between the terms which resist assimilation."[46] It is the imagination that allows for the assimilation of two terms and, at the moment of their fusion, to forge new meanings. This suggests a new turn in the theory of imagination. Gary Madison writes: "Taking the metaphor as our model, we could therefore say that the essential business of the imagination (the imagination as it functions in all creative endeavours) is to bring together disparate semantic or semiological fields, the net effect of this bisociative act ... being to alter the way we think of, categorize, interpret things."[47]

The metaphor as developed by Ricoeur becomes a hyperreality in the postmodern theory of Jean Baudrillard and the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida. While Ricoeur's metaphor continues to disclose a world to which it refers,

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[45] Except, perhaps, by a similar metaphor, for example the metaphor 'man is a bear'. The example, 'man is a wolf,' is from Gary Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*, p. 189.

[46] Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan Montefiore, tr. Kathleen McLaughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 184.

[47] Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*, p. 189.

the postmodern image drops the function of reference altogether. This is particularly seen in Derrida's concept of *différance*, a French word used by Derrida to suggest a linguistic device which defers referentiality in the very moment of assuming a difference between two referents. This makes the very operation of referring self-divisive, leaving the function of reference deferred indefinitely. "The verb 'to differ' seems to differ from itself," he writes. "On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay."[48] The essential metaphoricity or linguisticality of the imagination, then, becomes a limitless play of signifiers that refer only to one another's referring, annulling the traditional mimetic function of the image. The imagination operates as if upon a "bottomless chessboard where being is set in play" (154).

Derrida provides an illustration of *différance* in his comments on Stéphane Mallarmé's work, *Mimique*. Mallarmé is writing about a performance by Paul Margueritte of *Pierrot Murderer of His Wife*.[49] Derrida writes: "At once page and quill, Pierrot is both passive and active, matter and form, the author, the means, and the raw material of his mimodrama" (ibid., p. 198). The mime's art relies on the possibility of

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[48]   Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, tr. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 129.
[49]   A section of Mallarmé's text is quoted in Derrida's *Dissemination*, tr. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.175.

reference, whether it be a murder, a particular character, or a general situation. But not only is the reference fictional, as Ricoeur would say; it ultimately gets lost in the charade of doubling. The scene is Pierrot (a fictional character) reenacting the murder of his wife (which never actually happened) by pretending to be his wife (198-202). The actual mime, Margueritte, is not actually Pierrot, and Pierrot is acting out an event that is not happening and did not ever happen, and yet has already happened hundreds of times in theatres around the world. The mime, as described by Derrida, is a good example of the postmodern image that loses its sense of reference in the very act of referring.[50]

The progression from the image as referring to the image as deferring is detailed in Baudrillard's *Simulations*,[51] where he traces three stages in this transition of the image. In the first stage, the image is seen as a counterfeit or copy of an original reality, such as one finds in Plato's *Republic*.[52] Second, the image, engaged in incessant production, loses the original reference but continues to

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[50] See, for instance, p. 211, where he writes: "The referent is lifted, but the reference remains: what is left is only the writing of dreams, a fiction that is not imaginary, mimicry without imitation, without verisimilitude, without truth or falsity, a miming of appearance without concealed reality, without any world behind it, and hence without appearance: '*false appearance*'."

[51] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, tr. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983). For the different stages of simulacra, see pp. 11-12 and 83; the first two stages of the four at pp. 11-12 are conflated at p. 83.

[52] Plato, *Republic*, tr. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 509d-511e.

operate 'as if' it signifies something. An example of this is the ethnologist's attempt to preserve a primitive culture. What is important to him is not so much that the culture survives as that the public curiosity concerning that culture survives.[53] Finally, the reference is dropped altogether for a realm of incessant doubling with no beginning or end--the stage of simulacra.[54] At this stage the image loses its centrifugal referentiality and implodes on itself and its play of simulation (ibid., p. 57). The difference between image and reality, so important for establishing reference, is called into question. "The very definition of the real becomes: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction* ... At the limit of this process of reproducibility, the real is not only what can be reproduced, but *that which is always already reproduced*. The hyperreal" (146).

Starting from the hermeneutic phenomenology of Ricoeur, the philosophy of the imagination has come to be understood primarily as a function of production. For Ricoeur, this production involved the creation of narrative forms and

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[53]   Another example that Baudrillard uses is Watergate, in which it is not so much the truth that mattered to the public as the appearance of truth; see pp. 13-23 and 26-30.

[54]   This stage is illustrated by a simulated bank robbery. The police cannot accept such a simulation, for it undermines the law, so they turn the simulation into a crime such as disturbing the peace. Baudrillard writes: "Transgression and violence are less serious, for they only contest the *distribution* of the real. Simulation is infinitely more dangerous, however, since it always suggests, over and above its object, that *law and order might really be nothing more than a simulation*" (38).

metaphors that reveal novel meanings. But in postmodern philosophy this production becomes an end in itself and drops all reference to reality. The image becomes the primary vehicle for an exchange of information that bears only a semblance of novelty and reference. It is as if the image were infinitely reflected in a labyrinth of mirrors, undermining its ability to refer and to trace its origin.[55]

We have been examining the general themes of perception, elemental images, fanciful thinking and aesthetic production in relation to Western philosophy. Modern philosophy stressed the imagination's role in perception, but found it to be a psychological mystery. The Romantics found this mysterious power to be a source of inspiration and artistic truth, decentering the Modern concern for perception and scientific knowledge for an interest in aesthetic production. The development of psychoanalysis conceived the imagination as the ability of the unconscious to conceal unsatisfied drives. Lacan shows how the imagination causes a radical schism between the inner drives of the self and its external identity. We can see here both the imagination's ability to act in a fanciful manner and its ability to contribute to the development of self-identity. Bachelard finds in elemental images a rich source of inspiration for the production of

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[55] The image of the labyrinth of mirrors is from Kearney, *The Wake of the Imagination*, p. 31.

poetry. With Husserl, the imagination remains essential for the discernment of essences, but this importance gets overshadowed by an emphasis on fanciful thinking in the imagination theories of Casey and Sartre. Both see the imagination as a moment of freedom in which consciousness can entertain a number of possibilities for action and can ultimately change its environment. Finally, we found in the hermeneutics of Ricoeur the imagination as a producer of narrative forms and novel meanings. With Derrida and Baudrillard, this production takes on a life of its own, collapsing the difference between fiction and reality and eliminating the possibility of unmediated perception.

We have seen the imagination described as having at least four different functions: (i) synthesizing perceptual experience, (ii) interpreting elemental images, (iii) fanciful thinking, and (iv) aesthetic production. In the next chapter, these different functions will be examined in some depth with explicit regard to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

CHAPTER THREE: IMAGINING

A. Introduction

On hot summer days, my family and I would pack a lunch and head for Cap Lumière--a stretch of land extending out into the New Brunswick side of the Northumberland Strait. Lining the cape is a long stretch of beach with white sand that slopes gracefully into the ocean. The waves crashing into the shore keep perfect time, a *basso continuo* interrupted by the occasional sound of a gull's cry. The sand is soft to the touch, scorching hot to bare feet from the baking sun overhead. In the shallow water, the colour of the sand at the bottom is blurred by the murky substance which reflects the sunlight, sparkling like crystal on the surface. The waves caress my feet as I walk along the shore, like the tentacles of an octopus luring me back to sea.

What's in an image? This water, rubbing up and down my ankles, this hot, white sand, soft and soothing as it trickles through my fingers, this air, bright blue and infinite in expanse, salty and with a touch of seaweed to taste and smell, this searing orb of yellowish light that infuses the rest with energy and warmth. Are these images simple qualia, bits of absolute data, that I receive instantly like the information transmitted through a telephone wire or across the internet?

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If we continue to explore the seashore, we realize that these images contain more than simply information for mental processing. The water soothes me, cools my body from the scorching heat, and recalls my pre-natal ocean in the womb. The sand provides a natural cushion for my body, reminds me of Adam's creation out of dust and of the soil that nourishes the sea grass and flowers. The air betrays an infinite distance, symbolizing both the infinite possibility for motion in space and the infinite time that it has taken for the sunlight to approach me. The light is a source of heat and energy, bringing the entire scene to life by replenishing the sea grass and inaugurating an endless play of reflections on the water's surface. All four, the water that perpetually cascades over the horizon (however close to the horizon I travel), the innumerable grains of sand, the infinite expanse of the air, and the distance traversed by the sun's beams, provide me with my first sense of eternity and infinity, while reminding me of my inescapable finitude.

These seashore images--of water, earth, air and fire-- also reveal a natural communication. The air is full of the smell and taste of the water's saltiness, the water reveals the texture of the soft furrows of sand at the bottom. The sand's white colour and heat betray the working of the sun. In the heat, each image melts and blurs into the other to form a single synaesthetic experience of the basic elements.

At the seashore a child receives his first lessons in chemistry, thermodynamics and the physics of light.

The image is a central theme throughout Merleau-Ponty's work. From his early writings on the stirrings of filings in the field of a magnet to his later writings on the grand transitions of culture and history, Merleau-Ponty finds a dynamic interplay of images upon a background, of form and structure being created out of chaos. Images are the handles upon reality that allow us to invest it with meaning, to sculpt within the flesh of the world a path for our movement, to erect upon its surface the products of culture. Philosophy must unfold the significance of the image, of the medium of exchange between consciousness and world, in order to establish itself as a science of experience.

B. Perceptual Imagining

Merleau-Ponty was fascinated by vision. Claude Lefort has argued that his entire philosophy is a philosophy of vision. It is also Lefort who reports that, at the time of Merleau-Ponty's untimely death, a book was found open at his desk, one that he had discussed several times throughout his career and seems to have been still thinking about up until the end of his life--Descartes' *Dioptrique*.[56] From the initiation of his phenomenology in *The Structure of Behavior*

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[56] Claude Lefort, *Sur une colonne absente: Écrits autour de Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 140.

to the unfinished manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy was centered around the question of perception and, in particular, the aporia that have arisen in the philosophy of vision.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception must be understood as a blend of Husserlian phenomenology and Gestalt psychology. From Husserl, Merleau-Ponty adopted the concept of the 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*), while from Gestalt psychology he adopted the concept of a gestalt as a single structure consisting of a figure on a background.

Later in his career, Husserl began to see that a philosophy of consciousness could no longer simply take stock of how consciousness discloses meaning, but must also take account of its historical and cultural background--what he called the lifeworld. Even the most objective science, writes Husserl, "is a human spiritual accomplishment which presupposes as its point of departure, both historically and for each new student, the intuitive surrounding world of life, pre-given as existing for all in common."[57] Every act of understanding, as a mode of human existence, occurs within a context that we do not completely understand. In Merleau-Ponty's words, the lifeworld is "the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions" (PP xi/PPF v). And like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty claims that

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[57] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, ed. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 121.

phenomenology is the study of "phenomena" via "an inventory of consciousness as milieu of the universe" (SB 199/SBF 215). But because of the prominence of the lifeworld, this science is never totally accomplished. Reflection is a secondary experience, grounded in an original sense of insertion into a world over which we have only limited control.[58]

From the Gestalt psychologists, Merleau-Ponty came to understand the basic structure of perception. Whenever we are able to focus on a particular object, say, a white cup, it appears upon a background, such as the table, the café, and the streets of Paris outside. If I change my focus to the table or the café, the cup becomes blurred and indeterminate, and becomes part of the background. All perceptual experience occurs in this fashion, as well as every other kind of experience. Even the work of the mathematician occurs within a context of problem-solving and within a community of scholars that is never completely understood (PrP 32-3/PrPF 83-5). For Merleau-Ponty, this suggests a special relationship not only between the perceiver and her world,

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[58] Merleau-Ponty explains reflection in the following way: "Reflection never lifts itself out of any situation, nor does the analysis of perception do away with the fact of perception, the thisness of the percept or the inherence of perceptual consciousness in some temporality and some locality. Reflection is not absolutely transparent for itself, it is always given to itself in an *experience*, ... it always springs up without itself knowing whence it springs and offers itself to me as a gift of nature" (PP 42-3/PPF 53). But reflection is not superfluous. He writes: "this unreflective experience is known to us only after reflection" (ibid.). He explains: "Experience anticipates a philosophy and philosophy is merely an elucidated experience" (PP 63/PPF 77). The ground of philosophy is the lifeworld which provides an "ambiguous domain" of meanings. Reflection "transforms the phenomenal field into a transcendental one" (ibid.).

but between the objects themselves as they are united within a particular gestalt. In *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty explains that there is an image that unites the entire structure of the reflex (SB 23 and 51/SBF 22 and 54). The reflex cannot be understood in terms of single forces, but as an irreducible context of stimulus and response. The image is the total structure of significance that makes the reaction to a stimulus possible. And this is all understood on the basis of the model of a figure on a background, which Merleau-Ponty borrows from Gestalt psychology.[59]

Merleau-Ponty elaborates on this idea by showing that any bit of sense information can have a meaning only as a "figure on a background" (PP 4/PPF 10) and not as a simple and indubitable piece of knowledge. The background, in turn, can cause our experience to vary, so that there are no absolutes in sense experience. Gray on a black background, for instance, reinforces the colour of the background, while the same gray on a gray background is made to look darker. A ring of gray on a yellow background appears blue (SB 80-1/SBF 89-90). In each of these cases, the colour that is actually

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[59] In *The Structure of Behavior* and the introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that both empiricism, which attempted to explain perception in terms of empirical events, and intellectualism, which attempted to explain perception in terms of a judgment of the mind, are flawed in not accounting for how, on the one hand, an empirical event could be said to unify experience and, on the other hand, how a judgment could relate to sensation. Gestalt psychology avoids this problems by focusing on the totality or form of an experience that is neither made up of individual units nor imposed by the mind (SB 7-128/SBF 6-138; PP 3-12, 26-35/PPF 9-19, 34-45).

seen is affected by its context rather than reflective of an absolute shade. To determine the true shade would require understanding the relation of the colour to its background. That background, as well, does not assume a determinate shade but "tends toward neutrality" (SB 82/SBF 91). The moment that we focus on the colour of the background, we see not a 'blackness' or 'grayness' upon which other colours stand out, but a new figure with a new background behind it (a gray 'area', for instance, whose colour fades into neutrality on the fringes). Each time that we focus on the colour of the background, it comes forward as the figure of our experience and another background emerges to take its place (PP 5-6/PPF 11-12). Sense experience always involves a background that can never be broken down to absolute and irreducible impressions.

We can especially see the contextual nature of sense experience in the education of colour perception. Children learn to distinguish colours not by identifying absolute shades but by a gradual process of differentiating colours, beginning with very general categories until they arrive at the spectrum that adults usually use (PP 29-30, 175-6/PPF 38, 204-5). In the reverse case, colour awareness is lost not by losing the ability to see particular shades but by a gradual blurring of colours until there is only a single nondescript

hue.[60] A colour is not an absolute shade but bears a meaning in terms of its difference from other colours. Blue, in the spectrum, is 'literally' a shade 'between' all of the others, a 'place' allotted to it by us within the general colour spectrum.[61]

Colour is a differential field in which colours are meaningful in terms of their differences from each other. Red, for example, bears a certain relation to green (as more bright and arresting) that is slightly different again from blue and gray (as even more bright and arresting). These relations do not hold between absolute shades, as can be seen in cases where the interpreted colour is not the same as the actual shade. A white object in the shade will be experienced as white despite its 'absolute' shade of gray. When the artist uses gray to depict this speck of white, we immediately translate it into white (such as the shades used to depict white in impressionism). Blue paper in gaslight and brown paper in daylight are in fact the same shade, as indicated by a photometer, but they are seen by us in their

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[60] Merleau-Ponty also explains the contextual nature of perception in terms of tactile experience. A prick on the skin is distinguishable only in relation to other moments in which the point of skin is not being pricked. If we repeatedly prick the same spot, we will eventually fail to sense a prick and will rather have a burning sensation (PP 74-5/PPF 88-90). Rudolph Arnheim explains that we need to have an experience of difference (between the prick and other moments of rest) in order to have sensation at all. See Arnheim, Visual Thinking (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 20.

[61] Even standardized colours make sense only on the background of a field, with a standardized colour and level of lighting. Merleau-Ponty compares standardized colour with surface colour (PP 306/PPF 353).

natural shades (PP 307/PPF 353). A colour, then, cannot be identical to absolute shades or physiological information, but is the nucleus of a series of relations to other colours, and a particular way of differentiating the colour field.

The perceptual gestalt, so far, has been shown to provide a general sense to a given experience. It must not, however, be taken to be an objective unity. The differentiation of colours in a particular context (the gray circle appearing blue on a yellow background, for instance) is not due to causal relations within that particular whole, so that if the context were to be repeated, similar results would follow as a matter of course.[62] Merleau-Ponty argues that the context cannot be broken down in an objective, causal way. One context, set up by Müller-Lyer, involves two lines of equal length that are made to look as if they are unequal.[63] When asked whether or not the lines are equal,

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[62] Merleau-Ponty's criticism at this point is mostly directed at Gestalt psychologists. Though they contributed to the study of perception by emphasizing the context or form over absolute bits of sensory information, many of them still explained the relation of parts to the whole in a causal way (so that the whole distributed its parts in causal ways). In *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty explains that these forms are not 'objective' and existing in the external world. "Form is not an element of the world but a limit toward which physical knowledge tends and which it itself defines ... Thus form is not a physical reality, but an object of perception; without it physical science would have no meaning" (SB 142, 143/SBF 153, 155). The form is a limit of our knowledge of an object, and thus is affected by how we experience it. But the form is also not purely subjective: form and structure are "two dialectical moments and not two powers of being" (SB 142/SBF 153). They are both abstract terms of a single phenomenon in which the subject and objects are inevitably interrelated. See PP 49/PPF 61 and PrP 23-4/PrPF 63; see also Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, pp. 4 and 14-15.

[63] The first line has reversed arrowheads at each end so that the tails of the arrowheads form a Y at each end, while the second line has

Merleau-Ponty responds that "it is only in the objective world that this question arises" (PP 6/PPF 12). Usually, we do not resort to an objective background to make sense of the world, but rather to one of "an indeterminate vision" (ibid.) in which objects appear in an ambiguous fashion.[64] We treat each line in its own universe, as an "equivocal" or "expressive" (ibid.) meaning, such as a simple design drawn in the sand or a sign along the road (perhaps for an upcoming bridge, or a fork in the road). It is only when we set out to measure the two lines that a determinate relation between them exists. In each case, the meaning of the lines "is not so much copied as constituted."[65] This suggests that "the perceived, by its nature, admits of the ambiguous" (PP 11/PPF 18). The relation of the form of perception to individual sensations cannot be interpreted in a purely objective way.

The ambiguity of perception is especially shown in the experience of foreshadowing. We perceive an arc not by adding together the points on its circumference but within a general perceptual Gestalt in which each point implies the overall

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arrowheads on each end in the normal fashion. The effect is that the first line looks longer, even though they are of equal length (PP 6/PPF 12).

[64] Merleau-Ponty describes the usual context for seeing things as "that strange zone in which contradictory notions jostle each other" (ibid.); in the case of the Müller-Lyer's lines, the notions are equality and inequality.

[65] PP 9/PPF 16. "Constituted" is my translation of Merleau-Ponty's "constitué," which Colin Smith translates as "composed". I retain the stronger meaning of the word to show that Merleau-Ponty is contrasting empiricism with intellectualism (in which all meaning is understood to be constituted by consciousness). Shortly after this section, Merleau-Ponty turns the tables on intellectualism as well.

shape of the arc (PP 14-17/PPF 21-5). Concerning perceptual objects, we observe their depth and volume in terms of the foreshadowing that occurs within their particular contexts. We do not 'first' see a stone in the foliage, and 'later' realize that it was a rabbit. At first we are unsatisfied with the spectacle; it resists our focus, and draws us towards it. As we approach the foliage, its original sense begins to alter. The planes and surfaces that we could detect from the lines and colours are at first blurry and confused, but begin to fall into an identifiable pattern as we approach the scene. Some fragments that originally belonged to the background begin to emerge into the foreground and take on a new meaning; what we thought was probably a twig behind the blurry figure slowly blends with the figure itself until we see that it is an ear.[66] The appearance of the 'twig' was not mistaken, for we could tell that it was blurry and demanded further investigation. Along with all of the other elements of the spectacle, this appearance foreshadowed the depth and

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[66] Some other examples used by Merleau-Ponty are that of a ship's mast which, from a distance, looked like one of the tree trunks in the background, and that of a hexagon camouflaged in a series of lines that is more readily identifiable if we look at an isolated hexagon immediately before looking at the hidden one (PP 17-19/PPF 25-7). Likewise, a recent experience with a ship or a rabbit would alter the examples already mentioned (so that we would identify the object faster). Some of these patterns of seeing are less arbitrary, such as the pattern that we use to identify a face. When we see a face upside down, we immediately recognize the distorted perspective without having to explore it, as we do with the ship or rabbit (PP 19-20/PPF 27-8). See also PP 50/PPF 61, where Merleau-Ponty writes: "One phenomenon releases another, not by means of some objective efficient cause, like those which link together in natural events, but by the meaning which it holds out."

structure of the overall object. Merleau-Ponty comments that
by "following up this hint, and stealing into the form of
existence which is thus suggested to me, I am brought into
relation with an external being" (PP 213/PPF 247). The
original spectacle presented itself to me as a "muddled
problem for my body to solve" (PP 214/PPF 248). In order to
grasp a perceptual object, we do not need to escape the flux
of sense information to synthesize it again in the world of
objective thought; we need only follow up the "vague
beckoning" (ibid.) of each experienced quality until the
entire scene assumes a particular shape and clarity.

The perceptual gestalt introduces a function of the
imagination that is similar to the neutralizing role that it
plays in Husserl's phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty writes that
"we can elucidate this singular fact [of what something is]
only by varying it somewhat through the agency of
imagination, and then fastening our thought upon the
invariable element of this mental experience."[67] By means of
the imagination, we are able to experience the object as
transcending its particular appearance in a blending of
perspectives and possibilities. But the image is not the
product of human psychology. The imagination is not an
"anthropomorphic imagination dissimulated behind the
mechanism which we posit as an instrument of its power."[68] The

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[67] PP 63/PPF 76. See also PP xvii/PPF xii.
[68] SB 48/SBF 51. He is citing L. Lapicque.

task of phenomenology "is to understand these strange relationships which are woven between the parts of the landscape, or between it and me as incarnate subject, and through which an object perceived can concentrate in itself a whole scene or become the *imago* of a whole segment of life" (PP 52/PPF 64). Phenomenology is a study of the 'image' as it stands out from the background of embodied experience; the phenomenologist must explore the "immanent meaning" (PP 49/PPF 61) of this structure, and not simply a meaning that is intuited by consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty thus extends Husserl's phenomenology to a philosophy of the perceptual gestalt. He proceeds to say that all understanding is ultimately based on perception. "By these words, the 'primacy of perception,' we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent *logos*; that it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the tasks of knowledge and action" (PrP 25/PrPF 67). Perception is the most basic contact of the body with the world and forms a medium through which meaning is established and discovered. My perception of the cup, or of the waves at the seashore, occurs on a level that is below explicit consciousness, and contains an irreducible

background that I can never completely understand.[69] It also contains an immanent meaning that I do not put there--the cup lures me to explore its other side, or to peer inside; the waves are already understood to be opaque and full of power.[70] What is basic are not meanings posited by consciousness but "a whole charged with immanent meaning, ... the structure, the spontaneous arrangement of parts" (PP 58/PPF 70), that is at work in the café or on the seashore, when I perceive an object and become aware, through the imagination, of its hidden aspects and meanings. There is an "'operative' intentionality" (PP 418/PPF 478) that I discover and enact rather than establish, that I embody rather than control. Upon the structure of perception we posit a "'faith' or 'primary opinion'" (PP 343/PPF 395) in the world around us, before we begin to think or to talk.[71] In order to understand ourselves and our world, Merleau-Ponty suggests that we must dig down to this layer of meaning like an archeologist (PrP 5/INF 403). The phenomenologist, explains John Bannan, "must

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[69] By this, Merleau-Ponty does not mean that perception is the ultimate truth. "I have never claimed that perception (for example, the seeing of colors or forms), in so far as it gives us access to the most immediate properties of objects, has a monopoly on truth. What I mean to say is that we find in perception a mode of access to the object which is rediscovered at every level" (PrP 34/PrPF 87). Scientific knowledge appears upon a background, and draws from perception. Merleau-Ponty describes it as being "cut from the earth (à ras de terre)" (PrP 35/PrPF 88).

[70] Merleau-Ponty stresses that these structures indicate "the natural aspects of the world" (PrP 7/INF 405) and not a meaning posited by consciousness.

[71] Sam Mallin describes our relation to the perceptual world as a 'primitive contact'. Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), Chapter One.

discover, in short, how things and meanings emerge from our general perceptual involvement in the world and take their place around us."[72]

We see this theory of imaginative perception at work in Merleau-Ponty's description of qualities. He describes the quality red in the following way:

> This red patch which I see on the carpet is red only in virtue of a shadow which lies across it, its quality is apparent only in relation to the play of light upon it, and hence as an element in a spatial configuration. Moreover the colour can be said to be there only if it occupies an area of a certain size, too small an area not being describable in these terms. Finally this red would literally not be the same if it were not the 'woolly red' of a carpet.[73]

Sense qualities do not appear as absolute bits of matter but as particular configurations of an immanent, bodily meaning. Within the context of a particular perceptual gestalt, the red is not seen primarily as a particular shade in a spectrum, but as a unique opening to a world that I can inhabit. Here, the red is seen in the concept of carpet as a soft support for my feet, a place of potential passage, an absorbent material of rain from my shoes and of the sound of approaching footsteps. Outside of this particular situation, the quality would cease to have its existential value and

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[72] Bannan, p. 59.

[73]   PP 4-5/PPF 10. See also PrP 5/INF 403: "[S]ensory qualities are not opaque, indivisible 'givens', which are simply exhibited to a remote consciousness--a favorite idea of classical philosophy. We see too that colors (each surrounded by an affective atmosphere which psychologists have been able to study and define) are themselves different modalities of our co-existence with the world."

would become a flat hue, a shade in a spectrum. Qualities, in the prior case, assume an "active" role in the establishment of a meaning for the situation. A wheel lying flat on the ground is perceived as having a different meaning than a wheel bearing a load; an object can be found to be repulsive even before associations between it and illness are recognized. "Sense experience," says Merleau-Ponty, "invests the quality with vital value, grasping it first in its meaning for us, for that heavy mass which is our body" (PP 52/PPF 64). Far from being mere shades in a spectrum, colours, textures and smells are infused with meaning and depth that condition the body in many ways.

The meaning of a particular quality, however, is not restricted to the meaning offered by a particular situation. Qualities also bear a universal value. The red of the carpet recalls the red of the Russian Revolution, the red of blood, the seductive red of a woman's dress, or the colour of roof tiles (VI 132/VIF 174). But the universality here is not an absolute shade or a concept. Merleau-Ponty explains colour in terms of the body, especially in terms of how a colour can elicit particular responses from the body. Qualities contain "a certain rhythm of existence" (PP 213/PPF 247), such as the energizing effect of red or yellow, or the soothing effect that the colour of the sky has on me as I lie on the beach. Merleau-Ponty explains that "before my body synchronizes with

it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning." He continues:

> As I contemplate the blue of the sky I am not *set over against* it as an acosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out towards it some idea of blue such as might reveal the secret of it, I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it 'thinks itself within me', I am the sky itself as it is drawn together and unified, and as it begins to exist for itself; my consciousness is saturated with this limitless blue.[74]

Picasso is noted for having had a 'Blue Period' in his career. In a similar way, staring up into the sky inaugurates a blue period for us, a moment of repose, which becomes a universal meaning of blue. We come to hear the waves in this 'blueness' as relaxing our thoughts, the smell of seaweed as sweet perfume. Imagine the difference if we were in a boat, under the same sky, but feeling queasy and cursing every sound of the wave, every scent of salt and seaweed. Here we are not concerned for qualities, but focused inward on our own dizziness, closing off the blue of the sky. Qualities do not, then, provide an immediate and absolute meaning, but bear within themselves a whole universe to explore, if we have the time and patience to explore it.[75]

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[74] PP 214/PPF 248. The passivity of the subject here is brought out even stronger in the following quote: "The sensible gives back to me what I lent to it, but this is only what I took from it in the first place" (ibid.).

[75] The meaning of the object is not subjective, however. Gary Madison explains: "As an overflowing fullness the thing reveals to us the existence of a depth of being which transcends us." *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, p. 32.

