

CREATIVE ADEQUATION: MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHILOSOPHY OF PHILOSOPHY

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### ABSTRACT

Phenomenology is characteristically associated with the motto 'to the things themselves', or even more tellingly, 'back to the things themselves'. This injunction makes sense only against the background of the belief that somehow we are at some remove from 'the things themselves' to which we are invited to return. In phenomenology, this 'origin' is variously determined as 'experience', 'existence', 'the life-world', and so on.

Much depends upon how we understand this return that phenomenology advocates and practises. On one interpretation, phenomenology claims to extricate itself from prejudices, which distort or otherwise falsify 'experience', in favour of achieving a direct and presuppositionless contact with experience, as if there were something like a pristine experience, a raw datum, that could be disclosed in a presuppositionless seeing. Such is how Derrida, for example, interprets phenomenology, and it is on these grounds that he relegates it to the 'metaphysics of presence'.

Several commentators have argued (and Derrida himself has suggested) that Merleau-Ponty's The Visible and the Invisible breaks with phenomenology in the above sense. I argue that even in his Phenomenology of Perception (and to a lesser extent in Husserl's later writings) phenomenology is in fact less naive than Derrida and others would have us believe. Admittedly, conservative prejudices are at work in the Phenomenology, but on the whole the momentum of the text is on



the side of a break with and implicit critique of the metaphysics of presence. Certain indications to the contrary notwithstanding, Merleau-Ponty attempts to articulate a conception of phenomenology significantly different than the one described above, a conception that would take into account the fact that phenomenology is itself a point of view and as such mediates the disclosure of 'the things themselves'.

Merleau-Ponty focuses this mediation with reference to language, and more precisely with reference to phenomenology as itself an instance of language. Such development as occurs in his philosophy fleshes out, and does not repudiate, the teaching of the Phenomenology concerning language and expression. The phenomenologist neither mirrors nor coincides with experience in the sense of a full presence on the other side of speech. He expresses experience, and his expression is necessarily a creative deed. This emphasis upon phenomenology's creativity has not received due recognition in the literature on Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, I argue, is best characterized as an attempt to reconcile the ideas of adequation and creativity. It embraces both the demand to return to 'the things themselves', the demand to be faithful to experience, and the recognition that, in virtue of its own linguisticity, phenomenology's rendering of experience is necessarily creative. This tension, which I trace throughout Merleau-Ponty's writings, is what is comprehended in the paradoxical expression 'creative adequation'.

## PREFACE

Merleau-Ponty titled his 1952 inaugural lecture to the Collège de France "In Praise of Philosophy". Indeed, this could aptly serve as the epigram for his entire authorship. Thirty-five years later, in a time when the death of philosophy is widely proclaimed and even celebrated, the fact that Merleau-Ponty spoke in praise of philosophy would be enough to discredit him in some circles. Who today among those who could be considered his philosophical heirs would speak in praise of philosophy? Would not such praise, even if written in the genre of a funeral oration, be perceived as the sign of some adolescent infatuation?

Merleau-Ponty was certainly aware of reports that philosophy was dead. Indeed he took them very seriously. He explicitly addressed this issue in his 1959 course at the Collège de France: "With Hegel something comes to an end. After Hegel, there is a philosophical void. This is not to say that there has been a lack of thinkers or of geniuses, but that Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche start from a denial of philosophy. We might say that with the latter we enter an age of non-philosophy." (TFL, 100) This "age of non-philosophy" is marked by a heightened awareness of the irrational, the contingent, or what otherwise resists totalization. The 'non-philosophers' (Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard are some contemporary examples) thematize what takes place on the fringes or margins of philosophy--what philosophy has failed to capture and even excluded. This resistant 'other' stands

as an indictment against philosophy insofar as philosophy, committed to the ideal of total knowledge, ought not to leave anything out, ought not to have an 'other'.

It is philosophy's pretense to total knowledge, the ideal or project of encompassing everything, including its own contingent point of view, in a rigorous system of knowledge in which each thing would be assigned a determinate place, that "comes to an end" in this "age of non-philosophy". Kierkegaard, in polemic with Hegel, calls this project 'the system'. Merleau-Ponty calls it 'metaphysics'.<sup>1</sup> Like the non-philosophers, Merleau-Ponty rejects metaphysics, but he is no less resolute in rejecting non-philosophy. This is what makes him an especially interesting thinker in this age of non-philosophy. He says of the non-philosophers that "their negation of metaphysics cannot take the place of philosophy." (TFL, 102) He speaks of the need for a new philosophy that will avoid the twin pitfalls of metaphysics and non-philosophy, of rationalism and irrationalism.

It is thus with eyes open, and without denying the experience of unreason, that Merleau-Ponty speaks in praise of philosophy. Without wistfully dreaming of or "yearning for its lost empire", he believes that there is yet a future of philosophy. (TFL, 105) If philosophy is not dead, there can be no doubt that it is in crisis. In Merleau-Ponty's view, however, philosophy is never more alive and vital than in such times of crisis, when its meaning and purpose are radically put into question. Husserl is Merleau-Ponty's mentor on these matters:

Driven to self-examination by the irrationalism of their times, as well as by the intrinsic evolution of their problems,

philosophers have arrived at a definition of philosophy as the interrogation of its very own meaning and possibility. "What I seek under the name of philosophy," writes Husserl, "as the goal and the field of my labor, I know naturally. And yet I do not know it. Has this 'knowledge' ever been sufficient for any true thinker (*Selbstdenker*). Has 'philosophy' ever ceased to be a riddle to him in his life as a philosopher?" (TFL, 104)

In virtue of the fact that philosophy remains a question for him, the philosopher distinguishes himself from both the dogmatic metaphysician and the skeptical non-philosopher, each of whom must 'know' what philosophy is; the former to execute its programme, the latter to deny or otherwise negate it.

The "definition" of philosophy as "the interrogation of its very own meaning and possibility" will seem empty if one does not consider that this interrogation arises out of and turns back upon a tradition. Such interrogation opens upon a text or a history of texts purporting to be philosophical. One could say that for Merleau-Ponty the task of the philosopher is to situate himself self-consciously in relation to this tradition. In this light, Merleau-Ponty's difference from the non-philosophers emerges as a difference concerning the interpretation of the philosophical tradition. While he believes that metaphysics has indeed played itself out and has come to an end, this would spell the end of philosophy only if the history of philosophy could be reduced to metaphysics. Merleau-Ponty does not accept this reduction, however. He would certainly take issue with Jacques Derrida's sweeping assimilation of the entire tradition under the heading of the 'metaphysics of presence'.

In his readings of his predecessors (most notably, Husserl), Merleau-Ponty displays an acute sensitivity to the ambiguities in

their texts, to the tensions at work in their philosophies. Above all, he seeks to avoid closure in his interpretations. He reads less for the accomplished thought that can be circumscribed and fixed by a label than for the questioning thought that is struggling to establish itself. It is because he reads generously in this way that he can recognize a kindred spirit even in thoroughly 'metaphysical' thinkers such as Leibniz, Descartes, and Kant. Merleau-Ponty believes that the non-philosophers too have more in common with (and owe more to) the tradition than they admit. Indeed he suggests that the "negation and the end of philosophy" is "the very same inquiry restored to its vital sources." (TFL, 100) In other words, in their critique of philosophy the non-philosophers embody something of the animating spirit vitally at work in the tradition of philosophy from which they seek to dissociate themselves.

Throughout his writing Merleau-Ponty interrogates philosophy--including his own philosophizing--in a self-reflective inquiry as radical as any practised by the non-philosophers. It is remarkable (but too little remarked) how attuned he was to the questions and themes that dominate much contemporary philosophy (and non-philosophy). He has said enough about these matters that, a quarter century after his death, one can imagine him at home in dialogue with deconstructionists about the metaphysics of presence, with post-analytic philosophers about language, and with hermeneuticists about history and interpretation. This thesis carries Merleau-Ponty's thought forward and engages him in such dialogue.

In the course of writing this thesis I have enjoyed the support of several good friends. In particular, I would like to thank Tony Kerby for sharing with me his technical knowledge about word processing, John King for his editorial advice, and Gary Madison for his advice on questions of style and strategy. I am indebted to all three of these people for numerous conversations in which we played and struggled with many of the words discussed in this thesis. I would also like to thank the members of my thesis committee for their promptness in returning material submitted to them and for their helpful comments and criticisms. Finally, I would like to thank Barbara (and Alexandra), who have taught me what is most important about the flesh and have helped me to put all these words into their 'proper' perspective.

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### INTRODUCTION: READING MERLEAU-PONTY

The various sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books of an author are not so many unconnected things. Interpreters endeavour, with good reason, to relate sentence to sentence, chapter to chapter, book to book. The concept of the 'author' has long been the organizing principle of our reading. Is it not, after all, one 'author' who is in some sense responsible for all those texts bearing a common signature? Is it not reasonable to expect that this unity will be reflected in an author's texts? Indeed, even when interpreters divide an author's works into different periods, they do not therefore cease to make reference in a non-trivial sense to the 'author' whose views changed from one period to another—who preserved, modified, contradicted, or discarded his earlier views. In Merleau-Ponty scholarship, for example, even those who claim a radical change from the The Structure of Behavior to The Visible and the Invisible endeavour to relate the 'before' and the 'after' and thus to integrate the difference within a unity of sorts (albeit a differentiated one). Similarly, although he wrote on subjects as diverse as art, politics, psychology, and philosophy, Merleau-Ponty's interpreters appear to hold the conviction that the works he produced in these various disciplines share something more than a common signature.

After the much celebrated 'death of the author', however, such apparently uncontroversial assumptions acquire the status of

questionable prejudices and it is not without some trepidation that one undertakes a detailed examination of the works of an 'author'.<sup>1</sup> After the death of the author (in more than one sense), what can the proper name 'Merleau-Ponty' signify for us? In our view, the difficulty is to conceive the unity promised by the signature in such a way as not to reify the 'author' into some eternal character. What Merleau-Ponty has remarked concerning the interpretation of Descartes' works is equally pertinent to the interpretation of his own:

the idea of grasping him in his entirety at his source is perhaps an illusory one if Descartes—instead of being some "central intuition", an eternal character, and an absolute individual—is this discourse, hesitant at first, which is affirmed through experience and use, which is apprised of itself little by little, and which never wholly stops intending the very thing it has resolutely excluded. (S, 131-2)

Merleau-Ponty's signature will not signify for us some originating power commanding his discourse from outside of it. He understood his own authorship as the pursuit of a thought which as much possessed him as he it. He was fond of saying that speaking (writing) teaches the thinker his thought. We will not posit some "central intuition" behind his texts to which differences could be attached like instances to an essence. His work has the character of an ongoing conversation that incessantly questions its aims and finds itself in each moment, and not that of an artifact produced according to some pre-established plan. To posit some such essence would be to deafen ourselves to the searching voice that resonates across so many differences. It would be to blind ourselves to these differences or otherwise to suppress them.

And yet the voice we listen for does not begin anew with the pause of every sentence, paragraph, chapter, or book, as if from

nothing. Although the author is not and could not be in possession of some kind of plan of which his corpus would be but the mirror image, there is nevertheless a kind of logic to his discourse. We recognize in his voice a familiar accent, a certain habituality that weaves differences together into the fabric of a single text, and ultimately into the texture of a single life.

This is what Merleau-Ponty has called 'style'.<sup>2</sup> No more than is the discourse of one's partner in conversation, the sentences, paragraphs, and books of an author are not simply differences externally related to each other and lacking internal cohesion. These differences are informed by a certain style, a typical way of setting things up. We discern this style by attending to how the moments of discourse typically blend with each other to lead us in a given direction. Having acquired a sense for an author's style, we have won not only a way of retrospectively understanding what we have already read, but also a way of understanding what we have not yet read. We acquire the ability to anticipate, as we are able to anticipate the speech of someone we know well--that is, someone whose style we are well acquainted with.

Style is certainly a key concept in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and what he says about it both anticipates and corrects much contemporary discussion concerning 'the death of the author'.<sup>3</sup> There is a remarkable continuity of style within Merleau-Ponty's corpus. Problems are set up in characteristic ways, typical patterns occur within and across texts, and so on. This is not the sign of some fancy for architectonics, and, indeed he has bequeathed to us nothing

resembling a 'system of philosophy'. Rather his general style is the manner of expression proper to a certain preoccupation (Merleau-Ponty would call it a 'significative intention') that animates the authorship throughout and never exhausts itself in any single expression. This style structures itself around the metaphor of the 'return'.

We find references to a 'return' throughout Merleau-Ponty's authorship. More precisely, we find references to several different but related 'returns': the return to existence, to the phenomena, to the unreflected, to the speaking subject, to the social, to silence, and so on. Typically, when he makes positive claims about some subject, when he offers his own considered views, he presents this positive as something to which we are invited to return. In reading Merleau-Ponty, therefore, it is less incisive to ask what is signified by 'existence', by 'experience', and so on, than to ask what they signify in light of the instruction that they are to be approached in the manner of a 'return'. The manner of approach furnishes a context without which the positive would risk becoming an abstraction, or even worse, a dogma.

Although Merleau-Ponty speaks about several 'returns', they share a family resemblance in virtue of the connecting metaphor, and this licenses us to speak about the 'return' in the singular. In idea, a return implies a distance separating a present point of departure from some earlier position, and the traversal of that distance. Literally interpreted, this characterization would be of little use for making sense of the various returns Merleau-Ponty advocates. In

the case of the return to existence, for example, the ontological status of the positive to which we are to return is very ambiguous, as is the sense in which it is 'prior' to the point of departure. To return to existence is not to coincide with something that remains identical as we approach it but rather to express something that is otherwise only indeterminately present on the horizon of our thinking. Furthermore, the point of departure is not simply at a distance from the place of return--one must add that it is alienated from it. This limitation noted, however, the metaphor proves to be quite fruitful. The return does exhibit a certain structure and this has important interpretative value.

The context out of which the return emerges, like a figure against a background, is already present in the opening sentences of The Structure of Behavior. Briefly, and concisely, Merleau-Ponty describes the metaphysics of modern science, which in the modern world is the assumed point of departure for philosophy as well. Indeed it is the stock of concepts we modern men typically reach for when we reflect upon our existence or our 'being-in-the-world'. This metaphysical mind-set is inaugurated with the distinction between the 'real' and the 'apparent' (or 'phenomenal'). In modern psychology, for example, "the scientific analysis of behavior was defined first in opposition to the givens of naive consciousness." (SB, 7) Following the movement of a luminous spot across a wall in a dark room, "I would say that it has 'attracted' my attention, that I have turned my eyes 'toward' it...." (Ibid.) The scientist-psychologist, who would himself admit that this description answers to his own experience, is not

content to remain with it and is quick to theorize. "Science seems to demand that we reject these characteristics as appearances under which a reality of another kind must be discovered." (Ibid.)

What is significant for Merleau-Ponty is not the scientist's refusal to accept and remain with such descriptions, which are admittedly quite unilluminating, as the final word about light. It is rather the devaluation and eventual suppression of the phenomenal world they describe that is significant--the dubious metaphysical status assigned to the term 'appearance'. Henceforth, in his theorizing the scientist need no longer, or so he thinks, take seriously the phenomenal world with which he began. His concern is with the 'real' world of 'physical facts' that lies 'under' or 'behind' it and that allegedly gives rise to it as cause to effect.

The 'real' is thus opposed to the 'phenomenal'; the significations naive consciousness gives to these terms is reversed. "This reversal immediately poses a series of questions." (Ibid.) In his questioning Merleau-Ponty shows this reversal to be a concealment or suppression of what the 'real' means for us, as given in experience. This questioning amounts to a re-evaluation of this devaluation of the 'phenomenal', to a reversal of this reversal. Merleau-Ponty returns to the state of affairs which antedates this distinction. This does not mean simply reversing, in a reactionary fashion, the significations science attaches to the 'real' and the 'apparent' or 'phenomenal'. The distinction itself is questionable. The return could not be accomplished simply by refusing to perform scientific analysis, as if this would leave us with the 'real' by

subtraction and without any serious effort on our part. One would still be operating under the domination of the very distinction one was trying to put into question. Merleau-Ponty has perhaps learned from Nietzsche, who writes: "We have abolished the real world: what world is left? the apparent world perhaps....But no! *with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!*"<sup>4</sup> The return to the "givens of naive consciousness" advocated in The Structure of Behavior is in an important sense a return to pre-science, but Merleau-Ponty does not blindly accept the scientific prejudice about the nature of pre-science. He does not accept the scientific determination of the 'phenomenal'. Rather, this becomes a question mark for him, and his project is to find a way to approach pre-science so that it can itself teach us what it is.

From what has been said we can isolate the fundamental structural moments of the 'return' as practised in The Structure of Behavior. Its point of departure is a certain alienation. The title of the 'real' has been usurped from the "givens of naive consciousness" and secondary and derivative constructions have been substituted in their place. In effect, this substitution puts us at a distance from the 'real', estranges us from it, and the return is a corrective to this alienation. It is the traversal of this distance in a reverse direction, the endeavour to make contact with the primordial reality from which the distinction between the 'real' and the 'apparent' or 'phenomenal' originates. This primordial reality, determined as 'experience', 'perception', 'existence', 'life-world', is in turn

appealed to as a ground for adequate philosophical descriptions or statements.

Merleau-Ponty structures his subject matter in this way throughout his works. Indeed, the return is not simply an idea that recurs from text to text; it is as well the style of his philosophizing, virtually his method. Thus understood, the return is an integral part of phenomenology in the general sense Merleau-Ponty gives this term in the Phenomenology of Perception. He writes that "phenomenology can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking...[which] existed as a movement before arriving at a complete awareness of itself as a philosophy." (PhP, viii) As a "style of thinking", phenomenology is not simply a new doctrine to be placed alongside other doctrines left to us in the history of philosophy. It does not amount to a substitution of a new knowledge for others which have been at one time dominant. What makes phenomenology a "style of thinking" is the structure of the return which is its central motif. This return is a performance of sorts and is necessarily polemical.

A passage from The Primacy of Perception illustrates this with particular clarity. Responding to a challenge from M. Bréhier that philosophy could never have been created if the early Greeks had been phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty writes: "This hypothesis is itself impossible. Phenomenology could never have come about before all the other philosophical efforts of the rationalist tradition, nor prior to the construction of science. It measures the distance between our experience and this science. How could it ignore it? How could it precede it?" (PriP, 29) The point we wish to stress here is that



Merleau-Ponty sees phenomenology as standing in polemical relation to some already existing construction which is at a distance from and at odds with "our experience". It is the attempt to return to this experience across an instituted distance and to restore it in its primacy and dignity.

Phenomenology does not, however, amount to a bare assertion of "our experience" (and later we will see how this is relevant as concerns contemporary discussion concerning 'the metaphysics of presence') over and against some secondary and derivative constructions. Its aim is not simply to coincide with experience, as if truth were a matter of silent identity. It aims rather to capture experience in reflection, to understand it, to express it. Thus phenomenology begins with the fact that, as concerns the dominant ways of understanding our experience, we are at some distance from the *terminus ad quem* to which we must return. Phenomenology tries to show how scientific prejudices about the 'real' and the 'phenomenal' have been constructed from and conceal something yet more primary that has preceded. This indirection, and the polemical style required by the rhetorical situation, cannot be avoided, if phenomenology is to be something more than the undialectical assertion of one thesis against another. Phenomenology is essentially dialectical or polemical in this sense. ✓

This is clearly evident in the Phenomenology of Perception. No matter what subject matter is taken up, Merleau-Ponty invariably proceeds with a critical analysis of some widely accepted point of view upon it, and this serves as a point of departure in relation to

which the phenomenological account of the same subject is a return. He begins the work, for example, with an analysis of some of the classical concepts used to 'explain' perception. It is only by guiding us through this detour, which amounts to a Socratic examination of "traditional prejudices", that he is able to return us to the "things themselves". (PhP, 26) It is only after "sense experience has become once more a question" that he properly introduces the "phenomenal field" that will serve as the inexhaustible well from which he draws his insights throughout. (PhP, 52)

This polemical style is sustained throughout Merleau-Ponty's authorship and will be the connecting thread linking the moments of my study of his philosophy. The polemical foil varies from text to text. In The Structure of Behavior it is empiricism that serves as the polemical point of departure. In the Phenomenology of Perception it is predominantly intellectualism that is polemically engaged. In The Visible and the Invisible phenomenology itself is put in the position of a foil. I shall argue that, throughout these structured changes (each moment organized by the motif of the return) something of a development occurs in his philosophy. After the Phenomenology, and parallel to an increasing occupation with art, literature, language, and history, the notion of 'expression' becomes more and more important in his works. The status of the 'given', of the 'immediate', and so on, those 'certainties' Merleau-Ponty characteristically evokes when he wants to criticize or correct competing philosophies, becomes more and more problematic. The backward turning and grounding movement of

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the return becomes background to the forward surging and creative movement of expression.

Within the general framework we have described, I shall undertake to elucidate the problem of philosophical expression in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. This problem is exemplified by the marriage of two unlikely partners--creation and adequation. In a working note of June 1959, Merleau-Ponty says that philosophy is "a creation in a radical sense: a creation that is at the same time an adequation, the only way to obtain an adequation." (VI, 197) This is a puzzling characterization of philosophy. Are not the notions of creation and adequation antithetical, or even mutually exclusive? Indeed someone might protest that there is a confusion here. Either philosophy is creative, in which case it must abandon the claim to adequation, or it seeks adequation, in which case creativity, as a source of distortion or falsehood, must be excluded. Merleau-Ponty refuses to choose between these alternatives, however. Indeed it is his attempt to reconcile these antithetical demands that makes him an especially interesting and important figure in contemporary philosophy. How then are we to understand this duality in Merleau-Ponty's characterization of philosophy?

On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty describes his philosophy as a search for 'the fundamental'. This fundamental--existence, the unreflected, Being--is said to be primordial in relation to what is assigned the place of 'reality' in certain dominant accounts. We misunderstand ourselves when we attempt to capture the sense of our existence in objectivistic categories. We leave out of account the

fundamental experience of being-in-the-world. ✓ The philosophical project is to make contact with this fundamental, and the manner of approach is characterized as a return. As such, the fundamental functions in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as a touchstone for truth. It is appealed to both in order to criticize competing theories and as the ground for adequate philosophical descriptions or expressions. ✓

On the other hand, however, it is clear that philosophy is not, for Merleau-Ponty, a matter of coinciding with experience in innocent identity. The task of philosophy is not to coincide with but rather to understand and indeed express what we experience. Distance is necessary for such understanding. The task of philosophy is to 'say' what we experience. This distance and this 'saying' cannot be ignored if philosophy is to be truly radical. Philosophy does not merely double its object, leaving it unchanged. In the 'saying' the fundamental is itself transformed, 'promoted to its truth', as Merleau-Ponty often says. Expression is in some sense creative or constitutive of what is brought to expression. Philosophical expression does not, therefore, simply mirror something that is already well formed and complete in itself. The fundamental appealed to, which at first glance appeared to be on the hither side of language or expression, is determined by the expression which captures it. "Being," Merleau-Ponty says, "is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it." (Ibid.) The fundamental seems to be both before and after expression--to be both its ground and its creation.

The task of this thesis is to elucidate this antinomy in Merleau-Ponty's account of philosophical expression. I shall trace the

trajectory of this problem from the The Structure of Behavior to The Visible and the Invisible with particular emphasis upon the relationships and differences between the concepts of 'reflection' and 'expression' as they function in his philosophy. This trajectory, I shall argue, traces a path from a philosophy of reflection to a philosophy of expression.

Merleau-Ponty turned to phenomenology because he saw in it the promise of a renewal of philosophy, the promise of a vital philosophy that could address man in his fleshy existence. He inherits this conception of phenomenology from Husserl, and I begin my thesis with an interpretation of Husserl in light of the motif of the return. This interpretation, in which I tease out some of the ambiguities in Husserl's phenomenology surrounding the idea of the return, prepares the stage for my argument that Merleau-Ponty conceived phenomenology as being essentially dialectical or polemical. Reading with Merleau-Ponty, I challenge the view that phenomenology, insofar as it is a return 'to the things themselves', is committed to the idea of presuppositionless and completely neutral descriptions.

This view of phenomenology, from which I dissociate Merleau-Ponty, is shared by some of phenomenology's avowed proponents and detractors alike. Among the former, some have criticized Merleau-Ponty for deviating from phenomenology. It has been argued that he is too dialectical in his presentations, instead of directly consulting 'the things themselves'.<sup>5</sup> He is not 'phenomenological' enough. On the other hand, phenomenology's detractors have criticised Merleau-Ponty for opposite reasons, charging that he is not

sufficiently dialectical and holds a naive belief in direct or unmediated access to 'the things themselves'.<sup>6</sup> He is too 'phenomenological'.

Neither of these criticisms reaches its mark because they both presuppose a view of phenomenology that is much less sophisticated than the one Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl, attempts to work out. Merleau-Ponty is partially responsible for this misunderstanding, however, because of the ambiguity in his characterization of phenomenology. He is especially ambiguous about reflection, for example, and this concept dominates much of his early work. This ambiguity becomes especially apparent with reference to language. As his interest in language and expression increases, he characterizes the phenomenologist (and the philosopher) more and more not simply as one who reflects, but as someone who speaks as well.

The emphasis on language, and expression in general, has the effect of bringing the creative aspect of phenomenology to the fore and of radically calling the phenomenological project into question. This creativity, I argue, had been obscured in his earlier characterizations of phenomenology as a reflective activity. At the same time, however, the emphasis on creativity comes into conflict with the motif of the return in his philosophy, which is directed toward achieving adequation. If there is an element of creativity in what the phenomenologist (philosopher) says about experience, the idea of returning to the things themselves and of appealing to experience as a kind of evidence becomes questionable. Thus one of the major problems that arises in the later works concerns how the rival demands

of creativity and adequation, neither which Merleau-Ponty wants to sacrifice, can be reconciled.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERITAGE

In Greece, and in the youth of philosophy generally, it was found difficult to win through to the abstract and to leave existence, which always gives the particular; in modern times, on the other hand, it has become difficult to reach existence. The process of abstraction is easy enough for us, but we also desert existence more and more, and the realm of pure thought is the extreme limit of such desertion.

Soren Kierkegaard

#### 1. The Phenomenological 'Style'

In "Everywhere and Nowhere", in which he explicitly addresses the hermeneutical question concerning the interpretation of a philosopher's works, Merleau-Ponty attacks "the twin myths of pure philosophy and pure history". (S, 130) According to the first, a philosophy is something completely autonomous with respect to its historical context. Insofar as it is "pure philosophy", it reveals eternal truths, and our interpretative efforts should be directed toward appropriating these truths from its 'interior'. Historical considerations are thought to be not only irrelevant to this endeavour, but potentially subversive of it as well, since they relativize the claim to truth of a philosophy. According to the myth of a "pure history", on the other hand, a philosophy is merely a product or even an effect of historical circumstances. To understand a philosophy is to explain its theses with reference to historical

factors that are thought to operate in some sense as causes. A philosophy is interpreted with regard to what is 'exterior' to it.

Merleau-Ponty argues that interpretation does not have to choose between these two alternatives. What is required rather is that we "get back to their effective relationships". (Ibid.) A philosophy is at once both an event and an advent. It is an event in history and carries this history within it insofar as the philosopher speaks from somewhere. He is situated in a language and in a history that is effective in his philosophizing in ways that he can never become completely conscious of. On the other hand, a philosophy is an advent and achieves transcendence, is able to speak beyond its own time, insofar as, in responding to his context, the philosopher modifies his inheritance and makes his already acquired past speak in a new way.

The task for interpretation is to comprehend the relation between advent and event. There is a need, Merleau-Ponty says for "a theory of concepts or significations [that would take] each philosophical idea as it is: never unburdened of historical import and never reducible to its origins." (S, 130) He compares philosophical discourse with language in general.

As new forms of grammar and syntax arising from the rubble of an old linguistic system or from the accidents of general history are nevertheless organized according to an expressive intention which makes a new system of them, so each philosophical idea emerging in the ebb and flow of personal and social history is not simply a result and a thing but a beginning and an instrument as well. (Ibid.)

The point of situating Merleau-Ponty's philosophical adventure in the context from which he sets out is not then to submit his authorship to a fate imposing itself upon him from behind or to reduce

his voice to an echo of his philosophical predecessors. An author, and Merleau-Ponty least among authors, does not passively suffer the context out of which he works as an exterior force or cause. Rather, in assuming and engaging it he effects its transformation. "A man cannot receive a heritage of ideas without transforming it by the very fact that he comes to know it, without injecting his own and always different way of being into it," Merleau-Ponty writes. (S, 224) It would be equally true (or equally false) to say that he is somehow or other the product of his context as it would be to say that he constitutes it.

Of course, the concept of 'context' is very broad and it would be folly to suppose that one could ever adequately circumscribe the total context in which an author wrote. In this chapter we shall limit our remarks to the *philosophical* context in which Merleau-Ponty wrote, and even more selectively will filter this with reference to the motif of the return. His encounter with phenomenology, and in particular with the thought of Edmund Husserl, is especially relevant for our purposes.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to realize that phenomenology, in Merleau-Ponty's eyes, was something that transcended and indeed antedated the precise method articulated by Husserl. He believed that phenomenology was something that "can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking" and "existed as a movement before arriving at a complete awareness of itself as a philosophy." (PhP, viii) Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and even Marx and Freud, are named as thinkers in this "style". What does it mean to call

phenomenology a "style of thinking"? How are we to understand this "style" of which Husserlian phenomenology is but an instance, albeit the consummate instance and crowning achievement?

For Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's phenomenology is dialectically or polemically inaugurated in an effort to overcome prejudice. It is a radical shift in perspective from the dominant way in which we understand ourselves and the world in which we live.

Husserl's first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a 'descriptive psychology', or to return to the 'things themselves', is from the start a forswearing of science. I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. (Ibid.)

Husserl develops his position on the "things themselves", that toward which phenomenology directs or returns us, with constant reference to that from which it turns us away. The famous injunction 'back to the things themselves' is the dialectical twin of the injunction to turn away from or put out of play an operative prejudice which conceals the 'things themselves'. The word 'back' in this slogan is important and indicates the dialectical movement that Merleau-Ponty calls the 'return'.<sup>2</sup>

In the above passage the distorting prejudice to be turned away from is identified with science, but more generally Merleau-Ponty calls it 'objectivism'. In "The Vienna Lecture" Husserl himself describes phenomenology as the effort of overcoming objectivism.<sup>3</sup> Objectivism there denotes the prejudice, common to science and common sense alike, that the world exists already-made without any

contribution from the subject, who is thought to receive its imprint passively through various causal agencies. Phenomenology's inaugural moment is a return from the world as conceived through the prejudice of objectivism to the phenomenal world as perceived and lived by an incarnate subject.

Understanding phenomenology as being polemically structured in this way better enables us to comprehend what it could mean to call it a "style of thinking" and to recognize the affinity Merleau-Ponty sees between such apparently radically different thinkers as Kierkegaard and Husserl. In the Phenomenology of Perception it is Kierkegaard he acknowledges as being the source of his critique of objectivism and not, as one might expect, Husserl.<sup>4</sup> (PhP, 71) Kierkegaard's account of objectivism is remarkably similar to Husserl's, and both link this prejudice with the development of science. One finds in each the concern that this prejudice gives rise to a forgetfulness or even concealment of how the real is experienced in the first person. Both undertake to reveal or exorcize this prejudice and thereby to return to what it conceals. Both state the need to get back to, or return to, what is more primary or fundamental. Kierkegaard calls this 'existence' and Husserl (in his later period) calls it the 'life-world'.<sup>5</sup> There are indeed important differences between these two thinkers, but they each structure a central problem, the problem of how we understand ourselves, in a similar way. It is this structural similarity that authorizes Merleau-Ponty to speak of a phenomenological 'style' of thinking.

Similar affinities could be pointed out between Husserl and others that Merleau-Ponty calls thinkers in the phenomenological style. This is not to belie Husserl's originality but rather to make the point that for Merleau-Ponty phenomenology is part of a tradition and is born in polemics with a dominant mode of understanding. It is not something created *ex nihilo* by Husserl or anyone else. Merleau-Ponty understood phenomenology as a distinctively modern development and as a response to a distinctively modern situation characterized by the prestige of science and the dominance of objectivism in the modern world, man's alienation from his own experience, the crisis of value and the loss of meaning. If others can be said to think in this style it is because, putting aside the question of influence, they address critically the same prejudices. The situation in and against which Husserl's thought was inaugurated was not something merely private to him. It had an intersubjective reality and indeed a history encompassing other thinkers before and after him.

Putting Husserlian phenomenology into this broader context and laying out its dialectical or polemical structure enables us to understand better the 'existential' import of this "style of thinking" and the attraction it held for an ethically and politically motivated thinker like Merleau-Ponty. John Bannan offers an insightful account of the value Merleau-Ponty saw in phenomenology:

What attracted him to phenomenology was the prospect that he felt it offered for a renewal of philosophy. Husserl, who was the founder of phenomenology, called it a "return to the things themselves", which the already accomplished philosophies had lost sight of. This return was accomplished primarily by beginning with a careful description of things as they appear

and of the consciousness in which they appear--a description sensitive to the richness and complexity that characterizes both things and consciousness before they are refined by philosophical analysis. It is this richness, the phenomenologist feels, that previous philosophies have let slip away by attempting to analyse reality as if it were fashioned according to some mechanical, biological, or spiritual model. In his earliest writings Merleau-Ponty protests this abuse and advances phenomenology as its corrective.<sup>6</sup>

What the "already accomplished philosophies", infatuated with science, had "lost sight of" or "let slip away" was existence as it is lived or experienced in the first person singular. The rise of objectivism, as Husserl argues in his later writings, has alienated man from his own existence. Man cannot recognize himself or get his bearings in the world such as it is understood by objectivism. Love, death, politics, art, the "richness" of our experience--in short, everything that human beings care about--lose their meaning when translated into objectivistic terms. In the face of this reductionist loss of meaning, phenomenology is essentially restorative of meaning. It keeps close to the level of everyday experience and talks about the world and existence in terms in which flesh and blood human beings can recognize themselves.

Bannan's insight that for Merleau-Ponty (and for Husserl as well) phenomenology comes on the scene as a "corrective" to a dominant prejudice about the nature of consciousness and reality is important. Phenomenology arises as a movement of resistance against a certain way of understanding (or misunderstanding), in relation to which it is polemical or dialectical. This total rhetorical situation is what I mean in speaking about the 'structure' of the return. I shall elucidate this structure and some attendant difficulties in Husserl's

phenomenology with reference to several exemplary texts. This will set the stage for a discussion of the meaning and significance of the return in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. My objective here is not to establish a one-to-one correspondence between ideas in their respective philosophies but rather to sketch in Husserl the motif Merleau-Ponty inherits and invests to his own fortune. "I borrow myself from others; I create others from my own thought," he says with reference to Husserl. (S, 159)

## 2. Husserl's Critique of Objectivism

I claim that Husserl presents phenomenology in the context of a return. To speak of phenomenology as a return means that it is a returning or turning away from something. What Husserl's phenomenology returns from, what it polemically turns away from, is what he calls, at the most general level, objectivism.

In his 1911 article "Philosophy as Rigorous Science",<sup>7</sup> Husserl lays out his position polemically against the foil of what he terms 'naturalism'. Naturalism (which for my purposes designates approximately the same thing that I have been calling 'objectivism') is described as "a phenomenon consequent upon the discovery of nature, which is to say, nature considered as a unity of spatio-temporal being subject to exact laws of nature." (Ibid., 79) The sense of every 'event', of what it is for something 'to be', is fixed under the auspices of this metaphysical framework and conditions are legislated for valid explanation. Anything that can be said 'to be' must exist as



such in one of two modes of being, one of which is merely derivative or epiphenomenal in relation to the other. According to this prejudice, "whatever is is either itself physical, belonging to the unified totality of physical nature, or it is in fact psychical, but then merely as a variable dependent on the physical, at best a secondary 'parallel accomplishment'." (Ibid.) Husserl's quarrel with naturalism is that consciousness, if reduced to a mere event in nature thus defined, is not appropriately characterized and indeed is falsified. He attacks the psychology of his day because he believes that it had uncritically allowed itself to be dominated by this prejudice.

According to Husserl, nature as defined by naturalism does not, as is claimed, 'contain' everything that is. The psychical, consciousness, insofar as it can be so contained, is not the psychical proper but rather a pale caricature. Despite its bold claims, naturalism makes no progress toward understanding the psychical in its own being. Husserl charges that "the natural sciences have not in a single instance unraveled for us actual reality, the reality in which we live, move, and are." (Ibid., 140) Natural science, and philosophy insofar as it shares the same metaphysical assumptions, fails to remain close to the surface of "actual reality", fails to respect its internal meaning and texture. This "actual reality", presupposed but not clarified by naturalism, will be the field opened by phenomenology.

In this early article, Husserl does not say much about "the reality in which we live, move, and are". It is evoked as a corrective

to naturalism, but is not itself carefully thematized. The phenomenal field is not 'unraveled' as it will be, with patience and rigor, in his later works. What I wish to draw from this text is the dialectical relationship between the naturalistic prejudice and "actual reality". Under the sway of this prejudice, "actual reality" is concealed. It has a mode of being that is not captured by and is irreducible to either of the kinds of being defined by naturalism. Naturalism, in that it insists on squeezing everything into its reductive categories and views everything in their light, is thus effectively blind to the "phenomenal". Husserl uses this term to describe the being of "actual reality". "The phenomenal," Husserl writes, "had to elude psychology because of its naturalistic point of view as well as its zeal to imitate the natural sciences and to see experimental procedures as the main point." (Ibid., 101-2)

The elusiveness of the proper object of phenomenology is not insignificant as concerns how we gain access to it. It is not simply a matter of opening one's eyes and seeing what is 'there'. Insofar as we are spell-bound by naturalism, and this attitude is virtually natural to us moderns, "actual reality" is not accessible to our reflective glance. The prejudice gets in the way of its disclosure, as it were. For this reason such disclosure must go hand in hand with the removal of the obfuscating prejudice. The initiation into phenomenology does not begin with the positive, with the return to 'the things themselves', but rather with the negative, with the removal of the prejudice of naturalism. Phenomenology, as a return, is dialectically structured. It involves a negative and a positive moment. It is

important to note where Husserl puts the emphasis when he says: "What is needed is not the insistence that ones sees with his own eyes; rather it is that he not explain away under the pressure of prejudice what has been seen." (Ibid., 147)

These themes are explored in much greater detail in Ideas, published two years later in 1913.<sup>8</sup> The use of the terms 'epochē' and 'reduction' (which for our purposes are practically synonymous) affords him greater precision and adds flesh to his phenomenology.<sup>9</sup> In this text Husserl speaks of several reductions or epochēs, indicating by this that the path to 'transcendental consciousness' takes us through certain intermediate steps, each step being a deepening of the preceding one. (Ideas, 103) Two steps are particularly noteworthy. The first takes us from the abstractions of science and philosophy back to the 'natural attitude'.<sup>10</sup> The second takes us from the natural attitude back to 'transcendental consciousness'.

The first step Husserl calls the 'philosophical epochē'. He writes: "The *philosophical epochē*, which we propose to adopt, should consist...in this, that in respect of the theoretical content of all previous philosophy, we shall abstain from passing any judgement at all...." (Ibid., 72-3) (From the context it is apparent that he has in science in mind as well as philosophy.) The assumption is that the "theoretical content of all previous philosophy" distorts reality or otherwise gets in the way of a more faithful understanding. What the proposed epochē requires is that we abstain from affirming (or denying) the metaphysical prejudices of all theory. With respect to perception, for example, we refrain from theorizing about the real,

the better to appropriate it with the meaning it actually has in experience. We depart from theoretical prejudices about the real and return or go back to 'the things themselves' as they are given prior to and independently of all theory.

Husserl's text raises some questions that we will explore here in a preliminary way and later analyze in greater detail. In the first place, there is a question as to the relationship between the theoretical prejudices and the 'given' (i.e. "actual reality") to which Husserl returns. In Ideas the relationship appears to be non-dynamic. Prejudices 'veil' the given, but the given remains at one with itself, unaffected by prejudices and there to be seen if only we put aside the veil. Husserl tells us: "Self-evident data are patient, they let theories chatter about them, but remain what they are." (Ibid., 80) On this account, there is no interpenetration between theories (prejudices) and the given. Each remains external to the other. Experience, actual reality, is what it is regardless of how we understand it. (This relationship becomes complicated and ambiguous in the later writings where Husserl speaks about theories 'flowing into' the life-world.)

A second and related question concerns what is involved in putting prejudices out of play. Husserl acknowledges that this is no mean task: "That we should set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking....are hard demands." (Ibid., 38-9) The execution of this task is assigned to epochē. It is questionable, however, that epochē alone is sufficient to "break down

the mental barriers" of prejudice, to neutralize the inertial effectiveness of "previous habits of thought". Husserl's own practice certainly goes beyond mere epochē. Throughout Ideas he offers detailed analyses and critiques of various theories. This is something more than and different from 'bracketing' them.<sup>11</sup> Despite his explicit pronouncements about epochē, his own practice seems to indicate that at some level he acknowledges that, in order to render a prejudice ineffective, something more than the epochē is required. Husserl himself does more than 'bracket' or 'suspend' the prejudices in question: he works through them as well, analyzes them, traces their roots. In Ideas this work is not assigned an integral place in his phenomenology, but later he does explicitly acknowledge its importance and attempts to integrate it.

Putting aside then the prejudices of all theoretical standpoints, Husserl offers a description of "our first outlook upon life", which is taken "from the natural standpoint". (Ibid., 91) This standpoint is "first" or "natural" in that it is the one in which we simply find ourselves as human beings prior to any theorizing. Indeed all theorizing is founded upon this standpoint and more or less surreptitiously draws meaning from it. In relation to 'theorizing', Husserl's 'description' of the world of the natural standpoint is a return to what is more primordial. He refrains from intellectualizing our experience and attends to how we do in fact experience the world when we are "consciously awake". (Ibid., 92)

Putting aside the 'veil', it is manifest that "through sight, touch, hearing, etc., in the different ways of sensory perception,

corporeal things somehow spatially distributed are *for me simply there*, in a verbal or figurative sense 'present', whether or not I pay them special attention by busying myself with them...." (Ibid., 91) The things I perceive are set in a horizon such that other marginal things are always dimly co-present with them, extending out to the indeterminate limit at the fringes of my perceptual field. Moreover this world, which is "for me simply there", does not give itself, contrary to what certain theories teach, as a "mere world of facts and affairs". It is "a world of values, a world of goods, a practical world." (Ibid., 93) I encounter the things before me furnished "with value-characters such as beautiful or ugly, agreeable or disagreeable, pleasant or unpleasant, and so forth." (Ibid.) Furthermore, they appear in light of my practical engagements with them "as objects to be used, the 'table' with its 'books', the 'glass to drink from', the 'vase', the 'piano', and so forth." (Ibid.) The world we live in gives itself in light of and in correlation to our projects, to our praxis.

Such, briefly sketched, is Husserl's account of how the world is given to us pre-theoretically in ordinary wakeful life. Husserl's observations may seem obvious and superficial, and in a sense they are. In light of the tendency for scientific and philosophical theories to overlook and even falsify the world we experience, however, these things must be said, if only to remind us of something that we are prone to forget in our theorizing. In theorizing under the auspices of objectivism we abstract from the meaning that things and the world have *for us*.

The first step, philosophic epochē, having secured the integrity of the natural standpoint against the obfuscating prejudices of theory, the second step takes us back from this standpoint to what is even more primordial according to Husserl--namely, transcendental or pure consciousness. This is the phenomenological standpoint proper, in relation to which the first step has been a preparation. The natural standpoint implicitly posits, in its naivety, a world existing independently of its appearance to any subject. Husserl now proposes that we practise an epochē in relation to this standpoint, or more precisely in relation to the implicit thesis of this standpoint. This he calls the 'phenomenological epochē'.

To perform this epochē, Husserl tells us, "we put out of action the general thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural standpoint, we place in brackets whatever it includes respecting the nature of Being...." (Ibid., 99) The thesis indicated here is approximately the implicit naive realism of common sense.<sup>12</sup> The epochē suspends our immediate, animal faith in the world, what Merleau-Ponty will call 'the perceptual faith'. Husserl emphasizes that to place the world in brackets is not to deny or even doubt its existence.<sup>13</sup> The point rather is to grasp in reflection what is assumed to be valid in perception. The world remains intact throughout the epochē but the faith in which it is posited is put out of play. The world's claim to validity independent of the subject to whom it is given is put in suspense. The world becomes a 'phenomenon'.

Bracketing, Merleau-Ponty says, is a matter of stepping back from the world and Being in order to see them, or of putting "them in

quotation marks as one does with the remarks of another, to let them speak, to listen in...." (VI, 107) When in conversation we bracket the truth-claim of someone's statement, we do not thereby annul its meaning. Indeed, we sometimes do this precisely in order to facilitate the analysis of a statement's meaning. So too, in bracketing the thesis of the natural standpoint we do not alter its content in the least but rather are enabled to grasp its meaning--to grasp how the world is meant or intended from the natural standpoint. Even if it should turn out that the thesis were false, it would still retain its meaning. Whether the world exists or does not exist in the sense that it is posited in the natural standpoint, it nevertheless exists as thus meant or intended, in the space between brackets. As such it is not nothing and can be inquired into in its own right. After the epochē Husserl continues to talk about the world, about objects and other men, and so on, but his statements carry the qualification 'as meant or intended in experience'.

The epochē thus opens up a whole new region to be explored within its brackets, which Husserl calls "conscious experience", or more simply "consciousness". (*Ideas*, p. 104) Within this new region things and the world in general are 'reduced' to being correlates of consciousness, to being that which consciousness is 'consciousness of'. The epochē thus returns from the natural standpoint (and the world as posited in the perceptual faith) to consciousness (and the world as its correlate). This "new region of Being" had been in principle inaccessible from the natural standpoint. (*Ibid.*, pp.101-3) Under the spell of this standpoint's native objectivism, consciousness



so exhausts itself in the constitution of objectivities (things, persons, events, and so on) that it is blinded to its own work and accomplishment. Within the new standpoint, it becomes manifest that the objectivities consciousness posits as standing over and against it have been constituted as such through its own meaning-bestowing activity. As Paul Ricoeur puts it: "After the reduction consciousness continues seeing, but without being absorbed in this seeing, without being lost in it. Rather, the very seeing itself is discovered as a doing, as a producing, once Husserl even says 'as a creating'."<sup>14</sup> Once lost or alienated in the 'natural world', consciousness finds or returns to itself in recovering the meaning it has spontaneously invested in the world. We come to see that perception is in some sense what Ricoeur calls 'creative vision'.

An example will help to clarify this. In any culture it is possible to identify a 'natural standpoint' from which people view the difference between man and woman. Individuals unreflectively living within this standpoint do not realize that it is indeed a 'standpoint', that they are constituting sexual difference from a certain point of view and within the horizon of a certain set of assumptions. They believe that the difference, such as they understand it, is something inscribed in the nature of things and that they are merely passively taking note of it. There is something of a phenomenological reduction practiced by those who, putting in suspense the question of any absolute or metaphysical difference between man and woman, inquire into how sexual difference is constituted or intended within a given individual or culture. The question asked is

not "What is the difference between man and woman?" but rather "How does this difference appear to a given subject or group of subjects?" Whether the difference is in fact such as the subject believes it to be is from this reflective point of view irrelevant, for it can be inquired into in its own right.

From this reflective standpoint it becomes apparent that powerful stereotypes and clichés mediate the conception, and indeed the perception, of sexual difference. On the one side, from the 'natural standpoint' it is believed that sexual difference, such as it appears from this standpoint, is a brute 'given', something that consciousness passively receives from things. On the other side, from the reflective standpoint, it becomes apparent that this difference as such is 'constituted'. Where the natural standpoint thought that it had to do with something ready-made on the other side of consciousness, the critical standpoint shows that consciousness has been at work 'constituting' what the natural standpoint believes to be simply 'given'. What were thought to be 'objective' facts come to be seen as mediated by prejudices. In the reflective standpoint consciousness, at first alienated in objectivities, oblivious to its own accomplishment or mediation, returns to itself.

### 3. Teleological-Historical Reflection

These all too brief remarks on Ideas have allowed us to introduce some themes that we will now examine in a more detailed way building on the text of The Crisis of European Sciences and other writings of that period. In Ideas the return signifies a backward turn

toward that which is more fundamental in relation to a given point of departure: the natural standpoint in relation to the objectivism of theory, consciousness in relation to this standpoint and its implicit objectivism. In Ideas, however, and in the works up until the last period of his life, Husserl did not explicitly analyze the historical dimension of the return. In turning now to the Crisis, we will see that this dimension comes to take on a central importance there. We know by his own testimony that Merleau-Ponty was deeply impressed with and influenced by this later work, which for him marked a decisive turning point in Husserl's philosophy. "It was not until his last period", Merleau-Ponty claims, "that Husserl himself became fully aware of what the return to phenomena meant...." (PhP, 49n.)

There is an obvious parallel between Ideas and the Crisis, which at first glance suggests the possibility of a simple translation. In Part III of the Crisis, which Husserl considered the main part of the text, two progressively more fundamental epochēs are distinguished, reminiscent of the 'two steps' we identified in Ideas.<sup>15</sup> The first, which Husserl calls "the epochē of the objective sciences", seems to be roughly equivalent to the 'philosophic epochē' of Ideas and plays a similar role. (Crisis, pp. 136ff.) It secures the point of view of everyday experience, of the 'life-world', against theoretical prejudices. What Husserl calls the 'life-world' could be viewed as a fleshing out of what he called 'actual reality' in "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science" and 'the natural standpoint' in Ideas. This first epochē is preparatory to a second more fundamental epochē, the transcendental epochē. This second epochē is essentially

the same as the 'phenomenological epochē in Ideas. (Ibid., pp. 148ff.) It turns backwards from the life-world thus secured in order to reveal its hidden constitutive sources in subjectivity or consciousness. This is the properly phenomenological turn.

Thus there are indeed continuities that would suggest the possibility of a straight forward translation from Ideas to the Crisis, but there are important discontinuities as well. In the first place, despite the affinities, the concept of the life-world does not merely deepen the concept of the natural standpoint. Something new is introduced with this concept. Secondly, and related to the first point, the "epochē of the objective sciences" in the Crisis is preceded by several hundred pages of what Husserl calls 'teleological-historical reflection'. This adds a new dimension to the epochē and must be integrated within his overall project.

There seems to be little preparation for teleological-historical reflection in his earlier works. Indeed, as Ricoeur has remarked, Husserl's later emphasis upon the importance of historicity is something of an anomaly against the background of his earlier pronouncements concerning history.<sup>15</sup> In "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science", for example, the changing and relative facts of history are juxtaposed against the enduring and universal truths of philosophy. (see. pp. 122ff.) Philosophical interest in history is identified with historicism, which Husserl attacks for the reason that it reduces truth to an historically conditioned and therefore merely relative phenomenon.

In this light it is at first quite surprising to read, in the preface to the essay that would later make up the first two parts of the Crisis, that "teleological-historical reflection upon the origins of our critical scientific and philosophical situation....becomes, in its own right, an introduction to transcendental phenomenology." (Crisis, 3n.) Leaving aside for a moment what such reflection involves, it will be fruitful to push the comparison with Ideas a little further.

In our discussion of the philosophic epochē in Ideas, we saw that Husserl made use of historical and critical analysis of theories and prejudices, although he did not acknowledge such analysis as having any integral significance within his phenomenology proper. The philosophic epochē could stand on its own. In the Crisis, however, historicity is taken more seriously and the relation between historical reflection and epochē is not as straight forward. According to David Carr, Husserl's "new awareness of historicity" spells an acknowledgement that the philosophic epochē, which in Ideas had been treated in a rather cursory way, needs to be augmented by reflection upon the historicity of theories or prejudices.<sup>17</sup> Carr contends that "if the notion of historicity, especially as it applies to philosophy itself, is to be taken seriously, then the 'philosophical epochē' would seem to be a much more difficult procedure, something that requires as much mental effort and explanation as the 'phenomenological reduction' per se." (Ibid.)

In the Crisis, Husserl displays an acute sensitivity to the subtle effectiveness of prejudices and to the difficulties that are

therefore involved in the attempt to liberate oneself from them. He writes:

the power of historical prejudices also plays a constant role here, especially of those which, coming from the origin of the modern positive sciences, dominate us all. It is of the very essence of such prejudices, drilled into the souls even of children, that they are concealed in their immediate effects. The abstract general will to be without prejudices changes nothing about them. (Crisis, 120)

Could not these remarks be turned against what Husserl says about the philosophic epochē in Ideas and even against what he says about the roughly parallel epochē of the objective sciences in the Crisis? If the philosopher, in virtue of his historicity, is not merely prone to prejudices but destined to them as well, and if philosophical prejudices, like those spoken of above, are "concealed in their immediate effects", would not something more than epochē be required in order for the philosopher to liberate himself from them? Would he not need to investigate and understand them as well? Indeed without such investigation would not the philosophic epochē amount to what Husserl here calls the ineffectual "abstract general will to be without prejudices"?

This seems to be implied, although not explicitly developed by Husserl, in his pronouncement that teleological-historical reflection becomes an introduction to transcendental phenomenology. On the importance of such reflection in the Crisis, Carr writes:

If it is, as Husserl suggests, really essential to such an introduction, it means that it is no longer sufficient simply to bracket the views of other philosophers and turn with an unprejudiced gaze to a reflection on consciousness. On the contrary, we must consider the views of others in great detail and in their historical sequence.<sup>18</sup>

In the Crisis there is a profound recognition that even the most careful philosopher uses and takes for granted concepts that are not transparent to him:

If he is to be one who thinks for himself, an autonomous philosopher with the will to liberate himself from all prejudices, he must have the insight that all the things he takes for granted are prejudices, that all prejudices are obscurities arising out of a sedimentation of tradition--not merely judgements whose truth is as yet undecided--and that this is true even of the great task and idea which is called 'philosophy'. (Crisis, 72)

If the philosopher's judgements are in fact at the same time prejudices--if something more and other is effective in them than is at the level of explicit awareness--then the effectiveness of epochē is very questionable. Epochē could only put out of play the explicit judgement, if indeed it could accomplish this much. The sedimented deposits of meaning under the surface of the judgement, the prejudices surreptitiously contributing to its meaning, would not and could not be neutralized by the epochē. In order to liberate oneself from prejudices (to the extent that this is possible), it would first be necessary to uncover and interrogate them.