Qualities are also experienced as implying each other. We saw earlier how the sun was implied by the touch and colour of the sand. Cézanne has allegedly claimed to be able to paint smells (SNS 15/SNSF 26). "Synaesthetic perception is the rule," argues Merleau-Ponty. "For the subject does not say only that he has the sensation both of a sound and a colour: it is the sound itself that he sees where colours are formed" (PP 229/PPF 265, 264). The whitecaps of the waves contain the roar of the angry water, and the slightly greenish hue betrays the smell of seaweed. We also understand completely the texture of certain sounds--the sharpness of breaking glass, the hollowness of a sounding bell (PP 230/PPF 266). The intertwining of these different qualities is made possible by means of the perceptual image, which offers up its own logic and reveals a multi-sensory world.

It is also by means of a latent logic of synaesthesis that we perceive an object. The perceptual gestalt not only exposes a particular quality of an object, but provides "a way into the thing" (PP 305/PPF 352) as an "intersensory entity" (PP 317/PPF 366). The thing is "an organism of colours, smells, sounds and tactile appearances which symbolize, modify and accord with each other according to the laws of a real logic" (PP 38/PPF 48). This logic is not that of an eternal form underlying a host of secondary qualities. "The unity of the thing beyond all its fixed properties," argues Merleau-Ponty, "is not a substratum, a vacant X, an

inherent subject, but that unique accent which is to be found in each one of them, that unique manner of existing of which they are a second order expression" (PP 319/PPF 368). This 'accent' is less a form than a "distinctive perceptual style" (PP 39/PPF 49) which, like a style in music, is developed over time and which "disintegrates and reforms ceaselessly" (PP 38/PPF 48). The identity of objects, then, is based on a dynamic logic of synaesthesis that is never complete.

Sam Mallin offers a rigorous analysis of synaesthesis. He observes that the difference between two colours, red and green for instance, will show up more or less clearly depending on whether the objects involved are lights themselves, transparent, or opaque. For example, red and green are distinguished to a high degree when they take the form of traffic lights compared to red and green stained glass or red and green carpet. Mallin claims that this can be explained in a numerical fashion. The relation of clarity between two colours, say red and green, will change slightly (on a diminishing scale) from the colours of transparent objects to those of opaque objects. But the difference between red and green opaque objects in white light is still clearer than the difference of red and green light sources in another, less differentiated, light source (such as blue light). Thus we can tell both the reflective quality of the object and the light source from the difference between two

colours.[76] According to this interpretation, light sources, glass and carpet are not 'colour' qualities, although they are represented by the very appearance of the colour. They suggest, rather, a certain tactile quality of the object (in terms of how they might resist or accommodate my touch) and qualities of sound as well (how well they might reflect or absorb sound). All of this is indicated by the mere appearance of colour. Within a colour, the other media are presented within a logic of lighting that synthesizes the qualities into a single sensuous experience.

There are some problems with Mallin's analysis, however. First, it is difficult to see how one might include other senses such as smell and taste into this framework. Though it may be easy to see that a reflective object is most likely vitreous and thus brittle, it is difficult to see what associations one could make between visual qualities and smell or taste. Thus Cézanne's claim to be able to paint the smell of a scene must be referring to something else. Second, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty does not mean to suggest that synaesthesis occurs by means of a positive sign in one sense domain that refers to another sense domain. At one point, Merleau-Ponty compares the inside and the outside of a glove as not two sides that resemble one another, but as two dimensions that encroach upon each other (VI 263/VIF 317).

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[76]   Mallin, pp. 146-7.

Likewise, the qualities of different senses need not resemble each other, but only encroach upon and imply each other. A colour, we have seen, is based on its difference from the others, and not by means of a positive sign or a particular intensity or quality of light. I come to learn colours not by lining them up but by comparing how they differ from one another, and how they each differentiate a general field of colour. Likewise, each sensory field is understood in terms of the other precisely in how it differs from the others within the common medium of sense experience. The juncture of the two realms serves as "the pivot of a system of equivalencies" (VI 205/VIF 258), and appears not as a positive sign in each realm but as an abyssal opening to the other field. Mallin's explanation of synaesthesis in terms of the positive register of the other senses in a quality of light is mistaken. Synaesthesis is rather the ability of qualities to *not* appear, to serve as a dimension rather than a positive sign. "It is *that separation (écart)* first of all," concludes Merleau-Ponty, "that is the perceptual *meaning*" (VI 197/VIF 250).

The dimensionality of perceptual qualities as offered by the perceptual gestalt is developed by Jacques Garelli in his essay, "Voir ceci et voir selon," which roughly translated means 'seeing that' and 'seeing by means of'.[77] He argues that

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[77] Jacques Garelli, "Voir ceci et voir selon," *Merleau-Ponty: Phénoménologie et expériences*, ed. Marc Richir and Etienne Tassin (Grenoble: Jerôme Millon, 1992), pp. 79-99.

in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception there is a priority given to perceptual objects as a *means* for seeing rather than as something to see. He cites one of the working notes from *The Visible and the Invisible*, where Merleau-Ponty writes: "Perception is not first a perception of things, but a perception of elements (water, air ...) of rays of the world, of things which are dimensions, which are worlds, I slip on these 'elements' and here I am in the world, I slip from the 'subjective' Being."[78] As the title of Garelli's essay suggests, the perceptual image is not something that I look *at* as much as something that I see *through*, that enables me to see, like a dimension or a ray of Being (Garelli, ibid., pp. 87-88). Likewise, a perceptual object, also occurring within a perceptual gestalt, is not, as Renaud Barbaras explains, "in front of me, as an object that I can exhaustively reveal, but around me; I do not perceive *it*, I perceive *by means of* it."[79] Within the contextualization or 'dimensionality' of the perceptual gestalt, a quality and an object are visible precisely because they themselves are offered up as potential dimensions for perception. It is on the basis of an interchange between the different qualities and their respective fields that the perceptual image makes synaesthesis possible.

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[78]   VI 218/VIF 271. What Merleau-Ponty means by 'element' will be discussed later on in this chapter.
[79]   Barbaras, p. 279.

The perceptual image has been shown to be a general structure or gestalt within which the various sensuous dimensions of our world coalesce into a single style or motif of appearing. We usually do not notice this gestalt not because it is not there, but because by means of it we are enabled to engage with a particular aspect of the world. Thus if we are to come to understand the nature of the perceptual image, we must switch our focus to this margin. But the switch in focus should not be towards an inner thought or cognition, but towards the very qualities themselves which alone provide for the interchange of dimensions and sensory fields--we must, to use an expression of Mikel Dufrenne, alter our thinking so that it is "flush with the image."[80] The perceptual image is the point of exchange between these different dimensions, a lacuna of lacunae, the ultimate dimensionality of Being. On the basis of the perceptual image, Being is able to be differentiated along the fault lines of a number of different sensual dimensions, held together not by means of a positivistic sign system, as suggested by Mallin, but by means of a chiasmatic and poly-

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[80] Mikel Dufrenne, *In the Presence of the Sensuous*, tr. Mark Roberts and Dennis Gallagher (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1987), p. 29. Dufrenne describes qualities as possessing an affective a priori significance for us. "What haunts subjectivity at its most secret point is the images invested in it by Nature during its prehistory." By "thinking flush with the image," we are able to tap into the "secret plenitude" of these "vectors of psychic energy" (29).

dimensional opening, what Martin Heidegger calls the 'Worldhood of the world'.[81]

We shall discuss this dimensionality further throughout this and following chapters. It would help, for the moment, to explore some of the other kinds of imagining so that we do not risk reducing dimensionality to a single type of imagining.

C. Aesthetic Imagining

In Merleau-Ponty's later works, he expands the domain of the image to the work of art. This image serves as an image of the second order, a double of the image of perception. This double is not a simple copy of nature, as Plato suggested, but a re-enactment of the very genesis of perceptual images. In the paintings of Cézanne, for instance, the lines demarcating the edges of solid objects seem to be alive, to bear a physical meaning as weighty, as textured, as bending around the object and disclosing its depth (SNS 14-15/SNSF 25). The "flexuous line" (PrP 183/EMF 73) serves not as a positive element in the painting, but disappears in the spectacle of an object with weight and depth. The line is, in a sense, invisible, and by means of its being invisible, an object, the bowl of fruit, is made visible. What is particularly important in this observation, claims Merleau-

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[81] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 91-95 (H 63-6) and 134-48 (H 101-13).

Ponty, is that the magic of the line is itself visible: we can examine the line with our eyes, follow the transition of colours and the build-up of paint that brings the line alive and allows it to symbolize depth and texture. The power of the work of art, the invisible ciphers of a particular appearance, is made visible by the artist in the form of lines and colours on a canvas.

The secret ciphers of the painting are interpretations of similar ciphers that exist in ordinary perception. Before we have an experience of commonly recognized objects, we are in a whirl of qualities with depth and invisible functions such as the line in Cézanne's painting. The artist is aware of these "inward traces of vision" (PrP 165/EMF 24). Even the light of day that illuminates ordinary objects "must have its *imaginaire*" (PrP 178/EMF 59). Even ordinary perception taps into the magic of vision that the artist manipulates. This is because any quality can serve as a background for other qualities. The black line, for instance, can serve as a positive element in its own right, or can sink into the background of a scene upon which another quality can serve as figure. Merleau-Ponty explains:

> Every visual something, as individual as it is, functions also as a dimension, because it gives itself as the result of a dehiscence of Being. What this ultimately means is that the proper essence of the visible is to have a layer of invisibility in the strict sense, which it makes present as a certain absence. (PrP 187/EMF 85)

We see this especially in the case of light, where we can treat a particular colour of light as a level (such as the electric bulb in my office) or as an object (a yellowish orb) upon the background of daylight (PP 311/PPF 359). This duality of visibility and invisibility permeates all of being. Every act of perception is an interpretation, an exploration of the invisible depths of each quality, an imagining of the infinite possibilities of a particular opening onto a scene, a particular colour or texture.

To illustrate this, Merleau-Ponty quotes André Malraux who recounts the story of an innkeeper at Cassis. The innkeeper noticed Pierre Auguste Renoir painting next to the ocean, and was surprised to discover that what Renoir was painting was not the ocean but the brook in *The Bathers*. Why would Renoir paint a brook by looking at the sea? Merleau-Ponty explains: "Because each fragment of the world--and in particular the sea, sometimes riddled with eddies and ripples and plumed with spray, sometimes massive and immobile in itself--contains all sorts of shapes of being and, by the way it has of joining the encounter with one's glance, evokes a series of possible variants and teaches, over and beyond itself, a general way of expressive being" (S 55-6/SF 70). Renoir realized that the sea expresses the same general sense of disclosing Being as the water in a brook--that the same invisibility of water as the background of a scene can be found in any instance of water, but most especially in the

rich and dynamic qualities of a churning sea. Renoir's experiment testifies to the fact that we do not perceive qualities in a unilinear fashion, but as part of a dynamic and interpretive interweaving of their invisible functioning with their visibility in depth and texture.[82]

Like the perceptual image, the aesthetic image acts as a dimension for our experience, so that "it is more accurate to say that I see according to it, or with it, than that I *see* it" (PrP 164/EMF 23). This reference clearly presents the same sense of 'seeing by means of' as opposed to 'seeing that' expressed by Garelli in relation to the perceptual image. The artwork is less like a material object than a new organ, like the blind man's stick that becomes an extension of his ability to touch the world (S 52/SF 66). The aesthetic object is a "visible of the second power" (PrP 164/EMF 22); it subverts ordinary vision and reveals the creativity of vision that the artist first practiced when she examined the landscape and that the viewer is now able to witness and explore.

An aesthetic image, like that of perception, provides a "system of equivalences" (S 54/SF 68) which are understood systematically only in terms of their differences from one another, be they lines, colours, shapes, textures, or any other visual element. Within such a system, the artist is

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[82] For a discussion concerning Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics, see *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

able to externalize traces of her experience. The artwork forms "a blueprint for the genesis of things" (PrP 183/EMF 74), indicating within an amorphous and oneiric mass the direction in which things generate themselves in ordinary perception as a visual landscape in the making. The aesthetic object provides clues as to the kinds of objects that are emerging in the new visual landscape, like a pre-historic map of Atlantis whose vague outline betrays the contours of future continents. And since the painting is an externalization of the artist's experience, the sum of artworks could be understood as a general reservoir of experiences, of dimensions or organs of vision that we can share with others.[83]

The work of art is a festival of vision, a feast for the eyes, the making visible of what is not visible and will never become visible: the motif of the scene expressed by the artist. Since the artist must rely on the fragments of Being that she encounters in the landscape, she is never completely free in her expressive activity. But her art develops a sensitivity to the appearing of Being and "awakens powers dormant in the ordinary vision" (PrP 182/EMF 70), powers by which she transcends habitual experience and returns to the mysterious depths of potentially expressible Being.

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[83] The choice of the word 'organ' over 'lens' is deliberate, and consistent with Merleau-Ponty's essays. A lens calls upon only the eye to see, while an organ suggests the involvement of the entire body.

D. Fanciful Imagining

In addition to treating the image as a perceptual gestalt and as a work of art, Merleau-Ponty also explores the image as a fanciful product of the mind. Especially in several places in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he compares the image to dreams and hallucinations. His preoccupation with this kind of image has led many scholars to claim that in his earlier works, Merleau-Ponty identifies his theory of imagination with that of Sartre, in which the image is an act of consciousness against the world. He writes that unlike a perceptual object that we must explore further, the imagined object is given immediately and has no sense of depth: "In the realm of the imagination, I have no sooner formed the intention of seeing than I already believe that I have seen. The imaginary has no depth, and does not respond to our efforts to vary our points of view; it does not lend itself to our observation."[84] Like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty seems to be stressing that the imagination is secondary to perception, and is a negation of perception and the rules for perceiving. To see the cup, I must adjust my position; to see an object requires that I see it as having an unseen inner side. The image, by contrast, is given all at once in its totality, with nothing left behind or within it to teach us something new about the world. And the image makes sense only

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[84]   PP 323-4/PPF 374; the quote is even followed by a reference to Sartre's *L'imaginaire.*

in relation to a reality that has been negated and reduced to a phantom. The image "always forms round a sensible nucleus, however small, and it is in the sensible that its verification and fullness are found."[85] This has led many scholars to assume that Merleau-Ponty holds a Sartrean view of the image in *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Structure of Behavior*, and changes his view in the later works.[86]

Such a view is too extreme. At the very least, the two books contain a vacillation between a Sartrean conception of the image and the view that I have been developing in this chapter. For example, while at times Merleau-Ponty seems to treat the imagination and perception as polar opposites (such as at PP 35/PPF 44, where Merleau-Ponty says that perception is "the antithesis of imagination"), at other times he claims that they are simply different modes of presenting objects to consciousness (such as SB 196/SBF 211-12). It is also unclear how his statements about the imagination in relation to Sartre are to conform with his other statements concerning the 'image' of a scene and of Husserl's eidetic variation. There is no clear case in favour of the view that Merleau-Ponty was a full-fledged Sartrean concerning the imagination; it is rather more likely that Merleau-Ponty was over-

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[85]   PP 293/PPF 359; see also PP 343/PPF 395, where he compares imagining to hallucinating as grounded in perception.
[86]   Mazis, "*La Chair et L'imaginaire,*" pp. 30-42 and Dastur, p. 47.

concerned with perception and the body, so that he made the explicit connection between the body and imagination only later.[87]

But despite the lack of an explicit unity of these two conceptions of the imagination, it is perfectly in keeping with Merleau-Ponty's writings to say that he intended to treat the imagination in a broader manner than Sartre. Even the statement, above, that the imagination and perception are opposed to each other could be taken to mean only that a *kind* of imagination is so opposed to perception, namely, fanciful thinking, which approximates a Sartrean negation of reality. Other kinds of imagination, such as artistic creation and the discovery of perceptual gestalts, are not opposed to perception. Thus it seems that Merleau-Ponty is suggesting that the imagination is more than simply a negation of reality.

Confusion occurs mostly when statements are taken out of context, such as Merleau-Ponty's apparent priority given to perception in saying that "our power to imagine ... borrows from vision."[88] The fact that the imagination rests on perception is as primary as the reciprocal claim that perception requires the imagination in order to have the structure that it does. Merleau-Ponty writes, with equal

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[87] In Chapter Five, it will be shown how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body implies that the imagination plays a prominent role in perception.

[88] PrP 187/EMF 83-4. See also PP 296 and 424/PPF 342-3 and 485.

conviction, that "our waking relations with objects and others especially have an oneiric character as a matter of principle: others are present to us in the way that dreams are, the way myths are, and this is enough to question the cleavage between the real and the imaginary" (TFL 48/TFLF 69). Far from stressing the radical separation of imagination from perception, Merleau-Ponty stresses their mutual dependence and implication. Without perception, the imagination would have no possibilities to explore and develop; without the imagination, perception would be flat, with no depth and structure.[89] Thus while holding that fanciful thinking is similar in many ways to how Sartre describes the imagination, Merleau-Ponty continues to extend it to the areas of artistic creation and ordinary perception. The 'imago' is not only the product of free-thinking, but is also, and more primarily, a product of perception and aesthetic creation.

By looking at a few experiences in which perception and imagination begin to blur, we can come to see the importance of not separating them as radically as Sartre. Concerning the importance of imagination in perception, for example, we have the problem of perceptual error. One game that I would play with my siblings while lying on the beach was to try to spot

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[89]   Glen Mazis points out that "without the playing of the imaginary, it is the perceptual which becomes thin, loses its possibilities for *sens*" (ibid., p. 36). But he attributes this view of the imagination only to Merleau-Ponty's later work.

Prince Edward Island in the distance. On a clear day, you could barely see a strip of bluish gray in the distance, but it was always impossible to tell if we were really seeing the island, or imagining it on the horizon. Between the water and the sky we found, as children, a magic place where perception and imagination became blurred and confused. Similar sea-side illusions are quite common, from the appearance of ghost ships to the humped backs of mythical sea monsters. These perceptual illusions are real and inevitable, and disclose the gaps in scientific conceptions of perception and imagination. Children are quick to learn that such illusions are nonsense, and to leave their experience behind for the conventions of mathematical precision and nautical calculation. "Of course Prince Edward Island is over there; I can see it on the map!" But the question remains: was I 'seeing' the island, or imagining it? Did I confuse an image for a percept?

Sartre would have to argue against the view that images and percepts can be confused if imagination and perception are radically separate modes of consciousness. He argues that we never mistake perception for imagination, but at worst only perceive vaguely, and mistake a particular strand of blue to be land when in fact it is really a cloud.[90] He refers

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[90] Sartre writes: "To perceive a man where a tree stands is not to form an image of a man, but merely to perceive a tree poorly. One remains on the terrain of perception, and up to a point one perceives rightly: there is indeed an object in the shadows, ten feet away. It is indeed a thin body, slender, about six feet tall, etc. But the deception

to an experiment in which a subject is shown a faint image of a banana on a screen which appears blank, and is told to imagine a banana. Sartre argues that there is no mistaking of perception for imagination in this case, but does not elaborate his point. Edward Casey adds that the subject could be seen as imagining the object *in spite of the image*, so that regardless of what is actually perceptible and appearing on the screen, he is clearly in the act of imagining and not perceiving.[91] Casey's suggestion seems to preserve the difference between perceiving an image and imagining it.

Merleau-Ponty's theory of imagination, as developed above, suggests that a radical difference between imagination and perception is unnecessary. He admits that, in cases like those mentioned above, there is no confusion of modes of consciousness but a gradual development of a sense that is immanent in the landscape. If I were to approach the mirage by boat, either the cloud would dissipate and an island would appear, or vice versa.[92] Though Sartre is correct in insisting

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lay in the manner of grasping the *import* or *meaning* of the object," Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, p. 97.

[91] Casey, *Imagining*, pp. 148-50; Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, p. 75.

[92] Concerning a similar mistake of seeing a spot of light as a flat stone, he writes: "I cannot say that I ever see the flat stone in the sense in which I am to see, as I draw nearer, the patch of sunlight. The flat stone, like all things at a distance, appears only in a field of confused structure in which connections are not yet clearly articulated. In this sense, the illusion , like the image, is not yet observable ... I cannot unfold it before me by an exploratory action" (PP 296/PPF 343). The flat stone, like the invisibility of the painting, is like a phantom that exists only in the particular experience; when we attempt to see it more clearly, it vanishes into the background and becomes the visible stone.

that we do not confuse imagination for perception, the above case does not justify Sartre's radical separation of them. Edward Casey argues: "Combination or compromise [between imagination and perception] is ruled out [by Sartre]: you must choose either the real or the imaginary, never both. Yet no such strictly exclusive choice operates in ongoing human experience, which is often composed of a subtle mixture of real and imaginal elements."[93] There is, no doubt, a difference between perceiving the island out at sea and daydreaming while lying on the beach. But there is no need to radically separate them, like Sartre, and such a separation goes against how we ordinarily experience the world. Merleau-Ponty is able to account for this difference while avoiding the radical division of perception and imagination found in Sartre's theory.

Another experience in which Sartre's theory seems extreme is the phenomenon of seeing a form with multiple aspects, such as Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit.[94] Sartre would be required to say either that the imagination is at work and there is no 'seeing', or that the interpretation is intrinsic to the perception.[95] Due to the multiple meanings of a more

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[93]   Casey, "Sartre on Imagination," *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schlipp (La Salle: Open Court, 1981), p. 156. This statement, however, seems to contradict Casey's claim that the imagination and perception are radically separate modes of consciousness.

[94]   Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 194-97 and 213.

[95]   See, for instance, Sartre's discussion of seeing a face in the fire, *The Psychology of Imagination*, pp. 49-52.

polyvalent form, such as an inkblot, it becomes difficult to believe that the imagination is not involved; but we seem to detect the image immediately 'as' a duck, or 'as' a rabbit, suggesting that it cannot be the result of fanciful thinking. While Wittgenstein believed the case to be a unique blend of perception and cognition, Warnock and Casey both see it as an obvious instance of the imagination at work in perception.[96] On the surface, Merleau-Ponty sounds the same as Sartre, stressing that a two-dimensional picture of a cube can be seen as sitting on the ground or suspended from the ceiling immediately.[97] But he never denies that the imagination is aiding the perception, nor does his latent theory of imagination force him to deny such a role for the imagination. Again, Merleau-Ponty's theory of imagination is less problematic and extreme than that of Sartre, allowing the imagination a role in the interpretation of perceptual experience.

While Sartre fares poorly in the above objections, it is Casey who fares poorly when it comes to describing the spatiality of a fanciful image. There is uncertainty concerning Casey's radical separation of imagination from depth and spatiality. Casey concedes that images are not completely depthless, but have a "quasi-depth" (92) and a

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[96] Warnock argues: "*All perception is seeing as,*" thus radicalizing Wittgenstein's theory that only *some* perception is seeing as (*Imagination*, p. 186); Casey also agrees that the imagination is necessary for aspect seeing (*Imagining*, pp. 142-45).

[97] PP 263/PPF 304; see also PP 17/PPF 24-5.

pseudo-horizon or background; but he claims that this depth "resists exploration, since it does not *remain* to be explored" (92). This is because "everything in the presentation ... is in some sense apprehended since the presentation itself is nothing *beyond* what it is apprehended as being" (54). This margin or background is "*unthematizable*" (53); "we imagine it through a kind of lateral or tandem consciousness" (54). Casey, however, seems to beg the question here. It is one thing to say that a fanciful image contains 'less' depth than a perceptual image, and even to say that it is on the verge of being depthless, and another thing to say that the fanciful image is completely depthless. When I imagine the number of columns in the Parthenon, my fanciful image fails to provide me with the opportunity for exploration and verification that a perceptual experience would provide. But perception, as we have seen above, is also experienced laterally, and perpetually occurs upon a margin of experience that we can never completely grasp. To see an imaginative image as indeterminate is still similar to seeing something on the margins, such as when I notice an approaching automobile out of the corner of the eye in time enough to escape collision. Lateral seeing suggests depth-seeing, the possibility of exploration even if such exploration will not produce an exhaustive report. Lateral seeing also recalls aspect-seeing, since an element in the imagined margin can become a theme for a new image. Contra

Casey's claim, I can attempt to explore the margins of an image, which provides it with a quasi-space that is, nonetheless, a 'space' in some ways similar to that of perception. This infusion of space into the image and dream cannot be explained away as something that is immediately given to consciousness, but that remains to be explored like a perception.[98]

It is interesting to note that Sartre, unlike Casey, is very determined to give to the image a certain material or content. Despite his bold statements concerning the image as an act of consciousness, he also stresses the importance of a material component to the image. "I have recourse to a certain material which acts as an *analogue*, as an equivalent, of the perception."[99] A photograph, for example, provides the material for seeing my absent friend, and a mime the proper gestural material for the creation of an image. The material of the photograph, however, is negated, and operates as a background for my friend's absence now made apparent to me. "I really do see something, but what I see *is nothing*" (70). The material for mental images is more difficult to determine. It cannot be anything perceptual, and so must be

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[98] It is less cumbersome to say, with Merleau-Ponty, that imagination involves a different 'kind' of space than to argue that its space is a 'quasi'-space with no depth. In other words, while Casey radically separates the imagination and perception in order to maintain a particular notion of space, Merleau-Ponty allows space to assume a variety of meanings for the imagination and perception which need not be radically separated. Most likely Casey would hold a different view today with his more recent works on spatiality. See PP 293/PPF 339.

[99] Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, p. 23.

"solely from the intention that animates it" (23). He concludes by saying that whatever this content is, an analysis of it inevitably becomes "reduced to conjectures" (77). By his own admission, Sartre's theory of the mental image becomes reduced to a study of the probable.[100]

Most critics, such as Warnock and Casey, argue that Sartre would have been more consistent had he stuck to his position of the imagination as a pure negation of reality with no recourse to any material at all.[101] And no doubt Warnock is correct when she claims that Sartre ends up replacing the intentionality of consciousness with the intentionality of the analogue.[102] With the photograph serving as an analogue of the absent friend, the photograph becomes a signifier of the object and the image becomes a thing. Now, in place of imagining an object (rather than perceiving it), we are imagining an object through another object that we neither see nor imagine (since we cannot imagine the friend and the photograph at the same time and, if we imagined both, then there would be no need for the analogue in the first

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[100] The second part of *The Psychology of Imagination* is entitled "The Probable."

[101] Sartre's reason for attempting to find a material for mental images was to distinguish the imagination from eidetic analysis. He claims that Husserl confuses two functions of the imagination as a neutral domain for the analysis of essences and as a faculty that is diametrically opposed to perception. He writes, "the distinction between mental images and perceptions cannot derive from intentionality alone. A difference in intention is necessary but not sufficient. The matter must also be different" (*Imagination*, p. 143).

[102] Mary Warnock, "Imagination in Sartre," *Existentialist Ontology and Human Consciousness*, ed. William McBride (New York: Garland Press, 1997), p. 107.

place). According to Warnock and Casey, Sartre's theory of the analogue seems to cause more problems than it solves.

But it could be argued that Sartre is only insisting on the fact that in order to imagine, we require some kind of perceptual basis or medium.[103] We must see the invisible through the visible, as we see the depth of an object in the very thickness of the artist's line. It is through the content of the analogue that we are able to see the absence of the object; the inner lining of the analogue is its very reference to the object as not there, as only 'quasi' present. Like the artist, Sartre's imaginer is making use of the secret ciphers of the visible in order to make the absent present. Without realizing it, Sartre was tainting his pure imagination with perceptual content.

Though I agree with the view that every image involves some kind of material, I disagree with Sartre's claim that the material of images must be completely different from sensation. Rather, images and percepts are sensual through and through. Of course, mental images are little more than the result of vibrations in the eye. The phantom-like image of the columns of the Parthenon that I see as I peer into the

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[103] Thomas Flynn stresses the role of the analogue as a priority of the real over the imaginary in Sartre. "Absence presupposes presence; de-realization realization" ("The Role of the Image in Sartre's Aesthetic," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33 [1975], p. 433). Though the real is usually a polar opposite in Sartre, this statement and Sartre's insistence on keeping the problematic notion of an analogue could suggest that he was starting to see the role of perception in imagination and the problem of severing the two completely.

blank wall before me serves less as a picture for me as a means of relating to an object that is present in a fanciful way. The combined effort of my mind, my emotions and the blank space before me (or the dark wall I form by closing my eyes) provides the backdrop for the fanciful appearance of the object--the Parthenon with its radiant white columns. The fact that we appeal to some kind of content is shown by how we insist, when imagining, on focusing on a blank space, or on closing our eyes, exposing the expanse to the slightest movement of the eye or the slightest affect.[104] Fanciful thinking borrows from ordinary perception and extends its influence to the point of vanishing, though this influence is never completely left behind.

My position concerning the perceptual nature of fanciful thinking is perfectly consistent with the view that the imagination is at work in perception and artistic creation. Though we learn from Sartre the importance of having some kind of content for imagining, we find as well that his insistence on identifying the imagination with pure consciousness leads to a narrow view of the imagination as a fanciful negation of reality. By appealing to Merleau-Ponty's theory of the image as a perceptual gestalt and a work of art, and by dropping Sartre's insistence on their separation

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[104]   See, for instance, *The Psychology of Imagination*, pp. 116-17.

from the imagination, we are able to attain a broader and richer theory of the imagination.

The fanciful image must be understood as the extreme pole of a continuum of images, from the dense and rich images of perceptual experience to the fanciful images of fancy and daydreams. Rather than reduce the image to the status of fancy, Merleau-Ponty attempts to maintain the image in all of its various and irreducible forms. There is, throughout his philosophical work, a genealogy of the imagination.

E. Elemental Imagining

There is another, more striking, similarity between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, one that will help to explain the full extent of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the image. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were both influenced by Gaston Bachelard, who saw the imagination as a primordial connection to the world. In particular, Bachelard argues that there is a difference between formal and material imagination, the former being merely the reproduction of mental images, and the latter being an exposure to the inner meanings of matter.[105] The material imagination taps into the sources of meaning provided by the four elements of earth, air, water and fire. At the root of our experience, qualities contain a psychic meaning for us, and determine how we can think about

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[105] See, for instance, Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination*, p. 37.

ourselves and the world.[106] Analyzing the meanings native to each element is not a superfluous word play or a subjective enterprise, but follows certain laws set down by nature.[107] These laws are older than the laws of physics; before we had a physicalistic conception of the world, there was the world of the poets, the world of the aboriginal Australian that was perpetually sung into being, the world of the African tribe that saw little difference between the living and the dead. Bachelard claimed that such a world underlies our Modern world of computer technology, at the chiasm of the psyche and matter.[108]

Sartre, like Bachelard, sought to inaugurate a "psychoanalysis of things."[109] He writes: "Material meanings, the human sense of needles, snow, grained wood, of crowded, of greasy, *etc.*, are as real as the world, neither more nor less, and to come into the world means to rise up in the midst of these meanings" (765). His proposed analysis is "to be concerned with establishing the way in which each thing is

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[106] Bachelard believed that poets could be categorized according to the particular element from which they draw most of their inspirational power. He said that Nietzsche, for instance, drew from the power of air, as shown by the many references to empty spaces and mountainous heights (ibid., pp. 42-53).

[107] Bachelard writes: "If meanings become too profuse, [the image] can fall into *word play.* If it restricts itself to a single meaning, it can fall into didacticism" (ibid., p. 28). He later writes that these poetical laws of interpreting images "are as positive as experimental laws" (37).

[108] Unfortunately Bachelard's poetics was drawn too closely in line with psychoanalysis. He claimed that his phenomenology of our oneiric ties to the universe had nothing to do with natural science.

[109] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 768.

the *objective* symbol of being and of the relation of human reality to this being" (768). He continues:

> All this comes to pass as if we come to life in a universe where feelings and acts are all charged with something material, have a substantial stuff, are *really* soft, dull, slimy , low, elevated, *etc.*, and in which material substances have originally a psychic meaning which renders them repugnant, horrifying, alluring, *etc.* No explanation by projection or by analogy is acceptable here. (771-72)

One of Sartre's examples is the symbolic nature of 'the slimy'. We readily see a metaphorical connection between the experience of physical slime and the smooth-talking of a used car salesman. This occurs naturally and not by means of explicit association or enculturation. In particular, the slimy "represents in itself a dawning triumph of the solid over the liquid--that is, a tendency of the indifferent in-itself, which is represented by the pure solid, to fix liquidity, to absorb the for-itself which ought to dissolve it" (774). What is worse, this triumph is delayed indefinitely; a solid object sinks slowly into the sticky mass "like a retarded annihilation" (775). In this quality, I witness my factical helplessness before the elements of nature, and I am threatened by a continual death, which is both horrific and alluring. We would not get the same meaning from water which melts everything into the same, or from fire which voraciously enraptures and consumes. Thus each element has its own law that pre-dates us. "The gluey, the sticky, the hazy, etc., holes in the sand and in the earth, ... all

reveal to [a child] modes of pre-psychic and pre-sexual being which he will spend the rest of his life explaining" (780). In order to understand the extent of control that nature has over our thinking, we must explore these influences and their meanings for consciousness.[110]

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty, as well, suggests the need for a "psychoanalysis of Nature" (VI 267/VIF 321). Our experience of qualities reveals a law of their appearance that we do not give to them, and that the artist only begins to explore in her paintings. "What is indefinable in the quale, in the colour, is nothing else than a brief, peremptory manner of giving in one sole something, in one sole tone of being, visions past, visions to come, by whole clusters" (VI 135/VIF 178). These clusters form general archetypes of meaning, such as the archetypal meanings of water, earth, air and fire. In order to understand our relation to the world, we must stop playing with formal structures of meaning posited by consciousness and embrace these clusters of meaning. We must explore how an image is given to us, and how it gives to us a perspective on Being. We must understand how the image embodies our world and structures what it can mean for us.

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[110] Ibid., p. 767. In order to maintain his radical separation of imagination from perception, Sartre stresses that the imagination is not involved in the perception of these qualities. Mary Warnock, however, provides a good argument suggesting that Sartre's description at this point betrays a powerful "concrete imagination" that undermines Sartre's actual comments concerning the imagination (Warnock, "Imagination in Sartre," p. 110).

Archetypal images pre-pattern our experience, interweaving with each other within a common fabric that constitutes the world. All of being is mediated by this fabric and surrounded by it. In Chapter Six (Section B), we shall explore the ontological significance of this fabric, which Merleau-Ponty comes to call the flesh of the world (*chair du monde*). For the moment, I wish only to stress the essential relation between this mundane fabric and the four elements. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> To designate [the flesh], we should need the old term 'element', in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being. (VI 139/VIF 184)

To illustrate this, Merleau-Ponty comments on how the element of water has its own laws that are revealed when we see tiles at the bottom of a pool. What to the Modern eye would be distortions in colour and size are in fact the very grammar of a logic of water, revealing the tiles as 'straight-while-submerged' (rather than as 'straight-while-in-open-air'). We do not see the tiles despite the distortions of the water, but precisely by means of the water and its own laws of delivering up the appearance of objects. Water has its own effects on the objects as they appear to us, distorting their sizes, muffling their sounds, and it also has a blurring effect on our senses so that we can decipher the appearance

(PrP 182/EMF 70-1). These laws are neither given by the subject nor fixed in nature, but present a general medium for experiencing the tiles. They also elicit a number of psychic meanings, like the values of homogeneity and physical liberty, and the virtues of cleanliness, innocence and forgetfulness. Likewise, all of the elements provide general laws by means of which they can serve as a level or medium for the appearing of Being.[111]

When Merleau-Ponty refers to flesh as an element, he means it in the sense of the Presocratic philosophers. Before the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, philosophy in Greece was based on a mix of religious and scientific ideas. To these philosophers, an element was an ultimate substance of the universe, holding it together by means of a common meaning. 'Element' should not be mistaken for Empedocles' conception of the 'atom', but resists such reductionism in favour of a more mythical understanding of Nature. Perhaps Heraclitus' use of fire as the primal element is most appropriate. Fire is not a static 'thing' but lives by means of its own consumption. Fire is a spirit of life and consumption, of energy that is spent and rejuvenated. The

[111] Even as early as *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that there are dynamic laws of perception that we do not control. In spite of his occasionally calling them "natural signs" (PP 49/PPF 61), he stresses the fact that they do not involve a "natural geometry" (PP 205/PPF 237) but are rather similar in nature to the dynamic unity of the body schema. For a good description of the dynamic nature of perceptual laws, see his description of approaching a ship, PP 17/PPF 24-5. This distinguishes Merleau-Ponty from Bachelard, who saw elemental laws as laws of nature (*On Poetic Imagination*, p. 37).

Presocratics, due to a sensitivity to Nature, blended the sensual experiences of water, earth, air and fire with the loftiest thoughts of universality and abstraction.[112]

Renaud Barbaras explains the extent of Presocratic influence on Merleau-Ponty's conception of the elements. He claims that, like the Presocratics, Merleau-Ponty understood 'element' to mean a sense of homogeneity, of sameness and interchange among the different elements. Water, when boiled, becomes steam or air, because water is in some way similar to air. Picking up on this philosophy of sameness, Barbaras argues that one element can act as a measure or dimension of another. He writes, "the element is a secret principle of equivalence, the carnal invisible of phenomena, concrete generality."[113] We saw earlier how red can act like other colours *qua* dimension for other colours, as well as *qua* colour within a particular dimension provided by another colour. But the two occurrences are never simultaneous; there is also an essential heterogeneity to elements, such that Merleau-Ponty diverges from the Presocratic conception of a single *Urstoff* that holds the cosmos together. An element is essentially an act of differentiation, inaugurating a differential realm or diacritical system. Barbaras explains,

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[112] T.M. Robinson, *Heraclitus: Fragments* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), especially Fragment 49a. See also G. Vlastos "On Heraclitus," *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 76 (1955), pp. 365-67; and Merrill Ring, *Beginning with the Presocratics* (Mountain View: Mayfield, 1987), pp. 14-17.
[113] Barbaras, p. 222.

"the element is not subjective, nor is it *that which* is perceived, it is the dimension by means of which perception takes place" (222). It is thus not simply a means for achieving unity, but also for achieving difference, an "active producer of heterogeneity (*actif producteur d'hétérogenéité*)" (220). We must conceive of elemental images, then, not simply in terms of a single matter that underlies all of being, but as the potential differentiation and mediation of Being along a particular line or direction (*sens*)--a particular trace for the spacing and temporalizing of Being. An element does not offer a unity for the cosmos but "the identity of being and mediation" (223).

The fact that these elemental images inaugurate and engage in an irreducible mediation suggests, for Barbaras, a new sense of metaphor. We saw earlier (Chapter Two, Section E) how Ricoeur criticized the traditional view of metaphor as a deviation of sedimented meaning or as a linguistic ornamentation. The metaphor, rather, by clashing two disparate semantic fields, gives rise to new meanings that were impossible to express before. Prior to the forging of the metaphor 'Man is a wolf,' we were unable to articulate the experience of man's animality. This meaning was present only as a divergence between 'man' and 'wolf', civility and animality, waiting to be expressed in terms of a new semantic unit. Rather than simply elaborating on a previously

established language, metaphors expose that language to change and renewal.

We have also already discussed how, for Ricoeur, the metaphor is not an escape from reality or from intentionality, but continues to bear a reference to a fictional reality that remains indeterminate and ontologically neutral. Since the hermeneutical metaphor establishes at the heart of Being a moment of creativity, Barbaras lauds it as an "ontological doorway" (267) opening onto a new conception of the world. But Ricoeur's analysis of metaphor stresses an ostensive reference to reality. A metaphor remains, for Ricoeur, a paradoxical union of an ostensive reference and a deferring of reference (Barbaras pp. 273-74). Thus even Ricoeur's concept of metaphor leads to a paradox that he is unable to solve.

Barbaras argues that it is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty avoids making use of the concept of metaphor in his later philosophy. Merleau-Ponty writes: "There is no *metaphor* between the visible and the invisible ... *metaphor* is too much if the invisible is really invisible, too little if it lends itself to transposition" (VI 221-222/VIF 275). Too much, in other words, if elemental images are subjective and fanciful, since metaphors are entrenched in a diacritical system and attain a sense of stasis and materiality; too little if it is supposed to translate a fixed and static mode of being, since metaphors defer their ostensive references.

Merleau-Ponty is arguing that in saying that two things *are* and *are not* the same (that a man is like a wolf, while not being identical to a wolf), one is already dealing with two sedimented semantic fields (however 'open' those fields might be to change). But flesh, in relation to elemental images, is the very origin of such fields as a primordial openness of Being to differentiation. Before we can have a clash of meanings leading towards a new meaning (and thus a metaphor), there must already be meaning in the form of a difference of Being from itself. Metaphors presuppose an order of elemental images.[114]

Barbaras admits that this reference in Merleau-Ponty's work might bring his own theory of the element as a metaphor into question, but responds to such opposition by claiming that Merleau-Ponty overlooks another kind of metaphor: that of originary meaning. Thus, according to Barbaras, "it is not metaphor that is the concern here, but *a certain conception of metaphor*."[115] And had Merleau-Ponty given metaphor more thought, he would have conceived of elemental images in this way.[116]

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[114] This is not to argue, however, that there is a sense of unmediated being. It only brings into question the central role of metaphor in the establishment of that medium. As we will see shortly, in order to grant metaphor this unique role in the inauguration of meaning, we must radically change our notion of metaphor. I suggest, on the contrary, that we stick with the term 'elemental image' to play this role, although I admit that using metaphor to explain flesh can be useful.

[115] Barbaras, p.284.

[116] We should keep in mind that the quote from *The Visible and the Invisible* is from the working notes and do not represent a 'finished thought' of Merleau-Ponty.

Thus Barbaras argues that elemental images involve an "originary metaphoricity"[117] of Being. He explains: "The metaphor invites us to the originary presence of the perceived, reveals an elementary communication there where language circumscribes the defined differences." It reveals the elemental image as "a dimension or generality" (281), so that "we must define being by a *fundamental metaphoricity* as the constitutive excess of the visible on itself" (284). In other words, Barbaras gives to metaphor the same meaning that Merleau-Ponty gives to the elements.

We find a similar extension of the meaning of metaphor in Edward Murray's description of archetypes. In *Imaginative Thinking and Human Existence*,[118] he explains archetypes as root metaphors which, rather than fostering the clashing of semantic fields to produce new meanings, tend to draw several different meanings towards them like magnets. An archetype is described as "a ganglion of metaphors around which, indeed, families of metaphors might cluster."[119]

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[117] Barbaras, p. 281.

[118] Edward Murray, *Imaginative Thinking and Human Existence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1986).

[119] Ibid., p. 143. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe the logic of metaphorical systems, showing how different metaphors combine to provide a single meaning. Arguments, for instance, are seen both as war (needing reinforcement and buttressing), and also as containers (as being empty or dense). The result is a complex structure of metaphors. This is not, however, the same thing that Murray and Barbaras are talking about. Lakoff and Johnson's metaphorical system presupposes a level of meaning that is already articulated. See *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 98-99.

Murray does not say what these meanings 'are', and tends to leave them to the level of thought. But the four elements can be seen to do the same thing, at a level prior to explicit thought and action. Even in the very sensual experience of water, earth, air and fire, clusters of meanings begin to form. If we consider water, for instance, the fluid and clear substance offers the tiles at the bottom of the pool to vision according to unique laws. When poetically expressed, these laws can lead to a series of associated images. It might suggest innocence and cleansing, or unity and homogeneity. The Greek goddess, Aphrodite, was born from a shell, free of the messy labour of human birth, and the innocence of Ophelia and the Lady of Shalott found proper burial in the forgetfulness of water. Water allows us to forget the guilt and suffering of past sins, and to pass successfully from this world to the land of the dead. These are literary expressions, no doubt, but of a sense of water that precedes all literature, all separation of fact from fiction, in our immediate discovery of a world around us of sounds and sights, and of qualities that radiate from within. By 'element', Merleau-Ponty was not talking about an Ancient myth or an abstract concept, but the "intentional tissue" (PP 53/PPF 65) that connects us to the world. Within this tissue or texture of Being are elemental images that cluster round about them a host of meanings that we spend the rest of our

lives discovering and developing--these images of water, earth, air and fire.

Thus it seems that there is a sense of metaphor that operates on the level of elemental images. There is also, in Murray's explanation, a clear reference to a verticality of the archetype that is lacking in ordinary metaphors--a centripetal organizing force or style that establishes a cluster of meaning, rather than a centrifugal deferral of meaning that we find in ordinary metaphor.

But have we not returned to the implosion of the image, to the simulacrum of Baudrillard? It was shown earlier (Chapter Two, Section E) how he claimed that the history of the image has gone through a series of transformations, first as a copy of an original nature, then as the concealment of the absence of an original nature, and finally as a doubling of itself with no ostensive reference. At one point, Baudrillard explains the phenomenon as an implosion of the image on itself, a reduction of all unity and reference to a co-existence of information--the human being reduced to DNA which can be reproduced indefinitely, and the implosion of aggression in a cold war where power is immediately transformed into impotence.[120] Are elemental images like DNA?

Though Baudrillard brilliantly describes the simulacrum as a new development of the image, he overestimates the power

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[120] Baudrillard, pp. 56-75.

of this kind of image to absorb every instance of imagining. Whatever the worth of his analysis of simulacra, it is begging the question to insist that all images follow in their wake.

It is clear that this is not what Merleau-Ponty has in mind for elemental images. The centripetal force of elemental images is not the implosion of simulacra, but the verticality of Being that establishes the differences among the senses that we have been discussing throughout this chapter. Barbaras explains: "the known horizon in the manner of something horizontal, as a potentiality of consciousness, the opening of a halo of perception, rests on a horizon of an originary or vertical sense of a presentation of the world that is totally present."[121] Merleau-Ponty is not content to see the originary sense of being reduced to a play of signifiers or simulacra, but insists on the fact that the world maintains a differentiation that is essentially vertical. By this he means that we cannot reduce all images to the level of the same, but rather find them scattered throughout an interchange of a series of diacritical systems, between which one can find yet another exchange of differences. Yellow is understood as being different from green, and both occur within a diacritical system of colour that collides with that of touch in a diacritical system of

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[121] Barbaras, p. 250.

sense experience, and all of them in turn are different from the world so that, between the sentient and the sensible, another 'differential system' is established.[122] Though each of these systems provide for a being in flux, a being in creation, they do not, as Baudrillard would suggest, become reduced to a level of sameness. Being is essentially self-differentiation, and holds itself together not along lines of similarity, but along folds and divergences, in the joints of things which serve as "archetypes and variants of human life" (VI 116/VIF 156). There is, inherent in Being, an irreducible verticality that is held in place by elemental images. Thus while Being can be seen as a "poetic productivity" (VI 116/VIF 155), along the lines of Barbaras, Murray and others, it cannot be seen as the double of simulacra.

Though I find Murray's and Barbaras' descriptions of an originary 'metaphoricity' of Being to be consistent, I think that it is questionable to stretch the meaning of metaphor to such extremes. It can certainly be asked (though I refrain from elaborating here) whether language should assume such a universal status as the medium of expression for Being's originary dehiscence. Might it not, indeed, be a stretch of

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[122] A good description of this layering of diacritical systems is provided by John Barry in "The Textual Body: Incorporating Writing and Flesh," where he writes that "it is only our difference from that other flesh [of the world] that makes the open dialectic of flesh" (24). In this case, it is the relation between the flesh of the world and of the imagining body that is being discussed (*Philosophy Today* 30 [1986], pp. 16-31).

metaphor to assume that language can serve as the model for every mode of expression? Is using metaphor to explain elemental images a possible misuse of metaphor?

I think that Merleau-Ponty avoided a development of metaphor in order to stress the proximity of the sensible in its elementary revelation. Metaphors still suggest, for many people, an intellectual achievement rather than something that is more immediate and sensual. But there is no apparent contradiction in using metaphor to understand what these elements are, as long as we remember that we are using the term in a special sense.[123]

We can now see even more clearly the wealth of meaning in Merleau-Ponty's description of Renoir's painting the water of the brook by looking at the sea. It is not only that water reveals, in a sense, all of being, but that it constitutes an elemental image that conditions our thinking and grounds it in the poetical play of Being. Cézanne once wrote: "What I am trying to translate to you is more mysterious; it is entwined in the very roots of being, in the impalpable source of sensations" (PrP 159/EMF 7). Renoir was able to paint the water of the brook by looking to the sea because both partake of the same element, both tap into the same source of

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[123] For a lengthy discussion of Merleau-Ponty's use of metaphor, see Jerry Gill, *Merleau-Ponty and Metaphor* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1991). Gill stresses that metaphor plays a central role in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as a philosophy of expression. See especially chapter six, where he considers the role of metaphor in philosophical expression. Unfortunately, Gill says very little about Merleau-Ponty's negative comments concerning metaphor.

meaning, the same style or ray of Being that is opened by our sensing of water. Water, along with the other elements, provides us with a medium for relating to the world; they provide "the soil of the sensible" (PrP 160/EMF 12) that plants us within a multi-sensory world. Together, these elemental images guide us in weaving together a single scene or perceptual gestalt. The seashore scene that opened this chapter is already more basic than the images of fanciful thinking and the images of the artist, is itself grounded in elemental images. Merleau-Ponty's reference to Renoir painting water suggests that he had in mind water as a primordial image, a primordial way of being open to Being.[124]

I am not suggesting that these meanings are fixed and universal; by virtue of being divergences, they could not assume such a status. The meaning of water, no doubt, has many cultural variations. Merleau-Ponty would also not restrict the number of elemental images. Each element provides a cluster of significance that embeds us in the world in a manner that is more immediate than words or culture, that is as close and intimate as the skin on our bodies--as close as the sea to the strand (VI 130-31/VIF

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[124] It seems that Casey agrees with this reading of the elements. He writes: "As imaginatively projected in the guise of fire, air , earth or water, the real reveals itself in a way that is distinctively different from, and yet no less valid than, the way in which it exhibits itself in ordinary perception" ("Sartre on Imagination," p. 150). But it is difficult to see how such an imagination can have any impact on perception at all, if it is strictly the "purely possible--as having a positive thetic character that allows imagined content to escape certain empirical limitations" (162).

173). At the heart of experience is a spiritualism and psychologism that perpetually circumscribes reason like a mist. Thales is noted for having said that the gods dwell in everything. Here, too, there is a transubstantiation of earth, air, water and fire into a mix of human and divine, finite and infinite, visible and invisible. And this event occurs not in a church or a synagogue, but wherever Being emerges into the medium of signification, itself differentiated further into the levels of elemental images, fanciful images, aesthetic images and perceptual images.

The image has been shown to take many different forms, from fanciful mental images to elemental images of earth, air, water and fire. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy accounts for this rich family heritage of the image, descending not only, as in Sartre's theory, from a French tradition of literature and Cartesian thought but also from Greek philosophy. Escaping the confines of a philosophy of mental images, Merleau-Ponty discovers at the heart of Being a perpetual play of images that affects how we experience the world. This primal dance of imagining, it will soon be shown, is simultaneously the fact of our embodiment. For the moment, it is enough to see that Merleau-Ponty's theory of imagination incorporates many of the family meanings that we considered in the first chapter: as essential for perception, artistic creation and fanciful thinking, as well as being capable of taking on a life of their own, both at the surface of Being,

as in the case of simulacra, and at the heart of Being, as we have just seen with elemental images. We have also come to see a faint outline of an ontology of a dynamic Being that allows itself to be mediated by the image, that imagines itself into being. We will return to this imagining Being, Being personified as muse, in Chapter Six.

The next two chapters explore the imagining body as a response to the images discussed throughout this chapter. While Being is already partially determined for us, especially in relation to archetypes that form central fault lines of meaning for our existence, the body is our original response to these images. And the body, too, has its own mythology, its own inner logic that we find ourselves already using and never completely understanding. It is to the body that we now turn, to understand how our originary images are embodied and lived before we speak and think them--to the body of the mime, and her silent shadow play of embodied meanings.

CHAPTER FOUR: BODIES

A. Introduction

In Chapter Two the imagination was shown to involve at least four different functions: (i) perceptual imagining, (ii) aesthetic imagining, (iii) fanciful imagining, and (iv) elemental imagining. In Chapter Five, it will be shown that each function of the imagination is a form of embodiment. Before this can be shown, however, we must first develop a theory of the body. The following will explain the nature of the body according to Merleau-Ponty.

When asked to visualize the body, our first thoughts are usually of a physical body, complete with head, torso and limbs, probably clothed and involved in a particular action. In its physical appearance, the human body resembles the bodies of other organic creatures that are alive and in motion. When physiologists engage in a study of the body, they usually adopt a different set of terms than those used in the physical sciences. But the methods used in each is frequently the same: a theory is developed, and then tested on a particular subject, using laws of induction in order to arrive at a causal explanation of the phenomenon. This kind of analysis is often of use to us, especially with respect to repairing the body's chemical or physiological structure by means of various medicines and exercises. But physiological

illness is only the tip of the iceberg for possible malfunctions in 'bodily' experience. To understand these pathologies, and several other, normal experiences, we must treat the body as something that transcends causal mechanisms. The body, it would seem, involves far more than flesh and bones.

Consider, for instance, the experience of the body as an anchorage or perspective on the world. We are not ghosts who float above a world that reveals itself to us as a mere spectacle. We are entrenched in the world, and require great effort to move around and stay alive. This anchorage is what some theorists call our 'zero point', a point from which all points are experienced. The body as anchor cannot be examined by us or anyone else, since to us, we see only a mirror image or a part of the body (such as a hand or foot), and to others we are always 'somewhere else' and a 'consciousness from afar' (PP 67, 100/PPF 81, 117). Our 'here' is never explained in terms of a position in space. When we examine our own body in the mirror, the image moves with us, rather than allowing us to examine all of its sides as we can the coffee cup on the table.[125]

Another experience of the body that is unexplainable in terms of causality is that of double sensation. When I touch my left hand with my right hand, a blurring of sensation

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[125] PP 91/PPF 107. Seymour Fisher, *Body Consciousness* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 3.

takes place (PP 92/PPF 108). If I clear my mind, I can begin to lose track of which hand is touching and which is being touched; conversely, if I try to monitor and analyze the experience, I am unable to detect both roles of touching and being touched in one hand at the same time, in spite of the fact that the two roles are constantly present. Double sensation involves "an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of 'touching' and being 'touched' .... The body catches itself from the outside engaged in a cognitive process; it tries to touch itself while being touched, and initiates 'a kind of reflection' which is sufficient to distinguish it from objects" (PP 93/PPF 109). Both the experience of the body as anchor and zero point and the experience of double sensation suggest an "inner communication with the world" (PP 96/PPF 113)--a communication that defies physiological explanation. We are internally related to the world by means of the body as zero point, and sense an inner communication between the two roles of the body *qua* object and the body *qua* subject.

The body, then, is extremely elusive. It acts like an object, affected by the doctor's chemical remedies and observed by other people. It acts like a subject, observing the world around it from a particular position. It acts like a magical combination of objective and subjective elements, an interface of exchange between the experience of sensing and of being sensed.

B. Traditional Theories

In *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues for a new way to understand the body by first criticizing traditional theories of the body. He does this, first, by explaining the body in terms of what it is *not*. The body is not a mechanism of reflexes or brain functions, nor an idea in the mind. By squaring empiricist theories off with mentalistic theories (what he calls 'intellectualism'), Merleau-Ponty hopes to clear the way for a new way of understanding the body.

Empiricism suggests that bodily experience is explainable by means of the causal relations that hold between its physical parts.[126] The life of the body as a unified mode of existence is a fiction composed out of the functioning of individual cells and nerves. Central to this theory is the structure of the reflex. Merleau-Ponty describes the reflex as "the action of a defined physical or chemical agent on a locally defined receptor which evokes a defined response by means of a defined pathway" (SB 9/SBF 7). When a bird flies across the sky, I follow it with my eye because I am hard-wired to do so. The impression of the bird on my retina elicits the eyes to dilate and focus, and then to move so as to keep the bird in sight. When I later say that 'I watched the bird in flight', I am giving an

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[126] By empiricism, I mean only a very general theory that assumes a causal and mechanical explanation to all phenomena, and not to any particular theory, such as the British Empiricists.

artificial meaning to a simple reflexive process, and assuming an element of choice that does not really exist; it is not the case that I watched the bird, but that the bird elicited certain movements of my head and eye. Likewise, when I experience my body as a unified structure of possible movements and sensations, I am artificially imposing a meaning on a series of unconnected reflexes. The phenomenal body, according to this theory, is the product of a causal line of independent events, understood as a unity only after the fact.

This theory runs into problems because it explains away the role of the organism in reflex action. The scientist sets up a controlled situation to test her hypothesis, and changes the context in order to produce different results. The scientist assumes a certain role in the context, controlling it and contributing to its overall meaning. This is acceptable as long as the scientist's contribution is recognized, and as long as that contribution is not assumed to apply to every situation. But often the scientist assumes that the organism has no role to play at all. The example of watching the bird suggests not that we passively follow the bird's flight. The context assumes that I am already open to the spectacle and that I already open my eyes to 'see' the world in certain ways. It is by means of our expectation of seeing something that the flying bird can 'catch my eye' (SB 31/SBF 31). The bird is like a fish that surprises the dozing

fisherman only to the extent that the fisherman has already cast his net into the water. We already cast a net of expectations onto the spectacle when we open our eyes to see.[127] "For the excitation itself is already a response, not an effect imported from outside the organism; it is the first act of its proper functioning" (PP 31/PPF 31). Empiricism assumes that the excited entity is passive, and contributes nothing to the situation. But in the case of observing the flying bird, the observer is not a passive receptor but is actively involved in the creation of the context. Treating the reflex as a universal structure of experience overlooks the possible impact that the receptor can have on the stimulus.[128]

Empiricism also does not deal with the effects of the overall context on the meaning of reflex action. The form or total situation is treated as an artificial result of combining individual events, such as the reception of visual impressions on the retina and the eliciting of certain movements in the body. To Merleau-Ponty, the causal relation is the other way around: the overall context comes first, and gives meaning to the individual events. There is "something

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[127] The image of the net is used in the introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception* to show that we discover meanings only because we are already aware of meaning. See PP xv/PPF x.