In the Crisis, and this is something new, Husserl acknowledges that the philosopher, even despite his efforts to be original, stands within a tradition that is effective in his philosophizing. The recognition of the hidden effectiveness of tradition, of history, has the consequence of displacing consciousness from its privileged position. Gadamer has stated the matter with brevity and acuteness:

Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of

historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.<sup>13</sup>

One could say that prior to the Crisis Husserl had not clearly thought out the relation between judgements and prejudices and therefore had not been sensitive to the dimension of depth. The recognition of depth, of history, or tradition, puts in question our ability to come to full awareness of our prejudices. To awaken such reflective awareness as is possible it is necessary to make a detour through a dimension that is at first not 'present' to consciousness. Teleological-historical reflection is such a detour. What is involved in this reflection?

One of the key themes of Husserl's later writings is that philosophy, if it is to be truly radical, must examine its own point of departure and become aware of its rootedness in an effective history. He reminds us that "we as philosophers are heirs of the past in respect to the goals which the word 'philosophy' indicates, in terms of concepts, problems, and methods." (Crisis, 17) The tradition we inherit is constitutive of how we philosophize. We take it for granted at the peril of being superficial. The "concepts, problems, and methods" at our disposal are burdened with historical import that is not transparent to us in our thinking. Thus, it is necessary, Husserl continues, "that we reflect back, in a thorough historical and critical fashion, in order to provide...for a radical self-understanding." This is the role Husserl assigns to 'teleological-historical reflection'.



Such reflection is 'historical' in that the philosopher turns back upon the effective history within which he stands. The available concepts have a significance that goes beyond his present consciousness of them, and are effective in hidden ways. These concepts have the status of prejudices. 'Subject', 'object', 'consciousness', 'nature'--the stock concepts for which modern man reaches when he attempts to understand himself and his world--have roots buried below the surface meanings at his conscious disposal. The concepts he uses are not self-effacing instruments that would allow him to handle his object without leaving their own mark. At least initially, he is more slave than master of his concepts, which mean more than he might consciously assign to them or stipulate for them. To be radical, the philosopher must realize that in his reflecting he is caught up in a sedimented history that exceeds his immediate grasp, and he must undertake to understand the history effective in his own philosophizing. In the Crisis Husserl does nothing less than reconstruct (or de-construct) the essential history of the modern spirit.

Such reflection is 'teleological' in that the philosopher is concerned not simply with what philosophy is and has become, but also with the task and future of philosophy. The philosopher turns back upon his effective history not out of some antiquarian interest in the past but in order to establish contact with the ground and original telos of his own philosophizing. What is the instituting sense of philosophy? Out of what praxis did it arise? Prior to becoming an institution and to its proliferation in a plethora of lexicalized

'philosophies', what desire animated philosophizing and what end did it hold in view? The desire that gives rise to philosophy, Husserl answers, is the desire for self-understanding. "Know thyself", the oracle urges. This desire, of course, presupposes that we have somehow or other become a question for ourselves.

The existential context for Husserl's teleological-historical reflection is what he calls 'the crisis of the European sciences'. This crisis, generated by the loss of meaning and purpose, is at the same time the crisis of European man, of the European spirit.<sup>20</sup> For a being such as man it is not enough simply to exist. He must also orient himself or find his bearings in the world, he must be able to make some sense of his own existence, to find (or create) a meaning in light of which the brute fact of his existence is redeemed. To paraphrase Heidegger, man is distinguished by the fact that, in his very being, that being is an issue.<sup>21</sup> Such understanding as was available to man before the rise of philosophy and science, however, is no longer sufficient for modern man, who forbids himself, in accordance with the demands of reason, the comforts of reassuring myths. His image and world as reflected by the myth-usurping categories of science or objectivism, however, although in conformity with the demands of reason narrowly conceived, is one in which he can not recognize himself. This image does not capture his existence such as he experiences it in love, concern, hope, boredom, anxiety, and so on. Ironically, the world reflected by some of the key "concepts, problems, and methods" handed down to him and dominant in his

philosophizing is devoid of essential humanity. It is not the world he inhabits. It is not inhabitable.<sup>22</sup>

Alienated in his self-understanding, modern man has lost his sense of purpose and meaning. This loss of purpose is at the same time a loss of ground, the loss of contact with his own existence. Husserl attempts to retrieve this lost ground and telos by rehabilitating the life-world, by offering us a standpoint from which to understand ourselves which takes into account our essential humanity. To achieve such understanding, it is necessary to work backwards from the dominant categories in which we understand or misunderstand ourselves to the life-world that they conceal and from which they have arisen. The aetiology of the crisis requires an examination of its effective history.<sup>23</sup>

In "The Vienna Lecture", Husserl traces the development of the modern spirit, which he characterizes as being essentially objectivistic and dualistic, back to its ground in the life-world, and rediscovers its telos in the birth of philosophy in ancient Greece. Motivated by insight into the relativity of 'truths' a new 'attitude', the 'theoretical attitude', was born. In face of the "multiplicity of nations" and the fact that "each with its own surrounding world which is valid for it, is taken for granted, with its traditions, its gods, its demons...simply as the actual world," there arises the idea of a true world not relative to time or place. (Crisis, 285-6) Observing that what is held valid by one person (or nation) is often not held valid by others, the Greeks instituted the ideal of a 'truth-in-itself' that would be valid for everyone, everywhere, and at

all times. Spurred by the puzzling plurality of "actual worlds" and the relativity of truths, Husserl says, "a new question of truth arises: not tradition-bound, everyday truth, but an identical truth which is valid for all who are no longer blinded by traditions, a truth-in-itself." (Ibid., 286) The philosopher distinguishes himself as one who no longer takes the validities of his nation's "actual world" (now appearing as merely one 'world-representation' among others) for granted. Unlike other citizens, he demands evidence for truth claims instead of submitting himself to the authority of tradition. The ideal he pursues is of a universal truth not bound to his own or to any tradition.

The introduction of this ideal and its development "through isolated personalities like Thales" gradually brought about a thorough transformation of Greek culture. (Ibid.) It came to be extended to all aspects of life because this ideal, in its very definition, promised to be of universal scope. "If the general idea of truth-in-itself becomes the universal norm of all the relative truths that arise in human life,..." Husserl says, "this will also affect all traditional norms, those of right, of beauty, of usefulness, dominant personal values, values connected with personal characteristics, etc." (Ibid., 287)

In the Crisis, Husserl traces the trajectory of this telos throughout the history of science and philosophy. He narrates the intellectual history of the West. The story he tells is of how this telos became cut off from its ground, namely, the life-world. In pursuit of this telos, thinkers fell prey to the temptation to reify

the ideal--to posit, in the face of the multiplicity of 'truths' and 'actual worlds', an objectively existing world. At the same time the status of the merely relative 'actual world', the world of everyday experience, was devalorized. It came to be designated as merely 'subjective-relative', as merely 'appearance'. Thus arises the basic dualism within which modern science and philosophy understand the world and within which modern man, the heir of this tradition, understands himself.

What characterizes modern science, which for Husserl is exemplified by Galileo, is "the surreptitious substitution of the mathematically substructured world of idealities for the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception, that is ever experienced and experienceable--our everyday life-world." (Ibid., 48-9) According to its own self-understanding, science thinks that it knows all it needs to know about the world as it is given in experience, that it has captured its essential meaning in designating it as a mere 'appearance' of the 'objective world', merely 'subjective-relative' in relation to it. Husserl believes that this dualistic conceptual system is inadequate. He believes that the category of 'appearance' is too restrictive and is in fact abstract in relation to something much more concrete, the life-world, that it in a sense both translates and conceals. He thematizes this evasive reality of which the category 'appearance' is merely a pale caricature. In his analysis he adds more depth and concreteness to what science designates as the other of the objective world. Without accepting the terms of the dualism, he reverses the order of priority science

assigns to 'appearance' and 'objective world' and shows that the 'objective world' is itself founded upon the life-world, in relation to which it is an idealization.<sup>24</sup>

Husserl links the objectivistic prejudice of the 'real world', in the sense of an independently existing 'thing-in-itself' causally determining the 'appearances', with the rise of geometry. It is a further step in the process of 'idealization', which is the method of geometry. Indeed Galileo, who for Husserl typifies modern objectivism par excellence, imagined the 'real' or 'objective' world to be essentially geometrical in its configuration. He conceived the perfection of knowledge in the image of a science capable of expressing in algebraic formulas the occult relationships obtaining between everything in nature.

Husserl points out that even as early as Galileo, geometry was received and understood in virtue of a tradition. It had passed through a series of stages out of which evolved the mature science known to Galileo. He and his contemporaries, however, accepted this geometry in its accomplished form and did not concern themselves with the motivating historical circumstances out of which it arose. It was enough to know the axioms and the definitions and to know the rules for constructing any possible geometrical shape in order to pursue the interests and problems that occupied them as geometers. Qua the practice of geometry, this failure to re-activate the original and originating sense of geometry was not a matter of great significance. It proved to be a "fateful omission", however, when thinkers like Galileo, with broader objectives, extrapolated the method of geometry

(idealization) beyond its instituting sense. (Ibid., 49) The failure to re-appropriate the origin of geometry led to the "superficialization" of its constituted results. (Ibid., 49-50) Under the spell of this superficialization, the "mathematically substructured world of idealities" acquires an independent being and appears as something eternal and universal over against the changing and geometrically imperfect world of everyday life.

It is under this spell that Galileo looked to geometry for a key to the nature and structure of the 'real' world. With the marriage of geometry and physical science, presided over by Galileo, the dualism that Husserl finds at the source of modern philosophy is firmly entrenched. The distinction between the real world and the apparent or subjective-relative world is elaborated with a distinction between primary and secondary qualities. The life-world is buried under the category of 'secondary qualities'. The ideal usurps the place of the real. What is actually a method comes to be taken for "true being". (Ibid., 51)

Husserl reminds us that geometry is itself a cultural accomplishment founded upon a life-world praxis. It arose from surveying, from the need to redefine property lines each time that boundaries were obscured by the flooding of the Nile, for example. Geometry is linked to the life-world in an even more essential way than through practical applications, however. After all, at some time in the ancient world geometry did become an autonomous discipline, freed from practical interests. The properties and relationships between ideal shapes can be analyzed in their own right. Even so,

however, within this purely theoretical interest, a life-line still provides geometry with nourishment from the life-world in virtue of the method of idealization by which it achieves its results. Idealization is the process of arriving at ideal figures by imaginatively perfecting the natural or technically produced shapes we encounter in the life-world. 'Essences' are produced by imaginatively varying the 'facts'. The crooked lines and irregular shapes that punctuate the landscape of the life-world are the spiritual ancestors of the perfect figures of geometry.

The snare that idealization falls prey to is to imagine that the perfected models derived from the rough 'approximations' found in the life-world, second in the order of discovery, are first in the order of being. As long as geometry (and science in general) is appropriated in forgetfulness of its dependence upon the life-world there is a danger that, cut off from the sources of its own praxis, it will hypostasize its own achievement and mistake the ideal for the real. The return to the life-world is a corrective to this tendency. The perfect shapes of geometry are idealizations of the rough shapes met with in everyday experience and do not, as Galileo thought, occupy an autonomous region of being.

Idealization plays a major role in the natural sciences in general. The exact scientific laws formulated in scientific theories are perfected empirical inductions such as, in our everyday experience, we find it expedient to make in order to carry out our projects. The things or events between which science finds law-like correlations must needs be, if not immediately, at least ultimately,



things that are or can be experienced in the life-world. Husserl writes: "All knowledge of laws could be knowledge only of predictions, grasped as lawful, about occurrences of actual or possible experiential phenomena, predictions which are indicated when experience is broadened through observations and experiments penetrating into unknown horizons, and which are verified in the manner of inductions." (Ibid., 50) Even the scientist studying sub-atomic particles must rely upon the curious shapes that do appear to him in his everyday contact with things--his microscope and his laboratory, for example--in order to confirm or disconfirm the theories he puts forward concerning the nature of the 'real' world.

Husserl believes that in this regard the scientist's practice is in contradiction with his theory. In his theorizing, the scientist devalorizes the things of the life-world, ordinary objects and so on, as being merely 'subjective-relative'. Husserl writes: "This 'subjective-relative' is supposed to be 'overcome'; one can and should correlate it with a hypothetical being-in-itself, a substrate for logical-mathematical 'truths-in-themselves' that one can approximate through ever newer and better hypothetical approaches, always justifying them through experiential verification." (Ibid., 126) In his practice, however, the scientist must have recourse to life-world objects not as indexes of 'truths-in-themselves' but precisely in their everyday experienceability and validity. "The visible measuring scales, scale-markings, etc., are used as actually existing things, not as illusions; thus that which actually exists in the life-world, as something valid, is a premise." (Ibid.)

In his theorizing, however, the scientist suppresses this "premise". The microscope through which he studies the sub-atomic particles that he believes make up the real world, the instrument 'ready-to-hand', has a very definite kind of being for him. In his practice it has a significance and a kind of being that is not adequately comprehended in the terms of his theory. Its being qua instrument, for example, is not comprehended under the category of 'appearance', nor is its broader significance. The microscope is in the space of the laboratory, which is connected to the administrative building where he picks up his cheque every month. Perhaps he had to work very hard to justify the purchase of such an expensive item given the constraints on his institution's budget; requisition forms had to be filled out, letters carefully written, and so on. Perhaps he argued to those pulling the financial strings that it was indispensable to his work as a scientist, and that this work might ultimately have important applications in the service of humanity. Qua life-world object the microscope has a great deal of significance for him and an undefined kind of being that he does not integrate in his theory. More precisely, he integrates it under the ungrateful and obfuscating label 'appearance'. To determine it as such, however, fails to do justice to its practical, experiential meaning. The scientist surreptitiously makes use of the life-world and in practice grants it a validity that he is forbidden to acknowledge in his theory.<sup>25</sup>

Phenomenology thematizes this suppressed "premise", this kind of being that even the scientist implicitly acknowledges in his own practice. The scientist lives and practices within the horizon of a

world, in light of which he experiences things in a way that his theory cannot comprehend. Husserl rehabilitates this life-world, which has been devalorized and even suppressed under the category of 'appearance'. What 'appears', whatever its ultimate metaphysical status, is not nothing. It can be investigated in its own right. Husserl shows that, far from being a mere 'appearance', the life-world is in fact the ground of science, always presupposed but never responsibly thematized. He writes: "The concrete life-world, then, is the grounding soil of the 'scientifically true' world and at the same time encompasses it in its own universal concreteness." (Ibid., 131) This ground has been suppressed or concealed, however, and Husserl advances it into the foreground and makes it thematic. He does so in a polemic with the natural sciences and objectivistic philosophy.

#### 4. The Return to the Life-World

Because the life-world is concealed in its own proper being by obfuscating theories, a special effort of interpretation is required for its disclosure. Dominant prejudices about the real, prejudices linked with the dominance of science, have put a spell over us, Husserl says. "For we ourselves, who are carrying out these reflections (and, as I may assume, my readers), stand under the *spell* of these times." (Ibid., 58) What is first required, therefore, is to undo this "spell". This is the significance of Husserl's historical-teleological reflections. The detour through history is an integral part of the return to the life-world, since under the "spell

of these modern times" the life-world is concealed. The return to the life-world is inextricably intertwined with the spell-breaking epochē (here expanded to include teleological-historical reflection) of the objective sciences.

Gadamer has captured in precise terms the sense of this polemic or dialectic at work in Husserl's reflections on the life-world. He writes: "What had been sought and inquired after for a long time, especially in Husserl's own thought, was in fact gathered in the word 'life-world'. The counterconcept to the 'life-world', which provoked the coining of the new concept, is without doubt the 'world of science'."<sup>26</sup> The expression 'counterconcept' conveys the sense of the polemic we have been trying to emphasize in our analysis of Husserl, and that we shall emphasize in our analysis of Merleau-Ponty. The concept of the life-world is framed against or 'counter to' the concept of the objective world. "The concept of the 'life-world' is the antithesis of all objectivism", Gadamer says.<sup>27</sup> Objectivism having put us at some distance from the life-world, having buried it under the category of 'appearance', the return to the life-world is at the same time the negation or undoing of objectivism. Husserl writes that "the proper return to the naïveté of life--but in a reflection which rises above this naïveté--is the only possible way to overcome the philosophical naïveté which lies in the (supposedly) 'scientific' character of traditional objectivistic philosophy." (Crisis, 59)

There is, however, an unsettled ambiguity in the Crisis concerning the life-world and our reflective access to it. This is especially apparent if, alongside this text, we read Experience and

Judgement, which was written during the same period.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, Husserl often speaks as if the life-world is the world of everyday experience. We are said to live in the life-world, "which appears straightforwardly to us men, and to us as scientists...." (Crisis, 103) It is "experienced", whereas the 'objective world' posited by objective thought cannot be for reasons of principle. (*Ibid.*, 129) In these terms, the life-world remains unchanged throughout history and in spite of the rise and spread of science. Husserl writes: "This actually intuited, actually experienceable world, in which practically our whole life takes place, remains unchanged as what it is, in its own essential structure and its own concrete causal style, whatever we may do with or without techniques." (*Ibid.*, 51) In the same vein, he writes: "The life-world was always there for mankind before science, then, just as it continues its manner of being in the epoch of science." (*Ibid.*, 123)

Judged from these and other similar texts, it seems that Husserl is working within a dualism of concept and percept. It is as if he believes that our concepts are subject to historicity, but our perceptions are in contact with an extra-historical world not subject to change. The terms in which we understand ourselves may change from time to time and place to place, but what is simply there to be understood remains identical to itself and is not affected in its being by our chatter about it. At one place Husserl says that the aim of his historical reflections is "to make vital again, in its concealed historical meaning, the sedimented conceptual system." (*Ibid.*, 71) It is significant that here he locates sedimentation in the

"conceptual system" and not in the life-world as such. The assumption seems to be that only our "conceptual systems" are subject to change, while the life-world remains unaffected by any such changes. Our "conceptual systems", the paradigms by which we understand, have a history, but the life-world as such does not. When Husserl speaks of the life-world in this way, it is usually appealed to as a kind of evidence counter to objectivism. Experience is evoked against theory, fact against idealization, and so on.<sup>29</sup>

However, Husserl sometimes describes the relationship between the life-world and conceptual systems in more dynamic terms. The spiritual accomplishments of science are said to "flow into" the life-world. (Ibid., 113) He says that theories of the objective sciences "have the character of validities for the life-world, adding themselves as such to its own composition." (Ibid., 131) From these texts it appears that Husserl believes that there is indeed interaction or interpenetration between the life-world and "conceptual systems", since when the latter are "added" to the former they change its "composition". Here the "conceptual system" by which we understand ourselves is in some sense constitutive of the life-world. Carr writes:

Thus it is not merely a matter of the way we have learned to *think* about the world, not merely a matter of a certain stock of concepts we apply to a world which is given independently of them beforehand. Rather 'from the start (*von vornherein*)' the world of our experience has already been interpreted for us in virtue of our membership in the culture that descends from Galileo and his contemporaries. We might say that their legacy to us is not merely a way of thinking about the world, but the very world about which we think.<sup>30</sup>

The life-world itself could be said to have a history. Understood in these terms it is much more problematic to evoke the life-world as a kind of pristine evidence standing counter to objectivism, because as such it is not something that is or could be presented independently of such prejudices.

Husserl does not expressly thematize this ambiguity. He has reasons for affirming each of the apparently contradictory poles of this ambiguity, but does not think the two together. Carr writes: "Somehow Husserl wants to say *both* that we are always already in the life-world--not that we have left it behind and are cut off from it by history--*and*, on the other hand, that we as philosophers must go through history in order to get at the life-world." (Ibid., 173) We cannot resolve this ambiguity here, but we can at least offer reasons as to why Husserl would not want to choose either of these alternatives at the price of denying the other. On the one hand, to say that we have immediate access to the life-world has implications that Husserl could not accept. As Carr puts it, "if we say we have direct, unmediated reflective access to the life-world, then we are saying not only that historical reflection has no importance for phenomenology but that history has no power to affect the way we experience things." (Ibid.) On the other hand, however, if we do not have unmediated access to the life-world, the appeal to the life-world as a kind of ultimate evidence against objectivism becomes problematic. Husserl's thought is pulled by this tension between the demand for evidence and the acknowledgement of historicity.

Experience and Judgement helps us to clarify and refine this ambiguity, if only to reinstate it at another level.<sup>31</sup> In this text Husserl distinguishes the life-world from what he calls the 'pre-given world'. (pp. 47-51) It is the pre-given world that is described as the world of everyday life, the world such as it is given in our experience. The life-world is said to be 'buried' underneath the pre-given world and as such is not immediately experienced, contrary to what he says about the life-world in the Crisis. By way of distinguishing it from the life-world, the pre-given world is said to be in dynamic interrelation with theoretical or conceptual systems, which interpenetrate it, such that it changes as new concepts deposit their meanings. The world that is pre-given is thoroughly permeated or sedimented with historical or cultural accomplishments. The pre-given world of 'European man', for example, is "no longer a pure world of original experience but a world having the sense of a world within which all particular existents in advance and as a matter of course are given to us as determinable in principle, according to the exact methods of science...." (Ibid., 48-9)

The pre-given world changes as new conceptual systems deposit their meanings in culture, but the life-world remains unaffected. In order to disclose the life-world, which here has the sense of being pre-theoretical or even pre-cultural, it is necessary to dig below the pre-given world. There is needed a "retrogression from the pre-given world with all of its sedimentations of sense, with its science and scientific determination, to the original life-world." (Ibid., 50) Because the pre-given world, permeated by science, effectively



conceals the life-world, the latter cannot be disclosed by straight forward reflection upon what is 'given'. As Carr puts it, "Since we no longer *live* in the original life-world, since the world no longer *presents* itself to us in this way, we cannot simply turn, in the manner of reflection, to the *way* in which it is given." (op. cit., p. 169) Husserl writes:

Psychological reflection on lived experiences as they are accessible to internal perception can never lead to the origination of this garb of ideas thrown over the world from the original experience of the life-world....every such psychological reflection leads to lived experiences which, insofar as they are such, are experiences of the world, of a world which, for this subject, is already given as complete; and this means that this world is there as that on which contemporary science has already done its work of exact determination. (Experience and Judgement, 47-8)

Note that a "garb of ideas" is effective not only at the level of reflection or understanding, as if "lived experience" would remain the same independent of and unaffected by whatever "garb of ideas" is authoritative for us. "Lived experience" is penetrated in its being by our "ideas". The pre-given world as interpenetrated by a "garb of ideas" is what is immediately accessible to our reflective grasp. The life-world, however, is not immediately accessible because it is covered over by the sedimented meanings that constitute the world such as it is given.

For the above reason the disclosure of the life-world requires a kind of depth psychology, requires an historically mediated reflection that would dig beneath the sedimented landscape of the pre-given world. Teleological-historical reflection as described in the Crisis answers to this requirement. The role of such reflection is

not simply to divest us of prejudices, as if to bring us to some zero-point emptied of all positivity. Rather, the analysis and critique of prejudice is dialectically related to the disclosure of the life-world.<sup>32</sup>

##### 5. The Life-World and Point of View

One might think that with the retrogression from the pre-given world to the original life-world one would hit rock-bottom, so to speak. In fact, for Husserl this is merely preparatory for a "regressive inquiry which goes from the life-world to the subjective operations from which it itself arises." (Experience and Judgement, 50) The structure is the same in the Crisis. Within the overall project of this text, teleological-historical reflection and the epochē of the objective sciences, which serve to disclose the life-world, are merely introductory to the transcendental epochē, which is the phenomenological move proper for Husserl. Husserl says: "The life which effects world-validity in natural world-life does not permit of being studied from within the attitude of natural world-life." (Crisis, 148) The transcendental epochē, which will facilitate such study, is described as "a total transformation of attitude, a completely unique, universal epochē." (Ibid.)

In this epochē, which is not essentially different from the phenomenological epochē in Ideas, the life-world itself is transformed into a phenomenon correlative to consciousness, which is said to 'constitute' it. Husserl says that "the natural, objective world-life

is only a particular mode of the transcendental life which forever constitutes the world...." (Ibid., 175) For Husserl, it is this transcendental life, and not the life-world, which is primordial. The disclosure of the life-world is only a means to this end.

I will not discuss this second epochē or reduction in the Crisis for the reason that it is not significantly different from that in Ideas, which we have already discussed. Indeed, given the shift indicated by Husserl's discovery of the life-world and the importance of history, this similarity is itself astonishing. Gadamer writes:

When we read the explicit summary of the new role of transcendental reduction that Husserl gives in the Crisis...we are astonished to find the old, well-known problems and insights of the earlier program have returned, though in a somewhat altered form. The analysis of the *a priori* of the life-world and its methodical founding involves a change of attitude that is none other than the familiar transcendental epochē of the Ideas.<sup>33</sup>

What is "astonishing" is that, in the face of what is new in the Crisis--the life-world, the sensitivity to historicity, teleological-historical reflection--the overall program of his earlier work remains intact. There is an unresolved tension in Husserl's later thought between existential-hermeneutic and idealist motifs: for example, between the recognition of facticity (the irreducibility of the life-world) and the retention of transcendental consciousness as the *a priori* of this facticity. It is questionable that these motifs can be patched together as Husserl seems to think they can be. The teaching of the Crisis concerning the philosopher's inherence in a tradition and the hidden prejudices effective in his reflecting and even his experiencing points to the conclusion that it would be

impossible to achieve absolute transparency in our reflective understanding of the life-world.

Husserl is thus divided against himself when he says that the life-world is "only a mode of the transcendental life". This implies that the philosopher could lay the life-world out before his reflective gaze as an object with no hidden depths. In performing the transcendental epochē, Husserl says, the philosopher is "situated *above* his own natural being and *above* the natural world...." (Crisis, 152) Husserl does not say it here, but it seems implied, that the philosopher is thus situated *above* history as well. From such a high altitude, he is able to circumscribe everything in an all-encompassing glance. If one asks where the philosopher thus situated stands, the only possible answer is that he stands nowhere. He has extricated himself from all points of view. Indeed, Husserl emphasizes that "this is not a 'view', an 'interpretation' bestowed upon the world." (Ibid.)

Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty believes that the philosopher requires distance, but he insists that the philosopher cannot erase the steps he took to travel this distance, nor erase the effects of his initial point of departure. He cannot escape point of view. He carries his history and his world with him. He cannot step outside of the life-world to survey it from "above".

Husserl is at odds with himself on this point. The second reduction, the reduction of the life-world to transcendental consciousness, is at odds with the first, the reduction that returns from the hypostasizations of objective thought to the life-world. It is with respect to this issue--the capacity of reflective thought to

encompass the unreflected life of perception, experience, or in general the life-world--that Merleau-Ponty diverges from Husserl. More precisely, since Husserl is himself divided, we should say that Merleau-Ponty opts for and carries forward his existential-hermeneutic side. He writes:

Husserl in his last period concedes that all reflection should in the first place return to the description of the world of living experience (*Lebenswelt*). But he adds that, by means of a second 'reduction', the structures of the world of experience must be reinstated in the transcendental flow of a universal constitution in which all the world's obscurities are elucidated. It is clear, however, that we are faced with a dilemma: either the constitution makes the world transparent, in which case it is not obvious why reflection needs to pass through the world of experience, or it retains something of that world, and never rids it of its opacity. (PhP, 385n.)

Merleau-Ponty chooses the second horn of this dilemma posed by a reading of the later Husserl.

For Merleau-Ponty, as for Husserl, the task of reflection is to reveal or make explicit our experience of the world. Like the common man who lives more or less unreflectively, the philosopher lives in the life-world. To a greater degree than the common man, however, he is puzzled and wonder-struck by the fact of existence and is driven by the desire to make sense of what it is to be in the world, to make explicit what is only implicit in everyday life. The difference between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl, or rather a certain idealist strain in Husserl, is that Merleau-Ponty, no less committed to the philosophical enterprise, is struck by the "obscurity" and "opacity" of the life-world. He is humbled before the radical contingency of the world, by such facticity as could never be rationalized in a 'science of the life-world'.

This is the background against which we should understand Merleau-Ponty's oft-quoted pronouncement concerning the "impossibility of a complete reduction". With reference to Husserl, he writes:

All the misunderstandings with his interpreters, with the existentialist 'dissidents' and finally with himself, have arisen from the fact that in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it and, also, from the fact that from this break we can learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world. The most important lesson the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction. (PhP, xiv)

In our attempt to capture our experience in reflection, which is what essentially defines us as philosophers, something always slips through our fingers and escapes our grasp. It is this recalcitrant 'something', opaque and obscure, that reflection encounters as its limit and that Merleau-Ponty tries to thematize in his philosophy.

For Merleau-Ponty, the opacity of the world is the obverse side of the fact that consciousness always inheres in a point of view. Even the philosopher reflecting upon the life-world stands somewhere. He is situated in a tradition of thought that he can never completely thematize or render transparent. What he is able to see from where he stands will always appear in the light (and shadows) of hidden prejudices.

Merleau-Ponty shares an affinity with Gadamer in this regard. Earlier we made reference to Gadamer's humbling claims concerning the finitude of self-understanding or self-awareness. "The prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being," Gadamer says. (Truth and Method, 245) This is not to endorse the unreflective life. Gadamer does not

mean that we should cease trying to understand ourselves and indulge or succumb to our prejudices. On the contrary, he believes in philosophy, believes that the task of philosophy is to become aware of our prejudices. This task is important for Gadamer, as for any philosopher, but for Gadamer it is also important to be aware of the limits of our reflection. His point is that it is impossible for the philosopher to make all of his prejudices explicit or to make reflection equal to the the unreflected life it tries to capture. Merleau-Ponty learns this important lesson from (and to a certain extent, in spite of) Husserl. Understanding, like perception, always has a blind spot--the spot in which the philosopher stands and from which he sees what he sees, the invisible in virtue of which there is something visible. What is visible is never completely transparent, since it is visible only in virtue of the fact that something else, his point of view, is invisible to him.

## CHAPTER 2

### TRADITIONAL PREJUDICES AND THE RETURN TO PHENOMENA

In this regard, phenomenology represents a return to naïveté. It liberates sight and renders it attentive to all the richness of the real. For it, the perceived and the willed are original contours of the world; they are even dimensions of a reality more original than the scientific object, which appears later, at a second level of elaboration, while reality has already become a meaningful world at the stage of perception and action.

Paul Ricoeur

#### 1. Traditional Prejudices

Merleau-Ponty emerges on the philosophical scene as a dialectical philosopher par excellence. The thesis with which he began--the primacy of perception or of the life-world--was, to be sure, virtually a cliché among his contemporaries. Yet there were few philosophers--Bergson and to a lesser extent Husserl would number among them--who attempted to engage this thesis with the apparently antithetical views of natural science and naturalistic philosophy in as thorough a way as did Merleau-Ponty. He took very seriously the rival claims of the dominant scientific paradigms and in a painstaking way attempted to address this thought on its own terrain.

It is instructive to contrast Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger in this regard. While these two indeed had a great deal in common, were to a large extent arguing for the same thing, there is a great deal of difference in their rhetorical strategies. While science is certainly



represented in Heidegger's philosophy, it is usually spoken of in only the most general terms.<sup>1</sup> The standpoint of 'being-in-the-world' emerges triumphant and unscathed from the confrontation with science, but science has not been given much opportunity to speak in its own voice. In Merleau-Ponty's writings, by contrast, the scientific standpoint is expressed in its own terms. This is especially true in his early works, which are replete with detailed analyses of arguments coming from those quarters. The viewpoint of science is not simply criticized but is assigned a place in a larger whole in which its truth is preserved. It is said to be not so much false as partial or incomplete. The question of falsity arises only with respect to science's claim to totalization and its attempt to reduce the pre-scientific life out of which it arises to the concepts projected in its own understanding.

Even where science is not his principal interlocuter (as becomes more and more the case with each new book) his style of philosophizing is thoroughly dialectical in the sense that he brings his theses into relation with dominant counter-positions and seeks a non-reductive intergration or synthesis. In advancing his theses, he is acutely sensitive to the fact that on virtually every topic there are already powerful prejudices at work, and he undertakes to address these prejudices. This is one of the many respects in which Merleau-Ponty stands squarely within the tradition of Husserlian phenomenology.

This dialectical style, indeed this rhetorical strategy, is clearly exhibited in the Introduction to the Phenomenology of

Perception. The two adjuncts of the subtitle of the Introduction, "Traditional Prejudices and the Return to Phenomena", should be thought of as being in a dialectical relation. The standpoint of the phenomena, the position for which and from which Merleau-Ponty argues, is not simply asserted. He begins rather with a critical examination of the traditional prejudices which 'veil' or 'conceal' the phenomena and in relation to which the standpoint of the phenomena is secured by way of a return.

The work of the Introduction is primarily negative or even cathartic. Its purpose is to enable us to gain some distance from objective thought, to frame it in a perspective and thereby relax its hold upon us. "In order to revive perceptual experience buried under its own results, it would not have been enough to present descriptions of them which might possibly not have been understood, we had to establish by philosophical references and anticipations the point of view from which they might appear true." (PhP, 63) The work of getting into position for obtaining the desired "point of view" is bound up with the work of deconstructing another point of view which is dominant in our culture--objective thought. The strategy here can be likened to that of a Socratic dialogue. No definite conclusions are achieved, but through an interrogation of obfuscating prejudices an open space is cleared where the question can be creatively and radically raised. "Sense experience has become once more a question for us," he writes near the end of the book. (PhP, 52).

The traditional prejudices he argues against come principally from two interrelated traditions, empiricism and intellectualism, both

of which are said to be under the sway of classical science.<sup>2</sup> Empiricism, represented primarily by the empirical psychology of the day, is characterized by the presupposition of an objective world existing in itself and as such totally independent of any perceiver. It sets itself the task of showing how the objective world operates upon the human body, which is understood as one body among others in a closed system of nature, in such a way as to reproduce its phenomenal analogue in the 'subjective experience' of a perceiver. Perception is thought of as an effect of a complex event taking place in an all-encompassing objective world. "Perception is built up with states of consciousness as a house is built with bricks, and a mental chemistry is invoked which fuses these materials into a compact whole." (PhP, 21)

Intellectualism, which is represented not only by Descartes, Kant, and the early Husserl, but also by certain psychologists of the day, makes an advance over empiricism in that it brings into question the presupposition of an objective world existing independently of consciousness and owing nothing to it. Consciousness is not a passive registration of sense-data. What appears does so in accordance with or in light of the hidden constitutive activity of consciousness--Kant's categories of the understanding, for example. The orderliness or organization of the world such as it appears cannot be accounted for on the supposition that consciousness is entirely passive. Intellectualism thus understands the world as relative or correlative to consciousness.

Intellectualism assigns to a transcendental ego (operating upon its own mental states) the activity of synthesis that empiricism explains as the action of an independent external world upon the body. The world is relative to a subject, but to a thinking, rather than a perceiving subject. The body too (here reduced to the status of a representation for the ego) is included in the world thus understood, and the synthesizing laws of the ego or intellect inherit the functions that empiricism assigned to laws of nature. The world remains objective as standing over and against a subject who is pure intellect. This world proves to be little more than a reflected image of the objective world postited by empiricism, since "it is still defined by the absolute mutual exteriority of its parts, and is merely duplicated throughout by a thought which sustains it." (PhP, 39) If on empiricist assumptions consciousness is too passive, on intellectualist assumptions it is too active or spontaneous. Merleau-Ponty tries to find a balance between receptivity and spontaneity, sensibility and understanding.

My interest here is not so much with the specific differences between these two positions, which are somewhat caricatured in any case, as with their common rhetorical place in Merleau-Ponty's argument. In the final analysis, he tells us, the two positions converge insofar as they share the same general prejudice about the objective world. "Both take the objective world as the object of their analysis, when this comes first neither in time nor in virtue of its meaning; and both are incapable of expressing the peculiar way in which perceptual consciousness constitutes its object. Both keep their

distance in relation to perception, instead of sticking closely to it." (PhP, 26) As such, Merleau-Ponty incorporates both empiricism and intellectualism under the heading 'objective thought'.

The world, such as objective thought prejudges it and takes it for the starting point of its analysis, has the character of being complete or closed. Every particular existent is conceived as being a part within this all-encompassing totality. The things of the world, among which the human body is counted, are thought to stand in a determinable relation with every other thing in a continuum of objective space and time. Everything is already there in place. Perception, like a light beamed on a set stage, initiates nothing new. Perception at best illuminates, at worst shadows, something already complete in-itself--the world as it exists 'in-itself' or as God might perceive it. The perceptual event, the world such as it is given in perception, is reduced to a mere effect issuing from the objective world. It is thought of as being a translation or interpretation of the objective world, albeit an imperfect one. A problem naturally arises within this framework as to the explanation of the mechanism whereby this analogue is constructed.

Merleau-Ponty does not so much argue that the notion of the objective world is false as that it is derivative. Problems arise only insofar as its derivativeness is lost sight of and it is taken as the ultimate reality from which everything else is assumed to be derived. As long as analysis begins with an objectivistic prejudice about the world, perceptual phenomena will be falsified, concealed, or otherwise overlooked. It is the starting point of analysis that is at issue, and

Merleau-Ponty seeks a more radical starting point, one more primary than the prejudice of the objective world. He proposes to take a fresh look at perceptual life unencumbered by this prejudice, to examine it and "stick closely to it" at the same time. This was the project of Husserlian phenomenology, which by this time had already become somewhat of a 'movement'.

Objective thought, presupposing an objective world in which the perceptual event is a mere effect, does not take perception seriously in its own right. Whereas objective thought tries to *explain* perceptual phenomena, the humble task of phenomenology is to *describe* them.<sup>3</sup> Suspending judgement on, or otherwise putting out of play the alleged causal determinants of perception, phenomenology thematizes perception and thematizes the world such as it is given in perceptual life.

Merleau-Ponty conceived phenomenology as a corrective to the dominant trend of objective thought. We have read Husserl in this light. There is, however, a truth in Emile Bréhier's complaint that if philosophers had been phenomenologists from the very beginning, that is, if perception had been taken as the measure of all things, philosophy (or science) would never have developed at all. Certainly philosophy's inaugural distinction between 'appearance' and 'reality' required a certain abstraction from the anthropocentric point of view of perception. It is true that science developed only by going beyond experience in the direction of a certain 'objectivity'. Indeed, it was no doubt a distrust of experience, motivated by the fact that the way things appear in perception can be contradictory, that set in motion

the effort to coordinate or explain what does appear on the basis of things unseen, and thereby launched science and philosophy. Mars seems to the eye to reverse its movement at a certain point in its journey, but modern astronomy would never have developed if the evidence of the eye was given the final word on retrograde movement.

Phenomenology is not in competition with science at this level, however, and admits science's rights to go beyond experience in this sense. The quarrel arises only insofar as science tries to swallow its tail by endeavouring to enclose perceptual experience in the circle of its own explanation. Phenomenology shows that when science makes reference to experience, what it brings close for examination is not at all an adequate or exhaustive representation.<sup>4</sup> There is a distance and a difference between experience as represented under the objectifying methods of science and experience as it is lived, even in the first person of the scientist himself. It is because science (and objective thought in general) have instituted this distance that phenomenology could emerge as the effort to return to the primordial experience from which science has taken its leave. Thus Merleau-Ponty responds to Bréhier's challenge as follows: "Phenomenology could never have come about before all the other philosophical efforts of the rationalist tradition, nor prior to the construction of science. It measures the distance between our experience and this science. How could it ignore it? How could it precede it?" (PrP, 29) In other words, it is only because there is already a dominant self-understanding alienating or distancing us from experience that phenomenology could emerge on the scene as the effort to reinstate

experience, suppressed by objective thought, and to overcome this alienation.

It is in this context, against the background of objectivistic thought, that the return to the phenomena must be understood. Merleau-Ponty writes: "classical science is a form of perception which loses sight of its origins and believes itself complete. The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world...." (PhP, 57) Long before we attain the objective point of view (and thus to a certain measure find ourselves in an objective world) we have lived in a world with an entirely different landscape, which in relation to the objective world could be called pre-objective. This pre-objective world, which science thinks it comprehends under some such category as 'appearance', can be inquired into in its own right. The objective point of view comes second, and the return advocated here is directed toward the pre-objective opening upon the world that it succeeds and indeed suppresses. Phenomenology is a return to something more primary and fundamental than is comprehended under the terms by which objective thought fixes perception, experience, the world.

It will have to be shown how science, or more generally objective thought, originates out of and yet conceals perceptual experience and in what sense the return takes us back to an irreducible origin. From the outset of such questioning, the metaphor of a return soon becomes complicated. When I return to my apartment,



for example, it is simply there, much as it was when I left it. Can the same be said of the "world of actual experience"? In what sense could anyone ever leave it in the first place? In what sense is it or has it been there for someone to return to? Upon returning, does one find it the 'same' as when one supposedly left it? What is the relationship between experience as lived through unreflectively and experience as described or brought to light in reflective understanding? Does experience itself change in conformity to the reflective paradigm through which we attempt to understand it?

The metaphor is even further complicated by the fact that Merleau-Ponty often says that experience has been 'forgotten', 'concealed', 'buried', etc., by objective thought, which is said to 'blind' us to experience. Insofar as we are under the sway of objective thought, experience is not accessible to our reflective glance. To speak of a 'distance' between experience objectified and experience lived can therefore be misleading. It must be said that this distance does not traverse a homogeneous space, that the two points connected are not strictly commensurate with each other. This incommensurability makes a certain indirection necessary. The return must proceed by way of a detour through a critical exposition and analysis of the obfuscating prejudice. The deconstruction of this prejudice will be the dialectical twin of the disclosure of the world of experience, or of what Merleau-Ponty otherwise calls 'the phenomenal field'. He articulates this disclosure along the same lines as Husserl's disclosure of the life-world, and runs into similar difficulties.

## 2. The Need for a Detour

In light of these remarks we are better enabled to understand a certain style or even strategy at work in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Although he regards experience as the "the ultimate court of appeal" (*source tout proche*), it is important to note that he does not, at least initially, appeal to experience in order to criticize or refute objective thought. (PhP, 23) He does not simply place the facts of experience alongside the explanatory claims of objective thought as a superior evidence. His reason for not arguing in this way is that "generally speaking, the description of phenomena does not enable one to refute thought which is not alive to its own existence, and which resides in things." (Ibid.) "Thought which is not alive to its own existence", that is, thought that is under the sway of objectivism, is blinded to experience. It would therefore be fruitless to offer alternative descriptions since, from the objective point of view, what is described will not be seen. "In this sense," Merleau-Ponty says, "reflection is a system of thought no less closed than insanity." (Ibid.)

Given the 'incommensurability' between the standpoint of objective thought and of experience, any direct appeal to evidence for the purpose of arbitration would be naive. Objective thought does not recognize the authority of experience, "the ultimate court of appeal", because it thinks it comprehends under some such category as 'appearance' all that there is to know about experience. The category 'appearance', however, effectively conceals experience, as the rich

differences between blackbirds, swallows, and so on is concealed from someone who assimilates these differences under the undifferentiated category 'birds'.<sup>5</sup> Experience is richer, contains a greater number of species, than is thought all too quickly under the explanatory categories of objective thought.

What is required, therefore, is something like a gestalt shift. Experience comes into view only if one adopts "a new way of looking at things". (PhP, 23) This "new way of looking at things", however, becomes a live option only if the objectivistic way of looking at things is put into question. This new standpoint will only "be seen to be justified by the abundance of phenomena which it elucidates." That is, one must discover this standpoint and look at the world from this vantage point in order to understand the things about which it speaks. "Before its discovery," Merleau-Ponty tells us, "these phenomena were inaccessible." Thus Merleau-Ponty does not attack objectivism directly. He acknowledges the validity of what is seen from this point of view, but tries to awaken objective thought to the relativity of its own seeing--to teach objective thought that what it sees is not absolute, indeed to teach objective thought that it is a *point of view*. Other ways of looking at things will disclose other, at first unsuspected, 'facts'.

This does not mean, however, that Merleau-Ponty believes that all points of view are equal. "Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naive and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely

consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself around me and begins to exist for me." (PhP, ix) The scientific or objectivistic point of view is 'naive' insofar as it fails to realize that it is a point of view and insofar as it believes that it effaces itself as point of view in order to mirror a reality that owes nothing to its mediation. It is 'dishonest' insofar as it fails to acknowledge a reality that is not adequately comprehended in its theorizing but that is nevertheless implicit as the horizon within which its theorizing takes place. Merleau-Ponty argues that the scientific point of view is secondary, that it is dependent upon and presupposes perceptual life such as it is thematized in phenomenology, even if it fails or refuses to acknowledge this presupposition. "Laws have meaning only as a means of conceptualizing the perceived world," he writes. (SB, 145)

Where objective thought assumes a notion of being--being as standing over against the seer and owing nothing to him--Merleau-Ponty undertakes a "genealogy of being". (PhP, 54) At the same time, he provides a kind of genealogy of objective thought. He shows how it is motivated, how it arises out of and continues to draw from perceptual life. He traces objective thought back to its origin in this primary reality, which little by little is disclosed in the process. This genealogy proceeds along essentially the same lines as Husserl's 'teleological-historical reflections' and plays a parallel role in his philosophy.

If objective thought is indeed 'a' point of view and not a positionless mirroring, this point of view is not therefore an

arbitrary one. It is motivated by perception itself, which, Merleau-Ponty says, naturally leads reflection astray.<sup>6</sup> "Our perception ends in objects, and the object, once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it which we have had or could have." (PhP, 67) There is a subtle dialectic of the constituted and the constituting here. In perceptual exploration, walking around a house, for example, the house is given through a series of profiles: from the side, the front, and so on. Normally, we do not attend to the manner of givenness of the house. We cognize the house as a constituted unity. Just as the materiality of language--its phonic or graphic mediation--is effaced in communication, thereby enabling us to attend to what the other means, so too the perceptual event hides or conceals itself and precisely for this reason allows the thing to be constituted as a constant and enduring object which outruns or transcends the relativity of perspectives upon it.<sup>7</sup>

The object as such, which has been constituted through perception, can thus come to take on a spurious primacy. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Obsessed with being, and forgetful of the perspectivism of my experience, I henceforth treat it as an object and deduce it from a relationship between objects. I regard my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world. My recent awareness of my gaze as a means of knowledge I now repress, and treat my eyes as bits of matter. They then take their place in the same objective space in which I am trying to situate the external object and I believe that I am producing the perceived perspective by the projection of the objects on my retina. (PhP, 70-1)

The object, the house, is next to another house, which is not very far from the train station. The moon and even the distant stars are

farther away than I can even imagine, but the space in which they exist is continuous with the space in which I stand now regarding the house. My own body, my perceptual profiles if I attend to them, are inserted in this objective space--which has been in the first instance constituted through perception. "Thus 'objective' thought (in Kierkegaard's sense) is formed--being that of common sense and of science--which finally causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and the natural sequel." (PhP, 71) The objects constituted in perceptual experience come to be seen as the cause even of the perception that reveals them. The objective world, in the first instance an idea rooted in perceptual life, is set up as an absolute existing 'out there' and already made. Perception only registers, more or less confusedly, what is really there. The originality and creativity of perception is lost sight of and the fact that the world is in some sense an 'accomplishment' is concealed.

For Merleau-Ponty, science is an extreme example of this tendency for perception to misunderstand itself. This is eloquently stated in The Visible and the Invisible, where he speaks about the origin of what he calls "the Great Object", that is, the 'objective world'. He writes:

Science began by excluding all the predicates that come to things from our encounter with them. The exclusion is only provisional: when it will have learned to invest it, science will little by little reintroduce what it at first put aside as subjective; but it will integrate it as a particular case of the relations and objects that define the world for science. Then the world will close over itself, and, except for what within us thinks and builds science, that impartial spectator

that inhabits us, we will have become parts or moments of the Great Object. (VI, 15)

The problem here is that "the subjective", as it is construed by science and thus swallowed up in "the Great Object", is but a pale caricature of our openness upon the world in perceptual experience, which is in fact presupposed (but not explicated) by science. It is subjectivity as seen through a microscope, so to speak, and not the subjectivity that handles the microscope and peers through it. Oddly enough, it is subjectivity '(mis)translated' into something objective. Merleau-Ponty says that "science succeeds in constructing only a semblance of subjectivity: it introduces sensations which are things, just where experience shows that there are meaningful patterns; it forces the phenomenal universe into categories which make sense only in the universe of science." (PhP, 11)

This mistranslation can be exhibited with reference to how objective thought understands 'the phenomenon'. In phenomenology, this term indicates the being of the thing 'for us'. Objective thought too recognizes something like the phenomenon, but it typically understands the being of the thing 'for us' with recourse to some such concept as 'sensation', a concept having ancestral links to Galileo's notorious 'secondary qualities'. The attempt to 'explain' experience as being built up of elementary units such as sensations, as a house is built up of bricks, is typical in the psychological and philosophical literature. The pure sensation is conceived as "the experience of an undifferentiated, instantaneous, dotlike impact." (PhP, 3) As such, it is thought to exist only for consciousness, or in consciousness, and

gets its reference to objects by some postulated causal mechanism. While the experience of sensations thus defined is indeed possible under artificial or experimental conditions, the punctual sensation, as Gestalt psychology has demonstrated, is nowhere to be found in normal perception, which opens onto 'things', 'events', or even 'situations', and not 'sensations'.

If sensation, as an explanatory concept, does not originate in actual experience, how then does this prejudice arise? Merleau-Ponty writes:

If it is introduced, it is because of attending to the experience of perception, we overlook it in favour of the object perceived. A visual field is not made up of limited views. But an object seen is made up of bits of matter, and spatial points are external to each other. An isolated datum of perception is inconceivable, at least if we do the mental experiment of attempting to perceive such a thing. But in the world there are either isolated objects or a physical void. (PhP, 4)

The pure impression or sensation is a construct of a reflection which has lost contact with perception. Perception is not built up out of such units, but theories about perception are. The endeavour to construct perceived objects out of elemental sensations is based upon a false analogy suggested by the fact that objects are made up of parts. Relations that are known to obtain within or between objects are erroneously imputed to perception itself.\*

The concept of sensation, which is primarily associated with empiricism but uncritically taken up by intellectualism as well, distorts certain 'facts' about perception which have been brought to light by Gestalt psychology. Typically, for example, qualities (colours, sounds, smells, etc.) are thought of as being punctual or



distinct elements in consciousness. If this were true, however, if consciousness were absorbed by or coincided with qualities, things would have no depth or indeterminacy, which is precisely what invites perceptual exploration. What I penetrate in perceptual exploration is not a sensation. It is an object in a visual field. The identity of the object throughout such exploration is not and could not be based on the association of disparate sensations. It is guaranteed rather by the stability of the visual field in which it is placed. A figure is always perceived against a background of unthematized relations which support it and which can in turn be explored with a redirected gaze.

The properties of the visual field cannot be understood starting from the assumption that it is a composite reality built up from the action of objects on the retina. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Suppose we construct, by the use of optics and geometry, that bit of the world which can at any moment throw its image on our retina. Everything outside its perimeter, since it does not reflect upon any sensitive area, no more affects our vision than does light falling on our closed eyes. We ought, then, to perceive a segment of the world precisely delimited, surrounded by a zone of blackness, packed full of qualities with no interval between them, held together by definite relationships of size similar to those lying on the retina. The fact is experience offers nothing like this, and we shall never, using the world as our starting-point, understand what a *field of vision is*. (PhP, 5)

The 'boundaries' of the visual field are not at all like the frame of a painting and do not sharply delimit an inside packed with qualities and an outside which could only be an empty region of sheer non-being, since it would be defined as the absence of all quality.<sup>9</sup> "The region surrounding the visual field is not easy to describe," Merleau-Ponty

says, "but what is certain is that it is neither black nor grey."

(PhP, 6)

The view that quality (or sensation) is a punctual element in consciousness is not testified to by the evidence of normal perception. It arises only when quality is abstracted from its concrete relations within a total field or context that contributes to its *de facto* perceptual meaning. If sensations were punctual units somehow or other causally related to things in the objective world, it would be difficult to understand why a given quality, the redness of a carpet for example, is modified by the presence or absence of other colours co-existing in the same field. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty says, this becomes comprehensible if we cease to understand qualities as being elements in consciousness and view them instead as properties of the perceived object which are, as such, determined by their configuration in a context or background. He writes: "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....this red would literally not be the same if it were not the 'wooly red' of a carpet." (PhP, 4-5) Colour is always the colour 'of' something. Qualities are not in consciousness but rather adhere to things set in the field that consciousness opens onto. The figure/background structure of perception is obscured by the attempt to build up the perceptual field out of sensations, qualities, or other such atomic units that could supposedly be transported whole from one field to another without any significant change taking place

in the surrounding context or without being themselves modified by this context.

If we wish to describe perception, the most primitive term that we can identify is the 'phenomenon', and not 'quality' or 'sensation'. "The perceptual 'something'," Merleau-Ponty writes, "is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a 'field'." (PhP, 4) Merleau-Ponty is in agreement with Gestalt psychology that the most simple sense-given is not a sensation but rather a figure on a background. He says that this is "the very definition of the phenomenon...." (Ibid.) Moreover, the relation between the figure and ground, or between the phenomenon and its context, is not a static one. The figure or phenomenon is not a discrete entity that could be transplanted from one background to another and remain identical in the transition. It receives its sense from its place in a context such that the 'same' figure will have a different meaning in different contexts.<sup>10</sup> "Perceived objects change properties when they change places," Merleau-Ponty says. (SB, 144)

Furthermore, it is not only the spatial context of the perceived object that is significant in determining its sense. The entire intentional situation in which it figures plays a role as well. "Sense experience," Merleau-Ponty writes, "invests the quality with vital value, grasping it first in its meaning for us, for that heavy mass which is our body, whence it comes about that it always involves a reference to our body." (PhP, 52) For a 'body-subject', the 'same' knife is given as one thing if placed alongside a piece of bread, another if held in the hand of an angry person, and something else

again if set alongside a screw. What is the 'same' objectively speaking (or for a bodiless subject not incorporated in a situation or point of view), is not necessarily the 'same' speaking from the point of view of the life-world or of the thing for us. The sense of a phenomenon is co-determined by its involvements with other things in its field or context and with reference back to the praxis of a body-subject. In the text we have been referring to, Merleau-Ponty limits his remarks to what he calls the 'visual field', but this is but one dimension of what he calls the 'phenomenal field', which is the total context in which the sense of a phenomenon is given.