[128] The empiricist theory of reflex action not only assumes that the subject has no active role in the situation, but that this objective stance on the action is primary. But we do not always assume the role of the scientist, and often allow our own interests and emotions to affect the overall meaning of a situation. The empiricist provides no grounds for giving priority to their own position.

general in our reflexes" (SB 30/SBF 30) that makes it possible for the stimulus to motivate us in the first place. Rudolph Arnheim observes that frogs who 'instinctually' catch flies with their tongues will starve to death when surrounded by dead flies. His explanation is that the frog does not respond to particular stimuli (such as a particular colour or shape), but to a general situation in which 'little black orbs' are 'behaving a certain way'.[129] There is a general 'form' of the situation that makes it of interest to the organism, in so far as the form is related to the life of that organism. The organism's interests determine the "descriptive norms"[130] with which it makes sense of its environment, so that it can react to it in a certain way (SB 13/SBF 11-12). "The function of the organism in receiving stimuli is, so to speak, to 'conceive' a certain form of excitation" (PP 75/PPF 89). This form is provided by the organism's "proper manner of offering itself to actions from the outside."[131] If the form precedes the individual events, then it is not based on individual reflexive events, and the

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[129] Arnheim, pp. 22-3.

[130] SB 28/SBF 28; Merleau-Ponty also refers to this form as a "preferred distribution (*distribution privilégiés*)" (SB 46/SBF 48), the preference being dependent on the organism's interests.

[131] Merleau-Ponty explains that the law is articulated in terms of body-meanings such as the rhythm, figure and intensity of the impression on the receptor. All of these meanings suggest a gradient or field of differences, in which one degree of intensity, for instance, can be meaningful in relation to the others. The organism's law "gives a bodily existence to those beings of reason such as the rhythm, the figure, the relations of intensity and, in a word, the global form of local stimuli" (SB 31/SBF 31).

reflex action becomes a secondary structure without the importance that empiricism warrants it.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the reflex is an abstraction of a more basic causal relation between the organism, stimulus and the overall form of the situation in which all three are internally related and affect one another. There is a "circular process"[132] of causation in any bodily experience that is irreducible to simple reflex action. My readiness for the spectacle affects the meaning of the situation in which a bird is made manifest to me, so that I find it irresistible to follow the bird's flight. The synthesis of this bodily experience cannot be explained exclusively in terms of reflex action--to do so would be to abstract from the phenomenon.[133]

Another empiricist explanation of bodily experience is provided by neurology. Some theorists suggest that we obtain a general sense or form for experience by means of a unity in the brain: the different elements of a given experience bear a one-to-one correlation to innervations in the brain.[134] There is evidence that some relations can be drawn between behaviour and particular locations in the brain. For example,

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[132] SB 46/SBF 48; Merleau-Ponty also refers to it as a "circular causality" (SB 15/SBF 13).

[133] Gary Madison writes: "Already in its beginnings life is oriented upwards; there already exists here a kind of movement of transcendence," *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, p. 9.

[134] The psychologist that Merleau-Ponty attacks most bitterly in this respect is I. P. Pavlov in Chapter Two of *The Structure of Behavior*. He refers to F.J.J. Bytendijk who described the central sector and its relation to behaviour as a rudder that steers a boat. Bytendijk later rejects this theory (SB 61/SBF 66).

the stimulation of a particular part of the brain can make a limb appear larger or smaller.[135] There is also a pathological condition called the 'phantom limb' in which an amputated limb continues to be felt by the patient. It is often assumed that, since the presence of the limb can occur without the limb's existence, the awareness is strictly a product of the brain (PP 76/PPF 90).

But a closer examination destroys all confidence in the theory. Though damage to the brain inevitably leads to changes in behaviour, relations to brain lesions can only be drawn in the most general way. Damage to different parts of the brain can cause the same behavioral pathology, and damage to the same part can cause different pathologies (SB 62-3/SBF 66-7). "Only a mixed conception of localization and a functional conception of parallelism can be accepted" (SB 72/SBF 79), concludes Merleau-Ponty. Two studies conducted more recently confirm Merleau-Ponty's objections. The tests were performed on patients before and after their operation which involved the amputation of a limb. The researchers wanted to see if there was any difference in two-point recognition between the original limb and the stump. It was assumed that the ability to distinguish between two pricking sensations close together on the skin was better at the distal regions of the body (fingers and toes, for instance)

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[135]   Seymour Fisher, Sidney E. Cleveland, *Body Image and Personality*, 2nd. rev. ed. (New York: Dover, 1968), p. 7.

than in the more central regions (like the upper arm or chest), and that this distribution involved a one-to-one relation between parts of the brain and the different body parts. The researchers wanted to see if the sensitivity of the upper arm remained the same when it became a stump, reinforcing the idea of an absolute distribution of bodily sensitivity by the brain. They found that the stump gradually comes to assume the same sensitivity that was originally felt by the amputated limb.[136] This suggests, according to Seymour Fisher, a psychological aspect of the body that is not identical to the physiological body and that can be redistributed after amputation.[137] These tests also suggest that the awareness of the body cannot be associated with a particular brain function, but operates according to its own "law of behavior" (SB 26/SBF 25).

Merleau-Ponty is also suspicious of intellectualist theories that try to explain the body in terms of mental images or memory. The phantom limb, for instance, is explained in terms of a memory of the limb infused with

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[136] The first test was conducted by Teuber on 38 men who had their knees amputated, and the second was conducted by Haber on 25 men who had their arms amputated. The tests are cited in Fisher and Cleveland, p. 11. It has also been reported that massaging the stump helps to speed-up the process of adjusting to the new body.

[137] "One may say then with some confidence that after amputation a radical change in the sensitivity gradient does occur, and the stump takes on an increased sensitivity usually found only in more distal areas ... At another level, these results suggest that following the amputation of a limb there are forces mobilized to maintain a pattern of body responses as closely similar to the preamputation pattern as possible" (Fisher and Cleveland, p. 11).

intense emotional value. The limb is the product of a calculation or will that fails to obtain 'bodily' support. The opposite case, when a body movement fails because of a lack of calculation, lends support to the view that mental states, and not physical ones, determine behaviour. When a patient fails to perform an abstract motion (such as touching the nose on command), intellectualism suggests that the patient has failed to calculate where the nose is in relation to the hand. The patient laboriously reconstructs the objective situation by following, step by step, the motions of the doctor or the subject's own motions in a mirror. The normal subject translates instantaneously the doctor's request into bodily action, "as on a taximeter the distance is given already converted into shillings and pence."[138] But the intellectualist theory breaks down when we observe that the same patient who could not perform abstract motion can readily locate the position of a pricking sensation or a mosquito on the arm.[139] Another patient who loses her voice when separated from her lover can still speak in limited,

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[138] Henry Head, cited in PP 140/PPF 163. The example of calculating the required space to get through a tunnel is also given by Head (PP 143/PPF 167). Merleau-Ponty's objection is that even though Head does not think that these judgments are explicit, they are still judgments based on an awareness of the body as an object. This gives precedence to an objective view of the body and its parts, rather than to the general shape of the gesture or action involved. See also PP 103-4/PPF 119-20.

[139] Ibid. Merleau-Ponty writes: "The whole operation takes place in the domain of the phenomenal; it does not run through the objective world" (PP 106/PPF 123). He adds: "My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function'" (PP 140-1/PPF 164).

concrete situations, and has lost not "a certain stock of movements but a certain type of acts, a certain level of action."[140] The phantom limb does not persist as a memory of the old, but is seen as deformed and shrinking (PP 76, 81/PPF 91, 96). The limb is not a mental note of what is 'absent' but an "ambivalent presence" (PP 81/PPF 96) of a way of being in the world that continues to linger even when the actual limb is gone. The body cannot be explained in terms of the presence or absence of a thought or calculation, but in terms of a general mode of existence that escapes the control of consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty has shown that we have an immediate grasp of our body as an instrument for action and reaction to the world. We know immediately what we are capable of doing: whether we can squeeze through a narrow opening, catch a softball that has been thrown towards us, or reach for the alarm as we awake in the morning. In each of these actions, the parts of our bodies are called upon instantly and are forgotten as soon as the task is completed. How are we to explain this 'knowledge'? Not, according to Merleau-Ponty, by means of a radical dualism of mind and body; such theories inevitably involve the problem of putting the two substances

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[140] SB 64/SBF 69. Merleau-Ponty addresses the same pathology in *Phenomenology of Perception* in the chapter, "The Body in its Sexual Being." The problem, he argues, is not that the girl has lost her ability to speak or has forgotten how to speak, but that she has had her social life disrupted. It is corrected not be working on her physiological body or on her memory, but by a gesture like holding her hand (PP 160-3/PPF 187-90).

back together (SB 208-9/SBF 225-6). Instead, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the body is 'phenomenal', and proceeds to describe it in a phenomenological way. The body, he argues, must in some ways be like the mind.

C. Body Schema and Body Image

It is in terms of the 'phenomenal' body that the body's imagination begins to make sense. Many psychologists over the past century have come to believe that we have a tacit awareness of the unity of the body, allowing us to call upon our different limbs to perform various actions. This awareness is called a 'body schema'; by means of the body schema, we can locate and manipulate our body parts instantly, without referring to thought or a specific image of the body in our mind. When we are bitten by a fly, we know instantly where to strike without calculating the distance between the spot and the position of the striking hand. We are also aware of the different parts of the body in an internal way. We feel our hand as it touches another object, and experience it as our own. This phenomenon has come to be called 'proprioception'. We also have an internal sense of our bodies as they move through space that we do not deduce from the changes of our position in physical space--what is known as 'kinesthetic' experience.[141] Our bodies are given

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[141]   Kinesthesis will be discussed in Chapter Five, Section B.

already with an instructor's manual that we know completely, and we respond to its instructions without thought as an organist who plays a song 'by heart'.[142] And in the process of carrying out its instructions, we experience each movement of our bodies as internally motivated and felt.[143]

The body schema also affects how we understand the world around us, before we consciously give it meaning. By means of the body schema, we can tell how our body relates to objects around it. We 'duck our heads' when approaching a narrow passage, suggesting a 'secret' knowledge of the dimensions of the world and their proportion to our bodies. It is as if the body, of its own will, determines how we will engage ourselves, and offers us a medium that is already geared for

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[142] Merleau-Ponty writes: "The subject knows where the letters are on the typewriter as we know where one of our limbs is" (PP 144/PPF 168).

[143] This is only one alternative of conceiving of the body. Another direction that is possible is to see the body in terms of a disunity of drives and urges that threaten the unity of the body and social intercourse. Inspired by Freud and the Marquis de Sade, such philosophers as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze have developed this alternative. For a comparison between Merleau-Ponty and Foucault's conception of the body, see Richard Cohen, "Merleau-Ponty, the Flesh and Foucault," *Philosophy Today* 28 (1984), 329-37, where he argues that Foucault focuses on specific modes of embodiment rather than on an enveloping flesh of the world, and concludes that the difference between the two philosophers is only "a difference in tone" (335). But I doubt that Foucault would agree to such a conception of the unity of being in flesh at all, making the difference between the two thinkers more radical than Cohen suggests. For a discussion concerning Merleau-Ponty's relation to Deleuze with respect to the body (as well as a comparison to Bergson), see John Mullarkey, "Duplicity in the Flesh: Bergson and Current Philosophy of the Body," *Philosophy Today* 38 (1994), pp. 339-55, where he sees Bergson as a bridge between the pole of unity (which he attributes to Merleau-Ponty) and the pole of division (which he attributes to Deleuze). But these poles are drawn at the expense of the complexity of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh of the body which is not simply a moment of unity within the body but an opening and exposure, in some ways similar to Mullarkey's 'Deleuzian' pole (not to be conflated with Deleuze). See especially pp. 342-4 and 348-51.

action. We cannot say that this is our 'conscious' mind imagining, since it occurs at a level below explicit consciousness. It is as if the body had a 'mind of its own'.

Far from being a fad in psychology, the body schema continues to be relevant today. But there is a lot of confusion concerning the difference between the body schema and the body image. For example, two of the pioneers in body schema research, Henry Head and Paul Schilder, vacillate between the views that the body schema is an immediate sense of the body and its abilities and that it is an actual image or mental representation of the body in the mind. They also are not consistent with their use of such terms as 'body schema', 'body image' and 'body concept.'[144] In more recent literature, Seymour Fisher And Sidney Cleveland continue this confusion. They describe 'body image' as "a term which refers to the body as a psychological experience, and focuses on the individual's feelings and attitudes toward his own body. It is concerned with the individual's subjective experiences with his body and the manner in which he has organized these experiences."[145] This definition suggests that the body schema is a representation in the mind, and not an immediate sense of the body and its abilities.

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[144] They are quoted in Shaun Gallagher, "Body Schema and Intentionality" in *The Body and the Self*, ed. José Bermudéz, Anthony Marcel, Naomi Eilan (Boston: MIT Press, 1995), p. 227.
[145] Fisher and Cleveland, p. x.

It seems that we experience both a body schema and a body image, and that we should not reduce one to the other. Many people with eating disorders have a distorted view of their bodies as being too large, even though they maneuver their bodies in ways that only normal subjects would. When they approach a tunnel, they adjust their posture to the extent that is actually needed, and not to the extent that would be needed for a larger body. The person with the eating disorder seems to operate with two unique things, a body schema and a body image.

Recent research by Shaun Gallagher suggests that it is imperative that we separate the two concepts, 'body schema' and 'body image'. First, there have been tests conducted on a patient who has lost all proprioceptive awareness of his limbs and bodily abilities below the neck. The patient can see his limbs, and with extreme effort he can use his understanding of the body to maneuver his arms and legs, but he cannot determine his posture or the location of his limbs. Gallagher concludes that the patient's body schema is greatly defected while the body image is still intact; the patient cannot spontaneously move his body, but he can make use of an explicit body image to imitate normal behaviour.[146] Another experiment suggests that while the body schema is intact, the body image is defective. A patient with no sense of the left

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[146] Gallagher, "Body Image and Body Schema in a Deafferented Subject," *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 16 (1995), pp. 374-76.

side of her body is able to make basic movements with the left arm and leg. She is able to walk with a normal gait, but does not stop walking when her shoe falls off. She appears to have no sense of the left side of her body, and yet can use that side for spontaneous movements. It seems, in this case, that there is a body schema intact while the body image is truncated to include only the right side of the body.[147] Both experiments suggest the need for a clear distinction between body image, as a representation of the body in the mind, and body schema, as an immediate sense of the body and its abilities.

When Merleau-Ponty discusses the body, he is quite consistent in using the term 'body schema'.[148] He introduces the term by first explaining its traditional use:

> 'Body schema' was at first understood to mean a compendium of our bodily experience, capable of giving a commentary and meaning to the internal impressions and the impression of possessing a body at any moment ... When the term body schema was first used, it was thought that nothing more was being introduced than a convenient name for a great many associations of images. (PP 99/PPF 115)

But Merleau-Ponty proceeds to attack this view. In order for the different associations to work in unison, we would need a "superimposed outline of the body" and "a single law" or "purpose" (ibid.). This law or purpose, then, would be an

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[147] Shaun Gallagher and Andrew Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," *Philosophical Psychology* 9 (1996), p. 215.

[148] The French reads *schéma corporel* (PP 98/PPF 114). Colin Smith's translation is "body image" rather than "body schema." By contrast, John O'Neill translates the term as "body schema" (TFL 129/TFLF 177).

image of an image, and we would have the new problem of explaining how this 'super' image relates to the others. "We are therefore feeling our way towards a second definition of the body schema," he argues. "[I]t is no longer seen as the straightforward result of associations established during experience, but a total awareness of my posture in the intersensory world, a 'form' in the sense used by Gestalt psychology" (PP 99-100/PPF 115-16). Merleau-Ponty thus separates himself from traditional psychology in order to stress the global nature of the body schema.[149]

The body schema, far from being a mental representation of the body, comes to be seen by Merleau-Ponty as a felt sense of the body. We spontaneously move our limbs and adjust our posture without any explicit thought or judgment, and live our bodies as if they were already programmed in a number of ways. The body schema, however, is not completely in our control. Beneath the level of conscious, personal existence, lies a level of generality that we never have in our complete control. "[O]ur body comprises as it were two distinct layers, that of the customary body and that of the body at this moment" (PP 82/PPF 97-8). The second level is personal existence, in which I engage my body in consciously

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[149] A good summary of Merleau-Ponty's relation to prior body schema research is provided by Douwe Tiemersma, who traces the concept back as far as 1905. See "'Body Image' and 'Body Schema' in the Existential Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 13 (1982), pp. 246-55. Tiemersma's article, however, is more exegetical and historical than critical, and does not account for the body schema and body image distinction.

chosen projects. The customary level is a general mode of being, capable of performing 'what anyone could do' ("ce qu'*on* peut manier," ibid.), and giving to my existence a stock of general behaviour. By means of this general existence, I am aware of what my body can do and how it can bring me into contact with the world. "My organism, as a pre-personal clearing to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence, plays, beneath my personal life, the part of an inborn complex. It is not some kind of inert this, it too has something of the momentum of existence" (PP 84/PPF 99). By means of the body schema, I am able to open myself to the world as an embodied being with certain capabilities, such as the ability to take in the world as a spectacle, to grasp objects with my hands and to walk around them and explore their hidden sides. The body inserts me not in terms of fixed reflex responses, but in terms of a complex of practical activities that I can make use of to explore the world.

In the pathologies mentioned above (the phantom limb, failure to perform abstract movement, et cetera), the problem occurs not in a reflex or a thought, but in the body schema as a general mode of existence. Concerning abstract motion, Merleau-Ponty explains that the patient is forced to resort to objective motion because of a failure of the body

schema.[150] In contrast to the patient, the normal subject need not resort to such motion. Merleau-Ponty explains:

> In normal imitation, the subject's left hand is immediately identified with his partner's, his action immediately models itself on the other's, and the subject projects himself or loses his separate reality in the other, becomes identified with him, and the change of co-ordinates is pre-eminently embodied in this existential process. This is because the normal subject has his body not only as a system of present positions, but besides, and thereby, as an open system of an infinite number of equivalent positions directed to other ends. What we have called the body schema is precisely this system of equivalents, this immediately given invariant whereby the different motor tasks are instantaneously transferable. (PP 141/PPF 165)

The normal subject has an immediate sense of what his body can do, and immediately imitates the actions of the doctor without recourse to objective motion. The patients, however, are unable to do this because their body image is out of sync with their personal projects. In some cases, such as swatting a mosquito, the patients can respond without difficulty, but they are unable to use their bodies beyond such concrete cases because their world has become "reduced to concrete and immediate experience" (SB 64/SBF 69). In the case of the phantom limb, the old way of opening to the world with the limb persists as a mode of action without physical support,

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[150] The patient understands the task of touching his right hand to his right ear and his left hand to his nose, but he touches both hands to his nose, or to his nose and eye. "In other words, the right and left hand, the eye and ear are still presented to them as absolute locations, and not inserted into any system of correlations which links them up with the corresponding parts of the doctor's body, and which makes them usable for imitation" (PP 141/PPF 165).

and only gradually becomes absorbed in a new body schema that
is proper to the physical body in its present form.[151]

Merleau-Ponty talks less frequently about the body
image. One of the few places where the body image is
mentioned is in "The Child's Relations with Others," where he
describes it in terms of a 'specular image' (l'image
spéculaire, PrP 125, n. 13/ROF 42). Taking his cue from the
work of Jacques Lacan[152] and others, Merleau-Ponty shows how

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[151] Alluding to his claim later in Phenomenology of Perception that
the body image is synonymous with temporality, Merleau-Ponty explains
the phantom limb as follows: "Impersonal time continues its course, but
personal time is arrested" (PP 83/PPF 98). The body schema, as
'impersonal time', continues to control the patient's grasp of the
world, despite his conscious attempts to overcome the pathology.

[152] See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Formation
of the I," pp. 1-7. I do not wish to detail the complex relation between
Merleau-Ponty and Lacan. I only wish to point out a particular
difference between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty. Though both see the mirror
stage to be formative for the child's body image, they disagree
concerning what is affected during this stage. Martin Jay shows that
Merleau-Ponty sees the mirror stage as formative of the super-ego which
rests on a prior ego that was already related to the Other before this
stage. Thus there is a difference between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty in
that Lacan sees the mirror stage as formative of the ego (PrP 136/ROF
56; Lacan, ibid., p. 2). This difference leads Helen Fielding to argue
that while Lacan bases sociality on an essential alienation of the self
from itself (through the mirror image), Merleau-Ponty sees this
mediation as a stage in one's existence which is already essentially
social. David Michael Levin agrees with this position. He writes that
"there is a schematism of mutual recognition already inscribed in the
flesh, and it implicates the achievement of an ideal communicative
situation." Lacan, however, does not take account of this essential
sociality by over-stressing the alienation of the mirror stage. See
Martin Jay, "Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the Search for a New Ontology of
Sight" in Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision, ed. David Michael Levin
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.174; Helen Fielding,
"Envisioning the Other: Lacan and Merleau-Ponty on Intersubjectivity" in
Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World,
ed. Dorothea Olkowski and James Morley (Albany: State University of New
York Press, 1999), pp. 194-95; David Michael Levin, "Visions of
Narcissism: Intersubjectivity and the Reversals of Reflection" in
Merleau-Ponty Vivant, ed. M.C. Dillon (Albany: State University of New
York Press, 1991), p. 53.
    Another point of comparison between Merleau-Ponty and Lacan is
Lacan's essay, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," Les Temps Modernes 184-85

our sense of self is at first diluted into a general sense of social existence. When an infant hears another infant crying, he begins to cry because he has no sense of separation from the emotions of others (PrP 124/ROF 40). But around the age of six months, the child begins to experience an alienation of other people in the form of their mirror images (PrP 127-8/ROF 44-5), and later discovers the same phenomenon to occur for himself. It is only at this point, claims Merleau-Ponty, that the child comes to separate himself from others. But even this development of a self is based on a sense of reciprocity with others--in this case, a reciprocity of the ability to be made visible. Merleau-Ponty explains that "what is true of his own body, for the child, is also true of the other's body. The child himself feels that he is in the other's body, just as he feels himself to be in his visual image" (PrP 134/ROF 53). On the basis of the reversibility of the Other and her mirror image, and thus of her subjectivity and her ability to be seen, the child comes to see the same reversibility within himself. And on the basis of this reversibility the child comes to see himself as separate from others. Thus the body image emerges in the mirror phase as an idea of the self in comparison to others. It is not reducible

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(1961), pp. 245-54. Lacan argues that Merleau-Ponty promotes a priority of presence over the workings of the unconscious in perception, language and art (pp. 250-53). We have already seen above (in Chapter Three) that Merleau-Ponty is not stressing presence in a metaphysical sense, but as the dimensionality of qualities that harbour within them a sense of absence. The unconscious and the claim that Merleau-Ponty promotes a metaphysics of presence will be discussed in Chapter Five, section E.

to any one of the single visual images appearing in the mirror, but is a general sense of self and other that the child develops throughout the mirror stage. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes the body image (or, in his words, the specular image) from the actual physical image in the mirror (l'image du miroir, PrP 129/ROF 46). The body image, then, could be seen as the specular image that is developed during the child's mirror phase.

The difference between the body schema and the body image is crucial to making sense of embodied existence. One instance of the need for maintaining this difference is in determining the origins and extent of sexual and cultural differences.[153] Merleau-Ponty tends to address these differences only at the level of the body image. The "battle of the sexes" (PrP 103/ROF 10), for example, is based on the reciprocation of meanings at the level of the body image. Thus Gail Weiss is correct in criticizing Merleau-Ponty for not taking into account the full extent of sexual and cultural differences.[154] But Weiss's own analysis conflates the body schema with the body image, so that it is difficult to tell when she is talking about the effects of the body image on the development of differences, and the extent to

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[153] I do not wish to embark on a comparative analysis of specific differences at this point; I only wish to show the need for recognizing the difference between the body schema and the body image when discussing sexual and cultural differences.

[154] Gail Weiss, "Body Image Intercourse: A Corporeal Dialogue between Merleau-Ponty and Schilder" in Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, pp. 131-4 and 137-9.

which certain differences are innate in the body schema or incorporated into it by means of habituation. To the extent that certain habits may be divided across sexual or cultural lines, we could begin to discuss such differences at the level of the body schema. But these differences would be different from those found at the level of the body image--those that Merleau-Ponty focuses on, for instance.[155]

It is also unclear when the body schema and body image are formulated. According to Merleau-Ponty, a child does not really interest himself in his body until about the fourth month. It is also around this time that there is a union between interoception and exteroception--between the inner awareness of the parts of his body and the awareness of an external world (PrP 122/ROF 37). "The consciousness of one's own body," concludes Merleau-Ponty, "is thus fragmentary at first and gradually becomes integrated; the corporeal schema becomes precise, restructured, and mature little by little" (PrP 123/ROF 39). Merleau-Ponty is repeating the claims of Jean Piaget, Henri Wallon and others, that the body schema is developed and not innate.

Current research, however, suggests that the opposite is true. In a recent study by Andrew Meltzoff and M. Keith Moore, infants were shown to be able to imitate facial

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[155] Weiss's analysis would benefit from a comparison with that of Iris Young who studies the different kinds of habits that women develop as opposed to men. See *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 141-59.

gestures, recognize faces according to previous gestures, and return the same gestures when unsolicited; the infants were also shown to frequently develop and simplify the gestures to suit their own preferences.[156] This requires at least some unity of the body schema and of its relation to the image of the other person that is imitated, suggesting an innate relation of the body schema with exteroception. It also suggests that the infant has an interoceptive awareness of his body, which Gallagher takes to be an instance of the body image.[157] It seems, then, that Merleau-Ponty would need to modify his view of the fragmentary nature of interoception and exteroception at birth.[158] But it would not contradict Gallagher's analysis to say that, at birth, the body schema and body image are quite basic and indeterminate, and that they are in need of radical development such as occurs when a child learns to walk and speak, and when he passes through the mirror stage and develops a more mature sense of self and Other. Thus while admitting that there is some kind of vague unity of bodily motility and self-awareness, the mature forms of these bodily phenomena are the result of many years of development, including many radical stages such as the mirror stage and the acquisition of language.

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[156] Andrew Meltzoff, M. Keith Moore, "Infant's Understanding of People and Things: From Body Imitation to Folk Psychology" in *The Body and the Self*, pp. 48-58.

[157] Gallagher and Meltzoff, pp. 223-4.

[158] This is suggested by Gallagher and Meltzoff on pp. 225 and 228.

What is the extent of the body schema? So far, we have explored it as a synthesis of motility and of our awareness of the location and relation of the parts of the body. By means of the body schema, we are able to treat our bodies as potentialities for experience and to be situated in the world. The body schema allows us to experience the world by means of potential body movements. These movements are not remembered in a step-by-step fashion, but as components of a more general type of behaviour that can be modified depending on the situation.[159] A cat that learns to pull on a string to receive food modifies the behaviour by first pulling with its paw and later with its teeth. What the cat possesses is not a set of individual skills but a general type of behaviour that discloses the situation as a place for possible action rather than a factual state of affairs.[160] This general type of behaviour assumes the form of habits, by means of which the body schema is enriched and expanded. Merleau-Ponty describes habits as "our power of dilating our being in the world" (PP

[159] "[T]he subject does not weld together individual movements and individual stimuli but acquires the power to respond with a certain type of solution to situations of a certain general form. The situations may differ widely from case to case, and the response movements may be entrusted sometimes to one operative organ, sometimes to another, both situations and responses in the various cases having in common not so much a partial identity of elements as a shared significance" (PP 142/PPF 166).

[160] SB 96/SBF 106. Merleau-Ponty writes: "Thus, to learn never consists in being made capable of repeating the same gesture, but of providing an adapted response to the situation by different means. Nor is the response acquired with regard to an individual situation. It is rather a question of a new aptitude for resolving a series of problems of the same form." A cat's ability to deal with new situations is limited compared to that of humans--it involves the use of 'signals' rather than 'symbols' (see SB 112/SBF 122).