Objective thought typically abstracts the phenomenon from its concrete involvements in a field. It abstracts from its concrete being for a perceiver and fixes its meaning in relation to its supposed 'referent' in the objective world. Having stripped the phenomenon of everything that is merely 'subjective', it then proceeds to reconstruct the 'phenomenon' starting from what it 'knows' about its 'referent', in relation to which the phenomenon is only an appearance. On these assumptions, it is impossible to understand such basic things as how two lines that are 'objectively' of equal length can appear unequal in certain contexts, as in Müller-Lyer's optical illusion. On the other hand, when we free the phenomenon from its alleged causal relation to a referent and consider it in relation to its field or context, this becomes comprehensible. Perceived as phenomena in a field (and this is the only way they can be perceived), the perceptual meaning of each line is functionally related to other relevant elements in its context.<sup>11</sup>

In light of these remarks, let us return to the question of what we have called Merleau-Ponty's "style" or "strategy". As concerns his manner of exposition, it is significant that he does not simply assert that objective thought is 'wrong' and proceed from there to lay out his own position as an absolute evidence, for reasons we have already discussed. Rather, he presents his own position dialectically. He takes a 'detour' through objective thought. He brings the 'phenomenon' to light with reference to objective thought, with respect to its difference from the 'sensation' for example. In effect, he builds a bridge that enables one to pass from one point of view to the other.

It is important to emphasize this point in order to correct the misconception that phenomenology conceals its own point of view, or otherwise places itself beyond reproach, by appealing to some pristine evidence and claiming unmediated access to it. Phenomenology does indeed appeal to evidence, but, I have tried to clarify in this reading of Merleau-Ponty, this appeal does not exempt the phenomenologist from arguing for his claims and from examining what others have said. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty teaches that such examination is an essential moment in phenomenology's disclosure of experience. One arrives at the phenomenological point of view only by means of a detour through powerful prejudices at work in our tradition.

### 3. Perception: The Dualism of Sensibility and Intellect

Merleau-Ponty is by no means dogmatic in his account of perception in the Phenomenology. "Nothing is more difficult than to know precisely what we see," he writes. (PhP, 58) Although it is indeed difficult to know what we see, and though no positive account could ever be definitive or exhaustive, perception is not so evasive a target that one cannot criticize some accounts as being off the mark. Merleau-Ponty is cautious in his remarks about what we do see, but he is emphatic in saying that we do not see what objective thought claims that we see. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty believes that classical analyses of perception falsify perceptual experience. He argues against certain ways of conceptualizing the 'perceptual given'. He believes that it is difficult to say just what is given, but he nonetheless believes that there is a 'given' with which any account of perception is obliged to accord if it is to be truthful.

It is illuminating to clarify Merleau-Ponty's own account of the perceptual given with polemical reference to the view that perception is interpretation.<sup>12</sup> He rejects this view, which he associates with intellectualism, but he does believe that it furnishes a valuable critique of empiricism. Against empiricism, intellectualism took a step in the right direction by establishing that there is always more to what is perceived than meets the eye. "Once perception is understood as interpretation," he says, "sensation, which has provided a starting point, is finally superseded, for all perceptual consciousness is already beyond it." (PhP, 37) Perception cannot be

the passive registering of sensations because we perceive more (or less) than is 'given' to us with our senses, as evidenced by the experience of illusions.

While intellectualism did indeed "pave the way to true self-discovery", it nevertheless remained bound by empiricist presuppositions. "The conception of judgement as a psychic force or a logical mediator, and the theory of perception as 'interpretation'--the intellectualism of the psychologists, is indeed simply a counterpart of empiricism...." (PhP, 38-7) Intellectualism understood the 'more' that belongs to the perceived object, the excess or surplus beyond what is 'given' in the empiricist sense, as being a kind of supplement added by judgement or some such intellectual activity. Merleau-Ponty paraphrases a famous passage from Descartes as follows: "The men I see from a window are hidden by their hats and coats, and their image cannot be imprinted on my retina. I therefore do not see them, I judge them to be there." (PhP, 32) The thesis that perception is interpretation thus left untouched the idea of a basic level at which the perceived is given prior to and independent of the supplemental judgement. The senses contribute the given, and the intellect furnishes the meaning.<sup>13</sup> "Perception becomes an 'interpretation' of the signs that our senses provide in accordance with the bodily stimuli, a 'hypothesis' that the mind evolves to 'explain its impressions to itself'." (PhP, 33)

Intellectualism was not radical enough in its critique of empiricism and was itself committed to an untenable dualism, the first term of which (the sense-given, anatomically defined) it unwittingly

inherited from empiricism. In doing so, it undermined its own radical potential and became ambiguous or even inconsistent. How, Merleau-Ponty asks, could perception "be a process of reasoning since there are no sensations to provide it with premises, or an interpretation, because there is nothing prior to it to interpret?" (PhP, 37) Against empiricism, intellectualism maintains that there is more to what is perceived than is given by the senses, but it reinstates the empiricist given at another level as that upon which interpretation operates to yield what we think or judge that we see, namely, the phenomenon. The 'given' that judgement or interpretation allegedly supplements cannot be perceived, since, according to the hypothesis, what is perceived is already interpreted.

Intellectualism thus mixes together the attempts to describe and to explain what we perceive. Entities such as 'the sense-given' and the supplemental 'judgement' are abstract in relation to the concrete perceptual phenomenon, in which the abstracted terms, sensibility and intelligibility, are 'given' as inseparably intertwined. In theorizing in this way, Merleau-Ponty writes, "we construct perception instead of revealing its distinctive working; we miss once more the basic operation which infuses meaning into the sensible, and which is taken for granted by any logical mediation or any psychological causality." (PhP, 34)

In saying that meaning is infused into the sensible, Merleau-Ponty attempts to articulate a position beyond the dualistic alternatives of sensibility and intellect, the given and the judged. The sensible is from the very beginning and in its very corporality



configured as meaningful. What is perceptually given is always set in a context that informs its *de facto* meaning. Unless the circumstances are indeed extraordinary, I do not 'judge', on the basis of 'hats' and 'coats', that I see men parading below my window. This much is comprehended in my glance as I look down at the street. Indeed, it would require an effort of surrealistic abstraction for me to see 'hats' and 'coats', and not men.<sup>14</sup> Such meaning as perceived phenomena do have is not externally related to some mute given in the objective world. The meaning of what is given is embodied in its very presence to perceptual consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty employs the concept of physiognomy in order to elucidate this sense in which meaning is infused into the sensible. The etymology of the word physiognomy, from the Greek *phusis* and *gnomon*, is instructive in this regard. It synthesizes 'nature' and 'judgement', sensibility and intellect. Literally, it means the art of judging character from features of the face or the form of the body. To speak of 'judgement' here is misleading, however, in that it implies a mediating activity. In fact, when we 'read' the face of another, meaning and corporality are fused together. The meaning of the smile is incarnate in the configuration of the face. We do not have to 'deduce' it from allegedly neutral premises. So too, normal perception is physiognomic in the sense that the meaning of things is inscribed in the 'face' they present to perceptual consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty often makes reference to Schneider, a patient of the psychologist Kurt Goldstein, who serves as a kind of foil by means of which normal perception is highlighted. The world "no longer has

any physiognomy for him," Merleau-Ponty says. (PhP, 132) Except in very specific and concrete situations, Schneider does not experience the things around him as being meaningful. There is no immediate apprehension of the significance of an object placed before him, a knife let us say, although he can, through tedious mediation, 'deduce' its meaning. Sensibility and intellection are indeed separate for him and perception is "a veritable act of interpretation."

(PhP, 131)

In virtue of his abnormality, Schneider indirectly reveals what it is for the perceived world to have a physiognomy and also serves to exemplify the view that Merleau-Ponty is criticizing. What is perceptually given for him, we can surmise, is much like the 'given' that intellectualism claims interpretation operates upon in order to yield perception. Schneider needs to 'translate' from the sign to its signification. A gesture that would be immediately understood by a normal subject is for him a dumb movement of the body through objective space. He needs to translate from this 'given' to its meaning, as if consulting a manual or code book to link the sign with the appropriate signification.

In normal perception, by contrast, the thing and its meaning, the sensible and the intelligible, sign and signification, are not externally related to each other or brought together through a process of reasoning or interpretation. A knife on the table is immediately given as 'something to butter bread with'. These value predicates adhere to things in their perceptual givenness and are not deduced. The body of another is not perceived as being in itself mute, only

subsequently to have sexual significance superimposed upon it. Merleau-Ponty writes: "In the case of the normal subject, a body is not perceived merely as an object; this objective perception has within it a more intimate perception: the visible body is subtended by a sexual schema, which is strictly individual, emphasizing the erogenous areas, outlining a sexual physiognomy...." (PhP, 156) In normal perception, the body is 'given' as being meaningful from the beginning. It has a physiognomy.

In its zeal to discover the conditions that make perception possible, intellectualism passed over the unity and originality of the perceptual phenomenon and missed or at least equivocated about what is actually perceptually given. Attention to perception teaches that the dualism of subject and object, or of the given and the judged within which classical theories of perception are framed, is a false starter. What is 'given' in perception is neither a neutral and mute state of affairs nor transparent and fully articulated meanings or mental events. Both of these are abstractions. "In actual perception taken at its origin, before any word is uttered, the sign [*signe sensible*] offered to sense and the signification [*signification*] are not even theoretically separable. An object is an organism of colours, smells, sounds and tactile appearances which symbolize, modify and accord with each other...." (PhP, 38) What is immediate for us in perception is neither sign nor signification as these are defined by dualism, but the phenomenon itself, which is the concrete unity of both.

Merleau-Ponty's account of the perception of other people should be understood in this light. Provided that the perceptual

phenomenon is understood as itself embodying meaning, the essential point of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the gesture could be summed up by saying that the meaning of a gesture is perceptually given. He argues against the dualist view that bifurcates the gesture into two distinct elements; empirical sign and ideal meaning, sense-given and judgement. This separation creates the need to posit some activity or other (interpretation or introspection, for example) that joins the two elements.

The premises of this dualism at the core of so much modern thought are summarized in the following quotation:

Classical psychology unquestioningly accepted the distinction between inner observation, or introspection, and outer observation. "Psychic facts"--anger or fear, for example--could be directly known only from the inside and by the person experiencing them. It was thought to be self-evident that I can grasp only the corporal *signs* of anger or fear from the outside and that I have to resort to the anger or fear I know in myself through introspection in order to interpret these signs. (SN, 52)

On this view, the gesture is in itself meaningless. The mute corporal sign becomes intelligible only by being supplemented by a non-empirical meaning imposed upon it from the interior of an interpreting subject.

Merleau-Ponty believes that the psychic is improperly conceived as being an 'inner' by contrast with corporal signs given on the 'outside'. The distinction between the inside and the outside, and its filial distinction between introspection and outer observation, only serves to confuse the matter. "Introspection" does not yield the emotional 'state', for example, in a pristine meaning devoid of corporality. An emotion does not have a purely 'psychic' existence.

Apart from its signs it is virtually nothing. For this reason, "in reality, introspection gives me almost nothing. If I try to study love or hate purely from inner observation, I will find very little to describe: a few pangs, a few heart-throbs--in short, trite agitations which do not reveal the essence of love or hate." (SN, 52)

Similarly "outer observation" does not yield a purely corporal sign devoid of meaning. A person's emotional life does not consist of interior 'states' accessible to another only mediately by analogy. In my dealings with others I am not in the first place given naked corporal signs the meaning of which I would have to infer. I see the emotion in the gesture that is played out in the world. The emotions are not private interior states hidden behind corporal signs, which then would only indicate them in an external way by a kind of analogy. The gesture and its meaning are not given as two separate items but rather as a unity. He writes: "I do not see anger or a threatening attitude behind the gesture, I read anger in it. The gesture does not make me think of anger, it is anger itself." (PhP, 184) The gesture communicates its own meaning. Its meaning adheres to it.

Sign and signification are held together in the gesture. "One can see what there is in common between the gesture and its meaning, for example, in the case of emotional expression and the emotions themselves: the smile, the relaxed face, gaiety of gesture really have in them the rhythm of action, the mode of being in the world which are joy itself." (PhP, 186) In a similar vein, one ought not to say that Beethoven's "Hymn to Joy" is a sign of joy but rather that it embodies joy.

Against the view that perception--of things or of other people--passively registers sense-data that are in themselves meaningless, Merleau-Ponty argues that what is given is from the beginning infused with meaning and is already saturated with 'value predicates' that dualism attributes exclusively to the supplemental judgement. The perceptual given, in the language of phenomenology, is 'constituted'.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, he rejects any attempt to characterize this constitution as being a mediate activity such as judgement or interpretation. To say that what is given is already constituted means that the phenomenon is always set in a field or context. The phenomenon is configured in a part/whole relation such that its meaning is spontaneously determined by other things happening in its field. Its meaning stands out against a background.

What is true at the level of perception is also true at the level of reflection. To understand the meaning of the return it is important to be alert to the dialectic that obtains between point of view and the given. To return to the phenomena is not a matter of achieving unmediated contact with experience, as if experience were something simply 'given' and all that is required is that we open our eyes to see what is manifestly there. It is not a matter of some absolute seeing free of point of view. Such an archimedean glance is what objective thought aspires to. For Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, anything that can be 'given'--in perception or in reflection--can only be 'given' from a point of view. This means that the 'phenomenon', which after all functions in phenomenological discourse as a kind of evidence, is itself given as such from a point of view. For

Merleau-Ponty, this point of view, and the 'given' that it opens onto, can only be secured by carefully working through certain dominant prejudices (other points of view). The important point to realize, admittedly a difficult one, is that the idea of a given and of a point of view are not incompatible. Eugene Gendlin has put the matter nicely: "A this, a given may be given for me only after I have received a rather complex set of instructions for finding it."<sup>15</sup>

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

I felt very much as if someone, trying to explain the causes of each thing I do, should say first that the reason why I sit here now is that my body consists of bones and sinews, and when the bones are uplifted in their sockets the sinews slackening and tightening make me able to bend my limbs now, and for this cause I have bent together and sit here; and if next he should give other such causes of my conversing with you, alleging as causes voices and airs and a thousand things like that, and neglecting to give the real causes. These are that since Athens thought it was better to condemn me, for this very reason I have thought it better to sit here and submit to any sentence they may give. For by the Dog! these bones and sinews would have been somewhere near Boeotia long ago, carried there by an opinion of what is best, if I had not believed it better to submit to any sentence which my city gives than to take to my heels and run.

Socrates

#### 1. The Elusive Body

For Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological point of view is recommended because it discloses fields of meaning that are overlooked and even concealed from the point of view of objective thought. The human body, behavior, and the world as disclosed from the phenomenological point of view appear as meaningful. Man is able to recognize himself in the world such as it appears from this point of view. Phenomenology addresses man's desire for self-understanding.

Merleau-Ponty describes the phenomenal field, the being of the world such as it is given in experience, in polemics with or in



opposition to the objective world and to such constructs as 'sensation' and 'representation'. Because the prejudice of the objective world effectively conceals experience, conceals the world such as it is given in experience, a kind of Gestalt shift is necessary in order to bring it into view. "If we are led to rediscover experience behind it," Merleau-Ponty writes, "this shift of ground will be attributable only to the difficulties which objective thought itself raises." (PhP, 72) His analysis of the body plays a central role in bringing about this "shift of ground". The body 'evades' any attempt to grasp it grounded on the presupposition of the objective world and thereby shows up the inadequacies of this presupposition. Simply put, the body and its world have a *meaning* that cannot be understood starting from the presuppositions of objective thought. The body is also at the centre of Merleau-Ponty's disclosure of the phenomenal field, because "by withdrawing from the objective world,...[it carries] with it the intentional threads linking it to its surrounding...." (PhP, 72)

Experience is overlooked and cannot be described from the standpoint of an analysis that inserts the body in the objective world and attempts to construct the phenomenal field or the subject's world from the action of the objective world upon the body. Attempts to do so tend to oversimplify (or perhaps unduly complicate) perceptual experience by translating it into small and manageable units that can be punctually related to the body. The concept of sensation, for example, is tailor-made to facilitate such a translation. The body is

funnelled into 'a place of excitation' and experience, the world disclosed in experience, is telescoped into the category 'sensation'.

The critical question concerns how well concepts such as 'place of excitation' translate the body and concepts such as 'sensation' or 'representation' translate 'phenomena' and the 'phenomenal field'. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty, against those who conceptualize the perceptual phenomenon in terms of such punctual units as sensations, believes that "a figure on a background is the simplest sense-given available to us...." (PhP, 4) Anything in the field of perception gives only an aspect of itself, and gives that aspect only contextually bound up with other things horizontally present alongside it such that the figure is modified by its background. This total relationship of figure and ground is the most basic datum of experience. Furthermore, a figure refers back to the position of a perceiver. To have a perspective, to have before oneself a figure on a ground, is to see from somewhere or from some position. To see from somewhere is to be a body. But is the human body 'somewhere' in the same sense that a rock or a house is somewhere? Can the human body, the position from which we are oriented in a phenomenal field, be understood on the same level as rocks and houses? What gets left out of account or evades an analysis that places the body in the objective world and explains experience in terms of the action of the objective world upon the body?

In the 'objective world', there are no perspectives. The desk at which I sit writing this is there all at once with its sides, its back, front, top, and bottom. Indeed, in the objective world there is

no 'top' and 'bottom', since these terms are relative to the perspective of a perceiver (for whom a thing can be given only through perspectives). The desk is itself inside a house, and the house is also there all at once in the objective world, with its facade, its backdoor, roof, basement, kitchen, cupboards in the kitchen, and so on. In the phenomenal field, however, that is, in our experience, the house can only be given from a point of view. At the moment, my perception opens onto the wall against which my desk runs. The wall, in turn, is set in a horizon trailing off imperceptibly toward a ceiling, a floor, other rooms, the outside of the house, and so on. I can make any of these other parts of the house figures by moving my body, but there is no point of view in which I could position my body, not even in an airplane, from which the house would be given all at once; that is, without perspective. The identity or unity of the house is not for this reason something about which I am in doubt. It is experienced through the convergence of successive perspectives or points of view within a relatively stable horizon.

And what now of these perspectives through which the house is given, and of the world on the horizon of this house? Are they too in the house? Are they too in the 'objective world'? Here objective thought will say that it is necessary to make a distinction. The perspectives upon the house are neither in the house nor in the objective world. They are not the kind of things that can be anywhere at all. They have no spatial substantiality. They are only 'representations' standing in for things that in themselves do have such substantiality. My body is such a thing and indeed, like the

desk, it is in the house and in the objective world. The perspectives or representations, although not 'in' my body, are in some sense related to it. Somehow they are produced or result from an interaction between my body and other things in the objective world--things which I can never perceive as such, since to perceive is always to perceive from a perspective, and thus not to have the thing itself but a representation of it.

For objective thought, the world and the things in the world are thus doubled. Two series run parallel to each other seemingly never to meet: the real thing and the representation; extended substance and thinking substance. And yet they do in some sense intersect in the human body. The body is at once both an extended substance, and somehow or other (through a 'magic' the science of which neurophysiology will someday reveal) a machine that translates extended substance into thinking substance, real things into representations. If, however, we try to insert the body, precisely as a point of intersection, in one or the other of these two dimensions, we end up, not with a unity of the two, but rather, with a new set of doubles: the body as extended substance and the body as represented. Viewed in this way, the body has a double life. On the one hand, it is a material body like any other external object in the world and is thus expected to behave according to the same laws as other things. On the other hand, as experienced, it is a representation that exists for or in thought. As such it is in some as yet undetermined, but ultimately determinable relation with the material body. In this bifurcation of the body into the body 'in itself' and the body 'for

consciousness' or as represented, we hear echoed the fundamental dualism bequeathed to modern thought by Descartes.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the body can be squeezed into either of these two dimensions only at the price of becoming, in the analysis, so distant and different from our everyday experience of our body as to be scarcely recognizable. After such an insertion, there is a great deal that is left out, and it is this overflow, this recalcitrant body resistant to objectification, that Merleau-Ponty takes as the theme of his analysis.

The body exhibits some remarkable characteristics that classical psychology had taken note of but did not thematize. It was noticed, for example, that my body, unlike other sorts of objects, is always with me. I can move a table or a lamp away from me, out of my field of perception, but my body is always with me as a permanent 'here'. I can never escape this strange permanence of my body, which is quite different from the permanence of things. Related to this point, my body is not objectifiable as are external objects. I cannot observe it from a position external to it. "I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk round them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe: in order to be able to do so, I should have need of a second body which itself would be unobservable." (PhP, 91)

Classical psychology had also noticed the remarkable fact that my body can give me 'double sensations', as when I press my two hands together and attempt to catch the one in the act of touching the other. As the body tries to thus catch itself touching, it "initiates

'a kind of reflection' which is sufficient to distinguish it from objects, of which I can indeed say that they 'touch' my body, but only when it is inert, and therefore without ever catching it unawares in its exploratory function." (PhP, 93) Related to this capacity for double sensations, my body is also an affective object. Unlike the nail upon which I step, my foot is not the 'cause' of my pain. It is more precisely the 'place' of my pain. The foot where the pain is felt and the nail that is the cause of the pain are not on the same plane of being or not in the same universe of discourse. Finally, classical psychology had noticed, in connection with the issue of 'kinaesthetic sensations', that I move my body without the help of any intermediary, whereas I move external objects only through that intermediary which is my body.

Had classical psychology sought to integrate these insights about the peculiarities of the body, its objectivistic assumptions would have been radically brought into question. Under the sway of modern science, however, they did not do so:

they chose the position of impersonal thought to which science has been committed as long as it believed in the possibility of separating, in observation, on the one hand what belongs to the situation of the observer and on the other the properties of the absolute object. For the living subject his own body might well be different from all external objects; the fact remains that for the unsituated thought of the psychologist the experience of the living subject became itself an object and, far from requiring a fresh definition of being, took its place in universal being. (PhP, 94)

Classical psychology tried to understand the body from an 'objective' point of view, to conceptualize it from the 'outside' as the physicist allegedly does with his proper object.<sup>1</sup> The experience of the body,

the lived body, being derivative, could then be superadded to the objective body as a mere effect consequent upon the interaction between the objective body and the objective world. From this standpoint, the "experience of the living subject" itself came to be objectified. It was transformed into a 'representation' ultimately destined to be brought under the same laws as everything else in nature. "It was postulated that our experience, already besieged by physics and biology, was destined to be completely absorbed into objective knowledge, with the consummation of the system of the sciences." (PhP, 94)

There was nevertheless something about the psychologist's relation with his object of study that resisted translation into this dualistic scheme taken over from the natural sciences. He had a peculiar relation with his object significantly different from the one that the natural scientist had with his object. "For whereas neither the physicist nor the chemist are the objects of their own investigation," Merleau-Ponty writes, "the psychologist *was himself*, in the nature of the case, the fact which exercised him." (PhP, 95) Ironically, his "representation of the body, this magical experience, which he approached in a detached frame of mind, was himself; he lived it while he thought about it." (Ibid., 95-6)

The peculiar relationship between the psychologist and his object can thus give rise to a kind of schizophrenia, since it is possible for his bodily existence to be in contradiction with his theoretical statements about it. "The psychologist's being", Merleau-Ponty says, "knew more about itself than he did." (PhP, 98) As

long as the psychologist objectifies his body, his objectivistic self-understanding will be out of gear with his lived experience, as the madman who thinks he is Napoleon is out of gear with himself. There is a falsifying distance between his body as he lives it and his body as he understands it. He is effectively blinded to his own existence.<sup>2</sup>

Merleau-Ponty attempts to secure a point of view from which the lived body and the body understood, existence and self-description, can be brought into accord. In order to attain such a point of view, one must avoid the temptation to theorize and objectify the body as an extended thing on the other side of consciousness, so to speak. One must carefully attend to one's experience of that strange and evasive body which is one's own. "Experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality." (PhP, 198-9)

## 2. Behavior

The inadequacy of the objectivistic understanding of the body and one's relation to one's own body becomes especially apparent when the body is considered not only as the locus of perception, but as the agent of behavior as well. Objective thought views behavior as the action of the objective world upon the objective body. Merleau-Ponty maintains, however, that behavior "is capable of being apprehended



only by another kind of thought, that which grasps its object as it comes into being and as it appears to the person experiencing it, with the atmosphere of meaning then surrounding it...." (PhP, 120) In order to understand behavior, it is necessary to take into account the meaning that the behavioral situation has *for the acting subject*--the behavioral situation as experientially given.

In The Structure of Behavior this is what Merleau-Ponty means by advocating "starting from phenomenal givens" or "returning to the givens of naive consciousness". (SB, 44, 219) This early text exhibits the polemic with traditional prejudices that I have characterised as being an integral part of the return. Objective thought is said to be 'abstract' in relation to the "givens of naive consciousness", to the 'lived body', for example, to which Merleau-Ponty urges us to return. In a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, Merleau-Ponty argues that behavior is rendered virtually meaningless, loses its immanent intelligibility, starting from objectivistic assumptions. What objective thought calls "behavior" is but a pale caricature of behavior as understood "starting from phenomenal givens." Directing his criticism specifically against behaviorism, which exemplifies objective thought par excellence, he urges a return to a more primary phenomenon than is comprehended under the category of behavior narrowly defined in behaviorism's impoverished terms.

On the behaviorist hypothesis, a linear causality runs from the world to the body, both terms understood as defined by the sciences of physics, chemistry, physiology, and so on. Behavior is the effect of a third person process. At the initial point of the causal chain there

is a 'stimulus' which excites one of the body's 'receptors'. The receptors are in circuit with 'exteroceptive' parts of the body that perform the behavior. When the entire circuit is as it were prescribed or programmed by nature, the resultant behavior is called a 'natural reflex'. When the circuit is established by the transfer of the reflexogenic power of an unconditioned stimulus to another that is initially neutral, it is called 'conditioned' or 'learned' behavior'.

On the classical model of the reflex arc, the stimulus is defined exclusively in terms of its anatomical significance.<sup>3</sup> It is not what the subject sees or thinks he sees that is important. Behaviorism bypasses this entire dimension, which it views as being merely epiphenomenal. It is only the mark that the stimulus makes upon the relevant receptors that it takes to be significant. It should therefore be possible to decompose the stimulus into constituent parts that modify the receptors. The "place of excitation should decide the reaction; the stimulus should act by those of its properties which can modify the anatomical elements taken one by one...." (SB, 10) By stimulating the relevant anatomical part directly, for example, one should obtain the same results as are obtained by the effect of the actual stimulus on the receptors.

This is not confirmed by empirical research, however. Studies on frogs and baby mammals, for example, show that "reactions comparable to those which the excitation of the receptors evokes are never obtained by the excitation of the nerve trunks." (SB, 10) The direct stimulation, which simulates the effective action of the stimulus, does not 'count' for the organism as being the same as the

actual stimulus. This argues against any reduction of the actual stimulus, a fly, for example, to its effect upon the nervous system. The actual stimulus 'acts upon' the organism not in terms of its separate properties physiologically defined but in terms of its global 'form', which here means its being 'for the organism'.<sup>4</sup> The relation between the stimulus and the organism is not that of two things, subject and object, each of which has its identity external to or independent of the other. "The adequate stimulus cannot be defined in itself and independently of the organism," Merleau-Ponty says. (SB, 31) Its identity as a stimulus is indissociable from its *being for the organism*. The "form of the excitant is created by the organism itself...." (SB, 13)

Habit transfer is especially revealing in this connection. Habit transfer occurs when behaviors learned in one setting are transferred or adapted to other settings that are materially but not essentially different, or, in relation to the same setting, when behavior is transferred or adapted to bodily organs other than the ones with which the behavior was originally acquired. The phenomenon of habit transfer proves to be an anomaly for the behavioral theory of conditioning, which analyzes behavior by breaking the stimulus down into its material parts and localizes the response in pre-established pathways traced through the nervous system. Habit transfer shows that 'reactions' depend on the "vital significance rather than on the material properties of the stimuli." (SB, 161)

In one of Koehler's well-known experiments, for example, a domestic chicken is conditioned, in the presence of two equal piles of

grain, to choose the one that is signalled by a light gray instead of the other, which is signalled by a medium gray. In a critical experiment, the medium gray is replaced by a new gray which is even lighter than the remaining one. Under the assumption that the stimulus acts in terms of its absolute, material properties--that is, in terms of its properties objectively defined without reference to its being for the organism--one would expect the chicken to select the original light gray which is already reflexogenic. This is not what happens, however. In a significant number of trials, the chicken selects the new light gray.

Merleau-Ponty takes this as evidence that it is not so much the absolute properties of the stimuli that are behaviorally significant as it is the relation between stimuli; the vital significance that the stimuli have *for the organism*. He concludes that "the reflexogenic power is not bound up with a certain nuance of gray but 'to the lighter' of the two." (SB, 106) This relation remains constant even when the terms of the relation (the colours used), are changed or substituted. The substitution of one colour for another changes the value of the remaining colour. Similarly, if the original colours are both changed by darkening each proportionately, their relative value remains the same. The stimulus acts in terms of its form, or its relative configuration within a form.

A behavior learned in relation to one situation can be transferred to another which is materially but not essentially different because in the first place the 'stimulus' has a certain generality. The situation to which a behavior is transferred may be

different than the initial situation from an objective standpoint and yet be significantly the same for the organism. In the organism's vital world, it may count for the same thing. Similarly two stimuli 'objectively' the same may be significantly different for the organism. The foregoing remarks indicate the need to distinguish, in the analysis of behavior, between the objective world and the proper milieu of the organism; between its 'geographical' and 'behavioral environment'. "Already the mere presence of a living being transforms the physical world, bringing to view here 'food', there a 'hiding place', and giving to 'stimuli' a sense which they have not hitherto possessed." (PhP, 189) Each organism has its own species-specific way of elaborating the stimuli of its geographical environment and carving out for itself a milieu. Not everything that exists in the milieu of the salmon exists in the milieu of the trout, as lure-makers and fishermen know very well.

Merleau-Ponty finds it remarkable that chimpanzees already capable of using a rod as an instrument to achieve a goal cannot, or only after a long phase of inactivity can, use a tree branch to the same end. The tree branch 'objectively' speaking has the same value as the rod, the same length, width and so on, but in the milieu of the chimpanzee it counts as being significantly different from the rod. If the stimulus is defined objectively, however, it is incomprehensible that the rod and the tree branch are treated differently. Merleau-Ponty says that the "constant error of empiricist and intellectualist psychologists is to reason as if a tree branch, since as a physical reality, it has in itself the properties of length,

breadth, and rigidity which will make it usable as a rod, also possesses these characteristics as a stimulus...." (SB, 114) They assume that since the rod and the branch are the same *for them*, the same in the 'objective world', the two must also be the same for the chimpanzee. What they fail to consider, Merleau-Ponty says, is "that the field of animal activity is not *made up* of physico-geometric relations, as our world is." (SB, 114) Chimpanzees (and, for the most part, even scientists) do not live in an objective world in which rods and tree branches are the same. If the difference in the behavioral significance of the tree branch and the rod is to be understood, it must be granted that the "physico-geometric relations" in terms of which the rod and the branch are equivalent do not figure in the milieu of the chimpanzee.

On Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, the chimpanzee has difficulty treating the tree branch as an instrument because in the first place it already counts in his world as a tree branch. In the world of the scientist, a tree branch and a rod may indeed be identical, but in the world of the chimpanzee they have a different significance. If the chimpanzee is to perceive the tree branch as a potential instrument or means to a goal, a kind of Gestalt shift will be necessary so that it ceases to have its initial vital significance 'tree branch'. In order to grasp the tree branch in the same way as it grasps the rod, "other more natural structures have to be broken up...." (SB, 113)

In another experiment, a chimpanzee already capable of manipulating cases in order to reach a goal does not use one if

another monkey has been sitting on top of it. Merleau-Ponty interprets this to mean that "the box-as-seat and the box-as-instrument are two distinct and alternative objects in the behavior of the chimpanzee and not two *aspects* of an identical *thing*." (SB, 116) The box is given as being either one or the other, seat or instrument for climbing, depending on the structuration of the field in which it is figured.

The crux of Merleau-Ponty's criticism of behaviorism is that it bypasses this whole dimension of 'being for the organism' and reduces everything to predicates quantifiable in terms of the objective world. It views the organism as being inserted in an objective world in which stimuli act according to their absolute properties. It is not the stimuli thus defined with which the organism has to do, however. The effective stimuli are not in the objective world. The rod and the tree branch are significantly different in the milieu of the chimpanzee. To refer back to Koehler's experiments with chickens, the two grays considered absolutely "are part of nature, but not the 'pair' of colors constituted by the organism and which it 'recognizes' in another ensemble in which the colors are different." (SB, 129) The relation between the two colours is a relation *for the organism*, a vital significance having reference to its specific way of configuring the environment.

The notion of the stimulus is thus ambiguous. 'Stimulus' can mean either the alleged thing in itself in the objective world or the thing as configured in the milieu of the organism. Behaviorism, Merleau-Ponty charges, does not clearly differentiate these meanings. He continues: "On analysis, the equivocal notion of stimulus separates

in two: it includes and confuses the physical event as it is in itself, on the one hand, and the situation as it is 'for the organism', on the other, with only the latter being decisive in the reactions of the animal." (SB, 129)

Merleau-Ponty's analysis is similar with respect to the behaviorist notion of the response. "Even if there existed specific stimuli, receptors and nerve pathways", he writes, "they would not of themselves be able to explain the adaptation of the reflex to the stimulus, since the movement to be executed depends upon the initial position of the members, which is variable." (SB, 28) Even in a reflex as basic as a scratch, the muscular contractions involved in moving the hand to a stimulated point vary a great deal depending on the initial position of the hand. It is beyond credibility that there would be as many pre-established circuits at the stimulated point as there are possible initial positions of the hand.

Here again Merleau-Ponty makes reference to habit transfer. Habit transfer shows that conditioning (learning) is not simply a matter of creating reflexes localized in certain muscles and nerve pathways, since "there is something general in our reflex responses...." (SB, 30) Habits acquired by one group of muscles can be transferred immediately to another. A cat conditioned to obtain its food by pulling on a string with its paw will in subsequent trials pull it with its teeth. (SB, 96) This is something more than a random process of trial and error, since useless movements or partial errors that have been mixed with the first favourable attempts disappear from subsequent responses until the behavior is reduced to its essentials.



In human behavior countless examples pointing in the same direction could be adduced. A person's handwriting on a blackboard resembles his writing on paper, even though "the muscles concerned in each case are not the same." (SB, 30) Someone who has learned to play a melody on an organ may be able to transpose it onto a piano or even a guitar, even though each instrument is materially quite different. Similarly, "an experienced organist is capable of playing an organ which he does not know, which has more or fewer manuals, and stops differently arranged, compared with those on the instrument he is used to playing." (PhP, 145) With only a few hours preparation, he is ready to play on the new instrument. "Such a short preparation," Merleau-Ponty argues, "rules out the supposition that new conditioned reflexes have been substituted for the existing sets...." (PhP, 145) Neither does it happen, however, that the organist calculates the objective position of the stops and pedals in relation to his body and its pre-rehearsed movements. His efforts to gear himself to the new organ do not take place in objective space at all. Rather he feels his way around the new organ, transposes his already acquired knowledge onto the new instrument, puts himself into it. The different organs, as poles of his intention to play, are not simply objects standing out against his body. They have a common form or a shared meaning.

Such phenomena are incomprehensible if the response is understood as the effect of a stimulus setting in motion pre-established causal chains in the organism. The response is not primordially an event that occurs in the objective world. Merleau-Ponty writes: "Like that of stimulus, the notion of response

separates into 'geographical behavior'--the sum of the movements actually executed by the animal in their objective relation with the physical world; and behavior properly so called--these same movements considered in their internal articulation and as a kinetic melody gifted with meaning." (SB. 130) This entire dimension of "meaning", the meaning that belongs to "behavior properly so called", gets overlooked or otherwise suppressed when behavior is explained as an effect of third person processes occurring in the objective world.

Because it prescind from "meaning", and because meaning is an irreducible property of "behavior properly so called," behaviorism is weak in descriptive and explanatory power. If learning, for example, is reduced to a trial-and-error process in which new sets of mechanical movements become traced out in the nervous system, it becomes impossible to account for the ability, which is the essence of learning, to generalize beyond already acquired powers in new situations. A cat that has learned to draw a string near with its teeth instead of with its paw has not simply developed a new set of accomplished movements. Rather it has learned a type or 'form of behavior' that will in turn be useful to it in new situations. Merleau-Ponty continues: "In an organism, experience is not the recording and fixation of certain actually accomplished movements: it builds up aptitudes, that is, the general power of responding to situations of a certain type by means of varied reactions which have nothing in common but the meaning. Reactions are not therefore a sequence of events; they carry within themselves an immanent intelligibility." (Ibid.) Reactions having different physiological

substrates can be substituted and said to be in an important sense the 'same' because they have the same meaning or "immanent intelligibility". Objectively speaking, two quite different movements are performed depending on whether the cat pulls the string with its teeth or with its paws. Phenomenally speaking however, these two quite different movements have the same meaning or immanent intelligibility. Each has the goal of 'drawing food closer'.

The reaction and the situation that summons it, the goal, for example, belong to an encompassing form that cannot be reduced to component parts in the objective world. The reaction cannot be understood independently of the significance that the behavioral situation has for the organism. Merleau-Ponty says that "one finds, immanent to the phenomenal organism, certain nuclei of signification, certain animal essences--the act of walking toward a goal, of taking, of eating bait, of jumping over or around an obstacle--unities which reflexology...does not succeed in engendering from elementary reactions...." (SB, 157) Behaviorism eschews such descriptive categories, however, which it views as being vitalistic. It tries to bypass anything that cannot be quantified in its objectivistic terms. It does so, however, at the cost of blinding itself to a whole dimension of meaning and thereby denying itself explanatory power. Such basic categories cannot be avoided if behavior is to be described in such a way as to render its immanent intelligibility.

Learning is tied neither to the literal features of the setting nor to the literal place in the body where 'conditioning' first occurs. Learning involves the transcendence of the literal in the

direction of a certain generality of situation and behavior. Merleau-Ponty writes: "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 problem of the same form." (SB, 96) What this means is that the animal's response to the stimulus is mediated by something like a grasp of the general relevance of the situation. It is necessary to recognize, in addition to the strictly material features of the behavioral situation, something like a vital significance that can be the same for materially different situations and different for two or more situations that are materially the same.

On the basis of such considerations concerning the generality of the stimulus and the adaptability of the organism, Merleau-Ponty concludes that the reflex arc and the complementary model of linear causality are not adequate to capture the dynamics of animal behavior. The relationship between the animal and its milieu cannot be reduced to a one-way linear causality. The relations, Merleau-Ponty maintains, are dialectical and not mechanical, mechanical relations being ones "in which the cause and the effect are decomposable into real elements which have a one-to-one correspondence." (SB, 161-2) In normal animal activity it is not possible to isolate separate places of excitation, since each receptor works in coordination with the whole nervous system. It is not possible to isolate out individual stimuli, each stimulus receiving its value in relation to other stimuli in the milieu of the animal. It is not possible to isolate the physiological

substrate 'causally' responsible for the reaction, materially different reactions having the same meaning. The two terms of the stimulus/response relation are not mutually exterior to each other. It is wrong to say that the objective world acts upon the animal because the relevant stimuli are from the very beginning selected out and imbued with vital significance in virtue of the internal make-up of the animal. "The organism cannot properly be compared to a keyboard on which the external stimuli would play and in which their proper form would be delineated for the simple reason that the organism contributes to the constitution of that form." (SB, 13)

If it is necessary to distinguish the milieu of the animal from the geographical environment or objective world in order to comprehend animal behavior, it is even more important to do so in order to comprehend human behavior.<sup>5</sup> Human behavior loses meaning, is rendered meaningless, when understood exclusively as the result of a mechanical causality between the objective body and the objective world. If it is to be *understood*, one must take into account the meaning or vital significance that the behavioral situation has for an acting subject. Behavior makes 'sense', appears in its immanent intelligibility, only if the behavioral situation is understood in its given practical, existential, and dramatic significance. To this end, such descriptive, life-world categories as 'loving', 'hating', 'threatening', 'punishing', 'avoiding', 'taking revenge', and so on must be recognized as being irreducibly constitutive of our fundamental manner of inhabiting the world. The "phenomenal givens" to which

Merleau-Ponty urges us to return are meanings such as these, and not raw sense data.

This is the existential significance of Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the phenomenal and objective body and between the phenomenal field and the objective world. The phenomenal field, the 'milieu' of the human being, is the horizon in which our actions are constituted not simply as mechanical effects but as "kinetic melodies gifted with meanings". The behavioral world of the human being, the phenomenal field, is a 'theatre of action' in which phenomena are immediately gifted with meaning and value relative to the intentionality of the acting subject. It is this world of meaning, ignored or suppressed by objective thought, that Merleau-Ponty tries to bring to light with the notion of an 'intentional arc'; a notion polemically framed as a corrective to the descriptively impoverished views of behaviorism in particular and objective thought in general.

### 3. The Intentional Arc and the Phenomenal Field

The notion of the phenomenal field plays the same role in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of man as does the milieu in his discussion of animals. Like the milieu, the phenomenal field is set in opposition to the objective world and by contrast indicates the being of *the world for us*. "Our most natural life as men intends an ontological milieu which is different from that of being in itself, and which consequently cannot be derived from it in the constitutive order." (S, 163) In our earlier discussion of perception, we described the

phenomenal field with reference to the contextuality of the perceptual phenomenon. The perceptual meaning of a given phenomenon is co-determined by its reciprocal interplay with other phenomena in a shared context. The phenomenal field then is the total Gestalt in which a given phenomenon is configured.

Having now considered the body not simply as a position of observation but as a locus of behavior as well, this earlier description of the phenomenal field needs to be to be expanded in order to incorporate this practical reference to the acting body. The spatiality of the body, the body's style of inhabiting space, is not simply a spatiality of geographical position but rather a "spatiality of situation". (PhP, 100) The body is 'engaged' in its space and with the things that surround it. It is an 'I can' in relation to possibilities offered by things set in a phenomenal field, and this field appears in light of its possibilities. The phenomenal field, the world of the body-subject, is thus more properly thought of as 'a theatre of action' than as a 'spectacle' spread out before a sovereign gaze.<sup>6</sup> The meaning of a phenomenon is constituted not only with reference to other phenomena but also with reference to the interests, projects, and possibilities of a body-subject. When the body is at work, for example, a hammer is given as 'something with which to drive home a nail'. In a threatening situation, the same hammer may be given as 'something with which to ward off an attacker'.

This circuit or 'intentional arc' between the body and its world best comes into view in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the 'categorical' or 'abstract attitude' and the 'concrete attitude'.<sup>7</sup> The

psychologist Kurt Goldstein, dissatisfied with attempts to localize behavior in specific regions of the brain, originally introduced these terms in order to make comprehensible certain behavioral abnormalities exhibited by his brain-damaged patients. The abstract or categorical attitude refers to our capacity to 'abstract' the essential features of a situation and to mediate our behavior with general categories. The concrete attitude, by contrast, is characterized by adhesiveness to the concrete features of a situation.

This distinction is further refined to differentiate 'abstract' and 'concrete movement'. Abstract movement is movement initiated upon command and without immediate reference to an actual or concrete situation; a simulated or make-believe situation, for example. Concrete movement is movement occurring spontaneously in an actual or real situation. The analysis of abstract movement in brain-damaged patients serves Merleau-Ponty as a kind of foil by which he brings to light the normal subject's relation with his body and his world.<sup>8</sup> It "throws into relief this possession of space, this spatial existence which is the primary condition of all living perception." (PhP, 109) Examining certain behavioral abnormalities with respect to movement serves both to show up the essentials of normal behavior and its field and to underscore the poverty of objective thought with respect to its blindness to meaning.

One of the behavioral problems associated with patients who are deficient in the abstract attitude is described as follows: "If the patient is ordered to shut his eyes and then perform an abstract movement, a set of preparatory operations is called for in order to



enable him to 'find' the operative limb, the direction or pace of the movement, and finally the plane in which it is to be executed." (PhP, 109) The patient's body is not at his immediate disposal. He has to calculate at every step, as if he were figuring out how to perform the movements, measuring the space to be traversed, and so on. His body is like an alien thing that needs to be consciously and deliberately manipulated in order to bring about the desired result. The normal subject, by contrast, does all of this spontaneously and without any effort. He does not have to put himself 'in gear' in order to perform abstract movement.

Another typical patient, asked to point to a designated point on his body, is unable to do so at will, and "manages the abstract movements only if he is allowed to watch the limb required to perform them, or to go through preparatory movements involving the whole body." (PhP, 103) What is interesting, and what argues against any attempt to explain this abnormality in strictly physiological terms, is that the patient can perform the same movement with no difficulty when he is in a concrete setting. The same subject who cannot upon command point to his nose, effortlessly moves his hand to that very spot to swat a troublesome mosquito or to hold his nose protectively. Physiologically considered, the movements are virtually identical. Merleau-Ponty raises the question: "If I know where my nose is when it is a question of holding it, how can I not know where it is when it is a matter of pointing to it?" (PhP, 104)

Traditional psychology has nothing to say in response to this question because it views consciousness of place as a positional

consciousness, as representational, and objectifies the body. The place touched or pointed to is assigned a determinate place in the objective world. In order to get there the hand, guided by a representation of the body as if by a map, has to move through objective space. On these presuppositions analysis is doomed from the beginning because, Merleau-Ponty says, "It is never our objective body that we move, but our phenomenal body...." (PhP, 106) The patient does not have to search in objective space for the place of the sting upon his objective body because it is not there that the sting occurs:

He finds it straight away, because for him there is no question of locating it in relation to axes of co-ordinates in objective space, but of reaching with his phenomenal hand a certain painful spot on his phenomenal body, and because between the hand as a scratching potentiality and the place stung as a spot to be scratched a directly experienced relationship is presented in the natural system of one's own body. The whole operation takes place in the domain of the phenomenal; it does not run through the objective world.... (PhP, 105-6)

In concrete situations the patient's body is given to him not as an object detached from his consciousness but rather as integrated or in circuit with his intentional life.

From the objective point of view it is incomprehensible that a subject could be able to perform a movement in concrete situations but be unable to do so in abstract ones because, objectively speaking, the two movements, scratching (or swatting) and pointing, are virtually identical. Under the sway of objective thought, traditional psychology could not appreciate that "bodily space may be given to me in an intention to take hold without being given in an intention to know." (PhP, 104) There is an important distinction to be made between "my arm seen as sustaining familiar acts, my body as giving rise to

determinate action having a field or scope known to me in advance, my surroundings as a collection of possible points upon which this body may operate,...and my arm as a mechanism of muscles and bones, as a contrivance for bending and stretching, as an articulated object, the world as a pure spectacle into which I am not absorbed, but which I contemplate and point out." (PhP, 105) An analysis that recognizes only the latter, that inserts the acting subject into the the world of the scientist, will not be able to distinguish, in the 'same' movement objectively defined, two different types of act, each with a different intentional context.

The patient who has difficulty with abstract movements has not lost a stock of movements, since he can perform them in concrete settings. Rather he has lost the capacity for a certain type of act. There is an intentional difference between abstract and concrete movement, between scratching and pointing, grasping and knowing. This difference is obliterated as long as movement is thought of as a third person process occurring between the objective body and the objective world. As a corrective to the notion of a 'reflex arc' linking these two terms thus understood, Merleau-Ponty proposes the notion of an 'intentional arc' that runs between the body-subject and his world. "The life of consciousness," he writes, "--cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life--is subtended by an 'intentional arc' which projects round about us our past, future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects." (PhP, 136)

The body and its behavioral situation are attuned in a system of reciprocal relationships such that even patients unable to perform abstract movement can display a remarkable dexterity in concrete situations. When the patient is in his workshop, for example, and has a concrete task to perform, he loses himself in his work and his body takes over, as it were. The patient, "when put in front of scissors, needle and familiar tasks, does not need to look for his hands or his fingers, because they are not objects to be discovered in objective space: bones, muscles and nerves, but potentialities already mobilized by the perception of scissors or needle, the central end of those 'intentional threads' which link him to the objects given."<sup>9</sup> (PhP, 106) The situation solicits his movements and it is to the situation as meaningfully configured, and not to indifferent markers in objective space, that his movements are directed. His body is not in objective space but rather in a 'theatre of action'. It is an 'I can' attuned to the demands of the situation.

Likewise, the familiar things with which the patient busies himself are immediately perceived as meaningful in terms of the possibilities they offer to his body: "it is the piece of leather 'to be cut up'; it is the lining 'to be sewn'." (PhP, 106) Things are given as configured in a web of intentionality. Their 'properties' are correlated with his project. "The bench, scissors, pieces of leather offer themselves to the subject as poles of action; through their combined values they delimit a certain situation, an open situation moreover, which calls for a certain mode of work." (Ibid.) The patient

understands his body and the phenomena with which he has to do without having to objectify either.

For Merleau-Ponty the concrete attitude, of which even brain-damaged patients are capable, expresses what is essential about our fundamental manner of inhabiting the world. It shows up the world's essential character as a practical, value-imbued world and it shows up the things of the world as being intentional poles of our activities. Here Merleau-Ponty's indebtedness to Husserl's return to the life-world is apparent, but so also, and perhaps even more directly, is his indebtedness to Heidegger's analyses of 'being-in-the-world' in Being and Time.<sup>10</sup> The concrete attitude, in Merleau-Ponty's analysis, exemplifies the kind of being that things have when they are, in Heidegger's terms, "ready-to-hand".<sup>11</sup> For Heidegger, "readiness-to-hand" expresses the most primordial manner in which things are given to "Dasein". It expresses the kind of being that things have in "average everydayness". What is "ready-to-hand" is given as the correlate of the aims and projects of "Dasein". In Merleau-Ponty's terms, what is given is configured or woven in the webbing of an intentional arc joining subject and object.

Heidegger opposes "readiness-to-hand" to "presence-at-hand". The "present-at-hand" is the thing such as it exists before a subject supposedly adds his contribution to it. It is the object in its being independent of and indifferent to whatever significance it might have for a given subject. "Presence-at-hand" is also an apt way to describe the being of things such as they appear to brain-damaged patients like Schneider in abstract situations or virtual situations. If Schneider

is asked to identify a fountain pen, for example, "the phases of recognition are as follows. 'It is black, blue, and shiny,' he says. 'There is a white patch on it, and it is rather long; it has the shape of a stick. It may be some sort of instrument. It shines and reflects light. It could also be a coloured glass.'" (PhP, 131) Judging from his descriptions, in such abstract situations as this one where he is asked to identify something with no reference to context, things have no immediate meaning for him. He does finally succeed in identifying the pen, but only after a tedious process of mediation in which he actually 'deduces' its meaning. Here subject and object seem to be really distinct.

It is also thus that objective thought conceptualizes the thing. For objective thought, we live in a world that is in the first instance a mere nature upon which we project personal and cultural significations. Things are at first and most primitively 'nakedly' "present-at-hand". By 'interpretation', 'reasoning', 'brain activity', or whatever, subjects 'clothe' objects (at first "present-at-hand") with 'subjective' value predicates. The "ready-to-hand" thus emerges as a kind of epiphenomenal effect. For both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, this order of derivation needs to be reversed. It is the "present-at-hand" that is derived and indeed contrived. It is not that we reach a world "ready-to-hand" by clothing a naked nature at first merely "present-at-hand". Rather the "present-at-hand" is contrived precisely by stripping what is "ready-to-hand" of the meaning it already has.<sup>12</sup> What is most primordially given is given as woven in a network of intentional significations. It is true that this is not so

for brain-damaged patients like Schneider in abstract situations, but Schneider, it must be remembered, is abnormal. His abnormality is a deficiency, and it is the norm against which it appears as a deficiency that must be taken as the essential datum for analysis.

The norm is that one's relation to one's body does not have to be mediated by a schematic representation of the body with consciousness playing the role of engineer. The body does not so much respond to 'objective stimuli' as to meanings, and behavior occurs not in the objective world but in a phenomenal field constituted in relation to our projects. The 'things' to which we respond are immediately perceived or given not as mute and indifferent but as bearers of meanings having a reference back to our projects and to our bodily or lived space. This is what Merleau-Ponty means when he says that things and the world have a 'physiognomy'.

The stop sign at which I bring my car to a halt is not merely a coloured piece of metal that excites my retina in such a way as to set in motion a causal chain in my body, ultimately resulting in the halting of my vehicle.<sup>13</sup> I originally perceive the stop sign as invested with a certain significance which it receives in virtue of being a sign with such and such a value in a context or code. Furthermore, its value may be different depending on the total configuration of the situation in which it counts. If it is late at night, and if my range of vision is broad enough such that I can see that no vehicles (and especially police vehicles) are coming from the other direction, my response may not be the coded stop response. Similarly, the sign will have a different value for me if I am in a

hurry, if I am walking, or riding a bicycle instead of driving a car, and so on.

The 'stimulus' is not some neutral thing-in-itself. It 'counts' for the subject, 'figures' in his behavioral field, as the intentional pole of his projects. The link between body and consciousness, and between the body and its world, has been obscured and indeed severed by identifying consciousness with an 'I think' in command of a body. "Consciousness is in the first instance not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'," Merleau-Ponty says. (PhP, 137) Body, world, and consciousness are intertwined in an 'I can'. The 'properties' of the object and the 'intentionality' of the subject cannot be separated in the description of behavior. This is what Merleau-Ponty means by speaking of the 'intentional arc' of behavior.

Merleau-Ponty borrows the idea of the 'I can' from Husserl, who used it to underscore the embodiment of the subject and the dynamics of the intentional relation between consciousness and its object. There is in every perception a tacit knowledge of possibilities: 'I can walk there in a day', 'I can reach the book with a stretch of my arm', 'I can see the facade of the building if I walk around to the front'. Things present their faces not to an indifferent mirror that simply represents their presence, but to a body or a body-project that from the beginning perceives and understands them in light of its own capabilities and possibilities.