143/PPF 168). A habit "elucidates the nature of the body schema" (PP 143, n.3/PPF 168, n.1), and allows us "to acquire a certain style of seeing, a new use of one's body; it is to enrich and recast the body schema" (PP 153/PPF 179). The habit of pulling a string to receive food, for instance, can be repeated in new situations and modified to suit the new situation. Within this habit, the body schema of what the cat is capable of doing and achieving with its body is modified and enriched, so that both the mouth and the paw become instruments in addition to their other, more natural functional values. Habits develop the body schema and allow us to experience the world in a general way regardless of the specificity of the situation.[161]

We have seen the body schema to be a general structure that underlies human experience. It cannot be explained in terms of physiology or conscious thought, but resembles more of a habit that we tacitly possess and make use of without explicitly thinking about it. The body schema assumes the form of "a certain style" or manner of existence, that both inserts consciousness into a particular complex of potential action and transcends its immediate context in terms of styles of behaviour. Personal and general existence are poles of a dialectic in which old habits are developed to meet new

[161] Edward Casey has written an interesting article on the temporality of habituation. He argues that 'body memory' in the form of habituation is a missing link in Merleau-Ponty's early conception of temporality. See "Habitual Body and Memory in Merleau-Ponty," Man and World 17 (1984), pp. 279-97.

situations, and general body structures are applied to consciously chosen projects. These levels of existence are involved in an "imperceptible twist" (PP 88/PPF 104) in which they seek greater and greater integration but "never quite coincide" (PP 87/PPF 103). By means of the dialectic, all of the different modes of existence (sociality, sexuality, dreaming, et cetera) are integrated into "a woven fabric" (PP 166/PPF 194) that is both grounded in the world and open to new possibilities.[162] The body schema makes sense only within this dialectic between the constituted and the transcending, as the ground for meaning of every experience.

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[162] Merleau-Ponty describes the body schema as a work of art, since its meaning is indistinguishable from its expression. "It is a focal point of living meanings, not the function of a certain number of mutually variable terms" (PP 151/PPF 177). For this reason, we are unable to discern the body schema in purely positivistic terms.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMAGINING BODIES

A. Introduction

In Chapter One we started to think about the body as an imaginative medium. The mime, in particular, draws from the body's secret powers to communicate an entire scene to the audience without speaking a word. On the surface, the mime seems to merely imitate real life experiences--the embarrassment of falling through a chair in public, the nervousness of going on a first date, the drama of witnessing a criminal's execution. But the source of the mime's inspiration is found in the depths of the body as lived, below the cultural level of ordinary social practices. Anyone can 'imitate' a teenager on his first date, but the mime turns this imitation into an art. How does she do this?

The body has a beauty of its own. Even the simplest movement of an arm or a leg can be performed gracefully and simply, or awkwardly and disjointedly. When we first learned to walk, the 'art' of the body was at the forefront of our attention, as important as the art of speaking, and it is later, when we have 'mastered' our own motility, that we forget the body as a medium for expression. In many ways, it is similar to our attitude towards art in general. There are many adults who continue to draw 'like children', and are too embarrassed to develop their artistic skills. But this is

because they stopped drawing when they were children and not, as they claim, because they lack a 'gift'. Likewise, we lose the art of the body quite early, as soon as we have developed it sufficiently to navigate ourselves safely throughout a given space. It is only when we see a mime performing her art that we remember just how expressive the body can be.

The most obvious starting point for a theory of the imagining body is the body image, the mental picture or representation of the body. Therapists have found that by making a patient's body image explicit, the patient is able to confront his or her image and to either accept it or attempt to change it. An anorexic, for instance, can be made to explicitly deal with her view of herself as overweight, and to explore the social or psychological causes of her body image. It is not enough simply to hold up a mirror to her and compare her image to the 'actual' body. A change in behaviour must begin with a creative change of her body image.

In what way could the body schema be said to be an instance of imagining? If the body schema is mostly a bodily synthesis that we do not control, and that operates much like the visceral components of our body, in what way could it be said to be creative and to involve images? We would not, for instance, say that our kidneys imagine anything, so why would we be led to say that the body schema imagines?

We have already seen, however, that the body schema is not a hard-wired set of instructions but an open and creative

medium for human existence. We find, even in some animals, an innate ability to perfect basic actions in order to attain a particular goal. The cat, we saw, learns to pull a string to obtain food with different body parts, simplifying the action and forcing its environment to meet its own needs and preferences. In the studies mentioned earlier by Andrew Meltzoff and others, we saw how newborn infants possess a similar capability to develop the body schema. As adults, we develop our bodies in a number of ways, learning new skills and adjusting to changes due to illness and age. We find ourselves in a perpetual state of developing the body schema.

There seems to be a paradox here between the body as given and the body as creative. Merleau-Ponty argues that we receive our bodies as already equipped and determined to be open to reality in a number of ways. "Acquisition must be accepted as an irreducible phenomenon" (PP 393/PPF 450). But this constitution is never total: "[I]n the first case we are acted upon, in the second we are open to an infinite number of possibilities" (PP 453/PPF 517). The body schema is not a set of actual and pre-determined instructions that we are forced to follow, but a finite field of open possibilities that we can develop in a number of ways. "The body is essentially an expressive space" (PP 146/PPF 171), like the keys of a piano, determining a range of possible sounds that allow, rather than prohibit, the pianist to express

herself.[163] The actual body schema has an aura of virtuality, exposing it to potential development. The body schema involves a dialectic between the acquired and the developed, the constituted and the constituting. There is room in the body schema, then, for imaginative development.[164]

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[163] Very early in *The Structure of Behavior* is a reference to the body as an instrument: the body is like "a keyboard which moves itself in such a way as to offer--and according to variable rhythms--such or such of its keys to the in itself monotonous action of an external hammer" (SB 13/SBF 12).

[164] Sam Mallin describes this as "creative specification" (64), in which we are given a "primordial understanding of the world" (80) by means of the body schema, but as something that requires further development. The body schema provides only vague and indeterminate instructions that we must develop in different ways if we are to turn them into concrete actions. This suggests that even though the body schema is innate and already determines our existence to a large extent, it also forces us to construct symbols and meanings out of our experience and to develop our primary contact with the world in a number of different ways. As Mallin says, "We cannot speak of these details, entities, or attributes as existing in themselves before their discovery, since they are a function of my creativity." The body schema is the original source of creativity that allows us to construct for us a world of meaning. See Mallin, p. 71. See also Michael Yeo's dissertation, *Creative Adequation: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Philosophy* (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1987), pp. 185-7.

An important issue that arises at this point is Merleau-Ponty's theory of freedom. It was shown in Chapter Two, Section D, that Sartre and Casey both saw freedom in terms of an imagination that separates itself from reality and establishes its own meaning. Merleau-Ponty's theory of freedom is less extreme in that it sees freedom as essentially bound to the imagining body. This may seem, at first, to be a paradox. The body schema conditions our existence, and seems to limit rather than enable our freedom. Merleau-Ponty admits that we acquire our body as a fate or destiny (PP 438, 444/PPF 501, 507) that conditions our existence "before any personal decision is made" (PP 449/PPF 513). The body's physical limitations provide an additional limit to our freedom. "In so far as I have hands, feet, a body, I sustain around me intentions which are not dependent upon my decisions and which affect my surroundings in a way which I do not choose" (PP 440/PPF 502). But despite the fact that we are conditioned by the body schema, we still possess "that strange power" (PP 371/PPF 425) to transcend our immediate situation and to give to it a personal meaning. Such transcendence could never take the form of absolute freedom, since without a situation and a body, any project would become impossible and human action would be reduced to a series of instantaneous acts. (See Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Sartre at PP 452-3/PPF 516-17 and AD 101-14/ADF 139-55. For a good volume on the comparison of Merleau-Ponty with Sartre, see Jon Stewart, ed., *The*

The body schema is also described as a symbolic medium. Unlike some organisms that appear to react to the world instinctually, the body automatically categorizes the world into different types and symbols. "Each situation," claims John Bannan, "is the analogue of many others, and what our experience with them generates are global aptitudes, not repeatable gestures."[165] The cat experiences its situation in terms of the global meaning of the task of attaining food, and in light of that global meaning it can explore different ways of achieving the goal. The cat also experiences its body as a global system with symbolic parts, rather than as a collection of parts each with its own prescribed operation. The paw is not hard-wired as a tool for grasping and the

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Debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998].) Rather than appealing to an absolute form of freedom, Merleau-Ponty suggests that freedom is found in the dialectic between using old habits of the body and acquiring new ones. "Thus it is by giving up part of his spontaneity, by becoming involved in the world through stable organs and pre-established circuits that man can acquire the mental and practical space which will theoretically free him from his environment" (PP 87/PPF 103). It is by giving up the dream of total freedom that real freedom can be found in the body as an expressive medium. The imagination, then, continues to be essential for freedom, but unlike the theories of Sartre and Casey, the imagination is found here in the expressive body and its creative appropriation of sedimented habits. The different ways that the body imagines will be discussed throughout the rest of this chapter.

[165] Bannan, p. 39. See Merleau-Ponty's description of this symbolic activity in the following: "The subject does not weld together individual movements and individual stimuli but acquires the power to respond with a certain type of solution to situations of a certain general form. The situations may differ widely from case to case, and the response movements may be entrusted sometimes to one operative organ, sometimes to another, both situations and responses in the various cases having in common not so much a partial identity of elements as a shared significance" (PP 142/PPF 166). There is an interesting comparison of this essentially human ability to symbolize to other organisms, in particular, to chimpanzees. See SB 95/SBF 104 and following.

teeth as a tool for chewing, but both become significant as symbols of a common meaning for the body as a whole. The body, according to Merleau-Ponty, is "that strange object which uses its own parts as a general system of symbols for the world" (PP 237/PPF 274). Each part can become a symbol for an entire activity or meaning. These symbols are not arbitrary, however, but rely on the body schema for their original orientation and meaning.[166] The body schema recognizes that some parts are better for particular tasks than others. It provides a set of preferences, so that the cat, for instance, comes to prefer using its teeth rather than its paw. The body schema also provides us with natural gestures, such as a cry for food, the bearing of teeth to inflict fear on others, and the downward glance of embarrassment.[167] All cultural gestures are a development of natural gestures; without the provision of natural gestures by the body schema, we would not have the ability to create new gestures. The body schema provides not only an original stock of natural gestures and expressive abilities, but the ground for a continued life of expressing meaning.

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[166] Merleau-Ponty writes: "The body is the vehicle of an indefinite number of symbolic systems whose intrinsic development definitely surpasses the signification in 'natural' gestures, but would collapse if ever the body ceases to prompt their operation and install them in the world and our life" (TFL 9/TFLF 18).

[167] There is substantial evidence in recent research suggesting that many of these gestures are cross-cultural and even found in some primates. See the selection of articles in *Nonverbal Communication: Where Nature Meets Nurture*, ed. Ullica Segerstrale and Peter Molnar (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997).

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe the body schema's expressive nature in terms of bodily metaphors. They claim that there are a number of basic bodily metaphors out of which we construct not only a sense of space but a sense of logical concepts and relations. "The essence of metaphor," they argue, "is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another."[168] A child discovers the meaning of exclusion and inclusion when it experiments with its thumb or rattle, and develops a sense of spatial orientation as well as of the relations of forces both within and outside of its body. These basic experiences form the bodily metaphors that the child will use throughout his life in order to make sense of his experience.

Since linguistic metaphors occur within a language, so bodily metaphors must occur within a bodily language. Johnson and Lakoff's analysis suggests that the activities of the body can be treated like a language. We see this treatment especially in the bodily narratives told by the mime. Maravene Sheppard Loeschke claims that a mime sequence can be divided into a number of sections and movements which operate

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[168]   Lakoff and Johnson, p. 5. In this book, they argue that even conceptual and linguistic metaphors are ultimately based on an experiential basis, such as the body's experience of up and down. On the basis of this experience, we can arrive at such metaphors as a computer being 'up and running' (rather than 'down and out'); the experience of in and out also allows us to understand the concept of logical inclusion and exclusion. See especially Chapters One to Four. A more detailed examination of these metaphors in embodiment is provided in Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

much like the words and punctuation of a language. For example, the mime sequence, "The Big Date," includes a number of sections including getting ready, leaving the house, and driving to the date. These sections can be divided further into units, such as looking at the clock and having a shower, and again divided into beats, such as pulling back the shower curtain and turning on the shower.[169] The mime is aware of bodily experience as an intrinsic and silent language that we speak without explicit knowledge every moment of our lives. The body schema, far from restricting our ability to express meaning, enables us to develop an entire language of gestures and silent meanings.[170]

There is a limitation to the analysis of bodily metaphors by Lakoff and Johnson concerning the nature of bodily language and space. Though they are correct to see embodiment in terms of a language, they treat it as a language that is already mostly written. They do not, for instance, explore how it is that a child comes to distinguish between up and down, inside and outside, but seem to suggest that the child already makes use of these distinctions as innate categories of embodiment. But according to Merleau-Ponty, language does not operate in this fashion, and rather

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[169] Loeschke, pp. 31-32 and 43-45.

[170] Julias Fast, in a book called *Body Language*, tells the story of a psychologist who held a party at which nobody was allowed to speak. After a few minutes of awkwardness, the guests were surprised by how much they could communicate with their bodies. See *Body Language* (Richmond Hill: Simon and Schuster, 1971), pp. 24-25.

involves differences within an open and dynamic diacritical system. Merleau-Ponty writes: "This primordial level of language may be approached by defining signs, as Saussure does, not as the representations of certain significations but as the means of differentiation in the verbal chain and of 'oppositive, relative and negative entities' in speech" (POW 31/POWF 45). Lakoff and Johnson do not take account of this dynamism of language, due to their being influenced by Modern philosophy, and so also miss this dynamism at the level of the human body. Thus while they are helpful in showing us that the body is like a language of metaphors, they do not explore the true nature of such metaphors. Rather than developing bodily metaphors along the lines of Barbaras' ontological metaphoricity, they appeal to the traditional view of the metaphor as a clash of already established semantic fields.

Lakoff and Johnson also rely on a traditional theory of space that is criticized by Merleau-Ponty. The child's body is assumed to develop bodily metaphors within Euclidean space and in relation to external objects. Not only does this seem to contradict with the fact that children do not have a sense of external objects at an early age[171], but it reduces spatiality to a single model. Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, sees spatiality as dynamic and essentially based on a

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[171]   See, for instance, Meltzoff and Moore, pp. 44-45 and 59; and James Russell, "At Two with Nature: Agency and the Development of Self-world Dualism" in The Body and the Self, pp. 127-39.

divergence between subject and object. Space, he claims, is not a simple frame for experience (VI 260/VIF 313). He uses the example of the inside and outside of a glove, and writes the following note: "Reversibility: the finger of the glove that is turned inside out--There is no need of a spectator who would be on each side. It suffices that from one side I see the wrong side of the glove that is applied to the right, that I touch the one through the other (double 'representation' of a point or plane of the field) the chiasm is that: the reversibility" (VI 263/VIF 317). Spatiality is not the glove as container or the container of the room where the glove is found, but the divergence between the two surfaces. Johnson and Lakoff reduce the nature of space to externality and base their theory of bodily metaphors on this reduction. The result is a narrow conception of bodily metaphors.[172]

It may still be asked, however, how it is that the body schema can be treated as an instance of imagining if it mostly occurs without our being aware of it. How can it be said that we develop the body schema in a creative way if we do not, for the most part, even see it at work? However, despite the predominant absence of the body schema, it is erroneous to assert that it does not exist at all, or that it

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[172] For a good discussion of Merleau-Ponty and space, see Edward Casey, "The Elements of Voluminousness: Depth and Place Re-examined" in *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*, pp. 1-41.

is completely beyond the auspices of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty explains:

> If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it with both hands, only my hands are stressed and the whole of my body trails behind them like the tail of a comet. It is not that I am unaware of the whereabouts of my shoulders or back, but these are simply swallowed up in the position of my hands, and my whole posture can be read so to speak in the pressure they exert on the table. (PP 100/PPF 116)

We do not lose contact with the body schema; it is still present in a kind of absence. This phenomenon is developed by Drew Leder in his book, *The Absent Body*, in which he argues that different parts of our bodies 'disappear' into the background without ceasing to be present for us as part of the background.[173] Thus it would be wrong to say that the body schema is a set of operations that occur below the level of consciousness; it would be better to say that consciousness is made possible by means of the body schema that is always present in some manner.[174]

At this point, we can see that the body image is really only the virtual aspect of the body schema. We saw above how the body schema involves not simply an actual synthesis of bodily sensations and abilities at a given moment, but also a global sense of the body as an open field of possible developments. This means that the actual body schema contains

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[173] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Chapter Two. Though I agree with Leder's description of the absent body, I disagree with his giving equal priority to both flesh and the visceral system. I criticize this in Chapter Six, Section B.

[174] Merleau-Ponty and the unconscious will be discussed in Section E of this chapter.

its own virtuality or invisible lining. This lining is what we work on when we learn a new habit. We inhabit a virtual extension of the body schema as actually lived, and find ourselves perpetually in this magical chiasm of the actual and the virtual. The body image is simply the virtual pole of such an extension. On the basis of a general sense of the body as both actual and virtual, we are able to conceive of different ways to live our bodies and picture our bodies. We can picture ourselves when young as bipedal like our parents only because we discover within our body schema the potentiality for walking; likewise, we can see ourselves as overweight only because part of our actual body schema is already equipped with an ability to entertain alternative possibilities, such as the possibility of being overweight. The body image, far from being radically separate from the body schema, is really only the virtual extension of the body schema.[175]

We must now see in what way the imagining body can be shown to be at work in the instances of imagination developed in Chapter Two: (i) perceptual imagining, (ii) aesthetic

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[175] This view need not contradict with Shaun Gallagher's distinction between the body image and the body schema. Gallagher has stressed that such a distinction, however useful in analysis and treatment, need not be seen as absolute. I would also add that none of the patients mentioned in Gallagher's research are completely without either a body schema or a body image. There is always at least part of the image and schema intact. Thus we find between them less a relation of opposites and more a relation of poles in a dialectic.

imagining, (iii) fanciful imagining, and (iv) elemental imagining.

B. Perceptual Embodiment

It was shown above that perception involves both the discovery of positive qualities and the concealment of certain features that make those qualities visible. These invisible aspects of the scene were shown to be developed into the work of art, so that we could see how a given colour or form can make visible various dimensions such as depth, volume, texture and sound. In what way could it be said that these aspects of the visual scene are related to the imagining body?

We have already seen how a simple patch of red can also suggest a background and a range of colours. There is already a *logos* of the general scene in the form of an interpretation. Merleau-Ponty claims that "prior to stimuli and sensory contents, we must recognize a kind of inner diaphragm which determines, infinitely more than they do, what our reflexes and perceptions will be able to aim at in the world, the area of our possible operations, the scope of our life" (PP 81/PPF 95). Gary Madison echoes the claim that perception is essentially an interpretative process. Perception is not a passive reception of data, he claims, but "a semantic or metaphorical innovation whose purpose is to make our lived-though experience intelligible to ourselves,

to *explain* it."[176] Colors are like words or symbols, "command posts" that control "the structural properties of perception" (SB 85/SBF 94), already endowing our experience with a particular meaning.

But these 'perceptual metaphors' are not the determinate concepts of logic, and follow a law or grammar that we do not completely understand. "[T]here is a significance of the percept which has no equivalent in the universe of the understanding, a perceptual domain which is not yet the objective world, a perceptual being which is not yet determinate being" (PP 46-7/PPF 58). Rather than treating perception as a product of consciousness, it would be better to understand it as a text that is already writing itself, already partially defined, and made complete by the human touch of interpretation. In this way, both the percept and the perceiver contribute to the meaning of perception. "All perception," says Merleau-Ponty, "is already primordial expression" (S 67/SF 84). There are, in a sense, two authors, but a single, primordial expression.

Perception, as we have seen, is also an instance of imagining. The red patch suggests not only an implied background and interpretation of reality, but also the possibility of serving as a background for something else.

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[176] Gary Madison, "Did Merleau-Ponty have a Theory of Perception" in *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism*, ed. Thomas Busch and Shaun Gallagher (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 84.

Red can be intended as a positive shade or as a symbol for depth or weight in an artist's painting. Either way, the colour is already an interpretation of a given experience. Perception contains a background of virtuality; my experience involves "an interlacing of significations such that, when certain among them are perceived and pass into actuality, the others are only virtually intended" (SB 217/SBF 234). The experience of red as a vibrant colour, for instance, overshadows the possible experience of the world as vibrant by means of red light. Perception itself, then, is like art or poetry, awakening us to possible modes of expression: "It must be poetry; that is, it must completely awaken and recall our sheer power of expressing beyond things already said or seen" (S 52/SF 65). Perception is not only an interpretive act, but an instance of creative expression and a poetry of the senses.

What we have not seen (at least explicitly) is that perception is also a mode of embodied imagination. We find that in our very discussion of perception, we appeal to a number of corporal metaphors: we glance at an object, we grasp it and hand it over to others, we reach out of our inner selves into a world that is ready for our bodily contact. "We must therefore recognize that what is designated by the terms 'glance', 'hand', and in general 'body' is a system of systems devoted to the inspection of a world and capable of leaping over distances, piercing the perceptual

future, and outlining hollows and reliefs, distances and deviations--a meaning--in the inconceivable flatness of being" (S 67/SF 83). The system of systems that allows this contact is none other than the imagining body. The body is "an object which is *sensitive to* all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colours" (PP 236/PPF 273). The world of perception consists of a number of bodily capabilities: the cup that is graspable, the plate that I can reach and touch. "The visible world and the world of my motor projects are each total parts of the same Being."[177] The knowledge of perception is based on the knowledge of the body schema and what it can do, a "kind of knowledge that is very close to praxis" (TFL 8/TFLF 17). This knowledge is something like what Gilbert Ryle called 'knowing how', a practical ability rather than an understanding of what something is.[178] But this pragmatic knowledge is prior to particular projects and to concepts and is based on our original insertion into the world by means of the body. Percepts suggest a way that I can live my body, and only secondarily do they suggest real objects with a determinate size and shape or use. "My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven" (PP 235/PPF 272). Objects are first understood in terms of my bodily-abilities, as bearing a

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[177] PrP 162/EMF 17. See also S 66/SF 82, where Merleau-Ponty writes, "the spirit of the world is ourselves, as soon as we know how to move ourselves and look."

[178] Ryle, pp. 26-60.

"physiognomy" (PP 144/PPF 168). Thus to perceive is to imagine the body according to the cues of the perceptual scene.

The above description of perception suggests that the body plays an essential role in perceptual experience. The perceiver must be situated in the world and must assume a particular perspective. The unity of an object is not determined by abstractly thinking of its structure as it persists beyond that perspective, but by following up on the foreshadowing of the scene within which it appears. The hidden sides of an object are present as suggested by horizons, foreshadowed by the tension of lines and colours around the edges, and by the resistance of its texture to my touch. On the basis of this bodily experience of the object, I can then discern the number of sides and its constant shape and colour.[179] Without the perspectival nature of perception, an experience of a unified object would be impossible. And perspective is possible only for a situated body, suggesting that the body schema, as my insertion into the world, is essential for the unity of the perceptual object (PP 203/PPF 235).

The body schema mediates the experience of a perceptual object in a number of ways. First, it establishes a zero-

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[179] Merleau-Ponty explains that even the geometric definition of a cube is based on bodily experience with the object. The definition provides a "limiting idea whereby I express the material presence of the cube which is there before my eyes" (PP 204/PPF 236-7). See also VI 202/VIF 255 and Jacques Garelli, "Voir ceci et voir selon," pp. 83-4.

point from which we can relate to objects. The horizons of an object make sense only in relation to some position. As I explore the object, I need some way of determining if it is my body that is moving around the object or the object that is moving around me. Merleau-Ponty explains that the body determines its relation to objects. The body is experienced as an unsurpassable 'here' from which everything else is seen as 'there'. "The word 'here' applied to my body," explains Merleau-Ponty, "does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or to external coordinates, but the laying down of the first coordinates."[180] Rather than being a position amongst positions, the 'here' of the body is our initial insertion into a world. The body as zero-point is shown in the example of moving throughout a particular landscape. Usually we can tell immediately whether we are moving or the scene itself is moving, and immediately translate the new relations that we have to the changed environment. "When I intend to look left, this movement of the eye carries within it as its natural translation a vacillation of the visual field: the objects remain in place, but after a moment's fluctuation. This consequence is not learnt, but is one of the natural procedures of the

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[180] PP 100/PPF 117. Merleau-Ponty describes the relation of the body's location with other points in space as the backdrop of their appearance, with the same role of "the darkness in the theatre to show up the performance" (ibid.). He also argues that the position of the body is not determined by thought but is a horizon that I live through and experience immediately (PP 304/PPF 350-1).

psychosomatic subject. It is, as we shall see, an annex of our body schema, the immanent meaning of a changed direction of the 'gaze'" (PP 48/PPF 59). The body schema establishes our relation to objects, so that we can move about the spectacle without losing track of 'where we are'.[181]

The body schema also makes it possible for us to experience sense qualities. Sensation is actually a slice of our embodied experience, which qualities determine in various ways. Colour and sound, for instance, are bodily attitudes that the scene invites us to adopt: blues and greens are invitations to relax and explore the scene at will, while reds and bright yellows catch our attention and cause us to be excited or even to feel intruded upon.[182] "When we say that red increases the compass of our reactions, we are not to be

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[181] Merleau-Ponty attacks a traditional view that our orientation within the world is provided by 'kinesthetic' sensations that make us aware of our own movement. He argues that body movement is radically different from moving objects; the former is direct and self-moved, while the latter is indirect and involves an agent that is external to the moved object. The latter kind of movement relies on the first, and the first assumes that the mover is already inserted into a place and aware of its position in that place. The traditional sense of 'kinesthetic' fails to account for this (PP 94/PPF 110).

For this reason, Merleau-Ponty reserves the expression 'kinesthesis' (kinesthésique, PP 303/PPF 349) for a global bodily attitude towards the sensible world. He contrasts this with a localized attitude, such as an ability to grasp or bend the knee (PP 303/PPF 349). Constant colour, for instance, is not the result of physiological stimulation but of the body's global ability to recognize colour in any medium of light, so that the body attitude involved is not reducible to physiological explanation. Also, the touch of linen is identifiable not only to the local organ with which the body learned the behaviour (such as the hand) but to any other skin surface on the body (such as the back, PP 317/PPF 366). The experiences of qualities do not specify a single mode of action, but a general mode of relating to the world. See Mallin, p. 131.

[182] This is why yellow and red are traditionally associated with caution, attention and revolution; see PP 210-11/PPF 244.

understood as having in mind two distinct facts, a sensation of redness and motor reactions--we must be understood as meaning that red, by its texture as followed and adhered to be our gaze, is already the amplification of our motor being" (PP 211/PPF 245). Other senses could be described in a similar way: a rough edge is identified by how it affects my touch (PP 314-17/PPF 363-6), and a cacophonous noise by how it affects my comfort within the soundscape. In all of these examples, sense experience is shown to be primarily an invitation of the body to move in certain ways, rather than to passively receive information.[183]

Ultimately, the unity of an object is provided by the unity of the body schema. The object is presented to us in terms of things that the body can do, which in turn are understood and organized by the body schema. We interpret shading at the outlines of a figure as signs of depth only because we already understand our hands to be capable of feeling around the object, and our eyes to be capable of sweeping the spectacle and achieving a particular focus (PP 142/PPF 166). These abilities are synthesized into a single "synergetic system," operating as a single organism and providing a single, "general action of being in the world"

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[183] I stress that perception involves an 'invitation' of the body to move and is not identical to body movement. Merleau-Ponty is sensitive to this difference, despite Yorihiro Yamagata's claim that Merleau-Ponty conflates perception with kinaesthesis. Yamagata's article will be discussed later in this section. See Yamagata, "The Self or the Cogito in Kinaesthesis" in Self-awareness, Temporality, and Alterity, ed. Dan Zahavi (Netherlands: Kluwer, 1998).

(PP 234/PPF 270). By means of this general action, we are able to see unified objects rather than a flux of sensations. "It is my gaze which subtends colour," writes Merleau-Ponty, "and the movement of my hand which subtends the object's form" (PP 214/PPF 248). The unity of our body movements, of course, is the body schema. "The identity of the thing through perceptual experience," writes Merleau-Ponty, "is only another aspect of the identity of one's own body throughout exploratory movements; thus they are the same in kind as each other. Like the body image, the [object] is a system of equivalents not founded on the recognition of some law, but on the experience of a bodily presence."[184] Just as the colours of the object present a way of engaging my body with the scene, so the overall structure of the object provides a composite action for us to assume or reject.[185]

Far from being mere physiological abilities, the bodily attitudes that the senses provide us with are modes of

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[184] PP 185/PPF 216; see also PP 233/PPF 270, where he argues that "if we want to account for the things as the transcendent terminus of an open series of experiences, we must provide the subject of perception with the unity of the body schema, which is itself open and limitless."

[185] Merleau-Ponty strengthens his argument by demonstrating what happens to our perception of an object when the body image breaks down. If a marble is placed between the index and middle fingers so that both fingers touch the marble, it appears that there are two distinct objects. This is because the inner sides of the fingers are not usually used for sensing an object, and present two different yet co-existing tactile fields (with their respective 'objects'). When the marble is touched at the edge of the two fingers, the regular unity of the body schema is resumed and the singularity of the object restored. "The synthesis of the object is here effected, then, through the synthesis of one's own body, it is the reply or correlative to it, and it is literally the same thing to perceive one single marble, and to use two fingers as one single organ" (PP 205/PPF 237).

existence capable of infinite development and generalization. Merleau-Ponty claims that "there is an immediate equivalence between the orientation of the visual field and the awareness of one's own body as the potentiality of that field" (PP 206/PPF 238). The visual spectacle is automatically a situation of action for our eyes through which we are present to visual objects; the rest of the fields coalesce into a general situation of action within which we engage with objects.[186] Combined, the body acts as an intentional tissue for our projects and establishes "that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life" (PP 52-3/PPF 64-5). "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism" (PP 203/PPF 235), as a vital organ that breathes life into the world as a possibility that we can live through and experience. And like any mode of existence, we can develop our contact with the world in a variety of ways, and personalize our existence in terms of preferred habits and perspectives. One may wish to focus only on certain actions, or may give priority to hearing over vision. We are not bound to any one way of living our body schema, but can develop it in different ways.

But the body obeys our personal commands only so far. The body schema, it is true, determines how we perceive so

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[186] "[T]he sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion" (PP 212/PPF 245-6).

that "[t]he theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception" (PP 206/PPF 239). But initially, the body schema is an anonymous self "on the periphery of my being" (PP 215/PPF 249) that establishes my hold on the world as a "primal acquisition" (PP 216/PPF 250). Sensation is established as a "modality of a general existence, one already destined for a physical world and which runs through me without my being the cause of it" (ibid.). Before I am able to develop the body schema, it already opens me to the world a certain way, and establishes a logic of perception that I inherit as a "perceptual tradition" (PP 238/PPF 275). This tradition consists of a "latent knowledge" (ibid.) concerning the world and my relation to it that is never completely understood in an explicit way. Far from being the creation of consciousness, the body schema determines (to some extent) how consciousness can relate to the world.[187] On the basis of the body schema and its modalities of sensation and perception, we accumulate a stock of familiar habits and attitudes that are used to make sense of the world.

Barbaras stresses the relation between perception and the body by focusing on its relation to kinesthesis. We saw earlier how kinesthesis allows us to be aware of our movement

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[187] "My act of perception, in its unsophisticated form, does not itself bring about this synthesis; it takes advantage of work already done, of a general synthesis constituted once and for all, and this is what I mean when I say that I perceive with my body or my senses, since my body and my senses are precisely that familiarity with the world born of habit, that implicit or sedimentary body of knowledge" (PP 238/PPF 275).

without referring to changes in our perspective of the immediate situation as it adjusts to our changes--the house getting larger as I approach, its colours getting sharper, et cetera. There is, says Barbaras, a sense of self that is discovered at the heart of movement, a zero point that grounds the experience within a particular perspective. "Perception," writes Barbaras, "is not to be understood apart from motility, the truth of *perception* resides in *self movement*."[188] This is not to reduce perception to the traditional view of kinesthesis as a sum of psychic events that corresponds with a sum of bodily movements. Kinesthesis, explains Barbaras, is an "intentional exteriority" (230) and not the persistence of an interiority that observes itself and its movement 'from within'. By means of this 'intentional exteriority', we are able to maintain simultaneously an engagement with the perceptual object and a distance from it, precisely because our movement is neither a thought floating above the world of perception nor another object alongside the perceptual one. "The subject's movement," writes Barbaras, "is equally distance and proximity to [the perceptual object], placed in a nascent state, always already begun and never deployed, dynamism without extension. The *Sich bewegen* [self-movement] is the effective identity of entering [the object] and leaving it" (231). Kinesthesis, as

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[188]   Barbaras, p. 228.

the site for this proximity-at-a-distance, is essential to perception.

It is important, at this point, to stress that while Merleau-Ponty believes there to be a proximity between body movement and perception, he does not conflate the two, as some critics have argued. Yorihiro Yamagata, for instance, argues that Merleau-Ponty sees kinesthesis and perception to be "synonymous."[189] The justification for this claim is the following quote, from *The Visible and the Invisible*:

> *Wahrnehmung* [perception] and *Sich bewegen* [self-movement] are synonymous: it is for this reason that the *Wahrnehmung* never rejoins the *Sich bewegen* it wishes to apprehend; it is another of the same. But this failure, this invisible, precisely attests that *Wahrnehmung* is *Sich bewegen*, there is here a success in the failure. *Wahrnehmung* fails to apprehend Sich bewegen (and I am for myself a zero of movement even during movement, I do not move away from myself) precisely because they are homogeneous, and this failure is the proof of this homogeneity: *Wahrnehmung* and *Sich bewegen* emerge from one another. A sort of reflection by Ec-stacy, they are the same tuft. (VI 255/VIF 308)

If one identifies *Sich bewegen* not only with self-movement but with kinesthetic self-awareness, as Yorihiro Yamagata does, then it seems that Merleau-Ponty conflates perception with kinesthesis.[190]

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[189] Yamagata, p. 12.

[190] Yamagata argues that perception and kinesthesis should be separated, so that within kinesthesis we will be able to find a passive awareness of self, a kinesthetic version of the Cartesian Cogito, along the lines of a Husserlian transcendental subjectivity that is aware of itself in its very bodily movement. Yamagata continues, saying that Merleau-Ponty overlooks the presence of an immediate self-awareness because he conflates kinesthesis with perception and thus sees it as mediated by experience. Merleau-Ponty, of course, denies the possibility of an immediate self-awareness in the quote above, as well as in his

Yamagata's reading of this quote, however, shows an insensitivity to Merleau-Ponty's language. Not only is this quote from one of the working notes for *The Visible and the Invisible*, but it appears in a book that is dismantling the philosophy of objectivity and identity and developing a new concept of the flesh of the world. I reserve a discussion of flesh for Chapter Six, Section B; it is enough, at this point, to stress that while Merleau-Ponty says that self-movement and perception are of the "same tuft", he is not suggesting that we reduce one to the other. This would be to overlook the essential nature of each as a differentiation of a unique segment of the world, one in the realm of externalized intentions, and the other in the realm of colours and textures. Thus while agreeing with Barbaras that the truth of perception lies in self-movement, we do not need to reduce one to the other as Yamagata suggests. Just as self-movement involves both a proximity and a distancing between the body and the world, so self-movement and perception, as different aspects of our embodiment, encroach

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essay on the cogito in *Phenomenology of Perception*. We do not have the space in this thesis to discuss the relation of kinesthesis to self-awareness, and it has already been discussed at length elsewhere. (See, for instance, Bill Brewer, "Bodily Awareness and the Self," and Naomi Eilan, "Consciousness and the Self," both in *The Body and the Self*. I wish only to show here that Yamagata avoids a frontal confrontation with Merleau-Ponty on this matter by focusing on the view that Merleau-Ponty conflates perception with kinesthesis. Not only is this a misreading of Merleau-Ponty, but Merleau-Ponty would deny that there is an immediate self-awareness in both perception and kinesthesis even if they were different. Thus Yamagata does not really confront Merleau-Ponty's reasons for denying the existence of an immediate self-awareness. See also VI 257/VIF 310.

upon each other while remaining separate, as different dimensions within a common diacritical field that is our embodiment as a whole.[191]

The imagining body not only provides an awareness of our own body and the correlation of its abilities, but underlies our experience of sense qualities and the perception of objects. Without the body schema, for instance, we would be unable to detect our own movement, or to be able to enter into the "secret life" (PP 38/PPF 48) of perceptual objects. The imagining body schema is not totally in our grasp; it betrays our having been thrust into the world already equipped and limited in certain ways. It is as if there were a secret person deep inside of us, telling us what to do without giving to us the choice to disagree. Our bodies are already programmed to receive information about the world in certain ways--preprogrammed not in the sense of being 'hard-wired' but of already having a certain way of relating to the world that we can neither overcome nor do without. On the basis of the body schema, we can develop this inheritance into personal styles of perceiving and living.[192]

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[191] Another problem with Yamagata's criticism of Merleau-Ponty is the assumption that Merleau-Ponty is implying that *Sich bewegen* is identical with the traditional view of kinesthesis as 'self'-movement. It is more likely that Merleau-Ponty is deconstructing the traditional German concept and returning to its more general meaning as simply 'self-movement'. Merleau-Ponty usually uses the term *kinesthésique* (PP 303/PPF 349) rather than *Sich bewegen*, so the unusual German reference suggests that Merleau-Ponty is distancing himself from the term and its more technical meaning.

[192] Merleau-Ponty refers to this grounding of perception not as a hard-wiring of our bodies to see the world only in certain ways but as a

C. Aesthetic Embodiment

A more obvious place to find the imagining body is artistic creation. We have already considered the art of the mime and its immediate appeal to the audience. The mime communicates by means of the body any number of ideas or experiences. A large elephant is shown on the stage by the manner in which she pulls on its imaginary rope, her gestures of fatigue, and her exaggerated smallness in comparison to the large imagined animal at the end of the rope. We see the elephant as we live her body and share the forces and tensions on the rope that the mime recreates on the stage. The mime taps into a common expressive medium that is the body.

Maravene Sheppard Loeschke explains that in order to create an image by means of mime, one must discover the inner motivation or truth of the activities that the image involves. The image 'elephant' suggests immense volume and inertia, which can be represented either by the mime herself (exaggerating her own body to represent these proportions), or by means of her own external relations to the animal. In

tradition of perception that can be altered in certain ways (PP 238/PPF 275). He frequently refers to artists as altering this, as we will see in the next section. Another example of changing the tradition of perception is suggested by the radically different conception of colour held by the Greeks, in which colour consisted more of differentiations of shade rather than colour as we know it today. Thus certain Classical references to 'blue' hair and to the 'red' sea are really references to a kind of differentiation with which we are unfamiliar today.

the above example, she depicts the elephant in terms of the actions of an elephant trainer dragging the elephant by a rope. The truth of this movement, then, will concern the kind of bodily action required to pull the elephant: a particular center of gravity, a particular configuration and intensity of muscle tension, and the appropriate facial gestures of fatigue. But the mime does not simply imitate the actual body pulling on the elephant; the mime breaks down the entire bodily experience to a few simple, essential gestures that communicate immediately the bodily exertion involved in the act, and with a certain style and grace that the average person lacks. If one does not discover the inner beauty of a given action, however mundane that action might be, one does not arrive at the art of mime.[193]

To elaborate on the role of the body in mime, it would help to consider Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's lengthy study of the art of dance. She explains that the dancer's body is "a center of force which presents changing linear designs."[194] By moving about on the stage, the dancer creates a "spatialization of force" (124) that the audience can follow, literally tracing an intricate pattern or image on the stage floor. Dance is a 'form in the making', the activity of creating a form with the body. But the form is not

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[193] Loeschke, pp. 28-9.

[194] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 121.

experienced (by either the dancer or the audience) as a
visual spectacle. The dancer does not attempt to picture her
movements from a bird's eye perspective, and the members of
the audience do not watch the dancer as they might watch a
fireworks display. The dancer becomes absorbed in the entire
experience of the movements, from head to foot, from inner
motivation to external expression. Sheets-Johnstone explains:
"The dancer has a fund of lived experience of her body in
movement, and consequently, a highly developed pre-reflective
awareness of the moving spatial presence of her body" (117).
The dancer craftily expresses this inner truth or motivation
of the sequence, which the audience experiences as an
intricate pattern of bodily experience. The inner truth of
the given sequence, however, relies on the body schema as an
expressive medium. "The pattern for the movement is already a
part of the global bodily schema" (118). The members of the
audience recognize the image because they, too, have a body
schema that can be virtually extended in the ways of the
dancer. They follow the dancer not as much with their 'eyes'
as with their virtual bodies and the tensions and kinesthetic
impressions that they would feel if they were to literally
join the dancer on the stage. This means that one could also
experience virtual bodily experiences in the normal bodily
activities of others: while watching basketball, we feel the
upward force of the player's hand as he throws the ball
towards the net, and we feel the vibrations in our virtual

feet as the ball bounces off of the wooden floor. But in dance, the movements themselves become the focus. "What differentiates dance from movement is that lived form-in-the-making is created as a sheer form in and of itself, and unlike other movement activities, such as basketball, gymnastics, and the like, it has no meaning beyond itself" (148). The dance focuses our attention away from everyday objects and towards the creative movements that are possible for an imagining body.[195]

It is less obvious how the body applies to other art forms. Though Merleau-Ponty says little about dance, he writes extensively about the visual arts. The painter, as we

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[195] Sheets-Johnstone assumes a Sartrean position concerning the image. She claims that the "linear and areal qualities [of the dance] exist within the total illusion of force and have no existence apart from that global phenomenon" (115). Thus for the dancer there must be a radical difference between imagining the image traced out by the dance, and experiencing the dance kinesthetically. She claims that a "spontaneous shift occurs from the imaginative mode to the perceptual mode" (118) when the dancer switches her focus from the image to the body. The audience meanwhile experiences only the image. They do not, essentially, 'see' anything at all, but are made to imagine the figure by means of the analogue of the dance.

Though I would agree that the image does not exist apart from the global phenomenon, I do not agree with the claim that the image and the body schema can be radically separated. The members of the audience understand the dance on the basis of their own bodily experiences, which means that they must be aware of both the forces on the dancer's body and the image that is created by means of it. There is no 'shifting' from perception to imagination, but rather we imagine here by means of shared kinesthetic and bodily experience.

She also makes use of the difference between drawing a circle in the air and imagining it to illustrate her Sartrean view of the image. The dancer is like the person who can draw circles in the air really well, closing them off perfectly without imagining them (116). But the same example can be used to show the relation between tactile and visual space, and not between perception and imagination. Visual space allows us to see the figure all at once, and to be more precise and thus more able to close the circle properly, while in tactile space we experience the parts of a figure over a period of time. The two spaces, then, are irreducible to each other. See PP 223-4/PPF 257-9.

saw earlier, is involved in presenting how the world first appears to us, before we make use of regular patterns and concepts to make sense of it. The artist first disrupts ordinary ways of seeing and provides a distorted picture, forcing the viewer to re-explore how she sees in order to experience meaning in the painting. The painting "is a system of equivalences which demands precisely this particular upheaval, and it is in the name of a *truer* relation between things that their ordinary ties are broken" (S 56/SF 71). The artist provides this deeper truth of perception by presenting in visible form the invisible levels and depths that we experience in ordinary perception. Cézanne, in particular, was a master of colour and line, showing how the very changes in the colour of an object's outline provides a sense of depth, voluminosity and weight. We usually overlook these aspects of perception and make use of them as one makes use of the body schema in ordinary action (SNS 14-15/SNSF 25).

Merleau-Ponty is particularly fascinated by the artist's creative activity. How is it, he asks, that a painting can be constructed out of simple brush strokes, and that such emotion and perceptual depth can be expressed by a few movements of the hand? There are two sides to artistic creation: the right side, the work itself, and the "feeble movement of the brush or pen" (S 45/SF 57). Like the dancer, the artist "did not have in his mind's eye all the gestures possible, and in making his choice he did not have to

eliminate all but one" (ibid.). The 'two sides' metaphor is dramatized even more in the case of weaving in which the artist literally works on the 'wrong' side of the artwork. The artist's action, however, expresses a more general action that is irreducible to either the artist's movements or to the simple strokes of paint on the canvass: the action of the eye on the world, and of the body as it forms the background for the artistic vision.

To understand what this means, we must return for a moment to the description of the body schema. As Drew Leder has shown, when one sense becomes my body's focus, the other senses are still present in the form of an absence or background. Likewise in art, though vision is stressed, the rest of the body is implied. The artist expresses, more than anything, his own embodied relation to the world, and his own manner of completing its vague meaning in visible form--in the form of a painting. This general mode of embodiment is revealed by the style of the artist.[196] The style cannot be reduced to actual movements of the hands, since we recognize the artist's style in a variety of artforms that involve completely different movements. But there is a style nonetheless. For some, it is savage and emotional, as in the

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[196] *SNS* 20/*SNSF* 25. Merleau-Ponty sometimes refers to the artist's life in general, and not specifically to the artist's 'embodiment'. Thus in the case of Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty claims that his art "called for this life" (ibid.) and required that it be created in "the wretchedness of his empirical life" (*SNS* 25/*SNSF* 43). But following from his other works on the body, it is clear that this life called for by his art was one of embodiment within a world.

work of Cézanne and Jackson Pollack; for others, it is very polished and refined, like the paintings of the French Classicists. These styles, unique to each artist, are essentially ways of being embodied in the world that are universalized in the visible work of art, available for all to see.[197] The artwork is an expression of the artist's style of embodiment. The contours of Matisse's women, for instance, are not mimetic but "veins, as the axes of a corporeal system of activity and passivity."[198] The work of art, writes Merleau-Ponty, provides us with "new organs" (S 52/SF 66) with which to see the world. Without this implied embodiment, the painting could not bear the meaning that it does, composed out of "certain gaps or fissures, figures and grounds, a top and a bottom, a normal and a deviation" (S 54/SF 68). The viewer does not simply look at the artwork, but must employ her virtual body to reassume the artist's stance and gaze into the artist's original conception of the particular scene. A painting invites the viewer to "take up the gesture which created it" (S 51/SF 64).

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[197] Merleau-Ponty writes that the "inner schema" of a painting is the artist's own embodied life. "It is that life itself, to the extent that the life emerges from its inherence, ceases to be in possession of itself and becomes a universal means of understanding and making something understood, or seeing and of presenting something to see" (S 53/SF 66).

[198] PrP 184/EMF 76. Carleton Dallery translates the French "nervures" as "structural filaments," which is an unfortunate choice because it discards the 'living' aspect of the French word. Merleau-Ponty uses the same word again (VI 118-19/VIF 158-9) where it is translated as "nervure", such as the central vein of a leaf. I have chosen 'vein' here, to stress the organic quality of the line and its relation to the body schema of the artist.

The essentially carnal nature of painting is also shown in cases where movement has been depicted. Merleau-Ponty compares Gericault's *Epsom Derby* to a photograph of a running horse in order to show how art, and not photography, captures the embodied experience of running. The horse in the photograph appears to be floating, with all four legs outstretched. The painting, on the other hand, properly depicts movement while distorting the horse's actual posture so that some of the legs are touching the ground while others are not. The image is a structural story telling how the horse moves through time, with each hoof signifying a different moment in time. The gestalt created by the four hooves represents a temporal passage and an embodied experience (for the horse). Likewise, a painted picture of a runner will need to have different temporal moments and positions represented in order for movement to appear. Merleau-Ponty explains that while the photograph attempts to depict the body as it actually is at a given moment, the painting attempts to capture the embodied, temporal experience, complete with its virtual future and remembered past. "[T]he art of painting is never altogether outside time, because it is always within the carnal" (PrP 186/EMF 81). The essential medium of artistic creation is not simply the paint or the mind which reconstructs a scene, but the living body with its position and temporality. Merleau-Ponty concludes: "To live in painting is still to breathe the air

of this world--above all for the man who sees something in the world to paint. And there is a little of him in every man" (S 64/SF 81).

D. Fanciful Embodiment

In what way can fanciful thinking be seen as an instance of embodiment? As we saw in Chapter Three, fancy is based on perception. On the basis of this premise, and the premise, developed above, that perception is based on the imagining body, it follows logically that fancy, as well, will be based on the imagining body. We have already seen how fanciful thinking involves a 'quasi-spatiality' that cannot be completely separated from perceptual space (despite the efforts of Casey, Sartre and others). It is also clear, in the few references to fanciful thinking in Merleau-Ponty's writings, that fancy is based on perception (see, for instance, PP 343/PPF 395). We can reasonably assume that if perception is based on the imagining body, then fanciful thinking will also be based on the imagining body.

I would like to develop the idea of fancy being based on the imagining body by considering a particular observation made by Shaun Gallagher concerning a patient who has lost all proprioceptive awareness below the neck (and thus has lost a fully functioning body schema). The patient claims to make use of the imagination in order to carry out basic bodily movements. In order to walk across the room, for instance,

the patient will 'imagine' what his body is like and how it is related to objects in the room; using this 'mental image', the patient is then able to imagine his movement and mimic the image with his actual body.[199] It could be suggested that the patient is not using the body schema or the 'imagining body', but is in fact fabricating the imagining body as a fiction created by the mind.[200]

On closer inspection, however, this interpretation does not work. The body schema is not identical to the sum of proprioceptive impressions, and is not the actual unity of the body as a system of capabilities. The body schema, as shown above, is also a virtual body, an open field of possible modes of embodiment that can change and develop. It is precisely the virtual aspect of the body schema, for instance, that comes to the fore when we develop a new habit, distorting and extending our original capabilities to acquire a new mode of behaviour. When we have learned the new skill, we allow it to fall back into the rest of the body, to become, as Leder as shown, part of the absent bodily background for the particular activity at hand. I think that Gallagher's patient is like a person learning a new skill, but never reaching the point where it can become part of the background. The patient is like a perpetual learner, living

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[199] Shaun Gallagher, during a private conversation in Buffalo, New York, April 30, 2000.

[200] This is not, however, Gallagher's position.

in the virtual body but never able to contribute the new skill to the acquired body. The patient, nevertheless, lives by means of a virtual body that provides a sense of being centered and grounded in a virtual situation with a sense of orientation and gravity. Without this embodiment, the patient would be unable to inhabit the virtual scene and walk 'as if' he were the imagined body. Without a functioning virtual body schema, the patient would be unable to use the imagination to walk.

This view of fanciful thinking is suggested by what Merleau-Ponty says about sleeping and dreams. He often refers to fanciful thinking in the same context as sleeping. Both, he claims, are grounded in embodiment and perception. In order to fall asleep, we imitate a sleeping person by giving ourselves over to sleep, relaxing our muscles and allowing our minds to wander (PP 164/PPF 191). When sleep arrives, we are given over to dreaming which is itself partially guided by bodily feelings and vital forces that assume a unique meaning in the world of the dream. We begin, like Gallagher's patient, imitating a virtual body (that is asleep), until we become a sleeping body ourselves. And even within the dream, we continue to possess a 'point of view' and a spatiality that is unique to the dream. Regardless of the divine abilities that we have to switch that point of view without recourse to normal action (like walking or focusing our vision), the dreamed body is still, nevertheless, a body that

is grounded within a space that it cannot completely control. Rather than providing an escape from embodiment, sleeping and dreaming are only extreme instances of existing in terms of the body schema. We are no longer able to awake at will, but are connected to the world of voluntary consciousness only by means of the senses--if we hear a loud sound or see a bright light (PP 164/PPF 191). Like the dream or sleep, fanciful thinking borrows from the imagining body its virtual lining and extends that lining to an extreme modality of existing; but the body is still there, however faint and however free of its usual weight and restrictions. This shows that fanciful thinking is essentially grounded in the imagining body.

With the findings concerning fanciful thinking in Chapter Three, we found that even idle fancy involves a 'quasi-depth' and a 'quasi-space' that is an extension of the depth and space of perceptual embodiment. Fanciful thinking is an extreme case of the virtual body, a perspective that is almost acosmic but bears the traces of the perceiving body that it can never leave behind. It is better, then, to say that fancy and perceptual embodiment are not absolutely separate modes of consciousness, but poles on a continuum of the body's imaginative existence.

E. Elemental Embodiment

We now arrive at the final type of embodiment: the embodiment of the elements, traditionally reduced to those of earth, air, water and fire. We have already seen, in Chapter Three, Section E, how the elements involve very general and vague clusters of meaning that we find ourselves engaged with at a pre- or subconscious level. The water of the ocean is interpreted by us as soothing and replenishing, even at times when our minds are focused on something else. We also seem to have, as Sartre showed, a natural repulsion to the slimy due to its meaning for us as a slow annihilation. The world already contains clusters of vague meanings in the form of elemental images that we embody without explicit thought.

Gaston Bachelard claimed that the elements are the products of the unconscious as it encounters the world of sense. We experience a series of meaningful gestalts that taint our percepts with a psychological meaning, such as the fear of a slow annihilation in the presence of sliminess.[201] Bachelard believed that we can use poetry to discover the basic elements of perception. The Presocratic philosophers were also poets who were sensitive to the inner structure of the psyche's relation to Being. This secret inner relation of the unconscious to Being is not only the source of good poetry but also of the meaning of perception and thought. On

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[201] This is, of course, Sartre's example, and not Bachelard's. See Chapter Three, Section E.

the basis of these elemental reflections, Bachelard claimed to be doing a phenomenology of the imagination.[202]

Merleau-Ponty denied the existence of an unconscious. There is no inner self controlling our behaviour, but only consciousness as embodied (PP 296/PPF 343). Associations in dreams present "blurred outlines, distinctive relationships which are in no way 'unconscious'" (PP 168/PPF 196; see also PP 160/PPF 191). He argues, however, that the body does operate in some ways similar to an unconscious by providing a sense of existence that the subject does not determine, and by inserting the subject into a world that it finds already bearing a certain meaning.[203] Merleau-Ponty writes that we can think of this embodiment as an 'unconscious', but it is to be sought "not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our 'consciousness', but in front of us, as articulations of our field" (VI 180/VIF 234). The body is the site of an intertwining of the appearing of Being and its hiddenness, of the dawning of the expression of a being that was previously in darkness, an inarticulate void like the waters at the beginning of *Genesis*. The body inaugurates the expression of

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[202]   Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xiv.

[203]   Merold Westphal argues that Merleau-Ponty makes a good case for the unconscious in his analysis of politics and history, but that he is unable, in his writings on consciousness, to account for repression. See "Situation and Suspicion in the Thought of Merleau-Ponty: The Question of Phenomenology and Politics" in *Ontology and Alterity*, ed. Galen Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990). See also HT 104/HTF 112, where Merleau-Ponty writes: "Consciousness is not a good judge of what we are *doing* since we are involved in the struggle of history and in this we achieve more, less, or something else than we thought we were doing."

Being, expands it and articulates it. But this is done on the basis of meanings that are already intrinsic to how Being appears to us and that remain, for the most part, hidden from consciousness. These meanings are found especially in the elemental images of earth, air, water and fire, which provide us with an inexhaustible source of inspiration. These deeper meanings do not occur 'behind the back' of consciousness, but at the body's point of contact with Being. This is why we are invited to do a psychoanalysis of nature, and not of the individual psyche.[204]

With no clear distinction between conscious and unconscious, we cannot understand the effects of elemental images on the body in terms of a causal science, but must rather appeal to the dynamic and ambiguous method of poetical

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[204] VI 267/VIF 321; see Edward Casey, "The Unconscious Mind," *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority*, pp. 52-3.

Lacan disagrees with Merleau-Ponty concerning the unconscious. See the note above (in Chapter Four, Section B) concerning Lacan's relation to Merleau-Ponty.

There is a debate concerning the influence of psychology on Merleau-Ponty's work. Claude Lefort, for instance, claims that while psychology greatly influenced Merleau-Ponty's earlier writings, he came to distance himself from psychology for a philosophy of Being (*Sur un Colonne Absente*, p. 154). Martin Jay, by contrast, argues that Merleau-Ponty becomes more and more indebted to Lacan and Freud in his later work, including the essay "The Child's Relations with Others" as discussed in chapter four (see Jay, pp. 173-4). There are also several references throughout *The Visible and the Invisible* concerning Gestalt psychology, Lacan and Freud (VI 204-6, 126, 262, 270/VIF 258-59, 168, 316, 323). Though it is clear, as Lefort shows, that Merleau-Ponty leaves behind a philosophy of inner consciousness and along with it any form of psychologism, it is equally clear that he continues to use many psychological terms to describe the flesh of the world. Not only does he make use of Lacan and Freud, but he continues to develop the idea of a perceptual gestalt until the end of his life (see, for instance, VI 189-90 and 204-6 /VIF 242-44 and 258-59). It seems, then, that Jay's understanding of Merleau-Ponty's relation to psychology is more accurate than that of Lefort.

and artistic expression. Merleau-Ponty writes that the artwork "gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible" (PrP 166/EMF 29), namely, the creative emergence of perceptual meaning. We tend to overlook the creative activity of perception and to treat percepts as absolute givens. In order to return us to the imaginative basis of perception, the work of art presents its colours as ambiguously placed at the chiasm of background and foreground, at once visible to the eye and invisible as the ciphers of depth and volume. To see this intertwining of the visible and the invisible, we need not resort to another sense, a "muscular sense" (PrP 166/EMF 27), to supplement our other senses of touch, smell, et cetera. The work of art "opens upon a texture of Being of which the discrete sensorial messages are only the punctuations or the caesurae. The eye lives in this texture as a man lives in his house" (ibid.). The shade of red that we perceive not only presents a dimension of depth and an opening to other colours, but is an expression of the texture of Being that underlies all of perception. It is this texture, the "inward tapestries, the imaginary texture of the real" (PrP 165/EMF 24) that is expressed by the notion of elemental images. The texture of Being, before it is developed into categories for consciousness, is already inscribed with the rich meanings of the elements. We experience these different structurations of Being's texture when we imagine the significance of sand or

water, both as they appear in dreams and as we experience them in the beach scene illustrated in Chapter Three, Section A. Between thought and intuition, between the psyche and Being, are the elements as unique dimensions of meaning that deliver Being to our expression, and deliver us up to Being's imagining.[205]

When I refer to an elemental imagination, I am referring to the body as it already imagines itself in its relation to Being--the body, in other words, as embedded in the inner texture of Being, only hinted at by the work of art. At the point when the body first learns to touch itself, "a blending of some sort takes place--when the spark is lit between sensing and sensible, lighting the fire that will not stop burning until some accident of the body will undo what no accident would have sufficed to do" (PrP 163-4/EMF 21). The body inaugurates a tradition of expression which only death will undo; this tradition is primarily not a tradition of language or even of perception, but a tradition of experiencing the world along various fault lines of meaning, as represented by the elements. On the basis of these vague and ambiguous structures, we find that the world is already a song, already poetry that is half-written and completed the

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[205] David Pettigrew elaborates on how art expresses this elemental relation to being in his article, "Merleau-Ponty and the Unconscious" in *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority*, pp. 60-5.

moment that we move our bodies and complete the expression of Being that is begun in these elemental ways.[206]

The elemental imagination is the "natal pact between our body and the world" (PrP 6/INF 404), a pact that we are committed to throughout our lives. It provides the source for our ability to develop the body schema, to perceive the world in terms of perceptual gestalts, and to renew the imagination with fresh images from nature. The elemental imagination is a fundamental mode of embodiment; before we can have perceptual gestalts, we must dream the secret powers of water, earth, air and fire.