In these terms, the problem suffered by a patient who has difficulty performing abstract movement is that when there is no actual or concrete situation summoning him to action, he does not, as



does the normal subject, have his body available to him as a spontaneous power of action. Virtual situations do not have physiognomies for him. They do not speak to his body. In abstract or virtual situations his intentional arc "goes limp", Merleau-Ponty says. (PhP, 136) For such a patient the 'I can' is limited to actual or concrete situations. He cannot project his bodily possibilities into virtual situations in which the things are not there in the flesh to make their demands upon him.

Indeed, when such patients do attempt to perform in abstract or virtual situations, they simulate the total situation in which the behavior would figure as a part. If Schneider is asked to salute, he puts his whole body into the act. He assumes the serious and reverent expression of the military man, straightens out his body, and so on, as if he were actually in a military situation. He adopts all the external marks of respect that accompany the salute in actual situations. If at any point he is interrupted in his effort to salute, he must go back to the beginning and put himself in gear all over again. (PhP, 103) Faced with abstract or virtual situations Schneider behaves as if he did in fact live in objective space and as if his body were indeed an object alongside others. He needs to calculate his body's spatiality in relation to the demands of the situation. To observe him, one would think that objective thought were true in its account of space and the body.<sup>14</sup> The normal subject, by contrast, is able to reduce the command to its bare minimum and carry out the salute without all these associated gestures.

Goldstein had encountered patients who experienced difficulty imitating upon command the doctor's movement. The remarkable thing was that these same patients were able to imitate the doctor's movements correctly, touching their right ear with their left hand, for example, "so long as they stand beside the doctor and follow his movements through a mirror, but not if they face him." (PhP, 141) To imitate the movement of someone standing face to face it is not necessary for the normal subject to translate the co-ordinates of the other's body onto his own. The body effects this spontaneously. The patients discussed, however, do have need of such translation. In abstract situations, the body is not available to them as a fluid or adaptable system of co-ordinates. Merleau-Ponty says "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...." (PhP, 141) The normal subject, on the other hand, "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." (PhP, 141)

Merleau-Ponty uses the term 'body image' to denote this system of equivalents, itself invariant, "whereby the different motor tasks are instantaneously transferable." (PhP, 141) The idea of the body image has been used to make comprehensible the tacit knowledge we have of our body's position at any given moment. Without having to calculate, the normal subject is able to 'find' any part of his body. Even if it is dark, or if I am in a place in which I feel completely

spatially disoriented, I 'know' where every part of my body is. This knowledge is distributed across the range of senses, which communicate with each other without the need for intellectual mediation: my eyes immediately turn to the place on my arm where a stinging sensation is felt. Furthermore, I can spontaneously locate the parts of my body with reference to external markers. Clumsiness notwithstanding, if I am passing through a narrow space the relevant parts of my body gear themselves to the contours of the opening. Normally, I do not have to determine the objective dimensions of the opening and map onto them the actual and possible positionings of my body.

Indeed the body image can with a certain amount of habituation incorporate appendages or instruments which are not part of the biological body. The anatomist's probe becomes an extension of his hand or fingernails. The young girl's high heels, at first somewhat awkward, become extensions of her feet. This process of extension or incorporation is especially evident in the case of someone with a physical handicap who learns to adapt with a prosthesis. "The blind man's stick," Merleau-Ponty writes, "has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight." (PhP, 143) The stick thus becomes incorporated into the blind man's body image and in "the exploration of things, the length of the stick does not enter expressly as a middle term...." (PhP, 143) It counts in his phenomenal field as a virtual eye or a virtual hand.

In virtue of having a body image, the things with which we have to do in our surroundings are not in the first instance things with 'objective' volumes and dimensions. The space in which the body moves is not objective space. "The points in space do not stand out as objective positions in relation to the objective position occupied by our body; they mark, in our vicinity, the varying range of our aims and our gestures." (PhP, 143) The properties of things are bound together with the intentionality of the subject. They are disclosed in relation to the subject's body image or to his 'I can'. The experienced typist, for example, does not need to consult a schematic representation of the keyboard in order to find the key that will translate the appropriate letter. He "knows where the letters are on the typewriter as we know where one of our limbs is, through a knowledge bred of familiarity which does not give us a position in objective space." (PhP, 144) The keyboard is at the disposal of the typist's intention to type in the same way that my hand is at the disposal of my intention to reach or to grasp.

The process of incorporation described above is basic to all habit acquisition. Someone learning to play tennis, for example, first experiences the racket as an object and not as an instrument in circuit with his intentions. The court is spread out before him as marked out in an objective space that as yet owes nothing to the possibilities of his body. The net stands out indifferently as an obstacle of such and such dimensions, and so on. Intellectually speaking, provided he has learned the rules, he knows what he has to do. The task is to get his body in gear. During this process of

getting in gear he may indeed have recourse to calculation, but as he becomes habituated to the game, the objective distances between his body, the net, and the boundaries of the court, are replaced by 'intentional threads' connecting the spaces in a system of equivalences.

Games have often served philosophers as metaphors for understanding the human condition. It is not surprising, therefore, that Merleau-Ponty describes the phenomenal field with reference to a game. He writes:

For the player in action the football field is not an "object"....It is pervaded with lines of force (the "yard lines"; those which demarcate the "penalty area") and articulated in sectors (for example, the "openings" between the adversaries) which call for a certain mode of action and which initiate and guide the action as if the player were unaware of it. The field itself is not given to him, but present as the immanent term of his practical intentions....Each maneuver undertaken by the player modifies the character of the field and establishes in it new lines of force in which the action in turn unfolds and is accomplished, again altering the phenomenal field. (SB, 188-9)

The phenomenal field, in the double sense here punningly intended of 'football field' and 'world' in general, is not an object spread out before a contemplating consciousness. It is in circuit with the project of a body-subject and is behaviorally significant as such.

The psychologist who tries to understand behavior objectively could be likened to someone trying to understand a game of football without any reference to the significance that the various moves and the playing field in general have for the players engaged in the game. No doubt such a distanced observer would notice certain regularities. Perhaps he could even frame general laws to the effect that when 'x'

happens, 'y' follows. In all of this 'knowledge' that he acquired, however, there would be nothing that would indicate that he *understood* the game. If one asked him, for example, what happened at the game, he might be able to say a great deal, and what he said might even be interesting, but it would hardly be a proper answer to the question.

What is at issue in Merleau-Ponty's polemic with behaviorism (and objective thought in general) is the meaningfulness of our behavior and indeed of our lives. His major objection is that from the objective point of view human behavior does not appear in its immanent meaning. The objective world in which behaviorism situates man is a world utterly deprived of meaning. The phenomenological point of view, which undertakes to describe behavior with reference to the significance that the behavioral situation has for the acting subject, is essentially restorative of meaning.

This is not to say that Merleau-Ponty believes that our lives and our actions are reducible to whatever meaning we may be conscious of. To say that we live in a world imbued with meaning does not mean that we are masters of this meaning, that meaning can be reduced to the consciousness that we have of it. It is highly significant that Merleau-Ponty prefers to speak of the 'body-subject' rather than the 'subject'. The world is meaningful to us and addresses us not as sovereign subjects but as bodily beings. As body-subjects we are implicated in fleshy meaning beyond and different from such meaning as might be frontally spread out before a sovereign subject. Merleau-Ponty is as critical of the transparent constituting consciousness posited by intellectualism as he is of empiricism's

reduction of consciousness to an effect of things acting upon the body. To be sure, phenomenology is concerned with consciousness, and with the meaning that things have for consciousness, but Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that such consciousness as is proper to a body-subject is not transparent to itself.

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty views phenomenology as being convergent with psychoanalysis. He says that psychoanalysis has helped to develop the phenomenological method "by declaring, as Freud puts it, that every human action 'has a meaning', and by making every effort to understand the event short of relating it to mechanical circumstances."<sup>15</sup> (PhP, 158) Freud was rightly suspicious about our own self-interpretations of the meaning of our actions, but he nevertheless believed that at some level all human actions are meaningful and have a significance relative to the wishes, desires, hopes, and fears that punctuate our lives. Although psychoanalysis teaches that our readily available understanding of ourselves is deceptive and illusory, self-understanding nevertheless remains the *telos* of psychoanalysis. Our lives have a meaning beyond what is transparently clear to us, but such meaning can be understood.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of psychoanalysis has been best articulated by Paul Ricoeur, who argues that the psychoanalytic critique of consciousness is at least compatible with (if it does not presuppose) a teleology of consciousness. Ricoeur writes: "Everything that can be said about consciousness after Freud seems to me to be contained in the following formula: Consciousness is not a given but a *task*."<sup>16</sup> That consciousness is a task means that from the outset man

does not possess the truth about himself, that there is meaning yet to be understood. For Freud, such meaning as exceeds consciousness is not so alien that the body-subject cannot recognize himself in his 'unconscious' being. In a sense, the goal of psychoanalysis is to make the unconsciousness conscious. The subject, once made stranger to himself, is invited to recognize and appropriate himself in his strangeness.

It is instructive to contrast psychoanalysis with behaviorism in this regard. Both share a distrust of consciousness, but this is as far as the similarity goes. Psychoanalysis displaces a sovereign consciousness from its privileged centre, but it holds to the belief in the meaningfulness of our lives, even if such meaning exceeds whatever meaning may be readily available to us. Behaviorism, on the other hand, abstracts from consciousness altogether, and has no place for a teleology of consciousness, for a recovery or reappropriation of meaning. What it opposes to sovereign consciousness, unlike the unconscious that Freud opposes to it, is at a level so incommensurate with our life-world understanding of ourselves that we could never recognize ourselves in it.

In the final analysis, the main thrust of Merleau-Ponty's critique of behaviourism (and of objective thought in general) is not that its descriptions are simply 'false' as measured against 'experience' in the sense of an absolute evidence. He realizes that experience is not something clear and distinct, without hidden dimensions, and that it is a very ambiguous if not deceptive evidence. His criticism of behaviorism is that, in prescinding from experience



and consciousness altogether, its 'descriptions' are so remote from our lives that we cannot recognize ourselves in them.<sup>17</sup> Behaviorism does not enable us to make sense of what we are doing.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PHENOMENOLOGY

He who does not know how to put his will into things at least puts a meaning into them: that is, he believes there is a will in them already (principle of 'belief').

Friedrich Nietzsche

#### 1. The Primacy of Reflection

The argument of the Phenomenology unfolds in two dialectically related stages.<sup>1</sup> At the first level of reflection, Merleau-Ponty lays out the phenomenological point of view. He articulates "this new way of looking at things" with polemical reference to objective thought. It emerges in an effort of overcoming dominant prejudices and as a return to the meaning of the world and of our being-in-the-world such as they are given pre-objectively in experience. From the light of this point of view, Merleau-Ponty offers descriptions that, unlike the 'explanatory mythology' of objective thought, are said to remain 'faithful' to our experience. Thus he contrasts the phenomenal body to the objective body, and in general contrasts the phenomenological field, the world such as it is given in our experience, to the objective world.

The phenomenological point of view being thus understood and secured, the stage is set for a transition to a new and more radical level of reflection. "These descriptions," Merleau-Ponty writes, "must

become an opportunity for defining a variety of comprehension and reflection altogether more radical than objective thought. To phenomenology understood as direct description needs to be added a phenomenology of phenomenology." (PhP, 365) If phenomenology, as "direct description", is in the first instance reflection upon experience, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is reflective to a second degree in that he makes phenomenological reflection, or more precisely the situation 'reflection-upon-experience', itself a theme. There is a *difference* between reflection and experience, and 'radical' reflection takes this difference as its theme. What difference does reflection make? What is the relation between reflection and the unreflected?

Merleau-Ponty presents phenomenology as being a return to experience and to the world as experienced. What does it mean to return to experience? What is the status of this point of return? The destination of the return is characterized in a series of oppositions: it is the pre-objective as opposed to the objective; the true immediate in opposition to an immediate that is deduced, the unreflected as opposed to the reflected. These are all negative determinations, however, and the question remains as to the status of the first term with respect to the reflections or descriptions that bring it to light. How do we gain access to the 'pre-objective', the 'true immediate', or the 'unreflected'?

There is an ambivalence in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy concerning the status of the point of return and our reflective access to it.<sup>2</sup> The return is characterized by antithetical demands. The efforts of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty says, "are concentrated upon

re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with philosophical status." (PhP, vii) The return incorporates "direct and primitive contact", on the one hand, and the mediation of reflection or philosophy, on the other. It is "the ambivalence of seeking to return to the dimension of perceptual experience while, simultaneously, being obliged to maintain a distance from this dimension as the very condition of the possibility of the return," as John Sallis eloquently puts it<sup>3</sup> How can both of these antithetical demands be satisfied without one cancelling the other?

If one interprets the return one-sidedly, emphasizing the idea of "direct and primitive contact", for example, it seems that the return is a matter of turning away from reflection altogether and coinciding with experience. Experience is opposed to reflection as truth is to falsehood. To reflect is to be at a certain distance from experience and not to be in contact with it. Experience as it appears from the distance of reflection is not experience in its pristine truth but rather experience as it is entangled in the net of whatever prejudices reflection throws out to catch it. In his polemic against objective thought, Merleau-Ponty does indeed represent reflection as a source of distortion. It is reflection that leads objective thought astray. It is reflection that creates the gulf between experience objectified and experience lived that phenomenology attempts to bridge.

Looked at from this side, it might seem that Merleau-Ponty believes that if only we would cease to reflect, if only we would stop analyzing, experience would shine forth in self-evidence and the

falsity of objective thought would be manifest. Reflection, insofar as it distances us from experience, could only be a source of falsehood or distortion. What is necessary is the absence of all mediation. To return to experience means to cease reflecting and to coincide with experience instead. In order to relearn what feeling, seeing and hearing are, Merleau-Ponty says, we must "go back to the experiences to which they refer in order to redefine them." (PhP, 10) The pristine experiences, it seems, are there fully formed, waiting for us to abandon our reflection and fuse with them. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty does say that the task is "not to explain perception, but to coincide with and understand the perceptual process." (PhP, 48) In the same vein, he also speaks of a "truly immediate experience" and of a "direct experience". (PhP, 59, 54)

If we attend one-sidedly to such texts, it would appear that Merleau-Ponty appeals to experience or the unreflected in a dogmatic way as a kind of absolute on the other side of reflection. What he calls 'the insanity of reflection', which relativizes all evidence, is avoided by default for the reason that reflection is not brought into play at all. There is no problem of distance or difference because from the outset we are in identity with the object to be disclosed. It is in this light that we should understand the criticism, which Merleau-Ponty answered in his address to the Société française de philosophie, that his philosophy amounts to a renunciation of reflection.<sup>4</sup> Since reflection can falsify experience, it must be that one remains closer to the truth if one declines to reflect at all in favour of coinciding with experience in innocent identity.

To conclude such, however, is to ignore the other side of the ambivalence in Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the return and to misconstrue his thesis concerning the primacy of perception. One must balance terms such as "direct experience", or "truly immediate experience", which suggest coincidence, with terms such as "direct reflection". (PhP, 63) One must balance the demand 'to achieve contact' with the demand to 'endow this contact with philosophical status'. On this other side of the ambivalence there is a call for a "new type of reflection" that, unlike the distorting reflection of objectivist thought, will not falsify experience. (PhP, 50) Merleau-Ponty speaks of "a new way of looking at things". (PhP, 23) He says that the Phenomenology "attempts to define a method for getting closer to present and living reality...." (PriP, 25) Here "living reality", the destination to which we are to return, is presented not as something to be coincided with but rather as something to be disclosed by means of a method. The mediation of a method, namely phenomenology, is an integral moment of its disclosure.

When we consider this side of the ambivalence, the possibility of coinciding with the *terminus ad quem* of the return is ruled out. Experience is not something with which I am in coincidence at the outset but rather something from which, in virtue of my commitment to reflect and to endow my contact with philosophical status, I am distanced. When I reflect I am not quite at one with myself or with my experience. How does Merleau-Ponty reconcile the idea of a direct access to experience and of a method that will help us to get closer to it--of contact and distance, identity and difference?

In places, Merleau-Ponty expresses this ambivalence in terms that force him into a contradiction. In a typical discussion of the return in The Structure of Behavior, for example, he says that "verbalized perception should be distinguished from lived perception." (SB, 185) Everything will appear in its proper light if "we return to objects as they appear to us when we live in them without speech and without reflection and if we try to describe their mode of existence faithfully...." (Ibid.) On the side of contact or coincidence, we are invited to return to perception as it is lived before reflection comes on the scene and separates us from it. If this were the meaning of the return, however, it would be redundant to urge us to make such a return because presumably the common man (and even the philosopher in his unreflective moments) is already at this destination. As if to correct himself, Merleau-Ponty adds to this the demand of describing what we experience, of endowing it with philosophical status. Indeed, this is what makes us philosophers. From this point of view, however, coincidence is ruled out.

The difficulty with the way Merleau-Ponty frames this ambivalence here is that, in the terms of the above distinction between "verbalized perception" and "lived perception", the former, by implication, is determined as being unfaithful to the latter. The return thus framed, its project appears to be contradictory. To "return to objects as they appear when we live them without speech and without reflection" is to be faithful to our experience of them, but it is to be condemned to silence and to betray the demands of philosophy. To break this silence, however, to reflect, to verbalize,

is no longer to be faithful to experience. The antithetical demands cancel each other, since to satisfy one is to fail to satisfy the other.<sup>5</sup>

From reading such texts, one can sympathize with Emile Bréhier, who charged that "in order not to remain contradictory", Merleau-Ponty's "doctrine must remain unformulated, only lived." (PriP, 30) Bréhier claims that such an unformulated doctrine could hardly qualify as philosophy. In responding to this charge, Merleau-Ponty qualifies his position and characterizes the ambivalence of the return in a more felicitous way. He writes: "description is not the return to immediate experience; one never returns to immediate experience. It is only a question of whether we are trying to understand it. I believe that to attempt to express immediate experience is not to betray reason but, on the contrary, to work toward its aggrandizement." (PhP, 30) Indeed, Bréhier would no doubt agree that "to attempt to express immediate experience is not to betray reason", but in the terms in which Merleau-Ponty sets up the opposition between immediate experience and reflection (verbalized perception), the question is whether or not to express is to "betray" immediate experience.

However we understand this ambivalence, the opposition between reflection and the unreflected, "verbalized perception" and "lived perception", as falsehood to truth is not, on a balanced interpretation, the final resting place of Merleau-Ponty's thought. He does not renounce reflection in favour of perception, experience, or the unreflected. His 'primacy of perception' thesis is not a



reactionary thesis directed against reflection as such. Indeed Raymond Herbenick maintains that, far from renouncing reflection, there is rather a privilege or even primacy accorded to it in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. In "Merleau-Ponty and the Primacy of Reflection", he distinguishes between the ontological and the epistemological or methodological significance of Merleau-Ponty's famous thesis concerning 'the primacy of perception'.<sup>6</sup> He argues that, ontologically speaking, there is indeed a primacy accorded to perception. It is primary in the order of being in that it serves as a foundation upon which all other spiritual accomplishments (science, art, philosophy, for example) are built up and to which they can always be traced back as to a point of origin. It is in perceptual experience that the world, and our certainty of the world, is most primordially given. The "world is always 'already there' before reflection begins" and reflection, philosophy, must accommodate itself to it. (PhP, vii)

Herbenick maintains that epistemologically or methodologically speaking, however, Merleau-Ponty subordinates perception to reflection. For the philosopher, whose task it is to endow our contact with the world with philosophical status, perception cannot be a thing in itself or an absolute on the other side of reflection because it is in an important sense revealed relative to it. The relation of primacy between reflection and the unreflected or perception is the "two-way relationship that phenomenology has called *Fundierung*," which Merleau-Ponty articulates as follows: "the founding term, or originator--time, the unreflective,... perception--is primary in the sense that the originated is presented as a determinate or explicit

form of the originator, which prevents the latter from reabsorbing the former, and yet the originator is not primary in the empiricist sense and the originated is not simply derived from it, since it is through it that the originator is made manifest." (PhP, 394) Perception (the originator) is primary in the sense that reflection (the originated) is "a determinate form of perception", is parasitic upon something that pre-exists it and from which it takes its beginning. Reflection is primary, however, in that it is only through reflection that perception is made manifest. As reflection it disqualifies itself from positing something absolutely other to reflection. The other of reflection, the unreflected, is at the same time disclosed by it. To whatever one says about the unreflected, perception, and so on, one is obliged to admit the qualification: 'as it appears to me from the standpoint of my present reflection'.

It is important to preserve this ambivalence here, the genuine dialectic between reflection and the unreflected, because otherwise phenomenology becomes a kind of dogmatism. It becomes an instance of what Wilfred Sellars calls "the myth of the given".<sup>7</sup> Today phenomenology is under attack from various quarters, from analytic philosophy to deconstruction, and to a great extent this attack is based on the misconception that phenomenology dogmatically appeals to experience as an absolute given on the other side of all our reflection and discourse. This is how Jacques Derrida interprets it.<sup>8</sup> He believes that phenomenology effaces or otherwise conceals its own mediation, its own use of language, for example, in masquerading as some kind of privileged and direct access to the way things are before

we talk about them. Derrida believes that 'experience' (or 'perception') functions in phenomenological discourse as a kind of "transcendental signified". Experience is a thing in itself on the other side of whatever reflective terms we employ to bring it to light and is itself unaffected by them. The phenomenologist appeals to experience as a trump card or uses it as a kind of stick with which to beat his opponents over the head. He appeals to experience, as a religious fanatic appeals to the will of God, to justify his beliefs and to set himself above the responsibility of justifying himself before other men.

Although Merleau-Ponty does indeed appeal to experience as a kind of court of appeal, this is not to escape the responsibility of arguing for and persuading others of the truth of what he says, nor to conceal the fact that his own descriptions issue from a point of view. It is not a question of finding a transcendental guarantor for his own discourse or otherwise placing himself beyond reproach. Merleau-Ponty's critique of such absolutes in the discourse of morality could be applied to discourse about experience. He writes:

Recourse to an absolute foundation--when it is not useless--destroys the very thing it is supposed to support. As a matter of fact, if I believe that I can rejoin the absolute principle of all thought and all evaluation on the basis of evidence, then I have the right to withdraw my judgements from them control of others on the condition that I have my consciousness for myself; my judgements take on a sacred character.... (SN, 95)

Insofar as he is a philosopher, the phenomenologist, no less than the moralist, is forbidden simply to refer others to the oracle of experience to authorize the truth of his own descriptions, as if the

truth could be placed on one side, and the descriptions on the other. The truth of what he says must be revealed or even originated through the descriptions, by means of them, and not posited on the other side. Indeed, the point of the "phenomenology of phenomenology" is to draw attention to the mediation of the phenomenologist's own intervention in the disclosure of experience.

To satisfy the demands of philosophy, it is not enough to summon experience to appear in its self-evidence with magic words and incantations. The task is to say what we experience, and to say it in such a way that one's discourse becomes not simply the occasion but the means or equipment for others to discover how things appear from our vantage point. Merleau-Ponty does not simply point to experience in silence. He describes it, argues against certain other views about experience, and so on. In his critique of the notion of sensation, for example, Merleau-Ponty does not, as might appear at first glance, simply appeal to experience as a touchstone for truth. He does not simply invoke the authority of experience as if everything would be set straight thereby. He does indeed say that the notion of sensation is false to our experience, but this is not a conclusion we are asked to accept simply by comparing experience on the one hand and the notion of sensation on the other.

In fact, what he opposes to the description of experience on the basis of the concept of sensation is not experience per se but rather another description of experience. More precisely, this other description is set in a different category than that based on the concept of sensation, which is said to be not a description at all but

rather an explanation. He offers us a different way of looking at experience, a new set of terms to guide our reflection, and invites us to reflect upon our experience in this light. It is from the point of view of this alternative description that the notion of sensation is shown to be inadequate. The attempt to persuade takes place in what Sellars calls "the logical space of reasons".<sup>3</sup>

Consider how in fact Merleau-Ponty argues against behaviorism. He carefully examines its claims and identifies conceptual difficulties. He shows that from the behaviorist point of view certain important things, such as learning, cannot be accounted for adequately. He does not simply assert that the behaviorist's claims are 'false' because they do not conform to 'experience'. Nor does he sanctify his own descriptions on the grounds that they achieve a good 'fit'. He knows that his claims, like the claims of the behaviorist, issue from a point of view. Ultimately, it is competing points of view that are played off against each other. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty is aware that it is competing values that are at stake, and that his own descriptions are given in the light of his commitment to values such as freedom and dignity.

Merleau-Ponty insists in the Phenomenology (and throughout his writings) on the need to acknowledge the effects and originality of reflection. In virtue of the fact that he reflects and speaks about experience, the philosopher is obliged to take up the available resources of his language, the language he shares with other men, and to endow his contact with experience with philosophical status by situating it in "the logical space of reasons". There can be no

question of simply pointing to experience as an authority that could be used to refute a competing thesis. The philosopher must answer descriptions and arguments with other descriptions and arguments. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty is as critical of the 'myth of the given' as is Sellars and, more recently, Derrida. Experience is caught up in the circle of reflection. The phenomenologist does not simply point, he speaks. What is the status of his speech? What difference does it make?

## 2. Radical Reflection

Given that to return to experience is not to decline to reflect, what role does reflection play in this return? How does Merleau-Ponty's own discourse, for example, come into play? What relation do such descriptive terms as 'figure', 'field', and 'phenomenon', terms that reflection deploys to capture experience, stand in relation to the experience to which they give expression? Does reflection, as the word suggests, merely 'mirror' something that pre-exists it? Do the mediating terms with which reflection describes experience somehow or other correspond to something already there before reflection intervenes? In what sense could they correspond? Although Merleau-Ponty does not dismiss reflection per se as being a source of error or distortion, he nevertheless believes that it can be and often is. If reflection is a falsification of experience as concerns the mediation of the concept of sensation, for example, why is this not also the case as concerns the concepts he himself uses?

Some unguarded statements notwithstanding, Merleau-Ponty does not criticize objective thought simply because it 'verbalizes' experience. If to verbalize experience were to falsify it, then the Phenomenology of Perception would be an impossible project and Merleau-Ponty should not have spoken at all. The problem with objective thought is not that it is a verbalization, as if the truth of experience could only be coincided with in silence. The problem is rather that it is oblivious to its own mediating role in the disclosure of experience and the determination of its object. It believes that its own act of knowing, the language with which it talks about the objective world, for example, effaces itself to mirror what is already there waiting to be discovered. Consequently, it does not realize the creativity involved in its own intervention and that the 'objective world' is in a sense its own creation.

In this respect, phenomenology would be no more radical than objective thought if it did not acknowledge the fact that it is a point of view, that it describes things such as they appear from a given angle. It would be another dogma alongside others. Even though he was in complete agreement with Gestalt psychology as a descriptive psychology, Merleau-Ponty nevertheless criticizes it for being philosophically naive.<sup>10</sup> He says that "the psychologists who practise the description of phenomena are not normally aware of the philosophical implications of their method." (PhP, 47) Indeed "when it tries to reflect on its own analysis," Gestalt psychology understands its own significance in premises borrowed from objective thought. Gestalt psychology is a virtual breakthrough to the

phenomenological point of view, but it falls short of phenomenology's radical demand to understand itself as a point of view. This is why Merleau-Ponty speaks of the need for a "phenomenology of phenomenology". To satisfy the demand for radicality that philosophy makes upon us, it is not enough simply to describe the panorama from a given standpoint. One must attempt to bring this point of view into focus, to take one's standpoint itself as a theme.

Throughout his writings, Merleau-Ponty praises Husserl for his unwillingness to allow phenomenology to settle into a dogma and for his unceasing interrogation of his own manner of philosophizing. The philosopher, he quotes Husserl to say, is "a perpetual beginner". This means, Merleau-Ponty adds, "that philosophy itself must not take itself for granted, insofar as it has managed to say something true; that it is an ever-renewed experiment in making its own beginning; that it consists wholly in the description of this beginning, and finally, that radical reflection amounts to a consciousness of its own dependence on an unreflective life which is its initial situation...." (PhP, xiv) This situation of 'reflection upon an unreflected' is the theme of Merleau-Ponty's "phenomenology of phenomenology" and of what he calls "radical reflection."<sup>11</sup>

Radical reflection articulates and tries to reconcile two distinguishing features of reflection. On the one hand, reflection is situated in an encompassing reality (existence, being-in-the-world, the phenomenal field, the life-world) from which it takes its beginning and which it could never coincide with nor absorb into a system of transparent relationships. This is the existential strain in



Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the emphasis upon the brute facticity or radical contingency of existence. On the other hand, however, reflection does not simply mirror or coincide with something that pre-exists it. It transforms this brute facticity by endowing it with philosophical status. In this sense, reflection is a creative act.

Radical reflection is reflection that is aware of itself as a creation of sorts, but is also aware of itself as being dependent on something other. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Reflection cannot be thorough-going, or bring a complete elucidation of its object, if it does not arrive at awareness of itself as well as of its results. We must not only adopt a reflective attitude,...but furthermore reflect on this reflection, understand the natural situation which it is conscious of succeeding and which is therefore part of its definition; not merely practise philosophy, but realize the transformation which it brings with it in the spectacle of the world and in our existence. (PhP, 62)

Radical reflection is reflection aware of its own indebtedness to something that has preceded it--something it knows it neither coincides with nor exhausts because it knows itself to be a transformation with respect to this something.

If radical reflection is reflection that "arrives at awareness of itself", objective thought, on the other hand, is unaware of itself as reflection. It overlooks itself as event in favour of its results. It ignores its own creativity, the "transformation which it brings with it in the spectacle of the world and in our existence," because it thinks that it simply mirrors its object and that its reflected image is identical with and exhausts the object from which it takes its beginning. It does not question its own genesis because it sees itself as nothing more than a reflecting surface that doubles, more or

less faithfully, whatever shines its light upon it. It does not see the need to "arrive at awareness of itself" because it does not think it stands anywhere or that it has any content of its own. It believes itself to be entirely self-effacing.

In this regard someone who reflects objectively is in illusion. He thinks that his reflection as event effaces itself in mirroring a pre-existing object, but the object his reflection sets before itself, the sensation, for example, is really its own construction. The sensation, as it functions as an explanatory term in a theoretical system, is not something simply discovered but something created. Or again, the philosopher sets before himself an objective world which he thinks of as existing in itself and owing nothing to the reflection that knows it as such. He thinks his reflection simply mirrors what is really there. This objective world, however, is not a thing-in-itself but objective thought's own orphaned creation. It is the world as it appears in light of certain prejudices and assumptions and thus from a certain point of view. Objective thought, however, is unaware of this because it is blind to its own prejudices and represses its own point of view.

Objective thought believes that the objective world is self-sustaining and all-encompassing, but in fact it surreptitiously borrows meaning from and is secondary in relation to another kind of worldliness that objective thought effectively conceals. The objective world, the reified image of its own understanding, is not the same world that in its mystery and opacity elicited one's questioning in the first place and launched reflection on its trajectory. In

Husserl's terms, objective thought constructs the objective world through the idealization of the life-world, but deceives itself into thinking that its construct is in fact a thing-in-itself. It conceals its own artfulness. It cuts the objective world off from its source and reifies its own activity in the figure of a fully formed reality that it thinks it is merely mirroring. It is an interpretation dressed up in the disguise of simply reporting what is really there, a point of view pretending to come from nowhere, a man claiming to be a god.

Radical reflection keeps vigil against the danger of philosophy 'superficializing' its results, as Husserl would say, and repressing its own mediation. As a corrective to the tendency of reflection to reduce experience to its own projected categories, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the 'transcendence' of the unreflected, of what precedes reflection, of what reflection opens onto. "Philosophy is not a particular body of knowledge," Merleau-Ponty says, "it is the vigilance which does not let us forget the source of all knowledge." (S, 110) Merleau-Ponty reminds the philosopher that philosophy is an attempt to understand something already underway before his philosophy comes on the scene, something in which it is rooted and from which it derives meaning. Since there is a temptation for philosophy to lose sight of itself as an accomplished result, he reminds the philosopher that his philosophy is a creation.

Radical reflection distinguishes itself from objective thought in that it turns back upon the unreflective situation from which it takes its beginning and accepts responsibility for its own activity in the constitution of the object it sets before it. It does not try to

repress its own point of view and the transformation its own activity brings about in the indeterminate fund of experience from which it sets out. Radical reflection knows that it is an interpretation. It knows that it issues from a fund of unreflected experience that it can never exhaust or coincide with and that in thus emerging it brings about a transformation of what has preceded and given rise to it.

The problem posed in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of radical reflection, as John Sallis puts it, is as follows: "How is reflection to establish the originality of that whose very originality consists in its escaping the grasp of reflection, in its being opaque to reflection?"<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, against objective thought narcissistically spellbound by its own reified image dressed in the guise of 'objective truth', we are urged to return to and make contact with the unreflected as the ground from which to nourish our reflection. On the other hand, we are warned not to reify this unreflected and to acknowledge that it appears relative to the reflection that tries to grasp it. Merleau-Ponty writes: "It is true that we discover the unreflected. But the unreflected we go back to is not that which is prior to philosophy or prior to reflection. It is the unreflected which is understood and conquered by reflection." (PriP, 19) The unreflected with which Merleau-Ponty is concerned is thus not simply what is before reflection, since by definition reflection could not grasp such an unreflected. It is rather what reflection hits upon as being its limit, the facticity of the world and of our being-in-the-world such as they withdraw from and exceed our efforts to understand, "the unmotivated upsurge of the world."

(PhP, xiv) This is surely one way of understanding what Merleau-Ponty means when he says that the "most important lesson that the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction." (Ibid.)

Thus Merleau-Ponty does not reify his own reflection, does not pretend that his reflective intervention effaces itself to mirror what is 'really there'. He acknowledges that there is something of a creation in the transition to the phenomenological point of view. He writes: "The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being." (PhP, xx) Phenomenology is not a mere mirroring. In a sense, the phenomenal world or field was not really there before phenomenology. It is the creation of a reflection that attempts to understand and express the world such as we experience it in everyday life.<sup>13</sup> Phenomenology brings it into being. At the same time, however, the phenomenal field, for example, although it is a creation, answers or gives expression to something that preceded it and which it transforms.

Merleau-Ponty's ambivalence concerning this sense of a creative and yet faithful rendering comes out clearly in a discussion of subjectivity in his essay "Everywhere and Nowhere". The preoccupation with subjectivity, he says, is perhaps the most distinguishing mark of modern philosophy from Descartes to Husserl. At some point beginning in the seventeenth century, subjectivity in one way or another becomes a dominant theme in philosophy. Is it legitimate to talk about this cultural history in terms of the 'discovery' of subjectivity? "Are we

to believe," Merleau-Ponty asks, "that subjectivity existed before the philosophers, exactly as they were subsequently to understand it?" (S, 152) He answers this question with a qualified 'no'.

According to Merleau-Ponty, once the idea of subjectivity had been firmly planted in our philosophical and cultural tradition, it indeed assumed, in virtue of a "retrospective illusion", the status of an eternal verity. Once we have caught on to the idea, what Kierkegaard and others have taught us about subjectivity seems "no more than a *return* to what already *knew itself* through our life." (S, 153) It seems that they only pointed to something that was always true. Once I have read Kierkegaard, it seems that I have always been the subjectivity that I now know myself to be. But was I already such before the mediation of reflecting upon my existence in light of Kierkegaard's texts?

This is what we would conclude if we believed that reflection is a mirror that effaces itself to present something already there, fully formed, on the other side of reflection. To conclude such, however, would be to ignore the transformation, the act of learning, that takes place when we reflect. It would be to forget the difference that reflection makes. Merleau-Ponty continues: "Reflection has not only unveiled the unreflected, it has changed it, if only into its truth. Subjectivity was not waiting for philosophers as an unknown America waited for its explorers in the ocean's mists. They constructed, created it...." (S, 153)

The same could be said about such important phenomenological 'discoveries' as the 'phenomenological field', the 'noesis', the

'noema', and so on. Phenomenology does not simply preach 'experience' as if experience had all the answers, if only we would join it in silence. Rather phenomenology attempts to say what experience is. The question Merleau-Ponty raises concerns what happens in the transition from experience lived to experience reflected, described, or otherwise expressed. Phenomenology, and indeed all philosophy, is a creation in a very literal sense. There is Husserlian phenomenology, Sartrean phenomenology, and so on, and different sets of vocabularies and descriptive terms to guide our reflection. Are we to believe that they are all talking about the 'same' thing? Merleau-Ponty's own descriptive terminology changed radically from the early to the later works. Are we to believe that this difference is unimportant because his words only indicate a reality that is what it is on the other side of language or reflection?

Merleau-Ponty's point concerning the 'discovery' of subjectivity is that existence or experience is disclosed in different ways depending upon the reflective procedures by which one brings it to light. Existence presents itself differently depending upon whether one attends to or reflects upon it in light of its eventual termination in death, for example, or in light of being the recipient of the gift of a summer day. Reflection upon experience or existence starts from somewhere, begins with a point of view, and this point of view does not simply 'discover' but 'constitutes' the spectacle. "Without a study of Hegel," Eugene Gendlin asks, would Sartre "really find just these Faustian interactions of Being and Nothingness?"<sup>14</sup> Similarly, one could ask if Merleau-Ponty would have found the same

interactions of 'figure' and 'ground' if he had not read Gestalt psychology. The difficulty is to reconcile Merleau-Ponty's claim to have 'direct access' to experience with his claims concerning the creativity of the mediating intervention reflection. What is the status of his "direct descriptions" given that one hears echoed in them the voices of Koehler, Husserl, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and a host of others?

What radical reflection, the phenomenology of phenomenology, teaches us is that phenomenology is not a self-effacing mirror that simply reflects things the way they are. Phenomenology is a point of view and as such has the opacity of a text. If reflection is not to be naive, it must recognize its own activity in the constitution of its object. Instead of thinking of its object as existing fully formed, waiting for it to come along and illuminate it like a light, reflection must realize the transformation that its own intervention brings about. "Reflection", Merleau-Ponty says, "is truly reflection only if it is not carried outside itself, only if it knows itself as reflection-on-an-unreflective-experience, and consequently as a change in the structure of our existence." (PhP, 62) The model of correspondence or mirroring will not suffice to comprehend this relation between reflection and the unreflected, this "change in the structure of our existence" that reflection brings about. What appears fixed in the mirror of reflection is not identical to or coincident with something already there before reflection came on the scene. Reflection neither coincides with nor mirrors the unreflected. It transforms it. Reflection makes a difference.



What kind of difference does reflection make? What kind of "transformation" does reflection bring about? Reflection does not mirror its object but in a sense creates it. How can reflection be faithful and creative at the same time? These are the questions that radical reflection asks. Radical reflection acknowledges that there is a difference between what reflection grasps and what escapes its grasp, but nonetheless believes that reflection can be faithful in being different, can achieve contact at a distance. Radical reflection knows that something 'other' precedes reflection, and yet knows that this something is nevertheless preserved, albeit transformed, in the field that reflection has before it now. Between reflection and the unreflective experience that precedes reflection there is a distance that preserves contact and a faithful rendering that is not a mirroring or coincidence. The difficulty is to understand how faithfulness and creativity, apparently antithetical demands, can co-exist. To elucidate this difficulty, I shall consider Merleau-Ponty's account of attention, since he ascribes to attention the same paradoxical structure as he does to reflection.

### 3. Reflection and Attention

The empiricist account of attention that Merleau-Ponty challenges is based on the 'constancy hypothesis', a form of the prejudice of the objective world. The constancy hypothesis, criticized throughout his writings, is succinctly characterized in the following passage from the Phenomenology: "The objective world being given, it

is assumed that it passes on to the sense-organs messages which must be registered, then deciphered in such a way as to reproduce in us the original text. Hence we have in principle a point-by-point correspondence and constant connection between the stimulus and the elementary perception." (PhP, 7) The stimulus, the colour of a certain object, for example, is in itself either the characteristic green or the characteristic red frequency. If I am unable to decide the colour, or if I do so incorrectly, it is because I have been inattentive to the 'sensations' that, without knowing it, I was receiving all along.

On this prejudice, attention is like a light going on to illuminate what is already there fully formed in the objective world. Merleau-Ponty writes: "Even if what we perceive does not correspond to the objective properties of the source of the stimulus, the constancy hypothesis forces us to admit that the 'normal sensations' are already there. They must then be unperceived, and the function which reveals them, as a searchlight shows up objects pre-existing in darkness, is called attention." (PhP, 26) In the objective world everything is already there in a fully determinate form like a scene set on a stage before the lights go on.

Such an account of attention is itself inattentive to the indeterminateness of the world such as it is given in perceptual experience. The prejudice of an objective world already containing everything that could ever be 'discovered' obscures the act of attention, which transforms what is indeterminate into something determinate. It obscures the creativity of attention. Empiricism and intellectualism, Merleau-Ponty says, insofar as both are spellbound by

the objective world, are "in agreement in that neither can grasp consciousness in the *act of learning* and that neither attaches due importance to that circumscribed ignorance, that still 'empty' but already determinate intention which *is* attention itself." (PhP, 28)

Merleau-Ponty offers an example based on the phenomenon of colour discrimination among children which helps to clarify his point. Studies show that, in the first nine months of life, an infant's ability to discriminate colours progresses regularly through a series of stages. At first, the infant is only able to distinguish globally between coloured and colourless areas. After this he is able to distinguish between 'warm' and 'cold' shades. Finally he advances to a point where the detailed colours are clearly discriminated.

According to classical psychology, it is only "ignorance or the confusion of names that prevents the child from distinguishing colours. The child must, it was alleged, see green *where it is*, all he was failing to do was to pay attention and apprehend his own phenomena." (PhP, 29-30) All along the child was actually perceiving the detailed colours he later came to discriminate, but there was nothing to motivate him to attend to the differences, or no words with which to designate them. Finally, when the child does "pay attention", nothing new comes into being because his attention merely reveals what was already there. Merleau-Ponty argues that there is no strictly empirical reason to justify explaining colour discrimination this way. What led psychologists to do so and indeed to overlook the experience of attention itself, he maintains, was their inability to conceive "a world in which colours were indeterminate...." (Ibid., 30) In virtue

of a 'retrospective illusion' the psychologists read back into the field upon which attention opens the fully determinate qualities at which it later arrives.

If we attend to the experience of attention instead of reconstructing it on the basis of theoretical prejudices, we learn that attention does not simply mirror a pre-existing object. Attention, rather, introduces a global change in the perceptual field, like a Gestalt shift. Merleau-Ponty writes: "To pay attention is not merely further to elucidate pre-existing data, it is to bring about a new articulation of them by taking them as *figures*. They are preformed only as *horizons*, they constitute in reality new regions in the total world." (PhP, 30) Gestalt psychologists often illustrate this point with reference to ambiguous drawings that can be taken in more than one way. The whole field in which I originally saw a rabbit, for example, the meaning of the various lines and shapes that a moment ago defined an ear or a nose is transformed as I now notice a duck in the drawing. When attention shifts from the rabbit to the duck, the "data" supporting the first figure are broken up and reconfigured. Only when I notice the duck do I have before me the "data", the 'bill', the 'eye', and so on, that I can now identify as supporting the duck figure.<sup>15</sup>

Rather than simply mirroring pre-existing data then, attention effectively brings about a new object. Merleau-Ponty says that it is "the active constitution of a new object which makes explicit and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon." (PhP, 30) To be sure, there is an identity of

the object before and after attention, which enables us to say that we are dealing with one and the same object. This identity is an identity in change, however, an identity in transition. The articulated object is a transformation of something indeterminate in the shadows of the perceptual field. The act of attending is a "circumscribed ignorance" in that it opens upon something which it 'circumscribes' or explores. At the outset, however, attention is ignorant of this 'something' relative to the determinate knowledge that will subsequently emerge through the act. In this transition from circumscribed ignorance to determinate knowledge the object of attention is transformed.

If we fail to recognize this transformation, it is because we retrospectively reconstitute the object before attention on the basis of what we subsequently come to learn about it. We forget the moment in which the thing was ambiguous or indeterminate and the object after attention takes on the appearance of being an eternal verity. We overlook the change or the newness that attention brings about. Suppose, for example, that I am walking in the woods at night and see a moving shape which I cannot quite make out. At first, I am ignorant of what it is, but not so ignorant that my attention has nothing to get a hold of. (I 'know' that it is an 'animal' because it moves.) I focus on this indeterminate something and, after a time, decide that it is in fact a racoon. Once I have seen the thing this way, everything that had previously been indeterminate falls into place. Indeed, it did have the characteristic wobble of a racoon, the glistening eyes, the obese shape, and so on. These determinations appear to be data that pre-existed my present seeing and led to it as

premises to a conclusion. Merleau-Ponty's insist that it is only after the fact that the "data" appear this way. Once we have seen the racoon, we reconstitute the moments in which the thing was indeterminate. Retrospectively, the "data" become more determinate than they were at the time. Objective thought will say that I saw a racoon from the very beginning, but that I simply did not recognize it as such. The word 'saw' is equivocal here, and can mislead us to reconstruct what I did see from my knowledge of what I should or could have seen or from what, 'objectively' speaking, was 'really' there.

The phenomenology of perception teaches that the perceptual object has an inexhaustible richness. Merleau-Ponty says that "the perceived object is infused with a secret life, and perception as unity disintegrates and reforms ceaselessly." (PhP, 38) The perceived object, the perceptual phenomenon, is not transparently laid out before consciousness. Such determinateness or definition as it has is received from its contextual relations. In virtue of being set in a perceptual field, the phenomenon is indeed given as being meaningful or determinate, but its meaning always exceeds whatever meaning it has in a particular context, because it is transcendent with respect to any of its appearances. Thus, the identity of the phenomenon is preserved when it is placed in different contexts. It has a certain depth or transcendence that outruns its appearance and that makes perceptual exploration possible. It is because the perceived object has this depth, because it is not exhausted by or completely presented in any of its appearances, that attention is not simply a mirroring of its object.

With reference to attention, we are better enabled to understand the change that reflection brings about, the peculiar identity of the object before and after reflection. The return to existence or to experience, the transition to the phenomenological point of view, involves shifting our attention from the object *that* is perceived to the object *as it is* perceived, from the 'real object' of the natural attitude to the 'intentional object' correlated with our awareness of it. Even when it seems that the world in which we live is ready-made and owes nothing to us, experience is marginally present as a kind of background. This is why the reflection that thematizes it is not a groundless creation and why it is possible to subject it to the demand to be faithful. From the beginning, however, experience is indeterminate, and the reflection that thematizes it is a creative act that brings a new object into existence.

In this regard, it is instructive to recall what Merleau-Ponty says about the 'crypto-mechanism', whereby "perception hides itself from itself". He writes: "although it is of the essence of consciousness to forget its own phenomena thus enabling 'things' to be constituted, this forgetfulness is not mere absence, it is the absence of something which consciousness could bring into its presence...." (PhP, 58) To make this 'absence' present requires a shift of the reflective gaze away from the constituted 'things' with which we have to do in ordinary life and back to the stream of experience in which they are constituted as such. Out of the background a whole new type of object thus comes into existence, the 'phenomenon', and a whole new world, the 'phenomenal field'.

"The first act of attention," Merleau-Ponty says, is "to create for itself a *field*..." (PhP, 28) At the outset attention circumscribes a region to be explored. This is the significance of the 'phenomenal field'. The phenomenal field is a thematization of the world such as it is given unreflectively. In order to capture the sense in which this thematization is a transition, it would be more precise to say that the 'things' of the world become transformed into 'phenomena', and the 'world' becomes transformed into the 'phenomenal field', since in a sense they were already there. "But though the phenomenal field may indeed be a new world, it is never totally overlooked by natural thought, being present as its horizon...." (PhP, 23)

The tendency of perception to hide itself or to hide the phenomena is even more pronounced in scientific consciousness. Here too, however, phenomena are never totally concealed. Merleau-Ponty writes that "they are never completely unknown to scientific consciousness, which borrows all its models from the structures of living experience; it simply does not 'thematize' them, or make explicit the horizons of perceptual consciousness surrounding it to whose concrete relationships they give objective expression." (PhP, 58) Scientific consciousness, spellbound by the prejudice of an objective world in which everything is already in itself perfectly determinate, can indeed conceal our experience from us, can conceal the phenomena that we encounter in the phenomenal field or life-world, can indeed conceal the phenomenal field, but it cannot totally repress them. There will always be the curious and ironic difference between



the scientist's body as he lives it and as it serves him to manipulate things in his laboratory, for example, and his body as it appears reflected in his science. Or again, there is the difference between the skilled hand that knowingly manipulates the scalpel and the inert cadaver upon the table that submits to its commands.

Here Merleau-Ponty's indebtedness to Husserl is apparent.<sup>16</sup> According to Husserl, the life-world flows on underneath the objective world and surreptitiously gives it meaning. The life-world is marginally or horizontally present for the scientist as a background supporting and secretly nourishing the figures he makes thematic. Merleau-Ponty's famous thesis concerning 'the primacy of perception' should be interpreted in this light. Scientific laws, for example, are constructed so as to make the 'facts' intelligible. These 'facts', the observed motion of the planets, the regular changing of the seasons, and so on, are in the first instance happenings in the perceptual world. As such they can never be reduced to the explanatory terms used to make them intelligible. "The perceived happening can never be reabsorbed in the complex of transparent relations which the intellect constructs because of the happening." (PriP, 20)

Reflection thus brings something new into existence, but this something new is not produced *ex nihilo*. It is rather a transformation of something that is already there, but only marginally so. What is said of attention can also be said of reflection. Reflection too is a "circumscribed ignorance". The unreflected that reflection opens onto is not fully determinate, but neither is it completely indeterminate. It has a physiognomy the contours of which reflection is obliged to

follow insofar as it seeks to be a faithful rendering. To say that what is unreflected has a physiognomy means that at the outset reflection is in contact with something other, something transcendent in relation to it. Reflection creates its object, but this object is not created *ex nihilo*.

There are two obvious ways in which to misconstrue the kind of change reflection brings about. One would be to think of the object of reflection as a mirror image of something pre-existing it fully formed. This would be to ignore the initial ignorance of reflection, to overlook the transformation that reflection brings about, to ignore its creativity. The other would be to construe the object of reflection as something absolutely new and incommensurate with the object before reflection, as a kind of creation out of nothing. Merleau-Ponty accuses Bergson of this excess.<sup>17</sup> "Experience of phenomena", he writes, "is not, then, like Bergsonian intuition, that of a reality of which we are ignorant and leading to which there is no methodical bridge--it is the making explicit or bringing to light of the prescientific life of consciousness which alone endows scientific operations with meaning and to which these latter always refer back." (PhP, 58-9) It is true that at the outset reflection is "ignorant" of phenomena relative to the knowledge it will subsequently have of them, but this is a "circumscribed ignorance" opening onto something from which reflection takes its beginning and which it transforms into determinate knowledge.

In this chapter, I have tried to render comprehensible the idea of a phenomenology of phenomenology in the terms in which

Merleau-Ponty himself describes this project: that is, in terms of the relationship between the reflected and the unreflected. An ambivalence announces itself again and again in his characterization of this relationship. Reading the Phenomenology on this matter, it is as if Merleau-Ponty keeps coming back to the same problem because he is not quite satisfied with what he has already said about it, as if he believed that there is something more that could be said to open the matter up in a new way and throw a new light on things. Each new attempt to express this relationship, however, gets pulled into the orbit of the same ambivalence.

In the final analysis, I believe, there is a problem in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the relationship between the reflected and the unreflected. If I have tried to redeem his analysis of this relationship, to make it understandable, I have done so in the belief that this would be the best way to show up its limitations and to introduce what I believe Merleau-Ponty himself came to see was a better way of expressing what is at issue in a phenomenology of phenomenology. The problem with his analysis, I shall argue in the following chapter, arises from his failure to discuss explicitly the significance of language as concerns the transition from the unreflected to the reflected. The better solution is found in the concept of 'expression'.

## CHAPTER 5

### EXPRESSION

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And to know the place for the first time.

#### 1. From Reflection to Expression

We have seen that, for Merleau-Ponty, reflection does not simply mirror its object (experience, perception, the unreflected). Mirroring is impossible because reflection issues from a point of view, in light of which its object appears. But what does it mean to speak of a point of view with reference to reflection? To speak of a point of view with reference to perception seems straightforward enough. In this case we mean that perception is situated. The perceptual field is organized from somewhere, and this somewhere is the human body. In what sense is reflection situated, however? Indeed, it seems odd to think of reflection as being situated.<sup>1</sup> The very concept of reflection is deceptive in this regard. We are inclined to think of reflection as lacking any ties to corporeality, and thus to point of view. Seduced by the mirror idea we are inclined to think that reflection has no content of its own to tie it down. It does have such ties, however, insofar as it is embodied in language. Language implicates us in a point of view in that the fleshy words we use are

bearers of a tradition and mark our heritage in the cultural or historical world.

Although language is a major theme in the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty does not integrate his discussion of language with his discussion of reflection (or perception). He does not explicitly analyze the relationship between language and reflection. This is a remarkable omission because, I shall argue, his analysis of language both problematizes and corrects his discussion of the passage from the unreflected to the reflected. In a sense, what he says about language undermines his use of the concept of reflection and the analysis that occurs under its auspices.

One of the central threads in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of language is a critique of the dualism of thought and language. The main argument, which will be explored in some detail in the next chapter, is that thought and language cannot be opposed to one another as two independent dimensions. Traditionally, philosophy has conceived of thought as a dimension of transparent ideality. Language, the corporeality of language, has been excluded and devalorized as being a kind of external accompaniment to thought, a merely empirical instrument at the service of communicating transparent thoughts from one interior to another. Against this classical view, Merleau-Ponty argues that thought is incarnated in language. Far from being a mere instrument, language is rather the medium in which thinking itself occurs. Furthermore, this medium is not something of which the thinker, like a pilot manipulating an instrument panel, could be in total control. Language as much possesses the thinker as he it.