We can see, in the relation between the body and the elements, a possible response to Derrida's description of the mime. In Chapter Two, Section E, it was shown how Derrida used the mime to represent an embodied dissimilation of meaning where the body is constantly doubling and deferring itself, reducing all sense of authority and authorship to an endless play of signifiers. But it was discussed above (in Chapter Three, Section E) that the imagination involves a verticality that is missing in Baudrillard's analysis. There are certainly many cases where the production of images seems to circle back onto itself as if to forget its origins--feedback loops and the reproduction of computer images being but two examples. But to focus on this as a model for

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[206]   Merleau-Ponty writes that words, vowels and phonemes are "so many ways of singing the world (autant de manières de chanter le monde)" (PP 187/PPF 218).

imagining is to overlook the verticality present in our relation to elemental images.

Likewise, in the case of Derrida, the mime's imagining body cannot be completely reduced to a play of signifiers. In Chapter Four, Section B, it was shown that the body schema provides the body with a sense of balance and anchorage within the world. In Chapter Five, Section B, it was shown that perception is not possible without the body schema. To deny an anchorage and a perspective is to obtain not a series of signifiers, but the total collapse of all meaning. Without the gestalt structure with its margins and foreground, itself anchored by the body, there can be no meaning.

Unlike Baudrillard, however, Derrida does continue to see the play of signifiers to be an 'appearance' of reference and a 'deferral' of meaning by means of traces that never become completely present.[207] What Derrida objects to most in Merleau-Ponty's writings is the metaphysics of presence: the idea that Being can be intuited in some kind of immediate presence, appearance, or essence. He writes that "differance is not, does not exist, and is not any sort of being-present (on) .... the signified concept is never present in itself."[208] What the postmodern thinker deals with is not a presence of Being but a 'trace' which is "the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond

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[207] Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 210; *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 153-4.
[208] Ibid., pp. 134 and 140.

itself" (156). The mime refers to nothing but her body as a white page with no external reference. What we experience is the 'between' of presences, the 'invisible' of the visible illusion of the mime.

It has already been shown throughout this thesis, however, that in this respect Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the imagination is by no means an instance of the philosophy of presence. Qualities have been shown to be dimensions of sense as well as positive qualities when appearing within a perceptual gestalt.[209] Bodily habits fade into the background of our experience, providing a kind of 'absence' that makes possible the appearance of an object. And elemental images expose the body to the most general and vague openings or responses that the body appropriates in relation to the world.

It has also been shown that, for Merleau-Ponty, language must be understood in terms of a diacritical system. Rather than referring to anything outside of language, each sign achieves a meaning only in its differential relation to other signs. Merleau-Ponty explains: "Since the sign has meaning only in so far as it is profiled against other signs, its meaning is entirely involved in language. Speech always comes into play against a background of speech; it is always only a

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[209] Nancy Holland shows how Merleau-Ponty rejects traditional philosophies of perception for a theory which accounts for absence, "Merleau-Ponty on Presence: A Derridian Reading," *Research in Phenomenology* 16 (1986), pp. 112-15.

fold in the immense fabric of language" (S 42/SF 53). We find such a view even in his earlier writings, for instance in *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he says, "there is no experience without speech, as the purely lived-through has no part in the discursive life of man."[210] Merleau-Ponty also discusses the "primordial silence" (PP 184/PPF 214) that grounds language and defers the possibility for a word to attain a determinate meaning. Thus his theory of language sounds a lot like that of Derrida, as being based not on the positive presence of meanings but on the differential relations among words themselves.[211]

But it would be wrong to focus merely on the similarities between the two thinkers, as many commentators of Merleau-Ponty are prone to do.[212] The expressions of the body cannot be reduced to an arbitrary play of signifiers, and there is some truth, claims Merleau-Ponty, to the theory of natural gestures. This truth is not found in a world that is fixed and determinate and merely represented by words within a syntax. He writes:

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[210] PP 337/PPF 388. Thus it is wrong to say, as Ricoeur does, that according to Merleau-Ponty the body is some sort of primordial expression which language merely extrapolates." "Hommage a Merleau-Ponty," *Esprit* 296 (1961), p. 1120.

[211] It will be shown, in Chapter Six, how Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'flesh' further decenters presence in his ontology. "For him," writes Bernard Flynn, "the notion of the flesh does not designate a particular region of being but being itself as non-coincidence, or as coincidence deferred." "Textuality and the Flesh: Derrida and Merleau-Ponty," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 15 (1984), p. 174.

[212] See, for instance, the articles by Holland and Bernard Flynn.

> It would then be found that the words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of 'singing' the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naïve onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence.[213]

"The spoken word is a gesture," he adds, "and its meaning, a world" (PP 184/PPF 214). Like Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty claims that even within the differential system of language we are still exposed to a world that is anchored by our bodies. Words, then, do not close in on themselves, but provide openings for new ways to understand the world. Words are "several ways for the human body to celebrate the world and in the last resort to live it."[214] The mime does not simply engage in a bodily version of simulacra, but remains grounded in the world of perception and affected by gravity and the values imposed on it by elemental images.

It is also the case that, unlike Derrida, Merleau-Ponty holds to a theory of truth in terms of the world as a 'presence-in-the-making', which while not being an absence in the sense of Derrida's *différance* is also not a presence in the metaphysical sense. Thus Gary Madison is correct to observe that an essential difference between Derrida and Merleau-Ponty is that while the former gives up on the

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[213] PP 187/PPF 218. These emotional essences can be seen as the effects of elemental images on the body that later get expressed in words, especially in poetry.

[214] PP 187/PPF 218. The French reads "célébrer le monde," which Colin Smith translates as "sing the world's praises." I choose the more literal translation, "celebrate the world."

possibility of truth, Merleau-Ponty attempts to realign it with an ontology of *becoming.* He concludes: "Strictly speaking, reality, like truth, *is not*; it becomes, it transpires, *elle s'écrit*, and the locus of its most eloquent (*parlante*) inscription is the human seeing/writing subject."[215]

In the introduction, an exhaustive and restrictive definition of the imagination was rejected for a more fluid definition based on family resemblance. Just as we can recognize a member of my family by considering a number of different characteristics, so the imagination was defined in terms of many different kinds of experience: perception, aesthetics, fanciful thinking and the experience of elemental images. The imagination is not a restricted faculty of the mind, but a universal dimension of virtuality that can be found working on the margins of every experience. Far from being a mere escape from reality or a source of illusion and falsehood, the imagination has been shown to permeate our existence and to be an essential medium for the discovery and expression of meaning.

Despite the small number of explicit references to the imagination in Merleau-Ponty's work, it has been shown how even from his earliest writings he was dealing with a

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[215] Madison, "Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: La différEnce," *Écart & Différance: Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on Seeing and Writing*, ed. M.C. Dillon (New Jersey: Atlantic Highlands, 1997), p. 106.

general, expressive power of the body. The imagination, as expressive embodiment, is a common thread throughout his work. "There is," claims John Bannan, "a development by means of a phenomenology of imagination that can strikingly extend its range, allowing it many of the privileges once accorded only to idea and concept, without rupture with the familiar and the human from which phenomenology must draw its strength."[216] The imagining body, in other words, can be found not only in the dance of the mime, but in the most mundane experiences. We see the body imagining when we make use of sign language, when we attempt to communicate underwater or at the stock market, when we need to direct traffic or an orchestra, and when we worship God by means of liturgical actions. All of these expressions involve the imagining body, the same imagining body that the mime develops into an art. In order to understand how we experience the world, we are essentially asking about the art of mime. Katherine Sorley Walker, a practicing mime, writes: "If you look around, you'll be surprised how many gestures are quite instinctive with people. No one thinks of them as Mime. But of course, that's what they are."[217] A philosophy of human existence must be a philosophy of the imagining body; philosophy, as we said earlier, is grounded in mime.

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[216]   Bannan, p. 268.

[217]   Katherine Sorley Walker, *Eyes on Mime* (New York: John Day, 1969), p. 169. The examples can be found on pp. 162-4.

CHAPTER SIX: IMAGINING BEING

A. Introduction

If the body is essentially an imaginative medium for understanding the world, then it must be asked what effect this has on the understanding of Being. If we return to the seashore scene of the third chapter, there is also a sense of Being imagining itself. The sound of the water crashing into the shore, the smell of the salt and the seaweed in the air, the heat of the sand beneath my feet, suggest a timeless and dynamic coming-into-being that occurs according to a fate that is not of my making. A philosophy of the imagining body leads to a philosophy of imagining Being.

Towards the end of Merleau-Ponty's career, he started to focus on the ontological implications of his philosophy. Though there is no need to say, as some critics do,[218] that Merleau-Ponty's early works provide an insufficient ground for an ontology, it is at least fair to say that it is only in his later works that Merleau-Ponty began to focus on ontology in its own right. A parallel development in his philosophy is a progressive shift away from embodied consciousness to what he calls the flesh of the world. By developing the concept of the imagining body into the flesh

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[218] See Lefort, pp. 152-4.

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of the world, we can see in what way Merleau-Ponty intends for us to think of Being as imagining.

The following will include a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh, and the role that it plays in his ontology. In Section C it will be shown in what way the flesh can be conceived of as the imagining of Being, and in what way the body appropriates this imagining and makes it more determinate in acts of expression.

B. Flesh and Reversibility

To understand what 'flesh' means, we must first revisit the reversibility of roles that we found in double sensation. Reversibility both blends together the two roles of sensing and being sensed and holds them apart: "The act which draws together at the same time takes away and holds at a distance, so that I touch myself only by escaping from myself" (PP 408/PP 467). This unity-in-difference is made possible, we have seen, by the body schema. The body is the place for the "meeting of the inner and the outer" (PP 454/PPF 518). My mind, or subjectivity, is totally outside of itself and engaged in projects, while external objects are transformed into possibilities for my phenomenal body.[219] "Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself" (PP 407/PPF 466-7). The body schema

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[219] At the core of subjectivity is "the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp" (PP 408/PPF 467).

provides a unique interface for the reversibility of consciousness and world which is exemplified in the phenomenon of double sensation.

In *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty explains that between the sensing body and the thing sensed, or rather supporting them, is a common fabric or 'flesh' of the world. "[T]he world," he explains, "is made of the same stuff as the body" (PrP 163/EMF 19). This stuff is neither materialistic nor mentalistic, but is the very blending of roles that we have already discovered in double sensation. The body emerges at the point of convergence of activity and passivity, of sensing and being sensed. "There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place" (PrP 163/EMF 21). This chiasm of the sensible is made possible because the body that senses is also part of the sensible world. "Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing" (PrP 163/EMF 19). I cannot escape this exteriorization of my being; I am literally in the world, transcending myself towards things. And things resemble my own visibility. The body "holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are encrusted into its flesh, they are part of its full definition" (ibid.). The first meaning we have of things is not their Euclidean form

or their pragmatic value, but their "carnal formula" (PrP
164/EMF 22) which determines the ways that my body can relate
to them. A thing is 'graspable' or 'visible' insofar as it
allows me to grasp it or to see it. My body interprets the
thing by grasping it or by focusing on it, by seeing it,
essentially, as manipulable by means of my body. "Everything
I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach
of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the 'I can'" (PrP
162/EMF 17). The result is that the body and the thing are
'virtually' the same, in terms of the 'I can' of the body.
"The visible world and the world of my motor projects are
each total parts of the same Being."[220] One of these 'total
parts', that of the body, establishes a field in which
everything can be seen in terms of a possibility of
embodiment. The other, that of things, makes it so that in
order for me to see at all, I must be a visible like the
things I see. "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" (PrP 162/EMF 18). If we could not see
ourselves as being also visible, we would not realize
ourselves as being in contact with the world but rather, like
ghosts, would float above things and never interact with
them. We would have, Merleau-Ponty explains, an "adamantine

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[220] Ibid. 'Total parts' does not mean two distinct parts within a
common whole. It would be better to think of these 'total parts' or
'leaves' as different aspects of a whole, much as sexuality is explained
as a mode of existence that encompasses all of existence while not being
identical to it (PP 169/PPF 197).

body" (PrP 163/EMF 20). Perception involves an "overlapping (empiétement)" (PrP 162/EMF 17) of the two orders of the sensing and being sensed--of the visible and the invisible. And this overlapping is mediated by the fabric of flesh that is common to both orders.

Flesh is not "in itself, or matter" (PrP 162/EMF 18), nor is it a 'psychic' entity resulting in an animism of Nature. It is not a positive substance like clay out of which all beings are made, but is the essential divergence between sensing and sensed, an opening or écart through which Being is made manifest. In order to appear, Being must divide itself, must inaugurate a dehiscence of itself so that it can provide the distance and externalization required to have sense. Flesh, then, suggests that Being is always deferred, is always separated from itself. Flesh must be understood as "segregation, dimensionality, continuation, latency, encroachment" (VI 248/VIF 302). This does not make of flesh a simple negation of Being, but the opening and development of Being into a series of dimensions in which it can appear. Perhaps the best description of flesh is that provided by David Abram when he writes:

> The flesh is the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity. It is the reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible and of the sensible in the sentient, a mystery of which we have always, at least tacitly, been aware, since we have never been able to affirm one of these phenomena, the

perceivable world or the perceiving self, without implicitly affirming the existence of the other.[221]

We experience the roles of sensing and being sensed simultaneously and cannot imagine having one without the other. Rather than reducing one mode of being to the other, Merleau-Ponty sets out to understand their mysterious union as a primordial dimension of the appearing of Being. To describe Being and its manner of appearing, we must examine the medium for Being which is this flesh. "One cannot make a direct ontology" (VI 179/VIF 233), claims Merleau-Ponty, but must use the "indirect" or "negative" method of an analysis of flesh. It is now our task to understand what the flesh is, and what this essential embodiment of Being suggests about the imagination of Being.

How are we to understand this medium of Being? If it is based on the reversible relation between one hand and the other, how is this relation similar to that between the body and the world? At times Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that there is a reversibility between body and world that is symmetrical to the reversibility we experience within our own bodies in the phenomenon of double sensation. For instance, he refers to Paul Klee's story of being seen by Nature. "In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days, I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me" (PrP 167/EMF 31).

[221] David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception in a More-than-Human World (New York: Pantheon, 1996), p. 66.

Merleau-Ponty himself reports: "I feel myself looked at by things" (VI 139/VIF 183). There is, he adds, an 'emigration' of my consciousness to the realm of things where I am "to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated ... so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen" (VI 139/VIF 183). There is a remarkable blending of seeing and seen that lies at the heart of perception, a virtual identification of consciousness with Nature.

These passages have understandably caused much confusion. It could be seen, for instance, that Merleau-Ponty intends a kind of 'animism' or 'psychism' at the heart of Nature. But Merleau-Ponty makes it clear that this is not his intention. We are not talking about "that absurdity: color that sees itself, surface that touches itself" but the paradox of "a set of colors and surfaces inhabited by a touch, a vision" (VI 135/VIF 178-9). It could still be argued that Merleau-Ponty is challenging traditional conceptions of vision and redefining it. Though this is true, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty was not suggesting an animistic conception of Nature.

A better interpretation is provided by Martin Dillon, who claims that "we are speaking here in similes"[222] and

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[222] Dillon, p. 162.

should not read the passages literally. He explains that the tree, like a mirror, allows me to experience my externality and visibility--my inability to escape the fact that I am, in some ways, like the trees (in being visible). The mirror provides an external image of myself that reminds me of my being amongst the objects that I see. The tree, obviously, does not 'reflect' my visibility in the same manner as the mirror, but the mere fact that it shares with me the possibility of being seen provides me with the opportunity to see that my visibility is as embedded in the world as that of the tree. Dillon explains that Merleau-Ponty "wants to give consciousness an outside which limits it and makes it visible as a body which can be seen from external points of view" (162). The tree, far from assuming an experience and a reflexivity like my own, is a reminder of the fact that even my own vision is grounded in the possibility of being seen. Thus there is no identification of consciousness with Nature, but a radical asymmetry between my body and Nature: "The plain fact," writes Dillon, "is that the table is neither part of my body nor sentient in the way my body is. There is an asymmetry in the reversibility thesis emerging here that needs to be investigated" (159).

The asymmetry between the body and Nature revolves around the concept of reflexivity. By contrast to Modern philosophy, which stresses a reflection of the self based on thought, Merleau-Ponty is suggesting that it is the body, and

not the mind, that allows for self-reflection. Merleau-Ponty writes: "There is vision, touch, when a certain visible, a certain tangible, turns back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part, or when suddenly it finds itself surrounded by them, or when between it and them, and through their commerce, is formed a Visibility, a Tangibility in itself" (VI 139/VIF 183). What Merleau-Ponty is trying to explain is that reflective awareness occurs not in a thought about self, but in embodied experience. And this experience, in turn, is an event that occurs within the flesh of Being, a Visibility or a Tangibility inaugurated in the very separation or *écart* between sensing and sensed. The body, then, has a unique role in the appearing of Being. It is an "exemplar sensible, which offers to him who inhabits it and senses it the wherewithal to sense everything that resembles himself on the outside, such that, caught up in the tissue of the things, it draws it entirely to itself, incorporates it, and, with the same movement, communicates to the things upon which it closes over that identity without superposition, that difference without contradiction, that divergence (*écart*) between the within and the without that constitutes its natal secret" (VI 135-6/VIF 178-79). "The human body," explains Dillon, "is that particular kind of flesh that allows the flesh of the

world to double back on itself and be seen."[223] There is an asymmetry between my embodied experience and Nature because while Nature can serve as the site for such an intertwining of vision and the visible, the spectacle can only be seen from my side of the divide.

The centrality of the body in embodied reflection gives to it a central role in philosophical reflection. It is in the human body, Merleau-Ponty claims, that Being is able to express itself and to reflect on itself. The body, in other words, is the site for the institution of a meaning of Being, albeit an indirect meaning as it is mediated within the flesh of the world. Referring to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty writes that "since we are at the junction of Nature, body, soul, and philosophical consciousness, since we live that juncture, no problem can be conceived of whose solution is not sketched out within us and in the world's spectacle" (S 177/SF 223-4). Being, he later says, is "realized through man" (S 181/SF 228). Gary Madison explains: "It is in man, who is an opening in Being, that the question about Being arises; it is therefore in man that Being makes its advent or puts itself into question."[224] This does not make ontology anthropocentric, because it is not man who first poses the question of Being. Merleau-Ponty reminds us that "it is indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are

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[223] Ibid., p.169.
[224] Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, p. 265.

dealing with here" (VI 136/VIF 180). Thus even though humanity, in the form of embodied consciousness, has a privileged position as the site for Being's indirect reflection on itself (through the medium of flesh and its reversibilities), it remains an interrogation that is begun by Being--a problem posed, and a domain imagined, from the heart of Being itself.[225]

The matter is far more complex, however. An important distinction that emerges in *The Visible and the Invisible* is that between sentient and non-sentient flesh. Merleau-Ponty

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[225] Dillon agrees with Madison that humans actualize the self-reflection of being. "The flesh of the world," he writes, "also articulates itself through that part of itself which we, ourselves, are. Through itself is also through us: we who are both fleshly and articulate, the flesh of the world that has discovered the signs of its (and our) self-referentiality" (242). But Dillon goes further than Madison. The human development of flesh to the point of reflexivity is only *one* of many ways that flesh folds on itself. (Note the "also" in his quote.) He explains flesh in terms of a range of sentience, from human consciousness to simple organic forms: "There is flesh which is sensitive to light, flesh which is not, and degrees of sensitivity linking the extremes. We need not convert the animals, vegetables, and minerals of the world to humanity to overcome ontological dualism" (169). There is room in 'sensing' for other creatures, though they will not achieve the reflexivity that is found in human consciousness. This agrees with Merleau-Ponty's sensitivity to our proximity to animals as expressed throughout *The Structure of Behavior*. Merleau-Ponty explores the habits of kittens, chimpanzees, and insects in order to understand how Being emerges from embodied behaviour and comes to reflect on itself. It is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's writings, then, to suggest that animal sentience will play a part in his general ontology, although the human body will remain a unique instance of flesh reflecting on itself. A philosophy of sentience will need to include animals and should not refer simply to human sentience. For a good discussion and criticism of this problem, see David Farrell Krell, "Daimon Life, Nearness and Abyss," *Research in Phenomenology* 17 (1987), pp. 23-47.

While Madison provides a convincing argument that animals do not share the human ability to achieve disinterested juridical discourse (and thus do not have rights), he does allow dogs some standing as "quasi-persons." Thus there is room within his interpretation for animal sentience. "Prolegamena to a Hermeneutical Ecology" in *The Politics of Postmodernity: Essays in Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. Ingrid Harris (forthcoming), p. 260, n. 38.

writes: "The flesh of the world is not explained by the flesh of the body ... The flesh of the world is not self-sensing as is my flesh--*It is sensible and not sentient (sensible et non sentant)*" (VI 250/VIF 304; emphasis added). We see here an obvious support for Dillon's claim that the reversibility between my body and Nature is asymmetrical, and that the way that I experience my own flesh is not the same as the way that flesh appears in Nature. But we are not really any further ahead. Now, instead of understanding the world in terms of consciousness or consciousness in terms of the world, we are left with an obscure concept of a sensible that is neither material nor sentient. Flesh is neither an opaque plenum of Being nor human sentience. What is meant by this 'sensible that is not sentient', this material and exteriority that is neither materialistic nor psychic?

One clue for this is provided by Merleau-Ponty's unique notion of transcendence. Michael B. Smith explains that, for Merleau-Ponty, transcendence is an ontological structure, an ability to be outside of oneself and in the world. In order to do that, one need not be a Sartrean 'for-itself', a pure negation with no content. Merleau-Ponty writes, "the for itself is *a hollow and not a void,* not absolute non-being."[226]

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[226] VI 233/VIF 286; see also VI 191, 196, 200/VIF 244-5, 249-50, 253-4 and PP 215/PPF 249. Barbaras explains this by saying that "transcendence is not a modality of negativity ... it is rather negativity that is a modality of transcendence" (251). Priority is given to flesh's own transcendence and not to nothingness (or the for-itself) as the ground for meaning.

This invisible hollow, further, is not absolutely different from Being, but is visible like other beings--it is the sensible flesh. Smith explains:

> While traditional transcendence was a movement from self to what is outside of self, Merleau-Ponty's transcendence of perception does not stop at the exteriority of the outer world, but loops back: that movement is but one strand of a '*chiasme*', an '*Ineinander*' or crossing, a Husserlian '*Überschreitung*' that moves from self to world and from world to self, via the mediating elemental flesh.[227]

This suggests a blending of self and Being, an intertwining in which the self externalizes itself and becomes visible while the visible infects the self with visibility, is taken back up into the interiority of consciousness. "To say that there is transcendence, being at a distance, is to say that Being (in the Sartrean sense) is thus inflated with non-being or with the possible, that it is not only what it is" (VI 181/VIF 234). No longer can the self hide behind its absolute difference from Being, or within its ivory tower of indubitable existence, since it is the inner of the outer, and is the sensible turned inside out. The for-itself and Nature blend with each other, within the medium of flesh. Flesh must be like both of them in some way.

To go one step further, Merleau-Ponty decenters the for-itself or transcendence from the self altogether. He argues that transcendence is not a "possession of the object" but a

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[227] Michael B. Smith, "Transcendence in Merleau-Ponty," *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority*, p. 40.

"divergence" or a "separation (écart)" (VI 198, 197/VIF 251, 250) within Being, a dimensionality, an ability to reflect all of being not as consciousness but as the tree mentioned above (VI 218/VIF 271-2). In other words, the reflexivity of flesh need not be self-reflection, but can take the form of the tree or of the colour as a dimension mentioned above, reflecting our own dimensionality which is for us in terms of the reversibility of sensing and being sensed. That reversibility is a unique mode of the same transcendence that is found within Being itself.[228] Transcendence is not the outward movement of an inner self, but is the écart or differentiation of Being. "Écart is not nothing," writes Claude Lefort; "it is being as transcendence."[229] We must take Merleau-Ponty seriously when he says that he is going to replace a philosophy of the subject with one of Being (VI 167/VIF 221). He is not only asking about the nature of subjectivity, but exploring the possibility of a for-itself that is prior to sentience, that is the inner lining of the sensible before the sentient emerges, that is the imaginative aspect of Being underlying human imagining and perception.

This applies, as well, to embodied consciousness. Merleau-Ponty argues that "to perceive a part of my body is also to perceive it as visible, i.e. for the other" (VI 244-

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[228] Of course, even the reversibility occurring within us is also within Being, for we are a part of Being. My concern here is to stress a difference that is found between Being's transcendence and that found specifically in the thinking subject.

[229] Lefort, p. 144.

5/VIF 298). This suggests that the transcendence of the body depends on its ability to be seen, on its very *inherence* in the flesh. My body "assumes this character because in fact someone does look at it. But this *fact* of the other's presence would not itself be possible if antecedently the part of the body in question were not *visible*, if there were not, around each part of the body, a halo of *visibility*."[230] The transcendence of the body is nothing more than this instance of flesh folding back on itself, creating a foreground and a background, in this ontological gestalt of reciprocal roles. For this reason, Lefort is correct to say of the *écart* that "we must think of it with the Gestalt, it is being as transcendence."[231] The flesh of the body, in spite of its unique role in the expression of Being, is still only an instance of a transcendence of Being within the general medium of the flesh.

The flesh is also not a surface, as some commentators have nevertheless suggested. For instance, Drew Leder claims that Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh gives priority to vision and the other exteroceptive senses at the expense of the contributions made to our understanding of reality by the visceral organs. As shown earlier, in Chapter Four, Section C, Leder is particularly concerned with how the body is made

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[230] VI 245/VIF 298. I have placed a period between the two sentences, while the original text has two dashes.
[231] Lefort, ibid.

present in a sort of 'absence' as a background for
intentional activities, such as when a person relies on the
body to drive a car or relies on her visceral organs to
breathe and to digest food. In addition to the flesh, which
opens us onto a world of presence, there is also a "deeper
blood relation with the world"[232] in the form of the visceral
'absence' of the body. He explains: "I am not just a gazing
upon the world, but one who breathes, feeds and drinks of it,
such that inner and outer corporeality intertwine."[233] Unlike
perception, for example, in which a distance is maintained,
digestion absorbs the world into the self and overcomes
distance. The visceral, he claims, thus introduces "another
sort of depth, another sort of invisibility," a "vertical
synergy" ("Flesh and Blood", pp. 216 and 213) to complement
the horizontal nature of fleshly transcendence.[234]

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[232] Drew Leder, "Flesh and Blood: A Proposed Supplement to Merleau-Ponty," *Human Studies* 13 (1990), p. 214.

[233] Ibid., p. 215; see also *The Absent Body*, p. 66.