Merleau-Ponty's views on language have important implications as concerns how he understands the activity of philosophizing. It is this activity that radical reflection takes as its theme. But how 'radical' is radical reflection if, determining the activity of philosophy as reflection, it overlooks the philosopher's own use of language? Merleau-Ponty's silence concerning the relation between language and reflection is surprising since reflection, insofar as it is a kind of thinking, falls within the scope of his critique of the dualism of thought and language. Indeed, if philosophy has excluded corporeality from the concept of thought, it has even more rigidly excluded corporeality from the concept of reflection. Reflection, as the word literally suggests, is represented as a mirror that can faithfully present or represent something precisely insofar as it is itself devoid of content. Like a mirror, its own surface effaces itself in order to represent what it faces.

This self-effacement is an illusion, however. The objective thinker divides the world up into subject on the one side and world or object on the other. In so doing he believes that his reflection is merely mirroring the way things are and does not realize that a tradition is effective in his thinking. This tradition, this point of view, is incarnated in the very language he uses to speak about the objective world. The linguistic mediation, the terms 'subject', 'world', and 'object', for example, has a sedimented history and is constitutive of the reality that he believes it merely indicates or mirrors. The objective thinker is blind to this effective history, however, because he believes that language (and his own use of

language), which confesses his inherence in history and in a point of view, is self-effacing. The word has no significance of its own and exhausts itself in the service of showing or indicating the objective world, which he believes is what it is independently of the word, on the other side of all our saying.

Thus the objective thinker is oblivious to his own mediation in the disclosure of the world. His point of view, embodied in the corporeality of the language he uses, does not appear to him as being a point of view at all.<sup>2</sup> It is thus that he is able to mistake what are in fact cultural creations for things in themselves. The physicist believes that atoms (or whatever) are the fundamental reality, in contrast to which the life-world in which he conducts his experiments is deemed to be merely an appearance. The psychologist believes that the world is pieced together from elemental sensations. Atoms and sensations have a potentially subversive meaning that is not considered by the objective thinker, however, who uses these words as if they were only indicators of something on the other side of language. Atoms and sensations (and even the life-world) are concepts that are situated in the space of cultural history. If one brackets their alleged referential function, according to which they merely indicate, one can inquire into their status as ideas bearing a history and bearing relations to other ideas which co-determine their meaning.

Determining his own use of language as something merely incidental, however, the objective thinker cuts his reflection off from its embodiment in time and in the life-world. He ignores the history effective in his reflecting and loses contact with its own

primitive beginnings. Thus arises the illusion of a reflection that could free itself from the contingency of its starting point in time, a reflection that could absorb this contingency into a system of rationality. "The mistake of reflective philosophies," Merleau-Ponty writes, "is to believe that the thinking subject can absorb into its thinking or appropriate without remainder the object of its thought, that our being can be brought down to our knowledge." (PhP, 62)

We have already seen that Merleau-Ponty is critical of such objectivistic reflection because it does not take its own happening into account and does not acknowledge its own contingent beginnings from an anterior fund of unreflective experience. Radical reflection, by contrast, is said to be reflection "not only in operation, but conscious of itself in operation." (PhP, 219) Radical reflection, as opposed to reflection that is unaware of itself, does not feign to efface its own happening. Radical reflection is reflection that thematizes or draws attention to its own embodiment, in virtue of which it is linked to history and to a network of meanings that exceed whatever could possibly be present to consciousness. It does not feign to be in identity with some unadulterated meaning or even with itself.

Everything that Merleau-Ponty says about radical reflection comes into focus if it is the philosopher's own use of language that is thematized, and not just reflection. This is why it is remarkable that he does not link his discussion of reflection with his discussion of language. The analysis of language enables to us elaborate on the distinction between objective thought and radical reflection. Descartes, who is one of the major founders of 'the philosophy of



reflection', exemplifies reflection that is unaware of itself. The fact that his reader is perceptually engaged with a text has no significance for him. We are supposed to believe that it is merely incidental that his reflections are embodied in a text that is corporeal, sensible, and exterior to consciousness, which by contrast is conceived as unadulterated presence.<sup>3</sup> In the framework of his philosophy, it is as if there is no text insofar as his text is supposed to efface itself in the service of presenting reflections owing nothing to corporeality. Thus disembodied, reflection is severed from everything that could link it to change and history. The illusion thus arises that ideas (the cogito, for example) are eternal and do not come into existence. Descartes discovered the cogito as Columbus discovered America. The corpus of his thought is something of an 'embarrassment' in this regard. One wonders how these timeless ideas are somehow both bound to and yet independent of this particular body.

In this light let us once again take up our earlier analysis of the relation between reflection and perception. The central motif throughout Merleau-Ponty's discussion of perception is the return to the world of perception and the restoration of its rights of primacy over the spurious constructions of objectivistic thought. This return is not a retreat from the effort of thinking and of everything that could be lined up on the side of mediation. Its *terminus ad quem* is not a silent coincidence with a world of lost innocence. The philosopher cannot be content simply to point to perception or to appeal to its alleged self-evidence and self-identity. The term 'reflection' is used in this connection to express a certain

distancing that is proper to the return and that marks the philosophical moment. Everyone perceives, but the philosopher stands back and reflects upon what it is to perceive.

But just what is the philosopher doing when he reflects? What happens in the transition from perceiving to reflecting upon perceiving? The concept of reflection, in virtue of its semantic heritage, seduces us into believing that in reflecting the philosopher silently reproduces the concrete life of perception in the dimension of ideality. The philosopher, however, speaks. Husserl, after all, has bequeathed to us a plethora of words to describe perceptual life. In the transition from perceiving to reflecting, such terms as 'noesis', 'noema', 'intentional object', to name but a few, have intervened. What bearing do these words have on his 'reflection'? Are we to believe that these 'signs' efface themselves and merely mark a place or stand in for ideal meanings that are made present by them? According to what Merleau-Ponty says about the relationship between thought and language and about radical reflection, these 'signs' are important in their own right. The task of the philosopher is not simply to perceive (whatever such an injunction could possibly mean), nor to reflect, insofar as reflection is conceived of as a silent mirroring of its object. The task rather is to 'say' what we perceive and to 'say' what perception is. The philosopher does this whether or not he admits that it is a matter of significance. What distinguishes radical reflection is the philosopher's awareness of the importance of this 'saying' and the difference that it makes. The concept of reflection, however modified, only obscures the importance of the

philosopher's own 'saying', of the fact that he actually produces a text of one sort or another.

In his phenomenology of phenomenology, in taking phenomenology as the theme of his analysis, the point that Merleau-Ponty emphasizes again and again is that phenomenology is a creation. Phenomenology does not merely preach experience as if all we had to do was to 'experience' and we would be in the truth. Rather phenomenology attempts to say what experience is. Radical reflection does not ignore the creativity of this moment of 'saying'. The phenomenologist, after all, is situated in a language and out of this language manages to say something. It is in the public moment of this 'saying' that the genuine philosophical problems arise, and most importantly the question of truth.

The concept (metaphor) of reflection leads by its own logic to an idea of truth as mirroring or identity. Attention to the 'saying', on the other hand, shows that truth cannot be such insofar as the difference of the 'saying' stands out. Heidegger makes the point that truth cannot be correspondence because the 'statement' and the 'thing' it is about are dissimilar and cannot be compared.<sup>4</sup> His point, which is really a very obvious one, would be less obvious if 'reflections' and not 'statements' were under discussion.

Both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger characterize the transition from seeing to saying with reference to painting. The philosopher and the painter both 'say' what they 'see'. In the case of painting, no one would claim that the 'saying', the transubstantiation of vision onto canvas, is unimportant. To see what the painter sees, it would be

of little use to visit the place where he had set up his easel. The painting, even a 'representational' painting, does not merely stand in for some scene which could be presented to us without it. Strictly speaking, it is not possible to visit the scene of a painting except by visiting the painting. In the case of philosophy, however, the illusion prevails that the 'saying' is merely incidental, that elsewhere there is an original that this 'saying' merely stands in for, as if one could dispense with the saying and go directly to the original to achieve coincidence with what the philosopher sees. Descartes 'paints us a picture' of the cogito, but we are to believe that the picture he paints is itself unimportant. On the other side of his painting there is an original of which his painting is merely itself a faint copy. The concept of reflection only serves to reinforce and perpetuate this illusion.

The question I wish to raise here is whether, given the undesirable semantic chain in which it is linked, the concept of reflection is able to meet the demands of radical reflection, the demand that the philosopher take into consideration his own mediation in the disclosure of the world. The concept of expression is a more felicitous choice to express (reflect?) the duality of rootedness and creativity that is so important for Merleau-Ponty. Consider, for example, what is gained (and lost) in the difference between speaking about 'Cartesian expression' instead of 'Cartesian reflection'. The former draws our attention to the embodiment or corporeality of Descartes' thought. At this level it is possible to speak about Descartes' style, the originality of his gestures, the situatedness of

his thought in the institution of the French language and culture of that time, and so on. The latter obscures the fact that Descartes has actually produced something and that this something, the Cartesian corpus, is enmeshed in a system of institutions that exceed whatever might have been present to Descartes while he was 'reflecting'. It is this created something, the Cartesian corpus, that the critical efforts of generation upon generation have been directed toward, and not some disembodied reflection.

The itinerary of the concept of reflection is significant in this regard. It figures most prominently in the discussion of perception in the early chapters of the Phenomenology. From the chapter on expression and language onwards, however, the concept of expression becomes ascendent. To a certain extent, an undeclared competition develops between the two concepts insofar as they are used in similar contexts and are charged with similar functions. It is the concept of expression, however, that develops into the leading role and that is linked to what goes forward in his philosophy. It has central importance in the discussion of language, for example. Reflection is not mentioned in this context at all. Subsequent to the Phenomenology, the concept of reflection becomes less and less important (and more and more problematic) in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

Two reasons for this devaluation of the concept of reflection can already be found in the Phenomenology. In the first place, because the concept of reflection is so thoroughly sedimented in the philosophical tradition that Merleau-Ponty calls into question, it

operates against and in spite of his critical effort. Reflection is semantically linked in a chain of problematic metaphysical concepts such as 'correspondence' and 'mirroring' and therefore is implicated in the very framework that Merleau-Ponty undertakes to dismantle. Furthermore, in virtue of its links to concepts such as 'interiority', it conjures up the phantom of a private and silent thought on the hither side of language. The concept of reflection entangles Merleau-Ponty in a web of ambiguities and even contradictions that could otherwise have been avoided.

In the second place, the devaluation of the concept of reflection can be attributed to its inferior value relative to the concept of expression, which ascends in importance and frequency of use in his philosophy as the concept of reflection declines.<sup>5</sup> In the later chapters of the Phenomenology and in subsequent works Merleau-Ponty uses 'expression' in contexts in which the 'reflection' had previously born the brunt of the analysis. To a certain extent, the concept of expression supplants the concept of reflection.<sup>6</sup> This is possible because there are paradigmatic similarities between the two concepts. The opposition between the expressed and the unexpressed or pre-expressed, for example, approximately 'translates' the opposition between reflection and the unreflected. Such a translation enables Merleau-Ponty to avoid some of the difficulties that arise from the undesirable semantic chains in which the concept of reflection is linked. Just as something is always lost in translation, however, so too something is gained. The concept of expression is linked in a rich semantic chain and has a wide range of application.

It thus enables Merleau-Ponty to speak about diverse subject matters such as literature, history, and philosophy in similar terms, and thus to bring out important affinities between them, which I shall explore in the rest of this chapter.

The interpretation I offer here is supported by some retrospective remarks Merleau-Ponty makes on his first two books in a prospectus of his work written several years after the Phenomenology. He writes: "The study of perception could only teach us a 'bad ambiguity', a mixture of finitude and infinitude, of interiority and exteriority. But there is a 'good ambiguity' in the phenomenon of expression, a spontaneity which accomplishes what appeared to be impossible when we observed only the separate elements...."(PriP, 11) This "spontaneity", which in the Phenomenology he described in terms of the passage from the unreflected to the reflected, is subsequently described more and more as the passage from silence to language and expression.<sup>7</sup> Thus he says that it is his concern to describe "the experienced moment...when an existence becomes aware of itself, grasps itself, and expresses its own meaning." (PriP, 11) In a sense, it is this same "moment" that Merleau-Ponty had attempted to describe in terms of reflection in the Phenomenology.

In this same prospectus, Merleau-Ponty also announces his intention to work out a "theory of truth" conjointly with a "theory of intersubjectivity". (PriP, 7) The link between truth and intersubjectivity, between knowledge and communication, is important here. After the Phenomenology, and concurrent with a growing preoccupation with language, Merleau-Ponty becomes more and more

concerned with the public moment of knowledge and with the continuity between our knowledge and our incarnation, thus carrying out the intention earlier announced in his prospectus. He writes:

It seems to me that knowledge and the communication with others which it presupposes not only are original formations with respect to the perceptual life but also they preserve and continue our perceptual life even while transforming it. Knowledge and communication sublimate rather than suppress our incarnation, and the characteristic operation of the mind is the movement by which we recapture our corporeal existence and use it to symbolize instead of merely to coexist. (PriP, 7)

To the end of articulating the "characteristic operation of the mind" described above, the concept of reflection would be inadequate for two essential reasons. In the first place, reflection suggests the idea of a solitary thinker alone with himself in silent monologue, whereas Merleau-Ponty sees knowledge as presupposing communication. In the second place, the metaphor of reflection leads to a conception of the mind as a mirror, and the duality of 'preserving' and yet 'transforming' of which he speaks cannot be captured in such a model. The concept of expression, on the other hand, will enable Merleau-Ponty to talk about the public moment of knowledge, the moment when one enters the public space of language and attempts to say what one sees. It is also a more felicitous choice to capture the duality of preservation and transformation, which is the basis of Merleau-Ponty's later characterization of philosophical expression as 'creative adequation'. In the following sections of this chapter, I shall elucidate the concept of expression in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy with reference to his writings on literature, history, and philosophy.



## 2. The Prose of a Life

Merleau-Ponty elaborates on the phenomenon of expression, "the characteristic operation of mind...by which we recapture our corporeal existence and use it to symbolize instead of merely to coexist," with reference to its locus in the body. The phenomenon of expression reveals a dialectical relation between body and mind, reveals the mind not as the other of the body but as the signifying body. In this connection Merleau-Ponty speaks of a "metamorphosis" that "lies in the double function of our body." He writes: "Through its 'sensory fields' and its whole organization the body is, so to speak, predestined to model itself on the natural aspects of the world. But as an active body capable of gestures, of expression, and finally of language, it turns back upon the world to signify it." (PriP, 7)

The body is at once both in the world ('of' the world as the later Merleau-Ponty was fond of saying) and at the same time the locus of the process of signification by means of which the world is brought to expression. Merleau-Ponty describes this metamorphosis in which the body ceases to be something suffered and becomes a power of signification as a passage from the "order of events" to the "order of expression". He writes: "When one goes from the order of events to the order of expression, one changes levels but does not change the world. The *same* circumstances to which we first submitted now become a signifying system." (PrW, 75)

The duality described here echoes the duality that appears in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of habit. He says that "our body comprises as

it were two distinct layers, that of the habit-body and that of the body at this moment." (PhP, 82) On the one side, the body exhibits a certain passivity in virtue of which it has affinities with other kinds of bodies in the world. Insofar as it has a sedimented history and is incorporated in a situation, the body is subject to a kind of inertia. One's body is geared into habits and cycles of behavior and thus bears the weight of the 'already acquired'. In the absence of any effort (and sometimes despite such effort) the body comports itself according to anonymous cycles of behavior and prepersonal rhythms.

Such passivity, however, does not license us to reduce the body to the status of an object. In addition to being a repository of old habits, the body is also a power of transcendence with respect to what is already traced out or acquired. The body exhibits a remarkable spontaneity in its ability to reintegrate old powers and adapt itself to new situations, for example. Although someone who becomes blind loses a wide range of bodily possibilities, he can, with some effort, learn to transfer the 'habit' of his eyes to the tip of his cane. Similarly the amputee, transferring lost habits to other limbs, learns to reconfigure his old world to accommodate his modified body. As a power of spontaneity, the body does not merely suffer its 'accidents' but gives them meaning by integrating them into a future in which they will be redeemed.\*

A similar dialectic appears at the level of language. On one side, language is a repository of sedimented meanings, dead metaphors, clichés, stock phrases, and so on. As with the prepersonal passivity of our habits, it is always possible to let ourselves be carried by

the inertia of what has already been said, to allow ourselves to repeat old cycles of speech. To yield to this inertia is to float in an impersonal third person existence and to speak as if according to pre-written scripts. Speech of this sort is what Merleau-Ponty calls 'constituted' or 'secondary speech'.<sup>3</sup> This term comprehends what Heidegger analyses under the heading of 'inauthenticity' and 'idle chatter'.<sup>10</sup> On the other side, however, language is a fluid resource from which we draw in order to say something new. Like "the lover revealing his feelings...or the writer and philosopher who reawaken primordial experience anterior to all traditions," we can turn our effort of expression back upon the constituted or sedimented meanings available to us and reconfigure them so as to express something that has not been said before. (PhP, 179) Merleau-Ponty calls this 'constituting speech' because in such speech new meanings are created or 'constituted'. Metaphor is a prime example of constituting speech.

The dialectic of constituted and constituting speech is of paramount importance for Merleau-Ponty and, as we shall see, comes into play in several of his analyses. Here we want to bring it to bear on his discussion of the emergence of 'personal' from 'prepersonal' or 'anonymous' existence. The duality here is as follows: On the one side, personal life, the understanding of ourselves that we have laboured to achieve, has reference back to and is founded upon an anonymous or already constituted life. On the other side, however, anonymous life is not something fully formed of which personal existence would be a mere mirror image initiating or originating nothing. In expressing ourselves, in gathering together the diverse

moments of our lives so as to reveal their significance, we are indeed bound to something that has preceded, but this 'something' is transformed in a significant way in the process of expression.

When one questions one's existence, one finds that one is 'already there', just as the world is 'already there' at the outset of all phenomenological inquiry. This anonymous life, this prepersonal situation, serves as a kind of ground for our self-understanding. There is already something there to be understood, and it is this something that we aim to express (or that expresses itself in us). "Personal existence," Merleau-Ponty says, "must be the resumption of a prepersonal tradition." (PhP, 254) This prepersonal tradition, this corporeal history, is given to us as being neither completely meaningless nor completely meaningful to begin with. Like the existence of the world, one's prepersonal tradition is not transparently laid out like an object before a reflective gaze. It has a depth and ambiguity that solicits our expression but at the same time exceeds it or evades our grasp. "Ambiguity is of the essence of human existence," Merleau-Ponty says. (PhP, 169)

Our prepersonal situation being essentially ambiguous and indeterminate, expression is something more than passively reading off a silent meaning already fully formed in our lives. Merleau-Ponty gives the name "transcendence to this act in which existence takes up, to its own account, and transforms such a situation." (PhP, 169) Because our life is not transparent to begin with, expression is a creative act. To give expression to one's existence is to make what had been indeterminate determinate, to give meaning to something that

to begin with is not simply meaningless but does indeed have the intimation or promise of meaning. We transcend ourselves insofar as in expression we do not simply reproduce a meaning already fully formed in our lives but rather create determinate meaning by endowing what we have lived through with significance. In turning back upon our indeterminate life it is not so much a question of coinciding with ourselves as it is of self-transformation. In the act of expressing ourselves we teach ourselves who we are. Madison puts it nicely:

The work of expression addresses itself to our actual existence whose meaning it wants to grasp, but this immediate meaning of our being in the world manifests itself as a meaning only by and in the act of expression. We become conscious of our existence only by expressing it; before expression the meaning of existence is confused and concealed in the many everyday experiences which have not yet been thematized.<sup>11</sup>

Merleau-Ponty illustrates this duality with the example of someone coming to the realization that he is in love. Such a realization is certainly not a creative fiat. Before this realization there was perhaps "an impulse carrying me toward someone," an elation in the presence of the beloved, accelerated heart-beat, and so on. It is such lived-through experiences that inspire my effort of expression, that call for it as for a resolution. Indeed, when I conclude "I am in love", it seems that I have been in love from the very beginning, and that my present realization merely baptizes something I knew even before I realized that I knew it. When I write a letter to my beloved in which I reveal my feelings, it seems that these feelings, which I now express as 'signs' of my love, were always such. For Merleau-Ponty, this is a "retrospective illusion", however, in which I read back into my past "everything that I am later to learn

concerning myself." (PhP, 381) The love that I now know is indeed supported by a kind of anonymous love, but this anonymous love was not explicit from the beginning. "It was lived, not known, from start to finish," he says. (PhP, 381) I reconfigure my past, give new meaning to it, in light of my present understanding of myself as someone who is in love. The lover's speech is thus not a simple report of fully formed feelings that are what they are on the other side of his speech. To be sure, there is indeed 'something' that moves him to write, but this 'something' is at first vague and indeterminate. It becomes transformed in his speech. The lover discovers himself in his speech and teaches himself his feelings.

These remarks can be extended to the meaning of a life in general. In a sense, the meaning of my past is always both behind me and ahead of me in the future. "The interpretation which I now give of it is bound up with my confidence in psycholanalysis. Tomorrow, with more experience and insight, I shall possibly understand it differently, and consequently reconstruct my past in a different way. In any case, I shall go on to interpret my present interpretations in their turn...." (PhP, 346) In this process of trying to catch up with ourselves, as it were, there can be no arriving at a final interpretation that would put a stop to the movement of expression. There can be no ultimate interpretation that would sum up my past once and for all. Our existence is ambiguous and so lends itself to unending interpretation. "All life is undeniably ambiguous," Merleau-Ponty says, "and there is never any way to know the true

meaning of what we do." (SN, 34) Following Freud, he says that the meaning of our existence is "over-determined". (SN, 36)

What is lived always exceeds what I can grasp in my present effort to understand. It is only a 'lazy reason' that anchors itself in a given self-understanding and that allows its interpretation to settle into a dogma, a final interpretation. There is always a distance and a difference between who I am, my prepersonal tradition, and who I understand myself to be. Merleau-Ponty writes: "since the lived is thus never entirely comprehensible, what I understand never quite tallies with my present living experience, in short, I am never quite at one with myself. Such is the lot of a being who is born, that is, who once and for all has been given to himself as something to be understood." (PhP, 347) The lived and the known, the unexpressed and the expressed, the anonymous and the personal, are thus different and there can be no question of coincidence between them. It is this difference, if we are alive to it, that drives the dialectic of expression, that leads us continually to break up and go beyond already constituted interpretations and to seek ever new ways of understanding and expressing who we are.

If Husserl is Merleau-Ponty's guide in understanding the phenomenon of reflection, it is Proust who is his guide in understanding the phenomenon of expression.<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty says of Proust that "no one has better expressed the vicious circle or prodigy of speech, that to speak or to write is truly to *translate* an experience which, without the word that it inspires, would not become a text." (TFL, 26) He quotes from Proust in order to elaborate on

this: "The book of unknown signs within me (signs in relief it seemed to me, for my attention, as it explored my unconscious in its search, struck against them, circled round them like a diver sounding) no one could help me read by any rule, for its reading consists in an act of creation in which no one can take our place and in which no one can collaborate." Proust describes his effort of expression as a kind of "reading". Before he takes up his pen to write, there is already something there to be understood, something to which he seeks to be faithful. There is something that his effort of expression "struck against" and "circled round...like a diver sounding". This 'something', however, is at the outset indeterminate, a "book of unknown signs" and not quite a text, the promise of meaning and not meaning fully formed and only waiting to be reflected in a mirror. As such, Proust's prepersonal life requires (and indeed demands) interpretation. The act of reading these "unknown signs" is the act of integrating them into a coherent story in light of which they will be as it were redeemed. In being expressed these "unknown signs" retrospectively receive meaning that strictly speaking they did not have when they were merely lived through.

In the phenomenon of expression at work in art and literature, Merleau-Ponty finds an alternative to the model of truth as correspondence or mirroring that has so much dominated philosophy. On the mirror model creativity could only be a source of falsity and error. Enthralled by this model, philosophy has typically repressed its own 'saying', the creativity embodied in its own linguisticity and textuality. Art teaches a notion of truth that includes and does



not repress such creativity. There is a good lesson for philosophy in this. Merleau-Ponty writes:

From now on the tasks of literature and philosophy can no longer be separated. When one is concerned with giving voice to the experience of the world and showing how consciousness escapes into the world, one can no longer credit oneself with attaining a perfect transparency of expression. Philosophical expression assumes the same ambiguities as literary expression, if the world is such that it cannot be expressed except in "stories".... (SN, 28)

Literature teaches the originality of expression, the non-transparency of expression, but non-transparency is not here tantamount to distortion or falsification. Art accomplishes the reconciliation of creativity and faithfulness that Merleau-Ponty, from the very beginning, had sought for philosophy.

For Proust, the problem of truth could be described as follows: how can one be true to one's past given that the past is irretrievably past and that there is a distance and a difference between the past that was lived through and the past now remembered or expressed? In this matter, truth cannot be a matter of simply mirroring what is already there. Proust was well aware that he could never mirror or coincide with 'what really happened'. If the task of his art were literally to return to the immediate and to coincide with it, his project would have been an impossible one. What happened is past and his present memory of his past is situated in a new point of view that is different from that in which he originally lived it. In remembering his past he retrospectively confers meaning upon it that was not explicit in the lived through episodes. Indeed the various moments of his life only become 'episodes' in light of his present expression of

them in which they are integrated with other 'episodes' in the unity of a story.<sup>13</sup>

From this point of view his present expression is a creation, the birth of a meaning that had previously been held captive in his existence. This is not a matter of creative fiat, however, of making the story up from nothing. Proust's past, although not transparently present to him, nevertheless has a physiognomy that he attempts to be faithful to in his expression. As Madison puts it: "The feeling which dominates Proust's work is the feeling for the expressibility of life. In his infancy Proust often had the impression that things held in themselves an insurpassable wealth, an inexhaustible beauty, and that they called out to him to enter into them and to deliver up the secrets they contained."<sup>14</sup> In narrating his life, he is at the same time "reading" a meaning that is secretly contained in events. He transforms an ambiguous and indeterminate past into a rendition that remains faithful to but does not literally reproduce or coincide with the past. He delivers up its secrets.

Merleau-Ponty says that art cannot achieve its goal of expressing our contact with the world "by *resembling* things or the world." (PrW, 85) He quotes Sartre, who says that "in art, one must lie to tell the truth." Merleau-Ponty articulates this paradox with reference to a recorded conversation. If truth were simply a matter of literal reproduction, of 'telling it like it is', an exact recording of a conversation would be the most faithful or truthful rendering of it possible. Merleau-Ponty points out, however, that "the exact recording of a conversation which had seemed brilliant later gives the

impression of indigence." (Ibid.) Something important gets left out in the translation. A recorded conversation, he says, "is no longer what is when we were living it....The conversation no longer exists. It does not ramify in all directions--it is, flattened out in the single dimension of sound." (Ibid.) In a sense, to tell the literal truth is to lie.

The artist attempts to be faithful to our lived experience, but he does not accept literal reproduction or coincidence as the measure of faithfulness. "In order to satisfy us as it does, the work of art--which also usually addresses only one of our senses and in any case never has the kind of presence that belongs to lived experience--must have the capacity for more than a frozen existence. It must have the capacity for a sublimated existence, one more true than truth itself." (Ibid., 65-6) Relative to the standard of truth as literal reproduction or as coincidence with lived experience, art lies, and must lie insofar as it does not and cannot literally reproduce lived experience. Art is nevertheless "more true than truth itself" in that it captures the 'truth' of experience, its meaning. Art expresses not the singular and irreducibly unique event but rather something essential about the event, about my life, about human relationships, and so on.

Thus literature, and Proust par excellence, achieves a synthesis of individuality and universality, subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Proust's objective is not simply to tell us 'what happened'. If his objective were simply to give a record of his experiences his book would be a failure, as Proust knew very well,

since the experiences of which he speaks are irretrievably past. Proust does not try to emulate a camera or a tape recorder. He accents, highlights, dramatizes, and in so doing gives a universal significance to his experience. His effort is directed toward expressing the essential, toward expressing a meaning that goes beyond or transcends his irreducibly unique life, a meaning in which others who have lived through different experiences can nevertheless recognize themselves. The life that is expressed in In Remembrance of Things Past is at once both individual and universal. Merleau-Ponty writes:

What has been called Proust's Platonism is an attempt at an integral expression of the perceived or lived world. For this reason, the writer's work is a work of language rather than of 'thought'. His task is to produce a system of signs whose internal articulation reproduces the contours of experience; the reliefs and sweeping lines of these contours in turn generate a syntax in depth, a mode of composition and recital which breaks the mold of the world and everyday language and refashions it. (TFL, 25)

Such speech that "breaks the mold of the world and everyday language and refashions it" is what Merleau-Ponty calls constituting speech. Proust does not simply repeat old clichés for understanding our lives. He gives us a new organ for exploring our lives, a new 'signifying instrument' with which to probe our experience. Familiar experiences become strangely unfamiliar in his writing. He awakens us to marvels and mysteries that are concealed in routine living and opens fields of experience for fresh explorations. Reading Proust one has the feeling of putting one's finger on something that had been previously vague or unclear.

Such constituting speech is what Merleau-Ponty elsewhere calls "great prose". "Great prose," he says, "is the art of capturing a meaning which until then had never been objectified and of rendering it accessible to everyone who speaks the same language. When a writer is no longer capable of communicating, he has outlived his time." (PriP, 9) Great prose is thus prose that teaches us something new, that refashions the clichéd language by which we routinely understand ourselves so as to disclose something about the world that had previously been obscure or hidden. Merleau-Ponty opposes this to "prosaic writing", which "on the other hand, limits itself to using, through accepted signs, the meanings already accepted in a given culture." (PriP, 9) This distinction between constituted and constituting speech, between "great prose" and "prosaic writing", I shall argue, is the key to understanding Merleau-Ponty's views on history and on philosophy.

### 3. The Prose of the World

Merleau-Ponty presents his view of history and of social life in general in the framework of a return. "We must return to the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification," he says. (PhP, 362) Before we begin to theorize about or to objectify history, we are already in contact with it in virtue of being in a situation that extends beyond the confines of whatever could be called simply 'present'. We are 'of' history. Merleau-Ponty advocates that we

return to and thematize this primitive contact in order to ground and vitalize our thinking about history.

Marx figures very prominently in Merleau-Ponty's writings on philosophy of history. He believes that Marx does not, as is popularly thought, reduce history to economic determinants. Historical materialism does indeed grant paramount significance to economic factors, but it "consists just as much in making economics historical as in making history economic." (PhP, 171n.) What Merleau-Ponty values in historical materialism is the attempt to characterize social and historical phenomena, class for example, by taking into consideration and integrating both economic factors and the terms in which the historical persons involved understand themselves. Although he was always interrogating his own relationship to Marxism (and indeed came to have serious misgivings about his earlier reading of Marx), the view of history that he ascribes (rightly or wrongly) to Marx remains valid throughout his writings.

There are "two ways of overlooking the phenomena" that constitute our historical existence, according to Merleau-Ponty, one 'empiricist' and the other 'idealist'.<sup>15</sup> On the empiricist view, everything that happens at the level of self-awareness is understood as a mere effect of impersonal third person forces.<sup>16</sup> Self-awareness is merely derivative and should be bypassed altogether in a truly scientific analysis of historical phenomena. The 'real' historical phenomena are 'objective' and in their effectiveness owe nothing to how they are 'represented' in a given culture. The attempt is made to "derive class consciousness from the objective conditions of the

proletariat," for example. (PhP, 443) History is reduced to a series of 'objective facts' acting as causes and self-awareness is a mere reflex of 'objective processes'. At the opposite extreme, idealism believes that decisions and volitions are the driving force of history. It "reduces the proletarian condition to the awareness of it, which the proletarian arrives at", for example. (PhP, 443) From this standpoint "history itself has no significance, but only that conferred upon it by our will." (PhP, 443) It is only what people think and believe about their historical situation that is significant.

According to Merleau-Ponty, neither of these two views does justice to historical phenomena, to class consciousness, for example: "The former traces class consciousness to the class defined in terms of objective characteristics, the latter on the other hand reduces 'being a workman' to the consciousness of being one. In each case we are in the realm of abstraction, because we remain torn between the *in itself* and the *for itself*."<sup>17</sup> (PhP, 443) History is either a succession of 'objective facts' owing nothing to our merely derivative 'subjective interpretations' or it is reduced to the subjective drama of self-awareness, and it becomes impossible to understand how people can ever be deceived about their situation. Merleau-Ponty, carrying forward the philosophy of history he finds in Marx, attempts to situate and understand historical phenomena in a space between these two poles.

The empiricist view alone is insufficient. History cannot be *understood* as a mere succession of objective facts. The 'facts' enter

into the historical process and become effective only insofar as they have meaning or value at the level of how people understand their situation. A revolution, for example, does not emerge from the 'facts' alone. Whether or not a situation in which the 'objective conditions' are appropriate will actually issue in a revolution "depends upon how opposing forces think of one another." (PhP, 172n.) The economic 'facts', to be historically effective, must be integrated into something of a narrative with 'good guys' and 'bad guys' and with an envisaged triumph of 'good' over 'evil'. It is not enough that the workers are poor and that their children go to bed hungry. Perhaps they were poor and hungry long before the word of 'a revolution' sounded in their lives. They must understand their poverty in light of the 'oppression' of the factory owners, who are villified in popular speeches by 'agitators'. Merleau-Ponty says that the "economic factors are effective only to the extent that they are taken up and lived by a human subject, wrapped up, that is, in ideological shreds....Neither the conservative nor the proletarian is conscious of being engaged in merely an economic struggle, and they always bring a human significance to their action." (PhP, 172)

Before the agitators and others teach and spread the revolutionary word, the workers do not understand themselves as 'proletarian', and the fact that they occupy such and such a place in the economy is not sufficient to constitute them as such. "It is never the case that my objective position in the production process is sufficient to awaken class consciousness," Merleau-Ponty says. (PhP, 443) The factory worker is not from the beginning the proletarian that



he will come to know himself to be. He becomes such only when he takes up his *de facto* condition and integrates it in a certain historical narrative. Merleau-Ponty points out that while Marx did indeed provide "an objective definition of class in terms of the effective position of individuals in the production cycle," Marx also says "that class cannot become a decisive historical and revolutionary factor unless individuals become aware of it, adding that this awareness itself has social motives, and so on." (SN, 80)

Although satisfying certain 'objective conditions' is not enough for someone to be a member of a class that becomes "a decisive historical and revolutionary factor," such membership is not something achieved by an unsituated choice. If empiricism misses the mark because it bypasses the dimension of meaning, idealism misses the mark because it reduces meaning to the consciousness that historical agents have of it. Against both empiricism and idealism, Merleau-Ponty insists on the importance of a prepersonal situation that is lived through anterior to all decision and that "motivates" (but does not *cause*) one's coming to awareness of oneself as a member of a class. Idealism leaves this pre-expressed life (which is still something different from the 'objective conditions' empiricism posits as being significant) out of account. This is a dimension of historical existence that is neither objective in the empiricist sense nor subjective in the idealist sense, a concrete dimension of experienced meaning in virtue of which people can be bound in a community without explicitly knowing themselves as such. "Despite cultural, moral, occupational and ideological differences," Merleau-Ponty writes, "the

Russian peasants of 1917 joined the workers of Petrograd and Moscow in the struggle, because they felt that they shared the same fate; class was experienced in concrete terms before becoming the object of a deliberate volition." (PhP, 382)

The phenomenon of revolution cannot be understood if the dimension of meaning and drama in light of which the actors understand themselves and each other is bypassed, but this meaning and drama unfolds in the space of intersubjective life and exceeds what could ever be 'present' in the awareness of those involved. Merleau-Ponty writes: "the slogans of the alleged agitators are immediately understood, as if by some pre-established harmony, and meet with concurrence on all sides, because they crystallize what is latent in the life of all productive workers." (PhP, 445) What is "latent" is neither of the order of objective conditions totally independent of one's experience nor of transparent meaning totally explicit in self-awareness. It is rather embodied in the "preconscious relationships" lived through in the day-to-day life of those involved. Merleau-Ponty writes: "What makes me a proletarian is not the economic system or society considered as systems of impersonal forces, but these institutions as I carry them within me and experience them; nor is it an intellectual operation devoid of motive, but my way of being in the world within this institutional framework." (PhP, 443)

Both empiricism and idealism miss this dimension of "being in the world" and therefore are blind to the significance of becoming or transformation in history. A revolution is neither the inexorable result of objective causes nor the issue of deliberate choices. It is

born rather when objective conditions, precisely as they are experienced and suffered in the day-to-day lives of those involved as "preconscious relationships", are transformed in being brought to awareness and expressed in a revolutionary idiom. "A revolutionary situation or one of national danger," Merleau-Ponty says, "transforms those preconscious relationships with class and nation, hitherto merely lived through, into the definite taking of a stand; the tacit commitment becomes explicit." (PhP, 363) This "transformation" is of paramount importance in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of history, for it is in virtue of this transformation that historical development is neither driven by fate nor creative fiat.

On Merleau-Ponty's view, history is indeed something more than a succession of blind accidents and has an immanent meaning, a kind of physiognomy that can be 'read' to understand the shape of things to come.<sup>18</sup> There are certain 'signs' pointing in the direction of revolution such as rising prices, defeat in an unpopular foreign war, callous remarks from the authorities concerning a food shortage, and so on. These 'signs', however, must be interpreted. They become historically effective only when they are integrated into a 'reading' that confers revolutionary significance upon them. Such a reading, like Proust's reading of the "book of unknown signs", is (or ought to be if it is to convince) at once both faithful and creative with respect to something antecedent. History is transformed in being 'told'. The 'signs' become 'signs' pointing to a revolution only after they have been interpreted from a revolutionary point of view. Although the agitators would no doubt repress this fact, there is a

creativity in the 'stories' they tell in order to incite the workers.<sup>19</sup> There is an artfulness in the slogans they offer to help the workers crystallize their experience, a repressed metaphors of 'chains' and 'yokes' and 'opium'. A 'literary history' informs the stories by which they implot the secret machinations of the factory owners and the interplay between the types of characters involved.

Once the workers learn to interpret their situation in revolutionary terms, the meaning of the factory where they work, their work itself, their pay, their poverty, and so on, become transformed. This transformation is not a creative fiat but the bringing to expression of meaning held captive in their unexpressed lives. The creativity of the telling is constrained or bound by a kind of anonymous and even ambiguous living that can be brought to expression in more than one way, but which is nevertheless determinate enough that not just any expression will succeed in capturing it. The agitators must tell a convincing story, a story that enables the workers to make sense of the 'objective conditions' of their poverty not in the abstract terms of economics but as they are lived through and suffered. This rhetoric can either capture or fail to capture the imagination of the workers depending on whether or not it succeeds in giving meaning to their *de facto* condition. To succeed, it must give expression to something that the workers have already lived in their day-to-day lives, albeit without having before understood its meaning in this way.

Indeed, once the worker has learned to situate his life in the narrative codes of revolutionary rhetoric, the story may become so

convincing that he believes that he has always been 'oppressed' and has always been a 'proletariat'. Once he has learned to read the 'signs', it seems that they always had the meaning that they now have in his reading of them. For Merleau-Ponty, this is the effect of a retrospective illusion. The proletarian reads back into his past the present knowledge of it which he has lately acquired. He represses the creativity of the revolutionary story, which he now thinks is not a 'story' at all but simply the way things are and have always been. He overlooks the radical transformation that occurred when he learned to interpret his situation in revolutionary terms.

Merleau-Ponty sums up Marx's philosophy of history in saying that it is an "analysis of the past and present which enables us to perceive in outline a logic in the course of things which does not so much guide it from the outside as emanate from within it, and which will be achieved only if men understand their experience and will to change it." (IPP, 51) History is not so indeterminate or so vague that one cannot "outline a logic of things", but this "logic" is to begin with indeterminate enough that it requires interpretation. Before this interpretation, there is indeed something to be expressed, a style of being in the world that is shared by people living under similar conditions, and interpretation is not therefore a matter of creative fiat. This 'something' is to begin with indeterminate, however, and is transformed in being expressed. The expression, the rhetoric of the agitators, for example, does not mirror a fully formed meaning on the other side of expression but rather renders explicit meaning that is only vaguely promised or intimated in the style of history lived. The

"logic" is not a fate guiding history from without, because it becomes effective only in being expressed. The skeletal "outline" becomes a vital force only insofar as it is fleshed out in convincing stories.

Here one can see the convergence, with Hegel as a common point on the horizon, between historical materialism (as Merleau-Ponty creatively interprets it) and Husserlian phenomenology (as he creatively interprets it). For both Husserl and Hegel, phenomenology is "a logic of content". Merleau-Ponty explains this Hegelian definition of phenomenology as follows:

Instead of a logical organization of the facts coming from a form superimposed upon them, the very content of these facts is supposed to order itself spontaneously in a way that is thinkable. A phenomenology, therefore, has a double purpose. It will gather together all the concrete experiences of man which are found in history—not only those of knowledge but also those of life and of civilization. But at the same time it must discover in this unrolling of facts a spontaneous order, a meaning, an intrinsic truth, an orientation of such a kind that the different events do not appear as a mere succession. (PriP, 52)

The word "discover" is misleading here, since it suggests that such meaning is already fully formed and interpretation is only the mirror image of what is already there. Rather, phenomenology operates in the ambiguous field of indeterminate meaning. It does not impose a meaning upon things from without (idealism), as if in the first all that is given is raw objective data (empiricism) in relation to which interpretation would be something external. Like Proust, rather, it brings to expression a meaning that is vaguely inscribed in historical existence.

Thus a phenomenological reading of history combines both creativity and faithfulness. One cannot claim that history expressed,

history gathered together and integrated in a story, is simply the mirror image of a meaning already there because, strictly speaking this meaning did not exist until it was expressed. The telling or the saying makes a difference. Merleau-Ponty writes: "If man is the being who is not content to coincide with himself like a thing but represents himself to himself, sees himself, imagines himself, and gives himself rigorous or fanciful symbols of himself, it is quite clear that in return every change in our representation of man translates a change in man himself." (S, 225) This is why in revolutionary situations there are preliminary battles fought in words to decide which of several interpretations will triumph. The creation of meaning, however, the generation of "symbols", is not a creative fiat insofar as it roots itself in a spontaneous life which it transforms by bringing to expression. History is something more than the succession of one event after another because, Merleau-Ponty says, "history is thinkable, comprehensible. It offers us an order, a sense to which I do not have to submit but which I can place in perspective. Husserl called this an 'intentional history'. Others have called it 'dialectic'". (PriP, 89)

In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of history, we hear the echo of his analysis of constituted and constituting speech. Before the revolutionary speaks, for example, the workers already have a 'constituted' understanding of their situation. From the agitator's point of view, this is an oppressive ideology that merely keeps them chained to their suffering. Poverty, for example, is the result of merely natural forces and something to be endured graciously in the

promise of a better life to come in another world. To incite the workers to take up the cause of revolution, the revolutionary must drive a wedge into this constituted understanding and make it questionable. He must give them new instruments, a new idiom, with which to understand their situation. "The revolutionary movement," Merleau-Ponty says, "like the artist, is an intention which itself creates its instruments and its means of expression."<sup>20</sup> (PhP, 445) Like the artist, the revolutionary teaches a new way of looking at things. Like the artist, in a sense he creates his own audience. "The painter or politician shapes others more often than he follows them. The *public* at who he aims is not given; it is a public to be elicited by his work." (PrW, 86)

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty compares the revolutionary who gives new meaning to the "preconscious relationships" of the workers not only to the artist but to the philosopher as well. The "act of the artist or the philosopher," he says, exhibits a freedom which "consists in appropriating a *de facto* situation by endowing it with a figurative meaning beyond its real one. Thus Marx, not content to *be* the son of a lawyer and student of philosophy, *conceives* his own situation as that of a 'lower middle class intellectual' in the new perspective of the class struggle....Thought is the life of human relationships as it understands and interprets itself." (PhP, 172-3n.) The dialectic of expression, the transformation of the lived-through into the expressed, is the connecting thread that ties together Merleau-Ponty's discussion of art, social life, and philosophy. "Whether we are concerned with my body, the natural world, the past, birth or death,"



he says, "the question is always how I can be open to phenomena which transcend me, and which nevertheless exist only to the extent that I take them up and live them...." (PhP, 363)

#### 4. The Prose of Philosophy

In order to appreciate the significance of expression in Merleau-Ponty's conception of philosophy, it is important to understand the relationship between constituted and constituting speech. This relationship works two ways. Each term can be defined in relation to the other. Constituting speech is speech that breaks the paths already constituted or traced out in language. It opens new paths and creates new passageways. Constituted speech is the system of familiar paths in relation to which constituting speech is a deviation. It is made up of the clichés, stock phrases, syntagms, and so on, that are available to us without any effort of expression. It is speech that resides comfortably within the parameters of what has already been said. Constituted speech is also the 'future history' of constituting speech. It is the fate that befalls it once it has become lexicalized and has settled into the status of a commonplace. This settling or sedimentation "happens by the sole fact" that originally pathbreaking expressions "have been used and have lost their 'expressiveness'...." (S, 87)

Thomas Kuhn's distinction between 'normal' and 'revolutionary' science in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions exhibits the same articulations as that between constituted and constituting speech.<sup>21</sup>

Normal science operates within the parameters of a body of established rules and definitions that demarcate 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' statements. Abnormal or revolutionary science deviates from these norms and in so doing acts as a catalyst for change in science, albeit at the price, at least initially, of being dismissed as heresy or nonsense. Extrapolating from Kuhn, one could say that instances of constituting speech are 'incommensurate' with respect to the dominant 'paradigms' of constituted speech. Such speech is different. It does not follow the familiar paths, and breaks the rules. For this reason, it risks being dismissed as illegitimate. In creating new meanings, however, constituting speech, if it 'catches on', also transforms the status quo and effectively fashions or creates an audience capable of understanding it.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as commentators and scholars do their work of 'paradigm articulation', constituting speech gradually becomes lexicalized and assimilated into the reserve of constituted speech, just as 'revolutionary' science, with the passage of time, becomes 'normal' science.<sup>23</sup>

Fashion furnishes an interesting example of this process. Several years ago, what is now called 'punk' came on the scene. At that time it violated the already established fashion codes. With respect to these constituted codes it was 'deviant' and 'abnormal'. No one knew what it meant or what to make of it, including those who subscribed to it. Despite the fact that it could not be made sense of by conceptualizing it under existing codes, it was not therefore nonsense. In its semantic impertinence it nevertheless exhibited a certain coherence. Although its bizarre gestures were incommensurate

with the lexicalized gestures of already constituted fashion, indeed were from this point of view a scandal, they connected up with each other in a virtual style. The razor blades, the torn clothing, the military boots, and so on, complemented each other and cohered in a strange logic. Cultural observers had the feeling that something was being 'said', but were initially at a loss to say precisely what. As journalists and sociologists worked to decide its meaning, a code was constituted through the mediation of which its various signs or gestures could be assigned meanings. Gradually, the innovations came to be assimilated into mainstream fashion, which began to incorporate, albeit with the rough edges smoothed over, the impertinent gestures of punk.

Indeed this dialectic of innovation and assimilation, of the constituting and the constituted, obtains in a wide variety of cultural phenomena. The changing styles in music, painting, literature, politics, and even science, follow a like course from impertinence to cliché. The 'avante garde' loses its cutting edge and becomes a new 'school'. Revolutionary science becomes normal science. The rhetoric of the political revolutionary becomes a cliché, or even worse a dogma. Today's heresies often become tomorrow's self-evident truths and its pathbreaking metaphors are lexicalized and become commonplaces.

Heidegger has eloquently expressed the adventures of philosophy with respect to this dialectic. He writes:

Philosophy spreads out only indirectly, by devious paths that can never be laid out in advance, until at last, at some future date, it sinks to the level of a commonplace; but by then it

has long been forgotten as original philosophy. What philosophy essentially can and must do is this: a thinking that breaks the paths and opens the perspectives of the knowledge that sets the norms and hierarchies, of the knowledge in which and by which a people fulfills itself historically and culturally, the knowledge that kindles and necessitates all inquiries and thereby threatens all philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

On the one side, and most in accord with its telos, philosophy is a path-breaking thinking that does not exactly know where it is going. It is a questioning that breaks the chains of available answers, a wild desire that has travelled the well-worn paths and still not found a resting place. As such, path-breaking philosophy is a threat to philosophy that has settled into a stable paradigm. On the other side, however, as is the fate of all path-breaking thinking, once it has forged its path, from the standpoint of the 'end' it seems that its once "devious paths" were "laid out in advance". Trodden upon again and again by successive generations of scholars and commentators, the path loses its wildness. The path-breaking words of the originating philosopher gradually become sedimented and stabilized into the familiar and the commonplace.

Philosophy always risks becoming an 'institution' and in order to be radical must be ever vigilant against this possibility. What Husserl calls teleological-historical reflection is a vigilance of this sort. Such enquiry keeps open (or reopens) fundamental questions that have been buried in a history of answers and have lost their power to provoke. It retraces the steps that forged the paths and uncovers a hidden contingency at the beginning where the first steps were taken, a contingency that teaches that other paths are yet possible.

The philosopher, Husserl and Heidegger remind us, is always already on a path. He stands and speaks from somewhere. He is situated in an already constituted language. This language appears deceptively self-evident, however, and is effective in his philosophizing in hidden ways. The words that he uses bear the weight of a tradition that is not transparent to him, and to the extent that he is impervious to this history it seems to him that he is in total control and possession of his speech. Against the background of this illusion of self-evidence and control, Merleau-Ponty insists that "all words which have become mere signs for a univocal thought have been able to do so only because they have first of all functioned as originating words, and we can still remember with what richness they appeared to be endowed, and how they were like a landscape new to us, while we were engaged in 'acquiring' them, and while they still fulfilled the primordial function of expression." (PhP, 389)

"Originating words", words that do not simply confirm us in what we already know but express something new or teach us to see something old in a new way, lose their pathbreaking force as they become assimilated into the pool of disposable significations. They acquire univocal (or at least obvious) meanings. What is today a cliché routinely appropriated (God is dead, for example) was at one time a pathbreaking metaphor that provoked consternation and gave rise to thought. In the past one hundred years, however, Nietzsche has been lexicalized. Today every school boy 'knows' that God is dead and takes this for granted, but this was pathbreaking when Nietzsche said it (and may be yet for one who manages to think it with its full force).

It was not appropriated with the same ease as it apparently is today. Nietzsche called himself a 'posthumous writer' because he knew that he was entering unmapped territory and that time would be necessary to 'fashion' or 'educate' an audience capable of reading the signposts he left along the way.

In virtue of the process of normalization or sedimentation, constituted speech, and philosophy insofar as it has become an institution, has a history, albeit an obscured one. Merleau-Ponty says that "significances now acquired must necessarily have been new once." (PhP, 194) Constituted speech, however, is forgetful of its history, of what exceeds what it makes present. It occurs under the auspices of the familiar or average meaning of words. The words efface themselves (or seem to) insofar as they are immediately apprehended with self-evident meanings. This self-evidence, however, is deceiving. If we are questioned about the meaning of even the most ordinary words, it becomes apparent that there is really very little present to our mind when they are spoken. The illusion of self-evidence or of obviousness obtains to the extent that in constituted speech we are blinded to the fact that the meanings with which we have to do are not eternal but have come to be constituted. Some kind of unsettling, a fundamental question for example, or a teleological-historical reflection revealing the history sedimented or buried underneath our 'present', is needed to draw attention to the excess meaning of words beyond whatever is or could be present to mind and to break the spell of self-evidence.

Investigation into the 'corporeality' of words, such as we find in *etymology*, for example, has the effect of dispelling this illusion of obviousness.<sup>25</sup> Heidegger's archeological project could be understood in this light. He explores the subterranean life of certain familiar words and traces their roots to the rich soil of ancient Greece. He reopens the "question of Being" by making the word once again strange. There was a time when the meaning of Being, which we now take for granted, was a question and when men were provoked in thinking about Being. The question has been buried for us, however, for whom the meaning of Being is settled. Where once there were unsettling questions about Being, today we have only answers, or perhaps the illusion of having settled answers.

The distinction between constituted and constituting speech opens a fresh path to the famous phenomenological reduction and will help us to clarify its significance in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. He writes: "If we want to understand language in its original mode of signifying, we shall pretend never to have spoken. We must perform a reduction upon language, without which it would be hidden from our view...." (PrW, 48) Language is "hidden from our view", "promotes its own oblivion", he says elsewhere, because in constituted speech we look beyond what is 'said' to what is 'meant', because the 'meaning' of what is said seems obvious to us or even self-evident. Language effaces itself in the service of making such meaning present. Its "original mode of signifying" is concealed from us insofar as it has become an institution:

We live in a world where speech is an *institution*. For all these many commonplace utterances, we possess within ourselves ready-made meanings. They arouse in us only second order thoughts; these in turn are translated into other words which demand from us no real effort of expression and will demand from our hearers no effort of comprehension....The linguistic and intersubjective world no longer surprises us, we no longer distinguish it from the world itself, and it is within a world already spoken and speaking that we think. (PhP, 184)

Although he does not name it here, what Merleau-Ponty is describing in terms of constituted speech is the natural attitude.<sup>26</sup> One could say that constituted speech, language for which we already possess "ready-made meanings", is the 'natural attitude' in which we routinely speak.

In the natural attitude reality appears to us as being unquestionably and self-evidently 'there'. Just as language is an institution, having a sedimented and hidden history, so too reality is an institution. In the natural attitude, however, we are oblivious to this history. Reality gives itself as being already constituted, as being everywhere and always what it now appears to us to be. More precisely, it gives itself as if it were *not* constituted, as if it were 'natural'; as if we were present to the real without any mediation; as if the point of view from which we open onto the real effaced itself thus installing us in the midst of the things such as they would be if we were not there to disclose them. In the natural attitude we are so immersed in our point of view that we do not even realize that we have a point of view.