[234] An emphasis on the visceral at the expense of the exteroceptive aspect of the flesh has led some commentators to resort to Eastern philosophy in order to make sense of Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh. Leder himself compares flesh to the Oriental concept of *Ch'i*, which is a 'vital force' or energy that permeates the universe. "Forming one body with the universe," he writes, "can literally mean that since all modalities of being are made of *Ch'i*, human life is part of a continuous flow of the blood and breath that constitutes the cosmic process" (Leder, *The Absent Body*, 157). But Leder does not explicitly connect these ideas to Merleau-Ponty. Nor could he. Despite his sympathy for the value of Oriental thought, Merleau-Ponty would never attempt to understand it in terms of Western concepts, nor vice versa. The Orient, indeed, has something to teach us, but this includes only the rediscovery of "the existential field that [our own ideas] were born in and that their success has led us to forget" (S 139/SF 175). There is a lateral universality of history only at the level of embodied existence, an indirect sensitivity to the Communist plight in China or to the development of democracy in the West. Each can be understood only within

Merleau-Ponty at one point interprets the body as bearing only two dimensions: the subjective and the objective, the sensing and the sensed. Merleau-Ponty writes: "we say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them" (VI 137/VIF 180). Thus it sounds as if he ignores the visceral and focuses only on the body as object and the body as experienced. But he immediately rejects this description for another: "each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh ... There are not in it two leaves or two layers; fundamentally it is neither thing seen only nor seer only, it is Visibility sometimes wandering and sometimes reassembled" (VI 137-8/VIF 181). The actual visibility of the flesh is not important, but only its virtual visibility, its inherence in the visible (VI 244-45/VIF 298). This means that the visceral, like all other aspects of embodiment, is equally 'available to the gaze' as well as 'hidden'. To the extent that the visceral is proprioceptive, it enters the domain of the phenomenal body;

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a particular context that precludes holding onto ideas from a prior context. "Hence the 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 [or concept], it would be necessary to make the world which it expresses one's own, and one never does belong to two worlds at once" (PP 187/PPF 218). For a good illustration of how one might go about interpreting another culture, see Merleau-Ponty's own attempt to understand the life-situation of those involved in the Moscow trials in *Humanism and Terror*.

to the extent that it conceals itself from internal observation, it becomes an organ capable of being seen from the outside (by a physician, for instance). There is not, then, a radical difference between the visceral body and either the objective or phenomenal body, but a single mass that is both visible and vision, a single tissue or flesh.[235] There is also no priority here given to visibility, but only to the view that all being is virtually visible, is virtually an appearing or a becoming, and that nothing remains inherently in-itself as an absolute plenum. As surely as it is the vehicle for perceiving presences, the body is also the locus for absence. The body and its distances or differences (such as that holding between the visceral and the exteroceptive), "participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath [its] skin, unto the depths of being" (VI 149/VIF 195). It must not be said, then, that Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh is in need of another dimension of the visceral; rather, flesh is Visibility and

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[235] Leder refers to the maternal/fetal relation as an internal relation based on blood and inherence rather than on the 'surface' functioning of the flesh that we would see in mature intersubjectivity ("Flesh and Blood," p. 215). In a similar fashion, Luce Irigaray claims that Merleau-Ponty attempts to reduce the maternal-feminine to the masculine gaze of perception, rather than preserve it in its hiddenness and immediacy (An Ethics of Sexual Difference, tr. Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill [Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1993], pp. 152-53, 159, 184). To the extent that Irigaray wishes to preserve the feminine as an absolute mystery, Merleau-Ponty would certainly give priority to visibility over mystery. But as I have just shown, he is not attempting to reduce everything to the gaze of perception, but only to the common medium of flesh in which all things are potentially visible.

dimensionality, and Leder's analysis is at best the elaboration of an internal truth in Merleau-Ponty's original ontology of flesh.[236]

The flesh, then, is neither subject nor object, and forms a medium between the two for the appearing of Being. Merleau-Ponty often illustrates flesh in terms of a dynamic energy grounded in an abyss. There is, he writes, an "inspiration and an expiration of being" (PrP 167/EMF 31-32); flesh itself is structured like a series of currents that coil over each other, allowing Being to radiate from within them in the form of rays of Being.[237] He refers to them as "nervures" (VI 118-19, 215/VIF 158-9, 269), central nerves that bring energy to the sensible and the sensing, themselves described as "leaves" (VI 137/VIF 180) of Being. Finally, Merleau-Ponty refers to "one sole explosion of Being (éclatement d'Être) that is forever" (VI 265/VIF 318), and to "one sole vortex (tourbillon)" (VI 151/VIF 199)--what Jacques Garelli calls "the turbulent metastability"[238] of Being.

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[236] Leder does admit that the two levels of the body, the exteroceptive and visceral, are not opposed to each other but occur within a "chiasmatic identity-in-difference of perceptual and visceral life" (The Absent Body, p. 65). The absences of the visceral, he adds, "always remain depths of a surface, adhering to the esthesiological and expressive body" (Ibid., p. 67).

[237] VI 147, 209, 218, 241-2/VIF 183, 262, 271, 294-5. Compare these 'live wires' of being with the image of a 'net' in the preface to Phenomenology of Perception to illustrate how essences bring back "all of the living relationships of experience, as the fisherman's net draws up from the depths of the ocean quivering fish and seaweed" (PP xv/PPF x).

[238] Garelli, "Voir Ceci et Voir Selon," 94; see also 97 and Rhythmes et mondes: Au revers de l'identité et de l'alterité (Grenoble: Jerôme Millon, 1991), p. 358.

It would be wrong, however, as some commentators do, to understand flesh in terms of chaos theory. Such a view is taken up by Glen Mazis in his comparison of Merleau-Ponty to chaos theory. Glen Mazis argues that the flesh, with all of its openings and dimensions, is similar to a chaotic structure that is open, dynamic, and yet extremely fragile. A small change in the system can cause a radical change in the whole, such as when a decrease in temperature can cause ice to form on the wing of a DC9 and ultimately cause the plane to crash. Mazis writes:

> Both Merleau-Ponty's ontology and chaos theory not only face the implications of mortality that undoing the dualistic retreat from matter entails, but both conceive of matter as itself part of a dynamic, unfolding open system of forces. Thus, they reveal, for the first time, the authentic fragility of both human and nonhuman existence.[239]

Just as a simple change in the environment can cause an airplane to crash, so Being, it is claimed, can become radically different from its present condition by means of a simple shift in the way that it divides itself and creates a world for us.

Merleau-Ponty denies that flesh is like chaos. Flesh, he writes, "is not contingency, chaos (*chaos*), but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself" (VI 146/VIF 192). Merleau-Ponty does talk about a "return to *Sigè*, the Abyss (*L'abîme*)" (VI 179/VIF 233). But chaos theory suggests

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[239]   Mazis, "Chaos Theory and Merleau-Ponty's Ontology" in *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority*, p. 237.

that order follows contingency in the form of arbitrariness; it is totally arbitrary that ice begins to build on the wing, or that pressure mounts when exchanged in a feedback-loop. By contrast, there is an interiority to flesh that is lacking in a chaotic structure, suggesting that Being does not simply happen to be structured a certain way, but imagines that structure from within (VI 151/VIF 198).

There is also an order to flesh that is lacking in a chaotic structure. As shown above, there is a radical asymmetry between the reversibility of double sensation and of the body's relation to the world, so that one could not reduce the nature of the world to a single homogenous relational structure. Within these asymmetries, the body is also able to make sense of the world, to discern regularities and develop universals in the medium of language.[240] "What there is," writes Merleau-Ponty, "is a whole architecture, a whole complex of phenomena 'in tiers', a whole series of 'levels of being'."[241] Flesh is not a chaotic structure based

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[240] Chapter Five, Section E, showed how flesh is structured like a language. According to Thomas Busch, this marks an essential difference between Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur: while Ricoeur emphasizes the distanciation of textuality as a moment of transcendence, Merleau-Ponty stresses the differential structure of language as a model for understanding transcendence. He writes: "The model of symbolic systems becomes the model of thinking about Being .... All 'positivities' are understood as divergences, oppositions." "Perception, Finitude, and Transgression: A Note on Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur" in *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism*, ed. Thomas Busch and Shaun Gallagher (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p.32.

[241] VI 114/VIF 153. Marc Richir uses this idea of an architecture of being to oppose Heidegger's view that there is a radical difference between Being and beings. According to Richir, there is only an "architectonic difference" between the two, in the sense that Being is not some primordial silence of language or some primordial truth of

solely on chance, but on a series of divergences and levels that already partially determine what the world can mean. Flesh involves an open and dynamic medium for the appearing of Being, that is neither subjective nor objective, organic nor chaotic, but a system of levels and dimensions in which Being can become meaningful.

It has been shown in what way the flesh is a general dimensionality, a general medium for qualities to both appear and to serve as the background for an appearance, as well as for the body to both be seen and to serve as the background for seeing. This reversibility at the heart of flesh means that it can neither be an in-itself matter nor an absolute consciousness, but a transcendence upon itself that establishes every mode of appearing of Being.

C. Imagining Flesh

It must now be shown in what way flesh could be said to imagine itself, and how the body imagines flesh. The flesh, we have seen, is neither sentience nor sensible, but the essential *écart* that underlies, differentiates and chiasmatically unites both. The flesh thus precedes any real/ideal distinction, as well as any actuality/possibility

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appearances but is caught up at every level with the contingency of its appearance. The shift from ontic to ontological, then, pivots upon a structural and not a radical or "ontological" difference. See "Merleau-Ponty and the Question of Phenomenological Architectonics" in *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Patrick Burke and Jan Van der Veken (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1993), pp. 46-7.

distinction. The flesh is neither sensible nor sentient because it contains the possibility of the sentient as the sensible's inner lining. Flesh, in other words, is the medium for the possible that is taken up and actualized by the reversibilities of sensing and sentient, as exemplified in the imagining body. Merleau-Ponty explains this in terms of Leibniz's discussion of possible worlds. "I call it flesh, nonetheless ... in order to say that it is a pregnancy of possibles, *Weltmöglichkeit* (the possible worlds variants of this world, the world beneath the singular and the plural)" (VI 250/VIF 304). Merleau-Ponty is suggesting, like Heidegger, a primacy of the possible over the actual. Before the actual experience of reflexivity of Being within the human body, there must be a possibility for sentience. The flesh is essentially the first layer of imagining, the "virtual focus" (VI 215/VIF 269) of Being that is taken up and creatively developed by the human body.

One of the most frequent metaphors used by Merleau-Ponty to express this virtuality of Being is that of pregnancy and "embryonic development" (VI 147/VIF 193). For instance, he discusses birth as deriving not from anything actual but from a virtuality at the heart of the mother's flesh that develops its own visibility and actuality. "It can be said that a human is born at the instant when something that was only virtually visible, inside the mother's body, becomes at one and the same time visible for itself and for us" (PrP 168-

9/EMF 32). He later explains that "through a labor upon itself the visible body provides for the hollow whence a vision will come, inaugurates the long maturation at whose term suddenly it will see" (VI 147/VIF 193). The flesh, "this worked-over mass," inaugurates an "invagination"[242] in which visibility emerges. But this is possible only because the fetus (within the mother's flesh) contains within itself the ability to explore itself and divide itself, to develop its possibilizing nature to the point where an actual imaginer is born--the imaginer that we are familiar with, the imagining body. Before we can explore possibilities within our own bodies, there must have already been an exploration of Being that imagined our bodies into being and that continues to replenish us with possibilities for (our own) Being's appearance. The flesh is essentially the pure imagination, pure possibility, that does not await actualization but rather bears it as a mother bears her child. The flesh exists in latency and virtuality, an imagination before all self-perception and at the heart of perception.

We can see this more clearly by means of a contrast with the imagination theories of Casey and Sartre. Both argue that the imagination has a fundamental role in human existence as the source for possibility. The imagination, says Casey, is the locus of "possibilizing" my existence, of developing and

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[242]   VI 152/VIF 199; see also VI 233-4/VIF 287.

exploring alternatives to my present situation. And for Sartre, the imagination is the essence of human freedom as the power to negate reality. The imagination rests on an existential ability to be open to the actual world while being able to negate it and transcend it either by changing it according to imagined plans or by living in a fanciful alternative world.[243]

The possibility that is most important in *The Visible and the Invisible* is not a negation of the world that is already there, but the possibility of flesh to fold on itself, to become sensible and to inaugurate the original appearing of a world. The "unicity of world" upon which the imagination theory of Casey and Sartre depends is itself grounded in another possibility that is provided not by our own being but by Being itself. "[T]he unicity of the world means not that it is actual and that every other world is imaginary, not that it is in itself and every other world for us only, but that it is at the root of every thought of possibles, that it even is surrounded with a halo of possibilities."[244] This means that, unlike Sartre and Casey, the possibility here is not of consciousness being open to the world but of the world being open to itself in the matrix

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243 See Chapter Two, Section D.

244 VI 228/VIF 282; Merleau-Ponty is here commenting on Husserl's use of Leibniz's notion of possible worlds. Elsewhere, he writes: "Every evocation of possible worlds refers to a way of seeing our own world (*Weltanschauung*). Every possibility is a variant of our reality, an effective possibility of reality (*Möglichkeit an Wirklichkeit*)" (S 180/SF 227-8).

of flesh. The imagination that is primary is not that of consciousness, elaborating on a situation that is already given, but the virtual beginning of flesh in the moment of the fold, before any consciousness, and before any reality.[245]

What form does such a pure possibility take? Is it completely indeterminate? At the end Merleau-Ponty's Ontology, Martin Dillon recalls the Presocratic story of chaos as the origin of earth and sky, the first differentiation and order of Being. "Beneath this story," writes Dillon, "there is chaos, as there is beneath all such stories; because all stories, all the logoi, impart all the meaning and order there is to be had."[246] Dillon also alludes to Anaximander's concept of apeiron, a neutral element out of which are born the four elements and everything in the world.[247] Being, as abyss, is pure potentiality, the initial energy or heartbeat of the entire universe. Being, in this state, is pure virtuality, pure imagination, a dream that dreams itself with no real awareness of itself, a pure interiority that lacks an outer and thus dissolves its

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[245] The essentially virtual character of flesh as the 'sensible' is particularly shown in the following: "There are certainly more things in the world and in us than what is perceptible in the narrow sense of the term ... Sensible being is not only things but also everything sketched out there, even virtually, everything which leaves its trace there, everything which figures there, even as divergence and a certain absence" (S 171-2/SF 216-17); see also PrP 7/INF 405.

[246] Dillon, p. 241. It is more accurate to say 'abyss' than 'chaos' in this context; for a comparison of chaos with abyss, see above (Section B).

[247] See also Marc Richir, Phénomènes, temps et êtres: Ontologie et phénoménologie (Grenoble: Jerôme Millon, 1987), pp. 84-5.

interiority in a moment of immanence. It is out of this virtuality that Being is made actual, that it comes to divide itself in the moment of sensing and being sensed, and as ultimately actualized and reflected on itself within embodied existence.

We can also see the latency of flesh in the images of the Presocratic elements. The four elements are not the earth, water, air and fire studied by geologists, chemists, meteorologists and pyrotechnicians. Each suggests a vague and general sense in which Being is already partially determined and conversant with itself. Before there is a child to play in the sand or the waves, in "the immemorial depth of the visible" (PrP 188/EMF 86), there is a silent *logos* of the seashore that we take up, like the crest of a wave that is borne by a series of hidden forces that we do not see. These forces already assume a certain shape before they become the sensible fragments of qualities, such as the green-blue hue of the ocean or the graininess of the sand. We find, in Merleau-Ponty, a hint of water as a universal mode of relating to the world--a meaning that Renoir could discover just as clearly in the ocean as in the stream. Water is fluid, transparent, formless and chaotic. Elsewhere, Merleau-Ponty discusses the earth as ground, as a vessel that contains us. In *Genesis*, the earth was to contain the chaotic waters and to make oceans out of them, to give them form. Earth allows for the openness of air and the possibility of

space.[248] It "lifts all particular beings out of nothingness, as Noah's Ark preserved the living creatures from the flood" (TFL 122/TFLF 169). But the earth, like Noah's Ark, is buoyed up by the abyss of water to which the earth was in the process of giving form.[249] Volcanoes and earthquakes remind us of the fact that the earth's support is shaky and precarious. Fire is a replenishing lightning flash or "spark (l'étincelle)" (PrP 163/EMF 21) of life that breaks Being open and causes it to develop a sense, to mean and to imagine. "The ontology of Merleau-Ponty," concludes Barbaras, "can be characterized as an ontology of the elements."[250]

It would be wrong, however, to assume that Merleau-Ponty intends flesh to mean a primordial *Urstoff* of reality, a common substance out of which all beings are made. In Chapter Three, Section E, the elements were shown to be general divergences at a level deeper than qualities as a primary trace for such qualities in the material potentiality of flesh. But the elements must not be thought of as being "ontologically prior" to qualities. For this reason, Marc Richir writes:

> The *cosmos* of Merleau-Ponty is not only
> constituted, like that of the Greeks, by the four
> elements--again in a sense that we can take back--
> because there are, within it, as many elements as

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[248] *S* 180/SF 227; see also Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, p. 212.

[249] Elsewhere, Merleau-Ponty talks about the body as "floating in being" (VI 144/VIF 189).

[250] Barbaras, p. 221.

> there are apparent modulations of flesh, the appearing of *appearances* of the phenomenality of the phenomenon.[251]

Each modulation of Being bears the possibility of presenting either some other visible or of appearing itself as a visible. At the heart of each appearance is a touch of invisibility, of flesh in latency, of its lateral relation to everything else.

The imagining of flesh is not pure indeterminacy, an abstract neutral substance like the *apeiron* of the Greeks, but the very phenomenality of phenomena: the invisibility that makes phenomena visible. This self-inscription[252] of Being takes the form of what Merleau-Ponty calls a "brute essence (*essence brute*)" (VI 115/VIF 155), which is neither an intuited presence nor a concept, but is found, in the words of Richir, "'upstream' from concepts and ideas."[253] These essences involve a generality of meaning that assumes "a cohesion without concepts, which is of the same type as the cohesion of the parts of my body, or the cohesion of my body with the world" (VI 152/VIF 199). Each essence marks the place of a certain "excess" of Being, an overlapping or cantilever of flesh that assumes a general and repeatable form.[254] This form, like a musical style, is then developed while preserving an inner unity or identity, much as the body

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[251] Marc Richir, *Phénomènes, temps et êtres*, p. 90.
[252] Barbaras calls it an "originary inscription of being," p. 258.
[253] Richir, ibid., p. 47.
[254] Barbaras, p. 251.

maintains a certain genetic cohesion throughout its maturation. Thus Garelli defines the development of brute essences as "a transductional progress of the character of a differential and amplified variation, which invests its wild rhythm in the metastable system in which it is inscribed."[255]

At this point, it can be seen in what way the imagining body takes up the pure potentiality of the flesh and develops it into the modes of imagining with which we have become familiar. Marc Richir and Jacques Garelli explain how the discussion of brute essences in *The Visible and the Invisible* is an elaboration on Husserl's eidetic variation as discussed in Chapter Two, Section D, in which the imagination allows us to vary the essence of an object in order to develop it along the lines of its various appearances, such as the different sides of a perceptual object. By neutralizing any concern for the reality of a given object, the imagination allows us to synthesize the various presentations of an object into a single, generative essence.[256]

The method of phenomenology, however, becomes not a neutralizing imagination, but a productive one, an aesthetic imagination such as we found in Ricoeur's philosophy (Chapter

[255] Garelli, *Rhythmes et mondes*, pp. 359-60. One is reminded here of Baudrillard's simulacra as an implosion of being to the level of DNA where everything is simply doubled (see Chapter Two, Section E). This is clearly not what Garelli has in mind. See especially p. 358, where he explains that there is an essential gravity to metastability which is reminiscent of the verticality that was discussed in Chapter Three, section E.

[256] See Richir, *Phénomènes, temps et êtres*, pp. 67-103; Garelli, *Rhythmes et mondes*, pp. 359-72; VI 105-29/VIF 142-71.

Two, Section E).[257] There is, according to Merleau-Ponty, no intuition of essences but rather an encroachment upon them through the inexhaustible divergences of flesh--a sort of "auscultation or palpation in depth" (VI 128/VIF 170). We are reminded, at this point, of Bachelard's theory of the resonance of Being found in elemental images that the philosopher responds to and already interprets in terms of a particular affective situation. This means that there is no direct ontology, and that philosophy, rather than obtaining a bird's eye view of the dehiscence of Being in the flesh, is merely its interpretation and expression, or better its production and actualization at the level of the symbolic.

Richir explains that surrounding each essence is a halo of fiction. The essence, he explains, appears by virtue of two illusions: the illusion of centering, that there is a universal and primordial sense behind the appearance, and the illusion of decentering, that the appearance is only a sign of a universal idea.[258] This suggests that essences emerge out of the imaginary, creating a faith in the world, much as we saw in Hume above, where there is no 'actual' or 'real' world with which to correspond. In order to reflect on this production of reality, we must consider flesh as a "poetic

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[257] Or, to put this another way, Barbaras makes the comment that what is neutralized here is not the world but consciousness as a negation of the world in favour of a transcendence of things (250 and 260).

[258] Richir, Phénomènes, temps et êtres, pp. 78-9.

and oneiric power."[259] This means that the artist is perhaps closest to these brute essences. Jocelyn Lebrun explains: "Art becomes the only means of restoring a sense of the world of Being as a world of phenomena, in that the artist is this sublime illusionist who makes us feel like real this world of phenomena."[260] Though Lebrun's position is extreme (for certainly other forms of expression also encroach upon brute essences), it does show that art assumes a prominent role in the expression of Being. The imagination expresses and reflects the poetic power of flesh when it is engaged in aesthetic production, carrying forward a potency and productivity that has already begun, much like Coleridge's artist who reenacts the Divine production. All other instances of the imagination, be they fanciful thinking or perception, are modes of this productivity of flesh that is exemplified in the work of the artist and the interpretation of elements found in poetry.

Each of these modes of imagining--fanciful thinking, perception, aesthetic production and elemental interpretation --are based on the body as we found throughout Chapter Five. The lived body makes manifest the reversibility of the flesh in the form of double sensation and its reversible relation to the world. It is the body that makes actual and determinate the general traces of meaning laid out for it

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[259]   Ibid., p. 102.
[260]   Lebrun, p. 207.

within the metastable tissue of flesh. John Russon explains that "in the absence of bodily contact, the world remains only indeterminate possibility .... Embodied existence, then, is something which is performed, and its performance is a motivated creation of meaningfulness in which an indeterminate situation is resolved into a determinate relation of a determinate subject and a determinate object."[261] It is the body that 'sings the world' (PP 187/PPF 218), that makes specific the general traces of Being. Without the body, the world would be held, as it were, 'in suspense', would be 'bracketed' by its own indeterminacy from expressing itself in the form of language and gesture.

There is, in Being, a sense of its own imagining, its own emergence out of the plenum of immediacy into the rich and varied polymorphous flesh that supplies the asymmetrical dimensions for its own appearance. On their own, these dimensions are still vague and indeterminate, waiting to become the qualities of a Visibility or a Tangibility--the blue of the sea, the grainy texture of the sand. They await the advent of the imagining body that will develop them into determinate meanings, like the animals that waited for Adam to name them. The imagining of Being awaits its actualization in the imagining body that develops these traces into a situation and a life. Just as Cézanne found in his own

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[261]   Russon, pp. 294-5.

situation a life to live and a creative profession (SNS 20/SNSF 35), so we all find ourselves, by means of the imagining body, with a particular trace of Being that we are called to express in our own way. The direction and meaning of these traces contain the illusion of immanence and ideality, the illusion of a reality to which we can compare our interpretations. But this sense of reality is created by the imagination as a dream folded onto itself, the product of an oneiric substance that, like a work of art, never ceases to have its whole life before it (PrP 190/EMF 92-3).

The imagination assumes a prominent role in Merleau-Ponty's ontology. We have found within the notion of the sensible flesh a transcendence that is not explicit reflection but a kernel of potency and virtuality that precedes the imagination of the body. There is a sense, as Bachelard once wrote, of a narcissism of Being: "The cosmos, in some way, has a touch of narcissism. The world wants to see itself."[262] I suggest that this imagining of Being is an *unthought* thought of Merleau-Ponty (VI 119/VIF 159). Being imagines itself through our own imagining, and obtains a meaning that, through us, is nevertheless its own and guided by its own logic. And this logic is essentially one of virtuality and the imaginary. Our perceptual life is grounded

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[262] Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, p. 77.

in a plenum of possibility the extent of which we can only begin to imagine.

D. Conclusion

The imagination is a primary mode of human existence. Far from being merely a secondary activity, the imagination underlies every experience as its virtual lining and an openness to new developments. The imagination is particularly at work in the body schema, a basic mode of being in the world that allows for the experience of anchorage and perspective as well as creative production and freedom. Without the body schema, there would be no meaning; Being would remain in its immanent narcissism, unable to be imagined by the human body.

A philosophy of human existence must be a philosophy of mime. The mime illustrates the extent of creative power that the body possesses. Like the mime, we continually use gestures and bodily experiences to discover and create meaning and to communicate those meanings to others. But we usually fail to realize the extent of our potential to imagine the body in different ways. Philosophy must appropriate the mime's silent art and use it to enrich ordinary life and philosophical expression.

I have attempted to take the mime's lead by imagining the body with Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes embodied experience as an unsurpassable and essential ground

for every mode of existence. We first looked at the different kinds of imagination in order to determine what a theory of imagination must involve. These kinds included perceptual imagining, aesthetic imagining, fanciful imagining and elemental imagining. All were shown to be parts of a single, genealogical meaning of imagining.

The body was then looked at in some detail, in order to reveal it as an imaginative medium for engaging with reality. It was shown how Merleau-Ponty made use of the concept of a body schema that is still in use in psychology and cognitive science. The body is not primarily an inert sum of organs but a unified experience of anchorage and motility that allows us to engage with the world in terms of habits and creative acts. Creative embodiment was then treated as the ground for all four kinds of imagining, so that perception, aesthetic production, fanciful thinking and the interpretation of elemental images were all shown to be modes of creative embodiment. The body, then, must be the basis for the imagination; imagining is essentially to imagine the body.

In the final chapter, it has been shown that Being is not a pure in-itself reality but an open and dynamic potentiality for meaning. Being must be understood as a dehiscence of itself between the reversible roles of sensing and sensed. The dehiscence of Being follows its own traces and asymmetrical structures that affect it prior to the body's imagining; but it is the body that allows these traces

to become determinate modes of being, in the form of human gestures and symbolic language.

The body provides a relation to the world in terms of the material meanings of the elements. These vague traces of meaning are made determinate by means of an affective response, such as a fear before the presence of 'the slimy'. The body also already finds the world demarcated by means of certain structures of meaning, such as the different fields of sense that are appropriated by perception. But the body is not an inert or passive reception of Being's appearing; rather, the body helps to develop the meaning of Being by its interpretation and its creation of novel structures. In order to make sense of the elements and qualities of experience, the body creates for itself a situation of meaning, and reflects that situation in works of art and poetry. The imagination can be found, then, not only at the level of elemental and perceptual images, but in the development of works of art and even in flights of fanciful thinking.

The body does not, however, act as a perpetual creator. The body contains the ability to incorporate certain abilities into its flesh and to recall them as it recalls its ability to move a limb. Possibilities can be acquired and retold without explicit thought. But such acquisitions must be fragile and open to change if the body is to achieve its greatest potential as a free and imagining being. The body as found in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is an imagining being,

continually exploring the depths of its inheritance while exposing that resource to ever-opening horizons.

What does it mean to end a text, and to render the rest of its meaning to silence? Heidegger's analysis of Stefan George's poem, "Words," can help to make this clear.[263] The poem tells of an adventurer in search of the essence of language and its secret ability to make Being appear. After obtaining the prize, he hurries home only to realize that it has trickled through his fingers. The essence of language cannot be brought into language, and serves as an always invisible lining of every spoken word. The last line of the poem is telling: "Where word breaks off, no thing may be." Where word breaks off, Being no longer appears, and we are left with nothing to see. But in this silence, we are also open to the essence of language as transcending all words and as the ground of all things. With the last line, we arrive at a paradoxical moment of closure and opening, of the twilight of a philosophy that makes use of language, and the dawning of a philosophy of language.

As this text comes to a close, are we left with Heidegger's moment between philosophy and thinking, metaphysics and mysticism? Or are we left, like the reader at

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[263] Stefan George, "Words," in Heidegger, *On The Way to Language,* tr. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 140.

the end of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,[264] with a clear picture of reality, leaving all else to silence?

Merleau-Ponty, like Heidegger, believes that philosophy must end in silence. At the end of *Phenomenology of Perception*, he admits that when all is said, we return to our lives and live through our bodies, immersing ourselves in everyday concerns. But this does not mean that we cease from imagining new possibilities, and does not suggest a retreat to a private world. "Man is but a network of relationships, and these alone matter to him."[265] Even when we return to our silent existence, we are still related to others in terms of our intercorporeality. Our body still speaks to others and listens to others in the sea of significance that surrounds us as the flesh of the world. Even when words fall back into silence, we continue to imagine our bodies in relation to the world.

We see this especially in the case of the mime. Without the use of words, the mime continues to cast a spell on her audience and to communicate to it in ways that are louder than words. And even when the festival in Dundas is over, and the mime returns to her ordinary life, the imagining of the body continues. She continues to imagine new ways to be aware of her body, new ways to perceive the world around her, new

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[264] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuiness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), Section 7.
[265] A. de Saint-Exupery, quoted in PP 456.

ways to explore the elasticity of space and time, and new ways to endow a personal significance on her surroundings. When word breaks off, we do not return to a silence of nothingness, but to the silent language and open future of the imagining body.

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