The reduction is motivated by the insight that what is taken to be 'self-evident' is self-evident *for* someone, that the real is not simply given without mediation but is constituted in light of or



relative to a point of view. The reduction brings this point of view, which is hidden from the natural attitude, into the foreground. It is a matter of achieving a certain distance from our point of view in order to realize that we are in fact situated in a point of view. Teleological-historical reflection, which discloses the effective history constitutive of our beliefs about reality, creates such distance. The real, which for the natural attitude is simply there, is shown to have a depth exceeding what is immediately present. Its atmosphere of self-evidence becomes questionable. What anthropologists and sociologists call "culture shock", the experience of another culture, functions in a similar way.<sup>27</sup> One looks at one's 'truths' in a different light when one realizes, as Pascal puts it, that "What is true on this side of the Pyrenees is false on the other side."<sup>28</sup> From such experiences one comes to realize that what one believed was simply 'natural' or 'given' is in fact constituted relative to a point of view. Prior to the disclosure of one's point of view, the world upon which one opens has the status of an absolute. Following such disclosure, it appears as something contingent.

The 'reduction' Merleau-Ponty describes with respect to constituted language follows along parallel lines. He writes:

We become aware of the contingent element in expression and communication, whether it be in the child learning to speak, or in the writer saying and thinking something for the first time, in short, in all who transform a certain kind of silence into speech. It is, however, quite clear that constituted speech, as it operates in daily life, assumes that the decisive step of expression has been taken. Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, as long as we do not describe the action that breaks this silence. (PhP, 184)

The return indicated here, the 'reduction' performed upon constituted speech, involves putting its apparent obviousness or self-evidence into question. It is a matter of realizing that it is indeed constituted speech, that it is situated in a history that exceeds what it makes present. This history takes us back to a path-breaking and creative saying at the concealed or forgotten origin of the obvious 'truths' of constituted language. To return to the "primordial silence" beneath the "chatter" of what has already been said is to divest things of their *de facto* meaning in order to see them as if for the first time in their startling strangeness. It is what Rilke means when he speaks of "starving things by not knowing them".<sup>29</sup>

The "action that breaks this silence", that feeds this starvation, is the act of expression. It is out of silence and starvation that the poet (and the originating philosopher) speaks. The world made strange, he attempts to express it as if he were now seeing it for the first time. The act of expression requires or presupposes the reduction because, insofar as we are mesmerized by the already constituted, we take for granted the meaning of the world, of our lives, of our history, and they do not appear questionable to us. Constituted speech conceals the expressibility of the world, its excess beyond what has already been said. It suppresses the desire that is in fact its own originating but forgotten ground. The return to silence puts out of play the chatter of the familiar and the commonplace and kindles the desire for an expression more complete than has yet been achieved. This is what Merleau-Ponty means when he writes: "We are invited to discern beneath thinking which basks in its

acquisitions, and offers merely a brief resting-place in the unending process of expression, another thought which is struggling to establish itself, and succeeds only by bending the resources of constituted language to some fresh usage." (PhP, 389)

This other thought "struggling to establish itself" is the originating word, the word that will crystallize an evasive and unnamed experience of the world not yet captured in what has already been said. In one sense, the originating word is created from nothing, insofar as what it seeks to express does not yet have a name in the lexicon of constituted language. With respect to what has already been said, it is nothing. This nothing, however, this silence, is not an empty zero point or an absolute zero. What Merleau-Ponty says about the impossibility of a complete reduction is relevant here. One can never literally return to a point before there was something said because it is impossible to erase the effects of one's point of view, the tradition that one has acquired. In this sense the originating word, expression, is not created from nothing. It is rather a "coherent deformation" with respect to constituted speech. It is a speaking that reorganizes the disposable significations and "puts them to fresh usage".<sup>30</sup> Merleau-Ponty says that "It is a new way of shaking up the apparatus of language or of narrative to make it yield goodness knows what--precisely because what is said then has never before been said." (PrW, 48)

This is an important point for Merleau-Ponty, who was fond of saying that speaking teaches the thinker his thought. In constituting or expressive speech, one does not first have a fully formed meaning

that one subsequently puts into words for the purpose of communication. The lover expressing his feelings, for example, experiences something that cannot be adequately captured in any of the available formulas or clichés and this is what kindles his desire to express. This 'something', however, is not to begin with determinate. At the outset he does not know how he feels in the same way that he will once he has crystallized these feelings in speech. Here it is a question of transformation. The meaning comes into being in the act of speaking. He speaks in order to teach himself his experience. Merleau-Ponty says that in expression the "significant intention is at the stage of coming into being. Here existence is polarized into a certain 'significance' which cannot be defined in terms of any natural object. It is somewhere at a point beyond being that it aims to catch up with itself again, and that is why it creates speech as an empirical support for its own not-being. Speech is the surplus of our existence over natural being." (PhP, 197)

Here there can be no question of speech simply mirroring something already existing. Rather, we speak to give expression to something that is as it were yet waiting to be said, something that is not captured in the already said. There is a surplus of our existence over the already said, an excess. "In speaking or writing, we do not refer to some *thing to say* which is before us, distinct from any speech. What we have to say is only the excess of what we live over what has already been said."<sup>31</sup> (PrW, 112) To be sure, there is at first something to be said, there is Proust's prepersonal life, the landscape that puts a question to Cézanne and calls him to his easel

for an answer, the "outline logio" that the revolutionary reads in a volatile state of affairs and that is concealed in the dominant ideologies. This unexpressed, this surplus of what is lived over what has been said, however, is not at first given as something fully formed. It is transformed, only properly comes into being, in being expressed.

Expression then is solicited from things insofar as they have become questionable. When the act of expression begins, at the moment of silence before creation, there is something to be expressed, and an available language in which to express it, and so expression is not a creation *ex nihilo*. This something to be expressed, however, is not something fully formed of which expression could be a mirror image. Merleau-Ponty captures the duality here in saying that the signifying intention, the unnamed desire in search of recognition, is to begin with a "determinate gap". He writes: "In me as well as in the listener who finds it in hearing me, the significative intention (even if it is subsequently to fructify in 'thoughts') is at the moment no more than a *determinate gap* to be filled by words--the excess of what I intend to say over what is being said or has already been said." (S, 89) Such a significative intention, however, presupposes that a gap has been opened in what has already been said, a space-awakening desire. The reduction, the return to silence, opens this space.

The preceding remarks help to express the meaning of philosophy for Merleau-Ponty. Philosophy, he writes, "dwells in history and in life, but it wishes to dwell at their centre, at the point where they come into being with the birth of meaning. It is not content with what

is already there. Since it is expression in act, it comes to itself only by ceasing to coincide with what is expressed, and by taking its distance in order to see its meaning. It is, in fact, the Utopia of possession at a distance." (IPP, 58) Philosophy creates a distance from the world and from our existence, from "what is already there". It puts it into question in order that, once made strange, the world can be possessed not just in its mundaneness but in its mystery as well. It opens a gap, the space of a question in which desire takes foot, a space between who we are and who we think we are, between existence and what has been said, but it does so in order to give expression to the unnamed Being it has glimpsed appearing through this opening.

The conception of philosophy that, reading with Merleau-Ponty, I have articulated above, is rooted in a tradition, although it is by no means a simple repetition of old formulas. Its ancestry stretches back to the ancient saying that 'philosophy begins in wonder'. When Merleau-Ponty praises Socrates, that "patron" of "the philosophical writers whom we read and who we are," the praise is quite sincere. (IPP, 34) Indeed, what Merleau-Ponty says about philosophy incorporates the Socratic dialectic, according to which the moment of self-understanding (in which one stretches to learn something new) must be preceded by a moment in which one comes to see one's present understanding as being questionable. Merleau-Ponty is faithful to this dialectic--a dialectic that in a sense every schoolboy 'understands'. His contribution to the tradition consists especially in his effort to

integrate this dialectic with what we have come to learn about language.

Much has been written about the celebrated 'linguistic turn' in modern philosophy. This turn marks an important moment in the history of philosophy. Traditional problems and questions acquire a new significance when interpreted in light of language. Philosophy, it is true, has always been concerned with language as a special topic within philosophy, but today philosophers are becoming increasingly interested in philosophy itself as an instance of language. This is certainly true of Merleau-Ponty, for whom the fact that the philosopher speaks is central to the question of what philosophy is and ought to be. In the following chapter, I shall interpret the significance that Merleau-Ponty draws from this fact.

## CHAPTER 6

### PHILOSOPHICAL EXPRESSION

For it is characteristic of the Kantian tradition that, no matter how much writing it does, it does not think that philosophy *should* be "written", any more than science should be....Kantian philosophy, on Derrida's view, is a kind of writing which would like not to be a kind of writing. It is a genre which would like to be a gesture, a clap of thunder, an epiphany. *That* is where God and man, thought and its object, words and the world, meet, we want speechlessly to say; let no further words come between the happy pair. Kantian philosophers would like not to write, but just to show. They would like the words they use to be so simple as to be presuppositionless.

Richard Rorty

#### 1. Language and the Self-Effacement of Philosophical Expression

According to Merleau-Ponty, what unites the different philosophers working within the existentialist or phenomenological movement is that "all of them were calling the narcissism of self-consciousness into question,...all of them were pointing out our own and the world's factual existence as a new dimension of enquiry." (S, 155) Dissatisfied with the dominant paradigms by which we understand ourselves and the world, they sought to restore and express a more primary contact with things than is comprehended by objective thought. Although a rampant rationalism was the target of their polemic, this movement was not simply the reactionary antithesis of objective thought or the renunciation of rationality in favour of some kind of 'brute contact' with existence, as if truth were a matter of



silent coincidence with existence. It was something altogether more radical. In "going toward existence", Merleau-Ponty says, these thinkers were "also going toward dialectic". (S, 155)

Dialectic, a term he begins to employ with greater frequency after the Phenomenology (a sign of Hegel's growing prominence in his philosophy), plays a role similar to both radical reflection and expression in Merleau-Ponty's writings.<sup>1</sup> The task of dialectic is to hold together the tension between the demand to return to existence and the demand to endow that contact with philosophical status. It holds together the effort to establish contact with a more primary experience of the world, a contact that evades the conceptualization of objective thought, and the demand to express what is left unexpressed (and unexpressible) by objective thought. Dialectic, for Merleau-Ponty, reconciles the immediate with the mediate without sacrificing the one to the demands of the other. Modern thought, he maintains,

encounters the first and most fundamental antithesis, the inaugural and never liquidated phase of dialectic, the birth of reflection, which as a matter of principle separates and separates only in order to grasp the unreflected. As soon as it becomes sufficiently conscious, the search for the "immediate" or the "thing itself" is not the contrary of mediation. Mediation is only the resolute recognition of a paradox that intuition willy-nilly suffers: to possess ourselves we must begin by abandoning ourselves; to see the world itself we must withdraw from it. (S, 156-7)

The return I have been concerned to elucidate in this thesis is dialectical in this sense. It is the realization of immediacy and mediation, contact and distance, silence and expression, faithfulness and creativity.

In his reading of Husserl in the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty had analyzed this ambivalence in terms of the relationship between existence and essence. Phenomenology, he writes, "is the study of essences," but it is "also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than their facticity." (PhP, vii) On the one side, as "the study of essences", phenomenology is not really concerned with the fact of experience per se, with what actually occurs as an event in time and can never occur again. It seeks to grasp not what is or will be irreducibly past, but rather the essential structure of 'the fleeting moment'. "I get beyond my singularity not insofar as my consciousness is merely a series of facts or events but insofar as these events have a sense. The intuition of essences is simply a regaining of this sense, which is not thematized in our spontaneous, unreflective experience." (PriP, 55) My experience of today and my experience of yesterday, or your experience and mine, are, on one level, irreducibly different. Phenomenology is not ultimately concerned with experience at this level of facticity or immediacy, however, but rather with essential structures, the "sense" or meaning of experience, in light of which my past and present experiences could be said to be the 'same'. The fact of experience is important only as a starting point for a reflection

that seeks to discover something essential (and communicable) in the fact.<sup>2</sup>

On the other side, however, phenomenology places "essences back into existence". This means that it realizes that the essences with which reflection captures existence have a reference to something that, in its facticity, exceeds what is comprehended in the essence. Phenomenology does not try to repress the contingency of its starting point. It thus distinguishes itself from objective thought, which reifies the essences by which it attempts to understand (turns sensations into things, for example) and loses sight of its primitive beginnings. Merleau-Ponty says that the "essence is here not the end, but a means." (PhP, xiv) There can be no question of conflating the world such as I know it with the world such as I live and such as it in fact gives rise to the desire to know. Phenomenology does not attempt to close this distance but seeks rather to preserve and understand it.

In the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty had also articulated the ambivalence of Husserl's phenomenological reduction in these terms. According to Husserl, he reminds us, every reduction "is necessarily eidetic". (PhP, xiv) This means, he explains, "that we cannot subject our perception of the world to philosophical scrutiny without ceasing to be identified with the act of positing the world...without passing from the *fact* of our existence to its *nature*, from the Dasein to the Wesen." (PhP, xiv) To become aware of "our perception of the world", we must distance ourselves from it, and essences enable us to stand back from the existence in which we are otherwise immersed. "The need

to proceed by way of essences," Merleau-Ponty says, arises because "our existence is too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of its involvement...." (PhP, xiv-v) Existence requires "the field of ideality in order to become acquainted with and to prevail over its facticity." (Ibid., xv)

Essences then are means by which to crystallize experience, to bring it to expression. Owing to the mediation of essences, to the distance they create, there can be no question that reflection either coincides with or reproduces the experience to which it stands in relation. It cannot coincide with it because experience, from the standpoint of reflection, is already past. It cannot literally reproduce it because then it would no longer be reflection but experience. That "all transcendental reduction is invariably eidetic," Merleau-Ponty says in another place, "means that reflection does not coincide with what is constituted but grasps only the essence of it--that it does not take the place of intentional life in an act of pure production but only re-produces the outline of it." (S, 179)

This account of the passage from the lived to the known in terms of the move to essences is not, however, Merleau-Ponty's final word on the return to existence or indeed his final word on Husserl. Merleau-Ponty was from the beginning uneasy about 'essences' and became more and more so as his interest in language increased.<sup>3</sup> He came to believe that Husserl made the move to essences too quickly and did not pay sufficient attention to a dimension in between existence and essence; namely language. The following passage from Signs indicates an important shift in Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of

Husserl: "Husserl will only be bringing the movement of all his previous thought to completion when he writes in a posthumous fragment that transitory inner phenomena are brought to ideal existences by becoming incarnate in language. Ideal existence, which at the beginning of Husserl's thought was to have been the foundation for the possibility of language, is now the most characteristic possibility of language." (S, 105)

Indeed, is radical reflection, reflection upon reflection, truly radical when it defines reflection as the passage from existence to essence? The philosopher, more and more in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, is characterized not simply as one who reflects but as one who speaks. This is something that a radical philosophy ought to thematize. How does language come into play in the move from existence to essence? I shall argue that Merleau-Ponty came to believe that in the final analysis a philosophy of essences, although it overcomes the illusion of coincidence at one level, restores it at another. The critical issue here concerns what I shall call the 'self-effacement of language'. What is the relationship between language, on the one hand, and reflection, essence, and world, on the other? What is the significance of the fact that the philosopher is situated in language? What is the effect of the linguistic mediation?

In his later interpretation, Merleau-Ponty points out that Husserl did indeed thematize language in his early writings, but he conceived it as a merely derivative phenomenon and subordinated it to essences. Husserl sought to find the essence behind all languages, to produce a universal eidetics of language, a universal grammar, as if

essences and language were externally related to each other. In Husserl's later writings, however, "There is no longer any question of constructing a logic of language, a universal grammar, but rather of finding a *logos* already incorporated in the word." (PriP, 82) With respect to Husserl's later "phenomenology of language", Merleau-Ponty writes: "As his thinking developed, Husserl was led to link more and more what he had at first sharply separated--the possible and the actual, essence and existence."<sup>4</sup> (PriP, 84) Language is the missing "link" that Merleau-Ponty speaks of here.

For the later Husserl, language is no longer a neutral self-effacing instrument for communicating essences or for pointing out or indicating things. There is a "logos incorporated in the word" and "reason incorporated in sensible phenomena". (PriP, 82) As the bearer of the "logos", and not simply its 'sign', language becomes something important in its own right. With reference to the later Husserl, Merleau-Ponty says that the "philosopher is first and foremost the one who realizes that he is situated in language, that he *is speaking*." (S, 104) The philosopher's own speech is recognized as being a decisive moment in the transformation from the lived to the known, from existence to essence.

It is remarkable that, in a philosophy resolutely determined to be radical, the philosopher's own use of speech should not have been thematized from the very beginning. Derrida's analysis of language and philosophy are of great value here.<sup>5</sup> He argues that philosophy has typically overlooked or even repressed its own linguisticity, its own incorporation, because it has been dominated by the ideal of what

he calls 'presence'. Philosophy has tried to efface its own happening, its status as event occurring in time and history, simply to present, to make manifest without mediation, something that is what it is without philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

The treatment that writing has received in the tradition is emblematic for Derrida in this regard because in writing language stands out or conspicuously obtrudes, and the problem of mediation comes to the fore. With reference to certain exemplary figures, he shows that philosophy typically subordinates writing to speech. Speech is privileged because in speech the speaker's words seem to efface themselves in the service of presence to unmediated meaning. "Within so-called 'living' speech," Derrida writes, "the spatial exteriority of the signifier seems absolutely reduced...."<sup>7</sup> The voice or breath that is the signifying medium of speech seems to evaporate and surrender its difference in the spiritual ether of non-empirical thought or meaning, as the smoke from a chimney dissipates into the clouds. The distance or difference from meaning that the 'phonic substance' introduces seems to cancel itself. "That lived reduction of the opacity of the signifier," Derrida continues, is "the origin of what is called presence."

What Derrida calls "presence" would be meaning or thought that is completely transparent, "ideal existence", in Husserl's terms, with which the thinker could coincide in silence. Speaking has not been perceived as a threat to such presence because the mediation of the spoken word, the "exteriority" or corporeality of speech, seems to efface itself. Indeed 'presence' has often been represented in

philosophy on the model of a kind of inner speech. Writing, however, is not so easily reduced. The signifying 'substance' of writing is hopelessly exterior to the self-presence of the philosopher (and his readers) to his meaning.

To the end of protecting the ideal of presence against this exteriority, Derrida argues, philosophers typically conceived writing as being merely accidental and inessential in relation to meaning. Writing is thus determined as being merely a supplement to speech, as being but a reproduction of speech in another medium. Derrida's critique of this opposition between writing and speech, which typifies the general strategy of deconstruction, involves overturning the hierarchical relation between the opposed terms. The point is not to restate the traditional opposition in a mirror image but rather, by forcing it to its limit, to undermine it altogether. He shows that the materiality, exteriority, or non-presence that classical thought attributes exclusively to writing, and on the basis of which it distinguishes speech from writing, is proper to speech as well. Speaking is indeed a kind of 'writing' and introduces non-presence into allegedly non-empirical thought. The dissipation of the spoken word into the ether of pure thought turns out to be an illusion. Words, spoken or written, are inscribed or instituted in a network of meanings. They have etymologies, sedimented histories, semantic links with other words, and so on, and for this reason the meaning of speech always exceeds whatever is or could be present to the mind of the speaker. The thinker, insofar as his thinking occurs in or with language, is not in possession of or coincident with his thought.



As early as the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty had been sensitive to and indeed emphasized the significance of corporeality in thinking. He directs his polemic against the illusion of transparent thought in complete possession of itself, against a species of what Derrida calls 'presence'.<sup>8</sup> Meaning is not some purely non-linguistic representation but is "held within the word". Thought is worded from the beginning. Even in the supposed silence of inner monologue, thinking is a kind of speaking. Meaning cannot be fully contained by thought, escapes the thinker, because his thought is incorporated in words that transcend or exceed whatever might be 'present' to his mind. Presence is haunted by non-presence. Thought or signification is not a mirror-like reflecting medium. The corporeality of thought, the fact that it is embodied in words that have sedimented histories and semantic linkages with other words that are unthought or non-present, means that thought is never completely adequate or transparent to itself, that meaning transcends whatever might be present to the thinker.<sup>9</sup>

Merleau-Ponty argues against a dualism of language and thought that sets word in opposition to concept or essence and signifier to signified. Within the framework of this dualism, the terms opposed are defined as being independent of and external to each other. Language is determined as a mere instrument or vehicle that effaces itself in the service of a thought that it merely transports from one interior to another. It is said that "speech is a mere means of fixation" of thought, or that "it is the envelope and clothing of thought". (PhP, 182) In one way or another, speech is thus determined as being but the sign of thought. Thought is at first present and subsequently (by

mechanisms of association, for example) words come that merely serve to stand for this thought in the empirical realm and thereby to transport it from one mind to another. Speech in turn has no import of its own but merely translates, substitutes for, or supplements thoughts that have no need of speech in order to exist. Language follows upon thought and adds nothing to it.

Against the background of the dualism of thought and language, Merleau-Ponty invites us to return "to the phenomenon of speech and put into question the usual accounts which immobilize thought and speech, and make anything other than external relations between them inconceivable." (PhP, 177-80). What Merleau-Ponty takes to be most important about the "phenomenon of speech" are those instances in which a new meaning comes into existence. The basis of his critique of the dualism of speech and thought is that on this hypothesis the creativity of speech (constituting speech), the production of new meaning in speech, is obscured and cannot be accounted for.

Merleau-Ponty's thesis concerning the corporeality of thought is as follows: "Thought is no 'internal' thing, and does not exist independent of the world and of words." (PhP, 183) Echoing his criticism of the view that perception is interpretation, he says "speech is not a 'sign' of thought, if by this we understand a phenomenon which heralds another as smoke betrays fire. Speech and thought would admit of this external relation only if they were both thematically given, whereas in fact they are interinvolved, the sense being held within the word, and the word being the external existence of the sense." (PhP, 182) If thought were self-complete and

independent of speech, "we could not understand," he claims, "why thought tends towards expression as towards its completion...why the thinking subject himself is in a kind of ignorance of his thoughts so long as he has not formulated them for himself, or even spoken and written them, as is shown by the example of so many writers who begin a book without knowing exactly what they are going to put into it." (PhP, 177) Why, as sometimes happens, do we speak precisely in order to think? How does it happen that in speaking we sometimes have the experience of teaching ourselves our thought, perhaps even surprising ourselves in what we say?

Such experiences are incomprehensible on the hypothesis that word and concept or speech and thought are mutually exterior to one another. Speech here seems to be an integral part of thinking, and not distinguishable from it. In the speaking subject, Merleau-Ponty writes, speech "does not translate ready-made thought but accomplishes it." (PhP, 178) This is the significance that Merleau-Ponty later finds in Husserl's "return to the speaking subject". He writes: "In his last unedited writings, Husserl found a much deeper significance in the problem of language. In Formal and Transcendental Logic, published during his lifetime, he already expressly indicated that to speak is not at all *to translate a thought into words*. It is rather *to see a certain object by the word*." (PriP, 82)

Merleau-Ponty uses a similar argument to criticize the model of communication generated from dualistic assumptions. On the view that speech and thought are exterior to each other, the word is merely the occasion for the listener to think the thought that preceded it in the

mind of the one who spoke it. The listener must already have the thought somehow or other, since the word itself is devoid of significance and has meaning only insofar as it is associated with a thought already possessed. Supposedly, the speaker has a thought in mind and summons the appropriate words to represent it. The same thought becomes present to the mind of the listener provided that he associates the correct thought with the words spoken. "A consciousness constructs--for x--that linguistic mechanism which will provide another consciousness with the chance of having the same thoughts, but nothing really passes between them." (PhP, 178) The moment of exteriority wherein thought is 'doubled' by corporeal signs is regarded as being insignificant. Thought somehow or other requires corporeal signs to be transported from one interior to another, but it preserves its purity or non-empiricality in the passage. The corporeal sign is a necessary supplement to thought, but curiously this supplement remains external to it and adds nothing. The signs efface themselves in the service of rendering the pristine thought present.

On this view, the listener can find in words only the meaning that he has put there. The word being nothing more than what the listener associates with or puts into it, everything must therefore be known in advance. Learning, insofar as it involves the emergence of new meanings, becomes inconceivable. We do, however, have the experience of learning something in communication. Not always, but sometimes, we emerge from a conversation with a radically new understanding of something that, in retrospect, we realize we had previously misunderstood or understood only in a vague way. Here it

cannot be the case that we confer a pre-established meaning upon the words because we are not from the outset in possession of such meaning. It must be, Merleau-Ponty concludes, that speech can give us back more than we put into it. "The fact is that we have the power to understand over and above what we have spontaneously thought." (PhP, 178)

These experiences that Merleau-Ponty adduces in argument against the view that thought exists independently of speech are instances of 'constituting' speech: "that of the child uttering its first word, of the lover revealing his feeling, of the 'first man who spoke', or of the writer and philosopher who reawakens primordial experiences anterior to all traditions."<sup>10</sup> (PhP, 179n) Generally, instances of constituting speech are ones in which there is an effort of expression. In such instances, metaphor being a prime example, the corporeality of words comes to the fore and it is especially evident that speech is not simply an instrument or vehicle that transports silent thoughts or meanings from one interior to another. Rather the thought comes into existence in and through the process of speaking or expressing. Merleau-Ponty calls this 'constituting speech' because in such speech new meanings are created or 'constituted'.

It is constituted speech, speech that occurs under the auspices of meanings already constituted, of clichés, linguistic routines, syntagms, and so on, that seems to support the separation between thought and language. Because such speech remains within familiar and already established significations, it seems that language is merely the servant of these significations. Even in constituted speech,

however, where we speak only about or according to what we have already mastered, utilizing what is effortlessly at our disposal, there is a disturbing non-presence. Instances of constituted speech, Merleau-Ponty writes, "have indeed in each case their convincing clarity, without, however, ever enabling me to dispel the fundamental obscurity of what is expressed, or to eliminate the distance separating my thought from itself." (PhP, 391-2) What does it mean to speak about thought being separate from itself? Thought, even when incorporated in words that seem to efface themselves in virtue of their 'self-evident' meanings, is separate or different from itself insofar as these words exceeds whatever meaning is present. Presence is threatened by non-presence, interiority by exteriority, identity by difference. Owing to the corporeality of words, thought is entangled in a network of exteriority and is never entirely present.

Merleau-Ponty distinguishes two senses in which language "outruns us" or introduces 'non-presence' into thought. He writes:

Language outruns us, not merely because the use of speech always presupposes a great number of thoughts which are not present in the mind and which are covered by each word, but also for another reason, and a more profound one; namely, that these thoughts themselves, when present, were not at any time 'pure' thoughts either, for already in them there was a surplus of the signified over the signifying, the same effort of thought already thought to equal thinking thought, the same provisional amalgam of both which gives rise to the whole mystery of expression. (PhP, 390)

Because words have multiple meanings, not all of which can be simultaneously present to the mind, there is always an excess of meaning beyond whatever is present to mind. Polysemia, however, does not by itself undermine the fundamental assumptions of dualism. That

the word is not univocal and is the 'sign' of several thoughts is easily accommodated in a dualistic framework as long as the other non-present thoughts or meanings are themselves conceived as being untainted in their purity by the corporeality of words. This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty denies. The non-present multiple meanings, allegedly pure, are themselves tainted by the exteriority of other words. The polysemic meanings of words are themselves embodied in other words.

One of the conclusions Merleau-Ponty draws from his analysis is that the thinker is never in total possession of his thought and thought is never quite present or identical to itself. He writes: "Thus self-possession and coincidence with the self do not serve to define thought, which is, on the contrary, an outcome of expression and always an illusion, insofar as the clarity of what is acquired rests upon the fundamentally obscure operation which has enabled us to immortalize within ourselves a moment of fleeting life." (PhP, 389) Thought owes its 'clarity and distinctness' to the fact that familiar words have self-evident meanings in the service of which they seem to efface themselves. This self-evidence, however, rather than being the prize of a thought that has struggled to become transparent to itself, is on the contrary the indication that such thought has not yet even begun.

In his critique of the dualism of thought and language in the Phenomenology (which is only confirmed and sharpened by his subsequent, more thorough reading of Saussure), there is already an implicit critique of the philosophy of essences (or reflection). The

move to reflection or essences indeed leaves behind the idea of a coincidence with existence, or with the brute fact, but, insofar as it suppresses its own linguisticity, it has not abandoned the ideal of coincidence altogether. Coincidence is overcome at the level of existence only to be reinstated as an ideal at the level of reflection or essence. Reflection, the move to essences, effaces its own mediation, its own linguisticity, simply to be present to or coincide with itself in thought. In The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty makes this critique explicit:

We would err as much by defining philosophy as the search for the essences as by defining it as the fusion with things, and the two errors are not so different....Philosophy is flattened to the sole plane of ideality or to the sole plane of existence. On both sides one wants something--internal adequation of the idea or self-identity of the thing--to come stop up the look, and one excludes or subordinates the far-offs, the horizontal thought. (VI, 127)

Whether philosophy aims to coincide with essences or to coincide with existence, in either case the same ideal is operative. What is sought is an all-encompassing presence, a wordless philosophy that would efface its contingent beginnings and swallow its tail so to speak, a philosophy that would leave nothing out. More precisely, such a philosophy *must* leave out, exclude, and indeed repress the "far-offs" and the "horizontal", subordinate them by "flattening" them, because they are not and cannot be circumscribed by presence and testify to the failure of its ideal. For the same reason, such a philosophy must leave out its own linguisticity.

Dominated by the ideal of presence, philosophy could only be threatened by its own linguisticity, which testifies to non-presence



and non-coincidence. This is why Derrida speaks of philosophy's *repression* of writing (or language), which is something different than innocent inattentiveness. Derrida says that "the philosophical text, although it is in fact always written, includes, precisely as its philosophical specificity, the project of effacing itself in the face of the signified content which it transports and in general teaches."<sup>11</sup> In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, however, philosophy's own mediation, its linguisticity, is thematized. Conceived in Merleau-Ponty's terms, there is no reason for philosophy to efface itself or to suppress its own incarnation because he does not aspire to a "signified content" independent of words or to a disembodied presence. Such meaning as he seeks to express in his philosophy comes into being in being spoken. Philosophy, for Merleau-Ponty, is neither a "search for essences" nor the attempt to fuse with existence. It is rather the originating word that plunges beneath the surface of constituted language into what he calls the "lake of non-being" (VI,201), bringing back with it new species of being, "far-offs" or 'far-unders', that do not yet have a name.

## 2. The Cogito

The significance of linguisticity in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is best exhibited with reference to his discussion of the cogito. He writes on the cogito in several places, and it is one of the few subjects about which he is explicitly self-critical of his

own work. The cogito then is of central importance for understanding such change or development as takes place in his philosophy.

In what we have of Merleau-Ponty's last, unfinished work, The Visible and the Invisible, one of the major points of contention identified with the Phenomenology concerns what he called the 'tacit' or the 'silent cogito'. Not much is said about this issue, although it is important enough that it is mentioned no less than three times in the working notes. From what is said, it is apparent that the issue concerns the relationship between the tacit cogito and language. He faults his analysis of the cogito in the Phenomenology because "the chapter on the Cogito is not connected with the chapter on speech...." (VI, 175-6) At first glance, this is a strange thing for Merleau-Ponty to say because the whole discussion of the cogito in the Phenomenology, as we shall see, turns upon language. How then do we make sense of Merleau-Ponty's retrospective criticism?

Although language is discussed in the chapter on the cogito, it is not discussed in the same terms as it is in the chapter on speech. He opposes silence to speech as mutually exclusive terms. He reifies silence, and reifies the tacit cogito. In the chapter on speech, however, the relationship between silence and speech is more felicitously framed in terms of the dialectic of constituted and constituting speech. I believe that, when Merleau-Ponty later faults his analysis of the cogito in the Phenomenology on the grounds that is not connected with the chapter on speech, it is more specifically the failure to connect with this dialectic of the constituted and the constituting that is the source of the problem. In this light I offer

here a retrospective reading of the chapter on the cogito with reference to the constituted and the constituting, and with reference to some later remarks from The Visible and the Invisible.

In the chapter on the cogito, Merleau-Ponty maintains that the Cartesian cogito, contrary to what Descartes would have us believe, is in fact a 'verbal cogito'. He argues that there is another cogito more primary than the spoken cogito and which by contrast is 'silent' and indeed independent of language. Nowhere is Merleau-Ponty more ambiguous than he is on this topic. It is not surprising that, as we know from the notes to The Visible and the Invisible, he eventually rejected the 'silent cogito' as being an impossibility. But even within the framework of the Phenomenology the silent cogito, *as presented*, is untenable. Earlier I argued (chapter 5, section 1) that the Phenomenology is a text divided against itself insofar as there is a tension and even competition between the concept of reflection and the concept of expression, which pull in opposite directions. A related division occurs between the chapter on speech and the chapter on the cogito.<sup>12</sup>

Let us retrace the steps that lead to the Cartesian cogito. Just as I am normally unaware of my own speaking insofar as my consciousness is directed toward the subject matter at hand, so too in perceptual experience I am normally oblivious to my own act of perceiving insofar as my consciousness is directed toward and wholly absorbed in things. To become aware of my perception I must adopt a reflective attitude and turn my attention from things to the manner in which things appear to me. For Descartes, this reflective turn

requires that we break the chains of certainty or belief that imprison us in the natural world. In perception, I normally feel certain of the existence of the objects that I perceive. To see a table is also to believe that the table is there where I see it and furthermore that it is there for others to see. Upon reflection, however, this certainty becomes dubious. I recall that I have sometimes been mistaken about what I 'perceived'. Once I heard someone call me, or 'thought' I did, but it was only the wind.

If I can be mistaken once, however, I can be mistaken now, and what I believe that I perceive may not be such as I believe it to be at all. That there is an object 'corresponding' to what I believe I perceive, and that it is such as I believe it to be, is something about which I can be mistaken. It is certain, however, that I think it as such. My 'perception', even if I am mistaken, is still something. There may indeed be no object 'corresponding' to my perception, but the object exists at least insofar as it is something that is thought. Even if there is nothing on the 'other side' to cause or produce the images in the mirror, the images at least exist. Thus is born the cogito, which is the name Descartes gives to the spectator in the utopian theatre in which these images make their entrances and exits. That this interior drama is a 'true story', that it is based upon anything that happens outside the theatre, indeed that there is anything outside at all, is uncertain. What is certain is that inside the theatre something appears, and that to the extent that something appears to me, I am.

Merleau-Ponty criticizes Descartes from several points of view, but what is significant here is his claim that the cogito thus revealed is "merely a verbal cogito".<sup>13</sup> (PhP, 400) His argument warrants careful scrutiny. He begins modestly: "By following the meaning of the words and the argument, I reach the conclusion that because I think, I am...." (PhP, 400) The point made here, which at first seems somewhat trivial, is that the Cartesian cogito is something that is revealed as the conclusion of an argument. If I understand the meaning of the words, and make the proper logical moves, I am obliged to assent to the conclusion that "I am". But what am I assenting to? What is the content of this "I"? I think, therefore I am. But what am I? Descartes' answer is that I am a thing that thinks. This much follows from the premises, but does it exhaust my identity? Am I therefore equal to my thinking? Is my being coincident with what I think I am? Merleau-Ponty maintains that the cogito thus assented to, my self insofar as it is present in my thought about myself, is merely derived. The Cartesian cogito stands on the shoulders of another cogito that by contrast is not a conclusion but a hidden premise. Even before I began to think, I was. My existence precedes and exceeds my thinking and is not reducible to it.

The above point is a variation on the theme of the return to existence or to experience. Against (or rather underneath) objectivistic thought, which mistakes its own constructions for reality, Merleau-Ponty uncovers a more primary reality in which these constructions are themselves encompassed. The polemic against the Cartesian cogito from the standpoint of another more primary and

immediate cogito, one that could never be encompassed by a conclusion, one that by contrast could be described as a premise that can be made explicit but never completely so, echoes his general critique of objective thought. Before (and in a sense below) my explicit awareness of myself, I am a prepersonal, anonymous flux of life.

The next step of Merleau-Ponty's argument, however, is a shaky one. It is one thing to claim that the Cartesian cogito is a 'conclusion' and thus dependent for its truth and meaning upon antecedent premises. It is quite controversial, however, to claim that "this is merely a verbal *cogito*, for I have grasped my thought and my existence only through the medium of language...." (PhP, 400) Merleau-Ponty criticizes the Cartesian cogito here for the wrong reasons. The problem lies in the adjective "merely". This "merely" signifies that he opposes the Cartesian cogito for the reason that it is verbal. It implies, and later Merleau-Ponty explicitly states this, that more primary than this "merely verbal cogito" is a 'silent' cogito that can be "grasped", as he says, independently of "the medium of language". Merleau-Ponty is correct to insist that the Cartesian cogito is derivative with respect to another more primary cogito, but he opens himself to contradiction by determining this primary cogito as he does in opposition to language.

Leaving aside the "merely" for a moment, what does Merleau-Ponty mean by saying that the Cartesian cogito is "verbal"? He elaborates by drawing attention to the obscured fact that the Cartesian cogito is somehow embodied in a text. The Cartesian cogito is situated in the cultural space of language. Indeed, it is mediated

through a 'text'. "The wonderful thing about language is that it promotes its own oblivion: my eyes follow the lines on the paper, and from the moment I am caught up in their meaning, I lose sight of them. The paper, the letters on it, my eyes and body are there only as the minimum setting of some invisible operation." (PhP, 401) Given his criticism of the dualism of thought and language, it is not surprising that here he should emphasize the embodiment of the cogito and the mediating role of corporeality, i.e. the corporeality of the Cartesian text. The emphasis is necessary because language, the language of Descartes' text, effaces itself in thought, or as he says here, "promotes its own oblivion".

If this is what he means by qualifying the Cartesian cogito as "verbal", this by itself should not be damning in Merleau-Ponty's eyes. Indeed, initially his criticism is not so much that the Cartesian cogito is spoken as it is that Descartes does not acknowledge and even obscures the fact that it is spoken. He continues: "Expression fades out before what is expressed, and this is why its mediating role may pass unnoticed, and why Descartes nowhere mentions it. Descartes, and *a fortiori* his reader, begin their meditation in what is already a universe of discourse." (PhP, 401) What Merleau-Ponty objects to here is not the fact that Descartes must have recourse to words to reveal the cogito. Indeed how could it be otherwise? The problem rather is that Descartes does not treat the saying of the cogito as important, that he ignores this mediation, as if the words used to reveal the cogito effaced their corporeality in order for me to coincide with the cogito without remainder.

This effacement of the medium, of the text, gives rise to the illusion of a timeless thought on the hither side of language. When I read Descartes, and especially if I read him according to his own logic, it seems that the cogito that emerges out of this reading is something that I already was even before I pronounced the conclusion. The 'premises', the words of text, and so on, efface themselves, and the cogito that I now know myself to be gives itself as being independent of them. Retrospectively the words are seen as mere signs, in themselves insignificant, that point to this cogito without touching or otherwise adulterating it with corporeality. Merleau-Ponty continues:

This certainty which we enjoy of reaching, beyond expression, a truth separable from it and of which expression is merely the garment and contingent manifestation, has been implanted in us precisely by language. It [the text, the corporeal signs of the cogito] appears as a mere sign only once it has provided itself with meaning, and the coming to awareness, if it is to be complete, must rediscover the expressive unity in which both signs and meaning appear in the first place. (PhP, 401)

The cogito is revealed and indeed comes into existence through the medium of Descartes' text. It is something I accomplish in the reading. Descartes, however, takes for granted the mediating process in which the cogito is accomplished. Merleau-Ponty writes: "[if] Descartes never mentions language as the condition of the *reading* of the *cogito*, nor overtly invites us to pass from the idea to the practice of the cogito, it is because we take the process of expression for granted, because it figures among our acquisitions." (PhP, 402) During this "process", the 'signs' were not externally attached to pre-existent meanings, to an eternal cogito that was



already there. At first I did not know what they meant and they taught me. Now that I have caught on to the cogito, I forget their initial importance and it seems they are "merely signs" externally related to an ideal meaning independent of language and of corporeality in general.

The force of the arguments that we have examined thus far is to undermine the belief that the Cartesian cogito is something eternal with which I could coincide in silent thought. The Cartesian story is not the whole story, but the conclusion of a story that was underway long before it came on the scene. Indeed qua conclusion it is a bad one insofar as it is forgetful of its premises, of the history in which it was born. Along these lines Merleau-Ponty's critique of the Cartesian cogito is consistent with the general project of his philosophy.

Where his critique becomes problematic (as foreshadowed by the use of the word "merely" to qualify the verbal cogito) is in his determination of the pre-history of the Cartesian cogito, of who or what I was even before I concluded that I was a cogito, as silence in *opposition* to language. Merleau-Ponty writes:

I should be unable even to read Descartes' book, were I not, before any speech can begin, in contact with my own life and thought, and if the spoken *cogito* did not encounter within me a tacit *cogito*. This silent *cogito* was the one Descartes sought when writing his Meditations. He gave life and direction to all those expressive operations which, by definition, always miss their target since, between Descartes' existence and the knowledge of it which he acquires, they interpose the full thickness of cultural acquisitions. (PhP, 402)

Merleau-Ponty is consistent in insisting on the distance and the difference between existence and knowledge of existence. The Cartesian

cogito is not exhaustive. I am not equal to who or what I think I am. My existence will always exceed whatever self-knowledge might be present to my mind. Between the self that I am and the self that appears in the mirror there is a difference. Nothing in his critique, however, requires Merleau-Ponty to determine what precedes and escapes the spoken cogito as "silent" contact with myself in opposition to language. Ironically, Merleau-Ponty himself, despite his explicit pronouncements about the silent cogito, furnishes us with good reasons for not doing so.

Several of his own arguments in the Phenomenology can be adduced against the "silent cogito" thus conceived as independent of language. In the first place, much that Merleau-Ponty says against Descartes boomerangs back upon himself. If the Cartesian cogito is a spoken cogito, then by the same token so too is the allegedly "silent cogito". If the Cartesian cogito is an idea situated in cultural history so too is the tacit cogito. 'I am thinking of silent cogito, wanting to finish this work', to paraphrase the wonderful opening of the chapter on the cogito. That I am doing so is premised upon my having read about the silent cogito in a book by Merleau-Ponty. My thought is humming with a plethora of words, often at odds with each other, that he uses to describe the silent cogito. Indeed, the silent cogito is a veritable institution. The meaning of the word 'silent' is not some wordless thought. When I think of silence, I think of other texts and contexts in which Merleau-Ponty talks about silence, about the 'voices of silence', and so on. I think of other words with which Merleau-Ponty links silence and of still others to which he opposes

it. Each word takes me to still other words, and these to still others. The same is true of the word 'cogito', which takes me also to Husserl, and to countless other words such as 'self' and 'ego'. The silent cogito, insofar as it is spoken in a text by Merleau-Ponty, exceeds my grasp and it seems that I could never possess it or coincide with it.

What is the significance of all these words, of the words of Merleau-Ponty's text and of other texts in which it is woven? Are they themselves unimportant? Are they mere signs that efface themselves in order to indicate some silent contact with myself unadulterated by the corporeality of words? Is this not precisely what he forbids Descartes to say? And yet, unwittingly vindicating Descartes on the above point, he also criticizes the Cartesian cogito for the reason that "I have grasped my thought and my existence only through the medium of language," the assumption being that it is possible to grasp myself without this medium. What would such a grasp be? Complete and silent coincidence with self? But is this possible within the framework of the Phenomenology?

Merleau-Ponty equivocates on the question of coincidence with self in the Phenomenology, just as we saw that he equivocates on the question of the coincidence of reflection and the unreflected. He simply is not consistent. In one place he speaks about "absolute contact with myself." (PhP, 295) In another he says that "nowhere do I enjoy absolute possession of myself" (PhP, 240) He speaks about "the primordial certainty of being in contact with myself," (PhP, 355) but elsewhere says "since the lived is thus never entirely comprehensible,

what I understand never quite tallies with my living experience, in short, I am never quite at one with myself." (PhP, 347) In one place he urges us to "coincide with the act of perception and break with the critical attitude...." (PhP, 238-9) To break with the critical attitude is a laudable goal for philosophy, but is coincidence with the act of perception the only alternative? If it were, then by default the natural man would already be a philosopher. Later, as if to correct himself, he says: "All that is required is that the coincidence of myself with myself, as it is achieved in the *cogito*, shall never be a real coincidence, but merely an intentional and presumptive one." (PhP, 344)

It is understandable that Merleau-Ponty should be seduced by the idea of a virginal self-presence unpenetrated by words, but the better part of his philosophy holds this temptation in check. This idea (and ideal) goes against the grain of the movement of thought in the Phenomenology. His discussion of the question of the experience of the other is particularly relevant here. He writes: "If the sole experience of the subject is the one which I gain by coinciding with it, if the mind, by definition, eludes 'the outside spectator' and can be recognized only from within, my *cogito* is necessarily unique and cannot be 'shared in' by another." (PhP, 373) Here Merleau-Ponty expresses reservations about the idea of real coincidence and for good reason. If I were coincident with myself in the silence of either thought or experience, my existence would be a private thing. My identity would be on the hither side of my saying, of all

corporeality, something inaccessible to others and indeed even to me insofar as I seek to know or express who I am.

Ironically, the ghost of Descartes, against whom Merleau-Ponty introduces the silent cogito in the first place, looms in the background of the discussion of the tacit or silent cogito. In the final analysis the idea of silent cogito 'uncorrupted' by language and of a cogito that is absolutely present to itself in thought amount to the same thing. In either case it is a matter of being present to oneself without difference or distance. What Merleau-Ponty says against the Cartesian cogito should be turned against the silent cogito as well. I am not primarily a thinking thing because my existence exceeds my thought about myself, but nor am I a silent coincidence of myself with myself.

Before I speak in order to gather together and express who I am, I am indeed 'something'. To this extent one can speak of a tacit or silent cogito underneath the spoken cogito, underneath my explicitly constituted identity. Something does indeed precede my constituting speech, and indeed it is to express this something that I speak. This something, however, is not something simply present such that I could coincide with it. I am not something with determinate borders that could be circumscribed in an act of knowing that would add nothing. Insofar as I am a silent cogito, I am not entirely there; I am not entirely present. In The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The perceiving subject, as a tacit, silent *Being-at*, which returns from the thing itself blindly identified, which is only a *separation* with respect to it--the *self* of perception

as 'nobody', in the sense of Ulysses, as the anonymous one buried in the world, and that has not yet traced its path." (VI, 201) The "anonymous one" is the overflow of my existence insofar as I exceed my already constituted understanding of myself; "a lake of non-being" he also calls it. Expression plunges into this "lake" in order to catch something that has slipped through the nets of what has already been said, but this something only properly comes into being when it is caught and given a name. Furthermore, to give it a name is not to falsify it.

This is what Merleau-Ponty means in the Phenomenology where he writes that "the tacit *cogito* is a *cogito* only when it has found expression for itself." (PhP, 404) Unfortunately, however, he does not think through the implications of this statement in relation to his critique of the verbal *cogito*. In terms of this critique, silence and language, the pre-expressed and the expressed, the anonymous and the named, are opposed in such a way that to express the tacit *cogito* could only be to falsify it. As long as the tacit *cogito* is understood as simple presence or coincidence with itself, expression could only be a falsification or a non-coincidence because it introduces difference or distance.

The whole difficulty here is to understand how I can express myself without falsifying myself, how I can break the silence and yet preserve it at the same time. If I am fundamentally a self in silent contact with myself, speech can only be a falsification of myself. I am myself only for myself. My speech, my acts, my body, everything that can be linked to corporeality, is on the other side of this

self-presence. It is exterior, it is not who I am. Shall we say that everything that Descartes has written, the Cartesian corpus that has been bequeathed to us, is not the fundamental Descartes? Shall we say that beyond these texts and the countless other traces, on the hither side of all his saying and doing and of everything that could be linked to his body, there was a more primary Descartes who was not and could not be said?

Undoubtedly Descartes was once alive as I am now and one day this flow of experiencing ceased. The fact that his texts have outlived him and quite evidently can exist independently of his life, however, does not mean that his life was ever independent of what are now its corporeal traces. Descartes' life was not a silence on the hither side of what he said and did. His life as he lived it was no doubt different from and exceeded what he ever said or thought about it. This difference, however, is not like the difference defined by the border between two separate countries, with the lived on one side and the expressed on the other. Saying (and doing) does not put me on the other side of living. The difference between them is not a falsifying difference or an either/or.

If I am not inaccessible to others, it because my life has not primarily been a series of self-enclosed thoughts or private experiences but a corporeal history of signs. My saying, the public moment in which I exist for others, is not a falsification of myself. It is an expression of who I am. This is not to say that I am equal to what others think me to be. For the same reason that I am not equal to who I think I am, to what about myself is present to me, I am not

equal to what another thinks of me. My existence, my self, exceeds what could ever be present to myself or to another, exceeds whatever I could catch in speech, for my life has the opacity of a text. This opacity, this corporeality, this excess beyond whatever could be encompassed in a presence, has a double edge. On the one hand, it is the reason why I can never coincide with myself in unadulterated self-presence. On the other hand, however, this non-coincidence is the space, the opening, the distance, or the difference that kindles the desire for self-understanding, the desire to express. "Such is the lot of a being who is born," Merleau-Ponty writes, "that is, who once and for all has been given to himself as something to be understood." (PhP, 347)

In light of these remarks, let us qualify what we said earlier about the 'reading' of the tacit or silent cogito, to which Merleau-Ponty assigns the meaning "existential experience". (PhP, 374) The silent cogito is indeed an institution and in my effort to grasp it I am indeed enmeshed in a web of words. What animates these words, however, and serves as a precondition for my reading of the silent cogito is the fact of my experience, to which these words give expression. This is not to say that my experience or existence is a thing in itself that could be grasped independently of speech. Experience need not be conceived as closed in upon itself in silence on the other side of words. Merleau-Ponty's critique of the dualism of thought and word can also be brought into play here. Word and experience need not be opposed. Language is not a prison-house on the other side of which lay the wide open fields of experience. When I



'read' the silent cogito, I do not have words on the one side and unworded experience' on the other as if I could ever compare them to see if I had a good match. Rather I think about my experience, which is indeterminate, with the words that are available to me. The word teaches me my experience.

This is the direction of Merleau-Ponty's thought in The Visible and the Invisible. He writes:

Naïveté of Descartes who does not see a tacit cogito under the cogito of *Wesen*, of significations--But naïveté also of a silent cogito that would deem itself to be an adequation with the silent consciousness, whereas its very description of silence rests entirely on the virtues of language. The taking possession of the world of silence, such as the description of the human body effects it, is no longer this world of silence, it is the world articulated, elevated to the *Wesen*, spoken....There would be needed a silence that envelops the speech anew, after one has come to recognize that speech enveloped the alleged silence of psychological coincidence. What will this silence be?...this silence will *not be the contrary of language*. (VI, 179)

Relative to the spoken cogito, to the 'I' that I have already 'spoken', to the cogito of significations, there is indeed a more primitive cogito which is as yet unsaid. This tacit cogito, however, which in the Phenomenology had been described as the absolute other of speech, is not a coincidence with itself such that speech could only be its falsification. It is not unsayable. It is silent relative to the chatter of the already constituted, but it is not a silence that is "the contrary of language".

In the final analysis, I maintain, the problem with the tacit or the silent cogito in the Phenomenology has to do with the framework in which the analysis is articulated. The problem is that Merleau-Ponty sets the tacit cogito against the verbal cogito as a

kind of absolute other, sets silence and language in opposition to each other such that to speak can only be to falsify a silence. What the analysis of the constituted and the constituting was to make comprehensible, however, is a kind of speech that does not simply break the silence but *expresses* it. With respect to already constituted speech, Merleau-Ponty invites us to return to the ground of this speech, to a silence drowned out by its chatter. This return to a ground is only one part of a dialectic movement of expression, however, for the ground is appropriated in relation to a teleology, to a new effort of expression.

In his discussion of the cogito in the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty is somewhat at odds with himself and with what the Phenomenology teaches about language and expression. The tacit cogito is presented as a kind of full presence, as an absolute ground upon which the spoken cogito is superadded as an independent stratum. First there was the silent cogito, a sheer presence of self to self, and then the spoken cogito came along to break this silence and distance us from ourselves. First there was silence, and then there was speech. In these terms, there is no interpenetration between the silent cogito and the spoken cogito, between silence and speech. The two are conceived as being external to each other.<sup>14</sup> In The Visible and the Invisible, however, the boundary separating them becomes less well-defined. The two are thought of as intertwined.

### 3. Creative Adequation

The 'development' of Merleau-Ponty's thought from The Structure of Behavior to The Visible and the Invisible is best understood as a kind of 'deepening'. This at least is how he himself describes the development. In a working note to The Visible and the Invisible, he promises an analysis that "takes up again, deepens, and rectifies my first two books...." (VI, 168) Perhaps in his first two books Merleau-Ponty was to a certain extent guilty of the same "error" that, in an entry dated from the following month, he ascribes to the early Husserl: "Husserl's error is to have described the interlocking [of the various moments of experience] starting from a *Präsenfeld* considered as without thickness, as immanent consciousness...." (VI, p. 173) Certainly the semantic affinities between the metaphor of "deepening" and of "thickness" are suggestive. In any event, the fact that Merleau-Ponty recognizes the need to "deepen" his earlier analysis of the perceptual world indicates that he came to believe that it was in one way or other too close to the surface. The later texts stress that "lived experience is not flat, without depth, without dimension...."<sup>15</sup> (VI, 124)

If one can speak here of an "error" in need of being "rectified", in our opinion this "error" is incorporated into the rhetorical situation of the early works. These works, it should be remembered, are rhetorically and polemically engaged with objective thought and indeed with particular scientific theories. Given that Merleau-Ponty attempts to address this thought on its own terrain, it

is only to be expected that the terms of his own positive analysis, designed to reach a common ground, will bear the mark of their rhetorical negative. In The Visible and the Invisible, however, although he continues this polemic, Merleau-Ponty is less detailed in his critique of science. He announces in a working note that "being must not only be made manifest through its divergence from the being of science," indicating that he is more concerned to work out a philosophy in his own terms. (VI, 176)

In speaking against certain views about perception in the Phenomenology, in arguing that they 'falsify', 'conceal', or otherwise 'miss' the phenomenal field, Merleau-Ponty sometimes speaks as if this field were something more 'clear and distinct', something more 'present', than he actually believed it to be. In order to state his case against objective thought, he appeals to a 'given' or 'ground' with which objective thought is out of touch. The rhetorical situation requires him to speak as if this ground were solid, so to speak. It seems he believes that although the 'ground' evades objective thought, it could nevertheless be fathomed by phenomenology. In The Visible and the Invisible, however, the status of the 'ground' becomes much more problematic. The 'ground' recedes in the measure that thought, even phenomenological thought, approaches it. It becomes an *Abgrund*. The return, the archeology of the perceived world, penetrates deeper and deeper into its opacity and ambiguities. The thought that turns back upon the world in search of its ground is unable to find a resting place, to get to the 'bottom' of things. The ground is deeper and the world is 'wilder' than it seemed to be against the sober background of

science in the early works.<sup>16</sup> It presents even more problems for a thought determined to master it and to render clear and distinct all its hidden corners.

Several later works play on the metaphor of "deepening". In his preface to A. Hesnard's book on Freud, for example, Merleau-Ponty speaks of a "deepening" of phenomenology in Husserl's later works.<sup>17</sup> He claims that Husserl moved away from a "philosophy of consciousness" and away from "phenomenological positivism" because he realized that certain beings, "the body, "time", "history," do not "allow themselves to be brought under the correlation of consciousness and its objects, of the noesis and the noema." (Ibid., 85-6) Such beings cannot be spread out frontally before consciousness and made present. In virtue of their depth, they exceed what can be circumscribed in any act of consciousness. Indeed, they have a dimension that is "hidden" from consciousness. Merleau-Ponty continues:

All consciousness is consciousness of something or of the world, but this *something*, this world, is no longer, as "phenomenological positivism" appeared to teach, an object that is what it is, exactly adjusted to acts of consciousness. Consciousness is now the "soul of Heraclitus", and Being, which is around it rather than in front of it, is a Being of dreams, by definition hidden: Husserl sometimes uses the term "pre-being".<sup>18</sup> (Ibid., 85)

In Merleau-Ponty's later writings there is a greater emphasis upon what does not present itself to consciousness. There is a greater emphasis upon what consciousness does not and cannot grasp; upon what escapes consciousness; upon what sustains it from below or surrounds and envelops it like an atmosphere.<sup>19</sup> The "ultimate task of phenomenology as philosophy of consciousness", he writes, "is to

understand its relationship to non-phenomenology." (S, 178) He links "non-phenomenology" with what "resists phenomenology within us", with "natural being", and with "the 'barbarous' source of which Schelling spoke." (S, 178) The 'jungle' tropes, the themes of 'wildness', 'bruteness', and 'savageness' that so predominate in The Visible and the Invisible, should be understood in this light. 'Wild being' is being that remains 'untamed' by our philosophy, being that does not obey the order by which we attempt to capture the world in thought. It is being that has not been caught in speech.

In The Visible and the Invisible, these themes are played out again and again in terms of the relationship between the immediate and the mediate. Indeed, the key philosophical problem posed by this work concerns the effects of mediation. Not surprisingly, some of the ambiguities we have analysed around this topic in the Phenomenology reappear here.<sup>20</sup> Merleau-Ponty sometimes gives the impression of believing that mediation per se is a source of error. It is the mediation of consciousness, language, or philosophy, that 'hides' wild being from us. Mediation tames. Wild being is unmediated, even prior to mediation.

Merleau-Ponty often frames the relationship between the mediate and the immediate in terms of speech and silence. He says the following about a kind of "interrogative thought" that would simply let things be, rather than taming them with its own projected order: "It asks of our experience of the world what the world is before it is a thing one speaks of and which is taken for granted, before it has been reduced to a set of manageable, disposable significations; it

directs this question to our mute life, it addresses itself to that compound of the world and ourselves that precedes reflection, because the examination of the significations in themselves would give us the world reduced to our idealizations and our syntax." (VI, 102) The mediation of language is here represented as a source of error. It tames our "mute life" and reduces it to "manageable significations" that effectively desensitize us to its wildness and its hidden dimensions.

The text quoted above, which is not atypical, helps us to formulate an important problem posed by the The Visible and the Invisible (and which surfaces in one form or another throughout Merleau-Ponty's authorship). John Sallis puts the problem clearly:

How are we to understand the distinction between things as they are prior to being spoken and things as taken up in speech, especially in view of the fact that this distinction is itself already taken up into speech? Especially in view of the indissoluble positivity of the expressed, is there not reason to suppose that to posit an utterly pre-linguistic world is no less inappropriate than to pose the objectivist's world of things in themselves? (Sallis, 113)

Indeed, what would license Merleau-Ponty to speak about "a pre-linguistic world"? From what point of view could it be disclosed? Merleau-Ponty reproaches objective thought for repressing or effacing its own mediation and for feigning to speak from nowhere as if its own mediation amounted to nothing. Would it not be inconsistent for him to claim that it is possible to erase the effects of his own language and to achieve unadulterated or unmediated presence to something that is identical to itself on the other side of all speech? If the silence to which he invites us to return were the contrary of speech, "utterly

pre-linguistic", as Sallis puts it, would not philosophy, as the attempt to express this silence, be a contradictory project?

If Merleau-Ponty's remarks on the return to silence are interpreted literally, then philosophy, insofar as it speaks, can only be a distortion. The philosopher speaks of silence, of wild being, and so on, but this silence is already broken by being spoken, the wildness tamed by being caught in speech. The Visible and the Invisible, as the attempt to say something about this silence, would be a contradictory project. As Sallis puts it, the silence expressed "is *not* that silence which we seek to bring to expression but rather that silence *as already brought to expression*, as already transposed into the medium of language...." (Ibid., 111) If philosophy speaks, it has to do not with silence but rather with silence as caught in a web of speech. "The only way to avoid breaking the silence," Sallis says, "is simply not to philosophize." (Ibid.) In these terms, philosophy is either false or it is mute.

The point Sallis makes is a good one, and it helps us to focus an important issue. However, he forces Merleau-Ponty into a dilemma that Merleau-Ponty himself rejects. Merleau-Ponty does not oppose silence and speech (or the immediate and the mediate) in the framework that Sallis lays out. When Merleau-Ponty advocates a return to "our experience of the world...before it is a thing one speaks of," he is not speaking literally. If he were, then indeed his philosophy could only issue in what he himself, following Hegel, calls an "unhappy consciousness".<sup>21</sup> To speak is to break the silence and no longer to be in truth, but to be silent is to renounce philosophy: an unhappy



situation. Merleau-Ponty does not accept these alternatives, however. He speaks disparagingly of "the reign of the ineffable." (VI, 95) The return to silence is not a matter of erasing the effects of speech, of history, in order to arrive at silence as an empty slate before speech got underway. He seeks a dialectical integration of silence and speech. Speech hides wild being, but it also discloses it.

Indeed, the view that Sallis ascribes to Merleau-Ponty is one that Merleau-Ponty himself ascribes to Bergson, who proposed a kind of intuition that would present being to us without any mediation. In the beginning, he says, Bergson did indeed conceive intuition as the absence of all mediation, as unadulterated presence to being. Merleau-Ponty writes: "'Simple act', 'viewing without a point of view', direct access without interposed symbols to the interior of things--all these celebrated formulas of intuition define it as a massive grip on being, without exploration, without interior movement of meaning." (IPP, 12) Bergson, however, advanced beyond this undialectical position and, according to Merleau-Ponty, moved "from a philosophy of impression to a philosophy of expression." (Ibid., 28) He writes: "Perhaps Bergson began by understanding philosophy as a simple return to what is *given*, but later on he saw that this secondary, laborious, rediscovered naiveté does not merge us with a previous reality, does not identify us with the thing itself, without any point of view, without symbol, without perspective." (Ibid., 18) Given that the mediation of point of view, perspective, symbol, and speech, do not erase their effects simply to present something such as

it might have been before their intervention, the status of the immediate, of an absolute silence, is very problematic.

Merleau-Ponty believes that the attacks upon mediation, indeed the repression of mediation, are motivated by an ill-conceived ideal of truth as coincidence. The undialectical opposition of immediacy and mediation or silence and speech, set against each other as truth to falsehood, follows from the logic of coincidence. If the ideal is to coincide with experience, to fuse with things in the alleged silence of perceptual life, speech could only be a divergence from the truth, because it is a non-coincidence. Language being thus determined as a principle of error or deception, philosophy has had to feign to erase its own linguisticity. On the other hand, however, "if language is not necessarily deceptive, truth is not coincidence, nor mute." (VI, 125)

Merleau-Ponty realizes that the project of coinciding with the immediate is an impossible one, and that the idea of the immediate as a literal origin before all mediation is suspect. He writes:

What we propose here, and oppose to the search for the immediate, is not the return to the immediate, the coincidence, the effective fusion with the existent, the search for an original integrity, for a secret lost and to be rediscovered, which would nullify our questions and even reprehend our language. If coincidence is lost, this is no accident; if Being is hidden, this is itself a characteristic of Being, and no disclosure will make us comprehend it. A lost immediate, arduous to restore, will, if we do restore it, bear within itself the sediment of the critical procedures through which we have found it anew; it will therefore not be the immediate. (VI, 121-2)

For Merleau-Ponty, there can be no question of denying the effects of mediation. A thought attempting to return to the immediate cannot

erase the path it took to get there and the immediate that it 'discovers' will bear the mark of the "critical procedures" that brought it to light. Whether philosophy admits it or not, such pristine reality as it 'discovers' bears the mark of its own linguistic intervention.

This is not to say, however, that we are confined in a prison-house of our own making, that everything is mediation. Although Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea of an immediate that would be the absolute 'other' of mediation, an ineffable silence, and accordingly rejects the ideal of coinciding with the immediate, he does not renounce the immediate altogether. Mediation, speech, does indeed have an 'other', but this other is not in principle ineffable or inaccessible to mediation. It is not a transcendence on the other side of our horizon, without a sign in the visible. Philosophy, he writes, is "not a return to an immediate--which recedes in the measure that philosophy wishes to approach it and fuse into it. The immediate is at the horizon and must be thought as such; it is only by remaining at a distance that it remains itself." (VI, 123) The horizon is a principle of mediation. To have a horizon means that what is 'given' always presents itself from 'somewhere' and in relation to a point of view (situational as well as geographical) that organizes the scene. While there can be no question of a seeing (or thinking) without horizons, to have a horizon is not to be confined in a prison of immanence and to be closed to what is other, different, and new. Things present themselves within a horizon, but they present themselves with a certain depth that can be explored. What is 'inside' is not fully

determinate. When Merleau-Ponty says that "the immediate is at the horizon" he means that what presents itself within our horizon (and is thus mediated) is pregnant with depth and wild possibilities that are transcendent with respect to our present point of view.

What Merleau-Ponty says about the visual field applies equally to the horizon: one cannot draw a sharp line demarcating what is 'inside' from what is 'outside', being and non-being, immanence and transcendence, the mediate and the immediate. Indeed, this is what objective thought tries to do. It tries to put a frame around the horizon, to circumscribe everything including its own contingent point of departure. Everything, including its own situatedness in a point of view, is swallowed up in 'the great object'. To say, however, as Merleau-Ponty does, that the horizon is open (and 'openness' is a key theme in The Visible and the Invisible), means there is a kind of undefined being in the distance or on the margins of what is given within our horizon, which is neither 'being' nor 'non-being' but, with Husserl, 'pre-being'. There is a gap on the horizon, a desire-engendering space, a clearing in which something new can announce itself and make its appearance.

The whole problem is to understand the relationship between the immanent and the transcendent, the mediate and the immediate, without opposing them as mutually exclusive terms. For Merleau-Ponty, there is indeed something given, but this something is not completely or exhaustively given. With respect to what is given, there is something transcendent, but this something is not completely transcendent. It is not 'outside' in relation to an 'inside' which by contrast would

contain everything that is. In a passage of crucial importance, Merleau-Ponty writes:

We are interrogating our experience precisely to know how it opens us to what is not ourselves. *This does not even exclude the possibility that we find in our experience a movement toward what could not in any event be present to us in the original and whose irremedial absence would thus count among our originating experiences.* But, if only in order to see these margins of presence, to discern these references, to put them to the test, or to interrogate them, we do indeed first have to fix our gaze on what is apparently given to us. (VI, 159)

Against 'phenomenological positivism', which demands of everything that 'is' that it present itself before consciousness, such interrogation attempts to disclose something about what does not present itself and is transcendent in relation to what is given. Such interrogation nevertheless remains phenomenological in that it discloses what is transcendent starting from what is given. The transcendent is not external to the given. It is not 'outside'. It is not the absolute 'other' of what is present. The transcendent, the immediate beyond or beneath what has already been said or made present, is not a thing-in-itself on the other side of all horizons. The transcendent is 'intertwined' with or 'hinged' to the given, as Merleau-Ponty would say.

What Merleau-Ponty says about the 'given' in relation to Bergson is relevant here: "What is given, then, is not the naked thing, the past itself such as it was in its own time, but rather the thing ready to be seen, pregnant in principle as well as in fact--with all the visions one can have of it...." (VI, 124) The perceptual world is not a frontal object laid out clearly and distinctly before our view. It is ambiguous in its givenness and exhibits a certain depth.

Things are given within our horizon and indeed can only be given thus, but they have a depth in virtue of which they are unfathomable. They are "pregnant" with pre-being. Because the given is indeterminate, it needs our visions to bring its unborn possibilities into being. We are the midwives of being, so to speak. Merleau-Ponty writes: "this perceptual world is at bottom Being in Heidegger's sense, which is more than all painting, than all speech, than every 'attitude', and which, apprehended by philosophy in its universality, appears as containing everything that will ever be said, and yet leaving us to create it (Proust)...." (VI, 170) In its latency or pregnancy, the perceptual world invokes expression from man as does a question.

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty sometimes speaks as if the initiative for this creation came from the world. He says that the "existing world exists in the interrogative mood." (VI, 103) As the landscape inspires the painter, the existing world inspires the philosopher to find the words that will promote it to its truth. This must be qualified, however, for not everyone is a painter or a philosopher. The landscape exists in the "interrogative mood" only for the interrogating eye of the student of the landscape, the eye that does not settle for what is given but seeks to disclose its hidden secrets. The world exists in the interrogative mood only when it has been divested of its self-evidence or taken-for-grantedness. Consider where Merleau-Ponty locates the initiative in the following remarks about what he calls 'hyper-reflection':

It must plunge into the world instead of surveying it, it must descend toward it such as it is instead of working its way back up toward a prior possibility of thinking it--which would

impose upon the world in advance the conditions for our control over it. It must question the world, it must enter into the forest of references that our interrogation arouses in it, it must make us say, finally, what in its silence *it means to say*. (VI, 38-9)

The initiative here is on the side of man. To interrogate means not to accept at face value, to probe what is said, to wrest a secret from someone. In the context of the preceding passage, the philosopher (or the painter) interrogates the already constituted to make it surrender its secrets.

Paradoxically, the return to silence that Merleau-Ponty advocates is a matter of learning how to speak. To paraphrase Proust, one must know how to read (that is, to speak) the silence. Merleau-Ponty writes:

"the sensible is, like life, a treasury ever full of things to say for him who is a philosopher (that is, a writer) And just as each finds to be true and rediscovers in himself what the writer says of life and of the sentiments, so also the phenomenologists are understood and made use of by those who say phenomenology is impossible. The root of the matter is that the sensible indeed offers nothing one could state if one is not a philosopher or a writer, but that this is not because it would be an ineffable in itself, but because of the fact that one does not know how to *speak*. (VI, 252)

The return to the silent world is at the same time a matter of finding one's voice. For one who "does not know how to speak", the world does not exist in the "interrogative mood" and offers no secrets or nothing to be said. That is to say, it appears as if everything were already said. The pregnant silence is drowned about by the noise or chatter of familiar words and names.

"It is by considering language that we would best see how we are to and how we are not to return to the things themselves,"

Merleau-Ponty says. (VI, 125) Contrary to what Sallis says, there can be no question that Merleau-Ponty seeks a self-effacing language, a language that would erase itself and its effects.<sup>22</sup> It is not a question of speech effacing itself in order to coincide with an ineffable silence on the other side of speech. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty says that "the definition of philosophy would involve an elucidation of philosophical expression itself (therefore a becoming conscious of the procedure used in what precedes 'naïvely', as though philosophy confined itself to reflecting what is) as the science of pre-science, as the expression of what is before expression and *sustains it from behind....*" (VI, 167)

Philosophical expression is born out of a return to silence. It turns back upon speech in order to disclose a silence that "sustains it from behind". The silence to which it returns, however, is not an ineffable. It is not the absolute 'other' of language. After describing philosophy as the return to silence, Merleau-Ponty adds:

But in addition, what it finds in returning to the sources, it says. It is itself a human construction, and the philosopher knows very well that, whatever be his efforts, in the best of cases it will take its place among the *artefacts* and products of culture, as an instance of them. If this paradox is not an impossibility, and if philosophy can speak, it is because language is not only the depository of fixed and acquired significations, because its cumulative power itself results from a power of anticipation or of prepossession, because one speaks not only of what one knows, so as to set out a display of it--but also of what one does not know, in order to know it--and because language in forming itself expresses, at least laterally, an ontogenesis of which it is a part. (VI, 102)

Philosophy sets itself the paradoxical task of returning to a ground, to a certain silence, not to coincide with it but rather to speak it,



effectively to bring it into being, to make it appear within the horizon.

These matters are best understood with reference to the distinction between constituted and constituting speech, 'philosophical expression' being an instance of constituting speech. The silence to which we are invited to return is silent only relative to what has already been said. The immediate is immediate only relative to what has already been mediated or constituted. Wild being is wild only relative to being that has already been confined in the lexicons of constituted speech. This is another way of saying that there is something transcendent with respect to what is already given, present, or constituted. When Merleau-Ponty invokes silence or wild being, this is in relation to constituted speech. Constituted speech is not exhaustive of being. There is something more yet to be said, something left out, something not captured in constituted speech. In a sense this something hidden by constituted speech, this silence drowned by its chatter, is 'waiting' to be said. The *terminus ad quem* of the return is as yet unsaid, but it is not in principle unsayable. If it is speech (constituted) that hides it, it is also speech (constituting) that will reveal it or bring it out of hiddenness.

With respect to constituted speech--to what has been said, tamed in lexicons, flattened out and rendered evident--philosophy is a return to silence. It 'starves things by not knowing them', it places itself at the origin of the world. This return does not literally take us to the beginning of history, at a time before there was something said. It is not a matter of erasing one's point of view. It is rather

a matter of creating an opening, a space, or a gap in the fullness of what has already been said or constituted, of making the already said questionable. In the final analysis, this is the significance of the reduction for Merleau-Ponty, which, he says, underwent a "fresh mutation" in Husserl's later thought. Merleau-Ponty writes: "The reduction no longer involves a return to ideal being, but brings us back to the spirit of Heraclitus, to an interweaving of horizons, to an open Being." (TFL, 109) According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl once believed that the reduction installed us in a sphere of immanence in which being would be fully present without distance to a sovereign transcendental ego. This ego would not need to speak in order to know being. At best 'its' speech would efface itself in order to mirror something already fully formed on the other side of speech. In his later writings, however, and spurred on by fresh investigations into the 'phenomenology of language', Husserl began to see the reduction as the creation of an opening. Being, such as it discloses itself through this opening, appears as something less determinate and more wild. It ceases to be something that could be circumscribed and contained within the horizon of reduced thought and becomes rather 'pre-being'. It needs the speech of the philosopher to bring it into being. It summons his speech as a question summons an answer.

In the later philosophy of both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, philosophy is presented as the enemy of what is today called 'closure' and as the vigilant guardian of an open space (or gate) on the horizon of our tradition. It becomes a matter of keeping an open ear, of listening for the voices of silence drowned out by the noise of the

already constituted. The voices of silence for which the philosopher listens, however, do not speak in an articulate language such that he could pretend simply to record or translate an original text. The philosopher must read, write, interpret. His speech does not efface itself simply to make present a silence that is what it is on the other side of his speech. His "language realizes, by breaking the silence, what the silence wished and did not obtain," Merleau-Ponty says. (VI, 176-7)

For Merleau-Ponty, there are thus essentially two ways of misconceiving philosophical expression. The first would be to construe it as the attempt to achieve adequation (or coincidence) with pre-existent being. The speech of the philosopher would not penetrate being but would remain external to it. It would not make a difference. Indeed, to the extent that it did make a difference, it would fail to achieve adequation, for its difference could only be a distorting one. On this model, speech would have to efface itself in order to leave its object 'pure' and 'unmediated'. For Merleau-Ponty, however, philosophical expression does not mirror, coincide, or fuse with something that is what it is without philosophy. The originating speech of the philosopher does not efface itself in order to present something identical to itself on the other side of speech. Originating speech is a creation.

One would equally misconceive philosophical expression, however, if one separated this creation from its ground, from the pre-being it seeks to express. Merleau-Ponty indeed rejects a certain model of adequation, but he does not abandon the goal of adequation

altogether. To do so would be to reduce philosophy to the status of groundless speech. In a working note, Merleau-Ponty writes:

Philosophy as creation, resting on itself--that cannot be the final truth. For it would be a creation that sets as its goal to express as *Gebilde* what is *von selbst* (the *Lebenswelt*), that therefore negates itself as pure creation....What there is is a creation that is called forth and engendered by the *Lebenswelt* as operative, latent historicity, that prolongs it and bears witness to it." (VI, 174)

In returning to the sources (or resources of speech) philosophical expression knows that it is indebted to something that has preceded it, to a ground of which it is an expression. There is indeed something with which expression is obliged to accord and to be faithful, but this something is not fully-formed to begin with. It must be created.

This ambivalence is what Merleau-Ponty attempts to express when he speaks of philosophical expression as a 'creative adequation'. Philosophy (insofar as it is originating) turns back upon what has already been said in an attempt to uncover something more fundamental. This fundamental, however, is not preformed such that the task of expression would be to mirror or to coincide with it. To begin with, it is a non-being (but a determinate non-being, a pre-being). It must be expressed in order to come into being. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Philosophy, precisely as 'Being speaking within us,' expression of the mute experience by itself, is creation. A creation that is at the same time a reintegration of Being: for it is not a creation in the sense of one of the commonplace *Gebilde* that history fabricates: it knows itself to be a *Gebilde* and wishes to surpass itself as *pure Gebilde*, to find again its origin. It is hence a creation in the radical sense: a creation that is at the same time an adequation, the only way to obtain an adequation. Being is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it. (VI, 197)

Philosophical expression knows that it is a creation, knows that it is situated in a language and indeed a history of creation, but it also knows itself as opening upon something that has not yet been caught in speech, something that will come into being only in being expressed. Merleau-Ponty continues: "Being is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it."

Let us focus this issue with reference to the problem of the relationship between the Phenomenology and The Visible and the Invisible. That there is difference or change between these texts is undeniable. In addition to his explicit statements about his dissatisfaction with his earlier works, Merleau-Ponty introduces a whole new set of terms, a whole new vocabulary. He calls for a reform of the very concepts that were operative in the early works.<sup>23</sup> He proclaims his intention to "reinspect and redefine the most well-grounded notions, to create new ones, with new words to designate them, to undertake a true reform of the understanding...." (VI, 3) How ought we to interpret this change?

Two possibilities suggest themselves. One could say that the fact that the language is different is not important, that language is only a necessary inconvenience for presenting a truth on the other side of language. The world that Merleau-Ponty described in The Visible and the Invisible is the 'same' as the world described in the Phenomenology and the difference is only a nominal one. It is this world, on the 'other' side of all expression, that he sought to achieve adequation with and to which his different works merely 'refer'. The other possibility would be to eliminate the 'referent'

and to say that, 'there being nothing outside of the text', the world described in each text is completely different.

Neither of these forced alternatives is satisfactory. The first is to be rejected because it supposes that language and world can be sharply separated, whereas Merleau-Ponty teaches the intertwining of language and world. The second possibility, however, is also to be rejected. If Merleau-Ponty does not believe that one can meaningfully talk about a world independent of language, he nevertheless believes that the world is more than what has already been said. The world is given to us only through the mediation of language, but it also exceeds our mediation. In its excess or transcendence, however, the world is not a thing in itself on the other side of our speech. This excess, this surplus of being, is given to us as a determinate gap on the horizon of the constituted world, an indeterminate something that will only come into being in being named.

One of the key terms in The Visible and the Invisible is the 'flesh' (*la chair*). The fact that he typically describes the flesh in a series of negations is significant for us. For example, he writes: "The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance." (VI, 139) Such negative determinations signify that what he calls the 'flesh' is being that has not yet been said in constituted speech. Indeed, he says that "there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it." (Ibid., 139) The question we raise is this: are we to believe that the 'flesh' was 'already there' even before Merleau-Ponty gave it a name in his philosophy? .

To be sure, 'something' pre-existed its expression. He who spoke of the flesh was situated in a history. If the notion of the flesh is born from a return to silence, this return to silence is not a matter of erasing everything that had already been said. In determining the meaning of this notion, it would not be extraneous to consider the philosophy he had studied, the books he had already written, and even the fact that he was a Catholic. To understand the 'flesh', it would be helpful to relate it to such notions as the 'intentional arc', 'physiognomy', 'style', and 'embodied meaning', which were already formulated in the Phenomenology. Such echoes are not surprising because, after all, it is in some sense the 'same' author who wrote each of these texts. Merleau-Ponty no doubt changed from one text to the next, but he did not and could never erase the history from which he spoke. One never speaks from a blank slate.

But neither does one speak from a slate upon which everything that one will say is already written. As Merleau-Ponty says, "one speaks not only of what one knows, so as to set out a display of it--but also of what one does not know, in order to know it...." (VI, 102) The fact that the notion of the flesh is created from something should not deafen us to what is new in this notion, or lead us to conclude that it is merely a different name for what is already there. Indeed, if it were already there, why would the philosopher search for new expressions? For Merleau-Ponty, as for Husserl, the philosopher is a perpetual beginner who is constantly interrogating what has already been said in order to uncover the spaces between the words, the gaps of silence. The desire that drives the dialectic of expression and

that keeps thought from basking in its acquisitions digs beneath the surface of constituted speech revealing that there is something more yet to be said, something perhaps concealed in what has already been said.

This 'something more' is at first experienced only as an excess or surplus of what is lived over what has already been said, a determinate gap, an open space. Through this opening the philosopher catches the indeterminate outline of a strange being lurking in the shadows, in the silent spaces between the words, a being that will come out of hiding only when one calls it by its name. "For words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who speak and write. It is in the word, in language, that things first come to be and are."<sup>24</sup>



## CONCLUSION

La terre nous en apprend plus long sur nous que tous les livres. Parce qu'elle nous résiste.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The idea of philosophical expression as creative adequation is central to the project of The Visible and the Invisible.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, reading retrospectively, this idea appears as the culmination of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It echoes and resumes a tortuous ambivalence that had appeared even in his early works. What he says about creative adequation, however, is far from satisfying. Certainly he has provided nothing like a 'theory of philosophical expression'. One could excuse him for this on the grounds that The Visible and the Invisible is, after all, an unfinished work. Perhaps a fully developed position, less vague and less ambivalent, would have been articulated had the work been completed. In any event, the failure to render the idea of creative adequation clear and distinct would not necessarily be reproachable according to Merleau-Ponty's own standards. For Merleau-Ponty, it is those thoughts that cannot be easily consumed and that leave something remaining to be thought that are most interesting and important. He writes:

If there is an ideality, a thought that has a future in me, that even breaks through my space of consciousness and has a future with the others, and finally, having become a writing, has a future in every possible reader, this can only be that thought that leaves me with my hunger and leaves them with their hunger, that betokens a generalized buckling of my

landscape and opens it to the universal, precisely because it is an *unthought*. Ideas that are too much possessed are no longer ideas; I no longer think of anything when I speak them.... (VI, 118-9)

Creative adequation would no doubt qualify as one of these thoughts that, in virtue of its deviation from established standards, "breaks through the space of my consciousness" and, with this opening, creates a "hunger".

Indeed, what is said about several of the key ideas of The Visible and the Invisible--the flesh, wild being, silence, the chiasm--leaves us hungry. This has to do with the incompleteness of the meal, but also with the kind of cuisine that is offered. In general, Merleau-Ponty's later writings are marked not only by an increased emphasis upon language, but also by a change in the way that he himself uses language. There is more frequent recourse to metaphors, for example, which often bear the burden of the analysis. His writing becomes much more indirect and allusive. It is a style of writing that, by the standards of traditional philosophy--the standard of clarity and distinctness, for example--might well be judged a failure because it is frequently vague, indeterminate, ambiguous, and even paradoxical.

Merleau-Ponty, however, makes a virtue out of what traditional philosophy has deemed a vice. In his view, ideas that are clear and distinct, "that are too much possessed", that satiate us, are suspect precisely for reason of their clarity. Philosophy as Merleau-Ponty conceives it, as the interrogation of what has already been said and the effort to express wild being, must incorporate something of this

wildness in its own use of language. Wild being discloses itself only in wild language, in words that free, rather than "contain". "The words most charged with philosophy," he says, "are not those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon Being, because they more closely convey the life of the whole and make our habitual evidence vibrate until they disjoin." (VI, 102) These 'energetic words' are groping words. They aim at an indeterminate point beyond or beneath what has already been said. They flirt precariously with non-sense because they venture beyond the sense-legislating borders of constituted speech, beyond the safe self-evidence of what has already been thought 'clearly and distinctly'.<sup>2</sup>

These themes concerning a wild use of language arise again and again in The Visible and the Invisible. With reference to a use of language that would be a "manner of making the things themselves speak," he writes:<sup>3</sup> "It would be a language of which he [the philosopher] would not be the organizer, words he would not assemble, that would combine through him by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning, through the occult trading of the metaphor--where what counts is no longer the manifest meaning of each word and of each image, but the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges." (VI, 125) The words spoken of here are words that have meanings not yet contained by lexicons, words that do not have readily available meanings that could easily be circumscribed in taming definitions. In an important sense, they are words that have not yet been mastered, words that the philosopher has

not "organized", words that "assemble" in clandestine "kinships" other than those "manifest" ones over which he dominates. They are words that bear a thought that is unthought.

It is mastery, the idea of a sovereign subject (an "organizer") using language as an instrument to dominate things and bring them to order, that is being attacked in the above quoted passage and in so many other similar passages in Merleau-Ponty's later writings. For the later Merleau-Ponty, influenced by Heidegger, it is language that has us, and not we who have language. The philosopher, if he is to disclose wild being, must abdicate his sovereignty (or illusion of sovereignty) and let himself be carried by a power that language has over and above what he wilfully invests in it.

This relinquishment of mastery, however, should not be construed to mean that Merleau-Ponty excuses the philosopher from the task and responsibility of making himself intelligible to others. Merleau-Ponty does not reduce philosophy to the status of automatic writing or license the philosopher to say just anything. Although he believes that speech that is truly philosophical must risk itself, and risk not being understood, understanding (and communication) nevertheless remains the telos of speech for Merleau-Ponty. The understanding for which the originating philosopher reaches, however, is one that will be achieved only by transcending who one already is and has become. On the other hand, one who speaks according to and under the auspices of constituted speech can be sure of being immediately understood, but such immediate understanding wins nothing new and only confirms what we already know or believe we know.

Ironically, mastery, or the illusion of mastery, can be won only at the price of a kind of slavishness to constituted speech. It is secured only in the failure to ask fundamental questions and to take risks.

Originating (constituting) speech is not simply different from constituted speech, however. The speech of the lunatic or the idiot, after all, breaks the rules and transgresses the norms. In addition to being nominally different, originating speech knows that it is different, and knows what it is different from. Cézanne transgressed many rules, as all originating painters do, but he knew that he was breaking rules, and knew what rules he was breaking. Creativity, in speech as in painting, is not creation *ex nihilo*. It is in a dialectical relation to constituted speech. It is not simply a nominal deviation from constituted speech; it is a self-conscious departure. It begins with an interrogation of what has already been said in order to write some new things between the lines and in the margins.

The above remarks suggest what is perhaps the best way to come at the idea of creative adequation, namely, with reference to Merleau-Ponty's divergence from what has already been said. Merleau-Ponty, I have argued throughout this thesis, is a supremely rhetorical writer, a writer who defines his position with polemical reference to others. He forges new paths by navigating a space in between constituted positions, weighing upon them as markers by which to keep his bearings. Descombes correctly identifies this as an essential feature of what he calls "Merleau-Ponty's style". "Whatever the subject being broached," Descombes writes, "an antithesis is

sketched only to be rejected (Neither... nor...)."4 In order to follow the path of Merleau-Ponty's speech, it is necessary to keep an eye on the "neither" and the "nor" between which he moves. What is the "neither" and the "nor" between which the idea of creative adequation navigates a course?

On the one side, there is the 'traditional' view that philosophy ought to achieve coincidence or adequation with something: nature, being, experience, the given. On this view, philosophical expression, in the best of cases, is 'a mirror of nature', as Rorty puts it. The less language obtrudes, the better it serves its mirroring function. Ideally, philosophy should present its object as it would be, or would have been, before anyone ever spoke about it. The corporeality of words is not significant, since words are merely the external signs or accompaniment of ideas or reflections. Ultimately, it is not with words but with ideas that the philosopher has to do; ideas that are capable of mirroring precisely insofar as they are devoid of empirical content, insofar as, like a mirror, they have no surface and offer no resistance. The philosopher polishes his ideas, makes them clear and distinct, so that they can better realize their mirroring function and achieve adequation with something 'undistorted' by a point of view.

Merleau-Ponty rejects this model of adequation because he views language as something other than a mirror. He attends to the repressed fact that the philosopher speaks, and sees in the philosopher's own instance of speech a principle of non-coincidence or non-adequation. For Merleau-Ponty, philosophy is indeed a return, but "what it finds

in thus returning to the sources, it says. It is itself a human construction, and the philosopher knows very well that, whatever be his effort, in the best of cases it will take its place among the *artefacts* and products of culture, as an instance of them." (VI, 102) This is another way of saying that the philosopher speaks from somewhere, within a horizon that is not transparent to him, a horizon in virtue of which what is given as being transparent is given as such, an invisible in virtue of which there is something visible. A philosophy, because it must needs be incorporated in a language, can always be dated, and ironically what the philosopher says about eternal Being will take a place in the history of philosophy among other dated sayings, some of which will be contradictory. A philosophy is not a mirror held up to nature but a human construction, indeed a human creation.

Merleau-Ponty's critique of the notion of adequation, and the view of language upon which it is based, is strikingly similar both to the post-analytic philosophy of Richard Rorty and to the deconstructive non-philosophy of Jacques Derrida. Rorty's critique of the mirror idea and Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence both take their cue from the fact that the philosopher is someone who speaks. In virtue of this fact or this facticity, of the corporeality of his language, his philosophy is situated in a point of view. The philosopher's inherence in a language is an embarrassing reminder of his facticity (or historicity) and gives the lie to the illusion of a positionless or presuppositionless seeing. It subverts the traditional philosopher's pretense to a pristine, unmediated presence.

Merleau-Ponty (and phenomenology in general) has been grossly misrepresented on these matters. Indeed, the very view of adequation that Merleau-Ponty criticizes and rejects is often ascribed to him. Descombes' critique of phenomenology, from the standpoint of deconstruction, is a typical example of this. He writes:

*Deconstruction* appears to denote a negative operation, whereas *description* suggests the simple acceptance of the given. In reality, the 'phenomenological positivism' of which Merleau-Ponty speaks was never 'the return to the things themselves', nor the 'decision to confine oneself to the given' which it claimed to be, for it is no way given, like a fact which would simply require description, that the given is given 'to a consciousness', in a 'noetico-noematic correlation' etc.<sup>5</sup>

Descombes has misrepresented Merleau-Ponty's "phenomenological positivism". For Merleau-Ponty, I have argued throughout this thesis, "the return to the things themselves", even in the early works, was never a matter of a presuppositionless seeing, and the "given" was never something that could be described without point of view.

Indeed, if we take deconstruction in the sense Descombes gives it, Merleau-Ponty's position on the idea of coincidence or adequation with the given is itself deconstructive.<sup>6</sup> Speaking of deconstruction, Descombes writes:

Such a programme is clearly critical, for the philosophical statement means to be, or would claim to be, governed by the thing itself, and seeks only to make manifest the referent which it invokes, to show it, or to 'allow it to exist'. But the deconstruction of philosophical statements destroys this illusion. It is not because it reflects the thing itself, thereby permitting the thing to declare itself to us, that the statement is constructed the way it is. The statement is only constituted in this way as a result of the constraints inherent in philosophical discourse.<sup>7</sup>

Not only is this 'deconstructive analysis' of the philosophical statement, directed against Merleau-Ponty, compatible with what



Merleau-Ponty says, but he could have written it himself! Indeed it is what his critique of adequation amounts to in so many words. Merleau-Ponty does not need to be instructed that "the thing itself addresses you through the channels of the philosophical proposition."<sup>3</sup> Descombes (and others whose voices he echoes) needs to be reminded of Merleau-Ponty's critique of unmediated access to the given and of philosophical expression as a self-effacing mirror. He has missed the fact that Merleau-Ponty realized, and indeed emphasized, that philosophy "is itself a human construction,...[and] in the best of cases will take its place among the *artefacts* and products of culture...." (VI, 102)

Given the ambivalence in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, his effort to map out a territory between two apparently contradictory theses, it is not surprising that he has been misunderstood in this way. It is true that he understands philosophy as being essentially a return, and this metaphor lends itself to misinterpretation. He does not, however, advocate a naive return of the sort that Descombes criticizes. On the contrary, he criticizes such naivety. He does indeed advocate that we return to the things themselves, but 'the things themselves' of which he speaks are not given as such independently of our effort to express them.

This leads us to the other position away from which Merleau-Ponty steers a course. His affinities with deconstruction, and with Rorty, become tenuous in that, risking the possibility of being misunderstood, he retains the 'given', the 'things themselves', 'experience', the 'return'. To be sure, he does not retain these

things in a naive way, but he does nevertheless retain them. He realizes and even emphasizes that philosophy is a dated construct of culture and not simply a mirror of some eternal Being and rejects adequation in the sense of mirroring, but he nevertheless finds something in the idea of adequation worth preserving. Against adequation as traditionally conceived, he appeals to the mediating role of language and to the creativity involved in philosophical expression. Against the opposite extreme of reducing philosophy to statements and making of it a kind of groundless creativity, a 'bottomless chessboard', however, he appeals to adequation. It is necessary to balance his critique of philosophy as adequation with his critique of philosophy as a groundless creation.

Merleau-Ponty is speaking against the idea of groundless creativity when he says that philosophy "addresses itself to that compound of the world and of ourselves that precedes reflection, because the examination of the significations in themselves would give us the world reduced to our idealizations and syntax." (VI, 102) He retains the idea of adequation and brings it into play in his critique of groundless creativity, because he is sensitive to something about our existence, about "that compound of the world and of ourselves that precedes reflection," that both sustains and exceeds what we have been able to capture in our statements or our expressions. Indeed, it is this elusive something that fuels the desire to express in the first place.

To be sure, this something is not a thing in itself on the other side of all point of view and all language, and the *telos* of

expression is not to mirror it. It only properly comes into being through our effort of expression, as what resists us, and yet sustains us, like the ground we walk upon. That there is no thing in itself that language could reflect in a mirror image does not mean, however, that we are left only with statements or things said. Our effort of expression gropes toward something indeterminate, something which has not yet been captured in what has been said. The idea of expression includes both the idea of something that engenders expression (the pre-expressed or unexpressed, silence) and of something that is expressed or captured in the expression. Merleau-Ponty wants to hold both of these together.

On the one hand, he wants to avoid a rigid separation between expression and the pre-expressed. He wants to avoid reifying the pre-expressed and making of it something completely external to expression, something that has its identity independently of expression, a pristine presence. On the other hand, however, he wants to preserve a difference between expression and the pre-expressed, the idea of something transcendent to what is expressed. For Merleau-Ponty, expression is not groundless, although its ground is not fully determinate such that expression could be its mirror image. In the final analysis, the ground is an *Abgrund*. If we cut expression off from its ground, from what expression returns upon in desire, from the life-world, we are left with a "world reduced to our idealizations and syntax." (VI, 102) The world loses its transcendence and its mystery.

For Merleau-Ponty, it is a vague experience of something not yet said, something that resists our clear and distinct ideas, that awakens in us the desire, and indeed the need, to speak. If this desire, this *vouloir dire*, is left out of account, it becomes difficult to understand not only what speech opens onto, but also why anyone should speak at all. For the interrogating eye or the perked ear, the world exists in the interrogative mood, pregnant with words waiting to be delivered. It is a life-world, a world not simply given, but alive under our feet and under our express statements. If the originating philosopher speaks, it is to respond to a barely audible question posed by the whispering voices of the things themselves. We conclude this thesis with a passage from The Visible and the Invisible, which some will no doubt find unsatisfying because of the ambivalence it leaves us with, but which, in its ambivalence, expresses what is perhaps most essential in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty:

What would there be to say if there existed nothing but things said? It is the error of the semantic philosophies to close up language as if it spoke only of itself: language lives only from silence; everything we cast to the others has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave. But, because he has experienced within himself the need to speak, the birth of speech as bubbling up at the bottom of his mute experience, the philosopher knows better than anyone that what is lived is lived-spoken.... (VI, 125-6)

## END NOTES

### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAL        Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language, trans. Hugh J. Silverman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

IPP        In Praise of Philosophy, trans. John Wild and James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963).

PhP        Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

PriP       The Primacy of Perception, trans. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

PrW        The Prose of the World, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

S          Signs, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

SB        The Structure of Behavior, trans. Alden L. Fisher (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

SN        Sense and Non-Sense, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

TFL        Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

VI        The Visible and the Invisible, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

## PREFACE

1. It should be noted that Merleau-Ponty's attitude toward the term 'metaphysics' changes, perhaps occasioned by the influence of Heidegger's later writings. In Merleau-Ponty's early works, it is not used perjoratively, as it is here. For example, see "Metaphysics and the Novel" and "The Metaphysical in Man" in Sense and Non-Sense.

## INTRODUCTION: READING MERLEAU-PONTY

1. This expression originates with Roland Barthes. See "The Death of the Author", in The Rustle of Language, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986). Barthes' meaning is quite clear from the following passage:

To assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing....once the author is found, the text is explained....we must reverse the myth--the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the author. (pp. 53-4)

2. For example, Merleau-Ponty writes:

The words and turns of phrase needed to bring my significative intention to expression recommend themselves to me, when I am speaking, only by what Humboldt called *innere Sprachform* (and our contemporaries call *Wortbegriff*), that is, only by a certain style of speaking from which they arise and according to which they are organized without my having to represent them to myself. (S, 88)

3. If the author is conceived as the master of his text and in total control of all its possible meaning, and if the reader is conceived as passively recording what is 'already there', then Merleau-Ponty anticipates both 'the death of the author' and the 'birth of the reader'. His reading of Husserl (by certain standards a mis-reading), for example, attests to his view that there is an element of 'creativity' in all textual interpretation. He would no doubt protest, however, that Barthes gives the reader an unrestrained creativity. For Merleau-Ponty, reading is indeed creative, but it must nevertheless seek to be faithful to the author's meaning, granted that this meaning is not something that the author could ever totally control.

In Michel Foucault's works, the 'death of the author' appears from a very different angle than in Barthes. In stressing the effective history at work in textual production, Foucault goes too far in the direction of reducing the author, the experience of creativity involved in authorship, to a mere effect of impersonal processes. See

"What is an Author", in Language, Counter-Memory, Practise, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). Unlike Barthes, Foucault shows no regard for the distinction between constituting and constituted speech. Merleau-Ponty's notion of expression, I believe, manages to incorporate what is valuable in the attack upon the author without reducing the author to the status of an effect of language.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth", p. 41.

5. Eugene Bertoldi, for example, sees an inconsistency between Merleau-Ponty's use of dialectic, on the one hand, and his claimed allegiance to phenomenology, on the other. According to Bertoldi, dialectic proceeds by means of a critical examination of stated positions on some subject, whereas phenomenology dispenses with such mediation and goes directly to 'the things themselves'. He argues that Merleau-Ponty's use of dialectic is reproachable in "a work that presented itself as a development of Husserlian phenomenology, a style of philosophy that claimed to return to the things themselves, that claimed to be dedicated to neutralizing any pre-conceived manner of investigating problems in favour of a radical and faithful description of what appears." "Time in the Phenomenology of Perception", Dialogue Vol. XIII, no. 4, 1974, pp. 781-2. The assumption here is that phenomenology requires us to prescind from things said, advocating instead that we seek direct access to "what appears". To be sure, this conception of phenomenology--which is shared by deconstructionists, who go on to criticize it for being naive--can be justified on a certain reading of Husserl. It is not, however, how Merleau-Ponty conceives phenomenology (nor is it how he reads Husserl). I argue that his conception of phenomenology, and to a lesser extent Husserl's, is itself more sophisticated, if somewhat ambiguous.

When I use the term 'dialectical' to describe Merleau-Ponty style of philosophizing, I mean that he approaches a given subject matter with reference to what others have said about it. Since in most cases he is critical of what others have said, and articulates his own position in opposition to other positions, dialectics amounts to much the same thing as polemics.

6. The 'detractors' I have in mind here are deconstructionists. Derrida, for example, writes: "And contrary to what phenomenology--which is always phenomenology of perception--has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted to believe, the thing itself always escapes." Speech and Phenomena, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 104. If this remark, as seems likely, is directed against Merleau-Ponty, then Derrida misrepresents Merleau-Ponty's conception of phenomenology and his primacy of perception thesis. Merleau-Ponty, I shall argue, never believed that we could achieve unmediated presence "to the thing itself" or that perceptual

experience is something that could be simply 'given' to reflection in full presence. If what Derrida argues against is indeed orthodox phenomenology, then Merleau-Ponty is not orthodox and is as critical of orthodoxy as is Derrida. Nancy Holland has stated this case well: "Much of what Merleau-Ponty says, in The Phenomenology of Perception [sic], denies any primacy to, or often any possibility of, presence. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty's work often seems to foreshadow some of the criticisms Derrida himself makes of traditional phenomenology." "Merleau-Ponty on Presence: A Derridian Reading", in Research in Phenomenology, Vol. XVI, 1986, pp. 111-2.

## CHAPTER 1: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERITAGE

1. The biographical details of Merleau-Ponty's encounter with phenomenology are well known and so I will not recount them here. See, for example, Robert M. Friedman, "The Formation of Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy", Philosophy Today, Winter 1973, Vol. 17, pp. 272-8. Certainly there were other important influences, Hegel, Heidegger, and Marx to name the more obvious ones, but I have chosen to focus on Husserl because he is Merleau-Ponty's major partner in conversation throughout his authorship, his alter ego, so to speak. Merleau-Ponty keeps coming back to Husserl, interpreting him and reinterpreting him. Indeed, one could plot the development of Merleau-Ponty's thought with reference to his successive reinterpretations of Husserl. To a certain extent, this is what I do in this thesis.

2. See, for example, Edmund Husserl's Logical Investigations, trans. J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), Vol. 1., p. 252.: "Meanings inspired only by remote, confused, inauthentic intuitions--if by any intuitions at all--are not enough: we must *go back* to the 'things themselves'.

Husserl says much the same thing, albeit in a different context, in "Philosophy as Rigorous Science", in Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1965), p. 96-7. "In the epoch of vigorous reaction against Scholasticism the war cry was: 'Away with empty word analyses! Back to experience, to seeing, which alone can give our words sense and rational justification.' Very much to the point! But what then are the things? And what sort of experience is it to which we must return in psychology?"

3. What Merleau-Ponty, with Kierkegaard, calls 'objectivism' or 'objective thought', usually comprehends both 'empiricism' and 'intellectualism'. In some places, however, he uses the terms 'objectivism' and 'objective thought' more restrictively as approximate equivalents of 'empiricism' (for example, see PhP, 443). Charles Flynn, for example, follows this latter usage. I quote the following passage from Flynn both because it clarifies this usage and because it is an excellent statement of Merleau-Ponty's position:



In the Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty again elaborates his own position against the background of a presentation and critique of objectivism and intellectualism, empiricism and idealism. What he accomplishes by this procedure is to show that the positions at the opposite poles of the philosophical spectrum share one common assumption, namely, the determinancy of being. In their analyses of perception, both objectivism and intellectualism relegate the ambiguity of the perceived world, the trailing off of objects into an indefinite horizon, to the status of appearance....Being is itself determinate, it is merely for us that there is ambiguity, indeterminacy, horizons. "Textuality and the Flesh: Derrida and Merleau-Ponty", Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, Vol. 15, no. 2, May 1984, p. 173.

While this usage has some textual justification, I prefer to use 'objectivism' or 'objective thought' as blanket terms encompassing both of the terms Flynn opposes.

4. In Edmund Husserl, The Crisis of the European Sciences, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). (Hereafter Crisis.) See esp. p. 292 on the concept of objectivism, which tends to have a more restricted meaning for Husserl than it does for Merleau-Ponty.

5. Merleau-Ponty himself uses a number of terms almost interchangeably, e.g. 'existence', 'experience', 'being-in-the-world', 'life-world', 'the phenomenal field'.

6. John Bannan, The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1967), pp. 3-4.

7. To be sure, the meaning of the terms is not exactly the same, but such difference in meaning as may obtain is not significant for our purposes.

8. E. Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962). (Hereafter Ideas.)

9. Concerning the issues involved in distinguishing between the epochē and the reduction, see Richard Schmitt, "Husserl's Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction" in Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretation, ed. Joseph J. Kocklemans (Garden City: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1967), esp. p. 61.

10. What Husserl calls the 'natural attitude' could be roughly mapped onto the discussion of 'actual reality' in "Philosophy as Rigorous Science".

11. Such analysis is already on the way to 'teleological-historical reflection'.

12. Carr maintains that the natural attitude, as discussed in Ideas, is an explicitly theoretical attitude (see translator's Introduction in Crisis, p. xxxix), and gives a textual reference in support of this claim. While I agree that the particular passage that Carr refers to lends itself to this interpretation (Boyce Gibson, in his English translation [p. 45], seems to interpret it this way), I believe that overall the Ideas does not support this interpretation. Chapter 3 is especially relevant in this regard. For example, Husserl writes: "But the *natural world*, the world in the ordinary sense of the word, is *constantly there for me*, so long as I live naturally and look in its direction. I am then at the '*natural standpoint*', which is just another way of stating the same thing." (Ideas, 84) In this passage, Husserl seems to be saying that the natural attitude (standpoint) is pre-theoretical. This conclusion (and other passages could be adduced in its favour) is also supported by 'circumstantial evidence'. If the natural attitude were indeed an explicitly theoretical attitude, then, following Husserl's logic, it should have come under the philosophic epochē. This epochē alone should be sufficient to put this attitude out of play. In Ideas, Husserl does not grant the philosophic epochē this much range, however.

I grant Carr that the natural attitude is not neutral with respect to theory, but I believe that its theory is only 'implicit'. If one begins to reflect and to disclose what is presupposed in this attitude, the explicit theory that emerges is roughly what is called 'naive realism'. In a sense, this theory has been present from the beginning as presupposed, but it has not been made explicit. This is how Merleau-Ponty interprets the matter. He writes:

The natural attitude really becomes an attitude--a tissue of judicatory and propositional acts--only when it becomes a naturalistic thesis. The natural attitude itself emerges unscathed from the complaints which can be made about naturalism, because it is "prior to all thesis," because it is the mystery of a *Weltthesis* prior to all theses. It is, Husserl says in another connection, the mystery of a primordial faith and a fundamental and original opinion (*Urglaube, Urdoxa*) which are thus not even in principle translatable in terms of clear and distinct knowledge, and which--more ancient than any "attitude" or "point of view"--gives us not a representation of the world but the world itself. (S, 163)

13. Husserl says the following about his own brand of what he calls 'phenomenological idealism':

Its sole task and service is to clarify the meaning of this world, the precise sense in which everyone accepts it, and with undeniable right, as really existing. That it exists--given as it is as a universe out there in an experience that is continuous, and held persistently together through a thread of widespread unanimity--that is quite indubitable. (Ideas, 14).

14. Paul Ricoeur, Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987), p. 147.

15. See the quotation from the appendix to the German edition in the Crisis in Carr's footnote on p. 102. According to Husserl, Part III stands in relation to the first two parts as an opera does to an overture.

16. P. Ricoeur, Husserl, pp. 145-9.

17. D. Carr, Translator's introduction to the Crisis, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

18. Ibid., p. xxxii.

19. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. anonymously (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 245.

20. In addition to the version of this 'story' in the Crisis, see also Husserl's Formal and Transcendental Logic, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1969). The entire introduction is relevant, but esp. p. 5.

21. "Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it." Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), H12, p.32.

22. In this light the fundamental humanism behind Husserl's philosophical project is most apparent. The relationship between phenomenology and humanism is expressed by David M. Levin, "Husserl's Notion of Self-Evidence" in Phenomenology and Philosophical Understanding, ed. Edo Pivcevic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975):

Phenomenology for Husserl is a guardian of philosophical humanism. And self-evidence is the touchstone for this humanism....at the same time that we gain a deeper understanding of ontology and discover procedures for extending our acquaintance with the objects of the world, we shall come to recognize in the phenomenological evidence of these objects the uniquely human contribution to the textures and trajectories of our world. Phenomenology thus facilitates a deeper and more subjectively meaningful installment of man in the midst of this objective world. Through phenomenology we are offered the chance to recognize what is reflected in and, in effect, released by, the evidence of our intended objects; our most primitive power to mean, our power to bestow meaning. We are offered the chance, finally, to recognize ourselves. (78-7)

23. Ricoeur views the function of these historical reflections from a psychoanalytic perspective: "The aim of the entire history of philosophy is the catharsis of the sick modern spirit." In Husserl, p. 167.

24. Husserl's discussion of the falsification of the life-world is strikingly similar to the falsification of 'this world' Nietzsche describes in Twilight of the Idols, "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth", pp. 39-41. For both Husserl and Nietzsche, the immediately perceived and experienced world has been surreptitiously displaced by a construction or idealization that has become hypostatized as the 'real world'. In order to 'break its spell', each shows that this supposedly eternal world has a history. In tracing the history of the 'real world', Husserl at the same time brings the life-world out of concealment, since this history leads back to the life-world as its hidden ground.

25. For another very interesting perspective on this issue, see Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), esp. pp. 27-31. Lyotard points out that the scientist, when called upon to explain or 'legitimate' his own activity, must needs have recourse to a narrative (i.e. life-world) mode of accounting which, according to his own standards of knowledge, does not and ought not to have any cognitive force.

26. H. Gadamer, "The Phenomenological Movement" in Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 151-2.

27. H. Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 218. The following passage is also revealing: "Using a conscious counter-formulation against a concept of the world that includes the universe of what can be made objective by science, Husserl calls this phenomenological concept of the world 'life-world', i.e. the world in which we are immersed in the natural attitude that never becomes for us an object as such, but that constitutes the pre-given basis of all experience." (Ibid.)

28. E. Husserl, Experience and Judgement, rev. and ed. Ludwig Landgrebe, trans. James S. Churchill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). I am indebted to David Carr for pointing out some of the ambiguities that the following analysis attempts to clarify. See "History, Phenomenology, and Reflection" in Dialogues in Phenomenology, ed. Don Ihde and Richard M. Zaner (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975). Also see: "Husserl's Problematic Concept of the Life-World" in Husserl: Expositions and Appraisals, ed. Frederick Elliston and Peter McCormick (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977). I diverge from Carr on the following point: according to Carr, the ambiguity under discussion occurs primarily *between* the Crisis and Experience and Judgement, whereas in my view the ambiguity

already occurs *within the Crisis*, although it is certainly underscored by comparing the two texts.

29. The ambiguity here arises, at least partly, out of Husserl's rhetorical situation. When he argues against science, he presents the life-world as being an immediate evidence. It is what is 'given', whereas the objective world is not and could not be given. When he is not arguing against science, however, the 'given' turns out to be more problematic and less evident than it seemed to be at first. This same rhetorically motivated ambiguity arises in Merleau-Ponty, as I shall later argue (chapter 6, section 3).

30. D. Carr, "History, Phenomenology, and Reflection", p. 164.

31. The same ambiguity that we encountered in Husserl's discussion of the life-world repeats itself with respect to his discussion of the pre-given world. Does Husserl mean that science actually penetrates the pre-given world such that we actually *experience* the world in its light, or is he making the less bold claim that it is only at the reflective level of how we *understand* our experience that conceptual systems are effective, our experience being what it is no matter how we understand it? As is evidenced by a number of contradictory texts, he seems to want to have it both ways here as well. I believe that, if forced to choose, Husserl would probably choose the former. At least, this seems to be more consistent with his overall project. If the contrary were true, for example, the distinction he makes between the life-world and the pre-given world would collapse. There are, however, texts that could be adduced in favour of the latter option. Husserl writes that the dominance of science is such that "we understand every individual datum of our experience in its light." (Experience and Judgement, 43) By itself this text is ambiguous with respect to the question I am raising. He goes on to say, however, that "this experience in its immediacy knows neither exact space nor objective time and causality". (Ibid.) This would seem to imply that "experience in its immediacy" is not itself modified by scientific concepts, although the way we understand it is. Experience, the pre-given world, is what it is regardless of the conceptual system that is dominant in any given culture.

32. Carr praises Merleau-Ponty as someone who worked through the ambiguities in Husserl's writings that I have thematized here and takes the idea of historically mediated reflection further. Carr writes:

This idea of historically mediated reflection, incidentally, is found in practise--though it is not dwelt upon in such a tortured way, in the work of Merleau-Ponty. Like the early Husserl he often seems to be saying that we must *simply* turn our backs on historically derived conceptualization and go directly to the world as we live it. Yet his phenomenological descriptions always emerge from a dialectical critique of what he calls "intellectualism" and "empiricism", which constitutes

the two-sided tradition in which our thought moves as the historical beings we are. ("History, Phenomenology and Reflection", p. 174)

Carr's characterization of the ambivalence in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy concerning "historically mediated reflection", on the one hand, and "direct" experience, on the other, is an excellent statement of the problem my interpretation of Merleau-Ponty grapples with.

33. H. Gadamer, "The Science of the Life-World", in Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. 190.

## CHAPTER 2: TRADITIONAL PREJUDICES AND THE RETURN TO PHENOMENA

1. In the Translator's Introduction to The Structure of Behavior, John Wild writes of Merleau-Ponty: "he was certainly unaffected by the *seinmystik* which underlies this work [Being and Time], by its lack of concern for contemporary science, and by its neglect of perception and the human body. One cannot imagine Heidegger engaging in the careful study and criticism of Gestalt and Freudian psychology with which this work begins." (SB, xiii,)

2. Merleau-Ponty often uses these labels without reference to any philosopher in particular. For a more detailed discussion of these two positions, see Adrian Mirvish, "Merleau-Ponty and the Nature of Philosophy", in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. XLIII, no 4., June 1983.

3. The basis for the contrast between explanation and description here is not that the former is encumbered by prejudices while the latter is somehow neutral or free of all prejudice. For Merleau-Ponty, anything that can be said is 'theory-laden'. His quarrel is with the particular prejudices that inform what he calls 'explanation'. Explanation, for Merleau-Ponty, signifies the assumption of a certain set of prejudices, and usually has the sense of 'causal explanation'. (See PhP, 7n., for example) To explain something is to show it as the result of a causal chain. Description, on the other hand, prescind from questions of causality and dwells upon the immanent meaning of the phenomenon. This does not mean that description is without prejudices, but only that it does not have the objectionable prejudices held by 'causal thinking'.

4. Merleau-Ponty differentiates between ancient and modern science, and it is modern science against which he directs his polemic. Indeed he says that "for the most part Aristotle's physics is only a description of the perceived world...". (SB, 144) In some respects, Merleau-Ponty's return is a return to Aristotelian common sense.

5. For a complementary discussion of the interrelation between prejudice and experience, see Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), esp. Chapter X, "Revolutions as Changes of World View". For example: "What a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see." (113)

6. Merleau-Ponty writes: "it is natural for consciousness to misunderstand itself precisely because it is consciousness of things." (SB, 218-20) It is revealing to compare this early text with the following text from The Visible and the Invisible, which also addresses the 'blindness of consciousness'.

*What it [consciousness] does not see it does not see for reasons of principle, it is because it is consciousness that it does not see. What it does not see is what in it prepares the vision of the rest (as the retina is blind at the point where the fibers that will permit the vision spread out into it). What it does not see is what makes it see, is its tie to Being, is its corporeity, are the existentials by which world becomes visible, is the flesh wherein the object is born. It is inevitable that consciousness be mystified, inverted, indirect, in principle it sees the things through the other end...* (248)

7. For an excellent commentary on the texts I refer to here, see John Sallis, Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1973), pp. 53-4.

8. On the same matter, Merleau-Ponty also writes: "The psychologist's hybrid way of thinking always runs the risk of reintroducing into the description relationships belonging to the objective world." (PhP, 16) William James refers to this "hybrid way of thinking" as "the psychologist's fallacy", which he describes as follows: "Naming our thought by its own objects, we almost all of us assume that as the objects are, so too the thought must be. The thought of several distinct things can only consist of several distinct bits of thought, or 'ideas'; that of an abstract or universal object can only be an abstract or universal idea." The Principles of Psychology (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950), Vol. 1., p. 195. The entire section titled "The Sources of Error in Psychology" is relevant (194-8).

9. Merleau-Ponty also writes: "The edge of the visual field is not a real line. Our visual field is not neatly cut out of our objective world, and is not a fragment with sharp edges like the landscape framed by the window....When we reach the limits of the visual field, we do not pass from vision to non-vision: the gramophone playing in the next room, and not expressly seen by me, still counts in my visual field." (PhP, 277)

10. The examples given in the following passage are very instructive with respect to this point: "A wooden wheel placed on the

ground is not, *for sight*, the same thing as a wheel bearing a load. A body at rest because no force is being exerted upon it is again for sight not the same thing as a body in which opposing forces are in equilibrium. The light of a candle changes its appearance for a child when, after a burn, it stops attracting the child's hand and becomes literally repulsive." (PhP, 52)

11. It is striking how much Merleau-Ponty's views on language converge with and indeed echo his views on perception. On his analysis, the word, like the phenomenon, is not a punctual unit, the meaning of which is determined in relation to some referent. In the Phenomenology (and thus even before he had made a serious study of Saussure), his view is that a given word has meaning in relation to other words in its immediate context or co-present in the larger horizon of language. In my view, Gestalt psychology did for the study of perception what Saussurian linguistics did for the study of language: it showed that perception is 'diacritical'. Gestalt psychology freed the study of the phenomenon from its alleged referent in the objective world and in the space of this 'reduction' showed that the meaning of a given phenomenon is a function of its relationships with and differences from other phenomena.

12. What Merleau-Ponty, in the context of his discussion of perception, perjoratively refers to as 'interpretation', is not what hermeneuticists mean by this term. In hermeneutics, interpretation means that the meaning of the 'object' (the thing, the text, etc.) is always given in light of a certain point of view or within the horizon of prejudices. The 'seer' is implicated in the 'seen'. Merleau-Ponty is a decidedly hermeneutical writer in this sense.

13 The concept of *hyle* in Husserl's early writings (Ideas) unwittingly implicated him in the Cartesian dualism that Merleau-Ponty attacks. Husserl later 'abandoned' this concept, but one wonders to what extent terms like 'perception', 'experience', and the 'life-world', terms that designate an ultimate ground or evidence, carry forward its sense.

14. Descartes is of course correct that we can be mistaken in our perception, and indeed it is the experience of being mistaken that the dualism of sensibility and intellect is constructed to account for. For Descartes, if we are mistaken about something perceived, it is only because we misjudge what is 'really there', because the intellect jumps to a conclusion that is not warranted by the premises given by the senses. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the fact that we can be mistaken is 'explained' with reference to the ambiguity of phenomena, to the fact that as given they are often vague and indeterminate. The discovery that we have been mistaken about something only occurs in light of incompatible future perceptions that rule our earlier perception out of court. For Merleau-Ponty perception is always based on the faith that future perceptions will accord with and thus confirm our present ones. A 'mistaken' perception is no less a perception than



a 'correct' one, and it is only from the standpoint of other perceptions, themselves subject to revision, that the 'judgement' of truth and falsity comes into play.

15. It is important to stress that constitution, in the phenomenological sense, does not operate upon neutral sense-data. An example from Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the meaning of the gesture may be helpful here. In "The Film and the New Psychology", Merleau-Ponty reveals some interesting connections between the study of film and Gestalt psychology's analysis of perception. A film, he argues, is not a succession of disparate images but a "temporal gestalt". He articulates this point with reference to the following experiment:

One day Pudovkin took a close-up of Mosjoukin with a completely impassive expression and projected it after showing: first, a bowl of soup, then, a young woman lying dead in her coffin, and, last, a child playing with a teddy-bear. The first thing noticed was that Mosjoukin seemed to be looking at the bowl, the young woman, and the child, and next one noted that he was looking pensively at the dish, that he wore an expression of sorrow when looking at the woman, and that he had a glowing smile for the child. The audience was amazed at his variety of expression although the same shot had actually been used all three times and was, if anything, remarkably inexpressive. The meaning of a shot therefore depends on what precedes it in the movie, and this succession of scenes creates a new reality which is not merely the sum of its parts. (SN, 54)

What is said of the still shot can also be said of the gesture. A gesture is not in the first place an isolated happening in a void. It occurs in a certain setting or against a certain background that informs its meaning. It is configured (that is, constituted) in a total gestalt. The same gesture can therefore have a different meaning in different contexts. The fault of classical analysis is to abstract the gesture from the intentional context in which it is embedded. To understand a gesture is also to understand the context in which it is in an intentional relation with other things concurrently happening. If intentionality in its proper sense means that consciousness is 'consciousness of' something, in the case of the gesture one could say that the gesture is a 'gesture of' or at least 'at' something, and this something figures in the constitution of the meaning of the gesture.

16. Eugene Gendlin, "Expressive Meanings", in An Invitation to Phenomenology, ed. James Edie (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1965), p. 243.

### CHAPTER 3: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

1. This attempt to be objective--to be without prejudice--is of course a disguised point of view. The concept of 'objectivity' is itself a prejudice, a species of what Gadamer calls the 'prejudice against prejudice'.

2. Merleau-Ponty writes: "The philosopher describes sensations and their substratum as one might the fauna of a distant land--without being aware that he himself perceives, that he is the perceiving subject and that perception as he lives it belies everything that he says of perception in general." (PhP, 207)

3. Merleau-Ponty says that objective thought "severs the link which unites the thing and the embodied subject." (PhP, 320) Behaviorism is a particular way of severing this link. The "link" spoken of here is what Merleau-Ponty attempts to make comprehensible with the notion of the 'intentional arc'.

4. Merleau-Ponty defines form as follows: "We will say that there is form whenever the properties of a system are modified by every change brought about in a single one of its parts and, on the contrary, are conserved when they all change while maintaining the same relationship among themselves." (SB, 47) Music is an excellent example. The 'same' note in two different melodies may not be recognized as such depending on what else is happening around the note in each piece. Similarly "the same melody can be played two times without the two versions having a single common element if it has been transposed." (SB, 87) Elsewhere, he writes: "The form is a visible or sonorous configuration (or even a configuration which is prior to the distinction of the senses) in which the sensory value of each element is determined by its function in the whole and varies with it....This same notion of form will permit us to describe the mode of existence of the primitive objects of perception. They are lived as realities, we have said, rather than known as true objects." (SB, 168)

5. Merleau-Ponty is sensitive to the charge that such descriptions of animal behavior as he gives are 'anthropomorphic'. In a revealing passage, which raises problems beyond the scope of our present analysis, he qualifies his descriptions with an "as if". He writes:

Behaviors reveal a sort of prospective activity in the organism, as if it were oriented toward the meaning of certain elementary situations, as if it entertained familiar relations with them, as if there were an "*a priori*" of the organism", privileged conducts and laws of internal equilibrium which predisposed the organism to certain relations with its milieu. At this level there is no question yet of a real self-awareness or of intentional activity. Moreover, the organism's

prospective capability is exercised only within defined limits and depends on precise, local conditions. (PriP, 4)

A good part of The Structure of Behavior is devoted to distinguishing animal behavior (the 'vital order') and human behavior (the 'human' order) on the basis of a distinction between sign and symbol. See esp. pp. 145-184.

6. Husserl tends to concentrate on the gaze that merely beholds, as opposed to 'sight' in the sense of what Heidegger calls "circumspection" (for example, Being and Time, H69, p. 98). Ricoeur has argued that Husserl's analyses were overly prejudiced in favour of the analysis of 'objectifying acts', and that Husserl is therefore weak on the volitional or practical dimension of seeing. In Ricoeur's view, this is true even of his later works: "His last philosophy, at the time of the *Krisis*, is much more centred on the problem of perception and the 'Lebenswelt'; it is more concerned with a 'view' than with a theatre of action. To the end, the phenomenology of Husserl remains an analysis of the 'to see', phenomenology itself aims at seeing; its descriptions are an exercise of visions applied to visions." "The Philosophy of Will and Action", in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur", ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart, (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 1978), p. 86. Merleau-Ponty goes further than Husserl to integrate the body in his phenomenological descriptions and thus emphasizes more the practical dimension even of 'seeing'. The paradigm for visual perception is not so much disinterested seeing as it is circumspection, in Heidegger's sense.

7. Merleau-Ponty discusses these attitudes in several places, but in particular see SB, p. 64.

8. The rhetorical device described here is very similar to one used by Heidegger in Being and Time. In order to show up our primordial involvements with things, to show up what he calls "the ready-to-hand", he analyses certain 'deficient' modes of the ready-to-hand (conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy), H74, p. 104. When we are engaged in work, using a hammer let us say, the manner of being of the hammer, its readiness-to-hand, is not thematically present to us. It is when a tool does not work and thus becomes merely 'present-at-hand' that we are able to appreciate its lost significance as something that was once 'ready-to-hand'. Heidegger writes: "The peculiarity of what is ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically." (H69, p. 99.) The idea is that as long as we are immersed in activity, we are blind to the point of view in light of which things are given to us. A certain distance (such as is afforded by thwartation, deficiency, etc.) is necessary in order for this point of view to come to light.

9. The notion of 'intentional threads' used to describe the 'fabric' of the given, indeed in a certain sense the 'fabrication' of

the given, anticipates what Merleau-Ponty will later call the 'flesh', *la chair*.

10. What Heidegger calls 'being-in-the world' is very close to what Husserl calls the 'life-world'. In the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty makes frequent reference to 'being-in-the-world' (*etre au monde*), and by comparison the notion of the life-world plays only a small part in his analysis. This emphasis is somewhat suprising, since in the preface to the Phenomenology Merleau-Ponty says that "the whole of *Sein und Zeit* springs from an indication given by Husserl and amounts to no more than an explicit account of the 'natürlicher Weltbegriff' or the 'Lebenswelt' which Husserl, towards the end of his life, identified as the central theme of phenomenology...." (PhP, vii) On the significance of 'being-in-the-world' in the Phenomenology, pp. 78-9 are especially explicit.

11. The discussion of the 'ready-to-hand' and the 'present-at-hand' occurs in Being and Time, esp. H63-92, pp. 81-125.

12. This question concerning the order of 'foundedness' is a key problem in phenomenology. Heidegger puts the question concisely: "Readiness-to-hand' is the way in which entities as they are 'in themselves' are defined ontologico-categorically. Yet only by reason of something present-at-hand, 'is there' anything ready-to-hand. Does it follow, however, granting this thesis for the nonce, that readiness-to-hand is ontologically founded upon presence-at-hand?" (Being and Time, H71, p. 101)

In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, this problem is described in terms of the relationship between the 'natural' and the 'cultural' world. He acknowledges duality, but reproaches dualism. On the one hand, he insists upon the difference between the cultural and the natural, insists that culture is founded. On the other hand, however, he insists that the cultural and the natural cannot be separated as two distinct realms, and that the cultural is not merely superimposed upon the natural. They are not two distinct and independent strata. He writes:

For it is quite true that every cultural object refers back to a natural background against which it appears and which may, moreover, be confused and remote. Our perception senses how near is the canvas underneath the picture, or the crumbling cement under the building, or the tiring actor under the character. But the nature about which empiricism talks is a collection of stimuli and qualities, and it is ridiculous to pretend that nature thus conceived is...the primary object of our perception: it does in fact follow the experience of cultural objects, or rather it is one of them. We shall, therefore, have to rediscover the natural world too, and its mode of existence, which is not to be confused with that of the scientific object. (PhP, 24)

In short, Merleau-Ponty accepts that it is meaningful to talk about nature, but believes that science is only one point of view upon the natural. Merleau-Ponty also writes: "the natural world...can always be discerned underlying the other [the cultural world], as the canvas underlies the picture and makes it appear insubstantial." (PhP, 293)

13. It is not that Merleau-Ponty believes that talk of 'retinal impressions' is meaningless or that the nervous system counts for nothing. The point is that explanations of behavior in such terms, although they may *explain* a great deal, do not help us to *understand* behavior. Even assuming that a series of events in the nervous system could be rigorously linked in a causal chain with the retinal impression on one end and the stopping of the vehicle on the other, this would still not advance us one step further in understanding the behavior in question. The stop sign is behaviorally significant in virtue of its meaning or value in a certain code and its broader significance in a culture.

14. There is a wonderful irony in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Schneider in that this brain-damaged person in fact answers to objective thought's understanding of perception, behavior, and so on. Schneider exemplifies objective thought, ironically he confirms it. He is in fact the human being as understood by objective thought, or what the human being would be if objective thought were true. This irony is a good example of what Merleau-Ponty means by saying that the psychologist under the sway of objective is out of gear with himself. In describing the body, his own bodily being, he is in fact describing someone like Schneider. Indeed, in one place Merleau-Ponty describes Schneider with reference to the scientist. He writes: "The sensory givens are limited to suggesting these meanings as a fact suggests a hypothesis to a physicist. The patient, like the scientist, verifies mediately and clarifies his hypothesis by cross-checking facts...." (PhP, 131)

15. In another place, Merleau-Ponty writes: "'Psychical facts have a meaning', Freud wrote in one of his earliest works. This meant that no human behavior is simply the result of some bodily mechanism, that in behavior there is not a mental center and a periphery of automatism, and that all our gestures in their fashion participate in that single activity of making explicit and signifying which is ourselves." (S, 228)

16. Paul Ricoeur, "Consciousness and the Unconscious", in The Conflict of Interpretations, ed. Don Ihde, trans. Willis Domingo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 108.

17. Another way at coming at this idea of 'recognition' is through an examination of the relationship between "lived experience" and "structure". Merleau-Ponty discusses this relationship at some length in "From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss". Sociology and anthropology, he argues, teach that there is a certain 'lawfulness' to lived

experience, of which subjects are normally unaware. "The subjects living in a society do not necessarily know about the principle of exchange which governs them, any more than the speaking subject needs to go through a linguistic analysis of his language in order to speak." (S, 117) Lived experience is structured, and the study of its structures must initially look at lived experience from the outside, so to speak. Structure, in this sense, is like the Freudian unconscious.

At the same time, however, Merleau-Ponty cautions against reifying structure, against regarding it as the ultimate reality in relation to which lived experience would be but an epiphenomenon. He writes: "When the scientist formulates and conceptually determines structures, there is no question for him of substituting the model for reality. As a matter of principle, structure is no Platonic idea." (Ibid.) Thus lived experience remains primary for him: structures are structures of lived experience and we should be able to recognize the physiognomy of lived experience in them. He writes: "There ought to be a sort of lived equivalent of that structure,...The variables of anthropology...must be met with sooner or later on the level at which the phenomena have an immediately human significance." (Ibid., 119) In these terms, Merleau-Ponty's critique of behaviorism is that there is no "lived equivalent" for its "variables". They cannot "be met with sooner or later on the level at which the phenomena have an immediately human significance".

The understanding of anthropology that Merleau-Ponty articulates in this essay is also affirmed by Clifford Geertz. Geertz maintains that "our formulations of other peoples' symbol systems must be actor-oriented." The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 14. He explains that this means "that descriptions of Berber, Jewish, or French culture must be cast in terms of constructions we imagine Berbers, Jews, or Frenchmen to place upon what they live through, the formulae they use to define what happens to them." (15) In other words, lived experience remains the final court of appeal for the anthropologist's descriptions, even though such third person descriptions may (and even must) go beyond what actors are explicitly conscious of in their ordinary daily living.

#### CHAPTER 4: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PHENOMENOLOGY

1. Merleau-Ponty attempts to structure the Phenomenology in terms of a transition from 'the phenomenal field' to the 'transcendental field', perhaps consciously or unconsciously imitating the plan of Husserl's Crisis. In my view the text is not successful at this level. The relationship between the stages, and the transition between them, remains very obscure. To the best of my knowledge, this topic is not given any sustained treatment in any of the literature on Merleau-Ponty, and no doubt this is because it is so obscure.

In interpreting this transition, I have taken my cue from the fact that, each time the transition is discussed (and this only occurs

twice), it is connected with the idea of a "phenomenology of phenomenology". The relevant texts on this transition are on pp. 60-3 and 364-5.

2. Jacques Taminiaux describes this ambivalence as follows: "In one instance, there is the primordial affirmation of immediacy, of identity, and of indivisibility; in the other instance, the gradual emergence in the description of the motif of non-presence, of breach, and of difference." "Experience, Expression, and Form" in Dialectic and Difference, ed. James Decker and Robert Crease, trans. J. Decker (New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1985), p. 139.

3. John Sallis, Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings, (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1973), p. 110.

4. In his opening remarks, Merleau-Ponty responds to some written objections submitted to him by his colleagues, but he does not identify them by name. With regard to the objection that we have mentioned here, he says "let us say a word about the other objection which was addressed to us: you go back to the unreflected therefore you renounce reflection." (PriP, 19)

5. Taminiaux, reading with Jacques Derrida in the background, thematizes this tension in terms of the discussion of language (verbalized perception) and perception (lived perception) in Merleau-Ponty's early works. He argues that one of the distinguishing features of the later works is that this relationship becomes much more problematic and that Merleau-Ponty moves away from conceiving this relationship as an opposition between separate and mutually exclusive terms. "Experience, Expression, and Form", esp. pp. 141-5.

6. In The Horizons of the Flesh, ed. Garth Gillian (Carbondale: South Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 92-113.

7. Sellars warrants the consideration of Merleau-Ponty scholars because he takes aim at empiricism's "characteristic claim that the perceptual given is the foundation of empirical knowledge," and Merleau-Ponty's primacy of perception thesis seems to be within his scope. (170) What Sellars calls the 'the myth of the given', the effort to "break out of discourse to an *arche* beyond discourse" (196), is a species of what Derrida calls 'the metaphysics of presence'. Indeed Sellars himself talks about "knowings in presence". (170) "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", Science, Perception and Reality (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963). See also p. 165, p. 169.

8. The 'clearest' exposition of the concept of the 'transcendental signified' that I know of is in Jacques Derrida, Positions, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 19-20. Derrida (wrongly) believes that phenomenology is an instance of what he calls the 'metaphysics of presence'. His 'critique' of

phenomenology is most explicit in Speech and Phenomena, trans. David B. Allison and Newton Garver (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). See also Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), esp. p. 49; pp. 60-65.

When Derrida says that the "theme of 'pure presentation', pure and primordial perception, full and simple presence, etc., makes of phenomenology an accomplice of classical psychology--indeed constitutes their common metaphysical presupposition," he probably has Merleau-Ponty in mind as well as Husserl. (Speech and Phenomena, 45n.) It is the idea of perception as a kind of ground or foundation that is being attacked when he 'affirms' that "perception does not exist" (45n.), or again, that "there never was any 'perception'" (103). Merleau-Ponty's primacy of perception thesis, however, is not based on the metaphysics of presence that Derrida rightly calls into question. As Holland argues, "there is perception in Merleau-Ponty, but not in the sense that Derrida argues against because it is not a 'pure' perception, but rather an indeterminate, immanent experience." ("Merleau-Ponty on Presence", 113)

9. Admittedly, I am 'stretching' Sellars' idea of "the logical space of reasons" to incorporate a broader notion of 'reason' than is assumed in his works.

10. Gary Madison gives a concise and cogent analysis of Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Gestalt psychology. As Madison presents it, the issue concerns the "mode of existence of form" (or meaning). Gestalt psychology falls short of phenomenology insofar as it believes that such form as is presupposed and disclosed in its descriptions is already there in the world waiting to be discovered, as it were. The psychologist's descriptions, the consciousness of form or the point of view of the onlooker, adds nothing to what is already there. Gestalt psychology effaces (or even represses) its own point of view and the difference that it makes because it is spell-bound by an ill-conceived concept of objectivity. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the question of point of view and the status of one's own reflective intervention is critical. Madison writes that "in order to construct a philosophy of form it is not enough to describe structures...one must analyse their mode of existence. And what a first movement of reflection shows is...the essential ideality of form." The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, trans. G. Madison (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1973), p. 16. To speak of the "ideality of form" is to acknowledge the significance of the point of view of the onlooker, relative to whom the forms are revealed (i.e. it is ruled out that the cat 'understands' its behavior in the terms with which the psychologist describes it and thus renders its immanent intelligibility).

This is not to say, however, that description is a matter of 'projecting' form onto a reality that is in itself devoid of form to begin with. If Gestalt psychology errs on the side of naive realism, at the opposite extreme there is a danger that the "ideality" of form, emphasized by what Madison calls "criticist" philosophy, will be construed in idealist terms. Madison presents Merleau-Ponty as trying



to steer a course between "the antinomy which inevitably seems to arise between nature and idea", according to which "form must be either a thing in nature or an idea of a constituting consciousness." (Ibid., 15) I am coming at this same antinomy between nature and idea, the 'in-itself' and the 'for-itself', from a different but convergent angle.

11. Merleau-Ponty is not rigorous in his terminology. He speaks of 'radical reflection' in several places (PhP 219, 241, 289), but other terms are also used to communicate basically the 'same' idea: for example, 'authentic reflection' (PhP, 41) and, in the later writings, 'hyper-reflection' (VI, 38).

12. Sallis, Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings, p. 30.

13. The relationship between the 'phenomenal field' and the 'transcendental field', perhaps the most opaque theme in the Phenomenology, can be understood as follows: the phenomenal field is the world as it is disclosed to the phenomenological point of view; that is with reference to its being *for* someone. Gestalt psychology, in these terms, proceeds from the phenomenological point of view and 'discovers' the phenomenal field. The transition from the phenomenal field to the transcendental field, however, comes with the realization that the phenomenal field is not a part of nature, that it is not something that the onlooker (phenomenologist or Gestalt psychologist) simply 'discovers'. Rather it is given relative to the point of view of the onlooker. The "phenomenal field becomes a transcendental field" only from the standpoint of a phenomenology of phenomenology, from the standpoint of the onlooker who inquires into the "mode of existence" of the phenomenal field, as Madison would say. Gestalt psychology does not make this transition.

14. Eugene Gendlin, "Expressive Meanings", p. 244.

15. See Wittgenstein's discussion of this figure in Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), third edition, Part II, section xi, pp. 193-8.

16. Wolfgang Köhler as well was probably a major influence as concerns Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the relationship between science and experience, the objective world and the life-world. Indeed, the similarities between Köhler and Husserl on this matter are striking.

When I talk about a chair, I mean the chair of my everyday life and not some subjective phenomenon.

On the other hand, we have seen, the chair of objective experience cannot be identified with the chair as part of the physicist's world. Now, since the world of direct experience is the first I knew, and since all I now know about the physical world was later inferred from certain events in the experienced world, how can I be expected to ignore the experienced world?

After all, it still remains my only basis for any guesses about physical facts. If I choose, I can, of course, raise the question whether, in a certain sense, the physical world is perhaps the more important one. But even then I must admit that, from the point of view of acquaintance or access, the experienced world is prior to that of physics; also, that my only way of investigating physical realities is that of observing objective experiences and drawing from them the proper conclusions. Gestalt Psychology (New York: Mentor Books, 1947), pp. 18-9.

Chapter 1 of K  hler's text consists of a critique of behaviorism that is very illuminating as concerns Merleau-Ponty's critique.

17. It is rather strange that Merleau-Ponty should make this criticism of Bergson, whom he usually criticizes for his theory of intuition as coincidence. For example, see IPP, p. 12.

#### CHAPTER 5: EXPRESSION

1. The very fact that there is something odd about thinking of reflection as being situated testifies to the inappropriateness of this term for Merleau-Ponty's purposes.

2. The effacement of language is a species of the effacement or repression of the body, which we have already considered. In each case, it is a matter of suppressing what confesses our inherence in a point of view. This is motivated by an ill-conceived concept of objectivity, according to which having 'a' point of view is associated with distortion and falsity. A point of view could only be a screen between us and the objective world, the world such as it is in itself or as a God might conceive it.

3. Merleau-Ponty explicitly analyzes Descartes with respect to his oblivion to his own use of language, but he does not integrate this with his discussion of radical reflection.

4. M. Heidegger, "The Essence of Truth", in Basic Writings, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 122-5.

5. The point here is not one that could be established simply by counting up the occurrences of each word, although I believe such a count would weigh heavily on the side of expression. The claim concerns the weight that is placed upon each concept in his analysis, the centrality of the role each plays in his exposition.

6. I qualify this remark here because, to the end, Merleau-Ponty continues to express his problematic in terms of the relationship

between the reflected and the unreflected, even though he becomes much more critical of the 'philosophy of reflection'.

7. G. Madison interprets these remarks of Merleau-Ponty's in light of "transcendence" or a "teleology of consciousness" that becomes especially apparent with reference to the phenomenon of expression. See The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, p. 71. My interpretation, to relate it to Madison's, could be summed up as follows: In the earlier writings and under the domination of the metaphor of reflection, there is a greater emphasis upon the backward turning moment of the return, upon reflection turning back in search of its ground. With the shift from reflection to expression, however, it is not so much a matter of thought turning back in search of a ground but rather of a ground surging up from below, so to speak, and demanding to be expressed. The initiative, one could say, is on the side of the world, which solicits expression from the thinker. In the later writings, this is what is announced in such descriptions (no doubt inspired by Heidegger) of philosophy as "Being speaking within us." (VI, 197)

8. Merleau-Ponty describes this duality exhibited by the body as a dialectic of rootedness and transcendence. For an extended discussion of this dialectic in these terms, see Gary Madison, The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, pp. 45ff.

9 On these matters, as on so many others, Merleau-Ponty is not rigorous in his terminology. What I am here calling 'constituting speech' is variously called 'speaking speech', 'thinking speech', 'original speech', 'transcendental speech', and 'authentic speech'. The same terminological shifting applies to what I am here calling 'constituted speech'.

The distinction between constituted and constituting speech in some ways resembles Saussure's distinction between language (*la langue*) and speech (*la parole*), but the analogy is rather complicated. Saussure distinguishes language and speech as follows: "Language is speech less speaking. It is the whole set of linguistic habits which allow an individual to understand and to be understood." Course in General Linguistics, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 77. In a superficial way, both constituted and constituting speech come under the heading of what Saussure calls 'speech'. Both are instances of speech, speech acts, events as opposed to the system of language. Saussure locates the dynamics of change in language (system) at the level of speech (event). Merleau-Ponty is even more precise in locating it in constituting speech. For Saussure, speech is not necessarily creative or 'constituting' in Merleau-Ponty's sense. That is, it need not be a divergence with respect to the established system of language. What Merleau-Ponty calls 'constituting speech', on the other hand, is always creative (if not for the system of language considered as a cultural whole, at least for the system of language as it exists for or in the individual). Constituted speech, on the other hand, is like what Kuhn calls 'paradigm articulation'. It merely

instantiates the system, in a sense repeats what has already been said. In this sense, constituted speech could be likened to what Saussure calls 'language'. It is an event that merely apes the system. It does not change or modify it.

Although much has already been written on Merleau-Ponty and Saussure, many questions remain to be sorted out. For an insightful, but by no means exhaustive study, see Thomas Hohler, "The Limits of Language and the Threshold of Speech: Merleau-Ponty and Saussure", in Philosophy Today, Vol. 26, 1982.

10. Roland Barthes' discussion of syntagms, which belong to what Merleau-Ponty calls 'constituted speech', helps to situate or frame the problem of inauthenticity in terms of language, although he does not himself make this application. See Elements of Semiology, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1984), p. 19.

11. G. Madison, The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, p. 81. Madison's interpretation of the phenomenon of expression is also to be recommended because he quite rightly acknowledges the figure of Hegel looming in the background of Merleau-Ponty's discussion and makes the relevant connections, e.g. the dialectic of the 'in-itself' and the 'for-itself'.

12. Certainly Hegel is also an important figure in this regard, as is convincingly demonstrated in G. Madison's interpretation.

13. Against those who interpret Husserl exclusively with respect to his commitment to the ideal of science, it is worth recalling that Husserl said that "the ego constitutes himself for himself in, so to speak, the unity of a 'history' [*Geschichte*, story]." Cartesian Meditations, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), p. 75.

14. G. Madison, The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, p. 128. On the whole, Madison's interpretation of Proust has been very helpful to me.

15. M. Merleau-Ponty, PhP, p. 443. For the sake of terminological consistency, I am substituting the term 'empiricism' for what Merleau-Ponty, in the passage under consideration calls 'objective thought' (*la pensée objective*). In his philosophy, 'objectivism' or objective thought is usually used as a blanket term to cover both empiricism and idealism, and this is the usage I have followed throughout. (See my note #3 in chapter 1.)

16. Some ascribe this empiricist view to Marx, but for Merleau-Ponty this is only a crude interpretation of Marx's writing on history. In the Phenomenology, the idealist position is represented by Sartre.

17. Merleau-Ponty here speaks disparagingly of the terminology of the 'in itself' and the 'for itself', but elsewhere he himself uses it sympathetically. The apparent contradiction arises from the fact that both Sartre and Hegel use this terminology. Merleau-Ponty approves of Hegel's use of the terminology (and in fact works with it himself), but he is very critical of the use to which Sartre puts it. In the present context, it is very clear that he has Sartre in mind. Merleau-Ponty's own position here is in fact consistent with Hegel, even inspired by him.

18. The connection with reading here is not an arbitrary one. After the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty attempts to "elaborate the category of prose beyond the confines of literature to give it a sociological meaning." (PriP, 9) This was the project of his unfinished book The Prose of the World. He came to believe that Saussurian linguistics furnished a new key for interpreting history, although Merleau-Ponty never worked this out. He does, however, give us certain signposts. For example: "The theory of signs, as developed in linguistics, perhaps implies a conception of historical meaning which gets beyond the opposition of *things* versus *consciousness*." (IPP, 54) Also: "What Saussure saw is precisely this masking of chance and order, the return to the rational, the fortuitous. One could apply his conception of the history of language to history as a whole. The driving force of language is the will to communicate ('we are thrown into language', situated in language,...historical rationality does not eliminate chance. It turns chance or uses chance." (CAL, 102) [No doubt, Derrida would disagree with both Saussure and Merleau-Ponty about this "will to communicate" and its significance.]

19. In his "creative" reading of Marx as a phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty is conveniently silent about Marx's use of the rhetoric of science. In my view, Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Marx on the creativity that comes into play in revolutionary situations is somewhat strained. Marx does tend to *ground* his speech in science, which serves as a kind of authority beyond question. In other words, by appealing to science Marx tends to repress the fact that historical materialism is interpretative and indeed creative. On the subject of revolutionary rhetoric and its repression of its own status as interpretation, see Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), pp. 19-29.

20. Here again it is significant that Merleau-Ponty compares the revolutionary with the artist and not with the scientist. One wonders if Marx would have agreed to this comparison.

21. Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, esp. pp. 10-43, pp. 111-136.

22. A number of questions arise surrounding my phrase 'catches on'. What does it mean for constituting speech to 'catch on' (or fail

to catch on)? What does it 'catch onto'? For Merleau-Ponty, it catches onto to the pre-expressed, to a pregnant silence, to a meaning held captive in things and waiting to be said, as it were. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty speaks about phenomenology as a cultural movement in similar terms. He writes: "It is less a question of counting up quotations than of determining and expressing in concrete form this *phenomenology for ourselves* which has given a number of present-day readers the impression, on reading Husserl or Heidegger, not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognizing what they had been waiting for." (PhP, viii) That is, Husserl and Heidegger caught onto, geared into, gave expression to, a certain pregnant silence enveloping their contemporaries like an atmosphere.

23. Richard Rorty, generalizing on Kuhn's distinction, distinguishes between 'normal' and 'abnormal discourse'. Rorty's distinction is very close to Merleau-Ponty's distinction between constituted and constituting speech. Merleau-Ponty's analysis, however, is much richer because he brings the phenomenon of expression into play. Merleau-Ponty enable us to understand what motivates the passage from constituted to constituting speech, whereas for Rorty the two are simply juxtaposed as being different. Rorty has nothing to say about what it means for abnormal speech to 'catch on' by giving expression to something that is waiting to be said. There is no equivalent in his philosophy for Merleau-Ponty's 'pregnant silence'. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 315-356, esp. p. 320.

24. M. Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics, trans. Ralph Manheim (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1959), p. 9.

25. Etymology also reinforces Merleau-Ponty's arguments against an external relationship between speech and thought. To learn that the term 'understanding' derives from 'standing under', for example, is to learn something important about what it means to understand. Freud's use of etymology is also interesting in this regard. Freud points out that "most abstract words were originally concrete, their original significance having faded." Etymology is of use to Freud because he believes that the unconscious 'speaks a concrete language'. In interpretation (of dreams, for example), one "can represent the 'possessing' of an object as a literal, physical 'sitting upon' it (possess=*potis* + *sedeo*)." Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 156.

Etymology focuses the whole question of the 'original' and of the 'origin', which has come under attack in contemporary philosophy (Foucault and Derrida, for example). In my view, Freud (and Heidegger) has a tendency to reify the 'origin', to turn it into something literal, to 'a once upon a time', as if one could ever return to and circumscribe 'a proper meaning' at the beginning of a tradition.

26. In the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty did not link his discussion of the phenomenological reduction with his discussion of language. He discusses the reduction in terms of reflection and does not bring language into play. Similarly, he does not explicitly talk about the reduction in his discussion of language, although in my view this would have been a natural move for him to make. Here too we can see the importance of the move from reflection to expression.

27. See Peter Berger, Invitation to Sociology (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), esp. p. 23 and p. 51, but pp. 1-60 in general for an excellent discussion of the relevance of cultural alternation for social science methodology. See also Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), pp. 67-72 for a discussion of language and sedimentation from the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge.

28. Blaise Pascal, Pensées, ed. Louis Lafuma, trans. John Warrington (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1973), p. 35.

29. Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. from *Wir Haben Ein Erscheinung*.

30. Here I am elaborating on what Merleau-Ponty, borrowing from André Malraux, calls 'coherent deformation'. See PrW, p. 91, pp. 142-4.

31. In his critique of the 'metaphysics of presence', Derrida goes too far and makes of writing or speaking something that is entirely groundless. There is no place for the "significative intention" in his philosophy. Writing (speaking) is a groundless creation. Reading Derrida (and the same applies to Rorty), it is difficult to say why the writer writes. It seems that he writes simply for the sake of writing. For Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, the writer writes because he has something to say. Of course, this 'something to say' is not something that the writer already knows before he says it, something of which his speech or writing would only be a mirror image in the visible (Derrida is very convincing in his critique of this model). Rather the writer writes in order to know what it is that he wants to say, to express it.

## CHAPTER 6: PHILOSOPHICAL EXPRESSION

1. Taminiaux rightly points out that Merleau-Ponty interprets the Hegelian dialectic to his own end. He argues that numerous remarks he makes about Hegel (about his 'existentialism', for example), "only make sense when they are understood, not in terms of the Hegelian relation between natural consciousness and absolute knowledge, but against the background of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the relation between the unreflective and reflection." "Merleau-Ponty: From

Dialectic to Hyperdialectic", in Dialectic and Difference. I agree with Taminaux that Merleau-Ponty's reading of Hegel (like his reading of Marx, and Husserl) is strained in its creativity. In my opinion, however, it is less against the background of the relation between the unreflective and reflection that Merleau-Ponty interprets Hegel, than it is against the background of the distinction between the unexpressed and the expressed. Merleau-Ponty himself writes: "So the Hegelian dialectic is what we call the phenomenon of expression, which gathers itself step by step and launches itself again through the mystery of rationality." (PrW, 85)

2. Merleau-Ponty's distinction (following Husserl) between introspection and reflection is significant here. He writes: "This introspection is supposed to consist in the presence of data internal to the subject, which he observes and which are revealed to him by the mere fact that they are 'in him'. This is an internal perception, the noting of an event with which I coincide. But reflection is not at all the noting of a fact. It is, rather, an attempt to understand. It is not the passive attitude of a subject who watches himself but rather the active effort of a subject who grasps the meaning of his experience." (PriP, 84)

3. In fact, even in the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty is ambivalent toward Husserl's talk of essences. On the one hand, he comes to Husserl's defense and attempts to 'redeem' the language of essences, as if it is only in the hands of Husserl's 'misinterpreters' that the notion of essences becomes problematic. On the other hand, however, Merleau-Ponty claims that Husserl "in his last period...became fully aware of what the return to phenomena meant, and tacitly broke with the philosophy of essences." (PhP, 49n.) If Merleau-Ponty believes that it is a good thing that Husserl "broke with the philosophy of essences", then one wonders why he takes such pains to redeem Husserl's talk of essences in the first place. The Phenomenology is full of contradictions of this sort, which in my interpretation signifies that Merleau-Ponty is searching for his own voice in this text.

4. Merleau-Ponty believes that Husserl's later "phenomenology of language" was converging with Saussure's linguistics: "There is no doubt, I believe, that Husserl was here approaching certain insights of contemporary linguistics, especially that of Saussure." (PriP, 85)

5. It is significant that Derrida first developed his critique of the 'metaphysics of presence' through a reading of Husserl. Derrida translated Husserl's Origin of Geometry into French and his first book, Speech and Phenomena, is a careful analysis of the ambiguities surrounding meaning and expression in Husserl's writings. The issue Derrida fixes on, not surprisingly, concerns language and ideal existence. He writes:

Husserl no doubt did want to maintain, as we shall see, an originally silent, "pre-expressive" stratum of experience. But



since the possibility of constituting ideal objects belongs to the essence of consciousness, and since these ideal objects are historical products, only appearing thanks to the acts of creation or intending, the element of consciousness and the element of language will be more and more difficult to discern. Will not their indiscernability introduce nonpresence and difference (mediation, signs, referral back, etc.) in the heart of self-presence? (Speech and Phenomena, 15)

6. As Rorty tells the story, philosophy has conceived truth as correspondence, and, in keeping with the demands of this model, has conceived itself as a self-effacing mirror of the way things are in themselves.

7. J. Derrida, Grammatology, p. 186. See also Positions, p. 22: "When I speak, not only am I conscious of being present for what I think, but I am conscious also of keeping as close as possible to my thought, to the 'concept', a signifier that does not fall into the world....Not only do the signifier and the signified seem to unite, but also, in this confusion, the signifier seems to erase itself or to become transparent, in order to allow the concept to present itself as what it is, referring to nothing other than its presence."

8. Charles Flynn argues that, "in his late works, Merleau-Ponty has elaborated a profound critique of the metaphysics of presence." "Textuality and the Flesh: Derrida and Merleau-Ponty", p. 176. I argue that "a profound critique of the metaphysics of presence" is at least implicit in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of language in the Phenomenology. Derrida himself, judging from Nancy Holland's report of some remarks he made during a seminar, equivocates on this question. Holland reports that, asked whether "Merleau-Ponty's work would fall within the metaphysics of presence, Derrida said it would, "and cited the chapter on time in the Phenomenology as evidence. ("Merleau-Ponty on Presence", 111) She goes on to relate the following, however: "Derrida made it clear that the case was not so clear-cut, given the breadth and complexity of Merleau-Ponty's work, and left us with an interesting thought--if one could argue that The Phenomenology of Perception [sic] falls within the metaphysics of presence, with The Visible and the Invisible 'it is even harder to say'." Derrida's apparent reluctance to unequivocally situate even the Phenomenology within the metaphysics of presence could be interpreted as a confirmation of my point that the Phenomenology is a divided text. I argue that Merleau-Ponty's discussion of language and expression is at odds with other parts of the text (Derrida cites the chapter on time, I would cite the chapter on the cogito) that lean toward the metaphysics of presence. The following passage from Holland on the similarity between Derrida and Merleau-Ponty is interesting in this regard:

If language and thought cannot be rigorously separated, the integral unity of thought itself would be put into jeopardy. This is the main thrust of Derrida's argument against Husserl

in Speech and Phenomena:...the element of consciousness and the element of language will be more and more difficult to discern. Will not their indiscernibility introduce nonpresence and difference (mediation, signs, referral back, etc.) in the heart of self-presence?' (Speech and Phenomena, p. 15).

Interestingly, it is exactly this indiscernibility of speech and thought that lies at the core of Merleau-Ponty's own account of language. ("Merleau-Ponty on Presence", 117)

9. Without denying Derrida's genius and originality, my reading of Merleau-Ponty shows that in some of its details the critique of the 'metaphysics of presence' has been around for some time. The notion of 'effective history' in Gadamer, for example, is likewise directed against the 'metaphysics of presence'.

10. "There is, of course, every reason to distinguish between an authentic speech, which formulates for the first time, and second-order expression, speech about speech, which makes up the run of empirical language. Only the first is identical with thought." (PhP, 178) See also PrW, p. 110: "Man feels *at home* in language the way he never will in painting. Ordinary language or the givens of language provide him with the illusion of an absolutely transparent expression which has achieved its goal. But in the end art itself also passes into custom and becomes capable of the same ingrained evidence."

11. J. Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 160.

12. Stephen Watson argues that in its teaching concerning the tacit cogito "the Phenomenology remains a thoroughly classical work." "Pretexts: Language, Perception, and the Cogito in Merleau-Ponty's Thought". Research in Phenomenology, Vol. X, 1980, p. 149. He believes that the chapter on speech, however, pulls in a direction away from classical restraints ('the metaphysics of presence') and along a path that will lead to The Visible and the Invisible. Commenting on a passage from The Visible and the Invisible, Watson writes: "But this is just to say what Merleau-Ponty had held in the chapter on expression and speech and which was *excluded* from the doctrine of the Cogito in the Phenomenology." (160) The tacit cogito, in Watson's view, is a remnant of the metaphysics of presence, and this is what the chapter on expression calls into question. Watson continues: "the separation which Merleau-Ponty refers to in his criticism of the *Cogito tacite* divides the Phenomenology of Perception against itself." (160)

13. The original reads: "En suivant le sens des mots et le lien des idées, j'arrive à cette conclusion qu'en effet, puisque je pense, je suis, mais c'est là un *Cogito* sur parole, je n'ai saisi ma pensée et mon existence qu'à travers le médium du langage...." Phénoménologie de la perception (Paris: éditions Gallimard, 1945), p. 459.

14. The presentation here is similar to the one we encountered in Husserl's account of the life-world. As we saw, Husserl sometimes speaks as if the life-world were a virginal presence, an uncorrupted given upon which history and culture are superadded. In these terms, there is no interpenetration between the two.

15. The following note taken by George Klein at Merleau-Ponty's Feb. 1955 Collège de France lectures bears this out as well: "In my book on the phenomenology of perception I underestimated the richness and complexity of the perceived world. I paid too much attention to the perception of the mere things, and thus did not devote attention to the gaps and incompleteness in our perception....Our perception is mostly of symbols, vectoral, full of question and exclamation marks." (Quoted in Watson, "Pre-texts", p. 165, footnote 22.)

16. Watson has commented on this shift, but he has not related it to Merleau-Ponty's rhetorical strategy. He writes: "To accomplish its goal it [the latter work of Merleau-Ponty] necessitated dislodging the analysis of what it called our opening unto Being from the metaphysics of the Cogito--either at the 'level' of thought, or by moving underground to the level of the 'lived'. For this underground, as the development of Merleau-Ponty's work demonstrates, is no more a fixed point than any other of the grounds of classical thought." ("Pretexts", 163-4)

17. M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis: Preface to Hesnard's *L'oeuvre de Freud* in The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty, ed. and trans. Alden L. Fisher (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1969).

18. Note how hesitant Merleau-Ponty is here about the "something", about what is 'given'. Note how vague the "something" is. One cannot imagine him arguing this way against science in the Phenomenology. In the Phenomenology, perceptual experience, the 'phenomenal field', was not so "hidden" that he could not make positive statements about it to counter science.

19. More and more, the later works emphasize 'non-presence' and issue in what could properly be called a critique of the 'metaphysics of presence'. Compare the following texts from Derrida and Merleau-Ponty:

Contrary to what phenomenology--which is always phenomenology of perception--has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always escapes. (Speech and Phenomena, p. 104)

We have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, i.e. as transcendence, i.e. as always "behind", beyond, far-off...the present itself is not an absolute coincidence without transcendence; even the *Urerlebnis* involves not total

coincidence, but partial coincidence, because it has horizons and would not be without them--the present also, is ungraspable from close-up, in the forceps of attention, it is an encompassing. (VI, 195)

20. The problem of mediation is indeed a persistent theme throughout his works. In the earlier works it is discussed in terms of the relation between the unreflected and the reflected. In the later works, however, it is discussed in terms of the relationship between the unexpressed and the expressed. Language is made thematic in this light, whereas in the Phenomenology language had not been explicitly discussed in relation to the transition from the unreflected to the reflected. .

21. In order to avoid the conclusion of the "unhappy consciousness", Merleau-Ponty says, one must develop "a theory of the savage mind". (VI, 176)

22. The problem in Sallis' analysis can be traced to the false premise that Merleau-Ponty seeks a "self-effacing speech". (Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings, 111)

23. In the same vein, Merleau-Ponty also writes: "Replace the notions of concept, idea, mind, representation with the notions of *dimensions*, articulation, level, hinges, pivots, configuration--The point of departure = the critique of the usual conception of the thing and its *properties*...." (VI, 224)

24. M. Heidegger, quoted in Sallis, Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings, p. 112.

## CONCLUSION

1. To be sure, the expression 'creative adequation' is mentioned only a few times in The Visible and the Invisible, and even then only in the working notes. The problematic it addresses, however, is taken up again and again throughout the text. Indeed, it is present from the very beginning of his authorship, as reflected in the ambiguities surrounding the idea of the return.

2. John Bannan puts this 'groping speech' in an interesting perspective. He writes:

It can be said that Merleau-Ponty concedes too much to the groping character of philosophical effort, and exempts himself too easily from the conventional standards for judging a philosophy...it [his work] is consistent with the *incomplete* state of philosophy, an item on which there would be very substantial agreement between Merleau-Ponty and his critics. It

raises questions about the very availability of standards--the universality and completeness--which philosophers use when they criticize each other. No one pretends that philosophy is complete, that the final comprehensive view has been attained. But do not most, once they have made the ritual admission that philosophy must grope--that it must ask itself where it is and at what hour--do they not then place themselves in the light beyond all the groping and incompleteness? Merleau-Ponty, along with all his other accomplishments, contributes to the elimination of that nonsense. "The 'Later' Thought of Merleau-Ponty", Dialogue, Vol. V, no. 3, pp.402-3.

3. In the sentence previous to what is quoted here, Merleau-Ponty calls this "a language of coincidence". This is an unfortunate way of putting things since, as I have argued (and as becomes clear by the time one has reached the bottom of the paragraph), he does not believe that coincidence is the *telos* of philosophical expression. The Visible and the Invisible, it must be kept in mind, is very much an 'unfinished' work. Perhaps Merleau-Ponty would have sorted out such 'inconsistencies' had he had the opportunity to make a final revision of what he had written.

4. Vincent Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 56. James Edie has made the same point. He writes:

he [Merleau-Ponty] proceeds dialectically, using an existentialist version of what analytic philosophers call "Ramsey's Maxim". Ramsey's Maxim states that in those cases in which apparently antithetical or contradictory positions, neither of which is satisfactory, are in conflict, "it is a heuristic maxim that the truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both of the disputants." "The Significance of Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Language", in Dialogues in Phenomenology, ed. Don Ihde and Richard Zaner (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 254.

5. V. Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, p. 79.

6. Indeed, my reading of Merleau-Ponty leads one to suspect that Derrida, who has certainly read Merleau-Ponty, learned a lot more from him than he would have us believe.

7. Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, pp. 79-80.

8. Ibid., p. 81.

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